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SCHOLARSHIP INFORMED
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ARTICLES

- 4** "In Their Promised Canaan Stand":
Outlawry, Landscape, and Memory in
C. C. A. Christensen's Mormon Panorama
Jennifer Champoux
- 49** Latter-day Saints and Images of Christ's Crucifixion
John Hilton III, Anthony Sweat, and Josh Stratford
- 81** A Teacher's Plea
Tyler Johnson
- 127** Captain Moroni and the Sermon on the Mount:
Resolving a Scriptural Tension
Duane Boyce
- 163** Defend Your Families *and* Love Your Enemies:
A New Look at the Book of Mormon's Patterns of Protection
J. David Pulsipher

POETRY

- 80** Moon to Moon Nights
Dixie L. Partridge
- 126** What Her Missionary Son's Letter Didn't Say
Darlene Young
- 184** Mercy
Elizabeth Smith
- 188** Desert Harvest
Ben de Hoyos

ESSAYS

- 119** Mezuzah on My Doorpost
Heather Thomson
- 185** Shoulders
Bethany Sorensen
- 190** Manuscripts, Murder, and a Miniseries: A Personal Essay
Richard E. Turley Jr.

REVIEW ESSAY

- 205** *Murder among the Mormons: Reflections on the Docuseries—
and on Its Historical and Theological Implications*
J. B. Haws

BOOK REVIEWS

- 224** *Trinity and Monotheism: A Historical and Theological Review of the
Origins and Substance of the Doctrine* by A. Keith Thompson
Reviewed by Jason Robert Combs
- 229** *Watchman on the Tower: Ezra Taft Benson and the Making of
the Mormon Right* by Matthew L. Harris and *Thunder from the
Right: Ezra Taft Benson in Mormonism and Politics* edited by
Matthew L. Harris
Reviewed by Roger Terry
- 235** *Clogs and Shawls: Mormons, Moorlands, and the Search for Zion*
by Ann Chamberlin
Reviewed by Amy Harris

BOOK NOTICES

- 239** *Latter-day Saints in Washington, D.C.*
Hugh Nibley Observed



FIGURE 1. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *The Hill Cumorah*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 80½ × 116 inches, cropped. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

“In Their Promised Canaan Stand”

Outlawry, Landscape, and Memory in C. C. A. Christensen’s Mormon Panorama

Jennifer Champoux

Many favorite fictional stories involve characters who transgress boundaries. Robin Hood, for example, gathered his Merry Men in the greenwood where they stole from the rich and gave to the poor while evading the sheriff. Or consider Simba from *The Lion King*, an exile for years who returned to reclaim his kingdom and re-establish order and justice. Even Han Solo was a shady character with a bounty on his head, yet he became a key figure in the Rebel Alliance’s struggle against the evil Empire in *Star Wars*. More than just beloved characters from childhood tales, these figures are emblematic of a rich tradition in literature and art of the heroic outlaw.

Were nineteenth-century members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints outlaw heroes? Pioneer artist Carl Christian Anton (C. C. A.) Christensen’s famous Mormon Panorama seems to suggest so. This series of paintings based on moments from early Church history emphasizes persecution of the Latter-day Saints by both government officials and local vigilantes. Throughout the images, the Latter-day Saints appear orderly and innocent, in contrast to the disheveled animosity of their tormentors. The Mormon Panorama vividly depicts a narrative in which the Latter-day Saints were forced into an outlaw posture yet continued to fight for justice and ultimately re-established true order.

In medieval Europe, an outlaw was someone cast out of the physical and legal boundaries of society. English, French, German, and Scandinavian governments used outlawry as punishment for those who did not conform. Over time, the stories of actual historical outlaws began to be woven into fictional literature. The most enduring of these outlaw characters is



FIGURE 2. Daniel Maclise, *Robin Hood and His Merry Men Entertaining Richard the Lionheart in Sherwood Forest*, 1839, oil on canvas, Nottingham City Museums and Galleries.

Robin Hood, whose story is first found in ballad fragments from 1377.¹ Just as the name implies, an outlaw was no longer under the protection of the law—he had no legal or civil rights, and he was seen as more animal than human. However, the trick in the Anglo-Saxon legends about outlaws such as Robin Hood is that the outlaws are deemed outcasts *only* because of some corruption within society or some injustice by a local political or religious leader. The outlaws blurred the lines between right and wrong because they did not simply flout the laws but rather fought nobly against wrongful authority and injustice.² Thus, Anglo-Saxon outlaw literature works to flip the narrative, making the outlaw a hero and exposing the flaws in society and government.

Just as the outlaw lives a liminal existence between organized society and animal wildness, his geographical place is in liminal ecological spaces like forests, deserts, and swamps. The outlaw is forced into these environments against his will, yet he also finds refuge in them.³ There is, then, a tension inherent in the outlaw's landscape because it is both a place of banishment and deprivation *and also* a place of protection

1. J. C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 115.

2. Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 51.

3. Sarah Harlan-Haughey, *The Ecology of the English Outlaw in Medieval Literature: From Fen to Greenwood* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2, 47; Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 2.

and abundance. Artistic depictions of outlaws tend to emphasize this relationship with the forest. For example, in an 1839 painting by Daniel Maclise of Robin Hood, the lush foliage dominates the image, even providing framing borders and a curtain-like canopy (fig. 2). In the painting, Sherwood Forest creates a safe and idyllic retreat for the outlaws and provides abundantly for their needs, as slain beasts are carried in for a feast. The English forest serves not only as the geographical backdrop for the outlaws' exploits but also as a complicated symbol of freedom, rustic justice, patriotism, pride of place, and divine providence.

In many ways, nineteenth-century American members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had a similar relationship to society and to landscape as the Anglo-Saxon outlaw heroes did. The Latter-day Saints considered themselves a people unfairly pushed out of the boundaries of society and, thus, called to gather in a sacred space to establish true justice and law within a divinely provided, unspoiled ecological space. Although their liminal status relative to American society seemed to put them in the position of being outcasts, the Latter-day Saints viewed the local leaders and vigilantes with whom they clashed as the ones truly acting outside the law. As in Anglo-Saxon literature, the Latter-day Saints had a need to flip the narrative and make themselves the heroes. Even though they were the ones jailed as criminals and pushed out of state after state, the Latter-day Saints sought a way to make themselves the good guys.

One way they did this was by painting and displaying their own version of their history. As early as 1844, with the support of Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff, Philo Dibble began codifying the Church's historical narrative in large paintings.⁴ Dibble organized artists to paint a series of scenes, including the Battle of Crooked River, the massacre at Hawn's Mill, the surrender at Far West, the Nauvoo Legion, the assassination of Joseph Smith, and the Mormon Battalion. Only the latter three were actually painted, but between 1849 and 1879 Dibble traveled around Missouri and Utah displaying the three canvases and the death masks of Joseph and Hyrum Smith as well as presenting an oral narrative.⁵

Following this pattern, C. C. A. Christensen started painting his own series of Church history scenes in 1878. Christensen was born in Denmark and studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen before joining the Church and then emigrating to Utah in 1856.

4. R. Devan Jensen, "Philo Dibble's Dream of 'A Gallery in Zion,'" *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 4 (October 2018): 19, 28.

5. Jensen, "Philo Dibble's Dream," 30–32.

His Mormon Panorama paintings were completed between 1878 and 1890 as a didactic tool to teach the early history of the people to younger Church members. The huge six-and-a-half-foot by ten-foot canvases were sewn together and rolled into a scroll on wooden dowels, which was then transported to Church settlements in Utah, Idaho, Arizona, and Wyoming in the late 1800s and early 1900s for viewings.⁶ As the scroll was unwound to reveal the images, a prepared lecture was delivered—often by Christensen or his son—recounting the experiences of members of the Church. Several versions of this lecture, written down later by Christensen’s family members, are extant.⁷ The experience was intended to be theatrical, and this effect was enhanced with green curtains around the scrolling images and “kerosene lamps as footlights.”⁸

6. “Biography of C. C. A. Christensen and His Wife: Translated by Their Daughter Mary A. C. Welling and Assisted by Their Granddaughter, Mrs. V. Terry, July 30, 1940” (unpublished typescript), Brigham Young University Museum of Art, 12; Paul L. Anderson and Richard Jensen, “C. C. A. Christensen and the Mormon Panorama,” *Ensign* 9, no. 6 (June 1979): 80.

7. These versions include a transcript in the Church History Library which is partially handwritten and partially typed, a typescript “Lectures as Written by C. C. A. Christensen” in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University, and a computer typescript “Abbreviated Script / C. C. A. Christensen’s Mormon Panorama,” which is at the Brigham Young University Museum of Art and appears to be copied from the Special Collections version (the author is grateful to Nathan Rees and Ashlee Whitaker for assistance in locating these documents). None of these three sources indicate any date or provenance. Jennett Labrum, granddaughter of Seymour Christensen, who donated the Mormon Panorama to BYU, provided the author with a slightly different typed script, but it appears to be of a later creation date as it incorporates the margin notes from the Church History Library version into the text parenthetically, it is missing two of the scenes, and it mentions Seymour at the end. The Museum of Art also has a typescript donated by the Christensen family, “Mormon Panorama Lectures of C. C. A. Christensen (as Written by Charles J. Christensen, Eldest Son of C. C. A. Christensen),” with a written note saying, “Copied from lecture script donated to MOA from Christensen family.” This version has the most differences in wording, as compared with all the other versions, although they are mostly minor, and the substance is still mostly similar. All extant versions of the script follow a similar narrative, with only slight differences in details or wording. It may be that C. C. A.’s son Charles, who helped deliver the performances, or other family members such as Seymour wrote down different versions at different times, or wrote new versions building off of older ones. Additionally, Labrum recalls that C. C. A. and Charles used several versions of the script, choosing the most appropriate one depending on their audience (email to author, 22 April 2021). All quotations of the lecture script in this paper are taken from Charles John Christensen, “Lecture and Notes, Undated,” MS 3149, folder 2, accessed May 3, 2021, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record?id=e4999a17-7b2c-4e37-a194-239886b8ee45&view=browse>.

8. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, *On the Road with C.C.A. Christensen: The Moving Panorama* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Museum of Art, 2003).

The first painting in the series, of Joseph Smith's First Vision, is lost, but the other twenty-two panels are now housed as separate, framed paintings in the collection of the Brigham Young University Museum of Art.

The Mormon Panorama gives an important visual history of how late-nineteenth-century Church members viewed themselves. This is true not only because of Christensen's careful research, interviews with witnesses of the events, and inclusion of historical details, but also because Christensen spent years carting the Mormon Panorama around Western Latter-day Saint settlements to instruct Church members, thus shaping the way they thought about these events. Christensen created a sense of historical accuracy in his images by making visual reference to earlier images and photographs, including narrative details from written remembrances, and using the lecture to talk about specific dates, locations, and individuals. In fact, several times the transcript declares that the images are a "true representation."⁹ Moreover, the paintings and presentation were created at a time when Church leaders and members were feeling persecuted by government action opposing polygamy. As historian Steven C. Harper explains, "The saints' major goal in this era was the survival of their distinctive faith amid escalating opposition from the larger culture and its institutions, especially the U.S. government. Saints solidified their sense of exceptional, chosen, persecuted status and transmitted it to converts and especially to the next generation."¹⁰ The Mormon Panorama profoundly influenced and cemented the Latter-day Saints' understanding of their history.

The Mormon Panorama paintings follow patterns found in Anglo-Saxon outlaw literature, particularly ambivalence about the protective power of landscape and about who, exactly, is the criminal. While it is unclear whether Christensen was consciously drawing on Anglo-Saxon outlaw literature, viewing his paintings through this lens reveals that the early Latter-day Saints struggled with similar tensions in both the landscape and the society and were similarly working to shape their historical narrative and institutional memory. The paintings emphasize unjust treatment of the Latter-day Saints, calling into question which group is actually acting outside the law. Furthermore, Christensen's paintings consistently use landscape to help visualize the place of the Church and its members. Trees, rivers, weather, and animals feature prominently and symbolically and are even given a measure of agential

9. "Exterior of Carthage Jail," in "Lecture and Notes, Undated."

10. Steven C. Harper, *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 112.

power in many of the images. While the earlier paintings in the cycle tend toward a more menacing depiction of wilderness, the later images show the Latter-day Saints finding their place in a welcoming, pristine, and divinely provided landscape—their “promised Canaan” as Parley P. Pratt wrote in the 1840 hymn “The Morning Breaks.”¹¹

Additionally, the Mormon Panorama and the Anglo-Saxon outlaw literature share a thematic reliance on even older stories about sacred spaces, justice, and grappling with “the other.” Throughout the paintings and the outlaw literature, there are clear references to Old Testament exodus experiences, including miraculous crossings of bodies of water, destruction of the enemy, and manna from heaven. Even in the very first surviving Mormon Panorama painting, *The Hill Cumorah* (fig. 1), art historian Jane Dillenberger saw the unusual addition of a beard to the angel Moroni (distinct from other denominations’ depictions of angels) as underlining “the inevitable parallelism between this event and the Biblical event of Moses receiving the tablets of the Law.”¹²

This article examines the Mormon Panorama according to themes of outlawry in Anglo-Saxon literature, seeking to reveal insights into the nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint understanding of exile and sacred space, both in terms of their relationship to the landscape and to society at large. Several patterns recur throughout the outlaw legends, including (1) loss of status, (2) loss of land and movement into exile, (3) existence in a “natural” landscape (for example, rustic country as opposed to built-up city), (4) gathering of supporters and other outsiders, (5) companionship of animals, (6) clashes with political and military forces, (7) use of symbolic dress and disguise, and (8) ultimate establishment of true authority.¹³ These themes are also prominent throughout the Mormon Panorama. Comparing the outlaw literature with these paintings reveals that Church members saw themselves as unjustly forced into exile and unable to remain in society even though they wanted to. Neither the outlaws of Anglo-Saxon legend nor the nineteenth-century American Latter-day Saints wanted to be outlaws, yet they both managed to create

11. Parley P. Pratt, “The Morning Breaks,” in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 1.

12. Jane Dillenberger, “Mormonism and American Religious Art,” *Sunstone* 3, no. 4 (May–June 1978): 13.

13. In developing this list of themes, I have drawn from and elaborated on similar lists found in Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval England*, 23–30, and Harlan-Haughey, *Ecology of the English Outlaw*, 48–54; see also Stanley B. Greenfield, “The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of ‘Exile’ in Anglo-Saxon Poetry,” *Speculum* 30, no. 2 (April 1955): 201.



FIGURE 3. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Tarring and Feathering the Prophet*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78¼ × 114¼ inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

a narrative in which they could find divine providence in exile and ultimately turn it on its head so that being an outsider became a sign of their righteousness and chosenness.

Loss of Status

In the Mormon Panorama, landscape functions variously as a marker of boundaries, a symbol of injustice and oppression, and a sign of divine protection. And in some cases, as in *Tarring and Feathering the Prophet* (fig. 3), it does all three. Coming on the heels of the initial two paintings depicting Joseph Smith's First Vision of God and his receipt of the brass plates from a glorious angel Moroni, the third image abruptly changes mood and depicts a mob tarring and feathering Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon during the night.

The main action of the scene takes place between quaint houses in cleared land on the right side and a cluster of barren, ominous trees on the left side. In fact, the visual rhythm of shapes and lines in the painting pulls the viewer's eye from right to left, starting with the houses on the right, down to Sidney Rigdon's beaten body lying in the street, then to

the man coming forward with hot tar at the ready, on to a group of men holding and abusing Joseph Smith, then to the two mobbers carrying a case of feathers and a wooden rail who lead the group and even point the way left into the woods. The change in landscape from right to left marks the boundary of civilization on one side and the rejection of the rule of law on the other, and at the center Joseph Smith is the victim of this move toward injustice. The claw-like branches of the trees at left are a symbol of the aggressive mobbers and the violence they inflict. The dark forest likewise threatens, as it seems to afford cover to the mobbers. And yet a bright full moon peers out from a small break in the grey clouds to shine directly down on Joseph Smith, as if to signify protection from God that allowed him to survive the brutal attack. To underscore this point, Christensen's lecture script reads, "While Joseph was being beaten, tared [*sic*] and feathered etc. he says that his spirit left his body and stood a few feet above his persecutors in the air and he could see and hear the blows that were inflicted on his body, but felt no pain until afterwards."¹⁴

Tarring and feathering was meant to be humiliating and dehumanizing, disfiguring the human body to make it look more like an animal. The parallel to outlaw traditions here is striking. In medieval Europe, the bounty on an outlaw was often the same as the price on a wolf's head.¹⁵ Outlaws were seen as no longer human. They were afforded neither the protections of law nor the hospitality of society and could be freely abused or even killed. In the painting, Rigdon and Smith are stripped of their clothes in preparation for the application of sticky tar and feathers, effectively stripping them of their status as humans and as citizens.

Loss of Land and Movement into Exile

In the world of outlaws, loss of status quickly leads to loss of land. The fourth Mormon Panorama image illustrates mobbers attacking a Latter-day Saint settlement in *Saints Driven from Jackson County Missouri* (fig. 4). Here, the violence has moved from beyond just the Church leaders and is now unleashed on all Church members, including an old man engaged in hand-to-hand combat, a woman kneeling and pleading for her husband's life, two women carrying babies, and many terrified children. In their catalog of Christensen's work, Richard L. Jensen and Richard G. Oman point out "doors and fireplaces, powerful symbols of

14. "Tar and Feathering the Prophet," in "Lecture and Notes, Undated."

15. Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 9.



FIGURE 4. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Saints Driven from Jackson County Missouri*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 77¼ × 113 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

home, are being destroyed.”¹⁶ Again, the houses on cleared ground on the right are juxtaposed with the dark forest on the left. We see women and children being forced to cross that boundary, leaving domesticity and society behind as they flee into the forest.

There was a question not just among the Latter-day Saints but also among the larger American society about who was truly the outlaw in these skirmishes. Christensen’s painting dramatically visualizes this question, by showing the Latter-day Saints being exiled by men clearly acting outside the law and forcing innocent people off their property in the dead of night. In the ensuing years, Latter-day Saint leaders decried the attacks on their people in Missouri. Apostle Parley P. Pratt wrote that he had “a dislike to the out-laws who govern Missouri,” and the Prophet Joseph Smith called Missouri “that land of tyranny and oppression.”¹⁷ At the

16. Richard L. Jensen and Richard G. Oman, *C. C. A. Christensen, 1831–1912: Mormon Immigrant Artist* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1984), 94.

17. Parley P. Pratt to Dear Brethren, March 19, 1843, *Times and Seasons* 4, no. 11 (April 15, 1843): 163; and Joseph Smith, “Extract from the Private Journal of Joseph Smith, Jr.,” *Times and Seasons* 1, no. 1 (November 1839): 7, both quoted in David W. Grua, “Memoirs

time of the raids, there were mixed opinions among the broader American society about their legality. Some Missouri citizens supported the attacks on the Latter-day Saints. Reverend Benton Pixley, for example, led a local anti-Mormon meeting and sent a letter to Missouri governor Daniel Dunklin signed by hundreds of Jackson County residents complaining about the Church members' blasphemy and territorial aspirations.¹⁸ But other citizens saw aggressions against the Latter-day Saints as unlawful. The *Missouri Republican* editor said attacks on the Church members and their property were "wholly at war with the genius of our institutions, and as subversive of good order as the conduct of the fanatics themselves."¹⁹ Even looking back later in 1853, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* called the men who pushed the Mormons out of Missouri a "lawless, heartless mob, under the implied sanction of the civil authority."²⁰ This uncertainty about the validity of mob tactics against the Latter-day Saints continued into their time in Illinois. Josiah Conyers, a resident of Quincy, Illinois, wrote that mob violence there was antithetical to the U.S. Constitution and that "should citizens of Illinois 'resort to forcible banishment, without trial, not only of the guilty, but of the innocent also,' they should admit that either the Constitution was insufficient or that Americans lacked the 'virtue and intelligence' to 'administer their own laws.'"²¹

Like the Anglo-Saxon outlaws, the Latter-day Saints were not seeking outsider status so much as they were forced into it. Another painting in the series, *Leaving Missouri* (fig. 5), shows Church members walking out of Missouri with packed wagons, having been forced from their lands for good. As in the earlier paintings, trees mark a boundary between society and wilderness and also symbolize injustice. Jensen and Oman note, "The menacing tree on the left and the bleak background communicate the hostile environment that they were leaving."²² Indeed, the landscape becomes progressively greener the further it is from the

of the Persecuted: Persecution, Memory, and the West as a Mormon Refuge" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2008), 76–77, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/1550>.

18. Stephen C. Taysom, *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds: Conflicting Visions, Contested Boundaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 60.

19. J. Spencer Fluhman, "A Peculiar People": *Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 87.

20. "The Mormons," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (April 1853): 612, <https://digital.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-lincoln%3A35954>.

21. Fluhman, "A Peculiar People," 100.

22. Jensen and Oman, C. C. A. Christensen, 101.



FIGURE 5. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Leaving Missouri*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 114 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

Missouri town left behind in the snow. Church members at the time saw the episode as an injustice of Biblical proportions, with Parley P. Pratt writing that shortly “the indignation of a just God” would make “room for the rights of man and the laws of the Lord to be restored.”²³ The sense of injustice lingered and is highlighted in Christensen’s accompanying lecture script:

Here you see the Saints leaving the State of Mo. in the dead of winter about 1200 in number. Seven of the leaders of the Church as we have shown you were confined in the Liberty Jail. . . . Now that the governor of Missouri, issued his exterminating orders, every mormon must leave the state at once. Try to imagine the suffering and sacrifice [*sic*]; their properties had been confiscated [*sic*], their homes burned, driven from county to county and now expelled in dead of winter in extreme poverty and their leaders in jail. Many died of exposure and were buried by the wayside.²⁴

23. Quoted in Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 101.

24. “Leaving Missouri,” in “Lecture and Notes, Undated.”

Existence in a “Natural” Landscape

In *Leaving Missouri*, the wild landscape is already helping to provide for the refugees, as we see two men on the left chopping wood for fuel and a number of people warming themselves around two fires. Similarly, for English outlaws like Robin Hood, the forest turned out to be both a place of physical sustenance and “an asylum from the tyranny of evil lords and a corrupt law.”²⁵ In the outlaw legends, there is a certain rustic charm and higher moral code associated with untamed ecological spaces like the forest, particularly when set against the corruption of the city.

By the same token, spaces that were once inhabited but had gone to ruin were a melancholy “symbol of the failure of civilization and the victory of nature.”²⁶ This trope appears in the Anglo-Saxon legend of outlaw Fouke le Fitz Waryn, when his enemy William the Conqueror stopped to contemplate a ruined castle being overtaken by nature. In the Mormon Panorama, the *Burning of the Temple* (fig. 6) embodies a similar sense of the breakdown of law and civilization, resulting in nature reclaiming the space. This painting depicts a fire ravaging the Nauvoo Temple two years after the Latter-day Saints had evacuated. The night sky is black and ominous, as is the surrounding landscape. The red and orange flames reflect eerily off of the ground and off of the abandoned houses behind the temple. The lecture script further describes the complete return of the space to nature: “Now there is not one stone left upon another to show where this once beautiful and holy building once stood.”²⁷ The sense of loss and injustice is driven home by the contrast of this image with the previous one, *The Nauvoo Temple* (fig. 7), which shows the pristinely white and majestic temple in careful detail under a blue sky.

The Mormon Panorama also includes several instances of the natural elements coming to the aid of Church members. In three cases, weather and water particularly play a major role. First, *Mobbers on the Missouri River* (fig. 8) depicts mobbers who tried to cross the river to attack Zion’s Camp in Missouri, but the ferry they crossed on sank. In the painting, violent flashes of lightning fill the sky, one seeming to almost touch the men on the boat. A dark, monochromatic sky swirls with a raging storm, and the rough waves overtake the vessel. The clouds, the sky, and the water all reflect the same unearthly and foreboding dusty red and

25. Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 2.

26. Harlan-Haughey, *Ecology of the English Outlaw*, 114.

27. “Burning of the Temple,” in “Lecture and Notes, Undated.”



FIGURE 6. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Burning of the Temple*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 114 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.



FIGURE 7. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *The Nauvoo Temple*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 77 × 113 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.



FIGURE 8. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Mobbers on the Missouri River*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 114½ inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

inky black hues. All of nature seems to have conspired against the mobbers in order to protect the Church members. The lecture script reads: “A very heavy storm arose, which swelled these rivers to the height of 30 and 40 feet so they [Zion’s Camp] could not proceed for several days. On the opposite side of the other fishing river was a party of mobbers ambushed and prepared to kill our brethern [*sic*] had not the Lord hindered them in their plans. The storm was very terific [*sic*] but no one was ceriously [*sic*] hurt in the camp of the saints but the camp of the enemy was entirely broken up and their wicked plans frustrated.”²⁸

The Mormon Panorama presents the sinking of this ferry as evidence of God’s protection and of their status as a people chosen by God to fight back against political and economic injustice. Zion’s Camp was organized as a sort of Latter-day Saint militia with the purpose of petitioning the governor to help restore lost lands in Jackson County. Historian Stephen Taysom points out that the revelation to Joseph Smith that prompted Zion’s Camp includes language about the Latter-day Saints being set apart and protected from their enemies. The 1834 revelation

28. “Zions Camp,” in “Lecture and Notes, Undated.”



FIGURE 9. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Crossing the Mississippi on the Ice*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 77 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 114 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

prophecies that the Latter-day Saints will “begin to prevail against mine enemies from this very hour. . . . They shall never cease to prevail until the kingdoms of the world are subdued under my feet, and the earth is given to the saints, to possess it forever and ever.”²⁹ This kind of chosenness and divine protection, particularly as it relates to dominion over the earth, is illustrated in *Mobbers on the Missouri River*.

The natural elements also come to the aid of the Latter-day Saints in a painting of them leaving Nauvoo in winter, *Crossing the Mississippi on the Ice* (fig. 9). Although the snow and cold made the journey difficult, the frozen river was seen as a sign of divine favor manifested in the natural elements. The lecture script includes both a feeling of injustice and a belief in the miraculous protective power of the landscape:

It was not a matter of choice that about 20,000 american citizens left their homes in the dead of winter. The Governor of Ill. demanded a change in religious attitude of the Mormons or leave the State. Rather

29. “Revelation, 24 February 1834 [D&C 103],” 8, the Joseph Smith Papers, accessed March 8, 2021, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-24-february-1834-dc-103/1>, quoted in Taysom, *Shakers, Mormons, and Religious Worlds*, 65.

than deny that which they new [*sic*] was from God they chose the latter, left their homes, farms, beautiful and sacred temple and all earthly things dear to them, many of them to become martyrs [*sic*] dying from exposure. This Bridge of ice was made by a kind Providence at the time when the lives of our saints were at stake. Think of 20,000 homeless American citizens out on the prairies [*sic*] now covered with snow.³⁰

Christensen's painting is intended to invoke parallels with the ancient Israelites' miraculous exodus into the wilderness. Jensen and Oman write of this painting, "This is the Latter-day Saint equivalent of the miracle of the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea, since the Mississippi River did not usually freeze over."³¹ Christensen used his now-familiar pattern of movement, from society on the right to wilderness on the left. In fact, the wagon trains draw a line that stretches forward from the city in the right background and across the frozen river before heading left into the wild forest.

And finally, the painting *Pioneers Crossing the Plains of Nebraska* (fig. 10) shows the first wagon train leaving Winter Quarters in 1847 and crossing the Platte River. Again the natural elements act miraculously to aid the Latter-day Saints, allowing them to cross a river. The lecture script reads: "In crossing the North Platt [*sic*] River on a quick sand bar which might shift at any moment they humbly asked the Lord to see them safely over this dangerous stream. No sooner had the last wagon pulled off the sand bar and it washed away. One of the brethren [*sic*] tried to return on horse back to see if anything had been forgotten but the ford was gone. The Lord heard and answered their prayers and they went on rejoicing."³²

Gathering of Supporters and Outsiders

In the Anglo-Saxon outlaw legends, once the outlaw has been banished and moved into a wilderness environment, he gathers supporters and reaches out to other outsiders. In the ballads of Robin Hood, he met a variety of characters in the forest—many of them poachers or spies or outlaws themselves—and won them over to his camp one by one, creating a group of followers that came to be called the Merry Men. Little John, for example, was living in the forest when he met Robin Hood and refused to let him cross a bridge. The two men fought, and Little John

30. "Crossing the Mississippi [*sic*] on the Ice," in "Lecture and Notes, Undated."

31. Jensen and Oman, C. C. A. *Christensen*, 108.

32. "Pioneers Crossing the Plains of Nebraska," in "Lecture and Notes, Undated."



FIGURE 10. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Pioneers Crossing the Plains of Nebraska*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 77 × 113 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

won, yet he agreed to follow Robin Hood. Similarly, Arthur a Bland was poaching in the forest when Robin Hood came upon him, fought him, and convinced Arthur to join with him. And Friar Tuck had been cast out of his monastery for disobedience when he ran into Robin Hood, won a battle of wits against him, and then agreed to join Robin Hood's band. Like other outlaw heroes, Robin Hood created a crew of diverse characters and a blending of social classes with his Merry Men.³³ The people he defended and gathered to his cause came from all classes—the overtaxed peasant, the distressed yeoman, the cheated knight, the wandering friar, and the confined noblewoman.

In the Mormon Panorama, Christensen emphasized the way Latter-day Saints cobbled together a community that mingled social classes, occupations, regions, languages, and nationalities. Despite their diversity of backgrounds, the Latter-day Saints in these paintings are consistently shown as a united group. Persecution from other groups only highlights these communal bonds among the Latter-day Saints. For example, Christensen painted a scene of *Zion's Camp* (fig. 11), representing the men who

33. Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 24, 52.



FIGURE 11. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Zion's Camp*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 114 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

answered a call from Joseph Smith in 1834 to walk from Kirtland, Ohio, to Jackson County, Missouri, to assist fellow Church members there who had been persecuted and driven from their land. The script recounts, “About 200 of our good brethern [*sic*] readily valentered [*sic*] and organized into a company led by the Prophet and started out on this long and tedious journey of about 1000 miles.”³⁴ The painting shows the men arriving in Missouri and facing the same large storm that stopped the mobbers on their river boat. In this painting, the men heroically push and pull their wagons across the rain-soaked land to come to the rescue of people they may not have known personally but felt a kinship with as fellow members of the Church. Two boys on a fence wave a greeting. A woman holding a baby in an open doorway symbolizes the defenseless Latter-day Saints the men have come to aid. There is a feeling of common purpose as the men march along and the white canvases of their wagon train wind rhythmically into the background.

In a later scene of *Winter Quarters* (fig. 12), this sense of gathering and community is even more pronounced. The episode took place in

34. “Zions Camp,” in “Lecture and Notes, Undated.”



FIGURE 12. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Winter Quarters*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, $76\frac{3}{4} \times 113\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

December 1846, when 3,500 Latter-day Saints who had been forced out of Nauvoo spent the winter near Omaha preparing for a spring journey to the Rocky Mountains. The settlement is truly a liminal space, caught between frontier wilderness on the left and a large river on the right. Winter conditions in the cramped and hastily constructed log cabins were miserable and unhealthy. The script tells that “around the brow of the hill here about 600 of our Saints were laid to rest.”³⁵ Christensen’s painting exhibits a tension between the community and the individual. On the one hand, orderly rows of identical cabins push into the very front of the picture plane and extend far into the background, creating a sweeping sense of unity. But on the other hand, there are vignettes of individuals and families scattered throughout the image: “people shaking hands at departure, a child rushing to its father, a mother cuddling her baby, a family waving goodbye to their friends as wagons pull out.”³⁶ As Jensen and Oman point out, these vignettes indicate that “these were not merely individuals preparing to move west; it was a religious community emotionally bound

35. “Winter Quarters,” in “Lecture and Notes, Undated.”

36. Jensen and Oman, *C. C. A. Christensen*, 111.



FIGURE 13. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Joseph Preaching to the Indians*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 76½ × 112¾ inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

together. This was the Camp of Israel in the Wilderness.”³⁷ In contrast to the rugged individualism fashionable at the time in America, Christensen emphasizes that the Latter-day Saints had a need for communal action and protection. True to the outlaw-hero motif, the image shows a group of Americans who have been dislocated by mob rule, and yet in their makeshift city they bring to fruition the inclusive promise of American democracy that was not afforded to them.

Joseph Preaching to the Indians (fig. 13) represents one of many times that Joseph Smith taught Native Americans about the Book of Mormon and sought to establish an alliance with them. The script includes, “These hostile tribes became Joseph’s warmest friends in times of extreme trial in Mo. and Ill.”³⁸ Joseph appears in formal dress with tails and a waistcoat, while the Native Americans are shown in beige fringe, blue and red robes, feathers, and necklaces. To the right, a group of well-dressed white Latter-day Saints listens to Joseph Smith, including a woman seated in a chair. The men wear hats, and the woman holds a parasol.

37. Jensen and Oman, *C. C. A. Christensen*, 111.

38. “Joseph Presching [*sic*] to the Indians,” in “Lecture and Notes, Undated.”



FIGURE 14. John McGahey, *Joseph Smith / President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints addressing the Chiefs & Braves of several tribes of Indians in the City of Nauvoo, Illinois North America, June, 1843*, lithograph on paper, 192 × 277 mm. The British Museum.

They stand in contrast to the large group of people on the left who stand or sit on the grass with their heads uncovered. The woman in the chair has a small dog beside her. Directly across from her, a Native American kneels beside a dog. Perhaps in this pairing Christensen hoped to portray an affectionate meeting of cultures and their commonalities in spite of cultural differences.

Christensen's efforts to imbue his panorama with an aura of historical accuracy are on display here, as he appears to have based this image on an earlier lithograph of the same subject made during Joseph Smith's lifetime. According to Laura Allred Hurtado and David Grua, this Christensen painting is based on an 1843 lithograph by John McGahey (fig. 14).³⁹ McGahey was a British artist working at that time in the American West making copies of George Catlin's paintings of Native

39. Laura Allred Hurtado and David G., "Painting the Mythical and the Heroic: *Joseph Preaches to the American Indians*," *Juvenile Instructor* (blog), November 19, 2013, <https://juvenileinstructor.org/painting-the-mythical-and-the-heroic-joseph-smith-preaches-to-the-american-indians/>.

Americans. At Nauvoo in 1844, McGahey exhibited his lithograph of Joseph Smith preaching to Native Americans. It seems very likely that Christensen had access to a print of this image when he painted his Mormon Panorama almost forty years later. There are a number of similarities, including Joseph Smith's dress and position—with right arm raised in a gesture of oration and left hand holding a Book of Mormon—the semicircular shape of the listening crowd, the teepees sticking up behind them, and the tree framing the figure of Joseph Smith. Hurtado points out that Christensen's painting heroizes Joseph Smith and positions "Joseph (and, by extension, the Church of Jesus Christ) as the ultimate champions of marginalized peoples."⁴⁰

Companionship of Animals

In the stories of Robin Hood, the outlaws live peaceably with the animals of the forest but also hunt animals, such as deer, for food. In fact, the ability to hunt for food in the forest lies at the heart of the Anglo-Saxon outlaw legends. Following the Norman Conquest, William, duke of Normandy, claimed large areas of English forest for his personal royal hunting grounds and excluded many farmers and peasants from that right, sometimes even forcing them from their homes and villages to make way for royal forest enlargements. English resistance to this expansion resulted in outlaws like Robin Hood.⁴¹ Thus, many early depictions of Robin Hood show him in the royal forest hunting deer with a bow and arrow.

Throughout the Mormon Panorama, animals are portrayed as companions to the Church members. In *Saints Driven from Jackson County Missouri* (fig. 4), a small dog tries to defend its master by attacking the vigilantes. In the exodus scenes from both Missouri and Nauvoo (figs. 5 and 9), horses and oxen are depicted as obliging and essential helpers. In *Leaving Missouri* (fig. 5), several chickens are also making their way into the wilderness with the caravan.

The painting *Catching Quails* (fig. 15) most directly links the Church members with the animals of the forest. This scene shows the poor and sick from Nauvoo who were unable to leave with the earlier large evacuation and had finally been forced out at gunpoint. A small glimpse of

40. Laura Allred Hurtado, "Joseph Smith Preaching to the Indians," *Pioneer* 66, no. 1 (2019), 64.

41. Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 26, 30; Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 140.



FIGURE 15. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Catching Quails*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 76¼ × 113 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

Nauvoo, the temple, and the river can be seen on the right side of the canvas (in keeping with Christensen's formula for showing civilization on the right and wilderness on the left). The Latter-day Saints evidently also viewed the expulsion from Nauvoo as one more abuse in a string of trespasses against their legal rights. The lecture script emphasizes the injustice of the mob: "when the mobb [*sic*] element decided to eliminate all mormons from the state regardless of poverty or any other reason."⁴² A flock of quail appeared in their makeshift camp, so numerous that children could catch them, and the episode became another link in Latter-day Saint memory between their community and the ancient chosen people. Jensen and Oman describe the image as follows: "On 9 October 1846 flocks of quail landed in the Mormon camp, providing food for the destitute refugees. Thus, amid the sickness and suffering, God's intervention was seen as a modern-day equivalent of the quail and manna given the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt (see Exodus 16:13–15)."⁴³

42. "Catching Quails," in "Lecture and Notes, Undated."

43. Jensen and Oman, *C. C. A. Christensen*, 110.

Like Biblical outcasts or Robin Hood's band of outlaws, the Church members are shown as being illegitimately forced from their homes and land but finding protection and food in the forest. The canopy of trees in *Catching Quails* dominates the image, taking up almost two-thirds of the canvas, and it is larger than the human drama that takes place below it. As in the Daniel Maclise painting of Robin Hood's men in the greenwood, the landscape is not an afterthought or a quaint addition, but rather an integral part of the story. The forest symbolizes both the people's outcast status and the protection they receive from God. The lecture makes a similar point: "Here they are at a point of starvation, but true to God and his cause. They humbly asked God to come to their rescue in this hour of trouble, starvation staring them in the face. The Lord caused these birds to come by the meriolds [*sic*] swarming on the camp grounds and in the tents and were so tame that men, women and children could catch them with their hands as you see them doing. Thus you see how the Lord hears and answers the prayers of those who come to him in humility and faith."⁴⁴

It is believed that Christensen interviewed or read accounts from Church members who witnessed the events depicted in order to portray them accurately, and in many of the scenes there is careful attention to detail and historical accuracy.⁴⁵ As just one example, the *Catching Quails* painting and accompanying script matches up remarkably well with this published account of the event from an eyewitness:

On the 9th October, several wagons with oxen having been sent by the Twelve to fetch the poor Saints away, where [*sic*] drawn out in a line on the river banks, ready to start. . . . The quails descend. . . . See the sick knock them down with sticks, and t little children catch them alive with their hands! . . . They rise again, the flocks increase in number, seldom going seven rods from our camp, continually flying round the camp, sometimes under the wagons, sometimes over, and even into the wagons, where the poor sick Saints are lying in bed; thus having a direct manifestation from the Most High, that although we are driven by men, He has not forsaken us, but that His eyes are continually over us for good. . . . In the afternoon hundreds were flying at a time.⁴⁶

Accordingly, the painting includes the wagons lined up by the river, the sick administered to in makeshift shelters, the numerous quail all through the camp, and the children catching the birds by hand. The fact

44. "Catching Quails," in "Lecture and Notes, Undated."

45. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, *On the Road with C.C.A. Christensen*.

46. Thomas Bullock, "Letter from the Camp to Elder Franklin Richards," *Millennial Star* 10 (January 15, 1848): 29.



FIGURE 16. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *The Battle of Crooked River*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 114 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

that Christensen worked to recreate the scenes accurately indicates his desire for the paintings to be read as historical truth and for these foundational stories to be passed on to future generations.

Clashes with Political and Military Forces

Whatever deeper themes are woven into the outlaw legends, the fight is always, at some level, political. When the tension boils over to violence or military force, the outlaws are portrayed as unjustly put in a position of having to defend themselves. In the story of Robin Hood, it is corrupt local sheriffs, abbots, and bishops that compel him to defend himself and his oppressed friends. These local officials had legal authority but abused it, making their actions illegitimate and tyrannical.⁴⁷ Thus, in the topsy-turvy world of the greenwood, it is these officials who are actually outside the law, and it is the banished “outlaws” who enact true law and justice.

The Battle of Crooked River (fig. 16) visualizes these same themes of a world turned upside-down by local authorities illegitimately using violence against the Church members. It depicts the culmination of

47. Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 128.

escalating tensions between Latter-day Saints and their neighbors in Daviess County in 1838, as a Latter-day Saint militia sought to rescue three of their men captured by a unit of the Missouri state militia. The lecture script describes how three of the Latter-day Saints, including their leader, Apostle David Patten (who is seen wounded in the field), were killed in the fight. It goes on to say, “Returning to Farwest [*sic*], they were met by the Saints who bitterly mourned the loss of their dear Husbands and providers who laid down their own lives in trying to save the lives of their brethern [*sic*], and thus become martyrs for the cause of truth.”⁴⁸ Like Robin Hood, these men risked their lives and used extralegal means to try to save their friends from what they saw as unjust oppression.

As in other Mormon Panorama paintings, the narrative is overwhelmed by the landscape, with a thick grove of trees and an open meadow taking up the entire right half of the canvas. A scene of a shoot-out between an encampment of vigilantes and a band of Latter-day Saints could place more emphasis on the action of battle, or even on the captured men they sought to liberate. But Christensen instead tucked all the violence and heroics inside a powerful landscape. The Latter-day Saint men blend into the brush, but their shapes strongly echo the grove of trees behind them. The Latter-day Saints are much more unified with the landscape in terms of color and form than the mobbers, who stand out on the bank of the river with their white wagons and peaked tents. This too is like the Anglo-Saxon outlaw’s stealthy movement within the landscape, and especially his connection to the trees of the forest. Sarah Harlan-Haughey argues, “The literary outlaw becomes, in some ways, treelike, before springing into action—from tree to wolf in a moment. His attitude of casual waiting, of menacing immobility, is perhaps one of the most powerful and recognizable motifs of this tradition.”⁴⁹ There is a sense of this in Christensen’s painting, as the Latter-day Saints emerge from the trees with deadly force.

The atrocities of political leaders are even more pronounced in *Haun’s Mill* (fig. 17). In 1838, three days after the Missouri governor, Lilburn Boggs, issued Executive Order 44, stating that “the Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State if necessary for the public peace,” a group of Missouri militiamen attacked

48. “Picture # 6 [Crooked River Battle],” in “Lecture and Notes, Undated.”

49. Harlan-Haughey, *Ecology of the English Outlaw*, 171.



FIGURE 17. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Haun's Mill*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 114 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

the Latter-day Saint settlement of Haw'n's Mill.⁵⁰ Although there is some debate about whether the militia was authorized by the state or not, in the painting the attackers wear brass-hilted U.S. cavalry sabers, symbolizing that they are not just a rag-tag mob of civilians but rather acting on behalf of the state. The long sabers are all sheathed, and the men rely instead on their firearms to do violence to the Latter-day Saints.

Seventeen settlers were killed in this attack, and Christensen's painting does not shy away from portraying the defenselessness of the Latter-day Saints as women and children run into the woods in the background while the militia surrounds the entire settlement. The militiamen shoot at the fleeing women, take aim into houses, and peer behind a wagon curtain as if to leave no survivors. The settlers' livestock, including a calf and pig, are turned loose in the chaos. The lecture script gives a detailed description of the victims and the actions of the attackers. It also identifies the man in white attacked beside the wagon as "Father

50. Lilburn W. Boggs, Executive Order to John B. Clark, October 27, 1838, Missouri State Archives, https://www.sos.mo.gov/cmsimages/archives/resources/findingaids/misc/mormrecs/eo/18381027_extermorder.pdf.

McBride, an aged veteran who had fought in the Revolutionary War to establish the freedom which he as an American citizen was entitled to enjoy, that of worshipping [*sic*] God according to the dictates of his own conscience. After being shot down with his own gun and yet on his bended knees pleading for mercy he was literally [*sic*] cut to peaces [*sic*] with an old fashioned corn cutter.”⁵¹

In every detail, this painting drives home the understanding that men authorized by the state were acting contrary to the values and laws of the country. Religious liberty was understood to be one of the founding principles of America, and the language of the script also draws on the Church’s eleventh article of faith, which states, “We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may” (A of F 1:11).

Miscarriage of justice is also a theme in *Liberty Jail* (fig. 18), showing Joseph Smith and six other Church leaders being jailed. In the wake of Governor Boggs’s extermination order, the leaders were arrested at Far West, Missouri, and taken to Liberty Jail to await trial. In the painting, the Latter-day Saint leaders walk into their imprisonment peacefully, while the sneering jailor stands at the threshold holding the keys that will lock them in. Although there are many figures in the image, Christensen chose to reveal the faces of only the five men who appear to be shepherding the prisoners to jail—one on horseback and holding a rifle, the jailor, one driving the wagon that transported the prisoners, another on horseback, and one with a chain slung over his shoulder. The prisoners are seen only from the back in their black hats and coats. Local citizens from Liberty came to watch the proceedings, and this crowd of men, women, and children is also shown only from the back. By emphasizing the faces of the jailor and his accomplices, Christensen emphasizes the unjust actions of men in local authority. The lecture script recounts that the Church leaders were “cruely [*sic*] treated, poorly fed, at one time they were given human flesh to eat, and [the] next morning asked how the Mormon beef tasted.”⁵²

The script also points out that the painting “is a true representation of Liberty Jail as we have taken this from a photo.”⁵³ Indeed, the painted

51. “Lecture and Notes, Undated,” Jackson County Persicutions [*sic*]. Haun’s Mill.

52. “Lecture and Notes, Undated,” Liberty Jail.

53. “Lecture and Notes, Undated,” Liberty Jail. Jensen and Oman observe that the portrayal of Liberty Jail in this scene is almost identical to the undated Christensen



FIGURE 18. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Liberty Jail*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 114 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.



FIGURE 19. J. T. Hicks, *Liberty Jail*, *Liberty*, Clay Co. Mo., 1878, photograph, 14 × 20 cm, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

building and its surroundings match quite closely to an 1878 photograph of the jail taken by J. T. Hicks, who had a photography studio in Liberty, Missouri (fig. 19). Christensen's image appears to be based on the Hicks photograph, including the size, shape, and angle of the building and the placement of its door and two small windows. The painting also echoes the photograph's background, containing a pointed picket fence around the jail separating it from a few trees and houses on both sides. Christensen made a symbolic change to the fence though, leaving it orderly on the right, as in the photograph, but changing the fence on the left side of the jail into rough logs, some of which have fallen down. The change from straight and uniform pointed planks on the right to logs that are roughly hewn and askew on the left is consistent with Christensen's symbolic rhythmic movement from civilization and justice on the right to mob-rule and injustice on the left of his compositions. The jailor and the wagon carrying the prisoners appear to have used the rough fence on the left side to access the jail, perhaps knocking down the fallen posts in the process. To highlight the breakdown of the social contract in *Liberty Jail*, Christensen also painted a vivid sunset in the sky on the left side behind the rough fence and the jail as if the sun were setting on justice, or perhaps on the American experiment.

The Liberty Jail prisoners were eventually able to return to their families, although by this time the Latter-day Saints had been driven out of Missouri. They soon settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, and were allowed by the governor to create a local government and organize their own militia. Christensen depicted this militia in *Joseph Mustering the Nauvoo Legion* (fig. 20). It looks like any number of paintings of nineteenth-century patriotic American military parades. Uniformed troops line up in a neat, long line while a fife and drum play on the end. Joseph Smith rides a white horse and inspects the troops with his mounted officers, who carry American flags. Off to the side, women, children, and an old man waving a hat observe the parade. In the background, signs of economic prosperity abound in the sprawling town—brick houses, white picket fences, and bustling river port. Everything indicates order. Jensen and Oman point out that even Christensen's experimental technique for representing the row of soldiers makes them look like “a three-colored picket fence” and that “the neatness and order in the Nauvoo Legion contrasts with the state militia mobs that were led against the

painting *Liberty Jail* Clay Co. Mo., which does not include any people, C. C. A. Christensen, 75.



FIGURE 20. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Joseph Mustering the Nauvoo Legion*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 114 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.



FIGURE 21. *Smith at the Head of the Nauvoo Legion*, etching, c. 1851, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1853), Northern Illinois University, Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project, <https://digital.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-lincoln%3A32055>.

Mormons.”⁵⁴ But underlying and compelling all this patriotism and military order was the fear of extralegal violent action by their fellow citizens. The lecture script for this scene reads:

This is the prophet Joseph mustering the Nauvoo Legion having received this oppointment [*sic*] from the governor of the State of Ill. We shall not refer to the many times he drilled and trained his brethern [*sic*] in military science so as to be more able to maintain their rights as American citizens against the mob element. We shall just refer to the last time he met with the Legion. On this occasion Joseph formed them into [a] hollow square or horse shoe circle so as to be heard by them all if possible and asked them if they would be willing to lay down their lives in defence [*sic*] of their religion and their prophet and leader, if necessary, to which they shouted “yes, yes!” Then Joseph drew his sword and pointed it heavenward and said, “so will I lay down my life for you and for the gosple [*sic*] sake if necessary.” These words were construed into treason against the State and again Joseph was to go on trial.⁵⁵

Similar to his references to the McGahey lithograph and the Hicks photograph in other scenes, Christensen lent authenticity to this painting by patterning it on an etching of the same subject published in Charles Mackay’s 1851 *The Mormons, or Latter-day Saints: With Memoirs of the Life and Death of Joseph Smith, the “American Mahomet”* (fig. 21). The book had several printings in London and the United States in the 1850s and was widely reviewed.⁵⁶ Christensen may have been familiar with the etching from this book or from *Harper’s* where it was reprinted in 1853, along with seventeen other etchings from *The Mormons*.⁵⁷ In both Christensen’s painting and the earlier etching, Joseph Smith is on horseback at the front of a procession. In both images, he wears the same costume of a feathered hat, dark jacket, white breeches, epaulets, and sash. There is a similar treatment of the troop line with many figures pressed close together and faces undefined, although Christensen accentuated this effect and lengthened the line considerably. In the etching, Smith is accompanied by Emma Smith, who leads a company of women on

54. Jensen and Oman, C. C. A. *Christensen*, 103.

55. “Lecture and Notes, Undated,” Joseph Mustering Nauvoo Legion.

56. Leonard J. Arrington, “Charles Mackay and His ‘True and Impartial History’ of the Mormons,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1968): 24–40.

57. Six of the eighteen scenes in *Harper’s* also appear in the later Mormon Panorama, including tarring and feathering Joseph Smith, the Nauvoo Temple, Joseph Smith preaching to Native Americans, Joseph Smith leading the Nauvoo Legion, the death of Joseph Smith, and crossing the Mississippi on the ice.



FIGURE 22. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Interior of Carthage Jail*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 120 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

horseback. In Christensen's version, however, only one woman (perhaps Emma) is included at the back of the procession, and all the other figures are changed to men. Christensen also changed the two flags to clearly be American flags, emphasizing that the Latter-day Saints were law-abiding U.S. citizens. Finally, whereas the etching simply shows the Nauvoo temple and a few buildings on the hill behind the figures, Christensen opened up the landscape to show a more expansive view of the city and the land.

The next scene shows the martyrdom of Joseph Smith in *Interior of Carthage Jail* (fig. 22). It is the only painting of the Mormon Panorama to include a caption, which Jensen and Oman believe “tells us of the importance Christensen attached to this experience as the culmination of mob persecution against the early Saints.”⁵⁸ It also has the longest lecture-script entry, which recounts various injustices by local officials. It reads, in part:

Joseph had been arrested about 50 times on various charges but never had been proven guilty of any crime. This time he and his brother Hyrum were charged with High Treason against the state of Illinois and therefore

58. Jensen and Oman, C. C. A. Christensen, 104.

awaiting their trial in the jail, under the pledged faith of the Governor that they should have a fair trial. . . . The Governor had called out the State Militia to aid in arresting the brethren [sic], expecting that people of Nauvoo would stand up in defense for their beloved leaders, but now having them in his power, he disbanded his forces, which principally consisted of the mob that so long and cruelly had persecuted them and the Saints, only retaining a few hundred men as a body guard for himself and a company of the Carthage Grays to guard the prisoners in jail, and these were, of the whole force, the most bitter enemies of the Prophet and had openly declared that the prisoners would not see the sun set on a certain day. This took place in the morning of 27th of June, 1844. . . . A force of about 150 men during the day lay in waiting, partly concealed by a grove of timber about 1½ miles West of the prison, while the Carthage Grays outside the prison walls were in league with them and had their guns only loaded with blank cartridges . . . the mob burst upon the jail, a sham scuffle took place outside between the eight men of Carthage Grays that should have defended the prisoners, and the next moment the stairway was thronged with the mob, who tried to force the door open.⁵⁹

The script goes on to describe how Hyrum was mortally shot, John Taylor was wounded, and Joseph Smith leaped through the window and was shot. There is a sparseness and lack of detail in the painting that sets it apart from the others. The bare floor slopes up in an exaggerated and menacing angle. The sense of emptiness and loss is heightened by two empty chairs and a bed with hats and jackets that will not be picked up again.

Within two years, almost all of the Latter-day Saints had left Nauvoo due to continued persecution. *The Battle of Nauvoo* (fig. 23) depicts one final clash with the government, when an armed mob of hundreds attacked the few remaining Church members. The script reads, “When the mobb [sic] element decided to eliminate all mormons from the state regardless of pove-rtty [sic] or any other reason. Our poor saints were nobly befriended by Captain Anderson and his son, who declared a Mormon had as good a right to his religion as other demonations [sic] to theirs.”⁶⁰

The painting shows the Latter-day Saints scrambling to mount a defense against the vigilantes who are storming across the field in the background in a cloud of white smoke from their firearms. The script explains that the Latter-day Saints unsuccessfully tried to fashion

59. “Lecture and Notes, Undated,” Interior of Carthage Jail, 2nd Interior of Carthage Jail.

60. “Lecture and Notes, Undated,” Catching Quails.



FIGURE 23. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *The Battle of Nauvoo*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 76½ × 113½ inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

cannons with old metal parts. Christensen poignantly included details of orderly life run amok—chimney smoke from a tidy house (complete with outhouse in back) that will soon be destroyed, split-rail fences torn down in the chaos, gun smoke obscuring the bountiful corn fields, armed men coming out of houses, a ripe squash patch about to be trampled instead of harvested, a family dog running along with the commotion, and a hat blown off in the rush to defend the town.

Symbolic Dress and Disguise

In the Anglo-Saxon literature, the outlaws often used tricks of disguise to outfox their enemies, either concealing their true identity (as Robin Hood did at a Nottingham archery contest) or actually pretending to be another known person (as Robin Hood did when he donned the cloak and blew the horn of his slain enemy Guy of Gisborne, fooling the sheriff of Nottingham).⁶¹ Although the Mormon Panorama does not show the Latter-day Saints using tricks of disguise, costuming and

61. Holt, *Robin Hood*, 32, 35.



FIGURE 24. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *The Arrest of Mormon Leaders*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 114¼ inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

dress do serve as important visual symbols. For example, Jensen and Oman describe how in *The Arrest of the Mormon Leaders* (fig. 24), “the passively posed, clean-shaven, neatly dressed Latter-day Saint leaders are placed opposite the aggressive, unkempt, roughly dressed mob that is bristling with weapons.”⁶² Christensen here visualized a theme among nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint writers that contrasted law-abiding Latter-day Saints with their unruly tormentors. Parley P. Pratt, for example, “consistently portrayed the Mormons as ‘citizens’ while designating the vigilantes as ‘Robbers,’” and President Brigham Young “argued in 1855 that the Mormons had broken no laws, but that it was their opponents that had trampled on the Constitution.”⁶³ As in *Haun’s*

62. Jensen and Oman, C. C. A. Christensen, 99.

63. Parley P. Pratt, *History of the Late Persecution Inflicted by the State of Missouri upon the Mormons, in Which Ten Thousand American Citizens Were Robbed, Plundered, and Driven from the State, and Many Others Murdered, Martyred, &c. for Their Religion, and All This by Military Force, by Order of the Executive* (Detroit: Dawson and Bates, 1839), 30; and Grua, “Memoirs of the Persecuted,” 69, 75, referencing Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 2:172 (February 18, 1855).



FIGURE 25. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Exterior of Carthage Jail*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 78 × 114½ inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

Mill (fig. 17), the mounted officer brandishing his cavalry saber in this painting visualizes the sanction of the political state to this trespass.

Similarly, in *Exterior of Carthage Jail* (fig. 25), some members of the mob that murdered Joseph Smith wear “government-issue ammunition pouches, implying that the state government of Illinois was at least passively an accomplice.”⁶⁴ Moreover, it is the state-sanctioned mobbers who wear a sort of disguise, as many of them have blackened faces. Jensen and Oman note this disguise was to help them “avoid identification with a clearly unlawful act.”⁶⁵ The lecture script makes no mention of the blackened faces, yet it does include the narrative detail that “William Webb then stepped forth drawing a large knife intending to sever Joseph’s head from his body in order to gain the \$500.00 reward that was offered for his head, dead or alive.”⁶⁶ The state had imprisoned the Prophet and made him an outlaw with a bounty on his head, just like an outlaw from medieval literature. There is also a sense here of the failure

64. Jensen and Oman, C. C. A. *Christensen*, 105.

65. Jensen and Oman, C. C. A. *Christensen*, 105.

66. “Lecture and Notes, Undated,” *Exterior of Carthage Jail*.

of the political state to protect the innocent, and that is highlighted by the women and children who flee from the violence with arms raised, and by Joseph's murdered body dressed in pure white and protected from further maiming by a bright beam of light from heaven.

Establishment of True Authority

Over the course of the Mormon Panorama, there is a shift in attitude about the desirability of untamed ecological space. In the early paintings, such as *Saints Driven from Jackson County Missouri* (fig. 4), the Latter-day Saints are shown being forced to leave their civilized homes and flee into the forest like animals or outlaws. However, in outlawry "it is only outside it [the law] that true justice can be found,"⁶⁷ and we start to see a sense of this in the Mormon Panorama paintings as the forest provides shelter and resources for the refugees, and natural elements conspire to aid them.

The shift in the desirability of wilderness is brought full circle in the twenty-third and final image, *Entering the Great Salt Lake Valley* (fig. 26), which shows a caravan of pioneer wagons emerging from a wooded canyon. Finally, the Latter-day Saints have reached the other side of the forest that they were thrust into earlier in Missouri and Nauvoo. The movement of the figures is strikingly different in this painting in that it moves from the left, from under a lush canopy of greenwood, to the right, where an empty valley lies before them. In addition, the movement is no longer toward the viewer and the foreground, but away from the viewer and into an expansive background.

The forest is remembered here as a liminal space where the Church members were transformed from outlaws to heroes, and also a barrier between the U.S. government and the new society the Latter-day Saints hoped to build. The forest had become a place of protection for the Latter-day Saints, although it was always meant to be a temporary one. The valley is imagined as a blank slate on which to build a new and better society. Christensen's lecture script says that Brigham Young "had proved himself a modern Moses" and that when his wagon train reached the Salt Lake Valley, "the pioneers at once began plowing up the ground."⁶⁸ According to historian David Grua, the religious persecution experienced by the Latter-day Saints in Missouri and Illinois

67. Keen, *Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, 91.

68. "Lecture and Notes, Undated," *Entering Great Salt Lake Valley*.



FIGURE 26. C. C. A. Christensen (1831–1912), *Entering the Great Salt Lake Valley*, c. 1878, tempera on muslin, 77¼ × 113 inches. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of the grandchildren of C. C. A. Christensen, 1970.

caused them to conclude “that America as a nation had fallen and that true patriots would only find freedom in the American West.”⁶⁹ Thus, in 1854, Apostle George A. Smith proclaimed, “Like the pilgrim fathers who first landed upon Plymouth Rock, we are here pilgrims, and exiles from *liberty*; and instead of being driven into the wilderness to perish, as our enemies had designed, we find ourselves in the middle of the floor, or on the top of the heap. Right in the country that scientific men and other travellers had declared worthless, we are becoming rich in the comforts and blessings of life, we are now rocking in the cradle of liberty, in which we are daily growing.”⁷⁰

As Robert Pogue Harrison has noted, the old English outlaw stories always end with rectification and emergence from the forest: “Once absolved, the outlaw leaves the forest behind and steps into the light of

69. Grua, “Memoirs of the Persecuted,” 60.

70. George A Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 2:24 (July 24, 1854), emphasis in original.

salvation.”⁷¹ In part, this is true in the final Christensen painting, where the sun-dappled valley beckoning to the pioneers clearly lies beyond and apart from the shadowy forest. Yet, unlike the traditional outlaw narrative, the Latter-day Saints aren’t absolved or repatriated into the U.S. legal system. There is no final reconciliation with a king or government, but only with God.

Conclusion: Zion as Greenwood

The Mormon Panorama exhibits motifs that are found in outlaw literature as well as in the Biblical exodus. The Anglo-Saxon outlaw literature also has significant overlap with the exodus story, but it has not been well explored by scholars.⁷² It has been documented elsewhere that nineteenth-century members of the Church saw themselves as reenacting the ancient Israelite exodus as a chosen people. They may even have seen themselves as the third iteration of this story, following both Old Testament and Book of Mormon exodus patterns. Although a detailed examination of these parallels is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that the themes of outlawry are also strikingly apparent in the Book of Mormon. Nephi’s story, for example, matches up nicely with the themes of outlaw literature identified above: (1) loss of status when he was bound and abused by his older brothers (1 Ne. 3:28; 7:16); (2) loss of land when his family left Jerusalem and gave up their inheritance (1 Ne. 2:4); (3) existence in a prolonged wilderness exile outside the borders of Jerusalem and then in a new continent (1 Ne. 17:4); (4) gathering of supporters, including Zoram and Ishmael (1 Ne. 4:35; 7:4–5); (5) companionship of animals in the sense that wild beasts were divinely provided and their meat was even made “sweet” so it did not need to be cooked (1 Ne. 16:31; 17:2, 12); (6) numerous political clashes in the New World between the rival Nephites and Lamanites (2 Ne. 5:14); (7) tricks of disguise when Nephi donned Laban’s clothes and imitated Laban’s voice to gain access to the plates of brass (1 Ne 4:19–20); and (8) establishment of true authority when

71. Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 81.

72. Although Simon Schama suggests they are ancient patterns, and Sarah Harlan-Haughey mentions a possible connection between Cain in the Old Testament and Beowulf, the authors Maurice Keen and J. C. Holt, who wrote two foundational studies on Anglo-Saxon outlaw legends, do not explore this connection with more ancient ideas about Exodus.

Nephi led his band of followers into the wilderness, observed the law of Moses, and built a temple (2 Ne. 5:7–16). Nephi even embodies other Anglo-Saxon outlaw traits and tropes such as superhuman strength, archery prowess, beheading of the enemy, and wicked elder brothers. There may be more to say about how the themes of outlawry show up in the Book of Mormon, especially in the character of Nephi, or how Christensen's images reflect Biblical exodus patterns.

As Robin Hood's greenwood became a powerful symbol of his cause, so the American wilderness became a symbol for the Latter-day Saints of their outsider status, moral rightness, and divine deliverance. Both the Mormon Panorama and the Anglo-Saxon legends were motivated by a concern with political corruption, an attentiveness to moralizing meaning, a sense of pride of place, and even simply a need for entertainment. Christensen's paintings visualize the moral rightness of nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints relative to injustice in American society and government. Their outcast status became evidence for them that they were God's chosen people, called upon to establish true justice and righteousness in a special place apart. And Christensen presented this history as a form of entertainment—an evening of theatrical art, oral history, and hymn singing.

The Mormon Panorama was an important tool in solidifying the collective memory of the Church. It not only collated the early stories of persecution, hardship, faith, and miracles but also added a visual dimension to the oral narrative and presented it in a theatrical, emotional, and memorable way. Christensen drew from Dibble's list of scenes, followed published accounts of events such as in the *Catching Quail* painting, studied photographs of sites such as Hicks's photograph of Liberty Jail, copied McGahey's lithograph of Joseph preaching to Native Americans and the published lithograph of Joseph with the Nauvoo Legion, and conducted interviews with witnesses to get details such as the manner of death for Father McBride in *Haun's Mill*. These efforts gave his narrative a greater sense of accuracy, legitimacy, and objectiveness. By focusing on these particular scenes, Christensen encouraged other members to focus on them too. Christensen built upon memories of specific moments in Church history that were already coalescing in the collective consciousness of the Latter-day Saints, but he was the first to complete a full set of images, thus helping to consolidate that memory and shape the narrative.

Although Christensen began the Mormon Panorama in 1878, just a year after the death of Brigham Young, Christensen never depicted him

in these images, even when the script mentioned Young specifically, as it did in the final image of wagons arriving in the Salt Lake Valley. Joseph Smith, however, appeared in eight of the twenty-three paintings. This suggests that the Mormon Panorama was intended primarily for the edification and memory shaping of the younger generation that never knew Joseph Smith. In 1879, Christensen wrote, “The old generation who bore the burdens of the day in the persecutions in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois will no longer be with us a few years hence. History will preserve much, but art alone can make the narrative of the suffering of the Saints comprehensible for posterity.”⁷³ Christensen’s presentation of key moments in early Church history allowed generations of Church members to identify with and internalize these experiences.

Church leaders at the time welcomed Christensen’s contribution to stabilizing Latter-day Saint memory and identity. Christensen began showing his presentation in 1880, the same year that Joseph Smith’s First Vision account was canonized. Several handbills advertising Mormon Panorama presentations were endorsed by Church President John Taylor, his counselor Joseph F. Smith, many Utah bishops, stake presidents, and even a mayor. On one such handbill, the endorsement reads: “We, the Undersigned, having witnessed Elder C. C. A. Christensen’s Historical Panorama and Lecture, do hereby certify that we were pleasantly entertained and highly edified thereby, and with pleasure recommend them to the patronage of the Latter-day Saints, and all lovers of Truth and Fine Art.”⁷⁴

Both the outlaw legends and the Mormon Panorama narrative were based on real events but seen through the lens of people at a slightly later time who were projecting their own circumstances and desires onto the past. By the time Christensen painted these scenes in the 1880s, he was looking back half a century to imagine events such as the expulsion from Jackson County. These paintings, therefore, help us understand the context and priorities of Utah Latter-day Saints in the late nineteenth century. By that time, the Latter-day Saints had fully embraced their status as outsiders in American society. In 1857, Stephen Douglas said, “The inhabitants of Utah, as a community, are *outlaws* and alien

73. C. C. A. Christensen to A. W. Winberg, *Bikuben*, March 20, 1879, quoted in Jensen and Oman, *C. C. A. Christensen*, 18.

74. Handbill, “The Grand Historical Exhibition,” n.d., c. 1880s, Brigham Young University Museum of Art.

enemies, unfit to exercise the right to self-government.”⁷⁵ The Latter-day Saints knew they were seen as unquestionably different from and unable to assimilate into American society.

Moreover, by the late nineteenth century, renewed tensions with the federal government over statehood and polygamy kept issues of land ownership and usage a central issue for the Latter-day Saints. In illustrating the Latter-day Saint experience, Christensen presented them not only as outsiders but also as heroic figures with a divine right to the land. According to Steven Harper, “Christensen’s depiction of past persecutions would have resonated with Latter-day Saints who were dealing with a hostile government and Protestant establishment. The illustrated narration catalyzed memory recursion.”⁷⁶ The overarching themes of the Mormon Panorama are persecution and injustice, and “Christensen emphasized persecution in his scenes, both visually and orally, from the harassment Smith experienced as a result of his vision to his being tarred and feathered in Ohio to the Missouri persecutions to Smith’s martyrdom to the saints’ being driven from the United States. By so doing, he forged a coherent narrative characterized by chosen-ness and opposition.”⁷⁷ Pressure from the federal government in the late nineteenth century colored the way the Latter-day Saints remembered earlier events, even influencing which moments they chose to emphasize. The narrative told by Christensen’s Mormon Panorama is one of persecution, and it had as much to do with the earlier events as it did with circumstances surrounding the Church members viewing the presentation in 1880.

Latter-day Saint self-understanding has changed since the nineteenth century, and Church members today no longer view themselves as persecuted outcasts in quite the same way that they once did. In his book *The Mormon People*, Matthew Bowman argues that over the course of the twentieth century Latter-day Saints shifted from seeing themselves as outsiders to seeing themselves (or at least trying to portray themselves) as the ultimate insiders.⁷⁸ Perhaps this outlaw hero

75. Stephen A. Douglas, *Kansas, Utah, and the Dred Scott Decision. Remarks of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, Delivered in the State House at Springfield, Illinois, on 12th June, 1857* (Springfield, Ill.: 1857), 6–8, as quoted in Fluhman, “A Peculiar People,” 109, emphasis added.

76. Harper, *First Vision*, 111.

77. Harper, *First Vision*, 110.

78. Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of An American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012).

narrative does not hold up as well today, but there are still threads of it in Latter-day Saint memory. Members of the Church still see pioneer art in their Church manuals, celebrate Pioneer Day to commemorate the arrival of the Latter-day Saints in the Salt Lake valley, dress their youth in pioneer costume to reenact pioneer treks, and sing pioneer songs with lines like “We’ll find the place which God for us prepared, Far away in the West.”⁷⁹ For Latter-day Saints, Zion is still in some sense like Robin Hood’s greenwood: a place on the borders of society where God’s exiled chosen people can be called together and dwell in righteousness.

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79. William Clayton, “Come, Come Ye Saints,” *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 30.

Latter-day Saints and Images of Christ's Crucifixion

John Hilton III, Anthony Sweat, and Josh Stratford

In his classic 1897 work *The Ministry of Art*, Frank Bristol proclaimed, “Art has glorified Christianity. It has set forth her doctrines, portrayed her saints, and even her very God and Savior. Limited only by the necessary restrictions of her powers, art has been a teacher of things divine.”¹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (herein referred to as “the Church”) also employs the power of visual art to portray its central doctrines and perpetuate its sacred history. Religious paintings adorn hallways and classrooms of Latter-day Saint meetinghouses, fill the walls of sacred temples, and accompany published articles in Church magazines and other curricula. Indeed, the Church encourages the didactic use of art to help its members understand religious messages. For instance, the 2016 manual *Teaching in the Savior's Way* states, “Art, including pictures, videos, and dramatizations, can help engage learners—especially visual learners—and make scriptural accounts more memorable. The art you use should be more than decoration; it should help learners understand gospel doctrines.”²

Many Latter-day Saints have indeed learned gospel doctrines from visual art, forming and framing their conceptions of historical and doctrinal subjects through the communicative power of art, sometimes unconsciously so. Consider how Arnold Friberg's oft-reproduced Book of Mormon paintings have reared entire generations of Saints who know

1. Frank Milton Bristol, *The Ministry of Art* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1897), 54.

2. “Use Music, Stories, and Art to Teach Doctrine,” in *Teaching in the Savior's Way* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2016), 22.

the stories of Samuel the Lamanite on the city wall and Ammon defending the king's flocks. Conversely, think of the dissonance that can occur when people learn from historical sources that Joseph Smith sometimes translated the Book of Mormon by placing Urim and Thummim stones in a hat when most Church art and film does not portray the translation process that way.³ Instead, Book of Mormon translation art typically depicts Joseph sitting with his finger on open plates, without any visible Urim and Thummim, pensively translating in his mind as a scribe writes behind a sheet.⁴

Issues connecting religious art, doctrinal understanding, and spiritual impact are not inconsequential. As art historian Jenny Champoux wrote, "[Art] has the power to shape belief, influencing the way Mormons tell scriptural stories and understand doctrinal lessons."⁵ Or as Noel Carmack, a scholar of Latter-day Saint artwork, noted, "The motivating impact that visual images of Christ have on members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cannot be overestimated."⁶ Visual images are so important that in May 2020, the First Presidency of the Church sent a letter directing that "framed artwork that focuses on the Savior should always be displayed" in "meetinghouse entries and foyers," specifically "artwork that depicts the Savior Himself or the Savior ministering to others."⁷

Although artwork helps shape understanding and culture, art also *mirrors* cultural values and beliefs. The relationship between art and culture is symbiotic. Kerry Freedman writes in *Teaching Visual Culture*, "Visual culture creates, as well as reflects, personal and social [norms]."⁸

3. See "Book of Mormon Translation," Gospel Topics Essays, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/book-of-mormon-translation?lang=eng>.

4. See Anthony Sweat, "The Role of Art in Teaching Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine," *Religious Educator* 16, no. 3 (2016): 40–57. The first published image of Joseph Smith translating using a hat in an institutional Church magazine appeared in the *Ensign* 50, no. 1 (January 2020): 38–39.

5. Jennifer Champoux, "Wise or Foolish: Women in Mormon Biblical Narrative Art," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2018): 71.

6. Noel A. Carmack, "Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture, 1900–1999," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2000): 19.

7. "Principles and Guidelines for Meetinghouse Foyers and Entries," Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, May 11, 2020, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/art-foyers-entryways-reverence-jesus-christ>.

8. Kerry Freedman, *Teaching Visual Culture: Curriculum, Aesthetics, and the Social Life of Art* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003), xii.

What artists see, think, understand, and value as part of their culture is infused into their creative expressions. If something is not of value to a particular culture, it usually isn't emphasized or embraced in that people's art. If a historical episode or doctrinal teaching is important, you will find those cultural tenets adopted in and displayed through that culture's art.

Given the importance of artwork in shaping religious understanding and how a culture's given values are reflected in its art, the purpose of this article is to explore how the Church and its members view and have used artistic imagery of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We chose to examine this issue after noticing an apparent disconnect between the teachings of scriptures and Church leaders regarding Christ's Crucifixion and the perceptions of many Latter-day Saints of its atoning value.

Latter-day Saint scriptures, including the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, heavily emphasize the salvific importance of Christ's Crucifixion relative to his suffering in Gethsemane. More than fifty passages of scripture speak of Christ *dying* for our sins, whereas only two passages speak of Christ suffering for our sins in Gethsemane.⁹ Moreover, Joseph Smith referred to Gethsemane only once in his non-canonized writings and sermons, but he mentioned Christ's death more than thirty times.¹⁰ All Church presidents have made more statements regarding Christ *dying* for our sins on the cross than they have made about Christ *suffering* for our sins in Gethsemane.¹¹

While the scriptures and Church leaders emphasize Calvary relative to Gethsemane, some Latter-day Saint populations do not. We surveyed

9. Passages counted as references to Christ suffering our sins during his Crucifixion include the following: John 3:14–15; 12:32; Romans 5:6, 8, 10; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20–22; 2:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Hebrews 9:15, 26; 10:10, 12; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; Revelation 5:8–9; 1 Nephi 11:33; 2 Nephi 2:7–8; 9:5; 26:24; Mosiah 14:12; 15:7–9, 12; 18:2; Alma 21:9; 22:14; 30:26; 33:22; 34:15; Helaman 14:15–16; 3 Nephi 9:21–22; 11:14; 27:14; Ether 12:33; Doctrine and Covenants 18:11; 20:23–25; 21:9; 35:2; 46:13; 53:2; 54:1; 76:41; 138:2, 35, 57; and Moses 7:47, 55. The two verses that specify Christ atoned for our sins in Gethsemane are Mosiah 3:7 and Doctrine and Covenants 19:16–19. See John Hilton III, "Teaching the Scriptural Emphasis on the Crucifixion," *Religious Educator* 20, no. 3 (2019): 133–53.

10. John Hilton III, "Joseph Smith, Gethsemane, and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ," in *How and What We Worship: Christology and Praxis in the Revelations of Joseph Smith*, ed. Rachel Cope, Carter Charles, and Jordan Watkins (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2020), 320.

11. John Hilton III, Emily K. Hyde, and McKenna Trussel, "The Teachings of Church Leaders Regarding the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ: 1852–2018," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2020): 76.

992 students at Brigham Young University (BYU) and asked them this question: “Where did Jesus Christ atone for our sins?” This was a free-response question, and students could write as much or as little as they wished. In total, 541 people (55%) wrote “Gethsemane,” 416 (42%) wrote “Gethsemane and Calvary,” and 35 (3%) wrote additional answers, such as “on earth.”

We next surveyed 835 students at BYU and asked, “Where would you say the Atonement mostly took place?” We provided students with only two choices—Gethsemane or Calvary. In total, 737 people (88%) selected “Gethsemane,” and 98 (12%) selected “Calvary.” Less rigorous, anecdotal surveys with other Latter-day Saint adult populations in the United States, Europe, and Mexico yielded similar results.

Admittedly, this second question presents a false choice of having to locate Christ’s Atonement primarily in Gethsemane or Calvary. We remedied this issue by asking this same question but adding a third possible response. We asked 792 BYU students (who were not part of the previous groups surveyed), “Although Christ’s Atonement was a process, where would you say Jesus mostly atoned for our sins?” This time students had three choices: “In the Garden of Gethsemane,” “On the Cross at Calvary,” or “Christ atoned for our sins equally in Gethsemane and on the Cross.” Even when students had the option of choosing both Gethsemane and Calvary, a majority (58%) chose Gethsemane only. Forty percent of students chose Gethsemane and Calvary, and 2 percent chose Calvary only.

While larger sample sizes from different populations would be needed to make more broad and concrete assertions, these results indicate that at least some Latter-day Saints emphasize Gethsemane as the *primary* location where Christ atoned for our sins, with Calvary being a secondary location.¹²

12. We note that several scholars, both inside and outside the Church, have discussed this emphasis that members place on Gethsemane. For example, John G. Turner, a Protestant scholar, explained that for Latter-day Saints “the principal scene of Christ’s suffering and, thus, his atonement, was at Gethsemane rather than on the cross.” John G. Turner, *The Mormon Jesus* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016), 284. Robert Millet wrote, “It is probably the case that if one hundred Protestants were asked where the atonement of Christ took place, those one hundred persons would answer: At Golgotha, on the cross. It is also no doubt true that if one hundred Latter-day Saints were asked the same question, a large percentage would respond: In Gethsemane, in the garden.” Robert Millet, “This Is My Gospel,” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 401.

Although there may be many reasons for the apparent difference between authorized Church teachings and the perceptions of Latter-day Saints, we hypothesize that artwork is one important factor.¹³ In this article, we seek to do some preliminary explorations of the intersection between artwork and doctrine in connection with Christ's Crucifixion. Specifically, our research questions are as follows:

1. When Latter-day Saints are asked to select artwork to display in their homes, do they select Crucifixion or Gethsemane images? What appears to influence their choices? How do their choices of Crucifixion or Gethsemane art compare to Protestant Christians' selections among the same images?
2. To what extent does Crucifixion artwork appear in Church buildings relative to images of Gethsemane?
3. To what extent has Crucifixion artwork appeared in the Church periodicals for adults (the *Millennial Star* [1840–1970], the *Improvement Era* [1897–1970], and the *Ensign* [1971–2020]) relative to images of Gethsemane?
4. Which Crucifixion artwork has been most frequently utilized by the *Ensign*?

Latter-day Saints Choices Regarding Displaying Artwork

We surveyed 853 BYU students to identify their perceptions of artwork portraying Christ's Crucifixion and his suffering in Gethsemane. These students were in a required religion class (REL C 225), and they took this survey as an optional question on a quiz delivered electronically before class. Students were shown three images of the Crucifixion and three images of Gethsemane. To help mitigate for bias in artistic expression, we chose one painting of Gethsemane and one of Calvary produced by each of the same three artists, representing different time periods and styles: Carl Bloch from the 1800s with a more classical style;

13. Other hypotheses for an emphasis on Gethsemane include the powerful prose Elder James E. Talmage wrote regarding Gethsemane in *Jesus the Christ* or Elder Bruce R. McConkie's memorable final conference talk, "The Purifying Power of Gethsemane." It may also come from past Church curricula that have emphasized Gethsemane over Calvary. See John Hilton III, *Considering the Cross: How Calvary Connects Us with Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021), 96–100. Perhaps because the Latter-day Saint doctrinal teaching that Gethsemane played a part in the suffering for sin is unique in Christianity, it has been emphasized by some Church members.



FIGURE 1. Survey Images. Image 1: Carl Heinrich Bloch, *Christ on the Cross*, 1870; image 2: Harry Anderson, *Jesus Praying in Gethsemane*, 1973, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.; image 3: Carl Heinrich Bloch, *Christ at Gethsemane*, 1880; image 4: Harry Anderson, *The Crucifixion*, ca. 1970, © Intellectual Reserve Inc.; image 5: J. Kirk Richards, *Crucifixion*, courtesy J. Kirk Richards; image 6: J. Kirk Richards, *Gethsemane*, courtesy J. Kirk Richards.

Harry Anderson from the 1900s with a more realistic, illustrative style; and J. Kirk Richards from the 2000s with a representational, somewhat abstracted style. While being able to see all six images on the same page, students were asked, “If you had to choose one of the following six paintings to hang in your home, which would you choose?” The paintings were displayed as in figure 1.

Students selected the following paintings, listed in order from most to least chosen:

41.7% chose image 2, of Gethsemane by Harry Anderson

29.6% chose image 3, of Gethsemane by Carl Bloch

25.6% chose image 6, of Gethsemane by J. Kirk Richards

1.8% chose image 5, of the Crucifixion by J. Kirk Richards

0.9% chose image 1, of the Crucifixion by Carl Bloch

0.4% chose image 4, of the Crucifixion by Harry Anderson

In total, 829 (97%) students in our sample chose a painting of Gethsemane. When asked why they chose the painting they did, 410 people (48%) specifically wrote something negative relative to Crucifixion imagery, suggesting that part of their decision was influenced less by what they *liked* about the Gethsemane images and more by what they *did*

not like about the Crucifixion images. We examined these 410 responses looking for common themes. A process of emergent coding led to five themes that we used to code each reference. Table 1 summarizes our coding structure.

TABLE 1. Negative Statements about Crucifixion Artwork

Theme	Key words	Sample phrase	Percent of the total respondents who spoke about the Crucifixion in their response to why they chose a specific painting
Violent	Graphic, gruesome, dark	"They all seem too graphic or painful to look at."	32
Don't like	No connection, wouldn't want in home	"I never liked the paintings of him on the cross."	32
Sad	Sorrow, uncomfortable	"When I look at [the cross] I feel sad and uncomfortable."	21
Focus on death	Dying, death	"Christ on the cross focuses too much on his death, and I prefer to focus on Christ's resurrection."	10
Church position	As a Church, LDS culture, in our faith	"Other churches use crosses so much, and I was always taught that we don't use the symbol of the cross."	5

Of those who explained their choice in artwork in terms of their feelings about Crucifixion artwork, 32 percent said that the Crucifixion images were too violent and graphic. For example, one student wrote, "The [paintings of the Crucifixion] seemed more gruesome and made me feel guiltier about being human and making mistakes in my life." Another responded, "I don't want to always remember Christ in pain and agony, it seems like it is almost celebrating his suffering." One student captured the sentiment of many, writing, "It is sad to see Jesus Christ on cross and too violent for my future children to look at everyday even though it is important to remember."

Another 32 percent of respondents said they did not like or feel a connection to depictions of Jesus on the cross. One student wrote, “Maybe it is bad of me, but I have never been too keen on seeing pictures of Christ on the cross. Yes, it invokes a feeling of respect, love, and admiration of the Savior, but I also get extremely uncomfortable seeing it as well.” Another student explained, “I don’t really feel a connection to Crucifixion artwork, it just doesn’t speak to me.” Most respondents in this category stated something like, “I don’t like to focus on the cross,” “I wouldn’t want to see Christ on the Cross in my home,” or “I do not like to see Christ hanging on the Cross because many criminals were hung like that as well.”

Related to the previous two categories, 21 percent of respondents said the cross makes them sad or uncomfortable. For example, “[Crucifixion paintings] honestly make me feel slightly uncomfortable, as Christ would be hanging on the cross almost fully naked in my house every day,” and “I love the truth of the cross, but I feel the image of the cross is often focused on sadness and despair rather than hope and joy.”

Ten percent of students said they did not like that the cross focuses on Christ’s death. Sample statements include, “Sometimes just a picture of the cross seems to celebrate His death over the fact that He lives,” and “While I recognize the significance and importance of Christ’s death on the cross, I’d rather not focus on the moment that He died.” Finally, 5 percent mentioned their belief about the Church’s position on the cross. For example, one student wrote, “As members of the church we don’t dwell on the fact that he suffered on the cross, we focus on the atonement.” Another said, “I think focusing on the crucifixion is not how [members of the Church] view the Atonement.” For these individuals, there was clearly a connection between their understanding of Christ’s Atonement and their perceptions of artwork.

Of the twenty-four individuals who chose a Crucifixion painting, seven chose Carl Bloch’s depiction, three selected Harry Anderson’s, and fourteen chose J. Kirk Richards’s. When examining the comments of those who chose a Crucifixion image as to why they chose a specific image, we found that about two-thirds centered on the aesthetics and style of the painting, as well as its uniqueness. The other third mentioned how they felt the depictions of the cross were meaningful and symbolic. For example, one student wrote, “I feel a sense of awe when I consider the Savior giving his life for me. The image of his lifeless body represents His condescension, submissiveness and love for me.” Another student responded, “Christ’s crucifixion was a symbol of love

and hope. And it literally enabled us to escape the bands of death and be resurrected one day.”

While intuitively these results appear to indicate something unique about the Latter-day Saint population, we wanted to determine whether other Christians would respond differently about their artistic preferences when choosing from the same six paintings. Consequently, we surveyed 100 students at the University of Pikeville, a Christian University in Kentucky founded in 1889 by the Presbyterian Church.¹⁴ Today, two-thirds of the student body self-identify as Christian. Students at the University of Pikeville indicated their preferences for artwork by taking the same survey described above. The following are the results from this population, from artwork selected most to least:

47% chose image 2, of Gethsemane by Harry Anderson

22% chose image 1, of the Crucifixion by Carl Bloch

14% chose image 3, of Gethsemane by Carl Bloch

12% chose image 4, of the Crucifixion by Harry Anderson

5% chose image 6, of Gethsemane by J. Kirk Richards

0% chose image 5, of the Crucifixion by J. Kirk Richards

In total, sixty-six of one hundred (66%) of our sample chose a painting of Gethsemane. While this was still a strong majority, students at the University of Pikeville chose a Crucifixion painting 34 percent of the time, compared to 3 percent from the BYU sample. A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between students at the two schools and their artwork preferences. The relation between these variables were statistically significant.¹⁵

Moreover, University of Pikeville participants also had very different reasoning for selecting their paintings than those at Brigham Young University. In describing why they chose the artwork they did, only 17 percent wrote something negative about the Crucifixion images, as opposed to 48 percent of the BYU students. Those who did write something negative about Crucifixion tended to focus on feelings of sadness or wanting to avoid violent images.

However, in most instances, those who didn't choose a Crucifixion image did not negatively discuss the Crucifixion but instead explained why they chose a Gethsemane image. Their responses centered on three

14. “History,” University of Pikeville, accessed March 16, 2021, www.upike.edu/about/history.

15. The chi-square statistic is used to calculate whether there is a relationship between categorical variables. The results were (X^2 (1, $N = 953$) = 152.3.9, $p < .00001$).

themes: the painting was aesthetically pleasing (36%), they liked to see Jesus praying (27%), and they felt that the painting was peaceful or comforting (25%).¹⁶

No University of Pikeville students mentioned Gethsemane in their response or identified Christ as atoning for our sins in a Gethsemane image.¹⁷ In contrast, 230 (27%) of BYU students specifically commented on Christ's Atonement as taking place in Gethsemane. Although more than 25 percent of University of Pikeville students specifically mentioned choosing a Gethsemane image because they liked seeing Christ pray, almost no BYU students reported selecting a Gethsemane image because they enjoyed seeing Christ praying. This was most likely because BYU students perceived the paintings of Christ in Gethsemane differently from students at the University of Pikeville.

Of the 34 percent (34/100) of individuals at the University of Pikeville who chose a Crucifixion image, 41 percent specifically said it was because the image showed Jesus dying for their sins.¹⁸ One stated, "It would be a daily reminder that he died on the cross for me." Another wrote, "The crucifixion of Jesus is very important to me as Christian because this act made it possible to be saved from sin." In contrast, 21 percent of the BYU students who selected an image of the cross said something about Christ dying for our sins. Put differently, across the entire survey population, at the University of Pikeville, when commenting on their chosen artwork, 14 percent (14/100) of people wrote about Christ dying for their sins, compared to .01 percent (5/853) of BYU students.

These results appear to verify what Douglas J. Davies wrote: "Amidst Christian traditions Mormonism stands out both iconographically and theologically, in the way it gives higher priority to Christ in Gethsemane than to Christ on the Cross, as favoured by Catholic traditions, or to the bare cross preferred by Protestants."¹⁹ Is this iconographic preference for Gethsemane over the Crucifixion—strongly reflected in the BYU student survey—similarly mirrored in the paintings that are hung in the hallways of Latter-day Saint chapels?

16. Additional student statements were categorized as miscellaneous.

17. It is not surprising that most Christians do not identify Gethsemane as a location of the Savior's Atonement—a reasonable position from their perspective, since the Bible also does not do so.

18. The other three main reasons students reported for choosing a Crucifixion image were that it looked realistic (23%); it evoked powerful feelings (20%); and aesthetics (17%).

19. Douglas J. Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation* (London: Routledge, 2018), 46.

Images of the Crucifixion in Latter-day Saint Meetinghouses

To gather data on paintings that hang in the foyers and hallways of Latter-day Saint buildings, we informally used social-media channels (Instagram and Facebook) to ask willing individuals to share with us information about artwork in the hallways and foyers of their chapels. Participants were asked to count and report in their respective meetinghouses (1) how many total paintings of the Savior hang in the hallways, (2) how many paintings of Christ in Gethsemane are displayed in the hallways and, (3) how many paintings of Christ on the cross hang there. We note that by policy, a typical Latter-day Saint Sunday meetinghouse does not allow any paintings, statues, murals, or mosaics in their main chapel interior, where the congregation meets to partake of the sacrament. Those who have responsibility to care for the building, however, may choose approved artwork to adorn the hallways, offices, and classrooms of Church meetinghouses.²⁰

We received responses regarding 146 Latter-day Saint meetinghouses across 25 states. Of those, 42 were from Utah and 8 from Idaho, with the remainder coming from other states. We also received responses for 5 international chapels, giving our sample a total of 151 Church buildings. Every meetinghouse had pictures of the Savior, with the average building having seven. Slightly fewer than half of the meetinghouses (72/151) had a picture of Gethsemane, and only four had a picture of the Crucifixion. In one of these four cases, the meetinghouse was a large institute building in Idaho, which displayed an image from the *The Life of Jesus Christ Bible Videos* series of Jesus Christ being crucified. In another instance, a small, framed picture of Harry Anderson's depiction of Christ's Crucifixion had been placed in a meetinghouse in Florida. Clearly this was an informal survey based on a social-media convenience sample, and thus the results are exploratory; however, it is notable that while close to half of the meetinghouses displayed artistic images of Gethsemane, only 3 percent displayed an image of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This iconographic scarcity is likely noticeable to newcomers from traditional Catholic or Protestant backgrounds who are used to images of the cross or Christ's Crucifixion. The disparity between Crucifixion and Gethsemane images suggests a similarly strong visual preference for Gethsemane images rather than for Crucifixion images in Latter-day

20. See "Artwork," Policies on Using Church Buildings and Other Property, in *General Handbook: Serving in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2020), 35.4.1.

Saint worship houses, similar to the sampled BYU students' preferences for images in their homes.

While more in-depth and robust research is needed to investigate this phenomenon, one factor alone may explain the scarcity of Crucifixion artwork in the hallways of Latter-day Saint meetinghouses. As mentioned above, those assigned to custodial care of Church meetinghouses can select artwork to be hung based on the policy guideline that "Church-approved artwork for meetinghouses is obtained through the facilities manager using the *Church Facilities Artwork* catalog."²¹ This catalog has a limited set of approved artworks for hanging in chapels. As of March 2021, the Church Facilities Artwork Catalog contained eighty New Testament images, including three of Gethsemane, but none of the Crucifixion. This is particularly interesting given that guidelines for Church artwork include having the artwork "serve as a teaching resource for missionaries and members" and help "portray Church doctrine accurately."²² It may be that the omission of Crucifixion paintings unintentionally works against these objectives by minimizing an event that Joseph Smith referred to as one of the "fundamental principles of our religion."²³

Moreover, the May 2020 guidelines that require an image of Christ to be hung in the welcoming foyer of all Church meetinghouses limit the choice to twenty-two approved paintings. There are images of Christ ministering, teaching, sitting at the Last Supper, suffering in Gethsemane, and rising from the tomb, but there are no images depicting his Crucifixion.²⁴ Thus, even if a local Church leader or facility manager wanted to order an image of Christ's Crucifixion to be displayed in a foyer or hallway, no such options are currently available in the Church-approved facilities catalog.

21. "Artwork."

22. "Guidelines," Church Facilities Artwork, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://churchfacilitiesartwork.churchofjesuschrist.org/guidelines>.

23. In response to a question about the fundamental aspects of his religion, Joseph Smith said, "The fundamental principles of our religion is the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets concerning Jesus Christ, 'that he died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven;' and all other things are only appendages to these, which pertain to our religion." *Elders' Journal*, July 1838," p. [44], the Joseph Smith Papers, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-july-1838/12>, emphasis added.

24. See "Principles and Guidelines for Meetinghouse Foyers and Entries."

Thus far we have seen how individual Church members privilege artwork featuring Gethsemane over Calvary. At the same time, the Church similarly privileges Gethsemane artwork in its meetinghouses. Is this emphasis also represented by the institutional Church's selection of artwork in its official magazines?

Depictions of the Crucifixion in Early Church Magazines

In terms of Latter-day Saint depictions of Christ's Crucifixion, John G. Turner identifies figure 2 as being "possibly the first Mormon printed image of Jesus Christ."²⁵ This depiction by an unnamed artist appeared in 1866, in the inaugural issue of the *Juvenile Instructor*.²⁶ We searched every periodical published or sponsored by the Church prior to 1866,²⁷ including periodicals in foreign languages²⁸ as well as those published by other early restoration churches that claimed belief in Joseph Smith's prophetic call.²⁹ In each case, we looked at the periodical's inaugural issue through issues published until 1866 and did not find any earlier images of Jesus Christ than this one identified by Turner. Thus, it appears that the first printed image of Jesus in a Latter-day Saint publication was of Christ being crucified.



FIGURE 2. Untitled image, artist unnamed, published in 1866. This is the earliest image of Jesus identified in a Latter-day Saint publication.

25. Turner, *Mormon Jesus*, 259.

26. "Death by Crucifying," *Juvenile Instructor* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1866): 2.

27. The periodicals we searched include the following: *The Evening and the Morning Star*, *Messenger and Advocate*, *Elders' Journal*, *Times and Seasons*, *Millennial Star*, *Gospel Reflector*, *The Wasp*, *Nauvoo Neighbor*, *Gospel Light*, *The Prophet*, *The New-York Messenger*, *People's Organ*, *The Frontier Guardian*, *Deseret News*, *Deseret Almanac*, *The Seer*, *Zion's Watchman*, *The Mormon*, *St. Louis Luminary*, and *Western Standard*.

28. The periodicals we searched include the following: *Prophwyd y Jubili*, *Udgorn Seion*, *Étoile du Déseret*, *Skandnaviens Stjerne*, *Zion's Panier*, *Der Darsteller der Heiligen der letzten Tage*, and *Die Reform*.

29. The periodicals we searched include the following: *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, *Voree Herald*, *Star in the East*, *Zion's Reveille*, *Ensign of Liberty*, *Gospel Herald*, *Melchisedek and Aaronic Herald*, *Northern Islander*, *Zion's Messenger*, and *True Latter Day Saints' Herald*.

The text accompanying the article states that crucifixion “was usually done by driving nails through [the victims’] feet and hands, they were in some places left to lie on the ground till they died, and stakes, or sticks sharpened at the ends, were driven through their bodies; in other places the cross was raised up and the bottom end driven violently into a hole made in the earth, which often dislocated, or drove out of their places, the joints of the persons nailed to it.”³⁰ Although the author of the article writes that “a great many who call themselves Christians, or followers of Christ, pay a great deal of reverence to the cross, more, indeed, to the symbol or sign of the manner in which Christ died than to doing what He told them to do,”³¹ the overall thesis of the article seems to be inculcating in readers an understanding of the severity of what Christ suffered.

Atonement Images in the *Millennial Star*, *Improvement Era*, and *Ensign*

In this section, we examine how Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane and his Crucifixion on Calvary were portrayed in three major magazines for adult Church members: the *Millennial Star* (1840–1970), the *Improvement Era* (1897–1970), and the *Ensign* (1971–2020). We included images of Christ praying or suffering in Gethsemane but excluded images of olive trees (without Christ in the image) or the betrayal of Christ (which also took place in Gethsemane). We also excluded any documentary or location photographs that were not considered artistic expressions. We included any representation of Christ hanging on, being nailed to, or being taken down from the cross, and any representation with Christ on the cross in the background. We excluded any implicit or imminent Crucifixion representations including the crown of thorns on Christ, Christ carrying his cross, his trial before Pilate and scourging, the Christus statue (including zoomed in pictures of Christ’s hands), and any images of Golgotha without Christ represented.

Gethsemane and Crucifixion representation in the Millennial Star

The *Millennial Star* was published primarily for the British Latter-day Saints and was begun by Parley P. Pratt in 1840. It ran until 1970, becoming the longest-published periodical by the Church. It was replaced in 1970 by the *Ensign*. In its 130-year run, the *Star* included just three

30. “Death by Crucifying,” 2.

31. “Death by Crucifying,” 2.



FIGURE 3. *Christ in Gethsemane*, Heinrich Hofmann, 1890. © C. Harrison Conroy Co.



FIGURE 4. Artwork of Christ in Gethsemane published in the *Millennial Star* in 1953, attributed to Heinrich Hofmann.

images of Gethsemane and two of the Crucifixion. Heinrich Hofmann's famous image of Christ praying in Gethsemane as he kneels by and rests his hands on a rock (fig. 3) is featured in the December 1948 issue of the *Millennial Star*.³² A similar artwork, attributed to Hofmann, of Jesus praying in Gethsemane, again kneeling by a rock with hands resting upon it (fig. 4), is depicted in the April 1953 issue of the *Millennial Star*.³³ The April 1957 *Millennial Star* shows a two-page spread of a large, pulled-back panoramic view of *The Crucifixion* by Jan Styka (fig. 5).³⁴ The April 1968 *Millennial Star* has an image of Christ praying in Gethsemane accompanying a poem called "Watch with Me" by Gillian Brown-Lee. Just a few pages later, the same issue has a full-page poem and illustration of Jesus nailed on the cross; the poem and artwork were both created by fifteen-year-old Sheila Cuthbert from England (fig. 6).³⁵

32. *Millennial Star* 110, no. 12 (December 1948): 361.

33. *Millennial Star* 115, no. 4 (April 1953): 73.

34. *Millennial Star* 119, no. 4 (April 1957): 112–13.

35. *Millennial Star* 130, no. 4 (April 1968): 15, 22.



FIGURE 5. *The Crucifixion*, Jan Styka, created 1895. This monumental painting (195 feet by 45 feet) is now displayed at Forest Lawn Museum, Glendale, California. Published in 1957.

Gethsemane and Crucifixion Representation in the Improvement Era

We examined every *Improvement Era* magazine between 1897 and 1970 for images of both Gethsemane and Christ's Crucifixion. We note that images in general in the *Improvement Era* were much rarer than in the later *Ensign* magazines. For example, in the decade of the 1930s, there were only twelve images of Jesus Christ in any form in the 120 issues of the magazine. Across the corpus of *Improvement Era* magazines from 1897 to 1970, there were eight images of Christ in Gethsemane and two portrayals of his Crucifixion, reflecting a heavier visual emphasis on Gethsemane than the more balanced results from the *Millennial Star*.

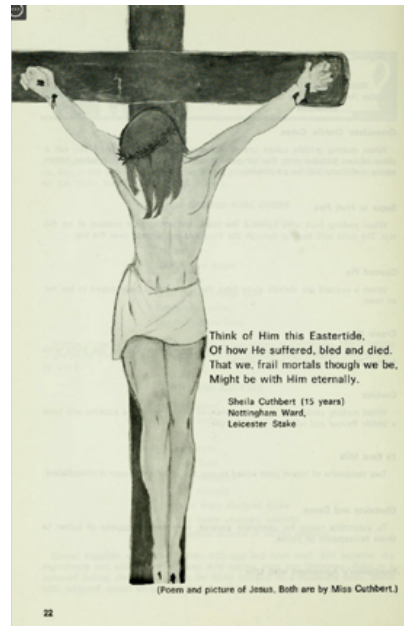


FIGURE 6. Poem and artwork by Sheila Cuthbert, published in 1968.



FIGURE 7. Artwork depicting Christ in Gethsemane published in the *Improvement Era* in 1964. The artist is unidentified.

The earliest *Era* image of Gethsemane was in November 1940 accompanying an article called “Armistice.”³⁶ It contains a black-and-white reprint of Heinrich Hofmann’s well-known image of Christ praying in Gethsemane (fig. 3), the same one previously mentioned as printed in the December 1948 issue of the *Star*. Four more distinct Gethsemane images were printed in the *Era* in the 1950s. In April 1952, accompa-

nying an article by Orson F. Whitney on the Resurrection is an image of Heinrich Hofmann’s other, less well-known Gethsemane painting, the same used in the April 1953 *Star*. This same Hofmann painting was used again in July 1956 and in March 1957. Hofmann’s painting of Christ in Gethsemane, used in 1940, was again reprinted in February 1958, December 1962 (although the image was reversed and cropped), and April 1964. The last Gethsemane image (by an unidentified artist) was also in the April 1964 *Era* (fig. 7). It was printed in color as a small thumbnail but matches the same Gethsemane image printed in the April 1968 *Star*. It shows Christ praying calmly but sorrowfully by a tree, hands resting on his knees, with the sleeping Apostles and city of Jerusalem behind him, a common artistic composition by Christian artists at the time when depicting Gethsemane. Thus, between the *Star* and the *Era* there were twelve depictions of Gethsemane using only three paintings by two artists.

The only two images of Christ’s Crucifixion in the *Era* were in March 1958 and April 1964. Neither of these were printed in the *Star*. The 1958 illustration was a half-page image of the Crucifixion named *It Is Finished* by Johann von Kdeler-Wiliandi (fig. 8). The painting is in neoclassical style and is masterfully executed. The beloved disciple holds a fainting Mary, the mother of Jesus, at Christ’s feet, while another woman (likely representing Mary Magdalene) buries her face in her hands in sorrow. The only other Crucifixion image to appear in the *Era* is a very small image of the Crucifixion, part of a mural by Sidney E. King that was created for the Church pavilion at the 1964 World’s Fair (fig. 9). Several

36. *Improvement Era* 43, no. 11 (November 1940): 653.



FIGURE 8. *It Is Finished*, Johann von Kdeler-Wiliandi, published in 1958.



FIGURE 9. *Jesus Is Crucified*, part of *Life of Christ Mural* created for the 1964 World's Fair, by Sidney E. King.

images from the mural are included in the April 1964 issue. This scene shows the Crucifixion, with three crosses, Jesus's cross larger and in the middle, with a crowd of mourners, soldiers, and onlookers. Between the *Star* and the *Era* there were four depictions of the Crucifixion using four different paintings, each by a different artist.

Gethsemane and Crucifixion in the Ensign

Using the same methodology described for the *Millennial Star* and the *Improvement Era*, we searched the *Ensign* magazine between 1971 and 2020 for artistic images of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion. The *Ensign* began in January 1971 as the official English magazine for adults of the Church, subsuming and replacing other Church periodicals such as the *Millennial Star* and *Improvement Era* (along with the *Juvenile Instructor* and *Relief Society* magazines). At the end of 2020, the *Ensign* was discontinued, replaced by the worldwide *Liahona* magazine. In comparison to the *Star* and *Era*, the *Ensign* historically made greater use of visual imagery to accompany the printed word. We identified 100 total representations of Christ's Crucifixion in the *Ensign*. Of those 100, 53 were smaller than a quarter page, 24 were a quarter page up to just under a half page, 9 were between half a page and just smaller than three-quarters of a page, and 14 were three-quarters of a page or larger.

In comparison, we found 215 total representations of Christ in Gethsemane in the *Ensign*. Of those 215, 131 were smaller than a quarter page, 39 were a quarter page to just under a half page, 13 were a half page to just smaller than three-quarters of a page, and 32 were three-quarters of a page or larger. These data are summarized in table 2.³⁷

TABLE 2. *Ensign* Crucifixion and Gethsemane Images, 1971–2020

Crucifixion Images	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010–2020	Total
Smaller than ¼ page	6	4	12	16	15	53
¼ to just under ½ page	0	8	8	5	3	24
½ to just under ¾ page	0	1	5	1	2	9
¾ to full page	2	1	7	1	3	14
Total Crucifixion	8	14	32	23	23	100

Gethsemane Images	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010–2020	Total
Smaller than ¼ page	8	14	17	41	51	131
¼ to just under ½ page	0	5	9	11	14	39
½ to just under ¾ page	0	0	0	9	4	13
¾ to full page	2	1	5	14	10	32
Total Gethsemane	10	20	31	75	73	215

Although we found more than twice as many Gethsemane images as Crucifixion images, this does not tell the complete story. Between 1971 and 1999, there were 61 images of Gethsemane compared to 54 images of the Crucifixion, showing a relatively balanced artistic representation of these two atoning events. In contrast, between 2000 and 2020, there were 154 images of Gethsemane compared to 46 images of the Crucifixion—more than three Gethsemane images for each image of the Crucifixion.

Even more disparate results occur when we examined the largest images (those from three-quarters of a page up to a full page). Between 1971 and 1999, there were eight large images of Gethsemane and ten large images of the Crucifixion, again representing a visual balance. However,

37. There are small differences between our data set and that of Noel A. Carmack in his article “Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture, 1900–1999.” Carmack’s study appears to have included images of the crown of thorns and zoomed-in pictures of Christ’s hands on the Christus statue as being Crucifixion images, whereas we excluded them.

between 2000 and 2020, there were twenty-four large images of Gethsemane compared to only four images of the Crucifixion—six times as many large images of Gethsemane. Curious to learn whether this large discrepancy reflected the text of the *Ensign*, we examined the text surrounding the large images of Gethsemane between the years 2000 and 2020. We found that the text accompanying these images generally did *not* dictate the necessity of using a picture of Gethsemane. In these twenty-four instances, only four spoke specifically of Gethsemane without also referencing Calvary. In ten instances, both Gethsemane and Calvary were mentioned in the text. On three occasions there was no reference to Christ's Atonement whatsoever, and text accompanying seven of the twenty-four large Gethsemane images talked about Christ's Atonement without referencing a specific location.

For example, an article about the relevance of the Book of Mormon included a section about the Savior's Atonement. Several Book of Mormon verses were used in this section; however, none of them explicitly talked about Calvary or Gethsemane. Accompanying this section of the article was a three-quarter-page image of Christ in Gethsemane.³⁸ This is representative of several other examples in which, based on the article content, an image of Christ's Crucifixion would have been equally appropriate as a painting of Gethsemane. While a complete textual analysis of *Ensign* text is beyond the scope of our study, our preliminary investigation suggests that heavy use of Gethsemane imagery relative to Calvary between 2000 and 2020 was not primarily based on the accompanying article text.

Which Crucifixion Artwork Is Most Frequently Utilized by the Ensign?

The two most common Crucifixion images appearing in *Ensign* magazines were Carl Heinrich Bloch's *Christ on the Cross* (30 times; fig. 10) and Harry Anderson's *The Crucifixion* (25 times; fig. 11). These two paintings account for 56 percent of all paintings in the *Ensign* depicting Christ's Crucifixion. Bloch's *Christ on the Cross* and Anderson's *Crucifixion* were two of the three Crucifixion images that were part of the student survey described earlier and are also shown in figure 1.

Bloch's oft-used painting of the Crucifixion of Jesus is brilliantly painted: The dark clouds cause the contrasting vertical, light image of

38. See Byron R. Merrill, "They Wrote to Us As If We Were Present," *Ensign* 30, no. 1 (January 2000), 12.

Christ on the cross in the middle of the painting to stand out. Christ hangs dead, yet serene, with a halo around his head. While realistically painted, the nail prints in Jesus's hands and feet and the wound in his side are not gory or bloody, features that—based on our surveys—would likely not be embraced by Church members. Overall, this painting presents a dignified, realistic, and masterfully painted image, which may be why the institutional Church embraces and uses it most often when portraying Christ's Crucifixion in its periodicals.

Anderson's Crucifixion painting includes the two thieves, tied by ropes to their crosses as opposed to nailed, with Jesus nailed in the middle. Like Bloch's image, Anderson's Crucifixion is realistic yet devoid of overt representations of gore and pain. It is more of a panoramic, pulled-back image, showing a crowd of people affected by Christ's death: a Roman soldier sitting pensively, women mourning at the feet of Jesus, and passersby looking on. This beautifully painted image provides a poignant picture of what transpired at Calvary.

Outside of the Bloch and Anderson paintings, only four other Crucifixion representations appeared more than twice in the *Ensign*, with twenty-nine unique artistic depictions in total. One image, *The Crucifixion of Christ* by Louise Parker (fig. 12), has appeared six times. It has a similar composition to Anderson's Crucifixion scene. A second Crucifixion image used more than twice in the *Ensign* is Wilson Ong's



FIGURE 10. Carl Heinrich Bloch, *Christ on the Cross*, 1870.



FIGURE 11. Harry Anderson, *The Crucifixion*, ca. 1970, © Intellectual Reserve Inc.



FIGURE 12. *The Crucifixion of Christ*, Louise Parker. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.



FIGURE 13. *Christ Being Taken Down from the Cross*, Wilson Ong. © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

painting depicting Christ as he is lowered from the cross (fig. 13).

This painting has been used four times in the *Ensign*. Ong's style is more painterly and expressive, rather than classical, but is still representational and not symbolic or abstracted expression. His scene is also dignified, showing Christ being borne lovingly by two men who carry his body as a woman waits with a white sheet to cover him.

James Jacques Joseph Tissot's *The Raising of the Cross* (fig. 14) has been used three times in the *Ensign*. Tissot's watercolor is powerful, full of movement and drama, depicting men strenuously pulling on ropes to raise Christ up on the cross, the beam with Christ upon it at about a sixty-degree angle. While the ropes and poles depicted to raise the cross are likely historically inaccurate,³⁹ they ingeniously divide the composition with angles and verticals.

39. Scholars estimate that crosses most frequently consisted of a six-to-eight-foot vertical beam and a five-to-six-foot horizontal beam. Thus, contrary to many modern artistic depictions, the victim would have been suspended only one or two feet off the



FIGURE 14. *The Raising of the Cross*, James Jacques Joseph Tissot, 1886–1894. Brooklyn Museum.

J. Kirk Richards's image *Grey Day Golgotha* (fig. 15) is perhaps the most abstracted, following his general style, and is beautifully composed. One thief is to the right of the viewer and closer, almost in silhouette, and a mist hazes the details of Jesus, the other thief, and the crowd, creating an ethereal feel.

All other remaining images of the Crucifixion have been used two or fewer times (see the appendix for a complete list of images and the issues where they appear). These images include five different woodcuts by famed



FIGURE 15. *Grey Day Golgotha*, J. Kirk Richards. Courtesy J. Kirk Richards.

ground. See Roger W. Byard, "Forensic and Historical Aspects of Crucifixion," *Forensic Science, Medicine, and Pathology* 12 (2016): 206.

illustrator Gustave Doré and an additional three Tissot Crucifixion paintings. After Bloch and Anderson, Doré and Tissot are the most oft-used artists in the *Ensign* with respect to Christ's Crucifixion, each with eight total depictions. Doré's black and white woodcut illustrations are dramatic and full of high-contrast drama. They do not hesitate to show expressions of suffering, pain, or anguish. Tissot traveled to the Holy Land multiple times and created over 350 biblical scenes painted in gouache (watercolor that is opaque) that have been circulated broadly. The images of the Crucifixion used by the Church are part of that series.

Additional Crucifixion paintings printed in the *Ensign* include one each from Greg Olsen, Robert T. Barrett, J. Kirk Richards, Rembrandt van Rijn, and Liz Lemon Swindle. Greg Olsen's image is actually a recomposition combining figures from both of the oft-used Bloch and Anderson Crucifixion images and a detail of a larger painting by Olsen called *The Bible and the Book of Mormon Testify of Christ*. Liz Lemon Swindle's painting depicts perhaps the most blood of all the published *Ensign* Crucifixion images, with red lacerations across Jesus's chest and back from his scourging and blood dripping down his forehead from the crown of thorns.

Conclusion

In this article, we have shown that although scripture and Church leaders more frequently discuss the atoning efficacy of Calvary relative to that of Gethsemane, when Latter-day Saint adults are asked to emphasize one location with respect to Christ atoning for their sins, they heavily focus on the Garden of Gethsemane. Latter-day Saint adults likewise indicate a strong preference for Gethsemane artwork over Crucifixion artwork. While most students (66%) at a Christian university also chose a Gethsemane image to hang in their home, a much higher percentage (34%) of those students selected Crucifixion images than did students at BYU (3%). The reasons provided for the choice of image indicate that BYU students do not place as much atoning value on the Crucifixion as do their counterparts at a Christian university, instead placing more emphasis on Gethsemane. Moreover, BYU students appear to have an aversion to images of Christ being crucified relative to their peers at the University of Pikeville.

Gethsemane images are represented in approximately half of the hallways of surveyed Latter-day Saint meetinghouses, whereas Crucifixion

images were reported in only 3 percent of our sample. Although our surveys do not extend beyond the populations from which our data was gathered and additional, more rigorous research is needed, based on our anecdotal experience with other Latter-day Saint groups we assume that broader Latter-day Saint populations would yield similar results because of current Church policies.

Our review of Church-published artwork of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion in the *Millennial Star* and *Improvement Era* revealed a fairly well-balanced emphasis in the *Millennial Star* (3 images of Gethsemane and 2 of the Crucifixion), with a heavier emphasis on Gethsemane in the *Improvement Era* (9 images of Gethsemane and 2 of the Crucifixion). Overall, the *Ensign* has shown a much heavier visual emphasis on Gethsemane (215 artistic images) compared to Christ's Crucifixion (100 images). Between 1971 and 1999, there was a relatively balanced visual emphasis in the *Ensign* both in total images (61 of Gethsemane and 54 of the Crucifixion) and in page size (8 large images of Gethsemane and 10 of the Crucifixion). In contrast, between 2000 and 2020, there were 154 images of Gethsemane compared to 46 images of the Crucifixion published in the *Ensign*. Of those images, only 4 Crucifixion images were three-fourths of a page or larger in size, whereas there were 24 such images of Gethsemane.

This increase in Church magazines focusing on Gethsemane visuals mirrors an increase in the frequency with which the Garden of Gethsemane has been emphasized by Church leaders in General Conference.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the paucity of Crucifixion imagery remains somewhat puzzling given that even with the increased use of Gethsemane in the past forty years, in these same forty years references in general conference to the atoning value of Christ's Crucifixion appear twice as frequently as those to the atoning value of Gethsemane⁴¹—a fact *not* mirrored in selected or published artwork by the Church and its members, or in the available artwork catalogs for Church facilities.

Although we cannot state with certainty why Gethsemane artwork has been more favored by Church members, in meetinghouses, and in

40. The use of the word *Gethsemane* dramatically increased in usage in LDS general conference beginning in the 1980s and continuing through today. For example, in the decade of 2010–19, the word *Gethsemane* was mentioned in general conference 86 times (or 69 occurrences per million words), compared to 9 times (or 5 occurrences per million words) one hundred years earlier, from 1910 to 1919.

41. Hilton, Hyde, and Trussel, "Use of 'Crucifixion' by Church Leaders," 49–80.

magazines, based on our survey research it appears that Church members tend to attach more atoning efficacy to Gethsemane than Calvary. As indicated by our BYU sample, there also seems to be an aversion in Latter-day Saint visual culture to images that are graphic, violent, or sad in relation to Christ's death. Admittedly, the results we have shared are tentative and preliminary. More robust survey techniques could be employed to learn more about the connections between Church members' perceptions of artwork and their view of Christ's Atonement. It may be that preferences for artwork are influencing perceptions about the relative importance of atoning acts and perhaps perceptions about the importance of atoning acts in turn drive preferences for artwork.

Just as art can reflect cultural values, it can also help to change culture. The didactic and visual power of art can embed itself in the minds of learners, sometimes more powerfully than written or spoken language. If art's ability to catalyze cultural acceptance is significant, then an important opportunity exists to better inculcate in the minds of Latter-day Saints the atoning significance of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary. Increased visual depictions of the cross or Crucifixion by Latter-day Saint artists, support from patrons of Latter-day Saint religious art and leaders of families who hang religious art in their home, and an increase in available Church-approved artwork of Christ's Crucifixion in the *Church Facilities Artwork Catalog* would likely result in a greater appreciation for Christ's Crucifixion in Latter-day Saint discourse and teaching. An increased visibility of Crucifixion images may also help Latter-day Saints better connect Christ's redemptive sacrifice for sin to both events, rather than only to Gethsemane.

Perceived meanings of Crucifixion imagery do not change the doctrinal importance of Christ's Crucifixion. Some may view the cross as a symbol of death to be avoided, but symbols are multifaceted—they invite layers of meaning. For many Christians, Crucifixion imagery represents Christ's ultimate triumph or his love or is an image of suffering that can comfort us in pain. As Elliott Wise, an assistant professor of art history and curatorial studies at Brigham Young University, shared,

Far from being bothered or uncomfortable by images of Christ on the cross, I am profoundly moved and inspired by those depictions. The representation of his agony and blood is not disrespectful—far from it! There is no better way of communicating his descent below all things. The crucifixion proclaims that he was broken and lifted up for his people that they might 'look on him whom they pierced' and 'look

unto [him] in every thought . . . behold[ing] the wounds that pierced [his] side, and also the prints of the nails in [his] hands and feet.' For me, looking upon the crucified Christ focuses on much more than just his death. The cross manifests the depths of his eternal, living love, love that we are to emulate.⁴²

Feelings about the symbol are separate from the doctrinal reality that Jesus Christ was, in his own words, "crucified for the sins of the world" (D&C 35:2). It is true that Church leaders have emphasized that we should focus on the living Christ,⁴³ and certainly it is the living Christ that we worship. At the same time, we also worship a *loving Christ*. The scriptures repeatedly teach that both Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ manifested their love for us through the Savior's death. The Savior himself defined his Crucifixion as his greatest act of love, declaring, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13; see also John 10:17; Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:9–10; 2 Ne. 26:24; Ether 12:33). Acknowledging and teaching that Christ's Crucifixion is an act of *love* may help members who avoid Crucifixion artwork find greater spiritual strength in such images.

While our survey data indicate that some Latter-day Saints do not prefer to look at images of the death of Christ, the scriptures repeatedly invite us to reflect upon the Savior's Crucifixion. Mormon wrote to his son Moroni, "May Christ lift thee up, and *may his sufferings and death . . . rest in your mind forever*" (Moro. 9:25, emphasis added). Similarly, Jacob wrote, "We would to God that we could persuade all men [to] . . . believe in Christ, and *view his death*, and suffer his cross" (Jacob 1:8, emphasis added). Commenting on this passage, scholar Deidre Green wrote, "The operative definition of the word *view* during Joseph Smith's time was 'to survey intellectually; to examine with the mental eye; to consider the subject in all its aspects.' Additionally, a sense from the Latin root is that of reaching or extending toward the object one views. Jacob desires for everyone to contemplate thoroughly the multifaceted death of Christ in a way that requires each person to reach or extend toward it."⁴⁴

42. Elliott Wise, interview with John Hilton III, December 17, 2019.

43. For example, see Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Symbol of Christ," *Ensign* 5, no. 4 (April 1975): 92–94; Gerrit W. Gong, "Hosanna and Hallelujah—the Living Jesus Christ: The Heart of Restoration and Easter," *Ensign* 50, no. 5 (May 2020): 52–55.

44. Deidre Green, *Jacob: A Brief Theological Introduction* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2020), 22.

In a modern revelation, Jesus Christ himself commanded, “Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. *Behold* [meaning ‘fix your eyes upon’⁴⁵] *the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet*” (D&C 6:36–37, emphasis added). It may be that more fully embracing artistic images of the crucified Christ will help Latter-day Saints follow these scriptural invitations.

John Hilton III is Associate Professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. His interest in researching the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ began while teaching at the BYU Jerusalem Center, particularly by spending time in locations associated with the Savior’s death. Although John has published more than seventy-five peer-reviewed articles on a variety of important subjects, he says that no other research he has been involved with has influenced him more than Christ’s Crucifixion.

Anthony R. Sweat is Associate Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. He received a BFA in painting and drawing before earning his MEd and PhD in curriculum and instruction. As a religious educator and practicing religious artist, he has researched and published articles on the role of art in Latter-day Saint religious education, such as the First Vision and Book of Mormon translation. This article on Latter-day Saint uses and perceptions of images of the Lord’s Crucifixion reflects his continued interest in this fascinating field.

Joshua R. Stratford graduated from the Marriott School of Business with a finance degree in 2020. He is pursuing a career in corporate finance.

45. American Dictionary of the English Language, s.v. “behold,” accessed March 17, 2021, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/behold>.

Appendix

Images of Christ's Crucifixion in the *Millennial Star*, *Improvement Era*, and *Ensign*, Organized by Magazine, Frequency, and Date

Artist	Magazine Issue
Jan Styka	<i>Star</i> , April 1957, 112–13
Sheila Cuthbert	<i>Star</i> , April 1968, 22
Johann von Kdeler-Wiliandi	<i>Era</i> , March 1958, 158
Sidney E. King	<i>Era</i> , April 1964, 280
Carl Heinrich Bloch	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1984, 7
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 1984, 5
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1987, 11
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 1988, 42
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 1991, 48
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 1994, 43
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1994, 36
	<i>Ensign</i> , February 1995, 9
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1997, 9
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 1998, 18
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1998, 2
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1998, 3
	<i>Ensign</i> , October 1998, 7
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 1999, 26
	<i>Ensign</i> , September 1999, 26
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2000, 15
	<i>Ensign</i> , June 2002, 24
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 2002, 4
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 2003, 42
	<i>Ensign</i> , February 2003, 35
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2003, 28
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2004, 54
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2004, 58
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 2006, 26
	<i>Ensign</i> , September 2009, 32
	<i>Ensign</i> , February 2010, 54
	<i>Ensign</i> , March 2011, 49
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 2011, 50
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 2011, 53
	<i>Ensign</i> , February 2019, 38

Harry Anderson	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1971, 41
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1974, 42
	<i>Ensign</i> , August 1974, 51
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1975, 17
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 1979, 11
	<i>Ensign</i> , June 1981, 15
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1982, 2
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1983, 47
	<i>Ensign</i> , June 1984, 72
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1986, 11
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 1988, 11
	<i>Ensign</i> , August 1990, 32
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 1991, 23
	<i>Ensign</i> , May 1994, 85
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1995, 52
	<i>Ensign</i> , March 1996, 5
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1997, 18
	<i>Ensign</i> , March 1998, 6
	<i>Ensign</i> , September 1998, 56–57
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 2000, 4
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 2003, 8
	<i>Ensign</i> , July 2007, 7
	<i>Ensign</i> , August 2012, 2
	<i>Ensign</i> , August 2012, 48
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 2013, 22
Gustave Doré	<i>Ensign</i> , December 1979, 11
	<i>Ensign</i> , September 1980, 28
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 1982, 52
	<i>Ensign</i> , May 1991, 89
	<i>Ensign</i> , May 1998, 74
	<i>Ensign</i> , June 2003, 32
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 2011, 80
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2015, 36
James Jacques Joseph Tissot	<i>Ensign</i> , September 1974, 5
	<i>Ensign</i> , May 1987, 81
	<i>Ensign</i> , May 1988, 77
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 1990, 26
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1994, 37

	<i>Ensign</i> , December 2001, 21
	<i>Ensign</i> , September 2002, 4
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2013, 35
Unknown Artist (all same image)	<i>Ensign</i> , January 1991, 12
	<i>Ensign</i> , June 2001, 19
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2004, 47
	<i>Ensign</i> , September 2008, 9
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2009, 59
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2015, 39
Wilson Ong	<i>Ensign</i> , April 1990, 7
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 1999, 11
	<i>Ensign</i> , February 2017, 1
	<i>Ensign</i> , February 2017, 7
J. Kirk Richards	<i>Ensign</i> , July 2011, 26
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2017, 23
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2020, 35
Greg Olsen	<i>Ensign</i> , March 1991, 81
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 1992, 48
Robert T. Barrett	<i>Ensign</i> , January 1995, 46
Balage Balogh	<i>Ensign</i> , March 2016, 42
Bernando Cavallino	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2018, 38
Heinrich Hofmann	<i>Ensign</i> , July 1990, 21
Liz Lemon Swindle	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2014, 56
Rembrandt Van Rijn	<i>Ensign</i> , March 2016, 24
Scott Snow	<i>Ensign</i> , June 2003, 33
David Wilson	<i>Ensign</i> , August 2006, 44
All Others (Unidentified Artists, Each Image Different)	<i>Ensign</i> , July 1975, 20
	<i>Ensign</i> , February 1990, 23
	<i>Ensign</i> , February 1992, 9
	<i>Ensign</i> , April 2005, 17
	<i>Ensign</i> , December 2016, 65
	<i>Ensign</i> , January 2019, 5

Moon to Moon Nights

like time-lapse film,
signify now a moment,
now a lifetime. A bonedrift of stone shapes
pale and rise like years
along garden's edge. . . .

What erasures there are in memory
remain a presence—

like every pasture since
that first childhood bringing in of the cows.
A remnant fear of drought surfaces again,

decades after turns for irrigation
on your father's farm, changing canvas dams
in the shallow ditches, twice before bed,
again before dawn—that early acquaintance
with twilights, the lit variegations of water
moving in the dark.

Now the voices of children—your own—
ribbon the sheer deep of sky

no bears out tonight

what time is it Moon?

And their children answer, present tense,
your own voice fading
with stars in this moonrise light.

Like the river and all rivers
you have ever known—undercurrents pulling
out of sight—

night breezes tune in
and out with peripherals of sound,
their patterns fractal, ongoing,
and still unsayable.

—Dixie Partridge

This poem tied for first place in the 2021 Clinton F.
Larson Poetry Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.

A Teacher's Plea

Tyler Johnson

Part 1: A World Transformed

Our Brave New World

Modernity surges from change to change.

The last thirty years, after all, have seen the advent of the smartphone, the proliferation of the internet, the democratization of the press, the dawn of social media, the creation of eBay and Amazon, the beginning of Google, and the birth of the post-9/11 world order.

Of course, any thirty-year period would include many changes, but this most recent period constitutes not simply another small advance along the arc of history but the type of epochal, tectonic shift that occurs only a few times each millennium. Depending on your exact comparison, these changes—taken together—rival either the advent of television, the birth of radio and “mass culture,” or—and in some ways this seems the most apropos analogy—the invention of the printing press and the fading of oral history as the reigning mode for the transmission of knowledge.¹

I see this every day in ways large and small. I spend most of my time with digital natives—both my work teaching medical students and my work teaching institute and serving in a young-adult ward bring me into close daily contact with millennials and members of Generation Z. I consider myself not quite a millennial, but very close. In some ways,

1. Among others, Nicholas Carr makes a similar argument in *The Shallows* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

I feel like I've been "adopted" into their tribe. As someone who loves our young people dearly—and who considered myself one of them not so many years ago—I want very much to better understand how we can teach them the restored gospel so that it will lodge deeply in the fleshy tablets of their hearts. In this essay, I convey what I have gleaned as I have pondered on just that idea. I hope these thoughts will prove meaningful to parents, bishops, local leaders, and, especially, those whose special charge it is to teach the restored gospel of Jesus Christ as part of the seminaries and institutes program.

Even as an "adopted millennial," I recognize that true digital natives process the world very differently. For them, the digital cloud extends the scope of their physiological brains. Part of the reason separation from their phones challenges them (us?) so much is because the information they store in their brains and the information they store digitally becomes messy at the borders—no crisp margin partitions them.

This fundamental difference in how information flows defines epistemology for millennials and the youth of Generation Z. It affects not just how they do mundane things like organize events or communicate, but it also creates their very sense of self and their perceptions of the world. For this reason, understanding the digital universe and its impact on young people must dictate how we interact with, minister to, and, especially, teach those of the rising generation.²

We cannot understand teaching if we do not understand how much we have changed. Some of the changes remain invisible because we have never noticed them; others have become so common that they no longer impress us (though they should). Regardless, only an appreciation of the

2. I wonder if a similar change in approach isn't reflected in recent changes that have been made to the curricular design of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For many years prior to 2015, after all, the Church's *modus operandi* for disseminating knowledge was, in essence, through textbooks and teachers who taught from them. A teacher was supposed to be something of an expert who stood at the front of the class and lectured, asking just enough questions to keep people on their toes. Similarly, for many years previous to about 2005, missionary discussions were memorized and recited verbatim to investigators.

Recently, however, the Church has adopted radical changes on both fronts. The last fifteen years have seen the introduction of *Preach My Gospel*, a study manual that places emphasis on missionaries' personal preparation and on teaching with flexibility to suit the needs of the learner rather than on teaching by rote memorization, nearly word for word. By the same token, the last four years have seen the rolling out of the "Come, Follow Me" curriculum, which, again, emphasizes the role of every member as a teacher. Instead of the official instructor lecturing, she is to sit with the class, facilitating meaningful discussion that ideally incorporates the experiences and needs of every person in the classroom.

scope of the transformation unlocks for us an understanding of how we must adapt our teaching if we are to succeed in conveying the full scope and beauty of the restored gospel.

Let's step back and see if we can appreciate just how dramatically different our new world is.

Thirty years ago, people lived in a particular place, and that place defined their upbringing. By this I mean that unless they had particularly wealthy parents, many young people did not physically travel much beyond the confines of their immediate neighborhood, and beyond such rare physical travel, the only way to escape their immediate locale intellectually was through reading, radio, and perhaps the occasional movie. I do not doubt or minimize the impact of reading and radio but am nonetheless afraid their effects pale in comparison to the digital world's informational onslaught. If nothing else, when people read a book back then, their reaction and its effects were largely confined to the space between those people's ears. Yes, they might have an isolated conversation about the book with a friend, but that's generally as far as such things went.

Similar strictures thirty years ago limited our acquisition of knowledge. Imagine if, in 1990, I had wanted to familiarize myself with, say, the country of Tunisia. I would have started by reading the brief entry in our *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Then, I would have walked to the library, and in order to find anything there, I would have needed to know enough about a card catalogue to find the books I sought. I would then have had to check the books out and cart them home (or briefly peruse them at the library). If I had wanted to record specific information from such a book, I would have needed to either transcribe it by hand or make a photocopy. If, after returning the books, I had thought, *Oh, I remember this one interesting thing from the book, but I can't remember the details: what was it exactly again?* I would have needed to actually return to the library and rehash that entire process.

This is all to say that the acquisition of knowledge carried with it an intuitive price. That price seemed symbolically appropriate; somehow, we sensed that knowledge should be available but perhaps not instantly, almost flippantly, so.

But my, how things have changed.

Now, of course, the price of acquiring knowledge has fallen so far that carrying facts in our brains seems pointless: what good is memorizing anything if Google knows everything and is always available? I see this profound shift in medical students I teach. When I was in medical school—just fifteen years ago—all phones were still “dumb” and Google

was just poking its way into our consciousness. Most systems cataloguing information online felt like digitized versions of musty card catalogues: they existed, but they were clunky, slow, and labyrinthine. Indeed, my first college writing class featured lessons about Boolean search terms—at that time, the internet could give you information but often required coaxing and the whispering of just the right words to extract it.

As a consequence, when we learned things in medical school, it was with the assumption we would *really need to know* those things. There was a possibility that some patient would present to us, somewhere down the road, a mysterious constellation of symptoms requiring a real Sherlock Holmes to recognize them. In such a scenario, if I did not remember that *one key fact* from medical school, that poor patient might be undone on my account.

Now, however, such worries seem not just antiquated, but downright anachronistic, like carrying around a pocket watch to be pulled out of the vest from a three-piece suit. The internet now is a symbiotic parasite on the medical brain. All doctors know this—and, yes, they sometimes look things up on Google (or its medical equivalent, UpToDate) after you leave the room.

This is not to suggest doctors don't know things; most of them still easily access huge stores of knowledge. What has changed, instead, is what it means *to know*. Now, “knowing” may as well mean being in command of finding something on the internet as much as having a fact reside in your own physiological brain. Indeed, the way doctors view themselves now jumps very much out of Star Trek: a large percentage of “my brain” consists of my own physiological neurons, but another large percentage consists of the neurons provided by UpToDate, Google, and PubMed.

What does all of this have to do with how we teach the gospel?

Everything.

It has everything to do with our teaching because the above is not true just for doctors—this reality rules for virtually all millennials (and younger). I recognize that when digital foreigners (like me) teach digital natives, it can be hard for the teacher to understand that it is not just that the natives know different things—it is, instead, that the *very way they know* differs fundamentally from the knowing of older generations.³

3. This contention—that millennials process information differently than their predecessors—has been demonstrated and discussed exhaustively, and many books outline the differences. Two I have found particularly illuminating are Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows* and Sheri Turkle's *Reclaiming Conversation* (New York: Penguin Random House,

Since at least part of teaching has to do with getting a person from “I don’t know” to “I know,” the process by which millennials acquire knowledge matters profoundly.

In some ways, of course, *what* they know also matters. When I was growing up, most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints knew little about complex matters of Church history and doctrine. For the most part, acquiring such knowledge required quite a bit of effort, and, since many people thought they would gain little (or would actually be materially harmed) by studying such things, relatively few made the effort.⁴

Now, however, knowledge about thorny questions is widely available, and many young people with even passing interest are quite familiar with some of our theology and culture’s most perplexing quandaries. This is as simple as a supply and demand curve. When the price was high, the demand was low; with the price at zero dollars and almost no effort, the demand is much, much higher. Who knows if young people are really that much more interested in such things now than they were a few decades ago? Regardless, it now takes just one common Facebook link, and an entire group of young folks becomes instantly aware of a whole host of questions.

Again, I don’t mean to suggest that information about thorny Church questions has not been available for decades—it has. There are multiple examples, even in Church publications, of articles addressing difficult issues from decades ago. And there have always been those with a keen interest in such things who have explored these issues as an important part of their scholarship and discipleship.

Still, while such information has always existed, the last three decades have seen the information transform from something that is *available* to something that is almost *unavoidable*.

This availability matters a lot, but the change goes far beyond this. When I was coming of age, many members of the Church lived in walled religious gardens. We learned what we learned about religion in Sunday School and within the walls of our homes, and that was often it. Where

2016). The former discusses how millennials—largely, it seems, because of their wired world—think differently; the latter covers how they process emotions distinctly and for largely the same reasons. I also covered this topic in some detail in “Reclaiming Reality,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018): 7–38.

4. There were exceptions to this rule, of course. Gospel scholars—including invested amateurs—have long been a part of many wards and stakes, but in prior eras even such amateur familiarity required a deeper level of commitment and much more time.

else, after all, would such a thing have been discussed? If religion was ever to have been raised in mixed company back then, we (as Latter-day Saints) often would have been bringing it up, and the conversation would often have been largely on our terms (one less obvious advantage, in some ways, of our well-known evangelical zeal).

Now, however, the walls have all come tumbling down. They no longer exist for most young people around the globe. Religion has been tossed into the hurly-burly of the digital world, and with this change, religion is fair game for discussion by everyone all the time. Indeed, it strikes me that, while direct comparisons are difficult to make, the percentage of the world's inhabitants with access to the internet is fast approaching the percentage with access to clean water and appropriate sanitation.⁵

That is to say, in many places, it may soon be true that everything from Shakespeare to CNN will be more accessible than basic hygiene and something to drink.

While I was writing this manuscript, my wife and I went to see *Fiddler on the Roof*. This play (and later movie) tells the story of a Jewish dairyman named Tevye, who resides in a small Russian village called Anatevka with his wife and children. The play chronicles their lives as they grapple with how to adapt to a changing world while clinging to the values and traditions that define them.

In the play, part of what binds Anatevka together is its insulation from the outside world. When, near the play's outset, a local know-it-all (one of the rare villagers who can read fluently) starts announcing headlines from an outside newspaper, his interlocutors cast aspersions on the dreary news and ask him to read something else instead. It is as if they think that by asking him not to read about what is going on outside their little village, they hope to change the course of those events, or at least make sure such events never affect them at home.

For a time, that ostrich-like approach seems to work, but finally the world encroaches—first seeping, then rushing, then flooding in on them.

This encroachment—and Tevye's response—constitutes the engine powering most of the play's central tensions. When the czar orders his

5. Compare "1 in 3 People Globally Do Not Have Access to Safe Drinking Water—UNICEF, WHO," World Health Organization, June 18, 2019, <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/18-06-2019-1-in-3-people-globally-do-not-have-access-to-safe-drinking-water-unicef-who>; and *Measuring the Information Society Report* (Geneva, Switz.: International Telecommunication Union, 2016), 77, <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/misr2016/MISR2016-w4.pdf>.

troops to drive the Jewish natives from their homes, Tevye and his family load their few possessions in handcarts and leave for America and an uncertain future. The questions lingering as the play closes are these: What will become of Tevye once he emigrates to the United States? Can Jewish religion and culture thrive beyond the walled garden? What will happen to his family? Can their bonds survive without Anatevka to anchor them? Can such a close-knit religious community thrive when they are scattered to the winds?

One senses just how much the walled garden meant to the people forced to leave it as they sing, sullenly, with a hint of irony but a dollop of winsome sorrow: “Anatevka, Anatevka, underfed, overworked Anatevka. Where else could Sabbath be so sweet? Intimate, obstinate Anatevka, where I know everyone I meet.”

As members of the Church, we are leaving Anatevka.

Winsome though we may feel—we must adapt.

We must learn to thrive in a world without walls.

Leaving Anatevka

Our religion can no longer tell its story in isolation. Yes, part of our expulsion from Anatevka is exposure to the writing and thinking of those critical of the Church. (It is not hard to stumble onto overtly critical works online.) But our leaving Anatevka also means that the Church's narratives will be put up endlessly against those of disinterested third parties—as well as against competing narratives that do not directly challenge Church claims but will nonetheless compete with Church claims implicitly and indirectly.

A few examples help illustrate this point.

The first concerns the way we understand Joseph Smith's First Vision. When I was young, we still spoke almost exclusively of Joseph's 1838 account, and many members were not aware of other accounts, let alone of any of the details that differ between the retellings. Now, however, that information is becoming increasingly well-known. Part of this comes from people reading more sophisticated treatments of Joseph Smith's life, such as Richard L. Bushman's *Rough Stone Rolling*, but familiarity with the multiple narratives does not require any special academic interest. The Church discusses the accounts themselves in great detail in the corresponding Gospel Topics Essay, the information is found in *Saints*, and the accounts are harmonized and synthesized even in the version of the First Vision that is recounted in visitors' centers. The approach we take to understanding this foundational event in our history now draws

on a good degree of nuance and subtlety and even requires learners to think through how we approach history generally and how this applies to the history on which we base spiritual beliefs.

This demand for increased nuance does not just apply to understanding this single event either—it applies equally to our understanding of religion generally. Growing up in a “walled garden,” I found that the Church’s worldview settled into and around me as surely as Utah’s desert air. This perspective was simply the way the world was because those were the stories I knew.

Now, however, that is true for almost no one.

With the advent of the internet, our religious narrative lives in a frenetic and ceaselessly morphing marketplace of views that uses hyperlinks and idea marketing to ensure almost no one reads a thing straight through. As soon as we try to read anything about anything online, the internet lures us to jump to another perspective or a follow-up piece. If I begin reading a piece about religion A written by author B, and stay online for an hour, I will quickly be taken to where author B wrote about religion C, and then to a piece by a different author about religion C that leads to yet another article by that author about religion D, and on and on and on (or I end up looking at endlessly looping cat videos on YouTube, but that’s a different story).

I may begin by reading about restored Christians only to be instantaneously transported to reading about Muslims, Sikhs, atheists, Pentecostals, Catholics, and the growing group who call themselves the religious “nones.” With the walls all torn down, we must recognize that religious education occurs—whether or not we know it, acknowledge it, or like it—fully in the face of an endless array of competing ideas. Many of these ideas have merit, and we will be required to redouble our efforts if we are to showcase the meaning and cohesion of our life and religious philosophy in their midst.

Where once I found comfort within the confines of Anatevka, now I stare—awestruck and with perhaps a little trepidation—over the entire expanse of humanity’s religious impulses and recognize that any fifteen-year-old with a smartphone has access to virtually all of it. As President M. Russell Ballard observed, “It was only a generation ago that our young people’s access to information about our history, doctrine, and practices was basically limited to material printed by the Church. Few students came into contact with alternative interpretations. Mostly, our young people lived a sheltered life. . . . Today, what they see on their mobile devices is likely to be faith challenging as much as faith promoting. Many of our young people are more familiar with Google than with

the gospel, more attuned to the internet than to inspiration, and more involved with Facebook than with faith.”⁶

So, if the world around us has changed, often almost unrecognizably—what are we to do? Though teaching the restored gospel was arguably a simpler affair thirty years ago, it will do little good to long for those bygone days. We must instead approach teaching restored Christianity with a renewed vigor and nuance. In the section that follows, I will offer my thoughts on eleven recommendations—beginning with those that are simpler and progressing to those that are more complex and demanding—that I have found useful in this regard.

Part 2: Teaching in a World Transformed

1. Embrace the Rushing in of Ideas

Ours is a robust and welcoming faith. We have inherited a philosophy expansive and generous enough to not just tolerate but to grow and learn from the best the entire world of philosophy and religion has to offer. We want to embrace all truth not because we have a monopoly on it but because we believe we can gather it in from the four corners of the earth and because eventually it will all coalesce into one great whole.

2. Teach Our Students about Nuance and the Importance of Knowing Our Sources

It has become paradigmatic in the internet age that who is saying something often matters as much as what is said. We and our youth must understand where to look for truth and that, in terms of seeking for deep eternal truth, the internet offers many mirages. I already discussed how the price of truth used to be more obvious, but that does not mean that important truth can now be had for free. We must make sure our youth know that they cannot discover the meaning of life through hyperlinks or social media.⁷ The things that really matter will open themselves only to those who truly seek by study and also by faith.

6. M. Russell Ballard, “By Study and by Faith,” *Ensign* 46, no. 12 (December 2016): 24.

7. The Church wields an impressive social media presence, but even this can be seen as little more than an invitation to deeper engagement with life’s most probing questions. Even President Russell M. Nelson’s tweets go only so far—not because of prophetic limitations but because of Twitter’s.

3. Recognize What Teaching in the Digital Era Demands of Us

In particular, we must be ready, always, to give a reason for the hope that is within us (see 1 Pet. 3:15)—after all, the ideas we teach compete endlessly in a marketplace of ideas. The unsettled nature of modern religious identity is exacerbated by the fact that belief in anything is declining. Increasingly, we will need to convince students that belief merits effort and that religious belief, in particular, should demand the kind of careful and lifelong cultivation that true discipleship demands. We can no longer teach with an undergirding presumption that our students will understand the importance of religion at all, let alone of restored Christianity.⁸

Many of them do not.⁹

4. Reconsider How We Approach Our Students' Engagement with Faith

The new context within which our youth encounter the restored gospel requires that we approach our students' engagement with the faith quite differently. Because both a bevy of other religions and an increasingly skeptical and secular world now constitute the milieu in which our students live, choosing belief in the restored gospel is rapidly becoming audacious. Whereas even a generation ago, when we still lived in Anat-evka, choosing *anything else* constituted a breach of startling daring, increasingly—and in spite of being raised in gospel homes—our youth will feel as though they are choosing belief from among a very live set of religious (and nonreligious) options.

8. Jana Riess, among others, has made a similar point recently. Jana Riess, "Dear LDS Parents, It's Not Just Your Children Who Are Leaving Church," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 30, 2020, accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2020/06/30/jana-riess-dear-lds/>.

9. The evidence for this claim abounds. From the rise of the "nones" (see Michael Lipka, "A Closer Look at America's Rapidly Growing Religious 'Nones,'" Pew Research Center, May 13, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones/>) to the U.S. reaching, for the first time, the place where more than half of our citizens do not belong to a religious congregation (Scott Neuman, "Fewer Than Half of U.S. Adults Belong to a Religious Congregation, New Poll Shows," *NPR*, March 30, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/30/982671783/fewer-than-half-of-u-s-adults-belong-to-a-religious-congregation-new-poll-shows>) to, finally, leaked reports that the activity rates of our own young adults (especially single ones) is abysmal (Jana Riess, "Worldwide, Only 25 Percent of Young Single Mormons Are Active in the LDS Church," *Religious News Service*, October 5, 2016, <https://religionnews.com/2016/10/05/leaked-worldwide-only-25-of-young-single-mormons-are-active-in-the-lds-church/>).

We should be little surprised if many consider other paths seriously—such consideration is an understandable response to the intellectual, social, and religious ecosystem in which they make their home outside of Anatevka. Those who choose belief in the restored gospel will do so more fully aware than ever before of the opportunity cost of doing so, and thus each who so chooses merits delight and celebration.

It seems this choosing to believe in—and live according to—the precepts of restored Christian discipleship will become a more and more difficult feat; if we do not equip our students appropriately, it may become rarer still.

5. *Don't Simplify the Stories You Tell*

Somewhat paradoxically, given all the foregoing, we may need to consider complicating the stories we tell about our history and our faith—even when students wish to keep the matter simple. I recognize that I tread here on treacherous ground, and I assume the maturity and nuance of my readers as I raise this idea. A teacher could teach for the purpose of provoking controversy, bringing up complex matters just to “stir the pot” and get a rise out of her listeners. Similarly, a teacher could probe deeply to flex intellectual muscle. These reasons are spiritually immature and not what I suggest here.

Instead, I recommend—carefully, and as the Spirit directs—probing beyond the comfortable limits of a student's understanding and helping the student embrace complexity.

I can best illustrate this principle by a personal example. My dad is an amateur Church historian and has long cultivated a library of thousands of books about the Church. I grew up with *Salamander* (by Linda Sil-litoe), *The Mormon Hierarchy* (by Michael Quinn), and *No Man Knows My History* (by Fawn Brodie) as part of the backdrop of our home. Once, looking to nibble at my dad's library without needing to really sit down to the buffet, I picked up a slender and little-known volume by Hugh Nibley called *No Ma'am, That's Not History* (more of a pamphlet than a book, really). In it, Hugh Nibley jovially dismisses—with his characteristic wit and twinkle—Fawn Brodie's entire project. The puckish tone of the title conveys the flavor of the enterprise. Having never read Brodie's book, I was happy to encounter Nibley's because it taught me, as I supposed, that her assertions were all libelous and that, clearly, no serious historian would give them credence.

The night after I read the pamphlet, I mentioned off-handedly to my dad that I was glad to know how worthless her book was—and even now,

probably twenty years later, I remember his answer distinctly. Without question it would have been easier, simpler, faster, and more spiritually convenient to tacitly accept my conclusions and move on with his day. My dad cared enough, however—and knew me well enough—to instead stop, sit me down, and enter into a long discussion with me about Joseph Smith and his history. As part of that discussion, he explained that while Nibley was genius-level smart and a first-rate Egyptologist and cultural critic, he really wasn't much of a historian of early American history. Furthermore, my dad said, some of what Brodie wrote was probably right.

All in all, my dad told me, he preferred history as explained by someone like Juanita Brooks—who reportedly loved Joseph “warts and all”—rather than as conveyed in that slender pamphlet, which at least implied a hagiographic view of the Prophet. For my dad, the “warts and all” history mattered not because it stirred up controversy but because truth matters and, ultimately, succors our faith much more deeply and lastingly than easy stories.

Now, to be clear, my dad's approach that night worked only because of how well he knew me and because his motives were well placed. A teacher with ulterior motives could have done something superficially similar to disastrous effect. Similarly, the same lesson to a different student might have come off all wrong. But in my case, that lesson and a thousand others like it proved determinative. When I later encountered complexities on my own late at night in a small apartment in Philadelphia during medical school, I took them in stride *because my dad had taught me how to persevere through complexity to the simplicity on the other side*.¹⁰

Given that complexity is, as discussed above, virtually unavoidable in the internet age, I would argue that we would do well to err on the side of teaching complexity survival skills, because without them many of our students will survive only so long as the narrative remains simple—and in the age of the internet, that is never very long.

10. I acknowledge Bruce and Marie Hafen's recent use of this construction in *Faith Is Not Blind* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018).

6. Recognize That Some Aspects of Our History and Doctrine Will Challenge Even Devoted Disciples—Affirming That Fact Is Okay

Even while accounting for the problems of unbalanced sources, we must also explicitly acknowledge the complex, nuanced, and sometimes frankly challenging nature of our beliefs and our history.

A necessary antecedent to this acknowledgment is a matter of delineating what matters more and what matters less among Church truths. We can imagine the Restoration's many truths forming concentric circles around the power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, which constitutes the beating heart of the gospel and the center of this imaginary "target." The closer a truth lies to that central reality, the more it matters. The farther away, the less.

I know that for me, anyway, my teaching resonates and matters more when it hews close to the heart of the gospel—the farther into the outer circles I stray, the less meaningful my teaching becomes. By the same token, sometimes concerns about peripheral gospel teachings matter little, not because the concerns are not valid but because their distance from the gospel's center makes them relatively irrelevant to the gospel enterprise.

Even recognizing this, however, we must also see and become comfortable with this fact: some aspects of our relatively consequential and central doctrine and history challenge even steadfast Saints. Denying this may at first seem helpful, but to many faithful and young Saints, such denials come across as "gaslighting," a term dripping with such cultural opprobrium as to rank, in the eyes of many millennials, as among the most heinous cultural sins.

In this vein, I am brought to think about the way we understand Joseph Smith. Heaven knows that some concerns about the Prophet, his actions, and his calling come from misinformation or from lack of context or historical understanding. Having said that, however, even if students read only the analysis of those who are *faithful* and *objective*, many will be left with probing questions. These questions refuse to be ignored whether we read *Saints*, *Rough Stone Rolling*, the Joseph Smith Papers, or the Gospel Topics Essays.

We might imagine, for instance, a young woman who comes of age with a nascent testimony of the Prophet Joseph. One night, while reading online about other matters, she stumbles on a description filled with disturbing uncontextualized accusations against the Prophet. Frightened, she turns to a beloved teacher for advice, and the teacher directs the student to any of the above-named sources.

Richard Bushman and *Rough Stone Rolling* tidily illustrate the paradox of resorting to faithful accounts of our history in the twenty-first century. While certainly not alone in recounting our history “warts and all,” Richard Bushman symbolizes these complex crosscurrents precisely because he presents what many consider to be the gold standard of faithful history. After all, there could hardly be a better author to turn to; Bushman has been a vocal and lifelong champion of the faith, its history, and its values, and, at the same time, one of the Church’s most decorated and universally admired scholars.

But that’s just the point.

In the course of reading that book, the student will find a great deal of context and nuance but not necessarily easy answers. Regarding Joseph’s polygamy and polyandry, for instance, she may learn that he was married to many women, that some of them were already married to other men, and that many of the marriages were not initially known to Joseph’s first wife, Emma. I do not hereby suggest that the questions raised by these historical findings do not have answers; rather, I mean to suggest that part of the answer we give if a student approaches us with concerns about these facts should perhaps include, simply, “Yes, I understand you; this can be a challenging subject for me, too.”

The challenges our LGBT members and their loved ones face likewise illustrate some of the points I stress above. In my work with young single adults in the Bay Area, I have sat across from many sincere and faithful members who are seeking solace on this issue. Almost all these good members either are LGBT themselves or have friends and family who are. They have watched as the United States and many other places in the world have undergone a remarkable sea change on the issue of LGBT rights in general—and gay marriage in particular—over the last twenty years. These members perceive that many gay members who stay in the Church feel like—and fear they will forever be—second-class citizens. Many gay members feel deeply uncomfortable with the idea of heterosexual (that is, “mixed orientation”) marriage but recognize that without entering into such a union, a gay man cannot, for example, become a bishop or preside over a stake and, similarly, cannot work as faculty at BYU or become a CES-employed seminary or institute teacher.¹¹

11. I have had members come to me at different times with each of these as concerns. If any of them is inaccurate or outdated, my apologies.

Far beyond this, LGBT members and their loved ones look all around them and see gay people in wider society entering into happy homosexual unions. These unions speak to a very deep part of many gay members' hearts. Thus, as has been frequently documented, many gay members feel deeply torn between a gospel they deeply love and their yearning for human intimacy. Similarly, their loved ones feel torn at seeing their LGBT friends and family in such a plight. Beyond even this, gay members may point out that there exists—so far as I am aware—no canonical explanation of what will happen to their homosexual tendencies in the eternities. Many of them feel deeply that these tendencies are part of their eternal being and don't want them to change but still find themselves tormented by the ambiguity concerning their eternal destiny.

No one claims that gay members are the only ones to face significant trials or heartache within the gospel family, but their struggles weigh heavily regardless.

My point is to say that this difficult issue causes deep pain, and this pain declares itself as a clear and present force in the lives of many young Church members. I question whether further teaching, better articulation, and improved explanations will remove this pain.

The pain simply *is*.

We can fully recognize it as such without declaring whether the pain is “right.” We can understand that—for many young people—this challenge is real and weighty. When a young person raises these concerns—whether in class or in a subsequent private discussion—we must carefully draw upon all our intellectual and emotional resources to approach the matter with candor, context, understanding, empathy, and faith.

I acknowledge that explicitly articulating empathy regarding concerns like those discussed here may seem uncomfortable or even unfaithful. My experience tells me, however, that articulating empathy need not be either. Furthermore, when we *do not* do this, it can come off as so puzzling and frustrating to those with questions as to become counterproductive. With regard to Joseph Smith's polygamy, for instance, if we pretend that there is nothing challenging about the historical narrative, young members are left wondering how it is possible their seniors in the Church (teachers, local ecclesiastical leaders, and others) don't recognize the dissonance between the chastity, propriety, and transparency with which we covenant to live our lives and the seemingly problematic nature of Joseph Smith's behavior in this regard. Similarly, when approaching the deep heartache of LGBT members, a

failure to begin by articulating empathy can come off as tone-deaf at best and heartless at worst.

Again, this is not to say that there are no answers to these questions, but I recommend we consider an articulation of empathy as a starting point in these discussions. This allows a struggling member to say, in effect, “Ah, here is someone who gets where I’m coming from,” and it is that very recognition that opens the door for further enlightenment and meaningful discussion. In this sense, articulating empathy is both a crucial end in itself (for reasons I will discuss more below) and an unmissable means to opening the door to further understanding. We should articulate empathy both because we have covenanted to do so (for example, see Mosiah 18:8–9) and because without doing so we cannot help students seek further light or knowledge.

Both the Joseph Smith–polygamy and the LGBT-rights issues afford an opportunity to recognize in all of this an important paradox: the heartache I described above suggests that our religion is succeeding marvelously in some important and weighty regards. I say this because I do *not* believe members who struggle to square their testimonies of Joseph Smith as God’s prophet with a new understanding of the historical record lack faith. Rather, they instinctively yearn for all the Prophet did to be “virtuous, lovely, . . . of good report [and] praiseworthy” (A of F 1:13). When they come up against actions that seem on their face not to fit that description, this troubles them deeply.

By the same token, many of those who agonize over the plight of LGBT members do so not because they don’t trust or have faith in the prophets but rather because their hearts overflow with empathy and they simply seek to succor those they see suffering. As more and more LGBT members have brought their stories out into the open, more and more straight members have grown deeply sensitive to their needs precisely because our religion so effectively weaves us into covenant Christian communities, and thus we cannot ignore the suffering of a fellow parishioner.

A corollary to all of this matters, too: many such questions cannot be helpfully confronted by referring to scripture alone. Scripture—our official canon and the words of modern prophets—dictates the contours of our official theology and of ongoing prophetic direction. Increasingly, however, we recognize that the proper contextualization and interpretation—never mind defense and explanation—of our foundational beliefs relies on a complex interdisciplinary web of interconnected understanding.

In this vein, I'm reminded of Steven Harper's recent book on Joseph Smith's First Vision.¹² The surface-level question many newcomers to the history of the vision have is, "Why do the accounts Joseph gave at different times of his life differ from each other in some seemingly key details?" Harper approaches the answer to this question but does so obliquely. His answer draws together threads from neurobiology, psychology, and history—and does so, I argue, because a satisfactory answer requires this kind of deep and interdisciplinary dive. This kind of answer will increasingly become relevant because our faith increasingly intertwines itself into many aspects of our lives and will no longer confine itself to a neat cognitive box called "religion."

Growing out of this interdisciplinary nature of understanding, our faith comes to an equally consequential truth: we will need to marshal expertise from all walks of life to allow our understanding of our faith to fully flourish. Here, again, President Ballard speaks to the point:

Wise people do not rely on the internet to diagnose and treat emotional, mental, and physical health challenges, especially life-threatening challenges. Instead, they seek out health experts, those trained and licensed by recognized medical and state boards. Even then, prudent people seek a second opinion.

If that is the sensible course to take in finding answers for emotional, mental, and physical issues, it is even more so when eternal life is at stake. When something has the potential to threaten our spiritual life, our most precious family relationships, and our membership in the kingdom, we should find thoughtful and faithful Church leaders to help us. And, if necessary, we should ask those with appropriate academic training, experience, and expertise for help.

This is exactly what I do when I need an answer to my own questions that I cannot answer myself. I seek help from my Brethren in the Quorum of the Twelve and from others with expertise in fields of Church history and doctrine.¹³

This quote strikes me for multiple reasons but most deeply because, in it, President Ballard includes himself (if only implicitly) as both questioner

12. Steven C. Harper, *First Vision: Memory and Mormon Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); see also Aubrey Chaves, Tim Chaves, and Steven C. Harper, "Memory and the First Vision—Steven C. Harper," March 21, 2020, in *Faith Matters*, produced by Faith Matters Foundation, podcast, 1:21:03, <https://faithmatters.org/memory-and-the-first-vision-steven-c-harper/>.

13. Ballard, "By Study and by Faith," 25.

and expert. On the one hand, though he doesn't specifically acknowledge as much, we can imagine that his brethren in the Quorum of the Twelve (and others in the Church) go to him with difficult questions. Perhaps more telling, however, is that when *he* has questions requiring subspecialty expertise, he goes not only to other General Authorities but also to those with expertise in the appropriate field. That he should explicitly articulate this and invite us to do likewise reminds us that we seek truth wherever it is found—including from our General Authorities but also from professional academics without official clerical roles.

This broad-ranging and holistic approach to understanding and teaching truth will challenge us as teachers more deeply than simply delivering rote points from a prepared lesson. This method of preparing to teach requires deeper engagement and more thoughtful analysis—and sometimes, it also requires a heavier weight on our collective hearts.

7. Become More Alive to Our Students' Struggles

As an oncologist, much of what I do deals with delivering bad news to my patients. Sometimes this news signals a temporary setback, but other times it shatters and devastates. You can imagine that if I am discussing either the return of a tumor (after a patient was apparently cured) or the fact that we no longer have therapy options for a disease that will soon take a patient's life, discussing these developments is one of my gravest and most difficult responsibilities.

Because of this, I've pondered frequently on the best way to deliver this kind of news. What's more, it turns out there is a good deal of research and expertise around this dilemma, especially from important contributors to the field of palliative care such as Anthony Back and James Tulsky.¹⁴

Delivering this news and responding to a patient's resulting reactions requires something of a Goldilocks approach. Of course, it would be both clueless and hurtful to deliver bad news, have the patient respond by being overcome with emotion, and then simply move on without acknowledging the emotion at all. At the same time, however—and perhaps less intuitively—it harms a patient as much or more if I respond

14. These two authors and their colleagues developed a training course known as VitalTalk that helps train doctors in the art and science of having difficult conversations with patients.

to that wave of emotion by saying, “This must be so hard, and I know exactly how you feel.”

Both of these responses are problematic precisely for the same reason—because they both evince that I’ve done nothing to really try to understand what the patient is experiencing. On the one hand, I would never pass by that reaction unmoved if I had really wondered what it must be like to feel that way; on the other, I would equally never claim to know how it feels if I had thought about it—even a glancing analysis would demonstrate that I most certainly do *not* know how it feels.

Given all of this, it turns out the best response to such an emotional reaction is something like this: “I’ve tried to imagine how this must feel. I know I can’t really understand, but I want you to know I can *imagine* it must be really scary and unsettling—and I am here for you while this is hard.” Notice what I do and do not say in this response. I do *not* claim perfect understanding, but I *do* evince that I’ve spent the time and emotional energy necessary to try to put myself in the shoes of the patient.

Note one other thing I do not do: I do *not* respond by unleashing an avalanche of facts, even facts I consider helpful or necessary. To do so is a common misstep in this kind of situation and demonstrates a fundamental error. Providing facts in this setting suggests that I believe the problem is a deficit of knowledge—if the patient only knew more, she would feel better. But of course, assuming the news really is as bad as it at first seems (and that the emotions don’t proceed from some misunderstanding), the problem is not a lack of facts but, instead, that the situation is difficult and frightening.

Emotions comprise an expected and appropriate response.

There is a certain parallel between this situation and responding to students (or loved ones) who face fear or sorrow while grappling with complications to their beliefs.

What we often refer to as a “faith crisis,” while perhaps proceeding from cognitive questions, very quickly becomes in some large part an *emotional* experience. This fact proves crucial in directing our response. If the problem were cognitive, we would respond most helpfully by supplying information, but if the problem is emotional, we cannot assuage the grief, fear, or trepidation with a boatload of facts or contextual understanding of the scriptures or Church history. Yes, of course there is a time for this, and sometimes providing such information is critical, but to the degree a person comes to us in spiritual extremis, the first response must be to *acknowledge the emotion and then to dwell with the person within that emotion for a time.*

At the risk of being overly specific and didactic, let me illustrate in a spiritual context an approach I have often found helpful in teaching other doctors how to respond to emotional medical situations. Let's consider Sister Hernandez, an institute teacher. She is in her office one day, and one of her students, Michael, comes to her with a problem. Let's consider two ways this scenario might play out after a common first statement of concern:

Scenario #1:

Michael: Hi, Sister Hernandez, could I talk to you about something?

Sister H: Of course!

Michael: Well, a few months ago, a friend recommended that I read *Rough Stone Rolling* because I had been wanting to learn more about Joseph Smith. I started reading, and I found the book to be really interesting, but to be honest, I found out some things that really troubled me. I was especially concerned to learn about Joseph's treasure-digging and a lot of the stuff about that because I had just never heard any of that before. I tried to ignore it for a while or to focus on other things, but it seems like it's just been gnawing away at me, and then my questions about that started to make me want to question other things in the gospel, and before I knew it, well, it just felt like my whole testimony came tumbling down like a castle of cards. I've always loved the Church, but now I feel confused and betrayed and frustrated and dark and kind of lost.

Sister H: Wow, Michael, thanks for talking to me about this. You know, this is a common misconception that people have after reading about Joseph's early years for the first time. The truth is that there is nothing to worry about in all this. You just need to understand a little historical context. Let me explain to you what you probably don't know . . .

Michael: OK, I guess . . . I hope you're right.

Scenario #2:

[after the same first three exchanges]

Michael: [. . .] but now I feel confused and betrayed and frustrated and dark and kind of lost.

Sister H: Wow, Michael, thank you so much for bringing this to me. It sounds like, from what you've told me, after reading those parts in *Rough Stone Rolling*, you're feeling kind of scared, and frankly a

little betrayed. Like you wish you had known about all this earlier. Is that about right?

Michael: That's *exactly* it. I love the Church and totally want to keep believing; it's just that I feel like if the Church has known this all along, they should have told us. Plus, I just feel so confused because my testimony is central to my life, and I need to know how to put it back together to figure out how to keep moving forward from here.

Sister H: Michael, thanks for talking to me so candidly. I can imagine what it must be like to be in your shoes, and I can tell you're feeling confused and anxious. I want you to know that I am here for you and this is a safe place to come with these concerns.

The difference in Sister H's responses in 1 and 2 may seem subtle or relatively unimportant, but experience and a host of data from social psychology tell us the differences matter a great deal. The key virtue of the second response is that in it Sister H recognizes that Michael's main motivation for coming to her is not actually wanting a cognitive answer to an intellectual question, but instead it is that *he needs an acknowledgment of his sorrow and confusion and wants someone to be with him and to help him work through his feelings*. Most often, questions about the Church, while manifesting as intellectual concerns, are, at their core, more about an emotion—or at least contain an emotional element that must be addressed before cognitive questions can be helpfully answered.

Leaders and teachers can do a world of good when they recognize and acknowledge this.

Notice, also, a couple of other facets that differ between the above two accounts. First, the second response requires, perhaps, a measure of bravery because in it Sister H does not instinctively brush away the concern—she does not claim it does not exist or does not have merit. She admits the difficulty. Subconsciously, the first response is a form of self-protection; dismissing the concern out of hand can powerfully reinforce the notion that there is nothing there to see.

Second, the first response sets a dangerous precedent. Because Sister H claims to have a ready answer, she sets herself and Michael up to expect a tidy resolution to a complex problem. This may initially strike us as exactly what she should be doing, but on this issue—and in many others in the Church and in life—the resolution, even if and when it comes, requires nuance, emotional and intellectual maturity, and more than a little faith.

This is not to say that the resolution isn't real, but just that the first response sets up a sort of intellectual poker game where the only way Sister H and Michael "win" is if the response she provides fulfills the expectations she has (perhaps unintentionally) created. With the second answer, however, no such expectations are created. The second answer simply acknowledges distress and promises to confront it together with Michael. Notice also that in the second response Sister H does *not* say that the problem is insoluble or that Michael is "right" to be concerned or, in fact, anything at all about the merit or substance of his concerns.

The *only* thing she does is name and validate his emotions and promise to be there with and for Michael, come what may.

8. Normalize Uncertainty and Valorize Choosing to Believe

An often unspoken—but sometimes explicit—spiritual and intellectual paradigm in the Church suggests that we should expect spiritual certainty early and often along the path of discipleship. This idea appears most obviously in our testimony meetings, which almost universally feature "to know" as the most common verb. It would be one thing to hear apostles and prophets using such a word commonly—in that case it might seem appropriately aspirational—but when the word is used by everyone from Brother Jensen, the otherwise spiritually unremarkable Primary teacher, to little Suzie, the fourth grader who proudly proclaims her testimony every Sunday, it can come to seem as if that is the *only* appropriate, expected, or valuable approach to our religion.

I mention all of this not to question the honesty of those who use the expression "I know" nor to suggest that those who feel such conviction tone their rhetoric down—obviously that's not my place—but instead to observe that the ubiquity of the term can create unfair and scripturally inaccurate expectations. This universal use of "I know" seems to suggest that *any and every* honest seeker should receive certainty as the response to spiritual inquiry. More to the point, the routine usage of "I know" may inadvertently tell our young people that if they *cannot* state "I know," then they are either spiritually broken or are not really trying.

But the scriptures simply do not support this conclusion. After all, even if Moroni seems to suggest something like this in Moroni 10:3–5—the scripture we most often cite when discussing how to gain spiritual confirmation of the truth of the Book of Mormon in particular but also often of the gospel in general—Alma goes to great lengths in Alma 32 to remind us that an immediate, lightning-strike arrival of certainty is *not*

to be expected. Alma's loving description of the growth of a tree constitutes a tribute to those whose knowledge really does come line upon line and precept upon precept. His sermon is a paean to those who do not "know" (notice how often he makes a point of observing what is *not* knowledge) but who continue in faith regardless.

And then perhaps most tellingly of all, in Doctrine and Covenants 46, as the Lord articulates a list of spiritual gifts needed for the proper functioning of the Church, he reminds us that while "to some it is given to know," to others it is given to "believe on their words." Given the way in which this second spiritual gift is painted in relief against the first, it is clear from the context that the Lord is saying that some people's spiritual gift is to *not* know but to walk by faith regardless.

Because "I know" features so prominently in our cultural discourse, we can take care as teachers to emphasize that continuing in belief when knowledge is lacking is *not* the silver prize for subpar saints. No, to press forward believing (but uncertain) constitutes a brave, even audacious, choice to follow our best instincts even though evidence does not inescapably compel us.

Most of us, after all, pass through periods of belief without knowledge as we cultivate the tree of discipleship, and many of us will see periods where we must return to uncertain believing even after we feel we could honestly say, "I know." That confidence in spiritual ideas ebbs and flows in just this way is normal and expected—but our students may not know that. A loving teacher articulating as much can be spiritually life-saving. Let us enthrone Alma 32 as one of our most beautiful allegories when addressing the growth of testimony and the life of faith. And let us lovingly remind our learners who feel stung during testimony meeting when their certainty does not seem to measure up to that of those around them that we are not, in fact, engaged in a race for deeper certainty and that faith without knowledge is its own beautiful gift—one that will allow them to minister to the body of Christ in unique and important ways.

9. Remind Our Youth That Christ Commands and Empowers Us to Minister to the Marginalized

One important reason youth turn away from the restored gospel may be that they feel we as Church members do not really care about the less fortunate. Or, rather, they may sense we care about the marginalized but as a sort of secondary concern, a thing to be done once we've paid our tithing, attended our Sunday meetings, and finished the weekly

Aaronic-priesthood basketball game. Then, if we have time, we will find a way to turn to those society has left behind.

Perhaps it should not surprise us that our youth feel particularly sensitive to this issue. After all, they have come of age surrounded by the stories of the marginalized in a way that never before has been possible. Consider for a moment the protests that erupted after the death of George Floyd in summer 2020. It is not as if Mr. Floyd was the first Black man to be murdered by a white police officer. Part of the difference, of course, was the callous and protracted way the killing happened—requiring sustained action by Derek Chauvin over many minutes. But even that was not unique. Instead, the reason the killing sparked such widespread protest so quickly was because it was recorded and instantly beamed throughout the world. The voice of a marginalized Black man, even after he died, echoed across the globe, calling for justice—and the people of the world answered by spilling out into the streets in spontaneous protests.

That could never have happened before the advent of social media.

Similarly, consider a young man growing up in an ethnically and socioeconomically homogenous neighborhood along the Wasatch Front. Even a few decades ago, that young man might never have encountered the stories of those outside his own immediate social circles. Now, however, that same young man, if he holds social media accounts, is almost certain to be *inundated* with those same stories. The voices of people of all stripes will call out from Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, curated news feeds, and a hundred other sources. And if this does not happen while he is still at home, the same flood will come rushing in once he goes away to college. In the face of this, needs that previously might have seemed removed and theoretical have suddenly become pressing and inescapable.

Given this context, we as Church members and gospel teachers are faced with two pressing priorities. One is a matter of messaging. What an irony and a tragedy that our youth could come away from studying the gospel without understanding that the very most elemental call of Jesus Christ—as articulated, yes, in the New Testament but also throughout restoration scripture—is to minister to the marginalized.¹⁵ What tableau could teach this more poignantly, after all, than the image of Alma teaching those who were asked to build a resplendent synagogue

15. In his new book *Restoration* (Meridian, Idaho: Faith Matters, 2020), Patrick Mason argues this is even one way of understanding what the Lord (and President Nelson) means when he calls us to gather Israel.

only to be cast out of it because their dress and manner of bearing were too humble (see Alma 32)?

But that example—of a church that not only didn't minister to the marginalized but also actively ostracized them—should likewise serve as a warning regarding the second point: we must also ensure that we, as Latter-day Saints, *do the work of centering those who've been pushed to the periphery and of bringing succor to those who society has left behind*. In other words: while part of this is about messaging, another part is about us more fully living up to our creed. We can't just say we welcome people, nor can we pretend—we as Church members need to *actually become* the welcoming Zion our younger members long for us to be.

Indeed, as we think about this, we would do well to reflect on the story in Alma chapter 4 where we read, “Alma saw the wickedness *of the church*, and he saw also that the example *of the church* began to lead those who were unbelievers on from one piece of iniquity to another, thus bringing on the destruction of the people. Yea, he saw great inequality among the people, some lifting themselves up with their pride, despising others, turning their backs upon the needy and the naked and those who were hungry, and those who were athirst, and those who were sick and afflicted” (vv. 11–12).

Alma's observations here leave us with a series of stinging questions, especially as he remarks *specifically about the church*. Are there times when we as Church members ostracize those who most need our help? Are there those we leave on the outside of our nurturing social circles? Are there times inequality creeps into our congregations? Are we turning off those outside the Church—or even our youth within the Church—by either failing to minister to the marginalized or (even if unintentionally) marginalizing some people ourselves? As I ponder these questions, I'm reminded of the words of Professor Ryan Gabriel, who, speaking specifically about racism as a marginalizing force, said in a BYU devotional, “To falsely diminish the impacts of racism on the lives of Heavenly Father's children does nothing to stop racism. . . . To pretend that race is not important does not show compassion for the experiences of others who, by virtue of their experiences with racism, know that it is. Christ Himself asks us to remember and know His suffering—to touch the scars on His hands and feet. He does not ask us to deny another's pain but to know it and touch it.”¹⁶ Gabriel's call is for

16. Ryan Gabriel, “Healing Racism through Jesus Christ,” Brigham Young University devotional, Provo, Utah, April 6, 2021, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/ryan-gabriel/healing-racism-through-jesus-christ/>.

us to first recognize the great harm racism perpetrates on those against whom it discriminates, to seek to understand the pain it causes, and to let that understanding spur us to reckon with how we can “lead out” in abandoning racism.

Furthermore, it is not as if Alma and Professor Gabriel stand alone in their observations or in the call to ensure we reach out to those who may feel they are looking in from the outside. We could turn to King Benjamin in Mosiah 3–5, or to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland in “The First Great Commandment,”¹⁷ or to President Thomas S. Monson in “What Have I Done for Someone Today?”¹⁸ or to Elder Dale G. Renlund in “Infuriating Unfairness,”¹⁹ or to President Linda Burton in “I Was a Stranger,”²⁰ or to the entire joint Relief Society Presidency who centered the words and experience of a self-described queer woman at the 2021 BYU Women’s Conference,²¹ or to President Nelson, who recently reminded us, “The gospel net to gather scattered Israel is expansive. There is room for each person who will fully embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . Each of us has a divine potential because each is a child of God. Each is equal in His eyes. The implications of this truth are profound.”²²

All of this brings up a great irony: many young Church members stand ready and willing to remind *us* that any church’s truth depends not only on its access to authority or its fidelity to biblical patterns of ecclesiology but perhaps even more importantly on how well it protects and ministers to society’s most vulnerable. After all, if Jesus taught that individuals will be divided into sheep and goats based specifically on how well they care for those for whom society has not provided, then it would stand to reason that churches will be judged likewise. This is all to say, while acknowledging the key role of everything from real priesthood power to authentic scripture, we must also remember that *we as Church members* help to make the Church “true” by the way we care for those who need our help, especially those whom society has placed on its

17. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The First Great Commandment,” *Ensign* 42, no. 11 (November 2012): 83–85.

18. Thomas S. Monson, “What Have I Done for Someone Today?” *Ensign* 39, no. 11 (November 2009): 84–87.

19. Dale G. Renlund, “Infuriating Unfairness,” *Liahona* 45, no. 5 (May 2021): 41–45.

20. Linda K. Burton, “I Was a Stranger,” *Ensign* 46, no. 5 (May 2016): 13–15.

21. See Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Help All Women—including Queer Members—to Feel They Belong in Relief Society, LDS Attendees Told at BYU Conference,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 29, 2021, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2021/04/29/help-all-women-including/>.

22. Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 94.

margins. Even a church with appropriate authority, after all, can be hollowed into an empty vessel if its members do not care for those in need.

All of the foregoing leaves us with these two central questions: Do we emphatically articulate to our youth just how much the call to minister to those on the margins defines our restored Christian discipleship? And do we as Church members fully live up to this creed?

10. Help Our Students Unlearn Two Unproductive Ideas

Most Church members acknowledge that Church culture sometimes differs from our doctrine. Some elements of our culture—like green Jell-O—elicit a chuckle and matter little. But other matters, such as the two ideas we'll discuss here, can deeply injure the body of Christ generally and the spiritual lives of our young people specifically. The first idea is that a de facto monoculture defines the body of Christ. The second is that specific political preferences are prerequisites for effective engagement with the gospel or the Church.

Now, let's be frank for a moment. On the one hand, anyone who has been a Church member for very long can recite practically by rote the statement that is read from the pulpit with metronomic regularity each election season stating that the Church remains staunchly nonpartisan and that Church members should determine which parties and candidates best represent gospel principles and vote accordingly. Having said that, however, we all also know that many Church members hear that statement as if a few extra words were supposed to be understood at the end: "as long as the candidates in question are (U.S.) Republicans."

The history of why much of the Church understands itself to be unofficially but definitionally politically conservative is long and complicated, and it is not my intent to attempt that explanation here. But we know that many people have this impression. Recent data, however, demonstrates younger members of the Church skew toward greater political diversity (as one example, a recent poll showed that more Church members under forty voted for Joe Biden in the 2020 U.S. presidential election than for Donald Trump).²³

If those younger Church members continue to confront the tacit (and sometimes overt) suggestion that their political preferences disqualify

23. Jana Riess, "Younger Latter-day Saints Voted for Biden, but Trump Fared Well Overall," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2021/04/01/jana-riess-younger-latter/>. "The breakdown for the under-40 set was 47% Biden, 42% Donald Trump, and 11% for third-party candidates."

them from Church membership or at least demote them to lesser status in the kingdom of God, it will become increasingly difficult for them to reconcile the political preferences dictated by the leanings of their hearts with the religious inclinations that spring from those same principles.

This problem is as real as it is unnecessary.

Indeed, the deepest irony of this issue is precisely what President Dallin H. Oaks articulated in his striking Sunday afternoon, April 4, 2021, general conference address.²⁴ The idea that Church membership dictates clear and unwavering political allegiance of any kind is, on its face, nonsensical. Political parties and their constituent candidates and principles shift according to the will of the people over time, as they should in a democracy. Different issues come to the fore and then recede. And some issues matter more in one election than they do in another. Therefore, if we have minds and hearts that are, as Elder Neal A. Maxwell once suggested, “furnished with fixed principles,”²⁵ then *of course* we will change political allegiances and find reasons to support candidates of different stripes over time. Engagement in the political process *should challenge* us because the work of applying our Christianity to life in the real world is rarely simple.

President Oaks, again, provided perhaps the most clarion example of this in recent times when he declared unequivocally in a 2020 BYU devotional that “Black lives matter” is an “eternal truth all reasonable people should support.”²⁶ Because this catchphrase has become tangled up in complicated political tussles, many Church members approached it with suspicion or even derision. But President Oaks reminded us that, as a matter of our theology, this is *not even a hard question*. Indeed, the fact that his pronouncement came as such a shock (anyway, many people I know were shocked, and I sensed a similar sense of at least strong surprise more generally) tells us something important and condemning about the backward politics→religion determination that has come to define much of our shared cultural consciousness. Of course, as he also acknowledged that day, the matter of precisely which political initiatives (associated with the *group* Black Lives Matter) should be

24. Dallin H. Oaks, “Defending Our Divinely Inspired Constitution,” *Liahona* 45, no. 5 (May 2021): 105–8.

25. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Pathway of Discipleship,” *Ensign* 28, no. 9 (September 1998): 9.

26. Dallin H. Oaks, “Racism and Other Challenges,” Brigham Young University devotional, Provo, Utah, October 27, 2020, <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/dallin-h-oaks/racism-other-challenges/>.

pursued is a question for appropriate political debate, but affirming the fact that Black lives matter is not.

And that brings us to the most important part of this fundamentally important point: we need to help young Church members understand that, often, the very principles that tug at their minds and hearts, inclining them to support a political party or partisan platform, *spring from the restored gospel of Jesus Christ*. The drive for racial justice, the pursuit of economic equality, the prioritization of ecological stewardship, and the longing for a more truly just society—all of these are not tangential political pursuits but find deep, meaningful roots within the Savior's restored gospel. Not only should a student who longs for these things not feel ostracized in our classes and communities, but she should instead learn to articulate why gospel principles drive that very longing.

11. Recognize That to Teach Is to Tread on Sacred Ground

Living in Northern California, we have been blessed (though admittedly sometimes frustrated) to have public health officials who took the COVID-19 pandemic seriously right from the very get-go. As a consequence, from the time we entered lockdown in March 2020, our options for activities were seriously curtailed: no parks, no nature preserves, no school, no rec centers, no restaurants, no playdates, nothing. Like much of the rest of the world, we suddenly woke up one morning that month and found that all three of our boys were effectively grounded for the next many months—it was just the three boys and my wife and I here in our little house.

One of the hidden blessings of this period, however, was the unexpected opportunity it afforded me to watch our second son—then five—become acquainted with nature. Though all official parks and preserves were off limits, we looked on maps of the area and, figuring it might be a good way to have the little boys let off steam, started visiting ponds and wooded areas to let the boys explore. Our oldest and youngest kids never got all that excited about it. But watching my second son will never leave me.

We found a small pond nestled in the woods about twenty minutes from our home. We visited often, he and I, and each time he would descend the small hill to the water's edge and, once there, would silently doff his shoes and then become one with the shoreline. Running his fingers through the loamy sand, carefully shifting small logs and stones to peek at the wildlife beneath, putting his eyes down to ground level to look out at the water, and finding over and over endless creatures—salamanders, newts, lizards,



Tyler Johnson's second son searching for creatures on the shore of a pond near Los Altos, California.

fish, frogs, and on and on—that were invisible to me and, I imagine, to most everyone else. Somehow, he had an eye for little critters and other camouflaged wonders and would silently stalk them through the grass—moving, though seemingly motionless, and through it all he was as quiet and reverent as silent prayer.

That son seemed intuitively to grasp that this place required complete presence—that it must be understood on its own terms. Because he did this without thinking, he was able to connect to the essence of the land in a way that made it sacred.

I mention this here because it reminds me of this fundamental fact: the human heart, like that little pond, is sacred in its essence—but, if we would have access to that sanctity, we must understand each heart on its own terms. Encountering another human heart demands our total presence.

When we teach, what is it we hope for? It seems to me we can hope a student decides to trust enough that she willingly lowers the defenses around her heart to allow some key doctrine or, even better, the love of the Savior in. But when those defenses are lowered, we as teachers are freighted with enormous responsibility. As we enter that sacred space, we would do well to doff our proverbial shoes and then to recognize that we must never allow prejudice to poison what we teach. In these moments, we can remember what Elder Dale G. Renlund taught: “To be Christlike, a person loves mercy. People who love mercy are not judgmental; they manifest compassion for others, especially for those who are less fortunate; they are gracious, kind, and honorable. These individuals treat everyone with love and understanding, regardless of characteristics such as race, gender, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and tribal, clan, or national differences. These are superseded by Christlike love.”²⁷

We can combine this with President Russell M. Nelson’s recent words: “We likewise call on government, business, and educational leaders at every level to review processes, laws, and organizational attitudes regarding racism and root them out once and for all.”²⁸ And finally we

27. Dale G. Renlund, “Do Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly with God,” *Ensign* 50, no. 11 (November 2020): 111.

28. This quotation is taken from an op-ed published jointly by President Russell M. Nelson of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and three leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: Derrick Johnson, president and CEO; Leon Russell, chairman of the board, and the Reverend Amos C. Brown, chairman emeritus of religious affairs. “Locking Arms for Racial Harmony in America,”

can add President Nelson's tweet that we must "repent" of our prejudice of all kinds.²⁹

When taken together, these quotes tell me as a teacher that it is not enough to simply tiptoe around the subjects of racism and other kinds of bias—be they in our own history and culture or elsewhere. As my children are now often taught in school, I—as a teacher of the restored gospel—must take up the mantle of being an "upstander" and must proactively demonstrate the ways in which the restored gospel of Jesus Christ preaches against racism and prejudice of every kind.

Given our own religion's complex history with anti-Black racism in particular, I must ensure that I leave no doubt that whatever may have been done or said in the past, I belong to a religion that lives up to the creed Nephi articulates, that God "denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female" (2 Ne. 26:33). In my classrooms, I can without equivocation articulate along with President Oaks that, indeed, Black lives matter.

I recognize that engaging our history on these matters may discomfit us precisely because our history as a people with respect to racism features many uncomfortable episodes and words. But when pondering on such examples, we need to remember Elder Renlund's injunction to be "stone catchers,"³⁰ even if those stones sometimes originate from our own history. If ever we are asked about harmful rhetoric from past Church members, or even Church leaders, we can confidently confirm that racism is wrong, no matter whence it comes. As the Church has written, succinctly and without equivocation, "Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form."³¹ We can bring this all together in our classrooms to ensure that we create there sacred spaces of safety and grace, rooms within which students of every skin color, sexuality, country of origin, educational background, socioeconomic status, and political preference feel welcomed and at home.

Medium, June 8, 2020, accessed April 15, 2021, https://medium.com/@Ch_JesusChrist/locking-arms-for-racial-harmony-in-america-2f62180abf37.

29. See Tad Walch, "President Nelson: 'Deeply Saddened at Recent Evidences of Racism and a Blatant Disregard for Human Life,'" *Deseret News*, June 1, 2020, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/6/1/21277362/president-nelson-face-book-post-social-media-racism-violence-latter-day-saints-naacp>.

30. Renlund, "Infuriating Unfairness," 43.

31. "Race and the Priesthood," Gospel Topics Essays, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed April 15, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/race-and-the-priesthood?lang=eng>.

If we occasionally must confirm this position even with respect to the words of past Church leaders, we can rest assured that to do so is not to deny that leader's mantle specifically nor to question prophets generally. It is, instead, to *heed* the prophets; it was, after all, Moroni who wrote, "Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, . . . but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been" (Morm. 9:31).

Part 3: The Fairy Tale and the Phoenix

In this essay, I have made two fundamental comparisons: of our restored Christian cultural moment to leaving Anatevka and of discussing a faith challenge to discussing impending death with a patient. All of this begs twin questions: What is it we are leaving? And what is the death our students grieve? I ask these questions together because I believe their answer is the same: We are abandoning a fairy tale, and it is the death of the fairy tale we mourn.

When I was coming of age, there was a certain way to understand the gospel that hewed tidily to clear moral boundaries. The Saints in Kirtland and Nauvoo were good; their antagonists were bad. Joseph was a practically perfect saint; his detractors were very nearly devils. The pioneers were the good guys; anyone who opposed them was nefarious. And so on.³²

More complete knowledge has taught us that these facile statements don't stand up to scrutiny. The early Saints distinguish themselves by their valor, faith, grit, and determination—yet they could also be clan-ish, stand-offish, and prone to anger. Their detractors could be antagonistic and even cruel—and some of what they did was inexcusable by any standard—but they were also demonstrating their own tenacity as they tried to eke out a living on the American frontier. Joseph, as it turns out, defined himself by paradox and—his prophetic mantle notwithstanding—recognized himself as far from perfect. And the list of complexities goes on and on.

To be clear, none of the above is to suggest that we abandon ourselves to ambiguity or moral equivalence—to say life is complicated is not to say we cannot identify truth. Rather, the above simply acknowledges

32. I recognize, of course, that part of the additional nuance with which I personally now understand these issues simply reflects that I'm older and have read and lived more. Nonetheless, it strikes me as fair to suggest that on an institutional level we are discussing these issues in more depth and with greater nuance and candor than we previously did.

that the narrative of the gospel unfolds in the midst of a fallen world, and none of the actors within it prove immune to mortal imperfection. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland wryly observed, “[We] are all God has ever had to work with. . . . He deals with it. So should we.”³³

Oliver Wendell Holmes is often attributed with a statement that offers a useful prism through which to understand this shift: “I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity. But I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side.”³⁴ My best sense tells me that many of us individually—and, to my reading, we as a people collectively—are passing through a moment of cultural complexity. My faith tells me that our perseverance will ensure we press on through the fog and find the simplicity on the far side.

Yet, in the meantime, we would do well to acknowledge the fog and to respond without surprise or reprimand when our students come to us mourning the passing of their own personal gospel fairy tale. That version of the story was incomplete, even if it had taught the students its own powerful lessons in its time—but whatever value it once had, if students once understood it to be *everything* and now recognize it is not, the death of that sense that *what they knew was all there was to know* may still feel to them like the fairy tale is dying, and its passing may still leave them rightly sad.

Which brings us to my final and most important point. In the scenarios presented above (section 2, point 7), Sister Hernandez’s second response outshines the first primarily because with it she *keeps her baptismal covenants to “mourn with those that mourn”* (Mosiah 18:9). I am especially sensitive to this issue for three reasons. One is that the Lord apparently knew I would struggle to do this—my patriarchal blessing advises me that I should “learn to listen to understand, and not just to answer.” The second, ironically (and tellingly), is that my wife will tell you how often she has come to me seeking emotional connection and I have offered her instead an intellectual fix. Third, this is part and parcel of what I do at work every day. The conversations mentioned above—“I’m terribly sorry, sir, but what remains of your life will likely only be a few days or weeks”—range from hard to devastating.

33. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Lord, I Believe,” *Ensign* 43, no. 5 (May 2013): 94.

34. This statement is quoted frequently, but always without a solid reference. Holmes also stated: “The only simplicity for which I would give a straw is that which is on the other side of the complex—not that which never has divined it.” Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. to Lady Pollock, October 24, 1902, in *Holmes-Pollock Letters: The Correspondence of Mr. Justice Holmes and Sir Frederick Pollock, 1874–1932*, ed. Mark DeWolfe Howe, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 1:109.

And yet, difficult as they are and sad as they make me, those conversations paradoxically encompass the most beautiful part of being an oncologist. My team and I scour every resource at our disposal, hoping to find meaningful treatments to extend life. When the moment arrives, however, that no such further treatment remains, we are left, together with the patient, facing the plight of us all: knowing that we must die. Strangely, though, because of cancer's insidious growth, we often see death coming from days, weeks, or even months away and thus discuss its approach, planning, questioning, pondering, and crying together.

What about these moments could be beautiful? I was reminded of their beauty while reading the remarkable *Just Mercy*, a memoir of a lawyer working to free those who have been wrongly imprisoned on death row in the Deep South, often with convictions or sentences apparently arising at least in part from racial animus (this is the book Elder Renlund referenced in the April 2021 general conference). One night, after the author (Bryan Stevenson) has lost an appeal—and as a consequence has to spend the last hour of his client's life trying to soothe the condemned man—and after the patient is executed, Mr. Stevenson returns to his office and, while there, breaks down sobbing, unable to contain himself after years of working for some of the world's most decidedly woebegone prisoners.

As he ponders what precisely brought him to tears that night, he observes:

My years of struggling against inequality, abusive power, poverty, oppression, and injustice had finally revealed something to me about myself. Being close to suffering, death, executions, and cruel punishments didn't just illuminate the brokenness of others; in a moment of anguish and heartbreak, it also exposed my own brokenness. You can't effectively fight abusive power, poverty, inequality, illness, oppression, or injustice and not be broken by it.

We are all broken by something. We have all hurt someone and have been hurt. We all share the condition of brokenness even if our brokenness is not equivalent. . . . We all have our reasons. Sometimes we're fractured by the choices we make; sometimes we're shattered by things we would never have chosen. But our brokenness is also the source of our common humanity, the basis for our shared search for comfort, meaning, and healing. Our shared vulnerability and imperfection nurtures and sustains our capacity for compassion.³⁵

35. Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy* (New York: Random House, 2014), 289–99.

This quote speaks volumes regarding the way we respond when a student approaches us with a deeply troubling question. While our initial inclination may be to cow the question into submission, intimidating it with the strength of our conviction, we will more effectively bind ourselves to our students and cultivate between us a compassionate connection if we respond with vulnerability and empathy, rather than with certainty.

The time for certainty may well come, but empathy must precede it.

All of this reminds me that in almost every case those who have most profoundly impacted my life have done so not by offering advice—but by listening. I can recall a handful of moments when friends took my heart in their hands by listening so intently that I felt the very deepest parts of me were heard. To be known that deeply—and loved despite doubt, pain, frustration, anger, and all my shortcomings—requires a spiritual, emotional, and psychological depth and confidence on the part of the listener.

Such listening will require the very best of us as teachers.

Some aspects of restored Christianity remain stubbornly anachronistic. Where modern life zips from hyperlink to hyperlink, discipleship requires sustained devotion to fixed principles over a lifetime. True transformation into women and men who evoke Christ demands from us sustained belief, faith, and diligence that belie the modern ethos of satisfaction on demand. And Twitter and Facebook notwithstanding, our most sacred connecting moments call for listening, not proclamation. Yet if we wish to teach all this to a generation wired with the internet as part of their brains, we will need to deeply understand that very wiring and then respond with empathy when our students find believing hard.

The glory of the gospel lies beyond the fairy tale. Indeed, the fairy tale was simply that: a mirage. We ought never to have expected a church populated or led by the perfect, nor an unfurling of the kingdom immune from the foibles, difficulties, imperfections, and sins that are the wont of all humanity. The *real* gospel is what remains when the fairy tale falls away. Though we may at first rightly mourn the fairy tale's death, those who persevere beyond that dying will find a magnificent resurrection, a phoenix-like renaissance of belief in something resplendent, enduring, and true.

Indeed, as I sit here writing the end of this essay, it is May 2021. The last fourteen months have seen the world unspool. First, the pandemic took the globe by storm, confining us to our homes, ravaging our

economies, and felling hundreds of thousands across the earth. Then, in summer 2020, we all watched as Derek Chauvin kept his knee on George Floyd's neck for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds³⁶—murdering Mr. Floyd—and afterward witnessed seemingly endless crowds spill into the world's streets protesting racial injustice. And finally, in January 2021, we found ourselves transfixed by the horror of an armed mob breaching the U.S. Capitol, weapons and handcuffs in hand, roaming the halls like a pack of wolves, seeking the vice president and other political officers in hopes of subverting democracy.

At the end of all this, we have to wonder: Has our world ever been as riven—by race, by income, by origin, by political party—as it is now?

But it is precisely this state of affairs that would render the waning of restored Christianity for all the foregoing reasons particularly ironic and tragic: we preach precisely what the world so desperately needs. At its foundation, after all, our religion is not just about eschewing alcohol and paying tithing and attending Sunday meetings, important as all those things are. Rather, to be a Latter-day Saint is to affirm the existence of a compassionate God and to embody that compassion for the listing world around us.

One of our scriptures' most stunning tableaux, after all, involves Enoch looking down with God on the state of humanity and seeing "Satan; and he had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced" (Moses 7:26). There have been moments in the last year when I have wondered if we are not living through the kind of time he may have seen. But what matters is that God responds not by throwing his hands in the air and abandoning us as a hopeless enterprise, but instead "the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept; and Enoch bore record of it, saying: How is it that the heavens weep, and shed forth their tears as the rains upon the mountains?" (Moses 7:28).

In the fairy tale we tell ourselves, the one we pretended was the gospel, we might have imagined God assuring us that things are not quite so bad. But what strikes us so deeply about Moses 7 is that God fully owns the overwhelming pain. It is as if he and Enoch survey 2020 and

36. Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, "Prosecutors Say Derek Chauvin Kneled on George Floyd for 9 Minutes 29 Seconds, Longer Than Initially Reported," *New York Times*, March 30, 2021, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/30/us/derek-chauvin-george-floyd-kneel-9-minutes-29-seconds.html>.

2021 and are left bereft at, yes, the pandemic but even more so at the tragedy of our enmity—at our racism, prejudice, economic inequality, callousness, materialism, loneliness, and all the rest. The cumulative weight of it all breaks God’s heart and leaves him weeping. Then our Heavenly Parents and Jesus Christ respond by inviting us to join them in metabolizing that ineffable, suffocating grief and using the resulting energy to bind up the world’s wounds.

The call is to build up Zion.

The restored gospel matters so much because in an age of isolation, it binds us into communities; in an age of ambiguity, it offers us meaning; in an age of desperation, it offers us hope; and in an age of the echoing, empty, and careless cosmos, it offers us an empathic, invested, omniscient Heavenly Father and Mother whose hearts beat in sympathy with ours.

It is, without doubt, a heritage worth passing to our children.

I sense doing so will require the very best of us.

As teachers we must offer no less.

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Mezuzah on My Doorpost

Heather Thomson

When my husband and I moved across the city into a Jewish community in Montreal four years ago, we discovered the previous owners of our newly purchased home had left their mezuzah on the front doorpost. I don't remember now if I'd noticed it when we first stepped through the doorframe of the mid-century, red-brick bungalow on a Friday evening—so unused to the rhythms of Jewish religious observance were we then that we'd unwittingly requested a showing that fell just before sunset, the beginning of Shabbat. But we did see the mezuzah when we moved in a month later, on another Friday evening: its small cylinder case on the right-hand side of our front door at about eye level, positioned at an angle, pointing inward, as though an invitation to enter.

As we drove our first load of belongings to our new home that Friday evening, we saw what would become a familiar sight to us on Shabbat: girls wearing frocks with frills, young boys with sidelocks, men wearing kippas, women with small hats on immaculately bobbed hair (wigs, it turns out, with shorn hair underneath), all walking home from synagogue. We would learn that in this community of 32,000—in which 40 percent of the population was ethnically Jewish—there were seven synagogues, all within about a half-hour walk of our home, and two less than ten minutes away. Parents pushed double strollers, men of all ages ambled in pairs, and family groups congregated on sidewalks, “*Shabbat shalom*” spilling into the streets.

Most of what I knew about Judaism I'd learned in lessons at church. In my early twenties, I watched my institute teacher fasten a black, cube-shaped

object to his forehead like a headlamp—a pretend phylactery—to demonstrate the Old Testament custom of keeping God’s law between one’s eyes. Real phylacteries—*tefillin* in Hebrew—are a set of small black leather boxes containing scripture written on parchment, worn traditionally by observant Jewish men on their forehead and arm during weekday morning prayers. By the time I moved into our home in my early thirties, newly married and pregnant with our first child, I only vaguely knew what mezuzahs were, not enough to know their name, only that they contained scripture, which I erroneously thought consisted of the entire Torah rather than just a few passages. In my ignorance, the mezuzah was illuminated in the full beauty of an ancient tradition I felt connected to but only dimly understood. Had I been pressed to put my impressions into words, I might have described the mezuzah as a religious decoration, which appealed to me as a predecessor to my own Christian faith.

Christianity was built upon the teachings of a Man who had been Jewish, went my reasoning. And as a member of a church that exists on the premise of being the restoration of Christ’s ancient Church, I felt—as others belonging to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also seem to—a special kinship to Judaism. Maybe even a theological claim to it, a spiritual link that fundamentally joined me to this earlier faith, even in my gross ignorance of it. But was the connection I felt to Judaism a legitimate reason to keep the mezuzah? Did I think I had greater access to the foundations of the Christian gospel because of the object outside my door? When I try putting these thoughts into words, I fear they sound as they are: presumptuous, at best, without a true regard for or consideration of my neighbors’ lived and living faith.

As I now write, it’s been over four years, and the mezuzah is still fastened to our doorpost. I’ve asked myself on occasion why I’ve kept it up, since I’m not Jewish myself. But the question is usually forced upon me, an imperative reckoning to sort out the aftermath that follows a misunderstanding. Like when the boys belonging to the local synagogue brought matzah before Passover that first year (and every year since). Or when a Jehovah’s Witness showed up with a ready-made argument that Jesus is the true Messiah, and all she could do was point helplessly to my doorpost when I told her that I believed it. I have learned, through these experiences, that the mezuzah is a recognizable mark of a Jewish home. But I’ve also learned it does not take long for people to figure out otherwise, whether I overtly tell them or not. For the most part, I’m content to let the question slip by unexamined, evading the need to face it again until the next occurrence.

The first person who questioned me outright about the mezuzah must have been Nancy, my next-door neighbor, whose family shares the dividing wall of our semidetached house. My husband met her before I did, on a Saturday morning when friends from church were helping us move in. “Oh, church!” she’d said when my husband told her how we knew our friends. “That means you’ll have a Christmas house.” Did Nancy point the mezuzah out to me the first time we’d met, knocking on my door two weeks later to let me know we could get a ticket if we parked overnight on the street? (Except for Fridays, she said—there was an exemption in the bylaw for Shabbat, as well as for other holidays.) Or was it only after months of talking over the back fence and at each other’s front doors before dinner to borrow eggs or spices or other missing ingredients when one day on leaving my steps, she pointed out the inconsistency of me having a mezuzah up while simultaneously displaying the Nativity scene, a silhouette in my front window?

In those early days, I fancied I could get away with it—if not the decision itself to keep the mezuzah up, then at least my own justification for it. When faced head-on with the question, whether by a neighbor or a friend who came to my home, I had my answer ready: the previous owners had left it when they moved, I’d say, and we’d just never taken it down. (Besides, I thought, if it were taken down, there’d be holes in the doorpost that would need to be filled.) I would respond as though I’d never had the question put to me before—as though it were an afterthought. Indeed, until I began writing this essay, I didn’t think about the mezuzah much. Perhaps I had an inkling that if I considered it too seriously, I might find a need to take it down, which I wasn’t ready to do. Yet, because I consistently avoided a too-close study of my motives for keeping it up, I didn’t know why.



Soon after we moved in, we discovered all of our immediate neighbors were Jewish, with varying degrees of observance. This is different from the kind of designation of “active” or “less active” we use in our church to indicate participation levels for members in the same congregation. Rather, our neighbors were part of different denominations based on their observance, from the liberal Reform to the orthodox Hasidic. Some believed in a living faith; others, none at all. But they all observed Shabbat, to one degree or another, if only to gather for the evening meal with family. And they all had a mezuzah.

The word *mezuzah*—though now commonly used for the scroll within the box fastened outside one’s door—simply means “doorpost” in

Hebrew. It's used in the Torah when the children of Israel are commanded to mark their doorposts with blood so that death might pass over them. It's also used in two scriptures in Deuteronomy where they are instructed to write the words of God on their gates and doorposts of their houses. As they are now referred to, mezuzahs can be found on the doorposts of Jewish homes and the rooms within. They're also on the doorposts of workplaces, as I'd noticed at my doctor's office when I went for prenatal visits. (Incidentally, my doctor wasn't called in for my delivery, which fell on a Friday evening, as she observed Shabbat even for work.)

Like the religious lines which define us, there are physical lines that differentiate us from each other, too—the fence that separates my backyard and Nancy's, or the hedges separating my other next-door neighbor's lawn and ours, or ours and the neighbors behind us. And yet our lives intersect in ways deeper than the above-ground barriers. Our dividing hedges share the same roots and soil: they are, in fact, the same living bush, bursting into flame each autumn when the intertwining vines turn scarlet with the first frost. The raspberry canes and fire lilies of Nancy's garden bend through the fence to my side, and the red runners of my strawberry plants reach to her flower patch. We share a wall that is supposed to divide, but through it we hear Nancy's family playing the piano, and they, the noises of our young children.

In the time we've been here, I've gone to a shiva—a seven-day period of mourning following the death of a close relative—at my next-door neighbor's home, with whom we share a hedge, and a Seder dinner at Nancy's during Passover, to commemorate the liberation of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. For the most part, though, we don't pass through the frames of our neighbors' doors, nor do they ours: more often, we find ourselves talking on either side of our doorposts, or else we're all on the outside.

From where I sit at my desk and write, I can see my neighbor across the street touch the mezuzah on her doorpost and lightly kiss her hand when she leaves. Like those who lived in the home before her, she and her family are Hasidic, recognizable by their more conservative dress and strict adherence to Jewish law. I met her one morning not long after they'd moved in when putting my recycling out at the curb, still wearing my pajamas; she looked at me from the sidewalk across the street, and I took this as invitation enough to cross over and introduce myself. "Maybe our children can play together," she suggested, unprecedentedly, and offered a tricycle for my daughter to use while we talked.

The mother who'd lived there previously hadn't come to the front door when I'd knocked one winter day to offer help after seeing her spinning her tires on the ice, unable to leave the driveway. As I stood waiting at her unopened door, I could see her young children looking at me curiously through the living room window, and when an older daughter finally opened the door to see what I wanted, she promptly closed it again until my message was relayed, and her mother's reply returned to me: "No, thank you." They'd moved away without her ever having spoken directly to me. So I was doubly elated with this unexpected offer of friendship from this new, young mother. Yet when I realized that she might not know I was not Jewish, something inside me sunk, as I knew that, in knowing it, she might feel differently.

The mezuzah, I knew by now, was the mark of a Jewish home. I would never have put it up myself, but I was in no rush to take it down either. And yet when I learned that some Christians have adopted the practice of putting mezuzahs on their doorposts, I am bothered by the appropriation. Had I justified that I could keep it up because I was part of Christ's restored Church? I could find nothing which said a mezuzah should be removed by new owners if they are not Jewish, and no one directly told me I should take it down. But it must have puzzled my neighbors, who knew I was Christian, to see it still up.

We heard a loud rap on our front door one Friday night around nine thirty or ten o'clock, and my husband, when seeing who it was, called for me immediately. I opened the door to see my neighbor from across the street standing on my porch with her children, a beautiful beaded white hat covering her head, her dress finer than I'd ever seen on weekdays. After exchanging a few polite commonplaces, and hoping she hadn't disturbed me, she told me that the thermostat was set too low in their home, and it was a cold night. . . . I remembered the Shabbat elevators at the Jewish hospital in which I gave birth, which stopped at each floor so that no one need press a button and do that which was forbidden on Shabbat. All at once, I understood. She must have been confident that I wasn't Jewish—despite the mezuzah—or she wouldn't have come. I slipped on some shoes, stepped past the mezuzah, crossed the street with her, and entered the door that had once been closed to me. It would be the first of many times I would go over on a Friday night to turn something off or on, flip a switch. I've been through her doorpost, now, more than any other neighbor's, with the exception of Nancy's. "Oh, are you her *Shabbos goy*?" Nancy asked me one Friday evening from her front porch,

when she saw me returning to mine. I was delighted to know I had a name for my newfound role.



I've often wondered why the previous owners left the mezuzah up, knowing we weren't Jewish ourselves. Was it simply an oversight of instruction, which clearly states—I looked it up—that a mezuzah must be removed if the next occupants are known to not be Jewish (with an equally clear mandate that a mezuzah must remain if it's known that they are)? Or was the decision something more deliberate, and if so, for what purpose?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Montreal, my family and I would leave our neighborhood on Sunday mornings to worship, though our church is only a ten-minute drive away. With lockdowns, and gatherings of all kinds being restricted, then banned, it's been ten months since I've set foot in a church, though I've been "active" all my life. I had valued my connection with my neighbors before, but it's become more vital now: they've become my primary community.

I went outside to take a break on my back porch one Sunday afternoon in the spring after teaching a Zoom Sunday School lesson. Nancy was out too, bringing in her laundry, and asked what we did for church, now that we couldn't go in person. She told me how Zoom wasn't an option for the Hasidic community, in which electronics were forbidden on Shabbat (and some prayers required ten men to be performed, she said). I told her how we took the sacrament at home now, my husband blessing the bread and water at our table. "If you ever need matzah for it, I have some," she offered.

I've wondered about my reticence to take the mezuzah down, even after all my neighbors knew that I'm Christian. The mezuzah, I now realize, had become my own private symbol of my need to belong in the community in which I live. Having seen it solely as a symbol upon which I'd superimposed my own meaning, I hadn't understood the sanctity with which the object itself was regarded. When I learned that it should be inspected for any fading of the text or damage to the parchment twice every seven years by a certified scribe, I finally decided to have it taken down. I thought perhaps I could ask my neighbor across the street if her rabbi might be willing to remove it. And I hoped it wasn't seen as sacrilege that I'd kept it up all this time.

One dark Sunday evening last December, we heard a knock at our front door. "Hi, just here to remind you to light your menorah!" came

a strong, male voice which I heard across the room. This was the first time someone had shown up at our door for Hanukkah. “Ah, we’re actually not Jewish,” admitted my husband, whose Mormon pioneer lineage extends to almost every line. Instead of an awkward shuffling which usually follows that admission, I heard the clear, jovial voice ring out, “Then what’s this all about?” My husband must have then recited our worn-out script about the previous owners having left the mezuzah up, though the words were lost to me. “Would you like me to take it down for you?” came the unexpected offer. My husband called me, knowing I was in the midst of this essay. “Yes, please,” I said, as he went to get some tools.

The young man with the voice stood on my doorstep wearing a sweater with a large menorah on it, lit up with flashing colored lights. He grinned though his mask. In our brief conversation that followed, he told me the mezuzah would be put up on a Jewish home and seemed surprised that, out of respect, I hadn’t taken it down myself. I had imagined what the ceremony might look like as the mezuzah was removed. Would a prayer be offered? Instead, this young man took the back end of the hammer my husband offered him, wedged it between the door-frame and the mezuzah, and gently railed on it, breaking off the ends, which were still attached to the doorpost. It was the scroll inside that mattered, he said.

The next day, I took the nails out of the doorpost myself. I was left only with the mark of what had once been there but no longer was. All that remained were the imprints: another kind of witness. The scars from a set of nails. I decided not to cover them.

This essay by Heather Thomson won first place in the 2021 Richard H. Cracroft Personal Essay Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.

What Her Missionary Son's Letter Didn't Say

Rain hangs in the air.
Even my underwear feels wet.

I listen to the tapping fingertips
of the bodies of bugs hitting netting
at night. Gray water. Bare floors.

My companion is
around.

The people
are more real
than anyone I've ever met—
than you, maybe,
in that long-ago world.

My companion won't sing.
This is the rainy season.

—Darlene Young

This poem tied for first place in the 2021 Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.

Captain Moroni and the Sermon on the Mount

Resolving a Scriptural Tension

Duane Boyce

A natural tension seems to exist between two important features of the Book of Mormon. On one hand, Mormon includes in his record a version of the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus gave to the Nephites—an address that sets the standard for discipleship and that contains teachings obviously opposed to violence.¹ In it, we hear about not resisting evil, turning the other cheek, going another mile when compelled to go one, loving our enemies—and so forth (3 Ne. 12:39–44). On the other hand, Mormon also presents various Nephite leaders as righteous even though they were *immersed* in violence. Captain Moroni stands out among these leaders because his wartime activities dominate the last third of the book of Alma: we see him in significant detail.

The juxtaposition of these two threads appears contradictory. We see righteous men, including prophetic figures, engaged in the very activities that the text itself seems to prohibit. And this apparent contradiction seems significant even though most of these leaders lived before the Sermon was even given. This is because it is natural to think of the Book of Mormon as a whole—as a collection of significant experiences and teachings that are consistent with one another and that together present a unified, divine message to the world. We thus expect to see

1. Although there are two different presentations of this sermon, the Nephite and New Testament versions are virtually identical in the passage that is relevant to my topic (3 Ne. 12:39–44 and Matt. 5:39–44). For this reason, and because it is the most common way to speak about these teachings, I will simply refer to “the Sermon on the Mount.” That there are actually two presentations of this sermon should be understood.

the book's most prominent leaders actually live the standard found in the book's most prominent teachings—whether they actually possessed the Sermon on the Mount or not.² And therein lies the problem. Although these prominent teachings clearly seem to be opposed to violence, we see these prominent leaders very much engaged in violence.

It is not necessarily obvious how to resolve this tension. One strategy, of course, would be to ignore the tension and to simply avoid thinking about it. But a sacred text requires more from us than that. So the apparent disparity has to be faced. How is it possible to reconcile Captain Moroni with the Sermon on the Mount?³

Mormon's Perspective

In thinking about this question, it is useful to recognize an important element of the text at the outset—namely, that although modern readers might see a tension between these threads, Mormon himself apparently did not. He gives no indication that he believed there was a conflict between the Sermon on the Mount—which *he* included in the text—and the conduct of multiple Nephite leaders who engaged in conflict. Nowhere does he criticize the wartime involvement or behavior of any Nephite leader—a list that includes Nephi, King Benjamin, Alma, Ammon, Captain Moroni, Teancum, Lehi, Helaman, Lachoneus, Gidgiddoni, Moroni (the son of Mormon), and Mormon himself. If he had wanted to contrast the behavior of Nephite leaders with the standard taught in the Sermon on the Mount, or at least to express reservations about their conduct on this basis, he had plenty of occasion to do so. Mormon never does this, however, and even goes out of his way to praise Captain Moroni for his spiritual qualities—and he does so specifically in the context of Moroni's

2. Note, for example, that Mormon and Moroni certainly possessed the Sermon on the Mount, and yet, when faced with conflict, they behaved no differently than earlier Nephite leaders had behaved. This suggests that possession of the Sermon itself is not an important line of demarcation between earlier and later Nephite leaders. We can consider them as a group. And the question about them, then, is not whether they, or any subset of them, actually possessed the Sermon, but only whether they lived the *standard* that appears in it.

3. Although they do not normally frame the matter in terms of the Sermon on the Mount specifically, writers have long wrestled with the problem of Christianity and war. See, for example, John Howard Yoder's historical treatise, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos, 2009). Latter-day Saint writers have done the same. For a brief introduction, see appendix A.

wartime efforts (Alma 48:11–18). He does the same regarding King Benjamin, calling him a “holy man” while simultaneously describing his leadership in war (W of M 1:13–18). That Mormon does this, and that he never criticizes any Nephite leader’s wartime involvement, suggests that we should not be quick to do so either.⁴ This seems especially the case when we remember that Mormon not only possessed the Sermon on the Mount but also enjoyed a spiritual status and nearness to the Lord that is quite breathtaking.⁵

This point regarding Mormon is important because, on the face of it, one tempting path for reconciling the apparent conflict between the Sermon on the Mount and Nephite leaders’ engagement in war would be to conclude that these leaders were simply wrong: whatever their other qualities, they did not live up to the Lord’s most important teachings.⁶ However, since this was quite evidently not Mormon’s own view,

4. It should also be noted that Mormon’s lack of criticism cannot be attributed to a general aversion to criticizing people he thought deserved it. His record contains numerous observations of people’s wickedness (see, for example, Alma 17:14; 30:60; 43:6; 46:8–10; 47:4; 48:24; 50:21; Hel. 4:11–13; 6:2, 31, 35; 3 Ne. 2:1–3; Morm. 3:9–12; 4:11–12; Moro. 9:7–20). Indeed, in one place he devotes an entire chapter to denouncing mortals’ tendency to wickedness (Hel. 12). All of this suggests that Mormon would have been comfortable criticizing various Nephite leaders if he had wanted to.

5. Mormon “was visited of the Lord” at the age of fifteen (Morm. 1:15), he taught canonized doctrine by the power of the Spirit (for example, Hel. 12; 3 Ne. 29, 30; Morm. 7; Moro. 7–9), he was visited by the Three Nephites (3 Ne. 28:24–26), he received multiple revelations from the Lord (for example, 3 Ne. 30; Moro. 8:7–9; W of M 1:6–7), and he was entrusted with the responsibility of crafting the primary historical and doctrinal instrument for gathering Israel in the latter days.

6. Adopting a narrative approach to the Book of Mormon, Joshua Madson argues for this general kind of view. See his “A Non-Violent Reading of the Book of Mormon,” in *War and Peace in Our Time: Mormon Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Q. Mason, J. David Pulsipher, and Richard L. Bushman (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 13–28. He argues that the Book of Mormon is not actually a self-consistent whole, but instead a developing narrative (with a beginning, a middle, and an end) whose overall message of nonviolence can only be discerned by attending to particular instances of the Lord’s teachings in 3 Nephi (specifically what the Lord says in 3 Ne. 9:19–20) and to how the book ends in violence. Seeing this developing narrative, including the collapse of Nephite civilization through violence at the end, is how the book is to be read as a “whole”—a reading that is said to convey a clear message of nonviolence. Derived in this way, this overall nonviolent theme of the book is said to supersede and correct any parts of the text that are inconsistent with it, such as Nephite leaders’ involvement in war. For an analysis of this argument and why it does not succeed, see Duane Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), chapters 8 and 9.

and since he created the record in the first place, we should be cautious about simply defaulting to this conclusion. It seems preferable to see if we can gain the kind of perspective Mormon himself apparently had on these features of his text.⁷

To do this would seem to require just a few steps. These steps involve the following: noticing certain features of the scriptural record that might be easy to overlook, making explicit an elementary moral distinction (that we actually draw tacitly all the time), making sure we are thinking carefully about the Sermon on the Mount itself, and being clear about the wartime conduct of Book of Mormon leaders, including Captain Moroni. All of this can be seen as we proceed through six central topics.

1. The Savior's Personal Conduct

Because the Lord's teachings speak of turning the other cheek and of loving our enemies, as well as of other charitable responses to mistreatment, it is easy to think that the Sermon teaches an ethic of complete nonviolence.⁸ Two aspects of the scriptural record seem to demonstrate that this perception is mistaken, however.

The Lord Gave the Sermon . . . and He Exercises Violence

The most obvious indicator that there is no intrinsic conflict between the Sermon on the Mount and violence per se is the Lord's own behavior. He, after all, exercises violence, and he *gave* the Sermon. From the destruction at the time of Noah (Gen. 7:13; Moses 7:34, 43) to his destruction of numerous Nephite cities following his Crucifixion (3 Ne. 9:3–12) to the destruction he will visit on the wicked incident to his Second

7. In one place, Mormon says to his latter-day readers that “ye must lay down your weapons of war,” which might be taken to indicate his rejection of violence. But of course he immediately goes on to say that we should not take them up again “save it be that God shall command you” (Morm. 7:4)—a command that, as we will see in section 1, the Lord explicitly gave to the Nephites and that Mormon records. And of course, Mormon himself took up arms in defense of his people after making this statement in Mormon 7. (Mormon specifically identifies the “remnant of the house of Israel” as his audience in this passage [Morm. 7:1], but his remarks about taking up arms would seem to have application to people generally.)

8. This is what Eugene England thought, for example. See his “Hugh Nibley as Cassandra,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (1990): 104–16. A more recent expression is found in Joshua Madson, “A Non-Violent Reading of the Book of Mormon.”

Coming⁹—to multiple episodes in between¹⁰—the Lord demonstrates his willingness to employ violence. It would seem evident, therefore, that the Sermon—which *he* gave—cannot be a denunciation of violence *per se*. He, at least, is morally permitted to exercise that kind of conduct.

*The Lord Instructs His People to Defend Themselves,
and He Helps Them Do So*

The Lord does not limit this propriety to himself, however. More than once he has told his followers that there are times when they, too, can exercise violence: specifically, when they are forced to defend themselves against aggression. He told the Nephites that “inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies” and also that “ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed” (Alma 43:46–47). Captain Moroni thus explained that it was explicitly because of God’s commandments that he took up the sword to defend the cause of his country (Alma 60:28, 34) and that resisting Lamanite invasion was “the cause of our God” (Alma 54:10). We also see that Moroni went to battle against traitors in the government precisely because the Lord instructed him in an explicit revelation to do so (Alma 60:33).¹¹

This theme is corroborated in Doctrine and Covenants 134:11 as well as in 98:33–36, where the Lord speaks of appropriate defense as “the law” he has given over the earth’s history. Moreover, speaking of the prediction that in the last days it will be “army . . . against army,” the Prophet Joseph Smith remarked, “It may be that the saints will have to beat their ploughs into swords, for it will not do for men to sit down [patiently] and see their women and children destroyed.”¹²

9. For example, Malachi 4:1; Isaiah 11:4; 66:15–16; 1 Nephi 22:23; 2 Nephi 30:10; Doctrine and Covenants 1:13; 29:17; 45:50; 63:34; 133:50–51.

10. See, for example, Exodus 9, 12, 14; John 2:14–17; Matthew 21:12–13; Jacob 7:15–20; Alma 19:21–23; Alma 33:10.

11. Some modern writers assert that Moroni’s report of this revelation is flawed. See, for example, Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 176, 177, and Kindle location 6815. In a recent paper, I have demonstrated why this view is a mistake, however. See Duane Boyce, “Captain Moroni’s Revelation,” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 58, no. 4 (2019): 155–59.

12. “History, 1838–1856, Volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844],” 19, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-f-1-1-may-1844-8-august-1844/25>. This quotation is taken from Thomas Bullock’s report, which is the most complete firsthand record of the sermon. See also Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo*

The Lord's approving attitude toward his people's defense of themselves is further evident in the help he gives them. Because of the Lord's command to the Nephites "to defend your families even unto bloodshed" (Alma 43:47), they understood that, as they were faithful, the Lord would warn them "to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger" and that he would actually tell them "whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies" (Alma 48:15–16)—and the text records more than one incident of exactly this type (Alma 16:6–8; 43:23–24). The Book of Mormon also reports numerous incidents when the Lord strengthened and helped the Nephites in battle against their aggressors, including strengthening Alma in his hand-to-hand combat with Amlici (Alma 2:29–31).¹³ In each of these cases, the record directly attributes the Nephites' strength and success in waging battle to the Lord.

Thus, although the Lord gave the Sermon on the Mount, the scriptural record depicts him as not only exercising violence himself but also as commanding—and helping—his people defend themselves with violence when necessary. Such features of the scriptural record clearly preclude the idea that the Lord's Sermon prohibits violence in itself: the Lord cannot really be forbidding in the Sermon what he himself explicitly teaches and does elsewhere. To read the Sermon as a condemnation of all violence is a mistake because doing so entails that it is a condemnation of the Lord himself.

2. The Moral Difference between Aggressors and Victims

The Sermon on the Mount, then, does not prohibit violence per se. It obviously does not follow from this, however, that it permits all violence in any circumstance. We can start to see what the dividing line might be by noticing the fundamental moral distinction between acts of aggression and acts of defense. Most recognize, for instance, that the violent conduct of a victim who is defending herself against rape is nothing

Discourses of the Prophet Joseph (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 367. The report of this statement in the Joseph Smith Papers places the word "patiently" at the end of the statement: "[I]t may be that the saints will have to beat their ploughs into swords, for it will not do for men to sit down and see their women and children destroyed patiently." I have changed placement of the word "patiently" to capture the obvious intent of the statement and thus to improve its clarity.

13. Passages that either report or presuppose the Lord's help include Words of Mormon 1:13–14; Mosiah 1:13–14; Alma 2:16–19, 28; 44:3–5; 57:25–26, 35, 36; 58:10–12, 33, 37, 39; 59:3; 60:20–21; 61:13, 21; Helaman 4:24–25; 7:22; 12:2; 3 Nephi 3:15, 21, 25; 4:10, 31, 33; Mormon 3:3, 15.

like the violent conduct of her assailant. Both might be acting violently, but, morally speaking, few would think to compare their actions. Nor would we compare the conduct of a victim—who, say, is merely defending himself against being murdered—with the conduct of the aggressor who is attempting to murder him.

Such distinctions are codified in criminal law because we recognize a fundamental distinction between aggressors and victims. They have a different moral status. Aggressors, after all, are *violating* the rights of their victims, whereas victims—when all they do is fight back to defend themselves—are only *defending* certain rights. Although both might be committing violent acts, their acts are not morally equivalent. Because aggressors and victims have a different moral status, their *acts* have a different moral status.¹⁴

This is why, although both Alma and Amlici exercised violence toward one another (Alma 2), including in hand-to-hand combat (vv. 29–31), Amlici was wrong, and Alma was right. Although both wielded swords, their wieldings were not remotely the same. One was an aggressor, seeking to overthrow, slay, and subjugate the Nephites, while the other was merely defending *against* that aggression. And, of course, the Lord actually intervened to help Alma in his defense (vv. 30–31). As we saw above in section 1, this is something he did with regard to the Nephites generally. Thus, while the Nephites were prohibited from committing acts of aggression or offense themselves (see 3 Ne. 3:20 and Morm. 3:14),¹⁵ the Lord specifically approved the violence necessary for the Nephites to defend themselves.

It can help to think of all this in terms of simple mistreatment. When aggressors attack their victims, it is obvious that they are mistreating them. But there is no sense in which victims, in merely defending themselves, are mistreating their attackers. How does it *mistreat* a would-be murderer to prevent him from murdering you?

All of this helps us see why the Lord can support and even direct violence in certain circumstances while forbidding it in others: some acts of violence are immoral, while others are not, and the Lord, so it would seem, treats them accordingly.¹⁶

14. This is the case to the extent that defensive acts are genuinely defensive. If they move from being defensive to becoming their own acts of hostility and aggression, they lose their defensive status and the moral status that goes along with it.

15. This prohibition is also presupposed in Alma 43:46–47.

16. Although the difference between aggressors and victims is a common-sense distinction, my personal thinking on the matter derives from important works stretching

3. The Sermon on the Mount and the Righteous State of Heart

With these clarifications about violence in mind—both regarding the Lord’s attitude and conduct and regarding the distinction between aggressors and victims—we can turn our attention to the Sermon on the Mount itself.

To begin, note that part of the reason the Sermon seems to contradict the behavior of Captain Moroni and others is that it is easy to assume that its instructions (for example, turn the other cheek) are meant to apply to every dimension and scale of life. Coupled with this is the additional tendency to think that the same instructions are behavior oriented—that they are about our physical conduct. If we think this way, it is natural to suppose that if the Lord prohibits something as small as slapping someone in return for their having slapped us, then it obviously must be wrong to do something *more* violent than this—for instance, to take up the sword to actually kill someone. If mere slapping is forbidden, how could something like wielding a sword *not* be forbidden—indeed, forbidden even more stringently?

If we assume the Sermon’s injunctions apply to every scale of life and that they are about behavior *per se*, this is a natural conclusion to draw. Actually, though, there is no reason to make these assumptions. Two elements of the Sermon suggest a completely different line of thinking.

The Scope Presupposed by the Sermon on the Mount

Notice, first, the kind of circumstance the Sermon presupposes. The Lord does not use images of serious threats to one’s life or limb (for example, rape and murder) in his teachings; much less does he employ images of peril to a whole society. The scale of life the Lord chooses to speak of is the scale of everyday living. He thus speaks of cheeks and smiting and cloaks and second miles, not of raping and killing and military devastation. This scope is evident not only in the examples the Lord selects but also in the audience he is addressing. These are normal, everyday citizens faced with the circumstances of ordinary life. He is not addressing them as heads of state confronted with the complexities of international relations, including that of protecting the lives of their citizens.¹⁷

from Kant, Buber, and Levinas to Constant, Foot, Anscombe, Thompson, Kamm, Fried, and Dworkin. A deeper discussion does not seem required for present purposes, however. I will be content if my remarks correspond to most readers’ considered judgments.

17. Classical writers have typically considered the scope of these injunctions, as found in the New Testament, to be narrow as well. For a sample, see appendix B.

Because the scope of the Lord's Sermon is limited in this way, its specific injunctions simply do not "map" more extreme circumstances. Turning the other cheek is the proper behavioral response when the issue is one of slapping, but in extreme circumstances the issue is *not* one of slapping. It is one of rape or murder or genocide. We have already seen that the Lord clearly countenances and even commands his people to defend themselves in violent circumstances of that sort. This in itself indicates (1) that the Lord is presupposing something other than violent circumstances in this sermon and (2) that its specific injunctions, therefore, are not intended to cover every possible situation. His own conduct and commandments demonstrate this.¹⁸

The Focus of the Sermon on the Mount

In addition to presupposing a limited scope, the injunctions in the Sermon on the Mount are not really about specific *behaviors* in the first place. They actually teach a larger point than just what to do if someone literally slaps us on the cheek. The prescriptions are metaphorical expressions that teach us a certain way of *living*, evoking in us a sense of the kind of people we are to be.¹⁹ N. T. Wright describes them as sketches that simply give us the general idea of what the Lord wants.²⁰ This becomes more

18. Along with key passages in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Mormon is the most decisive witness of this claim (see section 1 above: "The Savior's Personal Conduct"). Nevertheless, this point has been evident to Christian writers even though they have not had the benefit of these modern scriptures. This is one reason both Augustine (354–430) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)—both of whom knew the Sermon on the Mount well—could justify entering war to defend against aggression. Indeed, they are the ancient architects of what has come to be called "just-war theory." Augustine himself coined the term "just war" (see *The City of God* 19.7, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120119.htm>), and Aquinas further developed the concept centuries later (see St. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros., 1947), second part of the second part, question 40, esp. article 1, <https://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/SS/SSo40.html#SSQ40OUTP1>).

19. Although I am relying on the account in the Book of Mormon, commentators on the New Testament have long made this kind of point about this passage in the Sermon on the Mount. For remarks by Augustine and Aquinas, see appendix C.

20. Of course, Wright is commenting specifically on the New Testament version of the Sermon, but, as mentioned earlier (note 1), the relevant verses are virtually identical to those found in 3 Nephi. For his comments, see N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone*, part one (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 49–53. Ellicott's nineteenth-century commentary sees it the same way: the Sermon is not a code of laws, but an expression of principles—the central core of which is that we are to eliminate from ourselves the natural desire for

obvious when the Lord follows these images with an explicit description of the deep attitude they exemplify. “Love your enemies,” he instructs; “bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you” (3 Ne. 12:44). And this, of course, simply reflects what he had said earlier: it is not enough that we simply not kill (that is, murder) our brother;²¹ we are condemned by the Lord if we are even angry with him (3 Ne. 12:21–22). And he said the same about adultery and lusting (vv. 27–28). The Lord is teaching a higher standard than simply avoiding certain kinds of behavior; he cares about who we are *inside*. “Suffer none of these things to enter into your *heart*,” he emphasized (3 Ne. 12:29, emphasis added).

The Sermon on the Mount thus pertains primarily to a certain condition of heart—not to specific behavior itself.²² Toward the Lord, this condition is characterized by a responsiveness to his Spirit and a humility and earnestness in trying to follow him. Toward others, it is characterized by charity and unselfishness—by an attitude of patience and longsuffering rather than of spitefulness and vengeance.²³

4. The Righteous State of Heart and Violent Conduct

Because the Sermon on the Mount does not pertain to behavior per se, its specific injunctions (such as turn the other cheek) are limited in scope: they do not apply universally but are meant for matters of

retaliation. See C. J. Ellicott, *New Testament Commentary for English Readers* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1878), 29 (commentary on Matthew 5:39), <https://archive.org/details/new-testamentcommoielli/page/28> and <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ellicott/matthew/5.htm>.

21. The Hebrew word used in this commandment is roughly equivalent to “unlawful killing.” The commandment is not a prohibition against killing per se but against murder.

22. This is apparent for an additional reason. New Testament commentators (William F. Albright, for instance) frequently point out the meaning of specific references in this passage to the circumstances of the Jews (for example, the Roman customs of slapping and of forced labor), and yet the Lord repeated these same expressions to the Nephites—who experienced no such customs from Roman occupiers. This indicates that the specifics of these edicts are secondary and that what matters is the state of heart they exemplify. Additionally, a strict and literal reading of such edicts would also make the Sermon more of an addition to the Law of Moses—with its detailed behavioral requirements—than a replacement of it. We would just have *new* rules—about slapping, walking two miles, giving two articles of clothing, and so forth—along with all the previous rules. I am indebted to Kim Sloan for this observation. For Albright’s commentary on the Near Eastern context of these edicts, see his *Matthew: A New Translation* by W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 68–70.

23. This emphasis on the heart—on who we are inside—is true of scriptural teachings generally. For a brief introduction, see appendix D.

everyday life. What *does* apply universally is what these injunctions teach us about the proper state of heart. What we seem to learn from the Lord's Sermon is that we are to approach all situations—both everyday and extreme—with an attitude of humility and earnestness toward following the Lord and an attitude of patience and unselfishness toward others. In matters of ordinary life *and* in situations of violence, we are to possess the righteous state of heart.

Such a condition of heart does not prohibit all violent conduct, however. As we saw earlier, although the Lord's state of heart is not only righteous but perfect, he himself commits acts of violence. We see this in the mild violence he exercised in the temple: wielding a whip, turning over tables, and threatening those who were present (John 2:14–17; see also Matt. 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46). But we also see it in far more violent acts than just clearing the temple. As we saw above in section 1, he has destroyed countless lives over the history of the earth and will do so again at the end.

Since the Lord performs such acts with a perfect and devoted heart, it should not be surprising that mortals can be expected to possess a righteous state of heart under violent circumstances as well—situations in which the Lord countenances and even commands the violence necessary for self-defense.²⁴

Certainly we see this state of heart in the lives of prophets like Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni. All of them engaged in defensive war and yet all of them enjoyed visions, revelations, and angelic ministrations.²⁵ It would seem unlikely that the Lord would bless them with such divine experiences if they had not approached even the most desperate circumstances with the heart the Lord expects of us.

We see the same spiritual condition in King Benjamin. Many write and speak of his saintly demeanor in the early chapters of Mosiah. What might be less familiar is the degree to which he was forced to engage in war prior to this time. The record tells us that “armies of the Lamanites” came against King Benjamin's people and that King Benjamin therefore “gathered together his armies,” fought “with the strength of his own arm,” contended “in the strength of the Lord,” slew with his army

24. Note the Lord's statement to the Nephites in one situation that “ye *shall* defend your families even unto bloodshed” (Alma 43:47, emphasis added). The Lord's attitude toward self-defense is an important topic, and I have treated it at length in Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed*, particularly chapter 7.

25. See, for example, 1 Nephi 11–14; 2 Ne. 4:23–25; 11:3; 25; 26:1–22; 28–30; 31:10–15; Helaman 12; 3 Nephi 30; Mormon 1:15; 7; 8:10–11; Ether 12:39; Moroni 8:7–9.

“many thousands of the Lamanites,” and contended against the invading armies until “they had driven them out of all the lands of their inheritance” (W of M 1:13–14). And specifically around the time of these wars, Mormon explicitly describes King Benjamin as reigning over his people “in righteousness”—indeed, as a “holy man” (W of M 1:17).

From Nephi to King Benjamin to Mormon and Moroni, all of these spiritual figures would seem to exemplify the condition of heart taught in the Sermon on the Mount. And yet, with such hearts, all of them took up the sword to defend their people against Lamanite assault.

5. The Conduct of Book of Mormon Leaders

If the wartime behavior of various prophetic leaders flowed from the state of heart taught in the Sermon on the Mount, we would expect it to show in how they conducted themselves in war. And this is in fact what the record shows. Three general themes emerge when we consider the actions of prominent figures in the Book of Mormon.

Personal Righteousness and Encouragement of Righteousness in Others

An obvious feature of the text is the frequency with which *prophets* led their people in defense against aggression. Nephi, Alma, Helaman, Lachoneus, Gidgiddoni, Mormon, and Moroni all held the highest spiritual designation, and they all actively led people in war. Their spiritual devotion is obvious. And that devotion was reflected in their efforts to help their people repent and develop the same spiritual earnestness. During a period when the Nephites were under threat from the robbers of Gadianton, for example, the first action taken by Lachoneus was to “cause that his people should cry unto the Lord” and to teach them to “repent of all [their] iniquities” (3 Ne. 3:12–15). Some two or three years later, when the Nephites had finally prevailed against those robbers, “they knew it was because of their repentance and their humility that they had been delivered from an everlasting destruction” (3 Ne. 4:33).

Similarly, Helaman, who led armies during one long stretch of war (including leading the Ammonites’ sons in battle), first engaged in an explicit effort to help the Nephites repent and humble themselves before the Lord as they faced the Lamanite threat (Alma 48:1–6, 19–20). Mormon, too, famously exhorted his people to repentance as they faced danger (for example, Morm. 3:1–3).

All such efforts were completely consistent with the early promise to Nephi, which explicitly required remembrance of God (1 Ne. 2:19–24).

This promise was highly familiar to later Nephite leaders,²⁶ and creating this spiritual remembrance was consistently their concern in leading the Nephites—including in preparing them to thwart aggressors' assaults.

The same spiritual devotion is evident even earlier in Shule—an important figure in the history of the Jaredites—who was involved to a considerable degree in war. We are told that he “did execute judgment in righteousness” (Ether 7:11), that he provided protection to prophets who had been sent to declare repentance to the people so that they “were brought unto repentance” (Ether 7:25), and that he “did execute judgment in righteousness all his days” (Ether 7:27).

Generosity of Spirit

The story of Shule also introduces a second theme common to righteous Book of Mormon leaders who engaged in war. In addition to his spiritual devotion, we see a surprising generosity of spirit in Shule's dealings with his enemies. He eventually reclaimed the kingdom of his father from his treacherous older brother (who had plundered it years earlier), and then, when that brother repented, Shule forgave him and even gave him authority in the restored kingdom (Ether 7:1–13). In the course of additional family drama over a period of years, which included wars and multiple shifts in Jaredite power, Shule again showed remarkable expansiveness of soul in the wake of the treachery and threat that had been imposed upon him (Ether 7:14–22).

Think also of prophets Jacob, Enos, Mormon, and Moroni. All of them experienced repeated aggression from the Lamanites, and yet all were motivated to make and preserve sacred records *specifically in order to bless them*.²⁷ This is particularly poignant in Moroni's case: he was preparing records to bless the Lamanites in the latter days at the very time the Lamanites were hunting him down to kill him (Morm. 8:2; Moro. 1:1–3; 10:1, 32–33).

26. Some version of this promise is explicitly reported twenty different times in the Book of Mormon. It is mentioned by seven different figures, in seven different books, in six different centuries. See 1 Nephi 4:14; 2 Nephi 1:9, 20; 5:20, 25; Jarom 1:9; Omni 1:6; Mosiah 1:7; 2:22, 31; Alma 9:13–14, 24; 36:1, 30; 37:13; 38:1; 48:25; 50:20–21; 3 Nephi 5:22. My thanks to Royal Skousen for assisting me in identifying this list.

27. See Jacob 7:24; 4:2–3; Enos 1:11–17; Words of Mormon 1:6–8; Mormon 7; Moroni 1:4; 10:1; title page.

Defensive Fighting Only

A third characteristic of righteous Book of Mormon leaders is that they were never motivated by greed or the desire for power in their military conduct but only by defense. This was true of Shule (see Ether 7) as well as of all the righteous Nephite leaders who came later. We already observed above in section 2 the difference between the aggression of Amlici and the defensive posture of Alma and the Nephites he led (Alma 2). We see the same in Mormon, who, as the Nephites faced dire circumstances, urged “them with great energy . . . [to] fight for their wives, and their children, and their houses, and their homes” (Morm. 2:23). Whereas their enemies sought for power and subjugation, the Nephites were urged by Mormon only to defend sacred matters of life, family, and freedom.²⁸

Ammon’s story, in particular, is interesting in this respect. Although he embarked on his mission to the Lamanites with a desire to share the gospel with them, that didn’t stop him from wielding a sword and killing enemies when circumstances became threatening and defense was required. Nevertheless, Ammon never harmed or even threatened anyone for selfish reasons of power or gain or self-aggrandizement. He took up the sword only when defense required it (Alma 17:19–39; 20:1–27).

28. This description of the difference between Lamanite and Nephite motives in war does not overstate the matter. The text depicts the Lamanites as prone to attack and wage war against the Nephites from the beginning. In the very earliest days, Nephi himself had to fight to defend his people from Lamanite assault (Jacob 1:10; also 2 Ne. 5:14), and aggressive wars are also reported by Jacob (Jacob 7:24), Enos (Enos 1:20), Jarom (Jarom 1:6), Abinadom (Omni 1:10), Amaleki (Omni 1:24), Zeniff (Mosiah 9–10, 19–21), and Mormon (W of M 1:13–14). This is a record of aggression starting centuries before the detailed reports we get in Alma’s time and spanning the first four hundred and sixty years or so of Book of Mormon history. We also know from multiple reports that the Lamanites were motivated by hatred in their assaults on the Nephites (Jacob 3:7; 7:24; Enos 1:14, 20; Jarom 1:6; Mosiah 1:14; Alma 26:9; 4 Ne. 1:39) and that they “delighted in murdering the Nephites” (Alma 17:14). Captain Moroni also reports at one point that the Lamanites are “murdering our people with the sword,” including “our women and our children” (Alma 60:17). Indeed, we learn that Moroni, and the Nephites generally, fought to prevent their wives and their children from being “massacred by the barbarous cruelty” of those who would destroy them (Alma 48:24) and that this was one of the Lamanites’ explicit aims—to “slay and massacre” the Nephites (Alma 49:7). Indeed, one Lamanite leader (a Nephite dissenter who joined the Lamanites and stoked their anger against the Nephites) declared that the Lamanites’ aggression would be “eternal”—it would continue either to the complete subjugation of the Nephites or to their “eternal extinction” (Alma 54:20).

This was true of all recorded Nephite leaders. Gidgiddoni prohibited the Nephites from starting war themselves, even though they were under constant threat of assault and murder from the robbers of Gadianton (3 Ne. 3:20–21). Similarly, centuries later, Mormon refused to lead the Nephites in battle once they became hostile in outlook and were motivated by the desire for vengeance (Morm. 3:14–16). Indeed, the single indication we have of the Nephites apparently aggressing against the Lamanites occurred at this time (Morm. 4:1–4). It is significant, however, that, in addition to being very late in Book of Mormon history, this was also a rogue action. The apparent aggression explicitly violated Nephite principles, occurred in violation of Mormon’s personal command, and was conducted in the absence of properly constituted Nephite leadership—authority that resided in Mormon, who was refusing to lead them.²⁹

In short, the Nephites repeatedly found themselves embroiled in conflict simply because they were repeatedly defending themselves against enemy assault. Indeed, as Hugh Nibley observed long ago, all wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites occurred on Nephite lands: they were the result of Lamanite invasions.³⁰ This was true for all instances, through a thousand years of history, except for the one rogue episode cited above in which they were not led by anyone in actual authority.

The difference between Nephite and Lamanite societies is displayed even in those cases where Nephite dissenters led the Lamanites into war against the Nephites. Examples include the Amalekites and Amulonites

29. Although an army of Nephites once set out to attack the Lamanites who were settled in the land of Nephi—so that they might retake that land—no attack ever materialized. Indeed, led by Zeniff, one faction of this party actually went to battle with others to prevent any attack on the Lamanites, and they succeeded (Mosiah 9:1–2). We are not told how this army originated or on whose authority it was acting. We do know, however, (1) that its leader was completely unlike other leaders actually named in the record—from Nephi and King Benjamin to Alma, Gidgiddoni, and Mormon—since he is explicitly described as “austere” and “bloodthirsty” (Mosiah 9:2), and (2) that, due to objections within its own ranks (resulting in the forceful overthrow of those wanting to attack the Lamanites), no attack ever occurred.

30. For Nibley’s observation, see “Warfare and the Book of Mormon,” in Hugh Nibley, *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, ed. Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994), 294; see also Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988), 298; and “Freemen and King-men in the Book of Mormon,” in Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1989), 354.

(Alma 24), the Amalekites (Alma 27), the Zoramites and Amalekites (Alma 43–44), Amalickiah (Alma 46–51), Ammoron (Alma 52–62), and Coriantumr (Hel. 1). In addition, although they are not named, the text records additional instances of Nephite dissenters who were highly instrumental in fomenting Lamanite aggression (see Alma 63:14–15, Hel. 4, and Hel. 11). The Book of Mormon records no instances in which agitators gained power by stirring the Nephites up to anger and prodding them into war against the Lamanites. There are numerous examples, however, of such dissidents doing exactly that with the Lamanites toward the Nephites.

All of this—based on the record we have—highlights an important distinction between Nephite and Lamanite societies: Lamanite unrighteousness consisted at least partly in large-scale invasion, attack, and murder—including, on a smaller scale, acts of spoliation and plunder—while Nephite unrighteousness did not. Moreover, although Nephite dissenters had significant success in prodding Lamanites into war against the Nephites, there is no example of the opposite occurring.

The text thus shows us that the pattern of war between the Nephites and Lamanites was not a cycle of violence in which the two populations took turns attacking each other. The pattern, over a thousand years, was actually one in which the Nephites routinely had to *defend* against attack. Indeed, fighting only in defense was a Nephite principle.³¹ Thus, while we saw earlier that King Benjamin took up the sword, this was only because his people were under attack from Lamanite armies. His wartime behavior was not aggressive, but defensive, motivated purely by the responsibility to protect his people from attack and murder.³²

31. Years after the events mentioned in note 29, and after Zeniff and another party of Nephites had been granted permission by the Lamanites to settle among them in the land of Nephi, “a numerous host of Lamanites” attacked and killed some people of Zeniff who “were watering and feeding their flocks, and tilling their lands” (Mosiah 9:14). Zeniff and his people formed an army at this time and drove the Lamanites out of their appointed land, slaying many of them. Thus began a series of subsequent conflicts—yet even here it is noteworthy that the clash was initiated by Lamanites (1) entering land that was legitimately occupied by the Nephites, (2) killing the Nephites who dwelt there, (3) stealing the Nephites’ goods (in this case “flocks, and the corn of their fields”), and (4) having then to be driven out by force of arms. Zeniff was not one of the Nephites’ prophetic leaders, but even he is not a counterexample to the way such Nephites behaved in terms of defensive fighting.

32. It might seem that Captain Moroni was the aggressor on occasion, but we will see in the following section, “The Conduct of Captain Moroni,” that this was not the case.

State of Heart and Extreme Circumstances

These three themes in the wartime behavior of Book of Mormon leaders teach us something important about the state of heart taught in the Sermon on the Mount. After all, we already appreciate, at least in a general sense, what it means to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to turn the other cheek, and so forth in the *ordinary* circumstances of life. We understand that we are to be patient and unselfish toward others and that we are to resist the temptation for retaliation when we suffer insult, for example. But it is more difficult to understand what this state of heart means in the *extreme* circumstances of life. It is natural to wonder what an attitude of unselfishness and patience looks like when aggressors (1) repeatedly invade one's country; (2) seek to murder men, women, and children; (3) explicitly pursue overthrow of one's gospel-founded society; and (4) plan to replace that society with a culture that is united in open hatred of one's people and their gospel roots.³³

Book of Mormon leaders give us a good picture of what the righteous state of heart looks like in exactly such circumstances, however. As we have seen, all of these prophets and other righteous leaders (1) were personally devoted to the Lord (and implored their people to be the same), (2) were surprisingly generous in the way they dealt with their assailants, and (3) engaged only in defending their people and themselves—they did not start aggressive wars of their own and were not motivated by greed, power, or a spirit of vengeance. This is true of leaders from Shule and King Benjamin to Mormon and Moroni.

Such characteristics are impressive. It is fair to say that these leaders lived the principles taught in the Sermon on the Mount, at least to the degree that any mortal can, in the extreme circumstances that were forced upon them. Indeed, it would seem that their behavior demonstrates what living up to the Sermon simply *meant* in their threatening and violent circumstances.

A Note on the Ammonites (Anti-Nephi-Lehies)

Now, it might be tempting to think that the Sermon on the Mount is actually best exemplified in the conduct of the Ammonites, not that of Alma, Mormon, King Benjamin, and others. After all, allowing themselves to be killed seems a direct instantiation of the instruction to “turn

33. Again, this way of putting it does not overstate the matter. See note 28.

the other cheek” and thus might seem superior to the defensive fighting seen in King Benjamin and other Nephite leaders.

This conclusion would seem to be a mistake, however. A careful reading of the text indicates that the Ammonites were actually not opposed to violence in principle. The reason the Ammonite men allowed themselves to be killed—perhaps the most dramatic episode in the Book of Mormon—is that they were a people who were repenting of murder. Their repudiation of violence was a token of their penitence for past acts of aggression and violence against the Nephites; refusing to take up arms, even in self-defense, was a part of their repentance.³⁴

The Ammonites are wonderfully impressive, of course. They supply what must certainly be among the most inspiring examples of repentance, contrition, humility, and sustained devotion to the Lord that can be found anywhere in scripture. Nevertheless, their attitude toward war was actually no different than the attitude of Alma, King Benjamin, and other Nephite leaders. Their outward behavior was materially different only because their past was materially different.³⁵

6. The Conduct of Captain Moroni

The themes we see in Nephite leaders generally, then, are (1) personal righteousness and the encouragement of righteousness in those they led, (2) generosity of spirit toward their attackers, and (3) confinement to defensive fighting. These, it would seem, are expressions of the state of heart taught in the Sermon on the Mount as applied to extreme circumstances. What does the text show us about Captain Moroni?

34. I have developed these points at length in other publications, each with a somewhat different slant. See Duane Boyce, “The Ammonites Were Not Pacifists,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 20 (2016): 293–313; “Were the Ammonites Pacifists?” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 1 (2009): 32–47; and Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed*, chapters 4 and 5, where I go into the greatest detail.

35. This is one reason, among others, why the view advanced by J. David Pulsipher in an earlier paper does not succeed. He argues that the Book of Mormon exhibits a continuum of acceptable approaches to aggression, with active defense on one end of the spectrum and pacifist response (the more divine approach) on the other end. In addition to other difficulties, however, this argument appeals for support to the pacifism of the Ammonites when, in fact, the Ammonites were not pacifists. For Pulsipher’s discussion, see J. David Pulsipher, “The Ammonite Conundrum,” in Mason, Pulsipher, and Bushman, *War and Peace in Our Time*, 1–12.

Personal Righteousness and Encouragement of Righteousness in Others

Here is a sample of what we see in the text regarding Captain Moroni's spiritual devotion:

1. He engages in "mighty" prayer (Alma 46:13, 16, 17).
2. He receives revelation from the Lord in the form of a full sentence (Alma 60:33).³⁶
3. He writes "In memory of our God" as the first words on the title of liberty (Alma 46:12).
4. He identifies those he is defending at this time specifically as those "who have taken upon [them] the name of Christ" (Alma 46:18).
5. He invites the people to rally around the symbolism of the title of liberty "in the strength of the Lord" (Alma 46:20).
6. He implores the people at this time to "keep the commandments of God," quotes the prophet Jacob from the brass plates in order to provide the context for the title of liberty, and ends by framing it all in terms of "the faith of Christ" (Alma 46:23–27).
7. He specifically attributes the victory over Zerahemnah to "our faith in Christ," speaks of the "all-powerful God," considers the duty of the Nephites to defend their families as something "sacred," and declares that the Nephites "owe all our happiness" to "the sacred word of God" (Alma 44:3–5).
8. He explains the purpose of the Nephites' defense against Lamanite invasion in terms of "our religion and the cause of our God" (Alma 54:10).
9. He explains that he is engaged in defense specifically to honor "the covenant which I have made to keep the commandments of my God" (Alma 60:34).
10. He commands one Lamanite leader to deliver up his army's weapons and cease their aggression "in the name of" (a) "that all-powerful God, who has strengthened our arms that we have gained power over you"; (b) "our faith"; (c) "our religion"; (d) "our rites of worship"; (e) "our church"; (f) "the sacred support" that

36. As mentioned earlier, some doubt the accuracy of this revelation. But see again note 11.

the Nephites owe their wives and children; and (g) “the sacred word of God” (Alma 44:3–6).

11. He is referred to by Helaman, high priest at the time, as his “dearly beloved brother . . . in the Lord” (Alma 56:2).
12. He is described by Pahoran as having “greatness” of heart, even though Pahoran felt wrongly censured by Moroni (Alma 61:9).³⁷

And, in his running commentary on the text, Mormon tells us of Captain Moroni:

1. His very first effort in preparing the Nephites to defend themselves from Lamanite assault was to prepare them spiritually—to be faithful to the Lord (Alma 48:7).
2. His purpose was to allow the Nephites to “live unto the Lord their God” and to maintain “the cause of Christians” (Alma 48:10).
3. His heart “swelled” in thanksgiving to God (Alma 48:12).
4. He was a man “firm in the faith of Christ” (Alma 48:13).
5. He “gloried” in keeping the commandments of God (Alma 48:16).
6. He gloried in “doing good” (Alma 48:16).
7. “The very powers of hell would have been shaken forever” if all men were like him (Alma 48:17).
8. “The devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men” if they were like him (Alma 48:17).
9. He was “like unto Ammon” and “the other sons of Mosiah,” and he was even like Alma (Alma 48:18).

These features of the text are significant. Despite the text’s recording of Moroni’s many wartime activities, along the way it also portrays him as a spiritually earnest disciple of Christ who prayed mightily and repeatedly invoked the name of the Lord in his defensive efforts, and who also received revelation, gloried in keeping the commandments of God, rejoiced in doing good, and implored his people to be faithful disciples of the Lord.

37. Pahoran took Moroni’s censure personally, even though Moroni wrote his epistle to all the Nephite governors—not just Pahoran—who had responsibility for managing the war. For a discussion of this, see Duane Boyce, “Captain Moroni’s Revelation,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2019): 155–59.

Generosity of Spirit

Mormon also tells us that Captain Moroni, though embroiled in war, “did not delight in bloodshed” (Alma 48:11). Indeed, like other Book of Mormon leaders, Moroni displayed a surprising generosity of spirit in view of his circumstances. For example,

1. He gave Zerahemnah’s army every chance to end the battle it was losing, saying, “Behold, Zerahemnah, that we do not desire to be men of blood. Ye know that ye are in our hands, yet we do not desire to slay you” (Alma 44:1).
2. He ceased this battle altogether on the simple condition that the Lamanite attackers enter a covenant that they would never aggress against the Nephites again (Alma 44:19–20).
3. He forgave rebellious Nephites, who were compelled to end their aggression against other Nephites, and permitted them to return to their own lands in peace (Alma 50:25–36).
4. He refused to attack defenseless Lamanite soldiers when he easily could have assaulted them (Alma 55:18–19).
5. He managed on two occasions to completely surround an army of Lamanites and, though he could have slain them at will, spared their lives and permitted them to surrender (Alma 52:31–39; 55:20–24). This is in stark contrast to the Lamanites who, in one theater of the war, spared only the chief captains of the Nephites whom they took prisoner—and killed all their other prisoners of war (Alma 56:10–12).
6. Despite his anger toward Ammoron, he still held out the possibility of Ammoron’s repentance, stating that there would be no more war if Ammoron withdrew his aggression and returned to his own lands (Alma 54:6–11).
7. He attributed the Lamanites’ hatred of the Nephites to “the tradition of their fathers,” contrasting it with the much worse “love of glory and the vain things of the world” afflicting Nephite dissidents (Alma 60:32).
8. He led people who “were sorry to take up arms against the Lamanites, because they did not delight in the shedding of blood . . . [and] were sorry to be the means of sending so many of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God” (Alma 48:21–23).

9. At the end of one battle, in the final year of the war, he extracted a covenant from the Lamanite invaders that they would no longer aggress against the Nephites and then simply sent them in peace to live with the people of Ammon (Alma 62:14–17).
10. He did what we see in the previous example a second time as well, later that same year (Alma 62:19–28).

It is not uncommon for those embroiled in war to become hardened, cynical, and even cruel in their conduct—to actually seek blood and to lust after revenge (think of Mormon’s soldiers, for example, in Mormon 3:9–11, 14).³⁸ As mentioned above, in one theater of the war, the Lamanites actually killed most of the Nephites they took as prisoners. But this was not true of Moroni. Although he was engulfed in war for nearly fifteen years,³⁹ even in the final year of war he was willing to spare his attackers and allow them to leave the battlefield in peace.

Moroni’s Anger toward Ammoron

Moroni was not without anger in the extreme circumstances of his war, of course. In an epistle to Ammoron, for example, he said, “Behold, I am in my anger” (Alma 54:13), and then, after receiving Ammoron’s reply, “was more angry” with him (Alma 55:1). It was during this exchange that Moroni said, “I will come against you with my armies; yea, even I will arm my women and my children . . . ; yea, and it shall be blood for blood, yea, life for life; and I will give you battle even until you are destroyed from off the face of the earth” (Alma 54:12).

Such anger might seem to disqualify Captain Moroni as having the state of heart taught in the Sermon on the Mount. But it is important to keep three significant factors in mind.

The first is that Moroni expressed his anger toward Ammoron after suffering attacks from the Lamanites for a full decade.⁴⁰ These assaults caused massive destruction and loss of life, and they were all completely needless and unjust. It does not seem much of a defect to

38. See also Mormon 4:11; Moroni 9:5, 8–10, 19, 23.

39. The long conflict in the book of Alma begins at the start of the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges, and Captain Moroni has charge over all the Nephite armies at that time as well (Alma 35:13; 43:4, 16–17). The long series of conflicts finally ceases at the end of the thirty-first year of the judges (Alma 62:39), making fourteen years in all.

40. Moroni became general of the Nephite armies in the beginning of the eighteenth year of the judges (Alma 43:4, 16–17), and he wrote this epistle in the beginning of the twenty-ninth year (Alma 54:1).

express anger at one's assailants after suffering attack and murder from them for a *decade*.

Second, Moroni sounds more violent in these statements than he ended up actually behaving. Following this exchange of epistles, when he actually had the chance to pursue “blood for blood” and “life for life” and to “destroy” large numbers of Lamanite warriors who were completely at his mercy, he did not follow through. This was one of the episodes mentioned above in which Moroni managed to completely surround a whole army of Lamanites whom he could have slain almost at will. Yet despite his earlier expressions about “blood,” “destroying,” and “seeking death,” he spared their lives and simply invited them to surrender (Alma 55:20–24).

Thus, while Moroni might have gotten carried away in his feelings in writing to Ammoron, his anger was not such that he actually delivered on his rhetoric. To possess the right state of heart is not equivalent to being perfect, after all. That Moroni engaged in extreme threats is undoubtedly evidence that he was not perfect, but the fact that he did not come close to carrying out those threats—when he easily could have—is evidence that he also possessed the right state of heart in the way that mortals are able to possess it. He apparently repented of the excesses in his epistle, and it was because of his righteous state of heart in general that he was led to do so.

Finally, it is important to note that the Lord himself expresses anger numerous times in scripture.⁴¹ This indicates that anger in itself is not a spiritual defect. Instead, it would seem that anger, like violence, can actually flow from the righteous state of heart taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Just as the Lord's violence stems from a perfect and divine state, so, too, does his anger. It is not the selfish emotional mistreatment of others that typically comprises mortal anger. It is the natural condemning response of a pure and sinless soul to craven wickedness.

To the degree mortals approximate this same state of heart, it is plausible that they would have the same condemning response. They would experience moral indignation where the Lord experiences it. This seems to be the case with Moroni in his attitude toward Ammoron.

41. In one place, for instance, the Lord says: “I command you to repent—repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not” (D&C 19:15). For just a few more examples, see Isaiah 1:4; 65:3; 66:15–16; Jeremiah 32:30; Alma 8:29; 9:12, 18; 33:10; Helaman 13:10; Doctrine and Covenants 1:13; 5:8; 29:17; 63:2, 11, 32; 84:24; 87:6; 133:50–51; Moses 7:1, 34; 8:15.

From Zerahemnah to Amalickiah to Ammoron himself, the Nephites had had to defend themselves repeatedly from being murdered. And, in conducting defense against this ongoing violence and aggression, the Nephites had suffered huge loss of life over many years—many thousands of deaths of Nephite citizens who should not have had to defend themselves in the first place. And the Lamanites, led by these Nephite dissenters, pursued their aggression without end. The Lord expressed his anger at the violence filling the earth at the time of Noah (Moses 7:34–36; 8:28–30), so if Moroni had a heart similar to the Lord’s (in kind if not in degree), then it is no surprise that he would have a similar response to the violence being visited upon his own people in his own time.⁴²

What we seem to see in all this is that anger, just like violence, can flow from the state of heart taught in the Sermon on the Mount. We saw earlier that the Lord’s Sermon denounces anger; however, based on present considerations, it would seem to do so in exactly the way it denounces violence: the condemnation presupposes a certain *kind* of anger, just as it presupposes a certain *kind* of violence. The Sermon obviously does not condemn the *Lord’s* kind of anger, after all—any more than it condemns the Lord’s kind of violence. And it would seem that, in large degree at least, Moroni’s anger toward Ammoron was just that: the Lord’s kind of anger. As such, neither is it condemned. And the same analysis applies to other incidents of Moroni’s anger during the long war.⁴³

It is true, of course, that all judgment is left to the Lord and that we are required to forgive everyone (see, for example, D&C 64:10). Thus, whatever the Lord does with Ammoron and other aggressors, Captain

42. This is in contrast to the anger we see in Amalickiah. In his failure to outmaneuver Moroni on one occasion, we are told that Amalickiah “was exceedingly wroth, and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood”—and all this “because Moroni had kept the commandments of God in preparing for the safety of his people” (Alma 49:27). The text depicts Amalickiah as fighting only because he lusted after power, and he did so in murderous threat to innocent lives. His anger toward Moroni was the tantrum of a wicked and violent man who found himself thwarted in his wicked and violent purposes. This was completely unlike Moroni’s anger. In circumstances of defending his people from unjustified violence and attack, Moroni was fighting only because he had to, and he did so purely in defense of innocent lives. His anger in the circumstances was a natural condemning response to the suffering of his people and to the wicked men who were causing it. Similar to the Lord’s own case (again, in kind if not in degree), it was an expression of the spiritually earnest, unselfish state of heart.

43. See, for example, his attitude toward Amalickiah (who explicitly intended to kill Nephites in his quest for power) in Alma 46 and toward the traitorous Nephite governors (who were complicit with the Lamanites’ aggression) in Alma 60.

Moroni must ultimately forgive them. But it does not follow from this that, in facing their aggression, he cannot have the same condemning response toward them that the Lord has. It would seem obvious that he can, and that's what the account appears to show us.⁴⁴

Defensive Fighting Only

With all this in mind, it is no surprise that Captain Moroni also fought purely in defense. We saw earlier that this was a Nephite principle, and we are told more than once that Moroni's motivation in taking up the sword (as well as the motivation of those he led) was the same: strictly to defend Nephite lives and Nephite society.⁴⁵

It might be tempting to think that Moroni engaged in aggression in a number of incidents, including when one of his subordinates, Teancum, slew Amalickiah and Ammoron (Alma 51:33–34; 62:36).⁴⁶ But to draw connections of this sort is to confuse offensive tactics with offensive war. The famous Jewish uprising against Nazi forces in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943 was certainly an offensive tactic, for example—but it could hardly be considered an act of offensive war. The Jews were already engulfed in war as a result of the Nazis trying to exterminate their race, and their revolt was simply a defense against *that*. This was also true of Allied forces generally in World War II, from the invasion of Normandy to a thousand other incidents: their defense against Axis aggression required countless offensive tactics, but that's exactly what they were: offensive tactics integral to defending themselves from the Axis onslaught.

The same was true of the Nephites. Whenever Nephite leaders pursued offensive military tactics, it was only because they were already engaged in a defensive war that was not their doing.⁴⁷ They themselves

44. Classical writers on the New Testament have addressed the question of anger for disciples of Christ. For some examples, see appendix E.

45. See, for example, Alma 35:14; 43:9–10, 45, 47; 48:10, 12–14, 24; 49:7; 56:46; 60:17; 61:10. We saw the one apparent exception to this Nephite pattern earlier, but it was an exception that occurred during Mormon's time (and in spite of Mormon), centuries after Captain Moroni. We also saw an instance in which Nephites intended to attack the Lamanites but in which other Nephites forcefully prevented this (see note 29).

46. See, for example, Alma 43:30–42; 44:8–18; 46; 50:6–12; 51:13–21; 62:1–8, 15, 25, 31–32, 38.

47. Examples include Alma 2:35–37; 3 Nephi 4:11–14, 20–22, 25–27. When considered in full context, such actions are different from those condemned by Gidgiddoni and Mormon when, as we saw earlier, they insisted that the Nephites act only defensively (3 Ne. 3:20; Morm. 3:14). In the Gidgiddoni and Mormon examples, the Nephites who were pressing for revenge would not have been purely defensive in their actions: in an

had not instigated the hostilities but were merely defending against them. Moroni himself initiated no aggression, for instance. He invaded no lands, and he sought no power over other populations. He fought only because, and when, the Lamanites were invading and assaulting his people in their own lands.

The Episode in Alma 50

The commitment to defensive fighting was true of Moroni even when he drove Lamanites out of lands that were part of Nephite territory and back into Lamanite lands (Alma 50:6–12). This action occurred during a lull in the actual fighting, but this lull was nothing like a cessation of hostilities or of danger. Indeed, Mormon reports of the circumstances during this period of Nephite history that the wars did not cease “for the space of many years” (Alma 48:22). Moroni was thus urgently engaged in defense against ongoing Lamanite assault at the time, and he was responsible, as general of all the armies, for protecting Nephite lives and Nephite society against such murderous aggression. All the while, these Lamanite settlements established “strongholds of the Lamanites” and were seen as sources of “strength and power” for Lamanite invasion—and they were all situated in Nephite territory (Alma 50:11–12). It would seem that no responsible leader could fail to attempt what Moroni did: drive these Lamanite settlers back into Lamanite lands. Indeed, later Nephite dissenters appreciably increased the threat to Nephite lives when, living on Nephite lands, they actually overthrew and possessed the city of Zarahemla and then entered into an alliance with the Lamanites—specifically in order to assist them in achieving victory over the Nephites (Alma 61:1–8). This episode indicates the extreme danger faced by the Nephites in having Lamanites positioned in Nephite territory.

Thus, while Moroni’s act of driving Lamanites from Nephite land certainly constituted an offensive tactic, it was nothing close to aggression or to the launching of offensive war.⁴⁸ What is someone *supposed* to

important sense they would have been doing more than employing offensive tactics in a defensive war but actually instigating conflict of their own. This is not true of the incidents in Alma 2:35–37; 3 Nephi 4:11–14, 20–22, 25–27.

48. On one occasion, Captain Moroni threatened to follow the Lamanites into their own land and to wage war until the Lamanite invaders were “destroyed from off the face of the earth” (Alma 54:12). This occurred during the exchange of epistles with Ammoron mentioned earlier, in which Moroni demanded both a certain type of prisoner exchange and the withdrawal of the Lamanites from their “murderous purposes” and of their armies from Nephite lands (Alma 54:4–14). Even though the Lamanites refused to withdraw,

do when his people face ongoing attack and murder and he is explicitly charged with protecting them? And the same analysis applies to every other incident in which Moroni employed offensive tactics.

Summary and Conclusion

It is one thing to think of the Sermon on the Mount in terms of ordinary life—to feel the necessity of absorbing slights or insults rather than replying to them in kind, for instance. Life with family, friends, neighbors, and so forth supplies the domain in which most of us practice the teachings of the Lord’s Sermon.

Prominent Book of Mormon leaders did not enjoy such luxury. If we want to consider their conduct against the standard taught in the Sermon on the Mount, we have to recognize at the outset that their circumstances were very different from ours. They repeatedly faced invaders who were trying to *kill* them—and not only them, of course, but their families, their people, and their way of life. What does living the standard taught in the Sermon on the Mount look like in circumstances like *that*?

That is precisely what the Book of Mormon shows us. To appreciate this, it helps to recognize that the Sermon does not prohibit violence *per se*. Some types of violence certainly fall within its prohibitions, but not all, and we begin to see what the dividing line might be when we recognize the common-sense moral distinction that we implicitly draw all the time—the distinction between aggressors’ acts and victims’ acts. It helps further to notice that the Lord’s Sermon presupposes a limited scale in its specific injunctions: it is manifestly not about circumstances of murder, rape, or war. Perhaps it helps most, however, to notice that the Lord’s Sermon is also not about specific behaviors in the first place—for example, about literally turning the other cheek. Rather, the Sermon on the Mount is primarily about *possessing a righteous state of heart*—and

however, and instead continued their war against the Nephites, Captain Moroni never carried out this threat. Indeed, as we saw in the previous section (“Generosity of Spirit”), the record tells us of three separate occasions, following Moroni’s epistle, on which he had Lamanite warriors completely at his mercy—and yet spared them (Alma 55:20–24; 62:14–17, 19–28). He did not come close to trying to destroy the Lamanite invaders “from off the face of the earth” as he had threatened: simply put, Captain Moroni behaved far less violently than he sounded in his epistle. This is consistent, of course, with what the record reveals in general about him: his spiritual stature, his generosity of spirit, his hatred of bloodshed, and his commitment to defensive fighting only.

this state of heart is completely consistent with acts of defense in violent situations that require them.

Prominent Book of Mormon leaders—from Shule and King Benjamin to Mormon and Moroni—possessed this state of heart when they led the defense of their countries and of their people's lives, and they conducted themselves accordingly. Their extraordinary behavior demonstrates what living the Sermon simply *meant* in their extraordinary circumstances—circumstances of pervasive threat and violence. When we appreciate this, we see that they did not violate the Sermon on the Mount. They manifested it.⁴⁹

The text indicates that the same was true of Captain Moroni. He, too, faced extraordinary circumstances. Though he bore immense responsibility over many years to protect the Nephites' lives from unjustified attack and murder, just like other leaders he, too, was personally devoted to the Lord (and implored those he led to be devoted to him as well), avoided all the bloodshed of Lamanite aggressors that he could, and fought in the first place only *because* of such assaults on his people. It is hard to see how any mortal could have done better in the violent and threatening circumstances created by those attacking and seeking to kill his people. Indeed, far from violating the Sermon on the Mount, Moroni appears to have manifested its virtues in exactly the way they *would* be manifested in such extreme circumstances. He thus appears to have waged defense with the same state of heart possessed by other Nephite leaders—the state of heart taught in the Sermon on the Mount.⁵⁰

Apparent Tension Resolved

What we seem to see, then, is that the Sermon on the Mount and the war-time conduct of various Nephite leaders—including Captain Moroni—are actually not in tension. They are not disjointed and competing textual threads, one demanding nonviolence and the other accepting

49. No one can approach the perfection of the Lord, of course, but it is hard to see how anyone could have done better than these leaders did to live the standard taught in the Sermon on the Mount—in exactly the ways their violent circumstances required of them—indeed, in circumstances that exercised enormous pressure to do the exact opposite.

50. This is no doubt why Mormon could say of Captain Moroni that he was “beloved by all the people of Nephi” (Alma 53:2). I examine why this would be so in Duane Boyce, “Beloved by All the People: A Fresh Look at Captain Moroni,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021): 179–201.

and embracing it. Rather, the conduct of Nephite leaders is completely synchronized with the Sermon on the Mount at a deep level. *The Lord's Sermon teaches a certain state of heart, and Book of Mormon leaders displayed this state of heart in exactly the way it would be displayed in violent circumstances.* Thus, together, the two threads—the Sermon and the wartime conduct of Nephite leaders—illuminate the subject of war in a way that is completely consistent and whole. In appreciating this, perhaps our perspective approximates Mormon's own.

It is only natural, of course, to hope that different threads in the Book of Mormon would speak with a single voice and that they would thus provide clear direction on a matter like the relationship between violence and righteousness. The good news is that they do. And the upshot of this is significant: while it might seem ironic, it would appear that the Lord's most famous sermon is actually exemplified by the Book of Mormon's most famous warrior.

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APPENDIX A:

A SAMPLE OF LDS WRITERS ON THE GOSPEL AND WAR

Among prominent Latter-day Saint writers, Hugh Nibley has made the most statements about war, often related to his admiration for what he considered the Ammonites' pacifism. His biographer reports that Nibley considered the Ammonites' refusal to take up arms "the perfect example" of what to do in cases of conflict.⁵¹ Nibley also contested the

51. See Boyd J. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 221. For additional examples of Hugh Nibley's writings on war, see "Last Call: An Apocalyptic Warning from the Book of Mormon," in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, vol. 8 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1989), 517; "Freemen and King-men in the Book of Mormon," in *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 356; "Scriptural Perspectives on How to Survive the Calamities of the Last Days," in *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 487; "The Prophetic

righteousness of war by frequently insisting that the Nephites were not righteous when they were involved in war—they were not “the good guys.”⁵² He also thought that war could simply be avoided by discussion⁵³ and that Mormon and Moroni both considered war to be unnecessary.⁵⁴ In addition, he seemed to believe that the Lord would fight the battles of the righteous and therefore that they need not resort to violence to defend themselves.⁵⁵

Eugene England also wrote much on the topic of war and peace,⁵⁶ and a significant number of other Latter-day Saint authors have taken up the topic more recently—predominantly from a non- or antio- violence perspective.⁵⁷ The topic, and its antio- violence lean, is an important thread in scholarly Latter-day Saint discourse.⁵⁸

Book of Mormon,” in *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 466; “Leaders to Managers: The Fatal Shift,” in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, ed. Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994), 499; *Since Cumorah*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988), 348 (where, by “the good guys,” Nibley obviously means the Ammonites).

52. See Nibley’s “Warfare and the Book of Mormon,” in *Brother Brigham Challenges*, 283–84; “Freemen and King-men in the Book of Mormon,” in *Brother Brigham Challenges*, 338; *Since Cumorah*, 339, 340, 342–343, 348; “In the Party but Not of the Party,” in *Brother Brigham Challenges*, 122; “The Prophetic Book of Mormon,” in *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 436–37; “Last Call: An Apocalyptic Warning from the Book of Mormon,” in *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 524; “Brigham Young and the Enemy,” in *Brother Brigham Challenges*, 238; and “Scriptural Perspectives on How to Survive the Calamities of the Last Days,” in *Brother Brigham Challenges*, 493.

53. As reported in Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 221.

54. Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 292.

55. Hugh Nibley, “If There Must Needs Be Offense,” in *Brother Brigham Challenges*, 270–71.

56. See Eugene England, *Making Peace: Personal Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995); and his “A Case for Mormon Christian Pacifism,” in *Moral Perspectives on U.S. Security Policy: Views from the LDS Community*, ed. Valerie M. Hudson and Kerry M. Kartchner (Provo, Utah: David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Brigham Young University, 1995), 96–103.

57. See Mason, Pulsipher, and Bushman, *War and Peace in Our Time*.

58. My volume, *Even unto Bloodshed*, addresses this thread comprehensively and identifies the errors that appear in all the significant pacifist (and pacifist-like) arguments, including those made by Nibley, England, and more recent writers.

APPENDIX B: THE SCOPE OF THE RELEVANT EDICTS IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Church Father John Chrysostom (349–407) presupposed a narrow scope for the passage we are considering (Matt. 5:39–44; 3 Ne. 12:39–44). Writing in the fourth century, he speaks specifically in terms of “neighbors” and does not even consider applying the injunctions in any broader or more extreme contexts.⁵⁹ Additionally, the commentary edited by Charles John Ellicott (1819–1905) notes that this passage requires disciples to free themselves of a retaliatory spirit, but simultaneously recognizes that the same people also have other duties in other spheres of life, including prosecution, punishment, and protection of society. The assumption is that one’s duties in these other spheres of life are not exhausted by the edicts in this sermon.⁶⁰

The venerable Adam Clarke (1762–1832) draws the scope even more narrowly, indicating that this passage specifically contemplates the persecution one might suffer specifically for righteousness’ sake—that is, (presumably) for being a Christian.⁶¹

Such commentators see the Sermon on the Mount as applying to its listeners in the ordinary aspects of their lives—not, apparently, to other dimensions of living (such as the prosecution, punishment, and protection of society mentioned in Ellicott).

APPENDIX C: HEART VERSUS SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR

Martin Luther appreciated the distinction between the heart and outward behavior as a general gospel matter. Indeed, it was precisely in such terms that he saw faith itself, profoundly identifying such a believing

59. See his Homily 18 in *St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, vol. 10 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, n.d.), 226–35, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/s/schaff/npnf110/cache/npnf110.pdf> and <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/chrysostom/matthew/5.htm>.

60. See Ellicott, *New Testament Commentary for English Readers*, 29 (commentary on Matt. 5:39).

61. See his comments on Matthew 5, especially verse 39, in *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (originally eight volumes and published 1810–26), available at <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/acc/matthew-5.html> and <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/clarke/matthew/5.htm>.

response to the Lord as “the yes of the heart.”⁶² In another place, he distinguishes between the heart and outward behavior in a way very reminiscent of Mormon (Moro. 7:6–11). “It is not right to judge a man merely by the kind of works he does,” Luther observes. “One should judge him on the basis of why he does them . . . on the spring and fountain whence they flow.”⁶³

Centuries earlier, Augustine saw the same distinction, specifically in relation to the passage we are considering in the Sermon on the Mount. In seeing the Lord’s Sermon as more about the heart than about specific behavior, Augustine draws attention to Psalm 108:1. He quotes this verse to say, “My heart is prepared, O God, my heart is prepared,” in order to distinguish between literally turning the other cheek (which, he points out, Christ did not do in John 18:22–23) and having a heart *prepared* to turn the other cheek on the occasions when it is right to do so (that is, a heart that has the *inclination* to do so). He applies the same concept of “preparation of heart” to the edict about giving our cloak to someone who has already sued us for our coat.⁶⁴

In other words, to Augustine, turning the other cheek might not always be the correct behavior to perform, but being able and inclined to do so is always the right heart to have. In the same spirit, he said on another occasion that turning the other cheek is not a matter of bodily action but of “inward disposition,” adding that “the sacred seat of virtue is the heart.”⁶⁵

Thomas Aquinas speaks the same way. Referring to Augustine on the matter, he says that although we are not always required to suffer reviling from others (there are times when that would not be right), our

62. Martin Luther, in *What Luther Says: An Anthology, Volume I*, ed. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 466.

63. Martin Luther, in *What Luther Says: An Anthology, Volume III*, ed. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1511.

64. See Augustine, *On the Sermon on the Mount*, 158–59, vol. 6 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight, trans. William Findlay (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/16011.htm>.

65. See Augustine, “Reply to Faustus the Manichæan (Contra Faustum Manichæum),” in *St. Augustine: The Writings against the Manichæans and against the Donatists*, vol. 4 of Schaff, *Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, sec. 76, p. 301, <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnfio4/npnfio4.iv.ix.xxiv.html>.

minds must be *prepared* to suffer in this way. The central issue, in his view, is also one of our inner condition.⁶⁶

An additional point is this: if the injunctions in the Lord's Sermon were really about specific behaviors, then they would also be about specific *numbers*—a second cheek, a second mile, and a second article of clothing (3 Ne. 12:30–41). But it would seem evident that these edicts are not making a point about a specific number any more than the command that we are to forgive “until seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:21–22) is about a specific number. Scriptural commentators have long, and persuasively, viewed the expression “seventy times seven” in this passage as metaphorical rather than literal. In one argument for the view, Augustine refers to Colossians 3:13, which speaks of “forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: *even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye*” (emphasis added; for obvious reasons Augustine does not use this King James translation of the verse, but the sense is the same). “Here you have the rule,” Augustine says. If Christ has forgiven us seventy times seven, but no more, then fair enough: the number is literal, and we ourselves should forgive others no more than seventy times seven. But if Christ has forgiven us for “thousands of sins upon sins,” as indeed he has, then to forgive others *as Christ has forgiven us* (as Paul in this passage says we must) requires that we do the same: there is no limit to how much we should forgive. This, therefore, is the actual meaning of the expression “seventy times seven.” It is not literal, affirming that we are to forgive a certain number of times. It is metaphorical, affirming that we are to forgive without end.⁶⁷

In understanding Augustine, it helps to know that he, and the Church fathers generally, interpret Jesus's remark “seventy times seven,” when read literally, to refer to the number 77 (“70 times, plus 7 times”) and not to 490 (“70 times multiplied by 7”), as modern readers typically interpret the text. Thus, Augustine also argues in the same place for the metaphorical interpretation of the expression by noting (1) that the number 11 denotes the concept of sin because it exceeds the number of commandments in the Decalogue, and (2) that the number 7 “is usually put for a whole; because in seven days the revolution of time is completed.” Augustine then observes that if we multiply the number

66. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, second part of the second part, question 72, article 3.

67. See Augustine, “Sermon 33 on the New Testament,” *City of God*, 19.7.

that denotes sin (11) by the number that denotes wholeness (7), we get the number 77, which thus denotes *sin in its wholeness, or totality*. And this means that in saying we are to forgive 77 times (again, the classical understanding of Jesus's expression), we are saying that we are to forgive the *whole* of sin, not some particular number: we are to forgive without limit.

Although this second argument of Augustine's is tortured, his first, from Colossians 3:13, is credible and supports the idea that we are to forgive without limit rather than up to a particular number.⁶⁸

All of this is relevant to our current topic, since the Lord's command that we are to forgive completely and endlessly is tantamount to the command that we are to have a certain kind of *heart*. We must achieve the condition of soul that can actually forgive to this degree.

APPENDIX D: STATE OF HEART

Central to the gospel are "a broken heart and a contrite spirit," the offering of our hearts and souls to the Lord, and the desires of our hearts (2 Ne. 2:7; see also Omni 1:26; 3 Ne. 9:20; Hel. 3:35; Morm. 9:27; D&C 59:8; 137:9). To have a spiritual condition of humility before the Lord and unselfishness toward others is the general state of heart taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Its specific characteristics are described in different ways at different times (for example, Alma 7:23–24; 13:28; 1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5:22–23), but in its fullness, this condition of heart seems captured in Paul's declaration, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). This state of heart is frequently contrasted with its opposite. It is evident, for example, in every mention of heeding the Spirit versus resisting the Spirit, humility versus pride, submissiveness versus willfulness, softheartedness versus hardheartedness, obedience versus disobedience, devotion versus slothfulness, faithfulness versus unfaithfulness, meekness versus stiffneckedness, circumcision of heart versus

68. The linguistic reasons for why the Church fathers were correct to understand "seventy times seven" to mean 77 are identified in a number of places; one of the most trenchant is Royal Skousen's "Through a Glass Darkly: Trying to Understand the Scriptures," *BYU Studies* 26, no. 4 (1986): 2–20, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/through-a-glass-darkly-trying-to-understand-the-scriptures>.

uncircumcision of heart, and so forth. Perhaps the best single passage contrasting the two states of heart is the statement by the angel who visited King Benjamin. He spoke of the “natural man” and explained that one becomes a “saint” by “putting off” the natural man. He then provided a partial list of qualities that characterize this spiritual condition, the most common and fundamental of which is the concept of submissiveness to God (Mosiah 3:19).⁶⁹ Paul’s explanation to the Romans makes the same point. He speaks of the difference between walking “after the flesh” and walking “after the Spirit,” and of minding “the things of the flesh” and minding “the things of the Spirit.” He adds that “to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace,” and that the “carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God.” He also says that we are “in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in [us]” and that “as many as are led by the Spirit of God . . . are the sons of God.” All of this is in contrast to living “after the flesh” (Rom. 8:4–14). Stephen drew the same distinction. In condemning the spiritual condition of his accusers, he told them they were “stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart” and that they did “always resist the Holy Ghost” (Acts 7:51). The contrast is also elegantly captured in Hezekiah’s invitation to Israel: “Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord” (2 Chr. 30:8).

APPENDIX E: CLASSICAL WRITERS ON ANGER

Commentators on the New Testament have addressed the question of anger. Although he maintains a high standard regarding anger (and enmity generally), in one place Chrysostom (349–407) nevertheless tries to get at the distinction between types of anger by speaking of the proper *time* for anger—namely, not when we are seeking personal revenge, but (for example) when we are preventing others’ lawlessness.⁷⁰

69. All of the remarks in this verse seem to be expressions of the concept of submission to God. We read of yielding to the Holy Spirit, of putting off the natural man through Christ, and of becoming as a child—and all of the childlike characteristics listed by the angel can be summed up in the idea of submission to the Lord “even as a child doth submit to his father.”

70. See his discussion regarding Matthew 5:17 in Homily 16 in *St. Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, vol. 10 of Schaff, *Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 203.

In his personal commentary on Ephesians 4:26 (“Be ye angry, and sin not”), Ellicott (1819–1905) cites Chrysostom and agrees with him that there is a proper anger against sin and that a good person *ought* to have such feelings.⁷¹ Others—quite mistakenly, I believe—have failed to see this distinction and have expressed condemnation of all anger. This is the case with the contributor who wrote on Ephesians in Ellicott’s edited commentary (1878)⁷²—contrary to Ellicott’s own view as expressed in his personal writings⁷³—and with Adam Clarke in his biblical commentary (1810–1826).⁷⁴ In neither case is the reasoning about anger persuasive when compared to the thoughts of Chrysostom and Ellicott, however—and certainly not when compared to the additional insights gained from the Book of Mormon and other modern revelation.

71. See Charles J. Ellicott, *Commentary, Critical and Grammatical, on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, with a Revised Translation* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1863), 110–11, <https://archive.org/details/commentarycritooelli/page/110>.

72. See Ellicott, *New Testament Commentary for English Readers*, commentary on Ephesians 4:26.

73. See again Ellicott, *Commentary, Critical and Grammatical*, 110–11.

74. See Adam Clarke’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, in his remarks regarding Ephesians 4:26, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/ephesians-4.html>.

Defend Your Families *and* Love Your Enemies

A New Look at the Book of Mormon's Patterns of Protection

J. David Pulsipher

A primary purpose of the Book of Mormon, as described on its title page, is to show “what great things the Lord hath done.”¹ The whole narrative serves that goal, being saturated with frequent examples of divine goodness and guidance. Then, in the book’s stunning climax, God’s presence is made most explicit through the personal appearance of the resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ, during which he displays the physical emblems of his compassion and redemption, heals broken bodies and souls, and invites everyone to become “even as I am” (3 Ne. 27:27). The power of divine love is clearly a central message of the text. Interlaced with that divine love, however, are regular episodes of human violence.² The Book of Mormon narrative opens with lethal threats and a desperate flight into the wilderness, quickly introduces a gory death, morphs into multigenerational warfare, and ends with a catastrophic genocide. The ubiquity of the violence and the ways God frequently intervenes and assists some of the combatants cry out for interpretation. What exactly is the text trying to illustrate about principles of human violence and patterns of divine protection? And how are such principles and patterns illuminated by Christ’s invitation to imitate his selfless love?

1. *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), title page.

2. The narrative also includes instances of divine violence (see Jacob 7:13–20; Alma 30:40–50; 14:24–28; and, especially, 3 Ne. 8:9–14; 9:3–12). Such episodes deserve extended analysis. This study, however, is focused solely on the Book of Mormon’s treatment of human violence, especially depictions of large-scale conflict.

Unfortunately, good illumination is hard to come by. The narrative's elaborate tapestry defies easy interpretation, and no aspect of that tapestry is more polarizing than its violence. Some earnest students of the text read the Book of Mormon's accounts of warfare as cautionary tales about the futility of violence, with some suggesting the text is decidedly antiwar, even a pacifist manifesto.³ Joshua Madson, for example, notes that the text is "a narrative by design" and is thus "meant to be read as a whole." "When read in this manner," Madson argues, "the Book of Mormon presents a strong critique of violence as a solution to conflict."⁴ But other readers, equally earnest—and studying exactly the same text—interpret the narrative as an endorsement of just warfare, with some suggesting that the text actually *requires* individuals to employ defensive violence.⁵ For example, Duane Boyce believes the Book of Mormon narrative supports just warfare because "in its pages we observe the actions of God, his prophets, and other men of God in concrete circumstances" of warfare. Boyce argues that these concrete actions allow readers to "draw inferences" about just-war principles that are "safer" than those drawn from "abstract declarations" and "broad statements" in other scriptural texts.⁶

One narrative with multiple, even contradictory, interpretations. Such variety demonstrates that reasonable people of goodwill can disagree about exactly what to infer from the book's violent stories. The character and actions of the Nephite warrior Teancum provide an excellent case in point. The narrative extols Teancum as someone who "fought valiantly for his country, yea, a true friend to liberty" (Alma 62:37), yet it renders no judgment on other aspects of his personality. How are readers to assess his full character? Was he as spiritually grounded as his commander, Moroni, whom the text describes as "firm in the faith of Christ" (Alma 48:13), or as his compatriot Lehi, whom the text declares

3. See, for example, Joshua Madson, "A Nonviolent Reading of the Book of Mormon," and Rick Duran, "Pax Sanctorum," both in *War and Peace in Our Time: Mormon Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Q. Mason, J. David Pulsipher, and Richard L. Bushman (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 13–28, 57–79, respectively.

4. Madson, "Nonviolent Reading," 15–16.

5. See, for example, W. Cleon Skousen, *Treasures from the Book of Mormon*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1974), 2369; Glenn L. Pearson and Reid E. Bankhead, *Building Faith with the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 112; Duane Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 1.

6. Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed*, 254–55.

to be “like unto Moroni” (Alma 53:2)? Or was Teancum more akin to Omni, a man who “fought much with the sword to preserve [his] people” but was, by his own admission, “a wicked man” who had “not kept the statutes and the commandments of the Lord as [he] ought to have done” (Omni 1:2)? Unfortunately, there is no way to know for certain, at least from the narrative, which relates only Teancum’s battle exploits. Likewise, when the text describes his covert assassinations of two sleeping and defenseless (albeit reprehensible) enemies, what is it trying to suggest? Does God approve of such tactics? Again, the narrative is frustratingly silent. It offers no divine comment on the assassinations. But then this is a general pattern throughout the text. More often than not, explicit narrative interpretation is sparse when it comes to violence. Readers are generally left to fill in the blanks, to determine for themselves whether each instance of violence is *prescriptive* (an example to follow) or merely *descriptive* (a simple account of what happened).

Filling in those blanks requires readers to make assumptions about what is permissible, or even desirable, when it comes to violence. More often than not, those assumptions spring unconsciously from our cultural conditioning. Years of family, community, and political conversations; decades of visual, verbal, and ideological representations; lifetimes of popular songs, films, and games—these elements all subtly shape our ethical sensibilities. Such incessant training ultimately hones our sensibilities into what we regard as “common sense,” or “intuition,” which in turn constrains the narrative’s interpretive possibilities.⁷ If our “common sense” sharpens around a particular interpretation—whether it be antiwar or just-war—we may find it difficult to understand how a different interpretation could be even possible, let alone legitimate. Meanwhile, readers who are less sure of their interpretive intuitions can be left bewildered, struggling to make sense of the book’s maze of warfare and complex range of rationales, motivations, and methods.

Dichotomous Directives?

A clearly divine declaration—the unambiguous voice of God speaking directly about the nature of violence—might clear up a reader’s

7. Duane Boyce, for example, builds his just-war interpretation of the Book of Mormon on assumptions about what constitutes “common sense,” “intuition,” and how “most people” would interpret a particular text or ethical choice. See Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed*, 1–3, 7–15.

interpretive confusion by confirming or correcting certain types of cultural conditioning. Focused and extended instruction occurs in the Book of Mormon for several knotty problems, including infant baptism and apostasy. But while the text does include a few brief and isolated examples of divine declarations on human violence, it contains no comprehensive treatment of the subject. In the absence of extended instruction, the two broad camps of interpretation—antiwar and just-war—generally gravitate to statements in the text that seem to support their respective views.

Those who favor a just-war interpretation tend to gravitate to an instance of divine instruction in the book of Alma. In the middle of a description of a major Nephite-Lamanite battle, the narrator, Mormon, engages in a comparison of each side's motives, noting that "the Nephites were inspired by a better cause" because they were "fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children, and their all, yea, for their rites of worship and their church" (Alma 43:45). He then takes this one step further, observing that the Nephites were defending faith and family not simply because they wished to, but rather because "they were doing that which they felt was the duty which they owed to their God." To support this, Mormon inserts two divine statements: first, "Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies," and second, "Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed" (Alma 43:46–47). Given the strong prescriptive nature of *shall* (a divine injunction about what God's children *should* do), it is easy to assume that these two statements, taken together, represent a straightforward *requirement* to engage in defensive violence, even warfare.⁸ Case closed.

Well, not quite. Those inclined to an antiwar interpretation tend to gravitate to another divine statement from later in the narrative. When the resurrected Christ visits the surviving inhabitants of the promised land, he delivers an extended sermon in which he declares that his disciples should avoid not only killing but also anger. What's more, he commands them to "not resist evil" but instead "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you" (3 Ne. 12:39, 44). Assuming

8. There may be a case for interpreting this divine "shall" as *descriptive* (a prediction about which course the Nephites will choose), but within the context of the full passage, Mormon seems to be using it in a *prescriptive* way.

Christ's injunctions apply not only to interpersonal relationships but also to social arrangements, these statements can be interpreted as a straightforward *prohibition* against engaging in defensive violence.⁹

Given what appears to be a vast gulf between two explicitly divine commands—"defend your families" and "love your enemies"—how might they be reconciled? Each of the interpretive camps has its favored strategies. Those who favor just-war tend to follow the lead of the ancient theologian Augustine of Hippo, who suggested that, under the right circumstances and with the right inward convictions, killing an enemy might constitute a form of love: "What is here required is not a bodily action, but an inward disposition."¹⁰ Duane Boyce employs this approach when he notes, "If circumstances demand that we answer provocation or even enter conflict, even then we must seek the spiritual state of a peaceable heart—entering with love in our hearts for all of God's children, even for those who are on the opposing side."¹¹ In contrast, those who are antiwar tend to emphasize the idea that Christ's teachings supersede, even correct, the old "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" law (Ex. 21:24), replacing it with a higher standard that all subsequent disciples should follow. Eugene England describes this premise when he notes, "God is working with a people whose understanding of God is incomplete, even wrong, and *developing*. Though they have claimed or received some kind of revelation, and have understood it violently, God is trying to lead them beyond that."¹² In this spirit, Joshua Madson emphasizes the way that Christ's miraculous visit and ministry offer "corrective teachings" that denounce "all sacrificial violence, including war," and elevate the "abandonment of war as the quintessential Christian act."¹³

Both of these reconciliation approaches have merit and offer meaningful insights. Still, there may be yet another lens through which we might reconcile the divine commands to "defend your families" and

9. There may be a case for interpreting these requirements as only interpersonal in nature, but the text itself provides no explicit instructions to limit the scope of loving one's enemies to individuals while excluding whole communities.

10. Augustine of Hippo, *Reply to Faustus the Manichæan*, 22.76, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, ed. Marcus Dods, vol. 5, *Writings in Connection with the Manichæan Heresy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1872), 465.

11. Boyce, *Even unto Bloodshed*, 240.

12. Eugene England, *Making Peace: Personal Essays* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 232, emphasis in the original.

13. Madson, "Nonviolent Reading," 15, 24–26.

“love your enemies” as well as interpret the narrative’s frequent violence. This approach requires us to resist our cultural conditioning, abandon our dichotomous interpretive stances, and shift our perspective, letting other significant but often overlooked patterns emerge from the Book of Mormon’s complex narrative.

The Law God Gave

A key interpretive lens is provided by a revelation given to Joseph Smith in summer 1833, now known as section 98 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Unlike the Book of Mormon’s sparse and isolated statements, the 1833 revelation contains the most extended discussion on standards of human violence in all of Restoration scripture. Laying out the essential “rules of engagement,” as it were, this revelation justifies the use of lethal force in certain carefully defined circumstances, broadly defined as patient and restrained self-defense. Disciples are instructed to first endure multiple attacks with nonviolent responses, for which they will be rewarded with greater and greater blessing as the attacks increase (see D&C 98:23–26). Then, if the enemy does not repent and somehow escapes God’s “vengeance,” disciples are instructed to issue a clear notice to withdraw. The full text is instructive:

See to it that ye warn him in my name, that he come no more upon you, neither upon your family, even your children’s children unto the third and fourth generation. And then, if he shall come upon you or your children, or your children’s children unto the third and fourth generation, I have delivered thine enemy into thine hands; and then if thou wilt spare him, thou shalt be rewarded for thy righteousness; and also thy children and thy children’s children unto the third and fourth generation. Nevertheless, thine enemy is in thine hands; and if thou rewardest him according to his works thou art justified; if he has sought thy life, and thy life is endangered by him, thine enemy is in thine hands and thou art justified. (D&C 98:28–31)

In accordance with these instructions, violent self-defense is clearly *justified*—a word that is emphasized twice—and decidedly not *forbidden*. But neither is it *required*. No “thou shalt” language here. Rather, the revelation takes pains to emphasize that alternatives to violence still exist, even in moments of extremity. Aggrieved or threatened people might “reward” their attackers with violence, but they might also “spare” those attackers, eschewing retaliation in favor of forgiveness or other loving forms of nonviolent resistance. This, then, is the first great interpretive

key—defensive violence is a *choice*. A justified choice, to be sure, but only one of several divinely sanctioned options.

What's more, the revelation strongly implies that these options carry different outcomes. Notice how God's parallel promises of multigenerational engagement highlight important differences between the two options and suggest the gravity of the decision. God promises to *fight* with those choosing violent self-defense, even to the third and fourth generation. But he will *bless* those who choose nonviolent responses, even to the third and fourth generation. These are not necessarily of equal value. The first suggests that choosing violence might set in motion cycles of recrimination, committing one's children and grandchildren to paths of conflict that may require divine help. The promise of assistance in battle is thus both a blessing and a warning that even justified violence may perpetuate multigenerational warfare. On the other hand, choosing a nonviolent response, such as forbearance or forgiveness, has the potential to initiate cycles of virtue and blessing that edify and elevate that same posterity and possibly even one's enemies. One option may represent a *justified* conflict, but the other may achieve a *redemptive* peace. One may be "blessed," but the other is "more blessed," to borrow a common Book of Mormon comparison.¹⁴ The choice, according to the revelation, is ours.

This 1833 revelation can be read—maybe even *should* be read—as a commentary on the Book of Mormon because it explicitly connects these precepts to that narrative. "Behold," God declares, "this is the law I gave unto my servant Nephi" (D&C 98:32), thereby suggesting these principles were known or at least accessible to that ancient prophet and, by extension, his descendants. Consequently, the revelation's emphasis on choice and consequence provides an invaluable lens for interpreting Book of Mormon violence, particularly large-scale conflict.¹⁵ Do we see God assisting justified violence or blessing nonviolent responses according to the principles outlined? Viewed through this lens, interesting narrative patterns begin to emerge. True to his promises, God often

14. See, for example, Alma 32:12–16; 3 Nephi 12:1–2; 28:1–11.

15. The principles outlined in Doctrine and Covenants 98—especially in its language and the way it singles out Nephi in what is otherwise a relatively standard list of the ancient Hebrew patriarchs—suggest that the revelation might be read as an intriguing comment on Nephi's account of his well-known encounter with Laban. As intriguing and relevant as that might be, this study is concerned primarily with the Book of Mormon's patterns of large-scale conflict rather than with its incidents of interpersonal violence.

assists violent combatants in moments of justified self-defense, extending to the third and fourth generations—sometimes even beyond—and this represents a remarkable blessing and form of protection for those involved. But another pattern also begins to come into focus. Violence is not the only option. Despite what can seem like the narrative’s preference for justified violence—a perception that is perhaps fueled by popular artistic renderings that emphasize these stories over other elements—influential individuals and whole communities often pursue alternative paths. In the face of menacing threats, they at times flee the scene, pacify their enemies, or lovingly confront them. And these strategies (again, true to God’s promises) induce divine blessings that extend down through the generations. As we shall see, such nonviolent alternatives, and their attendant blessings, assert themselves time and again throughout the narrative.

Whither They Should Go

Before examining these nonviolent alternatives, let us first look at some interesting questions raised by the narrative’s incidents of fight, flight, and loving confrontation. Who are the primary agents behind these strategies? Are leaders and nations *choosing* whether their communities will fight, flee, or pacify? Or are they being divinely *commanded* to take certain paths? Here, the Book of Mormon provides yet another interpretive lens—another brief but intriguing comment, this time inserted in the midst of Mormon’s ringing endorsement of Captain Moroni. The passage begins with another digression about Nephite motivations. Mormon notes that “the Nephites were taught to defend themselves against their enemies, even to the shedding of blood if it were necessary; yea, and they were also taught never to give an offense, yea, and never to raise the sword except it were against an enemy, except it were to preserve their lives” (Alma 48:14). So far, this is simply another articulation of justified self-defense, similar to the one outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants. But then Mormon goes one step further, observing that the Nephites had faith that God would “warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger; and also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them” (Alma 48:15–16).

This suggests that, at least when they were their best selves, the Nephites had a tradition of relying on divine inspiration for guidance

on how to respond to threats and aggression. Note that both types of divine warnings—to flee or to prepare to fight—would “deliver” them from danger. So the next logical step would be to examine the narrative for moments when God explicitly issued such warnings and try to discern what patterns these instructions might reveal. Given the frequency of violent conflict in the text, along with the number of instances in which God is credited with assisting armies after a violent defense has been engaged, we might expect to find frequent warnings to prepare for those conflicts. But a careful reading yields a surprising result—before a conflict has started, direct warnings to flee are relatively common, but explicit warnings to prepare for war are nonexistent.

Consider the textual evidence. The narrative contains several examples of God warning people to protect their lives and their communities by abandoning their homes and seeking refuge in other lands. This pattern is established in the first pages, when the voice of the Lord warns Lehi to “take his family and depart into the wilderness” to escape those who “seek to take away [his] life” (1 Ne. 2:1–2). Years later, when Nephi’s brothers plot a bloody coup, Nephi relates that “the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them and flee into the wilderness, and all those who would go with me” (2 Ne. 5:5). Hundreds of years after that, the first Mosiah is “warned of the Lord that he should flee out of the land of Nephi, and as many as would hearken unto the voice of the Lord should also depart out of the land with him, into the wilderness” (Omni 1:12). Alma the Elder receives two warnings to flee: first near the waters of Mormon and again in the land of Helam (see Mosiah 23:1–2; 24:16–17). To these examples from the Nephite record we might add one from the Jaredites when “the Lord warned Omer in a dream that he should depart out of the land” to escape a mortal threat (Ether 9:3).¹⁶ Such divine instructions to flee become less frequent as the narrative progresses. This might be due to the growth of Book of Mormon populations and the logistical difficulties that flight would eventually create. Then again, the decline may also reflect that as time went on, and their populations grew, and they became more dependent on the protection

16. This list deliberately omits one significant Book of Mormon narrative example. When the Anti-Nephi-Lehies become targets of renewed aggression by their former attackers, God tells Ammon, “Get this people out of this land, . . . for I will preserve them” (Alma 27:12). Since they had previously renounced violence—thus self-constricting their range of possible strategies—God’s instructions to them are not included in this analysis of narrative patterns.

of Laban's sword, the Nephites also became less capable of imagining alternatives to war (a point we will return to later). Nevertheless, even a cursory review of the Book of Mormon reveals a God who often warns his children to flee.

Now consider the other option—warning his children to prepare for war. Aside from the Spirit “constraining” Nephi to kill Laban (an example of interpersonal violence rather than warfare), the Book of Mormon narrative is surprisingly spare when it comes to instances in which God explicitly commands anyone to engage in defensive violence (see 1 Ne. 4:10). There are, as noted, numerous descriptions of divine assistance in wars that have already commenced, including two instances in which God instructs Alma about *where* the Nephite armies might locate enemy forces.¹⁷ But the most striking element in all of the text's examples of divine assistance is that they involve assistance *after* a decision to go to war has already been made or a battle has already been engaged. In other words, God consistently fulfills his promise to help under circumstances of justified defense—in accordance with the law he gave to Nephi—but he never seems to directly tell anyone in the Book of Mormon to *prepare* for war. As far as we can tell from the narrative itself, every war is instigated through human agency rather than divine instruction. This is surprising, especially if we consider that as populations increase and options to flee become more logistically problematic, we might expect explicit divine instructions to prepare for war to also increase. But while a close reading of the text yields a total of *five* instances of divine warnings (for family groups as well as whole communities) to flee to another land, we find *zero* instances of divine instructions (for social groups of any scale) to prepare to violently repel an impending attack. Although the Nephites believed that God would tell them when they ought to prepare for war, the Book of Mormon suggests that God never actually did. Thus, when it comes to strategies for preserving his children, the narrative describes an Eternal Father (of *all* sides in any given conflict) who explicitly directs only nonviolent options, such as flight, at least when given a chance to weigh in beforehand.

17. See Alma 16:4–6; 43:23–24. The voice of the Lord is not explicitly quoted in either instance, but Alma emerges from both prayerful meditations with military intelligence that proves both correct and useful, and in the second instance this information is prefaced with the observation that “the word of the Lord came unto Alma.”

Ye Shall Defend

With these patterns in mind, let us return to the two divine injunctions in Alma that seem to require violent self-defense: “Inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies,” and “Ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed” (Alma 43:46–47). In light of the principles of agency contained in the 1833 revelation, and given the Book of Mormon’s frequent examples of divinely inspired flight, these statements now seem less absolute. Consider the first injunction to “not suffer yourselves to be slain.” The general success of flight in the narrative clearly demonstrates that this standard can be achieved without shedding blood. But does the second injunction suggest that bloodshed—or any form of violence—is required? Not if, as we might reasonably conclude, the word *defend* means “to prevent from being injured, or destroyed.”¹⁸ Such protection might be achieved through nonviolent means, including flight, making violence only the most drastic of several options to protect self and family. This is borne out by the construction of the command itself: The relationship between *defend* and *bloodshed* is not direct (as in, “Ye shall defend your families *with* bloodshed”) but rather is relative (“Ye shall defend your families *even* unto bloodshed”). The adverb *even* in this context compares a general principle with an extreme case. Thus, the heart of the divine command becomes simply, “Ye shall defend your families,” full stop. The exact method for defense, on the other hand, is left to the discretion of individuals and communities. It might involve bloodshed. Then again, it might not.

So even the Book of Mormon’s most straightforward command regarding self-defense characterizes violence (again) as a choice rather than a command. Our modern culture often shapes our assumptions—that defending families requires violent methods—and these assumptions in turn color the way readers interpret the text. But when we gain a measure of objective distance from our culture and let the subtle and ancient patterns of the Book of Mormon speak for themselves, the intricate narrative tapestry increasingly resolves into focus. What at first appeared to be a bold element of the overall message and design—*God requires us to use defensive violence*—begins to dissolve, and another pattern—*we must choose from a range of moral responses*—emerges as

18. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828 edition), s.v. “defend,” accessed April 1, 2021, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/defend>.

more significant and more frequently repeated. This should come as no surprise. Choice, it turns out, is inextricably woven through the whole narrative cloth of this text. The Book of Mormon's large-scale conflicts are thus best characterized as wars of human *decision* rather than wars of divine *requirement*. And, as we shall see, the text suggests that even when flight is logistically impractical—as it would be with an extensive and settled population—there are other nonviolent strategies for self-preservation that effectively draw upon the powers of heaven. In other words, although the option of violent self-defense is definitely considered “blessed” within the text, the narrative also illustrates that there are “more blessed” options to consider.

More Excellent Ways

What are some of the “more blessed” options? The narrative highlights several and even compares them with their violent counterparts. As Grant Hardy has noted, the Book of Mormon often includes parallel narrative elements that provide subtle but clear comparisons between different “modes of action.” Each path may be “virtuous and acceptable to God,” but some may be better than others; such differences demonstrate “a distinction between faithful, ordinary competence and miraculous, blessed achievement.”¹⁹ This dynamic seems at play with several parallel descriptions regarding violent and nonviolent attempts to protect and preserve. Consider, for example, some of the parallel elements in the story of King Limhi and his people. When the Lamanite armies initially attack, they are successfully repulsed with force, and the Lamanite king (who is nameless in the narrative) is captured. But Limhi recognizes that this success cannot be sustained, so he seeks to win the trust of the captured king, which he does by being honest and forthright with his prisoner. Once the Lamanite king is pacified, he asks the people of Limhi to trust him in return—to essentially experiment with unarmed confrontation by proceeding with him “without arms to meet the Lamanites” (Mosiah 20:25). It is a remarkable moment—the king of the Lamanites pleading with his own army on behalf of his former enemies—and the narrative relates that “when the Lamanites saw the people of Limhi, that they were without arms, they had compassion on them and were pacified towards them, and returned with their king in peace to their own land” (Mosiah 20:26). The first strategy of armed

19. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 166.

resistance is temporarily effective in protecting Limhi's community (blessed), while the second strategy of unarmed resistance is even more effective in preserving their community in the long run (more blessed).

Indeed, one of the narrative's most repeated, successful, and creative alternatives to violent resistance is unarmed confrontation. The people of Alma employ this strategy when a Lamanite army invades their secluded community in Helam, a strategy that allows them to preserve and protect their fledgling community without bloodshed (see Mosiah 23:25–29). Even apostate groups effectively use unarmed confrontation. Consider the former priests of King Noah, now under the leadership of Amulon, who put their Lamanite wives forward to plead their case (albeit in a much more disturbing way to modern readers, considering the abductor-victim relationship with these women), and the Lamanite relatives of these wives “had compassion on Amulon and his brethren, and did not destroy them, because of their wives” (Mosiah 23:33–34).

The most detailed, successful, and honorably motivated example of unarmed confrontation is the well-known and beloved story of the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Facing a brutal attack, they go out to meet the advancing aggressors, prostrate themselves on the ground, prick the consciences of their attackers, and ultimately fend off the assault on their community (see Alma 24:21–22). When this story is placed in parallel with other narrative examples of violent self-defense, the effectiveness of the Anti-Nephi-Lehi strategy becomes even more starkly evident. At first glance, the loss of a thousand and five lives seems catastrophic, until we consider that the casualties of other battles are usually significantly higher. Thus, in placing their bodies between their enraged enemies and their community, the Anti-Nephi-Lehies defend their families more efficiently than they would with violent alternatives. As a 1939 Sunday School manual observed, “Had the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi resisted the attacks of their brethren with the sword, no doubt many more of them would have been destroyed even if they had been victorious. . . . As it was, fewer were killed, many were converted, and much better conditions prevailed.”²⁰ This last observation hints at how the narrative itself commends this strategy of loving, nonviolent confrontation for its redemptive potential. The unarmed confrontation not only redeems (saves) the Anti-Nephi-Lehi families, it also redeems (saves) many of their enemies. What's more, as the narrator Mormon observes, “those

20. Deseret Sunday School Union, *The Quorum Bulletin and Gospel Doctrine Sunday School Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (January–March 1939), 13, in *Sunday School Lessons*, vol. 12, 1939.

who had been slain were righteous people, therefore we have no reason to doubt but what they were saved” (Alma 24:26). Enthralled by this dramatic story of noble sacrifice and conversion, a casual reader might easily overlook another salient point—the nonviolent confrontation worked even with the *unconverted* aggressors. In other words, a group of weaponless defenders effectively protected their community by convincing even the hard-hearted Amalekites and Amulonites to abandon their deadly designs.²¹ This was no small accomplishment.

The Book of Mormon also juxtaposes the long-term, structural consequences of violent and nonviolent strategies. Consistent with the promises of the Lord, defensive warfare often protected the Nephite community and created conditions for periodic armistices. But it rarely, if ever, achieved lasting peace. Even the valiant and talented Captain Moroni only managed to achieve a peace that lasted a mere five years. Compare such “blessed” successes with the “more blessed” and ultimately enduring achievements of nonviolent, loving advances into enemy territory. The best-known incursion is accomplished by a small and compassionate “special forces unit,” as it were, led by the sons of Mosiah, princes (and therefore likely military commanders) in the Nephite kingdom. Employing assertive yet loving strategies, they win the trust of their traditional enemies through consecrated service and self-sacrifice. As a result, these nonviolent intruders effect a permanent cultural and political reconciliation with a significant portion of the Lamanite community—a literal burying of the hatchet combined with an intertwining of the two communities as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies (later called the people of Ammon) enter into a political, economic, and religious alliance with the Nephites.²²

Another later incursion yields even more remarkable results. Over fifty years after the nonviolent advance of the sons of Mosiah, the narrative relates how a still-antagonistic group of Lamanites, with the help of Nephite dissenters, successfully conquers nearly all Nephite cities and territory. Moronihah, the son of Moroni, is able to forcibly claw back only half the lost ground, even while employing the full political and economic resources of the Nephite state and military. The struggle takes several years, with “great loss” and “great slaughter,” but is ultimately discontinued because “it became impossible for the Nephites to obtain

21. See Alma 25:1–2. Unfortunately, the unconverted attackers simply redirected their rage, blaming the Nephites and destroying the people of Ammonihah.

22. See Alma 17:12–25; 23:17–18; 27:21–22, 26.

more power.” Even in their reconquered lands, the Nephites feel vulnerable, living “in great fear, lest they should be overpowered, and trodden down, and slain, and destroyed” (Hel. 4:11, 19–20). Violence succeeds, but only in part, achieving a “blessed” yet limited and precarious peace.

In the midst of this uncertainty and anxiety, another set of unarmed invaders, this time the brothers Nephi and Lehi, march into the occupied territory; convert eight thousand Lamanites in the land of Zarahemla, the previous Nephite capital; and then drive even deeper into more traditional Lamanite lands, allowing themselves to be captured and abused. Miracles ensue, with heavenly pillars of fire, a trembling earth, and a divine voice “of perfect mildness, as if it had been a whisper” (Hel. 5:30). These gentle, loving, yet assertive efforts initiate a miraculous and even “more blessed” outcome—a mass conversion of Lamanites who then *voluntarily* return all the conquered lands, effectively ending generations of warfare (see Hel. 5:52). And a state of permanent peace, commerce, and intermingling between these former enemy communities endures for centuries (as subsequent conflicts shift almost exclusively to struggles with the Gadianton robbers). What years, even decades, of armed conflict could only partially achieve, confrontational compassion fully achieves (and more) in relatively short order.

Likewise, consider the effects of various strategies to remove the threat of the Gadianton robbers. Military forays are generally and notoriously ineffective.²³ On the other hand, compassionate efforts to convert the robbers, employed at different times by both Lamanites and Nephites, manage to “utterly destroy”—or rather “put an end to”—the Gadianton robbers by transforming them from enemies into friends (see Hel. 6:37; 3 Ne. 5:4–6). Thus, as it does in several other respects, the Book of Mormon’s narrative tapestry displays a good/better sensibility when it comes to conflict. It consistently characterizes defensive violence as acceptable, justified, even divinely assisted, and effective in achieving short-term armistices. Nonviolent strategies, on the other hand, are depicted as more efficacious, redemptive, accompanied by even greater miracles, and effective in achieving enduring peace.

The efficacy of this higher law is punctuated in the narrative’s beautiful climax, when the Savior of the world descends in a cloud of light.²⁴ As

23. See, for example, Helaman 11:27–32 and 3 Nephi 2:11–19.

24. Even examples of divine violence fit the standards outlined in Doctrine and Covenants 98, such as the natural catastrophes that wipe out a significant portion of the population prior to Christ’s visit. The violence is clearly justified—but not necessarily

promised by previous prophets, Jesus enhances and supersedes the old “blessed” code of ethics with higher and even “more blessed” standards, particularly the injunction to “love your enemies” (3 Ne. 12:38–48). The narrative goes on to illustrate the fruits of this higher law after the Savior departs. As his eager disciples embrace and implement principles of active compassion, they create a remarkably elevated society, in which “every man [and woman] did deal justly one with another” and there is no violence in the land—not even justified violence—“because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people” (4 Ne. 1:2–17). Thus, at the apex of the narrative, the disciples of Jesus Christ eliminate all human violence by taking the Savior’s words to heart—loving rather than fighting their enemies. What’s more, their peaceful and just society lasts for more than 160 years, an astonishing achievement that is explained not simply by the divine being who initiates it but also by the principles of loving engagement upon which it is based.

The transformative power of assertive and confrontational love is one of the most significant patterns hidden in plain sight within the Book of Mormon’s intricate narrative tapestry. This pattern does not denigrate the noble efforts of those who choose to defend themselves and their families with justified violence. A recognition that the Melchizedek Priesthood is higher than the Aaronic Priesthood does not denigrate the lesser authority. Extolling the higher worship of the temple does not denigrate the lesser worship of meetinghouses. Thus, the Book of Mormon narrative praises the courage and righteousness of those who engage in just warfare. For example, it lauds Captain Moroni for being “firm in the faith of Christ” and celebrates the periodic times of peace that his and other such efforts achieve (Alma 48:13; see also Alma 50:23). But the narrative also suggests that assertive love represents an even higher law, not simply for its personal sanctifying effects, but also for its capacity to protect families and communities in the long term. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies, for example, are also lauded for being “firm in the faith of Christ” (the only other time this specific accolade is used), and the narrative extols the long-term peace that assertive love achieves (Alma 27:27; see also 4 Ne. 1:16). God’s people thus demonstrate a range of approved options with a range of efficacious and redemptive outcomes.

required or redemptive—and is characterized as a choice for which God takes complete responsibility. See 3 Nephi 9:3–12, where the voice of God openly acknowledges this decision and fully accepts its consequences.

According to Their Desires

If strategies of assertive love are more redemptive and more efficacious, and if that pattern is central to the narrative tapestry, why does the text not highlight them more often and more explicitly? Even a cursory review of the Book of Mormon reveals that the narrative is dominated by regular examples and long descriptions of violent self-defense, many of which are actively aided by God. So, why doesn't God seem to more actively direct his people to "more blessed" strategies? Here, we might employ yet another interpretive lens, this time inspired by a brief line from Alma the Younger's stirring soliloquy in which he wishes to be an angel. After expressing his longing to employ "the trump of God" and "a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people," Alma notes, "But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me. I ought not to harrow up in my desires the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life" (Alma 29:1, 3–4). This last line is haunting, because it suggests an old adage—be careful what you wish for, because you just might get it. Jacob makes a similar observation earlier in the narrative when he notes that the ancient Jews "sought for things that they could not understand," and so God "delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand, because they desired it" (Jacob 4:14).

Assuming this principle holds when we apply it to the overall narrative—that God grants unto men and women according to their desires, even when the outcomes are not optimal—it suggests that the prevalence of "blessed" defensive warfare, and God's frequent assistance with it, are due (again) to human decision rather than divine directive. Which raises another question: Why do some of the text's best individuals and societies not choose the "more blessed" nonviolent protective options more often? While, as we have seen, individuals and societies in the Book of Mormon do choose such strategies, many of the narrative's most prominent and exemplary heroes participate in, even lead, justified violent conflict. These include Nephi, King Benjamin, Alma the Younger, Captain Moroni, and the principal narrator himself, Mormon. If nonviolent confrontational love is really more effective and more redemptive, why do these notable figures seem to not choose it?

It's a fair question, with several possible answers. First, we should note that such figures choose "more blessed" options more often than readers might recognize. Consider how Alma, after leading or directing battles early in his public career, concludes that "the preaching of the

word . . . had had more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword” (Alma 31:3). For the remainder of his life, he never again personally picks up the sword, dedicating himself instead to an increasingly strenuous, fearless, and nonviolent ministry, even while his fellow countrymen courageously engage and receive divine assistance in subsequent battles. Similar trajectories—from “blessed” to “more blessed” choices—might be traced in the lives of Nephi, King Benjamin, and Mormon.

Even so, the text is clearly saturated with justified violent self-defense by many of its major figures. This may reflect the experience of the principal narrator, Mormon, himself a prophet-general who led armies into battle from a very young age. But the best explanation may be that nonviolent, loving, yet assertive defensive strategies are extraordinarily difficult to conceive, let alone pull off, particularly in societies that encourage violent self-defense. John Paul Lederach refers to an ability to stretch beyond our culturally conditioned responses as *moral imagination*, which he defines as “the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist.”²⁵ In a world conditioned to respond to violence with violence—a reflex cultivated not only by traditions in the ancient world but also by our modern media and entertainment—it is relatively easy to imagine oneself or one’s community picking up the sword against an enemy in order to “destroy them and their iniquity out of the land, lest they overrun us and destroy us” (Alma 26:25). Imagining loving resistance strategies is much more difficult—and, frankly, implementing them requires a significantly higher degree of faith and fearlessness. Individuals and communities are not generally conditioned to submit to and serve historically mortal enemies (as did Ammon), or preach in enemy territory in the middle of a prolonged violent conflict (as did Nephi and Lehi), or lovingly and prayerfully confront a crazed and attacking enemy (as did the Anti-Nephi-Lehies). What makes such unusual behavior and rich moral imagination possible is what Lederach calls “the capacity of individuals and communities to imagine themselves in a web of relationship even with their enemies.”²⁶

Such daring and countercultural imagination is difficult to develop, even for the best individuals and communities. And we should celebrate

25. John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), ix.

26. Lederach, *Moral Imagination*, 34.

“blessed” choices even when “more blessed” choices leave us awestruck. Consider the respective desires and choices of Christ’s twelve New World disciples when he asks them, “What is it that ye desire of me?” (3 Ne. 28:1). Nine of these disciples—presumably some of the best souls of their generation—choose what Jesus declares to be a “blessed” option of a predictable death and ascension to heaven after their earthly work is completed. Only three of his disciples are able to conceive of and choose a “more blessed”—and, admittedly, excruciatingly more difficult—option of remaining on the earth to continue to labor (and weep) for God’s children, of whom many (if not most) will be their enemies. The second response requires a significantly higher degree of moral imagination than the first, which is why only a few even conceive of it. So it should be no surprise that throughout the Book of Mormon narrative, most of God’s servants—again, the best of souls—often opt for the “blessed” option of justified self-defense, while individuals and communities rarely rise to the “more blessed”—and more imaginatively challenging—option of meeting aggression with loving, nonviolent responses. But to emphasize the point yet again, even if these respective choices don’t hold the same degree of immediate efficacy and long-term redemptive power, both are characterized throughout the narrative as righteous responses.

Accepting that both justified warfare and assertive love are “blessed”—albeit with different outcomes and redemptive potential—helps reconcile the command to “defend your families” with the command to “love your enemies.” It also moves us beyond dichotomous thinking regarding whether the narrative is fundamentally “antiwar” or “just-war” in character. The interpretive strategies of both camps have merit. The Book of Mormon suggests that Christ’s teachings *do* supersede the old law of Moses, that some responses to aggression are higher and holier than others, and that “after the law is fulfilled [or superseded] in Christ, that [we] need not harden [our] hearts” against the higher law (2 Ne. 25:27). Likewise, the Book of Mormon also suggests—in the spirit of Augustine and according to *True to the Faith*, the modern Church’s official gospel reference book—that it *is* possible for warriors to go into battle “with love in their hearts for all God’s children, including those on the opposing side,” so that “if they are required to shed another’s blood, their action will not be counted as a sin.”²⁷ The Nephites, for example, achieved this when they were “sorry to be the means of sending so many

27. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *True to the Faith: A Gospel Reference* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), s.v. “War,”

of their brethren out of this world into an eternal world, unprepared to meet their God” (Alma 48:23). But the Book of Mormon also suggests that such interpretive strategies are not the only ways to reconcile the two commands. Rather, as we have seen, the text itself suggests a simpler but far more challenging form of reconciliation—to creatively defend and protect our families *through* assertive and nonviolent love for our enemies. That path may seem exceptional, counterintuitive, even unfeasible. Only a small percentage of the human family has ever exhibited such imagination, action, and ways of being. But acknowledging such difficulties is different than saying that disciples of Christ should therefore hold only to the lesser law or that we *can’t* or *shouldn’t* aspire to the higher ground our Master has charted.

Whither Should We Go?

Near the end of the Book of Mormon, after surveying and abridging the entire span of Nephite history, Mormon seems to conclude that although justified violence may be “blessed” and even at times divinely assisted, it cannot ultimately satisfy the human soul or save human communities. Security and salvation are found only in the compassionate and violence-absorbing sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Speaking to his distantly future readers, Mormon implores, “Know ye that ye must lay down your weapons of war, and delight no more in the shedding of blood, and take them not again, save it be that God shall command you. Know ye that ye must come to the knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ, that he is the Son of God, and that he was slain by the Jews, and by the power of the Father he hath risen again, whereby he hath gained the victory over the grave; and also in him is the sting of death swallowed up” (Morm. 7:4–5).

Mormon’s words touch on the essence of a key narrative pattern—*violence may be a justified choice for self-defense, but exerting loving resistance in the face of threats will accomplish so much more*—and he seems to recognize that we, his future readers, may be blind to it. Thus, he pleads with us in the same way his son Moroni pleads with us to “learn to be more wise than [they] have been” (Morm. 9:31) and the same way that Shakespeare’s Earl of Kent pleads with King Lear to “see better.”²⁸ Patterns of redemptive love are woven throughout the text, but we won’t

accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/true-to-the-faith/war>.

28. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 1.1.140.

see them unless we confront our cultural biases and alter our collective gaze. Similar to a “magic eye” picture, in which a three-dimensional image is hidden in what initially appears to be a completely unrelated pattern of colors and swirls, the subtle efficacy and sanctifying potential of loving resistance can be difficult to perceive within the Book of Mormon’s bold strokes of justified violence. However, once our eyes adjust, and the pattern “pops” from the textual tapestry, it may be challenging to see anything else.

The process of seeing better begins with the desires we bring to the text. After all, the Lord “granteth unto men [and women] according to their desire.” So, what do we desire? If we desire a narrative that is full of divinely justified violence, then God will certainly grant us that desire, and the narrative’s patterns of righteous self-defense will (rightfully) reassure us that such responses are “blessed.” But if we desire a narrative that reveals “more blessed” patterns of even more effective, redemptive, loving, and nonviolent responses, then the Lord will surely grant us that desire as well, and patterns of compassionate confrontation will emerge from the text and direct us on an even more challenging path. God might have a preference; one path may be better than the other, and he may encourage us to pursue that “more excellent way” (Ether 12:11). But both responses are “blessed,” and neither response, it turns out, is required. So, while the Book of Mormon enjoins disciples of Christ to both protect the innocent and love the aggressor, the narrative suggests that the choice of exactly how to do that is ultimately up to the moral desires and imaginations of both individuals and communities.

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Mercy

I merge into surging highway wind,
my backseat baby babbles
to the Tim-Tams macaroni yogurt
burger cookies and bananas,
and a crackling alto announces the world this hour:
 buildings burst in a distant port,
 scoundrel stabs doctor in a clinic past the mountains,
 furious inferno feasts on trees, towns just south of here.

I cruise under red, misspelled bitterness on the bridge—*I can't breath.*
Death. I think *death*
as I brake past masked faces in even spaces at the bakery.
I dread an eternal six feet apart
like I dread the six feet under.

Stop, signals the traffic light.
Through the windshield is my world
this hour, beckoning me to befriend
the brilliant corner daisies, the silent watercolor sky.
Behind, my warm, curly daughter
with a dried-applesauce nose
coos to road roller, restaurant, Ram,
tips her bottle, then chews her toes.

I smell smoke: a harbinger
of the flames that may shatter my tomorrow.
But today,
they showed me mercy.

—Elizabeth Smith

Shoulders

Bethany Sorensen

“**W**e” are taking a nap, but she’s the only one sleeping. The canvas shade above our heads and the subtle breeze off the water make the 95-degree heat tolerable. The gentle rocking of the houseboat lulls us both into a trance.

Her back is to me. I hear the telltale sound of her subconscious thumb-sucking. It means she’s fallen from the waking world. She’s out for the count. I feel the relief every parent feels getting their exhausted child to step away from the fun and action long enough to rest and reset. Maybe I’ll sleep too. The full moon the night before kept me awake; I watched it until even the bats called it a night.

I am tired but can’t close my eyes against the scene beside me. My daughter is curled up, a towel covering her legs, wearing her favorite navy-and-white-striped swimsuit. It features a smiling pineapple wearing sunglasses on the front. One strap has slipped just outside her tan lines so I can see the contrast of sun-browned tones against her natural skin. Her tousled dark-blond hair curls and waves from a recent swim. I see the gentle rise and fall of her shoulders. My eyes rest on her small back. Even the majesty of the thousand-foot-tall redrock walls surrounding me cannot compare to the marvel of those tiny shoulder blades.

Like every mother before me, I wonder how many more times I will watch her sleep. It’s not an infinite number. I consider the last time I held my son, now ten, while he napped. My arms were asleep, and it was time to start dinner, but I couldn’t bring myself to move. I had the same feeling then as now—slow down and enjoy. I want to remember this.

In half an hour, my little girl will wake, stretch, and jump back into life, moving fast, her preferred speed. There's a good chance she'll strap on her life jacket and leap off this deck into the warm water below within two minutes of waking.

Realizing your child is growing up hits at odd moments, certainly not when you expect it. You would think realization shows up when birthday candles are blown out or on school picture day. Instead, it steals into everyday moments and catches you off guard, like when we're walking up the stairs to bed and she turns to ask for her favorite story—the one about unicorns believing little girls are real. Suddenly she looks older. I stare, trying to determine what subtle changes have taken place. I can't narrow it down. When did it happen? A small heartbeat of panic pulses—I need to pay closer attention. Tonight I will use all my best voices to read her bedtime story aloud because the countdown has begun. Which story will be the last?

I launch into another parental pastime—imagining her future. We won't always sit at gymnastics meets watching turnovers on a four-inch-wide platform while my husband mutters “I *hate* the balance beam” under his breath. She will outgrow the backpack that looks large enough to carry her. She will wear swimsuits unadorned with smiling fruit. Her shoulders will grow. What will those shoulders encounter? She will drive away. She will change her name. Someday she will watch her own baby sleep and wonder whether she's given enough to help that little person survive life's storms.

Her earliest days began with milk and mimicry. Words came with a side of pureed fruit and vegetables. I didn't need forensic science to determine by the spatter pattern that sweet potatoes were not her favorite. Sentences and solids were followed by chapters and a variety of cuisine. In a matter of long days and short years,¹ we progressed from naming apples, bananas, and oranges as we walked the grocery store aisles to please and thank you, wash your hands, be kind on the playground.

I nourish her a little at a time, offering love and language like individual stalks of wheat placed across her back, laid so lightly she barely feels them. Each lesson accumulates until, through the years, they become great sheaves of love, faith, and knowledge. She is hardly aware of the precious burden across her shoulders, nor of how much more there is

1. Gretchen Rubin, “The Years Are Short,” June 15, 2012, video, 1:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KktuoQwb3vQ>.

to glean. I am tempted to slow the pace or carry her load, wishing to grant her respite. Surely there is still time to prepare. Yet I know some of what may lie ahead. Her burden feeds her strength to accompany her years. Only then will she “not be beaten down by the storm . . . , neither . . . harrowed up by the whirlwinds” (Alma 26:6) so she can “come again with rejoicing, bringing [her] sheaves with [her]” (Ps. 126:6).

A slight breeze has picked up. The change in the air stirs her to wakefulness. She turns toward me, pleased at finding me there. She stretches, smiles, and reaches for her life jacket. I snap the buckles for her, each click nudging me free of my reverie. She asks to jump and I nod, slowly resurfacing into the present. I watch her step to the edge of the deck, square her shoulders, and leap.

This essay by Bethany Sorensen won honorable mention in the 2021 Richard H. Cracroft Personal Essay Contest, sponsored by BYU Studies.

Desert Harvest

At last, it came,
The cleansing rain at the fading
Of this long, parched day.

We had arrived in the dark,
When the pre-dawn sky proved flawless,
And the familiar constellations staunchly challenged
The rebellious glory of a falling star
Until their light
Was absorbed by the glory
Of greater light.

The covenant of warmth from the nascent sun
Drew diamondbacks from deep within their den
Opposite this curious desert tree,
This giant Nopal
With its desirable fruit, the prickly pears,
And their promise of succulent pleasure
In the arid Sonoran terrain.
Six rings on an upright tail
Rattled a beguiling cadence
Like a summons to pick the first,
The beginning of our day-long harvest.

So it began.
With naked hands
Consciously tentative, we
Reached between the spines and I,
With the pricking of my thumb,
Recalled the warnings of my Dad
That such a fruit cannot be had
Without the pain and payment
Of sweat and
Blood.

The desert has been exacting,
The labor, arduous,
And yet,
Rewarding.
Blossoms stipple fruitless nopal blades,
Harbingers of a harvest yet to be, but
Our basket is full.
Clouds deepen the inevitable twilight:
We can pick no more, and the gathering: well,
It is finished and I—
We—my worthy helper and I
At last, together,
Can contemplate
The crimson rapture of the cactus rose
Redeemed by the sudden grace of desert rain.

—Ben de Hoyos

This poem won honorable mention in the 2020
Clinton F. Larson Poetry Contest, sponsored by
BYU Studies.

Manuscripts, Murder, and a Miniseries

A Personal Essay

Richard E. Turley Jr.

On March 3, 2021, a three-part miniseries on the Mark Hofmann forgery-murder case of the 1980s premiered on Netflix, a popular subscription-based streaming service. The three-part miniseries, titled *Murder among the Mormons*, quickly catapulted into the top echelon of most-watched Netflix programs in the United States.¹ Because I appeared in the miniseries, many people began asking me questions about this criminal case I have followed since it first attracted widespread public attention.

In many ways, Mark William Hofmann's early life paralleled mine, though with vastly different results. We were born fourteen months apart, putting him a year ahead of me in school. During high school, we lived within walking distance of each other's homes in Salt Lake City. I graduated from Skyline High School, and he graduated from Olympus, schools that are sports rivals but that also draw from adjacent neighborhoods students who are friends.

I often mixed with Olympus students academically, socially, and religiously but do not recall ever meeting Mark. I interacted with Olympus students during interscholastic academic activities, dances, and seminary programs, usually in a spirit of friendship instead of the animosity some people expected from sports rivals. After high school, Mark went on a mission to England, and I on a mission to Japan.

1. Taylor Horn, "Interview: Utah Historian Featured in Netflix's Docu-series 'Murder among the Mormons,'" ABC4.com, *Good Morning Utah*, March 11, 2021, <https://www.abc4.com/gmu/interview-utah-historian-featured-in-netflixs-docu-series-murder-among-the-mormons/>.

I later had an opportunity to interview Mark's mission president and others who served in his mission with him. In addition, I read accounts of people who knew him during his missionary service. On the surface, his mission president told me, Elder Hofmann seemed like a typical missionary in his day. Other missionaries who did not live in the same apartment with him said essentially the same thing.

Those who lived with him twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, portrayed him in widely different ways. On the one hand, he displayed behavior that suggested he was ultraconservative in his religious views and diligent in his missionary labors. On the other hand, he liked to frequent old book shops and purchase literature that was critical of the Church, keeping his cache of negative materials in a box under his bed, a symbol of the closet atheism he adopted in his mid-teens but sought to hide under a pious façade.

The two faces of the superficially devout Hofmann and the secretly nihilistic one began forming years earlier when he developed doubts and questions for which he found no suitable outlet or answers. He nurtured his doubts to the point of cynicism and elected to live a life of deception. On the surface, he pretended to be an active Latter-day Saint, a returned missionary who married in the temple. Secretly, he believed humans were destined to die and had no future beyond this life. If he succeeded in deceiving them or shortened their life spans, then in his mind there was no harm done.

He coldly deceived and used his innocent wife, Doralee Olds, in the "discovery" of his first highly publicized forgery, that of the Anthon transcript, which he offered to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As with subsequent forgeries acquired by institutions, this one was studied by historians and subjected to background research to confirm Hofmann's account of the document's provenance. After six months of study turned up nothing to discount the document's authenticity or Hofmann's story of its genealogy, a librarian purchased the document to add it to the Church's collections.²

Hofmann's second major "find," the Joseph Smith III Blessing, ended up with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, known today as the Community of Christ. The RLDS Church submitted the document to highly skilled professional document examiners and submitted a physical sample from the document to a top scientific

2. Richard E. Turley Jr., *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 24-39.

laboratory for testing. None of the experts found anything to suggest the document was anything other than what Hofmann represented it to be.³

My wife, Shirley, and I were living in Japan when the Anthon Transcript and Joseph Smith III Blessing hit the news. We returned to Utah in 1981, and having a deep interest in Latter-day Saint history, I heard a lot about Hofmann and his documents, including his most famous forgery, the so-called Salamander Letter. The letter, purportedly written by Book of Mormon witness Martin Harris, portrayed one of the key events of the Restoration in folk magic terms.⁴

Some people found the letter quite disturbing, leaving the Church or ceasing activity in it because of the document. One man—the brother of one of my later neighbors—committed suicide as the result of a mental slide the letter precipitated. I marveled at these dramatic life decisions made on the basis of one document or at most a few. The Salamander Letter didn't bother me because it struck me as an anomaly. I couldn't explain it immediately but was sure time would answer the questions it raised. I looked at Church history as a giant jigsaw puzzle, and I didn't see one piece of the puzzle or even a few as changing the overall picture very much.

Even though I knew that the Salamander Letter, like Hofmann's other documents, had been subjected to forensic analysis, I also knew such analysis could never really prove any object to be authentic. At most, it could only identify problems that might prove the object to be fake. But the failure to discover such problems didn't make the document authentic.

President Gordon B. Hinckley's comment on the document seemed a reasonable one to me. "No one, of course, can be certain that Martin Harris wrote the document," he said in a public statement at the time of the document's release. "However, at this point we accept the judgment of the examiner that there is no indication that it is a forgery. This does not preclude the possibility that it may have been forged at a time when the Church had many enemies."⁵

In a course I took at Brigham Young University on the early history of the Church in the British Isles, I learned how the first Latter-day Saint missionaries in Preston, England, had seen a banner emblazoned

3. Turley, *Victims*, 40–53.

4. Turley, *Victims*, 79–82.

5. Turley, *Victims*, 100.

with the words “Truth shall prevail.” The slogan lifted their spirits, and they responded with hearty amens and “Thanks be to God, truth will prevail!”⁶ Time, I knew, was the great tester, and truth would prevail.

Time tested the Salamander Letter and ultimately proved it a forgery.

Hofmann set his bombs to buy time for his increasingly complex forgery scheme to work out. Instead, the bombs accelerated the trap that was closing in around him. The bombs concentrated forensic resources on his documents at a level not previously reached. From Hofmann’s first highly advertised “discovery,” the Anthon transcript, people had doubts about his documents. But efforts to prove them fake failed.

Until the bombings.

With three explosions and two murders to solve, detectives and forensic document examiners went further than ever before in looking at the possibility the documents were not real. The bombings focused investigative resources and took advantage of tools like subpoenas and court orders. Without such extraordinary focus, it might have been years, even decades, before Hofmann’s forgery scheme completely fell apart.

Like virtually everyone in Utah in October 1985, I became aware of the bombings as they happened. The murderous explosions and ensuing investigation topped the news that month and in ensuing weeks and months. It seemed the whole state was on edge, or at least those like me who lived and worked in the Salt Lake Valley. The possible tie between the bombings and Church history put history on the lips of everyone with more than a superficial interest in the topic.

Under these conditions, I found it strange when a call came through on my law office phone line and the caller introduced himself, said he was representing an undisclosed principal, and asked if he could question me about Church history. Normally, I was too busy to deal with solicitors and might have turned him down. But something about the call intrigued me, and I agreed to answer the man’s questions.

“What is the likelihood that on a free Saturday afternoon you would be studying Church history?” he asked. Other questions similarly centered on me and my background, not Church history per se. I hung up the phone at the end of the conversation thinking it was one of the most unusual calls I had ever received.

6. The story is conveniently accessible in *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth: 1815–1846* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018), chap. 24.

I didn't begin to understand the call's purpose until the following Monday, December 30, 1985, when I received another telephone call, this one from Elder Dallin H. Oaks, who had been called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles almost twenty-one months earlier. He had been a role model for me over the years, and I felt honored when he invited me to lunch that day and probed my knowledge of Church history.⁷

I had begun a deep study of Church history in 1971 when I was fifteen years old, and he asked me to name books I had read recently and journals I studied to keep me up to date on the subject. He also asked questions about my family and my personal life. He was gregarious, warm, and witty, and I felt comfortable around him.

He called me again on Friday, January 3, 1986, and by the end of the day I had met with two more General Authorities, Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve and Elder Dean L. Larsen of the Presidency of the Seventy. The latter, who also served as Church Historian and Recorder, stunned me by asking me to become the managing director of the Church Historical Department.⁸ I was an august twenty-nine years of age at the time.

I started my new job seventeen days later and found myself in the Church Historical Department at one of the toughest times in its history. The potential tie of the Hofmann bombings to historical documents made the department a veritable crime scene. All it lacked was yellow police tape. The staff was cooperating with investigators, who had requested copies of all the documents the Church had acquired from Hofmann and documents that were unquestionably authentic to compare with them.⁹

7. Richard E. Turley Jr., *In the Hands of the Lord: The Life of Dallin H. Oaks* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021), 198–99; Richard E. Turley Jr., “How I Came to Write *In the Hands of the Lord: The Life of Dallin H. Oaks*,” March 4, 2021, <https://www.ldsliving.com/Richard-E-Turley-Jr-How-I-came-to-write-In-the-Hands-of-the-Lord-The-Life-of-Dallin-H-Oaks/s/93993>.

8. Actually, he asked me to be the assistant managing director, a title used at the time that really made no sense since there was no managing director. The assistant managing director title was the vestige of an earlier Church titling system in which the General Authority department heads were called managing directors and the staff heads were called assistant managing directors. Sometime before I was asked to serve as staff head, the General Authority title had been changed to executive director. Eventually, my title, like those of all other staff heads of departments with General Authority leaders in the Church, was changed to managing director without a change in responsibilities.

9. Turley, *Victims*, 236–37.

The bombings had created fear in the Church history community and taken a toll on staff morale. At the time, some of the staff defended Hofmann vigorously to their colleagues, saying he couldn't possibly be a bomber and a murderer. And yet what investigators were quietly telling us about their investigation seemed to point to him as the chief suspect.

On February 4, 1986, Salt Lake City police informed the head of Church security that Hofmann had been arrested and charged with twenty-nine criminal counts that included capital murder, bombing, and theft by deception.¹⁰ The charges only increased the volume in the argument between Hofmann's detractors and defenders in the historical community. The preliminary hearing that followed these charges walked the public through the evidence uncovered by investigators and created high drama, culminating in Hofmann's pleading guilty in January 1987. The sentencing judge recommended to the board of pardons that the murderous forger spend the rest of his life in prison.¹¹

During the period between Hofmann's bombs in 1985 and the year 1988, I watched as books, journal articles, newspaper stories, and broadcast media features recounted the story of Mark Hofmann and his impact on the Church. Though I had never met Hofmann and did not work for the Church at the time he was polluting its historical collections with his forgeries, I knew there was an inside story of the case that had never been told.

As a staff member at Church headquarters, I often found myself in offices of senior Church leaders who wanted to discuss history and current events. One day, as I was sitting in the office of Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, we were discussing the Hofmann case, and I proposed writing a book about it. He seemed amenable to the idea, and a short time later, I found myself in another high-level conversation. This one was initiated by Elders Boyd K. Packer and David B. Haight of the Twelve, and they also expressed their feelings that a book should be written on the topic. At the time, I assumed they were responding to what I had said to Elder Maxwell. Later, I learned they came up with the idea independently.

With help from staff (especially Glenn N. Rowe, one of the senior employees in the Church Historical Department) and full cooperation from Church leaders, who opened their personal and work records to

10. Turley, *Victims*, 240.

11. Turley, *Victims*, 240–313.

me, I worked four grueling years to finish the book *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case*, which was published by the University of Illinois Press in 1992 and became a regional best-seller. While I was writing the book, Hofmann sent me identical messages through two different sources expressing a willingness to assist me with the work. To both messages, I gave the same response: Please put your offer in writing. I knew Hofmann was a pathological liar who liked to manipulate people, and I wanted to document fully whatever he told me. He never responded.

I also asked his attorney, Ron Yengich, for permission to interview his client, but he would not let me. That disappointed me, but I would probably have responded similarly had I been in his shoes as a defense attorney. Hofmann's only chance to get out of prison would be for the parole board to consider his case sometime in the future, and Yengich may not have wanted his client to incriminate himself further.

Although other books had been published on the topic before *Victims*, my book did two things others did not. First, it followed a diachronic approach. As readers worked their way through the narrative, the book provided them in each chapter with only the facts people had at the time. This way of unfolding the whole story made a huge difference in historical interpretation because hindsight skews our understanding of the past, making it difficult to put ourselves in the mindset of characters we are studying.

Other books on the case began with the Hofmann bombings, which made readers suspicious from the beginning of those books and gave them a point of view lacking at the time key events occurred. Such a viewpoint can make people wrongly conclude that if they had been present on the scene at the time, they would immediately have detected Hofmann's documents as forgeries and would not have been deceived. Though this is a psychologically comforting perception, research suggests it does not reflect reality.

In writing about another famous Utah crime, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, I delved deeply into the history of violence and learned how much people rely on the false notion that they can detect criminals and their schemes ahead of time.¹² News stories sometimes feature mug

12. Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Richard E. Turley Jr. and Ronald W. Walker, eds., *Mountain Meadows Massacre: The*

shots of recently arrested criminals who have tussled with police, been on drugs, or done other things that leave them with mussed-up hair, crazed looks, bruises, or other signs people may associate with criminals. But the reality is that many successful criminals appear perfectly normal, even nondescript. Ted Bundy succeeded in perpetrating rape and murder because he was an educated, good-looking man who differed from the television stereotype of a serial sex offender. Mark Hofmann succeeded by projecting the aura of a nerdy, even goofy, guy who didn't know a lot about history but chased down leads well and enjoyed a bit of luck.

In the wake of the recent miniseries, I have been amused at how often people with twenty-twenty hindsight imply they would not have been deceived by Hofmann's exploits had they lived at the time. What made Hofmann successful was not just skilled forgeries. Rather, it was his clever façade of being a bumbling nerd. Some of his forgeries were world-class, others rather amateurish, and from time to time, historians and others pointed out anachronisms or other problems with documents he tried to peddle. Hofmann responded by acting stupid, thanking the person who pointed out the problem, and saying he would have to go back to his seller and get his money back.

He deceived experts by not appearing to be an expert himself.

A second difference between *Victims* and other books on the case was its inclusion of endnotes to guide readers to the sources of the story. The idea that journalists create the first rough draft of history goes back many decades.¹³ By creating the first draft, journalists do their readers and history generally a great service. But history-writing must not end there. Journalists sometimes repeat rumor and speculation that, unchallenged, harden into supposed facts. It is up to historians to sift true news from fake, fact from fiction, truth from error, rumor from reality.

Andrew Jenson and David H. Morris Collections (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009); Richard E. Turley Jr., Janiece L. Johnson, and LaJean Purcell Carruth, *Mountain Meadows Massacre Collected Legal Papers*, vol. 1, *Initial Investigations and Indictments* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017); Richard E. Turley Jr., Janiece L. Johnson, and LaJean Purcell Carruth, *Mountain Meadows Massacre Collected Legal Papers*, vol. 2, *Selected Trial Records and Aftermath* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

13. Jack Shafer, "Who Said It First? Journalism Is the 'First Rough Draft of History,'" *Slate*, August 30, 2010, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2010/08/on-the-trail-of-the-question-who-first-said-or-wrote-that-journalism-is-the-first-rough-draft-of-history.html>.

Though the mere appearance of footnotes and endnotes in a work scares away some readers, it attracts others and in the long run provides the key to sorting solid evidence from speculative interpretation.

Because I wrote a book on the Mark Hofmann case, I have been interviewed many times over the last three and a half decades for television programs that feature his crimes. Some of these have been news programs. Others have been true-crime productions, a highly popular genre for today's television viewers. These programs have varied in quality. The worst have been breathless B-grade dramas that take an already fascinating case and soup it up with needless and even misleading fictional elements. One of the best programs in which I participated was a serious documentary produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Having been a frequent interview subject for programs about the Hofmann case and other historical subjects, I was not surprised when I was approached by Jared Hess, Tyler Measom, and one of their colleagues on March 16, 2018, about their desire to create a miniseries on the Mark Hofmann case. We chatted for some time, and I agreed to assist them. In harmony with my long-time operating principle of being transparent to those with whom I worked, I let our staff and senior Church leaders know about the request and my desire to cooperate.

Jared Hess, who is well known in Latter-day Saint circles for his comedy films *Napoleon Dynamite* and *Nacho Libre*, is a cousin of mine. His great-grandfather Lawrence Edward Turley is a half-brother of my grandfather Edward Vernon Turley. The brothers were born to different wives of our polygamous ancestor Edward Franklin Turley in Colonia Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. I did not recall meeting Jared before he came to my office in 2018, but I knew Lawrence quite well, and he had even given me some family treasures when I showed interest in our Turley family organization while I was in my twenties.

Tyler Measom is likewise an experienced filmmaker, with titles like *An Honest Liar* and *Sons of Perdition* to his credit. When he, Jared, and their colleague approached me in my office, I was pleased that experienced filmmakers with an understanding of Latter-day Saint culture had decided to take on the complicated story of Mark Hofmann and his crimes. To understand the Hofmann case clearly requires comprehending details that could only be presented in a multipart film of the type they intended to produce.

Between that first meeting and the debut of the miniseries on March 3, 2021, my three visitors and I communicated many times, especially Jared and I. We hit it off well, and I could tell they were asking the right kinds of questions and speaking to as many key figures in the case as they reasonably could. As one with an obsession for digging deeply into original historical sources, I resonated with their approach of seeking genuine news footage from the 1980s about the Hofmann case.

When it came time for filming, I was happy to show up at the Masonic temple on South Temple in Salt Lake City, the filmmakers' chosen venue for doing many of the interviews for the miniseries. The Masonic temple offered large spaces that could be rented inexpensively and would provide interesting backgrounds for interviews. Having done many similar interviews in the past, I realized that the half day I dedicated to being interviewed might dissolve into a single sound bite in the final product. Such is the nature of filmmaking: weeks of filming have to condense into a size digestible by the viewing audience.

Originally, Jared and Tyler wanted to create a six-part miniseries that would explore some of the arcane details of the fascinating case for the BBC America audience to which they initially aimed it. When Netflix acquired the rights to their work, however, editors with the company who had vast experience in reaching the general public decided to simplify and rename the miniseries. The final result seems to have validated their approach. *Murder among the Mormons* reached millions of viewers.

If their editing and simplification had a downside, it is that the editors trimmed out some of the details that would appeal to those with greater-than-average interest in the topic, particularly those who considered themselves part of the Latter-day Saint historical community. Cutting the miniseries in half reduced some of the nuance and texture that might otherwise have been achieved.

Having been told the miniseries would debut on Netflix on March 3, 2021, I awoke in the wee hours of that morning with my wife and binge-watched all three episodes. Later, my youngest daughter hosted a watch party at her home, and we watched the entire miniseries again with her family.

Taken as a whole, I found the production to be a balanced mix of history and storytelling. Many people offered their opinions about the miniseries to me over succeeding weeks, pointing out what they liked and disliked about it. Some Latter-day Saints were bothered by

implications in one episode that the Church was behind the bombings and the assertion by someone from law enforcement that the Church had impeded the investigation.

I offered these viewers some thoughts for their consideration. The assertion that the Church was behind the bombings was, of course, laughable. But in October 1985—the period the filmmakers were trying to reflect in the miniseries—people were speculating wildly about the bombings and their causes, and the crazy idea that a Church agent planted the bombs was one of the conspiratorial stories that arose and was subsequently shot down.

The notion that Church officials impeded the investigation reflected a difference in point of view between some law enforcement officials and Church representatives. Having been on the scene in the Church Historical Department at the time in question, I knew the Church and its leaders had gone to great lengths to assist the investigation. At the same time, we were sensitive to the idea that many people thought Mark Hofmann was innocent, and we didn't want precipitous actions on the Church's part to give further impetus to another crazy theory that was circulating at the time: that the documents were real and that the Church was railroading Hofmann because Church leaders didn't like their contents.

To avoid giving steam to this baseless rumor, we followed advice from legal counsel and asked for subpoenas or other written orders before providing information and documents that investigators requested. Many in the law enforcement community seemed to understand why we adopted that approach and didn't seem bothered. Others interpreted the approach as not being cooperative. But the truth was we wanted to help law enforcement solve the crimes. Particularly in the Church Historical Department that I headed, the longer the investigation continued without resolution, the more pressure our staff felt and the more morale plummeted. The sooner we could bring a resolution to the case, the sooner we could refocus the department away from the bombings and toward helping researchers.

After the case was resolved through plea bargain, something that took place without our knowledge, I realized that one piece of information we had passed along had apparently not made it to investigators. In March 1986, as I explain in *Victims*, we had become aware that some journals of William E. McLellin had been purchased by the Church in the early twentieth century. When we made this discovery, we passed

the information up the line with the intention that it go to investigators. To me, this seemed to be a material fact since Hofmann had claimed to be selling a McLellin Collection containing these journals. The discovery of these journals meant Hofmann didn't have them as he claimed and added to the growing body of evidence that he was a fraud.

Why this information never made it to investigators is not clear to me since everyone in my reporting line wanted investigators to have it, including Elder Dallin H. Oaks, who was then one of our two advisors from the Quorum of the Twelve. But given the environment at the time, the information may simply have been lost in the flurry of the moment. Those of us who lived through those days know how hectic they were and how much was coming at us at the time.

But I do know this. After the plea bargain and my mutual agreement with Church leaders that I would write a book on the topic, I felt strongly that this fact needed to be revealed, and they agreed with me. When the book came out, my revelations about the McLellin journals created a media sensation.

To respond to media interest, we called a press conference in the east wing of the Church Office Building where the Church Historical Department was housed at the time. Media representatives flowed in with their video and still cameras, sound recorders, and notebooks. We laid out McLellin's journals on a table in the front of the conference room, and after describing the discovery to reporters, I invited any and all to come forward, don white gloves provided for the occasion, and read the original journals themselves.

In general, the response from busy reporters was to ask that I summarize the journals' contents, which I was happy to do. Instead of taking time to look through the journals, many looked at their watches, explained apologetically that they had deadlines to meet, and left. I empathized with them. Journalism is driven by deadlines, and they needed to move on to the next story, whatever it happened to be that day.

Because of public interest in the journals, however, we contacted two scholars—Jan Shipps, a renowned scholar of the Church who is dedicated to her own Methodist faith, and John W. Welch, at the time a professor of law at the J. Reuben Clark Law School and then editor in chief of *BYU Studies*—who agreed to partner in publishing the journals to a much wider audience than would likely come to see them in the Church Historical Department in that day before widespread internet access. In 1994, Dr. Shipps and Professor Welch published *The Journals*

of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836, as a joint imprint of BYU Studies and the University of Illinois Press.

Even after all these efforts to make the journals available, however, I read speculation on the part of some that I had personally delayed making these journals public until some statute of limitations had expired that supposedly protected me and others from criminal prosecution for obstructing the Hofmann investigation. I smiled at this conspiracy theory, knowing first that I had not intended to obstruct anything and second that whoever started the theory knew little about the law and less about how statutes of limitations operate—or they would not have ventured such a claim.

But such was the atmosphere in those days.

Another comment I received from people about *Murder among the Mormons* related to a statement I made in the film when asked about Church leaders not detecting Hofmann's frauds in advance of the bombings. I gave a theological or doctrinal answer to the question that the filmmakers and editors included in the finished production. Essentially, I pointed out that while God can inform leaders that people are attempting to deceive them, he rarely does so.

That was the point of two epigraphs I included on the pages that divided *Victims* into two parts when I wrote it. Along with the heading "Part One," which prefaced the story of what happened before the bombings, I quoted part of Doctrine and Covenants 10:37: "You cannot always tell the wicked from the righteous." Even before the Church was organized, the Lord made this point to Joseph Smith. Thus, it should not be surprising that criminals or other sinners in the exercise of their agency should try to deceive Church leaders and succeed for a time.

Since publishing the book, I have heard people boast that they detected Hofmann's frauds before the bombings. Certainly, Church leaders had concerns as well. Besides President Hinckley's public expression of doubt about the Salamander Letter before the bombings, others inside the Church administrative structure expressed doubts too. As *Victims* points out, for example, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who died before the bombings, went to great lengths to prepare a memo casting doubt on the Joseph Smith III Blessing.¹⁴ And there were others, including document collector Brent Ashworth and professional Church critic Jerald Tanner, who joined in the chorus of calling the Salamander

14. Turley, *Victims*, 53–55.

Letter a fake. But I know of no one, inside or outside of the Church, who correctly labeled all of Hofmann's forgeries as such before the bombings.

When I wrote *Victims*, I included another epigraph under "Part Two." This one I extracted from Doctrine and Covenants 10:6: "The man in whom you have trusted has sought to destroy you." Again, this is the voice of the Lord telling Joseph Smith in 1828 or 1829 that a Church leader can be deceived by someone. That a Church leader can be the victim of a crime should not surprise anyone. Church leaders have been kidnapped, assaulted, battered, and murdered. Joseph Smith was killed by vigilantes. The Savior was crucified. People who feel bothered that Church leaders can be deceived suffer from false assumptions.

"Ministers of the gospel function best in an atmosphere of trust and love," then Elder Dallin H. Oaks observed after the case was solved. "In that kind of atmosphere, they fail to detect a few deceivers, but that is the price they pay to increase their effectiveness in counseling, comforting, and blessing the hundreds of honest and sincere people they see. It is better for a Church leader to be occasionally disappointed than to be constantly suspicious."¹⁵

The two epigraphs included in *Victims* both come from a section of the Doctrine and Covenants dealing with the loss of the Book of Lehi, often called "the 116 pages," which were in the handwriting of Martin Harris. As early as Hofmann's full-time mission to England, he told people his goal was to find these pages. Some of Hofmann's forgeries aimed to lay a foundation for forging this Holy Grail of Latter-day Saint manuscripts. The Salamander Letter and other Hofmann forgeries provided the only substantial samples of Martin Harris's handwriting beyond a few signatures.

As I wrote at the end of *Victims*, "In Joseph Smith's revelation about the lost 116 pages, those who planned to alter the manuscript were said to have 'laid a cunning plan, thinking to destroy the work of God.' The revelation, however, foretold that their fate would be 'to catch themselves in their own snare.' Believers and unbelievers alike could sense both justice and irony in the fact that Hofmann's own bomb curtailed his criminal career."¹⁶

As co-director Jared Hess said of *Murder among the Mormons*, "In the end, the good guys win and the bad man goes to jail, with the

15. Turley, *Victims*, 344.

16. Turley, *Victims*, 345.

exception of the heartbreaking aspect of the amazing people in our community who were innocent and lost their lives due to the calloused acts of this horrible person.”¹⁷ When the case ended, we came to understand that Mark Hofmann was a heartless killer who for selfish purposes took the lives of two innocent people and damaged the lives of many others, including especially the family members of the murder victims. Hofmann’s crimes had many victims, and his crimes continue to affect people today who made life-changing decisions based on documents that in the final analysis turned out to be forgeries.

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17. Tad Walch, “Jared Hess Explains His Turn to True Crime for Netflix Series ‘Murder among the Mormons,’” *Deseret News*, February 23, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2021/2/23/22296381/murder-among-the-mormons-netflix-director-jared-hess-explains-turn-to-true-crime-mark-hofmann>.

Murder among the Mormons

Reflections on the Docuseries— and on Its Historical and Theological Implications

J. B. Haws

You know that you've hit upon something when a docuseries you have produced soars to number two on Netflix's weekly list of most-watched shows. That is the place where Jared Hess and Tyler Measom found themselves with their film *Murder among the Mormons* in mid-March 2021.¹ Their retelling of the tragic deaths of Steven Christensen and Kathleen Sheets at the hands of Mark Hofmann—and the police investigation that exposed Hofmann as a forger and murderer—made for compelling television, and millions of Netflix customers agreed.

With that kind of viewership—and with this sort of subject matter—it likely surprised no one to see reactions and reviews and commentary about the docuseries proliferate across the internet. The Mark Hofmann saga was one of incredible complexity and controversy, and the reviews and reactions to Hess and Measom's account of that saga have reflected complexity and controversy, too.²

1. See, for example, Renee Hansen, "5 Best Shows on Netflix This Weekend: *Murder among the Mormons* and More," March 6, 2021, <https://netflixlife.com/2021/03/06/shows-on-netflix-murder-among-the-mormons/>.

2. For a sampling of reactions, see Samuel Benson, "What Latter-day Saint History Experts Thought of 'Murder among the Mormons,'" *Deseret News*, March 9, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/opinion/2021/3/9/22315949/murder-among-the-mormons-netflix-review-reaction-mark-hofmann-latter-day-saint-history-scholars>; Jana Riess, "Netflix Docuseries 'Murder among the Mormons' Is TV Worth Watching," Religion News Service, March 4, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/03/04/netflix-docuseries-murder-among-the-mormons-is-tv-worth-watching/>; Daryl Austin, "Netflix's 'Murder among the

Admittedly, with that kind of viewership and that level of reaction, one more review essay like this can feel excessive and unnecessary—I highly doubt that the docuseries escaped the notice of any reader of *BYU Studies Quarterly*. But perhaps it is a tribute to the filmmakers that I could not help myself. It is hard *not* to keep thinking about the film after watching the docuseries and reading reactions to it. I’ve been mulling over three broad questions, while reminding myself that one film, even spread over several episodes, cannot do everything: What did the docuseries do remarkably well? What might the documentary have done that it left undone? And why should we even keep talking about this story and its historical and theological implications?

1. What did the docuseries do remarkably well?

The voices of victims.

My initial dissatisfaction with the docuseries came from the directors’ choice not to reveal from the outset that Hofmann was a forger. Nothing in the trailer or Netflix teaser hinted at that, nor did anything in the first episode.³ Like many others, I worried that if viewers did not make it to the second episode, this choice could perpetuate the same kind of confusion and misperceptions that reigned in 1985 and 1986 and 1987 (more on that in the next section).

But then I rethought that—and rewatched the series.

What strikes me now is that this storytelling choice could be the series’ greatest contribution: in *Murder among the Mormons*, viewers would learn things in the same order that victims originally learned them. So, while this choice was problematic from one perspective, it was powerful from another. The power comes from feeling something of the raw experience of Mark Hofmann’s victims as we move along the timeline with them.

Mormons’ Uses the Same Stereotypes about Our Faith as the Villain,” NBCnews.com, March 10, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/netflix-s-murder-among-mormons-uses-same-stereotypes-about-our-ncna1260447>; Aja Romano, “Bombs, Grift, True Crime: Netflix’s Murder among the Mormons Almost Had It All,” *Vox*, March 5, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/culture/22315736/netflix-murder-among-the-mormons-review-mark-hofmann-shannon-flynn>; Meg Walter, “I’m Not So Bullish on ‘Murder among the Mormons’ Any more,” *Deseret News*, April 5, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/opinion/2021/4/5/22357001/not-so-bullish-on-murder-among-the-mormons-mark-hofmann-lds-church>.

3. I’m grateful to Clint Weston for pointing out to me just how far into the series that revelation came.

Thus, we watch Mark Hofmann and his wife, Dorie, discover together Hofmann's first big find—the Anthon transcript. We hear his associates describe his rising fame in the document world. We feel the growing discomfort that surrounded some documents that introduced strange new elements into the origin story of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We sense that some people accused the Church of suppressing evidence that would harm the Church's image—and that the soon-to-be-acquired "McLellin Collection" would deal some very painful blows to the Church in just that direction.

With all of that in the air, we watch news footage of the events that unfold when two people, Steve Christensen and Kathleen Sheets, are murdered by package bombs on the same morning in October 1985. Reporters and police detectives scramble to piece together connections based on troubled financial partnerships between Sheets's husband and Christensen—but then historical documents are always lurking in the background because Steve Christensen had purchased the infamous "Salamander Letter." Additional reports of bomb threats throughout the day keep Salt Lake City in the grip of a tense panic.

And then, the next day, Mark Hofmann himself is almost killed in a third bombing. A distraught Brent Metcalfe rushes to the scene and is told by police that his own life might be threatened too. Curt Bench slams his fist against his steering wheel when he hears the news about the third bomb and cries out in frustration because he had warned Mark Hofmann to be careful. As the first of the series' three episodes closes, we hear the speculation that these bombs seem like the retaliatory acts of a religious fanatic who has gone to desperate lengths to keep hidden the historical secrets of his or her faith—and all of this as the episode closes with scenes of Latter-day Saint congregations singing, "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet." The implications seem obvious: Is there something sinister—and deadly so—underneath Latter-day Saint loyalty? How far would that loyalty take someone (or someones) in defense of their church?

The power of this approach in the film is that it can evoke in viewers some of the emotions that key figures must have felt in that terrible fall of 1985: fear, confusion, suspicion, distress. We see why everyone was a suspect and no leads were ruled out. And this makes it all the more understandable that the naming of Mark Hofmann as the suspect in this case seemed initially outrageous. Virtually no one at the time saw that coming.

Of course, many viewers did see that coming, but perhaps fewer than we might think (more on that later). It is likely that a fair number

of viewers knew enough of the story to know its outcome—and it is likely that others did a quick Google search when they saw the trailer. But the filmmakers’ decision to tell the story the way that they did—by not hinting at all in the first episode or in the trailer or in the teasers for the docuseries that Mark Hofmann was a forger—likely gave some viewers for whom this was a first introduction to this story a window into the mindset of all of those who were interviewed in the series: they truly had no idea this was coming. And even for viewers who did know beforehand the contours of the story, this was a reminder that no one in the 1980s knew the end from the beginning.

That matters here because of the way this series lets viewers glimpse the emotional journey that so many people must have traveled at the time. There is Shannon Flynn’s haunting description of Hofmann’s father hearing his son admit guilt, or the eerie foreshadowing of home video footage of Dorie Hofmann watching her husband watch a news broadcast about his very case, or Brent Metcalfe’s emotional description of wishing he had never been born, so deep was his anguish that he had been the one to introduce Steve Christensen to Mark Hofmann. These are unforgettable moments in the film. This docuseries puts the attention squarely on the depth of human pain—something easier said than done in the retelling of history, as narratives can get further and further away from people—and in the end, it feels like this is where the attention rightly should be. For that reason, *Murder among the Mormons* makes a powerful contribution to the record. So many people were deceived, betrayed, used. The interviews, the honesty, the emotion, the time to reflect—all of that has been combined in this series to foreground the human impact of the story. The filmmakers never forget that this is a human story.

2. What might the documentary have done that it left undone? Elusive clarity.

But this is also an institutional story; this is the “Mormons” half of the series’ title. How does The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints fare in the docuseries? It seems a safe bet to venture a guess that many—even most—Latter-day Saints had that very question floating in their minds as they hit the play button on Netflix. Such a question feels almost reflexive for Latter-day Saints. There is no way around it: Latter-day Saints pay attention to the public’s perception of the Church, for so

many historical and cultural reasons.⁴ That is likely true, to some degree, of every group that has felt itself to be a minority population in a majority culture—especially a minority group that feels that it has a message to share. The *Boston Globe*'s Michael Paulson put a generous spin on this when he told a crowd in 2009 at Utah Valley University that “no other faith group is as quick to respond to newspaper coverage as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”; at least, Paulson said, “Mormons are nicer when dealing with reporters,” since “no one in public affairs for the church has sworn at me, which is a treat, but I also can't recall anyone who has hung up on me.”⁵

All of this is to say that it is hard to resist the gravitational pull to focus a review of the film on the question of how *Murder among the Mormons* depicts the Church and its members. Reactions on this score have been mixed, with some Latter-day Saints expressing gratitude that it was not worse and some expressing dismay that it was not better.⁶ On the one hand, the Church's storyline ultimately proves only to be a tangential one in this series, since the directors keep their focus on the experiences and loss and pain of those whom Mark Hofmann betrayed—and on the investigators who solve the crime. The directors said they had “no axe to grind” about the Church in this story.⁷ On the

4. For a recent—and perceptively personal—consideration of the contested place of Latter-day Saints in American public perception, see McKay Coppins, “The Most American Religion,” *The Atlantic*, December 16, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/01/the-most-american-religion/617263/>.

5. See Paulson's account at Michael Paulson, “Reflecting on Mormonism and the Media,” *Boston Globe*, April 4, 2009, http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles_of_faith/mormonism/. Richard and Joan Ostling put it more bluntly: “Mormons of every stripe are obsessive about their image.” Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999), xx.

6. For example, Riess, in “Netflix Docuseries Is TV Worth Watching,” says, “I was largely impressed with the religious sensitivity they brought to the story. There is no Mormon-bashing here, no axe to grind; mostly, they want to understand how these murders occurred and how so many people could have been duped by the killer for so long.” In contrast, Austin, in “Netflix's ‘Murder among the Mormons’ Uses Same Stereotypes,” says, “Dark aspersions, innuendos and accusations against the church and its leaders are allowed to pile up. . . . Worse, the first two parts of the three-part series leave viewers believing that church leaders may even be behind a plot to commit the very murders of which Hoffman [sic] was convicted.”

7. See Lauren Kranc, “The *Murder among the Mormons* Directors Are Prepared for the Church of Latter-day Saints' Response,” *Esquire*, March 3, 2021, <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a35683846/murder-among-the-mormons-directors-interview-lds-church-response/>.

other hand, viewers have a point when they complain that the series played into—sometimes passively, sometimes actively—the perpetuation of some Latter-day Saint stereotypes (think here of Ken Sanders’s joke early in the film about setting one’s clock back ten years upon landing at the Salt Lake airport—and, almost right on cue, the docuseries uses excerpts from Church films from the 1970s that were meant to stand in for the Church of the 1980s).

A review like this could easily fall into the trap of reviewing the film that I *wish* had been made rather than the film that actually *was* made. It is worth repeating that it is apparent that Jared Hess and Tyler Measom did not intend to tell a story with the Church at the center. The choice to keep the lens on the victims and their experiences is worthwhile in and of itself—and makes for riveting moments—even if that choice doesn’t satisfy some Latter-day Saint reviewers who are worried (and rightfully so, in some cases) about persistent misperceptions.

Yet it is not only Latter-day Saint reviewers who have wished for more clarity about the Church’s part in the Hofmann drama. A *Vox* review by Aja Romano is telling: “*Murder among the Mormons* flits away from a deeper look at the Mormon church, denying us the context to really understand the relationship between the church and the forger in its midst. What does it matter that the church might have been buying documents to prevent them from wider circulation? *Was* the church buying documents? . . . The lack of attention to these questions makes *Murder among the Mormons* seem thin in all the places where it should be richest as a narrative.”⁸

Could the filmmakers have done both—that is, could they have done more to clear the historical air while keeping their focus where they wanted it to stay? I say yes, and that they could have done this even with a few simple additions that would not have changed the overall narrative direction or flow of the film that they had in mind. Inserting an explanatory note in a few key places, for example, or coming back to an interviewee to offer a “we later learned what had really happened” type perspective about the Church’s involvement, or including a couple of end titles to tie up loose threads in the story—moves like these could have gone a long way. Certainly, reviewers like Romano are not saying that the Church needed to be defended, just that the full story needed to be told.

8. Romano, “Bombs, Grift, True Crime,” emphasis in the original.

Here are two examples of what I mean. One deals with chronology, and one with context.

First, I wish the filmmakers would have done more to highlight the fact that Mark Hofmann's plea deal and confession came a full fifteen months after the bombings.

While the filmmakers did put the date of the plea-deal announcement on the screen (January 23, 1987), I think more could have been done to emphasize the time gap. A more prominent explanatory intertitle card would have worked well here. It could be too easy for viewers who aren't paying careful attention to miss that detail in the chronology or to lose track of the dates. The crucial point here is that because Mark Hofmann's confession and plea deal came more than a year after the bombings, a lot of people likely missed the full story at the time. As *Murder among the Mormons* makes very clear, media attention to the murders was intense and ever present. (The inclusion of so much time-period news footage is one of the strengths of this documentary.) But media attention to the plea deal—to the rest of the story—was much less prominent. And it was disconnected, such that it would be hard to fault people who remembered the terrible murders in Salt Lake City but never remembered (or even realized) that one of the victims was actually the perpetrator—and that the perpetrator was also a master forger.

Most reporters who rushed to Salt Lake City in October 1985 were a lot like Salt Lake City prosecuting attorney Gerry D'Elia, who admits in the film that before the bombings he was completely unfamiliar with Mormonism. He said that he had originally come to Utah for the skiing.

People like Jan Shipps and Peggy Fletcher Stack were repeatedly called upon in 1985 to give crash courses in Latter-day Saint history and theology to the crime reporters sent in from all major news agencies.⁹ In those first few days of confusion and fear, headlines and television news broadcasts had little more to go on than to link murder and attempted murder with those who bought and sold historical documents that cast an unflattering light on the powerful and wealthy—and seemingly secretive—Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Is it any wonder that in the course of such reporting the Church took on a dangerous hue—and is it any wonder that many then, and now, might think that such a hue was deserved?

9. See Jan Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 105.

That impression does come across in the docuseries. There are insinuations that reflected the spirit of the times—that the Church was hindering the investigation, that President Gordon B. Hinckley was being less than forthcoming about his meetings with Hofmann, that the Church did not want to face the facts that the documents presented. But today, those insinuations in the film feel underexplored or ill-timed. The filmmakers do not hammer on this, though. It all feels true to the doubt and suspicion that swirled around Salt Lake City in the mid-1980s.

But what the docuseries missed seems reminiscent of what happened in real life. The details and nuance are hard to get at; the insinuations are left hanging in the air; the Church's part in all of this is never quite resolved. The archived news footage of the plea-deal announcement that the docuseries does include is of Tom Brokaw on NBC, and in the clip, Brokaw announces Hofmann's confession—and then states that Hofmann confessed to forging *two* documents related to the founding of the Church. This understatement is part of the problem. Viewers of the docuseries might miss the fact that Hofmann actually dealt *dozens* of forged documents to the Church (and to many others). Losing track of that sense of scope can make a big difference because many (maybe most) viewers of this docuseries are learning for the first time about Mark Hofmann.

If my limited experience is indicative of larger realities, my guess is that even many Latter-day Saints (especially young Latter-day Saints), pre-Netflix documentary, did not know Mark Hofmann's name or story. Probably fewer than 20 percent of my students in Church history classes at Brigham Young University over the past several years have indicated that they have heard of Hofmann. All of that has now changed with this docuseries. It has introduced a new generation to this tragic story.

But the significance of that is more than just awareness of this case. In a number of ways, I think Mark Hofmann's forgeries and murders ran together with several other 1980s happenings—the *God Makers* film, for example, or the wave of violence in several fundamentalist polygamist families—to cast a shadow on the public image of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members that stretched all the way through Mitt Romney's campaign—even if two decades later people were far enough removed from the specific episodes to not even necessarily know what was causing the shadow. The incidental concurrence of *The God Makers* and the Hofmann saga mattered, in a mutually reinforcing way. *God Makers* debuted in December 1982 and, over the next several years, played to thousands of viewers a month. The thrust

of *God Makers* was that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was a cult that deceived the outside world *and* its own members by hiding dark secrets behind a family-friendly façade. Mark Hofmann and his crimes seemed to be “exhibit A” in confirming the worst assertions of *The God Makers*. The impression that something sinister was going on, or that the Church responded to reputational threats with deadly seriousness, reverberated long and loudly in the public’s mind, even if people did not know the specifics of these Hofmann-related events.¹⁰

Plus, these reputational blows against the Church clearly figured into Mark Hofmann’s planning. One short story that I wish the docu-series would have included to highlight that very point is a revealing incident with the *Los Angeles Times*. The *Times* ran an extensive two-part feature about the Mark Hofmann saga in spring 1987 (post-plea deal) that persisted with a claim from an unnamed informant that the Church was hiding an Oliver Cowdery history that would have provided a corroborating (and damaging) witness of the Salamander Letter’s assertions. The *LA Times* stated that their informant had seen this Oliver Cowdery history, even though the Church had countered that a thorough search of its archives had turned up no such Cowdery history. Finally, four months later—in August 1987—in a one-paragraph retraction that appeared on page 29 of the newspaper, the *LA Times* admitted that the unnamed informant was none other than Mark Hofmann. The *LA Times* expressed regret that the newspaper’s staff, like so “many others who had dealings with Hofmann,” had been “seriously misled.” “In retrospect,” the retraction read, “it’s clear we erred in publishing it without verifying Hofmann’s story with another source.”¹¹ But it was

10. This is the point (about the impact of the *God Makers* film and the Mark Hofmann episode) that I aim at in chapters five and six of *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

11. “Tried to Kill Self, Mormon Artifacts Dealer Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 1, 1987, 29. For more on these *Los Angeles Times* stories, see Richard E. Turley Jr., *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 309; Haws, *Mormon Image in the American Mind*, 145–46. See also Elder Dallin H. Oaks’s strong criticism of several prominent news organizations along these lines in “Recent Events Involving Church History and Forged Documents,” *Ensign* 17, no. 10 (October 1987): 63: “In a circumstance where The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could not say much without interfering with the pending criminal investigation and prosecution, the Church and its leaders have been easy marks for assertions and innuendo ranging from charges of complicity in murder to repeated recitals that the Church routinely acquires and suppresses Church history documents in order to deceive its members and the public.”

this kind of slow and soft corrective statement that allowed mischaracterizations of the Church's part in all of this to persist in people's minds. Having an interviewee retell this story in the docuseries would have been an easy addition that could have accomplished multiple things: it could have given insight into the depth of detail in Mark Hofmann's plotting, and it could have offered insight as to why suspicion of the Church often became overblown. The docuseries could have made some headway in this direction by showing just how intentional—and entangled—Mark Hofmann's assaults on the Church were and how long it was before Hofmann's admissions were made public.

*Second, I wish the docuseries would have stated that Mark Hofmann's post-plea deal interviews with investigators ended abruptly and that some investigators concluded that Hofmann continued to deceive and manipulate investigators even in those interviews.*¹²

In other words, I don't think we should readily trust Hofmann's account of things. We should not let him control the narrative, even as a voice from the past. In the third episode of the docuseries, we hear Mark Hofmann tell interviewers that he knew he could succeed because "people tend to ignore anything that does not fit within their beliefs. They reject the facts because it means giving up their beliefs, for which they have sacrificed so much." In an earlier excerpt, he expresses mild surprise that so many people were fooled by his forgeries. There is no question that the dramatic tension of the docuseries is enhanced by weaving Mark Hofmann's own voice into the narrative. But I worry that the docuseries did not push back on his version of events. In this case, I think both of Hofmann's statements are worth disputing because I think Hofmann's view is a distorted one—and one that does not do justice to the victims.

Near the end of that third and final episode of the series, Shannon Flynn says something that, in light of these same Hofmann statements from earlier in the episode, could leave the audience with a skewed view. "I should have suspected," Flynn muses. "We all should have suspected. We didn't. *People don't want to know.*" Flynn's statement could be read in at least two ways, and those two possible readings offer a key distinction, I think, for understanding the whole story.

12. An August 1987 *Salt Lake Tribune* article put it this way: "No one is certain Hofmann is telling the truth in these transcripts." Quoted in Turley, *Victims*, 334. See Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts, *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 509–11.

On the one hand, Flynn could be saying, “We all should have suspected that Mark Hofmann, the *individual*, was suspicious or untrustworthy,” and “People didn’t want to know what kind of *person* he really was.” Flynn’s self-indictment here is a poignant moment in the film, but I don’t think others will be (or should be) quick to pile on. Thinking of other key moments depicted in the series, one can imagine the retrospective recriminations that Flynn might have felt when he remembered what he had seen of Hofmann’s drinking binge in New York City, or that Brent Metcalfe might have felt when he remembered an interaction at Hofmann’s home in which Hofmann had admitted his atheism. After the fact, in hindsight, it is true—there *were* at least a few telltale signs of a double life on the part of Mark Hofmann. In that sense, it is understandable why Flynn would say, “We all should have suspected.” An honest observer might say, “Yes, you had grounds to be suspicious that Hofmann did not always act with integrity. Perhaps you did not want to admit that to yourself, and that’s what you mean when you say you didn’t *want* to know.”

But still, even with that said, it is hard to fault these individuals for “not wanting to know,” as Flynn put it. The series shows just how utterly *unsuspicious* Mark Hofmann the person was to everyone who knew him. The repeated insistence of Hofmann’s innocence on the part of his neighbors, his father, his wife—and their total incredulity when Hofmann was charged—make it hard to accuse anyone of willful ignorance or simply turning a blind eye. The preponderance of evidence was in favor of trust, not mistrust. It is not hard to empathize with people who did not want to let their minds think the worst of someone they felt they knew intimately. Who would have done better or differently? This, again, is what makes this docuseries shine. We travel through the devastating realizations with the victims who learn that the unthinkable was the truth.

There is a second way that Flynn’s closing statement can be read, though. It could be taken to imply that “we should have been suspicious of the *documents*. People didn’t want to know the truth about the *documents*.” That interpretation of Flynn’s meaning, though, seems untenable, considering all of the evidence depicted in the series (and all of the evidence that the series left out). But it is an interpretation that the excerpt from Mark Hofmann’s prison interview wants to promote, too—and that’s the danger of giving Hofmann too much narrative control. There are other moments in the series that seem to reinforce this interpretation that buyers did not *want* to suspect the authenticity of the documents, or that the forgeries should not have fooled people

so easily—and that’s what makes this point worth emphasizing. For example, collector Brent Ashworth says that his wife described Ashworth as greedy, and the implication is that his greed made him gullible. (Interspersed comments by Gerry D’Elia and Ken Sanders reinforce this idea.) Ashworth’s is an understandable regret about things that could only have been clear in hindsight. But “greedy” seems the wrong descriptor here, wrong for the implication that Ashworth and Hofmann were somehow driven by a shared motivation. It is clear that Ashworth was not in this for the money. Ashworth admits that he was “greedy” in the sense that he wanted “the best documents”; his subsequent explanation is that “I always wanted to build a collection to be the best that it could be.” The best historical documents are, of course, verifiably authentic documents. Hence, Ashworth’s passion for possessing “the best documents” was the very reason that he was energetic in verifying the documents. But again and again, the verification process gave him no reason not to trust Mark Hofmann.

That is the point. What the docuseries shows is just how much work went into verifying the authenticity of the documents. This is not a story of people rushing to conclusions. This is a story of careful examination and tentativeness—and the consensus of experts. The series and the story may, in the end, be a cautionary tale about the limitations of experts, but that seems a wholly different matter. The buyers who interacted with Mark Hofmann demonstrably wanted to know the truth—think FBI examiners and cyclotron tests. Mark Hofmann’s forgeries were just that convincing.

One moment in the docuseries underscores this point, but it’s a moment that can be easy to miss. George Throckmorton, the forensic expert who, along with Bill Flynn, finally discovered the ink-cracking breakthrough that exposed Mark Hofmann as a forger, relates that he and Flynn had spent *one hundred ten hours* examining the Salamander Letter before detecting the cracks in the ink under powerful magnification. One hundred ten hours. The forged document defied forensic detection even after one hundred ten hours of expert scrutiny. Hence any dismissal of the victims in this story as easy marks or credulous dupes simply does not hold. The chilling counterfactual implication from the film is this: if it were not for the murders and the extraordinary time and investigative resources devoted to the documents precisely because this became a murder case, would the forgeries ever have been detected? And not for want of examination, either—it is simply apparent, again and again, that the forgeries were just that convincing.

This is why I wish the docuseries would have raised doubts about just how far investigators ultimately felt they could trust Mark Hofmann in his prison interviews. Despite his assertion to the contrary when he was interviewed on tape, Mark Hofmann succeeded because people did *not* ignore or bury facts. The parties involved—the victims—deserve better than to be explained away as overly eager or credulous. Instead, viewers should ask if Hofmann, in his prison interviews, subtly mocked the experts and his buyers as a form of self-gratification and ego. We should be careful not to let him control the narrative about how easy it should have been to catch him.

Certainly, Church leaders (and numerous other buyers) made missteps—almost always related to trusting Mark Hofmann’s word—but not out of carelessness or out of a desire to play fast and loose with facts. Ironically, Hofmann perversely benefited from the Church’s own integrity to its mission. This is part of the context that I wish the docuseries would have laid out—and it is the context that the victims had at the time that many of the Netflix viewers likely do not have. The docuseries could have done more, I think, to highlight the idea that the Church and its members have always felt divinely charged to collect and preserve documents related to the Church’s history—and had been doing so for a century and a half before Hofmann arrived on the scene. That institutional mandate gave an opening to Hofmann. And while laying this kind of background might have slowed the pace of the docuseries’ narrative, more could have been said about Leonard Arrington’s decade in the Church’s history department (1972–1982), and the tensions, by the early 1980s, between those in Church leadership who favored a move toward more historical openness and nuance about the Church’s past and those in Church leadership who saw such a move as giving fodder to enemies who sought to discredit everything about that past.¹³ Even *Newsweek*, in 1982, caught wind of this internal tension and published a brief article with the headline, “Apostles vs. Historians.”¹⁴ This was not a climate that Mark Hofmann created, but it was a climate that

13. Benjamin Park sets up this backdrop in an article he wrote for *Religion Dispatches* to coincide with the release of *Murder among the Mormons*. Benjamin E. Park, “Murder among the Mormons; Latest True Crime Doc from Netflix, Highlights Issues of Faith, Skepticism, and Authenticity,” *Religion Dispatches*, March 1, 2021, https://religiondispatches.org/murder-among-the-mormons-latest-true-crime-doc-from-netflix-highlights-issues-of-faith-skepticism-and-authenticity/?fbclid=IwAR215AJOFv_6Lv6i7i2mqNeJhj8JX_y98WVONUwRIr9qP8fjqo86NEUD21Y.

14. Kenneth L. Woodward, “Apostles vs. Historians,” *Newsweek*, February 15, 1982, 77.

worked to his advantage. He knew that these tensions would raise the stakes—and hence the interest—in his “finds.”

With this context, accusations of the Church’s efforts to suppress the troubling documents that Hofmann brought to light seem both understandable *and* overstated. While the Church did keep a few Hofmann acquisitions quiet, it publicly commented on others: the Salamander Letter is a case in point in the film. But even in the Salamander Letter case, the story has so many twists and turns that it can be too easy for viewers to lose their way and fall into easy assumptions about Church motives. Here’s one example of that: an online March 2021 *Esquire* interview with the docuseries’ directors originally included this passage (emphasis added): “But the most damaging perhaps was the Salamander letter—a document Hofmann forged which called the founding tenants [*sic*] of Mormonism into question. *The church bought the document in an attempt to shield its contents from members of the faith*, and even though the letter proved to be fake, the *coverup* did enough damage to the community itself.” The article was later corrected with this passage (emphasis added again):

But the most damaging perhaps was the Salamander letter—a document Hofmann forged which called the founding tenets of Mormonism into question. Steve Christensen purchased the controversial document *and gave it to the Church* in 1984, and *though the Church later released its contents to the public*, President of the Church Gordon B. Hinckley stated that “This does not preclude the possibility that it may have been forged at a time when the Church had many enemies,” in the early days of Mormonism. Although the letter eventually proved to be fake, the letter itself and Church’s handling of the situation had a profound impact on members at the time.¹⁵

While I’m grateful for the correction, the author’s original confusion is but one more reminder of an area where the docuseries could have done more.

The docuseries might have also highlighted that the Church publicly announced acquisition (from Hofmann) of the “Joseph Smith III

15. Compare the archived original version of Lauren Kranc, “The Murder among the Mormons Directors Are Prepared for the Church of Latter-day Saints’ Response,” March 3, 2021, at <https://web.archive.org/web/20210303191729/https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a35683846/murder-among-the-mormons-directors-interview-lds-church-response/>, with the corrected version at <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a35683846/murder-among-the-mormons-directors-interview-lds-church-response/>.

Blessing” that offered documentary support more in the direction of the prophetic succession model of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints than that of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and LDS Church leaders offered the blessing to RLDS leaders in a document exchange. In other words, Church suppression of the documents acquired from Hofmann was by no means the standard *modus operandi*. The story is much more complex than that, and blanket accusations are patently unfair. Instead, the desire on the part of many Church leaders and members to be as well informed as possible on the Church’s history—and to make that history as well documented as possible—opened doors for Hofmann on good faith. And wherever his Latter-day Saint customers fell on that “historical tension” spectrum—whether they were excited by his finds for the insight they offered about the past or anxious about their potential for mischief in the present—Hofmann knew they would be interested. He knew their religious commitments made them so—and sincerely so.

Thus, we come full circle back to Hofmann’s prison interview comment and to the reason why that comment deserves to be disputed: Hofmann succeeded precisely because people of faith would *not* ignore things that even went against their beliefs.

3. Why should we even keep talking about this story and its historical and theological implications?

Agency and redemption.

This turn to religious belief brings me to a final section. Is there value in retelling this story? I say yes. Apart from the historical value and memorable moments of this docuseries—and despite the misses detailed above—I think this story offers profound moments for theological reflection. Reflections about trust and betrayal, reflections about transparency and courage, reflections about the epistemological limits of historical inquiry—the film calls forth all of these.

I say all of this hesitantly, though, because of how blithe this can sound. My heart aches for the victims whose lives were forever changed by Mark Hofmann. It is worth repeating that the docuseries should, above all, draw out deep empathy and sorrow from viewers for those whose lives were devastated. And it can be easy for someone far removed to speak about theological reflections when the pain is not personal. But I cannot help but think of a repeated scriptural phrase that is dear to readers of the Bible and the Doctrine and Covenants alike. Here’s

the Romans 8:28 iteration of this: “We know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God” (compare D&C 90:24; 98:3; 100:15). The comprehensiveness of this assertion is what gives the passage its power. “All things.” In a Latter-day Saint cosmology, this cannot mean that God causes all things or that God ordains all things. This cannot be fatalistic or deterministic. Rather, all things that *happen*—through our agency, through the agency of others, through the agency of no one—can still work together for our good. God is just that good; he can turn all things to work for our good.

Two such possibilities have been on my mind, and the film gestures toward both of these.

The first centers on a question about prophets and revelation and agency. The film raises this question, even if not in quite these words: Why weren’t Church prophets privy to divine detection of the forgeries—and immediately so? I’m grateful that the Hofmann episode lets us wrestle with this question for all of the good thinking this question can generate about the role of prophets, the process of divine communication, the wisdom and foresight of God, and especially the place of human agency in the economy of God.

Of course, that question presupposes an assumption about the way prophets—and God—*should* function. So, it is worth calling that assumption into question by asking ourselves a host of other questions. Shouldn’t we be grateful that the Church is led by prophets who are interested in and intrigued by historical documents related to the Church? That their kneejerk reaction in this instance was not to reject everything that runs counter to their expectations of the historical narrative? That they were willing to consider and respect the opinion of experts? That they took a “wait and see” approach? That they did not see documents that altered the picture of the early Church and its leaders as necessarily undermining the spiritual source of their faith and witness? That they expressed that history can go only so far as a source of knowledge about ultimate things? These kinds of queries fall into one line of questioning, but there are other lines, too: Even if God were to have exposed Mark Hofmann and his plot to his prophets from the outset, how might the story have been different if prophets originally took a strong stand against the authenticity of the documents—only on the basis of their claims to revelation—in the face of expert evaluation on the part of Church members and others? Would Church leaders have alienated more people by what could have been seen as a stubborn refusal to face the facts? Would that have been an even more impossible

situation? And would there ever have been a resolution? Tugging on these counterfactual threads shows how quickly other things could unravel. The situation is not so simple as we might think it is, knowing what we now know.¹⁶

Richard Turley does this kind of theological work in episode three of the film—and his articulate response to the question as to why prophets did not detect Hofmann's deceit is remarkably layered for a brief sound-bite answer. His response asks viewers to step back and to consider what would be the consequence if God *were* to intervene and detect and stop all wickedness and conspiracy and deceit. The Latter-day Saint answer is that agency would be permanently compromised—and the whole plan of God would thus be frustrated.

Human freedom to act means that pain can be inflicted—we will inflict pain on others, and others will inflict pain on us. It seems a steep price to pay—until we consider the alternative.

I cannot forget that it is easy to speak of this in generalities; it can seem callous to speak of this in specifics. But my mind is drawn to Alma 14. I think of the unspeakable pain of women and children suffering death by fire; I think of Alma and Amulek watching. I hear Amulek ask how this can go on without their calling upon the power of God to stop this. And I hear Alma's aching response: "The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand; for behold the Lord receiveth them up unto himself, in glory; and he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them, according to the hardness of their hearts, that the judgments which he shall exercise upon them in his wrath may be just; and the blood of the innocent shall stand as a witness against them, yea, and cry mightily against them at the last day" (Alma 14:11).

This turn to Alma 14 is not meant to imply in the Hofmann case that I think the Lord was constraining his prophets from revealing what they, in reality, knew about the documents all along. Instead, it is meant to reinforce the reality that true agency means that real human choice also means the possibility of real human evil. This is a "problem of evil" question, and the Latter-day Saint answer to that problem hinges on agency. In a universe where agency is key to progress, where choice is key to

16. In early 1981, Church Apostle Bruce R. McConkie did compose an internal memo in which he expressed his doubts about the authenticity of the Joseph Smith III Blessing, based on contextual and doctrinal inconsistencies. For a full description of that memo, see Turley, *Victims*, 53–55.

becoming, where actions reveal (as well as shape) our true colors and our true desires, we begin to see that it could not be otherwise. There are times when God has preemptively revealed a pending plot—think Doctrine and Covenants 10 and the lost 116 pages—but there are other times when he has not—think Joseph, the son of Jacob, being sold into slavery by his brothers. Either way, the message seems to be the same: the work of God cannot ultimately be frustrated.

The docuseries offers a chance to look back at just how far The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has come in its institutional approach to the Church's history. There is no question that Mark Hofmann's exploits forced Church leaders and managers to evaluate much of what they were doing in their historical work (even though it would be wrong to say that Mark Hofmann was the only factor driving such evaluations). Richard Turley's appearance in the film seems significant not just for what he says but for what he symbolizes. In the midst of all of this mid-1980s turmoil, Turley was hired to manage the Church's historical department. Over the next two decades, he and like-minded colleagues quietly advocated for a new philosophy and outlook and fearlessness in preserving and telling the Church's history. In that regard, the world of today feels remarkably different than the world of 1985.

I would not do justice to the docuseries, though, if I did not come back from the institutional level to the individual level. The Latter-day Saint answer to the problem of evil cannot just be agency. It is meaningless without the redemption that Jesus Christ promises. This is the second theological reflection that has been on my mind because of *Murder among the Mormons*: the question of redemption, and the hope that the pain that is on full display in the film is not irredeemable.

Who could not be moved by Brent Metcalfe's comments when he expanded on his heart-rending wish that he had never been born? He told the interviewer on camera that this was "soul crushing," that it felt like the plot of *It's a Wonderful Life*, only in this real-life version there was "no redemption at the end of the story." I have thought over and over about his statement. I think about the burden of blame that Mark Hofmann so unfairly put on Brent Metcalfe, his close friend, or on his wife, Dorie Olds. Both Metcalfe and Olds became emotional in the film when they expressed the wish that they could go back in time and undo everything. It is heartbreaking that they felt this responsibility when in reality they, too, were innocent victims. In the face of this depth of despair, I do not ask this lightly: Can there be any redemption at the end of this story? Can any of this work together for good?

With hope, and humility, we want to say yes, don't we? In the closing moments of the film, the directors return to Al Rust. He recounts being forced to sell his entire coin collection to repay to the bank the amount that Hofmann had swindled from him—an advance loan of \$185,000. Rust talks about not being able to sleep because of the press of anxiety and worry and loss. But then he describes a moment of deep clarity and insight: the thought came to him that Mark Hofmann had taken so much already that Rust must not let him steal the future, too. “All of a sudden it just came to me: he's destroyed you financially, but don't let him destroy you otherwise—spiritually, emotionally, physically. Don't let him do it!” Rust called Mark Hofmann's father and said that he would not—did not—hate his son, and then Rust asked him to tell Mark that Rust forgave him. “From that moment on,” Al Rust says with a catch in his voice, “my life changed.” There is something deeply redemptive in Rust's way of putting a face on a concept that Elder Richard G. Scott had put into words: “Forgiveness . . . allows the love of God to purge your heart and mind of the poison of hate, . . . the desire for revenge. It makes place for the purifying, healing, restoring love of the Lord.”¹⁷ This is powerful, real-world theology in action.

Should we retell this Mark Hofmann story? Yes—and I'm glad that *Murder among the Mormons* did so. If the docuseries pushes us to pay attention to the pathos and pain in the victims' perspectives, or to do additional reading and research to get the full story, or to ask bigger questions of deep spiritual significance, then I think there is redemptive value in all of that.

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17. Richard G. Scott, “Healing the Tragic Scars of Abuse,” *Ensign* 22, no. 5 (May 1992): 33.

*Trinity and Monotheism: A Historical and Theological Review
of the Origins and Substance of the Doctrine*

By A. Keith Thompson

Redland Bay, Qld.: Modotti Press, 2019

Reviewed by Jason Robert Combs

The history of Christian beliefs about the nature of God is complex. It would be helpful for Latter-day Saints and other Christians to have a simple, straightforward introduction to this topic. A. Keith Thompson, professor of law and the associate dean at the Sydney School of Law of the University of Notre Dame Australia, who previously worked as international legal counsel for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, set out to write such a book. Motivated in part by his interfaith work and by his own religious beliefs as a Latter-day Saint, Thompson wrote *Trinity and Monotheism* to “build bridges of understanding” among all who believe in Jesus Christ (9). This is a noble pursuit. I wholeheartedly support Thompson’s notion “that better understanding can enable deeper and more respectful inter-Christian dialogue” (171). Unfortunately, Thompson’s efforts in *Trinity and Monotheism* are marred by the misrepresentation and omission of important historical facts as well as by the poor use of sources.

The narrative Thompson promotes throughout the book could be described as dispensationalism. Thompson suggests that ancient Israelites believed in an anthropomorphic God and a divine council of gods but fell away from this idea under the influence of political “superpowers in the late first millennium B.C.” (13–42, quote on 33). Christians then restored the idea of an anthropomorphic God and a plurality of gods with their doctrine of Jesus Christ’s divinity and his embodiment as a resurrected being (43–82). Once again, however, those ideas fell away, Thompson argues, as Christians were attacked by Jews who insisted on monotheism (83–133)—see more on this below. Finally, Thompson claims that, following the Nicene Council, Christians came to fully embrace monotheism and a disembodied God, until Nicene orthodoxy was questioned by Michael Servetus (145–52), who in modern times

was followed by Unitarians (155–59) and then by the theological innovations of Latter-day Saints (159–63) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (163–67). Although this sort of dispensationalist master narrative may appeal to some Latter-day Saints, it fails to accurately describe the history of Jewish and Christian theology because it omits and misrepresents evidence that does not fit the narrative. For instance, here I will summarize just a few of the problematic omissions and misrepresentations in the first ten pages of Thompson’s third chapter, “Christians as Jewish Heretics—The Origins of the Idea of Trinity” (43–82).

Thompson begins his third chapter with a description of an early conflict between Christians and Jews (45–50)—a description seemingly influenced by a latent anti-Judaism that persisted in much of biblical scholarship up to the early twentieth century.¹ For Thompson, Jesus preached about “brotherly kindness and secret charity,” but Jewish rabbis focused on “ritual punishment for technical violations of the Oral Law” and engaged in “self-serving public religious observance to be seen of men” (46). This may summarize Jesus’s critique of some scribes and Pharisees, who “love . . . to have people call them rabbi,” in Matthew 23:2–7 (NRSV), but it certainly does not describe all rabbis in that time or any time. In fact, Jesus was not the only person to teach about “brotherly kindness and secret charity.” Rabbi Hillel, who taught around the time of Jesus’s birth, preached the importance of loving all people (*m. Avot* 1.12), and Rabbi Akiva, who taught a century later, named love of one’s neighbor as the greatest principle in the law of Moses (*y. Nedarim* 9.4; see Lev. 19:18 and Sifra on Lev. 19:18).² Thompson next describes the rabbis’ “secret religious police” who “were engaged to expose Christians worshipping behind closed doors.” He continues, “The political

1. On the history of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in biblical scholarship, see William Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 8–19; and Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). For a discussion on how this scholarship influenced some Latter-day Saint authors, see Matthew J. Grey, “Latter-day Saint Perceptions of Jewish Apostasy in the Time of Jesus,” in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy*, ed. Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 147–73.

2. For a summary of the ways Christians today commonly misrepresent Judaism in the time of Jesus, see Amy-Jill Levine, “Bearing False Witness: Common Errors Made about Early Judaism,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd ed., ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 759–63.

and legal authorities were engaged as allies in the witch-hunts, or they turned blind eyes towards the excesses of the religious police when they breached the Roman secular law” (46). This sounds like an exaggeration of Acts 8:1–3 and 9:1–2, but Thompson does not cite Acts or any other sources to support his claim about Jewish secret police.

The first ancient source that Thompson cites in this chapter is the mid-second-century Christian Justin Martyr. Thompson intends to use Justin Martyr to show how Christians were attacked as polytheists by Jewish monotheists. One of Thompson’s prime examples of disagreement between Jews and Christians is Justin’s interpretation of Genesis 18:1–2 (NRSV)—Abraham’s vision of the Lord by the oaks of Mamre: “The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre. . . . [Abraham] looked up and saw three men standing near him.” Thompson argues that Justin reads Genesis 18 as describing that “though Jesus Christ is a god, he is not the same as the Lord God and is subject to Him” (50), whereas “for the Jews, there was only one God” (51). Thompson seems unaware that Jews in antiquity, from Philo of Alexandria to the author of *3 Enoch*, did in fact theologize about other heavenly powers—and did so in a way quite similar to Christians.³ For instance, when explaining the meaning of the passage “for in his own image God made humankind” (Gen. 9:6; compare Gen. 1:26–27), Philo writes, “For nothing mortal can be made in the likeness of the most high One and Father of the universe but (only) in that of the second God, who is His Word.”⁴ Thompson is correct that monotheism is patent in both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, but he incorrectly assumes that the views contained in these works from the fourth through sixth century AD represent all Jewish thought from 500 BC to AD 500 (see 37–41).

There are also some significant problems with the sources Thompson cites and how he uses those sources. For instance, Thompson claims, “Justin Martyr’s teaching that God and Christ were distinct is the reason

3. For a discussion of the problems with imagining an early and definitive “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity, see Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

4. Philo of Alexandria, *Quaestiones in Genesim* 2.62, trans. adapted from Ralph Marcus, *Philo, Supplement I: Questions and Answers on Genesis*, Loeb Classical Library 380 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), 150. See Peter Schäfer, *Two Gods in Heaven: Jewish Concepts of God in Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020), 62–64.

why he is identified as a ‘pagan’ in the *New Advent Encyclopedia*” (51). What Thompson cites as the *New Advent Encyclopedia* is actually a digital version of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* on the New Advent website. Moreover, it is not accurate that this Catholic source calls Justin Martyr a “pagan” because he taught that God the Father and Jesus Christ are distinct persons. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* correctly notes that Justin Martyr was a pagan—meaning a worshipper of various Greek and Roman gods—before his conversion to Christianity.⁵

I have focused on only the major problems in the first ten pages of Thompson’s third chapter, but these are indicative of issues throughout the book. I do not enjoy criticizing anyone’s published work. I recognize that any published work reflects intensive efforts in time and labor, and that some minor errors are often unavoidable—I have intentionally ignored such things as typographic errors in this review. Furthermore, I do not intend to imply that Thompson labored under anything but the best intentions. His concern for fairness and interest in interfaith dialogue shines through when he makes statements such as, “While some critics of the Nicene creed may take delight in this evidence of Constantine’s personal involvement in the formulation of the creed at Nicaea, with respect it does not prove or disprove the creed’s value or its divine provenance” (98). And I truly appreciate Thompson’s stated purpose in describing such events as the Council of Nicaea: “All that is intended here is to provide context to enable and facilitate contemporary debate with humility and respect” (86). This is a noble purpose, but it is hampered by the misrepresentation, however unintentional, of ancient Jewish and Christian beliefs and history.

If one desires to understand better the history of beliefs about God within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through an academic lens, I recommend Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Givens touches upon ancient Christian writings, but he is at his best when treating the history of Latter-day Saint theological developments. For a history of ancient Christian theology and its developments through the councils and creeds, I can recommend two books. If one is interested in a brief and accessible summary of the most important councils and creeds in Christian history, I recommend

5. Jules Lebreton, “St. Justin Martyr,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910), accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/o8580c.htm>. Compare Thompson, *Trinity and Monotheism*, 51 n. 219.

Justin S. Holcomb, *Know the Creeds and Councils* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2014). For those interested in an academic monograph written for specialists, Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), is excellent. Finally, for a history of ancient Jewish theology and its relationship to Christianity, I recommend Peter Schäfer, *Two Gods in Heaven: Jewish Concepts of God in Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020).

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*Watchman on the Tower:
Ezra Taft Benson and the Making of the Mormon Right*
By Matthew L. Harris

Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020

*Thunder from the Right:
Ezra Taft Benson in Mormonism and Politics*
Edited by Matthew L. Harris

Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019

Reviewed by Roger Terry

Although I was already fairly well acquainted with the activities and rhetoric of Ezra Taft Benson, a controversial twentieth-century Apostle, what surprised me when reading these two books about him was their relevance to what is happening in the United States today. Historian Matthew L. Harris authored the biography of Benson titled *Watchman on the Tower* and edited the anthology *Thunder from the Right*. They help explain not only Benson's life and times but also political conservatism and paranoia about government conspiracy among American Latter-day Saints today.

The two books can be profitably read in tandem because, even though they overlap somewhat in content, they also complement each other well and provide a fascinating portrait of the man who served eight years as Dwight D. Eisenhower's secretary of agriculture and went on to become the thirteenth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Watchman on the Tower is not a full biography but a narrower account of Benson's involvement in right-wing politics. Harris chronicles "how Benson developed a radical form of conservatism" (9), which included his belief in and his dissemination of various conspiracy theories. Harris traces this development to three significant influences in Benson's life: his 1946 humanitarian mission to Europe, his eight years serving in the Eisenhower administration, and his close affiliation with (but not membership in) the John Birch Society. While several other General Authorities were politically conservative, none were as much so, or as outspoken about it, as Ezra Taft Benson. Indeed, his crusade against communism sometimes caused friction within the Church's leading quorums and, Harris argues, likely even resulted in his assignment to oversee the

Church's European mission, which some of his fellow Apostles hoped would serve as a cooling-off period for the right-wing firebrand.

Watchman on the Tower is not a lengthy book, weighing in at just under 130 pages of text, but the 73 pages of endnotes reveal how thorough Harris's research was. Significantly, Harris incorporated material from the previously restricted papers at the John Birch Society headquarters as well as "documents at the Herbert Hoover, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Ronald Reagan Presidential Libraries; materials . . . in the William J. Grede Papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society and the George Wallace Papers at the Alabama Archives and History; meeting minutes of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the David O. McKay Papers at the University of Utah; correspondence and private memos in the J. Reuben Clark and Hugh B. Brown Papers at Brigham Young University; and . . . documents in the Ezra Taft Benson and Spencer W. Kimball Papers at the LDS Church History Library" (11).

Harris organized *Watchman* into five more-or-less chronological chapters. "Socialist New Deal" examines Benson's 1946 apostolic humanitarian mission to Europe, which influenced his views on communism, fascism, and socialism. It also looks at his experience organizing and promoting farm cooperatives during the Great Depression, which affected his belief that Roosevelt's and Truman's domestic policies were a danger to democracy and capitalism but also opened a door for him to be appointed executive secretary of the National Council of Farm Cooperatives in Washington, D.C. This appointment led to his membership in Eisenhower's cabinet.

"Socialized Agriculture" investigates Benson's tenure as secretary of agriculture, where he attempted to scale back government involvement in agriculture, including subsidies that most farmers viewed as essential. Although President Eisenhower supported the policies Benson tried to implement, his efforts were opposed by many farmers and bureaucrats and led to calls for his resignation as well as accusations that he was both overly ideological and inflexible. His experience in government led him to believe that "subversives had infiltrated the federal government" (9). Benson began his tenure in Eisenhower's cabinet in 1953, during the height of Senator Joseph McCarthy's investigations of suspected communists. The Army-McCarthy hearings of the next spring led to the Senate's censure of the Wisconsin politician, though Benson maintained his belief that communists had infiltrated the American government. Harris shows that shortly after being sworn into office, Benson "began a secret surveillance system within the Department of Agriculture to catch suspected communists" (34), and

less than six months after the Army-McCarthy hearings, Benson denied a security clearance to Wolf Ladejinsky, a Ukranian-born Jew,¹ despite being unable to produce any evidence that Ladejinsky had any communist sympathies or connections.

“Making a Conspiracy Culture” explores the relationship between Benson and Robert Welch, the founder of the John Birch Society, whom Benson first encountered shortly after his return to Salt Lake City from Washington. “Welch’s intelligence, genial nature, and ‘uncanny ability’ to spot communists endeared him to Benson” (56). The Apostle certainly would have joined the Birch Society, but President David O. McKay forbade it. Benson promoted the society publicly, though, and his wife, Flora, joined. Their son Reed became a regional coordinator for the organization. Benson’s devotion to Welch’s conspiracy theories led to some uncomfortable situations, particularly when the Apostle tacitly supported Welch’s assertion that President Eisenhower had been “a dedicated, conscious agent of the communist conspiracy” (58). Although Benson had harbored strong ultraconservative views for many years, it was after his return from Washington and his acquaintance with Welch that he began giving controversial political speeches in general conference and other venues. This chapter also discusses Benson’s short-lived attempts to run for both U.S. president and vice president and his statements about the civil rights movement.

“Reining in the Apostle” recounts the largely unsuccessful attempts by other General Authorities to muzzle Elder Benson. Part of the challenge was that President McKay was also a staunch conservative and an anticommunist, having even delivered some anticommunist addresses in general conference. But McKay’s views were not as conservative as Benson’s, and he did not like personal confrontations. Harris argues that Benson took advantage of this situation by either asking McKay’s permission to speak at Birch events or quoting McKay’s sermons in his own, then going beyond what the prophet would have endorsed while implying that endorsement. This tactic led senior Apostle Harold B. Lee to observe that “as long as McKay ‘can be quoted,’ Benson’s ‘militant diatribe following the John Birch line’ would continue” (84). After McKay’s death, the new First Presidency of Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and N. Eldon Tanner warned Benson “not to discuss in general conference the John Birch Society, socialism, the welfare state, ‘secret combinations,’ ‘Gadianon Robbers,’ or anything conveying a government

1. Although Harris and some other sources indicate Ladejinsky was born in Russia, it appears he was actually born in Katerynopil, Ukraine, in 1899.

conspiracy” (86). Harris says that “Benson’s Birch crusade was temporarily interrupted when Harold B. Lee became church president in 1972” (87), but after Lee died unexpectedly, “Benson resumed his aggressive partisanship” (88). Spencer W. Kimball, who succeeded Lee and who had been called to the apostleship at the same time as Benson, tried with varying degrees of success to rein in Benson, who was now President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and next in line to the Presidency. Finally, after Benson delivered a particularly controversial 1980 devotional address at Brigham Young University, Kimball asked “Benson to apologize to the Quorum of the Twelve but they ‘were dissatisfied with the response,’” so Kimball “instructed Benson to apologize again . . . to a combined meeting of all the general authorities.” Apparently, Benson took this lesson to heart. He never again “spoke exclusively in public about politics or communism” (103).

The final chapter, “Remaking Benson,” discusses the years of Benson’s presidency, which lasted from November 1985 until May 1994. Because *Watchman on the Tower* is an examination of Benson’s political views, it glosses over some of his more memorable ecclesiastical endeavors, including his emphasis on reading the Book of Mormon, and focuses instead on what he did not do. As Church president, Benson did not engage in any appreciable political discourse, and as his health waned, counselors Gordon B. Hinckley and Thomas S. Monson assumed active leadership and promoted a more moderate image for the Church. But that does not mean that Benson’s earlier fiery political rhetoric became irrelevant. Harris traces some of the influence Benson’s speeches and writings have had on various ultraconservatives—from Glenn Beck to Cliven Bundy and his sons—even after Benson’s death.

Thunder from the Right is a compilation of essays on Ezra Taft Benson’s life and influence in both politics and the Church. Some of the essays expand upon topics raised in *Watchman on the Tower* or fill gaps in that account. Others stretch beyond the scope of *Watchman*. Among the former is Brian Cannon’s fine essay on Benson’s early involvement in farming and cooperatives and on his service in Eisenhower’s cabinet. Cannon gives a thorough account of the complex economic issues facing farmers during the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt’s attempts to keep the farm economy afloat, Benson’s opposition to FDR’s liberal policies, and Benson’s largely unsuccessful attempts to roll back those policies. In a fascinating essay on Benson’s meeting with Nikita Khrushchev, subtitled “Memory Embellished,” Gary Bergera argues that the story Benson often told about meeting the Soviet leader may not have happened

as Benson later recollected. Robert Goldberg's essay, "From New Deal to New Right," expands significantly on Harris's account of Benson's involvement with Birch Society founder Robert Welch and the Apostle's controversial speeches during the McKay presidency. Newell Bringhurst examines Benson's efforts to win the U.S. presidency in "Potomac Fever," an essay that illustrates just how interested Benson was in pursuing high political office and just how uninterested his fellow Apostles were in his quest. Matthew Harris goes into much finer detail about Benson's anti-civil rights statements in his essay, "Martin Luther King, Civil Rights, and Perceptions of a 'Communist Conspiracy,'" than he did in *Watchman*. In particular, he discusses the Apostle's accusations that Martin Luther King Jr. and the entire civil rights movement was a communist conspiracy.

Of the essays that extend beyond the scope of Harris's political exploration in *Watchman*, the one I found most intriguing was Matthew Bowman's "The Cold War and the Invention of Free Agency." Bowman proposes that Benson took the notion of agency that is deeply embedded in LDS theology and gave it new meaning in economic and political contexts. Andrea Radke-Moss, in "Women and Gender," examines Benson's coming of age in a world of male dominance and his later attempts to preserve that patriarchal system in the Church in the face of powerful societal impulses promoting an expanded role for women. Finally, J. B. Haws discusses Benson's presidency years, juxtaposing his first three years as prophet, when he was active and traveling and speaking, against his "final five-plus years, when health challenges severely limited his day-to-day involvement in church leadership" (211). Several important events punctuated these two periods: the Mark Hofmann forgeries and murders, the dedication of a temple in communist East Germany, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the organization of the first stake in Africa outside of South Africa (in Nigeria), the "Rodney King" riots in Los Angeles and Latter-day Saint relief efforts in their aftermath, the excommunication of the "September Six," and Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist Steve Benson's public renunciation of his faith (Steve is a grandson of Ezra Taft Benson). All of these events created a tumultuous backdrop for the notably *nonpolitical* Church presidency of Ezra Taft Benson.

These two books are well researched and present a comprehensive picture of the political and ecclesiastical life of an influential Apostle and Church President. But perhaps most significant for me was what the books only hinted at but did not address directly. As I read, certain ideas seemingly jumped off the page and connected with what I was seeing

in the here and now. While I was reading these volumes, America was experiencing the most divisive presidential election in memory, which culminated in an assault by insurrectionists on the U.S. Capitol while Congress was in the process of certifying the election results. These insurrectionists were operating under the false belief that the election had been stolen. They had accepted conspiracy theories that, like almost all conspiracy theories, do not hold up well under scrutiny. I could not help but see echoes in the present of the conspiracies Ezra Taft Benson believed and promoted fifty to sixty years ago.

By coincidence, my elders quorum presidency had asked me to present the lesson (by Zoom) to the quorum on January 10, 2021. As I was preparing this lesson, the January 6 attack on the Capitol occurred. I was impressed that we needed to address the issues underlying the insurrection instead of the planned topic; so, with my quorum president's approval, I presented some ideas on how to obtain reliable information. Afterward, along with several complimentary responses, I received from a friend in the quorum a surprising email expressing concern about the direction my lesson had taken. He felt strongly that I should have addressed what he described as a worldwide conspiracy that has taken over mainstream media and controls both major political parties. He then quoted to me three fairly lengthy excerpts from the writings and speeches of Elder Ezra Taft Benson. This underscored to me the fact that even though the Church has tried to distance itself from these controversial statements (including omitting mention of them from Benson's official biography and from the Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society manual containing his teachings), they are still alive and well in certain circles and are influencing some Latter-day Saints.

As mentioned above, the life and political beliefs of Ezra Taft Benson have great relevance to the issues and divisions we see in America today. Matthew Harris has produced two books that give fascinating insights into a controversial and still-influential Apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Twentieth-century Church history is a field that lay fallow for many decades. I am grateful to Harris and others who are finally plowing this field and beginning to reap a rich harvest of insight into our more recent past.

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*Clogs and Shawls:
Mormons, Moorlands, and the Search for Zion*
By Ann Chamberlin

Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019

Reviewed by Amy Harris

Born in turn-of-the-century Bradford, Yorkshire, the eight Whitaker sisters were raised as Latter-day Saints, all eventually immigrated to Utah, and all remained members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints throughout their lives. Their lifelong faithfulness was an important cornerstone of their family story, a story Ann Chamberlin, a granddaughter of one of the sisters, situates within a larger narrative about their family culture—both its positive and negative elements and the parts that tipped into becoming family mythology.

The book is family biography, family story, and family memoir—and accordingly shifts perspectives, often in a gentle stream-of-consciousness way. Chamberlin's structure—a short novella, a straightforward narrative of the sisters' lives interspersed with the author's family memories, and then a sudden insertion of a non-family member's account of a holiday excursion—is a conscious narrative choice that undergirds her overall story. But for readers expecting a straightforward history or more traditional memoir, they need to be prepared for a more varied and literary structure.

Clogs and Shawls covers more than a century of Whitaker family life; the first sister was born in 1897, the last sister died in 2006. The account is based on, and sometimes quotes directly from, hours of taped interviews Chamberlin conducted with the sisters—sometimes one-on-one, other times as a group, or in the midst of family gatherings. The tapes were produced in the early 1980s, but the writing was done in recent years and is clearly augmented by the author's personal memories as well as some input from other descendants of the sisters. The taped information is further supplemented with a transcribed travel diary of one of the girls' friends from 1917, selected transcribed correspondence between the Utah and England branches of the family from the 1920s to

the 1940s, and a novelized account of the early lives and courtship of the sisters' parents, Mary Jane Jones and Ralph Robinson Whitaker.

The book consists of three major sections, each in a different genre, covering the Whitaker sisters' lives, interspersed with Chamberlin's memories of the sisters. The first section, the novelization of Mary Jane Jones's and Ralph Whitaker's lives, covers their childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in the late nineteenth century. It also recounts Mary Jane's conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The second section (the largest) covers the sisters' births and childhood. The final section describes the different paths the sisters took in adulthood. Sprinkled across the last section are transcribed letters and a diary. Organized thematically and roughly chronologically, the book covers the sisters' experiences with work, home, church, schooling, immigration, marriage, death, and motherhood.

The family mythology is referenced multiple times to good effect—highlighting places where memory and events blur in order to craft a story of meaning for the family (246). At one point, Chamberlin insightfully refers to the Whitaker family mythology as the “family's theology” (262). All families, with varying degrees of consciousness, craft narratives about their pasts and their values. The Whitaker sisters were particularly conscious of their narrative. The sisters' family theology covered straightforward views of their loving father and hardworking mother, an account of financial precariousness and thrift, a rose-colored view of what life in American Zion would be like, and an assertion of unmatched uprightness and faithfulness. The Whitaker narrative revolved around a sort of pride in their resilience despite poverty and around an identity as Latter-day Saints in their Yorkshire context (sometimes in tension with what they perceived and then experienced of the American, or Utah, church context).

Chamberlin's narrative shines in her account of the individual sisters' stories—when their group experience diverges as they pursue schooling, training, marriage, and immigration to Utah. At times they are pious or irritating; at others they are deeply marked by tragedy and loss.

There were places where I appreciated Chamberlin's subtlety in drawing out that narrative without analyzing it too closely in a way that would crush the story. And there were places where I wanted more precision.

I sometimes wondered how the taped interviews could be supplemented by consulting original documents beyond the family's own preserved documents and stories. For example, the family told a story of their mother's conversion to the Church as occurring in 1894, but

they also related how the Church misplaced the baptism record, and therefore she had to be rebaptized in 1901. The Church record of both baptisms, however, does survive. So, the question becomes, why did claiming the original record was lost become part of the family's narrative? Why did their mother perpetuate, or perhaps even start, that way of framing her two baptisms? It is possible that she had been told the record was missing and was rebaptized in ignorance of the record's survival, but the fact that between those two dates she married a man who was not a Latter-day Saint, conceived her first child before that marriage, and had her first two daughters christened into the Church of England suggests there might have been other factors that influenced how she framed the story of her conversion. Chamberlin notes that the family knew, but did not often comment on, the eldest daughter being born only six months after their parents married. But using the documentary context of their mother's two baptisms and the sisters' christenings might provide additional insight into the family mythology. Families tell stories, and do not tell other stories, to highlight what is important to them; these are not deceptions but choices. Additional details beyond the family memories might have changed how the Whitakers' choices are understood or interpreted.

The sisters' feelings of deprivation regarding the Church—the missing baptism record, the missionaries who forgot them once they returned home, the lack of full appreciation for what they did for the Bradford branch, the lack of access to temple ordinances—were important parts of the family myth (262–65). But it is not always clear why the sisters held on to these when some of them represented short-term or only partial deprivations. For example, three of the six sisters who immigrated did so in their twenties and thirties and were endowed and sealed not long afterward. As the sisters sometimes admitted to Chamberlin, the family mythology did not allow for a more nuanced family narrative (375, 384). Chamberlin seems to want that to be the point, but it is not always clear why the myth lingered—what it was doing for the sisters when its content contradicted their own lived experiences.

Particularly evocative are the times the sisters confide, *sotto voce*, to Chamberlin about the gaps or tensions in the family narrative of hard work and unwavering faith. There was a time when the “myth was lived and breathed” (385)—as the sisters dreamed of joining Zion in Utah—but the reality of their lives in Utah and the realities of their descendants feeling ever more distant from the myth's origins in working-class Bradford erode some of the myth's power.

While references to Zion, life as a millworker, the struggles of being poor, and the Yorkshire moors all appear in the title, none of those is really the center of the story. Those topics are the scaffolding of the writing, but they are not the heart of the story. It is the sisters and their durable connections who are the heart of the narrative, no matter the setting they found themselves in. Chamberlin's skill lies in peeling away some of the mythical layers to reveal a story made all the more powerful because it is embedded in the sisters' humanity and in the poignancy of human frailty.

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Kenneth L. Alford, Lloyd D. Newell, and Alexander L. Baugh, editors. *Latter-day Saints in Washington, D.C.* Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2020.

Latter-day Saints in Washington, D.C., is edited by Brigham Young University professors of Church history and doctrine Kenneth L. Alford, Lloyd D. Newell, and Alexander L. Baugh. This volume collects essays written by the faculty of the Department of Church History and Doctrine at BYU after they traveled to D.C., attending a symposium in the Washington D.C. Temple Visitors' Center. The essays are organized into three sections—"History," "People," and "Places"—aiming to educate readers about the intriguing, complicated relationship between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the United States federal government.

In "History," Byran B. Korth, Jordan T. Watkins, and Gerrit Dirkmaat write, respectively, on the D.C. locations, religious revelations, and federal pressures that surrounded the Saints' expulsion from the United States. Fred E. Woods recounts Apostle Orson Pratt's defense of plural marriage in Washington, D.C. Alexander L. Baugh narrates the journey of the Nauvoo Temple sunstone now on display in the Smithsonian. Lloyd D. Newell lends a personal perspective to the history of the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square. W. Justin Dyer and Michael A. Goodman clarify the secular context and prophetic nature of the family proclamation, and J. B. Haws examines Latter-day Saint representation in the *Washington Post*.

In "People," Casey Paul Griffiths and Carter Charles provide separate takes on the trial and political career of Senator Reed Smoot. Other biographical essays laud WWII Senator Elbert D. Thomas's advocacy for peace, Ezra Taft

Benson's influence as secretary of agriculture, the rise of the Marriott family business, T. H. Bell's contribution to the federal educational system, and Beverly Campbell's efforts as Church public and international affairs director. Finally, Ralph W. Hardy Jr. canvasses the lives and achievements of eight Latter-day Saints in Washington, D.C.

In "Places," Anthony R. Sweat traces the providence and artistry of the National Portrait Gallery's rendition of Joseph Smith Jr. Alonzo L. Gaskill and Seth G. Soha explain the temple-like status of the Washington Chapel, while Maclane E. Heward focuses on the Washington D.C. Temple itself. Kenneth L. Alford explores Arlington National Cemetery and some of the Saints buried there. Scott C. Esplin navigates the hot-and-cold relationship between the Church and the National Park Service. Richard B. Crookston and R. Devan Jensen provide a photo essay of historic sites in Washington, D.C.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has had surprising influence in Washington, D.C. Casual students of Church history will discover rich biographical detail and intriguing political shifts, while academics and historians will benefit from the tight focus that allows each of the various essays to dive deeply into its chosen topic. Taken together, these essays tell of a church that began in obscurity but has since emerged onto the national and international stage.

—Tina Hawley

Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Shirley S. Ricks and Stephen T. Whitlock, editors. *Hugh Nibley Observed*. Orem, Utah: The Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2021.

As a tribute to Hugh Nibley the editors of this volume have collected forty

essays written by Nibley's family, peers, colleagues, students, and friends. The title of the book is a play on the title of Nibley's autobiographical film, *The Faith of an Observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley*. As described in the introduction, this volume contains "a kaleidoscope of portraits, perspectives, and memories from family, friends, and colleagues—observers, as it were, of a preeminent observer."

This volume is a valuable and welcome addition to the two biographies that have already been written: *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*, by Boyd Peterson, and *Sergeant Nibley, PhD: Memories of an Unlikely Screaming Eagle*, by Alex Nibley. A few of these pieces have been published elsewhere, but the great majority are new. There are over two hundred photos throughout the volume, many from the Nibley family, that help to illuminate the life and work of Hugh Nibley.

The collection is organized in four parts. "Part One: Portraits" presents a broad biographical overview of Nibley with an essay by John W. Welch, an essay by artist Rebecca Fechner Everett about her painted portrait of Nibley, and Nibley's own intellectual autobiography, which was originally published in the volume of Nibley essays, *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (1978). For the first time, this essay is accompanied with photos that illustrate aspects of Nibley's life that are vividly described in the text.

"Part Two: Nibley the Scholar" provides revised and enlarged versions of

thirteen presentations that were given as part of a Maxwell Institute lecture series organized for the centennial of Nibley's birth. These previously unpublished essays give an assessment of Nibley's scholarly work as they relate to various aspects of Latter-day Saint and secular scholarship. Eight additional essays highlight other aspects of his scholarship, including Shirley Ricks's comprehensive assessment of Nibley's publications; Ricks is an editor intimately familiar with his writing practices, including the reliability of his footnotes.

"Part Three: Nibley the Man" is a collection of pieces that provide personal insights into Hugh's life and character, including tributes presented at his funeral by his children, as well as the significant funeral addresses of John W. Welch and President Dallin H. Oaks. Tributes and reminiscences round out this collection. Especially notable is Jane Brady's rich selections from the vast folklore of Hugh Nibley assembled in the BYU Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections.

This is a delightful volume with many insights about Hugh Nibley the scholar and the man. It contains many valuable assessments of Nibley's contributions, looking in retrospect at the value and lasting significance of his scholarship. Even for someone who closely followed Nibley's life and scholarly writings, there are many precious observations, anecdotes, and evaluations that will give added insight into this remarkable person.

—David R. Seely