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SOCIETY FOR MORMON PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Element is the official publication of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology. The Society brings together scholars and others who share an interest in studying the teachings and texts of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It facilitates the sharing and discussion of work by sponsoring an annual conference, and publishing this journal. Its statement of purpose reads as follows:

> The purpose of the Society is to promote disciplined reflection on Latter-day Saint beliefs. Its aims include constructive engagement with the broader tradition of philosophy and theology. All its publications, conferences, and other forums for discussion will take seriously both the commitments of faith and the standards of scholarship.

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Theorizing Critical Mormon Biblical Studies: Romans 1:18–32

by Taylor G. Petrey

> "The central theological question today is not the modern question of whether or not G*d exists but the ethical question of what kind of G*d religious communities and their Scriptures proclaim."
> —Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza[1]

If Mormon biblical studies is to have any legitimacy as a scholarly activity, the scholars who engage in this endeavor must theorize its methodological parameters.[2] Those who value a particular tradition or a particular assumption about the authority of the text may bring a different set of assumptions or questions to the text. They may speak to audiences whose interests do not always overlap with the supposedly objective realm of mainstream biblical scholarship in the historical-critical tradition. The rise of the particularist reading as a legitimate avenue for biblical scholarship has opened a space for Latter-day Saint commentary on the Bible.

For Mormons who engage with biblical scholarship, the central question is: What does it mean to interpret the Bible from a Mormon perspective? At stake in the question is whether Mormon scriptural hermeneutics is bound to tradition, to the preservation and maintenance of the authoritative voices that have defined its essence and foundation, or whether it is possible and maybe even necessary to critically explore aspects of this tradition that may

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1. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 178.

2. All following biblical translations are from the NRSV.

destabilize it. How does one weigh the competing authorities of the tradition, the text, and the contemporary situation in the hermeneutical task?

Previous scholarship has divided Mormon biblical studies into two groups, a "liberal" camp epitomized by Lowell Bennion (d. 1996) and a "conservative/fundamentalist" camp epitomized by Bruce R. McConkie (d. 1985). These camps represented different responses to historical critical scholarship and resembled such divisions in other American churches in the second half of the twentieth century.[3] However, this characterization does not capture the proliferation of approaches that have emerged in recent decades, nor the varied responses to historical criticism that Mormon scholars have generated. In the following essay I examine two movements within contemporary Mormon biblical studies: one that emphasizes the historical authority of the Bible and the another that emphasizes the theological authority of the Bible. These two movements are distinct and even oppositional in many key respects. However, I argue that both approaches share a foundationalist approach to scripture. Foundationalism, as opposed to fundamentalism, does not rest on the inerrancy of everything in the Bible. Rather, as Dale Martin defines it, foundationalism "holds that the Bible provides, or should provide, a secure basis for doctrine and ethics, at least if we interpret it by the appropriate methods."[4]

While Mormons are often quite eager to reject inerrancy and accept plural meanings, both historical and theological foundationalist approaches seek to minimize criticism, avoid problems, and reassure readers of the exceptional character of scripture. As I hope to show, Mormon foundationalist biblical interpretation serves more to redeem the past and justify the present than to adequately deal with the hermeneutical task of developing the kingdom of God. In particular, I am critical of the hermeneutical stance of the foundationalist approaches as being primarily interested in maintaining the authority and normativity of the scriptures to neutralize hermeneutics of suspicion and ideological critique.

As an alternative, the approach that I am suggesting here makes room for cultural and ideological critique of the tradition. It investigates both texts and their interpretations to reject the idea of a single, unitary, and correct reading, replacing it with an emphasis on multiplicity, instability, evolution, and the ideological interests of these shifting meanings. It pays particular attention

3. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of Latter-day Saints in American Religion*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 199–234. See also Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, "Mormons and the Bible," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism,* ed. Terryl L. Givens and Philip L. Barlow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 121–33.

4. Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 3.

to the problematics of power, gender, colonialism, and race as the areas for both a critical evaluation and a framework for envisioning a Zion society. The center of this approach is a hermeneutics that considers ethical issues and questions of power.

Attention to issues of power is in line with the Mormon interpretive tradition. Joseph Smith's letter from Liberty Jail explains, "we have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion" (D&C 121:39). This not only constitutes an admission that power informs religious discourse, but it specifically calls for an ethical evaluation of such power. This call for a hermeneutics of suspicion, attention to issues of authority and power for the sake of self interest, and a critique of unrighteous dominion should inform Mormon approaches to canonical texts as well. After exploring various hermeneutical methods, I turn to Romans 1 as an example of the effects such approaches have on interpretation. Those approaches which leave no room for critical appraisal of Paul's condemnation of same-sex acts and desires reinscribe problematic gender hierarchies.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONALISM

The historical-foundationalist paradigm is widely accepted in Mormon scripture studies today. It departs from the conservative fundamentalism of a previous era by using philology, history, textual criticism, and literary analysis. However, this approach does not fully employ the historical-critical method either, stopping short when important issues of faith are in question. The proponents of historical-foundationalism in the Mormon context, I argue, are invested in two perspectives that govern their interpretive approach. First, they emphasize the authoritative value of scripture by stressing its historical accuracy or at least its basis on some version of a "basic story." Historical reliability provides a foundation for faith, which sustains the claims of the modern Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) as well. Second, these thinkers harmonize the Bible with itself and with scripture produced in the modern LDS Church, including the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. Harmonization, like historical accuracy, lends credibility and reliability to the scriptures.

At stake in the claims to the historical reliability of the scriptural record is its authority—and the authority of its interpreters—to structure the life of the believer in particular ways. Historical foundationalism tends to reduce distinctive Mormon interests to historical claims, with the central question of historical-foundationalism being the historicity of both the Bible and the

Book of Mormon, and occasionally also the Book of Abraham. Daniel Peterson explains:

> It is vastly important that the scriptures be reliable guides to salvation and to the nature of God and His purposes. It is far less important that they be entirely accurate on the numbers of Israelites who left Egypt, or on the magnitude of the number π in the construction of Solomon's temple. . . . [However,] it matters very much whether the story of Christ really happened as the Gospels say it did. Even here, though, we must distinguish the essential from the nonessential.[5]

The primary assumption in this approach—of being able to distinguish the essential from the nonessential—is far from an objective determination. Rather than providing the promised secure foundation, this approach offers no sure guide for distinguishing what is essential and inessential to faith.

Paul Hoskisson's foundationalism is paradigmatic for my purposes for precisely the way that it veers into a fundamentalist paradigm. Theological claims trump historical claims when there is a conflict. For Hoskisson, historical criticism is a flawed theology. He assures his readers, "as Latter-day Saints we can safely reject traditional Christian concepts of God and the theological deductions of the Enlightenment. We can therefore ignore the conclusions of some higher critics."[6] The foundational claim is not, in fact, history, but doctrines that determine what must be historical *a priori*. For instance, Hoskisson takes the creationist/fundamentalist response to the Enlightenment as the necessarily normative LDS view of scripture: "As faithful members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we declare that in our faith everything depends upon the historicity of what Elder Bruce R. McConkie called the three pillars of eternity—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement."[7] He then adds to this the necessary historicity of "the Flood; the near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham; Moses' call to be a prophet; the reign of King David . . . just to name a few."[8]

The difference between Peterson and Hoskisson illustrates the limitations of a historical-foundationalist paradigm. Peterson does not deny evolution,

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5. Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on Historicity and Inerrancy," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 197–216, accessed April 7, 2016, https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/historicity-and-latter-day-saint-scriptures/4-need-historicity-why-banishing-god-history.

6. Paul Y. Hoskisson, "The Need for Historicity: Why Banishing God from History Removes Historical Obligation," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 99–122, accessed April 7, 2016, https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/historicity-and-latter-day-saint-scriptures/4-need-historicity-why-banishing-god-history.

7. Hoskisson.

8. Hoskisson.

the geological timetable of the earth, or accept many of the other major fundamentalist dogmas. He draws a smaller circle around what must be historical in order to sustain faith. By contrast, Hoskisson's approach to scriptural historicity is fideistic positivism. That is, he does not present evidence that the Flood actually happened or of Abraham being a plausible historical character. Rather, he suggests that faith depends on the historicity of these claims. Therefore, if these claims are not historical, faith is simply mistaken. He reasons, however, that since faith is not mistaken, these events must be historical. Where historical critical approaches have not been resisted or safely ignored, as Hoskisson suggests, they have often been repurposed for apologetics in the attempt to tell a counter-historical narrative that would accommodate a Mormon reimagination of history.

The lack of any method for weighing essential and inessential historical facts apart from pronouncements by LDS church leaders characterizes this approach. There are numerous scriptural commentaries, manuals, syllabi, articles, and books that represent the historical-foundationalist perspective in Mormonism today. The endeavor of the so-called Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary series offers a useful exemplum because of its self-reported standard as the most thorough biblical study in the history of the LDS Church. Modeling itself on other conservative commentary series, the project promises a "multi-volume commentary that illuminates both the historical and cultural settings as well as the linguistic heritage of this scripture for Latter-day Saints."[9] It sets high aspirations for engagement with non-Mormon biblical scholarship and aims to locate the biblical text within its historical context. The form, content, and topics of concern cohere largely with broader American conservative Christianity. Even while emphasizing the uniquely Mormon aspects of the project, the appropriation of the "commentary" as a method of reading scripture is more of an innovation to Mormonism than native expression.

There are a number of important critiques that one might make about the commentaries that have been produced so far, including their handling of the language, choice of the King James Version translation, various historical claims, and other interpretive matters.[10] These commentaries take conser-

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9. "The Project," Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary, accessed February 4, 2016, http://www.byunewtestamentcommentary.com/about-us/the-project/.

10. For some important critical analysis, see Philip Barlow, "The BYU New Testament Commentary: 'It Doth Not Yet Appear What It Shall Be,'" *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 6 (2014): 67–86; D. Jill Kirby, "Between Exegesis and Homiletics: Examining the Genres at Play in an LDS Commentary," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 6 (2014): 87–115; Grant Underwood, "Some Reflections in the

vative positions on authorship, eyewitness sources, theology, and favor harmonizing the biblical texts with each other and with LDS traditions. While "history" remains an important framework for the commentary series, the authors are frequently interested in establishing continuity between biblical history and the Mormon tradition. The hermeneutic adopted here favors the historical only so far as it conforms with modern Mormonism. When the two conflict, the modern Mormon version is preferred and considered more historically accurate. The historical method begins from an assumption of historicity for all modern Mormon claims, and it precludes alternative approaches, including other faithful ones.

I want to highlight a few key points from S. Kent Brown's commentary, *The Testimony of Luke*, the only commentary on one of the gospels that has appeared so far. Brown writes, "the basic story of Jesus in the New Testament gospels is reliable and accurate."[11] While the commentary seems somewhat aware of the broader historical study of the gospels, this approach is only invoked when it seems to confirm traditional belief, and it is frequently just ignored in order to highlight devotional interests or odd biographical tidbits such as the claim that Jesus is "an uncontrollable talker."[12]

Brown sees harmonization as the primary framework for analyzing Luke in relationship to other New Testament sources as well as modern scripture. On various historical questions, Brown turns to the other canonical gospels to reconstruct events in the life and ministry of Jesus. He rejects the most dominant arguments about New Testament sources, including the four source theory. To explain the similarities and differences between Matthew and Luke, Brown writes that "Jesus repeats the two stories on different occasions to different audiences in order to make a different point."[13] He expresses a high degree of confidence in the accuracy of Luke's account, suggesting that Mary was a direct source.[14] He reconciles the short ministry of the synoptics with that of John.[15] On the question of the "Son of Man" sayings, Brown affirms that they can reliably be traced to Jesus because, "modern scripture settles

Revelation of John in Mormon Thought: Past, Present, and Future," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 6 (2014): 116–26; Mike Pope, "A Closer Look: Luke 22:43–44 and Questions of Interpretation," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 6 (2014): 127–33.

11. S. Kent Brown, *The Testimony of Luke*, BYU New Testament Commentary (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2014), III.B.

12. Brown, II.F.

13. Brown, III.H.

14. Brown, II.E.

15. Brown, II.F.

the matter."[16] Scripture is thus exempt from the normal historical method because of its supernatural access to fact.

Brown sees the Book of Mormon as key evidence for historical claims about the authenticity of Jesus's sayings and deeds, and he frequently cites modern scripture to determine ancient history with surety. For example, Brown attests, "the Resurrected Jesus quotes lines from John 10:16: 'other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd' (3 Ne. 15:17, 21). Of course, his quotation shows that this saying is authentic."[17] Similarly, when New Testament authors are struggling to explain the failure of statements attributed to Jesus indicating that he would return soon after his resurrection, Brown cites Paul, the Book of Moses, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Joseph Smith Translation to determine that "Jesus is the author of this delay."[18] The apparent problems in Luke are resolved by harmonizing it with other scripture.

The historical-foundationalist approach is not particularly interested in theology but rather aims to provide a secure foundation for "doctrine." Brown's commentary on the Gospel of Luke focuses on a few "doctrines" of the text that he sees as particularly interesting for Latter-day Saint readers. The two most important that Brown emphasizes are "the Savior's activities in the world of departed spirits" and "the family."[19] Concerning the world of the departed spirits, Brown starts from Doctrine and Covenants 138, which cites the same Isaiah passage that Luke's Jesus cites at the beginning of his ministry about liberating "the captives." Brown seems to be aware that the theme of Jesus in the afterlife is not especially strong in the gospel, and he thus adopts a hermeneutic solution that "Jesus speaks on both a terrestrial level and on a celestial level."[20] Brown then interprets the parable of the strong man in terms of LDS teachings on the afterlife.

Additionally, Brown quickly breezes past the anti-family teachings in the gospel, including, "if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yea, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Brown argues that the various healing miracles and exorcisms that Jesus performs are evidence of the pro-family message of Luke's gospel because "these individuals return whole to their respective families."[21] Or, with the miracle of the haul of fish,

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16. Brown, II.E.
17. Brown, III.B.
18. Brown, III.D.
19. Brown, Intro., I.
20. Brown, II.B.
21. Brown, Intro II.B.

Brown argues that the disciples do not, in fact, forsake all after the miracle (Luke 5:11), but used the fish for their families: "Jesus knows that he is calling breadwinners away from their wives and children, and he graciously provides for the needs of these family members, both for sustenance and for income."[22] These readings, and others, actively work against the text to bring Luke's Gospel into conformity with Brown's own priorities for gender, family, and money. Further, Brown's analysis of the household is unremittingly positive, despite the limited role for women and the existence of slavery in ancient households.

The hermeneutical focus of historical foundationalism rests on legitimization of Mormon historical and doctrinal claims, with only limited care for the theologies and practices that might flow from the scriptural texts. Despite the attachment to historicity, this approach is ultimately ahistorical—it flattens any historical difference between the past and the present. Further, it imports the modern category of "historicity" into scripture, rather than exploring the different epistemology that operated in the ancient world.

The risks that this approach creates for the text are significant. In such a hermeneutic, any challenge to the reliability of the historical claims of the text can only undermine the value of the text. It ties claims of faith to historicity of ancient and modern scripture to guarantee the accuracy of the "basic story." If the "basic story" were not "reliable," its message would no longer have any worth. The message of the text is built on the sandy foundation of historical accuracy, propped up by failures to apply any serious historical method. Often one is left only with the insistence that one must believe that something is historically true as an essential matter of faith—but without any compelling arguments that such a thing is actually historically plausible, nor any investment in the meaning or interpretation of the text. This approach favors the reliability of modern scripture to provide a historically reliable account of the ancient world, preferring the modern claims to the ancient texts themselves.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONALISM

Historical foundationalism is not the only hermeneutical movement that has emerged in recent Mormon history. One of the most interesting and vibrant approaches to scripture in the Mormon tradition is the theological turn represented by James Faulconer, Adam Miller, Joseph Spencer, and others. These thinkers are sophisticated philosophers who reject the historical positivism and pre-critical hermeneutics of much of Mormon biblical scholarship. They engage with critical scholarship and offer some of the most advanced biblical scholarship in Mormonism. These scholars are widely pub-

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22. Brown, Intro, II.B.

lished in non-Mormon venues and are invested in conversations outside the boundaries of parochial Mormon topics. What makes the theological turn all the more interesting is that while theology has waxed and waned in the Mormon tradition, theological approaches to scripture have little precedent.

The theological turn is not devoted to the explication of dogmatic tenets, eschewing topics such as the Godhead, Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology, but is instead focused on more contemporary philosophical questions such as grace, meaning, language, and time. They participate in some of the most cutting edge philosophical and theological movements, engaging Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, and others. Their theological approaches take on the hermeneutical project after the linguistic turn, critiquing the objectivist assumptions of traditional historical criticism, and identifying lenses through which scripture should be viewed. These scholars did not receive graduate degrees in biblical history, languages, and exegesis. Instead, they come out of philosophy programs, which is indicative of some broader trends in continental philosophy's turn to religion in recent decades. While biblical scholars who are engaging "theory" have often done so with strongly secular agendas, the secular philosophers have turned to religion—specifically the Bible and Paul—to revive questions about belief, faith, Christianity, and universalism.[23]

My critique of the theological turn in Mormon scripture studies seeks to illuminate some of the blind spots, at least in some of the Mormon iterations of such theorizing, with which the theological turn still must reckon. While the theological turn represents itself as an alternative to the historical approaches to scripture, they frequently reaffirm the centrality of historicity as a prerequisite to theological analysis. They resist the idea that history determines meaning, but not that history provides a foundation for meaningfulness. For instance, Faulconer critiques historical foundationalists and historical critics who "undermine the literal historicity of scripture" as both agreeing that "the primitive meaning determines scripture's meaning."[24] Faulconer rejects the idea of the authority of the original meaning, not because it is not accessible, but because meaning must go beyond the original meaning: "The scriptures as a whole are meaningful to *us* only because their primitive meaning is not determinitive."[25] Even more strongly, he explains, "the primitive meaning . . . is more or less irrelevant."[26]

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23. Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 123–31.

24. James E. Faulconer, *Faith, Philosophy, Scripture* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010), 141.

25. Faulconer, 142; emphasis in original.

26. Faulconer, 141.

While Faulconer may insist that primitive meaning is irrelevant, the historicity of the events described in the text is not expendable. He still retains the basic assumptions that the historicist expounders make about historicity: "They are about real people and real events."[27] Additionally, he explains, "the basic historicity of the scriptural accounts . . . is essential to the scriptural meaning of the Bible."[28] In particular, the historicity of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, as well as the Book of Mormon is "essential." The non-historical account of scripture gives up too much: "The historicity of origins has been an essential element of biblical religion from the beginning."[29] Here, as with the historical foundationalists, the decision about what is essential and what is nonessential to historicity is entirely opaque. There are no rules for deciding what is essential and nonessential. Presumably, unlike Hoskisson, Faulconer would not accept that the Flood is an essential historical fact to faith, but the basis for such an exclusion or inclusion is unclear.

Elsewhere, Faulconer is less concerned with historicity and more concerned with meaning. He offers what he calls an "incarnational" account of Mormon scripture, which rejects the Enlightenment epistemology of historicity. As an alternative, he explains, "I believe that the understanding of history held by premoderns . . . is a quite plausible understanding of history, and that a contemporary rethinking of it gives us a better way to understand scripture than does a modern understanding."[30] Premodern thinkers, he argues, see scripture "not as an accurate reference to either history or another reality . . . but as the incarnation . . . of a symbolic ordering."[31]

The interpretation of the symbolic order of scripture is perhaps the most important hermeneutical key to the theological turn. Not only does this approach share a view of essential historicity with the historical foundationalists, but it shares a harmonizing impulse. The drive toward unity in the theological approach bumps up against some of the philosophical presuppositions it employs. One major presupposition of the theological turn is the plurality of meaning and a non-exclusive interpretive method. However, I argue that in practice the theological turn functions to bypass the multivocality of biblical texts in favor of a univocal theological framework, "a symbolic ordering."

Faulconer emphasizes the regulative controls on interpretation in order to ensure that there exists an ethic of unity. The standard works, priesthood authority, and tradition all discipline interpretation toward the goal of the

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27. Faulconer, 193.
28. Faulconer, 144.
29. Faulconer, 154.
30. Faulconer, 156.
31. Faulconer, 164.

"unity of Zion."[32] He admits that there is, and should be, tension between what he calls "private interpretation" and "common interpretations."[33] However, his depiction of tradition, priesthood authority, and common interpretation emphasize the univocality of those authorities, and provides no room for critical engagement of those normative constraints, nor an acknowledgment of their multivocality and historical contingency. The emphasis on unity and uniformity does not, he points out, suggest that we all have a single meaning, but the ethic of univocality of the community and the tradition takes precedence.

Allegory and typology are centerpieces of the theological-foundationalist school. The function of allegorical readings to harmonize the text recalls the premodern notions of the unity of the scriptural voice too. These readings protect scripture from the instability offered by historical criticism and consolidate scriptural texts in a uniform voice, reducing them to a singular theological theme or pattern. It rests on a method of harmonization to derive shared patterns or structures across diverse texts, privileging uniformity and consistency. In this approach, "the scriptures" are a single text that comments upon itself, rather than a collection of heterogenous voices. At the level of interpretation, Faulconer hinges his argument on "likening" the scriptures, a kind of analogy in the scriptures: "For premoderns, reading the story of Moses and Israel typologically, figurally, anagogically, allegorically is not what one does *instead of* or *in addition to* reading literally. Such readings are part and parcel of reading literally."[34]

Similarly, Adam Miller's "A Manifesto for Mormon Theology" poses theological readings that consist of "mapping a text's own latent patterns."[35] In this approach, the primary goal is identified as such: "Theological readings aim to develop a text's latent image of Christ."[36] In these examples he suggests that the patterns belong to the text, not the readers. This notion of "latent" patterns suggests that there is a presence of patterns in the scriptures awaiting discovery. Faulconer and Miller do not accept the metaphysics of ancient allegory, wherein meaning pre-existed the textual form. Rather, they hold that latent or allegorical meanings may arise from the text, but do not necessarily precede it. But, then where do they come from? This approach can obscure the activity of the interpreter by presenting the allegorical reading as if that is what the text has always meant.

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32. Faulconer, 146.

33. Faulconer, 145.

34. Faulconer, 198; emphasis in original.

35. Adam S. Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 61.

36. Miller, 61.

The allegorical and typological method rests on the theological ahistoricism of premodernity, dismissing anachronism as a theological inconvenience or even a desideratum in some cases. Spencer's most recent work, *For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope,* represents some of these points. Spencer posits a univocal "divine word" at work among various historical characters:

> Long before consecration was laid out in the canonical text of Doctrine and Covenants 42 in 1835, or even before consecration was laid out in the revealed law of 1831, a divine word of promise was delivered. Its earliest biblical appearance is perhaps in connection with Abraham and Sarah. . . . That same divine word of promise was given its first full articulation, however, only in the teachings of Isaiah and his disciples. . . . Eventually, the Book of Mormon would emerge as an even-fuller articulation of the divine word of promise. . . . Again and again the same divine word of promise has been given, each iteration point to the same eschatological events.[37]

Spencer's harmonization of the "same" word manifested itself to (historical?) Abraham, Isaiah, Paul, Book of Mormon authors, and Joseph Smith, flattens differences, collapses history, and posits a univocal, ahistorical, spiritual signified behind a series of historical signifiers.

The resistance to the gap between past and present in the theological turn represents a passion for a singular meaning and a resistance to plurality. By substituting a transcendent symbolic world, or a singular transhistorical divine word of promise, for the historically concrete, this hermeneutical framework harmonizes the overall meaning while still admitting that the form may be an imperfect representation of the ideal.

The theological foundationalists are most conscious of the contingency of meaning and the role of the interpreter in the production of theology. However, these approaches stop short of the critical interrogation of the scriptural text and the interpretive process. Miller asks: "What are we as Mormon scholars doing when, in the context of a prophetic and authoritative tradition, we dare to read and interpret scripture? My thesis is that we are helping to build a world just as literally as if we had brick and mortar in hand."[38] Miller offers an ontology of signs as broken, fragmentary, and heterogeneous. The work of interpretation, of gathering the signs to make meanings, then, is invariably constructive and affirms the authority of the tools at one's disposal. But it is one that also emphasizes the agency of the human builders, constructing the world around us by means of the signs, or bricks, at our dis-

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37. Joseph M. Spencer, *For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 148.

38. Adam S. Miller, "Take No Thought," in *Perspectives on Mormon Theology: Scriptural Theology,* ed. James E. Faulconer and Joseph M. Spencer (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 63–64.

posal. Miller's analogy does not, however, acknowledge the labor of the brick makers—those who have come before us and provided us with particular tools, sometimes a rather narrow set of tools, for interpreting, or building, as the case may be. In the next section, I want to suggest that the work of the Mormon scholar of scripture is not only in the constructive work of building, but also in the deconstructive task engaged in an investigation into the genealogy of the tools that have been handed on. To reframe Miller's analogy, success should not be measured by creativity alone, but also in the endeavor to denaturalize what has been constructed already. Inasmuch as the work of Mormon biblical scholars is to build something, they cannot use bricks that reproduce oppressive and flawed conditions.

IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM

I suggest that both historical- and theological-foundationalist schools in Mormon biblical studies lack sufficient attention to ethical interpretive issues and the dimension of power in the production and authorization of knowledge. In contrast to the species of foundationalism in other Mormon scripture studies, Mormon interpreters might critically engage the ideology of scripture and its interpretation. As a basic definition, ideological criticism "is concerned with theorizing and critiquing those processes of meaning production and social and political realities."[39] I use this umbrella term to include various movements within biblical studies that have interrogated the assumptions of historical-criticism, often from the position of a particular theoretical standing, including liberation hermeneutics, rhetorical and sociological criticism, cultural criticism, and other approaches that advance ethical critiques. While there is room to evaluate the important theoretical differences between the approaches categorized here, their commonalities mobilized against the assumptions of historical and theological foundationalism are the most important for the purposes of my argument.

Ideological criticism calls scholars to examine "the ethical character of and response to the text and to those lived relations that are represented and reproduced in the act of reading."[40] To engage in ideological critique helps to unpack the representations of self and other in scriptural texts. It pays attention to the social logic or social function of texts, as well as the political responsibilities of interpretation. Who benefits? Who is disadvantaged? What strategies are at work to convince readers of particular outcomes? How do the voices in the text engage with competing discourses? This engagement with

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39. The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale Univeristy Press, 1995), 272.

40. Bible and Culture Collective, 275.

the moral dimension of biblical interpretation entails critique of the historical and symbolic aspect of scripture and its meanings.

I suggest that Mormon biblical scholars need to critically interrogate the systems, structures, and discourses that condition what is possible. This is not just a statement about contingency, a point the proponents of the theological turn surely recognize, but also a statement about the need to investigate these productive powers that form and structure the *habitus* of interpretation. The structures of what is possible have specific genealogies that are subject to change. Rather than thinking about confessional or apologetic affirmations, spiritualized or moralistic applications, or individualized or private divine communication, the attention of Mormon biblical scholars should be on systemic socio-political, ethical, and discursive matters that are the proper objects of concern in building the ideals of *ekklesia,* the Kingdom of God, or a Zion society. This aim roots Mormon biblical scholars within the tradition and focuses on what is good for the community.

Specifically, I suggest that Mormon biblical studies must be concerned with ideological critique of substantive issues such as gender, race, and colonialism. I agree completely with the theological turn in Mormonism that has focused on post-structuralist readings that eschew a singular meaning and interpretation, even if in practice I find that they fall short. However, this approach must be coupled with critical appraisal of both past and present. Mormon biblical studies should focus on institutions, discourses, and epistemological frameworks that have shaped the tradition. Attention to regulative schemes of power, including the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy, offers more tools for interpreting scripture in the contemporary context. The deployment of pastoral power—which is salvation oriented (as opposed to military, political, or economic power)—to manage individual and community behavior must be critically investigated rather than simply redeployed by Mormon biblical scholars. The partnership of analytic power of Mormon biblical studies with ecclesiastical power explains the largely normative aims of such scholarship that reaffirms the authority of scripture. It reenacts the exclusions which should be the object of its inquiry.

This expansive attention to the world of the text and its interpretation includes both the historical context of the production of the scripture as well as the contemporary interpretation. Where historical and theological foundationalism each paid insufficient attention to one or the other dimension of the text, ideological criticism employs a hermeneutical stance that applies a second order of ethical evaluation of the text. This does not imply that there are already a given set of ethical principles. Rather, ethical evaluation is, and must be, open to critical argumentation, competing theories of justice, and revision and modification.

One of the most important insights to thinking about history—and historical texts—is a recognition of the gulf between the past and present, that the past is foreign territory. We might benefit less from establishing claims to continuity between the past and present—or between modern and ancient canonical texts—and instead focus on discontinuity, rupture, breaks, contradictions, absences, and gaps. This Foucaultian approach lays aside the claims to completeness, consistency, and foundationalism in approaches to scripture; it instead draws on the insights of historical critics who defamiliarize the text. Historical inquiry undertakes a genealogy of particular discursive frameworks in Mormon texts and traditions. A Foucaultian genealogy of texts and their interpretation is missing in allegorical, typological, or in the incarnational view of scripture. A genealogy calls into question the essence and origins of particular ideologies, perhaps especially those taken to be the most natural, foundational, and essential.

When it comes to ideology critique, a Mormon example is Mormon feminist hermeneutics, which flourished briefly in the 1980s and 1990s but has yet to return in the rebirth of Mormon feminist scholarship in the past decade. The hermeneutics of suspicion employed by some Mormon feminists points out the places where a redemptive version of Mormon theology has failed. Lynn Matthews Anderson noted gravely, "there has been no serious exploration of the implications of women's absence [in LDS scripture]."[41] The text, she argues, of the Book of Mormon and also the Doctrine and Covenants is about men and written for men. Anderson argues that the canon is itself androcentric and thus incapable of fully guiding us on questions of gender. From the most ancient to the most recent 1978 revelation, the canon is directed to men alone. According to Anderson,

> so long as Latter-day Saints continue to believe that women are included in our sacred stories when they are not, we not only perpetuate the myth that each dispensation of the gospel was in most ways identical to our own, but we perpetuate the larger myth that all the answers to contemporary questions pertaining to women can be found in our scriptures.[42]

The critical hermeneutics of the Mormon feminist tradition lay out an important framework for thinking about scriptural authority. Anderson argues for a shift in assumptions about scriptural authority, one that sees scripture texts as products of specific historical and cultural circumstances rather than offering timeless truths directly revealed. Second, she suggests, "a Mormon feminist hermeneutic proposes to expose patriarchal biases which account

41. Lynn Matthews Anderson, "Toward a Feminist Interpretation of Latter-day Saint Scripture," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 2 (1994): 186.
42. Anderson, 192.

for women being overlooked, excluded, or negatively portrayed, thereby re-
futing the notion of divine approval for any supposedly scripturally-based
hierarchical ordering of the sexes."[43] Indeed, the scriptural stories of exclusion
and oppression act, in their own way, as condemnations of androcentrism.
Anderson's acceptance of the hermeneutical gulf between the past and the
present is the necessary starting point that contemporary Mormon scriptural
studies has still not come to terms with. This model challenging "precedent"
as the standard for dealing with the status of women in the modern world
might be useful for thinking about other social changes including the status
of non-heterosexual kinship.

ROMANS 1:18–32

The first chapter of Romans might provide an important test case for the
interpretive approaches discussed in this essay. There lacks a major ex-
ample of interpretation of Romans 1 in the historical-foundationalist camp
of Mormon scripture studies. However, Romans has been a central text for
Miller, Spencer, and Faulconer in their philosophical scholarship that is not
directed primarily to Mormon readers, their scholarship that is directed to
Mormon scholarly readers, and their more devotional writing directed at more
popular Mormon audiences. The critiques I offer of their treatment of the text
would almost certainly apply to the historical foundationalists as well.

In their writings, the primary goals of the theological foundationalists are
to utilize Paul for constructive theological purposes, defend Paul against femi-
nist and homosexual critique, and reaffirm Paul's relevance and normativity
for questions about gender, sexuality, and philosophy. Specifically, I want to
analyze how contemporary Mormon readings of Romans provide incomplete
engagements with the text. I suggest that rather than critically engaging the
logic of Paul's argument, the theological turn reframes the logic of Romans 1
to render it authoritative and preserve its underlying logic. I choose Romans
1 both because it has received sustained attention from some Mormon schol-
ars, but also because it is a key text in contemporary Christian debates about
same-sex desire and relationships.

In broader scholarship, there is a range of options for dealing with how
Paul thinks about homosexuality in this section: (1) Paul is condemning het-
erosexual people engaging in homosexual sex, not homosexual people engag-
ing in homosexual sex;[44] (2)Paul is condemning same-sex intercourse among

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43. Anderson, 199.
44. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People
in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 109–10.

men and also lesbianism;[45] (3) same-sex acts merely illustrate the universal fall of humanity rather than a particularly egregious sin;[46] and (4) Paul is expressing a mythological worldview and gendered hierarchy in his origin story for same-sex intercourse.[47]

In the Mormon context, the first option has not gained any significant support. The mainstream Mormon view seems to be in line with the second option. The Mormon scholars of the theological turn have opted for the third option. I want to explore the implications of the fourth option, adopting a Mormon feminist ideological critique of the normative authority of the text, a resistance to harmonization, and an emphasis on difference between the conceptual world of Paul and our own.

ROMANS 1 IN THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONALISTS

The theological turn has focused a great deal of attention on Paul in an attempt to establish his relevance not only to Mormon readers but to larger philosophical matters. Miller takes on specifically philosophical questions, translating Paul's argument into a philosophical register. Such readings frequently challenge traditional Mormon interpretations. He argues for an "immanent" reading of Paul, shifting the metaphysical framework of Paul from the transcendent and heavenly to the earthy and actual. This approach emphasizes the individual: "Salvation is a question of recognition and the act of receiving it will require a fundamental shift in perspective that reveals God's righteousness as a blessing rather than a curse."[48] In this reading, Romans 1:16–25 is a story of individual salvation in response to God's revelation. This approach avoids the ethnic reasoning Paul introduces as the difference between Jew and Gentile, and it makes a case that Romans 1 is about "human wickedness" as a general phenomenon.[49] Further, Miller sees Paul's invocation of idolatry as a metaphor for the illusion of human self-sufficiency and a rejection of dependence on God.[50]

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45. Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 229.

46. Richard Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *Journal of Christian Ethics* 14 (1986): 184–215.

47. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 51–64; Bernadette J. Brotten, *Love Between Women: Early Christians Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1996), 215–64.

48. Adam Miller, *Badiou, Marion, and St. Paul: Immanent Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 25.

49. Miller, 31.

50. Miller, 32.

This philosophical approach explicitly eschews historical matters. Miller's interpretive move puts Paul in conversation with contemporary issues and preserves his authority to address such matters, even though it challenges traditional religious and historical interpretations. In order to accomplish this task more thoroughly, Miller shores up the hermeneutical gap between Paul and the contemporary context by truncating the thorny passages dealing with gender and sexual practices from his analysis. When it comes to the issue of gender and sexuality—which make up the primary evidence Paul invokes for his claims about idolatry—Miller's analysis of Romans 1 stops at verse 25, skips the passages on gender and sexuality, and picks up again at 2:1.[51]

Miller's more devotional work on Romans shares these characteristics of neutralizing the text's discussion of gender and sexuality. His colloquial paraphrase of Romans in *Grace is Not God's Backup Plan* offers a reading of Romans that emphasizes its transhistorical meaning, and it suggests that the "letter" of the text obscures the "logic." Miller's paraphrase of Romans 1 illustrates many of his alterations of Paul to achieve contemporary relevance. Miller renders Paul's ethno-religious categories of Jew and Gentile as "insider and outsider," which substitutes the historical context of Paul's reasoning for universally valid concepts. The subject of God's wrath is changed to the second person (you) from the third person plural (they) to speak about sexual sin. For example, "God'll let you bind yourself to things that can't love you in return. He'll let you exchange love for lust."[52] He also renders the homoerotic sins described by Paul to be about lust versus love. Finally, idolatry becomes a metaphor for generic sin. In this paraphrase, Miller is deliberate in sacrificing the historical context, but, he explains, "I think it gives Paul's discussion a real contemporary bite."[53] Further, "what Paul has to say about the law is as relevant today as ever."[54] In order to establish Paul's contemporary relevance, historical and linguistic accuracy must be shorn to reveal the essentially beneficial message. Though this is a popularized rendition of the text, these exegetical decisions characterize Miller's other writings, as well as Spencer and Faulconer.

While Miller avoids issues of gender and sexuality, Spencer's analysis of Romans 1:23–28 deals extensively with these topics. Spencer advocates a hermeneutics of "charity" *for Paul* in his reading of these passages, signaling his primary concern for Pauline authority over his feminist and homosexual critics. This principle of charity requires a transformation of Paul's meaning

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51. Miller, 32.

52. Adam S. Miller, *Grace is Not God's Backup Plan: An Urgent Paraphrase of Paul's Letter to the Romans* (N.p.: Self-pub., 2015)*,* 15.

53. Miller, 9.

54. Miller, 9.

so that homosexuality becomes a symbol of something "deeper" rather than the consequence of Gentile idolatry. For Spencer, idolatry is a symptom of a deeper problem with God, just as homosexuality is a symptom of a deeper problem with love. Further, Spencer makes the claim that the homosexual sins discussed by Paul can be applied to heterosexual relationships: "that same critique can unquestionably be extended to equally symptomatic heterosexual acts and desires."[55] This argument rests on the idea that homosexual sex is understood as a symptom of a larger problem of love. That is, the homosexual becomes symptomatic for human sin in general. Spencer reads this passage through the lens of Badiou and Agamben, arguing for a rather idiosyncratic reading of χρῆσις (use; also sexual intercourse):

> If with 'use' he has reference to that which has been freed from the imagistic exchange of commodities, 'the natural use of the female' cannot indicate a patriarchal bias meant to ensure the domination of women through their objectification or commoditization.[56]

Spencer expands on the themes of economizing in reading of Romans in *For Zion.* He roots Paul's views of the Law of Consecration, the historical Mormon utopian economic practices, in a unique translation of Romans 1:23: "And they economized God's glory by making it so many static images."[57] In Spencer's reading, Romans 1 is a mythological origin story about human sin through economic activity. He explains, "there is a perfect reciprocity between human unrighteousness . . . and the economic order of the world."[58] His translation of ἀλλάσσω suggests that the "exchange" or "trading" that is happening here is actually a transformation of the worship of God into an economic activity. Spencer extends this into a whole market, which he calls "the economy of the idol trade" and "a market for trading idols."[59] Idols are metaphors here for the things which satisfy human desire. Eventually, Spencer just renders idolatry a metaphor of the market: "Those who attempt to close themselves within an economic circle that shields them from God cannot help but worry and fret, as Paul makes clear, because God's fiery wrath never ceases to threaten them with ruin."[60]

Spencer's translation is grammatically implausible and faces significant historical challenges. Spencer explains his translation choice thusly: "This

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55. Joseph M. Spencer, "Toward a Pauline Theory of Gender, Rereading Romans 1:27–28," *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 7 (2010): 11.

56. Spencer, 7.

57. Spencer, *For Zion*, 10. Spencer put forward this translation in his earlier essay, Spencer, "Toward a Pauline Theory of Gender," 3.

58. Spencer, *For Zion*, 13.

59. Spencer, 13.

60. Spencer, 62.

word is usually rendered 'changed.' I used 'economized' to draw out the eco-
nomic resonances of the Greek word, which has reference as much to eco-
nomic exchange as to transformation."[61] However, the typical translation of
ἀλλάσσω + ἐν is not "changed," and does not imply transformation. Rather,
it is typically translated as "exchanged for." This term may describe economic
transactions, but it does not describe the action of turning something into an
economic activity, or "economize." The verbal form suffix "-ize" actually has
a Greek origin, "*izein,*" conveying the meaning "to render or make." There
is no indication in Romans 1 of this form to describe the origins of idolatry.
Further, Spencer translates the preposition ἐν + dative as "by," as the means
of achieving something. However, this translation cannot be justified because
the preposition with this verb identifies the indirect object, not the dative of
means. The Greek here must be translated as "exchanged . . . for," not "econo-
mized . . . by." The metaphorical reading of idolatry to be about markets or
material focus is not particularly convincing.

  Faulconer devotes an entire monograph to his treatment of Romans 1, of-
fering yet another approach in the theological turn. His exegetical discussion
situates Paul in an ancient Stoic philosophical context and connects Paul's
arguments to Hellenistic Jewish texts like Wisdom of Solomon. In describing
God's wrath, Faulconer is reluctant to understand it as human emotion at-
tributed to God; he instead suggests that when God "gives them up," God is
actually taking a passive response to allowing them to sin. On God's agency in
Gentile sin, Faulconer translates that the consequence of idolatry is that God
"abandoned [humans] in" their sins, rather than "handed over," "gave up," or
"delivered" (παραδίδωμι). He emphasizes the point: "the Lord does not cause
people to do evil, and the phrase *gave them up* thus cannot mean that these
people could not choose otherwise or repent once they sinned."[62]

  Faulconer treats the charge of idolatry as both culturally specific and
universally applicable. He begins his assessment of Romans 1:18–23 with
an acknowledgment that Paul's diatribe "discusses the unfaithful among the
Gentiles."[63] Later, Faulconer reframes this point: "Paul is almost certainly
specifically thinking of those whose culture is fundamentally Greek, which
would include most Romans, but he is using them as a type for all sinners."[64]
Idolatry stands in for "all sin."[65] He explains, "sin is always idolatrous because

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61. Spencer, 10.
62. James E. Faulconer, *Romans 1: Notes and Reflections*, Ancient Texts and Mormon
Studies I (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), 91.
63. Faulconer, 72.
64. Faulconer, 83.
65. Faulconer, 87.

it replaces God, who should be in our hearts, with something else."[66] This interpretation takes idolatry to represent any sin, and worship to represent a condition of the heart, rather than a set of unauthorized cultic practices.

Faulconer understands not only idolatry, but also homosexual practices to be metaphorical here. Similar to Spencer, Faulconer explains, "Paul presents this behavior [homosexual practices] as a type for sexual sin in general."[67] He makes the case for this interpretation by arguing that adultery and idolatry are closely connected in Hebrew scripture. Faulconer then reasons that all kinds of sexual sins are included in Paul's description of same-sex intercourse: "sexual sin is particularly obvious as a kind of idolatry."[68] At the same time, Faulconer sees homosexual practice as a particularly grievous sin: "[Paul] contrasts the creative power of God with the noncreative sin of homosexual practice."[69] Though Paul's argument against same-sex intercourse never invokes procreation, only referring to such acts as "degrading," "shameful," and "dishonorable," Faulconer adds procreation as a reason why they are especially worse than other kinds of sexual sin. Faulconer both protects heterosexual partners from the grievousness of such sins and suggests that they are at risk of symbolically participating in homosexual practice by engaging in non-procreative sexual exchange.

The theological foundationalists' metaphorical reading of Paul dehistoricizes his claims to make them relevant in the contemporary world. Such a move secures Pauline authority in his teachings on sexuality and gender in order to address other theological and philosophical topics. The arguments explaining Paul's objection to same-sex intercourse focus on procreation over non-procreative sex, love instead of lust, and the idea that homosexuality or idolatry is a metaphor for a generalized sexual immorality or some other sin. However, none of these arguments can be plausibly sustained by the text, and they render invisible the question of gender in Paul's logic. The scholars of the theological turn have taken for granted the universality of the indictment of Romans 1:18–32. The foundationalist frameworks that structure knowledge about Paul legitimate his condemnations of same-sex intercourse.

ROMANS 1 AND IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM

In contrast to the theological turn's metaphorical treatment of God's wrath, the sin of idolatry, and Paul's criticism of specific sexual practices, Romans 1 should be read as an ancient Jewish etiology of idolatry and Gentile sexual

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66. Faulconer, 88.
67. Faulconer, 88.
68. Faulconer, 89.
69. Faulconer, 89.

culture. In the scholarly evaluation of Romans 1:18–32, multiple positions have emerged, including the idea that the entire section is a non-Pauline interpolation.[70] Others have suggested that Paul is speaking in a *persona* here, one with whom he disagrees profoundly.[71] However, the dominant two positions have argued that this section is either (1) an indictment of a universal human situation of estrangement from God,[72] as the theological foundationalists have also argued, or (2) a specific attack against the Gentile practice of idolatry and a review of its causes and consequences.[73] This latter approach invites interpreters to take serious account of Paul's worldview about idolatry, gender, and sexuality and critically engage his point, rather than insisting that he must be actually talking about something else.

In Romans 1:18–32, Paul offers a mythological origin story of idolatry and the evidence of God's wrath against it. It is part of a broader diatribe, first against the Gentile "they," then against a fictitious and pretentious "you" in 2:1. After lulling his readers in with a familiar attack against Gentile unrighteousness, Paul turns to "the Jew" in 2:17–3:31.[74] Paul's use of the aorist tense here is an important factor in interpreting 1:18–32. God "has shown it" in the past. Further, "they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. . . . [T]hey became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images" (1:21–23). God's punishment also occurred in the past: "God gave them up to degrading passions" (1:24, 26). Such a punishment is ongoing, but it represents a prior decision by God based on a prior event. It is important to recognize that for Paul, sin is not simply a private event or act, and neither does God think in terms of individuals. Rather, Paul's logic here is an ethnic etiology for why some peoples have come to worship idols and how God has manifest his wrath against them as a group. While Paul concludes the opening section that all—both Jew and Gentile—are equally considered sinners, his case in Romans establishes the particular sins that result from idolatry.

In this myth, all of humanity began with a proper understanding of God as revealed through nature, but at some point the Gentiles did not honor God

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70. Most recently, see William O. Walker, "Romans 1.18–2.29: A Non-Pauline Interpolation?" *New Testament Studies* 45, no. 4 (1999): 533–52.

71. Douglas A. Campbell, *Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

72. Robert Jewitt, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 148–91.

73. For this latter reading, see Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 85–100, 109; Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 51–64.

74. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 159–75.

and their minds became darkened (Rom. 1:18–23). This narrative draws on widespread ancient Jewish story-telling about the origins of Gentile idolatry and the "decline of civilization," as seen in such texts as 1 Enoch and Jubilees. These texts expand on the stories in Genesis that talk about the origins of human depravities, and they frequently discuss the origins of particular sexual sins and the origin of idolatry.[75] Further, these were not simply abstract connections between idolatry and non-normative gender practices. Recent research has suggested that Paul is speaking of specific goddess cults such as Magna Mater, variant sexual practices associated with these cults, and their queer priests who violated the hierarchical norms of masculinity and femininity.[76]

The most relevant parallel to the origin story of idolatry in Romans 1 is in the Hellenistic Jewish text Wisdom of Solomon—also called the Book of Wisdom or simply Wisdom. The conventional dating for this text is sometime in between 100 BCE–50 CE. If it is toward the latter end of that period, it comes very close to being contemporary with Paul himself. While there is no evidence for any direct dependence of Paul on Wisdom, they do share a cultural context. The text tells a remarkably similar story about the origins of idolatry, Gentile culpability, and the cause of sexual immorality—wherein the Gentiles had the possibility of natural knowledge of God, made possible by God's self-revelation:

> Yet again, not even they are to be excused; for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things? But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are those who give the name "gods" to the works of human hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill, and likenesses of animals, or a useless stone, the work of an ancient hand. (Wisdom 13:9–10)

Despite the availability of knowledge about God, Gentiles failed to recognize these things and thus created idols. So also for Paul: "they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles" (Rom. 1:23). This narrative is not a metaphor for some generic human sin, let alone a specific economic iniquity, but rather a specific Jewish abhorrence for the use of cultic images of God.

Wisdom's narrative of the origins of Gentile idolatry explains that it lead to a confusion of sexual desires and acts. The text insists, "for the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication [πορνεία], and the invention of them was the corruption of life" (Wisdom 14:12). Among the list of sins, idolatry is the cause of "confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of

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75. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 52–55.
76. Jeramy Townsley, "Paul, the Goddess Religions, and Queer Sects: Romans 1:23–28," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 707–28.

favors, defiling of souls, sexual perversion, disorder in marriages, adultery, and debauchery. For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil" (Wisdom 14:26–27). While Wisdom does not specify the mechanism of causality for idolatry leading to confusion and sexual sin, Paul explains that God "gave them up" to degrading sexual acts as a result of their idolatry (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Paul sees the origins of such acts as God's punishment of Gentiles for their idolatry. God is the source of such behaviors, having cursed and darkened the minds of the idolators. God gave the Gentiles up to impurity, degrading passions, and a debased mind, "because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (v. 25).

As the argument has developed, there are two aspects of this passage that must be critically addressed. First, Paul sees the issue of same-sex intercourse as a specifically Gentile practice. He nowhere imagines that this is a condition or practice that afflicts Jews or followers of Christ, or in other words, a universal problem. In the subsequent chapters, Paul argues that Jews too are not exempt from God's displeasure, with the crescendo of his argument that "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (3:9). However, in chapter 1, the force of his argument rests on a catalogue of Gentile sins (idolatry and same-sex intercourse), which is then followed by undercutting Jewish self-assurance. Jews are not accused of idolatry, let alone same-sex intercourse, but of contravening the law in other ways.

Additionally, scholars might investigate why Paul sees same-sex intercourse as evidence of God's displeasure. It is not enough to ask what Paul thinks. The task of interpretation requires that scholars understand why, and then critically evaluate those reasons. For Paul, such sexual practices are not a symptom of disordered opposite sex relationships. Nor are such sexual practices deficient in the requisite amount of love that should exist between sexual partners. This modern idea of a romantic love is totally foreign to Paul's worldview. For Paul, same-sex desire is wrong because it subverts the natural order of gender, not the natural order of love or procreation. He defines the "degrading passions [πάθη ἀτιμίας]," thus:

> Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men. (1:26–27)

What makes such actions "degrading" and "shameless" for Paul? What work does his invocation of "natural" (φυσικός) and "unnatural" (παρὰ φύσιν) do in describing certain sex acts? What makes something natural and another unnatural?

For Paul, the question of nature is connected to his belief in the "natural" hierarchy of the sexes.[77] Paul is not concerned with procreation in this passage or anywhere else as the obligation of couples or the purpose of sexual intercourse (see 1 Corinthians 7). For Paul, "the husband/man [ἀνδρὸς] is head of his wife/woman [γυναικὸς]" (1 Cor. 11:3). In an instructive example, Paul connects the same terms of "degrading" acts and appeals to "nature" in another case:

> Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading [ἀτιμία], to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (1 Cor. 11:14–15)

Paul invokes "nature" that men should have short hair and women long hair, and he suggests that transgressing this nature is degrading or dishonorable. The use of the term "degrading" to describe hair styles is the same he uses to describe the "degrading passions" that lead to same-sex intercourse in Romans 1:26. What makes these hairstyles degrading is how they transgress gender boundaries.[78]

To a modern reader, it seems clear that Paul's understanding of "nature" in the case of hairstyle has more to do with cultural custom about gender than with anything in nature. So too, the reason that Paul sees certain sexual activities as "against nature" and "degrading" is because they confuse the roles of women and men. This is problematic for Paul not because the roles of men and women are separate, but because the roles of men and women are supposed to be hierarchically ordered. As Stephen Moore explains, "sex in this symbolic economy is nothing other—*can* be nothing other—than eroticized inequality."[79] For a man to act like a woman sexually is degrading because to be like a woman is to occupy a lower status. So also for women, unnatural intercourse is when a woman behaves like a man in a sexual relationship.

Is this mythology of idolatry and gender disorder useful to modern readers? As Dale Martin explains, "heterosexist scholars alter Paul's reference to a myth that most modern Christians do not even know, much less believe (that is, a myth about the beginnings of idolatry), and pretend that Paul refers to a myth that many modern Christians do believe, at least on some level (the myth about the fall)."[80] Do modern Mormon readers actually believe Paul's

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77. Stephen D. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 135–68.

78. For an important treatment of this text, see Troy W. Martin, "Paul's Argument from Nature for the Veil in 1 Corinthians 11:13–15: A Testicle Instead of a Head Covering" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 1 (April 2004): 75–84.

79. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 153.

80. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 55.

myth about the origins of idolatry and of same-sex acts? Do same-sex acts stand as evidence of the evils of the practice of worshiping created images of gods? Do modern Mormon readers believe some sexual practices are evidence of God's punishment? Do modern Mormon readers believe that there is a hierarchy between men and women and that some sex acts disrupt that hierarchy? If not, are they obligated to accept Paul's conclusions about such acts? Further, how might Paul's imagination and cultural context of same-sex acts differ from modern homosexuality, including same-sex marriage? While Mormons may have other reasons for objecting to same-sex intercourse and relationships, these reasons seem to have nothing to do with Paul's reasons. The reinscription of Pauline authority on this matter, enabled by a lack of critical hermeneutics of Paul, poses an ethical and interpretative problem in the Mormon reception of Romans 1:18–32.

I suggest that the theological turn has made a category mistake in the analysis of Romans 1, treating it as a moral discourse rather than a mythical one. This allows them to collapse the distance between Paul's outlook and the contemporary world, but it does so in a way that supports Paul's logic and conclusions. The metaphorical reading of Romans 1 seeks to redeem Paul by changing the condemnation of Gentile idolatry to a story of a universal human sin, changing the results of idolatry from a punishment of God to a result of human agency, and changing Paul's condemnation of non-hierarchical same-sex acts to a condemnation of sex without love. The hermeneutical stance of "charity" toward Paul comes at the expense of a hermeneutics of charity for women and non-normative sexual identities. Even those readings seeking to be less "homophobic" in their use of Paul by rendering his condemnation of same-sex intercourse as symptomatic of a deeper concern retain the position of same-sex intercourse (even while denying it refers to actual homosexual relationships) as the symbolic form of disorder, lust, and shame.

CONCLUSION

It seems to me that we stand at a crucial turning point in the world of Mormon Biblical Studies. While Mormons have wrestled with the impact of critical biblical studies for much its history, there has been a resistance to the approaches to the Bible developed within the paradigms of modernity, with their focus on historical context, authorial intention, and the normative value of scripture for addressing progressive social change.

One of the risks of ideological readings, a risk which has too often been borne out in reality, is that these readings may be marginalized. R. S. Sugirth-arajah's tellingly titled, *Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years after the Voices from the Margin*, illustrates the way that such theories have

failed to radically disrupt the mainstream.[81] The pluralistic ethos of scholarship that argues for the acceptance of a variety of methods can also enable the persistent rejection of ideological critiques as either peripheral to mainstream analysis or benign "alternative" readings. Mormon biblical scholars should take into consideration the successes and failures of ideological criticism in the broader discipline of biblical studies as they set a new charted course.

The questions that I have posed, I hope, do not represent a kind of disciplinary policing between the field of biblical studies and the philosophical or theological evaluation of scripture. Certainly, the historical development and disciplinary regimes that calcified over the course of the past century in universities and seminaries influence some of the ongoing tension between historical and theological readings of scripture. Instead, I hope that I have offered pathways and bridges that both enable and encourage theological readings that can also take a critical hermeneutical stance. I hope that I have made a persuasive case that such theological readings should not be unreconstructed appeals to premodern hermeneutics, or reify scriptural authority. They should take as their task a genealogy that investigates change, rupture, and discontinuity, rather than a theological framework that emphasizes similarity, applicability, and sameness between past and present.

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81. R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years after the Voices from the Margin* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008).

Response to Taylor Petrey's "Theorizing Critical Mormon Biblical Studies"

by James E. Faulconer

In Taylor Petrey's summary and criticism of the currently dominant strains of LDS scriptural interpretation, he assumes that history—modern scholarly history—and power are the master discourses for talking about the Bible. Using those assumptions, Petrey criticizes the work of those he identifies as historical foundationalists (Daniel Peterson is an example) as well as the group I am most interested in, those he refers to as theological foundationalists: Adam Miller, Joseph Spencer, and myself. I plan to contest the assumption that scholarly history and ideological critique are touchstones for scriptural exegesis.

Consider history first. My view is that of Nietzsche, who said:

> It is altogether impossible to *live* at all without forgetting. Or, to express my theme even more simply: *there is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a human being or a people or a culture.*[1]

Scholarly historical criticism of the Bible has done a great deal of good. We know more about the biblical source documents, their provenance, and their problems than we did two hundred years ago. But its sleeplessness and rumination, its attempt to remember everything, has been a disaster for understanding the Bible as *scripture*, as a text that has authority over those who accept it and whose meaning is largely a function of that authority.

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1. Friederich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 62.

Generally speaking, historical criticism is good history but bad exegesis, for it reduces the text to the reconstructed intentions of historical persons. Those persons are not usually the characters of the biblical narratives, for both the original authors and the narratives' characters have been reconstructed.[2] In the nineteenth century, historical criticism "liberated the Bible from 'the letter of divine inspiration' and allowed it to emerge as 'a system of human significances.'"[3] But that supposed liberation "signals a far-reaching change in the sense of 'inspiration'—from an authorized reorientation of life toward a *telos*, into a psychology of artistry whose *source* is obscure" at best.[4] The insistence on historical origins and authenticity undermined the possibility of understanding scripture in any of the many ways it had been understood before, all of which shared the fact that they were *scriptural* understandings.

But if, as Doctrine and Covenants 68:3–4 tells us, scripture is what is said by those who speak by the Spirit, then its meaning is not something that can be found simply by historical reconstruction. There is no reason to believe that what the Spirit says means only one thing, namely what it meant when the words in question were first uttered. Words may mean differently in a different context, as Jacques Derrida has shown with a seemingly straightforward sentence like "I have forgotten my umbrella."[5]

Of course, that is not to say that scripture does not have historical meaning. It does. But to say that the Spirit rather than human signifiers determine meaning is to say that the meaning of scripture *as scripture* cannot be determined only by using historical methods. The projects of historically reconstructing the meaning of a text and of giving a credible exegesis of scripture are different projects. They may overlap or not. In particular, exegesis may borrow from historical criticism, but since their *telae* are not the same, the meaning that shows through them also cannot be.

What, then, prevents us from simply claiming "the inspiration of the Spirit" for any claim we wish to make about a scriptural text? What distinguishes scripture from caprice? Paul Ricoeur cogently argues that scripture has at least these five characteristics:[6]

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2. See Johannes Zachhuber, "The Historical Turn," in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth Century Christian Thought*, ed. Joel Rasmussen, Judith Wolfe, and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 53–71.

3. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 37.

4. Asad, 37.

5. See Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 123–43.

6. Paul Ricoeur, "Manifestation and Proclamation," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis:

1. The numinous appears in the word: "the religious axis passes through speech acts."[7]

2. Its general tendency is ethical (in the broad sense) rather than aesthetic. Christian scriptural revelation is not hierophanic: generally, it teaches us how to live. Unlike the Qur'an for Sufism, it does not give us mystical experience.

3. A historical vector runs through biblical scripture (though this vector is a mythic/figural/typological historical vector rather than a modern historical one).

4. Biblical texts make specific truth claims about the world (but see the previous point and the next one for the world about which it makes those claims).

5. Biblical texts are revelatory: "above and beyond emotions, disposition, belief, or nonbelief, is the proposition of a world that in the biblical language is called a new world, a new covenant, the kingdom of God, a new birth."[8] Scripture reveals a different way of being in the world, a way not easily amenable to the concepts and methods of modern history.

Ricoeur also argues that scripture is (1) the result of thoughtful gathering (2) by a historical community who (3) assert the superiority of the texts in question for instruction—and the last of these three is particularly important.[9]

I believe that the inconsistencies Petrey finds in my thinking about scripture can be explained not only by the inchoate character of some of my reflections but also (and I hope more so) by the fact that I agree with Ricoeur's description of scripture. Each of Ricoeur's points could be profitably unpacked to a much greater degree, but I leave that for some other effort. Suffice it to say that one major difference between Petrey and me lies in how we understand what it means to reflect on scripture in a scholarly way. It appears that Petrey is an heir of Spinoza. So, in line with most contemporary biblical scholarship, he assumes that scriptural exegesis requires us to set aside both its

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Fortress Press, 1995), 56–57.

7. Ricoeur, 56.

8. Paul Ricœur, "Philosophy and Religious Language," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 44. How different this is from the claim that the numinous appears in the word is arguable.

9. Paul Ricœur, "The Canon Between the Text and the Community," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Exegesis*, eds. Petr Pokorný and Jan Roskovec, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 153* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 7–26, cf. 14–15. For a more detailed account of Ricoeur's understanding of scripture, see my "Paul Ricœur on Scripture," in a forthcoming *festschrift* for Louis Midgley.

numinous character and it's figural vector to treat the biblical documents as one would any other ancient document. That treatment has its place, but its place is not in exegesis. All this means that if I recommend a foundationalism, it is a foundation of the numinous and the typological that reflects that numinous rather than a foundation of some version of objective history, whether conservative or liberal.

That is my brief and probably inadequate response to Petrey's criticism that my approach to exegesis is too historically naïve, that it is a species of naïve foundationalism. But what about his more damning criticism—that the exegesis I recommend is insufficiently attentive to ethical issues and, particularly, to issues of power?

My short answer is that ideological critique is unable to step outside of its own presuppositions (prejudices, in the literal sense of the term, "prejudgments") in order to bring them, as well as its objects of critique, into question. Immanent critique is impossible for ideological interpreters. But I *can* go beyond my pre-judgments. Most people do with some regularity. I can go beyond them precisely by recognizing that the text always confronts my prejudices in the act of interpretation (rather than a dogmatic reading) and that to be a text is to be an open site as well as a repository of historical norms and understandings. The open site and the repository are one and the same. Openness is impossible without it being the openness of a particular repository, and there can be no repository that, in principle, is closed to possibility.

An encounter with the openness of a text, its opening of a particular possible world, for example, will unavoidably raise ethical and political questions, sometimes questions about historical norms and understandings, sometimes questions about my life and world, often questions about justice. A dogmatic or ideological interpretation is not genuinely an interpretation. It is an encounter with myself rather than the text, a repetition of what I already "know." This is so true that, as Gerald Bruns says, Gadamer sees the work of interpretation as not so much a matter of producing interpretations (though they will be the result) as a concern "with the question of what it is to inhabit a given hermeneutical situation."[10]

Contrary to what Petrey says—perhaps also contrary to what Miller means by his analogy of interpretation and masonry work—this Heideggerian/Gadamerian understanding of interpretation does not "affirm the authority of the tools at one's disposal" (p. 12). And it does not, especially does not, ignore "the labor of the brick makers—those who have come before and provided us with particular tools" (p. 13). Interpretation requires that one

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10. Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 158.

be within a tradition and, so, recognize the labor of those who produced the tradition. But to be within a tradition is not to be captive to it. Indeed, to be captive to the tradition is for it no longer to be a tradition. Søren Kierkegaard's *Repetition* is relevant here, the gist of which is an argument that the repetition of something that has come before, such as a tradition, requires difference rather than mere imitation. As Gerald Bruns points out, Gadamer understands interpretation to involve experience in Hegel's sense: "experience (*Erfahrung*) is dialectal rather than inductive."[11] *The text resists our attempts to bring it into our conceptual horizon, thereby foregrounding "the historicality [prejudices]—the limits or finitude—of our hermeneutical situation."*[12] To interpret the text is to be questioned, to be exposed to the limits of my tradition rather than to repeat its contents.

Heidegger's thinking about language and about *Gelassenheit* ("allowing," "letting go," or "repose," rather than mastery) as our proper goal in our encounter with it has everything to do with this understanding of interpretation and exegesis. As interpreters, we have a job that is best understood in terms other than the terms of work such as the grasp of concepts, however much effort interpretation may require. The supposed job as interpreters of any text, but especially of scripture, is "to let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into and submitting to it."[13] If we are attentive to language in our experience of it in *Gelassenheit*, our concepts and explanations and ideologies will necessarily be called into question.

Methodology cannot guarantee that we will pay attention, because doing so requires wisdom rather than only truth. There is no method or master discourse for producing good interpretations. In fact, if we insist on mastery of the text, then we will find it difficult for the text to bring into question *our* prejudices rather than the prejudices of those whom we judge with our tools. We will find it difficult to avoid dogmatism even as we fight against it.

But the absence of methodology does not imply that paying attention, listening to what is said in language, is impossible. Wisdom, thoughtful listening to the openness of the tradition and the questions it raises, makes genuine, sometimes even radical, interpretation possible.

Thus, my response to Taylor Petrey amounts to:

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11. Bruns, 155.

12. Bruns, 155; emphasis added.

13. Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper, 1971), 57, quoted in Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, 156.

1. The quest for historical meaning and that for scriptural meaning, in other words meaning that has authority over those who read it, are not the same.

2. We need not explicitly do ideological critique in order to find our prejudices drawn up short. That occurs in any good interpretation of a text, because in it one encounters its openness rather than its closedness. In a good interpretation, we are questioned by the text rather than the other way around.

In conclusion, let me add my thanks to Taylor Petrey. His criticisms have helped me reflect on how I think about scriptural exegesis and, I hope, to shore up some of the arguments I have made in the past. I'm grateful for his good deed, even if, on hearing my response, he will think, "It's true: no good deed goes unpunished."

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Ethics and Institution in Mormon Biblical Studies: Revisiting Taylor Petrey's Taxonomy

by Rosalynde Welch

Taylor Petrey has written a provocative account of the current moment in a newly revitalized Mormon engagement with the Bible. He identifies three emerging projects beneath the larger canopy of Mormon-oriented Bible or scripture scholarship, which he calls historical foundationalism, theological foundationalism, and critical biblical studies.[1] As these terms suggest, he argues that historical and theological foundationalisms, while different in many respects, share a crucial error: they call on biblical authority to support (or leave undisturbed) the institutional Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints's current doctrinal commitments, and they do so at the expense of historical accuracy, resulting in a distorted or diminished ethical dimension in their scholarship. Petrey aligns himself with the third strand, critical biblical studies, which he sees as prioritizing historical accuracy and ethical effect over scriptural authority and ecclesiastical concerns.

Four cardinal axes structure Petrey's analysis of these various strands of scriptural scholarship: (1) the moral authority of scripture, (2) the current doctrinal commitments of the institutional Church, (3) the historical reconstruction of scripture's original meaning and context, and (4) the role of ethical discourse the Church's Zion-building mission. Implicit in Petrey's formulation is the alliance of the first two axes, scriptural authority and offi-

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1. Petrey usefully distinguishes these three strands and gives them names reflecting the thrust of his analysis. I adopt his terms here for the sake of responsive reference, while noting that they are not neutral descriptors, but reflect Petrey's disciplinary perspective to which I am sympathetic but not aligned.

cial doctrinal commitments, against the partnership of historical inquiry and ethical motivation. As he frames it, historical and theological foundationalisms have prioritized the first pair, scriptural and doctrinal authority, while critical biblical studies prioritizes the second pair, history and ethics.

I find Petrey's four-fold rubric to be helpful in comparing the three projects he identifies. As a thought experiment, I'd like to suggest reshuffling the two-on-two teams of scripture and doctrine vs. history and ethics. Do the three projects look different when positioned against, say, an alliance of ethics and institution counterpoised against history and scripture? I suggest that they do, and that such an analysis brings to light significant affinities between historical foundationalism and critical biblical studies that remain unexplored in Petrey's paper. It is not my aim here to offer a definitive classification of Mormon biblical engagement as an alternative to Petrey's—no butterflies will be pinned to boards in this short essay—but simply to extend his provocation by further playing with the analytical axes he introduces.

To begin, take what Petrey calls "historical foundationalism." He characterizes this strand of scholarship, represented in his piece by Dan Peterson and Kent Brown, as an institutionally-oriented inquiry that aims to marshal scripture and its interpretation to shore up the current doctrinal values of the church. These values may not be prioritized in the scriptural text itself (and may sometimes be external to it). He notes, for instance, that Brown, in his commentary on the book of Luke, "actively work[s] against the text to bring Luke's gospel into conformity" with current pronouncements on the importance of the nuclear family, gender difference, and provident living (p. 8). Scholars like Peterson and Brown employ a strong notion of the moral authority of scripture to affirm correct teachings and practice for the religious institution, but they interpret the meaning of scripture so as to fall in line with the institution's current priorities. Despite its stated deference to scripture's moral authority over religious belief and exercise, then, historical foundationalism in practice makes scripture secondary to the Church, inasmuch as it makes the reading of scripture serve the primary concerns and claims of the institution.

Historical foundationalism's relationship to history is likewise complex. Petrey rather keenly shows a certain circularity in the way some scholars in this tradition locate scripture's authority in its historical reliability on matters relevant to the institution's teachings and self-image, yet these scholars readily dismiss historical findings when they call into question scriptural reliability on these matters. Because they decline to come to terms with the knotty problems raised by history, Petrey argues, these scholars *also* "lack sufficient attention to ethical interpretive issues and the dimension of power in the production and authorization of knowledge" (p. 13). Petrey may see the ethical failure flowing from the historical failure because he sees history and ethics as tightly allied

priorities in his own scholarly project. From Petrey's perspective, it is not un-
reasonable to criticize historical foundationalism for preferring the doctrinal
status quo and scriptural prestige over accurate history and correct ethics.

Yet it seems to me that interpretive methods of historical foundationalism
are highly attuned to a particular set of ethical interpretive issues. The Jesus that
emerges from Brown's commentary on the book of Luke is, in Stephen Webb's
description, "a Jesus who is from a stable, loving and quite traditional family,
who is well educated (knowing four languages, Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek and
Spoken Egyptian), who rises early in the morning to worship and work, and
who is a lover of conversation."[2] This portrait seems to flow quite clearly from
Latter-day Saint sexual, work, and community ethics. One might go so far as
to say that in portraying Jesus of Nazareth foremost as a family man, Brown
has elevated a particular ethics of family above any other interpretive consid-
eration. Historical foundationalism is, I would suggest, deeply motivated by
ethical concerns. Far from ignoring ethics in favor of (domesticated) history,
as Petrey suggests, this scholarly project places history in the service of ethics.
Ethical priorities govern the selection of historical topics for investigation and
the ideological orientation of the investigator, and strongly condition the his-
torical findings. Moreover, these scholars possess a rather urgent (if implicit)
sense of the political dimensions of scriptural interpretation, in the way those
interpretive moves can rule in or out certain kinds of knowledge.

So far, I've argued that so-called historical foundationalism ultimately
places scripture in the service of the institutional concerns, and it places his-
tory in the service of ethical concerns. In other words, and contra Petrey's for-
mulation, I'd argue that historical foundationalism prioritizes institution and
ethics over scripture and history, respectively. A rather different arrangement
of Petrey's four cardinal axes is thus suggested. It may be that an orientation
toward institution and ethics emerge as a functional pair in structuring dif-
ferent forms of scripture scholarship, while history and scripture constitute
another functional pair.

In this light, I'd like to suggest—as a friendly provocation in the spirit of
Petrey's own, I hope—that critical biblical studies resembles historical foun-
dationalism in several significant ways, though the two movements are dis-
tinct and often oppositional. This will require some explanation.

It is clear that major differences divide the two projects. Representatives
of each would likely point to very different sets of governing ethical commit-
ments, though both would ground those commitments in particular aspects

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2. Stephen H. Webb, "Review of the Testimony of Luke," BYU New Testament
Commentary, accessed October 5, 2018, http://www.byunewtestamentcommentary.
com/review-of-the-testimony-of-luke/.

of scripture and the revelatory tradition. As a result, the kind of scholarship produced by scholars like Kent Brown and scholars like Taylor Petrey will likely fall on the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Perhaps the most visible of these ideological differences lies in their demonstrated deference to ecclesiastical and scriptural authority: historical foundationalists are unlikely to overtly criticize scriptural texts or current Church teachings, whereas critical biblical scholars take such critique as a central aim of the project.

While acknowledging these stark practical and political differences, I'd suggest that fundamental conceptual similarities underlie some of them. Take for instance the question of ethics and history. Critical biblical studies on the Petreyan model sees the reading and interpretation of texts as an ethical practice that, according to its preferred vision of justice, works to dismantle injustice and promote "the proper objects of concern in building the ideals of *ekklesia*, the Kingdom of God, or a Zion society" (p. 14). Petrey suggests that Zion-building-via-biblical-studies should focus on "substantive issues such as gender, race, and colonialism" (p. 14), but he does not provide independent criteria for what constitutes "substantive" vs. insubstantial ethical issues. On Petrey's model, a Zion ethics may not be distilled in any straightforward way from scripture itself, given scripture's own complicity in oppressive social structures. It is not clear, then, on what hermeneutic principles and by what authority to rest determinations of "substantive" ethical issues. This remains a major theoretical lacuna in Petrey's account of critical biblical studies. In this sense, his own project may be implicated in the same kind of criticism he aims at historical foundationalism, namely that it lacks a method for determining essential vs. non-essential facts.

Regardless of their origin, however, it is clear that ethical concerns both govern the topic and orientation of critical biblical studies' engagement with history and strongly condition its emphases and findings. The same is largely true for historical foundationalism, as I argue above. To be sure, Petrey is more deferential than Brown to the expertise, methods, and findings of history as an academic discipline, and he does not hesitate to challenge the authority and relevance of the past (and past interpretive practices) for the present. Nevertheless, for Petrey as for Brown, it seems to me, ethics is the driver; historical inquiry is the passenger, serving urgent ethical imperatives.

In fairness, Petrey might dispute this. He writes of his analysis of Romans 1, for instance,

> In contrast to the theological turn's metaphorical treatment of God's wrath, the sin of idolatry, and Paul's criticism of specific sexual practices, Romans 1 should be read as an ancient Jewish etiology of idolatry and Gentile sexual culture. (pp. 21–22)

Petrey aims to "defamiliarize the text" (p. 15), to reconstruct its past alien features without casting it in a modern mold. Once appearing in its full strangeness, however, the past is to be measured against the familiar ethical standards of contemporary academia. Though Petrey disclaims any direct relevance of his historical analysis for contemporary sexual ethics, it seems clear that his very desire to bar Romans 1 from contemporary debates about homosexuality *is itself motivated by urgent ethical convictions* about the legitimacy of same-sex relationships. In other words, even a stated effort to disentangle history from ethics is undertaken in the service of ethics.

A similar dynamic is at work in the relationship between ethics and scripture. The ethical imperatives of Zion-building, as Petrey envisions that project, are endorsed over the voice(s) of scripture itself, when they conflict. Petrey at times actively works against scriptural texts in order to shore up his own set of ethical priorities. He urges scholars to read against the grain, a method that "entails critique of the historical and symbolic aspect of scripture and its meanings" (p. 14). That is, the scholar should not be satisfied merely to explicate what Paul thinks, for instance, or measure him against the norms of his society; Petrey implores us to critically evaluate Paul's understanding, even and especially *against* the text's own ethical priorities and context—presumably according to contemporary understandings of justice and righteous society. Seen this way, Petrey's promotion of ethics over scriptural voice(s) is substantially similar to historical foundationalism, which, as Petrey shows, imports contemporary family ethics (or other contemporary concerns) to guide the interpretive process. To be sure, Petrey is more candid about the fact that prior ethical commitments external to the text govern his engagement with scripture, putting him at odds with the original meaning(s). Still, I think a suggestive similarity between biblical studies and historical foundationalism is present in the preeminence of the ethical.

If it is true that both historical foundationalism and critical biblical studies sometimes find their ethical priorities at odds with scripture, the reason may lie in their respective notions of scriptural authority. Historical foundationalism holds a strong version of this authority. Petrey describes the scope of scriptural authority, as accepted by foundationalists, to be an "authority . . . to structure the life of the believer in particular ways" (p. 3). In its brevity, this account is quite broad: it seems to grant scripture the authority to determine beliefs ("the believer"), structure lived experience, and intervene directly and specifically in a life of faith ("in particular ways.") It's not surprising that scripture, given so broad and direct a charge to authorize contemporary religious belief and practice, would sometimes come into conflict with the social and ethical realities of modern institutions. (Although, as Petrey shows, this conflict generally remains unacknowledged in historical founda-

tionalist scholarship.) In contrast, other scholars have proposed rather narrower, though no less consequential, accounts of canonical authority: James Faulconer, for instance, following the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, has proposed that the canon possesses an authority over its adherents that other texts do not inasmuch as it underwrites a community's boundaries and self-understanding (rather than directly dictating religious beliefs or practice).[3]

While it is clear that Petrey rejects scriptural authority broadly conceived, it is not clear that he actually revises its parameters or proposes an alternate account of scripture *as scripture*. He briefly refers to Lynn Matthews Anderson's description of Biblical texts as "products of specific historical and cultural circumstances" (p. 15), but this account offers no explanation of the specifically *canonical* dimension of these texts. The absence of an alternate theory of scripture *qua* canon is an important missing piece in his manifesto for critical biblical studies. It may be that this absence allows the strong version to creep back as a default, rendering critical biblical studies a kind of mirror-image reversal of historical foundationalism: reversing its claims for scriptural authority, but working implicitly against the same strong model.[4]

A final point on the affinities between historical foundationalism and critical biblical studies: both projects take an active stance toward the doctrines and policies of the institutional LDS Church. For Petrey, Mormon biblical scholarship should prod its interpretive community toward greater justice and equality: its *raison d'etre*, "a critical evaluation and a framework for envisioning a Zion society" (p. 3), takes an explicitly institutional orientation for its inquiry and ethics. Petrey's Foucauldian lens predisposes him to "focus on institutions, discourses, and epistemological frameworks that have shaped the tradition" (p. 14). The latter is revealing: ultimately, the object of study for critical biblical studies is not scripture itself, but "the tradition" broadly—not only the institution, but also its history, self-concept, formal and informal teachings, practices, and so on. This expansive focus is necessary to adequately undertake "the political responsibilities of interpretation"

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3. See, for example, James E. Faulconer, "On The Literal Interpretation Of Scripture," in *The Expanded Canon: Perspectives on Mormonism and Sacred Texts*, ed. Blair G. Van Dyke, Brian D. Birch, and Boyd J. Petersen (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2018), 47–58.

4. It may be that a broad default notion of scripture's authority is what motivates Petrey's proprietary approach to scriptural interpretation: if scripture possesses great authority, its interpretation is greatly significant. While Petrey praises "the pluralistic ethos of scholarship that argues for the acceptance of a variety of methods" (p. 27), in this essay he is quick to fall into the role of referee and rule out particular theological readings of Romans 1. While he expresses no desire to police disciplinary boundaries, it's difficult to read him otherwise in this section.

(p. 13), which responsibilities transcend the narrowly analytical and extend to the righteous building of the Kingdom of God. In this way, again, critical biblical studies resembles historical foundationalism: both projects aim to mobilize their readings for particular—albeit strenuously opposed—social and institutional end. Whether approaching from left or from right, both interpretive practices suppose that there are various social orders that might be evaluated rationally (or by some other standard), and that we ought to use interpretive practice to establish in the institutional church the order most aligned with justice and equality.

The aim of this (perhaps tiresome) comparative exercise has not been to minimize the significant differences between historical foundationalism and critical biblical studies, much less to allege any crypto-cross-politics in either one. Rather, the aim has been to shed a different comparative light on critical biblical studies to see what features (or lacunae) appear. The exercise has the secondary effect of bringing into focus certain features of Mormon scriptural theology, or what Petrey calls theological foundationalism. From this perspective, what theology undertakes looks rather different from the project of ethical application that occupies ideologically—and institutionally—oriented readers. I will leave a full defense of scriptural theology to those scholars whom Petrey names explicitly, and they do so ably in this issue. I will just point out that my little game of musical chairs suggests that theology will be less concerned with ethics and with the direction of the institutional Church than are the other two branches of Mormon biblical engagement, and I believe this is borne out in its realization. Mormon scriptural theology, to gesture much-too-briefly at theory, is less concerned with Foucauldian institutional genealogies than with Deleuzian potentialities. Likewise, the theological turn concerns itself much more urgently with the messianic than with the ethical. This short response does not allow the scope for a full unpacking of these assertions, but I have explored the implications at greater length elsewhere.[5]

I will make just one point about scriptural theology before concluding. Speaking of the historical and theological strands of Mormon biblical studies, Petrey observes that "[t]he partnership of analytic power of Mormon biblical studies with ecclesiastical power explains the largely normative aims of scholarship that reaffirms the authority of scripture" (p. 14). In other words, Petrey argues that the close involvement of Mormon biblical scholars with official Church institutions, principally Brigham Young University and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, yields an inevitable ideological bias toward the ecclesiastical status quo and the interests of the institution.

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5. See Rosalynde Welch, "The New Mormon Theology of Matter," *Mormon Studies Review* 4, no.1 (2017): 64–79.

As a result, LDS Church-employed or -affiliated scholars are limited in their ability to critique the sponsoring institution. Petrey is surely correct about this. Indeed, from his Foucauldian perspective, the statement is something of a truism, a predictable manifestation of the Foucauldian model of knowledge production. Knowledge always emerges in relationship to power, and inquiry is always structured by an epistemic authority that judges legitimacy. Thus the question is not *whether* Mormon theology (or any other strand of Mormon biblical studies) is constrained by some relationship to institutional power— of course it is! That seems uncontroversial. Also uncontroversial should be the observation that overtly ideological academic disciplines (say, for instance, many biblical studies departments) are not flat utopias of intellectual free play unmediated by power relations; on the contrary, they too are governed and constrained by complex formations of social control, with their own set of political taboos and alliances. Were Mormon theology to attenuate its partnership with ecclesiastical power and situate itself nearer other institutional sponsors, then, it would simply find itself re-shaped according to the imperatives of a new set of power relations. There is no pristine knowledge or truth outside these social networks. Mormon theology will gain little by way of independence or purity if it takes up an ideological model of biblical studies, then, but will simply become the product of a different set of social structures. From Petrey's perspective, of course, the ethics espoused by academic institutions may be preferable to those of the institutional Church, and I have no objection to that move by those Mormon scholars who are so motivated.

Petrey has enlivened the field of Mormon biblical studies with a provocative charter for a new critical direction. I've attempted in this response to shuffle his analytical terms for the purpose of further illuminating the project he sets forth. In comparing a nascent Mormon movement of critical biblical studies to the established work of historical foundationalism, I've suggested that the former would benefit from a more rigorously defined theory of scripture and from a more careful and explicit accounting for its guiding ethical precepts. I've also suggested that Mormon scriptural *theology*, in contrast to historical and ideological approaches, charts a course largely orthogonal to (though not unaffected by or unconcerned with) the ethical and institutional concerns that preoccupy Petrey's project. I look forward to the development of Petrey's ideological project, which I trust will prove a productive foil and interlocutor for Mormon scriptural theology.

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Notes on Taylor Petrey's "Theorizing Critical Mormon Biblical Studies"

by Adam S. Miller

In his essay, "Theorizing Critical Mormon Biblical Studies: Romans 1:18–32," Taylor Petrey focuses his analysis on what he describes as three schools or movements in contemporary Mormon biblical studies: (1) what he calls the school of historical-foundationalism, (2) what he calls the school of theological-foundationalism, and (3) what he calls the school of critical Mormon biblical studies. The school of historical-foundationalists includes scholars like Daniel Peterson, Paul Hoskisson, and Kent Brown. The school of theological-foundationalists includes myself, James Faulconer, and Joseph Spencer. The school of critical Mormon biblical studies, on the other hand, is a nascent movement whose formation Petrey is advocating. You'll notice that of the three schools, two are described as foundationalisms and one is not. Most of my questions about Petrey's argument center on what is at stake in this difference.

Take the historical-foundationalist school. Consider, first, what makes the school "historical" rather than theological. Members of this school, Petrey says,

> emphasize the authoritative value of scripture by stressing its historical accuracy, or at least its basis on some version of a 'basic story.' Historical reliability provides a foundation for faith, which sustains the claims of the modern Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) as well" (p. 3).

This is, I think, an accurate description of this school.

The trouble is, as Petrey indicates, that while these authors insist that "historical reliability provides a foundation for faith," they *also* deny that history has a right to adjudicate the reliability of their historical claims. If historical work verifies a scriptural account, this is taken as good evidence that

scripture is true. But if historical work challenges a scriptural account, then this counter-evidence is automatically trumped and dismissed by the deeper demands of faith. Historical-foundationalism, then, claims that (1) faith must be grounded in historicity, and (2) the only reliable way to judge history is to ground that judgment in faith. As Petrey puts it, for these thinkers the "foundational claim is not, in fact, history, but doctrines that determine what must be historical *a priori*" (p. 4). Or, as he sums it up later: "Despite the attachment to historicity, this approach is ultimately ahistorical" (p. 8).

On this score, I share Petrey's dissatisfaction with the historical-foundationalist approach. There is something circular and self-defeating about the way this school *couples* the claim that faith must be grounded in history with the claim that the only reliable measure of such historicity is itself faith. With historical-foundationalism we end up in a position where "the message of the text is built on the sandy foundation of historical accuracy" and then "propped up by failures to apply any serious historical method" (p. 8).

Still, while I think Petrey's critique mostly hits the mark on this score, I remain sympathetic to what I think *motivates* the historical-foundationalist school to make this double gesture in the first place. I think that Daniel Peterson and company are right to argue (1) that faith must be intertwined with historicity, *and* (2) that the claims of faith must also, in some crucial respects, be irreducible to history's horizon. In my view, these two basic claims aren't the problem. What's problematic is trying to *justify* each of them, in circular fashion, in terms of the other. Even if every claim made in scripture could be justified and verified via an independent historical investigation, I still think it would be a mistake to ground faith so definitively in historicity. Faith and history are irreparably intertwined, but their relationship is, I think, weaker, less direct, and more mobile than we would generally like.

My reason for thinking that it is a mistake to reduce faith to a historical horizon is related to the second half of Petrey's formula "historical-foundationalism." Consider, on Petrey's account, what makes this first school not just historical but *foundationalist*. According to Petrey, both historical-foundationalism and theological-foundationalism are foundationalist in that they valorize a particular hermeneutical stance: "the hermeneutical stance of the foundationalist approaches" is "primarily interested in maintaining the authority and normativity of scriptures to neutralize hermeneutics of suspicion and ideological critique" (p. 2). Or, citing Dale Martin, Petrey argues that foundationalism "holds that the Bible provides, or should provide, a secure basis for doctrine and ethics, at least if we interpret it by the appropriate methods" (p. 2).[1] Foun-

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1. Citing Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 3.

dationalism, then, is defined by its willingness to invest scripture with authority and normative force when it comes to both doctrine and ethics.

The trouble with a *historical* brand of foundationalism, as Petrey points out, is that it specifically attempts to ground the normative authority of its faith claims in the historicity of scripture while, ironically, also denying that historical work has any right to adjudicate this historicity (and, by extension, normativity). Similarly, the trouble with James Faulconer's, Joseph Spencer's, and Adam Miller's shared brand of *theological*-foundationalism, Petrey argues, is that this approach also attempts to protect the normative authority of scripture from any ideological critique. The only difference, he claims, is that this theological approach does so by invoking a ground that *transcends* history—"[b]y substituting a transcendent symbolic world, or a singular transhistorical divine word of promise, for the historically concrete" (p. 12).

But what about Petrey's proposed third school? What about Mormon biblical criticism? Does it qualify as a kind of "foundationalism" as Petrey has defined it? On the face of it, no. Rather than protecting scripture from critique as the foundationalisms do, Petrey wants to propose an alternate approach called "biblical criticism" that would itself critique the normative authority of scripture.

> As an alternative, the approach that I am suggesting here makes room for cultural and ideological critique of the tradition. It investigates both texts and their interpretations to reject the idea of a single, unitary, and correct reading, replacing it with an emphasis on multiplicity, instability, evolution, and the ideological interests of these shifting meanings. It pays particular attention to the problematics of power, gender, colonialism, and race as the areas for both a critical evaluation and a framework for envisioning a Zion society. The center of this approach is a hermeneutics that considers ethical issues and questions of power. (p. 2–3)

As with the historical-foundationalists, I am sympathetic to Petrey's move. Or, at least, I am definitely sympathetic to what I think *motivates* this move. Though, as with the historical-foundationalists, I suspect that, in the end, this move undercuts itself in a similar way.

The obvious question to ask about Petrey's critique of the normative authority of scripture is this: *on what normative grounds is Petrey critiquing the normative authority of scripture*?

There are, I think, several possible scenarios. Least likely, here, is a scenario where Petrey would simply claim to be operating *without* any normative imperative of his own, engaging in deconstructive work that fragments and destabilizes scriptural authority without any deeper reason or justification for doing so. Maybe this is what Petrey intends. But, if so, I deeply doubt such a move is possible. And, more, I think this scenario pretty clearly contradicts Petrey's own account of what he's doing.

A second, more likely scenario would be one in which Petrey is critiquing the normative authority of scripture on the basis of *non-scriptural* norms, like the norms of a contemporary type of progressive liberalism. He does specifically note above that his critique is motivated by a cross-section of issues—"the problematics of power, gender, colonialism, and race"—that are central to the norms that shape a secular and progressive worldview. If this second scenario is the case, then, again, I'm sympathetic to the work he wants to do because I'm sympathetic to the moral (and, perhaps especially, religious) force of these secular, progressive norms.

But if this second scenario is the case, I do not see how Petrey's project can avoid being, itself, a kind of normative foundationalism. True, it may not be a *scriptural*-foundationalism (either historical or theological), but it would still be a kind of secular-progressive-foundationalism intent on preserving and imposing the normative authority of that system, wouldn't it? If this is the case, then his position is not different from what he calls historical or theological foundationalisms on the grounds that it avoids being a foundationalism. It would just be different because his school of biblical criticism wouldn't have taken *scripture* itself (in one mode or another) as its normative foundation. Historical or theological foundationalisms would not be wrong, then, to be foundationalist—Petrey's biblical criticism would itself be foundationalist— they would just be wrong in having taking scripture itself as their normative foundation when they should have chosen a solid, secular foundation.

However, there is a third scenario that I have not yet considered. And, for my part, this third scenario seems to me to be the one that Petrey himself is most clearly advocating. As we have already seen in the previously cited description of his project, Petrey intends to critique the authority of biblical ideologies on the basis of the normative strength of what he calls "a framework for envisioning a Zion society" (p. 3). Or, as he also says:

> Rather than thinking about confessional or apologetic affirmations, spiritualized or moralistic applications, or individualized or private divine communication, the attention of Mormon biblical scholars should be on systemic socio-political, ethical, and discursive matters that are the proper objects of concern in building the ideals of *ekklesia,* the Kingdom of God, or a Zion society. This aim roots Mormon biblical scholars within the tradition and focuses on what is good for the community. Specifically, I suggest that Mormon biblical studies must be concerned with ideological critique of substantive issues such as gender, race, and colonialism. (p. 14)

In this description, Petrey emphasizes the centrality of "substantive issues such as gender, race, and colonialism" to the work of ideological critique and, again, as in the previous description, he also justifies this critique in the name of "a Zion society." When ideological critique of the normative authority of biblical texts is motivated by a concern for "building the ideals of *ekklesia*,

the Kingdom of God, or a Zion society," then Mormon biblical scholars are still themselves working from "*within* the tradition," he says, because they are focused "on what is good for the community."

Perhaps I am wrong, but "the ideals of *ekklesia*, the Kingdom of God, or a Zion society" appear to me to be themselves explicitly *biblical* norms whose force within the Mormon community derives, at least in part, from their normative, canonical status as scripture. Petrey has, here, extracted a very specific normative core from scripture that he argues should serve as grounds for critiquing other scriptures that do not live up to the Zion ideal.

If this is the case, then I am especially sympathetic to this third scenario. However, if this scenario holds, then Petrey also seems to have sacrificed his stated grounds for distinguishing his brand of biblical criticism from the historical and theological foundationalisms he wants to criticize. Not only would Mormon biblical criticism be itself a kind of foundationalism, it would be a kind of foundationalism that *also* draws its normative authority from a curated set of biblical ideas about the Kingdom of God or Zion. Now, if so, we could still draw lines between these three schools and evaluate them comparatively, but we would have to do so on the basis of *intra*-biblical criteria. We would have to evaluate them comparatively on the basis of which elements of scripture were being invested with governing normative force and not on the basis of whether scripture itself was being invoked as a normative authority in the first place.

There is, though, another kind of difference—a more substantial difference—that, in my view, distinguishes what Petrey calls historical and theological foundationalisms from his proposed brand of Mormon biblical criticism. This difference is especially clear in the already-referenced description Petrey gives of theological foundationalism. Theological foundationalism, he says, is guilty of "substituting a transcendent symbolic world, or a singular transhistorical divine word of promise, for the historically concrete" (p. 12). This betrayal of history *qua* history is itself, on Petrey's account, an ethical breach. In my view, this betrayal of the historically concrete—not the issue of the normative authority of scripture—is the real problem to which Petrey objects in these two foundationalisms: both Daniel Peterson and Adam Miller commit the original sin of arguing that something crucial about faith is irreducible to history's horizon.

On Petrey's account, the school of historical-foundationalism is guilty of doing this in an *implicit* way that hamstrings its own appeals to history as the ground for faith. That is, historical-foundationalism wants to have it both ways, grounding faith in history but then judging history only by the measure of faith. Philosophers and theologians like myself, on the other hand, are, on Petrey's account, explicitly (and knowingly) guilty of claiming that something about faith is not homogeneous with history. I think Petrey is right on both

these counts. These foundationalisms are not different from his brand of biblical criticism because they appeal, in varying ways, to the normative authority of scripture—Petrey's project apparently does this too—rather, they are different because, in varying ways, they both see faith as irreducible to history. However, while Petrey may be right about this difference, I think he is wrong to deny that some crucial aspects of faith are *not* homogeneous with history. That is, I think he's on the wrong side of this difference.

Petrey's insistence that a Mormon biblical criticism *not* appeal to anything that is irreducible to history is, I think, pretty clearly motivated by an ethical concern. Keeping our religious focus on history is critical to keeping our religious focus on the ethical issues that matter most. If we wander off in search of something extra-historical, then we can get lost "thinking about confessional or apologetic affirmations, spiritualized or moralistic applications, or individualized or private divine communications," rather than attending to the "systemic socio-political, ethical, and discursive matters that are the proper objects of concern" in religion (p. 14). When this happens, we're prone to justifying all kinds of nonsense (like racial prejudices) that ought not to be ethically justifiable in light of our commitment to Zion.

Now, again, I'm sympathetic to this concern. But I think that Petrey's reduction of religion to the shared horizon of history and ethics amounts to a kind of ethico-foundationalism that itself risks robbing religion of the *christic* resources it needs to actually address the root causes of these ethical problems. Consider, for instance, Kierkegaard's familiar tripartite schema of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Petrey is keenly aware of how easily serious ethical questions can be reduced to aesthetic opinions by claims that escape the horizons of shared history and social responsibility (witness, of course, Abraham sacrificing Isaac). But, in the process, he also effectively excludes from religion the possibility of anything besides the ethical or the aesthetic. That is, he reduces religion to ethics and effectively excludes the religious from religion. Everything that falls outside the horizon of history and ethics is simply an aesthetic dodge of the ethical itself. Only "systemic socio-political, ethical, and discursive matters" are the "proper objects of concern" in religion (p. 14).

What, then, would mark the difference between the ethical and the religious? One way to think about the religious, as opposed to the ethical, is in terms of transcendence. On this account, while ethics are public, immanent, and historical, the religious is private, transcendent, and eternal. This move from the ethically immanent to the religiously transcendent is, however, exactly the move that worries Petrey, because it so easily papers over a betrayal of our ethical responsibilities; hence, his objections to historical and theological foundationalisms that invoke something irreducible to the immanent horizon of history.

But an alignment of the religious with the *classically* transcendent is only one way of thinking about the religious as irreducible to the ethical. And while I think that Petrey is right to read the invocation of this religious dimension by the school of historical-foundationalism in terms of this traditional model of transcendence, I believe he has missed entirely what is going in our theological work when we claim a dimension of faith that is irreducible to history and ethics.

For example, Petrey recognizes that the work of our theological school is focused on "some of the most cutting edge philosophical and theological movements, engaging Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, and others" (p. 9). But he does not seem to be clear about the *kind* of bleeding edge (and, I think, very Mormon) work that these thinkers are doing: they are all focused on rethinking traditionally transcendent categories in terms of immanent *but irreducible* elements. Consider, for instance, Jacques Lacan's version of Kierkegaard's tripartite schema: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. In Lacanian terms, Petrey's approach only recognizes the difference between the imaginary and the symbolic. His schema is binary and does not recognize a third possibility in addition to the imaginary and symbolic dimensions: he doesn't recognize the existence of the irreducible, systemic excess that Lacan calls "the real." In these terms, the aim of thinkers like Marion, Badiou, and Agamben is to rethink elements traditionally categorized as transcendent in terms of systemic remainders that are both (1) immanent to the systems that produce them, and (2) irreducible to (or indigestible by) those same systems. With these thinkers, these formerly transcendent elements are now being thought in terms of a *logic of exception* rather than in terms of a *logic of transcendence*.

Where a logic of transcendence sees the element that is irreducible to an immanent economy of history and ethics as simply *excluded* from that economy, a logic of exception treats these same elements only as exceptions to the set or system. That is, it treats them as *inclusive exclusions* that are included in the immanent set precisely as what must be excluded for the sake of constituting that set. Exceptions are weird: they are *included* in a system by way of their formal *exclusion*. They are both immanent to the set and indigestible by that set. They are simultaneously inside and outside the system.

Take history itself as an example. In order to posit the existence of something irreducible to the horizon of history, we don't need to posit something that transcends history. Rather, we only need to posit an exception. *We only need to posit a systemic excess that history immanently produces in the process of its formation*. What would this kind of systemically exceptional by-product look like? Taking a cue from Agamben, we could simply read this irreducible by-product in terms of the performative *process* of history's self-production. As

Agamben argues, the one thing that cannot be accounted for within the scope of history as a product is the immanent process of production by which history is constituted. Every concrete, *constituted* history will both cast and obscure the shadow of the *constituting* powers that actualized those events concretely.

At any rate, despite the fact that I have only gestured broadly at the philosophically technical questions here, these are *exactly* the questions with which Petrey must reckon in his assessment of theological foundationalism. Petrey is right to see the theological and historical schools as sharing the same commitment to a dimension of faith that cannot be reduced to history or ethics. But he's wrong to the see the theological school as naively treating this irreducible element in terms of a logic of transcendence rather than in terms of a logic of exception. To actually take stock of and critique what's going on in "theological foundationalism," Petrey will need to address the overtly *central* part played by a logic of exception in all of this work.

My hunch is that, if he does, two things could happen, both of which risk turning Petrey into a theologian: (1) Petrey may recognize that it is impossible to undertake his *own* work of challenging the homogeneity of our received histories unless he explicitly draws on elements that are heterogeneous to history. That is, he will recognize the need for a faith that is both intertwined with history and irreducible to history. Or, (2) Petrey may recognize that the most intractable ethical problems are not open to transformation from within the domain of ethics itself but involve instead a fundamental (and meta-ethical) shift in our relation *to* the ethical. That is, he'll recognize the need for a religion that is both intertwined with ethics and empowered to redeem ethics.

In short, Petrey may come to agree with us that some ethical problems cannot be solved by way of ethics, that some problems with the law cannot be solved by legal means. He may come to agree that, sometimes—as Paul's own letter to the Romans insists—the ethical demands of the law can only be fulfilled by an extra-legal grace.

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Theorizing Mormon Biblical Theology: Romans and Beyond

by Joseph M. Spencer

In his essay, "Theorizing Critical Mormon Biblical Studies," Taylor Petrey argues that a certain "foundationalist" motivation drives the work of still-nascent Mormon biblical theology. (Major representatives of the school Petrey means to criticize include myself, along with Jim Faulconer and Adam Miller.) Not only does Petrey's essay appear in the present issue of *Element*, so do responses by others involved or invested in the theological project under scrutiny. I echo critical rejoinders offered in those responses, but I wish to add here at least a few words in my own voice. In part, I wish to respond quite directly to the criticisms Petrey makes of my published writings in particular. But in larger part, I wish to offer general reflections on what it means to do biblical or scriptural theology as a Latter-day Saint, with the principal aims of clarifying methodology and of outlining a notion of theology that resists the characterization Petrey assigns to it. Petrey claims that the time has arrived for a theorization of Mormon biblical studies, theological or otherwise. This seems to me entirely right, and I wish to take the occasion for responding to his criticisms as an opportunity to theorize Mormon biblical theology.

In what follows, therefore, I offer a few direct responses to Petrey's criticisms of my work before turning to a more general theorization of Mormon biblical theology. I hesitate in some ways to respond so directly to particular criticisms, but clarifying my intentions in my previous writings will help to identify basic problems that need further reflection. That is, showing where and how Petrey has misunderstood my intentions should help to reveal where and how the project of Mormon biblical theology will generally tend to be

misunderstood. Dealing with criticisms, however local they might be, should help to make clear the real stakes for theorizing Mormon biblical theology.

SOME DIRECT RESPONSES

The first of Petrey's objections focuses on my references to "the divine word" in my book *For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope*. He worries, as he puts it, that I regard this divine word as "univocal"—that is, that I regard it as "a singular, same message" that can be extracted from history's "particularities." Petrey sees this as an example of what he observes happening with some frequency in Mormon biblical theology, where theological readings others and I undertake purportedly aim at producing a "harmonization" of disparate texts. Such harmonizing inevitably "collapses history" in that it imagines an "ahistorical, spiritual signified behind a series of historical signifiers" (p. 12). Put another way, theology exhibits "a passion for a singular meaning" and even stages a kind of "resistance to plurality." At one point, Petrey presents this criticism in more classically philosophical terms, indicating that he regards my impulse as Platonist. Talk of "the divine word" in *For Zion* suggests commitment to "a transcendent symbolic world," regarding every actuality as only "an imperfect representation of the ideal" (p. 12).

This is a serious objection, but I think it misses its mark. To quibble at the philosophical level first, it must be said that univocity does not oppose multiplicity and plurality. The work of Gilles Deleuze, which informs my own theoretical position, insists that ontological univocity may be necessary for any real account of the world's teeming multiplicity.[1] Further, Platonism does not necessarily appeal to a transcendent symbolic world or disregard actualities as imperfect representations. Here the work of Alain Badiou, even more central to my own thought, might be cited as a key example of a Platonism fiercely militant about its ontological commitment to strict immanence.[2] Petrey thus assumes a certain philosophical naïveté about my work that appears entirely unwarranted to me. This, however, is just a quibble.

More centrally, I believe Petrey has misunderstood the basic move I meant to make with my references to "the divine word" in *For Zion*. I did not seek to posit a univocal word; rather, I aimed at highlighting the continuity in sacred history straightforwardly assumed in uniquely Mormon scripture. The Book of Mormon routinely groups together a host of biblical "covenants" (sometimes singularized as one "covenant") given to Israel, tracing their role

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1. See, most illuminatingly, Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992).

2. See most directly Alain Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999).

through a long history. The same schematization of history also appears in the early revelations of Joseph Smith. That this sketch of sacred history is assumed as given in both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants is, I think, a bare fact. Now, it may be that uniquely Mormon scripture treats the texts and histories of Israel and Christianity irresponsibly from the perspective of the historian. Nothing less should be expected from ancient Israelites transplanted from Jerusalem at the time of the exile, or from a nineteenth-century frontier youth creating stories about ancient Israel. But however irresponsible such an interpretation of the Bible and its aftermath might be from the perspective of academic history, this *is* what is sketched in uniquely Mormon scripture. Thus, to speak theologically in the Mormon context of a divine word first given to Abraham and then revisited in various ways over history is *not* to propose as academically viable a meaning-making scheme for the multiplicity of historical texts. It is, rather, to seek to understand the theological gesture proposed directly by uniquely Mormon scripture. Perhaps this could be made clearer in any particular work of Mormon biblical theology, but it is worth stating that I take it as a kind of given—a point obvious enough that it usually needs only passing attention.

Later in his critique, Petrey comes to a second objection—or really, a pair of related objections. These all concern my treatment of Romans 1 in *For Zion*, and also in my essay "Toward a Pauline Theory of Gender." First, and at a more general level, Petrey claims that my call for a "hermeneutics of 'charity'" betrays my "primary concern": to reify Paul's moral authority (p. 18). That is, Petrey sees in my preference for theological reinterpretation over ideological critique a refusal to question the moral authority of scriptural voices. This Petrey also sees elsewhere in Mormon biblical theology as attempts to make each scriptural voice into a victim of misinterpretation rather than an exponent of morally problematic views that deserve ideological critique. Second, and somewhat more specifically, Petrey sees this will to reinterpretation as forcing tendentious interpretations and mistranslations. To make the text say something other than what it is usually assumed to say, he alleges, Mormon biblical theologians like myself stretch the meaning of the text (or its underlying original languages). I will cite some of his examples of this problem in the course of discussion.[3]

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3. Petrey also suggests that I wrongly treat Romans 1 as "a moral discourse rather than a mythical one," since Paul's intentions in Romans 1 are to explain gentile behaviors, not to provide moral instruction. It seems to me rather obvious, however, that Paul would have regarded his mythical account of gentile depravity as fraught with moral implications. Genres are real literary features of texts, to be sure, but no simple line can be drawn between them in this case. And at any rate, I take it Petrey

Does the principle of interpretive charity, as espoused in Mormon biblical theology, mask a refusal to question the moral authority of scriptural voices? While it would be too strong to speak of refusal, Petrey's description of matters here seems to me largely accurate, although I see what he describes as a virtue, rather than a vice, of Mormon biblical theology. In my view, scriptural theology intentionally asks interpreters to resist the temptation to rush into ideological critique (or into ideological agreement, for that matter) before asking about how the text might be read in a variety of distinct theological registers. This does not entail complete refusal to question the moral authority of scriptural voices, but it does postpone any such questioning until after exploring other possibilities. It asks, in effect, that interpreters make necessary decisions against the relevance or moral authority of scripture as hesitantly as possible. Morally productive or theologically forceful readings of texts—so long as they remain historically responsible (a point I will have to clarify)—should be preferred over interpretations that reduce meaning in a historicist fashion.[4] This is not to say that preferable theological readings offer *better* historical reconstructions than those proffered by the best historians. It is to say that theology highlights other, extra-historiographical criteria for sorting among possible interpretations.

It is necessary to clarify what it means for interpretations to be responsible to history without adopting historiographical criteria. Before doing so, however, I wish to make two brief remarks that might help to clarify the preceding paragraph. First, there is good philosophical (and commonsense) reason to believe that textual meaning exceeds what historians and literary critics can reconstruct. It is, in many ways, precisely this excess of meaning over historical and literary reconstructions that draws the attention of the theologian. Consequently, the best historical work on a passage of scripture provides only a starting point for thinking about the text; it cannot be the arbiter of its meaning. Theology is responsible to history, but it is *more* responsible to meaning, and this is at least in part a function of community. Second, there is good philosophical (and commonsense) reason to suspect that ideological critique (not asymptomatically) needs offensive texts to criticize. That is, one reasonably worries that ideological critique settles on certain historicist reconstructions so that it has an identifiable enemy. The fact is that ideological critique appears more forceful when its position appears more morally and

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also wishes to read Romans 1 as morally relevant, since he believes the text deserves (morally motivated) ideological critique.

4. It may well be that certain texts do not open themselves to redemptive readings, and so they deserve critique. I find it crucial that scripture itself usually offers the resources for making the necessary critique, and I think it is normative for scriptural theology to use scriptural resources to offer critique where necessary.

historically mature than that of voices it criticizes, and theological interpretation means to ward off this temptation.

Now, what does it mean for theological interpretation to be responsible to history? Here, Petrey's concern about tendentious interpretations and mistranslations comes into focus. There is a real danger that theological interpretation will propose problematic alternative readings of texts, readings that ultimately prove themselves historically irresponsible. Petrey identifies a few such points in my own work, as he sees things. He thus marks places in my translation of Romans 1 that, according to him, are "grammatically implausible" or face "significant historical challenges" (p. 19). To illustrate, Petrey focuses on my use of the word "economized" in my rendering of Romans 1:23. The problem here is that the underlying Greek word, as Petrey says, "does not describe the action of turning something into an economic activity" (p. 20). My rendering aims to bring out what other translations obscure: the economic overtones of the Greek word in question.[5] Petrey, of course, recognizes that the Greek term "may describe economic transactions," but he worries that the verbal form I use conveys "the meaning 'to render or make,'" while nothing in Romans 1 suggests an act of production (p. 20). This I concede, but it seems too strong to call my rendering a "mistranslation" on that score. It is certainly less than totally literal at some points (points explicitly noted in *For Zion*), but it draws out by translational exaggeration, and for theological reasons, something that *is* there in the text. Mine is thus perhaps a "hypertranslation," but I would argue that excessively strict rules are implied in the accusation of mistranslation.[6] Essentially, I have written into the translation itself the interpretive work I do as a theologian—and I have signaled this unusual move with a note. I might have provided a stricter translation and left the rest for theological discussion, but this seems like a matter of preference.

What, then, does it mean for theology to be responsible to history? Wherever it can be reasonably done, theological work should develop its reflections beginning from the likeliest reconstruction of a text's meaning produced by the best historians; where this is not possible or undesirable, it should take its orientation from something belonging to the set of real possibilities for making sense of the text in historical terms. This might be called the *basic rule* of

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5. See the note attached to my translation in Joseph M. Spencer, *For Zion: A Mormon Theology of Hope* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 10.

6. For some discussion of philosophical hypertranslation of texts, see Alain Badiou, *Plato's "Republic": A Dialogue in 16 Chapters*, trans. Susan Spitzer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), xxxi–xxxv. When Petrey says that in Romans 1:23, the Greek "must be translated as 'exchanged . . . for,' not 'economized . . . by'" (p. 20), he seems to me to describe what I mean to convey with my translation: God is reduced to an idol in that he becomes a tradeable object.

theology's responsibility to history. However, there are frequently situations where theological reflection is worth pursuing entirely against the grain of historical work on the meaning of a text, and in such cases theological work should make fully clear its awareness of historians' work while justifying its nonhistorical interests on other (that is, nonhistorical) grounds. This would constitute the *key exception* to the basic rule of theology's responsibility to history. Combining the basic rule with its key exception, theology can be responsible to history without being beholden to it. I am inclined to say that where historians or ideological critics with commitments to historicism demand anything more than this, they do in fact engage in what Petrey calls "a kind of disciplinary policing between the field of biblical studies and the philosophical or theological evaluation of scripture" (p. 27).

Now, I clearly believe my own work has modeled the right relationship between history and theology when it comes to interpreting scripture. This, however, has not been apparent to everyone, as Petrey's criticisms make clear. This fact demonstrates that, as Petrey himself suggests, it *is* time to theorize Mormon biblical theology (alongside other forms of Mormon biblical study). Others and I have done some preliminary (and likely premature) work in theorizing the discipline elsewhere, but the time has arrived when the task of theorizing Mormon biblical theology—and Mormon scriptural theology more generally—is necessary.[7] At Petrey's quasi-implicit invitation, then, I would like here to begin to do what he recommends: to theorize Mormon biblical theology to help it to avoid some of the misunderstandings Petrey has helped to illustrate in his essay.

SOME GENERAL REFLECTIONS

As anyone familiar with the field of biblical theology knows, the discipline is currently experiencing a remarkable resurgence.[8] Yet, specifically *Mormon* biblical theology—at least as this is practiced by Jim Faulconer, Adam Miller, and myself, among others—has not taken its primary orientation from this revitalized discipline. Despite certain similarities between specifically Mormon biblical theology and the larger discipline of biblical theology, one should locate the motivations for the still-nascent Mormon project elsewhere than in or

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7. Here I will point to my own first groping toward a theory of Mormon biblical theology in Joseph M. Spencer, "A Mormon Reading of Job 19:23–25a," in *Perspectives on Mormon Theology: Scriptural Theology*, ed. James E. Faulconer and Joseph M. Spencer (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 7–29. I wrote this essay in 2009, and I am sympathetic to certain aspects of what can be found in it, but my views have shifted in substantial ways since the time of its writing.

8. For a helpful history of biblical theology as a self-identified discipline, along with some outline of its current shape, see James K. Mead, *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

around biblical theology per se. This is not to say that those working in Mormon biblical theology have not turned to established authors from the tradition to seek insights and understanding. It *is*, nonetheless, to say that it was not a perusal of such authors that first inspired the push for a theological turn in Mormon biblical studies. The work of non-Mormon biblical theologians has been more of a late resource than an early spur for Mormon biblical theology.

The fact of the matter is that the three major representatives of Mormon biblical theology identified by Petrey in his essay are all trained neither in theology nor in biblical studies. All of us have our primary academic training in the field of philosophy, with a particular focus on twentieth-century French thought. Our implicit conversation partners have thus been less figures like Gerhard von Rad or N. T. Wright than figures like Paul Ricoeur or Giorgio Agamben. Put another way, the project of Mormon biblical theology has so far been more of an attempt at philosophical reflection in conversation with scripture than a direct contribution to biblical theology per se. This has been especially clear in the work of my colleagues, Faulconer and Miller.[9] Perhaps it has been less clear in my own case, since I have dedicated more sustained effort in my published books to sort out the internal coherence of the larger Latter-day Saint scriptural canon, and canonical coherence is a (if not *the*) central concern in the field of scriptural theology.[10] I will come back to this. But even in my own case, more strictly philosophical than biblical-theological concerns rise to the surface consistently.[11] Problems central to contemporary thought quite generally (rather than to biblical theology per se) have made themselves the chief focus of much or most of emergent Mormon biblical theology. And Faulconer, Miller, and I have seen such problems as problems to which Mormon scripture might be inventively read as addressing itself.

This is perhaps to say that Mormon biblical theology as Petrey identifies it has been a work of Mormon theology—or really of Mormon thought—*first* and a work of Mormon biblical or scriptural studies *second*. It has been, as

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9. See representative examples in, especially, James E. Faulconer, *Faith, Philosophy, Scripture* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute Press, 2010); and Adam Miller, *Badiou, Marion, and St Paul: Immanent Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

10. I have in mind here both *For Zion* and Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute Press, 2016). Still less philosophical but perhaps all the more biblical-theological is Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016).

11. See, for example, Joseph M. Spencer, "'As Though': Time, Being, and Negation in Mosiah 16:5–6," in *Abinadi: He Came Among Them in Disguise*, ed. Shon D. Hopkin (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Religious Studies Center, 2018), 263–86.

Adam Miller suggests, a self-identified project of speculative thought that takes the texts of the Latter-day Saint canon as a reserve.[12] It has not aimed primarily at clarifying the meaning of scripture, but at revitalizing the lapsed project of speculative Mormon theology, while nonetheless finding in canonical Mormon scripture rich resources for grounding and presenting its work. If there has been a *school* of Mormon biblical or scriptural theology, it has looked something like this: Latter-day Saint thinkers aimed at putting Mormonism in direct conversation with the best of contemporary thought, finding their principal resources in Mormon scripture, including but in no way limited to the Bible. I would like to call this project the *first form* of Mormon scriptural theology, since I will be coming to a *second form* of Mormon scriptural theology further along.

It seems that only Petrey's second objection (or pair of related objections) discussed in the preceding section of this paper directly concerns this first form of Mormon scriptural theology (distinct from biblical theology as it defines itself). Petrey's worries about too quickly granting scripture a position of moral authority relevant to present concerns (first part of the objection), along with his concern that theology promotes historically implausible readings (second part of the objection), focus principally on how speculative Mormon theology mobilizes scripture for arguably non-scriptural purposes. Petrey's anxiety, ultimately, seems to me to be that such theological work does not often or consistently enough make its responsibility to history clear. This is perhaps because it registers its responsibility to history most often only by appealing to the key exception to the basic rule articulated near the close of the preceding section. That is, the first form of Mormon scriptural theology more often than not elects to make its interpretive moves with scripture without giving any more credit than absolutely necessary to what historians have to say about the meaning of the relevant texts. At some point, this begins to look like lip service rather than real responsibility, and it is to this, I suspect, that Petrey ultimately objects.

The question, of course, would be why anyone would want to do the sort of work represented by the first form of Mormon scriptural theology. Why give attention to scripture in doing the work of speculative theology, especially if theological interpretations will more often than not part ways with interpretive conclusions drawn by responsible historians? In his "Manifesto for Mormon Theology," Miller claims that "a *Mormon* theology should be shaped by the centrality of scripture," the implication of his italics being that it is the use of Mormon scripture that makes this particular theological enterprise a Mormon one.[13] As he further puts it, "for Mormons, reading is a core religious

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12. See Adam S. Miller, *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 59–62.

13. Miller, 60.

practice and, as a result, Mormon theology reads."[14] The point is that Mormon theology is responsible to Mormonism as a religious community, and Mormon scripture serves as an anchor for that community, a set of authoritative texts that draw collective assent.[15] Faulconer also emphasizes the role of community in marking out the privilege given to scripture. Contending against the prejudice for "primitive" or historically reconstructed "original" meanings of texts, he argues that "a text is scriptural precisely because the primitivist assumption about meaning is not true."[16] Where the relevance of the text to the religious community is foregrounded, its scriptural nature is reified; but where the relevance of the text to the religious community fades, its status as scripture fades also. It is thus, at the very least, out of a sense of responsibility to Mormonism as a lived religion in a believing community that speculative Mormon theology turns its attention to scripture. Similarly, it is arguably with an eye to the community's non-historicist relationship to scripture that speculative theologians feel a certain freedom to do their interpretive work (albeit with at least a firm nod in the direction of solid historical-critical work).

There is another virtue to the first form of Mormon scriptural theology's frequent appeals to the key exception to the basic rule of theology's responsibility to history. Overly rigid appeals to the actual can obscure the virtual force of the real, which shows only one of its faces (if not in fact only its back parts) in the actual. To the extent that a philosophically infused project of Mormon theology seeks out the real-virtual (what Miller has been recently calling the *power*) of Mormonism, it will inevitably emphasize rich possibilities over poor actualities.[17] Where too much credit is given to historical work, the real-virtual suffers obscurity. Obviously, there is much that needs unpacking here, and the present essay is sadly not the place for a detailed exposition—or even for a less-than-illuminating brief exposition. One might therefore well worry that talk of the real-virtual, distinguishable from and preferred over the actual, plays into Petrey's criticisms of theology's supposed

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14. Miller, 60.

15. This, again, does not entail a refusal to criticize scriptural voices. Canonical inclusion does not mean infallibility or invulnerability, but collective communal investment in the relevance of each voice's contribution to a complex scriptural whole.

16. Faulconer, *Faith, Philosophy, Scripture*, 141.

17. For an elaboration of the relationship between the actual and the real-virtual as I have here used these terms, see Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 1–48. For Miller's use of the word "power" to describe the virtual-real, see Adam Miller, "Christo-Fiction, Mormon Philosophy, and the Virtual Body of Christ," in *To Be Learned Is Good: Essays on Faith and Scholarship in Honor of Richard Lyman Bushman* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute Press, 2017) 101–10.

tendency to resist plurality and particularity. This is emphatically not the case, although I lack here the space to make clear why this is so. Suffice it to say for now that there are philosophical reasons to promote a hermeneutical method that attends to the non-actual possibilities latent in historical texts in order to grow clearer about the real core of what the texts in question represent.

This preliminary theoretical elaboration of the first form of Mormon scriptural theology must end here to leave room for a theoretical elaboration of what I will call the *second form* of Mormon scriptural theology. Here I want to pick up the thread of my slightly uneasy fit with Faulconer and Miller, due to my having dedicated serious effort to discover the canonical coherence of Latter-day Saint scripture. I have no criticism to make of my colleagues' approach to scriptural theology—especially since it is one I share with them often enough—but I have long been working on (or working toward) a sort of Mormon scriptural theology that aims at something different from their projects. For this reason, my writings have engaged as often with figures like Gerhard von Rad and N. T. Wright as they have with figures like Paul Ricoeur and Giorgio Agamben. This gives much of my work a slightly different orientation vis-à-vis the field of (non-Mormon) biblical theology. As I mentioned before, the search for the theological significance of canonical unity or canonical shape of scripture, something central to my own work, lies at the heart of all non-Mormon biblical theology. In this connection at least, then, my own work in Mormon scriptural theology is more directly in conversation with mainline biblical theology than that of my friends. And it is likely in this project that I step outside any recognizable *school* of Mormon biblical theology (if in fact such exists), undertaking a project of my own.

The first of Petrey's objections discussed in the preceding section of this paper is the one most relevant to this second form of Mormon scriptural theology. His worry about talk of *the* divine word, signaling continuity among canonical texts that hail from radically distinct historical and social contexts, seems ultimately to be a worry about the very project of a biblical theology interested in canonical unity.[18] But what looks like harmonization to Petrey I would describe in rather different terms, as I have already made clear. At

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18. I noted before that Petrey criticizes Faulconer and Miller along the same lines, but it seems to me that his criticisms of their work on this score would mean something different from what they mean in connection with my work. I suspect Petrey finds attempts at harmonization, however subtle, in Miller's unswerving insistence on finding all of scripture as speaking directly to theological questions surrounding the meaning of grace. Miller would need to stage a defense of a distinct nature in response to such a criticism, and I think he arguably already has. See Adam S. Miller, "'Take No Thought,'" in *Perspectives on Mormon Theology: Scriptural Theology*, ed. James E. Faulconer and Joseph M. Spencer (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 63–67.

stake, in my view, is not a transcendent idea that might unify the complexity of history reflected in scriptural texts, but a whole network of intertextual relationships immanent to scripture, relationships that connect various canonical books and present them as a theological unity despite their historical diversity. These intertextual relationships are not the inventions of the reader, although they might come into focus only for a certain sort of reader. They are not, in other words, something the theologian posits, nor are they aspects of the text that show themselves only to the theologian who posits a transcendent realm of idealities. Rather, the network of intertextual relationships I have in mind is a real facet of the text, and the theologian simply assumes the task of making explicit the inchoate theological significance of the network that is really there.[19] On such a view, scripture is always already proto-theological.[20]

To describe what the second form of Mormon scriptural theology looks like, I might begin with a description of its parallel discipline in non-Mormon biblical theology. What I have in mind here is, of course, only one of several mainstream approaches to biblical theology in the larger Christian conversation, but it is a central one. The sorts of interpreters I have in mind "focus on how the New Testament's use of the Old Testament serves as a key for discerning overall unity. . . . The Bible's narrative unity surfaces especially as Paul or Jesus interpret the Old Testament and find an underlying storyline running through and between the Old Testament passages they cite."[21] A key example of this approach is N. T. Wright, whose massive project, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, depends heavily on the story of Israel discernible in a host of intertextual links between New Testament texts and the (expanded) Old Testament corpus.[22] The point of Wright's work—like that of others pursuing a similar interpretive line—is not to decide from the

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19. There is an important sense in which this articulation of the second form of Mormon biblical theology links up with philosophical hermeneutics. Martin Heidegger describes the task of interpretation as the making explicit of the implicit network of relations in a particular situation. This well describes what I have in mind. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 188–95.

20. On Brevard Childs's account, the very definition of (Judeo-Christian) scripture might well be what is proto-theological along these lines. See, for instance, Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

21. Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 99; I have expanded the authors' references to the "OT" and the "NT."

22. See, for instance, the summary in N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 1:75–196. The primarily theoretical work of Wright's project can be found in N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

standpoint of the New Testament what *actually* happened in Hebrew biblical times; it is, rather, to find the possibility of biblical unity in the New Testament's *reading* of the Hebrew Scriptures (in the reading that essentially made of the Hebrew scriptures the Old Testament of the Christian canon). The New Testament itself, one might say, contains a theological interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, and Christian biblical theology is primarily an exposition of that theological interpretation.[23]

It deserves notice that the discernment of the New Testament's implicit understanding of the Hebrew Bible is in no fashion a simply subjective affair. Taking orientation especially from the work of Richard Hays, there has developed over the past three decades an intense and productive conversation about how to trace "echoes of scripture" in the New Testament.[24] Although there is anything but disagreement about a great many possible uses of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures in various places in the New Testament, there is increasing consensus about how to decide among potential allusions, and there is also increasing consensus about what definite allusions, rightly recognized, mean for the contextual interpretation of New Testament passages.[25] Further, it becomes increasingly apparent that while many New Testament voices run roughshod over the contextual (both literary-contextual and historical-contextual) meanings of many Old Testament texts, many other New Testament voices exhibit remarkable interpretive insight into these texts.[26] Even so, so far as I am aware, no one involved in the conversation insists that the New Testament's uses of Old Testament passages present fully historiographically responsible interpretations of Hebrew texts. The point is ultimately to become clear about the theological claims of one set of heirs to the Hebrew scriptural tradition.[27]

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23. This is not limited to Christian theological interpretation. Michael Fishbane's notion of inner-biblical exegesis arguably does much the same sort of work within the boundaries of the Hebrew Scriptures alone. See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

24. See Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); and the crucial follow-up, Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

25. See the encyclopedia of sorts of New Testament intertextuality: G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

26. See, for example, Ben Witherington III, *Isaiah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).

27. This is not to say that some students of intertextuality do not argue for a certain normativity of the New Testament's hermeneutic methods. Hays himself, for example, takes Pauline usage of the Hebrew Bible to be exemplary and normative for believing Christians. For a helpful critique of such a position, see Brevard S. Childs,

The second form of Mormon scriptural theology largely parallels the discipline of biblical theology just described. It closely follows the study of intertextuality and theological interpretation underway in the field of biblical theology. But then it adds to such study its own uniquely Mormon considerations: the uses of the Christian Bible in uniquely Restoration scripture. In effect, Mormon scriptural theology sees in the relationship between uniquely Mormon scripture and the Christian Bible a direct parallel to the biblical theological relationship between the New and Old Testaments. The Book of Mormon, for instance, is riddled with direct and explicit interpretations of biblical texts, just as it is riddled with indirect and implicit interactions with other biblical texts. And it converses as much with the Old Testament as with the New.[28] In so many ways, the Book of Mormon serves as an (intensely complex) investigation of the Christian scriptures, a probing of their significance in a secular age. And of course, the very same must be said of the Doctrine and Covenants, as also of the Pearl of Great Price. All these volumes of Latter-day Saint scripture restage the Bible, presenting novel readings of its texts and outlining a view of biblical history and teleology that deserves theological elaboration.

It is something like this toward which my own theological and interpretive efforts have been working for a decade, often somewhat blindly. In *An Other Testament*, I attempted to sort out the larger structure of the Book of Mormon and how this organizes the volume around contrasting reading strategies—reading strategies focused principally on the Book of Isaiah.[29] In *For Zion*, I attempted to make theological sense of a complicated web of intertextual relationships linking texts in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Book of Mormon, the letters of Paul, and the prophecies of Second and Third Isaiah. Most recently, in *The Vision of All*, I have attempted to develop a much more nuanced interpretation just of one portion of the Book of Mormon's direct interactions with Isaiah (those of Nephi), underscoring the complexity of interpreting even the most explicit intertextual interactions between the Book of Mormon and the Bible.[30] My current project, which is addressed to a non-Mormon audience, attempts to sketch in one coherent picture the whole scope of the Book of Mormon's interactions with the Book of Isaiah,

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The Church's Guide for Reading Paul: The Canonical Shaping of the Pauline Corpus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 32–39.

28. See the helpful—but summary—discussion in Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 26–32

29. See Spencer, *An Other Testament*.

30. See Spencer, *The Vision of All*.

set in the context of the history of Isaiah interpretation and set alongside uses of Isaiah on offer in the nineteenth-century American Christian context.[31]

What does the second form of Mormon scriptural theology ultimately look like, then? It begins with or from a relatively stable typology of intertextual interaction between uniquely Mormon scripture and the Christian Bible, requiring some kind of general schema of Mormon scripture's use of the Bible.[32] From such a schema it extracts a more mobile but still traceable "worldview-story" (N. T. Wright's term): that is, a conception or series of conceptions of biblical history assumed in Restoration scripture.[33] Finally, it sets these conceptions of biblical history in (polemical) conversation with other conceptions on offer at the time of the appearance of Restoration scripture—that is, in the antebellum American Christian context. Such a move, as Wright puts it with respect to theological study of the New Testament, "can help us to grasp what was at stake in the debates" assumed by the text and its historical horizon.[34] That is, the point of (polemical) comparison and contrast here is to become still clearer about the theological meaning of Restoration texts, rather than to use Restoration texts to do battle against other conceptions. The second form of Mormon scriptural theology yields its final products when the theological meanings of uniquely Restoration scripture—via its multifarious uses of the Christian Bible—become clear. Obviously, this task requires much, much more work than it has yet been given.

Now, it must be conceded that there are certain dangers in pursuing Mormon scriptural theology in its second form, and Petrey's worry about my own talk of *the* divine word points in the direction of these dangers. Some note that the parallel discipline of (non-Mormon) biblical theology has two

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31. I have already published two installments of this project. See Joseph M. Spencer, "Isaiah 52 in the Book of Mormon: Notes on Isaiah's Reception History," *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 6, no. 2 (2016): 189–217; and Joseph M. Spencer, "The Book of Mormon as Biblical Interpretation: An Approach to LDS Biblical Studies," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 8 (2016): 130–56. A paper with the same basic methodology, but with a focus on the Book of Mormon's interactions with the New Testament (specifically the Gospel of John), is: Nicholas J. Frederick and Joseph M. Spencer, "John 11 in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 5, no. 1 (2018): 81–106.

32. A crucial methodology for discerning such interaction has recently been sketched, in obvious debt to Richard Hays and the conversation spurred by him. See Nicholas J. Frederick, "Evaluating the Interaction between the New Testament and the Book of Mormon: A Proposed Methodology," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 24 (2015): 1–30.

33. For Wright's articulation of the notion of worldview-story, see Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 47–80.

34. Wright, 76.

major "unintended consequences" that make its critics nervous: "(1) Old Testament texts not taken up in the New Testament are deemphasized, and (2) Old Testament texts that are mentioned in the New Testament are usually read *only* as the New Testament understands them."[35] Someone might just as well say of my own work that (1) biblical texts not taken up in Restoration scripture are deemphasized, and (2) biblical texts that are mentioned in Restoration scripture are usually read *only* as Restoration scripture understands them. Frankly, I have no rejoinder to such an objection. The criticism hits its mark. I would, however, note that I in no way wish to grant to the second form of biblical theology some kind of exclusivity, as if it were the only form that either Mormon theological reflection or Mormon biblical studies should take. This is only one form of Mormon biblical study, and I do not believe it should do everything Mormon biblical studies should ideally aim to do. At any rate, given my contributions to the first form of Mormon scriptural theology, it is clear that I do not mean the second form to prevail over all other forms of Mormon theological reflection. *And* I wish to emphasize that I in no way wish to bar other forms of Mormonism-inspired study of the Bible. Let the flowers of historical criticism, literary theory, ideology critique, devotional homiletics, and biblical theology all bloom together—along with a thousand other flowers!

In the end, I should hope that a theorization of Mormon biblical studies in its various forms will lead more to clarification than to conflict. In an intellectual tradition like that of Mormon studies, which is still so young, there is reason to encourage every responsible project. Part of that encouragement, to be sure, is critique, even polemical critique at times. But all such critique ideally aims at producing clearer and better work. I am personally convinced that this is what Petrey's essay has accomplished. In that spirit, then, I wish to conclude this rejoinder by thanking Petrey for his polemical critique, which has encouraged me in my own work greatly, and I can only hope that my rejoinders encourage his work as well.

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35. Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 101; with "OT" and "NT" again expanded.

Continued Dialogue

by Taylor G. Petrey

I count it an immense pleasure to have the opportunity to think with these colleagues and to benefit from their criticism, insight, and clarity. I hope that others too find much to consider in these exchanges and hope that they serve as a model for productive dialogue. I am also grateful to the editorial team at *Element* for supporting this exchange and encouraging all of us to refine our ideas.

At the outset of my concluding remarks, I want to clarify what I believe to be at stake and to set the parameters for a central problem that faces any kind of Mormon theorization of biblical interpretation: *How do we deal with difficult, maybe even dangerous texts?* Assuming that we share the idea that there are problematic aspects of these texts and traditions (even if we might disagree on what those might be), what, if any, resources does the theological-foundationalist school provide to grapple with these issues? For me, the problem is not about reducing faith to history or about seeking objective history; it is a question of critically engaging power and authority in ways that do not betray the postmodern commitments of many of these practitioners of Mormon scriptural studies. The Western genealogy of ideological critique, from Kant, Marx, and Nietzsche to liberation hermeneutics, provides a powerful resource for moving from the philosophical history of ideas to engagement with social formation. In Mormonism, this tradition I think has precedent in biblical text, the hermeneutics of suspicion and utopianism of Joseph Smith, and in the Mormon feminist scriptural studies. My own proposal for answering this question is that historicism and ethical evaluation are necessary intel-

lectual tools for confronting problematic aspects of our authoritative texts and interpretations.

Before circling back to the question of a theorized Mormon biblical studies, with some further reflections on Romans 1, I want to respond briefly to each of the interlocutors.

FAULCONER

I begin with James Faulconer's important response. Faulconer has been a voice in the wilderness of Mormon scriptural theology until the last decade when others have joined his cause. His important scholarship charted a new path that was always skeptical of the historical foundationalists who dominated in the 1990s and 2000s. Recalling his earlier criticism of these approaches, Faulconer describes his aim: "to contest the assumption that scholarly history and ideological critique are touchstones for scriptural exegesis" (p. 29). He then rejects both of my recommendations for Mormon biblical studies as he understands them. His view is that historical criticism "has been a disaster for understanding the Bible as *scripture*" (p. 29; emphasis in original). He casts me as an "heir of Spinoza" who "assumes that scriptural exegesis requires us to set aside both its numinous character and its figural vector to treat the biblical documents as one would any other ancient document" (pp. 31–32). To give force to this argument, Faulconer is working with a view of academic historiography as necessarily positivist and reductive, as "objective history" (p. 32). He hangs contemporary historical inquiry on its nineteenth-century iterations. Historical criticism "undermined the possibility of understanding scripture in any of the many ways it had been understood before" (p. 30). That is, he sees post-Enlightenment historical knowledge as limiting the meaning of scripture and wants to suggest that there are other ways that scripture might mean that may conflict with these historical claims. My answer, in brief, is that I do not think that my argument hinges on positivist historiography. My goal is not to fix the meaning of the text in the original, but to explore the ideological framework of the text and its interpretation through genealogies in order to then engage those in meaningful criticism. Historical study opens up the ways that the text has meant in order to call into question our own meanings.

Further, Faulconer objects to the practice of ideological criticism. I find him making two major objections: (1) "ideological critique is unable to step outside of its own presuppositions . . . in order to bring them, as well as its objects of critique, into question" (p. 32); and (2) "We need not explicitly do ideological critique in order to find our prejudices drawn up short. That occurs in any good interpretation of a text, because in it one encounters its openness rather than its closedness" (p. 34). Referring to ideological critique

as "closed" and "unable" to be self-critical, Faulconer suggests that it is also unnecessary because readers call into question their interpretations in any good reading. I think these objections deserve serious consideration, but I think they are problematic. With respect to the question of the closed position of ideological critique, this objection is a common one. So the argument that ideological criticism is invested in questions of class, race, gender, and sexuality, starting from a particular subject position that cannot critique those ideologies themselves. In contrast, there is a properly ordered hermeneutical stance in which the text is active and the reader is passive and is changed by "submitting" to the text: "We are questioned by the text rather than the other way around" (p. 34). This Heidegerrian/Gadamerian hermeneutics of understanding begins with the authority of the text. In the well-known criticism by Jürgen Habermas, the notion of submission to the text precludes ideological criticism. Of course, Paul Ricouer himself tried to mediate between these two positions to suggest that Gadamerian hermeneutics of understanding and Habermasian ideological critique are ultimately complimentary.[1]

I certainly hope that Ricoeur is right in this respect, but I think it involves a different relationship to the text than Faulconer lays out here. As an example, the critique that feminists have made is that they are tired of being in the passive position, of getting screwed by the text so to speak. Further, other ideological hermeneutes have argued persuasively that those who dismiss ideological critique do so from an ideological position. The point of ideology critique is not merely to read through a particular lens, but to investigate the ideology of those interpreters who profess submission to the text and to critically encounter the ideology that the text presents. As Christopher Rowland explains, "the study of ideology is to see how ideas and systems of thinking and belief function in a society in such a manner that the way people think and the ruling groups appear to be 'natural' and 'just.'" He continues, "the critique of ideology . . . involves laying bare the contradictions in society and the habit which the dominant groups have of neutralizing their potential for resistance and change."[2] The double move of study and critique of ideology allows readers to question the text rather than only be questioned by it. I worry that the emphasis on the numinous can limit our ability to critically engage it, and that it might even distract us from the suffering that certain readings inflict.

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1. Paul Ricoeur, "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology," trans. John B. Thompson, in *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Ast to Ricoeur*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 298–334.

2. Christopher Rowland, "Social, Political, and Ideological Criticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. J.W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 657.

WELCH

Next, I want to turn to Rosalynde Welch who, I think, accurately distills my argument in a way that is more articulate and concise than the original. I also find her reshuffling of the "teams" to be an insightful experiment that does indeed illuminate issues that require greater attention. At the same time, I hope that I can briefly draw out a few distinctions in critical Mormon biblical studies that may blunt some of her worries about this approach.

To begin, Welch suggests that I may be slightly unfair in my dismissal of the historical foundationalists. In her reshuffling, Welch argues that "historical foundationism is . . . deeply motivated by ethical concerns" (p. 37). I argued that the primary ethic in this hermeneutic is actually church authority, but Welch points out that this too is governed by a particular moral and even political stance. This is a useful insight that I think brings greater depth and a more charitable dimension to the historical foundationalists. However, I hesitate at Welch's apparent equation between the political and moral imperatives at work in historical foundationalism and the critical approach that I advocate. That is to say, I think that there is a tension between institutional loyalty and ethical reasoning that hobbles historical foundationalism as an ethical hermeneutic. In Welch's estimation, historical foundationalism "prioritizes institution and ethics over scripture and history" (p. 37).

Let me address this in two parts. First, I agree that while historical foundationalism appeals to history as a source of authority, it is actually demoting history. Welch asserts, and I agree, I believe, that this approach is ultimately ahistorical and that one of its primary goals is to legitimatize institutional authority. This approach grounds the authority of its conclusion in scripture and history when in fact they are derived from other sources entirely. This sleight of hand is more than just an example of a confused hermeneutics and is ultimately dishonest with itself. Thus, I think that Welch's insight is somewhat correct, but her evaluation of this situation is perhaps too generous.

Second, I believe that it may also be too generous to attribute ethics to the historical foundationalists. I do agree with Welch that there are certain values that are exhibited in historical foundationalism, and I will concede that these values may overlap with ethical values. At the same time, the only positions advanced in historical foundationalism are also those of the institution. I am reluctant to equate the kind of critical ethical evaluations I am calling for with those that are really rooted in tradition and authority. *Contra* Welch, I think that it is more accurate to say that historical foundationalism prioritizes the institution over ethics, history, and scripture because each of the latter are filtered through institutional authority.

On the relationship between history and ethical critique, I argue that rigorous historical inquiry operates alongside an ethical evaluation, which can happen only when these are separate points of analysis. Historical foundationalists only imitate the motions of these methods because they lack a critical dimension to their work. And here, I suggest, is all the difference. The promotion and propping up of scriptural authority is a potentially fraught activity, and the obligation in part of critical biblical studies is to open up the space for critique. Historical and ethical evaluations may be open to challenge, but it is crucial that the authority of scripture not be perpetually reified by its interpreters. This reification is both an illusion and itself constitutes an ethical breach by appealing to authority to circumvent the hard work of establishing one's claims.

Welch is careful to admit that there are important distinctions that might be overlooked in her reshuffling but that there is heuristic value in this move. I agree that the reshuffling does push us to think about these differences with some greater precision. But I would just point to one more that I think needs further fleshing out. Welch attests that there are competing values produced by LDS institutional constraints and modern academic biblical studies departments. The scholars who work within LDS institutional constraints will produce certain kinds of scholarship and the scholars who work in other academic contexts will produce other kinds of scholarship. Conceding my Foucaultian paradigm, Welch writes, "there is no pristine knowledge or truth outside these social networks" (p. 42). There is, she suggests, perhaps some reason to question my project of critical Mormon biblical studies as representing liberal academic virtues—outcomes of the context in which they are produced and sustained. This may indeed be correct. But the implication cuts both ways and raises deeper questions about the legitimacy and worth of historical and theological foundationalism. What is the power-knowledge of Mormon scripture theology in relationship to the institutional Church? Can Mormon scriptural theology can be disentangled from complicity, or is it inherently limited to the service of institutional values? Are there mechanisms within Mormon scriptural theology to analyze power?

MILLER

Adam Miller provides a characteristically precise analysis. He zeroes in on a problem Welch noted as well as a "theoretical lacuna" in my article. Miller asks, "on what normative grounds is Petrey critiquing the normative authority of scripture?" (p. 45). Rather than seeing critical Mormon biblical studies as anti-foundationalist, Miller describes my approach as "ethico-foundationalism" (p. 48). This is an important concern and one that I admit needs some more attention than my brief outline. But I think that there is also some

room to clarify. The question for me is not whether scripture informs the normative claims, but whether the claims being made are themselves given authority merely because they are grounded in scripture. My approach is non-foundationalist because I am not reifying scriptural authority as foundational, but rather I suggest that it must also be subject to critical evaluation.

Nor would I say that my ethical project is rooted in a traditional appeal to foundational principles for moral behavior. As Beverly J. Stratton admits of ideological criticism, "the choice of initial assumptions is somewhat arbitrary . . . and . . . no interpretation or set of interpretive assumptions can ever be entirely sufficient."[3] Rather, I am willing to admit that ethics face a challenge, but agree with Derrida that "ethics and politics, therefore, start with undecidability."[4] Anti-foundationalism is not moral paralysis but constitutes the beginning of ethical actions. The philosophical argument for thinking about ethics in an anti-foundationalist framework is beyond the scope of this present project, but I am not at all convinced that it is impossible—we must embrace this difficulty and work through it.

If scripture may not be an uncritical foundation, on what basis can a critical Mormon biblical studies appeal to scripture as authoritative? Miller points to what he sees as a contradiction in my rejection of foundationalism and simultaneous appeal to scriptural norms. Miller, I think, rightly discerns that Zion is my interpretive lens, though I am unsure that it functions in the same way as the foundationalism that I criticize. I suggest the problem at the heart of foundationism is a claim to a set of assumptions—taking scripture itself as normative *a priori*, flattening the distance between historical actors and the present world too quickly, harmonizing difference in scriptural texts from widely different contexts, and so on. In contrast to foundationalism, I want to point out the hermeneutical choice to focus on ethical issues of concern that are based on a combination of contestable arguments—historical, ethical, philosophical, and political—rather than proceeding as if this choice was self-evident.

This approach begins with a recognition that interpretation is always selective and partial. I think that Miller pushes too far when he argues that to use the Bible in any way constitutes foundationalism. My critique against the historical and theological foundationalists is that they close off critical engagement with the Bible. That is, the justification for foundationalist accounts of the Bible rests on reifying biblical authority, which must be propped up by

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3. Beverly Stratton, "Ideology," in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation,* ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 126.

4. Jacques Derrida, "Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida," in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy,* ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (New York: Routledge, 1999), 66.

harmonizing and avoiding criticism. An anti-foundationalist view does not take biblical authority for granted, but provides justification for the authority of the text—in this case ethical reasoning. I do not claim that one cannot use biblical ideals, but only challenge the idea that the biblical norms that one chooses are uninterpreted foundational claims. These are curated ideas, not anti-biblical. Rather than taking scripture as the norm, critical Mormon biblical studies recasts scripture as a divided norm that undoes its own self-authorization. That is, the very act of a deliberate curation already relativizes biblical authority and acknowledges the fractures of scripture. I think that in this contradiction, that Miller notes, lie the seeds for fruitful interpretation.

There is a second point that Miller emphasizes that is worth mentioning. He argues, I think correctly, that "something crucial about faith is irreducible to history's horizon. . . . [S]ome crucial aspects of faith are *not* homogeneous with history" (p. 48; emphasis in original). I am in agreement with Miller on this point, I believe. At the same time, I think that we are talking about different things and I hope that exploring these differences may be illuminating. First, by raising *faith* I think that he is shifting the question that I raise about ethics. I worry that the theological school has invested in an individualist approach to scripture that prioritizes the category of the personal and individual that may overlook ethical critique. Second, Miller characterizes my argument as saying that faith is reducible to *history*. I think that this shifts the question too. To insist on better history, closer attention to the meanings of language, and the relevance of history to interpretation does not constitute a reductive move. To use history to critically evaluate the text is not to suggest that faith is no more than history.

Miller invokes Søren Kierkegaard (the religious) and Jacques Lacan (the real) to do specific kinds of work on the category of religion. He acknowledges the potential problem that "papers over a betrayal of our ethical responsibilities" (p. 48). Miller claims to get around this problem by thinking about religion "in terms of immanent *but irreducible* elements" (p. 49; emphasis in original). It is true that my own interest for the purpose of scriptural interpretation lies at the level of the imaginary and the symbolic, the aesthetic and the ethical, rather than the real and religious. Miller's project, in line with Jean-Luc Marion, Alain Badiou, and Giorgio Agamben, "is to rethink elements traditionally categorized as transcendent in terms of systemic remainders that are both (1) immanent to the systems that produce them, and (2) irreducible to (or indigestible by) those same systems" (p. 49). Miller suggests that I must "recognize the need for a faith that is both intertwined with history *and* irreducible to history" (p. 50; emphasis added). In addition, I must "recognize the need for a religion that is both intertwined with ethics and empowered

to redeem ethics." In these irreducible pairings, Miller appeals to "extra-legal grace" (p. 50).

I have no reason to object to this philosophically, and I am grateful to Miller for this challenging framing of the issues at stake. It is certainly something that I want to think more about. What is missing for me is where a critical stance may be located. If there is an attention to excess in my work, to that which is outside and irreducible, it is the dimensions of the text to undermine itself, to speak back, and to be spoken back to. Rather than the intertwining of faith/history or ethics/religion, perhaps the dynamic that is closer at work in my thought is the intertwining between the locative and the utopian elements of religion. I am interested in the interrelationship between the two as the modality for a critical Mormon scripture studies. My rejection of a secularist stance that would dismiss scripture altogether because of its ideological deficits already points to a paradoxical embrace and critique of scripture. As Amy Hollywood has described it, "our reception of tradition is always also a critical engagement with it, and it is that gap—the gap between what is handed down and what is received—that makes life possible *and* that makes possible the more robust and self-conscious forms of critique on which most of our lives and any livable future depend."[5] In other words, the intertwining of both tradition and critique, of locative and utopian religion, of stabilizing and destabilizing faith is made possible by a Mormon hermeneutic that includes critique.

SPENCER

Finally, I turn to Joseph Spencer's response that is both incisive in its clarifications and contributes to a greater vision for Mormon scriptural theology. Spencer differs, as he notes, from some of the other figures in the scriptural theology movement. His discussion of Romans, for instance, includes both a sustained theological argument that engages historical evidence and a sustained ethical argument that has my sympathies. I find Spencer's response to my invitation to Mormon biblical scholars to theorize what it means to interpret from a Mormon perspective a key beginning. His description of two different forms of Mormon scriptural theology is particularly important. Spencer rightly claims that the Mormon scriptural studies movement of Faulconer and Miller have more in common with philosophy than with biblical theology. And here, I admit to being inattentive to these differences in my efforts to identify a broad label for this movement.

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5. Amy Hollywood, *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University, 2016), 17.

I find Spencer's articulation of his own engagement with biblical theology to be useful. His goal, he explains, is "to sort out the internal coherence of the larger Latter-day Saint scriptural canon, and canonical coherence is a (if not *the*) central concern in the field of scriptural theology" (p. 57; emphasis in original). I think that this is an illuminating description, and it is one that also highlights the disciplinary and, I think, theological issues at stake in Mormon scripture studies. Spencer makes an important deductive point about Mormon scriptural theology as he practices it. First, Mormonism accepts scripture as authoritative. Second, Mormonism's relationship to scripture is not from the standpoint of historicism. Therefore, Mormon scriptural and speculative theology takes scripture as both authoritative and from a non-historicist perspective.

I think that these descriptions highlight our differences in illustrative ways. Though Spencer develops a different label for his approach, I don't think he objects to my descriptive term of foundationalism. His concern for coherence in the canon is a key assumption in foundationalism. As he describes, this view connects "various canonical books and present[s] them as a theological unity despite their historical diversity" (p. 61). That is, it assumes or creates a theological coherence despite the recognition that these texts are historically disparate. Spencer adds another dimension here besides scripture. Mormonism itself, its coherent traditions and institutions, are another tool of interpretation. Indeed, the foundation for interpreting scripture as authoritative is not only the authority of the scriptures, but the authority granted to the scriptures by the Mormon people. Following evangelical-friendly scholars like N. T. Wright and Richard Hays as a parallel, Spencer's scriptural theology deploys the text beyond historical-critical limits and uses intertextuality as a method of interpretation.

But Spencer's framing of the institution, tradition, and scripture raises an important problem. Setting aside the interpretation of Romans 1 (I won't rehearse my concerns with his translation and interpretation), on what basis might a Mormon theologian critique slavery in the 1850s? On what basis might one object to the preaching of racial hierarchy in the 1950s? Mormon leaders at the time advanced these positions, and perhaps they were held by many of the Mormon people. Both positions had a robust tradition of biblical interpretation—not to mention Restoration scripture—to support them. Would a Mormon speculative theology produced in those eras be bound to those positions? Is a Mormon speculative theology produced in our era bound to the present positions of the Church on all matters? I suspect that Spencer and I would answer these questions differently, in part because of the assumptions we bring to the authority of scripture, the use of history, and role of ethical reasoning.

My own model for thinking about a critical Mormon study of scripture does not begin from a desire to either impose or expose "coherence" in a domesticated text, but rather to explore contradiction and tension. Such efforts then reveal the deliberate interpretations that one must make from a variety of options, rather than represent the latent ideas across the canon that are being discovered. The texts are multivalent and multivocal, and efforts to obscure differences and reinforce dominant ideologies choke out the resources that may be used for subversion, reimagination, and reinterpretation. Hermeneutics of suspicion call us to critical evaluation of the text, not just to buttress the authority of oppressive ideologies. Critique is destabilizing, but it is not destructive.

Finally, I think that Spencer's useful distinction between the philosophical use of Paul and the work of biblical theology is important, but it also raises new questions about the adaptation of the philosophical task within the devotional context of Mormonism. How do we render Paul's authority, especially in the context of a religious community and not the secular academy? The context of French philosophers' interpretation, where Pauline "authority" means something different than in religious settings, changes when those are brought to bear in a community with a particular relationship to canonical authority. I worry that if that context of interpretation is not theorized, we face a set of interpretive questions that our secular colleagues might not have to consider. If we take Paul on grace, the law, or economics, do we also take him on male headship, his poor treatment of his rivals, his belief that impurity is contagious, or that taking the Eucharist unworthily causes death? How will these ways of reading deal with Pauline authority that is put to use in the service of homophobia?

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There is more to say about each of these provocative responses and I hope that continued, constructive dialogue will contribute to more critical reflection all around. It as an honor to think with these fine thinkers. I certainly have not plumbed the depths of what these responses have to offer and have in some cases had to avoid issues that I am still chewing on. But I think that these responses provide important, and divergent, visions for approaches to Mormon scripture.

In conclusion, I want to return briefly to Romans 1. In my argument, I not only laid out what I believed to be the underlying hermeneutical moves of different approaches in Mormon scripture studies, but tried to show how those play out on Romans 1 with vital ethical and religious implications. I attempted to demonstrate the ethical lapses of foundationalist interpretations that were seemingly unwilling to critique Paul's account of same-sex intimacy.

Instead, in each case these scholars worked to shore up Pauline authority on this topic by various means. Laying aside the deeper, and vital, hermeneutical worries, we remain with a text with divergent ethical, historical, and normative interpretations. I have attempted to offer tools that might address the ethical and historical shortcomings of foundationalist approaches, if they exist. One need not agree that the heterosexualist interpretation of Romans 1 constitutes an ethical quagmire to agree that the possibility that ethical quagmires might exist in scripture requires some form of analysis that will help navigate those issues. If not historicism to relativize these texts, or ethical judgments to critique these texts, then what?

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Mormonism at the Crossroads of Philosophy and Theology:
Essays in Honor of David L. Paulsen

Edited by Jacob T. Baker

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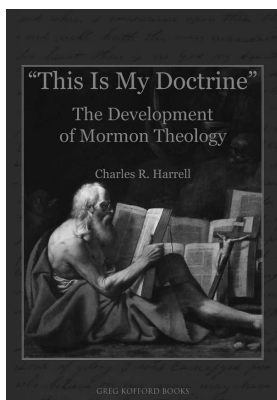
# "This is My Doctrine": The Development of Mormon Theology

Charles R. Harrell

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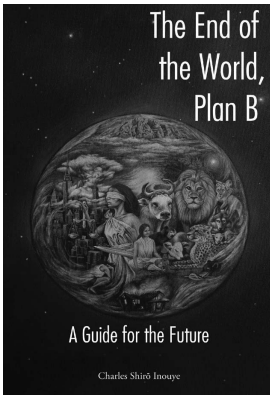
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Charles Shirō Inouye

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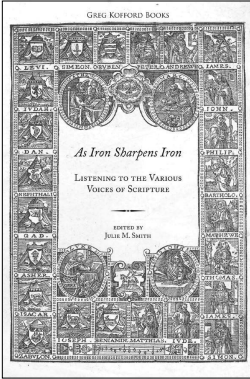
# As Iron Sharpens Iron: Listening to the Various Voices of Scripture

Julie M. Smith

Paperback, ISBN: 978-1-58958-501-0

2016 Best Religious Non-fiction Award, Association for Mormon Letters

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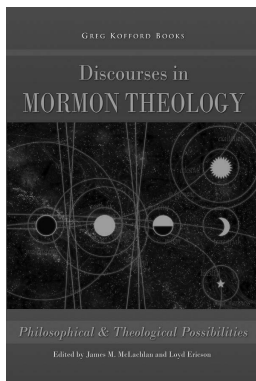
Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities

Edited by
James M. McLachlan and Loyd Ericson

Hardcover, ISBN: 978-1-58958-103-6

A mere two hundred years old, Mormonism is still in its infancy compared to other theological disciplines (Judaism, Catholicism, Buddhism, etc.). This volume will introduce its reader to the rich blend of theological viewpoints that exist within Mormonism. The essays break new ground in Mormon studies by exploring the vast expanse of philosophical territory left largely untouched by traditional approaches to Mormon theology. It presents philosophical and theological essays by many of the finest minds associated with Mormonism in an organized and easy-to-understand manner and provides the reader with a window into the fascinating diversity amongst Mormon philosophers. Open-minded students of pure religion will appreciate this volume's thoughtful inquiries.

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"In short, *Discourses in Mormon Theology* is an excellent compilation of essays that are sure to feed both the mind and soul. It reminds all of us that beyond the white shirts and ties there exists a universe of theological and moral sensitivity that cries out for study and acclamation."

-Jeff Needle, Association for Mormon Letters
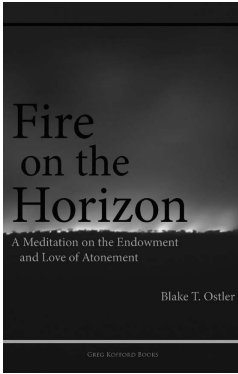
Fire on the Horizon:
A Meditation on the Endowment and Love of Atonement

Blake T. Ostler

Blake Ostler, author of the groundbreaking Exploring Mormon Thought series, explores two of the most important and central aspects of Mormon theology and practice: the Atonement and the temple endowment. Utilizing observations from Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, and others, Ostler offers further insights on what it means to become alienated from God and to once again have at-one-ment with Him.

Praise for *Fire on the Horizon*:

"*Fire on the Horizon* distills decades of reading, argument, and reflection into one potent dose. Urgent, sharp, and intimate, it's Ostler at his best." — Adam S. Miller, author of *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology*

"Blake Ostler has been one of the most stimulating, deep, and original thinkers in the Latter-day Saint community. This book continues and consolidates that status. His work demonstrates that Mormonism can, and indeed does, offer profound nourishment for reflective minds and soul-satisfying insights for thoughtful believers." — Daniel C. Peterson, editor of *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*
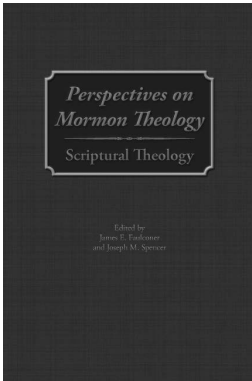
Perspectives on Mormon Theology: Scriptural Theology

Edited by James E. Faulconer and Joseph M. Spencer

The phrase "theology of scripture" can be understood in two distinct ways. First, theology of scripture would be reflection on the nature of scripture, asking questions about what it means for a person or a people to be oriented by a written text (rather than or in addition to an oral tradition or a ritual tradition). In this first sense, theology of scripture would form a relatively minor part of the broader theological project, since the nature of scripture is just one of many things on which theologians reflect. Second, theology of scripture would be theological reflection guided by scripture, asking questions of scriptural texts and allowing those texts to shape the direction the theologian's thoughts pursue. In this second sense, theology of scripture would be less a part of the larger theological project than a way of doing theology, since whatever the theologian takes up reflectively, she investigates through the lens of scripture.

The essays making up this collection reflect attentiveness to both ways of understanding the phrase "theology of scripture." Each essay takes up the relatively un-self-conscious work of reading a scriptural text but then—at some point or another—asks the self-conscious question of exactly what she or he is doing in the work of reading scripture. We have thus attempted in this book (1) to create a dialogue concerning what scripture is for Latter-day Saints, and (2) to focus that dialogue on concrete examples of Latter-day Saints reading actual scripture texts.

The Expanded Canon: Perspectives on Mormonism and Sacred Texts

Edited by Blair G. Van Dyke, Brian D. Birch, and Boyd J. Petersen

Among the most distinctive and defining features of Mormonism is the affirmation of continuing revelation through modern day prophets and apostles. An important component of this concept is the acknowledgment of an open canon—that the body of authoritative scriptural texts can expand as new revelations are made available and presented to the membership for ratification.

This volume brings together both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars to examine the place, purpose, and meaning of the LDS Standard Works (Christian Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price) in the Mormon tradition, as well as the extra-canonical sources that play a near-scriptural role in the lives of believers. Approaching LDS scripture from a variety of disciplines, methodologies, and perspectives, these scholars offer new insights into both the historical and contemporary understandings of Mormon continuing revelation.

Praise for *Textual Studies*:

"This volume is the first in a collaboration between Kofford Books and UVU, which will serve an important service for the field by reproducing some of the more provocative and smart proceedings in Mormon studies today. . . . there are some very thoughtful and important chapters in this volume. Mormonism's 'canon' will long vex outside observers, but hopefully these authors can help supply some answers."
— Benjamin E. Park, author of *American Nationalisms: Imagining Union in the Age of Revolutions, 1783–1833*