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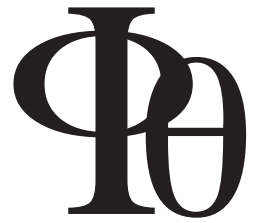
the journal of
the society for
mormon philosophy
and theology

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Volume 5, Issue 1
Spring, 2009

Defining Doctrine:
A Response to Loyd Ericson

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No one who has spent time surveying the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or made the effort to reflect on what Mormons teach and believe will suppose that it is a simple matter to define Latter-day Saint doctrine. It is, to be sure, a challenging enterprise. There is not, within Mormonism, a systematic theology. This is not simply due to the Church's relative youth and inexperience with theology-making. It is, rather, due primarily to the dynamics of our canon and the fluidity of modern revelation, both of which tend to militate against standardization.

My effort to suggest some guidelines for discerning doctrine[1] is not intended to be philosophically rigorous, but is instead a description of present Church practice, what is in harmony with the thinking of current apostles and prophets.[2] I appreciate the critique of my approach by Loyd Ericson in his thoughtful essay.[3] I find a number of his observations fascinating and would like to respond briefly to some of his points I find problematic.

Ericson points out, appropriately, that I provided "no justification why that particular set of criteria should be used over any other" (71). This is true enough. Frankly, however, I was not attempting to demonstrate why "my model" was better or worse than any other. I was merely reflecting on what kinds of criteria appear to exist in the Church today, factors to weigh in determining what constitutes doctrine. Nor was I attempting to make an authoritative pronouncement, for clearly I am in no position to do so. I was attempting to write by way of wisdom and not by way of commandment (see D&C 28:5-6).

During his interview with Larry King President Gordon B. Hinckley responded to a question about the current practice of plural marriage as follows: "It is *not the doctrine* of the Church." Note that he did not say, "It is no longer the *practice* of the Church." He said it is not the doctrine of the Church. Doctrine means teaching, and plural marriage is simply not taught today. And doctrine is the foundation for practice. By the way, President Hinckley's brief statement could be interpreted as a prophetic justification of the point I am making.

Roman Catholics look to the Magisterium, the teaching office, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to determine their doctrine. With the Protestants this task is much more difficult. Historian Randall Balmer has written:

> When Martin Luther posted his *Ninety-five Theses* on the cathedral door in Wittenberg, he declared, in effect, that he would be guided by

his own understanding of the Bible and not by the teachings of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Luther's sentiments created a demand for Scriptures in the vernacular, and Protestants ever since have stubbornly insisted on interpreting the Bible for themselves, forgetting most of the time that they come to the text with their own set of cultural biases and personal agendas. . . . Everyone becomes his or her own theologian. There is no longer any need to consult Augustine or Thomas Aquinas or Martin Luther about their understanding of various passages when you yourself are the final arbiter of what is the correct reading. This tendency, along with the absence of any authority structure within Protestantism, has created a kind of theological free-for-all, as various individuals or groups insist that *their* reading of the Bible is the only possible interpretation.[4]

While some would applaud this broad scriptural and doctrinal hermeneutic as generating a healthy theological creativity (or creating space for academic freedom) I find this approach chaotic. Consequently, on my view, any effort to interpret scripture or set forth doctrine that is not presided over by the *authorized* servants of God is haphazard and open to confusion and doctrinal disruption. Indeed, the so-called authoritative model is demonstrated in both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as the approved pattern for teaching and learning (Mosiah 18:18-20; 25:21-24; D&C 28:2-7; 43:3-6; 90:3-5).

Ericson correctly notes that I place "a heavy emphasis on contemporary sources" (70). Of course I do. This living Church (D&C 1:30) relies upon contemporary, continuing revelation through *living* prophets. Mormonism is deeply rooted in history in that we not only look to our past with appreciation and to our past leaders with admiration and respect, but also in that our doctrine and belief are largely linked to actual historical sites and events—the First Vision, the coming of Moroni and a host of angels, urim and thummim, the translation of golden plates, the restoration of priesthood, etc. Our past is crucial, especially as knowledge and power were given to Joseph Smith. In an interview with Mike Wallace on 18 December 1995, President Hinckley responded to a question about how he receives revelation for the Church: "Let me say first that there is a tremendous history behind this Church, a history of prophecy, a history of revelation, and a backlog of decisions which set the pattern of the Church so that there aren't constant recurring problems that require any special dispensation. But there are occasionally things that arise where the will of the Lord is sought."[5]

President Hinckley's words in an interview with Don Lattin, a San Jose, California reporter, are also instructive: "Let me say first that we have a great body of revelations, *the vast majority of which came from the Prophet Joseph Smith*. We don't need much revelation. We need to pay more attention to the revelation we have already received. But we have that background and *nearly every problem with which we deal, we deal with it on the basis of that revelation that we have*—this background" (emphasis added).

Thus the foundation of the faith was laid by Joseph Smith and his successors in the nineteenth century, and we honor and revere those called as prophet leaders. Much of what we believe today and how we conduct the affairs of the Church are a product of their search. But we are a forward-looking Church. We keep our eyes focused on the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in our day and attune our ears to their counsel and teaching when it comes to both policy and doctrine. "Continuing revelation" implies that teachings or practices may be discontinued, altered, expanded upon, clarified—in other words, *changed*. No Latter-day Saint should be put off by change. Does that mean that what is spoken or decreed in our day might well be altered, laid aside, or discontinued by the year 2030? Yes, and I would expect this to happen. "The Lord, in his infinite wisdom and goodness," Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained, "knows what ought to be done with his servants." The other thing to note is that when the Lord calls a new prophet he does so because he has a work and a labor and a mission for the new man to perform. "I can imagine" [he continued], "that when the Prophet Joseph Smith was taken from this life the Saints felt themselves in the depths of despair. To think that a leader of such spiritual magnitude had been taken from them! . . . And yet when he was taken the Lord had Brigham Young. Brigham Young stepped forth and wore the mantle of leadership. With all respect and admiration and every accolade of praise resting upon the Prophet Joseph, still *Brigham Young came forward and did things that then had to be done in a better way than the Prophet Joseph could have done them*."[6]

Ericson essentially asks what we are to do with a statement by President Brigham Young, delivered in January 1870, that Brigham had "never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call scripture"[7] (71). Allow us to read this in context:

> Well, brethren and sisters, try and be Saints. I will try; I have tried many years to live according to the law which the Lord reveals unto me. I know just as well what to teach this people and just what to say to them and what to do in order to bring them into the celestial kingdom, as I know the road to my office. It is just as plain and easy. The Lord is in our midst. He teaches the people continually. I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture.

Now look what follows: "*Let me have the privilege of correcting a sermon, and it is as good Scripture as they deserve.* The people have the oracles of God continually." This is theologically interesting because as long as Brigham is given the right to take a sermon and edit it according to prophetic prerogative, he can then give the Saints the equivalent of Holy Scripture. That implies that what he says at first may need adjustment. Or perhaps the leaders who live after his time may need to engage in such a divine editorial process. And unless one is caught up with a notion of prophetic or apostolic infallibility, he or she is not greatly troubled by such an idea.

Ericson refers to a "widespread belief that contemporary Church leaders are correct in pronouncing doctrine because God would not allow a modern day prophet to lead the Saints astray" (71). He then quotes the message from Wilford Woodruff appended to Official Declaration 1 in the current edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Ericson says: "This assurance, like the others, faces the bootstrapping question as to whether it is an infallible criterion for knowing what to accept as authentic doctrinal teaching" (71). First, to be more precise, President Woodruff did not mention doctrinal pronouncements or declaring doctrine; his specific reference is clearly to the Manifesto, to the fact that he as President of the Church has been directed by the Lord to discontinue the practice of plural marriage. Second, Ericson's evaluation of President Woodruff's remark may be trendy and provocative, but it throws us into the kind of postmodern paralysis that afflicts the contemporary academy. That mindset would bring the living Church to a dead standstill and ease us into a way of life based, not on prophetic teachings, but rather an unrestrained personal preference in which we reject anything as authoritative since we have no standard by which to judge. President Woodruff's principle is true to scripture and true to the stories in scripture wherein prophets who surrendered to personal ambition, whim, or wealth were removed out of their place (see Numbers 22-24, 31; Mosiah 15:13).

My appeal to doctrine having "sticking power" (72) was merely a way of indicating that a teaching or practice that endured the tests of time, that continued to be taught by Church leaders in later generations, would generally bear the mark of truth. I realize that such a criterion is less precise than some of the others mentioned in my article. For example, the Adam-God teachings, *which I believe was just as false in 1852 as it is today* (82), was in fact taught during the lifetime of Brigham Young but died rather quickly after his death in 1877. While it is true that a few folks today seek to perpetuate such teachings, they have generally become apostate from the mainstream church. Further, a recent president of the Church has declared the doctrine to be false.[8]

In addition, we do not teach today—the ideas are simply not found in holy scripture, official declarations, handbooks or curriculum, or general conference addresses of prophets, seers, and revelators—that the sons of perdition will return to their native element and be re-processed and start over after their dissolution hereafter; that Jesus was married and, in addition, was a polygamist; that God the Father had sexual relations with Mary, the mother of Jesus; that God is still progressing in knowledge; and that Blacks were denied the priesthood prior to 1978 because their ancestors were cursed.

Ericson's question regarding how long a doctrine must stay around for it to "stick" is a good one. The question, presumably addressed to me, as to when the revelation on priesthood would "have garnered enough sticking power to be considered doctrine" (72), is answerable, however. It was presented to a constituent assembly of the Church in the Tabernacle on 30 September 1978 and became Official Declaration 2 in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1981. It has been doctrine ever since.

Beliefs *may* be the same as teachings or doctrine (76) but need not be. If all the people in the world believe that abortion is right, it does not make it so. If every Jewish man in New York City denies that the historical Jesus was and is the Messiah, that does not affect at all the truthfulness of Jesus' claims or the doctrine of Christ found in the New Testament and Book of Mormon. Individual Mormons can believe all sorts of strange things that are not the doctrine of the Church. Persons may state that they do not accept the doctrine taught by a Church leader at General Conference (77), but such denial does not affect the truthfulness of a matter or determine whether it is the doctrine of the Church. In this regard, belief is not the same as doctrine.

Yes, I happen to think that we—the Mormon people—*ought* to know our faith well enough to be able to answer questions those of other faiths may pose, and we certainly ought to be better able to answer most questions members of the Church ask. In that sense I suppose I was suggesting by the use of the pronoun "we" that there are some things we *ought* to believe. And yes, it is true that one Church leader may disagree with another on doctrine (77), but I find it interesting that Ericson chose as his example the Orson Pratt-Brigham Young debates. Indeed, we don't see much public disagreement on doctrine between apostles brought before the public these days.

The distinction between *policy* and *doctrine* is one that I hear quite often, sometimes from those looking for rationalization for not taking a particular hard doctrine as the will of God. I want to be sensitive about this, but I hear this most often in regard to the priesthood restriction. That is, those who refer to the restriction as a policy seem eager not to allow this directive the elevated status of doctrine; that might lend credence to the possibility that it came from God. I would agree that a number of procedural matters in the Church would fall quite well into the category of policy, but I was rather surprised to see the Word of Wisdom in Ericson's list (77). The Church's law of health came to Joseph Smith by revelation (D&C 89). Is it relegated to policy because it has to do with *behavior* and with what *practices* are commended and which are proscribed? Would we really call baptism by immersion a policy, as Ericson suggests? (77). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "baptism is a sign ordained of God, for the believer in Christ to take upon himself in order to enter into the kingdom of God." Further, "Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God, and there is no other way beneath the heavens whereby God hath ordained for man to come to Him to be saved."[9] The apostle Paul indicated that the necessity of baptismal immersion is suggested in the symbolism of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-5), a pretty doctrinal-sounding idea. How about laying on hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost? Are the "specifics of temple ritual" policy? (77). That would seem to include temple covenants and ordinances. Where do we draw the line?

In addition, Ericson mentions the statements of Church leaders against the practice of homosexuality as an example of policy rather than doctrine (77). Some may see the Church's position against violating the law of chastity, both homosexual and heterosexual, as temporary or fleeting, "a contingent regulation

that may or may not be divinely instituted" (79), but I would not hold my breath waiting for a loosening of the Church's stance. Our position is based upon the doctrine of chastity, taught clearly and unambiguously in scripture (1 Cor. 3:16-17; D&C 59:6) and in recent statements from Church leaders: "the Lord and his Church condemn in no uncertain terms any and every sex relationship outside of marriage."[10]

Frankly, matters such as the age of the earth and the state of life before the Fall (82) have never been officially addressed in united doctrinal expositions by the First Presidency and the Twelve—such as "The Origin of Man" (1909), "The Father and the Son" (1916), the Proclamation on the Family (1995), and "The Living Christ" (2000)—although isolated Church leaders may have expressed their own views. As to "the immorality of birth control" (82), an honest assessment is that the Lord's command for us to multiply and replenish the earth (Genesis 1:28; Moses 2:28) has never been rescinded. It is just as true today that couples who choose to devote all of their time and energy to careers, who denounce parenthood as a major inconvenience, and who postpone indefinitely the bearing and rearing of children, will "reap disappointment by and by," as stated in the 1969 statement of the First Presidency. The fact of the matter is that the present statement on having children, as contained in the current *Church Handbook of Instructions*, places such decisions as "how often and how many" squarely upon husband and wife, in consultation with the Lord in prayer, but does not lessen the seriousness of avoiding parental responsibilities.

Because I spend a large percentage of my time with Christians of other faiths, and because they are often very eager to distinguish between what I call "pop Mormonism" and genuine LDS beliefs—just as eager as I am—I devised the list of criteria I did. Mormons cannot afford to equivocate. Given the fact that we are so misunderstood by well meaning persons throughout the world, it is not very helpful to our cause to continue to dredge up old doctrines which have long since gone by the way in order to demonstrate just how diverse our beliefs are. Diversity is not an end in itself. For some it is as though the Lord had said, "Be diverse, and if ye are not diverse ye are not mine." Rather, I feel we ought to be seeking for a unity of the faith. Our doctrine can never be reduced to a creed, nor can limits be placed upon ongoing direction, alteration, and correction in what we teach and how we teach it. But that is more of refinement than re-creation.

God's grand design in calling prophets and apostles to guide the destiny of the restored Church is to assist us in growing up, and in maturing spiritually, that we might reach the point at which we are "no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-15).

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Notes

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1 See Robert L. Millet, "What Do We Really Believe? Identifying Doctrinal Parameters within Mormonism," in *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Posssibilities*, ed. James M. McLachlan and Loyd Ericson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 265-81

2 Such as that which has been approved through the official LDS newsroom; see LDS Newsroom, "Approaching Mormon Doctrine."

3 See Ericson, "The Challenges of Defining Mormon Doctrine," *Element*, Volume 3, Issues 1 & 2 (Spring & Fall 2007), 69-90.

4 Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24.

5 Cited in Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 585.

6 "Succession in the Presidency," *1974 BYU Speeches of the Year* (Provo: BYU Publications, 1975), 24, emphasis added.

7 Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards & Sons, 1851-86), 13:95.

8 Spencer W. Kimball, Conference Report, October 1976, 115.

9 *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 198.

10 Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 175.

Truth, Doctrine, and Authority

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Mormonism is a very young religion. Twenty years shy of our bicentennial, we Latter-day Saints are religious and intellectual infants compared to other traditions. This is not without its virtues. There is an energy and dynamism to youth, as well as a sense of audacity and possibility. It does mean, however, that there is much in Mormon thought that is embryonic and yet to be worked out. The result for Mormon thinkers can be both excitement about the work yet to be done, and confusion about apparently fundamental questions. Recently, a number of Mormon thinkers have turned their attention to the question of what is church doctrine. Latter-day Saints are accustomed to speaking of their doctrine as though its contours and meaning are self-evident. Upon examination, however, this apparent simplicity proves deceptive. Indeed, the church acknowledged this when it issued a widely discussed statement on "Approaching Mormon Doctrine," which noted the misunderstanding that resulted from a failure to consider the scope of the church's doctrines without an appreciation of "the broad and complex context within which its doctrines have been declared." One example should suffice to illustrate the sorts of problems that arise when discussing the scope and claims of church doctrine.

In the 1880s, Bishop Bunker of Bunkerville, Nevada was excommunicated for apostasy. His apostasy consisted of publicly teaching against the doctrine that Adam was the father of Jesus Christ and the "only God with whom we have to do." This teaching, of course, was the famous Adam-God doctrine taught by Brigham Young. Less than thirty years later, however, the First Presidency under President Joseph F. Smith, along with the entire Quorum of the Twelve issued "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition," more or less explicitly repudiating the Adam-God doctrine. Over the course of the twentieth century the teaching was repeatedly condemned by church leaders, making its way, for example, into Elder Bruce R. McConkie's list of "Seven Deadly Heresies." This shift in teachings provokes a series of questions. Was the Adam-God doctrine ever "official" church doctrine? Is it church doctrine now? How do we go about answering these questions? If church doctrine has shifted, does that mean that previous "official" doctrines were false? If church doctrine has proved mistaken in the past, how can we be certain of its reliability today?

Both Robert Millet and I have published essays that seek to grapple with some of these questions. Both of us have focused our attention on the threshold question of how one determines whether any particular claim or teaching is

church doctrine. If I understand him correctly, Millet believes that it is possible to offer a set of criteria that constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for any particular teachings to enjoy the status of church doctrine. The list of criteria that he offers–consistency across time, centrality, etc.–may defy a simple, mechanical application, but Millet seems to believe that it is possible in theory to identify conditions, what legal philosophers have called a "rule of recognition," that would define church doctrine. As a practical matter, the various markers of authenticity identified by Millet strike me as eminently sensible rules of thumb for discovering church doctrine. As a conceptual matter, however, I reject the idea that there is a rule of recognition for church doctrine. Put another way, I think that Millet's approach is pastorally useful but philosophically unsatisfying.

I don't think that the authoritative can be sorted from the un-authoritative by applying a set of unchanging criteria. Rather, I think that authoritative church doctrine always emerges from the process of interpreting the totality of Mormon teachings and practices. We do not start from first principles but are necessarily always in the midst of an ongoing practice. In trying to figure out which parts of Mormonism have a heightened claim upon us–what is "doctrine" and what is mere "culture" or "opinion"–I think that we begin with those claims that no well socialized Mormon can plausibly deny are church doctrine. Such claims exist, I believe, as a kind of brute fact, much in the way that a language presents certain brute facts to well-informed speakers of the language. Whatever one's theories of botany, biology, and zoology, any well-informed English speaker knows that it does violence to ordinary understanding to claim that the term "vegetable" includes within its ambit elephants. Likewise, any well-informed Latter-day Saint knows that it is absurd to deny that church doctrine teaches that Jesus Christ is the savior of mankind or that the Word of Wisdom prohibits the consumption of alcohol. Such brute doctrinal facts exist even though one can make historically plausible arguments that the actual text of Doctrine & Covenants section 89 prohibits only hard liquor. Any well-informed Latter-day Saint will understand that a beer-drinking Mormon who uses such an argument to affirm to his bishop that he keeps the Word of Wisdom is dissembling.

I believe that such uncontroversial doctrinal claims exist as a matter of brute fact even when the meaning of those claims is hotly contested. For example, while all Mormons agree that Jesus Christ is the savior of mankind, they often disagree among themselves on the details–both trivial and significant–of Mormon soteriology. Such disagreements, however, do not render the original claim controversial. The distinction that John Rawls makes in *A Theory of Justice* between concept and conception is useful here. The concept of justice, says Rawls, deals with a particular normative task, namely specifying rights and duties between agents whose actions need not be guided by claims of affection or benevolence. Such a concept, however, admits competing conceptions of justice. Utilitarians and contractarians may disagree violently about what justice demands. They rightly understand themselves, however, to be disagreeing *about something*, namely the concept of justice. Likewise, Mormons agree that Jesus Christ is the savior of mankind at the level of concept–e.g. Jesus provides something uniquely

necessary in the working out of human salvation–even if they disagree at the level of conception–e.g. the relative importance of grace versus work or the merits of substitutionary versus empathy theories of atonement.

In the face of these brute facts, we construct theories that make sense of the core cases, placing them in the best possible light. On the basis of these theories we then examine other teachings and practices, seeking to include within the ambit of our interpretation as much of Mormonism as possible while simultaneously casting it in the most normatively attractive terms. Church doctrine consists of the theories that emerge from this hermeneutic process. This means that the authority of a controversial teaching will necessarily be contestable. Sometimes well-informed Latter-day Saints will have good-faith disagreements about what is or is not authoritative church doctrine, disagreements that will resist any mechanical method of resolution. This doesn't imply that there is no fact of the matter regarding the status of such controversial teachings' authority, but the inevitably contestable nature of the boundaries of church doctrine mean that our discussions must be hemmed by ethical as well as epistemic norms. For example, in the Book of Mormon, the risen Christ teaches, "For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me." (3 Ne. 11:29). This is not a formula for laying to rest doctrinal disagreements. Rather, it is an injunction to avoid animosity over such disagreements.

In a recent *Element* article, Loyd Ericson declared a pox of the houses of both Millet and Oman (as well as a number of others) insisting that both accounts of church doctrine are incapable of dealing with the sorts of questions raised by the Bishop Bunker example with which I began. Ericson's article is a detailed and nuanced discussion of the problems presented by discussions of church doctrine, but at the risk of over-simplifying his objections can be boiled down to two claims: First, he contends that both Millet's proposed rule of recognition and my own hermeneutic theory of church doctrine are internally inconsistent. Such proposals, he argues, claim that as a matter of church doctrine there is some method for discovering doctrine. Such self-reference, however, creates a problem of circularity. Second, he argues that neither approach can escape the problem of truth and church doctrine. Stated in its starkest form, if church doctrine contradicts itself over time–denying the Adam-God doctrine was apostasy in the nineteenth century while teaching it today would be apostasy– then how can it reflect the truth? Indeed, while his article is coy on the point, Ericson seems to suggest that the idea of continuing revelation necessarily cuts against any effort to discover authoritative doctrine and that we are best off abandoning the search. Grappling with the second of Ericson's objections helps to illustrate how his first objection is mistaken.

Ericson is right to raise the issue of doctrine's relationship to truth. While I believe that his conclusions are mistaken, understanding why requires that we think through more carefully what is at stake in discussions of church doctrine. Ultimately, I believe that church doctrine is about authority not truth. This

doesn't imply that church doctrine is false, but it does mean that the concept serves a particular theoretical and social function. Once this function is understood, many of the conceptual difficulties surrounding church doctrine disappear.

What is at stake when a Latter-day Saint hears about the Adam-God doctrine and asks, "Do we believe that?" First, it should be clear that in this case the Mormon is not asking about her subjective beliefs. Indeed, if she were merely asking about her own convictions – "Do I believe the Adam-God doctrine?"– the question would make little sense, except rhetorically. After all, she could generate an answer by simply consulting her own beliefs. Nor is she asking a sociological question about the content of most Latter-day Saints' beliefs. As an empirical matter I suspect that most Mormons have never heard of the Adam-God doctrine and would disbelieve its theological claims were they explained. Rather, she is asking a question about the church and her relationship to it. She wants to know if the Adam-God doctrine makes some claim upon her by virtue of her being a Latter-day Saint. Would her rejection of the theory alter her relationship to the church? Is there some sense in which she is supposed to believe the theory, not simply because it happens to be true, but because assenting in some way to the Adam-God doctrine is required of faithful Latter-day Saints?

It should be clear that these are questions about authority rather than questions about truth. The concept of truth may be related to the concept of authority, but it is not the same thing. Compare the question "Do we believe in the Adam-God doctrine?" to the question "Where is Kolob located?" The second question is different than the first question. It asks about the truth of the matter, but it doesn't seem to imply anything about one's duties as a Latter-day Saint. You may believe that Kolob is located in the Gamma Quadrant, and I may think that rather than being a particular star system, Kolob is a poetic device for describing heaven. You or I or (more likely) both of us may be mistaken, but unless we believe that there is some authoritative teaching about Kolob's location, our answers don't raise any question with regard to our relationship to the church. In contrast, this is exactly what is at stake in the question about the Adam-God doctrine.

Ultimately, authority is a form of reason giving. Because philosophical modernism, which dominates our world intellectually, and philosophical liberalism, which dominates our world politically, are both based in large part on the rejection of authority it is easy to miss this point. Modernism teaches us that the ignorant past was ignorant in large part because people did not think for themselves but rather abdicated intellectual responsibility for their own beliefs to authority. Likewise, liberalism suggests that the tyrannical past was tyrannical because rather than grounding the legitimacy of all human action in autonomous choice, people abdicated moral responsibility for their own actions to authority. As a historical matter, the modernist and liberal view of the past is inaccurate to the point of defamation, but both myths have a powerful hold on contemporary

thought. Accordingly, authority can seem a rather disreputable idea. Indeed, often liberalism and modernism reduce the idea of authority to the notion of force. The powerful image of Galileo recanting heliocentricism in the face of the Inquisition captures this sensibility. On this view, authority is the opposite of reason giving. Such a view, however, is mistaken.

The conceptual structure of an authoritative reason is somewhat peculiar. Ordinarily we make our judgments about what to believe or how to act on the basis of our all things considered conclusions about the nature of the world. Authority, however, seeks to exclude our all things considered judgments about the world. Consider a simple legal example. It is illegal to drive an automobile on the freeway in excess of 75 mph. I might decide on the basis of my all things considered judgment that the best speed is 75 mph, and drive accordingly. In such a case, I am complying with the law but I am not doing so because I acknowledge its authority. Now suppose that I believe, on the basis of my all things considered judgment, that the optimal speed is 85 mph. If I acknowledge the law as an authority, my judgment on this point becomes irrelevant. It is excluded. I drive at 75 mph because that is what the law says.

This exclusionary structure immediately raises the question of how authority might be justified. Why might I set aside my all things considered judgments in the face of an authority? One simple answer is that the authority has infallible access to the truth. I acknowledge my own fallibility and go with the authority instead. Certainly, if the authority were infallible this would provide a powerful reason for ignoring my own all things considered judgments. More often than not, however, the connection between authority and infallibility is part of a reductio ad absurdum. X claims to be an authority. In order for X to be an authority, X must be infallible. X is not infallible. Therefore X is not an authority. The problem with such reasoning is that even if an authority is being justified on epistemic grounds there is no reason to suppose that it must be infallible. For example, I accept the authority of doctors because the costs of acquiring the information necessary to make reliable all things considered judgments about my own health care are prohibitively high. It is not that I believe that the doctor is infallible. It is simply that I believe him to be epistemologically advantaged. I know that sometimes he may be wrong and I may be right, but on average I believe he is more likely to be correct than my all things considered judgments. Accordingly, in the absence of strong reasons to the contrary, I accept his conclusions, my prior beliefs notwithstanding.

This suggests that the relationship between truth and authority is complicated. It is surely the case that Latter-day Saints regard church doctrine as authoritative in part because it enjoys some privileged relationship to truth. The concept of authority, however, is not so demanding that church doctrine must be identical with the truth. Rather, Latter-day Saints are justified in letting the authority of church doctrine override their own all things considered best judgments so long as they believe that church doctrine, like a doctor, enjoys an epistemological advantage. This means, however, that there is no abstract conceptual difficulty in saying that some particular teaching – such as the Adam-

God doctrine – was church doctrine but is nevertheless mistaken. Such a claim may make us spiritually uncomfortable. It certainly suggests that in following church doctrine we will sometimes be mistaken. On the other hand, such an admission does not render the idea of church doctrine contradictory.

Acknowledging the distinction between claims to authority and claims to truth also makes sense of the fact that church doctrine changes over time. The notion of continuing revelation means that most well-informed Latter-day Saints are comfortable admitting that church doctrine changes over time. Generally speaking, however, this change is seen as being cumulatively consistent. Hence, Mormons often imagine church doctrine as proceeding line upon line, with any innovations merely adding to previous doctrines. As a historical matter, however, such a smooth vision of theological development is difficult to defend. On the other hand, it is not strictly speaking necessary if we are to maintain the coherence of church doctrine's authority. We may simply acknowledge that previous doctrines were mistaken. Ericson hints that the notion of continuing revelation may require some sort of dramatic new theory of truth that abandons ordinary correspondence theories of truth. I suspect that in this context Ericson wishes the notion of continuing revelation to bear too much metaphysical weight. In the end, of course, he may be correct in rejecting correspondence theories of truth. The mere fact of doctrinal inconsistency over time, however, doesn't require so dramatic a move. Rather, I can reconcile inconsistency over time with correspondence theories of truth by simply admitting that at times church doctrine may be mistaken as to the fact of the matter, while maintaining that ultimately the truth of church doctrine is measured by its correspondence to reality.

To a person genuinely troubled by doctrinal change over time, this discussion no doubt sounds glib. If church doctrine has been mistaken in the past, how do I know that it isn't mistaken now? How can church doctrine be trustworthy if it may be mistaken? One might respond that any mistakes in one's belief system perpetrated by church doctrine will not affect one's salvation. Indeed, one could make a fair argument that something like this claim is part of church doctrine, and seminary teachers and church leaders at a loss as to how to respond to such questions often make this claim. The mere fact that it is church doctrine, however, that following church doctrine will allow me to avoid any ultimately significant errors offers scant comfort. After all, that doctrine might be among those that is mistaken. One seems trapped in a conceptual house of mirrors from which there is no escape.

The short response to such concerns is that *church doctrine cannot be used to justify its own authority*. One's belief in the ultimate trustworthiness of church doctrine will have to rest on some source other than the mere fact that the doctrine asserts its own trustworthiness. This is really not all that surprising. Consider a thoroughly commonplace and uncontroversial example of a modern authority: a science textbook. I may have some theory about the mating habits of mollusks based on my own all things considered judgments about the fact of the matter. On the other hand, if I read a conflicting theory in an introductory

biology book, in the absence of a particularly compelling reason to retain my original theory I will abandon it. The structure of the reason giving here should be familiar. The book is an authority. How is its authority justified? One answer might be because the book itself claims to be an authority. This, however, is not why I trust the book. Rather, my reasons for acknowledging the book's authority have to do with an extremely complex set of judgments based on my sense of how knowledge in our society is produced. Indeed, it will probably be quite difficult for me to give a simple answer to the question of the book's authority. I will quickly find myself explaining why some publishers are more trustworthy than others, why some authors are to be trusted, the particular social function served by textbooks, the factors that mitigate in favor of their reliability given that function, and so on. There are two things that are worth noting about this process. First, I do not use the authority of the book's claims about its own authority to justify that authority. The justification lies outside of the covers of the book. Second, the authority of the book had nothing to do with a belief in the infallibility of introductory biology textbooks. Indeed, a sophisticated reader will expect the book to contain errors.

Any answer to the question of why church doctrine is trustworthy will be similarly complicated. If asked, a typical Latter-day Saint will likely justify his or her belief in the trustworthiness of church doctrine by appealing to a mixture of personal revelation, personal experience, and reliance on the testimony of others. For example, I might be willing to trust church doctrine because I have received a spiritual witness regarding certain matters such as the Book of Mormon. I could also appeal to the positive experience of applying church doctrines in my own life. I might point out the repeated testimonies of its trustworthiness given by people whom I respect and trust. I could then point to discrete reasons for believing particular doctrines. I might, for example, be persuaded that the finitist conception of God offered by church doctrine offers an attractive way of dealing with the problem of evil. And so on. In short, while my reasons for accepting the trustworthiness of church doctrine will include elements such as personal revelation that I might not appeal to in more commonplace cases, my reasoning will be quite similar to my reasoning in other areas of life. This means that like my reasons for accepting the authority of a biology textbook, my reasons for accepting the authority of church doctrine will be idiosyncratic, complicated, and messy. Such reasons, however, will not rest on an appeal to either the authority of church doctrine's own claims about its authority or an appeal to its infallibility. Indeed, while I personally accept the authority of church doctrine, I expect it to be mistaken on some points.

It is also important to realize that I may have non-epistemic justifications for the authority of church doctrine. For example, authority can solve problems of cooperation. Consider the example of language. I might make an all things considered judgment that Esperanto offers a better syntactical model than English. On the other hand, in order to communicate with others in English, I must bow to the rules of English grammar, even when those rules are the needlessly complex result of mindless historical accident. Were I to try to speak

using the syntax of my all things considered judgments, my sentences would be gibberish. Likewise, I might acknowledge an authority because to do otherwise would be to undermine a valuable social practice. When playing football, I may disagree with the referee's call. My own all things considered judgment leads me to believe that the ball advanced the full ten yards for a first down. On the other hand, if I am a player, I acknowledge the authority of the referee's call because to do otherwise would be to undermine the game by being "a bad sport." The authority of church doctrine can similarly be grounded in the need to coordinate Mormon practices and maintain valuable collective arrangements.

We can now return to Ericson's two core objections. The first was that theories of church doctrine are incoherent because any claim about what constitutes church doctrine would itself be church doctrine, leading us into a hopeless circularity. This claim, however, assumes that one identifies authority by recourse to the authority itself. As discussed above, this is a mistake. If an eccentric recluse in the Texas backcountry authors an elaborate legal code, the code does not become authoritative law because it contains a clause declaring this to be the case. Likewise, an introductory textbook on biology is not an authority on the subject because the preface makes this claim. To the extent that church doctrine is about defining the scope of authoritative teachings, the method of identifying church doctrine is not itself doctrine. Rather, it is a question of social fact. The fact in question is the body of teachings and practices that in fact purport to be exclusionary reasons to Latter-day Saints. When Robert Millet offers his critieria for identifying church doctrine or when I defend my own hermeneutic theory, we are not claiming that these criteria or this theory are taught as church doctrine. We are not appealing to the authority of church doctrine to justify our claims. Rather, we are appealing to the congruence of our claims with Mormon practices, properly understood. Ericson's second claim is that theories of church doctrine fail to grapple adequately with the conundrums created by the apparent shifts and contradictions in church doctrine over time. Understanding church doctrine as being a claim to authority rather than a claim to truth per se, however, provides one with a conceptual response to this difficulty. To admit that church doctrine is fallible does not render the notion of church doctrine incoherent. It does create a problem in justifying its authority. On the other hand, we regularly acknowledge authorities of known fallibility, suggesting that this is not an insurmountable issue.

I close with a final observation about the authority of church doctrine. It is possible to present Mormonism with a pronounced anti-authoritarian inflection. Joseph Smith reported that when the angel Moroni first appeared he "quoted the second chapter of Joel, from the twenty-eight verse to the last. He also said that this was not yet fulfilled, but was soon to be." (JS-H 41) The quoted scripture reads in part:

> And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants

and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. (Joel 2:28-29)

This is a message of radical spiritual egalitarianism. It would be a mistake, however, to indentify Mormonism wholly with this strand of discourse. Alongside this message of individual liberation to purse personal revelation, there are equally strong claims about the importance of authority. In the earliest days of the church, for example, Hiram Page, one of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, began promulgating revelations that he received through a private seer stone very similar to that which Joseph Smith had used in the translation of the Book of Mormon. In response, Joseph Smith issued a counter revelation, insisting that only the president of the church could receive revelations binding upon the church. Joseph Smith's experience with Hiram Page is as defining of Mormonism as Moroni's invocation of a nation of prophets. Accordingly, I believe that it is important for Mormon thinkers, many of whose instincts are individualistic and egalitarian, to grapple honestly and charitably with Mormonism's hierarchies and claims to authority. This requires that they use tools other than those provided by liberalism and modernism, both of which have difficulty conceptualizing authority as anything other than pathological.

That said, however, there are limits to the claims of church doctrine's authority. A full discussion of the functions served by the authority of church doctrine is beyond the scope of this essay, but I have one observation. Generally, church doctrine is a standard for teaching within and by the church. In this respect, it is striking that while Mormons often speak of "apostasy" they seldom speak of "heresy," the sermon by Bruce R. McConkie referenced above being a notable exception. To the extent that church doctrine is involved in apostasy, we generally say that apostasy consists of teaching as church doctrine that which is not church doctrine, the paradigmatic modern case being apostate polygamous groups. Likewise, apostasy might also occur if one makes intemperate public attacks on church doctrine. To return to the example of Bishop Bunker, with which I began, he was not excommunicated for disbelieving the Adam-God doctrine. Indeed, we know that a number of Brigham Young's associates in the highest councils of the church, such as Orson Pratt, John Taylor, and Joseph F. Smith, disbelieved the Adam-God doctrine. Rather, Bishop Bunker's apostasy seems to have consisted in what he taught in public as a bishop about the Adam-God doctrine rather than what he actually believed about it. Indeed, it is striking that apostasy does not consist in merely believing that this or that church doctrine is mistaken. While for a faithful Latter-day Saint, church doctrine certainly offers reasons for accepting certain theological claims, we generally do not use church doctrine to ferret out heretical belief. Indeed, church doctrine does not seem to be primarily about regulating the relationship of members to the church in terms of beliefs. Rather, it polices the acceptability of particular kinds of discourse in and about the church and its teachings. In the starkest terms, its authority is used to regulate how Mormons talk rather than how they believe. This suggests that the authority of church doctrine serves more than

merely epistemic functions. Understanding these non-epistemic functions, it seems to me, would do much to illuminate the fraught question of the claims that church doctrine makes on faithful Latter-day Saints.

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Is it Mormon Doctrine That Mormon Doctrine is True: A Rejoinder

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I am appreciative of Robert Millet's and Nate Oman's insightful and engaging responses to my previous article.[1] While reading these responses it has become clear to me that at the heart of the challenge of defining doctrine is the difference in how "doctrine" is understood by observers of Mormonism and believers within Mormonism. When asking "What is Mormon doctrine?" to someone merely wishing to make observational facts about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—either within or without the Church—the question is simply another way of asking "What does the contemporary LDS Church teach today?" However, when Mormons ask this question of themselves, there is a conception of doctrine evoked that transcends the simplicity of mere teachings. In Mormon discourse doctrine is more than just a list of official teachings; rather, it evokes eternal, absolute truths with spiritual power.

Before discussing the challenge of defining doctrine for both observers and believers I would first like to address some specific criticisms that Millet offers and clarify a few particular points where I feel that he has misunderstood my original article. In particular, there seems to be much misunderstanding of my discussion on aspects of Mormonism that may be policy instead of doctrine.

Millet writes that he was "surprised to see the Word of Wisdom in Ericson's list." He adds, "The Church's law of health came to Joseph Smith by revelation (D&C 89). Is it relegated to policy because it has to do with *behavior* and with what *practices* are commended and which are proscribed?" (p. 5). I probably should have been clearer in my article and specified that perhaps some *particularities* of the Word of Wisdom could be understood as policy and not doctrine. As I pointed out earlier in my article the *revealed* Word of Wisdom was not a "*law* of health," but was specifically given "*not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom*" (vss. 2-3). Furthermore, the revealed Word of Wisdom proscribes strong alcoholic drinks (vss. 5-7) but recommends mild alcoholic drinks made with barley and other grains (vs. 17). The contemporary *practice* of the Word of Wisdom, however, differs from the revealed Word of Wisdom. For example, the *Gospel Principles* manual used in Sunday instruction in the Church says that Latter-day Saints are "not to use . . . drinks containing alcohol," going as far to say that drinks containing alcohol are

"a curse to all who drink it."[2] My point is simply that the difference of how the Word of Wisdom was originally *revealed* to Joseph Smith and how it is *practiced* today may be indicative of a difference between the *doctrine* of the Word of Wisdom and the current *policy* of how that doctrine should be implemented—a policy perhaps made in the spirit of the revelation's own claim that it is "adapted to the capacity of the weak and the weakest of all saints" (vs. 3).

In the same paragraph, Millet writes: "Would we really call baptism by immersion a policy, as Ericson suggests?" (p. 5). To the contrary, I rather postulate that "the wearing of white clothes and *complete submersion* during baptism"[3] may be a matter of policy instead of doctrine. According to the 2010 *Church Handbook of Instructions*, during baptism the person should be "immerse [d] . . . completely, including the person's clothing."[4] My question is simply one of whether it is a doctrine that a floating toe, hair, arm, or dress would prevent a baptism from being salvifically efficacious, or if such a requirement is rather a policy made for aesthetics and purposes of uniformity.

Similarly, Millet responds to me, asking, "Are the 'specifics of temple ritual' policy? That would seem to include temple covenants and ordinances. Where do we draw the line?" (p. 5). Again, my point is not to draw a line, but to postulate that perhaps some aspects of Mormonism—include ritual—could be better understood as policy instead of doctrine. It has been over a century and a half since Joseph Smith introduced the endowment ceremony in the upper rooms of his Red Brick Store. Since then, numerous specifics of the temple endowment have gone through changes, modifications, and deletions. These include the styles and construction of temple garments, entire scenes in the temple drama, temple clothing, certain temple covenants, and how certain rituals are performed in the temple. Were these all changes in doctrine pertaining to the temple, or could some of them simply be changes in policy concerning how the endowment is performed and enacted?

The same misunderstanding occurs when Millet says that "Ericson mentions the statements of Church leaders against the practice of homosexuality as an example of policy rather than doctrine," implying that I am defining the entire "law of chastity, both homosexual and heterosexual, as temporary or fleeting," adding that he "would not hold [his] breath waiting for a loosening of the Church's stance" (p. 6). Again, to the contrary, what I actually said was that "the nature of homosexuality"[5] may be a matter of policy and not necessarily of doctrine. What I meant by this was that how the Church understands and responds to homosexuality may not be a matter of doctrine, but instead be a matter of policy. I say this because, while Millet may not want to hold his breath, he won't have to hold it long. The fact is that the Church has changed its understanding of homosexuality and how it chooses to respond to homosexual members. While sexual relations with a person of the same sex is clearly still considered a sin by the Church, the Church's views concerning homosexual thoughts and feelings has certainly undergone change over the years.[6] The question, then, is whether or not these changes are a matter of changes in doctrine or simply changes in policy regarding LGBT Mormons. Furthermore,

Millet adds that the Church's "position is based on the doctrine of chastity, taught clearly and unambiguously in scripture . . . and in recent statements from Church leaders" (p. 6). I contend, however, that it is seems to be hardly the case that the Church's views on chastity are "clear and unambiguous" in the scriptures and in leaders' statements. Discussions in the Church on chastity seem to go well beyond the simple rule of not having sex outside of marriage. For example, is it a violation of the "law of chastity" for unmarried heterosexual adults to be French kissing or to be simply lying on top of each other on a couch while watching television? For a homosexual male, is it a violation of the law of chastity to hold hands, cuddle, kiss, date, or affectionately gaze with another man—all of which I could do with my wife before we were married without being accused of violating the law of chastity? While the simple rule of not having sexual relations outside of marriage is pretty clear, what constitutes chastity outside of that simple rule does not seem to have as strong of a scriptural and authoritative basis.

In a final example, Millet again misunderstands me when he writes, "Ericson essentially asks what we are to do with a statement by President Brigham Young . . . . that [he] had 'never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call scripture'" (p. 3), and then follows with a traditional apologetic response that is usually given to critics of Mormonism who use this sermon to assert that everything said by Young is LDS doctrine. To the contrary, I was simply utilizing this sermon from Young to postulate a hypothetical "Young model" of determining doctrine to highlight a problem of circularity inherent in Millet's model—one that he repeats earlier in his response when he writes that his "so-called authoritative model is demonstrated in both the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants as the approved pattern for teaching and learning" (p.2). The circularity is found when criteria for the model are justified by the very model which provides the justification. In other words, Millet argues that scripture is a source of doctrine because the scriptures (which, according to his model, are a source of doctrine) say so. Similarly, I could put forth my hypothetical Young model and claim that all sermons that Brigham Young corrects and sends out should be considered LDS doctrine, appealing to Young's above statement.[7] However, if Millet's model is simply "a description of present Church practice" (p.1) as he asserts at the beginning of his response, and not necessarily dependent on other affirmed criteria, then there would be no problem of circularity. I believe this is what Oman means (and I largely agree with him) when he says, "We do not start from first principles but are necessarily always in the midst of an ongoing practice" (p. 10).

Furthermore, besides these misunderstandings, Millet seems to be inconsistent with his treatment of LDS doctrine and his own model of defining it. For example, in response to my highlighting the bootstrapping problem that seems evident in the common appeal by Latter-day Saints to Wilford Woodruff's claim about prophets leading the Saints astray, Millet writes that Woodruff's statement was not about "doctrinal pronouncements or declaring doctrine," but was just about the discontinuing of "the practice of plural marriage" (p. 4).

However, near the beginning of his response, Millet makes the complete opposite claim about plural marriage when he cites Gordon B. Hinckley's claim that plural marriage "is not the doctrine of the Church." Millet then proceeds to note that "he [Hinckley] did not say, 'It is no longer the *practice* of the Church.' He said it is not the doctrine of the Church. Doctrine means teaching, and plural marriage is simply not taught today. And doctrine is the foundation of practice" (p. 1). If we accept Hinckley (and the earlier Millet) that the ending of plural marriage was not than just a change in practice but was instead a change of doctrine, then we must reject the later Millet's claim that Woodruff's statement was merely about a change in practice and not about doctrine.

Another inconsistency exists when Millet writes that "matters such as the age of the earth and the state of life before the Fall have never been officially addressed in united doctrinal expositions by the First Presidency and the Twelve. . . . although isolated Church leaders may have expressed their own views" (p. 6). According to Millet's own model, being found in doctrinal expositions is only one of several criteria for something being considered LDS doctrine.[8] I think it would be safe to assume that not being pronounced in one of these expositions is hardly grounds for dismissing something that Millet believes is doctrinal—otherwise the corpus of LDS doctrine would be extremely small, and nearly everything that Millet has asserted as being doctrine in his response and original essay would be negated. Furthermore, his dismissal of these teachings as being simply from "isolated Church leaders . . . express[ing] their own views" seems to be overly minimalizing the fact that these Church leaders were prophets, seers, and revelators teaching these things without the clarification of being personal opinions, were publishing these teachings in official Church publications, were appealing to scriptures for justification, and were questioning the salvation of those who believed otherwise.

Just Teachings?

In their responses Millet stresses that "doctrine means teaching" (p. 1), and Oman takes things a slight step further back and says that "church doctrine is a standard for teaching" (p. 17). These are, of course, straightforward definitions of the term and are perhaps the appropriate uses when responding to observers of Mormonism who simply want a list of the contemporary LDS Church's teachings. Thus, if a simple list of teachings was all that was being delineated, then no real justification would be needed other than an appeal to common sense and common usage—or as Millet puts, we could simply appeal to "a description of present Church practice" (p.1), which Oman calls "sensible rules of thumb for discovering church doctrine" (p. 10). In light of such a view, Oman's theory of doctrine as authority offers a plausible theoretical basis for the practice.

With the perspective of doctrine as teachings, the question "What is LDS doctrine?" would be analogous to the hypothetical question, "What does Professor Xavier teach at the School for Gifted Youngsters?" Like Millet's

criteria, in order to give a careful description of what Professor X teaches we would simply need to listen to Professor X's lectures, read his syllabus and self-authored course manual,[9] and participate in his lab activities. We would, of course, also have to be careful to note when Professor X is speaking off-the-cuff and offering his opinion, exclude what he says among friends at an after-school party, and check to see if he is continuing to teach what he had taught in previous semesters. Furthermore, because Professor X is both highly knowledgeable in his field and in bit hard-nosed in his self-assurance, Oman's theory of doctrine and authority could adequately describe the relationship between Professor X's teachings and his students. Just as "the concept of authority . . . is not so demanding that church doctrine must be identical with the truth" (p. 13), a similar concept of professor-student authority does not demand that Professor X's teachings be identical with the truth. Even though it is possible that some of his teachings may be wrong, students "are justified in letting the authority of [his teachings] override their own . . . best judgments so long as they believe that [Professor X], like a doctor, enjoys an epistemological advantage." Furthermore, regardless of whether Professor X is right or wrong on a particular matter, the authority of his teachings requires that students affirm his teachings in tests and quizzes and not publicly contradict him in class in order to receive passing grades.

If Mormon doctrine was merely just a set of official teachings, then I would join with Oman in stating that church doctrine had no direct relation to truth and was primarily about authority. I could also join Millet in saying that the best way to know what is and is not contemporary LDS doctrine is to simply look at the criteria in his doctrinal parameters. The problem, however, is that, within Mormonism, doctrine is more than just a list of official teachings. As Millet puts it in his original essay: "There is power in doctrine, power in the word, power to heal the wounded soul, power to transform human behavior."[10] Millet is not alone in defining doctrine as such, and by both Millet's and Oman's models for defining doctrine, it seems to be a clear and unambiguous doctrine that doctrine is more than mere teachings. The Church-produced teaching manuals constantly encourage teachers and students to testify of the truthfulness and power of church doctrine.[11] A quick search on the Church's website brings up hundreds of example from general conference talks from just the last decade or so that define and use the word "doctrine" in a manner that denotes truth and power, not merely "teachings"—in one talk alone, Elder Henry B. Eyring uses the word 45 times with this meaning.[12] In fact, given its occurrence and use in contemporary Church-produced manuals, general conferences, Church statements,[13] and scripture, there is perhaps no doctrine of the church more pronounced than the doctrine that church doctrine is true.

This should hopefully make clear the primary problem I hoped to address in my original article. The challenges are not simply in defining Mormon doctrine for those within Mormonism. Even though more than the last third of my article was attempting to make this point clear, Millet virtually avoids the issue of doctrine and truth altogether in his response and Oman simply side-steps the issue by declaring that church doctrine is not directly about truth.

Without recognizing the heavy emphasis in church doctrine about church doctrine's truthfulness, the challenge of defining church doctrine becomes as interesting and simplistic as a student trying to find out what she needs to study for Professor X's mid-term exam. The challenge arises not when one wishes to know what the LDS Church teaches in its manuals and what how members are to relate to those teachings, but when Mormons try to ascertain what the doctrines of truth and power are—that the Church has a primary (though perhaps not exclusive) claim on truth is, after all, one of the foundational doctrines of the restoration. If it is the case, as Millet and Oman agree, that the doctrines of the Church can and do change, and if the doctrines of the restored Church are true, then how should Mormons understand the truthfulness of these changing doctrines?[14] How do we make sense of a new true doctrine of the restoration contradicting a discontinued true doctrine of the restoration? Is truth relative? Does truth change with time? Is the Mormon corpus of true church doctrine smaller than we might initially think—and if so, what are those doctrines and how do we determine which are true and which are not?

Or, is the church doctrine of church doctrine's truthfulness not true?

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1 Loyd Ericson, "The Challenges of Defining Mormon Doctrine," *Element* 3 (2007): 69-90.

2 *Gospel Principles Manual* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), 167-68. The manual's claim that alcoholic drinks are a curse to all who drink it would seem, then, to implicate Jesus, whose first recorded miracle was in turning water into alcoholic drinks for a wedding party (John 2:1-12).

3 Ericson, "Challenges," 77.

4 *Church Handbook of Instructions: Handbook 2: Administering the Church 2010* (Salt Lake City, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 172.

5 Ericson, "Challenges," 77.

6 For example, see the differences between the 2006 and 2010 editions of the *Church Handbook of Instructions*. *http://loydo38.blogspot.com/2010/11/homosexuality-in-2010-church-handbook.html* (accessed March 29, 2011).

7 Despite the claims of some apologists that the *Journal of Discourses* was never an official publication of the Church, a quick perusal of the volumes makes it clear that it was published with full support of the Church. For example, see Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, "Letter from the First Presidency," *Journal of Discourses* Vol. 1:6.

8 Robert Millet, "What Do We Really Believe? Identifying Doctrinal Parameters within Mormonism," in *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities*, ed. James M. McLachlan and Loyd Ericson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 266-67, 273.

9 While the corollaries of Professor X's lectures, syllabi, etc. to Millet's criteria may be clear, I specifically chose "self-authored manuals" to be a corollary to Church-authored manuals. Just as it would be incorrect to state that Professor X teaches the particular things in a text he uses for a course, it would be incorrect to say that the contemporary LDS Church teaches everything found in the LDS Scriptures (see my example above with the Word of Wisdom). Because scripture needs to be interpreted, it seems that there will always be a layer of interpretation (perhaps through a Church manual or statement from Church leaders) that would always separate the Church's teachings from scripture.

10 Millet, "What Do We Really Believe?" 265.

11 See for example, "Lesson 3: The Teacher's Divine Commission," in *Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide For Gospel Teaching* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 8-10.

12 Henry B. Eyring, "The Power of Teaching Doctrine," *Ensign*, May 1999, 73.

13 For example, the Churches official statement on doctrine states that "members are encouraged to independently strive to receive their own spiritual confirmation of the truthfulness of Church doctrine." In "Approaching Mormon Doctrine," LDS Newsroom, May 4, 2007, *http://newsroom.lds.org/article/approaching-mormon-doctrine* (accessed March 6, 2008).

14 See, for example, Charles R. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine": The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

MORMONISM DYSEMBODIED
PLACING LDS THEOLOGY IN CONVERSATION WITH DISABILITY

ANNE LEAHY

Introduction

The human body has not been a traditional site for theological reflection,"[1] but if "Christian faith is embodied faith,"[2] Mormonism in particular offers doctrine that centers the dualistic spirit/flesh body as the vehicle of salvation, and image of God. What are the implications for minds and bodies with disabilities in the Mormon understanding of the progression of the soul?

Through the successive waves of liberation theologies from Women's Studies to Black Studies and Queer Studies, there remains little attention to the productive ways that disability scholars can join ranks to counter the argument that places "bodies as barriers *to* rather than sources *of* moral insight."[3] [4] Analysis of disability has accelerated within Christian circles of the last decade and a half, and LDS thought can contribute to the debate in unique and compelling ways.

The budding corpus at the intersection of disability and theology has been founded upon social justice and memoir, and thinkers universally call for a closer examination of embodiment in both lived and theoretical terms, lamenting the "lack of [mainstream] body theorists who consider the reality of embodiment 'when it isn't *good*' leave this new territory "largely unexplored."[5] If any tradition has the potential to advance the fusion of embodiment and disability, it is Mormonism. Why should Mormon theologians pay attention to disability? According to Jackie Leach-Scully, the lens of disability offers us *new* ways of exploring "autonomy, competence . . . wholeness, human perfectibility . . . finitude and limits,"[6] or, as a Mormon might say, "putting off the natural man, eternal progression, and exaltation."

Disability and the Mormon Soul

The first unique contribution Mormonism offers the emerging school of Disability Theology is a theology of an advancing *eternal* embodiment animated in four stages: (1) the pre-corporeal spirit body that houses the intelligent will and enables it to act; (2) this spirit body combined with an elemental body, or one subject to the Periodic Table; (3) following death, as a disembodied spirit that bears the mark of mortality; and ultimately, (4) a spirit reincorporated into a

refined immortal body. During these stages of development, the forms of the soul move along the journey bearing the range of powers and limitations intrinsic to the particular experience, and new capacities and incapacities emerge during each phase of our eternal lives.

A Mormon understanding of the soul incrementally organized from consciousness, spirit, and elemental forms rolls back the Creation *imago dei* to our first body, when our pre-pneumatic will was given the ability to be provisionally carried out as a spiritual reproduction of God the Father and Mother. Therefore, our first dysfunctions were not of the body, but of the mind and spirit—some sought to emulate the godly virtue of obedience, while others radicalized it into compulsion; many advocated the allure of universal mercy that would nullify any need for justice; the attention brought by legitimately earned valor for some would metastasize into vainglory. Such were the unintended consequences of organizing spiritual vessels to enact personal differences, and allowing them to grow, or decay. In this first embodiment, extremists were excised from the body of spirits, and a second birth into atrophy and defect which would cultivate our best traits and purge our weaknesses was agreed to with acclamation. The cure for spiritual imperfections was mortality, where physical corporeality will further reveal the hazards and rewards of an expanded palette of differences.

Whereas those first bodies were begotten of Gods and formed from the eternal stuff of the universe, our second ones were conceived in a lower sphere, confining their physic. Rather than the *imago dei* revealed in our first spiritually begotten bodies, these second elemental bodies could be termed *imago Christi,* who as our exemplar, was sapped and broken in his whole soul. So too our own tripartite souls—in Mormon theology comprised of mind, spirit, and elemental body—will at turns be subject to psychological, emotional, and physical limits.

While in spirit we were stretched, but only within a limited scope which that spiritual existence could support. Mormon popular belief also recognizes that each soul may require and even request distinctive experiences to "filleth the measure of its creation" (D&C 88:19, 25) during mortality. Even before his own "silent sleepless night,"[7] Spencer W. Kimball commented on Paul's "pleasure in infirmities" (2 Corinthians 12:10), observing that "a healing of Paul might have ruined him."[8] In theory, Mormonism does not teach archaic superstitions that physical disability on earth is a "moral signifier"[9] or evidence of God's disfavor,[10] [11] but as our assignment[12]: God decides the body best suited to maximize our spirit, and we "submit to all things which the Lord sees fit to inflict upon [us]" (Mosiah 3:19).

Mormonism allows that even those bodies most severely restricted from motion or communication can still "act" internally. The intelligence that animates spirit, and the spirit which quickens element, establish a record that continues to enlarge, even in a state that does not appear to outwardly "think, and therefore be." Bodies which order the spirit by forcing it to wait or struggle against fleshly impulses or inaction are indeed still "working." Conversely, "inert" does not equal "innocent." Inward performance—the *decision* to murmur, or to become "submissive, meek, humble, patient, and full of [charity]"[13] is the capability of

every type of body. Indeed, Christ would have been delivered, but it was not granted. Instead, he performed his greatest service when his spirit accepted guilt and pain, his mind was overcome with anxiety and unable to endure without Michael's intervention,[14] and his body was marred and completely restrained.

Mormons would agree that the conditions of an *eternal* life dictate that each chapter is at once im/perfect, un/healthy, or dis/abled. As depicted in Mormon thought, suffering does not automatically end with a physical release. Where spiritual infirmity is not resolved, and we do not medicate/mediate our limitations through faith in Christ's Atonement, corruption abides in us into the next life.

The Innocents Myth

Mainstream Christianity places people with disabilities closer to God through suffering and childlike ignorance. LDS folk theology inherited this view, and in the case of true Innocents—or those who have been declared *incapable* of evil— extends their status further, placing them closer to *Godhood.* Assumed to have exercised their agency in perfect resonance to God's will in premortality, they are rewarded with an incapacity to feel or act as a "natural man,"[15] and these sinless spirits are said to depart mortality in the same veil-piercing purity into which they were born, regardless of their age. After all, if you cross Newton's Third Law with 2 Nephi 2:11, the inverse to choosing misery is *holiness,* not happiness.

Borrowing from a grieving Joseph F. Smith's doctrine about children who die before eight years old, a mainstream belief persists that these perfectly obedient spirits need only to receive a body—*any* body—and, in this case, resurrection is less a *restoration* than a *completion* of senses and capacities that were embryonic, but never imperfect. They are seen as higher souls—bodhisattvas who in pre-mortality bravely accepted this fate and were then sent among us to teach and provide opportunities for others to serve and learn from them until they are given the chance to mature to adulthood and with a typical range of capacities in a Millennial Utopia.

The Mormon development of its Innocents Myth could be an artifact of mid-twentieth-century Christian response, which replaced the archaic rejection of people with disabilities with a frothy *specialness* that persists today. An early official reference to accountability appeared in the 1940 *Church Handbook of Instructions*:

> Those who are mentally deficient do not need to be baptized, no matter what their age may be. They are not in a position to understand or capable of repentance and, therefore, cannot be held accountable. Should they ever become mentally responsible, the ordinances of the gospel may then be administered.[16]

Books were published in 1953 and 1960 which described these children as "Angels," "Holy," or "God's Children."[17] Mormon author Mary V. Hill followed

in 1973 with *Angel Children: Those Who Die Before Accountability.*[18] In 1977, Keith J. Karren and Sherrie A. Hundley published *God's Special Children: Helping the Handicapped to Achieve*, which surveys Catholic and Protestant views, and finally claims to proffer concrete answers and official Church counsel about "the perfect spirits" of people with disabilities (p. 192). Karren and Hundley go so far as to claim that sin or negligence of the mother, or even unknown causes which "go back several generations" (186, 188) could be the antecedent causing a child's disability.

In April that same year, Bruce R. McConkie did not endorse such indicting doctrines, but upheld the blanket statement from the *Handbook* a generation earlier, widening the pardon to include vague physical conditions as well:

> What about the mentally deficient? It is with them as it is with little children. They never arrive at the years of accountability and are considered as though they were little children. If because of some physical deficiency, or for some other reason unknown to us, they never mature in the spiritual and moral sense, then they never become accountable for sins. They need no baptism; they are alive in Christ; and they will receive, inherit, and possess in eternity on the same basis as do all children.[19]

One instructive case is that of the late Kim Peek, a lifetime member of the LDS Church who was born in 1951, during this trend of elevating "special" people as Innocents. He was a megasavant possessed of the specific and preternatural intelligence that inspired the lead character of Raymond Babbitt in the film *Rain Man*. Peek was widely known to have memorized the entire LDS standard works and to have graduated from the LDS Seminary program twenty times.[20] His family and ecclesiastical leaders surely labored over the issue of his accountability during mortality, agonizing whether he was capable of sin and therefore repentance. We cannot judge how they arrived at the wrenching decision, but in the end it was concluded that Kim would be exempted: according to his membership record, he was never baptized.[21]

An aspect of Mormonism which amplifies the Innocents Myth is its strong legitimization of personalized belief. Members receive priesthood blessings, answers to prayer, spontaneous impressions, and other charismatic experiences as they seek guidance about themselves, or for their disabled child. The unattributed fable about exceptionally "valiant" spirits from the pre-existence receiving the "reward" of unaccountability on earth has a demonstrable hold, even if it creates more questions than it satisfies. Certainly Mormon eternalism proclaims canonical certainties about the existence of pre-mortally developed antecedents to earthly characteristics and spiritual repercussions from mortality that outlast the second embodiment. However, Mormonism encourages individuals to access revelation for themselves and their families, and members may universalize the "answer" to their own disability—or worse yet, *all* disabilities—through

generalizing their own experience, or appropriating another's genuinely inspired claim.

Does disability discourse within Mormonism, and especially its version of the Innocents Myth, weaken the power in Plan of Salvation teachings through the weight of unofficial exceptions and exemptions? Whether such doctrines are proscriptive truth, the account of a premortal pact and earthly amnesty remains *descriptively* true for many Latter-day Saints with disabilities and their families. In practice however, the theory collapses, as one mother discovered:

> The answer to our question, "Will we be able to teach you?" is simple. Yes. Sarah learned everything we consciously tried to teach and much that we didn't. Our big problem was assuming she could not learn. Teachers outside our home accomplished things with her we would not have tried. With her own stubborn insistence, she often taught us she could do more. She learned several words on her own. . . . Yes, we could teach her.[22]

Some leaders have also attempted to gently revise the Innocents Myth. In 1977, Spencer W. Kimball recorded a statement for the political disability movement in the United States, claiming "soothing words of consolation alone" would not serve this population. Rather, "**t**rue Christian service lies in accepting the afflicted and helping them to develop the talents God gave them. . . . The Master would have us—all of us—struggle and build and grow."[23] In a 1978 address, Neal A. Maxwell retreated from McConkie's canonical statements with his subjunctive, "For all we now know, the seeming limitations may have been an agreed-upon spur to achievement," but warned, "We must be exceedingly careful about imputing either wrong causes or wrong rewards to all in such circumstances."[24]

In more recent General Conference addresses, Margaret S. Lifferth encouraged "parents of children who have disabilities to determine a reasonable expectation for their child because every child deserves a chance to progress."[25] Joseph B. Wirthlin was the first speaker to ever mention **a**utism from the pulpit, using his grandson Joseph as an example of the Lord's principle of compensation. While the boy was largely defined in terms of how he affected other people's lives, at least the optimistic point Wirthlin made was about the boy's development, not his absolution.[26]

In such an environment uncluttered by *official* doctrine and within a pluralist context allowing individual circumstances to guide personal revelation about one's *own* life, members are free to accept or reject the Innocents argument. Just as the Plan of Salvation dictates, the Disability movement also values a universally adaptable environment which is designed to allow each person to realize their individual capacity and maximum independence. Though in the Mormon case, instead of simply a broader conception of architectural features and social attitudes treated in civil rights laws, Latter-day Saint thought can encompass and develop a doctrinal approach to disability.

Imago Disability

Deborah Creamer argues that "we not only *have* but *are* bodies,"[27] and it is through bodies and as bodies that we experience God himself, and his expression via the world. Amos Yong adds how this sort of understanding requires "a new theological paradigm . . . which locates disability not only in human bodies but also in the very life of God."[28]

Mormons understand the invocation from Genesis, "Let us make man in our own image," to also mean, "Let us allow man to live as we do." Though mortal experience was organized to eventually refine our lives into a godlike existence, entropy inevitably negates our progress and mortality leaves a mark upon our bodies. If *taken together* we all complete His image, what characteristics of divinity are embodied in disability?

The hope of other faiths in the release from a fraught embodiment into an incorporeal realm is not an attractive reward to Mormons. We are warned that those awaiting the resurrection consider the "long absence of their spirits from their bodies as a bondage" (D&C 138:50), and waiting an additional one thousand years after the flurry of Millennial work for the second resurrection is another torment. LDS discourse emphasizes that those spirit agents who rejected the plan to emulate God and act in their bodies with choice, accountability, and reward, have become eternally *un*embodied—the ultimate disability. Even though the experience of being in a body is to risk one's Spirit becoming clipped, in Mormon belief**,** bodilessness is the worst kind of impediment to achieving godhood.

Mormons believe the Holy Ghost still lives in the *essential* body type we all once shared and has not yet undergone a physical birth; his work is largely to guide, warn, and protect all corporeal agents. However, this member of the Godhead who exists as a spirit yet is wholly a God,[29] exploits the limitations of his calling to exercise what Tracy Demmons calls "The abilities which Disability allow[s]." Remaining a spirit body enables him to literally be with and among every body everywhere (D&C 130:22)—the medium that coheres the Body of Saints.

One fresh idea from radical Disability Theology which Mormonism can take even further comes from Nancy Eiesland's *The Disabled God*. In her work, Eiesland emphasizes that Christ both still bears and also *bears testimony to* his wounds, reflecting the unfinished business of the Atonement in our own souls. The eucharist celebrates this broken body of Christ, and requires that the emblem of his sacrificed flesh literally become incorporated into ours, with the covenant between God and human beings sealing the co-transformation of us both.

An LDS interpretation would advance Eiesland's claim by allowing what we might call an **"**anthropomorphic infinitive." Mormonism's theology would hinge upon more than just a God with broken flesh, but adds elements of how the Creators themselves once lived a mortal existence with disabilities of their own, in a world subject to the effects of sickness, age, toil, injury, and war. Thus even

though scars from those brief lives might be erased from their bodies, such reconciled experiences would still be imprinted onto their eternal spirits which begat our own. Also, 2 Nephi 2:11 teaches that tension is a necessary eternal condition which tempers every stage of existence. If we extrapolate from this, it means that our Heavenly Parents' emotional life is still fraught with symbiotic pain and frustration over us, but on a grander scale. This teaching adds great depth to their mourning of our disobedience, grieving with our suffering, and vulnerability to the risk that material members of their body, their literal offspring, will spiritually die instead of render them glory.

Phillip Yancey observe**s** that "**w**e are called to bear [God's] image as a Body because any one of us taken individually would present an incomplete image, one partly false and always distorted, like a single glass chip hacked from a mirror."[30] Certainly, Disability can be grounding even as it can be de-stabilizing, and many people—physically or emotionally disabled or not—admit that their achievements are *because of*, not *despite of*, the fact they had something to push against. Mormonism amplifies this to suggest that even a Divine life requires opposition to sustain the struggle, for without work, there can be no glory. The Gods' bodies remain continually "in labor," and therefore generative.

Somatic Testaments

The insights and questions which Mormonism can contribute are vital to the Disability discussion. As Alma suggests, all things—all bodies—denote there is a God (Alma 30:44). If our bodies are temples in varying stages of construction, our lives are sacred observances that prepare us for God's presence, to ascend to the next *story*.

Unfortunately, as in other faiths, Mormons with disabilities are often absentees, seen for their metaphorical "emeritus" value "that the works of God might be revealed" (John 9:1–3) by and for other people. Also, the preference for industriousness and attainment in Mormonism's talent meritocracy can marginalize the performance of some to "work out [their] own salvation" (Philippians 2:12) with and through their own different bodies.

In previous versions of the *General Handbook of Instructions* no longer consulted, LDS leaders had been strenuously advised to categorically prevent some members from access living and proxy temple ordinances; instead of bodily enacting the rituals of spiritual transformation for themselves, they were expected to rely on others to perform the endowment for them. While this is no longer the case, it had been as late as 1976:

> A person subject to seizures not controlled by medication should not receive temple ordinances while living. Such persons are not held accountable for this work. Temple work may be done for them by proxy after their death. In addition, individuals who have received their own endowments but who are now subject to

uncontrollable seizures should not be encouraged to attend the temple.[31]

Similar counsel persisting into this edition was particularly extreme, providing that the First Presidency could be petitioned to grant the following exception:

> Temple ordinances *by proxy for living mentally retarded persons* [emphasis added] will be performed only in cases of extreme hardship where presence in the temple would be detrimental to the physical or emotional welfare of the persons or members of the family, or to the atmosphere of the temple.[32]

Even if those who currently occupy positions of authority were trained in such ideas and persist under their influence while administering the LDS church today, many within the highest ranks have publicly demonstrated personal and formative experience with disability. The scriptural and historical canon contains productive examples from the lives of prophets and apostles often identified with the marks upon their spirits and bodies.[33] To Christianity's examples of Enoch's and Moses's stutter, Job's fleshly decay, and Paul's thorn in the side, Mormonism adds Nephi's maudlin moods, George Albert Smith's anxieties and near-blindness, Neal A. Maxwell's bald witness of Christ, and perhaps most famously, Joseph Smith's limp from frontier surgery, lisp after a tooth chipped on a bottle of poison, and occasional hairless patches and tar-torn skin. These things are viewed within Mormonism as testimonies not of brokenness but of victory. Recall how Ezra Taft Benson's unresponsive and lingering body provided the proving ground for Gordon B. Hinckley. When we hear an early audio recording of Elder Spencer W. Kimball, who does not wish for the later distinctive voice which lent him the maturity and gravitas which so many associate with the years he served as prophet? Mark that Joseph B. Wirthlin's back spasm at a recent general conference normalized *in*ability and began a new precedent, demonstrating that there is no shame or weakness in a seated witness.

Such changes in the form or function of the body determine how one experiences the world, solves problems, and comes to know God. A more developed epistemology of disability could reveal even more clearly how physical or mental difference is transformed into the gift of spiritual proprioception—the heightened awareness of the interacting parts within one's being. Mother Eve taught a type of disability consciousness when she discovered her purpose. If Lucifer's sentence was the first order of bodily corruption, the Fall was the second. And here, an LDS audience breaks from mainstream Christianity's indictment of her decision with the belief that the net effect was deliverance from an unfruitful perfection.

Conclusion

Apotheosis must of a necessity, pass through disability. We all carry incapacities or blemishes, all warrant grace, and the Atonement acts as the ultimate spiritual prosthesis. In mortality, it is ultimately our spirit, not our body, that must learn to emulate Jesus Christ. As that ascending spirit pushes against the enmity of mortality, the expansive Atonement transfers disease, pain, guilt, shame, and thwarted desires onto Christ, our Host, who metabolizes these bodily failings into a sacrament. Mormons share the belief with traditional Christianity that we ritually reenact, and re-admit this recombinant antidote back into those same crumbling bodies. Our individual sufferings are subsumed into the consecrated balm that covers all of our brokenness. *Take. This is* our *bodies…and* our *blood.*

Even now Christ's body is graven with our collective image in the moment of his death, as testimony to our indwelling dependence upon him; we must have access to his wounds, and he ours in order that the Atonement can be transacted. Though resurrected, Christ still displays the emblems of his body and blood at the height of his divinity and the depth of his humanity. His God-begotten body must retain those man-made marks, as emblems of this continuing mystery, and he will not be whole until the entire Body of Christ is whole. Paul's metaphor that "the body is one, and hath many members . . ." (1 Corinthians 2:12) makes some the hand, some the foot. Disability theory adds that others of us represent the *marks* upon those hands and feet, or to take Neal A. Maxwell literally, those with seeming limitations whom we wait upon "are in the Lord's hands."[34]

Mormons look forward to a recapitulation of the solemn assembly that Christ officiated in the midst of the ruins of the Bountiful Temple, where one by one, the Nephite survivors personally received his outstretched hands, feet, and touched the inside of his body near the ribs (3 Nephi 11:14–15). After they witnessed these symbols of our birth in Adam and rebirth in the Atonement, Christ testified of his own resurrected perfection, improving upon his command from the Sermon on the Mount from "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48) to "Be ye perfect, even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (3 Nephi 12:48). Though clearly wounded, at-one we are perfect.

In Mormonism, eternal embodiment sacralizes all human relationships. Just as our gifts are to be shared, so too our flaws, and in cooperation they are rendered into corporate strengths. People with disabilities understand this alchemy well. The chink in the armor of practicing Mormons may be an aversion to individual and communal weakness—the pride that is so often railed against. Consider the touching scene of the washing of the feet that is not a prevalent feature within Christianity today but was restored by 1832 as a priesthood ordinance and initiation ritual into the School of the Prophets.[35]   Tracy Demmons, referencing in part another author, Stephanie Paulsell,[36] observed:

> Foot washing is described by some as the "sacrament that almost made it"… In the thirteenth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus participated in this rite, washing the feet of the disciples. The washer must kneel before the recipient, and intimately bathe the most disparaging part of the other, their feet. These feet were oftentimes smelly, dirty, sweaty and sometimes cantankerous. This intimate experience symbolizes humility, community and preparation for receiving communion, but it also symbolizes our common vulnerability (Paulsell, 31). Paulsell points out that, "When you offer your feet to another to be washed and gently dried, it is impossible not to notice the difficult relationship between our bodies and our identities. And when you kneel to wash the feet of another, you glimpse the vulnerabilities that attention to the body can evoke (31). For people with disabilities this vulnerability is often experienced daily, to an even greater extent, when they require assistance for daily [bathing, dressing, traveling, eating or communicating]. This [reveals] a window into the world of disability, and helps us understand the true degree of our reticence.[37]

Mormonism holds that we are at once conditionally redeemed, yet remain fallen, with "an effectual struggle to be made" (Mosiah 7:18), and disability reminds us as individuals and as a community of Saints that life is eternal, and only through acceptance of our *in*abilities can we achieve communion with God (Mosiah 4:11). Inspired by this principle, Bishop Newel K. Whitney and his wife Elizabeth opened their stores to a three-day feast, "after the order of the Son of God [where] the lame, the halt, and the blind were invited, according to the instructions of the Savior."[38] Guests were specifically selected from among members of Kirtland society who would likely never be able to reciprocate such hospitality,[39] and the Prophet's family and associates were formally requested to join them.[40] The meeting drew large attendance; the participants offered prayers, sang hymns, and received spontaneous blessings administered by Joseph Smith, Sr. Sister Whitney reported that

> **t**he Prophet Joseph often referred to this particular Feast during his lifetime, and testified of the great blessing he felt in associating with the meek and humble ones whom the Lord has said "He delights to own and bless." He often said to me that it was proferable and far superior to the elegant and select parties he afterwards attended, and afforded him much more genuine satisfaction.[41]

Shortly after sharing the food and fellowship offered by the Whitneys, the Kirtland Saints were prepared to partake in unprecedented spiritual bounty. The pentecost at the dedication of the Temple followed only seventy-seven days later[42]—an outpouring which may not have been possible without first mending

the social and physical barriers between members of the congregation. Indeed, a Mormonism that emulates a God who is already accessible to everyone, and reconciles disability within its theology and practice, *will* widen the threshold, and ensure the seats at the ultimate marriage supper can admit any *body*. When the doors finally close upon that feast, the transformation of the body of Christ will be complete. To theologians, this is transcendence. In disability language, inclusion. In Mormon parlance, becoming Zion.

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Notes

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[1] Robert C. Anderson, "In Search of the Disabled Human Body in Theological Education: Critical Perspectives on the Construction of Normalcy—An Overview," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 7:3 (2003), 33–55.

[2] Mary Timothy Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 25.

[3] In an example taken from the headlines, one Deaf scholar remarked to the author in July 2010, defending Sonia Sotomayor's statement that the niche of "a wise Latina" would enrich the entire judiciary, exclaiming in solidarity, "She is right!"

[4] "The late modern paradox of the body results from an absence of meaning arising from the loss of ontological and existential sureties provided by religious systems of belief." Nichola Hutchinson, "Disabling Beliefs? Impaired Embodiment in the Religious Tradition of the West," B*ody & Society* 12:4 (December 2006), 6.

[5] Hutchinson, 2.

[6] Jackie Leach-Scully, "Disability and the Thinking Body," *Arguing about Disability: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Kristijana Kristiansen, Simo Vehmas, and Tom Shakespeare (New York: Routledge, 2009), 57.

[7] Spencer W. Kimball, *One Silent Sleepless Night* (Bookcraft 1975), the stream-of-consciousness memoir which allows the reader to overhear Kimball's inner torment during the night following his 1957 throat surgery.

[8] Spencer W. Kimball, "Tragedy or Destiny?" *BYU Speeches of the Year, 1955–56* (Provo: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 1956), 8.

[9] Amos Yong, "Disability, the Human Condition, and the Spirit of the Eschatological Long Run: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Disability," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 1:1 (2007), 10.

[10] "Difficult and painful events in mortality are not evidence that God is punishing or rejecting you or your child." *http://disabilities.lds.org/disabilities/eng/disability-resources/family-resources/helps-for-mothers* (accessed 15 January 2010).

[11] Though he recanted soon afterward, Virginia delegate Robert Marshall opposed state funding of Planned Parenthood on 18 February 2010 by claiming that "the number of children who are born subsequent to a first abortion with handicaps has increased dramatically. Why? Because when you abort the first born of any, nature takes its vengeance on the subsequent children. . . . In the Old Testament, the first born of every being, animal and man, was dedicated to the Lord. There's a special punishment Christians would suggest." Rebecca Panoff, "AAPD's Statement on VA Delegate Robert Marshall's Remarks About People with Disabilities," American Association of People with Disabilities, *http://www.aapd.com/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=pvI1IkNWJqE&b=6059469&ct=8117733&notoc=1* (accessed 23 February 2010).

[12] "God has a plan for each of His children, both for mortality and for eternity. These assignments are fulfilled according to God's purposes." "Disability Resources: General Information,"Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *http://disabilities.lds.org/disabilities/eng/disability-resources/general-info* (accessed 28 January 2010).

[13] Ibid.

[14] For the prevailing LDS source for the uncontested claim that Michael was "the angel" in Luke 22:43, see Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1979-1981) 4:125.

[15] Ibid.

[16]*Handbook of Instructions for Stake Presidencies, Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks, and Other Church Officers, no. 16* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1940), 119.

[17] Dale Evans Rogers, *Angel Unaware* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revel Co., 1953) discusses a Down's Syndrome daughter who had recently died, whom the mother believed was a special messenger of God. Sigurt Petersen, *Retarded Children: God's Children* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1960) made the book club reading list for the journal *Pastoral Psychology* the year it was published (see 11:19, 43–44). Also, a contemporary group within a Roman Catholic order in San Francisco formed a group called "The Holy Innocents. "See Robert Perske, "An Attempt to Find an Adequate Theological View of Mental Retardation," a booklet by the National Association for Retarded Children, April 1965.

[18] Horizon Publishers, Bountiful, Utah. It was reprinted in 2009 by Cedar Fort, Springville, Utah as *Angel Children: Doctrinal Perspectives on the Salvation of Little Children.* While the death of children is not directly related to disability, the doctrines and discourse tend to bleed together: the assured exaltation of "perfect" beings, punishment for aborting deformed fetuses, refining suffering of the living or able-bodied, and the possibility to relive formative experiences in a resurrected state.

[19] Bruce R. McConkie, "The Salvation of Little Children," *Ensign*, April 1977, 3–7.

[20] Sharon Haddock, "'Rain Man' Has Been a Missionary His Whole Life," *Mormon Times* *http://www.mormontimes.com/article/7056/Rain-Man-has-been-a-missionary-his-whole-life* (accessed 28 December 2009).

[21] Entry for Laurence Kim Peek, Person ID #KWFR-69X, New FamilySearch; *http://new.familysearch.org/en* (accessed 28 December 2009).

[22] Mary Jane Hawkes, "Sharing Sarah: Our Downs Syndrome Baby," *Ensign,* June 1981, 32.

[23] Speech (audiorecording) distributed at White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals, 23–27 May 1977.

[24] "Neal A. Maxwell, "Meeting the Challenges of Today," (10 October 1978), in *BYU Speeches of the Year, 1977–1978* (Provo: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 1979), 153.

[25] Margaret S. Lifferth, "Respect and Reverence," *Ensign,* May 2009, 11–13.

[26] Joseph B. Wirthlin, "Come What May and Love It," *Ensign*, November 2008, 26–28.

[27] Deborah Creamer, *The Withered Hand of God: Disability and Theological Reflection*, doctoral dissertation, Iliff School of Theology and the University of Denver, Colorado, 2004, 6.

[28] Yong, 12.

[29] Daniel H. Ludlow, ed*., Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* "Godhead," (Macmillan, 1992), 1:552.

[30] Paul Brand and Phillip Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 40.

[31] *General Handbook of Instructions*, no. 21 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 64.

[32] Ibid.

[33] While he is little-known, Elder John B. Dickson, a General Authority currently serving in the West Africa Area Presidency, had his right arm amputated *before* serving a mission to Mexico as a young man in 1962. He afterward was called as a mission president (1978) and member of the Second (1992) and First (1995) Quorums of the Seventy. See *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_B._Dickson* (accessed 4 December 2010). Also, author's private e-mail correspondence with John B. Dickson (6 January 2011).

[34] Maxwell, 153.

[35] See Doctrine and Covenants 88:74, 139–140. See also Fred Collier and William S. Howell, ed, *Kirtland Council Minute Book* (Salt Lake City: Collier's Publishing, 1996), 6; Merle H. Graffam, ed., *Salt Lake School of the Prophets Minute Book: 1883* (Palm Desert, CA: ULC Press, 1981), 50–51, 64.

[36] See Stephanie Paulsell, *Honouring the Body* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

[37] Tracy Allison Demmons, "The Meaning and Message of Embodiment and Disability," master's thesis, Dalhousie University, 2001, 44.

[38] Brigham H. Roberts, ed., *Documentary History of the Church*, Brigham H. Roberts, ed., (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1904), 2:362 (entry for Thursday, 7 January 1836).

[39] Elizabeth Ann Whitney, "A Leaf from an Autobiography," *Women's Exponent* 7: 9 (1 October 1878), 71.

[40] Roberts, ed., *Documentary History*, 363 (entry for Saturday, 9 January 1836).

[41] Elizabeth Ann Whitney, "A Leaf from an Autobiography," *Women's Exponent* 7: 11 (1 November 1878), 83.

[42] The dedication took place on 27 March 1836; see Doctrine and Covenants 109.

Reflections on Justification, Theosis, and Grace in Christian and Mormon Thought

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Few would dispute that human salvation is a central concern of all branches of Christianity, but exactly what salvation entails has been a matter of considerable debate for nearly two thousand years. Because to one degree or another all Christian theology is tethered to the Bible, I begin with a few observations about New Testament teachings on salvation. The "good news" about what God has done for humanity in and through Jesus Christ is so extensive and rich that New Testament authors struggled to articulate it. The apostle Paul, who had the most to say on the matter, was compelled to employ a variety of images in his attempt to convey the grandeur of the divine grace manifest in the person and work of Christ. Redemption, reconciliation, justification, birth, adoption, creation, citizenship, sealing, grafting, even salvation itself, were all metaphors from everyday life with recognized non-religious meanings. Only over time did these metaphors acquire precise theological definition and elaborate exposition in that subdivision of Christian theology known as *soteriology*, or the study of salvation.[1]

Justification, for instance, is a legal metaphor that refers to acquittal and conveys "the image of expunging a record of debt or criminal guilt."[2] The parallel with divine forgiveness of sins is obvious. Different than in modern, everyday English in which justification means an explanation or reason for something, biblically, justification and its cognates "just" and "justice" are translations of Hebrew and Greek root words having to do with "righteousness." Thus, for Paul and later Christian commentators, justification is about how and in what sense humans can be considered as, or can actually become, righteous. To capture in modern English the proper Christian meaning of justification, we would need to invent an awkward term like "righteous-ification."

In the first centuries after Christ neither in the Latin-speaking West nor in the Greek-speaking East did the early church fathers "choose to express their soteriological convictions in terms of the concept of justification."[3] They preferred other biblical metaphors and images to describe the initiation into, and continuation of, one's life in Christ. Augustine, however, found justification useful because of its linguistic potential to convey what he believed to be the dual aspects of justification—that it both imputed *and* imparted righteousness to the Christian believer. The idea of imputed or ascribed righteousness preserved the

secular, judicial connotations of justification and evoked the image of humans receiving a "not guilty" verdict in the court of God's justice, whereby their sins are forgiven. By imputing Christ's righteousness to believers, God does not say that believers themselves are righteous, but that the demands of justice have been satisfied by Christ so that Christians are viewed by God *as if* they were righteous. Theologians call this aspect of justification "forensic," a word derived from the Latin "*foro*," or forum (anciently the Roman public marketplace where judicial action often took place).

For Augustine, though, justification was more than merely a forensic act in which the believer's sins were, so to speak, erased from the heavenly ledgers. Augustine understood justification to entail genuine moral and spiritual regeneration. For Augustine and Western Christian theologians for a millennium afterward, justification included what Protestant Reformers would later call "sanctification." That is, the Spirit-driven process of purging pardoned Christians of their fallen nature's sinful inclinations and imparting a habit of inner holiness. In contrast with the forensic dimension, this was known as the "effective" aspect of justification. In the Protestant Reformation, effective justification came to be known as sanctification and was separated logically and sequentially from forensic justification.[4] Thereafter, the term justification was reserved solely for the forensic crediting of Christ's righteousness to individual sinners. Sanctification was understood to refer to the subsequent and ongoing process of restoring to humans the *imago dei*, the moral, spiritual image of God, that had been lost in the Fall. Mormons inherited this justification-sanctification distinction from the Reformation. Though notionally separate, the two concepts were viewed as a complementary pair that could not be separated in describing the full work of salvation.

The process of sanctification, however it relates to justification, is akin to what Eastern Orthodoxy includes in its teaching of *theosis* or *theopoesis,* Greek terms typically translated as "deification" or "divinization."[5] John McGuckin, professor of Byzantine Christian Studies at Columbia University, defines theosis simply as "the process of the sanctification of Christians whereby they become progressively conformed to God."[6] Church fathers in the Greek East found a number of supporting images and metaphors for theosis. One of the more common images was "participation in the divine nature," a phrase originating in 2 Peter 1:4. This passage was interpreted to mean that Christians "participate" or share in the divine nature of the Spirit of Christ that dwells in them. The underlying Greek word *koinonia*, here rendered "participate," elsewhere in the New Tesatament is typically translated "communion" or "fellowship." This sense of communal participation in the divine nature is often missed by modern users of the King James Bible because it renders *koinonia* in 2 Peter 1:4 as "partakers." Given the evolution of the English language, today "partakers" conveys more of an the idea of individualist acquisition than was intended in the original Greek.

As the patristic discussion of *how* Christians participate in the divine nature developed, it became far richer than seeing participation as merely basking associatively in God's reflected glory. The church fathers found a key in the

Incarnation. By becoming flesh, Christ took on fallen, sinful human nature, our human nature, precisely so he could purify and divinize it. As the fourth-century Cappadocian Gregory of Nyssa expressed it in his *Catechetical Oration,* when the second person of the Godhead became flesh, divinity "was transfused throughout our nature, so that our nature, by virtue of this transfusion, might itself become divine."[7] Theologians have sometimes dubbed this participation the "exchange formula" and many of the early fathers from Irenaeus to Athanasius taught this doctrine using phrases like "God became man so man could become god."[8]

Such expressions have surprised and impressed Mormons, who, without fully understanding them, have occasionally lifted them out of context and held them up as proof that early Christians taught LDS doctrine. Yet Athanasius's couplet should not be equated with Lorenzo Snow's "as god now is, man may become." The "exchange" signifies an exchange of characteristics and attributes, not a change in being or substance. Humans remain humans and God continues to be God. Christians, whether in the Greek East or Latin West, consistently upheld what they considered the unbreachable wall separating God and human beings, expressed as the ontological opposites of Creator and creature, divinity and humanity, infinite and finite, self-existent and contingent. Moreover, godly attributes are not detachable qualities that "cling to the human heart apart from Christ."[9] Deification is about community, not autonomy. If he is not present, we are not righteous. We may live moral, upright lives on our own, but in God's eyes this is not salvifically meritorious righteousness. This only exists in Christ and is present in us only through our participation in Him.

Here I think the internet can serve as a helpful analogy. Christ's divinity, his righteousness, his godly attributes are like the incomprehensibly powerful internet. As long as we are connected to the internet, all its wonders become available to us, we share in its power and benefits. We become infinitely knowledgeable, but not independently so. Similarly, when through justification we become Christ's and enter into union with him, we participate in his righteousness, we become partakers of the divine nature, but we are still human. And while by this connection, this union, we can truly be said to be gods, it is not in the sense that we personally, independently, have become gods. We are not new internets, as it were, rivals to the world wide web. That is beyond us. No matter how much we download from the internet or how often we use it, there will always be a vast qualitative difference between what Google or God knows and what we know. Similarly, no matter how responsive we are to the indwelling Christ or how much his infusion of *caritas,* the pure love of Christ, creates certain habits of grace within us, we are still improved human beings at best, not new and separate deities. The created can never become the Uncreated. It is a matter of participation not possession, community not autonomy. For Christians like Luther who begin with the presupposition of an unbridgeable gap between humanity and divinity, deification must always remain a metaphor.

Mormons, of course, have a dramatically different ontology. Late in his life, Joseph Smith explicitly began to bridge the ontological gap between God and

humanity by teaching that God, angels, and humans are all basically the same class of being. We are, the same "race," so to speak, except at vastly different points in their evolution. God was once human and humans can become gods. This was one of Joseph's most distinctive doctrines, one that is virtually without parallel in Christendom, East or West. The Mormon doctrine of pre-mortal spirit birth constituted future humans as literal children of God with the potential to "grow up" and become like their divine Parent. Thus, humans belong not only to the same genus, but to the same family as God.[10]

In addition to abolishing the Creator-creature divide, the Mormon doctrine of deification differs from other Christian conceptualizations of divinization in two other important ways. One pertains to purpose, the other to timetable, and both are interrelated. For most Christians, the purpose of God's salvific work is to prepare human creatures to enter his presence and behold his glory. This is known as the "beatific vision."[11] The trajectory of earth-life divinization leads to "glorification," what theologians describe as the complete purification and sanctification of faithful Christians at the resurrection which prepares them to thereafter enjoy the beatific vision for eternity. For many Mormons, on the other hand, deification entails much more than becoming sufficiently holy to enter God's presence and praise his name forever. Deification is about God's literal children progressing to the point that they are able to do the very things their divine Parent does. Rather than becoming God's awe-filled audience forever, Mormons expect that God's deified children will become his active, albeit subordinate, collaborators in cosmic endeavors, partners in the family business, so to speak. But this will not happen at the resurrection. Rather, it will require a vast amount of grace-empowered, post-mortal development over eons of time to enable them to reach that point.

Of course, it would be possible to theorize that God could miraculously and instantly confer the requisite knowledge and power on his resurrected children, but Mormon appreciation for the value of doing one's part is projected into the afterlife and privileges that long and gradual process of learning and development Latter-day Saints call "eternal progression." From the LDS standpoint, compared to the relatively little progress accomplished in mortality, deification should be seen as primarily an afterlife phenomenon. Joseph Smith was only stating the obvious when he remarked that the knowledge necessary for exaltation or deification was "not all to be comprehended in this world."[12] Indeed, it would "take a long time after the grave to understand the whole" of it.[13]

The expectation of a lengthy period of substantive post-mortal progress toward godhood means that most Latter-day Saints have the same humility about the vast qualitative distance between themselves and God in this life that other Christians do. They tend to view the prospect of even far-off deification as something almost incomprehensible given their current, limited level of god-likeness. Certainly no Mormon prophet or apostle is on record as saying that either he himself or anyone else has climbed the ladder of godliness to the point that here in mortality the person is a mere rung away from being crowned a god.

Moreover, when deification is discussed in LDS church circles today it sometimes lacks its nineteenth-century focus on exercising cosmic power or ruling over an innumerable posterity on worlds the deified themselves have created. Rather, the stress is on the mortal sojourn and what it means, or should mean, in the here and now to be a child of God. Becoming *like* God rather than becoming *a* god seems to be the more common emphasis.

Teenage Mormon girls, for instance, affirm in their weekly gatherings that they are literal daughters of a Heavenly Father from whom they have "inherited divine qualities" which they promise to "strive to develop." Class discussion is not usually directed toward some distant prospect of morphing into goddesses, but rather toward how, with the help of the Holy Spirit, godly virtues can be cultivated in this life. Where it will all lead in the next life is only vaguely understood and rarely discussed. Given how difficult it is, in any case, for finite mortals to truly understand much about an *in*finite God, it is unlikely that during their mortal sojourn Latter-day Saints will ever have a very profound comprehension of what it might mean for humans to grow into godhood. Thus, although Mormons' ontological assumptions about theosis and its end result far off in a post-resurrection future are significantly different from those of other Christians, descriptions of what the divinizing process entails during the span of mortal life are much closer.

It now remains to say something about the dynamic driving that sanctifying, deifiying process. Mormons view it as a synergistic balance between divine grace and human effort. Still, throughout much of Mormon history, there has been a tendency to stress the human contribution. This seems to be the result of several factors. First and foremost is the stunning potency of the idea that human spirits are God's literal children, endowed with seeds of divinity. One early revelation counseled the Saints to be "anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for," the revelation affirmed, "the power is in them." (D&C 58:27-28). This elevated anthropology has been reinforced by the way in which the practical demands of colonization and community-building in the second half of the nineteenth century infused Mormon preaching on spiritual growth with a pragmatic, "can-do" quality. That aspect of Mormon discourse was so entrenched by the twentieth century that the astute Catholic sociologist of religion Thomas O'Dea, who did field work among the Mormons in the 1950s, was prompted to observe that "Mormonism has elaborated an American theology of self-deification through effort, an active transcendentalism of achievement."[14]

While over the years Latter-day Saints have clearly and consistently urged human effort, the other side of the divine-human synergy has not been entirely forgotten. One early revelation described the process of inheriting God's fullness as receiving "grace [upon] grace" (D&C 93:20).[15] And Joseph Smith, in his famous King Follett discourse, is reported to have declared, "You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves . . . the same as all Gods have done; by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace . . . until you are able to sit . . . enthroned in everlasting power."[16] The occasional invocation of grace is a

reminder that even "gods in embryo" cannot progress alone. They need grace as well as race.

Part of the challenge in properly evaluating Mormon theology is that grace, for a variety of reasons, has not generally been the Mormon term-of-choice for acknowledging God's gratuitous blessings and assistance in life. Still, most Mormons willingly acknowledge God's crucial role using other words. They may quote the Book of Mormon prophet who said, "I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak, but I will glory in the Lord . . . for in his strength I can do all things" (Alma 26:12, 16). They may speak of God's "tender mercies." They may acknowledge "promptings" from the Holy Ghost. They may testify of divine aid in overcoming personal weaknesses and perennial temptations. In such ways, they often publicly credit God's goodness. In short, when pressed, few Latter-day Saints deny that real progress toward godliness is the result of divine grace, even though they rarely employ the term. They might even concur with Augustine's famous remark that on Judgment day, "when God crowns our merits, he crowns nothing other than his own gifts."[17] And yet for pastoral and practical reasons, Mormon teachers choose to dwell on the human role in obtaining salvation. Singing the praises of one's amazing fishing pole or celebrating the wonder of a stream full of trout does not put fish on the dinner table. The downside of such a "do-your-part" emphasis is that acknowledgment and adulation of God's grace sometimes takes a back seat to exhortations toward Christian striving.

The delicate balance between grace and works is sometimes portrayed by Mormons using the analogy of a ladder. Fallen humanity finds itself at the bottom of a deep pit with no way out. The atonement of Jesus Christ is the rescue ladder that is let down to deliver hapless humanity. But the ladder is not an escalator. Mormons decry "cheap grace," just as did the famous twentieth-century German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who coined the phrase. In the LDS view, fallen humanity is not carried up the ladder. Believers still have to do the climbing themselves through repentance and righteous living. Yet, in the end, despite all their willingness to climb, if no ladder was provided, no escape from the pit would be possible. Thus, in the Book of Mormon, the grace of Christ's redemptive work is given primacy. This is how the relationship between grace and works is phrased: "By grace we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Nephi 52:23). Though this statement is sometimes interpreted differently, the best contextual reading understands "after all we can do" rhetorically rather than sequentially. Thus, rather than stressing human efforts and relegating to grace the role of merely making up the shortfall, as this passage is sometimes construed, in context the verse intends to glorify Christ's atonement by affirming that after "all we can do," in the sense of "after all is said and done," it is by the grace of God that we are saved.

Should there be an inclination to do so, Mormon scripture provides ample resources to expound the analogy of the ladder in ways that demonstrate considerable sympathy with the grace-appreciating spirit of mainstream Christianity. How then, at the close of our brief comparative journey, shall we summarize the soteriological similarities and differences we have encountered?

Perhaps it can best be done by invoking the proverbial image of the half full/half empty cup. On the one hand, our comparative cup must be acknowledged to be half empty. Even this introductory review has revealed enough significant differences between the Mormon understanding of deification and that of any other Christian group to equate their views. Though at times the words may be similar, the tune, so to speak, is quite distinct. Yet, such genuine differences should not obscure commonalities. Because Mormons are as committed to the pursuit of godliness in this life as they are to achieving godhood in the next, their understanding of justification and sanctification or theosis during mortality, shares much with other Christian soteriologies. Even with a monergistic emphasis on Christ dwelling in, and working righteousness through, faithful believers, synergistic Mormons have, as we seen, more points of contact than usually imagined. In emphasizing the "half fullness" of the comparative cup, we can echo a common refrain from ecumenical dialogues of all sorts—"let us celebrate the common ground we share without collapsing the significant differences that also exist between us." To build such bridges of mutual understanding while maintaining intellectual and institutional integrity is a useful endeavor in our global age and the very kind of comparative work richly evident in the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology.

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[1] The information in this and the subsequent paragraph is drawn from James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). See, esp., pp. 317-389.

[2] Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 328.

[3] Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 33. Adds McGrath, "The few occasions upon which a specific discussion of justification can be found almost always involve no interpretation of the matter other than a mere paraphrase of a Pauline statement. . . . Justification was simply not a theological issue in the pre-Augustinian tradition" (p. 33). Krister Stendahl observed, "it has always been a puzzling fact that Paul meant so relatively little for the thinking of the church during the first 350 years of its history. To be sure, he is honored and quoted, but, in the theological perspective of the west, it seems that Paul's great insight into justification by faith was forgotten." Stendahl., *Paul Among Jews and Greeks* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 83.

[4] The renowned nineteenth-century German scholar Albrecht Ritschl remarked that one could "search in vain to find any theologian of the Middle Ages" who made a "deliberate distinction between justification and regeneration." Ritschl, *Critical History of the Christian Doctrine of Justificaiton and Reconciliation* (Edinburgh, 1872), 90-91. Alister McGrath adds: "The notional distinction that came to emerge in the sixteenth century between *iustificatio* and *regeneratio* (or *sanctification*) provides one of the best ways of distinguishing between Catholic and Protestant understandings of justification, marking the Reformers' discontinuity with the earlier western theological tradition." McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 71.

[5] *Theosis* is a neologism of Gregory of Nazianzus that he first employed in 365. "Although *theosis* is the usual term by which deification came to be known among the Byzantines, it did not prove immediately popular. It was not taken up again until Dionysius the Areopagite used it in the late fifth century, and only became fully assimilated with Maximus the Confessor in the seventh." Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 215.

[6] McGuckin, "The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappadocians," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung, (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 95.

[7] Cited in McGuckin, "The Strategic Adaptation of Deification in the Cappadocians," 113.

[8] Athanasius's expression in *De Incarnatione*, 54:3 (cited in Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 8 is perhaps best known.

[9] Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, cited in Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 29.

[10] The most historically nuanced discussion of the emergence of the idea of a pre-mortal "birth" of human spirits is Craig Harrell "Preexistence in Mormon Thought, 1828-1844," *BYU Studies*. Terryl Givens places Mormon views in a broader philosophical context in *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[11] In one of Luther's "table talks," he expressed his musings about eternal life in heaven as "a life without change . . . without anything to do. 'But I think,' he suggested, 'we will have enough to do with God. Accordingly [the apostle] Philip put it well when he said, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied.' This will be our very dear preoccupation." Cited in Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: a History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 148.

[12] This statement is from Joseph Smith's famous 7 April 1844 funeral sermon for church elder King Follett. In almost identical words, it was recorded by three separate note-taking scribes: Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton. See Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 341, 350, 358.

[13] This is how Wilford Woodruff recorded Joseph's words at the 7 April 1844 funeral sermon. See Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 345.

[14] Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 154.

[15] The text actually reads "grace *for* grace" as in KJV John 1:16, which it is clearly echoing. Other modern English translations, such as the NRSV, render it "grace upon grace." Noteworthy is the fact that a year before dictating this revelation, when Joseph was revising this part of the John, he reworded the phrase to read "received <even> immortality [sic] and eternal life, through his grace." See Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 443.

[16] "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 5 (Aug 15, 1844): 614. This published version of the Prophet's speech represents an amalgamation of notes taken by William Clayton and Thomas Bullock.

[17] "et cum Deus coronat merita nostra nihil aliud coronet quam munera sua?" Epistola 194, Caput 5, 19, *Patrologia Latinum Database*. This statement is repeated in the Roman Missal—Prefatio I de Sanctis.

SOCIALITY:
PLURALISM, CONFLICT, AND LOVE IN THE VISION OF JOSEPH SMITH, JR.

CHARLES RANDALL PAUL
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We shall see [the Savior] is a man like ourselves. And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.

—*D&C 130:1–2 (emphasis added)*

I say unto you be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.

—*D&C 38:27*

This people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

—*Matthew 13: 7*

In this essay I expand on a broad thesis derived from my reading of the words and revelations of Joseph Smith that eternal life for God and other everlasting souls is intentionally social in form. Sociality allows for infinite possibilities of collaborations and interpretations in procreative response to different desires. I base this thesis on five basic ideas I find in Joseph Smith that I assert here but do not argue explicitly for:

1. God has never been alone, nor have you or I. Existence is interpersonal experience.

2. We as human beings desire to emulate without envying our God who enjoys the social experiences of love. Love means to desire and act for the good of another, and that good is open to negotiation between those who love.

3. Love requires a social collaboration of different desires that create unique and enlivening relationships from a mixture of embracing and resisting each other's influence. This is so in grand councils, in friendships, and in marriages.

4. Unity or oneness is a social experience associated with love that is not attained through becoming identical, but rather through collaborative interaction of differences. Zion is a *social atonement* achieved by patient love in mutual persuasion among an infinite

numbers of souls with different desires worlds without end. Contests over "the best way" to collaborate in joy-yielding projects make eternal life interesting.[1]

5. The true church exists when its members love and edify each other socially, and apostasy occurs when members envy and despise each other—*not* because they disagree about their doctrinal interpretations. We lose any priesthood authority we suppose we have via ordination whenever we try to force others to follow our ways instead of their own conscience or heart.

These five ideas serve as slats in a platform undergirding my thesis that the Mormon grand narrative is one of social salvation—the establishment of Zion, a heavenly place, where love between diverse immortal inhabitants brings them to unite in creative undertakings that make their eternal lives joyous and interesting expansions, worlds without end. In contrast, the opposite of this celestial sociality is isolated damnation, a totalitarian unity that shrinks from the influential desires of others—away from the sociality of Zion toward lonely darkness. Given this understanding, one of my main arguments is that apostasy from the true church of God and the establishment of Zion is primarily a "social disease" in which acrimonious contention has led those who profess a love of God to remove their hearts far from him. Ecclesiastical failure due to confusion over doctrines, decrease in charismatic gifts and loss of formal keys of authority is merely a secondary, and derivative, result of apostasy. God, through unequivocal revelation or vision to every person could clear up these secondary problems in an instant, but not even God can force diverse people to truly love each other.

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The Reality that Matters Most:
Eternal Interpersonal Lives, Together in Love

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Joseph Smith founded a radical Judeo-Christian religious tradition whose appeal is in large part based-in its vision of the everlasting distinctiveness of immortal persons (or Gods) in freely chosen social relations. Joseph Smith's theology is *social* theology all the way back and forward. The ultimate good life is found in everlasting togetherness with loved ones making new worlds together.[2] Smith aspired to eventually include an infinite number of souls as his loved ones. He lived with an unusual awareness of the eternal nature of each person in relation to the infinitely large family of God. His way of describing human happiness in eternity focuses on persons in covenant friendship, marriage, and family groups —all uncreated souls yet always interrelated under the organizing influence of God's love and form.[3] This, to him, is not speculative theology. Said he: "By the vision of the Almighty I have seen it."[4]

For Joseph Smith, God is an eternal person in the eternal company of others who are less full of light and truth but are still not unlike him. The grand narratives of Mormonism show that God is worship-worthy because he loves and leads eternal persons toward more joyful social interactions—in both quantity and quality. While divine light or intelligence pervades space and influences all existing things, God's most interesting work is expanding his friends and family. The unity of heaven is not in becoming ontologically one being, but one in interpersonal love, the mutual loyalty and affection of separate persons who edify each other through negotiated collaborations of their different desires. Note that collaborating in a society in which there is no scarcity of material resources entails a choice to absorb others' unique creative influences, a choice for originality through more interpersonal pro-creativity not based in any *lack* of love or power.[5] Joseph Smith's thought leads to broadening the creative scope and intensifying the enjoyment of love between exalted souls on an infinite scale that keeps eternal life forever original and interesting. The very organization of the Godhead, the singular atonement of Christ, and the organization of the earth were instrumental to expanding our capacity and desire for joyful interpersonal experiences—for loving sociality.

Enthroned in yonder heavens is the Man of Holiness, said Joseph, but we cannot imagine him just sitting still up there alone very long. Following the divine example, Joseph Smith says his own good work is to weld all humanity (past and future) into one affectionate family society. This society would allow for radical originality and continuous fecundity as infinite numbers of divine persons engaged in mutual persuasion and coming to collaborative social orders and common projects. Crucial to eternal social life is pluralism and originality that allows for a fusion of new desires that will make eternal relations infinitely interesting. Social welding, or sealing of souls in marriages family relations, is not a fusion or union that ends particularity. It is a fusion that expands particularity forever.

Contention, Not Doctrinal Disagreements, Causes Apostasy

Joseph Smith did not directly address the topic of religious pluralism or conflicts between worldviews in a systematic way. However, the conflicts that plagued him and led to his early death derived from religious claims and social practices that were beyond acceptable limits of religious diversity in the communities where his people had enthusiastically intruded.[6] While it is true that near the end of his life Joseph Smith emphasized liberty of conscience and largesse with respect to other religions, it was not always so. For many years, he had told other Christians that their priesthoods were powerless because their words were holy while their hearts were not. As a result, he had to overcome deep resentments if he wanted sympathy from those he labeled fissiparous Christian apostates, hence his later emphases might be viewed in part as a strategy to obtain reciprocal respect from his critical religious adversaries.[7] But I don't believe this tells the full story.

Joseph's respect for the religious liberty of others was *not* just a self-protective strategy for him and the beleaguered Saints. It was fundamental to his conception of God as the loving parent of humanity who desired to keep his family together in loyalty despite their multiple differences.

The venerable religious historian Richard Hughes compared Roger Williams and Joseph Smith with respect to their beliefs in an exclusive true church and liberty of conscience:

> Williams found the church of his day a corrupt abomination and a gross departure from the primitive model precisely because it compelled and coerced the consciences of men and women. For Williams, therefore, the premise of religious freedom was essential to recovery of the apostolic church. Put another way, true religion, for Williams, was religion born of persuasion, not of coercion. Ironically, however, it was the prevalence of persuasion in the competitive free market of souls that convinced Joseph Smith and a host of other seekers in the new American nation that the true church had disappeared."[8]

I disagree with Hughes's assessment with regard to Joseph Smith, who, like Williams, also exhibited a strong commitment to changing hearts through persuasion not coercion. For Smith it was the acrimoniousness of the contention, not the contestation itself, that marked the loss of true Christian authority.

Joseph initially took to his knees in the sacred grove out of a desire for personal forgiveness and for direction in joining a church. But there was also a third motive: He was so troubled by the contentious ill will between Christians that he wanted to find a way to stop it. Look carefully at his explanation of the problem he witnessed between religious groups:

> Notwithstanding the great love which the converts to these different faiths expressed at the time of their conversion . . . when the converts began to file off . . . it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both the priests and the converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensured— priest contending against priest, convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions. . . in the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinion I often asked myself, What is to be done? (Joseph Smith—History 1:6–10)

He reports that when he finally ventured to ask God in prayer,

> I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light which of all the sects was right (for at this time *it had never entered my heart* that all

> were wrong) . . . I was answered [by Christ] that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; . . . that their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, that they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."

Joseph continues that upon telling his story to ministers, he was told it was "all of the devil" and he was persecuted bitterly with great contempt and reviling by "those who ought to have been my friends and to have treated me kindly, and if they supposed me to be deluded to have endeavored *in a proper and affectionate manner* to have reclaimed me" (Joseph Smith—History 1:6, 19, 21, 23, 28, *my emphases*). Joseph Smith's tendency to show good will to other religions was influenced by his early observation of bad will among Christians. The sure sign of the true and living church was not so much in its doctrinal purity as in the way its members would treat people who disagreed with and opposed them.

In this third desire, one might be tempted to say that as Smith entered the grove, he was not so much seeking to know which church was "right," so much as which one had the true spirit of affectionate love among its members and leaders and showed the same for its opponents. As Hughes notes elsewhere, the Saints' restoration was one of revelation itself, not the correct form of organization.[9] In that same spirit Joseph Smith, might be said to have been seeking a revelation of the pure love of Christ that fills members of the true church. For Smith, the errors latent in all creeds of fallible men are excusable, but not the angry contentiousness over them. True Christians should love and respect their brothers and sisters who disagree with them about the truth. Joseph's question, "What is to be done?" was an ancient one and is with us still whenever there is a deep religious disagreement that cannot be universally resolved.

Here is my midrash on how Christ might have answered Joseph's question about the right church were they to have more time to really discuss what is important to God when considering the pluralistic sea of religions: "Joseph, join with no church because they are all corrupted by thinking that getting creedal doctrine precisely correct is more important than loving and listening to each other with kindness and remaining open to more revelation from God.[10] They give lip service to true faith and Christian love, for they show how they really despise each other whenever they choose to take offense at their inevitable differences of religious viewpoint. When they take pleasure and status from condemning each others' beliefs, they deny the loving power of Godliness and reveal just how far their hearts are from me. When they act like this. I am ashamed to be called their God. I began by giving people their agency and commanded them to love each other—but when I test their hearts by allowing their religions to call each other into question, they show they are without affection and they hate their own blood. Their creeds damn them not because they are erroneous—not even a righteous seer can take the full measure of God —but because they are used as harsh weapons to combat the power of loyalty

and love that I have asked them to show for each other. No power but loving persuasion can move any heart—yet they lose patience over their different beliefs about me and despise and coerce each other."[11]

Neither Jesus nor the original apostles persuaded everyone to become Christians—nor for all those who became Christians to agree with each other. Even with the disagreements, however, apostasy did not arise until the early Saints failed to be patient with each other over their strong disagreements. The center failed to hold in the early church because they got angry with each other instead of loyally holding on in kindness and love unfeigned. Indeed, Jesus, the strange Prince of Peace who came not to bring peace but a sword of difference, prompted the Jewish-Christian argument over the true religious way; but he only raised his voice and hand to denounce the disdainful hypocrisy of the orthodox, not their doctrinal differences of the people. He only raised his voice and hand to denounce the disdainful hypocrisy of the orthodox. He denounced angry contention over doctrine and had little patience with dishonest questioners; but from a young age he engaged in respectful discussions of doctrine with those who saw things differently. He even allowed Lucifer to speak without contentiously silencing him. Joseph Smith himself said it was not a sign of evil when fallible men in good faith preach false doctrine. What was evil was to throw them out for advocating their honest opinion.[12] God does not compel us to believe or love him. After all, according to D&C 121, the authority of God is not manifest in coercive power that creates universes at will—that would be mere technology. God's true authority and power is granted to him only by free hearts who lovingly respond to his love without compulsory means. As a boy, Joseph ~~as~~ saw that Christians often did not love each other when they disagreed about Christianity—and perhaps even then he may have recognized that not kindly loving ones opponents immediately spells an "Amen" to that person's or group's pretensions of priesthood authority. Whatever the true church was, it had to be a living church that invited the spirit of loving persuasion to help mortal members face their inevitable disagreements over eternal truth. There will be offenses as we stand for what we believe, but, said Jesus, blessed are they who do not choose to take offense.

In the Book of Mormon we read that the resurrected Christ told the Nephite people:

> [T]here shall be no disputations among you concerning the points of my doctrine as there have hitherto been. I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and *he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. This is not my doctrine to stir up the hearts of men with anger; but that such things should be done away.* I declare unto you my doctrine . . . that the Father commandeth all men everywhere to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me and is baptized shall be saved; . . . and whoso believeth not in me and is

not baptized, shall be damned . . . [and] can in no wise enter the kingdom of God. (3 Nephi 11:28–40)

We have here a text that seems to assume that we will disagree about points of doctrine but that tells us it is the attitude of disputatious contention that betrays our devilish spirit. Jesus lays out his doctrinal first principles and ordinances for all to follow. He does not mind using words with a hard edge; however, it is clear that he abhors contention and anger over his loving intentions. One might even imagine that God has provided the extensive scriptures themselves with different voices and stories as a way of helping us recognize that there is not just one way to speak of or to God, nor any way for just a few words or ideas to contain all of him—except, perhaps, the experience of love unfeigned.

Offensive, exclusive religious claims—"Believe in Christ our way or you will be damned"—although possibly true as doctrine, actually provide a test of our true feelings as Christians. Do we take offense and harbor resentful anger when we are criticized or called to repent? Joseph Smith condemned disloyal traitors but thought the true Christians who received the love of God would pass that love on liberally. Under this view, we are members of the true and living church whenever we show we love God by persuasively engaging our opponents not railing on them in contempt. We tempt apostasy ourselves when we live the form but deny the spirit. As Smith states:

> We ought always to be aware of those prejudices which sometimes strangely present themselves, and are so congenial to human nature, against our friends, neighbors and brethren of the world who choose to differ from us in opinion and in matters of faith. Our religion is between us and our God. Their religion is between them and their God. There is a love *from* God that should be exercised toward those of our faith . . . without prejudice; it also gives scope to the mind, which enables us to conduct ourselves with greater liberality towards all that are not of our faith, *than what they exercise towards one another.* These principles approximate nearer the mind of God or are Godlike.[13]

In contrast to my argument here, Richard Hughes, who is amplifying Marvin Hill's earlier thinking, sees Joseph's desire to heal the fractious Christian contentiousness as a rejection of pluralism by Joseph Smith.[14] After all, Mormonism was a restoration movement seeking to return unified oneness to Christianity—and indeed, according to Parley Pratt, to bring the entire world into one peaceful political and religious empire.[15] Under this view, Mormonism, if it could not inspire all nations to unity before the Second Coming, would at least manage this during Christ's millennial reign. While I see how Hughes, Hill, and others might draw these conclusions, I am arguing that the real unity Smith saw as needed in religion and politics was the accomplishment of loyalty between

people who show brotherly love even without agreement over doctrines or practices.

Looping back in some of the ideas presented in early sections of this essay, we can see that Joseph Smith certainly came to understand God's power as social influence centered in loving persuasion. He rejected the idea that God had power to make an eternal intelligence act against its will or believe against its conscience. To move a human heart or conscience by force of coercion was impossible. God might make universes all day long, but God is impotent to force a fellow intelligence to become anything.

Smith's idea of unity was pluralistic. My reading of Smith implies that in eternity, we will all exist as persons-in-relation who will still possibly disagree about truth, beauty and the best way to love in a given situation, yet will nevertheless find this disagreement an engaging source for creative exploration and potential originary collaboration. Mutual loyalty, not agreement, is the requirement for loving fellowship. In this same way, inside today's church, we are expected to sustain the Brethren, not always agree with them. The law of common consent, though trivial in some of its applications, stands with the other covenant ordinances of Mormonism as evidence of authority granted by the community—whether here in our congregations or in the eternities in relation with God. And, furthermore, outside the church, there is also no place for disrespect or anger in reaction to those who sincerely express their beliefs that we are wrong.

Sociality
Welding Souls Together in Love

Joseph Smith believed that human persons were unique, eternal, uncreated intelligences who have become part of God's family. Each distinctive soul shares with others a similarity of eternal agelessness and interrelatedness, but each has a different history based on different intentions leading to different experiences over eons. The form of human persons and relations seems to change over time as our decisions lead to different genetic and environmental influences that bear on our becoming.

Because of this vision of an eternal journey of souls, Joseph Smith knew that personal uniqueness and liberty of conscience will always be integral as prior conditions for divine and human love, that love itself will always be an experience of and decision for the good of another who is related to us but nevertheless different. And these differences are different enough to be a kind of pluralistic experience of interaction without convergence. In this sense, male-female procreative marriage, the central rite of Mormonism, reflects am embrace of this kind of radical difference. The pluralism inherent in marriage creates new life that is not identical to either of the unique persons. To be of one heart and one mind means to mutually desire and act to love each other as God loves us—in our utter uniqueness. If there is a social life in the heavens, there will be an everlasting

healthy tension of differences among the inhabitants. Mormons do not look forward to ontological unity and loss of individual identity in the One. Sociality describes the form of divine eternal life (D&C 130:2). The form of existence that God enjoys is a group of souls living eternal lives together (D&C 132:20–24).

Though not developed as a full doctrine, sociality, or social relations (humans interrelated with divine entities) seem to be inextricable from personal identity, even for God. Relations of love are a matter of free choice, ending if coercion is injected. Smith's vision for heavenly exaltation was social and inter-personal in form, so he talked about the welding principal of love while allowing for a plurality of unique loving relations. Families, after all, are perfect examples of similarities and diversities under a principle of mutual love or desire for each other's well being. It is impossible to *absolutely* assure a healthy family or a permanent friendship or marriage if love is the basis because love has to be free to end as well as to continue. Trust and loyalty are social virtues based on the freedom that either party might betray or be unfaithful to the other—even God.[16]

When family members disagree over ultimate purposes and ways to proceed with life, conflict occurs. This, of course, is the pluralistic condition in which we all find ourselves on this planet. But unlike many visions that seek for undifferentiated unity, Joseph Smith did not desire to end such differences but to lovingly "weld" them together in creative expansion. In his system, coercion is never an option, but this was coupled with a firm belief that real collaboration could take place. God and humanity ultimately have the power to influence eternal souls for good through long-suffering, patient, kind, knowledgeable, and careful persuasion (D&C 121).

Let's look at the welding metaphor a bit more carefully. Here is perhaps Joseph Smith's clearest statement about his role as "welder":

> If as a skillful mechanic I can take a welding heat to borax and aluminum and succeed in welding you all together shall I not have attained a good object? If I believe mankind to be in error shall I deride and bear them down? No! I will lift them up—and in their own way if I cannot persuade them my way is better! I will ask no man to simply believe as I do. . . . *Friendship is the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism and by that principle I intend to revolutionize and civilize the world.*

In two 1843 speeches, from one of which the above quotation was drawn, Joseph Smith compares himself to a religious blacksmith who would weld together —"seal" in friendship—the diverse members of the human family, and at the same time, weld together all the truthful knowledge-experience from times past, present and future.[17] This welding of interpersonal love was the centripetal force that held in balance the centrifugal force of persons' and Gods' infinitely expanding desires for more diverse experiences, interpretations, and originalities. The New Testament had made individual salvation more important than family ties (e.g., Matthew 3:6–19; Matthew 10:34–39). Smith saw, however, that the

individual saved by Christ's atoning sacrifice could never be happy alone. Smith's full "restoration" restored the family into soteriology. He balanced his radical revelation that each person was a unique, uncreated soul with another radical revelation that saw that only by inseparably connecting these unique souls— sealing or welding them in loyal social/psychological/physical/voluntary relations of love—could they find ultimate joy and eternal expansion.

Joseph Smith revealed that the great founding story of this world included a war in heaven, where envy and angry contention divided the family of God. This was not a doctrinal schism over the nature of God, for all were standing in His presence. It occurred because the spirits could not disagree without prideful reproach and contempt. So Smith learned it is on earth as it is in heaven: the evil one incites contentious blood and horror whenever a disagreement is given a chance. When Cain envied and killed Abel over the form of sacrifice acceptable to God, the fall of man was realized in the first conflict over "religion." Joseph Smith saw that the falls in heaven and on earth were the same: a rejection of love, and an envious anger and contemptuous disrespect for another. Such a radical breach between us required a radical welding power. This is what Smith was called to reveal. Jesus lived and died and rose again to inspire a *social atonement* for all mankind. The keys of the last dispensation would provide Joseph Smith and his followers the means to seal or weld *all* people who truly desired back together in a single family to be presented to the Father at the end of the world. Christ cleared the way for the soul to be one with God. Joseph Smith's role was to point toward and set up the kind of social relations that would entice unique eternal souls to desire to live forever with each other.

Smith recognized that the foundation of the sociality of eternal life consists of three social organizations—family (genetic), friendship (elective), and marriage (a combination of the two). These three organizations allow for the oneness of heart, mind, and means for infinite originality and creative love in eternal society. The Prophet's use of the New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage is especially apt. The new is the original that corresponds with variety, and the everlasting is the continuous that corresponds with loyalty. In eternal friendship and marriage, love will expand through continual experiences of conflict over differences of perspectives and interpretations and desires. More than any other religion, Christianity emphasizes that God loves mankind as a divine parent and friend and spouse. God desires to share a social life with us all in worlds without end. No Christian church makes this clearer than the one re-established by Joseph Smith. At the cost of dethroning that Being that is beyond all desire for something more, Joseph Smith revealed a divine Man of Holiness (and we trust a Woman of Holiness to come) who desired to enrich his social life and ours *ad infinitum.*

No prophet or thinker has made the possibility of a parental God, a friendly God, a God of interpersonal love, more conceivable and trustworthy than has Joseph Smith.

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Notes

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1 While mystical experience allows a comparative understanding of existential pluralism, Joseph Smith's thought does not elevate mystical unity or oneness above pluralistic togetherness. For Mormons, mystical experience seems to be an alternative form of experience that can provide clarity and potency to eternal particularity. It is not a revelation of the *highest* order, only of another order. It clarifies alternative possibilities for existence, but it does not prove the ultimate worthlessness of illusory particularity. Freedom would allow some souls to dwell in mystical heavenly experience, while Mormons enjoy everlasting social lives.

2 John Rawls developed an ethical system of justice using the notion of a pre-mortal society planning an earthly society. In the pre-mortal world, no one knew in advance the position they would hold on earth in which there would be an uneven distribution of limited resources and talents. In contrast, Joseph Smith sketched out a kind of eternal ethics of love (not justice) based on a society that lacked no resources or talent but instead promoted originality, variety, and joy in an everlasting social life.

3 To speak in Whiteheadian terms of nested actual entities, the interpersonal level of social life exhibited more interesting relations of love than the subatomic or intergalactic levels of complexity.

4 Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Joseph Fielding Smith, ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1938), 296.

5 In his *Fallible Man* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986, 121–27), Paul Ricouer discusses the valuing achieved by interpersonal relationships that are beyond "having" (economics), and "power" (politics). It is in mutual esteem and love that the deepest enjoyment occurs. The value of interpersonal love is the intrinsic joy of experiencing something good that one has never yet experienced.

6 Mormons were intolerable misfits that became tolerable misfits in the early twentieth century after discontinuing polygamy and quasi theocracy. In the twenty-first century, Mormons are an acceptable religious minority, though not widely trusted (at least if the polls are right). It is in the historical context of a persecuted minority that we must read Joseph Smith's 1840s views on religious freedom and respect.

7 This matter is still with the Saints today as they want to be called fellow Christians among those they have claimed to be unauthorized, hypocritical, blind, or ignorant apostates.

8 Richard T. Hughes, "Soaring with the Gods: Early Mormonism and the Eclipse of Religious Pluralism," in *Mormons and Mormonism: An Introduction to an American World Religion*, Eric A. Eliason, ed. (Urbana-Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

9 Richard T. Hughes, "Mormonism," *Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, Douglas Foster, Paul Blowers, Anthony Dunnavant, and Newell Williams, eds. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), 545.

10 Joseph Smith said all creeds had some truth and some falsity, but the main problem arose when men held so tightly to a creed that they allow the creed to stake out a barrier against further revelation from God. See Smith, *Teachings*, 327.

11 In Moses 7:33, God weeps because his children, who were commanded to love each other, are without affection and hate their own blood.

12 Smith, *Teachings*, 288–89.

13 Ibid., 147.

14 Marvin S. Hill, in his book *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989) took the view that Mormonism was an attempt to bring unity to the diverse and contentious religious and socio-economic forces in America.

15 Parley P. Pratt, *"The Millennium,"* in *Millennial Star*, reprinted in *Writings of Parley Parker Pratt*, ed. Parker Pratt Robinson (Salt Lake City: Parker Pratt Robinosn, 1952), 259–60.

[16] Protestant theologian and careful reader of Mormon intellectual history, Carl Mosser, has recognized the radical nature of Mormon claims about voluntaristic love, and he has criticized it as not necessarily true but has not (yet) refuted it. See his "Exaltation and Gods Who Can Fall: Some Problems for Mormon Theodicies" in *Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 3, nos. 1 & 2 (Spring and Fall, 2007): 57, 65 (footnote 34).

[17] This quotation is extracted from the Willard Richards diary of Joseph Smith in Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994), 234.