The Woman in the Wilderness:

Mormonism, Catholicism, and Inspired Syncretism

Notre Dame, 5 December 2013

Relations between Mormons and Catholics have entered upon a relative

Golden Age in recent years. One happy sign of this is the fact that I have heard

several Latter-day Saints referring to LDS counselor in the First Presidency Dieter

Uchtdorf as the Pope Francis of Mormonism. And I heard another refer to Pope

Francis as the Dieter Uchtdorf of Catholicism!

Tonight I want to lend momentum to what I see as salutary progress on

this front by reexamining some of the lingering paradigms that have historically

inhibited Mormonism's theological self-understanding, as well as its attitudes

toward and relations with the Catholic church. I will look at three interrelated

narratives Mormons have constructed, that I think deserve revisiting. Those are

notions of the Great Apostasy, the Restoration, and the Reformation. In brief, the

Mormon narratives of each emphasized the Great Apostasy as a total and utter

spiritual blightedness that fell upon the Christian world suddenly at the instigation

of what would be known as the Catholic Church.[1] The Restoration was a total

reconstitution of truth by Joseph Smith operating by "vertical revelation" received

in a cultural and historical vacuum, and the Reformation was a bridge to the

Restoration, an inspired corrective and salutary prelude, initiating though not fully

completing the work of doctrinal correction a great apostasy necessitated.

1. **Apostasy**

Apostasy, as generally used in Smith's day, had several meanings. The influential

theological dictionary of Charles Buck defined apostasy as a falling away of truth

that was Adamic (as in original sin), national (as in idolatrous Judah), or personal

(as in Judas).[2]. Protestant Restorationists sometimes used the term apostasy to refer

to the corruption of the Roman Church and its successors, and Smith both followed

and departed from this understanding. In Smith's thought, there was no question

that what he called "an apostacy . . . from the Apostolic platform" had occurred."[3]

He used that expression in early 1833, and a church newspaper article first

employed the term "Great Apostasy" shortly thereafter.[4]

Like his contemporaries, Smith believed the absence of spiritual gifts was

visible evidence of a decisive rupture with the church of the New Testament. But

spiritual gifts were only the superficial manifestation of a much greater challenge

to the integrity of the Christian religion, one that was the core of his thinking about

apostasy. The point was made most learly by Benjamin Winchester was an

influential early leader in the LDS Church. In his influential History of the

Priesthood of 1843, he wrote: the "Holy Priesthood . . . is the channel through which all the spiritual gifts, such as miracles, revelations, visions, &c., flow or are obtained;…. When it ceases to exist on earth, the church falls into darkness, and ultimately degenerates into apostasy." The priesthood was not just the source of spiritual gifts, which were signs of grace; more importantly, priesthood was the source of the sacraments, which were the vehicles of grace—the indispensable means by which the salvation of the human family was effected. The most important deficiency in the modern church, Smith wrote, involved the original "Laws," "ordinances," and "covenants" of the gospel.[5] Consistent with period usage, Smith originally used the term "ordinance" in a generic way to denote God's laws and statutes as well as divinely prescribed rites and ceremonies. Gradually, the term came for Mormons (as for low church Protestants) to signify what Catholics would call sacraments. An ordinance was "an institution of divine authority relating to the worship of God; such as baptism, . . . the Lord's supper," etc., according to a theological dictionary Smith relied upon.[6] Smith comes to use the term in essentially the same way.

"They have strayed from mine ordinances," reads section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the manifesto of Smith's new church, given in 1830. As the designated preface for his collection of revelations, this section laid down the

essential rationale behind the Mormon restoration. In the ordinances, Joseph would write in 1835, is the power of godliness manifest. With the authority of the priesthood, he continued, we access those powers of godliness.[7] When Smith recast his account of his First Vision, he used language that linked precisely those priesthood powers and ordinances to God's own language describing the essence of Christian apostasy. The purveyors of contemporary religion, he records the divine personage as explaining, have "a form of Godliness, but they deny the power thereof."[8] The 1787 Methodist Discipline indicated a similar concern: the Church "has lost the … Power of Religion," it declared.[9] Wesley and his Methodist followers were convinced that Methodists "uniquely possessed both the form of godliness and the power of true religion."[10] But whereas Wesley would find that power in "the therapeutic nurturing of holiness," Smith would emphasize authority derived from God channeled through saving ordinances.[11] This Mormon understanding of apostasy was concretized fairly early. Restoring this loss of priesthood authority, and consequently of the proper forms of "true order" and "true worship," were the great project Saints understood as the purpose of Smith's ministry.[12]

Accordingly, the central purpose of the gathering and temple building, Smith stated in an 1841 revelation, was "that [God] may [again] reveal mine ordinances therein, unto my people."[13] So Smith clearly conceived of apostasy as primarily the

corruption of ordinances, and loss of the priesthood authority to perform them. "All the known world have been left for centuries without . . . a priesthood authorized of God to administer ordinances," as Orson Pratt summarized, writing in 1840 that this belief in "a general and awful apostasy from the religion of the New Testament" was a general principle of the LDS Church.[14]

Given this conception, the principal components of the restoration, the priesthood and the ordinances, could only be restored by re-establishing a direct line of authority; this required angelic visitations and the transfer of what Smith called "keys." Smith believed that in his day neither the proper ordinances nor the authority to perform them were to be found on earth, or in the wilderness.

2. Restoration

"We can never understand precisely what is meant by restoration, unless we understand what is lost or taken away," Mormonism's first theologian Parley Pratt wrote in 1837.[15] His point may seem obvious, but it actually represents an unusual variety of restorationist thinking. Pratt is already referring to apostasy as loss or diminution, which is how Mormons today think of the term. It conjures up the image of repairing, reconstituting, or replacing what was lost. But the dominant meaning that apostasy, or corruption of the original kerygma, had for Pratt's contemporaries was the virtual opposite: unwarranted accrual. That is how the term

is generally used in art and architectural restoration alike, where restoration

generally involves peeling away layers of accretion: lacquers, dirt and grime that

have accumulated, or partitions, paneling, and paint that were deliberately imposed

on an original structure. That was the sense in which many religious restorationists

understood the term, as suggested by the simple motto of the age's most prominent

restorationists, Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone: "Where the holy Scriptures

speak, we speak; and where they are silent, we are silent."[16] Ethan Smith, another

contemporary, quoted the maxim, "Divinity consists in speaking with the scripture;

and in going *no further* [original emphasis]."[17]

Time and again, the language of reformers and Primitivists, as with the

moniker "Puritan" itself, suggests purification and its synonyms. And purification

works by subtraction, not addition, as in the expunging of unauthorized musical

instruments, singing, stained glass, or sacraments. "Spiritual building" has gone

too far, complained the translators of the Geneva Bible."[18] Or as Cromwell's

chaplain John Owen had it, invoking the familiar analogy of art restoration,

"paintings, crossings, crucifixes, … altars, tapers, wafers, organs, anthems, litany,

rails, images, copes, vestments, what were they but Roman varnish" on religion, in

need of removal?[19] For most who invoked the term, in other words, restoration

usually meant a return to a fixed point in the past, an "original purity."[20] It intended

the systematic removal of what Christ had never inaugurated and the New

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Testament had never authorized. Joseph Smith's project of Restoration, by contrast, was emphatically expansionist rather than reductive. New books of scripture, on-going revelation, recuperation of Old Testament forms and structures, a theology of both pre-and post-existence, and so forth.

The question is, how did this expansion unfold? What were the sources and precedents? How did Smith the relationship of his project to the original church?

A key image in this regard, and a window into both contemporary views and Smith's personal position, is the Revelator's allegory of the "woman in the wilderness" and its interpretation. Because evidence suggest that this allegory played a prominent part in Smith's evolving project, how he came to understand both apostasy and restoration, I want to examine it in detail.

In 1795, the Scottish minister Alexander Fraser published his Key to the Prophecies, which included a gloss of a passage from the Book of Revelation: "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, … where she is nourished for a time."[21] In Fraser's interpretation, this refers to the time when, "as the visible church declined from the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, the true Church of Christ gradually retired from the view of men, till

at length, … the true church of Christ, considered as a community, wholly disappeared."

This was not, Fraser believed, an unmitigated calamity. For the church in the wilderness, according to the words of prophecy, is "fed by the word and Spirit of God, **without the outward ordinances**, …which …. were defiled**.**"[22] In his vision, then, the "true church of Christ" is rendered invisible, protected, nourished, and preserved—while it awaits the restoration of properly administered ordinances or sacraments. Popular writer Joseph Milner, read by early Mormons, similarly wrote of the flight of "the faithful servants of Christ 'into the wilderness'" and advocated the need "to search out the real Church from age to age, . . . indeed a work of much labour and difficulty. . . . The ore is precious, but it must be extracted from incredible heaps of Ecclesiastical rubbish."[23] Indeed, Milner proclaimed an "apostacy" from the Church of Christ complete by the seventh century, believing the "visible church" was fallen into ruin, but he persisted in his "search after the scattered fragments of the true church."[24] All of this language will appear in Smith's corpus of thought.

A few decades later, in 1825, an article appearing in an independent religious journal The Telescope picked up Fraser's interpretation of the woman's flight into the wilderness. "Whenever a people become organized into a visible body," it agreed, "they are no longer the true church of Christ but fall in with the

grand apostasy."[25] Observing the condition of Protestant Christianity, the author agreed with Fraser's maxim, that conspicuous organization was only an invitation to new apostasy, and even quoted as corroboration the lament of John Wesley and John Fletcher that the Methodists had themselves so quickly fallen into strife and excess. Here again, Smith will address these contemporary concerns in his 1829 revelation known as D&C 10, a rather astonishing text wherein the Lord's voice urges members of Christ's people, members of his pre-Restoration "church" to not fear the impending organization of a restored church (D&C 10:52-55).

I want to argue that Smith was closer in spirit to these views than Mormons have appreciated, and influenced especially by the implication that much of the original church was successful preserved, ("nurtured in the wilderness"), that the vital loss was in the ordinances (which were "defiled"), and that restoration would involve retrieval and assimilation and not merely ex nihilo reconstitution. The influence of Revelation 12 in this thinking is evident not just in the fact that he appropriated the language of contemporary commentary on the allegory, but that he himself rewrote a pivotal revelation to incorporate the scriptural language itself. The earliest reference to a formal institution that Joseph Smith would restore came in 1829, with a revealed promise by the Lord to "establish my church, like unto the church which was taught by my disciples."[26] This version of the revelation, however, is not what appeared in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. Between the

1829 revelation and the 1835 publication, apparently taking to heart the allegory of the Revelator and perhaps contemporary glosses of it, Smith recast his language accordingly. This highly significant redaction refers to what would become known as Mormonism as the "beginning of the rising up and coming forth of my church **out of the wilderness**."[27] Subsequently, Smith dictates other revelations that employ that very language. One refers to the restoration as "this church I . . . called forth out of the wilderness;" another expresses the hope that "thy church may come forth out of the wilderness of darkness, and shine forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."[28]

Smith is reading his own moment in history as fulfilling the particular process or event described allegorically by the Revelator. The biblical prophecy reads more fully that "there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.… And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon. ... And the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And the *woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there* a thousand two hundred and threescore days."[29]

In the LDS edition of the Bible, the heading identifies the woman in this allegory, as have virtually all Protestant commentators, as a representation of the

church, whose flight before the forces of Satan portends the Great Apostasy. But like Fraser, Smith seems to have noticed the crucial fact that this woman is not banished from the earth—she retreats into the wilderness. There she does not perish altogether. On the contrary, she is nourished for a prolonged period of time. Smith's invocation of the language of this allegory suggests a view of church history in which many teachings and principles of the original church survived more or less intact, though clearly in retreat from the mainstream—underground, or on the peripheries of orthodoxy. As his subsequent work was to prove, Smith came to envision the Christian church as in retreat, not in oblivion. He did not interpret this coming out of the wilderness as an abrupt event, but rather as a gradual process of assimilation, differentiation and development. As a revelation *prior* to the church's formal 1830 organization indicated, the Lord's church already existed, constituted of the repentant; Smith reassured them in the voice of God that they who already "belongeth to my church . . . need not fear," Christ was about "to build it up."[30] Fittingly, the Nauvoo Temple exterior, in which Smith's work found its fullest expression, was ornamented like the wilderness woman in John's vision: with sun, moon, and stars. And Smith had said, the temple, broken down at Jerusalem's destruction to be rebuilt later, was a "Type of the church."[31]

Smith's predecessors and contemporaries believed the church in the wilderness symbolized the reality of an invisible church, where righteous

individuals, their spiritual gifts, and godly principles and practices persisted.[32] One

of the clearest confirmations of Smith's understanding of a holy church in the

wilderness that had never fully disappeared came by revelation in May 1831, when

the Lord revealed that in the background, independent of the Latter-day Saint

restoration, God had reserved unto himself "holy men" about whom Joseph knew

nothing.[33] This echoes, of course, the idea of the invisible church, and an earlier

revelation that in the latter days the Lord's work would be temporal before it was

spiritual, suggesting the temporal institution must not be confused with the

spiritual church.[34] Smith's task would involve neither simple innovation, nor *ex*

nihilo oracular pronouncements upon lost doctrines alone, but also the salvaging,

collecting, and assimilating of much that was mislaid, obscured, or neglected. This

would include doctrines, practices, sacraments, rituals, even blueprints for brick

and mortar Zions, and temples with baptisteries modeled on Solomon's temple

with its brazen sea.

A recent biographer of the great philosopher Spinoza wrote, "He rejected the

orthodoxy of his day not because he believed less, but because he believed

more."[35] Smith had a similar propensity to range widely and freely in appropriating

ideas and teachings as and where he found them. "Mormonism is truth; and every

man who embraced it felt himself at liberty to embrace every truth," he said.[36]

Mormonism, as he saw it, was about removing rather than imposing boundaries. "I stated that the most prominent difference in sentiment between the Latter-day Saints and sectarians was, that the latter were all circumscribed by some peculiar creed, which deprived its members the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time."[37]

Joseph Smith said late in his ministry, "If the Presbyterians have any truth, embrace that. If the Baptists and Methodists have truth, embrace that too. Get all the good in the world if you want to come out a pure Mormon."[38] Elsewhere, he called it "the first and fundamental principle of our holy religion" to be free "to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the dominations of one another."[39] Smith was always pushing in the direction of expansive addition rather than contracting reduction: "we don't ask any people to throw away any good they have got we ownly ask them to Come & get more."[40]

This catalog of his liberal statements on religious truth suggests that Smith's prophetic practice was neither the unstudied and erratic plagiarism of his caricaturists, nor always the epiphany-driven, receipt of "vertical revelation" imputed to him by his devoted followers. Many modern Mormons imagine a

relatively linear process of doctrinal development in the church's early years, with

Smith revealing each new doctrine to the church in orderly sequence. Smith,

however, viewed himself as both revelator and inspired synthesist, pulling truths

not only from heaven, but also from his culture, his background, and his

contemporaries. Smith believed himself to be an oracle of God, subject to

moments of heavenly encounter and the pure flow of inspiration. But he also was

insatiably eclectic in his borrowings and adaptations, with an adventuresome mind,

prone to speculation and fully comfortable with the trial and error of intellectual

effort. As he so well captured his synthetic approach, context and history might

provide him with "all the truth" but he had "an indepen[den]t rev[elation]n in the

bargain."[41]

From baptism for the dead, commonly discussed in 19[th] century texts, to

eternity of matter and eternal progression, treated by Thomas Dick, to defenses of

universal salvation found in John Taylor and Charles Chauncey, Smith

appropriated and incorporated—frequently publishing in church newspapers

accounts which exploded any presumptions of originality. Masonry was perhaps

the most conspicuous instance of his holy plagiarism. According to Benjamin

Johnson, Smith "told me Freemasonry, as at present, was the apostate endowments,

as sectarian religion was the apostate religion."[42] Masonry is to the endowment,

Smith reasoned, as sectarianism is to religion generally: Not to be discarded

wholesale. Smith joined the masons, found much of value there, and modified and recontextualized what he had found. His expressed theological rationale seems exactly modeled on Augustine's gloss of the Old Testament story of the spoiling of the Egyptians. On the night of their exodus, the children of Israel "appropriated to themselves" their enslavers' riches, "designing them for a better use," Just so, Augustine argued, the "heathen" have truths which, like gold and silver, they are "perversely and unlawfully prostituting to the worship of devils." It is the task of the Christians to "take them away from them, and to devote their proper use in preaching the gospel."[43] Smith was explicit and unabashed in his zeal to assimilate the scattered truths and practices he found, whether from contemporary writers like Thomas Dick, or groups like the Masons, and "put them to their proper use." His transparent reliance on Charles Buck, mentioned in connection with his Lectures on Faith, further attests his open willingness freely to appropriate teachings conformable to his syncretist vision.[44]

Joseph Smith's sense was that he was recuperating Christianity from its exile in the wilderness, reassembling it by gathering truth, restoring broken covenants, and adding new revelations. He would help "bring to light the things that have been revealed in all former dispensations, also other things that have not been before revealed."[45] Sidney Rigdon and the Pratt brothers, in particular, joined in the enterprise of theologizing, speculating, interpretation, and systematizing. What

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they all shared was the firm belief that an original church, "once indeed beautiful, pure, and intelligent;--clothed with the power and spirit of God," by their day was "a picture of ruin and desolation." It now lay "in broken fragments scattered, rent, and disjointed;" but Smith and Taylor and others of their generation believed "the shattered remnants of its ancient glory" were all around.[46] For those with eyes to see, the world was replete with these scattered "fragments of Mormonism."[47] This, ultimately, was the meaning of Smith's notion that the temple of Jerusalem, its destruction and rebuilding, was a type of the church. With the temple, as with the metaphorical "ancient palace" now reduced to ruins, to which they also compared the primitive church, the work of restoration would entail bringing together the new and the old, the excavation and assemblage of what was sound and the replacement and incorporation of what had been irredeemably lost or corrupted from Eden forward.[48]

3. Reformation

Finally, a third historical narrative I believe to be in need of revisiting and revision—and that is the long-standing LDS view that the Reformation is closer is spirit and substance to the Mormon tradition than the Catholic faith. Such a view, however, has several problems. First, because is so many substantive areas, Reformation theology is further removed from Mormonism than are

Roman Catholic teachings. This characterization is also strikingly problematic in light of Joseph Smith's last recorded public sermon, wherein he said, "the old Catholic Church is worth more than all" the other sects.[49] John Taylor made a statement in a similar spirit that would be surprising to 20th century Mormons. "There were [individuals] in those dark ages who could commune with God, and who, by the by the power of faith, could draw aside the curtain of eternity and gaze upon the invisible world . There were [those] who could gaze upon the face of God, have the ministering of angels, and unfold the future destinies of the world. If those were dark ages …I pray God to give me a little darkness."[50]

The longstanding sense that Mormonism exists across an unbreachable theological divide from Catholicism has probably been aided by misreading of Smith's own account of the First Vision. There, his famously impolitic words attributed to deity described the Christian creeds as "an abomination." Countless Mormons have assumed this was a blanket condemnation of the early Christian creeds—the Nicene, the Athanasian, perhaps others. But the creedal formulation most attacked by early Mormon writers had nothing to do with the Athanasian or Nicene debates; it was the Protestant wording of the Anglican Thirty Nine Articles (1563) that was the epicenter of controversy. Some of the older Christian creeds imply an ethereal, bodiless God, but the Articles made it explicit: "There is but one

only living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions [incorporeus, impartibilis, impassibilis]."[51] This was the formulation explicitly attacked again and again in the writings of early Mormons like Parley Pratt. In this instance, at least, Mormon thinkers clearly believed Reformation thought aggravated, rather than mitigated, theological error.

Let me in conclusion give some examples of where, on matters of deep theological import, the Reformation reconstructed doctrine in ways that were further removed from Mormon theological understanding than the Catholic teachings that preceded them.

1. Salvation as a project

In an important sense, salvation in Mormon doctrine is not a gift, neither is it a reward that humans earn. Nor is it attainable through the individual's unaided efforts. Self-elevation from an alienated and sinful condition is beyond human reach, and no works mortals perform can make Christ's intervention obligatory or necessary on His part. His intervention is a free gift which is beyond human capacity to deserve or repay. But the salvation it portends is itself equally beyond his capacity to either impose or bestow upon us. Eternal life, the kind and quality of life that God lives, is a natural and inevitable consequence of compliance with

eternal principles, just as God's own standing as God is the natural and inevitable consequence of His perfect harmony with eternal law. That God's merciful inclinations are circumscribed and delimited by law is clearly set forth in a revelation of Joseph Smith. "That which is governed by law is also preserved by law and perfected and sanctified by the same. That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, but seeketh to become a law unto itself, and willeth to abide in sin, … *cannot be sanctified by* law, neither by *mercy*, justice, or judgment. Therefore they must remain filthy still."[52] It isn't law itself, but the sanctity of choice (the "will" to *abide* by law or not) that constrains the consequences of Christ's grace.

2. Role of Grace and Freedom

The Catholic church convened a Council of Trent in order to respond to the onslaught of the Reformation and clarify its own theology of salvation. In a session on the doctrine of justification in 1547, the Catholic church's position was clearly differentiated from Protestant versions. Canon 11 specifically condemned the idea that "people are justified . . . solely by the by the attribution of Christ's justice, or by the forgiveness of sins alone," and Canon 12 repudiated the idea that justifying faith is "nothing else but trust in the divine mercy, which pardons sins because of Christ." The role of works was affirmed by Canon 24, which affirmed that "good

works" are the "cause of increase" of personal righteousness. The place of grace in

Catholic soteriology was explained in Canons 7 and 32.[53]

Those who turn to God, can only do so with "God's grace inciting and

helping them." Nevertheless, Belief that unaided human goodness leading to

salvation is possible constituted one of the Pelagian heresies. Virtually all

Christians, then, predicate salvation on the grace of Christ. The major point of

dispute is whether grace is the direct and sole factor in that salvation or whether

grace is what makes possible an individual's choices and works that in turn qualify

one for salvation. Mormonism finds congruence, for instance, with the position of

Cardinal John Henry Newman, who said, "Good works . . . are required, not as if

they had any merit of their own, nor as if they could . . . purchase heaven for us."

But through "our acts of charity, self-denial, and forbearance" we will become

"charitable, self-denying, and forbearing. . . . These holy works will be the means

of making our hearts holy, and of preparing us for the future presence of God."[54] In

LDS thought, only conformity to eternal laws and principles can sanctify us,

because only conformity to law creates the causal conditions under which our

character is transformed in accordance with our choices. But those choices are real,

deeply rooted in a conception of freedom so emphatic that Smith said existence

itself is contingent on moral independence.[55]

3. Nature of authority and Views on sacraments (ordinances)

I have already briefly alluded to this point. Protestants generally see a church sacrament (which Mormons call an ordinance) as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." Catholics was them as the "instrumental channels of God's grace to humanity."[56]

All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him whom I have appointed on the earth to hold this power are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead;
(Doctrine and Covenants 132:7)

4. Connection of living and dead

In 1843, the church came under attack for its doctrine of baptism for the dead. "You are as bad as the papists," said some, detecting a suspicious similarity with the doctrine of purgatory. Rather than distance the practice from what contemporaries labeled an apostate papist teaching, the LDS editor Thomas Ward responded: "We believe, . . . the Roman church . . . has traces of many glorious principles that were once in the church of Christ, of which . . . the protestant world knows nothing."[57] In fact, the entire mammoth work of redeeming the dead, absolutely foundational to Mormon theology, represented a direct challenge to the

Protestant severing of this worldly religion and post-mortal salvation, a re-embrace of the continuity so central to Catholic thought.

5. On Human Depravity and Human Potential

In Mormon thought, mortals are born neither good nor evil, but free as a consequence of the atonement. In the Book of Moses, humans are invited to participate in the process of divinization, eventuating in a condition that entails both the joy known to God, and also his infinite sorrow born of perfect empathy. But fellowship with the Gods and each other in familial relationship is the end of Mormon striving. Here again, Latter-day Saints find themselves on the side of a theological divide that has grown greater rather than narrower with post-Reformation developments that actually had roots in the early middle ages.

The twin condemnation of Pelagius and Origen, writes one scholar, ensured the supremacy "of a Christian theology whose central concerns were human sinfulness, not human potentiality; divine determination, not human freedom and responsibility; God's mystery, not God's justice. Christianity was perhaps poorer for their suppression."[4] Krister Stendahl traces Protestantism's fixation on the "plagued conscience" to a misreading of Paul. It is weakness, not sin, that is Paul's preoccupation he writes. For Augustine, writing three centuries after Paul, and then

more emphatically for the Reformers over a thousand years later, sinfulness and guilt assumed center stage in the Christian drama.[58]

However, in the face of Luther's radical pessimism, the council of Trent held it false that "all acts done prior to justification, no matter for what reason, are either truly sins or deserve God's hatred." And "the good deeds of a person," though enabled by God's grace, are "also the good merits of the one justified," and therefore that person does "truly merit . . . the obtaining of his own eternal life."[59] Or in the words of perhaps the greatest of Catholic mystics, Julian of Norwich, sin is not a malicious instantiation of human depravity; rather, sin is "behovely," or needful, an occasion for "profitable" learning rather than "dyspeyer,"[60] and a forgivable consequence of a bold venturing forth into the crucible of mortality, a risk undertaken out of love "and good wylle."[61]

Faith, Reason, and God's Knowability

Critics like Harold Bloom refer to Mormonism as an American Gnosticism. That may be only slight overstatement; Smith recurrently connected salvation to knowledge, and in collapsing cosmological dualism, constituted reality as a conflated realm of heaven and earth, spirit and matter, alike fully conformable to and accessible by reason. (Smith dismissed theological positions he considered

"contrary to a rational mind & reason."[62]) He would have heartily seconded the statement from the Catholic Dei Filius (of 1870): "Between faith and reason no true dissension can ever exist."[63]

For this reason, and given Smith's ontological collapse of dualism, God is not the distant, unknowable One.[64] Smith would have seconded Thomas More's fears of a radical incommensurability between God and human ways of knowing he thought Protestantism portended. Much of Smith's most radical theology, of course, stands in emphatic contrast to the "wholly other" description of God so dominant in Protestant thought.

Heavenly Divine

Mormons do not belief in the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption of Mary. But in Mormon conceptualizing of a Heavenly Mother, however tentative, one can surely see a kindred yearning to complete the Heavenly Family, find place in our respective theologies for the Feminine Divine, and assent to Goethe's wise insight, that "das ewig Weibliche zieht uns hinan." It is striking to me—more so to my wife perhaps—that the first recorded instance of this idea in Mormonism refers to that divine entity as the Queen of Heaven, a term I think those on this campus have very close to their hearts—even if they interpret it rather differently.

Certainly this list is far from comprehensive. Neither do I intend to promote

a kind of search for decontextualized parallels and points of superficial

congruence. I hope instead I have suggested two things. First, that the sometimes

triumphalist and exceptionalist strains in Mormon thought and rhetoric about the

Great Apostasy is opposed by a powerful countercurrent of inclusiveness,

openness, and receptiveness to theological illumination coming from all faiths and

traditions. And second, that Catholic thought in particular should find greater

resonance with Mormons than our previous narratives have promoted or even

allowed.

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[1] James Talmage's treatment, The Great Apostasy, is only the most extensive and famous in Mormon circles.
[2] Charles Buck, A Theological Dictionary (Philadelphia: Joseph Woodward, 1830), 28.
[3] "To N. C. Saxton," 4 January 1833, in Jessee, Personal Writings, 296.
[4] "Millennium," EMS 2.17 (February 1834): 131.
[5] "To Saxton," Jessee, Personal Writings, 296.
[6] "Ordinances of the gospel," in Buck, Theological Dictionary, 418.
[7] 1835 D&C 4:3 (D&C 84:20-21).
[8] JSP-H1, 214
[9] Cited in Wigger, Taking Heaven, 23.
[10] Christopher C. Jones, , "The Power and Form of Godliness: Methodist Conversion Narratives and Joseph Smith's First Vision," Journal of Mormon History 37.2 (spring 2011): 89. Jones' article shows the substantial influence of Methodism on Joseph Smith and early Mormon understanding and rhetoric of conversion.
[11] Wigger, Taking Heaven, 16. As an example of this contrasting emphasis, Wesley wrote of the need to "build [members] up to that Holiness, without which they cannot see the Lord;" For Smith, purity of heart was requisite (1835 D&C 81:4 {D&C 97:16}), but he also recorded that without "the ordinances . . . and the authority of the priesthood . . . no man can see the face of God" (1835 D&C 4:3 {D&C 84:21-22}).
[12] Benjamin Winchester, The History of the Priesthood from the Beginning of the World to the Present Time (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking & Guilpert, 1843), iii, 17, 74.
[13] 1844 D&C 103:13 (D&C 124:40).
[14] Orson Pratt, An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840).
[15] Parley P. Pratt, Voice of Warning and Instruction to all People (New York: Sandford, 1837), 147.
[16] The motto is attributable to Thomas Stone, who made it a principle of his 1809 manifesto, "Declaration and Address": "Nothing ought to be received into the faith or worship of the Church . . . that is not as old as the New Testament" (Washington: Brown and Sample, 1809). See W. A. Morris, ed., The Writings of Alexander Campbell (Austin: von Boeckmann, 1896), vii.
[17] Ethan Smith, View of the Trinity (Poultney, Vermont: Smith & Shute, 1824), vii.
[18] "To the Most Vertuous and Noble Queen," Geneva Bible. Facsimile of the 1560 edition. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969, iii.

[19] Thomas Russell, ed., Works of John Owen (London: Richard Baynes, 1826), 15:33.

[20] Hughes and Allen, Illusions, 21.

[21] Revelation 12:6, 14.

[22] Alexander Fraser, Key to the Prophecies of the Old and New Testaments, which are not yet accomplished (Philadelphia: John Bioren, 1802 [1795]), 157, 159.

[23] Joseph Milner, The History of the Church of Christ, vol.1 (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1834), v; vol. 2 (Boston: Farrand, Mallory, and Co., 1809), v. On early Mormon familiarity with Milner, see Matthew Bowman, "Biblical Histories and Joseph Smith," paper delivered at 2013 Church History Conference.

[24] Milner, History, 2:538.

[25] "The Early Degeneracy of the Methodists," The Telescope 1.48 (30 April 1825): 189.

[26] BC 4:5.

[27] 1835 D&C 32:3 (D&C 5:14).

[28] BC 35:4 (D&C 33:5); D&C 109:73.

[29] Revelation 12:1, 3, 4, 6 (KJV).

[30] BC 9:13-14 (D&C 10:52-55).

[31] The architectural parallel was pointed out to me by Joseph Spencer. Personal correspondence. Smith's typology was expressed in Journals, 1 January 1843, The Joseph Smith Papers: Journals Vol. 2, eds. Andrew H . Hedges, Alex D. Smith, Richard Lloyd Anderson (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), 208.

[32] Two of many examples would be John Calvin, who contrasted the invisible church, consisting of "the elect who have existed from the beginning of the world," with "the whole body of mankind scattered throughout the world, who profess to worship one God and Christ" (Institutes 4.1.7, p. 677); and Jacob Boehme, who spoke of the *Kirche ohne Mauer* [church without walls] as a place where "all rejoice to have the one mother [Sophia or Wisdom]" and live in mutual love and support, as distinct from the tainted and unstable institutional church (Letter 46, in Robin Waterfield, ed., Jacob Boehme (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2001), 16.

[33] EMS 1.6 (November 1832): 7 (D&C 49.8).

[34] EMS 1.4 (September 1832):2 (D&C 29:32).

[35] Matthew Stewart, The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World (New York: Norton, 2006), 38.

[36] Jessee, Personal Writings, 457-58.

[37] MHC D-1, 1433.

[38] The text is corrupt, but the sense is plain: "Presbyterians any truth. embrace that. Baptist. Methodist &c. get all the good in the world. come out a pure Mormon." WJS, 234.

[39] "To Isaac Galland," in Jessee, Personal Writings, 458.

[40] WJS, 159. For extended treatment of this theme in Smith's thought, and his adaptation of Masonic ritual in particular, see Don Bradley, "'The Grand Fundamental Principles of Mormonism': Joseph Smith's Unfinished Reformation," Sunstone 141 (April 2006): 32-41.

[41] WJS, 382.

[42] Benjamin F. Johnson, My Life's Review (np: Johnson Family Organization, 1997), 85.

[43] Augustine, On Christian Doctrine II.xl.60, trans. J. F. Shaw, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First series, ed. Philip Schaff (Edinburgn: T&T Clark, 1993), 2:554.

[44] For Buck's appropriation in early Mormonism, see Benjamin E. Park, "Reasonings Sufficient': Joseph Smith, Thomas Dick, and the Context(s) of Early Mormonism," Journal of Early Mormon History 38 (summer 2012): 210-24.

[45] TS 2.24 (15 October 1841): 578.

[46] "The Religion of the Ancients," TS 4.9 (15 March 1843): 136.

[47] Not the Prophet, S.T.P., "To the Editor," TS 5.8 (15 April 1844): 503. Samuel Brown points out that what Charles Buck pointed out in his theological dictionary as early Christian heresies, Mormons were glad to claim as some of these lost fragments. See Brown and Matthew Bowman, "Joseph Smith and Charles Buck: Heresy and the Living Witness of History," unpublished ms. This view has been propounded before, though it has never gained much traction in contemporary Mormon culture. Probably with the above article in mind, Joseph F. Smith said "if we find truth in broken fragments through the ages, it may be set down as an incontrovertible fact that it originated at the fountain, and was given to philosophers, inventors, patriots, reformers, and prophets by the inspiration of God." Using the same language, Hugh Nibley made this view his guiding hermeneutic, writing that Smith "recognized a primal archaic order which had produced all manner of broken fragments and scattered traditions." (Joseph F. Smith,

Gospel Doctrine {Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 191}, 38). Hugh W. Nibley, Temple and Cosmos, ed. Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 82.

[48] In a Catholic theologian's words, Mormons "pick up the detritus that was jettisoned" along the way to the ecumenical creeds and "recycle these discarded beliefs into a shining, novel creation of their own." Stephen Webb, Jesus Christ, Eternal God (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 245.

[49] WJS, 381-82. Smith was certainly correct, from a Mormon perspective. Contrary to a popular Mormon narrative that sees the Reformation as paving the way for the LDS Restoration, Luther, Calvin, and others in fact shaped Reformation theology in a direction much further removed from the teachings Smith would propound than Catholicism ever was. They did this by emphasizing a God "without body, parts, or passions," human depravity, the Bible as the only source of authority, and salvation by faith alone.

[50] John Taylor, Journal of Discourses, 26 vols., reported by G. D. Watt et al. (Liverpool: F.D. and S. W. Richards, et al., 1851-1886; reprint, Salt Lake City: n.p., 1974), 16:197-98.

[51] Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom: The Evangelical Protestant Creeds (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 487.

[52] 1835 D&C 7:8 (D&C 88:34-35).

[53] C&C, 2: 836-39.

[54] John Henry Newman, Selection, Adapted to the Seasons of the Ecclesiastical Year (London: Longmans, Green, and Co.: 1895), 282.

[55] All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also. Otherwise, there is no existence. D&C 93:30.

[56] Peter Marshall, The Reformation: A Very Short Introduction (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 51.

[57] MS 3.11 (March 1843): 177.

[58] Krister Stendahl, Paul among Jews and Gentiles (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 40–41; 85.

[59] C&C, 2:828.

[60] Julian Showings, XVI.78, p. 117.

[61] Julian, Showings XIV.51, p. 71.

[62] Words, 61. (1841)

[63] Dei Filius cap. 4. Cf All the articles of our Christian faith, which God has revealed to us in His Word, are in presence of reason sheerly impossible, absurd, and false." And "Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has."

[64] Kierkegaard referred to the "infinite qualitative difference" between the human and the divine, which idea found historical grounding in the doctrine of creation ex nihilo. Emil Brunner claimed there is "no greater sense of distance than that which lies in the words Creator-Creation…. Man … is separated by an abyss from the Divine manner of being. The greatest dissimilarity between two things which we can express at all . . . is that between the Creator and that which is created." (Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953), 90)