DIALOGUE
a journal of mormon thought

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RECONCILIATION AND TRUTH

Dear Editor,

I respect Clyde Ford as a scholar and peacemaker, two roles we have in common. I also appreciate his challenges ("Reconsidering Reconciliation," in *Dialogue* 57, no. 2 [Summer 2024], 1–3) to my article "Truth and Reconciliation: Reflections on the Fortieth Anniversary of the LDS Church's Lifting the Priesthood and Temple Restrictions for Black Mormons of African Descent" (*Dialogue* 56, no. 2 [Summer 2023], 55–83).

Mine is a long and impassioned article, and I am certain that some of my assertions could have been better considered and my conclusions more thoughtfully documented. Nevertheless, I disagree with Ford's characterization that in authoring the article, I "congratulated myself for shedding my 'scales of racial prejudice'" (1). In rereading what I wrote, I don't find any language of self-congratulation. On the contrary, I acknowledge that it took years of serious study and moral wrestling to finally be free of the racism that was part of my family and religious heritage (see my essay "Black Mormons and the Priesthood: A Retrospective Perspective," in *Dialogue* 57, no. 3 [Fall 2024], 100–107).

Ford faults me for using what he calls "unnecessary vitriolic characterization of earlier LDS beliefs" (1), but contexts of the examples he cites seem not to validate his accusation.

- "noxious fiction": This is in reference to the teaching that "certain premortal spirits (those destined to inherit black bodies) were morally flawed because they were less valiant than others." Since, as I document, that belief is currently held by a majority of both Black and white Latter-day Saints, "noxious," meaning "hurtful, injurious," seems both appropriate and accurate.
- "inhumane beliefs": i.e., President John Taylor's assertion that Joseph Smith taught "that a man bearing the Priesthood who should marry or associate with a negress, or one of that seed, if the penalty of the law were executed upon him, he and her and the offspring would be killed." If that

isn't *inhumane*, meaning "cruel and heartless," I don't know what would qualify.

- "false teachings": In general, the Church's teachings about the inferiority and cursed nature of Black people. There was and is nothing true about such teachings.
- "evil perpetrated in the name of revelation and divine sanction": This statement follows my contention that "[t]here is no way to calculate the humiliation, the degradation, or the emotional, physical, and spiritual violence suffered by Black individuals within the Latter-day Saint community" (77). Perhaps "evil" is too strong a word, but I meant it, in one of Merriam-Webster's definitions for the term, as "something that brings sorrow, distress, or calamity," words I feel accurately characterize the experience of many Black Mormons, at least in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Ford's criticism of my assertion that, in his words, "the priesthood restriction was instituted to maintain white racial purity by proscribing miscegenation" (1) is legitimate, if an oversimplification of my point. The reasons for the priesthood and temple bans were both multiple and more complicated than either Ford's or my choice of emphasis.

Ford argues that the Church's "focus on saving (exalting) souls in the afterlife requires the cultivation of a positive image and avoidance of unnecessary alienation of segments of the population," which is an interesting argument in light of Jesus' ministry, which seemed to provoke rather than avoid alienation among "segments of the population" of his time (2). The fact remains, I believe, that had the Church followed Joseph Smith rather than Brigham Young on the matter of race, not only would it have been in accord with God's will but, in so being, would have been more effective in preparing souls for salvation and exaltation. The fact that currently only 3 percent of the U.S. LDS population is African American would seem to bear that out.

What I tried to argue in that *Dialogue* piece was that by insisting on the prophetic rightness of its racial doctrine in the face of mounting historic, scientific, and social evidence to the contrary, the Church had a negative impact on both white and Black conversion and retention. One sees a similar pattern at present in relation to LGBTQ issues. I don't expect the Church to be "at the forefront of social revolutions" (3), but neither do I expect it to be in the rear of such

revolutions. I am aware that striking a balance between the two is extremely challenging, but it is the same challenge the Church expects, or should expect, of its members.

My argument was that it would be in the Church's best interest to initiate a truth and reconciliation initiative in relation to its racial past. Recently, I had a conversation with a faithful, distinguished Black Latter-day Saint friend who has devoted his life to supporting an informal reconciliation on this issue. Nearing the end of his life, he said, "I now hope for a formal Truth and Reconciliation initiative by the Church on this matter before I die." Nearing my eighty-ninth year, I hope for the same. As our recently departed friend Thomas Rogers wrote, "Reconciliation is one of the most sacred impulses within the human spirit."

Robert A. Rees
Novato, California

José de Faria, *Símbolos que Perduram*, 2021,
oil on canvas, 27 x 31 in.

JOHN TAYLOR ON THE "DARK AGES"

Charles Harrell

A foundational tenet and raison d'être of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that a Great Apostasy occurred within the first few centuries of the early Christian era, resulting in the withdrawal of God's priesthood, i.e., divine authority, from the earth. Without this there could be no saving ordinances performed nor gift of the Holy Ghost with its attendant sanctifying and revelatory powers. It took a restoration of the priesthood and gospel back to the earth for these spiritual blessings to be enjoyed again. At least that is the standard Latter-day Saint doctrine of the Great Apostasy.[1] LDS scripture affirms that from the time the lights went out in the early Church to the time of Joseph Smith, "darkness cover[ed] the earth, and gross darkness the minds of the people" (D&C 112:23; see also Isa. 60:2). "For over seventeen hundred years," wrote early-twentieth-century apostle James Talmage, "there appears to have been silence between the heavens and the earth."[2] This spiritual blackout is routinely depicted in Church teachings as the very time prophesied by Amos when the Lord would "send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord," and no matter how earnestly people seek his voice,

1. See Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Topics and Questions, s.v. "Apostasy," https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/apostasy?lang=eng.

2. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission According to Holy Scriptures, Both Ancient and Modern* (Deseret News, 1916), 745.

they "shall not find it" (Amos 8:11–12).[3] Given such a disparaging view of "apostate" Christianity, it is little wonder the Church has struggled to win the good will of Catholics and Protestants who feel slighted by such a dismissive narrative. Even many faithful Church members find it incredulous that a loving, all-powerful God would withhold the blessings of the gospel from his children for more than seventeen centuries. Adding to the pushback by Christians at large, the LDS Great Apostasy narrative is also at odds with the scholarly consensus that the Middle Ages were not, as previously thought, a time of darkness and ignorance. Rather, the so-called Dark Ages are hailed as "a period of extraordinary human intellectual and artistic achievements comparable to, if not surpassing, those of the Renaissance."[4]

Taylor-*ing* the Narrative

To placate critics who take umbrage at the LDS denigration of historical Christianity, several ecumenically sensitive LDS scholars have advanced a more conciliatory view of the Apostasy, disavowing the belief that God closed the heavens and asserting instead that open heavenly communication continued to bless Christian believers. The principal authority invoked in support of this revisionist narrative is a September 7, 1873 statement by then apostle John Taylor, which depicts even the "dark ages" as a time when men of faith were graced with extraordinary visions and revelations.

> There were men in those dark ages who could commune with God, and who, by the power of faith, could draw aside the curtain of eternity and gaze upon the invisible world. There were men who could tell the

3. See, for example, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Great Apostasy," https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/the-restoration/the-great-apostasy?lang=eng.

4. Zachary Gubler, "Mormonism and the Possibility of a Materialist Apostasy," Dialogue 54, no. 3 (Fall 2021): 71. See also C. Warren Hollister, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 3rd ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1974), 1–2.

> destiny of the human family, and the events which would transpire throughout every subsequent period of time until the final winding-up scene. There were men 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.[5]

Taylor's high praise and holy envy for this remarkable spiritual outpouring during the "dark ages" clearly runs counter to the traditional LDS view of the Middle Ages as a time of spiritual blackout. Granted, the Church has always held that medieval Christians received a measure of spiritual illumination through the light of Christ, which "lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (D&C 93:2), but Taylor audaciously elevates medieval spiritual enlightenment to a whole new level rivaled only by the visions and prophecies one reads about in scripture. Taken at face value, one could infer from Taylor's remark that the Restoration provided no more spiritual enlightenment than what was already available over the previous 1800 years. This has led some LDS scholars to assert that, despite what the traditional LDS Apostasy narrative has been, the more enlightened LDS view is that Christians have always been privy to the same spiritual outpouring as Latter-day Saints.

The first recorded instance of Taylor's "dark age" remark being invoked to argue for a more palatable Apostasy narrative occurred in a groundbreaking 2002 essay by BYU history professor Eric Dursteler titled "Inheriting the 'Great Apostasy': The Evolution of Mormon Views on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance." Dursteler's thesis was that the Church should abandon its traditional, Protestant-inherited view of the Middle Ages as "a time of spiritual and intellectual darkness in which all revelation and, indeed, progress of any sort disappeared."[6] In

5. John Taylor, Sept. 7, 1873, *Journal of Discourses*, 16:197.

6. Eric Dursteler, "Inheriting the 'Great Apostasy': The Evolution of Mormon Views on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance," *Journal of Mormon History* 28, no. 2 (2002): 38.

making a case for a more conciliatory view of the Apostasy, he invoked John Taylor's effusive adulation for "dark age" spirituality, calling it "the historical precedent" for justifying such a view.[7] A version of Dursteler's essay, including his appeal to Taylor's "dark age" adulation, was subsequently included in a 2005 FARMS publication and later again in a 2014 Oxford University Press publication.[8] In both of these scholarly anthologies reexamining the Great Apostasy, Dursteler's essay appears as the lead chapter, a nod to its significance in Apostasy scholarship.

Informed (and inspired) by Dursteler's work, other LDS scholars soon began appealing to Taylor's "dark age" remark to promote a more conciliatory Apostasy narrative. Among the earliest was Alexander B. Morrison, an emeritus General Authority seventy and respected academic. In his 2005 volume, *Turning from Truth: A New Look at the Great Apostasy*, Morrison quotes Taylor's "dark age" adulation to persuade readers to think of medieval Christianity more charitably. According to Morrison, Taylor understood that "mortals . . . still enjoyed at least a measure of spiritual enlightenment and blessings during the time between apostasy and restoration."[9] Taylor's "dark age" remark has also been put into service by Robert Millet, a prominent BYU religion professor (now retired) who has had a long-standing dialogue with evangelical Christians in an effort to promote greater mutual respect

7. Dursteler, "Inheriting the 'Great Apostasy,'" 58.

8. Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy* (Provo: FARMS and BYU Press, 2005), 29–65; Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young, eds., *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 23–53.

9. Alexander B. Morrison, *Turning from Truth: A New Look at the Great Apostasy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 3. There is little question that Morrison was influenced either directly or indirectly by Dursteler's essay, making many of the same points to promote the same thesis. He even acknowledges enlisting the assistance of Noel Reynolds, who was editor of one of the anthologies containing Dursteler's essay and quotes Taylor himself in a 2004 speech (see note 15).

and tolerance. In response to evangelicals who criticize the uncomplimentary LDS view of "apostate" Christianity, Millet states, "I believe it is a gross exaggeration and misrepresentation to suggest that Latter-day Saints believe all of Christian practice and doctrine since the time of the original Apostles has been apostate." Millet points to Taylor's praise of "dark age" spirituality as the *real* LDS view, stating that Taylor was referring specifically to "persons during medieval times."[10] Millet appeals to Taylor's "dark age" comment to defend a spiritually rich Christian legacy in at least five books he has published[11] as well as in articles and speeches he has given over the past two decades.

Terryl Givens has also frequently employed Taylor's "dark age" comment to quell critics who find it incredulous "that God was sort of snoozing until 1820." To such critics he replies: "Well, guess what? That sounds absurd to Mormons as well."[12] To back up this disarming comeback, he quotes Taylor's glowing praise for "dark age" spiritual enlightenment. In *The Crucible of Doubt*, he and coauthor Fiona Givens remarked that Taylor's praise for "dark age" spirituality "should shame those moderns who believe the medieval church was a spiritual

10. Robert L. Millet, "Reflections on Apostasy and Restoration," in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, edited by Robert L. Millet (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 19–41.

11. In addition to the above volume, the Taylor quote appears in Robert L. Millet, *The Vision of Mormonism: Pressing the Boundaries of Christianity* (St. Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, 2007); Richard J. Mouw and Robert L. Millet, eds., *Talking Doctrine: Mormons and Evangelicals in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2015); Robert L. Millet and Shon D. Hopkin, *Mormonism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Robert L. Millet, "'The Morning Breaks': The Glorious Light of Restoration," in *Foundations of the Restoration: The 45th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, edited by Craig James Ostler, Michael Hubbard MacKay, and Barbara Morgan Gardner (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 1–22.

12. Terryl Givens, "Letter to a Doubter," *Meridian Magazine*, Apr. 29, 2013, https://latterdaysaintmag.com/article-1–12607/.

wasteland."[13] The Givenses quote Taylor's "dark age" remark to advocate for a more charitable Apostasy narrative in at least five of their published books as well as in other presentations and interviews over the years.[14] Other LDS scholars have also appealed to Taylor's "dark age" statement to elevate perceptions of medieval spirituality.[15] MormonWiki.com, an online encyclopedia about Latter-day Saints, quotes Taylor under the page "Apostasy, Reformation, and Restoration" to show that "revelation continued" during the Dark Ages.[16] Taylor's quote even appears in the Church's *New Testament Seminary Teacher Manual* with the observation that it was specifically "regarding those who sought truth during the Dark Ages."[17] This growing acknowledgement of spiritual

13. Terryl and Fiona Givens, *The Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014), 88.

14. Taylor's statement is quoted in *The Crucible of Doubt*; *The God Who Weeps* (Salt Lake City: Ensign Peak, 2012); "Letter to a Doubter," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 131–46; *Mormonism: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 97; and *Let's Talk About Faith and Intellect* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022), 30.

15. See, for example, Noel B. Reynolds, "What Went Wrong for the Early Christians?," Brigham Young University–Idaho Devotional, June 15, 2004, https://www2.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2004_06_15_Reynolds.htm; James Faulconer, "The Only True Church," *Patheos*, Mar. 14, 2014, https://www.patheos.com/latter-day-saint/only-true-church-james-faulconer-03–15–2014; Jared M. Halverson, "A Marvelous Work and a Wonder," course slides from Religious Education 501 at Brigham Young University, available at https://www.coursehero.com/file/179862902/1-A-Marvelous-Work-and-a-Wonderpdf/.

16. MormonWiki, "Apostasy, Reformation, and Restoration," last edited Nov. 9, 2020, https://www.mormonwiki.com/Apostasy,_Reformation,_and_Restoration.

17. "Lesson 129: 2 Thessalonians," *New Testament Seminary Teacher Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), available at https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/new-testament-seminary-teacher-manual/introduction-to-the-second-epistle-of-paul-to-the-thessalonians/lesson-129-2-thessalonians?lang=eng.

outpouring during the Dark Ages, largely on the authority of Taylor, is a significant concession given the history of univocal restraint when portraying medieval spirituality in LDS discourse.

Taylor's Documented View of Apostate Christianity

Compared to traditional Church teachings on the Great Apostasy, Taylor's glowing appraisal of medieval spirituality is clearly an outlier and seems to disregard the conditions on which gifts of the Spirit have been traditionally predicated, namely priesthood participation and gospel compliance. Simply put, Taylor accords medieval Christians far greater spiritual privilege than what traditional Mormon doctrine seems to allow.[18] How could people living in the Dark Ages without the priesthood and gospel have the heavens opened to them, see God's plan from beginning to end, be visited by angels, and gaze upon the face of God? No Church leader has ever come close to attributing this level of revelatory outpouring to individuals devoid of the priesthood and gospel.

One wonders if Taylor's remark is really an accurate representation of how he viewed the era of the Apostasy. In his 1852 book *The Government of God*, Taylor makes his view explicit: "The world [has been] ignorant of God and his laws, not having had any communication with him for eighteen hundred years."[19] His published denial of there being "any communication" from God for the last eighteen hundred years is clearly at odds with the profuse revelations described in his 1873 remark.

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18. LDS scripture explains that the Melchizedek Priesthood holds the keys to the spiritual gifts of God and without the priesthood and its ordinances, "the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh" (D&C 84:19–22). Two exceptions in Mormon thought are (1) the spiritual outpouring afforded on rare occasions to little children, who are alive in Christ without the need of the Gospel (see, for example, 3 Ne. 17:21–25), and (2) the opening of a new dispensation to facilitate the restoration of the Gospel and priesthood keys.

19. John Taylor, *The Government of God* (S.W. Richards, 1852).

Taylor's dismissal of the presence of heavenly communication prior to the Restoration comports with traditional LDS teachings and Taylor's own belief about revelation—that it is the privilege only of those who have received the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. In December 1840 he denounced Methodists for their indifference toward this gift, contending that it was precisely through "the gift of the Holy Ghost [that New Testament Christians] . . . could have the ministering of angels, and the spirit of prophesy, . . . be wrapped in prophetic vision, have the curtains of heaven withdrawn[,] behold the opening glories of the eternal world, and prophesy of events that should transpire until the final winding-up scene."[20] Notably, these are the very same heavenly manifestations Taylor ascribed to people of "those dark ages" in his now-popular 1873 remark, yet here he explicitly ascribes them to New Testament saints, attributing their presence to the gift of the Holy Ghost. He alluded again to these same spiritual manifestations and their dependency on the gift of the Holy Ghost in February 1874, observing that Christ's disciples were "inspired men—men who had the ministering of angels, the spirit of prophecy, and the principle of revelation; men who had the heavens opened to them, so that they could contemplate the purposes of God as they should roll along throughout every subsequent period of time until the winding up scene. Whence did they obtain this knowledge? They obtained it through obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[21] As to how "this Gospel places man in communication with God," Taylor explained, "[This] Gospel, when received and obeyed, imparts the Holy Ghost, which Holy Ghost takes of the things of God, and shows them unto us."[22] As he would emphasize in a February 1883 sermon, one "cannot come to a knowledge of God, nor

20. John Taylor, *Truth Defended* (Liverpool: J. Tompkins, 1840), 11.

21. John Tayler, Feb. 1, 1874, *Journal of Discourses* 16:372.

22. John Taylor, Oct. 9, 1881, *Journal of Discourses* 22:292.

become acquainted with eternal things without the Gospel; without the gift of the Holy Ghost."[23]

The importance Taylor placed on the necessity of having the gift of the Holy Ghost in order to receive revelation is further evident from the distinction he made between the gift of the Holy Ghost, which only members of the Church possess, and the light of Christ, which everyone possesses. "We have something more than that portion of the Spirit of God [i.e., the light of Christ] which is given to every man," he said in a November 1882 sermon, "and it is called the gift of the Holy Ghost, which is received through obedience to the first principles of the Gospel of Christ, by the laying on of hands of the servants of God. . . . [T]his Holy Ghost . . . would cause . . . old men to dream dreams and . . . young men to see visions; and . . . servants and handmaids of God . . . [to] prophesy. These are the operations of . . . the Holy Ghost. It is this Spirit that brings us into relationship with God, and it differs very materially from the portion of spirit that is given to all men to profit withal."[24]

Thus, for Taylor, only the gift of the Holy Ghost received by the laying on of hands by one holding the priesthood entitles one to receive revelations from God, and whenever this gift has been absent in the world, spiritual manifestations, beyond the dim intimations of the light of Christ, were also absent. Taylor noted that even the inspired leaders of the Reformation "groped, as it were, in the dark, with [only] a portion of the Spirit of God [i.e., the light of Christ]."[25] Because these reformers were without the gift of the Holy Ghost, "God did not impart to them the light of revelation which the ancient Saints enjoyed"[26] Given Taylor's consistent stance that no one can receive heavenly manifestations without the gift of the Holy Ghost, one can only surmise that

23. John Taylor, Feb. 11, 1883, *Journal of Discourses* 23:373.

24. John Taylor, Nov. 23, 1882, *Journal of Discourses* 23:323.

25. John Taylor, Feb. 11, 1883, *Journal of Discourses* 23:371.

26. John Taylor, Feb. 1, 1874, *Journal of Discourses* 16:375.

his attribution of spiritual gifts to medieval Christians must have been either a slip of the tongue, an inaccurate transcription, or a misreading of the text.

Decoding Taylor's 1873 "Dark Age" Remark

Assuming the transcription of Taylor's 1873 "dark age" remark is substantively accurate and that it was not a slip of the tongue, a closer examination of the text can help determine if Taylor is being correctly interpreted. It is significant first of all that Taylor didn't actually refer to men in "*the* dark ages," but to men in "*those* dark ages" (emphasis added). In searching back through his sermon for the antecedent of "*those* dark ages," it is telling that not once did Taylor mention anything about the life and times of people living in the Middle Ages, making it unlikely that the antecedent of "*those* dark ages" is the medieval period. What he did describe, rather, was the lives of "ancient prophets," including Abraham and Moses, who were given "many visions, manifestations and revelations."[27] He also extolled New Testament visionaries including Paul and John the Revelator. Even the Book of Mormon prophets Nephi and Alma received mention for their visionary experiences. Taylor explained that all these "men of God on the Asiatic continent [and] also on this [the American] continent" were "in possession of . . . truth in relation to God, the heavens, the past, the present and the future," and all because they had the "everlasting gospel" and received "revelation" concerning these things.[28] So the most logical antecedent of "*those* dark ages" is ancient biblical and Book of Mormon times, not the Middle Ages.

But why, one might ask, would Taylor use the term "dark" to describe biblical and Book of Mormon times? To be sure, Taylor's sermon makes clear that he himself did not consider biblical prophets to be living

27. John Taylor, Sept. 7, 1873, *Journal of Discourses* 16:195–96.

28. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:197.

in darkness, but allegedly many of his Christian contemporaries did, and that is what he is contesting. According to Taylor, these Christians were claiming that because prophets of old "lived before there was a Gospel,"[29] "they were degraded and in darkness"[30] and therefore needed special visions and revelations to show them the light.

Breaking down Taylor's sermon, he begins by showing "from [the] . . . Scriptures . . . that man did once possess a knowledge of God and the future."[31] He further explains that "whenever a man had a knowledge of these things, they had a knowledge of the Gospel,"[32] a point he makes at least ten times in his sermon. Taylor emphasizes that even "ancient prophets" of the Old Testament possessed the "everlasting Gospel" in order for them to have had such marvelous visions and revelations.[33] This leads Taylor to rhetorically ask, "If God revealed himself to men in other days, why not reveal himself to us?"[34] Characterizing the response he imagines his contemporaries would give, he states, "Say some—'Oh, we are so enlightened and intelligent now. In former ages [i.e., biblical times], when the people were degraded and in darkness, it was necessary that he should communicate intelligence to the human family; but we live in the blaze of Gospel day, in an age of light and intelligence.'"[35] What Taylor is obviously chiding here is the belief among Christian contemporaries that biblical prophets received visions and revelations because they lived in dark times and therefore needed it to compensate for their darkness. Modern Christians, on the other hand, profess to being so enlightened by the gospel as to not require

29. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:196.

30. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:198.

31. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:196.

32. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:196.

33. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:196.

34. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:197.

35. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:197–98.

revelations. For Taylor, just the opposite was true: ancient prophets had visions *because* they had the gospel, while modern Christians have no revelations because they lack the gospel. Taylor summarily dismisses his Christian contemporaries, contending that with all their so-called gospel enlightenment they don't have nearly as much light and knowledge as ancient prophets who lived in the so-called "dark ages."

Taylor spends the remainder of his sermon reiterating that knowledge of the things of God comes only "through the instrumentality of the Gospel"[36] and, more specifically, "the gift of the Holy Ghost, which Jesus said would impart a knowledge of God and his purposes."[37] He concludes his sermon with an appeal to Christians to aspire for the kind of revelations enjoyed in biblical times, saying, "This is the kind of thing that they had in that day [i.e., those so-called 'dark ages']. This is the Gospel that we have to proclaim to you."[38] The clear takeaway from Taylor's sermon is that the gospel is the means by which men are brought into a relationship with God to receive divine revelation, and where the gospel doesn't exist, no such revelation exists. The gist of Taylor's "dark age" comment clearly conveys the idea that, while some Christians have alleged that biblical prophets lived in a "dark age" devoid of the gospel, the visions and revelations these prophets received demonstrate otherwise.

It becomes even more evident that Taylor was alluding to biblical times when referring to "those dark ages" when his remark is read in light of similar comments he made elsewhere. In a May 1870 discourse, Taylor bemoaned: "Some men will stultify themselves with the idea that in ages gone and past the human race was in a semi-civilized or barbarous condition."[39] After showing that such a caricature is not

36. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:196.

37. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:199.

38. Tayor, *Journal of Discourses* 16:199.

39. John Taylor, May 6, 1870, *Journal of Discourses* 13:225.

borne out by the biblical record, he observed that if we go back to "these dark ages referred to . . . we find that the gospel was preached to Abraham . . . to Melchizedek . . . to Moses . . . [etc.]."[40] He noted that these biblical prophets all had "the Melchizedek Priesthood" and "the everlasting Gospel" and "wherever the Gospel has existed, there has always been revelation."[41] In December 1876 Taylor again refuted the idea that ancient prophets lived in the "dark ages" saying, "I have frequently heard people say, and Christians at that, 'We do not know anything about the future' . . . but there were men in former times that had very different ideas from this; they lived back, away back, in what they [i.e., contemporary Christians] now call the 'dark ages.' For instance, I will name Job [who lived] . . . away back in the dark ages."[42] Then yet again in March 1880 he remarked, "Some people think that he [Abraham] was a kind of a shepherd with very few more ideas than a mushroom; that he lived in the dark ages and did not comprehend much."[43] Significantly, in every recorded instance that Taylor used the term "dark ages," he was merely parodying the Christian denigration of the biblical period. In none of his sermons and writings did Taylor ever use the term "dark ages" to denote the medieval period.

Who were these "Christians" Taylor alluded to that were dismissing the need for modern revelation and claiming it was only needed in "those dark ages" of the Bible? Those holding this view were (and are) referred to as *cessationists* and are found primarily in the Reformed tradition (Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Reformed Baptists, Anglicans, etc.). Cessationists maintain that visions, revelations, and other extraordinary gifts of the Spirit ceased when the Bible began to be available. As Congregationalist theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

40. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 13:232–33.

41. Taylor, *Journal of Discourses*, 13:232.

42. John Taylor, Dec. 31, 1876, *Journal of Discourses* 18:309–10.

43. John Taylor, Mar. 21, 1880, *Journal of Discourses* 21:245.

explained, these extraordinary gifts were "bestowed on the prophets [of the Old Testament] and apostles [of the New Testament] to enable them to reveal the mind and will of God before the canon of Scripture was complete."[44] Once the world had the Bible and Church for their guide, direct revelation was no longer necessary.

One rationale cessationists gave for the presence of extraordinary spiritual gifts in ancient times was that God was dealing with individuals who, according to Anglican preacher William Harness (1790–1869), "were for the most part poor and uneducated men," and it required "extraordinary illumination" from God to compensate for their "habits and prejudices."[45] Jonathan Edwards referred to the biblical era as "the dark times of prophecy," meaning it was a time of ignorance and superstition when "immediate revelations" provided a much-needed spiritual boost.[46] Edwards believed that the "extraordinary gifts" of the Spirit were provisional only, imparting a "reflected light . . . in the night, or in a dark season" until the bright light of Christ's gospel rendered them no longer necessary.[47] Taylor doesn't identify the specific cessationists he was referring to in his 1873 "dark age" remark. He may have been speaking generally or perhaps had a specific person or group in mind. Perhaps he was alluding to Methodists, whose cessationism he criticized decades earlier in a December 1840 pamphlet. Parodying the way Methodists dismissed the need for apostles and prophets, he wrote: "Apostles, and prophets, and inspired men . . . were only necessary for

44. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits: Christian Love as Manifested in the Heart and Life*, edited by Tryon Edwards (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1852), 29.

45. William Harness, *Modern Claims to Miraculous Gifts of the Spirit* (London: Longman, Reese, Orme, Brown and Green, 1831), 12–13.

46. Jonathan Edwards, *Dissertation of the End for which God Created the World*, 10 vols., edited by Sereno Edwards Dwight (New York, S. Converse, 1829), 606.

47. Edwards, *Dissertation of the End*, 605.

the dark ages, but as we have now got a more efficient ministry, we can perfect the saints without them."[48] He also mocked the way they supposedly discounted spiritual gifts: "Do not desire spiritual gifts, nor prophesy; it is not needed in this enlightened age."[49] Taylor repudiated cessationists on several subsequent occasions in this same way; however, this is the only time he targeted a specific denomination.

Taylor wasn't alone in denouncing cessationists for referring to biblical times as an age of darkness. Other Church leaders joined the refrain, most notably Wilford Woodruff, who in February 1855 enjoined in language similar to Taylor: "Ask any portion of Christendom why the ancient order of the Church of Christ is not among them—Apostles, Prophets, revelations, and other gifts, and they will inform you that

48. Taylor, *Truth Defended*, 11.

49. Taylor, *Truth Defended*, 12. Taylor's repudiation of Methodist cessationism may seem a bit puzzling, since Methodism has traditionally been anti-cessationist. Wesley believed that special revelation and other charismata disappeared in the early church, but not because the gospel light rendered them no longer necessary "as has been vulgarly supposed." Rather, he explained, "Christians were turned Heathens again, and had only a dead form left." John Wesley, "The More Excellent Way" (1787), in *Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 12 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 7:27. Though early on, Methodists were among the most enthusiastic seekers of spiritual gifts, an increase in converts among the middle class in the first couple decades of the nineteenth century resulted in a growing disdain for dreams and visions, which may account for the Methodist minister telling young Joseph Smith "that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them" (Joseph Smith—History 21). Taylor is essentially echoing what Parley P. Pratt had written about Methodism in an earlier 1838 pamphlet in which he stated, "The gifts of the Spirit . . . are denied by them, and totally set aside—for instance, Apostles, Prophets, Miracles, Healings, Revelations, Visions, Prophesyings, Tongues, Interpretations, &c.; therefore, they have a form of Godliness, denying the power and gifts of God." Parley P. Pratt, "Mormonism Unveiled: Zion's Watchman Unmasked" (New York: n.p., 1838), 42.

they were only needed in the dark ages of the world, to establish the kingdom of God, but in this enlightened age are not necessary."[50] Like Taylor, Woodruff also implored, "May the Lord give me such periods of darkness as were enjoyed by the Apostles and Saints of old, in preference to the Gospel blaze of modern Christianity. . . . [T]he Gospel of modern Christendom shuts up the Lord, and stops all communication with Him. I want nothing to do with such a Gospel, I would rather prefer the Gospel of the dark ages, so called."[51] Woodruff repudiated cessationists for derogatorily referring to biblical times as the "dark ages" on at least five subsequent occasions.[52] He further claimed to have first raised this criticism against them at the early age of "about eight

50. Wilford Woodruff, Feb. 25, 1855, *Journal of Discourses* 2:194.

51. Woodruff, *Journal of Discourses* 2:196.

52. In an 1877 sermon, Wilford Woodruff enjoined his congregation: "Ask the ministers . . . why they do not enjoy the gifts and graces and the light of revelation from heaven, and what is the universal reply? It is in substance, 'Oh, these things are all done away, they are no longer needed; it was necessary that they should exist in the dark ages of the world but not in these days of the blaze of Gospel light.' Whenever God had a Church upon the earth these gifts were enjoyed by the people." Woodruff, Sept. 16, 1877, *Journal of Discourses* 19:226.

Parodying Protestant ministers in a June 1881 sermon, Woodruff exclaimed, "You [Latter-day Saints] believe in revelation, you believe in prophets: we cannot bear these things, they are all done away with. These things were only given in the dark ages of the world, but today, living as we are in the blaze of the glorious Gospel, we do not need them." Woodruff, June 12, 1881, *Journal of Discourses* 22:175.

In an April 1889 sermon, Woodruff related an experience he had while attending a revival meeting as a young man prior to his introduction to Mormonism, which was in late 1833. Standing before the group of Congregationalist ministers leading the meeting, Woodruff asked why they didn't contend for the ancient religion of the Bible in which people were guided by "dreams and

years old."[53] In addition to Woodruff, other Church elders also joined Taylor in expressing disdain for the cessationist relegation of biblical

visions, and constant revelation." He was rebuffed by the presiding minister, who chided, "These things were given to the children of men in the dark ages of the world, and they were given for the very purpose of enlightening the children of men in that age, that they might believe in Jesus Christ. Today we live in the blaze of the glorious gospel light, and we do not need those things." Woodruff allegedly responded, "Then give me the dark ages of the world; give me those ages when men received these principles." *The Deseret Weekly*, Apr. 6, 1889, 450.

In a May 1892 sermon, Woodruff related what appears to be the same incident he related in April 1889. He described it as happening while a young boy living in Farmington, Connecticut. Woodruff confronted the ministers there saying, "'Why is it that you don't contend for the faith once delivered to the Saints? How is it that you don't have those gifts and graces that were manifest in the days of Christ and His Apostles?' They told me that these things were given in the dark ages of the world, to convince the children of men that Jesus was the Christ. But, said they, we are now living in the blaze of the great Gospel light, and we don't need them." *Deseret Weekly*, Salt Lake City, May 21, 1892, 719.

In an October 1895 sermon, Woodruff related what seems to again be the same incident related above. It was "[e]ighty years ago" when he "was about eight years old" while he was attending a Congregational Sunday School class. Learning about the great spiritual manifestations in the New Testament, he asked the ministers, "'[W]hy is it, gentlemen, that you do not advocate in your day and generation that faith once delivered to the Saints? Why don't you receive these things, if they were the servants of God and had the Gospel?' They responded, 'These things are all done away with. They were given in the dark ages of the world to convince the world that Jesus was the christ. We live in the blaze of the glorious gospel light of Christ; we do not need them to-day.' 'Then,' said I, 'give me the dark ages of the world.'" *Deseret Weekly*, Salt Lake City, Oct. 26, 1895, 578. Woodruff repeated this story yet again in an October 1896 sermon. *Deseret Weekly*, Oct. 17, 1896, 546.

53. Wilford Woodruff, *Deseret Weekly*, Oct. 26, 1895, 578.

figures to the "dark ages."[54] In some instances their disdain was directed at anti-polygamists who denigrated the practice of polygamy as being an outdated artifact of the "dark ages." Elder Henry Naisbitt observed, for example, "'Ah, well,' says one, 'that [i.e., the ancient practice of polygamy] was in the dark ages,'" to which Naisbitt replied, "Just so. But it was when God made Himself manifest among His children; when angels communed with those that dwelt upon the earth; when the spirit of revelation was felt among mankind; when the institutions of God's house and the ordinances thereof prevailed among the chosen people

54. As editor of the *Times and Seasons*, Taylor published an article in which a Mormon elder was quoted as saying, "the days of those [biblical] prophets, are by the sectarian world called the 'Dark Age;' . . . [but] those men were as familiar with the designs of God, and the future destiny of nations, as we are with the history of past events. Instead of darkness, God revealed himself to man, conversed with him, [and] told him what should come to pass in future ages." *Times and Seasons*, Nauvoo, Ill., 1843, vol. 4, no. 11, 207.

On October 29, 1856, William Appleby wrote a letter to John Taylor, then editor of *The Mormon*, excoriating "the religious world at present, and for centuries past [for] . . . believing . . . that God will never again speak from the Heavens to man—that all we want in this enlightened age, is a small morsel of . . . what the ancient Saints received and enjoyed in the 'dark ages,' and which 'now is done away, and no longer needed, in this enlightened age of Gospel liberty.'" John Taylor, ed., *The Mormon*, New York, Nov. 8, 1856, 2. Elder Joel M. Berry wrote in 1856, "Ask any portion of Christendom why . . . apostles, prophets, revelations and other gifts, are not in the Church now, and they will inform you that they were only needed in the dark ages of the world to establish the kingdom of God; but in this enlightened age are not necessary." *The Mormon*, New York, Nov. 15, 1856, 3. George Bywater stated, "'Fear God and keep his commandments: this is the whole duty of man' [Ecc. 12:13]. This sentiment was uttered long centuries ago, when men, according to modern writers and speakers, were supposed to enjoy only the light of Paganism, guided by the government of barbarism in the lower stages of the scale of human elevation—in the dark ages." June 4, 1882, *Journal of Discourses* 23:144.

In October 1885 Moses Thatcher remarked, "Abraham talked with God face to face, and although it may be thought that he lived in the dark ages, would to God that the Christian world would walk in such darkness today!" Oct. 8, 1885, *Journal of Discourses* 26:332.

of God! And you call that a day of darkness! . . . Would to God we had again a renewal . . . of the dark ages of the past."[55]

So, what Taylor and his associates so often raised their voices against was the cessationist disparagement of biblical times as an age of darkness, without the light of the gospel. With one voice they countered that the so-called "dark ages" of the Bible were instead a time of gospel light, far exceeding the so-called gospel light professed by contemporary cessationists.

Conclusion

Contrary to the growing assertion by Mormon intelligentsia that Taylor's 1873 "dark age" comment serves as a welcome corrective to the traditional LDS Apostasy narrative, which portrays the Dark Ages as a period devoid of revelation from God, Taylor's comment has nothing to do with spirituality during the Dark Ages of the world. Rather, it was an acknowledgement of God's spiritual outpouring to his ancient prophets living in biblical times, which cessationists in Taylor's time derisively referred to as the "dark ages" because, they claimed, these prophets were bereft of the gospel light. For Taylor and his associates, however, ancient prophets did have the full light of the gospel, otherwise they could not have had the remarkable visions and revelations described in the Bible. The uncritical adoption of Taylor's remark to promote the idea that the heavens were open to faithful Christians even during the European Dark Ages is therefore misguided and goes completely contrary to Taylor's actual view of the Middle Ages. For Taylor, just as for Church leaders living before and after, the Middle Ages were considered a time of spiritual darkness when the heavens were closed.

The nineteenth-century LDS polemic against cessationists for their derogatory use of the term "dark ages" to refer to biblical times has faded from LDS institutional memory. It is little wonder, therefore, that

55. Henry W. Naisbitt, June 7, 1885, *Journal of Discourses* 26:240.

many have hastily jumped to the conclusion that Taylor's "dark ages" must have reference to the historical Dark Ages, especially when such a reading serves to advance a more conciliatory Apostasy narrative. With the momentum and enthusiastic reception this presentist reading has had, it is also not surprising that it has persisted for over twenty years without being critically challenged.

Despite the fact that Taylor's September 7, 1873 sermon doesn't really support (and, in fact, actually undermines) the belief in a spiritually affluent medieval period, the revisionist Apostasy narrative that it has been instrumental in promoting is laudable nonetheless. The presumption that medieval Christians languished in spiritual darkness does injustice to the great spiritual legacy they left behind. Only time will tell if Mormonism will ever fully come around to replacing its disparaging, Protestant-inherited Apostasy narrative with one that is more conciliatory and historically based—one that acknowledges the same accessibility to spiritual gifts throughout Christian history, and one that doesn't rely on Taylor's 1873 "dark age" comment as a proof text.

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UNVEILING THE INVISIBLE HAND OF PROVIDENCE: EXAMINING THE SMITH FAMILY'S ECONOMIC AND SPIRITUAL CATALYSTS AMID TROUBLING TIMES AND THE PANIC OF 1819

Ryan N. Cramer

> *Desperation is the raw material of drastic change. Only those who can leave behind everything they have ever believed in can hope to escape.*
> *—William S. Burroughs (1914–1997)*[1]

Joseph Smith ascended to the revered position of prophet, eventually capturing the allegiance of millions. However, the precise chain of events that led him to that position is shrouded in uncertainty, given the formidable challenge of interpreting early Mormon history before his ascent to prominence. Originating from humble beginnings as an unknown farm boy, Joseph's[2] journey is further obscured by the family's nomadic lifestyle, particularly before their relocation to New York. Their transient nature poses a barrier to unraveling the intricacies of

1. William S. Burroughs, *The Western Lands* (New York: Viking, 1987; reis., London: Pan Books, 1988), 116.

2. This article departs from conventional academic practice by referring to members of the Smith family by their first names. Given the frequency of references to multiple individuals within the Smith family, this approach is intended to minimize ambiguity and enhance readability.

the family's character and motivations. Compounding the challenge is the scarcity of contemporaneous documentation, leaving the realities of Joseph's early life prone to speculation. Existing accounts detailing his transformation into a prophet and seer are marred by biases of related parties who could have motives for his success, or detractors with motives to impede his actions. While these sources offer a thread of reality, reconstructing the overall context the thread was weaved into provides insight into the shaping of the events in the Smiths' lives.

Numerous scholars have extensively delved into the early life of Joseph Smith. In works such as *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* by Richard Bushman, *No Man Knows My History* by Fawn Brodie, and *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* by Dan Vogel, the intricate details of Joseph's early life are illuminated. Paradigm-shifting scholarship about the Smith family's supernatural beliefs come from works such as *Early Mormonism and the Magic Worldview* by D. Michael Quinn and Mark Ashurst-McGee's graduate thesis, "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet." In addition, Adam Jortner's work, including his book *Blood from the Sky: Miracles and Politics in the Early American Republic,* further sets the stage for contextualizing the early American supernatural environment. This essay builds upon this groundbreaking scholarship, focusing on the apocalyptic events (e.g., earthquakes and comets) and economic circumstances that provide essential context for the formation of the Smiths' beliefs and circumstances.

This essay explores the impact of apocalyptic fears and economic challenges between 1809 and 1822 on the Smith family, particularly Joseph Smith Jr. It argues that turmoil, tragedy, and portents of doom during Joseph's upbringing shaped the family's choice of occupations and contributed to the development of their core beliefs in divination, astrology, and magical practices, particularly during the Panic of 1819, the nation's first depression, which lingered until the mid-1820s.

This essay relies heavily on contemporaneous newspaper accounts, which will be both beneficial and detrimental to an analysis of the environmental context. Several challenges come with relying primarily on contemporaneous newspaper articles for context including assumptions about information awareness, selection bias, and a tendency toward sensationalism. To attempt to minimize the problems of information awareness, the research prioritized newspapers that were local to the Smiths. Selection bias may be present because articles in newspapers were typically written by the more educated or literate, causing the true experiences and beliefs of poor, uneducated, or illiterate people to be underrepresented or ridiculed. In addition, due to the media's attraction to sensationalism, issues presented may or may not have been as important to the average citizen as portrayed.

In addition, the passage of time, the progression of knowledge, and the profound cultural shifts over the last two centuries have created significant barriers for people at present to fully empathize with the mental frameworks, worldviews, and daily challenges faced by people of that era. Due to these challenges, this essay will employ a significant amount of qualifying language. However, despite these limitations and challenges, the study will provide insights into factors that would have had a high likelihood of influencing the Smith family along with many others during the period of study.

Life for people in the early 1800s was vastly different from ours. They lacked many of the scientific discoveries that we rely on every day to form our worldview. Although the Enlightenment had dissuaded many from adhering to superstitious beliefs, many still held to this hidden "knowledge" of ancient people. They lived in a time when disease was caused by bad air, charms and amulets were sometimes used to ward off disease, and astronomical events were seen by many to be highly significant to their lives. Lacking the scientific knowledge of today, many people still believed that the sun, moon, stars, planets,

and even comets were inhabited,[3] and economic hardships were often seen as signs of God's disfavor.

It was within this environment that Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith started their family. After experiencing a reasonably comfortable lifestyle while living near his extended family, Joseph Smith Sr. experienced great misfortune, losing everything in a failed ginseng venture in 1803.[4] From this time forward, the family traveled from place to place, struggling to get ahead and regain what they had lost, their extended families seemingly unable or unwilling to help. Their loss seems to have also imposed some level of economic suffering on their entire extended families.[5]

In Vermont, because state law required towns to provide for the welfare their poor, many towns "warned out" undesirable newcomers to avoid the responsibility of supporting them. Joseph Smith Sr. received such a notice on December 1, 1809, while living in Royalton, Vermont, which was adjacent to his previous home in Tunbridge.[6]

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3. "The Comet," *Vermont Percursor* (Montpelier), Oct. 30, 1807, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/490742086/; "Inhabitants of Comets," *Kinderhook Herald*, May 7, 1829, [1–2], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&=kh18290507-01.1.1, quoting David Milne-Home, *Essay on Comets: Which Gained the First of Dr. Fellowes's Prizes, Proposed to Those who Had Attended the University of Edinburgh Within the Last Twelve Years* (Edinburgh: A. Black, 1828), 142–45; "Items," *The Geneva Gazette, and General Advertiser*, June 17, 1829, [1], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=tgg18290617-01.1.1; "Germany," *The Troy Sentinel*, Nov. 3, 1824, [2], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=tts18241103-01.1.2; Esther Inglis-Arkell, "Astronomers Once Thought There Was Life on the Sun," *Gizmodo*, Dec. 20, 2013, https://gizmodo.com/astronomers-once-thought-there-was-life-on-the-sun-1487292730.

4. Mark L. Staker and Donald L. Enders, "Joseph Smith Sr.'s China Adventure," *Journal of Mormon History* 48, no. 2 (2022): 79–105.

5. Staker and Enders, "China Adventure," [79].

6. *Royalton Vermont Town records, 1788–1880*, digital image, FamilySearch.org, citing FamilySearch microfilm 982526, items 3–5, 318; "Vermont State

Nevertheless, the family remained there until at least 1811 through Lucy's pregnancy and loss of their son Ephraim, who died at birth, and the birth of another son, William.

Joseph Smith Jr., age five, would begin growing up in a rapidly changing and contentious world. The religious landscape during this time was undergoing a remarkable shift. Between the ratification of the US Constitution and the passage of disestablishment bills between 1800 and 1830, a gradual erosion of the power of taxation wielded by churches occurred as church and state began their gradual separation. This shift forced ministers to increasingly rely on voluntary contributions from adherents rather than support through taxation. A competitive atmosphere emerged, not only among different denominations but also between established congregationalist churches and traveling itinerant preachers. These ministers, now dependent on attracting converts for their survival rather than being supported by the towns with the church at the center, found themselves in competition not only for followers but also for financial resources and property. This contest for both opinions and resources often led to tensions and animosity within the religious communities.[7]

The increase in conflicting opinions troubled many. Amanda Porterfield in her book *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* argues that "churches manipulated distrust as well as relieved it, feeding the uncertainty and instability they worked to

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News," *The Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (Montpelier), May 14, 1884, [1], https://www.newspapers.com/image/71218953/. Joseph Smith is a common name, but no other Joseph Smith appears in the Royalton town records during this period. The warning out may have been ordered as a common preventative measure to keep people from being a burden on the town. Due to appearances of his name in subsequent years, it appears the selectmen allowed the family to stay in Royalton until at least 1811.

7. Shelby M. Balik, *Rally the Scattered Believers: Northern New England's Religious Geography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 74–109.

resolve."[8] One itinerant preacher from Vermont met a man who noted that "he wished to have Religion, if he knew which way was right, but there were so many."[9] Lucy Smith had previously struggled with finding religion, saying after one meeting with the Presbyterians in around 1802 that "I returned saying in my heart there is not on Earth the religion which I seek."[10] Around 1811 Joseph Smith Sr.'s mind also "became much excited upon the subject of religion." Critics in Vermont claimed that Joseph Sr. had leanings toward the deist writings of Voltaire and Thomas Paine,[11] who were highly critical of sectarian priests and organized religion in general, Paine insisting that the "doctrines of damnation and salvation . . . had been contrived by priests who manipulated fear in the service of political tyrants."[12] Joseph Sr. belonged to no church but, according to Lucy, "contended for the ancient order" as established by

8. Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.

9. William Smyth Babcock journal, Jan. 20, 1802, William Smyth Babcock Papers, folder 3, cited in Balik, *Rally the Scattered Believers*, 118. The preacher was William Babcock, an itinerant Freewill Baptist preacher among the hills of Vermont who later married Betsey Merrill of Springfield, Vermont. She was a woman who claimed to have seen angels and had visions while in a trance beginning in 1805. Mark Bushnell, "History: Angel over Springfield," *Rutland Herald* (Vt.), July 24, 2004, https://www.rutlandherald.com/news/history-angel-over-springfield/article_48cc0428-b7ef-5c64-81b0-8e1aa10a690e.html.

10. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, book 2, page 5, Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/23.

11. Green Mountain Boys to Thomas C. Sharp, Feb. 15, 1844, as transcribed in *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 1, edited by Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 597. Later citations will use the abbreviation "EMD," followed by volume and page numbers. The Green Mountain Boys replied to Joseph Smith Jr.'s appeal for help, claiming Joseph Smith Sr. said "Voltairs writings was the best bible then extant, and Thomas Paine's Age of Reason."

12. Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, 14, citing Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1974; orig. 1794 and 1795), quotations from 60, 68, and 54–55.

Christ and his apostles. While contemplating "the confusion and discord that reigned in the religious world," he experienced a dreary and ominous dream.

Lucy recounted how her husband found himself in a barren field, surrounded by nothing but dead fallen timber, which his guide indicated represented "the world which now lieth inanimate and dumb, in regard to the true religion." His guide told him to travel on until he found a box that held fruit that would give him wisdom and understanding. Upon opening the box and starting to eat, he recounted, "all manner of beasts, horned cattle, and roaring animals rose up on every side in the most threatening manner possible, tearing the earth, tossing their horns, and bellowing most terrifically all around me. They finally came so close upon me that I was compelled to drop the box and fly for my life."[13]

Being an individual who interpreted dreams, Lucy may have interpreted this dream with guidance published in one of the many works similar to Ibrahim Ali Mahomed Hafez's *The Oneirocritic: Being a Treatise on the Art of Foretelling Future Events, by Dreams, Moles, Cards, the Signs of the Zodiac and the Planets*, which contains interpretations of numerous elements found in Joseph Sr.'s dreams. According to this work, dreaming of being pursued by a bull denotes "that many injurious reports will be spread of your character, and that you will be in danger of losing your friends." Similarly, dreaming of a dog barking and snarling suggests that "enemies are secretly endeavoring to destroy your reputation and happiness."[14] From this point forward, Joseph Sr.

13. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 52–53, Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/59.

14. Ibrahim Ali Mahomed Hafez, pseud., *The oneirocritic: being a treatise on the art of foretelling future events, by dreams, moles, cards, the signs of the zodiac and the planets* (New York: Printed for N. Ogden, [between 1790 and 1799?]). Note: Name is spelled "Ibraham" in some records. Many other books and editions were published during the period that claimed similar interpretations of fortunes. See also Ibraham Ali Mahomed Hafez, pseud., *The New and Complete*

became even more convinced that no true church existed on Earth.[15] This dream portending poverty and aspersion reflected themes that had already occurred and would persist throughout the family's life, resembling the feelings and experiences his son Joseph Jr. would describe in the following decades.

That year they would move to Lebanon, New Hampshire. It would be a year of great foreboding. On June 12, 1811, a comet began to be visible in the western sky, starting very nebulously but coming more into view in the fall.[16] This comet would come to have the longest recorded period of visibility of any comet until the appearance of the Comet Hale–Bopp in 1997 and would, at its greatest visibility, have a coma larger than the sun.[17] Many believed the appearance of a comet was an omen to be feared. The minds of some people began to remember all the calamities through the ages that had occurred as a result of the appearance of comets. Some were alarmed, fearing it was "the harbinger of War."[18]

An unrelenting stream of terrifying events would begin to unfold, which likely deeply impacted Joseph as he transitioned from the age of five when the comet first appeared in 1811 to the year 1818 when he turned twelve.

Fortune Teller (New York: Richard Scott, George Largin, 1816), https://www.loc.gov/item/11014336/; and *Every Lady's own Fortune-Teller, or an infallible guide to the hidden decrees of fate, etc.* (London: J. Roach, 1791). See topics of corn, 38; fields, 48; turnips, 88; wheat, 89; bulls, 32; dogs, 43; and eating, 45.

15. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 52–53.

16. "Comet," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 12, 1811, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/41024720/.

17. "Foxter's Letter," *Oswego Daily Palladium*, Oct. 1, 1892, 6, https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=tdpl18921001-01.1.6.

18. "The Comet," *The Washingtonian* (Windsor, Vt.), Sept. 16, 1811, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/489834244/.

Despite some skeptics dismissing the historical precedents set by comets as mere superstition, all the world was talking about it, recounting the earthquakes, pestilence, and wars they portended.[19] Joseph and his family would soon encounter compelling evidence linking this celestial event to struggles in their own lives. In October 1811, alongside reports about the comet,[20] newspapers noted that "in almost every democratic paper will be seen several columns filled with blustering and threatening of war with England."[21]

In December 1811, a catastrophic series of earthquakes centered in New Madrid, Missouri began, which caused widespread fear and upheaval. The earthquakes were felt as far as Massachusetts, Louisiana, and possibly even Vermont.[22] They destroyed half of New Madrid and caused damage and changes to the landscape within six hundred thousand square kilometers of its epicenter. With over three thousand distinct seismic shocks at estimated magnitudes of up to 7.7 over a period of five months, it is thought to be "largest outburst of seismic energy in American history." It not only destroyed half of New Madrid but also created new lakes, temporarily reversed the course of the

19. "The Comet," *The Washingtonian* (Windsor, Vt.), Nov. 4, 1811, [1], https://www.newspapers.com/image/489834445/. The author makes a long list of omens attributed to the 1811 comet while criticizing people who "foretell" things after they happen. See also John S. Jenckes, *Comets: Their General Properties and Effects on Large Bodies, With Their Influence on the Health and Actions of Mankind; Deduced from Reason, the Nature of Things, and Evidences of Holy Writ* (Philadelphia: Printed for the author, 1811), 22–26; "The Comet," *Cooperstown Federalist* (New York), Sept. 21, 1811, [2–3], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=cf18110921-01.1.2.

20. Dudley Leavitt, "Concerning Comets," *Portland Gazette* (Maine), Oct. 7, 1811, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/895246116/.

21. One of the people, "Modern Energy," *Portland Gazette* (Maine), Oct. 7, 1811, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/895246116/.

22. Myron Leslie Fuller, *The New Madrid Earthquake*, Bulletin 494 (Washington, D.C.: United States Geological Survey, 1912), DOI: 10.3133/b494.

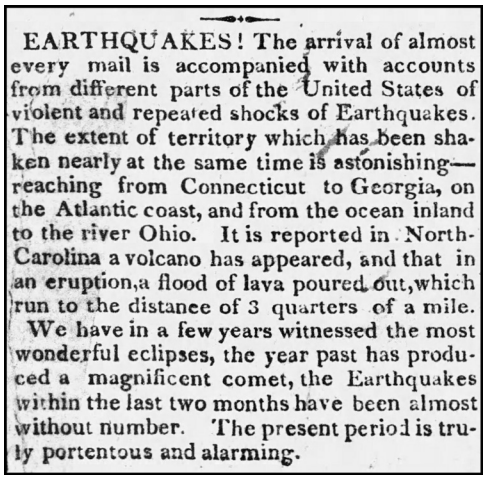
EARTHQUAKES! The arrival of almost every mail is accompanied with accounts from different parts of the United States of violent and repeated shocks of Earthquakes. The extent of territory which has been shaken nearly at the same time is astonishing—reaching from Connecticut to Georgia, on the Atlantic coast, and from the ocean inland to the river Ohio. It is reported in North-Carolina a volcano has appeared, and that in an eruption, a flood of lava poured out, which run to the distance of 3 quarters of a mile. We have in a few years witnessed the most wonderful eclipses, the year past has produced a magnificent comet, the Earthquakes within the last two months have been almost without number. The present period is truly portentous and alarming.

Figure 1: *Buffalo Gazette*, Mar. 11, 1812, [3].

Mississippi River, and caused deep seismic cracks, sulfuric vapors,[23] and large areas of "sunk country."[24] These earthquakes were rumored to have been prophesied by the Native American prophet Tenskwatawa through his brother Tecumseh,[25] and Indigenous legend suggested that there had been prior widespread upheaval in this area.[26] As the ominous comet dimly peered at Earth's inhabitants, "a dreary darkness brooded over the whole face of the creation."[27]

"A great many superstitious people" of Raleigh, North Carolina were alarmed not only by the comet but also by the bloodlike color of

23. Susanne Leikam, "Unpopular American Natural Calamities and the Selectivity of Disaster Memory," in *Unpopular Culture*, edited by Martin Lüthe and Sascha Pöhlmann (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 294.

24. Sir Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America* (New York: Harper & Brothers; London: John Murray, 1855), 2:175–80.

25. "Sketches of the life and public character of Gen. Andrew Jackson," *Charleston Mercury*, Nov. 9, 1824, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/604783744/.

26. Lyell, *A Second Visit*, 2:180.

27. "The Earthquake," *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (Montpelier), Mar. 5, 1812, [1-2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/491193980.

Figure 2: Claude-Louis Desrais, *Caricature sur la comète de 1811* [Caricature on the comet of 1811], National Library of France.

the sun, the aurora borealis, and a significant earthquake they experienced in December. It brought to mind all the appearances "that are still believed . . . to have been the awful precursors" of the Revolutionary War.[28]

Susanne Leikam, a scholar who has written on disaster studies, noted that the backdrop of the Second Great Awakening along with a solar eclipse in November 1811, the changes in the landscape, and "the repeated shakings of the earth—some of them occurring during the actual open-air camp meetings—were interpreted as demonstrations of God's power, as calls to repentance, and also as warnings to return to a pious lifestyle."[29]

28. "From the Raleigh Star," *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (Montpelier), Feb. 13, 1812, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/491193959/.

29. Leikam, "Unpopular," 293–95. For another example of the papers noting the many omens, see "Observations on the diseases of New York, for the months of July, August, and September, 1811," *Evening Post* (New York), Oct. 24, 1811, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/39629752/.

Less than six months after the comet's appearance, its anticipated effects reverberated throughout the world. The War of 1812 commenced with Great Britain on June 18, 1812, and immediately afterward, Napoleon invaded Russia on June 24, 1812. This period brought anxiety to Vermont and New Hampshire, where concerns of a possible British invasion prevailed. In response, twenty-eight men from Lebanon joined a militia to safeguard against potential attacks.[30] In Buffalo, some individuals, driven by their superstitions and concerns about the war, voiced an old adage: "What the sword spares, the pestilence will destroy, and what pestilence spares will be overwhelmed by famine."[31]

Amid this turmoil and the ominous signs of impending doom, the years 1812 and 1813 brought typhoid fever to Lebanon.[32] One by one, each child in the Smith family fell ill. After the doctor declared their ten-year-old daughter Sophronia was too far gone for his help, seven-year-old Joseph witnessed his parents' faith as they knelt by her bedside supplicating for God to answer their prayers. After Sophronia apparently stopped breathing, Lucy held Sophronia's lifeless body despondently while pacing the floor, believing that God would heal her. And Sophronia miraculously returned to life.[33]

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30. Bernard P. Chapman, "A Lebanon Timeline, 1810–1819," Lebanon Historical Society, https://lebanonnhhistory.org/lebanon-history/a-lebanon-timeline/1810–1819/; Rev. Charles A. Downs, *History of Lebanon, N. H. 1761–1887* (Concord, N.H.: Rumford Printing Co., 1908), 224.

31. "Progress of the War," *Poughkeepsie Journal* (N.Y.), Dec. 30, 1812, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/114615891/; "From the Buffalo Gazette," *Orange County Patriot* (Goshen, N.Y.), Jan. 5, 1813, [1], FultonHistory.com. These types of troubles would be referenced by Moroni in his later visit to Joseph Smith when "he informed [him] of great judgments which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence; and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation." Joseph Smith—History 1:45.

32. Nathan R. Welch, "Joseph Smith's Childhood Illness," *Religious Educator* 10, no. 3 (2009): 131–36.

33. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–45, 2:9–3:3. Joseph's illness is believed to have been typhoid fever, but Lucy's record calls it "typhus."

Following Joseph Jr.'s recovery from this pestilence, he endured excruciating pain for two weeks due to infection resulting from typhoid fever, leading to the horrifying and traumatizing experience of having some of his leg bone cut out without any anesthesia as his father held him down. This ordeal left him either bedridden or relying on crutches from age seven to ten.[34] The British blockade followed by the Embargo Act of 1813 compounded their suffering. Cost of living increased 20 percent in 1813 alone, plus another 10 percent in 1814.[35]

In 1814, a year marked by the burning of the US Capitol by the British on August 24th, the Smiths faced crop failures, which continued through 1815. As they entered the spring of 1816, the Smiths received yet another "warning out" notice from local town supervisors in March.[36] This warning out was likely a devastating blow to the Smiths, happening during a time that must have, for them, felt like the end of the world. In spite of their hardships, the Smiths attempted to plant crops once more. But 1816, a year dubbed by some farmers as "eighteen hundred and starve to death,"[37] posed an insurmountable challenge. The eruption of Indonesia's Mount Tambora in April 1815 had unleashed global climatic disruptions that went on to haunt them in the following year. A seaman near the eruption vividly recounted, "The darkness was so profound during the remainder of the day, that I never saw any thing

34. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 21.

35. Hugh Rockoff, "War and Inflation in The United States from The Revolution to The First Iraq War," Working Paper 21221 (National Bureau of Economic Research, May 2015), 53, table 2, "Money, Prices, and Interest Rates in the War of 1812," http://www.nber.org/papers/w21221.

36. Alden M. Rollins, *Vermont Warnings Out 1779–1817, vol. 2: Southern Vermont* (Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1997), 360. Unless the Smiths had been absent from Norwich for some period before 1816, the town selectmen's warning out probably wasn't legal. In Vermont, a person was considered to have established residence after living in an area for one year.

37. "1816," *Steuben County Republican* (Angola, Ind.), Nov. 27, 1872, [1], https://www.newspapers.com/image/105845227/.

equal to it in the darkest night—it was impossible to see your hand when held up close to your eyes."[38] Reports would eventually reach the United States a year later, describing a calamitous scene at the epicenter: a volcano-induced whirlwind that flattened a village, uprooted trees, and lifted cattle and people into the air.[39]

Although Americans didn't understand the cause of the 1816 weather anomalies, they experienced droughts, severe freezes every month of the year, dry fog, birds dropping dead in the streets, vast clouds of impalpable dust, and widespread crop failures.[40] In Italy they "received a greater quantity of snow than has been known in the memory of man." And to make it more alarming, the falling snow was red and yellow. The Italians formed "religious processions to appease the heavens."[41]

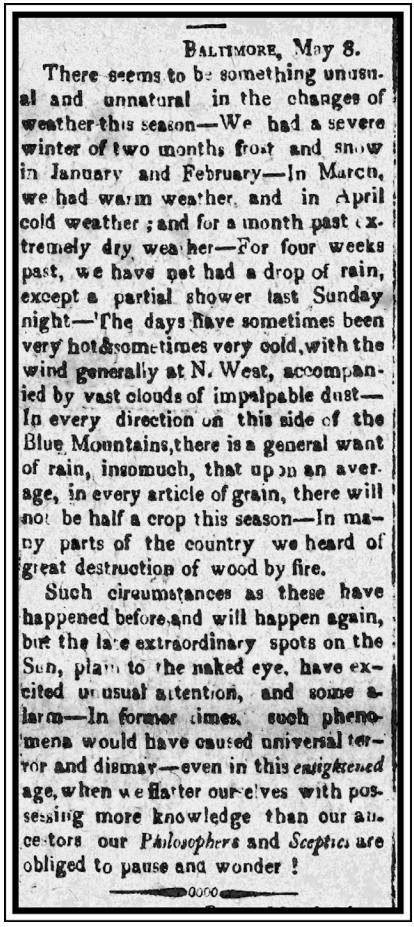
Reports of these extreme weather events around the world caused continued anxieties and contemplation of apocalyptic happenings. In the midst of this, Joseph Smith Sr., desperate for food and employment and limited in means, left his family behind and set out toward

38. "Volcano at Sumbawa," *Vermont Republican* (Windsor), June 3, 1816, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/405147508/; "From the Java Government Gazett, received by the ship Jacob Jones," *Buffalo Gazette*, June 18, 1816, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/255005298/.

39. Rev. C. C. Clarke, *The Hundred Wonders of the World, and of the Three Kingdoms of Nature, Described According to the Best and Latest Authorities, and Illustrated by Engravings* (London: J. Souter, 1818), 185–87. Advertised for sale in the Canandaigua bookstore in the *Ontario Repository* (Canandaigua, N.Y.), Jan. 29, 1822, [3], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=onrb18220129-01.1.3 and Mar. 5, 1822, [3], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=onrb18220305-01.1.3.

40. "Quebec, June 12," *Buffalo Gazette*, July 16, 1816, [2–3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/255005373/; "Baltimore, May 8," *Vermont Republican and American Journal* (Windsor), May 20, 1816, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/519582277/.

41. "Something as astonishing as spots on the sun," *Ontario Repository*, May 21, 1816, [2], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=onrb18160521-01.1.2.



BALTIMORE, May 8.

There seems to be something unusual and unnatural in the changes of weather this season—We had a severe winter of two months frost and snow in January and February—In March, we had warm weather, and in April cold weather; and for a month past extremely dry weather—For four weeks past, we have not had a drop of rain, except a partial shower last Sunday night—The days have sometimes been very hot & sometimes very cold, with the wind generally at N. West, accompanied by vast clouds of impalpable dust—In every direction on this side of the Blue Mountains, there is a general want of rain, insomuch, that upon an average, in every article of grain, there will not be half a crop this season—In many parts of the country we heard of great destruction of wood by fire.

Such circumstances as these have happened before, and will happen again, but the late extraordinary spots on the Sun, plain to the naked eye, have excited unusual attention, and some alarm—In former times, such phenomena would have caused universal terror and dismay—even in this *enlightened* age, when we flatter ourselves with possessing more knowledge than our ancestors our *Philosophers* and *Sceptics* are obliged to pause and wonder!

Figure 3: *Vermont Republican and American Journal. Windham, Windsor and Orange County Advertiser*, May 20, 1816, [3], newspapers.com.

Palmyra, New York, a place where he had heard "the farmers raised wheat in abundance."[42]

In the winter of 1816, after difficulties reconciling accounts with creditors, Lucy and the rest of the family left for Palmyra to join their husband and father. The hopelessness of a callous world would manifest itself in the man who transported them to Palmyra, Mr. Howard.

42. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, 3:3, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/33.

Lucy said he was "an unprincipled unfeeling wretch by the manner in which he handled my goods & money as well as his treatment to my children, especially Joseph who was still somewhat lame" and often forced to travel for miles on foot. Finally, they arrived in Palmyra penniless.[43] Lucy Smith remembered that they "were much reduced—not from indolence, but on account of many reverses of fortune, with which our lives had been rather singularly marked."[44]

When the Smith family arrived in New York, they did not find significantly better conditions. Lucy later recalled their plan to escape their poverty:

> We <all> now Sat down and maturely councilled togather as to what course it was best to take how we shold proceed to buisness in our then destitute circumstances It was agreed by each one of us that it was <most> advisable to aply all our energies together and endeavor to obtain a Piece of land as this was then a new country and land was low being in its rude state but it was almost a time of famine wheat was $2.50 per bushel and other things in proportion how shall we said My Husband be able to sustain ourselves and have anything left to buy land.[45]

Historical records verify Lucy's recollection about prices. Average wholesale wheat prices had increased from $1.50 per bushel in 1815 to $2.41 per bushel in 1817 due to the preceding year's unprecedented weather and failed crops.[46] This period of food shortage must have been traumatic for young William Smith, age six at the time, to have been able to remember fifty-eight years later: "It is Still in my memorey

43. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, 3:5.

44. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, 67–68, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/74.

45. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, 3:7.

46. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition, Part 1* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), Series E 123–134, "Wholesale Prices of Selected Commodities: 1800 to 1970-Con.," 209.

provisions very high corn at one dollar fifty cts per bushel, wheat 3 dollars and not much to be at that price."[47]

In April of 1817, the Native Americans in Buffalo comprising the Senecas, Cayugas, and Onondagas, were suffering a dire food shortage due to the winter's devastating impact on their corn crops. The Presbyterian Synod at Geneva, which oversaw Palmyra,[48] made resolutions to encourage their congregants and fellow Christians to provide aid to the Native Americans. The aid was intended to be distributed "in such a manner as shall have the best tendency to encourage the industry of the Indians, by taking in exchange for provisions, baskets, brooms, and such other articles as Indians are in the habit of manufacturing."[49]

The synod passionately implored their members to extend assistance, emphasizing the urgency of the situation:

> If these resolutions are carried into effect the natives may be supplied with bread; if not they must starve. —Mere resolutions will never feed them. Their fate remains yet to be decided. If ministers and christians generally, refuse or delay to help them, they die. . . . In various ways they have sought relief but could not obtain it. . . . They have come even to the door of the sanctuary to see if Christians have any bowels of compassion, or are capable of feeling for their fellow creatures. . . . Were the blessed Jesus on earth, as he once was; and could they go to him and tell their distress, his tender heart would melt with compassion. He would wipe the falling tear from their cheeks; he would feed their little children, now starving in the arms of their distressed mothers : never was one denied who applied to him for relief . . . by doing good to these heathen, you may unlock the prison of Satan and deliver nations of captive souls from the thraldom of sin. Give then, O give freely: give prayerfully, and let the Indians see what christians can do.[50]

47. William Smith, Notes, circa 1875, *EMD* 1:489.

48. Geneva-Lyons Presbytery, *Growth of the Church on the "Northwestern Frontier"* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Cushing-Malloy, Inc., 1955), 2, FamilySearch.org.

49. Henry Axtell and Daniel S. Butrick, "Cast thy Bread upon the Waters," *Buffalo Gazette*, Apr. 1, 1817, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/255061977/.

50. Axtell and Butrick, "Cast thy Bread."

The measure was supported by a "benevolent few," who hoped their benevolence would bring Christianity into a new light. But the measure was unpopular.[51] The relationship between Natives and Christian settlers was fraught with enmity. For some Christians, Native Americans were simply seen as heathen barbarians ruled by superstition.[52] But some Christians who understood Indigenous culture saw a possibility that Native Americans were fallen Israelites, some theorizing they were the biblical Danites who were prophesied to be "a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward."[53]

The alliances of many tribes with Tecumseh and the Native American prophet Tenskwatawa along with their craftiness, cunning, strategem, and brutality in burning villages and killing colonizers caused great distrust. Some would have believed these "heathens" were receiving the just punishments of God. "Mercenary speculators [give] them dinners, get them drunk, make them presents, stroke their heads and tell them how they loved them." Distrust caused the Natives to wonder whether the missionaries and schoolmasters had come to "do good or to fleece them."[54] At the same time, Enlightenment philosophies, which influenced many Deists' and Christians' beliefs that the revolution's success was part of God's divine purpose, also convinced them that the misery of Native Americans (and slaves) was "God's will and plan."[55]

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51. Jabez B. Hyde, "For the Buffalo Gazette," *Buffalo Gazette*, May 6, 1817, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/255062103/.

52. Adam Jortner, *The Gods of Prophetstown: The Battle of Tippecanoe and the Holy War for the American Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 48.

53. "American Indians," *Rochester Telegraph*, Apr. 6, 1819, [1], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=rot18190406-01.1.1; Genesis 49:17.

54. Hyde, "For the Buffalo Gazette," *Buffalo Gazette*, [3]. For additional insight on how the government took advantage of Natives through trickery and alcohol see Jortner, "The Bargain," in *Gods of Prophetstown*, 155–65.

55. Jortner, *Gods of Prophetstown*, 45.

A few days after the donations were made to the Natives in Buffalo, the *Ontario Repository* in Canandaigua and the *Geneva Gazette* reported that a "severe earthquake had sunk a country ninety miles in extent" in the narrow neck of land in current-day Mexico called the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.[56] "The whole face of the country had been turned up, and the rivers Tobasco [now Grijalva] and St. Francis were rendered impassable by the thousand floating trees on the surface," the newspaper reported. "An Indian village had been swallowed up, with all its inhabitants."[57]

These events made a long-term impression. Joseph later recalled, "from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind—the contentions and divisions, the wickedness and abominations, and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind."[58]

When the 1818 growing season arrived, Joseph Sr. and Alvin Smith likely remembered the record-high grain prices and food shortages of the previous year and perhaps sought ways to produce less expensive ingredients for their cake and beer shop and ensure their future survival throughout the coming year. If they were not paying attention to economic conditions, they might not have realized that grain prices had fallen about 20–25 percent between the spring of 1817 and the spring of 1818.[59]

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56. "Earthquake," *Ontario Repository*, May 27, 1817, [2], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=onrb18170527-01.1.2. The area of the devastation is described as "situated between the bay of Campeachy, and the gulph of Tequentepec."

57. "Earthquake," *The Geneva Gazette*, May 28, 1817, [1], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn83031109/1817-05-28/ed-1/seq-1/; "Earthquake," *Ontario Repository*, May 27, 1817, [2], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn83031529/1817-05-27/ed-1/seq-2.

58. Joseph Smith Jr., History, circa Summer 1832, 2, Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/2.

59. See Figs. 4 and 5.

Seeking a means of survival, Joseph Sr. and Alvin entered into some sort of partnership with Jeremiah Hurlbut, a local farmer, to farm the land of his widowed mother Hannah.[60] They also purchased two horses from Hurlbut, signing a promissory note on March 27, 1818 stating they would "Pay to Jeremiah Hurlbut Or Barer the sum Of Sixty five Dollars to be Paid in good Merchant Grain at the market Price by the first Ganuary."[61]

By August 1818, the crops they were growing had matured and were probably ready to harvest. But for whatever reason, the Smiths didn't harvest all the crops.[62] Something had gone wrong between the Smiths and Hurlbut. In February 1819, a month after the debt was due to Hurlbut, Joseph Sr. and Alvin sued him for $146.50, which included $80.00 for fraud for selling them defective horses, $25.00 for breach of contract, and $41.50 for services rendered by Joseph and his sons, as well as other items.[63]

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60. "List of Goods, between 10 May and circa August 1818 [*Joseph Smith Sr. v. J. Hurlbut*]," Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/list-of-goods-between-10-may-and-circa-august-1818-joseph-smith-sr-v-j-hurlbut. Evidence that this was a partnership is found in Hurlbut's list of goods provided. In each case where it is apparent the goods were provided for the farm, shillings are translated to dollars at one-half the normal exchange rate. For example, the first item on the list reads "To two bushels of oats @ 3/— $0.75." Normally one would take two bushels multiplied by three shillings equals six shillings. 6s=3/10£. The $/£ conversion rate was $5/£. So, 3/10x$5=$1.50 for 6s rather than the $0.75 presented.

61. "Promissory Note, Mar. 27, 1818 [*Joseph Smith Sr. v. J. Hurlbut*]," [1], Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/promissory-note-27-march-1818-joseph-smith-sr-v-j-hurlbut.

62. "Promissory Note," [2]. The note was partially cancelled by noting that Hurlbut had received "crops on the ground."

63. "List of Services, between circa 12 January and 6 February 1819 [*Joseph Smith Sr. v. J. Hurlbut*]," Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/list-of-services-between-circa-12-january-and-6-february-1819-joseph-smith-sr-v-j-hurlbut/.

Hurlbut counterclaimed that the Smiths owed him offsets for $25 for "damages for not working the land according to agreement" and "28 dollars damage sustaned in the wrong apprisal of crops." Hurlbut also sought reimbursement for half of the costs of his labor, seed, and other goods related to the farming of the land totaling $23.81.[64] The jury awarded Joseph and Alvin a judgment against Hurlbut of $45.54, which may have represented the $41.50 for services rendered plus interest and court costs. Unfortunately, extant documents do not detail how the judgment reconciles with the claims and counterclaims.[65]

64. "List of Goods."

65. "Docket Entry, between 12 January and circa 6 February 1819 [*Joseph Smith Sr. v. J. Hurlbut*]," Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/docket-entry-between-12-january-and-circa-6-february-1819-joseph-smith-sr-v-j-hurlbut/. The legal aspects of the case have been diligently studied by Jeffrey Walker, who provided a detailed review and analysis of its importance. Walker argued that the case was relatively ordinary, and that Joseph Jr.'s admittance as a witness indicated that he was found to be competent and credible. See Jeffrey N. Walker, "Joseph Smith's Introduction to the Law: The 1819 Hurlbut Case," *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 139. Daniel Peterson cited Walker's article in the *Deseret News*, conflating the word "credible" with the related but non-synonymous word "truthful." See Daniel Peterson, "Joseph Smith Was Known as Truthful," *Deseret News*, Dec. 14, 2011, https://www.deseret.com/2011/12/14/20238201/joseph-smith-was-known-as-truthful/. Walker's statement that Joseph was found to be credible because "every item [Joseph Jr.] testified about was included in the damages" does not seem to be supported by the available evidence. The documents lack specifics regarding Joseph Jr.'s testimony or the methodology behind how the damages were determined, making it difficult to judge his credibility or truthfulness without more details. Walker notes that different scenarios could have led to the judgment in favor of the Smiths. However, an error in table 1's reconciliation casts doubt on the selected solution and conclusion. Table 1 includes a $13.50 reduction already included in the calculation of the $66.50 figure at the top of the table. Furthermore, the $13.50 is unrelated to its description or its citation, which leads to an empty page. The table also includes a $1.53 adjustment to force the numbers to match the judgment. More information is needed to understand the true reasons behind the judgment. See Walker, "Joseph Smith's Introduction," table 1, 131.

Understanding the probable reasons for the conflict and its impact on the Smith family requires considering the economic environment in which it took place. Between March 1818 when they signed the promissory note and January 1819 when they were required to pay Hurlbut, several economic factors combined to create a credit crisis that led to a sharp decline in commodity and land prices, causing widespread unemployment in the cities and widespread debt defaults, now known as the Panic of 1819. The US economic expansion was fueled by unregulated banking, rampant land speculation, and export of specie (money in coin) due to rising imports. The panic was precipitated by the contractionary policies of the Bank of the United States in mid-1818.[66]

Economist Murray Rothbard explained the harsh economic conditions of the time:

> The severe contraction of the money supply, added to an increased demand for liquidity, led to a rapid and very heavy drop in prices. Most important for the American economy were the prices of the great export staples, and their fall was remarkably precipitate. The index of export staples fell from 169 in August, 1818, and 158 in November, 1818, to 77 in June, 1819. . . . In Massachusetts, the wages of agricultural workers fluctuated sharply with the boom and contraction, averaging sixty cents per day in 1811, $1.50 in 1818, and fifty-three cents in 1819. . . . Unskilled turnpike workers paid seventy-five cents a day in early 1818 received only twelve cents a day in 1819.
>
> Economic distress was suffered by all groups in the community. The great fall in prices heavily increased the burden of fixed money debts, and provided a great impetus toward debtor insolvency. The distress of the farmers, occasioned by the fall in agricultural and real estate prices, was aggravated by the mass of private and bank debts that they had contracted during the boom period.[67]

The fixed dollar amount of Joseph and Alvin's liability to Hurlbut, which was to be valued at the time of delivery, resulted in Joseph Sr.

66. Murray N. Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies* (Auburn, Ala.: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007), 17.

67. Rothbard, *Panic of 1819*, 19–22.

and Alvin to need to deliver significantly more grain than originally expected when they signed the note. From the summer of 1817 to the summer of 1819, New York wheat prices plummeted 43 percent and finally hit their low point in 1821 at around eighty-eight cents per bushel, about 63 percent below the 1817 peak.[68] The fifty-three dollars of "crops on the ground"[69] showing as partially cancelling the promissory note had likely been valued before Hurlbut had discovered the reality of drastically lower crop values. This sudden decrease would explain Hurlbut's later claim for a "wrong apprisal of crops."[70]

The Smiths may have become aware of the sudden price decline through Hurlbut's protests and tried to avoid being held to the contract by suing Hurlbut. At a time when unemployment was rising, wages were suddenly extremely low, and there was a great shortage of money, producing cash or valuable trade goods would be exceedingly difficult. The sixty-five-dollar liability would have normally been equivalent to several months of labor but would take substantially more time and effort to earn due to the collapse of wages.

The prices of wheat from 1813 to 1828 shown in figure 4 can serve as a proxy for the severity of the depression illustrated alongside events in the Smiths' lives.

The chart in figure 5 shows the same events with more granular data derived from a study performed in 1936 specifically for Philadelphia crop prices between 1806 and 1831.[71] This data illustrates the dramatic price changes and gives context to the events occurring in the Smith family's environment.

Hurlbut did not give up despite the judgment against him. The day after the judgment, on June 26, 1819, Hurlbut appealed and sued Joseph

68. U.S. Bureau, *Historical Statistics*, Series E, 209.

69. "Promissory Note," [2].

70. "List of Goods."

71. Anne Bezanson, Robert D. Gray, and Miriam Hussey, *Wholesale Prices in Philadelphia, 1784–1861* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), 158–59, HathiTrust.

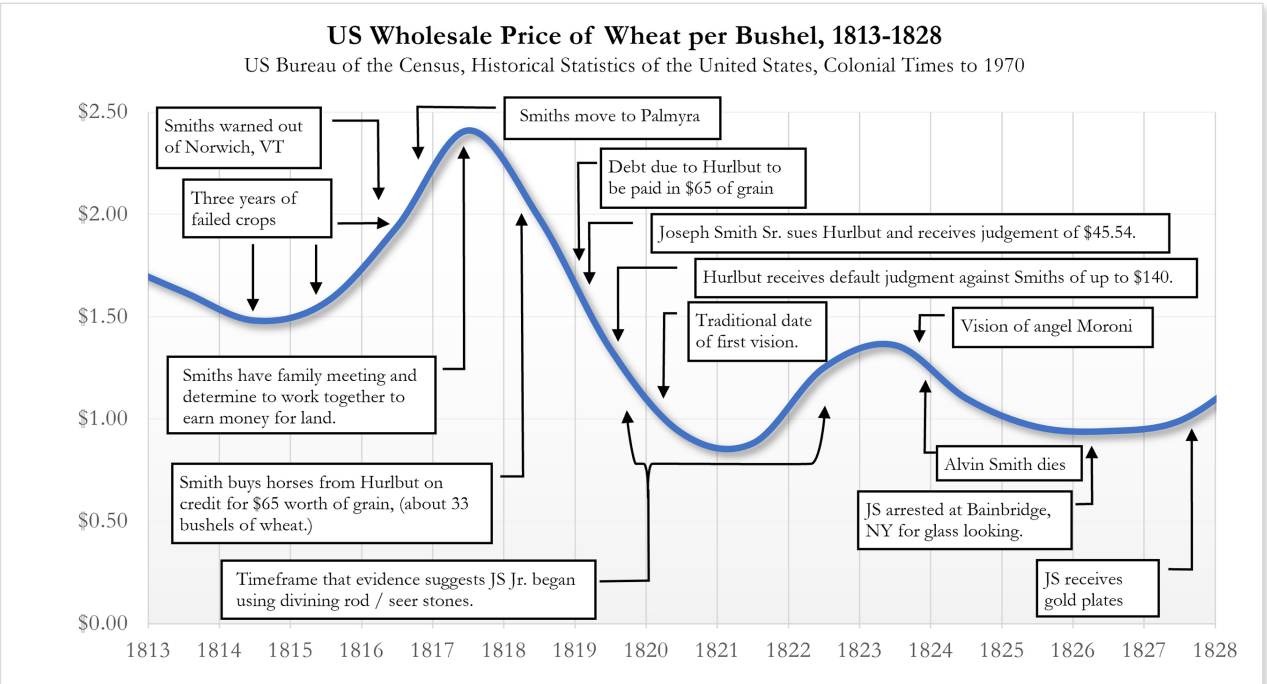


Figure 4: US wholesale wheat prices overlaid with a timeline of events in the Smith family's lives.

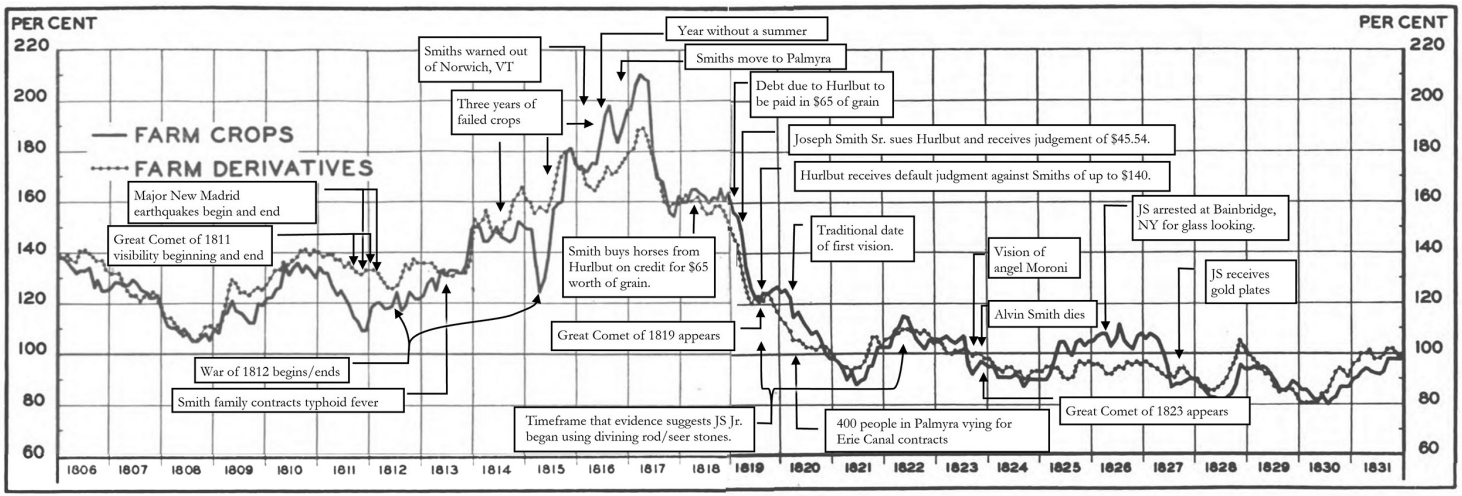


Figure 5: Philadelphia crop and crop derivative prices overlaid with a timeline of events in the Smith family's lives.

Sr. and Alvin for $140. He claimed Joseph and Alvin were required to pay the $65 "according to the tenor and effect of the said note" and that, although requested, they had "not paid said note or any part thereof to the said Plaintiff nor have otherwise paid and satisfied to the said Plaintiff the said sum of money or any part thereof, but they to do the same have hitherto wholly refused, and still do refuse."[72]

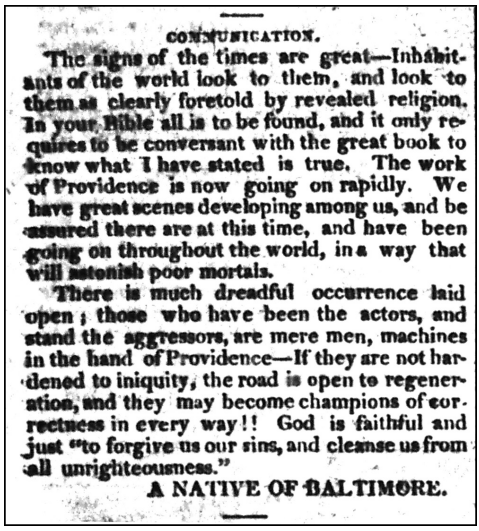
Available documents provide some clues but are inconclusive about the precise reason for the appeal. The promissory note was partially cancelled with writing on the back saying "Paid on the within note fifty three dollars by the crops on the ground August 10, 1818," contradicting Hurlbut's claim that the Smiths had paid nothing.[73] But the agreement was not for the Smiths to pay $65 worth of crops on the ground, but rather for $65 "to be paid in good merchantable grain at the market price." Crops on the ground would not have been considered "merchantable grain." The real issue of the appeal was likely whether Hurlbut's note had been paid at all. Under contract law, Hurlbut could demand payment according to the terms of the note, and not with a valuable substitution.[74]

One of the primary reasons the Smiths moved to New York was to be able to grow wheat in abundance, but economic conditions of the time thwarted their plans. The Smiths did not have any horses or land, and renting a farm would not generate enough profit to support their large family's needs. Moreover, it is unlikely that anyone in the area would want to partner with them so soon after they sued their former partner. The nation's first depression was taking hold. "The pressure for money and the stagnation of business [were then] the common topics of complaint from all quarters of the country," the cry of distress was

72. "Statement of Issues, circa June 26, 1819 [*Joseph Smith Sr. v. J. Hurlbut*]," Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/statement-of-issues-circa-26-june-1819-joseph-smith-sr-v-j-hurlbut/.

73. "Promissory Note," [2].

74. Theophilus Parsons, *Law of Contracts*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1857), 2:490–91, https://archive.org/details/lawofcontractsby02pars/.



COMMUNICATION.

The signs of the times are great—Inhabitants of the world look to them, and look to them as clearly foretold by revealed religion. In your Bible all is to be found, and it only requires to be conversant with the great book to know what I have stated is true. The work of Providence is now going on rapidly. We have great scenes developing among us, and be assured there are at this time, and have been going on throughout the world, in a way that will astonish poor mortals.

There is much dreadful occurrence laid open; those who have been the actors, and stand the aggressors, are mere men, machines in the hand of Providence—If they are not hardened to iniquity, the road is open to regeneration, and they may become champions of correctness in every way!! God is faithful and just "to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

A NATIVE OF BALTIMORE.

Figure 6: *Baltimore Maryland American*, June 16, 1819, University of Maryland Special Collections.

becoming universal,[75] and the Smiths' large family was destitute. The Smiths were now under pressure to come up with a defense to Hurlbut's countersuit from the June 26, 1819 appeal within twenty days.[76]

One of young Joseph's responsibilities was picking up the local *Palmyra Register* newspaper for his father once a week, bringing a little wood to sell and finding an odd job to do at the store.[77] Newspapers were particularly important in helping those in the outlying areas to gain a view of the happenings in the world.

Following the sudden price shock, some perceived the troubles as signs of the end times and the "work of Providence."[78] As the Smith

75. "The pressure for money" and "The Times," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, June 2, 1819, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/114706515/.

76. See Appendix 2.

77. Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester, N.Y.: W. Alling, 1851), 213–14. The Register was published from November 26, 1817 to March 7, 1821.

78. A Native of Baltimore, "Communication," *Baltimore Maryland American*, June 16, 1819, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Maryland.

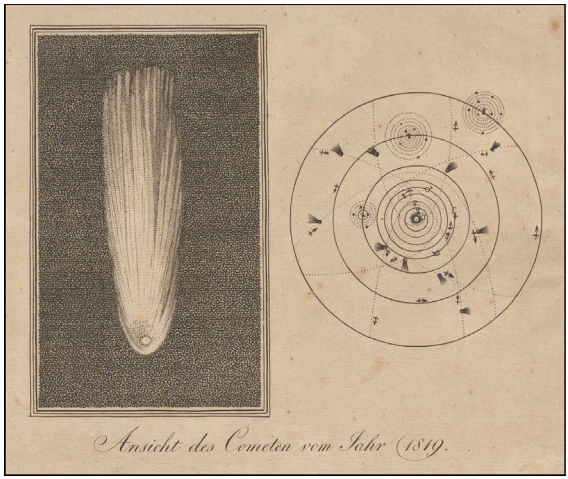


Figure 7: Unknown, *Der im Sommer 1819 von der Erde mit bloßem Auge sichtbare Komet C/1819 N1 (Großer Komet, auch Komet Tralles genannt)*, 1819, Wien Museum Inv.-Nr. 9816, CC0, https://sammlung.wienmuseum.at/en/object/95068/.

family would have been contemplating the continuous hard times, the Hurlbut countersuit, commodity collapse, omens leading to war, earthquakes, pestilence, famine, and the troubles and turmoil of their lives, all perhaps portended by that celestial omen in 1811, another omen manifested. On July 7, 1819, the *Palmyra Register* reported that another comet had appeared that week.[79] People immediately noticed that its magnitude and brilliance resembled and even exceeded that of the Great Comet of 1811, some thinking it had returned. In addition, some noticed that its tail pointed toward the pole star.[80] These coincidences served to

79. "A Comet or Blazing Star," *Palmyra Register* (N.Y.), July 7, 1819, [3], Fulton History.com. First mention of comet in Palmyra; "A Comet has been seen," *Ontario Repository*, July 13, 1819, [3], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=onrb18190713-01.1.3. A comet was visible a little west of north for about eight to ten days prior.

80. "The Comet," *Palmyra Register*, July 28, 1819, [2], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=par18190728-01.1.2.

stir divisions among people. For some it "served in some measure to revive and countenance the obsolete doctrines of astrology,"[81] worries about another war, and recollections of old rumors that the earth would one day be burned by an incendiary comet,[82] crying "Lo, here!" and others, "Lo, there!," attributing astronomical events to all sorts of misfortune.[83] But others hoped that its appearance and peaceful passing would correct the "erroneous and superstitious notions, which its immediate predecessor (perhaps itself,) created."[84] This comet, now known as the Great Comet of 1819, would remain with them the rest of the summer.

The Smith family and, in fact, the entire United States would not avoid the turmoil portended by this new comet, though the effects were not what some feared. Many banks in New York suddenly stopped redeeming their banknotes for gold and silver. During July, Jefferson

81. "The Comet," *Onondaga Register* (Onondaga Hollow, N.Y.), July 14, 1819, [3], FultonHistory.com, citing *The Albany Register*; "Astronomical," *Otsego Herald* (Cooperstown, N.Y.), July 12, 1819, [3], citing *The Albany Register*, https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=oth18190712-01.1.3.

82. "Epidemic," *Vermont Journal* (Windsor), Sept. 4, 1820, [4], https://www.newspapers.com/image/490774323/.

83. Deborah, "The man who wrote about the comet . . .," *Palmyra Register*, Sept. 15, 1819, [1], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=par18190915-01.1.1, woman attributing sorts of misfortune to the comet; "Extract from the Christian Advocate. Of Prophetic Signs," *The Clarion and Tennessee State Gazette* (Nashville), June 22, 1819, [4], https://www.newspapers.com/image/585940961/, discusses comets and earthquakes and how they portend the millennium; "Earthquakes," *Freeman's Journal*, Nov. 8, 1819, https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=frja18191108-01.1.2, earthquake in St. Louis tied to the comet and a comet before the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 is remembered; James Wilson, "Comets," in *A Complete Dictionary of Astrology* (London: n.p., 1819), 17–18; "The Comet," *Hartford Connecticut Courant*, Aug. 3, 1819, FultonHistory.com, citing *The Baltimore Morning Chronicle*, discusses how the newspapers have focused on the comet and what calamities it might bring, but they need to focus on "bodies terrestrial" and watch their own course instead of the course of the comet. See also Joseph Smith—History 1:5.

84. "Astronomical," *Otsego Herald*, July 12, 1819, [3], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=oth18190712-01.1.3.

Bank, Bank of Troy, and Chenango Bank closed their doors. Plattsburgh Bank, Greene County Bank, and Ontario Bank refused to redeem their bills.[85] "'Rumor with her ten thousand tongues,' [had] simultaneously made war with all the Banks in the State, as if determined at 'one fell swoop' to bury the whole of them in one common ruin."[86] These failures would cause lasting disdain of banking institutions, which many people perceived were to blame for the country's ills.[87]

The *Baltimore Morning Chronicle* reflected the cynicism of the time:

> The tail of the comet is so destitute of radiance, that some sage astronomers have conjectured that it was composed of certain bank-paper—it has a pale squalid death-like appearance of silver—as if it could never return to that glowing and golden radiance, that formerly denoted the circulating radiance of a comet; it shews the sickly lustre of death—an attempt to irradiate the heavens by the beams of expiring light—it is a just representative of some of our banks.[88]

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85. Various articles, *Evening Post*, July 2, 1819, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/40478679/.

86. "Worse and Worse!!!" and "From the Utica Gazette. Banks" and "Banks," *Palmyra Register*, July 14, 1819, [2], FultonHistory.com; "Banks," *Palmyra Register*, Aug. 4, 1819, [3], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=par18190804-01.1.3; "Bank Bills," *Vermont Republican and Journal. Windham, Windsor and Orange County Advertiser*, July 5, 1819, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/489039740/. List of banknotes considered noncurrent and wouldn't be accepted in Windsor, Vermont.

87. "Tennessee Legislature House of Representatives Thursday, September 25 Debate on the Banks," *Nashville Whig*, Oct. 13, 1823, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/603856071/. The contempt for banks during the ensuing depression could later be heard in Tennessee politician Davy Crockett's sentiment that he "did not think the merchants so much to blame, as was represented, but he considered the whole Banking system a species of swindling on a large scale and it seemed to him that in all cases when any difficulty or loss was created by the Banks, that the farmers suffered most."

88. *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), Aug. 3, 1819, [2], FultonHistory.com, citing *Baltimore Morning Chronicle*.

In regard to Hurlbut's countersuit, the Joseph Smith Papers editors wrote in their historical introduction to the case that "a scribal ambiguity in the court of common pleas docket renders the outcome of the case uncertain."[89] However, a newly discovered Canandaigua Court Common Rule Book entry, analyzed in Appendix 2, resolves the ambiguity of the transcription.

The docket entry is as follows:[90]

Jeremiah	*Copy Narr[atio] + notice of rule to plead being duly*
Hurlburt	*served in this cause more than 20 days since + No plea*
Vs	*being received On motion of F Smith attorney for plffs*
Joseph Smith +	*ordered that the defendants default be[ing] the same is*
Alvin Smith	*hereby entered for want of a plea*

89. "Introduction to *Joseph Smith Sr. v. J. Hurlbut*," Joseph Smith Papers, see archived text at https://web.archive.org/web/20220519210446/https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-joseph-smith-sr-v-j-hurlbut/1.

90. See appendix 2. *Canandaigua Court Common Rule Book*: Apr. 1819—Nov. 1819, [*Jeremiah Hurlbut v. Joseph Smith Sr. and Alvin Smith*], entry for July 31, 1819, Ontario County Records, Archives and Information Management Services, Canandaigua, New York. Digital image obtained from Ontario County Records, Archives and Information Management Services, Canandaigua, New York, on October 8, 2020. A Joseph Smith Papers legal historian reviewed an earlier unpublished draft of this article between February and April 2023, noting this was a previously unknown document. Following the review, Joseph Smith Papers updated its website and published an e-book clarifying the resolution of *Joseph Smith Sr. v. J. Hurlbut*. It is the author's belief that the present research, particularly the discovery of the Common Rule Book primary source material cited in this footnote, likely contributed to the ongoing work of the Joseph Smith Papers in uncovering this history. See "Introduction to Joseph Smith Sr. v. J. Hurlbut," accessed Nov. 21, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-joseph-smith-sr-v-j-hurlbut/1; David W. Grua et al., eds., The Joseph Smith Papers: Legal Records: Case Introductions (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2024), Kindle edition, citing Minutes, 17 Aug. 1819 and ca. 19 Aug. 1819, J. Hurlbut v. Joseph Smith Sr. (Ontario Co., NY, Court of Common Pleas, Aug. Term 1819), Ontario County Records and Archives Center, Canandaigua, NY.

The docket recorded that the Smiths didn't offer the required defense to Hurlbut's claim that they had not paid the note, so on July 31st, 1819 a default judgment was entered against them.

Understanding the rule book entry helps us correctly transcribe the previously ambiguous docket entry as follows:

> *The defendants default in not pleading having been duly entered on motion of F Smith Atty for Plaintiff ordered interlocutory judgment and that the Clerk assess the Damages.*[91]

The conflict likely created tension between the Smith family, Hurlbut, and possibly other community members. Sometime between April 1819 and that winter, the Smith family, comprising eight children aged three to twenty-one, relocated approximately one and a half miles to the south, near the Palmyra–Farmington town line.[92] They had been constructing a small cabin in the woods,[93] perhaps prompted by the ongoing conflict or even related to oneirocritics' notions that simply dreaming of a comet would be reason to relocate to a new residence.[94]

By August, the nation was experiencing devastatingly hard times. In Delaware and Maryland, newspapers reported the pressure as being "'equal to the worst days of the embargo'. . . . We have been nationally

91. Appendix 1; Docket Entry, circa August 19, 1819 [*Jeremiah Hurlbut vs Joseph Smith Sr. and Alvin Smith*], https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/docket-entry-circa-19-august-1819-joseph-smith-sr-v-j-hurlbut/.

92. Copies of Old Village Records [Palmyra, N.Y.], 1793–1867, King's Daughters' Library, Inc., FamilySearch film #007729100.

93. Donald L. Enders, "A Snug Log House," *Ensign*, Aug. 1985, http://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1985/08/a-snug-log-house. For context, this home was about 720 square feet at the ground level with a garret above.

94. Hafez, *Fortune Teller*, 37.

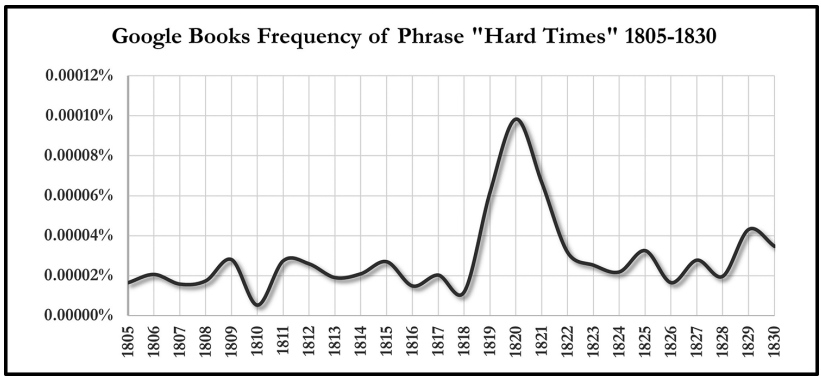

Figure 8: "Hard times" search in Google Books Ngram Viewer, 1810-1830, 2019 American English corpus, case insensitive, no smoothing.

drunk, and we are now getting sober through an interval of languor and sickly depression."[95]

Orsamus Turner, who came to Palmyra as an apprentice printer in about 1819, reported that he first saw the Smith family in the winter of 1819–1820, in a "rude log house" with "a small spot underbrushed around it."[96] The land on which the cabin was located was described as a "nearly wild or unimproved piece of land, mostly covered by standing timber," and the Smiths were said to occupy it "by the rights of 'squatter sovereignty.'"[97]

Local gossip that Joseph Smith Sr. had tried to sue Hurlbut for fraud may have influenced Turner's opinion that Joseph Sr. was "a little given to difficulties with neighbors, and petty law-suits."[98] A reputation of this type would likely have made others less willing to extend credit

95. "Hard Times," *Palmyra Register*, Aug. 4, 1819, [1], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=par18190804-01.1.1.

96. Turner, *History*, 212–13.

97. Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress*, 13.

98. Turner, *History*, 213.

to the Smiths in the future, and unfortunately, as will be shown later, credit was quickly becoming the only means of paying for things.[99]

The Smith family was marginalized and living in the backwoods without farmland or horses.[100] Troubles had been constant and unrelenting in their lives, but now they were particularly destitute at exactly the wrong time. Joseph Jr. attended some school but noted that "it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the Family therefore we were deprived of the bennifit of an education."[101]

But a feeling of excitement and uncertainty was in the air. In November 1819, the *Palmyra Register* reported that the canal engineers would soon be in the vicinity to make contracts for the Erie Canal's construction.[102] Low wages, driven by high unemployment, enabled companies and governments with means to complete these projects more economically.

As the depression deepened, people speculated about its cause. Many attributed it to society's obsession with fashion and worldliness driven by speculative boom. Others believed poverty was due to idleness.[103] This bias should be considered in some of the Smiths' neighbors'

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99. Rothbard, *Panic of 1819*, 22. Rothbard notes that "So low were prices and so scarce was the monetary medium in the frontier areas that there was a considerable return to barter conditions among farmers and other local inhabitants. Various areas returned to barter or the use of such goods as grain and whiskey as media of exchange."

100. Joshua Stafford Statement in E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed* (Painesville, Ohio: self-pub, 1834), 258, https://archive.org/details/mormonismunvaile00howe. Stafford indicated Joseph Jr., at a husking, called on him to become security for a horse, indicating they didn't have one.

101. Joseph Smith Jr., History, circa Summer 1832, 1.

102. "The Canal," *Palmyra Register*, Nov. 10, 1819, [3], https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn84031392/1819-11-10/ed-1/seq-3/.

103. Judge Ross, "A Cure for Hard Times," *Ontario Repository*, July 25, 1820, FultonHistory.com; also published in *Niles Weekly Register* (Baltimore), July 1, 1820, 321.

assessments that the family was lazy and that they simply did not want to work. The lack of farming may have prompted contemplation among their neighbors about "the long New England tradition that paired improvement of the land with improvement of the soul," suggesting to others that the Smith family might have been "failing to do God's work either in the fields or in their own hearts."[104]

However, farming wouldn't have been very profitable except for subsistence. In 1820 one fairly well-to-do farmer complained that "As for wheat and other grain, my Son *Penn* says they ar'nt worth sowing. So here we are, every day at mealtime, snarling and growling, doing nothing and, instead of work, some of the Boys go to sleep, some eat and drink all day; and Lord knows, I am bothered out of my wits."[105]

The credit crisis caused the common man to shift how they made and received payment for goods. This same well-to-do farmer reflected on the preference for specie (money in coin) when he remarked that "Uncle George's men will sell for cash alone; and where shall they raise it? Nobody wants vegetables or weeds."[106] In this agrarian economy with suddenly low commodity prices, farmers could choose to plant and sell for low prices or try to find other productive work and let the land go to the weeds. The ability to store the value of crops became more difficult due to fears of default on trade credit and low levels of reliable currency or specie available. Even the US Mint found itself without deposits of gold and silver and was unable to operate at times throughout the year 1820.[107] If Turner was accurate in his assessment

104. Balik, *Rally the Scattered Believers*, 158; Jortner, *Gods of Prophetstown*, 89, quoting William Henry Harrison speech at Indian Council, Sept. 12, 1802, in Papers of William Henry Harrison, 1:374–77. "There is nothing so pleasing to God as to see his children employed in the cultivation of the earth."

105. Farmer Sam, "From Relf's Gazette," *Lancaster Intelligencer* (Pa.), Nov. 4, 1820, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/561291754/.

106. Farmer Sam, "From Relf's Gazette."

107. "Mint of the United States Jan. 1st, 1821," *Niles Weekly Register*, Feb. 24, 1821 (Baltimore: Franklin Press), 19:430. See also "Mint Establishment," *Niles Weekly Register*, Apr. 15, 1820, 18:136.

that prior to the 1822 construction of their frame home the Smith family's farm work was done in a "slovenly, half-way, profitless manner,"[108] his assessment needs to be viewed with this additional context.

During 1820, public discourse centered on the economic collapse. One individual, referred to as "Eugenius," reflected on the hardships while observing farm laborers from his window. He experienced a peculiar dream wherein people gathered on a plain to exchange luxury and extravagant possessions for items embodying simplicity and industry. A towering pile held these articles, and individuals from all classes arrived, some with only their clothes. They were guided by "the direction of one, who seemed to me to be of a superior order of beings." A dandy exchanged fashion for humble attire and tools, while a pettifogger reluctantly carried a plough. As everyone engaged in productive work, smiles of contentment replaced sadness, highlighting the joy derived from hard work and humility over luxury. The American people needed to return to hard work and the values of the past.[109]

It was at this time, in the spring of 1820, that Joseph Jr., "by searching the scriptures," concluded, as his father had almost a decade earlier, that "mankind did not come unto the Lord but that they had apostatized from the true and living faith, and there was no society or denomination that built upon the gospel of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament." For the prior three years, Joseph had been pondering these matters, "concerning the sittuation of the world of mankind the contentions and divi[si]ons the wicke[d]ness and abominations and the darkness which pervaded."[110]

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108. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (Palmyra, N.Y.: D. Appleton & Co, 1867), 13, https://archive.org/stream/originriseprogre00tuck.

109. Eugenius, "For the Observer," *Woodstock Observer* (Vt.), Aug. 8, 1820, [1], https://www.newspapers.com/image/355603747/.

110. Joseph Smith Jr., History, circa Summer 1832, 2. Later accounts indicated the realization of an apostasy was communicated to him by the Lord in the Sacred Grove.

Although religious fervor in Palmyra has been well-documented in and around 1824,[111] scholars have debated over evidence available for religious excitement in Palmyra in 1820.[112] But 1820 was certainly a time of religious excitement for many, not only in Palmyra. The Geneva presbytery published that "during the past year more have been received into the communion of the Churches than perhaps in any former year."[113] Indeed, Richard Lloyd Anderson quoted William Smith's late sermon in which he noted that the revival "spread from town to town, from city to city, from county to county, and from state to state." Joseph Smith's 1838 account recorded that "the whole district of Country seemed affected by it."[114] This likely included the ongoing nationwide discourse about the causes of the hard times, the comet and other astrological signs, and the conflict of opinions about how to save themselves from the constant stream of God's judgments.

Rothbard further related the mindset of many of the citizens during this depression:

> Similar to the theme that individual moral resurgence through industry and economy would relieve the depression was the belief that renewed

111. For example, see "Revivals," *Buffalo Emporium and General Advertiser*, Nov. 20, 1824, 1, https://www.newspapers.com/image/255955015.

112. Milton V. Backman Jr., "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision," in *Exploring the First Vision*, edited by Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 2012), 171–97; H. Michael Marquardt, "The Palmyra Revival of 1824–25, From Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist Records: Its Impact on the Restoration Movement," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 40, no. 1 (2020): 39–47; Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins from the Palmyra Revival," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 59–81.

113. Backman Jr., "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District."

114. Richard Lloyd Anderson. "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision Through Reminiscences," *Brigham Young University Studies* 9, no. 3 (1969): 375–76. History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], 1, Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838–1856-volume-a-1–23-december-1805-30-august-1834/.

> theological faith could provide the only sufficient cure. . . . Typical was the (Annapolis) Maryland Gazette, which declared that the only remedy for the depression was to turn from wicked ways to religious devotion. A similar position was taken by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, which found the only effectual remedy in a resurgence of religion and its corollary moral virtues.[115]

One might imagine the anxiety, despair, and insecurity the Smith family would have experienced at this time, having no hope of profiting from farming due to the great collapse of commodity prices, seeing the great number of people competing for jobs, the scarcity of money, and the various factions arguing over how to relieve these judgments of God portended by celestial signs.

Joseph Jr. recalled that during this "time of great excitement [his] mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness."[116] In line with economist Jeanet Sinding Bentzen's study, which suggests that people tend to turn to prayer in times of uncertainty and adversity such as the COVID-19 pandemic,[117] perhaps Joseph pondered how his sins might have played a role in their difficult circumstances, which were underscored by clear signs of God's judgments and widespread upheaval. Yet, after examining various religious teachings and finding none that fully aligned with the Bible, he grappled with how to proceed. Driven by a desire for greater religious devotion and perhaps hoping for relief from his family's desperate circumstances, Joseph went to the Lord to seek forgiveness for his sins.

Seekers like Joseph Jr. and others like Betsey Carrol of northwestern Vermont found that "their natural surroundings intensified secret prayer. The woods could be a place of revelation."[118] After Joseph's sup-

115. Rothbard, *Panic of 1819*, 34.

116. History, 1838–1856, 2.

117. Jeanet Sinding Bentzen, "In Crisis, We Pray: Religiosity and the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 192 (2021): 541–83.

118. Balik, *Rally the Scattered Believers*, 113.

plication to the Lord in the grove, Joseph later described seeing the Lord in a pillar of fire and receiving forgiveness. The Lord also revealed to him what many probably were saying at the time: that "the world lieth in sin at this time, and none doeth good, no, not one."[119]

Perhaps young Joseph pondered why people doubted these omens as superstitious and whether spiritual gifts had been lost due to the obvious wickedness and worldliness he experienced every day. His family was known to be a spiritualist family, part of a subset of people who believed that "superstitious" practices were not imaginary or deceptive. A similar view was held by one identified only as "a Querist" in 1826:

> I have reason to believe that many arts, which we call "cabalistic," are lost, merely from the skepticism of modern philosophers. . . . Egypt and other countries shew vestiges of arts which are lost. . . . [T]he arts of witchcraft, conjuration, prognostication, palmestry, the interpretation of dreams, &c &c no doubt were based in natural philosophy, and might have been accounted for by a process of natural reasoning, had they been thought worth investigating.[120]

Historian Jason Coy noted that "After the Reformation ended, Protestant and especially Calvinist, theologians . . . complain[ed] that divination practices undermined proper faith in God's providence and challenged the clergy's exclusive role in interpreting signs of the divine will." Also, "most Lutheran authorities viewed astrology as a direct challenge to faith in God's plan." In the late seventeenth century, Protestants sought to purify the community of Catholic and pagan "superstition" and by the 1800s had been particularly successful with the demonization of divination.[121] This falling away from these spiritual gifts was

119. Joseph Smith Jr., History, circa Summer 1832, 2.

120. A querist, "It is a fact, not generally known," *Alexandria Gazette* (Va.), Feb. 10, 1826, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/816004219/.

121. Jason Coy, "A Christian Warning: Bartholomaeus Anhorn, Demonology, and Divination," in *Everyday Magic in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Kathryn A. Edwards (Farham, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 140.

probably concerning to Joseph, particularly with the signs during his lifetime that celestial omens carried real consequences.

The emergence of Shakerism had led many to equate miracles, visions, revelations, and superstitions as means "by which the elders obtain[ed] unlimited sway over the minds of their subjects." Consequently, terms like "magic" and "superstition" had been politicized as being antirepublican and associated with those "open to imposters and con men, who would steal both money and freedom."[122] Historian Adam Jortner noted that when Abner Cole began printing excerpts of *The Book of Mormon* in his newspaper, he reassured his readers that "we cannot discover anything treasonable, or which will have a tendency to subvert our liberties," as if he expected his readers would anticipate such content.[123] Although ceremonial magic, divination, and witchcraft were employed among a subset of citizens in the 1820s, these practices had generally lost credibility during the Enlightenment and, whether fair or not, were not widely viewed favorably at the time. Faith in "witchcraft, fortune-telling, lucky and unlucky days, astrology, ghost stories, second sight, fairies, and omens" were declared as extinct, or at most, "confined to the nursery"[124] by some, but in another account it was observed that "pretending to tell fortunes had become so common, that there is scarcely an old maid or a gossip but will pretend to show you the events of your future life."[125]

122. Adam Jortner, "'Some Little Necromancy': Politics, Religion, and the Mormons, 1829–1838," in *Contingent Citizens: Shifting Perceptions of Latter-day Saints in American Political Culture*, edited by Spencer W. McBride, Brent M. Rogers, and Keth A. Erekson (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2020), 17.

123. Adam Jortner, *Blood from the Sky: Miracles and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 141.

124. "On the Ancient Games and Diversions of the British People," *Charleston Mercury and Morning Advertiser*, Sept. 20, 1822, [1], https://www.newspapers.com/image/604785322/.

125. Eugenius, "For the Observer," *Woodstock Observer*, June 27, 1820, [1], https://www.newspapers.com/image/489835015/.

Unable to farm for profit, the Smith family turned to alternative sources of income, some traditional and some unconventional. They engaged in various manual labor jobs such as harvesting maple syrup and selling cake and beer from a cart on special occasions.

They also produced baskets, brooms, and cord wood, which were traditionally known to be Native American goods and subsidized by the Presbyterian Synod a few years earlier.[126] Natives typically lived off the land and had few resources. Likewise, basket makers in New England were known to be of a marginalized class, living on the edge of society, often in swamps and shacks. The manufacturing census of 1832 in Maine noted that "the basket makers are indigent persons, living in the back part of the town, on rocky sterile land, who employ themselves in making baskets, as the only means of affording a living."[127] Manufacturing these goods was a simple skill to learn and required little upfront investment, but it was tedious and unprofitable work.[128] The fact that the Smiths manufactured these items suggests their extreme poverty and lack of alternative options. It may even reveal an early relationship of the family with the Presbyterians who recommended people purchase these items to support Native Americans.[129]

In addition to these goods, Joseph Smith Sr. dug and peddled "rutes and yarbs"[130] perhaps led with a divining rod, a method historian Mark

126. David Stafford Statement in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 249; "Mormon Leaders at Their Mecca. . . . Joe Smith's Life at Palmyra," *New York Herald*, June 25, 1893, 12, *EMD* 3:203; Axtell and Butrick, "Cast thy Bread."

127. U.S. Department of the Treasury, *Documents Relative to the Manufactures in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: 1833), 27 as cited in Nan Wolverton, "'A Precarious Living': Basket Making and Related Crafts Among New England Indians," in *Reinterpreting New England Indians and the Colonial Experience*, edited by Colin G. Calloway and Neal Salisbury (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2003), 341–68, https://www.colonialsociety.org/node/1409.

128. Wolverton, "A Precarious Living."

129. Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress*, 14.

130. i.e., Roots and Herbs. James H. Smith Account, 1880, *EMD* 4:224.

Staker and curator Don Enders have suggested ginseng collectors in Vermont sometimes used.[131] Finding roots and herbs was an activity he had in common with Luman Walters, an eccentric witch doctor, who, according to D. Michael Quinn, would later become an occult mentor to young Joseph. Walters was said to have "engaged several men to gather various roots, such as burdock, mustard and other forms of vegetation which he compounded into medicine at his laboratory."[132] Lucy Smith administered remedial roots and herbs "when her lowly neighbors were sick or dying."[133]

Joseph Smith Jr.'s contributions to the family's economic self-sufficiency during the Depression have been a subject of debate. Quinn contended that Joseph ventured considerable distances in search of employment as a treasure seer, potentially extending to Seneca and Broome Counties in New York, as well as Susquehanna County in Pennsylvania. Others such as Dan Vogel tend to disagree primarily due

131. Staker and Enders, "China Adventure," 87.

132. "Doctor of Olden Days used Herb Remedies," *Geneva Daily Times* (N.Y.), July 26, 1929, FultonHistory.com. Luman had been previously arrested in New Hampshire in 1818 for his "pretended knowledge of magic, palmistry, conjuration, &c." See Jortner, *Gods of Prophetstown*, 114. Another source suggests an early acquaintance with Luman while Joseph Jr. was "acting in his primitive, supernatural capacity as water-witch and money-digger," later calling on Luman several times to assist in finding treasure in the Hill Cumorah. See Edmund Levi Kelley and Braden Clark, *Public discussion of the issues between the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Christ (Disciples): held in Kirtland, Ohio, beginning February 12th, and closing March 8, 1884* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1913).

133. Horace Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism* (New York: Woman's Executive Committee of Home Missions, 1881), as cited in Mark Ashurst-McGee, "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 2000), 97, https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/6873.

to the late and sometimes inconsistent accounts of his presence there until later and a lack of contemporaneous evidence.[134]

Shortly after Joseph Smith's prayer, an important economic event transpired in Palmyra. In May 1820, local economic conditions can be gleaned from a Canandaigua newspaper, which reported on contracts being offered for the construction of a ten-mile section of the canal that was planned to pass through Palmyra. A substantial number of people, eager for employment, descended on Palmyra in pursuit of these contracts:

> The contracts were mostly taken by citizens from the neighboring towns, and at prices somewhat lower than have heretofore been given. The great scarcity of money among us, the abundance and cheapness of provision of all sorts, for the subsistence of men and cattle, and the low price of labor, produced an extensive competition for taking jobs,

134. Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 202–08 expresses Quinn's position on Joseph's whereabouts, and Vogel, *EMD* 4:250n12, 4:302n11, and 4:335n4 express Vogel's reasoning against this position. For examples of sources placing Joseph far away from his home earlier than his venture with Josiah Stowell, see J. B. Buck Account, Circa 1873, *EMD* 4:334–36 states that Joseph Jr. was said to have been in Red Rock, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania soon after 1818; William R. Hine Statement, Circa March 1885, *EMD* 4:181 records that Riley Hine of Windsor says Joseph Sr. said Joseph Jr. was fifteen when digging for salt near his home in Windsor, Broome, New York; "The Birth of Mormonism," from the *Philadelphia Times*, reprinted in *The Evening Gazette*, Port Jervis, N.Y., Aug. 2, 1879, [1] states "Some time about the year 1820 an indolent and ignorant adventurer, known as Joe Smith, made his advent into what is now Oakland"; Mehetable Doolittle Reminiscence, 1877 *EMD* 4:339 says Joseph Jr.'s first appearance in Susquehanna to dig for money was ten or twelve years before the Book of Mormon was published; Christopher M. Stafford Statement, Mar. 23, 1885, *EMD* 2:195 says "Jo was away much of the time summers"; S. F. Anderick Statement, June 24, 1887, *EMD* 2:210 says "He was from home much summers. Sometimes he said he had been to Broome County, New York, and Pennsylvania"; Chester B. Bahn, "Joseph Smith, Mormonism Founder, Was Once Farm Hand in Onondaga," *Syracuse Herald* (N.Y.), Apr. 6, 1930 claims Joseph Jr. "a century and 10 years ago," aged "perhaps 20 summers" was in Onondaga using a divining rod to seek hidden treasure.

> among our citizens . . . The contracts were made at Palmyra, where, we understand, were collected for the purpose of making proposals, near four hundred respectable people, of different occupations and employments.[135]

The essential requirement for the canal was adequate water. In the same month when canal contracts were granted in Palmyra, the London-based *Quarterly Review* published an article that seemingly endorsed the use of divining rods as a legitimate method for locating water sources.[136] This ignited a contentious debate in numerous US newspapers, with one publication remarking that "the newspapers have lately been much occupied" with the topic.[137] One correspondent expressed the hope that Dr. Samuel L. Mitchell, whose name would later become associated with the story of Mormonism,[138] would offer his insights on the divining rod controversy.[139] Despite its controversial nature, the use of the divining rod was reportedly "religiously believed by thousands of persons both in Europe and America."[140]

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135. "From the Ontario Repository of May 16, Erie Canal," *Evening Post*, May 22, 1820, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/31960743/; "Canandaigua, May 16, Erie Canal," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, May 31, 1820, [3], https://www.newspapers.com/image/114467154/.

136. "Popular Mythology of the Middle Ages (Reprinted from the 'Quarterly Review' of January 1820)," 236–37, footnote a, https://archive.org/details/collectedhistori10palguoft/.

137. "The Divining Rod," *Delaware Gazette*, Aug. 24, 1820, [2], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=dg18200824-01.1.2.

138. Richard E. Bennett, "Martin Harris's 1828 Visit to Luther Bradish, Charles Anthon, and Samuel Mitchill," in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, edited by Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry Hull (Provo: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 103–15.

139. "The Subject of the Divining Rod," *Genius of Liberty* (Leesburg, Va.), Sept. 5, 1820, [3], https://virginiachronicle.com/?a=d&d=GL18200905.1.3.

140. "The Divining Rod," *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), Aug. 15, 1822, [1], https://www.newspapers.com/image/592348523/.

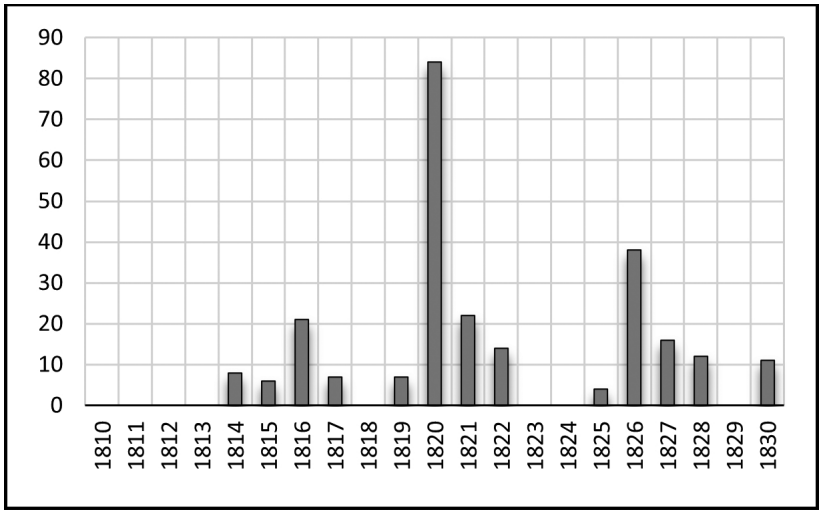

Figure 9: Number of pages in GenealogyBank.com newspaper database mentioning "divining rod," 1810-1830.

A search in the GenealogyBank.com newspaper database for the term "divining rod" reveals a significant surge of interest in the divining rod during 1820.

The use of the divining rod may have played a role in identifying water sources along the Erie Canal. The western segment of the Erie Canal, including through Palmyra, extending from Cayuga Lake to Lake Erie, was known as the "dry division" by canal commissioners. Although the Genesee River supplied a substantial amount of water, dry spells during the summer months affected water flow, creating challenges for lock operations and canal water levels,[141] making Governor DeWitt Clinton and his "ditch" the subject of ridicule from his political opponents.[142] Ensuring an adequate water supply to supplement the Genesee River to maintain canal depth, operate locks, and provide

141. "The Commissioners," *Aurora General Advertiser*, June 15, 1811, 2–3, https://www.newspapers.com/image/586583404/.

142. *The American* (New York), July 12, 1820, genealogybank.com.

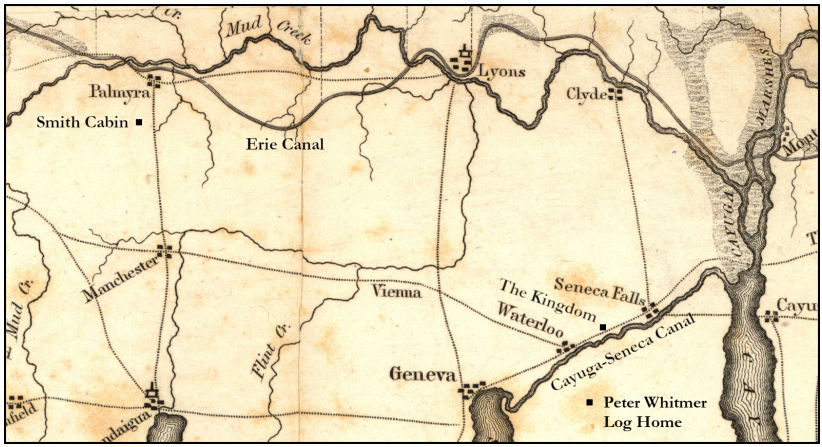

Figure 10: Partial map of Ontario and Seneca Counties, with added notation of locations relevant to the Smiths. Adapted from *Map and profile of the Erie Canal: commenced 1817, finished 1825*, 1825, map, NYS-[1825?].Fl; Map Collection, Brooklyn Public Library, Center for Brooklyn History.

fresh drinking water for the workforce in Palmyra became of utmost importance during these two years.[143] It seems plausible that during this period, individuals with dowsing abilities were highly sought after by those who believed in the rod's efficacy.

143. In November 1821, water was introduced into the canal at Palmyra, and by April of 1822 navigation of the canal began. But by May 1822, due to drought and the normal seasonal fluctuations, they could see that the water supply was going to be insufficient and began questioning why the canal commissioners at Lyons had not allowed a feeder from the Canandaigua outlet to Palmyra to fill its locks. By July 1822, boats going west had to stop at Lyons and the canal between there and Mann's Mill in Pittsford became unnavigable. See "During the past week water," *Buffalo Journal*, Nov. 27, 1821 (indexed as Sept. 27, 1821), 3, https://www.newspapers.com/image/354287106/; "Erie Canal," *Palmyra herald, and canal advertiser*, July 31, 1822, [3], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn84035797/1822-07-31/ed-1/seq-3/; "Erie Canal," *Ontario Repository*, Aug. 20, 1822, [3], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn83031529/1822-08-20/ed-1/seq-3/. *Ontario Repository*, Sept. 17, 1822, [3], https://nyshistoricnewspapers.org/lccn/sn83031529/1822-09-17/ed-1/seq-3/.

In the year 1820, during a period when the divining rod was a popular topic and the demand for water was pressing, Joseph Jr. was first documented to specialize in the practice of using the divining rod to locate water. One late source indicates Joseph left his father's house at age fifteen, which would have been late 1820 or 1821.[144] This is supported by the fact that the 1820 federal census did not list Joseph Jr. as being present in his father's Farmington home as well as a notice published in the *Waterloo Gazette* in July 1820 listing that a letter to Hyrum Smith remained in the Junius post office, which, in 1820, was located in Waterloo.[145] Ernest L. Welch and Harrison Chamberlain, whose father Jacob had enlisted Joseph Jr.'s services, remembered that Joseph resided for a time in The Kingdom, between Seneca Falls and Waterloo, around 1821 or 1822. Welch remembered he worked "as a general hand for any kind of work; but engaged chiefly in finding water with a switch carried in his hand."[146] Another resident of Seneca Falls, reflecting on Joseph Jr., described how in 1820 their town was "visited by an odd-looking boy, clad in tow frock and trowsers, and barefooted. . . . [He] made a living by seeking hidden springs."[147]

144. "Impressions of the Work and Teachings of Joseph Smith, the Morman [Sic], at Nineveh," *Bainbridge Enterprise* (N.Y.), Aug. 16, 1888, *EMD* 4:231. Joseph Smith "lived with his father until he was 15 years of age."

145. For the source that Waterloo was the location of the Junius post office, see John E. Becker, *A history of the village of Waterloo, New York : and thesaurus of related facts* (Waterloo, N.Y.: Waterloo Library and Historical Society, 1949), 73; "LIST OF LETTERS, Remaining in the Junius Post-Office, July 1, 1820," *Waterloo Gazette* (N.Y.), July 12, 1820, [3], as cited in D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic Worldview* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 202 and n.185.

146. Specific years recalled in "Ernest L. Welch Account," 1904, *EMD* 5:298. Welch believed Harrison knew more about Joseph, and a similar recollection is attributed in "Harrison Chamberlain Reminiscence," 1903, *EMD* 5:296.

147. *History of Seneca County, New York* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign, and Everts, 1876), 34, https://archive.org/details/historyofsenecac00phil/.

The peculiar practice of going barefoot may have been a result of both poverty and the customs of dowsers who believed that moistening their feet with saltwater or diluted muriatic acid could heighten the connection between the dowsing rod and the water.[148] Bletonism, as it was called, was "the faculty of perceiving and indicating subterraneous springs and currents by sensation," a method of searching by feeling, generally with a witch hazel switch.[149]

Between 1819 and 1821, significant operations were also underway in the construction of locks in Waterloo, The Kingdom, and Seneca Falls, integral to the development of what would later become the Cayuga–Seneca Canal.[150] If Joseph Jr. was indeed hired to locate hidden springs in Seneca Falls and The Kingdom, his water-divining activities might have had connections to the monopoly held by the Seneca Lock Navigation Company, which controlled land and water rights along the falls. The company had acquired all the adjacent land along the river and was known to deny leases to others, potentially creating a local need for supplementary freshwater sources or assistance in optimizing the operation of locks.[151]

148. "The Divining Rod," *Franklin Repository* (Chambersburg, Pa.), Jan. 10, 1815, 1, https://www.newspapers.com/image/551815844 (indexed as Jan. 3, 1815).

149. "Bletonism," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Dublin: James Moore, 1791), 3:282.

150. Noble E. Whitford, *History of the Canal System of the State of New York: Together with Brief Histories of the Canals of the United States and Canada* (Albany, N.Y.: Brandow Printing Company, 1903), 1:472–74. Construction of this canal began in 1813 and was finally finished in 1821 at a cost of seventy thousand dollars, twenty-one thousand of which had been provided by the state legislature.

151. Sandra S. Weber, *Special History Study: Women's Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls New York* (National Park Service, 1985), 6, 11; Walter Gable, "Seneca Falls and the Seneca River and Canal," Seneca County Historian, July 7, 2017, 2, https://www.co.seneca.ny.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Seneca-Falls-and-the-Seneca-River-and-Canal-ADA.pdf.

However, specializing as a water diviner alone might not have provided a sufficiently diverse range of work to sustain a livelihood during the Depression, prompting Joseph to apply his talents for other purposes that would ultimately elevate his notoriety. Frederic Mather suggested that "the profession of a water-witch did not bring enough ducats [i.e., gold coins] to the Smith family; so the attempt was made to find hidden treasures."[152]

The period was marked by a rapid increase in the relative purchasing power of gold and silver, coupled with a growing interest in spiritual practices. This convergence of factors may have intensified the allure of treasure-seeking for the Smiths and other financially struggling families. As a result, Joseph would have received more incentive and opportunities to practice the skills his father taught him. This situation aligns with Stephen Harper's study of treasure-seeking, revealing that in earlier days in Vermont, "financial stress drove a substantial group of settlers to 'an unconquerable expectation of finding buried treasure in the earth.'"[153]

Neighbor Willard Chase recalled his initial encounter with Joseph Sr. and his family, reflecting that "first became acquainted with Joseph, Sen., and his family in the year 1820. . . . A great part of their time was devoted to digging for money; especially in the night time, when they said the money could be most easily obtained."[154] The scarcity of money during the Depression caused rapid deflation and hoarding of specie. This caused a stark contrast between those with wealth denominated

152. Frederick Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, 198.

153. Steven C. Harper, "The Probation of a Teenage Seer: Joseph Smith's Early Experiences with Moroni," in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, edited by Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry Hull (Provo: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 23–42.

154. Testimony of William Stafford in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 237–39.

in gold, silver, or currency and those with assets in trade accounts, bank notes, debt-financed land, or provisions. The latter, being the most common assets, became less desirable as a means of exchange due to fears about the solvency of banks and debtors.

Ashurst-McGee also contended that finding treasure was less important to Joseph than finding lost property but was easier for his contemporaries to ridicule.[155] But the differentiation between the two is, perhaps, superficial because contemporaries often referred to finding lost property and treasure digging interchangeably.[156] The treasure-seeking for Joseph usually involved finding lost or stolen property that just happened to be underground. Captain Kidd's treasure, for which Joseph Jr. was said to have had an interest, was lost, stolen, and supposedly buried underground, and the gold plates were also purportedly long-lost property. "In 1826 an astute observer noted that 'from north to south, from east to west' many 'respectable' men 'of large information, and of the most exemplary lives' continued to believe that divining rods could detect underground water; but 'in all parts of the land, if the diviner hunts for metals, he becomes distrusted by the better sort of men.'"[157]

Joshua Stafford mentioned in about 1819 or 1820 that the Smiths "were laboring people, in low circumstances. A short time after this,

155. Ashurst-McGee, "Pathway to Prophethood," 25.

156. For a couple of examples, see "Harvey Baker Reminiscence," *EMD* 4:196. "Smith had already considerable notoriety as being able to find lost property by looking into a stone in his hat, the hat being in darkness. He had already made large excavations in that town in search of a reported chest of gold."; "Caroline Rockwell Smith Statement," *EMD* 2:199 and "John Stafford Interview," *EMD* 2:121. One source says Sally Chase told him where to find lost and hidden or stolen things, and the other said she would look to see where money was, and they would dig for it.

157. Alan Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780–1830," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 6–34; Ashurst-McGee, "Pathway to Prophethood," 89, citing "The Divining Rod," *American Journal of Science and Arts*, 204.

they commenced digging for hidden treasures, and soon after they became indolent, and told marvellous stories about ghosts, hob-goblins, caverns, and various other mysterious matters."[158] But the divining rod had limited operational range. At some point between 1819 and 1822, Joseph Smith began using a seer stone "in place of the witch hazel."[159] His father reportedly had expressed a desire to help him find one that he could use to "see all over the world" rather than being limited to a local area with a divining rod.[160]

Although many have criticized Joseph's practices to point at him as a deceiver, some or all of his practices may or may not have been intentional deceptions despite their illegality. Mysterious phenomena, such as rocks appearing on field surfaces each spring—a periglacial process common in New England now understood to result partly from frost heaving—may have reinforced beliefs about Earth's mystical nature, including the idea that buried treasures could rise or sink in response to natural or spiritual forces.[161] Joseph's brother-in-law and critic Alva Hale would later express that Joseph Jr. told him he "was deceived himself but did not intend to deceive others."[162] Magical practices aimed at finding treasure or recovering lost or stolen property have been documented for centuries, with many individuals incorporating these practices into their Christian belief systems.[163] In the distant past, even

158. Joshua Stafford statement in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 258.

159. S. F. Anderick Statement, 1887, *EMD* 2:208.

160. Green Mountain Boys to Sharp, 1844, *EMD* 1:597.

161. Peter Ingersoll statement in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 233. Joseph Sr. believed summer was the best time for treasure digging because the sun caused the chests of money to rise near the surface.

162. Affadavit of Alva Hale in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 268.

163. Jortner, *Blood from the Sky*, 41. Jortner explores the prevalent magic, miracles, and superstitious practices of the era. He observes that "faith in Christ was essential for many kinds of magic."

royalty granted licenses to treasure-seekers, and priests were known to have summoned spirits to help them locate hidden treasures.[164]

Ashurst-McGee also noted that "Joseph Capron, one of Hurlbut's antagonistic informants, asserted that Joseph communicated with 'ghosts' and 'infernal spirits' that appeared in his stone."[165] Ancient practitioners of ceremonial magic invoked creatures from the celestial, terrestrial, and infernal realms,[166] intertwining the natural and the supernatural worlds. They called upon the spirits, intelligences, and archangels[167] who were believed to act as intermediaries with God or the planets.[168] For example, one ancient "experiment," in line with one of Joseph's objectives of finding stolen property, sought to compel a thief to return stolen property. The procedures, which have faint parallels to Joseph's first prayer and the finding of the gold plates, called for

164. Norfolk and Norwich Archeological Society, "On Treasure Trove and Invocation of Spirits," in *Norfolk Archeology, or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to the Antiquities of the County of Norfolk* (Norwich: Charles Muskett, Old Haymarket, 1847), 1:47–64, https://archive.org/details/norfolkarchaeolo01norf. The story related here occurred in 1521. See also David Rankine, *The Book of Treasure Spirits: A Grimoire of Magical Conjurations to Reveal Treasure and Catch Thieves by Invoking Spirits, Fallen Angels, Demons and Fairies* (London: Avalonia, 2009), 13, citing Sloane MS 3824 in which the monk William Stapleton chronicled his search for hidden treasure and noted that "one Denys of Hofton did bring me a book called Thesaurus Spirituum and, after that, another called Secreta Secretorum, a little ring, a plate, a circle, and also a sword for the art of digging."

165. Ashurst-McGee, "Pathway to Prophethood," 294.

166. Rankine, "The Prayer," *Book of Treasure Spirits*, 62.

167. Rankine, "An Operation for Obtaining Treasure Trove," *Book of Treasure Spirits*, 30.

168. Rankine, "Experiment to Obtain Treasure Trove," *Book of Treasure Spirits*, 120–26.

retiring to a secluded area in the woods and engraving the four cardinal directions on each side of a lead plate along with the accompanying names and signs of the spirits associated with each cardinal direction. The name of the thief would then be engraved in the center. The practitioner was instructed to bury the plate and then call upon these spirits and invoke the power of God through the nine orders of angels, including the thrones, principalities, powers, dominations, cherubim, seraphim, and others, to coerce the thief to change his ways and return the property. If this didn't work, the practitioner should bury the plate with foul matter and burn it while summoning infernal spirits to torment the thief to repentance.[169]

Although there are no known credible references to lengthy historical records being written on plates of gold, ceremonial magic, as previously described, sometimes involved engraving metal plates made of lead, silver, iron, brass, and even gold with characters, symbols,

169. Procedures vary between the two sources I examined. See Daniel Harms, James R. Clark, and Joseph H. Peterson, *The Book of Oberon: A Sourcebook of Elizabethan Magic* (Woodbury, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 2015), 179–83, which transcribes "The most true and profitable experiment for to make a thief to come again with that which he hath stolen, at the will of the master" from "Book of magic, with instructions for invoking spirits, etc. [manuscript], ca. 1577–1583," Folger V.b.26 (1), 69, digital image, Folger Digital Image Collection, Folger Shakespeare Library, https://digitalcollections.folger.edu/img42272; Rankine, "The Prayer," *Book of Treasure Spirits*, 58–67. Similarly, these angels were invoked in a "benediction" in the medieval grimoire called *The Sworn Book of Honorius*, supposed to be a bishop in the thirteenth century. The benediction involves blessing of the blood and contains a few similarities to the sacrament prayer in the Book of Mormon. Joseph Peterson, trans. and comp., *The Sworn Book of Honorius* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Ibis Press, 2016), 289, https://archive.org/details/sworn-book-of-honorius-liber-juratus-honorii-joseph-peterson/page/289/.

words, and sigils.[170] However, these plates were generally single metal plates. These "lamens" (Latin for plate) were traditionally made of the metal associated with specific planetary intelligences and sometimes worn as a breastplate, talisman, or amulet. However, "virgin parchments" such as the magic parchments that reportedly belonged to the Smiths and were passed down through Hyrum's family were also used if the metals were too expensive or unavailable.[171]

Remnants of these traditions may have perpetuated and informed Joseph's methods in "many instances of finding hidden and stolen goods,"[172] as his upbringing was steeped in echoes of the mystical culture of the ancient past, and he may have believed that these spiritual gifts or hidden truths had been lost to apostasy. The family was said to practice, experience, or attempt many spiritual practices. Ashurst-McGee writes that divination activities ascribed to Joseph's parents included "hearing the voice of Christ, visionary dreams, dowsing, astrology, numerology, palmistry, amniomancy, and the observation of omens." Lucy also was an interpreter of dreams, and Joseph Jr. indicated

170. Donald Tyson, ed., *Llewellyn's Source Book Series: Three Books of Occult Philosophy or Magic* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 1995), 178 discusses a form of hydromancy where a skin full of water on which they put plates of gold, silver, and precious stones, written upon with certain images, names, and characters. Page 121 refers to "plates of iron with strange words engraved on them." The Magus describes engraved plates of various materials in chapter XXVIII, describing the divine names, intelligences and spirits that are set over them. See also Francis Barrett, *The Magus, or Celestial Intelligencer* (London: Printed for Lackington, Allen, and Co, 1801), 2:41. Instructions for engraving a sacred seal on a small plate of gold or virgin parchment for protection from evil and danger. See also John Michael Greer, *Circles of Power: Ritual Magic in the Western Tradition* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 1997), 200–01.

171. For one example of usage of virgin parchment, see Tyson, ed., *Llewellyn's Source Book: The Three Books*, book 2, chap. XXII: "Of the tables of the planets, their virtues, forms, and what divine names, intelligences, and spirits are set over them," 319.

172. William D. Purple Reminiscence, Apr. 28, 1877, *EMD* 4:135.

some belief in astrology.[173] Some even claimed that Joseph Jr. believed in witchcraft,[174] although it's debatable as to whether he practiced it. Brigham Young, who later recommended against favoring astrology nonetheless noted that "an effort was made in the days of Joseph to establish astrology,"[175] and disaffected Mormons hyperbolically echoed that "the only thing the Prophet believed in was astrology."[176] As the family explored these alternative avenues of monetary support and spiritual connection, seeking additional light and guidance in their dark days, they ran afoul of both public skepticism and laws intended to discourage "unorthodox spiritual traditions" based on early European anti-witchcraft legislation.[177]

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173. For fortune telling see David Stafford Statement in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 249; Joseph Rogers Statement, May 16, 1887, *EMD* 2:205; For palmistry see Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 802. See also Ashurst-McGee, "Pathway to Prophethood," 120–21; For reading signs in the heavens/astrology see Journal, December 1842–June 1844, 2:10, March 1843–14 July 1843, 17, Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-2-10-march-1843-14-july-1843/25. Willard Richard recorded a diagram of the position of the moon and a remarkable sundog as described by Joseph Smith as a sign of "a union of power and combination of Nations." Other millenarians such as the Millerites, who first believed Christ would come in 1843, and later 1844, were also watching for these signs at the time.

174. Orlando Saunders, William Van Camp, and John H. Gilbert Interviews with Frederick G. Mather, July 1880, *EMD* 3:140.

175. Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 275, quoting Brigham Young office journal, Dec. 30, 1861, LDS archives, with typescript in folder 10, box 11, Donald R. Moorman papers, Archives and Special Collections, Donnell and Elizabeth Stewart Library, Weber State University, Ogden, Utah.

176. Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 276, quoting W. Wyl, pseud. [Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal], *Mormon Portraits, or the Truth About Mormon Leaders From 1830 to 1886* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Publishing, 1886), 19.

177. Manuel W. Padro, "Cunning and Disorderly: Early Nineteenth-Century Witch Trials of Joseph Smith," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 54, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 35–70; Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London: Elliot Stock, 1886), xxxi.

Although Quinn noted and Ashurst-McGee later reasserted that "for the treasure-seer the primary reward was expanding his or her seeric gift,"[178] the financial motivation should not be overlooked, particularly due to the financial pressure of the time. In much earlier days, there was no shame in charging a fee to perform divination activities. Treasure-seeking groups had characteristics of both business enterprises and religious congregations, diverse groups seeing themselves taking somewhat the role of clergy in a mission to aid the spirits of the dead in a cosmic struggle against good and evil, demons seeking to drive away the treasure-seekers from aiding in the spirits' deliverance.[179] But during this time period, the high fees charged even by water dowsers for their services were viewed as "imposing on the credulity of their neighbors."[180] However, the documented successes of dowsers were challenging for people to dismiss, primarily due to their limited understanding of the prevalence and characteristics of subterranean water. Some regarded the actions of the rod as a natural phenomenon, while many considered it a delusion. In contrast, Joseph Smith seemed to believe it was a spiritual practice and a means through which God communicated.[181]

178. Ashurst-McGee, "Pathway to Prophethood," 26, quoting Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 65.

179. Johannes Dillinger, "The Good Magicians: Treasure Hunting in Early Modern Germany," in *Everyday Magic in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Kathryn A. Edwards (Farham, UK: Ashgate, 2015), 108.

180. "Divining Rods," *Sandusky Clarion* (Ohio), Dec. 2, 1826, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/37053021/.

181. "Revelation, April 1829–B [D&C 8]," 13, Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-april-1829-b-dc-8/2. "Thou hast another which is the gift of working with the sprout. . . . Behold there is no other power save God that can cause this thing of Nature to work in your hands for it is the work of God."

Joseph's immediate vicinity was home to many seers. But many did it only in secret. Joseph's father was probably his closest tutor, having reportedly been involved in money digging far earlier than Joseph Jr.[182] Future convert and bodyguard Porter Rockwell perceived that "The most sober settlers of the district . . . were 'gropers' though they were ashamed to own it. . . . Joseph Smith was no gold seeker by trade; he only did openly what all were doing privately; but he was considered to be 'lucky.'"[183] This probably elevated his ability to charge money for it. According to the 1828 Webster's dictionary, a groper is "one who feels his way in the dark, or searches by feeling." This would perfectly describe the theology Smith would later establish: adherents feeling their way toward truth through a burning in the bosom. Such mystic practices would resonate with some spiritualists but would cause conflict of opinions with many deists and evangelicals. One critic, writing in 1804, lamented that revivalism caused men to "conclude this or that doctrine to be true or false, not because they find or do not find it in the holy scriptures; but because they felt so and so, when praying."[184]

However, there is little in the way of contemporary evidence about how much the family earned from these activities. Late accounts recall payment of seventy-five cents to Joseph for divining the location of stolen cloth,[185] or unspecified amounts for divining where a chest of

182. James Colin Brewster, *Very important! To the Mormon money diggers why do the Mormons rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?* (Springfield, Ill.: n.p., 1843), https://archive.org/details/veryimportanttom00brew. Joseph Smith Sr. was quoted as saying "I know more about money digging, than any man in this generation, for I have been in the business more than thirty years."

183. Norman R. Bowen, ed., *A Gentile Account of Life in Utah's Dixie, 1872–73: Elizabeth Kane's St. George Journal* (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1995), 74, cited in Ashurst McGee, "Pathway to Prophethood," 25–26.

184. Jortner, *Gods of Prophetstown*, 48.

185. Pomeroy Tucker Account, 1867, *EMD* 3:96.

gold was buried and telling fortunes.[186] One account mentions that he earned fourteen dollars per month as a seer, but this probably refers to the later employment by Josiah Stowell in 1825.[187] As a benchmark, the backbreaking work of digging the Erie Canal paid a meager twelve to thirteen dollars per month in 1819.[188] Joel K. Noble, a justice of Joseph Jr.'s second 1830 trial, recounted that the defendant testified he "says anything for a living I now and then get a shilling,"[189] which phrase seems to coincide with the desperate situation in which Joseph lived and the limited profitability of his sporadic money digging, even though the family reportedly engaged in it "to a great extent."[190]

Some neighbors believed the Smiths creatively hatched schemes in order to feed their family. It was not uncommon to hear stories that Joseph's real motivation in obtaining sheep to sacrifice in treasure-digging ventures was to obtain a meal of mutton.[191] The neighbors often had their sheep and poultry go missing, so they would call officers to search the Smith property. Rumors emerged that the creek near the Smith's house was lined with the heads and feet of stolen sheep.[192]

186. Joseph Rogers Statement, May 16, 1887, *EMD* 2:204. See also Jesse Townsend to Phineas Stiles, Dec. 24, 1833, *EMD* 3:21. Discusses Joseph Smith's activities as a money digger, fortune teller, and finder of stolen goods. However, Townsend does not seem to have known Smith personally before 1823.

187. Joseph Smith, "Questions and Answers," *Elders' Journal of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* 1, no. 3 (July 1838), 43, Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/questions-and-answers-8-may-1838.

188. "Canal," *Evening Post*, May 14, 1819, [2], https://www.newspapers.com/image/40478344/.

189. Letter, Joel K. Noble to Jonathan B. Turner, Mar. 8, 1842, 2, Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-joel-k-noble-to-jonathan-b-turner-8-march-1842/2.

190. Brewster, *Very Important!*, 4.

191. For a couple of examples, see William Stafford and David Stafford statements in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 239 and 249.

192. Anderick Statement, *EMD* 2:209.

Joseph's brother William would later vehemently deny these accusations, contending that they were not sheep thieves.[193] However, former associates from Vermont would later reflect similar sentiments that one of the reasons for Joseph Sr.'s departure from their area was due to his "being too extremely fond of mutton."[194]

In this environment with evidence of the reality of omens, constant toiling for survival, and conflicting opinions of priests who had rejected the supernatural communications with God, Joseph began his journey toward seership. Joseph may have been enticed by the lore, traditions, and practices of this belief system that merged ancient but socially stigmatized magical practices with protestant Christianity. This enticement may have been especially acute given the desperate and ominous times he lived in. His faith in the traditions he knew probably drove him to practice these skills, seeking additional sources of guidance, protection, and support in a world where the gifts of God seemed to have been lost. He may have even pursued these supernatural means to advance what he perceived was his purpose in life. Joseph Jr. later recorded, "My Grandfather Asael Smith long ago predicted that there would be a prophet raised up in his family, and my Grand Mother was fully satisfied that it was fulfilled in me."[195]

The Smith family's financial struggles, marginalization, and lack of viable options for employment forced them to adapt to and find alternatives to traditional agricultural pursuits. The financial pressure, ominous signs, and turmoil led the whole nation into a search for spiritual renewal, and through the hard times, the family supplemented their income with ventures that differentiated them from the masses of

193. William Smith Notes, circa 1875, *EMD* 1:482.

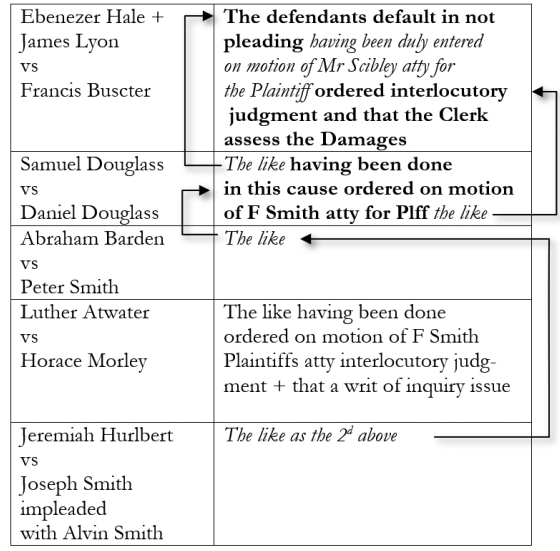
194. Green Mountain Boys to Sharp, 1844, *EMD* 1:597. At the time this was euphemism implying a person was a sheep thief.

195. History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [Sep. 1, 1834–Nov. 2, 1838], Addenda, Note R, May 16, 1836, Joseph Smith Papers, 5, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/308.

people desperate for work. Joseph's specialty and goals seemed to center around reviving ancient gifts some believed had been long lost from the earth.

Through reflection on the Smith family's economic and spiritual environment throughout the Panic of 1819, Joseph Jr.'s work with the divining rod and seer stones makes more sense from both an economic and a spiritual context. The continuous signs in the heavens and on earth during his upbringing triggered anxieties and revived a nation-wide renewed interest in connecting with the divine. These influences help us understand the family's course of actions and shed light on why a boy who allegedly saw God would nearly immediately become involved in practices many today perceive as errant and deviant.

Appendix 1: Transcription of Canandaigua Court, Docket Entry, August 19, 1819



Ebenezer Hale + James Lyon vs Francis Buscter	**The defendants default in not pleading** *having been duly entered on motion of Mr Scibley atty for the Plaintiff* **ordered interlocutory judgment and that the Clerk assess the Damages**
Samuel Douglass vs Daniel Douglass	*The like* **having been done in this cause ordered on motion of F Smith atty for Plff** *the like*
Abraham Barden vs Peter Smith	*The like*
Luther Atwater vs Horace Morley	The like having been done ordered on motion of F Smith Plaintiffs atty interlocutory judgment + that a writ of inquiry issue
Jeremiah Hurlbert vs Joseph Smith impleaded with Alvin Smith	*The like as the 2d above*

Figure 11: Transcription and assembly of Docket Entry, circa Aug. 19, 1819, "Jeremiah Hurlbut vs Joseph Smith Sr. and Alvin Smith."

Replacing the "The Like" with the reference text produces the following: *The defendants default in not pleading having been duly entered on motion of F Smith Atty for Plaintiff ordered interlocutory judgment and that the Clerk assess the Damages.*[196]

Appendix 2: Canandaigua Court, *Common Rule Book* Entry, July 31, 1819

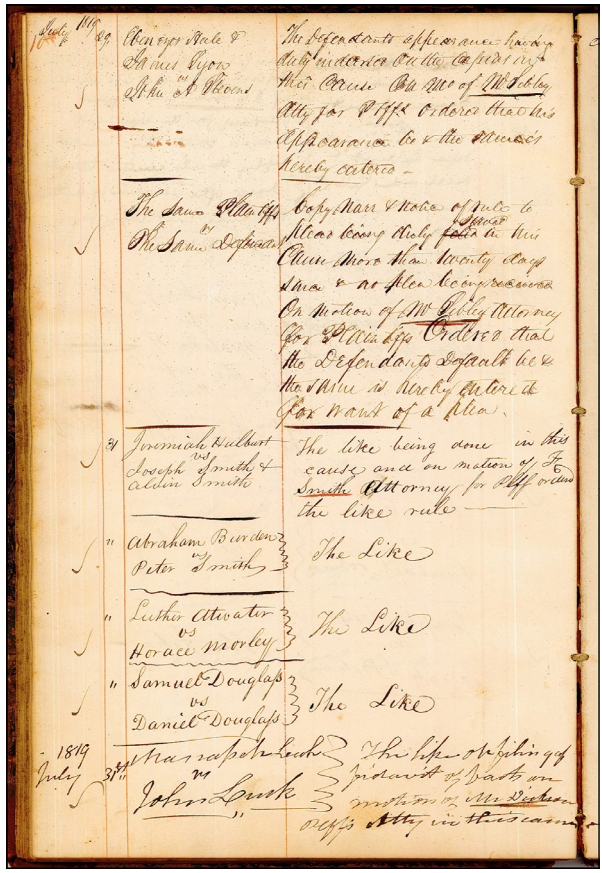


Figure 12: Canandaigua Court, *Common Rule Book*, entry for July 31, 1819, showing default judgment was entered.

196. Docket Entry, circa August 19, 1819 [*Jeremiah Hurlbut vs Joseph Smith Sr. and Alvin Smith*], Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/docket-entry-circa-19-august-1819-joseph-smith-sr-v-j-hurlbut/.

Transcription of Canandaigua Court, *Common Rule Book* Entry, July 31, 1819

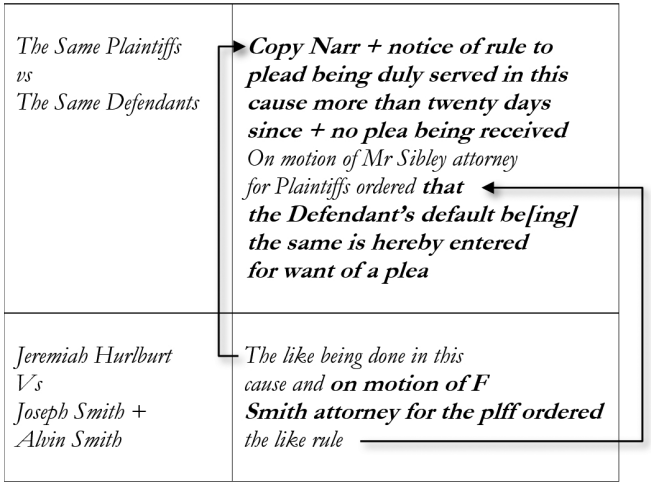


Figure 13: Transcription and assembly of Canandaigua Court, *Common Rule Book*, entry for July 31, 1819, "Jeremiah Hurlbut vs Joseph Smith Sr. and Alvin Smith."

Replacing "The like" with the reference texts produces the following:

Jeremiah Hurlburt Vs Joseph Smith + Alvin Smith	*Copy Narr[atio] + notice of rule to plead being duly served in this cause more than 20 days since + No plea being received On motion of F Smith attorney for plffs ordered that the defendants default be[ing] the same is hereby entered for want of a plea*

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ARMENIANS AND THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS: A HAUNTOLOGICAL EXHIBIT

Steven Epperson

From 1986 to 1993, I was history curator at the Museum of Church History and Art in Salt Lake City, Utah. In the spring and summer of 1993, I was preparing an exhibit on the story of Armenians who joined the LDS Church in what is now Turkey and Syria between 1884 and 1928. This forty-four-year period covers the beginning of the Church's mission to Armenians, the creation of congregations and church programs, and the travails of persecution and emigration. It ends with the death of Joseph W. Booth, the long-serving missionary to Armenian Saints, and the termination of Church efforts to create an "Eastern Zion" with Armenian Saints dedicated to cooperative agricultural and light industry. It was, and remains, an important and moving story of religious faith, persecution, genocide, rescue, emigration, culture, and perseverance. The Armenian Mormons in Utah whom I met and worked with thirty-plus years ago were generous with their stories, historical photographs, documents, artifacts, and samples of their skilled weaving and needlework. They looked forward to seeing the story of their ancestors and culture featured at the museum and in print.

It was a grievous disappointment to them (and me) that the exhibit, well into the planning stages, was canceled. I recall being told that shelving the exhibit was due to "politics"—I was told the Church was in secret negotiations with the Turkish government. An exhibit about Armenians at the museum during the late Ottoman era and the early years of modern Turkey was a no-go.

Thirty years later, I feel I still owe a debt to the Armenian Mormons who entrusted me with their stories and artifacts. I want to take what remains of that exhibit—the words written thirty years ago and a handful of photographs—and share them with readers of *Dialogue*. Consider it an example of hauntology: the enduring presence of elements from our social and historical past that abide as in the manner of a ghost. (Coincidentally, in 1993, Jacques Derrida coined the term "hauntology" in his book *Specters of Marx*.[1])

A history museum exhibit staff—the curators and designers who build the displays and create educational materials for docents and the public—strives to tell an important story from the past, one either unknown to most of the public or in need of retelling and reinterpretation. They do this through the display of artifacts, maps, photographs, interpretive wall texts, dioramas, documents, exhibit catalogues, and other media.

It must be said that there is no such thing as a neutral curatorial position in any museum. This is even more true for those professionals working for the Museum of Church History and Art, now called the Church History Museum, in Salt Lake City. While each member of the staff was dedicated and qualified in their respective professions, our many tasks in the museum were informed by and committed to both professional excellence *and* faithfulness to the Church and its mission. The outcome? As a museumgoer, you could get the straight story about the Perpetual Emigration Fund and nineteenth-century ocean-going Saints but not a word about polygamy. You could marvel at an exhibition of the skills of the architects and the artisans who built the Salt Lake Temple, but there would be no mention about the exclusion

1. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 63, 202.

of Black members from the priesthood and, therefore, their exclusion from the work and sancta of Mormon temples until after 1978. And no exhibit about Mormon Armenians in 1993–94 due to "politics." It could be—it was—a hard line to walk as a professional historian with a mandate to also promote the Church and its mission faithfully as expressed by Church authorities in the 1990s. The cancellation of the Armenian exhibit was a salient reason, though not the only one, that I stopped working for the Museum of Church History and Art in the fall of 1993.

Moving an exhibit story idea from conception to completion takes a number of steps or phases. What follows below is a version of the "Phase II Review" text of the projected Mormon Armenian exhibit submitted to the museum administration and the LDS Church Historical Department. What's missing is the rest of the exhibit process and thus the exhibit itself. The collection of artifacts, photos, and documents, the research and writing, the exhibit design and the fabrication of display cases and artifact mounts, the placement of maps, narrative wall texts and artifact labels, docent education, catalogue production and publicity—all of it came to an unfortunate, premature halt. We had hoped to open the exhibit at the end of 1993 or in the early months of 1994. The working title of the exhibit was "The Exodus of the Armenian Saints."

In history museums, everyone, curators and museumgoers alike, must use their sympathetic imagination in order to bring an exhibit alive with meaning and affect. In this case, this *hauntologial exhibit*, there is the ghost of an exhibit that should have been. Today, there are no artifacts, documents, maps, labels, graphics, and final narrative wall texts to display. It will be up to the reader to imagine, to picture in their mind's eye, what might have been.

The Armenian Saints I visited with in 1993, so pleased to share the stories and prized historic artifacts of their families and all that they had gone through for sake of their faith, have all passed away. I'm the older person now, still feeling the loss of an exhibit that never was.

July 28, 1993
Phase II review

The Exodus of the Armenian Saints

A. Development Schedule

Phase One: May 12, 1993—*An opening statement justified the exhibit, with projected staffing needs and a budget estimate. A working title, interpretive focus, and narrative content, as well as preliminary research, were presented for review and approval.*

Phase One approved.

Phase Two: July 28, 1993—*Identified and outlined the overall and section-by-section objectives. This phase also included a narrative outline of the introduction and the major exhibit sections. Most artifacts, maps, photographs, and documents had been collected for display.*

The exhibit is cancelled.

(Phase Three: October 27, 1993—*Would have included the final collection of artifacts, photos, and documents. Graphic elements and design features would have been presented. Preliminary texts for titles, wall-mounted panels, and all artifacts, etc., would have been submitted for review and approval or reworking.*

Phase Four: December 22, 1993—*The complete exhibit proposal for texts and design would have been given a final reading. If approved, the exhibit would have moved into production with a tight schedule for completion.)*

B. Interpretive Framework: Objectives and Narrative

Objectives

The principal objectives of this exhibit are to tell the story of the conversion and faithfulness of a group of Armenians to the Restored Gospel; their lives in Ottoman Turkey and Syria; the catastrophe that befell all

Armenians in Turkey (1915–21), including LDS Armenians; and the Church-assisted exodus of surviving LDS Armenians from Aintab,[2] Turkey, to Syria in 1921.

Additional objectives support this goal;

- underline the extensive scope of the missionary vision of the Church and of the universality of the gospel (a working theological and historical assumption of other international Church exhibits).
- demonstrate that the rescue of the Armenian Saints from Turkey in 1921 is best understood as Mormon Armenians themselves understood it—through the paradigm of the biblical Exodus narrative.
- introduce Joseph W. Booth as a principal agent in the rescue and reconstitution of the LDS Armenian community in Aleppo, Syria, 1921–28.
- explain that LDS Armenians wanted to gather with the Saints in Zion, that many of them emigrated to the United States, and that they continue to preserve their Armenian cultural heritage.

Objectives of the seven exhibit sections:

1. **introduction/setting and context:** Museumgoers will be introduced to learn an unknown and important story in LDS history. They will locate Turkey and Syria and Armenians within it, during the period from 1884 to 1928. Wall texts provide a basic orientation to site, history, and culture.
2. **LDS mission to the Armenians:** The Church's extensive vision of evangelization included the Ottoman Empire. A small, but significant number from the Armenian minority community embraced the gospel. Branches were organized, members were persecuted because of their LDS faith. Missionaries and Church leaders sought for years to establish an agricultural/light industrial "colony" for Armenian members to lift them out of poverty and strengthen their religious faith. Names and faces of missionaries and members will be introduced.
3. **the catastrophe:** Turkish governments singled out the Armenian people for extermination/deportation between 1915 and 1921. Armenian LDS shared this nightmare with the wider Armenian population.

2. The city is now called Gaziantep.

4. **the survivors reassemble: Aintab and Aleppo, 1918–1921:** LDS Armenian survivors of the war and genocide regrouped in Aintab, Turkey and Aleppo, Syria; French troops occupied this area but announced their retreat from Aintab. The Saints in Aintab were in grave peril once more due to Turkish efforts to "ethnically cleanse" the region.
5. **the rescue from Aintab:** The Church worked to rescue members of the Aintab branch in November–December 1921. This is a dramatic story best perceived, as it was by Armenian Church members, as a modern-day "exodus." Joseph Booth, under the direction of Elder David O. McKay, was the Church official responsible for rescuing members of the Aintab Branch by relocating them in Aleppo, Syria.
6. **Mormons in Aleppo:** These Saints strove to be economically self-sufficient and to create a fully viable religious community. Thereafter, many surviving Armenian LDS emigrated to the United States.
7. **keeping faith:** Finally, the exhibit will show that Armenian Latter-day Saints live and worship among us and strive "never to forget" their heritage.

Working Title: The Exodus of the Armenian Saints

Narrative Outline

Exhibit Section 1. Introduction, setting and context:

Two photographs of the Aintab Branch will be exhibited. The first shows branch members in about 1908. The second repeats the first but with faces of those members killed in the Armenian genocide blacked out. An accompanying text identifies the branch, states that approximately 1.5 million Armenians were killed as part of Turkish government policy, that Church members shared the fate of their people, and that in 1921, imminent peril faced the survivors of the LDS Branch in Aintab.

With a map of Ottoman Turkey and Syria, along with period engravings of Anatolia, of Turks, Kurds, and Armenians as visual aids, a brief text provides background information and context for the story of the catastrophe facing Armenian communities in the Ottoman Empire circa 1885–1915.

Exhibit Section 2. LDS Missions to the Armenians:

a. Beginnings:

The Church sent missionaries to Ottoman Turkey as early as 1884 in response to inquiries about the Church and as an expression of the extensive missionary effort in the nineteenth century to gather the Saints to Zion. While some Church leaders entertained hopes of making inroads into the Muslim and European populations, the only group to manifest interest to the restored gospel was a number of Armenians living in central Anatolia and to the south in Cilicia.

October 3, 1888. "There came [to Zara, Turkey] *a Mormon missionary by the name of F.F. Hintze . . . I went with the others and listened to him and asked many questions concerning the principles of the Gospel and he answered everything to my satisfaction. I also returned the second and third night. We were so interested that we remained until midnight . . . and we could hardly take our leave of him . . . Before I left to come home this very night, I asked him* [Hintze] *one last question: "So far as I understand, your words are all true, also your church is better than all other churches, for I have been seeking this thing all my life, and am willing to become a member of your church, but how do I know that you are an authorised elder and sent by God to preach His Gospel?" Then he said to me, "brother Sherinian, I cannot give faith to you, faith comes from God. Go home and read John 7:16–17 and you will know the "doctrine whether it be of God or whether I speak for myself."* (from "History of Nishan Krikor Sherinian, Emigrant from Zara, Sivas, Armenia to America 1902 . . . " LDS Church Archives)

b. Organization, Persecution and Response:

Between 1885 and 1896 and in 1898 to 1909, missionaries organized five branches. During this time, some two hundred adult Armenians joined the Church. They faced tough persecution from their fellow Armenians in the form of physical threats of violence, disruption of Church services, evictions from their homes, dismissal from jobs, loss of income,

etc. In response, Church members learned Persian-style rug making and Armenian lace craft in an effort to become economically self-sufficient. For many, to be Mormon in their everyday lives meant making rugs and fine needlework. In addition, they met frequently together in lively church meetings and study groups.

"We tried to hold meetings, which was difficult, but we held them for several years. As members we would go to church [and] people would stand on the side of the road and throw sticks and stones . . . This went on for quite some time." (from George Z. Aposhian, Oral History Program, Interview, 1972. LDS Church Archives)

"They had a hard time finding work because they were Mormons. They were the last ones hired and the first ones fired. It was at this time the missionaries solved the work problem. They sent Artin Ouzounian to Aleppo, Syria to learn the Persian style of rug weaving. He came back to Aintab and started a business. The members of the church learned the trade from each other. Soon, most of the Aintab branch became self-employed. (from Melva Emrazian, "Moses Hindoian Family: Early Trials and Conversion")

Figure 1: Aleppo Sunday School, 1905. (Church History Library and Archives. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter, Church History Library and Archives.)

May 20, 1894. "Meetings have continued as usual with Bro Herman generally speaking in the morning session and the Saints the afternoon session each Sabbath. Thursday evenings are occupied in testimonies by the Saints."

December 17, 1899. "Found the affairs running nice under the management of Armanag Shil Hagopian, both Sunday School and Sacrament meetings, and the Saints feeling very well." (Record of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Aleppo Branch, Turkey, LDS Church Archives)

June 21, 1899. "YS [Sisters] MIA *organized. It is hoped that the dawn of women's rights and advancement has burst upon this unenlightened land. Truly the gospel is able to work us wise unto salvation."* (J.W. Booth, *Diaries,* BYU Archives and Special Collections)

Figure 2: Photo of Aintab Branch before the departure of foreign missionaries in 1909. (Church History Library and Archives)

c. A "Colony":

Church leaders Ferdinand Hintze, Joseph Booth, Dr. Arminag Hagopian, and others, wanting to improve the vulnerable economic and spiritual condition of Armenian Latter-day Saints, proposed organizing the Saints as an agricultural and rug-making cooperative. In 1898, Elder Anthon Lund traveled to Ottoman Turkey and Palestine to explore the "colony" idea with Church members and identify a tract of land on which to settle the Saints in a pattern like gathered LDS communities in the American West. Lund, Hintze, Booth, and others continued to champion the idea into the twentieth century. These efforts were never realized.

Figure 3: The Armenian "Colony" Delegation from left to right: Ferdinand Hintze, Philip Maycock, Anthon Lund, Andrew Larson, Nishan Sherinian. On the occasion of this photograph, taken 9 May 1898 in Garabed Krikorian's studio near the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem, Larson wrote: "Dusted our old clothes, brushed our shoes, twisted our moustaches and went to the photographer and had our pictures taken." Larson, *Reminiscences and Journals*. (Photograph Church History Library and Archives)

April 23, 1898. "The country we wished to see lay on the west of the plain of Jezreel and extended into the plain as far as the River Kishon. . . .We are all very well pleased with the land and thought the location splendid." (Andrew Larson, *Diary,* LDS Church Archives)

This was the El Kireh property surveyed by Lund and his colleagues. Some 6000 acres, it was deemed sufficient for settling the Armenian Saints in an "Eastern Zion" on several town sites for farming and light industry. In a letter to Hintze, Elder Lund reported, upon his return to Utah, that Church officials had approved their final report. However, due to the Church's indebtedness in 1898, they had concluded "the time had not yet come to buy the land." "We will not always be so poor," Lund asserted. (Ferdinand Hintze, *Papers,* LDS Church Archives)

A subsequent "colony" project approached realization in the spring of 1909 when LDS missionary Elder Page reported favorably to the First Presidency about several tracts of land near Aintab and Aleppo and proposed an agricultural plan to gainfully occupy the Saints.

March 22, 1909. "We have to report that President Booth is very anxious to have a project of this kind started as early as possible; and that the Armenian members of the Church are in most cases in very destitute circumstances." (Elder Thomas Page, "Report to the First Presidency," LDS Church Archives)

However, rioting broke out April 15, 1909, and massacres decimated the Armenians in the Cilician port of Adana and the surrounding regions. The colony proposal was scuttled; missionaries were sent home, and Armenian Church members were left to manage their own affairs as a greater catastrophe was soon to descend upon Armenian communities throughout Ottoman Turkey and Syria.

Exhibit Section 3. The Catastrophe

Radical Turkish nationalism: A coup in 1913 brought to power a clique of radical, nationalist military officers. The "Committee of Unity and

Progress" (CUP), the junta's political/ideological party, pressed for a revolution of Ottoman society based in a three-part program:

- re-education and assimilation of minorities as *Turkish*, not Ottoman citizens; identity based on nationality, not religion/ethnic community.
- creation of a "greater Turkey," which entailed: (a) an independent state with absolute sovereignty over its external and internal affairs, (b) elimination of the Armenian presence in Anatolia; that is to say, the deportation and/or death of nearly two million people.
- unity of all "Turanians" (an idealized racial identity, like the Nazis' "Aryans") from Asia Minor to the Mongolian steppes in a Turkic-speaking super state.

The hostilities of World War I gave the CUP the pretext for carrying out their plans. In World War I, Turkey allied with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire against England, France, and Russia. Warfare broke out on Turkey's eastern border with Russia. Declaring Armenians a "fifth column" within the state, the CUP ordered the mass deportation and annihilation of the Armenian people in Anatolia and Cilicia. Beginning in 1915, Armenian communities were assaulted, men and adolescent boys were murdered outright, property was confiscated, and women, children, and elderly people were force-marched toward concentration camps far to the south in the northern Syrian desert. Most of those who survived the deadly trail died in the camps. LDS Armenians shared their people's fate. LDS branches in Zara, Sivas, and Marash ceased to exist. Many of the members of the branches in Aintab and Aleppo were killed.

A map of Turkey, with reproductions of the headlines of period newspapers and testimony of surviving Mormon Armenians will graphically narrate the events.

"In 1915, the Turkish government embarked upon a program of mass extermination of the Armenian people within Turkish held areas. . . . In this terrible time, all the Aintab Presidency lost their lives, as did a great many of the members . . . There was little food and clothing for the

members. . . . At times, the people had to eat the leaves of trees." (from Reuben Ouzounian, "Autobiography," LDS Church Archives)

"*That terrible massacre took place in all Turkey. . . .The rest of our relatives and friends all perished in that massacre. Zara our beloved birthplace was drenched in blood.*" (Arick Sherinian)

"*This is the story of their suffering and death.*" Elder Joseph Booth hears about the fate of the twenty members of the branch in Marash from its sole survivor. *"Aintab the beautiful city of so many years of my missionary experiences is now in ruins.*" (J.W. Booth *Diaries,* BYU Archives and Special Collections)

"How can the Armenians ever forget what they went through, to the last generation, all they suffered for their Christianity . . . even if it cost them their beloved land and their lives?" (Arick Sherinian)

Exhibit Section 4. The Survivors Reassemble: Aintab and Aleppo: 1918–1921

Under the direction of Moses Hindoian, a small group of LDS Armenians in Aintab who survived the bloody years of war attempted to reconstitute themselves as a viable unit of the Church. Brother Hindoian contacted Salt Lake City, informing Church headquarters of their survival, their life at the edge of subsistence in postwar Cilicia and their need for material assistance and missionaries.

French troops occupied the Cilician area, which included Aintab, in the wake of the defeat of Ottoman forces in 1918. Their goal was control and colonial administration of the region. However, they lacked sufficient military and logistical strength, as well as popular goodwill, to achieve the postwar mandatory power granted them in the Versailles Treaty. Turkish national armies and militias forced the French out of one city after another in Cilicia. The story of the French Mandate from 1919 to 1921, in what is now southern Turkey, is one of prolonged retreat.

Figure 4: Moses Hindoian (upper right) with Joseph and Reba Booth and some members of the Aleppo Branch, ca 1922.

In the late summer of 1921, French negotiators agreed to surrender their claims to Aintab and to accept the secured borders between what is now Turkey and Syria. This agreement exposed the Armenians of Aintab to the Turkish policy of what we call "ethnic cleansing." The prospects of the remaining Saints in Aintab were grim.

Exhibit Section 5. The Rescue from Aintab

Moved by the communications from the branches of Aintab and Aleppo, the LDS Church's First Presidency called Joseph Booth, who had already served nearly a decade of missions among the Armenians, to return, assist members, and build up surviving Church branches.

On November 4, 1921, Booth met Elder David O. McKay near Tel Aviv, and together they traveled to Aleppo and Aintab. Seeing the perilous state of the Saints in Aintab, McKay told Booth to organize the evacuation of members of the Branch to Aleppo. The rescue of the Saints has taken on mythic proportions to those who participated, witnessed, and reminisced about the events of November–December 1921.

(Benjamin Almagian brings word from Aintab.) "Fear, anxiety, threats, pleadings for passports, dread of a great calamity seem to hang over the city." (J. W. Booth)

November 30, 1921 "In Aintab the Saints are fearful of their lives as threats are reported of grave dangers of another massacre if the French withdraw and leave the remaining 7–8000 Armenians in the hands of the Turks. We are constantly praying for the Lord to open the way for them to escape." (J. W. Booth)

December 1, 1921 "I felt impressed to secure a conference with the French General DeLamathe and ask him to grant permission to bring the members of our church with their relations and friends from Aintab to Aleppo." (J. W. Booth)

" General DeLaMathe of the French army issued orders for 53 passports for all the Mormons [passports weren't required for the children] *to come out of Aintab, and also ordered the officials to assist me in getting them to Aleppo."* (J. W. Booth)

December 7, 1921 "In late afternoon I called at the passport office. The whole court below was filled with hundreds of people anxiously waiting . . . The roar and tumult of the crowd was hushed when about 150 names were read out . . . and then the words, "Now come the Mormons" was followed by the reading of names on my list which ended the passports issued today. Within a few minutes papers were in the hands of Bro Moses Hindoian . . . Mormons were famous in Aintab today." (J. W. Booth)

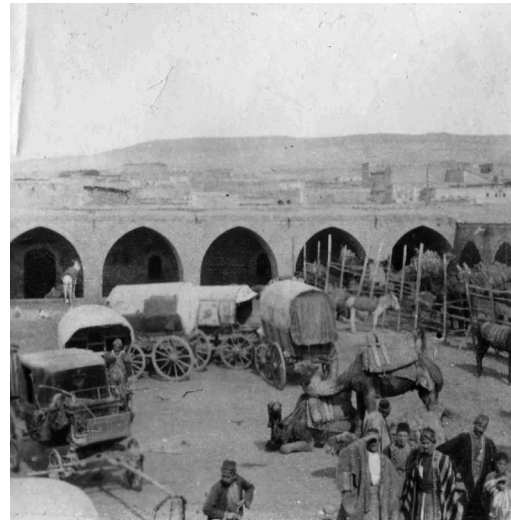

Figure 5: The Convoy of Wagons Assembles in Aintab. (Church History Library and Archives)

"All of the members of the Aintab Branch were evacuated for Aleppo on ten horse carts. The journey from Aintab to Aleppo took three days." ("Short History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Middle East," from *The Journal of Mary B. Ouzounian*)

Figure 6: Convoy to Aleppo, December 1921. (Church History Library and Archives)

"The picture shows the convoy on their way to Aleppo. The big covered wagon is the one in which I traveled, and slept at night. In a few days we were all safe in Aleppo." (J. W. Booth)

The "Exodus" Remembered

"This exodus of the Aintab members has been looked upon by the members of the Church in the Near East as the greatest event in the history of the Church in the Near East. During the following years, its anniversary was celebrated. Stories and poems were written to immortalize it. . . .to remind the members of the goodness and mercy of God in their deliverance, just as the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt was as by later prophets." (Rao Lindsay, *History of Church Missions in the Near East,* LDS Church History Library.)

Exhibit Section 6. Mormons in Aleppo

a. Booth and Religious Community, 1921–28: Joseph Booth spent the rest of his life in Aleppo working with the Saints: organizing auxiliaries of the Church, sponsoring writing and reading contests, attending to their material needs, striving, still, to preside over the creation of a "colony" for the Saints. The death of Booth in 1928 and the final rejection by headquarters of a Church-sponsored "colony" brought a nineteenth-century-oriented Mormonism in the Levant and Cilicia to a close.

Figure 7: Members of Aintab and Aleppo Branches together, Aleppo. 1922. (Church History Library and Archives)

April 11, 1922. "In the afternoon meeting Bros Hagop Bezjian, Moses Hindoian & Nazar Bezjian were ordained Elders. . . . Sacrament was administered by Moses and Nazar. Hagop offered the opening prayer& each one spoke with a humble spirit. It was indeed a day of great rejoicing." (J. W. Booth)

December 24, 1922. "The Officers & Teachers of the relief society met in my room this evening to consider the conditions of some of the poor who needed clothing and made some decision as to whom they should help. I instructed them to begin with the most destitute of the Saints—that is the younger children & Sisters." (J. W. Booth)

"President Booth hired Miss H. Hundakdjian to teach us to play the violin. There were twelve boys and girls who learned to play. We even formed a small orchestra and played several times." (Mary B. Ouzounian)

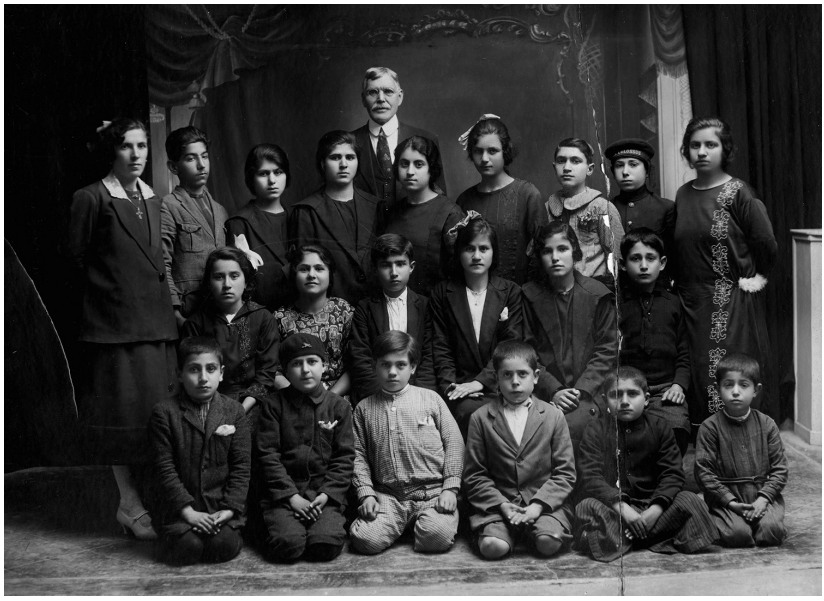

Figure 8: Sunday School in Aleppo, Syria, circa 1922. (Church History Library and Archives)

April 14, 1925. "MIA—the young people presented a Drama, 'An Armenian family of the Deportation 1915'—written and prepared by Garabed Junguzian and Kevork Nersisian etal. It was a very credible play. An audience of nearly 300 crowded into the open-air yard to witness the performance." (J. W. Booth)

August 1, 1925. "The name of the Drama was changed from 'Nephi' to one they thought would be more suitable for the public here and the handbills read "The Death of a Drunkard and 5 Marriages in one night" and took up the events in the life of Lehi and Nephi to the joining of the family of the fleeing Prophet with that of Ishmael. . . . We had about 400 present." (J. W. Booth)

Figure 9: Aleppo Branch members costumed as Book of Mormon characters to celebrate the Jubilee of the Mutual Improvement Association, 1925 (Church History Library and Archives)

b. To be a Mormon in Aleppo:

Economics: The Saints continued to strive for economic viability through lace and rug manufacture. Melva Hindoian recalls that "to be a Latter-day Saint meant making rugs and lace." Reuben and Mary Ouzounian eventually owned fifty looms and employed one hundred and fifty people, many of them members of the Church, making rugs throughout the Armenian quarter in Aleppo.

"Most of the Mormons lived on a large property of about three acres on Yabel Nahur Avenue . . . acquired through the help of President Booth, when the Mormons moved from Aintab. It was like a large "khan" . . . with large rooms divided into four parts, each family getting a part. The cooking and restrooms were outside. Most people used a gas burner inside their corner, but for baking and large cooking projects, they would go to the communal kitchen. Many of them used welfare funds from the Church until they found jobs and could make it on their own." (Mary B. Ouzounian)

January 21–23, 1924. Elder McKay visits the "khan where are living in 13 rooms, 26 families, 200 persons. Rugs on cement and rock floors, charcoal burning in fire pots—only source of warmth—carpet looms, lace making frames. Beautiful rugs and magnificent hand-made lace gave evidence of skill and artistic ability."

"Visiting rug factories—saw beautiful rugs. Also inspected beautiful needlework. Report given showing excellent work performed by members." (J. W. Booth)

Emigration: While Armenian Saints continued to live, work, and worship in Syria, they also lived with faces turned toward "Zion." LDS Armenians had emigrated out of Turkey/Syria since the 1890s. Many settled in Utah and became fully participating members of the Church community. The Saints in Aleppo and elsewhere continued to emigrate until, by the middle of the 1960s, most had relocated in the United

States. So be to an LDS Armenian also meant that the exodus of the community, which had begun in the 1890s, had only recently come to an end.

October 8, 1902. Leaving Zara for "Zion." Our two wagons were loaded and ready to begin our journey. . . . Many people holding on to the wagons, began following us, begging us to stay and not go to a country we knew nothing about. . . . We drove a short distance when suddenly we heard mother in the front wagon screaming, 'Stop the horses, stop the horses.' She had not seen Misag, her elder brother, but it was getting late, and the drivers drove the wagons faster to keep the crowd from catching up with us. There on the horizon near the bend of the road almost dusk, we saw three men doing an Armenian dance in the middle of the road with locked arms, their handkerchiefs waving above their heads. As we approached them, we recognized Misag as one of the men . . . More tears, more farewells, but finally we left them too behind us and we journeyed on into the dusk of the evening." (Herond Nishan Sheranian, M.D., *Odyssey of an Armenian Doctor,* LDS Church History Library)

All during this time, persecution kept increasing—not only for us, but for all Christians—to such an extent that we finally decided to emigrate to Zion." (Reuben Ouzounian)

Exhibit Section 7. Keeping the Faith:

While Armenian Saints have settled permanently and became citizens of the United States, most recall vividly their extraordinary history, and many continue traditions that were once so integral to Mormon group identity. Attention will be paid in this section to the rug- and lace-making skills of the Aposhians, Ouzounians, and Hindoians as a way of expressing, remembering, and keeping the faith with their Armenian heritage.

Note: In all the foregoing sections, use will be made of maps, documents, photographs, and artifacts drawn from the accompanying preliminary

objects list [below] to tell this story. In addition, large graphics panels, photo collages, display cases, music, recorded voices, etc., will be part of the exhibit team's resources. The use of these various design elements will be determined in the exhibit development process.

The "Objectives" and "Narrative" sections of the July 28, 1993, Phase II Review for the proposed exhibit on Mormon Armenians ended here. The following section of the review listed all of the historical artifacts, photographs, and documents that I had identified by July 1993 for display in the exhibit. They came from the personal collections of Mormon Armenians in Utah (Melva Emrazian, George Ouzounian, Mary Bezdjian, and George Z. Aposhian) and from the LDS Church Archives, Church History Library, and the Museum of Church History and Art.

Museums make things visible. In history museums, a professional staff strives to bring stories from the past out of obscurity. If effectively displayed, historical artifacts, photographs, and documents are the best media to help conjure the past into the present for the museum audience. It's precisely *here* that the absence of the exhibit that was canceled in the summer of 1993 is most haunting. In 2023, I was able to locate some of those photos to help illustrate the written narrative. But the artifacts, the other photographs and historical documents? They are beyond my recall; they are beyond our view and remain in private hands, in museum storage, and filed away in the LDS Church archives.

If the exhibit had gone forward in 1993–94, museum patrons would have seen stunning Armenian needlework, hand-tied and woven rugs, and rug-making frames and tools. A cooking pot, spoon, and serving plate from an early twentieth-century Armenian kitchen, a prayer rug, missionary diaries, historic Church pamphlets, scriptures and a hymnal in the Armenian language, baptism and marriage certificates, personal histories, passports, letters of appointment to missionaries, and a plethora of historic photographs—all this and more. The result? They could have lit up our imagination, brought the past to life and welcomed us into the rich and complex religious, economic, domestic,

and institutional lives of Armenian Saints and missionaries from 1884 to 1928 and beyond.

After everything these people went through—Armenians (and missionaries)—the thoughtful, faithful service, the failures, the uprooting of families because of conversion and emigration, the persecution, poverty, and peril, the terror of communal violence and genocide, the hard work and achievements—to have a museum exhibit honoring their lives canceled due to "politics" in 1993 was an ignoble betrayal. I felt it keenly then; I feel it now, more than thirty years later.

For three decades, I have carried this canceled museum exhibit with me—the phase reviews, the research notes, photocopies of journals, interviews, historic photos, maps, and books. And the memories. It has shadowed me from the US to Canada, from one profession to another, and from the religious community in which I grew up to another chosen later in life. The story of Armenian Mormons I had once hoped to tell as a museum curator, I have now tried to bring forward, though I can see that it is only a shade of what it could have been: a compelling, memorable exhibit seen by thousands of people crossing the threshold into the museum on West Temple Street in Salt Lake City. That said, the making of this hauntological exhibit helped me travel in time and mind; it renewed my profound appreciation and acquaintance with a handful of remarkable people.

Afterword

The Zadik Moses Aposhian Carpet

Zadik Moses Aposhian (born in Gaziantep, Turkey in 1870) became a master carpet weaver. In 1908, after having sent his wife and children on to Utah the year before, Zadik joined them. After settling in Salt Lake City, he entrusted a large carpet to Joseph Booth, the Mormon missionary who had returned from Turkey when the Armenian mission was closed due to the massacres of 1909. I learned about this in the summer

Figure 10: Zadik and Khatun Aposhian (Photograph provided by Church History Library and Archives)

of 1993 when interviewing George Zadik Aposhian (Zadik's son, born in 1905) in his home in Salt Lake City while researching and preparing for the Church museum exhibit.

According to the notes I kept at the time, George Aposhian said, "I was just a boy then. One day a man came to our door. I was standing next to father. I had never seen a grown man cry. He was asking my father to forgive him for what he had done. My father didn't say a word. He just stood there looking at the man, and then closed the door."

Then George Aposhian told me, as best I can recall thirty years later: "You see, it was Joseph Booth. My father had *lent* Booth his signature design carpet woven in Turkey—the work of a master weaver who shows to all the world his skill, his art, what he can do. Booth

said he would show the carpet around to attract attention and help establish my father in business. Instead, Booth *gave the carpet away* to his brother-in-law, Elder James Talmage, as a *gift*. And here he was years later begging my father's forgiveness. My father never forgave nor forgot, nor have I."

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José de Faria, *Nuvos Mundos*, 2021,
oil on canvas, 29 x 24 in.

HANDCART APOSTASY

Emma Tueller Stone

My grandma was a collector. Of dolls, spoons, PEZ dispensers. When she died six years ago, all ten of her children were able to redistribute her hundreds of lovingly collected Nativity sets representing dozens of countries from around the world. Through her life, my grandma moved to different houses in different countries while my grandpa worked in the US Foreign Service, and the two of them served a mission together. Sometimes, her collections came with her. Other times, they waited for her back in Utah, where she would eventually return to carefully display each item with individual knowledge and love.

According to family lore (or, at least, what my mother has always told me), my grandma's love of *things* came from a lost elephant collection, thrown away when she left her childhood home for college—a loss she mourned for the rest of her life. That's why, my mum has said, we all got dolls and spoons and bells and PEZ dispensers and Nativity sets when my grandma died; she collected things as an act of mourning and defiance. In a strange inherited heartbreak, I find myself liable to tear up over lost gloves, let alone a misplaced loved item.

Collections have also made me particularly sympathetic to the stories of my people—pioneers—who packed the things they loved most (children, yes, but also pianos and dishes and cabinets and handmade quilts) into handcarts and wagons and fled their homes, looking for Zion and Jesus and safety and community. Maybe it's having spent four years away from my home country or maybe it's a bit of my grandma haunting me, but I think there is something sacred about the things people choose to carry with them when coming or going from a holy place.

Maybe this feels so profound to me because I have spent most of my adult life coming and going from the LDS Church.

I came back to church two and a bit years ago after five years in almost-exile. I like to describe my relationship with my faith as one of wandering (yes, like the lyrics to "Come Thou Fount").[1] I first found myself outside as a sixteen-year-old, uncertain how my feminism and academic ambitions could fit into Young Women lessons that taught that womanhood could only mean one thing. I came back when I moved to New York City at eighteen because I was homesick for my mother's singing. But I fled again when, a month into university, questions about my own queerness got entangled with the 2015 policy about baptizing LGBTQ couples' children.[2] I eventually found my way back for two years until weekly church started to hurt too much. Telling myself that Jesus didn't need me weeping in the back of a chapel every week, I left for half a decade.

And now I've come back again, this time as my PhD research focusing on Mormon YA fantasy reminded me how much I love the theology of this gospel. As I studied characters becoming gods and wrote about eternal families, I started yearning for my community and wandered (quietly) into the back pews to see if I could find a place to rest for a while.

And while there is, perhaps, a triumphant reconversion story somewhere in my two years back at church, that version of my story doesn't feel accurate to me. I don't know if my wandering is over, and

1. "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," *Hymns—For Home and Church*, no. 1001, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/music/text/other/come-thou-fount-of-every-blessing?lang=eng.

2. Laurel Wamsley, "In Major Shift, LDS Church Rolls Back Controversial Policies Toward LGBT Members," *NPR*, Apr. 4, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/04/04/709988377/in-major-shift-mormon-church-rolls-back-controversial-policies-toward-lgbt-membe.

I'm still unsure of whether I can say "this is the place" on my own faith journey.

Instead, my story about coming back to my faith can be better explained with the metaphor of my grandmother's collections. Throughout her life, she gathered different items and stories, which quickly became treasures for us when she died six years ago. By holding onto things she found valuable—from Nativity sets to spoons to bells—she was able to create a rich treasure trove of a life that followed her around the world.

My favorite thing about my grandma's collections was how well she knew every item. As she moved from country to country with my grandpa and ten kids—living in Austria, Ireland, Morocco, Venezuela, Panama, the Philippines, Spain, and Greece—she found treasures and received gifts. She could tell us which child or friend gave her each Nativity set and exactly which part of a market silver spoons came from. Each PEZ dispenser had a place of honor on her shelves. She was even able to describe the origins of the incredibly creepy trio of dolls (another gift from friends) that my closest cousins and I inherited after she had moved back to Salt Lake City in retirement.

Even when it became clear that she would need to redistribute her precious items before going to a retirement home, my grandma was protective of her collections. She wanted their stories to be remembered. She knew that she had created a physical history with her life. She knew how to cherish that story and ensure that it was preserved.

And maybe it's sentimentality, but moving out of a house also makes me think of all the biblical and pioneer stories that we celebrate of people who pack boxes into handcarts and wave goodbye as they go in search of a promised land.

But also, I often think of one woman whose story isn't celebrated.

In coming back to church, I've been reminded of Lot's wife (the woman who looked over her shoulder at the "sinful" city she had called home) several times, when well-meaning ward members or friends have

suggested that the righteous should not feel nostalgia for sin or have claimed there is nothing worth missing outside of the LDS Church. I've also been reminded of the rich young man who was told by Christ to abandon all the things he loved in the world to "come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21).

What we know about Lot's wife is told in Genesis 19:26, as she and her husband flee the destruction of Sodom. There are many things I dislike about her story (including that, as often as I think about her, we do not know her name), but here's what the Bible says about her anyway: as she and Lot were leaving Sodom, she looked back at her home and, apparently because of this, she was turned into a pillar of salt. This is all we have of her—one single verse of grief, punishment, and death. "[She] looked back from behind [Lot], and she became a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:26).

I understand why we tell these stories, but the thing is, the rich young man had "great possessions" (Matthew 19:22)—like my grandmother's collections—and Lot's wife had a whole entire *lifetime* in Sodom. They both—according to the stories—had things to love and miss.

Or, in my own life, five years is a long time to build a life outside of the church.

And there are things that one collects in that time. Habits (Sunday brunch at the local coffee shop, anyone?) and communities (London Pride next June?) that don't easily fit into our conception of a faithful LDS life. Relationships, too.

In 2020, I met a British boy with red hair and a perfect accent who is also a writer. We celebrated our four-year anniversary last October, sitting in the darling Edwardian flat in London that we've rented together for three years. We argue over dishes and curtains and who has to double-check that the oven is actually switched off (it's always him). He waits patiently to go to bed as I read scriptures in the evening and meets me after church on Sundays to walk in Hyde Park, even if he reminds me that atheists, like him, get two lie-ins each weekend. We're

not married and don't want to be. Most importantly, he loves me and I love him and we've built a life together. And I couldn't imagine comparing him to a sinful city or a rich man's overinflated wealth.

But I don't tell my friends at church about him. How can I? I'm in a YSA ward and, to quote my grandma (who really was very understanding and devastatingly funny), we "live in sin."

I've had (wonderful, well-meaning) people in my life tell me that there are easy solutions. We could get married. Or we could break up. What is a boyfriend compared to all the possibilities of the gospel? A temple recommend? Not having to avoid conversations with my bishop because *what if he asks something that I would have to lie about*? I don't have simple answers except that one solution seems rushed and the other seems tragic.

Even more importantly, after what have felt like genuine, sincere, and difficult prayers, I cannot bring myself to believe that my relationship is sinful or shameful or something I should apologize for. That's not the answer I've gotten or a doctrine I can believe in. I don't even think my behavior is wrong.

I just think it's something unconventional and wonderful that I've collected during my time wandering outside of my faith.

When we tell (re)conversion stories with Lot's wife as a warning, what we are really saying is that our church is a church of extremes. Either with us or against us. Good or bad. Righteous or sinful, worthy of destruction. No looking back.

We need better stories to talk about coming back to the Church, especially as more and more people will find themselves prone to wander in and out. If Lot's wife is the paragon of consequences for what happens when we fail to turn away from sin, we create an all-or-nothing story where many people (like me) feel like staying away is the only option.

Jana Riess's work has shown that many millennial and Gen Z Mormons will leave or take breaks from the Church. According to her

research, modern politics and questions about Church leadership have millennials changing their relationships with the Church at increasingly high rates, more in line with other religious communities.[3] To be specific with numbers, retention rates have dropped from 72 percent among boomers to 46 percent among millennials. In my own generation, Gen Z Mormons are more likely than the national average to feel harmed by their faith or to feel like they cannot bring their "whole selves" to church.[4] And Riess explains that there are reasons to question these numbers, but also reasons to take them seriously. Anecdotally, many of my friends from high school and my home ward haven't managed to have the straightforward relationships with the LDS Church that we yearned for as children.

That's all to say that I am not the only person who has been wandering. Which also makes me think that I might not be the only one asking what it means to return. To be entirely clear: I don't want to make this seem like leaving or returning to faith is inconsequential. I've mourned and celebrated in the past years as I've found myself at church again. On several Sundays, I have found myself crying in the back of a chapel. None of this is uncomplicated.

And yet, it feels important to understand that while leaving doesn't have to be permanent, it also doesn't have to be expunged from our memory if we do decide to try again. As so many of us explore new and different ways to be Mormon, I want to celebrate those who find happiness clearly in or out of the Church. But I also wonder about those of us who wander through the grey area.

What happens to a Saint who has left and then comes home? What will we bring with us when we do?

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3. Jana Riess, "Introduction: The Changing Face of Mormonism in America," in *The Next Mormons: How Millennials Are Changing the LDS Church*, edited by Jana Riess (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

4. Jana Riess, "How Religious Are Gen Z Mormons in the US? The Results Are Mixed," *Religion News Service*, Dec. 27, 2021, https://religionnews.com/2021/12/27/how-religious-are-gen-z-mormons-in-the-us-the-results-are-mixed/.

I hope that, unlike my grandma, we will not find our precious collections disposed of and disregarded just because we've been away. Nor will we be told that there isn't a place for us in the Church with the beautiful things we've found while we've been gone.

I love my grandma's collections because she held onto things that, at some points in her life, it would have been more sensible to abandon. International moves, big life changes, and a house crowded with ten children don't make being a collector easy. But every item, no matter how ostensibly worthless, by virtue of being hers and being kept, has become indispensably valuable to our whole family now (yes, even the very creepy trio of dolls). If my grandma's collections have taught me anything, it's that sometimes it's worth saving things, even if they don't fit easily into a moving truck, a tiny closet, or, in my case, the modern LDS mold of what a "believer" should be.

Maybe Lot's wife had good reason to look back at what she was losing. As she and Lot left their home to go find a better land, they were also leaving a whole life behind. She might have been mourning her home, her friends, the experiences she'd had in Sodom. Did she leave behind a piano that she'd played for her whole life? A collection of beloved elephants she knew she would never see again? Did she have time to say goodbye? To ask her loved ones to come with her? Or did she grab an emergency bag and run?

What if she was looking back to make sure her handcart wheels were rolling along as they ought?

In Genesis 19, we don't get an answer for why looking back at Sodom was such a problem. In scripture, we aren't even told that looking back was punishable, a sin. In later scriptures, Christ calls his disciples "the salt of the earth," referencing the practice of salting meat offerings (Matthew 5:13; Leviticus 2:13). Instead of a punishment, could a "pillar of salt" be a testament to the "savor" of a woman who was both a pioneer and a woman of Sodom?

While we don't know much about Lot's wife, one thing we do know is that when God asked her to leave her home, she did. She packed her

bags and went trekking into the desert with her husband. This is not the story of a woman without faith or a woman who couldn't give up her home and comfort for God. It's a story about a woman who was able to see the value in what she was giving up, able to ask questions, able to mourn.

In looking back on the place she was leaving, maybe Lot's wife's "saltiness" was a practice of faith, a testament to her sacrifice. Lot's wife might be an example of remembering what is lost when we set off to the place God has prepared for us, but also what we can bring with us. A promise that none of us come to Zion empty-handed—we bring lives and stories, adventures, and wanderings along with us.

Maybe, instead of being a cautionary tale, the story of Lot's wife shows that we can both look back and carry on, all at once. Maybe what she practiced was a type of "handcart apostasy," where a complicated faith, imperfect as it might be, can still bring us closer to Zion. Where we are allowed to carry both the good and the bad with us as we wander through this world.

I think my grandmother—a mission president's wife, temple worker, lifelong Mormon, and devout follower of Christ—would have looked back at Sodom. She would have remembered the people she loved there and the places she'd found familiar. I know I would have; I know I do.

To borrow Carol Lynn Pearson's phrasing, "I have packed the handcart again / packed it with the precious things" that I have to carry with me as I walk toward the promised land.[5] Mementos of my time outside of Mormonism, enjoying life as the rich young man and basking in the desert sun of Sodom. This time, I'm bringing the man I love with me (baffled as he is by the Mormon girlfriend he's somehow managed to collect). I'm also bringing excellent taste in coffee, two tattoos, and a

5. Carol Lynn Pearson, "Pioneers," available at https://carollynnpearson.com/pioneers.

whiskey collection that Brigham Young would envy.[6] And I'm sitting in the pews each week, trying to find out if there's a place prepared for me in this church I love. Maybe it's a childish dream, but I yearn for a promised land where I can pack up everything I am and everything I have and find myself welcomed home.

But the truth of it is, if I had to leave everything behind to come back, I would stay away. If I'm going to rest from my wandering back home in my childhood religious community, I want to do it while celebrating the complexity and imperfection of the faith I've earned. I'm not ready to promise not to glance over my shoulder. Camels are too big for needles in this lifetime. I like my salt filled with savor, not sin. And I prefer to think of my faith journey as a handcart, pulling precious things, or wagons bringing pianos to the future choirs of Zion.

Even more, I like to think of my faith like my grandma's Nativities, especially the one that showed an elephant celebrating the birth of Christ. She never told us this, but I've always thought that one was extra special, a reminder of a collection she lost and never forgot but was able to rebuild over time.

She never got to meet my boyfriend—I think she would have loved him too.

6. Fred Minnick, "Young Was Once a Distiller," Feb. 1, 2013, https://whiskymag.com/articles/young-was-once-a-distiller/.

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José de Faria, *Dialogos Cosmicos, Sewing Group*, 2022,
oil on canvas, 27 x 24 in.

GOD LOOKS LIKE ME

Amelia Hollingsworth

I am a young mother. My arms have been full of *putti* almost exclusively for the past several years. I've done the work of mothering full-time for nearly the last decade of my life, and it was past time now for a vacation. Not the unpaid overtime of schlepping my brood to a different location and juggling the upheaval of the routine, not to mention everyone else's personal effects, but a real vacation. A "kid-ectomy," as my aunt calls it.

So I found myself standing alone in the north aisle of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, England. My husband was wandering around looking for Lord Nelson's tomb. I was staring at a sculpture by Henry Moore called *Mother and Child*. The audio guide I was given told me that it was okay to explore the themes of family and maternal love or to contemplate Mary and the baby Jesus. Photos aren't allowed in the cathedral, so I wasn't preoccupied with documenting Moore's work or dodging photobombs. I was undistracted, engrossed in the art, and that sculpture, with its fluid lines and abstract beauty, got me all misty. I wanted to contemplate the virgin mother and her baby who saved the world in a sacred space. I needed that permission.

I nearly fell over when one of the gentlemen in the St. Paul's Cathedral blazers told a little group of tourists, "You can touch it. The artist intended for people to interact with this sculpture." Part of the beauty of this art was that it was immediately accessible.

I spent quite a bit of time in the north choir aisle. We were waiting for an alternate access to the Whispering Gallery to open. And while I waited, I watched an installation entitled *Mary*, which is a video triptych by Bill Viola. And I further contemplated Mary and her son.

Jesus is Mary's son. We talk endlessly in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints about how Jesus is the literal Son of God. Fine. But

until I stood in St. Paul's Cathedral, I never thought about how Jesus is the literal, physical, emotional son of a woman like me. Wouldn't focusing on Jesus' earthly mother somehow demean him?

But for the rest of my life, I need to talk about how Jesus is Mary's son. How Jesus is the product of Mary's body and her care and love and her endless, thankless role of being his mother. Bill Viola's art casts several different women to represent Mary at different points in her life. The work starts with Mary breastfeeding baby Jesus. The work ends in a pietà, with Mary holding her son's dead body. And watching this art, which was beautiful but also jarring because I'm not used to installations like these in sacred spaces, reminded me of a feeling I've had for a long time now as a woman in the restored Church of Jesus Christ: I am invisible. My leaders, being all men, don't get it. They never will. They will never understand life from my point of view. They would never cast me to play an important role in Church leadership, local or regional. So it was no surprise that my mother, a converted Catholic and not a General Authority, said, "Only Mary had to fulfill the sacrifice of Abraham. There was no ram in the thicket waiting for her." It was also my mother's speechlessness for Michelangelo's *Pietà* that instilled in me a deep respect for art.

My Church leaders insist that the Godhead is made up of three male deities, all of them separate: God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is no room in that picture for the mother of God, or any mother. There are no beautiful sculptures of mothers holding their infants in our glorious temples or serviceable meeting houses. Maybe at Christmas we can show a small print of Mary and baby Jesus, but only if there is an army of shepherds around her and male seraphim in the sky, with Joseph prominently included, of course.

Watching general conference, it is apparent that none of my leaders look like me. They are all men who grew up decades ago in a culture where everyone pretended that single-family incomes were the ideal. There are a few token women who speak from the pulpit, but they are

grandmas. They don't look like me. Their voices are not mine. Their dyed gray hair is perfectly styled and has neither spit-up nor split ends marring it. They are plagued by nostalgia for their parenting glory days. They speak of children with an abundance of sentimentality. As my own children insist on scrambling on top of me and then fighting about whose turn it is to cuddle Mommy, I cannot understand.

My church doesn't see me. They tell me to hide in a smelly, poopy diaper–infested room as I breastfeed my babies. They tell me to drop my kids off with a couple of "priesthood holders" and a handful of battered toys so I can attend a Relief Society activity about family scripture study. They want me to serve only with children or other women, but only to do what they say. And to be patient, and to please be cheerful, and for goodness' sake, to have more faith.

The day after visiting St. Paul's, my husband and I made a day trip to Paris. I cried uncontrollably about this days later as we rode the airport shuttle bus back to our long-term parking at LAX. I went to Paris. I've wanted to go to Paris since studying Gothic architecture in seventh grade because I wanted to see the Notre Dame Cathedral for myself. I wanted to see flying buttresses, rose windows, pointed arches, gargoyles, and an abundance of Gothic sculptures. I wanted to step inside and touch columns and smell and listen. I don't know precisely why this building appealed so much to me. I thought it was cool since I was a preteen. It's a bit like not understanding why your favorite color is yellow. It just is.

Before I set off on my European vacation, my dad told me that Notre Dame's interior was disappointing. He said it was dark, old, and dirty inside. I didn't care. I still had to see it.

I wasn't disappointed. Dark and dingy is not how I would describe it. The interior had the same chiaroscuro effect as some of my favorite Renaissance paintings. It heightened the beauty of the stained-glass windows. I was pulled almost trance-like toward them. I wandered down the nave toward the choir until I stumbled over some chairs and

guide ropes and realized that I should follow the carpet down the aisle like most of the other visitors.

Inside Notre Dame there are sculptures. On the north aisle there is a particularly fine sculpture of Mary and baby Jesus. And that's when I lost it. Because someone had taken the scale and scope of the cathedral and put it into a life-size stone statue of a woman and her child. And what I saw was familiar—Mary looked like me, or my sister, or any one of my girlfriends with their chubby babies—but also divine and mysterious. And that idea that the divine was real and known but also fathomless, that it was as incredible as the cathedral that I was standing in, and that the divine could be embodied by a mother and her child, that it could look like me, well, that moved me to tears.

I cried some of my most meaningful and ugly tears in Notre Dame. Because I knew Mary. I knew what it felt like to hold a baby, filled with joyful exuberance, at the cusp of toddlerhood, excited to explore the world, arms outstretched to welcome the adoration of family and strangers alike. That's what I'd been up to for the last decade of my life.

In Europe, I found the divine feminine in abundance. I saw myself and my identity reflected in a tradition of art that spans thousands of years. The Louvre had treasures for me, too. Leonardo da Vinci's *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* was a notable one. I saw again and again that the divine feminine, the mother of God herself, was an important, integral component of art, spirituality, and worship.

And I felt seen.

This weekend, my four-year-old came inside, his face full of purpose and curiosity. "Mommy, do you actually see me?"

My little one's eyes were fixed unblinking on my own.

"Sarah says I'm invisible. But I'm really not. Can you tell her that I'm not invisible because you actually see me?"

My child had condensed years and years of my personal prayers into a couple of simple questions.

The answer did not come from inside my faith tradition but in the art I found in European cathedrals that I now include in my own

personal tent of Christian discipleship. I realize that contemplation on the divine feminine as embodied by Mary is not strictly a practice in keeping with our church's theology. But I venerate Mary just the same. If we can venerate modern-day prophets and sing songs of praise about Brother Joe, then why can't I do the same for Mary? Why can't I contemplate what she did at the cross? Because masterpieces like Michelangelo's *Pietà* don't happen just because.

And masterpieces like that change the world.

Why can't we as members of Christ's church make more space for Mary and her baby who grew into a toddler and was once a preschooler (and oh yes, the risen Lord, Jesus Christ) in our places of worship? Why can't we wonder how many of the parables that Jesus taught us were stories his mother had told him at bedtime?

Leonardos and Moores and Violas don't create art that explores the divine feminine just because it's quaint. Artists don't bottle up lightning to strike us again and again for generations just because they are talented. They do it because they feel things. They do it because they must, because they have something to say that can't be put into words. Our church places so much importance on talking. Our times in the mountains when we feel God riding on our shoulders, baptizing us once again with steady, inescapable sunlight until we are holy and it is as commonplace and comfortable as a sandwich and Diet Coke by the lake are supposed to be shared in tidy (though tearful if need be) sentences over a pulpit. But the words are a poor translation. Yet we insist on words. Even our prayers must be spoken, even when all we have are tears.

How do you convince your children that they are seen? How do you validate them as important members of your family and inherently worthwhile and significant? I don't think it is by insisting that something is wrong with them if they feel they are invisible. I don't think it is by ignoring their questions or their desire to see people like them reflected in their leadership. I don't think it is by whispering with embarrassment about a secret mother God or singing the same hymn now and then about her.

My son, who is a tactile learner just as much as I am a visual learner, would not be served by a trip to a mirror and a discussion about our mutual reflections. He pulled me away from my desk and, pudgy hand in mine, marched me outside to his older sister, who was giggling on the swing. I scooped my son up. "Sarah, if Aaron is invisible, who am I holding?" Aaron giggled joyfully. I kissed the top of his head and then tickled Aaron's tummy. "If Aaron is invisible, who is laughing?"

Notre Dame: our lady. I'm part of that "notre" now. I claim Mary as mine too. And I want more of her presence, which for me represents the divine feminine more eloquently than essays on LDS.org or the hymn "O My Father," in my sacred places. And I want different media there too—because sculpture, installation, architecture, and painting all helped me feel seen when for so long I'd felt invisible. I want different styles because Carl Heinrich Bloch, Greg Olsen, and Arnold Friberg translations aren't working for me. Why not imagine Ammon and Abish as shepherds from this century? Why not create installations symbolizing the miracles we believe God still works today?

Mary is the mother of God. You cannot be a Christian and dispute this fact. Jesus is her son by way of the miracle of the Virgin Birth, which, again, I believe holds water for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For the rest of my life, when the triangle of the godhead comes up, I will wonder if its shape should be expanded to that of a square. But I also don't believe that knowing God can be explained in the Latter-day Saint fashion. It's fuzzier. It's better explained by fluid shapes and abstract sculptures, or the precision and beauty of a sparrow on top of a gargoyle, or the way sunlight bathes a woman in rose light when it comes through a triumph of colored glass. And still, I believe now that God can be embodied by a young woman and her baby. I believe very much that God can be described as the love of a mother for her child. In fact, I believe that this image of the Madonna and Child is a more accurate depiction of the power of God than even a cross or empty tomb.

I've been told for years and years that man was made in the image of God, and ain't that grand? I was supposed to put the mental spin that "man" means "mankind," humanity in general, but even so, I felt excluded. And it bothered me. Where am I, God? What about me and my ovaries and my boobs that are still leaking milk?

Standing in Notre Dame that day, a building that in its very name venerates a woman, Our Lady—Mary, the holy mother of our brother Jesus—I could say with all certainty that I, a woman, am made in the image of God. And God looks like me.

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José de Faria, *Buzios*, 2022, oil on canvas, 35 x 27 in.

CHILDREN OF THE GODS WHO ORGASM, OR TWO WOMEN LEAD ME TOWARD EROTIC FULFILLMENT

Name Withheld

I don't want to let go of the rod. I don't want to drift off and end up on paths that are dark, strange, and lonely. Sometimes I worry I may have already wandered without knowing it. I don't want to be disconnected from my loved ones or alienated from God's love. Lehi's dream provides vivid images of those fears.

Fear of taking the wrong path is one reason I've avoided the erotic. Eros's energy is intense, complex, and ambiguous. I have some firsthand experience with how others can abuse the erotic. Such abuse can have devastating consequences. Many of my experiences have left me feeling confused and ashamed of my sexuality, my body, my desires, and my fantasies. These outcomes and the experiences behind them, experiences I choose to keep private, are the reasons why I have requested that my name be withheld. I add that some messages I have found in the culture of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in North America are messages that discourage serious investigation of the erotic. These messages reinforce eros's messiness and danger, supercharging my fears. In the context of these frightening messages, a friend once joked that they would not have been surprised to hear of a general conference talk titled "One Shade of White."

But there are other powerful messages I hear in that same culture. There are statements about God's glory being intelligence and that one cannot be saved in ignorance. There are stories of members, pioneers, missionaries, and others exercising faith in the face of fears. There are

LDS mental health experts and sex therapists inspiring courage in addressing what I dread. And there is the foundational story of a child of God lacking wisdom, going into the woods, seeking, and then finding that wisdom.

Two women have been instrumental in my path out of some of my sexual shame. One has provided key intellectual insights that I will discuss at some length, while the other has offered spiritual direction that will receive a brief and more evocative treatment. My path might provide useful landmarks for others. The first woman to help me out of the darkness has been Audre Lorde.

Lorde's Guidance Down the Path

Audre Lorde was a powerful feminist voice in the second half of the twentieth century speaking from her position as an African American lesbian. I don't recall her ever being quoted in general conference. Lorde's essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" has provided guidance out of my confusion and fear. One of Lorde's purposes is to describe how patriarchy confuses and suppresses eros's power. Lorde says that "in order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives."[1] Lorde continues, "We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within Western society," and "as women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge."[2] Lorde

1. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2007), 41. Lorde first published "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" as a pamphlet with Crossing Press in 1978. Lorde later published the essay in her book *Sister Outsider*.

2. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 41.

elaborates that because the erotic "has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation . . . we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information."[3] Suppressing the erotic—vilifying it, abusing it, devaluing it, and rendering it confused and trivial—all of those things rob women of a source of power and of deep, nonrational understanding as part of society's systemic exclusion of women.

Lorde sheds light on a path toward the recovery of this lost power and knowledge. She says that the erotic "is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire."[4] In Lorde's telling, this internal satisfaction is life-changing. She says that "having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves."[5] Lorde's sense of the erotic as "internal satisfaction" that brings a fulfilling "depth of feeling" can introduce us to something else going on in this essay. Lorde is bringing together two ideas about eros. So far, I have used the erotic and the sexual virtually interchangeably, but there is another use of eros. The second use of eros is a larger meaning that can include sexuality but encompasses much more. This use goes back to Greek sources like Plato's *Symposium* wherein eros is the force urging one toward excellence. Lorde's view of the erotic, which can include the sexual, is the power and drive toward excellence and the accompanying "fullness of depth of feeling" when one embodies that excellence.

The erotic, with its push to excellence, turns out to be a rather tall order. Lorde acknowledges as much when she says, "it is never easy to demand the most from ourselves, from our lives, from our work. To go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of the society that we live in is

3. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 42.

4. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 42.

5. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 42.

always fraught with danger and with fear, and the function of the erotic is to encourage excellence . . . and to give us the strength to pursue it."[6] Embracing eros's power is a process fraught with danger and fear in a society that encourages mediocrity and misunderstanding.

Lorde anticipates another possible obstacle or misunderstanding of the erotic—scrupulosity or unhealthy perfectionism. Lorde says, "This internal requirement toward excellence which we learn from the erotic must not be misconstrued as demanding the impossible from ourselves nor from others. Such a demand incapacitates everyone in the process."[7] Lorde refocuses the discussion away from impossible demands and toward a larger function of the erotic: "For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors brings us closest to that fullness."[8] Part of eros's knowledge comes with the clarification of what brings about deep fulfillment, satisfaction, and completeness. This experience becomes the measuring stick for examining everything. I can assess to what degree such a fullness is present in my life endeavors. Eros moves me to excellence and teaches me the satisfaction, completion, and fullness that can accompany whatever I do.

6. In addition to publication, a recording of Lorde reading "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power" is available on YouTube, posted Aug. 1, 2019, by growbean, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWmq9gw4Rq0&t=325s&ab_channel=growbean. In this reading, Lorde inserted ad-libs. It is unclear to me why those ad-libs were not included in subsequent printings of the essay, but I will quote from the reading since the ad-libs, in my view, provide useful clarifications and insight. The ad-libs cited here take place at 4:52–5:15 in the YouTube recording.

7. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 42.

8. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 42–43.

Eros and Mormon Intellectuals

Before I examine how Lorde's ideas might invite courage in exploring the erotic and the sexual for children of the Gods who orgasm, I want to connect Lorde's ideas about eros with what I think most of us do as Mormon intellectuals. This might seem like a sidetrack, but it is part of the path. I don't think that it would take much for most of us to admit that there is at least some anti-intellectualism in Mormon culture. We may have recently been cautioned about taking counsel from those who don't believe.[9] If we take that prophetic warning and add the trump card that any idea someone doesn't like can be labeled and then dismissed as "the philosophies of men mingled with scripture," then we end up with a culture that suppresses intellectual exploration. Intellectual pursuits can thereby be, to use Lorde's words, "vilified, abused, and devalued" while being cast as "the confused, the trivial, the psychotic."

The intellectual and the erotic appear to me as shared paths. The erotic for Lorde provides "an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire." This experience becomes a benchmark, such that "once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors brings us closest to that fullness." This sense of internal satisfaction and completion in the intellectual realm is something I started to taste from a young age. I have experienced this thrilling intellectual completeness in books and articles, in classrooms and at scholarly conferences. Some members of my family and church have expressed concerns that my intellectual pursuits were driven by pride or would lead me off the path. For me, my experiences demonstrate eros's fullness and Lorde's insight that "to go beyond the encouraged mediocrity of the society that we live in is

9. Russell M. Nelson, "Think Celestial!," Oct. 2023, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2023/10/51nelson?lang=eng.

always fraught with danger and with fear, and the function of the erotic is to encourage excellence . . . and to give us the strength to pursue it."[10]

I think some of us turn to sources like *Dialogue* because, despite the danger and fear we encounter in a culture that encourages intellectual mediocrity, we feel a force encouraging excellence, giving us strength to pursue it, and rewarding those efforts with a sense of satisfaction and completion. I add that many of us seem to see those pursuits as efforts to be like our heavenly parents in courage, faith, light, and intelligence. If developing thinking and feeling skills are God-given capacities, then we are attempting to increase and grow them like the servants in the parable of the talents who are given money to invest. I enjoy reading *Dialogue* to reap the rewards of the work others do to develop their faculties. I learn from you and am inspired by your excellence.

The Glory of God is Erotic Fullness

For me, then, sexual development is like intellectual development. Eros inspires both when it is understood as the quest for growth and excellence. Both can be shrouded in confusion and fear. Where "anti-intellectualism" describes efforts where intellectual pursuits are "vilified, abused, and devalued," an umbrella term describing similar efforts against sexual development is "purity culture." One key difference between developing these twin divine capacities is that there is a tradition of intellectual excellence in Mormon culture. We have brave thinkers past and present, and even if there is a tension, at least there are clear, positive examples. There are biographies featuring faithful people developing their intellectual capacities. There are no biographies charting sexual development of faithful Latter-day Saints. What we have instead is President Spencer W. Kimball's famous and frightening construal of sexuality in *The Miracle of Forgiveness*.[11] I think that there are

10. Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic," YouTube recording.

11. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969).

some increasingly useful efforts and voices in the present encouraging sexual development. Jennifer Finlayson-Fife, a licensed therapist and sexuality educator, comes to mind. And while we have Laura Brotherson's *And They Were Not Ashamed*,[12] this book does not emerge from a long-standing tradition nor do I think it has a similar impact as something like Richard Bushman's *Rough Stone Rolling*.[13]

Another contrast between intellectual and sexual exploration and development is how we typically talk about them with respect to God. Despite all the anti-intellectualism, at least we can turn to a phrase like "the glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36). I don't anticipate an upcoming prophetic announcement that the glory of God is erotic and sexual fullness. In fact, I'm banking on many readers being at least a little taken aback with the idea that we are children of the Gods who orgasm. Try tossing that phrase out in Sunday School. In a culture that, as Lorde said, vilifies, devalues, confuses, and trivializes the sexual side of the erotic, it may be difficult for many members to even imagine our heavenly parents as sexual beings. It can be difficult to imagine sexuality as part of their divine and complete nature.

Drawing a parallel between the more readily understood intellectual development and sexual development has clarified challenges and possibilities for me. I can embrace both aspects of God's glory. This has helped me along the path.

Two Trees Along the Path

Another helpful thing I've encountered on my path has been two Book of Mormon trees. I began this discussion with images of a path, a path leading to a tree in Lehi's dream. The two Book of Mormon trees I turn to now, trees that can reveal more about sexual development, are Jacob's

12. Laura M. Brotherson, *And They Were Not Ashamed: Strengthening Marriage through Sexual Fulfillment* (Boise, Idaho: Inspire Book, 2004).

13. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005).

tame and wild olive trees. In this allegory, the tame tree, as we recall, grew old and began to decay. Despite efforts to encourage new growth, "the main top thereof began to perish" (Jacob 5:6). The Lord of the vineyard decided to remove and destroy the withering main branches of the tame and graft in their place branches from the wild olive tree (verse 7). This entire grafting effort was done to preserve the roots of the tame olive tree (verse 11). The initial response was that the wild branches helped the tame trees bear fruit. There were some positive and some mixed results in other trees in the vineyard. When the Lord of the vineyard returned after a long time, the Lord found "all kinds of bad fruit" (verse 32). The wild had taken such control of the tree that the fruit was of no value (verses 34–37). Still, the Lord believed that the trees' roots were good. The Lord's initial plan was to level the vineyard and start over, but the servant advised patience (verse 50). The Lord decided on another round of grafting along with plucking the branches with the most bitter fruit (verse 52). Branches from natural trees that had become wild were grafted with other trees in the vineyard, the branches bearing the most bitter fruit were removed, and all of the trees were gradually pruned of the bitter fruit so that the roots could "take strength because of their goodness" (verse 59). The good replaced the bitter (verse 66). The allegory's outcome was that the energy and vitality from the wild branches gave new life to the decaying tame trees, and once the energy from the wild had been properly incorporated and the bitter had been pruned, strong trees bearing robust, good fruit emerged, grew, and flourished.

Just as the wild trees have a unique vitality lacking in the natural but tame and decaying tree, so can erotic exploration—be it intellectual or sexual—bring with it strength and power. My education has brought new ideas and new energy to my beliefs and testimony. Sometimes the energy of those new ideas has threatened to overpower the tame and traditional belief foundation. The power of those new ideas can result in some unusual fruit. I have experienced the fits and starts

Jacob describes. But time and patience have helped me preserve the roots of faith, hope, and love toward my heavenly parents. The energy of "wild" new ideas has brought power to the roots and strength to the tree. "Wild" ideas have strengthened the natural tree.

I'm in the process of doing the same sexual work. I'm stepping into my shame and fear about my body, sexuality, desires, and fantasies instead of cowering. I remember first hearing about French kissing in elementary school and thinking it was dangerously wild, taboo, and unhygienic. I grew beyond that fear. Now I'm asking myself what other seemingly "wild" aspects of sexuality might bring a new strength, vitality, growth, and development. I understand there will be fits and starts, but I'm less afraid of either failure or of getting overwhelmed. I'm less afraid of some occasional bitter fruit. All of that is part of the process. And there is one more key aspect of this path out of shame, confusion, and fear, and into erotic and sexual fullness.

The Second Guide

The essential second guide along my path is, of course, our Heavenly Mother. To give a sense of her role for me, I have a recent experience. I have a new church calling. As part of my calling, before I had even started, I was invited to an online Zoom training meeting. There were a couple dozen people in the meeting. Presiding was someone I didn't know but who I respected. As the meeting was about to start, the presiding leader asked me to offer the opening prayer. This instantly set off a shock of electric anxiety in me. Over the last couple of years, I have been struggling with whom to address when I pray. Personally, since I believe a Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father are listening and answering, I address my prayers to them. But I'm hesitant to begin my public prayers in a similar manner. To me, at least now, it feels too disruptive and too taboo for many members. So, what I do in my public prayers is a sort of gradualist compromise. I address our Heavenly Father and express love for him, and then I thank him for a loving

Heavenly Mother who also hears and answers our prayers and who also sent her son to die for us and show us the way back to them. The rest is standard-issue prayer material. While I have prayed in this manner before Sunday School and in other public settings, this situation made me very nervous. I don't know if it was stubbornness and pride or faith and courage—it was probably a weird mixture of all four—but I decided to pray as I always do. When the prayer was over, the presiding leader paused for a beat and said, "Someday I look forward to sitting down and talking with Heavenly Mother." My immediate thought was, "Um, you can do that right now!"

When I thought about this experience after the meeting, I tried to determine the precise mixture of the four motivations—stubbornness, pride, faith, and courage. I also asked myself why I felt it was so important to pray in that manner. As I thought about it, I concluded that my Heavenly Mother is far too important to me to not address her every time I pray. She has been my essential second guide down the path.

Part of what has made my painful sexual experiences so damaging is that I have not been able to shake the belief that my sexual desires make me bad, filthy, and unworthy. My desires bring an uncertain and ambiguous energy, and, given long-standing painful and shameful experiences, that energy has come to seem ugly to me. It has taken time and effort to change that view. I have spent hours talking with my Heavenly Mother about sexuality in the most specific ways. I have spoken with her about my body, what it is, what it can do, and what it has done. Over time I have come to see that my body is something my loving Heavenly Mother and her husband have given me. My body is like the ones they have. I have dedicated time in many, many prayers thanking both of them for every part of my body, naming and feeling gratitude for each. I have come to believe and to feel deeply that she is, like him, someone who loves her body and loves what it can do. She loves her desires. She joyously embraces everything about her sexuality, including her fantasies. We have a running joke, my Heavenly Parents

and I, about what they use as their safe words.[14] Let that thought rattle around in your soul! Oh, and probably don't mention God's safe words in Sunday School.

When I prayed at the start of the Zoom meeting, even though I felt nervous and anxious, I could not fail to acknowledge she who has done so much to lead me out of shame, fear, and confusion. I'm still on the path. The day after I completed a draft of this essay, I realized that I'm still trying to believe, or, better yet, fully embrace, what I have written. In my life now I look for something Lorde described to make sure I'm on the right path. Lorde put it this way:

> Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy, in the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, making love, examining an idea.[15]

I believe I'm on the right path when that path increases my capacity for joy. The right path is one where everything I do is part of moving toward the fullness that my Heavenly Parents embody. The right path reveals who they are and encourages me, no matter what I'm doing, to embrace my potential and become like them.

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14. One is "Worcestershire," and a newish one is "Mormon."

15. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 44–45.

NAME WITHHELD is an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I served as a missionary and was married in the temple. I have had my thoughts published in *Dialogue* and other LDS-oriented publications. In my dream world I would make enough money to buy a lot of wonderful art and then donate it to small and struggling museums. The tag on the wall would read, "Donated anonymously."

José de Faria, *Astros e Símbolos*, 2021,
oil on canvas, 39 x 31 in.

Ezekiel in Walmart

Truman Burgess

Bread aisle for tortillas
an infant's hand around my finger
sold-out souls
sharing beans and lentils
in Babylon, but

I've been warned, I think.
Sand spitting in the wind
sun-faded advertisements for
lip balm modeled by
nameless lips

we'll never know.
Watchman with a clay canvas
stolen laptops ripped from their
eye sockets for saying
"Stop staring at me,

you fools, you killers."
White pipes passing for ceiling decor
our temple waiting to become fake fingernails
the curdled yogurt lurking back there
Mother Earth staring at a shopping cart

where I find my Father's corpse.
Who will scatter Him again?
I forget this isn't the end
the baby formula cabinet
swinging open,

empty graves in the future.
A dream of dusty femurs
shiny dog food split across the back
a man drives his electric wheelchair
into the potato chips—

we laugh and never help.
That's not what this is,
a wintry expulsion, a caress, a kiss
no one cares to give as we
watch our feet fall in line

to the checkout aisle.
We travel hoping to return home
with new gods in plastic bags
we wish weren't empty on the asphalt
as we cry for flames to light the tundra.

TRUMAN BURGESS {trumanburgess@gmail.com} grew up in the Shenandoah Valley and the Pacific Northwest, and he earned a bachelor's degree in English from Brigham Young University-Idaho. Truman's prose and poetry have appeared in the literary journals *The Whisky Blot*, *Kula Manu*, and *Outlet*. His award-winning journalism has been published through the news agencies St. George News and Scroll. Truman currently lives in southern Utah with his wife and four children.

Dowser's Prayer

Maria Mortensen Davis

I am religious
the way small desert towns
are named after water;
eleven or twenty worn buildings,
brown hills, dust.

I know this land was once
a paleolake. I can remember it
foggy and moss-grown,
mastodon and ground sloth drinking
in the gray dawn

of time, but that baptism
has long since dried.
Now even my sweat wicks away
before it reaches my lips,
snatched away in a sandy gust.

Thirsty, I see water
everywhere I look—
here in Sand Wash
or Indian Wells
or Cave Creek—

written in seashells
embedded eye-level
in a limestone cliff,
in turgid cactus, virga
like a gray smudge,

mesquite roots deep
as the water table,
afternoon cumulonimbus.
I draw it from dry stalks
like the kangaroo rat
or Moses.

Mornings, I lick dew from my own skin.
And when white-hot afternoon
glare becomes unbearable, when
flash flood seems more dream
than threat,

I rest in the shade
and drink the canyons
with my eyes: turbid stone
flowing thickly from one wave
into another.

Holy Places

Maria Mortensen Davis

> *"The world, this palpable world, which we were wont to treat with the boredom and disrespect with which we habitually regard places with no sacred association for us, is in truth a holy place, and we did not know it.* Venite, adoremus."
>
> *—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

No Celestial room has ever compared
to the stalk of yellow bluestem held in my son's teeth
three-quarters of a mile into a Sunday afternoon walk,
    feathered seeds dancing with every step.

Sometimes I think the worst thing we ever did
was divorce the earth from holiness—
there is no greed beyond this treading down what is free
    in our eagerness for exclusivity.

Thirty-five years since I was in my mother, always *of* her:
there is no parent I would rather claim than this world.
I will not number creation *one, two, one, two, you are sacred, you are not*.
    How could I ask for a holier blessing than this August washing

of feet by January's melted snowstorms, come down
over forty-nine thousand feet of tumbled stone for me?
Don't offer me my own family, forever (I have them now)
    if you cannot throw in peachy five-o'clock light.

Raise me red-tailed hawks, chanterelles, pinyon pine—I might listen.
I don't want a world too wonderful to imagine: I want this one.
What sacraments have I passed up
    on the straight and narrow freeway to salvation?

I once asked my father-in-law the name of the delicate silver-blue
    plants
that mound into the Idaho distance, so lovely I ached.
Nothing but sagebrush.
    Show me, then, the border of Eden.

MARIA MORTENSEN DAVIS {maria.mortensen.davis@gmail.com} is a poet and mother of four living among the mountains and Mormonism of northern Utah, where she draws inspiration from both.

Golden Plates Ode

Timothy Liu

Were they fake news? Etched
on tin? Did the boy prophet
really find them sequestered

under a rock where the pageant
is held? We only had to wait
less than two thousand years

for the show to go on!, right
smack dab in the heart
of the Burnt-Out District

where a treasure-digging teen
unearthed a record no one
could decipher without the aid

of jewels in a breast plate
(such spectacles!) all taken
up to Heaven when the job

was done. How this became
the cornerstone of my faith
is anyone's guess now taking

root. Why the redundancy
of Three Witnesses followed
by Eight, plates which had

"the appearance of gold"
which "we did handle with
our hands; and we also saw

the engravings thereon, all
of which had the appearance
of ancient work, and a curious

workmanship." Divinity
embalmed in hearsay, this
was the start of many questions

I asked the Institute Director
at UCLA, our building housed
next to the Tri-Delt Trinity

out there still on sorority row.

TIMOTHY LIU's {timothyliu65@gmail.com} latest book of poems is *Down Low and Lowdown: Timothy Liu's Bedside Bottom-Feeder Blues*. His previous books have received a 2004 Book of the Year by Publishers Weekly; a 1998 Open Margins Award by PEN America; and the 1992 Norma Farber First Book Award from the Poetry Society of America. New work is forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Fence*, and *Michigan Quarterly Review*. A reader of occult esoterica, Liu teaches at Vassar College and SUNY New Paltz.

A December Poem

Anita Tanner

"I have loved the stars too fondly to be
fearful of the night."
—Sarah Williams

Under the dome above, we look up,
singing children's canticles,
our own domed hearts
clutched by the promise

of something new becoming—
a Cassiopeian beauty
or Cygnus bearing
the inner Northern Cross

of a pure heart.
We cannot name the clusters then,
major constellations
in the northern spheres,

but we learn again a yearning
when others attend stars,
when something new becomes
the pointing, gazing up

at a university night sky,
the class final to identify configurations,
astronomy's passionate professor
standing by, marking stars off,

one by one, with the same ancient
summons and longing
that seeks stars for signs,
that dreams of something new becoming,

that turns about to follow
Orion or some other Heavenly
Shepherd of the sky.

ANITA TANNER {anitatanner6@gmail.com} published *Where Fields Have Been Planted* in 1999. She's written poetry since 1978 and has published in numerous periodicals, magazines, and anthologies. She's the mother of six adult children and the grandmother of seventeen. Reading and writing are akin to breathing for untold years. Her husband Leonard died twenty-two years ago. She's still carrying on.

I DREAMED OF OIL

Theric Jepson

I don't know who was sick. Maybe it was you. Let's say it was.

You were sick and I was probably more worried than you (as per usual) but we brought our faith to our prayers and we pled that you would be healed. I anointed your head with oil. And I sealed that anointing and blessed you.

This was the last of our oil.

And you were healed.

Later, I was not there, but later you were telling this story to an apostle. And the apostle took a container of oil about six inches high and of curious workmanship—blown glass, clearly, but into such an astonishing shape it appeared the oil was twisting into the air like God in his pillar—and he blessed that oil and gave it to you.

Now, there is nothing in my theology (and, I believe, nothing in yours) that would lead us to believe that oil blessed by an apostle is any holier than oil blessed by, say, me, but you and I couldn't help but marvel at the container and its holy oil, a twinge of celebrity worship infecting our religious feeling. And then, somehow, and we have never quite been able to work out how this happened, but somehow the container was uncapped and tipped over and pouring its entire contents upon my body.

No point in collecting the oil, trying to put it back in the container. Your apostle-blessed oil is gone. Or, rather, it's soaking through my clothing and coating my skin. I feel bad. You feel bad. We sorrow that the oil is lost. Because, even though we do not believe it is holier than any other blessed oil, we imagine that telling of its origins might give hope to the next sick person we love as they receive a blessing.

But we are wrong. I don't know how much of what we believe to be true we are mistaken about, but certainly we are wrong about the relative holiness of blessed oils. Because I am changed. I don't feel any different, but I pick up a colicky baby and it calms. I ruffle the hair of a snot-nosed second grader and his sinuses dry. When you scratch your arm upon a thumbtack sticking strangely from a doorjamb and I take your hand, you are healed.

The oil has somehow entered me and made me holy. I can heal others with a touch.

I do not know what to do. Do I have an obligation like a Saturday-morning superhero to seek hospitals and campsites under overpasses and reach out my hand? Surely not. I am not the Christ. I am just me. I never go anywhere. I am too shy to speak to the downtrodden. Sometimes I do not say hello to friends when I see them at the other end of a supermarket aisle.

Then again, at baptism, did I not take upon myself his holy name? Did I not pledge to mourn with those who mourn and to act as he would act?

Who am I, now that an apostle has indirectly made me holy? What am I to do?

And then I realize. That while these small miracles have impressed me, they have not changed my faith. I do not believe I can enter a tent city and touch a man with the palsy then invite him to stand and walk. I do not believe I can pass through an ER waiting room and invite all present to shake my hand and return to their homes.

My faith is in a limited God. And I am ashamed. I am happy to heal my family and my friends and my fellow Saints—the ones I know. The story of my gift has spread through these circles, and people do come to me for small things—a twisted ankle, a scuffed knee, prom-night acne—but you and I have spoken and we both hope, though we wish we did not, that those who will get cancer choose their doctor and not seek me. Who am I to heal the truly sick? If I say yes, and thus burn through my faith, will I also burn through theirs?

I awake. The image of that strange bottle is clear in my mind. I am aware of the oil spilled upon me. I know that I am become holy.

But now—I fill in the gaps of my dream with mortal imagination. And I sit in my bed. And what should I do, now that I see that I am holy?

First, let me turn to you and let me kiss you with my holy lips. Let me touch your cheek with my holy hand. Let me wake you from your dream—and hear of it. Yours may matter too. Or be the key to mine. Or be a beautiful shadow you have already forgotten.

I do not know the implications of one oil being holier than another. But I have always known the implications of you sleeping beside me. Now, to you, let me surrender all the holiness I have until you, too, are holy.

Already I feel more certain. I realize no burden is shouldered alone.

Soon, we will rise and shower and go forth. Perhaps we will touch others as we make our way. And perhaps our touch will heal. If so, all glory be to God.

What need we to understand?

THERIC JEPSON {thmazing.com} is the author of *Byuck* and *Just Julie's Fine*. Although dreams do not play a significant role in either novel, if you read them, your own dreams will be so great. So great.

José de Faria, *Astro Das Trevas*, 2024,
oil and acrylic on canvas, 31 x 39 in.

O Utah, Where's Your Shame!: A Review of Two Mountain Meadows Massacre Books

Richard E. Turley Jr. and Barbara Jones Brown. *Vengeance Is Mine: The Mountain Meadows Massacre and Its Aftermath*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. 520 pp. Hardcover: $34.95. ISBN: 9780195397857.

Janiece Johnson. *Convicting the Mormons: The Mountain Meadows Massacre in American Culture.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023. 234 pp. Paperback: $29.95 ISBN: 9781469673530.

Reviewed by Chad Lawrence Nielsen

The Mountain Meadows Massacre is a hugely important (and hugely tragic) topic in the history of both Utah and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That is why it is so notable that not one but two heavy-hitting books on the topic came out in 2023. In this review, I discuss both of these books—*Vengeance Is Mine: The Mountain Meadows Massacre and Its Aftermath* by Richard E. Turley Jr. and Barbara Jones Brown and *Convicting the Mormons: The Mountain Meadows Massacre in American Culture* by Janiece Johnson.

Turley and Brown's *Vengeance Is Mine* is an exceptional book that delves deep into the outcomes and repercussions of the infamous Mountain Meadows Massacre. The authors have done a remarkable job of presenting a comprehensive and detailed account of the massacre and its cover-up.

The book is a sequel to the 2008 publication *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* and takes readers on a journey through the aftermath of the gruesome event. It quickly summarizes the history of the massacre before moving on to examine the attempts of the local southern Utah leaders to conceal their crime by suppressing witnesses and

disseminating lies. Both government and Church investigations were hindered by stonewalling and political maneuvering, and the authors provide insight into these challenges. They also delve into the trial proceedings of John D. Lee, the only person executed for the massacre. Using resources previously unavailable (including new transcriptions of the shorthand notes of Lee's trials), they analyze the complex relationship between Lee and Church president Brigham Young and question Young's involvement in the cover-up. They find that the local leaders in southern Utah intentionally misled Brigham Young, blaming the massacre on Paiutes, which Young accepted until evidence to the contrary was shared with him in 1870 by Erastus Snow and Lorenzo Roundy, then confirmed by Nephi Johnson. For this and other reasons, the authors conclude that published memoirs of John D. Lee (*Mormonism Unveiled*) were "altered and expanded" from "Lee's original and significantly shorter 'confession'" by William W. Bishop. The book also details the fates of the other perpetrators and survivors, noting that "the pursuit of further convictions continued after Lee's execution" (xv).

Turley and Brown's writing is well researched and presents a balanced perspective. They successfully convey the gravity of the event while maintaining sensitivity to the victims and their families. Their willingness to confront the difficult aspects of this history is commendable and reflects a deeply held respect for the truth. While the book was not easy or light to read, I think it's important to contend with this history.

The book provided new and interesting insight into the massacre. It made it very clear that even though John D. Lee was the only person ever successfully prosecuted and executed for carrying out the massacre, there were efforts to indict others. Those other efforts were thwarted by a variety of circumstances, including an inability to capture the suspects (like Isaac Haight), plea bargains for those testifying, and government agent refusals to accept assistance from the Church. The section of the book that was most new to me delved into the details of

Lee's trial. I learned, for instance, that the US attorneys in the first trial against Lee had a primary goal of putting pressure on Congress to pass legislation to disenfranchise Latter-day Saints and that a key struggle in the trial was establishing that Lee had killed people during the massacre (which proved more difficult that one might think).

Some aspects of the story still didn't feel clear to me after finishing *Vengeance Is Mine*. In particular, the story of Isaac Haight's membership being restored still felt hazy. The authors put his rebaptism in the context of Haight losing a daughter shortly before the rebaptism took place, but they did not connect the dots on how the two events were linked, if at all, or why Brigham Young made the sudden about-face and authorized rebaptism for Haight. Setting aside that minor criticism, the book is a historical tour de force in understanding the aftermath of the massacre.

Moving on, Johnson's *Convicting the Mormons* combines an analysis of the records of Lee's trials with a thorough understanding of American culture in order to illuminate the ways in which individuals and the media used (and continue to use) narratives of the Mountain Meadows Massacre as a weapon against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in constructing Latter-day Saints as uncivilized and "other."

In many ways, this book serves as an intersection of studies about the massacre (such as *Vengeance Is Mine*) with studies about anti-Mormon literature and what that literature says about the people who wrote it (following in the tradition of *Viper on the Hearth* by Terryl Givens, *A Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* by J. Spencer Fluhman, or *Sins of Christendom: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Evangelicalism* by Nathaniel Wiewora). Johnson also builds on the work of W. Paul Reeve (*Religion of a Different Color*) and others in discussing how Latter-day Saints were portrayed as no longer being white through anti-Mormon literature.

As an example of understanding the goals of the relevant anti-Mormon literature, Johnson demonstrates how Lee's first trial was run with the newspaper more in mind than the jury. Throughout the trial, the US attorneys were crafting a narrative about the massacre that would be broadcast nationwide to stir up anger against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rather than focusing on the jury in the courtroom, their goal being to "bring the savagery of the Mormon Church to 'the eyes of the whole civilized world'" in order to pressure Congress to pass legislation that would punish the Church (49). Their narrative portrayed Latter-day Saints as violent, subservient to their leaders, and unmanly (both for their subservience and for failing to protect women and children during the massacre). This had the mixed effect of damaging the public perception of the Church but failing to lead the jury to convict John D. Lee for his crimes.

One of the enjoyable aspects of *Convicting the Mormons* is its incorporation of both media and prose text. Political cartoons litter the pages, and folk songs, Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West shows, modern TV series, and novels are all discussed to highlight the themes of anti-Mormon literature about the Mountain Meadows Massacre. (The Wild West shows also make for a nice link between this book and the more recently published *Buffalo Bill and the Mormons* by Brent M. Rogers.) The title of this review is, in fact, taken from a folk song discussed in *Convicting the Mormons* (35–36).

One notable aspect of Johnson's writing is that she is able to dig beneath the surface and show how the story grew in the telling. For example, claims that Brigham Young was ultimately responsible for the massacre only really began to emerge during Lee's first trial. Johnson notes that "in spite of the lack of evidence, the U.S. attorneys ensured that Young's involvement became a central element of John D. Lee's first trial and its enduring legacy" (111). The attorneys had already decided that President Young was guilty (regardless of what any evidence indicated) and refused to be convinced otherwise. This attitude resulted in

the rejection of Lee's confession during the first trial because it "shows, beyond the possibility of a doubt that Brigham Young is innocent and knew nothing of the transaction until many days after the massacre occurred" (97). Ultimately, when Lee's attorney, William W. Bishop, published an edited version of a confession that implicated Young after Lee's execution, Bishop "provided the narrative the public desired" by "inculpating Young in the massacre . . . and the public responded in kind buying the book in droves" (129).

Convicting the Mormons is a fascinating exploration of how the public image of Latter-day Saints has been deeply affected by the massacre (even while noting how similar massacres perpetrated by other American colonizers in the western United States tend to not receive similar treatments). *Vengeance Is Mine* is an exceptional book that serves as a valuable contribution to the history of Mormonism and Utah. The authors' openness and depth of research is remarkable and presents a clear and thorough account of one of the most shameful events in Latter-day Saint history. The major difference between the two books is their disparate approaches to the subject. *Vengeance is Mine* concentrates on documenting and narrating the story of John D. Lee's trial and the aftermath of the massacre, while *Convicting the Mormons* is focused on the ways in which the massacre has been used in American culture to shape perceptions about Latter-day Saints. Both are worthy additions to Latter-day Saint historical studies.

CHAD LAWRENCE NIELSEN {chad.lawrence.nielsen@gmail.com} has three great intellectual passions in life: science, history/religious studies, and music. He has pursued a career in biotechnology but maintains an active interest in both of his other passions. Chad currently serves as a member of the Bells at Temple Square and writes for the Latter-day Saint blogs *Times and Seasons* and *From the Desk* as an independent scholar.

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Invigorating the Latter-day Saint Pioneer Woman Narrative

Martine Leavitt. *Buffalo Flats.* New York: Margaret Ferguson Books, 2023. 232 pp. Hardcover: $13.55. IBSN: 9780823443420.

Reviewed by Mik Johnson

"Rebecca had heard her father and others call this land God's country often enough that she wasn't as surprised as she might have been to come upon him, one warm spring evening, sitting on the tor overlooking Buffalo Flats. He was dressed in his work clothes, but you knew God when you saw him."

These are the opening lines to *Buffalo Flats*, Martine Leavitt's latest addition to young adult literature. From the first paragraph, two irrevocably important pieces of our protagonist's heart are handed to us: her relationship with God and her love of the land. The entire novel works like this, with frank, piercing honesty from eighteen-year-old Rebecca Leavitt, who wants nothing more than to own her own parcel of land and enjoy God's country as a homesteader for the rest of her life. The trouble? Rebecca is a woman, and in 1890s Northwest Territories (Rebecca's section of the territories is known today as Alberta, Canada), a woman is "not [a person] in matters of rights and privileges" and cannot own land. A further obstacle is the $480 price, not to mention her family's meager finances. Undeterred, Rebecca seeks a way around the law and, throughout the narrative, doggedly pursues her dream of homesteading. Combine this with Rebecca's mother, who publicly speaks against domestic abuse, and Rebecca's sister-in-law, who actively works as a suffragette, and you'll find a cast of strong female characters, all of whom fulfill traditional feminine roles (wife, daughter, mother) while also seeking equality and safety

for women and girls. This novel is a tribute to the women activists of the era.

Though the opening chapters read quite slowly as characters, relationships, and Latter-day Saint pioneer customs are established, the narrative quickly picks up the pace as romantic tensions are introduced, Rebecca's chances of securing her land are compromised, and as bears, disease, floods, abuse, prejudices, death, and famine threaten her life and her loved ones. Make your way through the first fifty pages as you would a mountain meadow, enjoying the flowers and the birdsong, and you'll soon be met with a river of a story that quickly rides into a steep waterfall. The view at the end of the book is breathtaking. It's worth the journey. I promise.

Martine Leavitt's previous work is well decorated. Her 2006 novel *Keturah and Lord Death* was a finalist for the National Book Award, 2013's *My Book of Life by Angel* was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize and winner of the Canadian Library Association Young Adult Book Award, and 2016's *Calvin* won the Governor General's Literary Award. Leavitt's previous works, including these award-winners, pertain to contemporary, magical realism, and fantasy genres. With *Buffalo Flats*, Leavitt also demonstrates her mastery of historical fiction. Throughout the novel, Leavitt interweaves historical artifacts (such as a handsewn patchwork quilt and traditional courting candles, used during visits between sweethearts) with historic social practices (such as Sunday church and box lunch socials) and historic events (such as the "grippe" influenza and the North Western Coal and Navigation Company irrigation project) without skipping a beat on plot and characters. The world-building is seamless, convincing, and delightful.

Buffalo Flats is as rich in prose as it is in history. Certain lines took my breath away, stopped me in my tracks, and begged to be read again for their beauty and their wisdom and their originality. A few examples:

- "Rebecca had come to her parents a daughter after six sons. . . . The way Ammon told it, when Rebecca came along, she was an afterthought, a

shrug, after the straight-shouldered pride of all that male offspring, a concession to God that they must take the bad with the good. But their beloved mother bent over that bit of flesh as if it were her own heart lying in the cradle, and the boys had to go along with it."

- "Then his mouth was on hers, and right then and there, she and Coby invented kissing . . . her spine bloomed into flame, until all that was left was light on bone."
- "At some point, Rebecca became too sick to care if she cried. Her chest burned, her head was filled with a pain as if little horns had been torn from her skull and caustic rubbed into the holes. She was a small animal in the jaws of a wolf: shaken, limp, crushed. She opened her eyes once and looked at her fingers beside her on the pillow. Poor fingers, she thought, you are so sick. . . . I never thought fingers could be so sick."
- "She had learned that no mortal soul could love the whole world at once; you could love only the person before you, and the next and the next, one at a time, man by woman by child, just the one before you and the world each soul carried with her. That was grace. That was commandment. That was the Point."

I could give you a hundred more examples. Leavitt's precision with language is part of what makes this book a masterful work of art. Never before have I thought of a baby as "a bit of flesh," or a first kiss as "light on bone," or illness as "the jaws of a wolf." These vivid images give vibrant, visceral feeling to the characters' experiences, allowing the reader an immersive opportunity to live it all alongside them. Young adult literature has long been bombarded with a bad reputation—especially in academia—for lackadaisical writing and airy pop culture lenses. Anyone who reads *Buffalo Flats* with those ideas will have to stop and eat their words. This young adult novel is as gorgeously written as any volume of literary fiction.

In her author's note, Leavitt shares her personal tie to the historical narrative. She writes: "Thomas Rowell Leavitt, my husband's great-grandfather, traveled by covered wagon from Utah to the North-West territories in 1887 with Charles Ora Card and some forty pioneers" (228). Leavitt later explains that Thomas Rowell Leavitt's personal

history and life experiences were kept, passed down, and treasured in a large volume their family affectionately calls "The Big Red Book." Leavitt drew much inspiration from this family relic, explaining, in connection to it, the naming of her protagonist: "Because my story was inspired by these real-life histories, I have indulged myself by giving the main character the last name of Leavitt, though she is not based on a single real person" (230).

As someone with a pioneer heritage myself (also situated within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints tradition, though my ancestors settled areas in Utah), I was delighted to see my family reflected in Leavitt's writing. I was raised with bulging family history books, too, replete with newspaper articles and handwritten journal entries. My pioneer ancestors' stories were often my bedtime stories, read to me by my mother, and together we marveled over my fourth great-grandmother Ellen Walmsley Clegg, one of Utah's first midwives, responsible for aiding thousands of mothers in the safe deliveries of their babies. I grew up with a strong sense of family pride and a heritage of courage, compassion, and grit. Yet, my family history is often seen with cynical scrutiny. Just last week, for example, while staying in the historic Ellerbeck Bed and Breakfast in Salt Lake City, I passed multiple shops sporting "All Wives Matter" T-shirts and other tourist paraphernalia, poking fun at my ancestors' religious and polygamic history. Now, I have my own qualms with polygamy—and this polygamy example is just one of many—but even so, it can be tiring to continuously listen to criticisms of the people who paved a way for my life. Yes, my ancestors made mistakes, and yes, some of their behavior was questionable and unethical. But there's so much more to them. What about their falling in love, and their suffragist activities, and their songs, and their dances around the fire, and their corn cakes and griddle potatoes, and their sacrifices and sweat and sorrows? What about all that?

Martine Leavitt speaks to that. *Buffalo Flats* is a love song to Latter-day Saint pioneers, especially the women, who lived during the late

1800s. She creates space for the good, the bad, and the ugly—but mostly the good—of our pioneer ancestors, and she does so with spellbinding prose and superb story. I'm indebted to her for it.

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The Power of Three: A Trio of Poets and Mormon Feminist Poetics

Heather Harris-Bergevin. *Katabasis: Monologues for the Dead.* BCC Press, 2023. 268 pp. Paper: $9.99. ISBN: 978-1948218894.

Susan Elizabeth Howe. *Infinite Disguises.* BCC Press, 2023. 79 pp. Paper: $9.99. ISBN: 978-1-948218-90-0.

Darlene Young. *Here.* BCC Press, 2023. 91 pp. Paper: $9.99. ISBN: 978-1-948218-88-7.

Reviewed by Danielle Beazer Dubrasky

In her introduction to her book *Katabasis*, Heather Harris-Bergevin quotes someone who accused her at one time of "consorting with witches." The word "witch" comes from an Old English "wicce," meaning "female magician or sorceress." In delving further, one finds the phrase "a woman who practices incantations." The word "incantations"

is further broken down and becomes "to sing spells." The notion of the witch, closely related to the word "magi," has been recast over the years in a feminist revision. It seems fitting to apply the notion of "magi" to three poets whose works contain various "singing spells" of poetry. These collections each exemplify a kind of feminist Mormon poetics, presented in varying degrees: slyly subtle in Susan Elizabeth Howe's *Infinite Disguises*, more apparent in Darlene Young's *Here*, and defiantly present in Heather Harris-Bergevin's *Katabasis*.

In one poem by Susan Elizabeth Howe, there is the line, "Don't I have any words at the center of my life?" This line not only expresses the question every poet asks themselves, but it is also an oblique apostrophe to Emily Dickinson, a primary motif throughout *Infinite Disguises*. Reference to Dickinson's poems reverberate throughout the sections—a poem that explores the idea of "telling it slant," another one on a "way of seeing" by looking into the dye of crushed cochineal beetles, or by giving a nod to a buzzing fly, and finally through a full address to the poet in "Oh, Emily." The idea of conjuring a connection to Dickinson's poems is prevalent, but so is the desire to find the source, the matrix—not only the artistic medium. Not the poems, but Emily Dickinson herself. This desire is implied through various images and references to origins. The speaker seeks not the artwork inscribed on sandstone but the touch of the Indigenous woman who left her handprint behind, in the poem "All Things." Not Perry Mason but the writer who created him in "The Case of the Jilted Jockey."

What is also impressive in this collection is the range of tone and focus. Some poems lean toward humor, wordplay, or satire, as does the clever poem "The Tenants of Philosophy," which takes its inspiration from a student's malapropism of the word "tenets." In this poetic sleight of hand, Howe riffs on the idea of the "tenants of Emerson's philosophies," imagining "nihilist tenants," "idealist tenants," and so forth. Other poems pointedly comment on aspects of social justice. "Meth Child" poignantly addresses the trauma experienced by the "Little wanderer who came to earth / in a sand-filled tire of the park / where your

mother gave birth." Another poem, "The Last Villager," speaks in the persona of the witness to the violence that has taken everything. Other poems address what it means to be living in the United States *now*, often "battered by television news," living in a time that has "let zombies into art as well as dinner conversations." Howe's poems are incantations: through the power of her words, they create a linguistically sharp vision that not only sees the exterior details, the "tiny female beetle that / . . . lives on the toughness / around the prickly pear's spikes," but also interior perspectives as these lines describe the mind of a poet (Dickinson) who "must often have wandered / the desert of bitter and little." This contrast is seen powerfully in another song-spell—"no map detailed as a dragonfly's eye, / no eye like earth as far galaxy."

Darlene Young's *Here* follows a different motif—that of a mother following the development of her son from youth to young adulthood through priesthood rites. In these poems, Eve is the feminist icon: a woman formed in a patriarchal world who is rhetorically placed at its center—the mother of all living, revered for her body's procreative powers—but in reality, she exists on the periphery with minimal power. As Young's poems express this paradoxical stance, the collection becomes a kind of tapestry in which the experience of having a female body—as wife, as mother, as aging woman—is woven into a search for God, her creator, who placed her in a world of paradoxes. The poems set Eve as a foil against a contemporary Mormon mother's journey of raising her son. The poem "Lone and Dreary: Cain Comes Home from the Field" contains a line that expresses the theme of the book: "The tumble of boys— / and then the horizon. / They grew. Natural, to want / to see for themselves. / Horizon: a mother's fear." This idea of knowing that the future will inevitably separate the son from his mother explains the book's title, *Here*, which calls us to pay attention—there is only the present, and all things move forward through time. Pay attention to the song of birds in the morning, to a couple's argument, to what is *not* said in a letter from the son written while he is on a mission. A kind of urgency compels these poems, an awareness that mortal life is temporary.

A prominent tapestry thread throughout the poems is the way the son inhabits his own space in this patriarchal world that the mother knows she can never truly be a part of: His coming of age and attempts to attract girls, his early morning service projects, the Young Men's weeklong rafting trip over which she has no control, and finally the mission itself. Behind the image of Eve as the prototype for "mother" is the deceased mother of the speaker. The occasional memory of her presence informs the speaker's anxiety of losing her thread to the next generation; it is implied that the thread to her own mother was cut short. Other poems address what it means to have a female body—to experience the "hot flash, the strangle of clammy clothes," the anxiety of having a breast biopsy, or to imagine Eve's womb wrenching "at the sight of that blood / her own seed" on Cain's return without his brother. Young creates some resolution for the emotional journey that accepts the aging body in the poem "Hot Flash." The body that conceived, gave birth, and said goodbye to the son is embraced through an image that finally gives it autonomy and that conjures up a dance similar to that of imagined witches: "Shut up. I'm not done dancing / The best belly-dancers are older women, pant- / omiming birthing, earth / goddesses, crones."

The final collection, *Katabasis* by Heather Harris-Bergevin, draws on many feminist motifs through Greek myths, Judeo-Christian myths, fairy tales, as well as Mormon history and lore. This collection starts as a conventional epic: "I will raise you up brim-filled with stories." The first poem invites the reader into a journey that explores many facets of being female, queer, or any kind of "Other" in a world defined by patriarchy. Those facets are also shaped by the inherent wounds one experiences as an "Other" within a patriarchal system. There is even a female guide—the sea nymph Thetis—who takes the place of Virgil; however, she presents herself as an unreliable guide as she refers to potential destruction by two monsters who were once women but have been punished (wounded) by the Greek gods for their transgressions. The wounds are various—psychological, physical, sexual—as the

poems move through one unsettled voice to another. Poems written in personas of literary women, nymphs, or goddesses from Greek myths are foils to a contemporary voice that pushes against patriarchal convention that is often Mormon and toxically masculine. In some poems, the story of the hurt is clear—in others, more opaque. But each poem offers a surprising turn as one is not sure which story will be encountered next.

The ways in which myths and fairy tales have constructed gender in society is deconstructed as the reader follows a journey that seems to also search for the divine source that would allow for such a punitive gendered chaos. Whether the source be through a female psyche that is the universe, or through a masculine father/God, or through a nonbinary sense of the divine, there is a slippage between philosophies, myths, divinities, and more personal poems that creates a labyrinthine journey. Cleverly placed at the labyrinth's center is the poem "Chicago," about the artist Judy Chicago and the famous vaginal dinner plates, which lists a pantheon of goddesses and feminist writers as inspiration. From this point in the book, the labyrinth turns away from Greek influence toward poems in the persona of biblical women, Mormon polygamous women, or other women connected to Christianity. These poems express the paradox of being a woman asked to worship a God whose patriarchal laws create bondage over women's bodies rather than agency. *Katabasis* explores a complex feminist intertextual theology that pushes back against most Judeo-Christian norms while ultimately centering on what is finally deemed to be truly sacred—the mother/child dyad. In that sense, these poems turn the father/child dyad, so prevalent in Mormonism, on its head. Mary's relationship with Christ, as his mother, supersedes all other divine powers. Similar to Darlene Young, Harris-Bergevin addresses the paradox of a religious culture that espouses the significance of experiencing life in a female body and extols the power of motherhood yet neurotically erases any notion of a female deity or matrix.

To read these three books together is to be invited into a trio of Mormon feminist poetics that explores how poetry can transcend time and delve into spaces of origin, how it can restore the severed dyad of mother and child, and how it can insistently defy ancient stories that define contemporary attitudes about gender. The three poets' voices—three magi—are vastly distinct, but they share a question that would be recognized by women familiar with a Mormon upbringing. Behind the many female icons—Emily Dickinson, Eve, Greek goddesses and Judeo-Christian literary women—the poems ask: *Where is the matrix, the Mother, and how can* she *be made more visible?* Thus, the unasked question in these poems is *Where did* we *come from*? *Where is the divine body through which women can hear the words: "Let us make woman in our own image, after our likeness*"?

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Salt That Lost Its Savor

Ryan Habermeyer. *Salt Folk*. Cornerstone Press, 2024. 244 pp. Paper: $26.95. ISBN: 978-1960329349.

Review by Jacob L. Bender

Ryan Habermeyer lays down the gauntlet immediately in *Salt Folk* with "La Petite Mort," a series of micro-vignettes about a professional

elephant masturbator (she is never referred to by any other appellation than "the elephant masturbator") who cares for an elephant at what appears to be a near-future Hogle Zoo in Salt Lake City. What most gets under your skin as the story progresses, however, isn't the repeated provocation of "elephant masturbator," but the rather bleak milieu that forms the story's backdrop: the Great Salt Lake has completely dried up, there are chronic water shortages across the region (hence why the elephant masturbator can only rarely indulge her charge in a mud bath), almost no one has children anymore (including the elephant masturbator herself), and the elephant in question appears to be the last of its kind (hence the need for a masturbator, since it can never mate). The French "Petite Mort" of the title apparently refers not only to the lonely orgasms of the elephant but to the "little death" that everyone globally is experiencing at both a literal and spiritual level; it is T. S. Eliot's "This is the way the world ends / not with a bang but a whimper" in zoo-centered story form.

The rest of the stories in *Salt Folk*—a collection of experimental short stories set in and around Utah—continue in a similar manner: a Yeti is forced by the oil and gas companies into a retirement community in southern Utah after his Himalayan glaciers melt; a mysterious glacier appears in the barren lake bed of the former Great Salt Lake, but it only grows if we feed it our joy; a chemically induced "algorithm of happiness" is discovered "after years of blackening skies" and "melted ice-caps" in "what was then still called Utah" (113); a color librarian scrapes up flakes from a rainbow in a postapocalyptic Utah where God has retired—"not dead, not MIA," the narrator carefully explains, "retired. From the old French. A strategic defeat, a falling away, a withdrawal into seclusion, into the cobwebs of the self" (211). Even when these stories are openly funny (e.g., "Book Fucker," a series of parody library late notices, and "Forecast," a satire of astrology readings, are two definite highlights of the collection), they are still of the Hermann

Hesse all-humor-is-gallows-humor variety. Though these stories are not exactly groundbreaking in structure (they definitely feel MFA workshopped), they draw from impeccable pedigrees: Habermeyer writes with the existential despair of Samuel Beckett, the nightmarish humor of Franz Kafka, the discomfiting imagination of Ben Marcus, and the dark precision of Gordon Lish and his acolytes (indeed, his closest analog on a prose level is probably Brian Evenson of *Altmann's Tongue*).

What's more, these stories do not appear to present such bleak futures in order to raise a warning voice against looming ecological catastrophe or impel the reader to environmental action or what have you; no, in true postmodern fashion, the stories proceed passively as though the apocalypse has already occurred and there is nothing left to be done but helplessly endure the aftermath. It is *Waiting for Godot* after Godot definitely never arrived. If Moroni writes, "whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world," Habermeyer by contrast creates landscapes lacking the presence of God (at least an interventionist one), as well as any hope for a better world.

Here I cite the Book of Mormon because, after the climate crisis, the *other* through-thread that binds these stories together is their Utah Mormon milieu. Almost all these stories take place in the Beehive State and are littered with little references to LDS history, practices, doctrines, folk doctrines, and cultural mores, all presented with the confidence of an insider. Habermeyer has clearly lived in Utah before or was at least raised in the faith (he dedicates this collection to his "Mother, who birthed salt that lost its savor"). Like the climate crisis, these Mormon allusions form more the backdrop than the main thrust of most the stories in *Salt Folk*; although the author sometimes critiques the faith directly in stories like "Wife No. 57" and "The Jump Humping Handbook for Dummies," largely the Mormonism stays in the background. Also like the climate crisis, Mormonism is presented not as something to be actively resisted or fought against but merely another

fact to be passively endured—another facet of Utah that, like the Great Salt Lake itself, is slowly yet inevitably drying up.

Habermeyer may be a lot less broken up about the Church's plateaued growth rates than he is about the evaporation of the Great Salt Lake, but what's interesting to note here is that, unlike many ex-Mormon screeds, he doesn't ever offer anything more hopeful to go in its place—perhaps because, again, hope is only for people who still believe in the possibility of a better world. The Book of Mormon is also a postapocalyptic text, one narrating the utter self-destruction of two ancient American civilizations; yet even after witnessing the death of his people and his own father, the book's final editor, Moroni, still stubbornly insists upon the absolute necessity of hope. By contrast, the various characters populating *Salt Folk* have, like Lot's wife, been transformed into metaphoric pillars of salt, paralyzed into inaction after witnessing an apocalyptic destruction befall that *other* great city on a plain by a Dead Sea, helpless to do anything more than mutely observe all that they have lost and were hopeless to prevent. How much that description will appeal to you personally is left as an exercise for the reader.

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A Brush with Mormonism's Ghosts

Mason Kamana Allred. *Seeing Things: Technologies of Vision and the Making of Mormonism.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023. 266 pp. Paper: $29.95. ISBN: 978-1-4696-7258-8.

Reviewed by Rosemary Avance

Media scholars, take note: Mason Kamana Allred's *Seeing Things: Technologies of Vision and the Making of Mormonism* is a haunting must-read that will leave you ghost hunting across other lanes of media history.

After pointing to Ben and John Durham Peters's 2018 assertion that "Mormonism is a media religion" in the introduction, the rest of Allred's text provides painstaking evidence for the claim. But *Seeing Things* does what other book-length Mormon media histories have not yet done: It weaves Mormon history, cosmology, and material culture tightly with the history of media technologies to reinforce a broader theoretical framework for understanding Mormonism as uniquely embodied—and all of that through his deft application of an incisive thematic device: "Mormons using machines to manage ghosts" (16).

Allred uses tightly focused case studies to investigate how Mormons have interpreted and engaged with a shared reality through the lens of various screen technologies, including print, canvas, glass plates in magic lanterns, type, film, microfilm, and television. Calling these "technologies of vision," Allred argues that Mormon ways of seeing derive from their use of these devices to reproduce experience and, in that way, invent tradition. For Allred, the First Vision casts long, ghostly shadows across Mormon history; Mormonism is a "culture of seeing" preoccupied with managing the religious philosophers' dilemma of body and spirit duality.

Allred's approach blends material culture and media history in a style reminiscent of Russ Castronovo's 2004 book, *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. While Castronovo is interested in the shaping of a post–Civil

War political sphere and Allred in the making of a world religion, it is no coincidence that both authors focus heavily on themes emerging from nineteenth-century American Spiritualism, which set the stage for the Mormon struggle with the spectral.

The book is structured into six chapters, with an additional introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1, "Circulating Specters," examines the presence of ghosts in Joseph Smith's cosmology and their ensuing haunting of Mormon lore. Beginning with phantasmagoria shows, in which glass slides were illuminated through a lantern to project an image, Allred traces technologies from Smith's lifetime that helped him and his fellow founders concretize and replicate the specters at the center of Mormonism, from the more obvious Angel Moroni to the Book of Mormon, itself a ghost text concretized through technologies of seeing.

Chapter 2, "Panoramic Visions," presents the place of Philo Dibble's panoramic art in memorializing Smith after his passing, and thus standardizing a vision of him as a spirit and a body. Later panoramic painters continued the tradition, codifying Mormon oral histories into epic narratives meant to be read sequentially as a story about the past and future of the faith and thus to "bring viewers to the same vision" of Mormonism-as-history.

Chapters 3 and 4 interpret the materiality of media representation vis-à-vis gender and race. In chapter 3, "Sensitive Machines," Allred focuses on depictions of and by Mormon women through photography and typewriting. All of these topics are deeply familiar to me, but Allred's parallels between nineteenth-century Mormonism's gender ordering that depicted women as vessels for the birthing of spirits and nineteenth-century America's gendered ordering that depicted women as vessels for the birthing of men's ideas through transcription—that is, *both* vessels of mechanical reproduction for men's seed—left me rereading this chapter. His treatment of women's creativity in transcription roles mirrors the political resistance among some Spiritualist mediums; see Castronovo's chapter 3, "'That Half-Living Corpse': Female Mediums, Séances, and the Occult Public Sphere."

In Chapter 4, "Cinematic Traffic," Allred is interested in the LDS Church's use of film to both standardize and visualize Mormonism for a curious and skeptical public. Examining *One Hundred Years of Mormonism*, a now-lost film from 1913, Allred shows the evolution of Mormon preoccupation with public image, curating a view of the faith as all-American and unmistakably white.

Chapter 5, "Micromanaging Death," deals with post-WWII Mormon obsession with proxy baptism and the Church's pioneering use of microfilm and microphotography to catalog enormous troves of resulting records. Allred shows the dually haunted nature of proxy work by juxtaposing the spiritual promptings and communions often reported by temple workers with the ghostly catalogues themselves.

Chapter 6, "Broadcasting Standards," places Mormon Correlation, the Red Scare, and the proliferation of broadcast media in conversation to show how Mormon standards for morality and the National Television System Committee's broadcast standards coalesced into a vision of Mormonism as patriotic, family-oriented, and godly.

Despite each chapter's tight focus on particular technologies across time, the theme of Mormon adaptation to and use of technologies of vision reinforces a view of Mormon history as haunted. Traces of these historical ghosts are present in what is reenvisioned through media, as well as what is forgotten and ignored. While Allred does not take up new media technologies beyond a nod, he reminds us to consider the spiritual implications of technological uptake—a timely message for today's media Mormons.

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Contextualizing and Chronicling the Lives of Enslaved People in Utah Territory

Amy Tanner Thiriot. *Slavery in Zion: A Documentary and Genealogical History of Black Lives and Black Servitude in Utah Territory, 1847–1862.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2022. 384 pp. Paperback: $39.95. ISBN: 9781647690854.

Reviewed by Brenden W. Rensink

Genealogical research has long played a prominent role in the theology and lived religious experiences of individuals, families, and communities associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Given this reality, one might postulate that average citizens of Utah—long the center of Church operations and population density—have more detailed and documented family histories than elsewhere in the country. Yet, as is the case with most historical endeavors, the more broadly one explores and the deeper one digs, the more obvious the deficiencies and incompleteness of our knowledge become. Historian and genealogical researcher Amy Tanner Thiriot's recent book, *Slavery in Zion: A Documentary and Genealogical History of Black Lives and Black Servitude in Utah Territory, 1847–1862*, demonstrates this dynamic with striking clarity. For all the genealogical research that has been done in Utah, the histories of Black residents in Utah Territory are thin (and not simply because there were relatively few of them). Thiriot's contributions here are multifold and merit serious consideration by scholars of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Utah history, as well as the general population who lives in Utah today or whose families have in the past.

Covering the years from 1847 to 1862, Thiriot's *Slavery in Zion* sets out to identify the approximately one hundred Black individuals

who ended up in Utah, narrate their experiences of slavery and servitude, explore the historical context of their lives, and provide detailed encyclopedic source data that others may use to investigate further. This documenting and relating of "their stories as completely and honestly as possible," Thiriot argues, is essential if we hope to "honor the memory of men, women, and children who struggled under the heavy burdens of enslavement" (xi). The dominantly devotional nature of the near two centuries of LDS histories have largely avoided the discomfort of race relations by not engaging with them, so Thiriot's early work to simply catalog who Utah Territory's Black residents were was no easy task. After recovering names, Thiriot takes great strides in explaining how they ended up in Utah, their enslaved lives, and post-emancipation experiences in the territory and with Church members. The text is divided into two parts. "Part I: The Story of African American Slavery in Utah Territory" provides context and background, while "Part II: Biographical Encyclopedia of the Enslaved" offers intimate individual narratives and exhaustive primary source documentation.

As one might imagine, part 1's background context is complicated and reveals histories full of contradiction. The early membership of the Church was dominated by northerners, but enslaver families did convert and migrate to Utah Territory. The legalized presence of enslaved people in the territory created theological and political tension, especially as ardent abolitionists and many who were more generally uncomfortable with racial servitude (including emigrants from nations where slavery had either not been prevalent or had already been abolished) worshiped and lived alongside enslavers. The racial restrictions enacted by the Church, the evolution of those policies, and decisions made by members in territorial government loom large over Thiriot's work, as they should. However, these important issues sometimes dominate historical discussions of race in the early Church and suck the oxygen out of the room, as it were. Their thorny nature and true historical significance, unfortunately, sometimes lead historians to focus

on them to the point of failing to adequately discuss other associated matters. Thiriot gracefully avoids this pitfall by persistently focusing on the lives of enslaved individuals. She does not ignore the broader context, but she also doesn't allow it to overshadow. The resulting work is moving and illuminating—a striking demonstration of the power of bottom-up and on-the-ground social history.

Part 2's encyclopedic entries of enslaved individuals include brief narrations of their lives, identification (when possible) of documented family members, their enslavers, wagon companies that brought them to Utah, burial locations, miscellaneous notes, and source bibliographies. The book would be a monumental contribution if it was this alone. Thiriot also includes information on other enslaved individuals in early Church history who did not end up in Utah, Black residents of Utah territory who have been misrepresented in various forms in prior histories, and discussion of Latter-day Saints in Utah whose families were documented or potential *former* enslavers.

One might hope that Thiriot's work represents a bellwether of more scholarship to come. *Slavery in Zion* certainly contributes to a historiographic movement underway. Recent works by W. Paul Reeve, Max Perry Mueller, Matthew L. Harris, LaJean Purcell Carruth, Christopher B. Rich, Tonya Reiter, and others, or projects and organizations such the Century of Black Mormons, BYU Slavery Project, Sema Hadithi Foundation, or Brigham Young Racial Reconciliation Ministry all attest to growing scholarly and public interest. In the context of these and other recent works, Thiriot's contribution fits well. Indeed, it is the type of work that would have greatly aided the many others had it been published a decade or two earlier. *Slavery in Zion* provides a methodological blueprint for how to approach these histories with humility, reverence, and solemn focus on individual lives. It also offers up a wealth of data and sources to aid future research. These are the very things needed at the foundation of the study of race and the Church. Perhaps, we have rushed to the important, but oft-overwhelming, discussions of Church policy without such a foundation. Pursuing such debates on the firm

historical footings offered by Thiriot and others, including those noted above, will produce discussion that is not only more contextualized and historically accurate but empowered to engender understanding, reckoning, reconciliation, and productive healing within and between communities.

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Broadening Out the Study of Scripture in Latter day Saint Traditions

Christine Elyse Blythe, Christopher James Blythe, and Jay Burton, eds. *Open Canon: Scriptures of the Latter Day Saint Tradition.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2022. 379 pp. Paper: $39.95. ISBN: 9781647690823.

Reviewed by Colby Townsend

This collection of essays provides important new analyses of several of the religious groups that make up the broader Restoration movement begun by Joseph Smith Jr. in 1830, what the editors of this collection call the "Latter Day Saint tradition."[1] While there has been considerable

1. The editors of this volume use the term "Latter Day Saint" instead of "Latter-day Saint" to signal to the reader that their interest is the larger Restoration movement begun by Joseph Smith Jr. and all of the groups that identify with it, rather than just the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

work done in recent years on the different religious groups that fall under this umbrella, very little of it has focused on the canonical traditions of the groups outside of the two largest organizations of the LDS Church and the Community of Christ (CoC). The majority of the essays in the volume consider scriptural traditions of the groups outside of these two churches, including the Church of Jesus Christ (Bickertonite), the Church of Christ (Temple Lot), and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion. Other essays discuss lesser-known movements like the reception of Harry Edgar Baker's early twentieth-century revelations, Earl John Brewer's lost caves and found metal plates, and the House of Aaron. Most essays in this volume, especially those on the traditions outside of the LDS and CoC, could be turned into future books since so little has been written on these scriptural traditions. The editors deserve recognition for bringing attention to such an understudied area of broader Mormon studies.

The volume is split into four parts. The three essays in the first part, "Introductory Essays," provide important context for the study of scripture within the broader Latter Day Saint tradition. In these essays, authors provide: an introduction (Christopher James Blythe); history so that the reader sees how deeply connected early Latter Day Saint tradition is with early American religious history (Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp); and a reflection on how the idea of diaspora helps to explain the splintering nature of the Latter Day Saint tradition after Smith's death (Richard L. Saunders). The second part, "Reception of Joseph Smith's Revelations," provides four essays that analyze: how the LDS and CoC have read, printed, and understood the Book of Mormon in different ways (Joseph M. Spencer); how the Community of Christ (Temple Lot) has been a "solae scripturae" religious group, being more open to continuing revelation than broader Protestant Christianity while also focusing attention on the text of their religious canon (Chrystal Vanel); how the process of canonization works through analysis of how Smith's letters from Liberty Jail were later canonized as revelations (Kathleen Flake); and finally, how the process of decanonization

works, specifically through the reception of the *Lectures on Faith* and its removal from the LDS Doctrine and Covenants (Richard S. Van Wagoner, et al.).

Part 3, "Case Studies in New Scripture: Nineteenth Century," begins to widen out the volume into analysis of the proliferation of groups within the Latter Day Saint tradition. This section includes essays on the reception of Lucy Mack Smith's biography of Joseph Smith in several Latter Day Saint traditions (Janiece Johnson), the development of Strangite scripture (Christine and Christopher Blythe), Charles B. Thompson rewriting of the Book of Enoch (Christopher Blythe), William Bickerton's approach to revelation and scripture (Daniel P. Stone), and Sidney and Phebe Rigdon's revelations for the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion (Jay Burton).

Part 4, "Case Studies in New Scripture: Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries," moves into Latter Day Saint traditions that are still developing at the present day, including reception of Harry Edgar Baker (Thomas G. Evans and Christopher Blythe), the House of Aaron (Casey Paul Griffiths), the ongoing search for Earl John Brewer's caves (Christopher C. Smith), and Matthew Philip Gill's new movement (Matthew Bowman). This area, in particular, invites scholars to study these more recent movements within the tradition.

The essays in this volume do important work and their subjects of study deserve further attention. Not enough analysis has been done on these traditions, and I hope that scholars in Mormon studies will take up these important topics in their future work. This is true especially for the topics in parts 3 and 4. While there are many strong essays in this volume, some could benefit from critical pushback. I was surprised that in her essay, Janiece Johnson decided to leave out of her description the fraught relationship between Lucy Smith's biography and the LDS tradition. Not only does Brigham Young's strong (negative) response go unnoticed, but the essay also only mentions his statement that she was a "mother in Israel" (150). He had more to say about her biography that is relevant to the topic.

Similarly, Joseph Spencer's argument that the LDS Church's and CoC's differing approaches to reading and printing the Book of Mormon means there were two completely different books is not a "reasonable" (75) argument from my perspective. It is not surprising that the two groups would have different approaches to the same work, as this is a normal part of the reception of books in general. The difference is at the level of editions and reading traditions, not that there are multiple works. Setting these rather small criticisms aside, I highly recommend this admirable new volume in Mormon studies. It will be a useful addition to any library, university, or home that includes American religion, literature, and Mormon studies.

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RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT

Jason R Steffen

Delivered to the North Branch, Minnesota Ward on Easter Sunday 2024

Good morning. It is an honor to speak to you today on the holiest of Sabbaths, when we come together to celebrate the resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Easter is, of course, a day of rejoicing. The events of Holy Week leading up to Easter—Palm Sunday, the Last Supper, Christ's suffering in Gethsemane and the Crucifixion—all lead inexorably to the joyful conclusion that "Christ the Lord is Risen Today."[1]

I want to acknowledge, however, that not everyone here today may be feeling unmitigated joy. Some might be feeling joy mixed with sadness or fear or shame. Perhaps you are one of those people. Perhaps you have experienced the loss of a loved one; perhaps a wayward child's antics are causing you anxiety; perhaps you are struggling with an addiction. Perhaps physical or mental health challenges prevent you from experiencing the full measure of peace and happiness the gospel promises. Perhaps you have been paying attention to the news lately and are overcome with grief at the tens of thousands of people who have died in conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, or other places around the world. Perhaps you are wondering, *What good is it to contemplate the Resurrection amid so much pain and suffering, whether in my own heart or in the world*?

Church leaders have acknowledged that it is neither possible nor desirable for life to always be easy and happy. In the April 2021 general conference, Sister Reyna Aburto, then a counselor in the Relief Society general presidency, acknowledged the many people who had recently

1. *Hymns*, no. 200.

suffered the loss of family and friends from COVID-19. She quoted President Nelson, who had given a talk many years earlier as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve in which he stated: "Irrespective of age, we mourn for those loved and lost. Mourning is one of the deepest expressions of pure love. . . . Moreover, we can't fully appreciate joyful reunions later without tearful separations now. The only way to take sorrow out of death is to take love out of life."[2] Even our Savior experienced sadness. When confronted with the death of his friend Lazarus, Christ raised him from the dead—but before doing so, whether because of grief over Lazarus's death or simply out of empathy for the grief of Lazarus's sisters, Mary and Martha, the Gospel of John reports simply: "Jesus wept."[3] It appears that, even if we have an ironclad testimony of the Resurrection, even if we know beyond doubt that we will see those we have lost again in the next life, even if we could, like Jesus, raise the dead, we must still experience grief and pain at the loss of our loved ones in mortality.

How, then, do we move forward in faith when faced with sadness—or with regret, fear, anger, or any other emotion that causes us to feel something other than joy? In her address, after acknowledging the suffering many were experiencing at the time, Sister Aburto turned to the events after the Crucifixion: "We can imagine how Jesus's friends, who had followed Him and ministered to Him, felt upon witnessing His death. We know that 'they mourned and wept.' On the day of the Crucifixion, not knowing what would happen on Sunday, they must have been overwhelmed by distress, wondering how they would go on without their Lord. Nevertheless, they continued ministering to Him even in death."[4] She then gave some examples of such ministering: "Joseph

2. Reyna I. Aburto, "The Grave Has No Victory," Apr. 2021 (quoting Russell M. Nelson, "Doors of Death," *Ensign*, May 1992, 72), https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2021/04/42aburto/?lang=eng.

3. John 11:35.

4. Aburto, "The Grave Has No Victory."

of Arimathea begged Pilate to give him Jesus's body. He took the body down, wrapped it in fine linen, laid it in his own new tomb, and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre. Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloes. He helped Joseph take the body and wrap it in linen with the spices. Mary Magdalene and other women followed Joseph and Nicodemus, watched where they laid Jesus's body, and prepared sweet spices and ointments to anoint it."[5]

We often think of Jesus as being the one who ministered to others, and of course this is true: his mortal life consisted largely of attending to others' needs, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. Yet he also received the ministrations of others, both during his life and after his death. His faithful disciples, as much as they no doubt sorrowed over his death, responded to their pain by continuing to minister to Jesus.

There are at least two lessons here for us.

First, we are called to keep ministering even when life is difficult. Perhaps it is especially during those times that we should strive to reach out to others. In doing so, we may find that our own burdens are lightened. Consider Mary Magdalene who, according to the Gospel of John, stayed at Jesus' empty tomb after the other disciples had left.[6] Christ revealed himself to her in that moment, perhaps because she had chosen not to give up and go home. Mary probably felt lost without the guidance of the mortal Jesus in her life—but it was when this loss was the most keenly felt that she found Jesus the Messiah, because she did not stop looking for him.

Second, we are called to be ministered to. As a Church we often talk of self-reliance as a virtue, but Easter should remind us all that, however great our talents and abilities, whatever degree of self-sufficiency we feel proud to have attained, ultimately we can do nothing for ourselves in terms of our own salvation and exaltation, for "there is no other way

5. Aburto, "The Grave Has No Victory."

6. See John 20:10–18.

nor means whereby [people] can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ."[7] Remembering that we are, as King Benjamin put it, "all beggars" can help us accept others' attempts to minister to us.[8]

Allowing others to serve us, and serving others in turn, can also help us avoid the dangers of passing judgment on others.

I would like to think that I know something about judgment, given what I do for a living. (For those who missed the joke, I am a judge.) So what does it mean to judge, and why is that a problem? The notion of judgment in the general sense has a finality to it. When I pass judgment in a legal case, that is generally considered a positive thing, at least in the sense that a decision has been made. Whether the decision is favorable to you or not, at least you have an answer to your question about whether you are, say, going to jail today, or going to inherit the property you believe you are entitled to, or whatever the issue is in the case at hand. Indeed, people sometimes get frustrated at what they perceive as the slow pace of justice simply because they want a final answer, one way or another.

On the other hand, judging in the more common sense, the one that Jesus warns us about in the Sermon on the Mount,[9] also has a finality to it, but in a negative sense. For example, suppose I have made up my mind that someone is a jerk and, with this judgment in mind, I vow never to speak to that person again. Or perhaps I speak to him in a way that is "Minnesota nice": with a surface-level politeness but while harboring unkind feelings toward him. By passing that judgment ("This person is a jerk!"), I have closed off other possibilities. I have made it unlikely that I could become friends with him, that I could work closely with him to help someone else, or that I could have empathy for him

7. Helaman 5:9.

8. Mosiah 4:19.

9. See Matthew 7:1–2.

based on his life circumstances. These are all possibilities that could bring me closer to the other person—and therefore closer to God—that I have rendered impossible by my act of judgment. So while it may be a desirable quality of the law that alternative possibilities are foreclosed—appeals must, eventually, be exhausted—this is not a desirable quality of character, and ultimately it leads us away from Zion.

So how do we stop, or at least reduce, our tendency to judge others? Ironically, here I have very little insight because I find that I am the least judgmental when performing my duties as a judge and the most judgmental when I am not. Perhaps this is because when I am judging in the professional sense, I am focused on hearing from both sides in a case, ensuring that everyone in my courtroom is treated respectfully, and maintaining the appearance of impartiality that people rightly expect from judges. It is when I am *not* forced to do that by my professional commitments that I often find myself being more judgmental of people, thereby foreclosing possibilities of meaningfully connecting with them and, therefore, with God.

But while I do not speak from a position of strength in this respect, I do feel confident in asserting that there is no better antidote to judgment than service, or what we call "ministering." As a judge in the legal system, I often must make decisions with limited information. I listen to lawyers' arguments and rely on common sense and, of course, the law. But I am sure I would sometimes make a different decision if I knew the whole story of someone's life. Likewise, think of someone you don't get along with. Is it possible that you would judge her differently, or not at all, if you knew her whole story? And how could you possibly get to know her story, or more of it, without serving her? King Benjamin asked how we can know the master we have "not served, and who is a stranger unto [us], and is far from the thoughts and intents of [our] heart";[10] but the same is true of other human beings: How can we know them if we do not serve them?

10. Mosiah 5:13.

In this respect, celebrating Easter should help us draw closer to God, but also closer to one another. The Resurrection reminds us that nobody is a lost cause. Everyone will be resurrected, and everyone will be brought to stand before God to be judged. And not a single person—not you, not me, not the homeless guy you think doesn't deserve your money, not the needy coworker you think doesn't deserves your time—will be denied a room in the celestial inn if they are willing to repent and accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And whether they will do that is something we cannot possibly know given our limited mortal view of things. Moreover, nobody—not you, not me, not the bishop nor even the prophet—can get there on our own. "We are all beggars," and we all need the grace of our Savior. This, above all, should give us pause before we judge others—or at least motivate us to repent when we find ourselves doing so.

Finally, let me suggest one other potential antidote to judgment. We tend to think that the time we are living in is particularly challenging, and sometimes in the Church we talk of the world we live in as if it were the worst of all possible worlds. In an era where the internet and social media give us instant access to the world, it is easy to think that humans have never been more sinful than they are today. But while we may be tempted to look upon the past with nostalgia, the view we have may not be as accurate as we think it is.

There is a passage in the Book of Mormon that I find instructive in this respect. In Helaman 7, Nephi the son of Helaman returns from an unsuccessful mission to the "land northward" where he "did preach the word of God unto them, and did prophecy many things unto them;" but, unfortunately, "they did reject all his words, insomuch that he could not stay among them, but returned again unto the land of his nativity."[11] Nephi is no doubt already saddened by his failure to con-

11. Helaman 7:1–3.

vince this one group to repent, and his mood is worsened when he returns home and discovers that his own people are, if anything, even more wicked:

> And seeing the people in a state of such awful wickedness . . . his heart was swollen with sorrow within his breast; and he did exclaim in the agony of his soul: Oh, that I could have had my days in the days when my father Nephi first came out of the land of Jerusalem, that I could have joyed with him in the promised land; then were his people easy to be entreated, firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity; and they were quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord—Yea, if my days could have been in those days, then would my soul have had joy in the righteousness of my brethren. But behold, I am consigned that these are my days, and that my soul shall be filled with sorrow because of this the wickedness of my brethren.[12]

Nephi's reaction to his sadness and anger and frustration is to yearn for the good old days when Lehi took his family out of Jerusalem and had a fun camping trip and a delightful cruise to the promised land, where everyone lived harmoniously in perfect righteousness!

When I read this, I want to say: "Nephi, are you kidding me?! Have you even read the records kept by your ancestors Lehi, Nephi, and Jacob? Apparently you need a reminder of some things Lehi and his family experienced":

- After Lehi prophesies about the destruction of Jerusalem, the people mock him and attempt to kill him.[13]
- Lehi's wealthy family members are commanded to leave all their possessions behind and travel through the wilderness, where they live in primitive conditions, sleeping in tents and subsisting on raw meat.[14]

12. Helaman 7:4–9.

13. See 1 Nephi1:18–20.

14. See 1 Nephi 2:2–4, 15; 17:2.

- Lehi worries constantly about his oldest children's wickedness and sees a vision that strongly implies that they are not going to inherit eternal life like the rest of the family.[15]
- Nephi on multiple occasions gets robbed, beaten, kidnapped, and nearly killed both by enemies like Laban and by his own brothers.[16]
- No sooner do they arrive in the promised land than Nephi, no doubt still grieving his father Lehi's recent death, is forced to flee their community and start over his own with his extended family because of his homicidal brothers.[17]
- Meanwhile, Nephi's comments on his own spiritual state go like this: "O wretched man that I am! Yeah, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities."[18]

Jacob takes over as prophet after the death of his brother Nephi, and at the end of Jacob's record here is how he describes the conditions of his age: "I, Jacob, began to be old; . . . wherefore, I conclude this record . . . by saying that the time passed away with us, and also our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren, which caused wars and contentions; wherefore, we did mourn out our days."[19] Nephi the son of Helaman appears to have forgotten about this section when he reminisces about the good old days of his ancestor Nephi I!

Now there were, of course, positive things that happened to Lehi and his family. They experienced miracles, they inherited the land of promise, and at one point Nephi even claims that they lived "after the manner of happiness."[20] But they were human, they faced immense

15. See 1 Nephi 8:4–18, 35–36.

16. See 1 Nephi 3:26–29; 7:16–19; 16:37; 17:48; 18:10–12.

17. See 2 Nephi 5:1–7.

18. 2 Nephi 4:17.

19. Jacob 7:26.

20. 2 Nephi 5:27.

challenges, and certainly it is naïve for Nephi son of Helaman to think, six hundred years later, that if only he had lived in the time of the ancient Nephi I he would have been happy. My point is not that we should blame Nephi son of Helaman—we all do this to some extent. But perhaps this vignette is here in the Book of Mormon as a cautionary tale for us as Latter-day Saints. Yes, we face unique challenges in our time. But every age (every life, really) comes with a unique set of challenges. Assuming that people are wicked, that the world is so much worse today than in the past, can cause us to retreat from others in a way that forecloses the possibility of Christlike engagement with them that is just as nefarious as passing judgment upon them as individuals. Perhaps we should worry less about how bad we think the world is and more about what we can do to minister to others, one soul at a time, the way our Savior did—and still does.

After all, Nephi son of Helaman, despite his anger and frustration and sadness, pressed forward with his prophetic duty to cry repentance to the people—and while many rejected him, others did not, for we read that there were "some among the people, who said that Nephi was a prophet."[21] Moreover, God told Nephi that it was because he had "with unwearyingness declared the word"—he didn't give up even though it probably seemed pointless to him to keep preaching—that he was granted the sealing power.[22] God trusted Nephi son of Helaman precisely because he didn't give up on people he thought were irredeemably wicked. So, too, should we persevere in loving and serving regardless of how we might feel about people or about the world we live in.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ lives. He was born of Mary. He set a perfect example of mortal living for us to emulate. He was betrayed, was unjustly condemned, suffered for our sins in Gethsemane, and was crucified, all to fulfill the will of the Father. And, as we remember today,

21. Helaman 9:40.

22. Helaman 10:4–7.

he was resurrected. All of this with the sole purpose of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of all his brothers and sisters.[23] On this Easter day, may we keep in mind our utter and complete reliance on his grace—and may we allow that knowledge to shape our interactions with all of God's children. This is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

23. Moses 1:39.

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