

GETHSEMANE AND ATONEMENT AGAIN

Grant Adamson

In his 2022 *Dialogue* article “The Garden Atonement and the Mormon Cross Taboo,” Jeremy Christiansen adds to a fuller understanding of LDS reception history of the Lukan account of “Gethsemane,” namely Jesus’ agony and sweat/blood in the garden on the eve of the Crucifixion (Luke 22:43–44; Mosiah 3:7; D&C 19:15–19).¹ He surveys and synthesizes a wide range of sources not limited to early Mormon scripture. Further, Christiansen astutely associates this aspect of LDS Christology with certain social factors: anti-Catholic animus such as opposition to the cross/crucifix in art and jewelry, among other things, and the need for religious movements to distinguish themselves from their rivals. With respect to the cross taboo in Mormonism, he builds on Michael Reed’s book *Banishing the Cross*.² Concerning Gethsemane, one of the previous articles he engages with is mine, which gives me a chance to refine my own ideas.³

1. Jeremy M. Christiansen, “The Garden Atonement and the Mormon Cross Taboo,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 55, no. 4 (2002): 89–116. As often noted, the placename “Gethsemane” technically only occurs in the Markan and then Matthean accounts of the garden scene, not the Lukan or Johannine, and the place is actually only called a “garden” in the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, even in biblical studies it is standard practice to refer to those pericopes collectively; see Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (New York: American Bible Society, 1985), 297–98.

2. Michael G. Reed, *Banishing the Cross: The Emergence of the Mormon Taboo* (Independence, Mo.: John Whitmer Books, 2012).

3. Grant Adamson, “Luke 22:43–44 and the Mormon Jesus: Protestant Past, KJV-Only Present,” *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 9, no. 1 (2022): 57–73.

After careful consideration, I find Christiansen's treatment of early Mormonism to be insufficient, and I'm unconvinced by the grand narrative, according to which the LDS movement started with a "cross-centric" understanding of "the" atonement and only shifted toward a garden atonement in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Besides responding to Christiansen's article specifically, I will also propose and deploy a system of classification that should be of general utility for categorizing the importance of the garden relative to the cross within the soteriology of any denomination. Before I conclude, I'll hazard a sketch of how Mormon belief in garden atonement developed out of Anglophone Protestantism from the 1820s and '30s to now.

Categories

My first disagreement is with Christiansen's binary framework, which either involves "the cross," meaning "cross-centric atonement," or "the garden atonement." Likewise, his analysis suggests either that Jesus' suffering and bleeding in the garden are anticipatory of the Crucifixion (thus no atonement in Gethsemane at all) or expiatory (hence "the garden atonement"), not both. Christiansen seems to allow for little to no gradation and only the slightest overlap between the garden and the cross.⁴

Moving beyond a binary either/or, I propose a sliding scale of five increments that I will label as:

- garden-excluded (with the cross alone in sight),
- garden-included (with the cross in central view),

4. His most common usage is "garden atonement" (thirty-nine times altogether, twenty-one times with "the"). As for his use of the phrase "garden atonement theory," that is a would-be neologism, to my knowledge. In the history of Christian thought, the various theories of atonement have not been named for theological events from the life of Jesus (incarnation, passion, descent to "hell," resurrection); rather, they have been named for conceptual models, often entailing metaphors (e.g., the fishhook). Different models may focus more on this or that Jesus event, while holding them all in some tension, especially the crucifixion and resurrection, but the theories are named for the conceptual models not the events. See Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories: A Way through the Maze* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2014).

- garden-included and -balanced (with the cross in equal focus),
- garden-included and -centered (with the cross to the side though hardly out of sight),
- garden-only (with the cross excluded).

The extremes at the opposite ends of the spectrum are rarely attested in the global history of Christianity, I would guess—that is, garden-excluded versus garden-only. If the total evidence from all Christianities, ancient to modern, were categorized according to this scale, I expect the majority would fall along the three middle increments, gradations of both-and, not binaries of either/or: that is, garden-included, -balanced, -centered. The upshot is that even an understanding of Christian salvation that has the cross in central view and that merely includes the garden does still include a form of garden atonement; it's just that Jesus is understood to atone more on Calvary than Gethsemane in that case.⁵

5. I know of no comprehensive much less exhaustive treatment of Gethsemane in Christian belief and practice, but see Karl Olav Sandnes, *Early Christian Discourses on Jesus' Prayer at Gethsemane: Courageous, Committed, Cowardly?* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Kevin Madigan, *The Passions of Christ in High-Medieval Thought: An Essay on Christological Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), chaps. 6–7; as well as Adam J. Johnson, ed., *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 216, 220, 470; Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 26, 30. Two Western European textual landmarks were written by the Dutch and English humanist friends Erasmus (b. 1466, d. 1536) and Thomas More (b. 1478, d. 1535), in Latin. Translation of Erasmus: “A Short Debate concerning the Distress, Alarm, and Sorrow of Jesus,” in *Collected Works of Erasmus: Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, volume 70, edited by John W. O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 13–67. Translation of More: “The Sadness, the Weariness, the Fear, and the Prayer of Christ before He Was Taken Prisoner,” in *The Essential Works of Thomas More*, edited by Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2020), 1251–1301. Among other points made in that pair of treatises, Erasmus rejects the distinction between the “propassion” and the “passion,” thereby merging the garden and the cross, while More likewise stresses the unity of Jesus' salvific suffering: “both bodily” torment on Calvary “and mental” torment in Gethsemane.

Pre-Mormon Commentary on the Bible

In order to argue for LDS novelty, Christiansen downplays, even disregards, the existence of any garden atonement in or outside of LDS belief before the late 1800s. He thinks “the first appearance . . . is likely in John Taylor’s 1882 book, *Mediation and Atonement*.”⁶ The classification system that I propose above may help to clarify our discord about the evaluation of examples of belief in garden atonement from the late 1600s, 1700s, and early 1800s. Engaging with me, Christiansen writes: “Adamson contends that other Christians [prior to Joseph Smith],” namely, well-known Protestant exegetes Matthew Henry, Philip Doddridge, Thomas Scott, and Adam Clarke, “may have held a garden atonement theory.”⁷ How much uncertainly are we dealing with here? Can we be more confident than “may have”? Using my sliding scale, I’ll rehearse the evidence from these biblical commentators and hopefully eliminate some confusion.

I’ll go in chronological order, by the commentator’s date of birth, and I’ll quote reprint editions that were circulating closer to Joseph Smith’s day. These were widely read commentaries, far from obscure.⁸

Matthew Henry (b. 1662, d. 1714):

We have here [in Luke 22:39–46] the awful story of Christ’s agony in the garden. . . . In it Christ accommodated himself to that part of his undertaking which he was now entering upon—the making of his soul an offering for sin [see Isaiah 53:10]. He afflicted his own soul with grief for the sin he was to satisfy for [see Isaiah 53:4, 7], and [with] an apprehension of the wrath of God to which man had by sin made himself obnoxious, which he was pleased as a Sacrifice to admit the impression of, the consuming of a sacrifice with fire from heaven, being the surest token of its acceptance. In it Christ entered the lists with the

6. Christiansen, “Garden Atonement,” 103.

7. Christiansen, “Garden Atonement,” 102.

8. Their popularity: Adamson, “Luke 22:43–44 and the Mormon Jesus,” 56n9.

powers of darkness, gave them all the advantages they could desire, and yet conquered them. . . . Sweat came in with sin, and was a branch of the curse, Gen. 3. 19. And therefore when Christ was made Sin and a Curse for us, he underwent a grievous sweat [see Luke 22:44], that in the sweat of his face [see Genesis 3:19] we might eat bread [i.e., the Eucharist], and that he might sanctify and sweeten all our trials to us. It is some dispute among the critics, whether this sweat is only compared to drops of blood, being much thicker than drops of sweat commonly are, the pores of the body being more than ordinarily opened; or, that real blood out of the capillary veins mingled with it, so that it was in colour like blood, and might truly be called a bloody sweat; the matter is not so great. Some reckon this one of the times when Christ shed his blood for us [i.e., the other time being the crucifixion], for without shedding of blood there is no remission. Every pore was as it were a bleeding wound, and his blood stained all his raiment.⁹

On my sliding scale, I would categorize this understanding of atonement in Henry's exegesis as garden-included and perhaps garden-balanced, though not garden-centered. Note how he blends the garden and cross together so that Jesus' sweat is associated with the reversal of the curse of Adam in Genesis 3 and with the presumably eucharistic bread symbolizing Jesus' crucified body. Note also how he imports the terminology of "sacrifice" for "sin" into Gethsemane: he identifies the Lukan Jesus sweating blood in the garden with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Via paraphrase of even earlier exegetes, Henry describes Jesus' bloody sweat as a "shedding of blood," thus collapsing any firm distinction between the garden and the cross. Yes, Jesus is "apprehensive" about his death, and of course the rest of the atonement will soon follow, but much more is going on than fear and anxiety; Jesus already starts to shed blood and atone in Luke's garden, as his clothing is saturated with bloody sweat.

9. Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament . . . with Practical Remarks and Observations* (repr., New York: R. Carter, 1827) 4:541–42. For Henry's commentary on the Lukan crucifixion, see 4:547–52.

Philip Doddridge (b. 1702, d. 1751):

If even Christ himself was so depressed with sorrow and amazement, and the distress and anguish he endured were such, that in his agony the sweat ran from him like great drops of blood [see Luke 22:44], when our iniquities were laid upon him, and it pleased the Father to bruise him, and to put him to grief [see Isaiah 53:5–6, 10]; how must the sinner then be filled with horror, and with what dreadful agonies of anguish and despair will he be overwhelmed, when he shall bear the burden of his own iniquities, and God shall pour out all his wrath upon him?¹⁰

By itself, this statement could be classified as garden-centered since the cross is not immediately mentioned, but naturally the genre must be kept in mind: verse-by-verse commentary on the Bible. Doddridge is not writing a theological treatise on atonement, and so things should not be pressed too far. Nevertheless, this is another example of the Lukan Jesus, bleeding and atoning in the garden, as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. What is more, Doddridge warns the sinful that they will suffer as Jesus did—in Luke’s agonizing garden!

Thomas Scott (b. 1747, d. 1821):

The appearance of a holy angel to our Lord, in this conflict with the powers of darkness, and when he was weighed down with the feeling of the wrath of God against our sins, was an intimation of approaching victory. . . . We cannot expect to escape tribulations and ill usage, in a world which numbered the Lord of glory with the worst of malefactors [i.e., at the crucifixion], if indeed we profess his truth and obey his commandments: but if we pray fervently that we “may not enter into temptation” [e.g., Luke 22:40], we shall either be preserved from the severer trials, or be enabled under them to say, “Not my will but thine be done” [Luke 22:42]. And surely, when we contemplate the Redeemer “in an agony, praying more earnestly” [Luke 22:44], and “his sweat like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” [Luke 22:44], while “he was bruised for our iniquities” [Isaiah 53:5]; we shall pray also to

10. Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor; Or, A Paraphrase and Version of the New Testament, with Critical Notes, and a Practical Improvement of Each Section* (repr., Charlestown, Mass.: S. Etheridge, 1807), 2:485.

be enabled “to resist unto blood, striving against sin” [Hebrews 12:4], if we should ever be called to it.¹¹

This strikes me as garden-balanced at the least. It could be categorized as garden-centered. Scott has the cross in sight, to be sure; he plainly alludes to Jesus being crucified with the two bandits, thieves, or malefactors. But the garden is just as much the focus of Scott’s view, if not more. Here yet again, the Lukan Jesus sweating blood in Gethsemane is identified with the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Alongside the soteriological thought, Scott’s moralizing lesson for the reader is to be prepared to meet with trials in life, even to bleed and die like Jesus as a martyr. Notably, though, the only blood of Jesus in near sight is his bloody sweat.

Adam Clarke (b. 1762, d. 1832):

Now, the grand expiatory sacrifice begins to be offered: in this garden Jesus enters fully into the sacerdotal office [see Hebrews 4:14–5:10]; and now on the altar of his immaculate divinity, begins to offer his own body—his own life—a lamb without spot, for the sin of the world [see Revelation 5:6, 8, 12–13, etc.; John 1:29, 36; 1 Peter 1:19]. St. Luke observes, chap. xxii 43, 44. that there appeared unto him an angel from heaven strengthening him; and that being in an agony, his sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground. How exquisite must this anguish have been, when it forced the very blood through the coats of the veins, and enlarged the pores in such a preternatural manner, as to cause them to empty it out in large successive drops! In my opinion, the principal part of the redemption price was paid in this unprecedented and indescribable agony.¹²

11. Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, According to the Authorized Version; with Explanatory Notes, Practical Observations, and Copious Marginal References* (repr., Boston: S. T. Armstrong, 1827) 5:431, 434.

12. Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The Text Carefully Printed from the Most Correct Copies of the Present Authorized Version . . . With a Commentary and Critical Notes. Designed as a Help to a Better Understanding of the Sacred Writings* (repr., New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1825), 1:237.

There isn't the slightest ambiguity here. Clarke has Jesus perform an expiation, a priestly offering of his own blood, right in the Lukan garden. Clarke even ventures that this bleeding outweighs that of the cross. The commentator's understanding of atonement is unmistakably garden-centered. It does not merely include the garden, since Clarke estimates that Jesus pays "the principal part of the redemption price" in Gethsemane rather than on Calvary. Nor is it garden-only, with the cross excluded, since Clarke allows for some lesser portion of the price to be paid during the subsequent crucifixion. To repeat, Clarke's understanding is manifestly garden-centered.

So just within this small sample set of data from popular Anglophone commentaries on the Bible, we have the garden overtly centered by one commentator (Clarke), either centered or balanced by another (Doddridge), balanced by yet another (Scott), and either balanced or at least included by one more (Henry). All of these understandings of atonement are gradations of both-and, involving both the garden and the cross. This evidence of pre-Mormon examples should then challenge the claim that "the garden atonement" appears in Mormonism late, at the end of the 1800s, somewhat coincident with the initial rise of the LDS cross taboo at the turn of the century.

Joseph Smith's Parabiblical Emphasis

My third critique is that I think Christiansen does not adequately interpret LDS scripture. His analysis suggests that references to garden atonement in key passages within the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, Mosiah 3 and D&C 19, are outliers, separate from Joseph Smith's teachings. The reality is that they are foundational: both were dictated if not also composed by Smith and both are early, from the year 1829.

When Mosiah 3 and D&C 19 are situated properly, chronologically, the picture that emerges is one of continuity with garden-inclusive Protestant understandings of atonement. Biblical commentators before

Smith had included the Lukan garden in their soteriological statements, distributing the atonement between Gethsemane and Calvary. Some of them went so far as to balance the garden with the cross, while others went even further by making the garden the center of view. If Smith and other early Mormons also believed in a form of garden atonement, that ought to be small wonder. I find no reason not to assume that the Latter-day Saint prophet was influenced by such commentators, supposing he had access to them and/or heard them read and adapted in sermons and preaching.¹³ A product of his era, in any event, Smith also understood Jesus' suffering and bleeding in Gethsemane as an atonement in these two important passages from Mosiah 3 and D&C 19.

Mosiah 3 contains an angelic prophecy of Jesus that is iterative in that it loops back to the advent. Iteration one, in verses 5–7, spans the incarnation/birth and the passion/atonement:

5. For behold, the time cometh and is not far distant that with power the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, which was and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay [see John 1:1–2, 14] and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. 6. And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwelleth in the hearts of the children of men. 7. And lo, he shall suffer temptations and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore [see Luke 22:44], so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.¹⁴

13. For examples of possible influence, see Adamson, "Luke 22:43–44 and the Mormon Jesus," 59n24, 60n29.

14. Quotations from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

Iteration two, in verses 8–10, does the same, spanning the incarnation/birth and the passion/atonement, but then proceeds to the resurrection and eschaton as well:

8. And he shall be called Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning [see John 1:3]; and his mother shall be called Mary. 9. And lo, he cometh unto his own that salvation might come unto the children of men, even through faith on his name [see John 1:11]. And even after all this, they shall consider him as a man and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him and shall crucify him. 10. And he shall rise the third day from the dead; and behold, he standeth to judge the world. And behold, all these things are done that a righteous judgement might come upon the children of men.

The chapter continues with references to the blood and atonement of Jesus: “his blood atoneth” (Mosiah 3:11); “the atonement of his blood” (Mosiah 3:15); “the blood of Christ atoneth” (Mosiah 3:16); “the atoning blood of Christ (Mosiah 3:18); “the atonement of Christ” (Mosiah 3:19).

Christiansen thinks atonement in Mosiah 3 is limited to “Christ’s death, crucifixion, and resurrection in verses 9, and 11;” he does not think verse 7 is included.¹⁵ His interpretation misses the iterative structure of the prophecy, where Jesus bleeds “from every pore” in the first iteration, in verse 7, and then is crucified in the second, in verse 9. Moreover, Christiansen has to overlook that the only bleeding mentioned in either iteration is the bloody pores in the Lukan garden of verse 7. Technically, there is not a word about blood in connection with the crucifixion in verse 9. The most obvious antecedent for all the references to the blood and atonement of Jesus in the rest of the chapter (verses 11, 15, 16, 18, 19) is verse 7: “for behold, blood cometh from every pore [see Luke 22:44], so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people,” verbiage that is synonymous with suffering and atonement for sin.

15. Christiansen, “Garden Atonement,” 101.

On my sliding scale, I would categorize the understanding of atonement in Mosiah 3 as garden-centered, although it's not as pronounced as the example from Adam Clarke's commentary. The garden emphasis is most apparent when the words about the passion/atonement in both iterations and verses are set next to each other:

7. And lo, he shall suffer temptations and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore [cf. Luke 22:44], so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people.

9. . . . and [they] shall scourge him and shall crucify him.

There's no denying the emphasis. Verse 7 is longer, even if we skip over the initial sentence and begin at the semicolon. It's more descriptive. It mentions Jesus' profuse bleeding. None of that applies to verse 9. Please note that I am not pushing for another dichotomous interpretation. Joseph Smith hasn't excluded the cross here, much as Adam Clarke didn't exclude it when he commented that the harrowing night in Gethsemane was the time and location at which "the principal part of the redemption price was paid." The atonement in Mosiah 3 is distributed, albeit unevenly, between the garden and the cross: Jesus suffers, explicitly bleeds, and implicitly atones in the garden in verse 7; he also suffers, implicitly bleeds, and implicitly atones on the cross in verse 9. Smith's understanding in Mosiah 3 is both-and, involving both the garden and the cross, not either/or. Once more, I would classify this as garden-centered.

D&C 19 comes from the same year as Mosiah 3. Smith dictated them within a few months of one another.¹⁶ Instead of a prophecy set centuries in the past, however, D&C 19 contains a revelation from the resurrected Jesus, who speaks retrospectively about the suffering and atonement he underwent some two millennia ago:

1. . . . I am he, the beginning and the end: Yea, Alpha and Omega, Christ the Lord, the Redeemer of the world: 2. I having accomplished

16. Larry E. Morris, *A Documentary History of the Book of Mormon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 486.

and finished the will of him whose I am, even the Father: Having done this, that I might subdue all things unto myself: 3. Retaining all power, even to the destroying of satan and his works at the end of the world, and the last great day of judgment . . . 4. And surely every man must repent or suffer, for I God am endless . . .

15. Wherefore, I command you by my name and by my Almighty power, that you repent: repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore: How sore you know not! How exquisite you know not! Yea, how hard to bear you know not! 16. For behold, I God have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer, if they would repent, 17. but if they would not repent they must suffer even as I: 18. Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore [see Luke 22:44], both body and spirit: And would that I might not drink the bitter cup [e.g., Luke 22:42], and shrink: 19. Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men [i.e., at the crucifixion]: 20. Wherefore, I command you again by my Almighty power, that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit.¹⁷

The revelation then concludes with sundry directives for Smith's scribe, Martin Harris, the addressee of the text.

Christiansen argues that D&C 19 “represents, at best, a proto-teaching [of garden atonement],” and that it is “an odd vehicle for revealing such a distinctive doctrine in such an oblique way.”¹⁸ So there are two points at issue: (1) the teaching's underdeveloped status and uniqueness and (2) the indirectness of the reference to it. As to the former, Christiansen's reading overlooks Adam Clarke and other Bible commentators who stated belief in some form of garden atonement before

17. Revelation, circa Summer 1829 [D&C 19], *Book of Commandments* pp. 39–40, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org>. Verse numbers from the current edition.

18. Christiansen, “Garden Atonement,” 101–02.

Smith. The doctrine wasn't distinctive in Smith's era, at least not among Anglophone exegetes, and thus we should not be shocked to encounter it in the parabiblical scriptures dictated by Smith. This revelation does not represent a departure into novel terrain. It is of a piece with Protestant commentary and with Mosiah 3:7: "blood cometh from every pore [see Luke 22:44], so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people." In both Mosiah 3:7 and D&C 19:18, Jesus suffers and bleeds "from every pore" or "at every pore." And Smith's Jesus is not just suffering from human anxiety in the face of his own impending death on the cross. He suffers, he sweats blood, "for the wickedness and abominations of his people" (Mosiah 3:7), for the "sins" of the penitent (D&C 19:20). With regard to the latter issue, the reference to garden atonement in the revelation isn't all that oblique. When Smith's Jesus wishes to avoid "the bitter cup" (D&C 19:18), it's a plain reference to the garden prayer in the synoptic gospels: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42 with parallels in Mark and Matthew). And when Smith's Jesus bleeds "at every pore" (D&C 19:18), it's a plain reference to the Lukan garden: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Jesus' oozing skin does not feature anywhere in the gospel accounts of the crucifixion. His sweat like blood and thus the imagery of his pores is limited to Luke's Gethsemane. Statements from biblical commentators of the time—Henry, Doddridge, Clarke—confirm and make the blood literal.

Like Mosiah 3, I'd categorize D&C 19 as a garden-centered understanding of atonement. No, the cross is not excluded; Jesus certainly does drink the cup in verse 19: "I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men," i.e., at the crucifixion. But according to the emphasis of the passage, it's before that, in the Lukan garden, that he suffers and bleeds for sin so that those who repent can be forgiven. D&C 19 says nothing about the blood of the cross—not because Jesus

doesn't bleed there but because his bloody pores in the garden are much more extraordinary. Anyone would bleed if crucified. Whereas for a person to sweat blood while praying, that kind of pan-dermic hemorrhage would be "preternatural," to quote Adam Clarke.¹⁹

Taking the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants as a whole, Christiansen claims that these volumes of scripture are centered on the cross and may be focused on it alone; therefore any apparent emphasis on the garden in Mosiah 3 and D&C 19 would be anomalous: "[R]eferences to 'atonement' are overwhelmingly, indeed seemingly exclusively, connected to the cross, not the garden."²⁰

He cites seven passages in support.²¹ They are . . .

One: "[Jesus] was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world" (1 Nephi 11:33).

Two: "[R]edemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah. . . . [H]e offereth himself a sacrifice for sin. . . . [H]e layeth down his life according to the flesh. . . . [H]e shall make intercession for all the children of men . . . to answer the ends of the atonement" (2 Nephi 2:6–10).

Three: "[Jesus will] die for all men . . . ; it must needs be an infinite atonement" (2 Nephi 9:5–7).

Four: "[Jesus will] take upon him the transgressions of his people and . . . atone for the sins of the world. . . . For it is expedient that an atonement should be made . . . that there should be a great and last sacrifice . . . an infinite and eternal sacrifice . . . a great and last sacrifice . . . a stop to the shedding of blood; then shall the law of Moses be fulfilled" (Alma 34:8–13).

Five: ". . . Jesus Christ, your Redeemer, the Great I AM, whose arm of mercy hath atoned for your sins" (D&C 29:1).

Six: "But little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ" (D&C 74:7).

19. As quoted above, Clarke, *New Testament*, 1:237.

20. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 103.

21. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 100–101n56–59.

Seven: “. . . Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood” (D&C 76:69).²²

These passages are not enough to support the assertion that “references to ‘atonement’ are overwhelmingly, indeed seemingly exclusively, connected to the cross, not the garden.” The cross is not mentioned at all in two of Christiansen’s seven passages (D&C 29:1; D&C 74:7). The cross is mentioned explicitly in one (1 Nephi 11:33) and implicitly in four others that technically refer not to the cross but to Jesus’ death, his sacrifice, or the shedding of his blood (2 Nephi 2:6–10; 9:5–8; Alma 34:12–13; D&C 76:69). But they are rather nondescript, and in none of them does Smith take any steps to exclude the garden. They cannot be used to dismiss Smith’s garden references in Mosiah 3 and D&C 19, which are much more intensely descriptive of Jesus’ suffering, I maintain, and so arguably much more emphatic.

In keeping with his overall framework, Christiansen’s assertion rests on a false dichotomy between the garden and the cross. To illustrate in more detail: he argues that the language of atonement as “sacrifice” and as the “shedding of blood” (e.g., 2 Nephi 2:6–10; 9:5–8; Alma 34:12–13; D&C 76:69) can only refer to Jesus’ death, which is admittedly the primary referent.²³ However, earlier exegetes of Smith’s day had also applied that language to Gethsemane. Recall Henry’s comment on the bloody sweat of the Lukan garden: “Some reckon this *one of the times when Christ shed his blood for us*, for without shedding of blood there is no remission.”²⁴ Recall too how Henry and then especially Clarke phrased Jesus’ suffering and bleeding in the garden in terms of sacrifice. Here’s Clarke repeated: “Now, the *grand expiatory sacrifice* begins to be

22. Doctrine and Covenants quotations from the 1835 edition published in Kirtland, Ohio. Verse numbers from the current edition.

23. Christiansen, “Garden Atonement,” 100–101.

24. Henry, *Exposition*, 4:541–42, my italics.

offered: in this garden Jesus enters fully into the sacerdotal office; and now on the altar of his immaculate divinity, begins to offer his own body—his own life—a lamb without spot, for the sin of the world.”²⁵ I’m not suggesting we read all mentions of the sacrifice and shedding of Jesus’ blood in Smith’s scriptures as exclusive references to the garden. My point is that once we get past the garden/cross binary, the language is not incompatible with an understanding of atonement that includes or even centers on Jesus’ bloody sweat in Gethsemane.

Last comes the issue of how variably, or not, Mosiah 3 and D&C 19 have been read by prominent Latter-day Saints over the decades. Christiansen argues: “[N]umerous high-ranking LDS leaders . . . [have] connected the sweating of blood in Doctrine and Covenants 19 to the *crucifixion, not the garden*.”²⁶ But if you check the footnotes, “numerous” turns out to be three: a statement from John Taylor in 1879, one from James Talmage in 1899, and another from Mark Petersen in 1979.²⁷ Furthermore, there is nothing in any of these three statements that excludes the garden. And on other occasions, all three leaders also

25. Clarke, *New Testament*, 1:237, my italics.

26. Christiansen, “Garden Atonement,” 103, italics in the original.

27. John Taylor, Mar. 2, 1879, *Journal of Discourses*, 20:259: “And as I have said, Jesus himself sweat great drops of blood [see Luke 22:44], and in the agony of his suffering cried out, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ [see Mark 15:34 // Matthew 27:46].” It seems that, as reported anyway, Taylor has compressed the garden and the cross without necessarily conflating them, by extending Jesus’ Lukan agony from Gethsemane to Calvary, based in part on a topical and maybe muddled association between Jesus’ garden prayer for the Father to remove the cup and Jesus’ later cry of dereliction on the cross. The topic of Taylor’s discourse is trials, not atonement, hence his statement: even Jesus was tried.

James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1899), 76–87, esp. 80–81, where Talmage writes about “The Atonement” in terms of Jesus’ death and sacrifice. He seems to understand Jesus’ agony to refer to the crucifixion and does not mention the garden even though he quotes D&C 19:18, and even though the agony and sweat like blood come from the Lukan account

made plain statements of belief in garden-inclusive atonement: Taylor in 1882 in *Mediation and Atonement*, Talmage in 1915 in *Jesus the Christ*, and Petersen in general conference in 1971.²⁸ At maximum, then, what we have here is indication of three leaders changing their minds. A more likely scenario is that the variation is a matter of the different topics and rhetorical purposes of their speaking and writing. Whatever the situation, their plain statements of belief in garden-inclusive atonement indicate a consistency of interpretation stretching back to Smith and even further back to Protestant commentary on the Bible.

Sketch of Development

Christiansen also provides some statistical analysis and a basic bar graph of LDS references to the Garden of Gethsemane from one century to the next.²⁹ Assuming the data have been coded well and that the stats are representative, references to Gethsemane in LDS discourse

of Gethsemane. Apparently, he did not recognize the influence of Luke 22 on D&C 19 then, but nowhere does he state the garden should be excluded.

Mark E. Petersen, "O America, America," *Ensign*, Oct. 1979, page 13: "What does the broken bread represent? The torn flesh of Christ! What does the cup represent? His blood shed on the cross in the midst of suffering of infinite proportions, suffering which made himself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain and to bleed at every pore [see Luke 22:44] and suffer both in body and spirit (see D&C 19:18)." It seems Petersen has conflated the bitter cup from the garden prayer with the LDS sacrament cup, perhaps deliberately, for rhetorical purposes of stressing Sabbath observance, the dangers of "the world," etc.

28. Christiansen discusses the statements from Taylor's *Mediation and Atonement* and Talmage's *Jesus the Christ* (see "Garden Atonement," 103–104, 108–109) but not the 1971 statement of belief in garden atonement from Petersen: Mark E. Petersen, "Honesty, a Principle of Salvation," *Ensign*, Oct. 1971, page 74: "The Savior knows the great burden of sin. He bore that burden in Gethsemane and on the cross for each one of us." Petersen's understanding there clearly includes both the garden and the crucifixion.

29. Christiansen, "Garden Atonement," 114, fig. 1.

have indeed risen dramatically in the 1900s and 2000s. Yet here too a nonbinary approach is helpful. The jumps and spikes do not mean there was no belief in a garden-inclusive atonement within early Mormonism, or that it arose and developed as a Christological tenet unique to Latter-day Saints. To reiterate, other denominations got there first. Nevertheless, the question remains: why the subsequent jumps and spikes in LDS references? If I were to sketch heuristically the development of belief in garden atonement among Mormons, from the 1820s and '30s to now, in terms of the big picture I would stress initial continuity with Protestantism first and then within Mormonism second. For precision and nuance, I would deploy my sliding scale in order to categorize soteriological statements (e.g., garden-included, garden-balanced, garden-centered). The scale would allow for gradation and overlap as well as some internal differences and debates. Despite the trends I see, I recognize that at least some Latter-day Saints at one time or another stated that Jesus did not bleed actual blood in the garden and/or that his suffering in Gethsemane was more anticipatory than expiatory. With an eye to the historical context of Mormonism past and present, I'd expect to find several factors that may explain the increase in references to Gethsemane in the 1900s and 2000s. According to graphs like Christiansen's, the biggest jumps and spikes when the numbers roughly doubled and then doubled again and again were around the 1910s, the 1940s/50s, and the 1980s; after that the numbers dropped some during the 1990s and 2000s before bouncing back in the 2010s.³⁰

One factor, however large or small, is surely Christiansen's charting of the rise and development of the LDS cross taboo, as it intersected with the continued development of LDS belief in forms of garden atonement. He has shown that to be the case with James Talmage's *The Great Apostasy* and *Jesus the Christ*, and with the works of Joseph

30. Christiansen follows John Hilton III and Joshua P. Barringer, "The Use of Gethsemane by Church Leaders, 1859–2018," *BYU Studies* 58, no. 4 (2019): esp. fig. 1, minus their stratification in figs. 2.1, 2.2.

Fielding Smith and Bruce McConkie, where (1) the cross taboo and (2) belief in garden atonement clearly coincide. But anti-Catholic sentiment among Mormons does not account for all those jumps and spikes, commencing as the sentiment does already with the harsh polemics against Catholicism in the Book of Mormon.³¹ No mono-causal theory is likely to make sense of all the statistics.

Changes in modern biblical scholarship are another factor that might help explain these developments in Mormon discourse. For instance, the KJV was revised as the RV in 1881–1885; then as the ASV in 1900–1901; as the RSV in 1946 (New Testament) and 1952 (together with the Old Testament), republished in 1971; revised again as the NRSV in 1989; and again as the ESV in 2001. A separate but wildly successful translation, the NIV, rivaling and even outstripping the KJV of late, was published in 1973 and 1978, then revised and republished in 2011. All these English translations of the Bible have democratized the erudite text-critical reasons for doubt concerning Luke 22:43–44, the angel, the agony, and the sweat like blood. The verses were already contested in Joseph Smith’s day, but for the most part readers of the KJV had to search in biblical commentaries and other reference works in order to discover that information in print then.³² By contrast, in these newer translations, the dubious nature of the verses in the ancient manuscript tradition has been flagged for Bible readers right there in the translation via one editorial convention or another, be it the use of a marginal

31. 1 Nephi 13:1–9, 20–29; 14:1–17; 22:13–14; 2 Nephi 6:12; 10:16; 28:18. Compare, e.g., the anti-Catholic reading of Revelation in John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* which became a bestseller in Protestant America; Grant Adamson, “Early Christian Literature,” in *The Bible and the Latter-day Saint Tradition*, edited by Taylor G. Petrey, Cory Crawford, and Eric A. Eliason (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2023), 317–318, 322.

32. In Smith’s day, the historicity and authenticity of the verses had been challenged, and so had the literalness of the blood in Luke’s or at least the Lukan interpolator’s simile; see Adamson, “Luke 22:43–44 and the Mormon Jesus,” 59, 62–64.

note, full excision of the verses, and/or the placement of double square brackets around them. Here's a tally:

- RV (1881–1885), marginal note: “Many ancient authorities omit ver. 43, 44.”
- ASV (1900–1901), marginal note: “Many ancient authorities omit verses 43, 44.”
- RSV (1946, 1952), marginal note: “Other ancient authorities omit verses 43 and 44.”
- RSV (rev. 1971), full excision, that is, the translation skips from verse 42 to 45, plus marginal note: “Other ancient authorities add verses 43 and 44.”
- NIV (1973, 1978), marginal note: “Many early manuscripts do not have verses 43 and 44.”
- NRSV (1989), double square brackets in the translation plus marginal note: “Other ancient authorities lack verses 43 and 44.”
- ESV (2001), marginal note: “Some manuscripts omit verses 43 and 44.”
- NIV (rev. 2011), marginal note: “Many early manuscripts do not have verses 43 and 44.”

The multiple jumps and spikes in LDS references to Gethsemane may have something to do with the influence of these multiple post-KJV translations and with Mormons' overarchingly negative response to modern biblical scholarship, especially the solidification of Mormon KJV-onlyism.³³

33. For these and other Anglophone translations, see F. F. Bruce, *History of the English Bible* (1961; New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible, from the KJV to the NIV: A History and Evaluation* (1981; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991); Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003). On the diverse reactions to biblical scholarship by LDS laity and leaders, including the Mormon brand of hyper-conservative KJV-onlyism, see Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (1991; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 112–198; and most recently the collection of essays in *The Bible and the Latter-day Saint Tradition*, esp. Petrey's

Let me highlight a possible link. In 1956, LDS apostle and First Presidency counselor J. Reuben Clark published his defense of the KJV. Within that single work, he deemed it requisite to buttress Luke 22:43–44 nearly a half dozen times against what he considered the godless machinations of the RV, the ASV, and the RSV.³⁴ In the preface, Clark tells of his personal and anti-intellectual faith journey, leading to this apologia for the KJV: “All his life the author has rebelled against the effort of the ‘higher critics’ to dilute and sometimes destroy the Word of God.”³⁵ So the Mormon leader’s project was, by his account, a lifelong labor, not just triggered by the publication of the RSV in 1946 and 1952. Nevertheless, the dates are notable, both that of Clark’s *Why the King James Version* and of his 1954 general conference address, which gave Church members a précis of his forthcoming book.³⁶

He opens his 1954 sermon with a summary of the publication of the RV, ASV, and RSV. In his preferred shorthand parlance, these translations are “the revisions,” that is, revisions of the KJV, while the translators and editors are “extreme textualists,” though it’s worth pointing out that most of these so-called extremists were committed Christians themselves, albeit of more progressive theological temperament. They are not to be trusted, the fundamentalist Clark says, because they have dared depart from the sixteenth-century Erasmian Greek textual base

introduction, chap. 1 by Philip L. Barlow and Stephen T. Betts, and chap. 2 by Thomas Wayment. For KJV-onlyism: Jason A. Hentschel, “The King James Only Movement,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America*, edited by Paul C. Gutjahr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 229–41.

34. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *Why the King James Version* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956), 70, 119, 305, 331–34, 411. Above all, here Clark relies on the Anglican cleric John William Burgon, whose scholarship was already conservative when it was published in the 1880s in reaction to the RV.

35. Clark, *Why the King James Version*, vi.

36. Further discussion of the circumstances and aftermath: D. Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1983), 173–79; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 173–98.

of the KJV New Testament. For the core of his talk, Clark chooses “a very few only (some sixteen) of the thousands of new renderings in these revisions, particularly the latest—the Revised Standard Version.” Branding them heretical per early Christian bugaboos, whether “Arian,” “Gnostic,” or “Marcionite,” he recurrently warns Church members to beware of the marginal notes in the RV, ASV, and RSV. His refrain: “the Church cannot accept” anything that does not align with Joseph Smith’s Inspired Version of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, all of which are dependent on the KJV for content and language.³⁷

Among these approximately sixteen unacceptable alterations to the KJV is the “doubt-raising marginal note” on “[t]he agony in the garden and the ministering angel (Luke 22:43–44),” from “Luke’s record of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.” In striking candor, and for all his fellow leaders to hear, Clark inadvertently itemizes what’s at stake: “These two verses contain our sole record of this event found in the New Testament.” No other gospel has them, not Mark, Matthew, or John. Clark continues: “The Inspired Version [of Luke 22:43–44] . . . follows the King James Version;” as for the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, the ancient Nephite ruler known as “Benjamin predicted this specific suffering (Mosiah 3:7),” and “the Lord himself recounted it in a revelation to the Prophet Joseph” in “D. & C. 19:19.” With so much hanging in the balance, Clark declares that “the question is settled for us. . . . We cannot accept the elimination of any part of the record of this great moment of almost unbearable agony” in the Lukan garden of the KJV.³⁸

I’m only able to speculate what impact Clark’s address may have had on other contemporary and future leaders of the Church and their views of Luke’s Gethsemane. Despite his intention to steer them away

37. *One Hundred Twenty-fourth Annual Conference . . . April 3, 4, 5 and 6, 1954* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 37–47.

38. *One Hundred Twenty-fourth Annual Conference*, 43–44.

from the evil marginal notes in post-KJV translations, he exposed his audiences to the very doubts he considered so troubling. Did anyone hear and read between the lines of his 1954 talk followed by his 1956 book and thus realize how much of a vulnerability Luke 22:43–44 was to the Church? In subsequent generations of LDS leadership, was anyone reminded of that weakness as more and more translations of the Bible were released wherein Jesus' agony and sweat like blood were doubted, excised, or double-square bracketed? Is there any pattern at all between the publication of Bible translations and the jumps and spikes in LDS references to Gethsemane around the 1910s, 1940s/50s, 1980s, and 2010s, or is this possible 1950s link in Clark just an aberration?

Conclusion

The relationship between the garden and the cross within the history of soteriological thought, Mormon in particular and Christian in general, is best conceptualized on a sliding scale, such as the one I have proposed, not according to a binary framework. Belief in garden atonement did not originate among Mormons, and the LDS cross taboo was not the only factor in the shaping of Mormon varieties of that belief. Although they intersect here and there, starting in the early 1900s in LDS literature, they are not reducible to the same impetus and timeline. Protestant commentators on the Bible were already stating belief in garden-inclusive atonement long before Mormons. The Methodist exegete Adam Clarke even subordinated Gethsemane to Calvary in the early 1800s. Joseph Smith himself emphasized Jesus' suffering and bleeding for sin in the garden too, in Mosiah 3 and D&C 19, without excluding the crucifixion. LDS disapproval of the cross and crucifix in art, jewelry, and so forth was a relatively late development in Mormonism, to be sure; but belief in some form of garden atonement was not.

If we want to explain the exponential rise in LDS references to Gethsemane in the centuries after Joseph Smith, another factor worthy of attention besides the LDS cross taboo is Mormonism's reaction to

modern biblical scholarship and post-KJV Bibles in which doubt about Luke 22:43–44, the sole account of Jesus’ agony and sweat like blood in the garden, was publicized to millions of readers like the Mormon anti-intellectual and KJV defender J. Reuben Clark. At any rate, the jumps and spikes we see in statistical analysis are informative but ultimately impressionistic. Basic bar graphs alone don’t tell us whether the increased references to Gethsemane involve statements of belief in garden atonement as such. The raw numbers must be stratified, which reveals that quite a lot of the references are “incidental,” not thematic of Jesus’ suffering for sin.³⁹ In other words, Mormon belief in garden atonement may have stayed more constant than the raw numbers suggest, at least until the 1970s and ’80s.⁴⁰ In addition, I think we need to know more in order to analyze these LDS statistics—more about other denominations, which ones hold or have held any belief in a form of garden atonement, and whether their references to Gethsemane over the centuries have also fluctuated. For all its eccentricity (and KJV-only regression), Mormonism is rarely if ever as unique or independent as it seems.

39. Hilton and Barringer, “Use of Gethsemane,” figs. 2.1, 2.2, and p. 58: “[F]rom the 1920s to the 1960s, the most frequent reason for using *Gethsemane* [in the discourse of LDS leaders in general conference and suchlike] was to mention it in passing.”

40. Hilton and Barringer, “Use of Gethsemane,” figs. 2.1, 2.2, and p. 58: “One key insight provided by these [stratified] data is a remarkable increase in statements regarding Christ atoning for our sins in Gethsemane, beginning in the 1980s.” That’s far removed from the happenings of the early 1900s that Christiansen thinks are pivotal: the publication of Talmage’s *Jesus the Christ*, and the controversy over erecting a cross on Ensign Peak in Salt Lake City.

GRANT ADAMSON {gwa1@arizona.edu} is a senior lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies and Classics at the University of Arizona.