

A Study of Religious Rivalry in America



Converting the Saints A Study of Religious Rivalry in America

Charles Randall Paul

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SCRIPTURAL ABBREVIATIONS GUIDE

Parenthetical scriptural references in this volume use standard LDS abbreviations.

Hebrew Bible		New Testament		Book of Mormon	
Gen.	Genesis	Matt.	Matthew	1 Ne.	1 Nephi
Ex.	Exodus	Mark	Mark	2 Ne.	2 Nephi
Lev.	Leviticus	Luke	Luke	Jacob	Jacob
Num.	Numbers	John	John	Enos	Enos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Acts	Acts	Jarom	Jarom
Josh.	Joshua	Rom.	Romans	Omni	Omni
Judg.	Judges	1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	W of M	Words of Mormon
Ruth	Ruth	2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Mosiah	Mosiah
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Gal.	Galatians	Alma	Alma
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Eph.	Ephesians	Hel.	Helaman
1 Kgs.	1 Kings	Philip.	Philippians	3 Ne.	3 Nephi
2 Kgs.	2 Kings	Col.	Colossians	4 Ne.	4 Nephi
1 Chr.	1 Chronicles	1 Thes.	1 Thessalonians	Morm.	Mormon
2 Chr.	2 Chronicles	2 Thes.	2 Thessalonians	Ether	Ether
Ezra	Ezra	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	Moro.	Moroni
Neh.	Nehemiah	2 Tim.	2 Timothy		
Esth.	Esther	Titus	Titus	ъ.	1.0
Job	Job	Philem.	Philemon	Doctrine and Covenants	
Ps.	Psalms	Heb.	Hebrews	D&C	Doctrine and
Prov.	Proverbs	James	James		Covenants
Eccl.	Ecclesiastes	1 Pet.	1 Peter	OD	Official Declaration
Song	Song of Solomon	2 Pet.	2 Peter		
Isa.	Isaiah	1 Jn.	1 John	_	1 60
Jer.	Jeremiah	2 Jn.	2 John	Pearl of Great Price	
Lam.	Lamentations	3 Jn.	3 John	Moses	Moses
Ezek.	Ezekiel	Jude	Jude	Abr.	Abraham
Dan.	Daniel	Rev.	Revelation	JS-M	Joseph
Hosea	Hosea			•	Smith–Matthew
Joel	Joel			JS–H	Joseph
Amos	Amos				Smith-History
Obad.	Obadiah			A of F	Articles of Faith
Jonah	Jonah				
Micah	Micah				
	Nahum Nahum			Joseph Smith Translation	
Hab.	Habakkuk			JST	Joseph Smith
Zeph.	Zephaniah			-	Translation
Hag.	Haggai				
Zech.	Zechariah				
Mal.	Malachi				

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I am truly grateful for the inspiring teachings as well as the help-ful criticism of my PhD dissertation reading committee: Harold Bloom (Yale and NYU), Martin Marty (University of Chicago), and David Tracy (University of Chicago). The excellent instruction and inspiration of my professors at The Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago where I studied in the early 1990s has guided my thinking in this work and beyond. I owe much to the late Brigham Young University professors Truman Madsen and Hugh Nibley who inspired my scholarly passion to probe the histories of religions, and especially the questions of understanding and dealing with intra- and interreligious conflicts over truth and authority.

I look back with affectionate gratitude at my Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant high school friends in Millburn, New Jersey, in the early 1960s. They inadvertently opened my mind and heart to the reality that people can live happily even in religious traditions that "fall short" of mine! More, they showed me uniquely inspiring religious practices and ideas that could improve my tradition's way—without requiring that I denounce it. Thus early in life my friendships outside my religious community spurred me to think about theological pluralism: Why had a just and loving God of revelation not re-revealed the same truth obviously and pervasively to all people at all times? Further, after rare but intense religious arguments with friends I sensed that religious conflicts are perennial and unresolvable by compromise. As I aged, influenced by social psychological training and life experience, I came to ponder the most important religious and ideological question of our time: "How does God-or our ethical standard—inspire us to feel and behave when critics and rivals challenge our most cherished beliefs, purposes, and alligeances?" These questions drive my scholarship and propel this book through its histories, theories, and meliorating prescriptions.

In writing this book I realized a Protestant scholar needed to edit my work, which attempts to interpret the Protestant voices that played such

a prominent role in the history I explore here. John Morehead, MA, carefully read the entire text and provided many hours of thoughtful analysis to help organize the whole presentation. He enabled more accurate interpretation of the Protestant protagonists and their doctrines, helping me re-write sections of the text where my limited experience in studying Protestant theology resulted in incorrect readings of normal Protestant positions. I deeply appreciate his work on this book and our continuing friendship. He is convinced the highest way toward divine light is not the road I follow, and I am persuaded that he is wrong about that. A lively tension of co-resistance and collaboration informs our love for each other. We tend to symbolize the pragmatic potency of trustworthy rivals engaged in a serious contest over the purpose of life and the best way to live.

My wife, Jann Waid Paul, and my son, Jeron Paul, carefully edited early drafts of this manuscript. Jann and my children all sacrificed greatly while I worked over eight years to complete a mid-life doctorate that provided the basis for this book. I will always be thankful for their loyal and patient endurance.

Prologue

Stephen said, "You stiff-necked people . . . are forever opposing the Holy Spirit just as your ancestors used to do.". . . and they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. And he said . . . "Look—I see the heavens open and Jesus, the Son of Man, standing on the right hand of God!" Then they covered their ears . . . and rushed together against him, and began to stone him: and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul [Paul].

Acts 7: 51, 56–58

Later as Saul [Paul], still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord . . . was approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, sir?" And the reply came, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." . . And afterward Saul [Paul] preached Jesus in the synagogues, saying that he is the Son of God. And all those that heard him were amazed, and said, "Is this not the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked the name of Jesus?"

Acts 9: 3–5, 15, 19–21

Thomas More referred to the above passages in his following final response to the judges that condemned him to death for refusing to consent to Henry VIII's claim to regal supremacy over the authority of the Roman Catholic Church:

"Paul... was present, and consented to the death of St. Stephen... and yet they are now both Holy Saints in heaven, and shall continue there friends forever. So I do trust... and pray, that though your lordships have now here in earth been judges to my condemnation, we may yet hereafter in heaven merrily all meet together to our everlasting salvation."

Anthony Kenny (1983, 88)

Introduction

Saving the world is complicated. Missions to do so are attacks no matter how benign the motive. The history of religious missions is replete with complex social, political, economic, and religious conflict. This study of how Americans have managed or mismanaged past religious conflicts can provide practical wisdom today when so many of our modern conflicts are strongly influenced by religious factors. We live in local and global societies that are deeply troubled by the perennial problem of religious and ideological conflict between uncompromising rivals that often justify political or economic coercion in their missions to save the world. Rival secular world-saving ideologies partake of the same problem.

More interesting is the less-observed fact that the primary offensive to save the sinful or enlighten the ignorant shifts toward a defensive war to eliminate rivals. Then religious adversaries, whose traditions criticize the use of violence over persuasion, often seek to justify coercive treatment of rivals by blaming them for supposed economic or political injustices. In either case, it is commonplace to reduce the diagnosis of social conflict to a struggle over political and economic power. However, this reduction is a fatal flaw in both political and religious policy formation. Not only do policy makers disregard the religious aspects of social conflicts, but both secular and religious thinkers have incorrectly presumed that resolution of religious conflict is both desired by the parties and a key to achieve social stability. The social-psychological fact is that humans desire to distinguish themselves in relationships of co-resistance as well as collaboration. The key to sustaining peaceful social relations is not found in overlapping consensus. The key to peacefulness is the desire in rivals to contest without coercion. Much of our global future depends on how we feel about our religious and ideological rivals. If we become trustworthy rivals who doubt not each other's good will, and if we can include the tension of contestation within our religious and political ideals of peacefulness, then we can face our difficult global problems with realistic hope that new collaborations between rivals will bless the earth and that violence between them will decrease.

Without reducing any conflict to one cause, there are cases where religious rivalry has been, and is today, the primary impetus. Rivals in these conflicts would prefer the peaceful conversion of their opponents that would create a more righteous and moral environment, which would bring divine blessing on all. They do not primarily desire the other's money or votes. Heart-to-heart conversation replaces hand-to-hand combat as the preferred method of engagement when persuasive conversion is the end goal.

This study is an attempt to demonstrate that our attitudes about the motives and capacities of our rivals substantially influence the methods we use to engage in conflict and vice versa. Congenial attitudes and methods are as potent as or more potent than common interests and beliefs in sustaining peaceful contestations and collaborations among rivals. When it is generally understood from experience that the best way to do religious battle honorably is in heart-felt contestation between respectful free agents, then our political and religious worlds will be liberated from wasteful violence. In America, this understanding was first manifested both socially and legally in the 1640s in Rhode Island, and a century and half later it was enshrined in the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. While there are notable exceptions that will be discussed in this study, for the most part the only legitimate way of engaging in religious conflict in America has been by verbal means of persuasive contestation. Still, to desire and know how to honorably engage with trustworthy rivals is not instinctual. Every generation must learn this desire and skill from experience. The current situation in American politics and religion show this learning is in danger of being forgotten. One of the purposes of this book is to revive this skill and pass it on.

This volume focuses on early-twentieth-century Protestant missions to convert Mormons in Utah to traditional Christianity. Although Mormons by then had already acquiesced to federal laws against polygamy and federal pressure to secularize Utah's governance, the religious conflict over Mormon legitimacy within the Christian world remained unresolved. This was a religious conflict that was engaged primarily as a contest to persuade the human heart. Both religious rivals understood this, and while they were disturbed by their aggressive mutual criticism, they did not think it wrong or even strange for their rival to engage them. This fact marks the crucial understanding at the center of the American experiment: that persuasive contestation over religion, ideology, or founding principles is normal in our secular state; and that contestation is even healthy for free citizens to flourish within a diverse society.

The general nineteenth-century presumption was of religion being entwined in all aspects of everyone's life; religious contestations were to be expected between intelligent rivals of different persuasions. In such an environment, persuasive missionary work was a normal and legitimate activity that took place in respectable venues for engaging in conflicts over beliefs and values between societies. During the twentieth century this changed drastically. It became unfashionable, if not improper or even illegal, for intelligent, practical people to engage in public religious or ideological contestation over inevitably unresolvable questions. Social and institutional places for engaging in conflict over economic and political security became the world order. But there are billions of people, religious rivals, who find no legitimate place for engaging the contests their integrity requires. World-changing terrorist strategies proliferate in the absence of an honorable venue to contend over religion. The religious voice is not respected nor welcome in the current public venues. Where could a respectable religious disagreement over social values or policies take place today? Not in the courts, the legislatures, the academy, the board room, the cyber street, or any sacred place of worship. The cultural wars over values are decreasingly fought between trustworthy rivals who respect each other. As a result, there are few models for this behavior and little interreligious space for congenial contestation and collaboration between rivals. Americans can tell of the great ideological/religious adversaries, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson who developed into respectful friends without coming to consensus. The great military enemies, Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, also provide moving examples of rivals who treated each other with honorable appreciation at the end of the Civil War.

The relevance of this study to national and world politics and religion should be clear: Without a legitimate and honorable place for religious and ideological persuasive contestation, frustrated advocates for change will find other means to contest seemingly unresolvable matters—including turning to inter-tribal or international wars or disruptive violence against civilian order.

To be forthcoming: I am a committed Latter-day Saint that dwells in Utah among my people. However, unlike many of my fellow Saints, I have found compelling warrants within Mormon orthodoxy and orthopraxy to seek divine influence from rival traditions that potently refute various LDS beliefs and practices. I thrive in the stimulating tension between different visions and suppose in my imagination that the God I revere does as well. I project from my own experience with critics I have come

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to respect that billions of people, now distrusting critics of each other, can learn to enjoy a kind of continual peaceful tension as trustworthy rivals. The God I worship could make things obviously clear to all of us by massive interventional revelation—and has chosen out of practical design not to do so. I believe that love is best proved in irreconcilable conflicts over things we value most—thus the radical pluralism provides a Providential, pragmatic way to develop more love. I imagine this condition to continue in any life-after-death that includes social persons of some kind.

This study of the conflict between a new revealed religion and older, established religions also founded on divine revelation and authority provides an interesting case study of non-negotiable, intractable, theological, ecclesiastical, and social religious conflict. Conflicting religious authority is a perennial problem. Revealed religions that answer the big questions regarding the true purpose and activity of the human soul now and after death provide the most important information there is. Naturally, religious groups that claim an exclusive revealed break-through on these all-important questions are prone to antagonistic rivalry with those who contradict them.²

The methods of proselytizing that are of core interest in this book can best be grasped in the social-religious milieu that gave rise to them. The method of interpretation for this study is an analysis of historical texts and context.³ To use Paul Ricoeur's term, I have "guessed" at the purposes of the protagonists after gathering as much information as seemed relevant and available.⁴ At the end of this study I will employ several disciplinary

^{1.} Hugh W. Nibley, Approaching Zion, 538-540, 554.

^{2.} Scott Appleby, "Missions and the Making of Americans," in John D. Sarna, ed., *Minority Faiths and the American Prostestant Mainstream*, 232–278. For a book length treatment regarding rivalry in the contemporary Middle East, see R. Scott Appleby, *Spokesman for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*.

^{3.} Hans-Georg Gadamer has linked interpretation with understanding as if they were synonymous because language seems to be the very form of human interrelatedness and identity. However, that all humans grasp some form of language does not mean they understand each other as particular persons. I employ Gadamer's hermeneutical method with the critique that linguistic universality is analogous to biological universality. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 364; Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis*, 131–3; Mary Ann Stenger, "Gadamer's Hermeneutics as a Model for Cross-Cultural Understanding and Truth in Religion," 159–61.

^{4.} See Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* and *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. On this point, Bruce Lincoln has said one cannot become an insider socially, religiously, or existentially,

lenses from the social sciences to elucidate aspects of the complex story. I will take positions with which readers can clearly argue. However, my primary bias is usually that of a social conflict theorist in the ever-open mode of radically pluralistic William James, not in the deterministic, materialistic mode of Karl Marx.

One over-riding purpose of this study is to persuade readers that certain ethical methods of inter and intra-religious contestation, if employed with skill, patience, and true care for the well-being of the rival or critic, will benefit the contestants and the societies in which they reside. ⁵ Today, conflicts over the purpose and destiny of humanity—religious and ideological in nature—exacerbate suspicion and contempt between billions of people facing economic and political stress over unevenly shared social and material resources. Mine is an ambitious goal for our tempestuous era: to provide the thoughtful desire—or passionate thought—that moves people towards a desire to experiment with new attitudes and healthy ways of engaging their critics and rivals in contests over what matters most. The evidence of history as I read it demands that we disenthrall ourselves from the desire to end conflict: rather, it is beneficial to cultivate the desire to sustain continual persuasive contestations over fundamentally unresolvable questions that guide our social order. I hope to engender among religious communities and secular enclaves serious desire to experiment with more fruitful ways of engaging in collaborative contestations.⁶

I theorize that particular forms of persuasive religious contestation can be healthy for both religions and societies; and more, that peacefulness in a pluralizing world depends on normalizing engaged contestation and col-

but one can do so linguistically. A language insider learns by imaginative trial and error guessing, not by belief. Bruce Lincoln, "Commentary on Genealogies of Religion by Talal Asad." I will examine later the close mutual influence between imagination and belief with respect to inter-religious differences and conflicts.

^{5.} One description of the basic pragmatic method I have adapted here can be found concisely in Richard Rorty, Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophic Papers 1, 110.

^{6.} Throughout this study I will use the term competition, which in Latin means to seek or try to obtain along with another, in contrast to the term, contest. The former denotes a situation whereby several competitors are seeking similar ends without impeding or even being aware of each other. The latter, contest, is a form of conflict in which the contestants are aware of each other, and desire to surpass each other more than attain a goal. Where competitions allow shared ends, contests allow only one unsurpassed winner. See Georg Simmel, Conflict and The Web of Group-Affiliations, 57-58.

laboration between trustworthy religious or ideological rivals. In studying religious conflict, one faces the enormity of scope that is involved, and the uncanny dilemma of gaining precision by analytical reduction while losing the sense of inexhaustible vastness that the terms religion and conflict connote. While I occasionally employ traditional power/interest negotiation theory and conflict resolution theory, they are both inadequate for understanding fundamental religious conversion contests. They are based on a comparative scarcity of resources—the social, economic, and political power resources that a successful religion procures. Whether the end game is win-lose or win-win, the presumption of these theories is a resolution via some new power arrangement. We need a new theory that reflects the basic human desire for comparative supremacy even amid over-abundance of powerful resources. This theory observes the continual desire that is never resolved because it is not based on a lack, but on a gain achieved only if a close rival creates value for the gain.

Any difference brings with it an evaluative comparison and a desire for experiencing relative supremacy, in some form. In religious or ideological modes, it leads rivals for supremacy to face the frustrating problem that places success beyond their control: they cannot force conversions of the hearts and minds of their rivals. The very presence of the adamant rival calls into question the innate power of their religion to appeal to the whole of humanity. This causes a tension for resolution that many cannot patiently bear. So often we humans decide to free ourselves from disturbing, destabilizing criticism—once and for all—ironically by coercively eliminating the very people we had desired to freely join us.

This theory has interesting ramifications. Most presume peace is the positive result of social harmony. If we could see our critics in a broader context and understand their views, harmonic differences would blend, and peace would reign. This is a fundamentally incorrect assumption. Observe how human desire for uniqueness, originality, and comparative superiority intrudes on harmony. We desire close co-resistance as much as close collaboration. We thus need a conflict engagement theory based on disharmony, disagreement, and unresolvable, continual contestation over that which we value most: our unique values, passions, and purposes.⁷

^{7.} James Duke lists the following ways conflicts can be terminated: a) disappearance of the object of conflict; b) complete victory and defeat (annihilation, exile, forced absorption); c) compromise; or d) conciliation. See James T. Duke, *Conflict and Power in Social Life*, 111. My theory adds a new termination category called conversion. It is a mutual victory of the vanquished

The theory I espouse, collaborative contestationalism, asserts the social and psychological benefit of sustaining conflicts over ideals in the mode of mutual persuasion contests between rivals that desire neither compromise nor final resolution.8 The struggle to convert rivals to acknowledge one's superior position can never be final because supremacy is only manifest and maintained through the dynamic experience of engaged contestation. Ordinary power conflicts are compromised and resolved when interests are measured to mutual agreement. Conflicts of misunderstanding are resolved when parties are mutually aware of each other's real meanings, needs, and values.

Finally, this study aims to show that understanding the other does not always lead to resolution of conflict. Some conflicts are enhanced with a very clear understanding of irreconcilable differences. No enlightened intelligence or cosmopolitan sophistication will eliminate rival contests over ultimate truths of eternal importance, especially when they involve social change. Even in highly-educated societies, serious ideological or religious differences will continue to yield difficult conflicts. Just as a person may fear getting sick from someone contaminated with a disease, many are concerned that they and their communities might become infected by rivals who hold beliefs and values that they deem to be socially or eternally dangerous. To remain spiritually healthy, they attempt to avoid interaction with their rivals. The concern for tribal health increases in pluralistic societies where laws do not allow for the beliefs of rivals to be quarantined or expelled. Any assessment of the twenty-first century must look at this squarely.

Conflict over cultural contamination—without coercion—is a reasonably optimal outcome for society. My prescription for this public health problem of spiritual contamination is neither to find or found a new universalism, over-religion, meta-language, or meta-praxis that

and the victor. However, it is only a temporary termination, as it gives rise to new intra-group conflicts of heretical persuasions.

^{8.} Social theorist Chantal Mouffe has promoted the idea that uneven distribution of social-economic power is a continual fact of political life manifest by agonistic subgroups seeking, but never finally achieving, hegemonic political supremacy. Her theory of managing with limited violence the continual engagement of rival challengers reflects James Madison's insight that rival interpreting factions will inevitably emerge from any perceived consensus, and thus peace cannot seriously be conceived as tranquil unity of factions, but as dynamic contestation without violent disorder. See Chantal Mouffe, Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically; James Madison, Federalist Papers 10 and 51.

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will convince everyone that our differences are not dangerous. This approach feels like arrogant effrontery, even if well-intended. The effective prescription is mutual contamination by means of principled advocacy. This allows healthy interreligious contestation and collaboration without precipitating resentment, coercion, and violence. I appreciate the desire that many share for social-spiritual convergence in a philosophical religious universalism, but argue that the very hope for peaceful community that such universalism implies is unfounded. I suggest that humans would inevitably invent conflict if they had to live in harmony for very long. The Christian Bible provocatively reveals there was war in heaven (Rev. 12:7). So how on earth can the cultural and religious inheritors of that sacred text expect tranquility?

^{9.} William Blake sets the tone for positive conflict. From Blake's *Milton* we learn that Contraries are Positives. A Negation is not a Contrary. From *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* we learn that reality consists never of One and the Other in Complete Harmony, but always One or the Other in Free Necessity to Love or Not. For a reading of Blake's ironic disparagement of Eternal Harmony and his celebration of the "eternality" of marriage of contraries that has influenced my study, see Robert Gleckner, "The Road of Excess," 114–17.

CHAPTER ONE

The American Lively Experiment: Sustaining Religious Rivalry and Peace

America's foundational document proclaimed that the Creator endowed all people with life and the liberty to pursue happiness. Their political order was an experiment to test whether millions of different people, together in one society, could freely pursue their conflicting, often mutually exclusive, ideals and programs for happiness without frustration and anger leading to coercion and social destruction. There is no fixed American creed or ideal for happiness upon which legitimate social order rests. The American experiment is based on mutual trust between citizens who agree not to resort to coercion or violence in their pursuit of happiness. The legitimacy of their governing order is not vested in the rule of law, but in a cultivated respect—if not love—for free rivals. Foremost, this applies to rivals that unceasingly challenge and contest our idealistic or religious purposes and programs for happiness. Breaking with thousands of years of tradition whereby social order was based on a given heavenly order mediated through priests, oracles, kings, and emperors, the American founding affirmed that the Creator gave men and women the unmediated responsibility to rule themselves. The foundation for their decisions was the human conscience influenced by both divine inspiration and natural reason. This required each citizen to learn from past sources and decide how to interpret and receive their influence without coercion from outsiders. This individual freedom opened the door to perpetual disagreements over the true or best purposes and methods that would bring happiness in our social union. To repeat for emphasis, America is not founded on a unifying Ideal or Truth, but on a way of embracing unresolvable never-ending contestations between rivals who actively influence others to follow their way toward happiness, first through socialization of their children, then exemplary living, and finally by various modes of public persuasion. This dynamic social process of continual contestation was constrained as orderly collaboration in two ways: first by civil laws that allowed no coer-

cion of belief or practice—legal or physical—to be employed by rivals or opponents; and second by the cultivated habitual attitude of patient engagement that allowed critics or rivals a full voice—not just to ensure the reciprocal right for oneself but, crucially, to receive the influence of an opponent who is not necessarily an enemy. For many American believers this meant that God, their divine governor, provided the perfect social model, restraining himself from imposing coercive sovereignty on human consciences, preferring to win the contest for the soul by means of inspirational persuasion—at least until the Final Judgment.

By contrast, during the same epoch, Napoleon took the French crown from the Catholic bishop's hands and placed it on his own head. His action let God and religious institutions know they were no longer needed in Europe except perhaps for sentimental reasons. The French aimed to end centuries of violent conflict over religion by denouncing all quarreling acolytes. The unifying mission was to civilize the world as enlightened French people. America's founders were more collegial with their Creator, claiming He wanted them to be grateful for the freedom He granted them to sincerely worship Him as their consciences allowed. They gratefully acknowledged that God had granted all humans radical sovereignty to choose their own religious and social order. Further, leaning on Jesus's pronouncement to make disciples of all the nations, Christians came to believe God did not intend for each person to maintain primary allegiance to their family and culture. They did not think it strange to engage actively in intramural evangelizing contests. No people or country had come to so highly value the individual choice of religious belief-indeed, it was the national pastime well before baseball. Americans kept their rowdy peace by containing it as a persuasion contest between free and sovereign consciences that simply could not be coerced. More, for their society to thrive, the free give and take of this contest of conscience had to be invigorating rather than exhausting and had to be coupled with an attitude of patience in the freedom of a rival to resist persuasion.

The Enlightenment fight against the church especially in France had turned into a conflict with God. Citizens of the secular religion of the French Revolution replaced the authority of the Roman Catholic Church with the state. The American Revolution did not need to overthrow any religious authority because Americans had, from the early years of colonization, been separating themselves from the influence of a State church; they had no dominant religion common among them. They were far from a unified nation of believers in a single form of Christianity.

God and Humans: Co-Sovereigns in America

Most early Americans possessed a self-confident Protestant spirituality derived from their understanding of a New Testament emphasis on personal salvation attained by responding faithfully to the Biblical testimony of witnesses of Jesus as divine redeemer—whether pre-determined or not. Protestants rejected the need for sacerdotal mediation between God and men. To be sure, the early Puritans had made a covenant to be upheld in a congregation of similar believers, but eventually the authority of the leaders or the congregation became less important than the integrity of the individual vis-à-vis God. In the tug of war between loyalty to community and integrity of conscience and between salvation as a group and salvation as an individual, the Americans have struggled without resolution to the present day. Individual spiritual integrity required each person to freely choose to follow the innate good conscience provided by the Spirit of God. But the Spirit seems to inspire dissociation as much as unity. This inner call, in many if not most cases, was more compelling than family, tribal, political, or ecclesiastical loyalty. It was the custom still to join a group of like-minded souls as a free act of Christian fellowship, but the divine right to follow one's God-given conscience in switching—among Christian religious denominations initially and then among all philosophies—became the American norm. For believers this placed each person in a powerful negotiating position with a God who desired to save him or her. Whatever our philosophy or religion, the social-psychological and cultural power of resistance and attraction between co-sovereign free lovers is at the heart of American sensitivity.

The tension over the true provenance and destiny of each human person has been at the heart of Euro-American culture. The can-do Americans found a liberating story of the divine within them more inspiring than these distancing alternatives. Rejecting the notion they were just enlightened apes without a connection to the divine, they reversed the focus of theology toward understanding why and how humanity could conceivably be the unique beloved subjects of the Divine Loving Parent that Jesus had revealed to the world. In the nineteenth century many Americans resonated with the Christian scriptures in which the divine Jesus called his human disciples no longer servants but friends who were one with him and the Father (John 15:15). This provided spiritual confidence that God

^{1.} This book will employ the gender specific usage of the earliest New Testament texts with reference to God and Jesus. Late in the twentieth century, many

designed humans to choose to love and believe, freely making their lives true unforced testimonies of what they valued most. Crucially, this provided the theological approval for a social-political system assuring that all humans are free to accept or reject any religious beliefs—and to love God as a sincere loving friend does free of compulsion.

The belief and attitude that religious lives should be uncoerced produced unique religious political leaders like Roger Williams in the seventeenth century and social theorists like James Madison in the eighteenth century who acknowledged the priority of their fellow citizens' God-given and godlike freedom of conscience. This attitude, in turn, allowed a lively experiment in government that encouraged perpetual persuasive contestations over fundamental questions of truth, ethics, religion, goodness, and purpose. In sum, the Christian God that identified with uncoerced love of persons found its first political expression in America. Love made unfettered individual choice inevitable; the moment we love another person, we face the ever-open and never final question of how best to do so.²

When eternal salvation and damnation are at stake, religious disagreement among persons with integrity always creates strong dissonance over

Protestant and other theologians have employed gender-neutral or affirmative female gender language to scripture. Gendered language with respect to God in Christian theology is controversial. Protestants have no doctrine regarding a female deity. The Roman Catholics had affirmed a feminine alternative to the mediating aspect of the God-*Man* Jesus in Mary, The Bearer of God, who was born without taint of sin and was assumed bodily into heaven at the end of her mortality where she pleads to the Father for the forgiveness of humanity. (The Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary became formal doctrines in 1854 and 1950 respectively.) Still, no *She* is a member of the traditional Christian Godhead. However, Mormons in the nineteenth century affirmed the material body of God, the Heavenly Father, and that an unnamed material female divinity called Heavenly Mother was the wife of the Heavenly Father.

2. The tension between the idea of absolute sovereign control of God and an open divine and human freedom arises with the idea that virtue or love cannot be coerced or predetermined to be real. This tension over divine control and human freedom was at the heart of the American founding. See Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought*, 42–44, esp. note 52. In the seventeenth century, John Milton examined this tension in *Paradise Lost* where Adam and Eve's fall was affirmed as a condition for freedom. We will see in this study that Protestants elevate absolute divine sovereignty and Mormons extol free agency in this disagreement over whether humans are liberatingly fettered by the fall.

who is right. Remarkably, some Americans faced it by finding uncanny enjoyment in the attractive intelligence and integrity of their religious rivals who might, nonetheless, be heading for damnation in their view. The unsentimental love of an honorable rival sprouted with Roger Williams in the 1600s and eventually bore fruit in the way Americans tend to view their prior enemies after wars—especially after their vicious and most costly Civil War. Such is expressed in these nineteenth-century stanzas of Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau's sentiments could stand as the theme for any realistic hopefulness as we face irresolvable religious and political conflicts in the twenty-first century:

> Let such pure hate still underprop Our love, that we may be Each other's conscience, And have our sympathy Mainly from thence.

We'll one another treat like gods And all faith we have In virtue and in truth, bestow On either, and suspicion leave To gods below.³

Thoreau's "pure hate" derives from the conflict between people whose pure love for each other requires their paradoxical mutual opposition. To engage in persuasive mutual contestation with integrity is to honor the unfettered freedom of the other to present their highest ideals without any desire to coerce conversion. Only "gods below" think they can, and thus try and fail, to influence a change of heart by force.

The innate authority to follow conscience in the contestation over truth provided the basis for individual sovereignty as a founding tenet for the new nation. Whether conscience meant the spirit of God telling the mind the truth or illuminating the soul to hear the truth, humans were responsibly free to follow or not follow their inner voice.

Since many religions have existed in America—and since personal religious experiences produce no universal basis for resolving disagreements—conflicts over God's opinions have been frequent. Those who announce they have experienced two-way communion with deity on a public issue offend those who claim contradictory revelations, or who feel

^{3.} Henry David Thoreau, "Let Such Pure Hate Still Underprop."

left out of the divine conversation. All doubt the others' reliability, and most conclude that no one should speak officially for deity.

The fallback position is one-way communication *to*, not *with*, deity. Denominations may still privately believe that they have a special relationship with God in which they experience God's specific directions, but the scandal of divisive religion is generally overcome—at least enough to keep the peace—by the social philosophy of "one nation under God." In terms of civic religion, Americans quasi-officially trust in a God of public prayer, pledges of allegiance, and mottos on coinage, yet many have developed rich, localized, religious lives that they balance against their national religious expression of pious humanism or deism that unites them enough for the government to govern.

The Great Code for Correct Conflict

Even though the government they established had no official religion, the self-identity of the founders and other early Americans was still deeply rooted in the Bible, perhaps the most powerful moral narrative to ever influence humanity. After many centuries, it had come to provide a code or way of thinking about all aspects of life, but especially social conflicts over the right way to live under the divine Eye.⁴ Although twenty-first-century Americans are hardly as conversant in Biblical lore as their eighteenthcentury ancestors, they have inherited an unwritten code of conduct heavily influenced by the Biblical narrative. From the Hebrew Genesis to the Christian Apocalypse, the theme resounds of conflict between God and his chosen people, between the chosen people themselves, and between the chosen people and their surrounding cultures. In response to the demands of a God who is jealous for the love of all humanity, the chosen people must confront and challenge those who do not worship the True God, which would inevitably lead to conflict—not only with strangers and enemies, but also with family and friends. While some Biblical stories denounce conflict over material or political power, conflict over ultimate questions of purpose and righteousness are shown to be humanity's main event—a sign that divine truth and goodness are continually at work expanding and resisting falsehood and evil.

Aware of the violence that has erupted over religious difference, America's founders recognized themselves as a new chosen people with a social order that would require authority to contain the inevitable conflicts

^{4.} Northrup Frye, The Great Code: The Bible and Literature.

within their kingless society. They experimented with a unique way to sustain religious conflicts with as little violence as possible by normalizing contestation in the persuasive mode. Evangelizing and counter-evangelizing, shouting your different views of truth out loud in speeches, sermons, newspapers, and pamphlets normally without resorting to coercion, became the American way of religious, political, economic, and social life.

In America, the state accepts that its citizens disagree about ultimate reality or religious authority, and that non-violent contestations over them can be appropriate. American constitutional democracy provided a scaffolding to sustain religious and ideological conflicts, not eliminate them. It is no coincidence that religious freedom was included among the first of freedoms in the Bill of Rights—along with the freedom of speech, a free press, and the right to assemble, which are necessary for people to engage in persuasive contests over truth and ultimate purpose.

However, even as the government affirmed the right to persuasive contestation, the deep Biblical code provided a different, darker precedent—preemptive violence (a massive flood, a Canaanite genocide, capital punishment for false preaching) allegedly sanctioned by divine representatives to assure uncontaminated growth of truth and righteousness. A main narrative theme throughout the Bible is of God speaking through human mediators, and of the intended recipients often strongly disagreeing with the message's validity. Thus, religious conflicts derive often from disagreements over who is authorized to represent God's will to humanity, or over the actual merits of different doctrinal claims or ethical programs coming from self-proclaimed authorized representatives.

Despite the all-powerful sovereign threat of annihilation, the Biblical code affirms that the Creator King desires company, a kingdom of human beings that honor and even love Him. Theologically speaking, there is no absolute authority—it has its limits in the divine desire for subjects to freely choose to follow the King without threatening compulsion.⁵ In the desire to be loved by free agents, the King radically shifts the foundation of authority to a living mutual relationship of trust instead of the absolute power of a Creator to do whatever He desires with His creations. Without any threats or bribes, authority is thus granted by loving consent of followers to the leader.

^{5.} Hannah Arendt's analysis of political authority is germane. See Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, 93, 102–3, 128–29.

To avoid social chaos, some leadership is required, but why do people grant authority to one person or group and not another? Governments or religions whose leaders can gracefully obtain uncoerced authority have the best chance of flourishing. Because of this, religious conflicts that challenge authorized leadership are extremely serious. They not only call into question who should be leading that society, but they also threaten the order that assures salvation in worlds to come. The conflict-engendering dilemma we inherit from the Biblical code is provoked by the divine injunction, "Choose you this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15).

Even Deeper than Morality and Law

The term "mores" denotes the typically religious social understandings that lead to unquestioned practices that provide a society its identity, values, and deep purposes. Mores, which are taken for granted, undergird a society's enduring institutions, laws, and traditions. Most cultures have invoked the divine as the earliest foundation for social and political legitimacy. The longest lasting social organizations on the planet also sustain legitimacy by appealing to divine constancy through centuries of change. Religious and ideological groups that spread throughout the globe can survive cross-cultural conflicts through their unifying mores and foundational myths.

Religious doctrines reflect and develop the mores of social cohesion in a way that formal law can never replicate. Traditionally, a society that lasts learns to interweave the oughts and ought nots of its common mores with its laws. When citizens share similar mores, they develop positive programs enforced by laws that they think are appropriate. However, when there is a conflict over the authoritative foundations of society—that is, a conflict over the mores that undergird the law—schism arises as people disagree over the correctness of their laws. Religious differences that display a conflict of mores can severely test the ability of any society to remain intact. As we shall see in the next chapter, on three occasions in American history, religious piety directly led to a snap of the limits that common mores could bear—with violent results.

The First Amendment was an attempt to leave to the individual states and churches the problem of religious conflicts over mores that developed

^{6.} For a classic theoretical treatment of this, see Georges Dumézil, *The Destiny of a King*.

^{7.} See the theoretical basis for this claim in Alexis de Toqueville, *Democracy in America*, 292–93 and Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.

within their borders and congregations. By the late nineteenth century, all of the states had ended their legal support for a particular religion, so the government's remaining task became establishing, by court ruling or legislation, those religious behaviors that offended American mores enough to require negative sanctions. In the case of social conflicts of interest, since these types of disputes are typically quantifiable and fungible, compromises are usually effective in maintaining stability. But in the case of conflicts of identity, compromise seems impossible—hence cries in times past and present that even one slave is too many, or two wives is too many, or one interracial or homosexual marriage is too many. For those holding fast to certain mores, compromising the moral truth even once would concede that their truth does not really matter. In short, Americans can be tolerant of conflicting beliefs but not of conflicting mores that influence behaviors, especially if those mores are held by a group that is a geopolitical competitor for cultural power. If a subculture's mores come to differ from the majority culture's mores, a secession crisis can occur; it means that the main culture has failed to persuade the subculture that it is wrong, or vice versa. At that point, the use of some form of coercion is inevitable.

Morality may be legislated, but mores always precede law. For this reason, republican democracies with identical systems of law function very differently in societies with different mores. Because they operate at such a core level, conflicts over mores are often seen as religious in nature—such as when Southern mores like slavery, or Mormon mores like polygamy, or Native American mores regarding property, family, and sacred practices conflicted with majority mores. As evidence, each of these conflicts was viewed first as conflict over right and wrong and only secondarily as conflict over power and interest. In these cases, when the tensions between mores could no longer be sustained, the majority imposed negative legal sanctions before ultimately using force to keep the United States intact. The immediate result was the creation of three major geographic reservations—the South, Utah, and Indian reservations—the existence of which allowed the divergent groups that formed the greater American society to feel unified by comparison.

Though religion generates contests that separate communities, it also generates mores of solidarity and loyalty that are often stronger than allegiances to kith, kin, nationality, or ethnicity. The social power a religion holds is derived from the pervasive, uncoerced, continuous authority that members of that group grant to their leaders. A community can become a very powerful force if it can generate a strong degree of solidarity. Religion

is the best example of genuine social power created through common mores that are not enforced by totalitarian or democratic means. As we can see in today's world, the largest faith traditions have each attained enough authority across cultural and international borders that disparate peoples, races, nation/tribes, and even states share purposes and allegiances beyond local interests. Viewed internationally, religiously authorized cross-cultural mores are the most powerful cultural influences in today's world.

Many early Americans inherited the belief that sharing the right Protestant religious ways played an important community-building role in establishing norms for personal, social, and political life. Hence Alexis de Tocqueville's observation: "I have known Americans to form associations to send priests out into the new states of the West and establish schools and churches there; they fear that religion might be lost in the depths of the forest and that the people growing up there might be less fitted for freedom than those from whom they sprang."8 In describing this phenomenon, Tocqueville is focusing on the overt unanimity of Protestant Christian mores—not belief in doctrines per se—that sustained the free institutions in America. He writes: "No one in the United States has dared to profess the maxim that everything is allowed in the interests of society" because "American revolutionaries are obliged ostensibly to profess a certain respect for Christian morality and equity, and that does not allow them easily to break the laws when those are opposed to the execution of their designs."9

Tocqueville's theory that common religious mores make it possible for people to uphold laws together is the essence of the problem at the heart of the American experiment with pluralism. When religious mores are truly diverse among large sectors of society, will there yet be enough social cohesion for a nation to stand undivided? Designed to evade the violent confrontations between social, religious, and political rivals that had caused years of bloodshed in Europe, America was and still is a precarious experimental contest in the practical limits of cooperation among voluntary associations. While the American Founders anticipated these contests for religious supremacy, they hoped to prove that the continual contestation between various factions would check and balance the overwhelming power of any individual faction.

While a broadly popular religion is a powerful political force for stability, the desire to keep true religion from being contaminated usually

^{8.} Tocqueville, Democracy, 292-93.

^{9.} Tocqueville, 292.

provokes criticism between factions who see each other as heretical. When this occurs, their desire to keep order and purity often leads them to exercise religious coercion, which, in turn, often leads to counter-coercion and, at times, violence.

Fairly understood, freedom describes a dual capacity to persuade and be persuaded. Freedom increases only as those two capacities increase. The freedom to change oneself, to become a convert, is as radical as the freedom to advocate change in others. Persuasion is never finished. This is the other experimental aspect of the American way: once converted, we can be converted again. It is the search for truth, or the continual testing of truth already found, that is the key to the American experiment. When American Protestants decided that they could no longer get along with heretics within their ranks, they would split in schism. There was no need to create laws against that. But as Tocqueville saw, since social cohesion and the rule of law arise from general acceptance of ethical and religious mores, when substantial numbers of people in a society hold very different ethical and religious mores, the social order might reach its limits to sustain cohesion though persuasive contestation. For instance, while he believed that Catholics, who shared similar enough mores, would eventually be assimilated successfully among Protestants, he did not think Native Americans, African Americans, nor charismatic prophet/leaders would be assimilated as equal citizens among white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. 10 As we shall discuss, history proved him partially right in his predictions.

Whose Promised Land Is This?

From the earliest colonies, American political and religious contests were engaged by clustered communities of people holding similar beliefs, mores, and interests; and in American democracy, social-political power was obtained by voting majorities in geo-political concentrations. As a result, large aspects of the American experiment were engaged as continual contests for land control. Religious beliefs and political interests melded in questions over the purposes that various groups had for gathering on particular sections of land as the nation expanded. Different groups from Europe settled each colony for a different purpose, establishing separate cultures with divergent values.¹¹ For early New England colonists, the

^{10.} Tocqueville, 317, 341, 435.

^{11.} Colin Woodard, American Nations: A History of Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America, 1–3.

"empty" continent was a savage place, not holy in advance of their arrival. In their view, it was they, the people of divine promise, who made America the "promised land." Massachusetts became the land of promise when John Winthrop declared it so. 12 Although the Mormons believed that Jackson County, Missouri, was the locale of the eschatological New Jerusalem, they nimbly followed Brigham Young to Utah where they created another promised land. Since the days of the earliest colonies, contests ensued over which religious group—including the Indians—would make the promised land of the Americas holy. To the European Christians who chose to settle here, the land north of Mexico seemed to be void of the important forms—such as temples, churches, and permanent cities that belie an eternal order. Hence, it seemed to be waiting for them to take or purchase it from the nomads already present on it, whose ownership claims seemed to them to have false legitimacy compared to the colonists' divine right to establish an orderly kingdom based on true religion that was to spread to all nations.

Is one nation destined to inherit the earth, along with the meek? Who decides whether one culture should expand or not? Does prior occupancy of land justify continued occupancy or expansion on it? It is an uncomfortable fact that every culture exists in tension with other forms of life, and historically cultures have exploited or displaced those who have allowed them to grow. Violent pushing and shoving have usually, if not always, occurred when a new nation is established on any previously inhabited land. There were missionaries like Roger Williams who evangelized while respecting the consciences, religions, and cultures of the na-

^{12.} The chosen people motif did not begin with the Massachusetts Puritans. The new American continents were claimed by the Roman Catholics as well. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI enunciated the Spanish/Catholic responsibility to colonize the world with true religion and declared the right of missionaries to acquire new land and converts with their free consent and fair payment. However, tellingly, most of the Christian colonizers believed they were warranted in taking the land by force if the native peoples would not allow evangelizing or promise to avoid violent resistance to them. See Paul Gottschalk, *The Earliest Diplomatic Documents of America*, 21; Ward Churchill, *Struggle for Land: Indigenous Resistance to Genocide, Ecocide, and Expropriation in Contemporary North America*, 47–48, 64n8.

^{13.} While I disagree with Rene Girard's thesis that all cultures are built on a ritual order that regularly sacrifices the weakest to placate the general pentup envy that, without the scapegoat, would lead to violent destruction of the group, it is nonetheless difficult, if not impossible, to historically discover human cultures that do not experience violent conflict due to their own expansion or

tive populations, but they were not the majority. While Cortez was more direct in his military approach to seizing control of land than Winthrop, European Americans, drawing upon the Biblical *herem* (holiness) code of Israel in Canaan as justification for their acts, eventually usurped the best land, killed or exiled the indigenous tribes, and established their sacred promised land. American Christians thought their mission was affirmed by geo-political expansion, while at the same time felt threatened by the cultures and religions they were trying to convert.

Peaceful Conflict is Not an Oxymoron

The American founding documents did not confront social conflicts between religious rivals directly. However, the framers handled the matter discretely behind the facade of the preamble to the Declaration of Independence that promoted vague deism as the safest way to publicly discuss religion without eliciting sectarian revolts. The Declaration's language encompassed any religion that believed God was the creator of human beings, appealing to "the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, . . . that all men are

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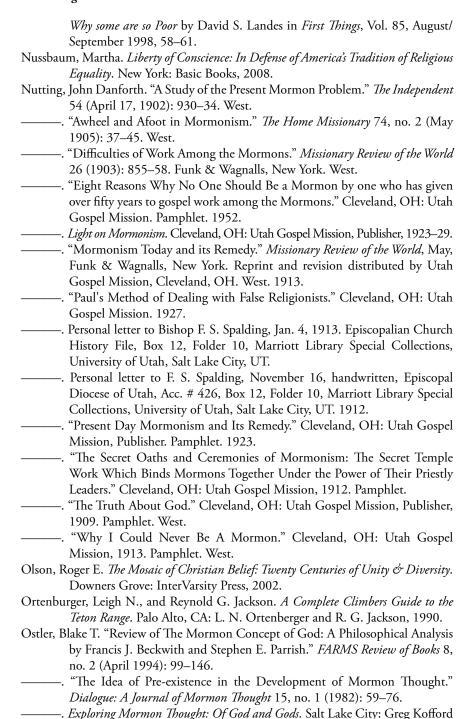
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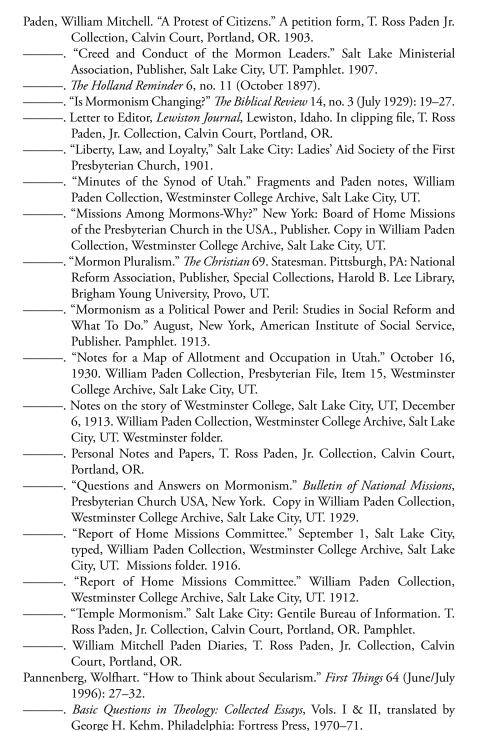
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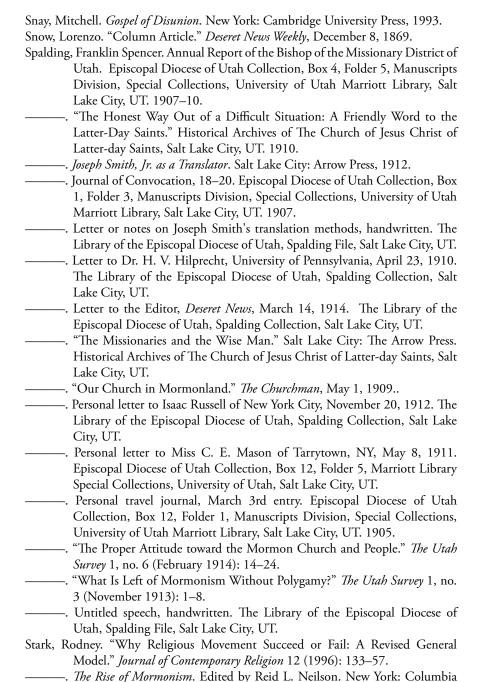




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