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Robert Lang Campbell: “A Wise Scribe in Israel” and Schoolman to the Saints

Frederick S. Buchanan

Radical departure from the establishment seems to come with the territory of the west of Scotland. Sir William Wallace began his crusade against English domination in the West, and Robert the Bruce, Earl of Carrick, had his roots and his strategies there too. It was in the West that the Covenanters, who saw themselves, like the Mormons, as a “remnant of Israel,” took up arms against the state church in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, a group of nonconformist believers in Dumfriesshire (the “Buchanites”) caused a stir by their advocacy of unorthodox theology and marriage practices. Other sons of the West include John Paul Jones, Captain William Kidd, and of course Robert Burns—all of whom in their own way challenged the norms of their day.

As Scotland entered the industrial age, the common folk of the West questioned the old attitudes and challenged the stance of both state and church in their response (or lack thereof) to the problems of the day. Out of Ayrshire in 1838 came a radical critique of the religious and political establishment charging that it was more interested in promoting “Toryism” or tyranny than in improving the lives of the poor. And in the West “operative manufacturers” (self-employed weavers) were suspected of being particularly attracted to “Socianism”—the doctrine that denied the divine nature of Christ and viewed salvation in rational terms. Robert Owens and Robert Dale with their Utopian Socialist enterprise at New Lanark further exemplify the spirit of the west of Scotland in their attempts to make the social ideals of Christianity relevant to the problems of the day.

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Robert Lang Campbell, c. 1870
Photograph courtesy of LDS Church Archives
In April 1830, a religious revival swept through Ayrshire and Renfrewshire with reports of healings, speaking in tongues, and other manifestations of "the spirit" witnessed among the poor, among women, and even among children. This movement was closely related to the charismatic preaching of the Reverend Edward Irving and the Reverend MacLeod Campbell, both ministers in the established church and both subsequently disciplined for their unorthodoxy. The richness of the mixture of religious enthusiasm, social idealism, and the Scots bent toward rationality in politics and religion also nurtured Keir Hardie, who introduced socialist ideology to the House of Commons and founded the British Labor Party. From William Wallace to Keir Hardie, then, Scotland's West Country has stirred the Scottish imagination and made Scots synonymous with social change, reform, and challenges to the approved way.

In 1847 the Reverend Dr. Robert Lee, moderator of the Edinburgh Presbytery, drew attention to another challenge to the establishment during a debate on the need to get more money for Scottish education. Around 1841 he had originally been assigned to one of the "manufacturing parishes" in the west of Scotland and had been appalled at the ignorance and lack of schooling among the common people. He was especially distressed that so many were joining the Mormons, even though the Mormons preached "absurdities so gross that one wondered that any man, even a Hottentot, could receive them and believe them." And this in the midst of the much vaunted Scottish commitment to education! Nothing could prove more the need for better education in Scotland, said Lee, than the fact that so many Scots were "being baptized into the faith of Joe Smith" and were "expiating the follies of which they were then guilty at Nauvoo." Lee's comments are typical of his time and class, but perhaps they tell us more about him than about the Mormons he condemned. The cry of "credulous" and "ignorant" may be seen as the overly simplistic plaint of those who were most directly challenged by the new religion. Compared to traditional Presbyterianism, Mormonism at this time was actually a radical religion and fit admirably into the 1840s *zeitgeist* of Scotland's western counties—Renfrew, Lanark, and Ayr.

Among those who were "duped" into believing in Joseph Smith's revelations were the two sons of a Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire, weaver, Alexander Campbell, and his wife Agnes Lang. But Lee's contention that ignorance was at the root of the Mormon success doesn't hold up when applied to the case of John and Robert Campbell. Indeed, the weavers of the west of Scotland have traditionally been viewed as among the most literate (and
radical) of the Scottish workers, and neither John nor Robert was the ignoramus that the establishment so freely and indiscriminately labeled Mormon converts. While exact details of the education they received are slight, Alexander and Agnes Campbell's sons probably received a traditionally solid basic education in the local parochial/public schools in Kilbarchan. Robert attended a college in Glasgow, probably in the early 1840s at Anderson's University on George Street (now the University of Strathclyde), where he studied to become a "writer" or law clerk. While a student there, he often took a shortcut through a cemetery that lay between his home and the university. On one such occasion, he took to jumping over the tombstones, tripped, and broke his arm or wrist. The physician who set it did so improperly, and his arm failed to develop, causing him some difficulty in his professional work but not enough to prevent him from making his ability to wield the pen one of his hallmarks and an important entrée to new opportunities.5

It was perhaps at Anderson's University that the Campbells first heard of Mormonism. In June 1840, Reuben Hedlock rented rooms at the university and held the first Mormon meetings in Glasgow there after having saturated the neighborhood with handbills perhaps similar to the ones used by Alexander Wright and Samuel Mulliner in their initial proselyting mission in the Glasgow area.6

John Campbell was apparently the first to be baptized, probably in 1840, and two years later his younger brother Robert responded to the Mormon message. This they did in opposition to their father's wishes. Only once were they able to get him to attend a Mormon meeting with them. As they walked the eight miles back to their home, it rained heavily, and Alexander took the soaking he received as evidence that he was being "righteously punished for absenting himself from his own kirk."7

When Mormonism was establishing a bridgehead in Scotland in the early 1840s, Scottish Chartistism was in full bloom. Unlike its English variant, Scottish Chartism eschewed violence and advocated peaceful and educational resolutions to the problems of the day. In typical Scots fashion, the Chartists had even established some twenty Christian Chartist Churches in the Glasgow and Paisley area by 1841. In Kilbarchan there were strong Chartist feelings, and the 120 members of the congregation owned a Chartist Hall that was used for political meetings and public worship. One Chartist went so far as to claim that so intertwined were Chartist principles with original Christian ideals that a person couldn't really be a Christian unless he were a Chartist.8 Perhaps Alexander Campbell's weaving occupation and its concomitant
THE
FULNESS OF THE GOSPEL
has been restored by the

MINISTRY OF A HOLY ANGEL;

By whose Ministry also, ANCIENT AMERICAN
RECORDS have been discovered, giving the history
of almost half a world for more than 1000 years.

A Minister of the Church of Jesus Christ, of LATTERDAY SAINTS,
respectfully informs the Inhabitants of this place, that there will be
Preaching in

Where the following subject will be illustrated: viz.—the Gospel in its
ancient fulness and glory, showing that the coming of the Lord is near
at hand.

And also a relation will be given concerning the ministry of a Holy
Angel, and the discovery of sacred Records as mentioned above.

General handbill used to advertise LDS meetings in Scotland, c. 1840
Reproduced courtesy of LDS Church Archives
radical streak, combined with the fact that he was not a member of the established church (he was a Baptist), made it easier for teenage Robert to involve himself with the Chartists and their ameliorative-educative-religious approach to social problem solving. Joining the Chartists may also have been a developmental step in moving him away from traditional religion because on 9 August 1842 he abandoned the Chartists and joined himself to the much despised Latter-day Saints.

He left no written account of why he found the Chartists wanting, although he did address a meeting at Kilbarchan on this subject. However, some tentative explanations could be suggested given what we know of Campbell and the Chartists. Chartism in Scotland, as has been noted, took on a decidedly religious aura, and an attempt was made to organize the Scottish Chartist churches on a national basis, but this failed to materialize, and local congregations were essentially autonomous in matters of doctrine and practice. However, even Christian Chartism was essentially a political-social movement, and the religious aspect was a secondary consideration: a means to the end of achieving certain social goals with minimum concern for the ultimate questions of salvation in the next world. For a young person concerned about his future state, with a disposition toward a literal interpretation of scripture and a need to have direction from those in authority, there was perhaps in Christian Chartism a lack of universal religious authority and a lack of emphasis on “spiritual” aspects of salvation. There was also some disputation over the calling of certain persons to be ministers who were not fitted for that calling, which may have made young Campbell wonder about the scriptural authenticity of the movement. Not to be discounted either is the fact that Chartism peaked in 1842 and began its slide into oblivion by the end of the decade. In the final analysis, however, perhaps Campbell best sums up the reason for leaving the Chartists of Kilbarchan when he records simply that at eighteen he “was convinced of the truth of the fullness of the everlasting Gospel being again sent to man by Priest John Craig and [was] born again on the 9th day of August 1842.” He accepted wholeheartedly and without question the unambiguous message of the handbills distributed in the Glasgow area by the early Mormon missionaries.

Mormonism surely answered the questions of authority with precision, and there was certainly no equivocation on the proper beliefs and practices to be followed. Having set his hand to the plough, Campbell apparently never gave Chartism another thought. Six days after his baptism, he attended an LDS conference in Glasgow where he was confirmed a member of the Church in the
presence of Apostle Parley P. Pratt. There was a portent in that, for in the next thirty-two years much of Campbell’s life was spent in the company of the first echelon leaders of the Church; like the Clan Campbell of Argyll, he always seemed to be at the right place at the right time and was always, without hesitation, willing to serve those whom he regarded as his superiors.

If he had any lingering doubts about the strength of Mormonism compared to the Christian Chartist Church at Kilbarchan, they must have evaporated as he listened to Elder Pratt. At this particular conference in Glasgow, Parley P. Pratt preached a sermon “upon the spiritual and temporal welfare of mankind in general, stating that it was God’s will that people should gather together in America. Only through concerted action would the Saints be able to achieve their material aims”; indeed, “in regard to politicks he stated that the Saints are the only people who should rule civil and military in a coming day, for when others rule the people mourn.”

Mormonism had all that Chartism offered—and more: spiritual and political power based not on the thinking of social reformers, but upon the word of God. Mormonism did not ignore the connection between the two spheres. Thus confirmed—spiritually and temporally—Robert Campbell began a commitment that would take him to Nauvoo, Winter Quarters, and the Valley of the Great Salt Lake and make him a participant in some of the central dramas in Mormon history.

However, before Rob Campbell became a confidant and an amanuensis to prophets and Apostles and schoolmaster to the Saints, he had to prove himself in as hostile an environment as any missionary ever labored in—the west of Scotland. The same environment and mix of people and ideas that created Scottish Socialism, Chartism, and Socianism—not to mention the ever-present Calvinism of the Covenanters and the rising significance of Irish Catholicism—gave no quarter to the Mormons with their “Fantastical, Enthusiastical” claims to divine authority, the impending end of the age, the visitation of angels, and a golden book buried in a New York hill.

This was the message that Campbell bore witness to in the environs of Kilbarchan, Johnstone, and Paisley, and in the towns that were strung out along the Caledonia Railway to the Clyde Coast: Kilbinnie, Dalry, Kilwinning, Drehorn, Irvine, Stevenston, Saltcoats, Ardrossan, Kilmarnock, and Ayr: all former centers of the handloom weaving industry and now, in 1843, part of the burgeoning coal mining and iron smelting industrial belt.

Beginning in July 1843 as an unordained eighteen-year-old preacher, Campbell traveled every Sunday from town to town,
from miners' square to miners' square and from door to door, "warning" the inhabitants of the approaching judgement. In Dalry in his first foray as a missionary, he succeeded in getting the majority of the colliers in one square to attend a meeting that he and his companion had announced in their door to door contacts earlier in the day. A vote of the group asked them to return, although there is no evidence that anyone asked for baptism as a result of the numerous door to door warnings, preaching meetings, prayer meetings, or "discussion" meetings.

In November of 1843, he was ordained a priest, and a few months later his employer, a "writer" (legal clerk) in Johnstone, Renfrewshire, hearing that Campbell was preaching Mormonism, thereupon terminated Rob's engagement in his law office. Apparently Campbell didn't object, but saw it as an opportunity to fulfill his ambition to be a full-time missionary in the west of Scotland; besides "he had no great liking to be in a Writer's office," and he eagerly offered his services to the Church.15

The general impression one gets from reading Campbell's account of his first mission is that there was at times a lot of interest in what he had to say, but it is almost as if Mormon meetings (in the days before TV) had a high entertainment value; the business of converting individuals was extremely slow—best seen in the Scots phrase "gie dreich"—very, very dismal. Indeed, it took some ten months before Campbell records any baptisms—two persons who joined at Irvine in April 1844. In the same town, Campbell was preaching four times on Sunday and twice during the week in the Spring of 1844. According to his record, his preaching "infuriated" the people against him, and threats were made on his life. Debates between Campbell and "hecklers," however, always insured a big turnout, and the hall in Irvine at one time was "crowded to suffocation."16

While he records instances at Kilwinning and Irvine where people "listened with breathless anxiety to the truths of heaven," most of his impressions tend to support the notion that a strong thread of cynicism towards the Mormon message ran throughout the West. For example, he "bore testimony twice to very inattentive sinners," "preached to a set of infidels," and some of his listeners "looked up through the ceiling of their houses and said 'God forbid I should become a Latter-day Saint.' " He was threatened with stoning, told he should be muzzled, and the minister in Dreghorn counter-warned Campbell not to warn him!17

In addition to having his straightforward message about the restoration of the Primitive Church and the Book of Mormon rejected because it was at odds with orthodox theology, Priest
Campbell had to contend with the ever-present anti-Mormon publicity that was widespread throughout the west of Scotland. In the early 1840s, Alexander Gardner of Paisley was reprinting an American tract entitled “The Folly and Falsehood of the Golden Book of Mormon” by Matilda Davidson, widow of Solomon Spaulding, who attributed the book’s origin to her late husband’s Manuscript Found, written c. 1812. Warning the public that religious novelties, such as Mormonism, could put their salvation at stake, the pamphlet ended with the stirring challenge, “Let the Mormonites Refute this, if they can.”

There were also the attacks of apostates who seemed to follow the missionaries from town to town with their exposés of Mormonism. These circumstances led Campbell to conclude that “people here have not heard anything save the false and slanderous reports.” In addition, some people were very cautious about the new ideas from America because they remembered the Irvingite phenomenon that swept through the West a decade before, and they did not want to be deceived a second time by another group of false prophets.

Although Campbell does not tell us directly how he responded to these challenges, in spite of this opposition and criticism he never wavered in pressing forward with his task of warning his fellow Scots about the results of rejecting the Restored Gospel. He was convinced that what he had was true and would prevail—ultimately. This teenage missionary was so sure of his position as to express some genuine puzzlement over those who were glad to hear him preach, acknowledged the correctness of the teachings, and even said they believed, “but do not evince any symptoms of wishing to obey” and join the Church. In a note of exasperation he cried, “Oh! that men were alive to the things of God!!!”

Robert Campbell demanded, as he gave, active commitment. He was satisfied with no less than absolute, unquestioning commitment in his own life and appears to have had a low tolerance for those who might be lukewarm.

As far as can be determined, in spite of his zeal and personal commitment (or because of it?) only a dozen or so people joined the Church as a result of Rob Campbell’s mission. He observed that “a few of the offscourings of Society seem to be the only persons who are looking for the truth.” And even some of those who wanted to join the Church “were bound down by their tyrannical employers” and were prevented from joining because “their masters are much endowed with the Spirit of aristocracy and they have to crouch beneath their opinions as semislaves.” Shades of Chartism? Perhaps more discouraging was the fact that even of those who had accepted and obeyed, many lacked, in Campbell’s opinion, a
“saintly disposition,” and some opposed his being made their presiding officer. Such people he viewed as “withered branches” and totally out of character as “children of God.” There was simply no equivocation in Campbell’s mind: Mormonism was true and he intended to commit himself fully to the cause—whether it was in warning his fellow Scots in Ayrshire or driving himself at times beyond reason to further the schools of the kingdom of God as Utah Territorial Superintendent of Common Schools and as a promoter of numerous civic enterprises.

Here then was a young nineteen-year-old with a crippled arm, one of only about a thousand Mormons in the west of Scotland, a neophyte convert of less than two years, confronted with apostates, criticism, anti-Mormon propaganda, unfaithful Saints, and cynics who challenged him to speak French in a public meeting to prove that he actually believed in tongues. The amazing thing is perhaps not that he didn’t baptize hundreds in the Firth of Clyde, but that he himself survived this baptism of fire. Though his preaching in Dalry bore little good “to all human appearances” because the meeting was held in a “garret room . . . which was no way enticing to any respectable people” and the personal lives of the Saints in Ayr “nullified” his efforts, yet perhaps because of the adversity he faced the principal convert out of all this contact with real life in the west of Scotland was assuredly Robert Campbell himself. He was discouraged, however. He wrote to President Reuben Hedlock about the “little success” he had had in his labors and expressed a desire to leave Scotland for America. Hedlock left it up to him to be led by the Spirit whether he stayed or left, and near the end of 1844 he indeed claimed to have received a personal manifestation through the gift of tongues in which he was told that he would soon be gathered to Zion—the ultimate seal of approval for numerous Mormons in the nineteenth century.

But like so many Mormon emigrants in that period, Campbell’s rationale for emigrating was probably not as purely spiritual as first blush would indicate. The general spirit of emigration was strong in the land among both Gentiles and Mormons, and Rob’s non-Mormon family members apparently went to Canada for economic and social reasons later in the 1840s. It should also be remembered that Robert Campbell was unemployed at this time (apart from meager support he may have received from Mormon congregations) and his crippled wrist put a stigma on his professional work as a writer. According to one family tradition, Campbell approached the doctor who had treated his broken wrist a few years before and convinced the doctor that he was responsible for its failure to develop and that the subsequent impairment of his
wrist made it difficult for him to follow his profession. "Writer Rob" succeeded in getting the doctor to compensate him by paying for his passage to the United States. He had apparently not worked in a lawyer's office for nothing!

Perceptions are perhaps more important than objective realities, however, and whatever material reasons might be given for Robert Campbell leaving his native land—discouragement with his work as a missionary, failure to get adequate employment, or success in putting pressure on his doctor—it is clear that when he decided to leave he did so because he believed he was following the direction of the Spirit, even if it meant going against his father's wishes. On 14 January 1845, he left Glasgow on the first phase of his sea voyage, and as he sailed westward on the Palmyra he wrote: "I am now on the Atlantic Ocean fulfilling that which I believe to be the mind of God." A few years later he would reaffirm that his decision to emigrate was related to his conversion, saying that before that event "I never thought of leaving my native soil." This twenty-year-old "veteran" thus left parents, brothers, sisters, and his sweetheart, Joan Scobie, to become a participant in the Mormon drama unfolding in Nauvoo, Illinois. He had a clear, if general, perception that what he did was part of a divine plan, not just a series of random happenings, but he surely did not foresee what would happen to his fondest hopes within the next twenty months.

Campbell arrived in New Orleans on 8 March 1845 and finally reached Nauvoo on 26 March after a journey of ten weeks and one day. While in St. Louis he met a number of his old Scottish acquaintances who had apparently apostatized from their original commitment to Mormonism. They told him there was no work to be found in Nauvoo and discouraged him from continuing his journey, warning him that "there was nothing but trouble and difficulties there." Not only was he discouraged by these reports, he was probably homesick and thinking of his sweetheart in Scotland. In addition, when he arrived in Nauvoo he was suffering from the agony of what may have been an impacted wisdom tooth.

Believing, no doubt, in the Scottish proverb that "ye get nothin wi a shut moo," on his first morning in Nauvoo Rob approached Brigham Young and asked him for a blessing. Brigham Young obliged, told him his sins were forgiven and that God was pleased with him for gathering with the Saints, rebuked the swelling and pain, and promised him that he would leave the Young home with his heart full of joy and praise to God. Some years later, Rob acknowledged to Brigham Young that this blessing had been a major means of keeping him faithful at this difficult juncture in his life. Indeed, his need for the approval and support
of those whom he deemed his superiors is a dominant theme in his life, and it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that his very busy life in Utah and his driven style as Territorial Superintendent of Schools were a result in part of his need to prove himself in everything he undertook. The Protestant ethic was alive and well in Robert Lang Campbell; as one prominent Mormon educator described his life-style, he was “a scholar of whom it is said, ‘He worked all the time.’ ”

Given his Scottish educational background, his ability as a writer, and of course his crippled arm, the job of teaching would have been a natural pursuit for him to follow, and this he did—either privately or in the public common school system organized in Nauvoo. Perhaps here was nourished and revived the old Chartist ideal of education as a means of shaping society and also the perspectives that led to his later being considered the father of Utah’s common schools. His other specific competency, that of writing, also gave him an entrée (albeit as a clerk) into the Mormon hierarchy. In May of 1845, he received a patriarchal blessing from John Smith (one of many he received during his lifetime) and was promised that he would prosper, do miracles, bring thousands to Zion, “share in all the glory the Lord hath in store for the Saints, [and] live till your satisfied with life, even to see the winding up scene of this generation.” Heady stuff for a twenty-year-old immigrant who hadn’t yet found his niche in life.

Perhaps more important than the actual promises made was the fact that Rob’s skill as a writer and clerk were being noised about Nauvoo; John Smith employed him as a clerk in May, and between June and September 1845 he “clerked” for William Smith, from whom he received another patriarchal blessing. Once again he was given a glimpse of the possibilities that lay ahead:

[A]s a shock of corn that is fully ripe thou shalt sit down in Zion, and enjoy thy inheritance in peace forever thy name shall be enrolled among the honored ones of the earth, and thy Priesthood shall beget thee great praise among thy Brethren & with fond remembrance shall thy goodness in days to come be cherished in the hearts of thousands, and a multitude shall call thee blessed forevermore.

Here are set out some aspirations that could do nothing but reinforce his own inclination to be a “high achiever” in the kingdom of God—with more than a hint that he might also be something of a leader. From the first such predictive blessing, which he received from a Brother Houston in a Johnstone prayer meeting in October 1843, to these officially recorded blessings pronounced by the Church Patriarch, young Campbell was being prepared by such portents for a life of service to Mormonism and its leaders. On
10 November 1845, he was hired as a personal clerk by Willard Richards and began his career as an amanuensis to a number of Apostles and eventually the Prophet Brigham himself. This word holds special significance for Robert Campbell because it literally means "a slave with secretarial duties." It was a role the emigrant lad from Scotland accepted willingly and without hesitation. He was indeed a slave for the cause he had espoused.

These things, like the implementation of the patriarchal blessings, were still in the future, however. More practical matters of living (and dying) presented themselves. On 15 November 1845, Joan Scobie arrived from Scotland, and five days later she and Rob were married by Patriarch John Smith. A few months later the patriarch gave her a blessing that Robert dutifully recorded. In typical fashion, she was blessed to be a "mother in Israel" and told that she would have "numerous posterity," that her "days and years would be multiplied," and that she would "stand on Mount Zion with the 144,000 and enjoy all the blessings of eternal lives." Joan was now pregnant with her first child, and the patriarch's words must have comforted both husband and wife because the reality of Nauvoo was something less than an ideal location in which to begin their family.

The Mormons were in the process of being driven out of the city, and the few pages of Campbell's journal that deal with this period suggest the tensions they lived under, describes the fighting as Nauvoo came under bombardment of the mob, and poignantly assesses his position when he saw at the very stairs of the temple the mob and their cannon: "I felt indeed I was an outcast and a stranger there." By 19 September, he and Joan had crossed the Missouri River on the first lap of their journey to Winter Quarters, Iowa, and by October they were on the prairie after crossing the Des Moines River. On 16 October they were about forty miles from Nauvoo when Joan gave birth to a stillborn son and she herself died two hours later. Rob Campbell, who had been promised so much, who had worked so hard for the kingdom, and who had come to Zion for a sense of security, was left a childless widower at the age of twenty-one.

For a time following Joan's death, he was in a delirium from malaria and perhaps from grief. He even felt a stranger among fellow Saints and grieved for the company of "her who was my chief delight & better society than hers I never longed for." He worried over how their parents in Scotland would take the news of Joan's death and feared they might blame him for going against their advice not to emigrate. For the first time, he wished he were back in his native land where he could "unbosom his feelings" to
his ain folk, but he realized that going back would not help his situation. Reflecting upon his misfortunes, he wrote, “[I]n this thing and in this trial has the Lord tried me and I feel now to fret not, nor repine at the dispensation of God’s providence, but like Job I feel to say ‘The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.’”38

Between this acceptance and his expressing hope in eternal life, he inserted a sharp condemnation of the “Mobocrats of Illinois,” claiming that they were ultimately responsible for Joan’s death “and at their hands do I require it.” In a verse written in farewell to his Joan he lamented:

O cruel man! hast thou a hate,
Which innocent blood alone can satiate;
Like heathen Gods, dost thou require
A victim’s life to appease thy ire.39

But for the care and ministrations of a “Sister Mayberry,” Robert himself might have joined Joan because of the “flux” and associated illnesses. However, by 16 January 1847 he was living at Brigham Young’s “home” in Winter Quarters and helping write out the “Word and Will of the Lord,” the revelation Brigham Young issued on 14 January 1847 as he rallied the Saints for their assault on the western plains and the distant Rocky Mountains. With Brigham’s approval, Robert volunteered to be a member of the first “pioneer” company, but instead of accompanying the first company to the Rocky Mountains he was put in charge of the post office at Winter Quarters and from there on 7 April 1847 he witnessed the “Pioneers starting over the hill Westward. God bless them.”40 He must have been sorely disappointed that he would not be among the first to see the promised land.

Perhaps in consolation, Willard Richards gave him yet another blessing on that same day and reminded him to “be humble, and be faithful, be diligent in all things that shall come before you.” If he did this, he would know the mind and will of God for him, “for the Lord has great good in reserve for thee.” He was being left at Winter Quarters “to do a good, great and glorious work in common with thy brethren,” and he should be ready at all times to “whisper Peace, Peace, and do good and prove yourself a wise scribe in Israel.”41

Ironically, the west of Scotland’s challenge to the establishment had produced the quintessential public servant. In his role as Saint, scribe, or schoolman, Robert Campbell never seems to have once rocked the boat or questioned the directives he received. For twenty-seven years he could be trusted to prove himself wise in all
things pertaining to the kingdom of God, which in the nineteenth century was much more than a spiritual abstraction. It involved Robert Campbell in the creation of a here-and-now “Mormon country” with a focus on farms and commerce, politics and government, taxes and schools, in addition to Sunday preaching and meditations on the glories of the next world.

Campbell arrived in the Salt Lake Valley sometime in 1848. During the winter of 1848–49 he is recorded as being engaged in writing out one dollar bills for use by the Saints in their new home and in impressing the bills with the seal of the Twelve Apostles. In the fall of 1849 he was called to participate in the exploration of the southern region of the territory between November of 1849 and February of 1850 under the direction of Parley P. Pratt. As recorder for the expedition, he prepared a report for the territorial legislative council based on his “Journal of the Southern Exploring Expedition” and helped familiarize the legislators with the geography of their new home. On his return from this expedition, Campbell was called and set apart to labor as a missionary in the British Mission in fulfillment of his own 1848 prophecy that within three years he would return to his “native soil,” where he would preach and “baptize my kindred, and bring them to Zion, all of them, and thousands of my countrymen should come along, and esteem me as their Saviour.”

On 13 April 1850, Robert was set apart for his mission to Scotland by Heber C. Kimball and Ezra T. Benson, with Kimball promising him that his enemies would flee before him, his speech would be sharper than a two-edged sword, that he would “do many mighty works,” and that “no one would supercede thee.” Once again, the blessings he received from those whom he esteemed his spiritual superiors reinforced the notion that he had an important role to play in the building of the kingdom, although the frequency with which he received blessings may also indicate that he was less than confident that he could do what was required of him. Indeed, following Heber Kimball’s encouraging words he received yet another set of promises from the Church Patriarch, John Smith, which included the promise of a “companion to comfort thy heart” and an honorable posterity.

The function of these blessings and prophecies served to encourage Campbell—and other Mormons, of course—to keep going in spite of difficulties and to provide cautions to him about possible shoals on which his spiritual barque might founder. It must be added that Kimball’s warning for Robert Campbell to “be humble & meek” and to “cease from your lightness” seems redundant given the seriousness the young Scot seems to have reflected from the moment of his baptism. However, perhaps such warnings
were a necessary balance to the other promise that "no one shall supercede thee." Taken seriously, that promise could cause problems in a system based on hierarchical authority! Paradoxically, it appears that such blessings enhanced and fed the fires of ambition and aspiration as they also banked the fires of too much ardor, independence, and enthusiasm. In so doing they played an important role in educating and socializing Robert Campbell into the value orientation of the Mormon faith community. They were considered as instructions from God to be taken very seriously as personal spiritual guidelines by the recipients, but they undoubtedly also helped in the task of boundary maintenance on which social systems depend for their continuance.

In a similar manner, Robert's assignment as pastor of the Scottish Latter-day Saints between 1852 and 1854 gave him the satisfaction of serving as leader of the Church in his native land and also reinforced in him the attributes of a faithful and diligent servant who could be depended on to do the will of his superiors. In a letter to Brigham Young, he expressed pleasure in having been called to serve but also indicated that he couldn't quite understand why, given "my weakness, my foolishness, my youth & inexperience, God's servants have placed me forward to occupy such stations, as have been assigned to me on this mission, but so it is." It may have been difficult for young Robert to understand, but in the perspective of history it seems obvious why the "brethren" chose the "weak things of the world to confound the wise." They could rest assured that when Rob Campbell was given an assignment he would fulfill it to the letter. As Orson Pratt and Franklin D. Richards said of him when they initially appointed him to labor in the Glasgow Conference in September 1850, "Elder Campbell has been associated for some years past with the 'Twelve' and also with the Presidency of the Church from whom he had gathered glorious truth calculated to benefit the Saints and all who will listen to him." This characterization of him as a gatherer and disseminator of information comes very close to the mark in describing his role as one of the most committed of civil servants in the kingdom of God. It was a characteristic that would continue as his hallmark long after his mission to Scotland.

In the fall of 1854, he returned to Utah with a large company of gathered Saints and a new Scottish wife, Mary Stewart, whom he married in Glasgow on 14 November 1853. During the next decade, he devoted his energies to becoming one of the pillars of the community and establishing a family. He married a plural wife, Jeanie Miller of Glasgow, in 1855 in Salt Lake City. Between 1854 and 1864 he fathered twelve children, seven by Mary and five by
NOTICE.

MR. ROBERT CAMPBELL,
A Latter-Day Saint Missionary,
From Eastern Upper California, North America, will deliver a
COURSE of LECTURES on the
FULNESS OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST,
as restored to earth in these days, in its ancient purity, acco-
ppanied with all its privileges and blessings; also, set forth the
Prophecies which are yet to be fulfilled, as spoken by holy men
of old, who were moved upon by the Holy Ghost.

IN THE
LOUDOUN HALL, BOAT VENNEL,
EVERY SABBATH-DAY, AT ELEVEN A.M., AND SIX P.M.
ALSO,
ON EACH WEDNESDAY NIGHT,
COMMENCING AT EIGHT O'CLOCK,
When all classes are respectfully invited to attend and hear for
themselves. A wise man will hear a matter and then judge.

"Doth our law judge any man before it hear him," John vii. 51.
On WEDNESDAY Evenings, Pamphlets, explanatory of our Faith
will be exposed for Sale; also, any Books published by the Latter-
Day Saints can be had, if ordered.

AYR, 25th Nov., 1850.
PRINTED BY THOMAS M. GEMMELL, AT THE AYR ADVERTISER OFFICE.

Handbill published by Robert L. Campbell
during his mission to Scotland, 1850–54
Reproduced courtesy of LDS Church Archives
Jeanie. Eventually Mary would bear him eleven children and Jeanie ten. In 1857 he married another Scot, Elizabeth Beveridge, but had no children by her. His honorable posterity was certainly on the rise and so too were his accomplishments as a citizen and public servant. Much of what he accomplished, however, could not have been done without not just the comfort, but the active aid of the three women he married. Quite apart from bearing, tending, and rearing his numerous children, Mary Stewart, Jeanie Miller, and Elizabeth Beveridge undoubtedly played an important role in the farming he was involved in. It is unfortunate that an understanding of how much he may have depended on them for his success must be a matter of speculation rather than being based on their accounts of how busy they were! Nonetheless, Mormon women of Robert Campbell's era (including his wives) were essential to the success of the community as they dug ditches, pruned trees, sheared sheep, and spun and wove cloth for their households. As Brigham Young himself is reputed to have said, "Great as the achievements of women were, they would have been much greater if they had had wives to help them."48

Because of the assistance he received from his wives, Robert was better able to meet the incessant demands on him as a secretary and recorder for this or that society—the General Scientific Society, the Deseret Theological Institute, the Pomological Society, the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society—in addition to his service as one of the presidents of the Twenty-ninth Quorum of Seventy and, of course, his full-time work as a clerk in the Church Historian's Office and his service as a regent and secretary of the board of the moribund University of Deseret (which served as a supervising agency of the quasipublic school system in Utah). Other tasks included the role of chief clerk of the territorial legislature, and when the University of Deseret was reactivated he served (with Issac Groo and fellow Scot David O. Calder) as the presiding officer of the committee that supervised the work of the university, being privileged to offer the invocation and "opening remarks" at the installation of John R. Park as principal of the university on 8 March 1869. No wonder it was said of him, "He worked all the time."49

Campbell's involvement in one set of activities led like the branches of a tree to other activities. On top of all his other personal, professional, church, and civic responsibilities, he accepted a "call" from the county court to be Superintendent of the Common Schools of Salt Lake County, and two years later, in 1864, the legislature elected him to the position of Superintendent of Common Schools for the territory of Utah. At the age of thirty-nine,
Rob Campbell was now literally the chief school officer of what Mormons regarded as the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God. Gie guid for a weaver’s chiel and Chartist reformer frae Kilbarchan, wi a crippled airm at that!

He was kept busy writing reports, visiting outlying communities, pleading for better schools, better teachers, and better books, and acting as chief booster of Brigham Young’s ill-fated attempt to reform English orthography through the Deseret Alphabet. It is in the arena of education that Campbell left his most remembered service to the Mormon cause. One historian of education has credited him with being the promoter of uniform textbooks in Utah and an early advocate of consolidated schools and of the improved preparation and remuneration of teachers. During his administration the gradual shift from funding schools through tuition to a public tax began, although it was not until a month before his death in April 1874 that the legislature finally made an appropriation of fifteen thousand dollars to aid district schools.

As one reads the numerous entries under Campbell’s name in the Journal History of the Church during these years and his official school reports to the legislature, one is reminded of the hard-driving arder of Horace Mann as he sought to shake Massachusetts out of what he perceived to be its lethargic attitude toward public schooling in the 1840s. Campbell also complained about the apathy and indifference towards education on the part of many of the Mormon school trustees, and he surely would have empathized with Mann’s own somewhat discouraged response to one of his less than successful evangelical tours on behalf of common schools in Massachusetts: “When I am about to present my gospel of education in some new place, I feel as if I were standing in bad weather before the door of a house and vainly pulling the bell, with no one at home, or all too busy to see me.”50 In spite of official Church backing for his efforts, Campbell too had to wage a relentless campaign to convince the Saints of the value of common schools.

When Robert Lang Campbell died on 11 April 1874 of typhoid fever, the Deseret News described him as an “industrious, useful, upright, trustworthy man” who had expended his life in service in ecclesiastical and secular affairs, and noted that his life was “closely interwoven with [Mormon] history.” Indeed, the Deseret News obituary suggested that his commitment to duty as “an indefatigable worker” may have been one of the factors that precipitated his early demise at the age of forty-eight.51

In correspondence in the months following Campbell’s death, the man with whom he worked most closely, Church Historian George A. Smith, paid personal tribute to him for his
devotion to Church and civic affairs: "As he had chief charge of the Historian’s Office for many years, his absence makes everything here appear lonely." "My intimacy with him was such that it seemed as though I had lost a brother." "His earnest zeal in the cause of education had rivited upon him the affection of the entire community."

There can be no doubt that Robert L. Campbell was held in high regard by his fellow Mormons and that his willing and obedient service in the Mormon cause was seen as a positive and necessary virtue by the leaders of the Church. However, no person could function in the various capacities that he did in a Utah that was slowly but surely becoming more pluralistic without raising doubts about whether his compliant disposition was best for the territory. Its increasingly diverse population did not always appreciate the Mormon ideal of loyal service, and it fell to the nemesis of Mormon hegemony in Utah, the Salt Lake Tribune, to critically editorialize on Campbell’s multidimensional contributions to Utah. While declaring that he had “been cut off in the midst of his usefulness and a sorrowing community mourn his loss” and characterizing him as a great civil servant who outdid himself in his devotion to the many causes in which he was involved, the Tribune editorial asserted that his energies and abilities had been spread too thin and he couldn’t keep up mentally and physically with the demands continually made on him by family, civic responsibilities, employment, and Church assignments, with the result that the schools of Utah suffered. As was the Tribune’s wont, it focused on what it perceived to be his subservience to his master, Brigham Young, who “had no more obsequious and humble servant.” The review of Campbell’s contribution to Utah’s civic life concluded—tongue in cheek—that he would live “green in our memories as a pious and much married Saint, an indefatigable—albeit hopelessly confused—worker, and a disciple faithful and true to his great Master.” Like Damon and Pythias, Boswell and Johnson, it continued, “Brigham and Campbell will be enshrined in the minds of future generations as lovely in their lives and in their deaths not long divided.”

Given its anti-Mormon orientation, it is easy to see why the Tribune would interpret Campbell’s faithfulness, diligence, and commitment as weaknesses rather than strengths they were certainly considered by the Mormon community. Indeed, in a very real sense his lifestyle epitomized the source of much of the friction engendered between Saints and gentiles in nineteenth-century century Utah (and that to some extent still persists): devout faith and obedience to authority for one can also be construed as blind
faith and servitude to another. The Tribune's criticism of Robert Campbell's life also reflects the challenges arising between the traditional patriarchal notion of a good society and the more secular, open variety seeking to assert itself in late nineteenth-century Utah.

Be that as it may, whether acting as an agent of the gathering to Zion in his native land, as a peripatetic recorder of the decisions of the Church's highest echelons, as an enthusiastic supporter of commercial and horticultural affairs, or a promoter of a formal system of education in the territory of Utah, Robert L. Campbell was playing out the role he consciously and conscientiously adopted when he was "born again" on 9 August 1842. He put his hand to the plough and never looked back.

Here on the very edge of civilization, in the wilds of the American West, where "manifest destiny" was being realized by the constant flow of emigrants moving westward, the writer's apprentice and former Christian Chartist from Kilbarchan was working out his own personal "manifest destiny." Because of his faithfulness, he was promised that he would yet play a role in bringing to pass the divine purposes far from the garret meeting places of Dalry, the infidels of Irvine, or the writer's office in Johnstone. Although he was not the recipient of the divine will directly, as a faithful disciple, a "wise scribe in Israel," and as schoolman to the Saints, Robert Campbell can be viewed as one of many unsung "civil servants" of the kingdom who recorded and transmitted the revelations to the world and to the Saints. He clearly accepted that his task was not to interpret or question what was done, but to implement the social policies of those who received the revelations and formulated the epistles and policy statements. Even prophets and Apostles still needed faithful Saints with the skills of the pen—including expertise in such mundane things as spelling and punctuation. Although the particular needs of the brethren defined, and in some sense circumscribed and limited, the aspirations of those who served them, the saintly scribe from the west of Scotland found his niche on the western frontier of North America and carved out for himself a place in the annals of Mormon and Utah history. And it all began with the conversion of a Christian Chartist to Mormonism in Johnstone, Renfrewshire, in 1842.
NOTES

1An Address to the Radical Reformers of Ayrshire (Kilmarnock, Scotland: Ayrshire Examiner Office, 1838).
2Chambers, Book of Scotland, cited in the Scotsman, 29 October 1830.
4Scottosman, 1 May 1847.
5Sketch of Robert Lang Campbell,” typescript in possession of Alice Spencer, Salt Lake City; see also reference to Campbell’s crippled arm in Peter McIntyre, “Autobiography,” c. 1846, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Marriott Library).
6Millennial Star 2 (October 1841): 92; letter of J. S. McGrath, Archivist, University of Strathclyde, to the author, 8 October 1986; handbill from Alexander Wright Collection, Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).
7Sketch,” 1.
9Robert L. Campbell, Journal, 20 October 1844, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.
11Campbell, Journal, 1 July 1843.
12Ibid.
13Minutes of Glasgow Conference, 15 August 1842, LDS Church Archives (emphasis added).
14One of the earliest publications that attempted to counter the Mormon work in Scotland was a broadside that proclaimed: “A Reply to the Fantastical, Enthusiastic Messrs Hamilton and Ure,” Millennial Star 2 (March 1842): 169–70. Hamilton and Ure were LDS converts and local missionaries in the early period.
15Campbell, Journal, January 1845.
16Ibid., 20 April 1844.
17Ibid., 15 October 1843; 26 November 1843; 27 May 1844.
18This pamphlet was found in the Paisley Public Library under “Paisley Pamphlets,” vol. 24. The librarian there, Mr. Kenneth Hinshalwood, drew my attention to it.
19Campbell, Journal, 27 May 1844.
20Ibid., 12 August 1844.
21Ibid., 27 May 1844.
22Ibid., 3 July 1844.
23Campbell included in his journal a synopsis of his mission under the date of January 1845. These comments are from that section.
24Campbell, Journal, 22 July 1844.
25Ibid., January 1845.
26Sketch,” 1.
27Ibid., 1; Campbell, Journal, 20 November 1846.
28Campbell, Journal, January 1845.
29Ibid., 27 March 1848.
30Robert L. Campbell, Dundee, Scotland, to Brigham Young, 14 June 1853, Brigham Young Letterpress Book, LDS Church Archives.
32Sketch, 1; conversation with James Kimball, 27 March 1987.
33Campbell, Journal, 7 May 1845.
34Ibid., 25 July 1845.
35Ibid., 20 November 1845.
36Ibid., 21 September 1846.
37Ibid., 16 October 1846.
38Ibid., 20 October 1846.
39Ibid.
40Ibid., 3 March 1847, 7 April 1847.
41Ibid., 7 April 1847.
42See entries in Journal History of the Church, 29 December 1848, 4 January 1849, LDS Church Archives.
43Robert L. Campbell, Journal of Southern Exploring Expedition, LDS Church Archives.
44Journal, 27 March 1848. This prophecy was made at Winter Quarters at the command of Dr. Willard Richards, who on being informed that Campbell’s father and grandmother and other kin had just died in Scotland, addressed Campbell thus: “Son of man! Prophecy.”
Campbell

44Campbell, Journal, 91.
45Robert L. Campbell, Glasgow, Scotland, to Brigham Young, 28 April 1852, Brigham Young Letterpress Book, LDS Church Archives.
46Campbell, Journal, 95.


48The Journal History of the Church is replete with references to the many facets of Campbell’s career from the early years as scribe to various Church leaders through his years as Superintendent of Common Schools until his death in 1874. For a factually oriented overview of his civic and educational involvements, see J. C. Moffitt, “Robert L. Campbell: Territorial Superintendent of Schools,” Utah Educational Review 40 (15 March 1947): 159–63, 190.

49See Moffitt, “Robert L. Campbell”; the quotation from Horace Mann’s journal is cited in David B. Tyack, Turning Points in American Educational History (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell Publishing Co., 1967), 124. Campbell’s complaints about apathetic school trustees who were supposed to be setting an example to the rest of the Mormon population can be found in his reports for the years 1866 and 1867 in J. C. Moffitt, comp., “Reports of the Superintendents of Schools for Utah, from 1861 to 1896” (Provo: Privately printed, 1941), 15–16, 19–22, photocopy of typescript in Marriott Library.

50Deseret News, 14 April 1874.

51See George A. Smith to Dr. Humphrey Gould, 26 May 1874; to William Geddes, 7 July 1874; to Lyman Coleman, c. August 1874 in George A. Smith Letterpress Book, LDS Church Archives.

52Salt Lake Tribune, 14 April 1874.
The Route We Take

1

The lake is a droop of space
and we are paddling in it,
remote and yearning.
An old man and woman start out
in their pontoon boat that sputters
weeds. We find them again,
farther on, fishing. The woman
has balanced her hips on a twig
of a chair. The man spits
at the water as if he has arrived
at exactly the right place.

2

A root floats up,
a gladiator's arm,
brown-studded, crooked.
Cut, it feels like cork,
or something you could
eat if you had to,
one thing standing for
another, and nothing
as horrible as it looks,
snaked underwater.
Two great blue heron jut fantastically, pterodactyl-beaked, carrying the sky to a cold distance. The high sun sinks its teeth in the waves. We arch our necks after the bird. The last thing we want, we tell ourselves, is intelligence, or comfort.

Dick says they subpoenaed the farmer who penned hogs across a feeder-stream, their raw fecal matter launching out, greening. We stop and wade to where the cold appears invisible. We actually drink from our hands, praying for innocence.

We follow the mink along the bank until it climbs into the tangle of roots where water has risen and fallen. We see through to clearings, stammers of light, a few sharp red cardinal flowers, a whole network of traces, not ours.
A row of old docks slope and dislodge like disproved theories. We observe the sequence of them, heavy and frail. Lily pads collect at their feet to soften the failure. The day is full of sunshine. We have our canoe, our traveling.

Toward evening, we can almost see home through the needle's eye of the bridge: Mile Point, our twelve swans huddled, all that is, seen and unseen, all we keep learning to care for because we return to it between extremities.

—Fleda Brown Jackson

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Perfection and Progression: Two Complementary Ways to Talk about God

Eugene England

On 6 April 1844, Hyrum Smith, counselor to the Prophet Joseph Smith, speaking at the general conference of the Church, stated, "I would not serve a God that had not all wisdom and power." Yet on 13 January 1867, speaking as president of the Church in the Tabernacle, Brigham Young stated, "According to [some men's] theory, God can progress no further in knowledge and power, but the God that I serve is progressing eternally, and so are his children."

It is difficult to imagine a more stark contradiction in authoritative statements about the Mormon concept of God: Hyrum Smith says that God has all wisdom and power; Brigham Young says that he does not and is progressing in those attributes. How could there be such a dramatic reversal in dogma? Isn't this a simple matter of fact or falsehood? Isn't it certain that either God is perfect, with all knowledge and power, or he is not? How could there be direct opposition at the prophetic level about something so unambiguous and fundamental?

My simple thesis here is that, in fact, these statements are not contradictory. These Church leaders were using two different, but complementary, ways of talking about God based on two different aspects of the Mormon understanding of God, both of which, I believe, are essential to our theology and must be maintained. With the help of a basic concept—that of different, progressive spheres of development and of possible perfection within each sphere—it is possible to believe both in God's perfection of knowledge and power in relation to our sphere and in his progression in these attributes in his own and higher spheres. This concept was first firmly articulated by Brigham Young, but it was suggested earlier in some of Joseph Smith’s discourses and in the Doctrine and

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Covenants, and it has been employed by most of the main figures in Mormon theology from the beginning until the present.

Joseph Smith taught both of these doctrines about God. The Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, consistent with the traditional Christian scriptures, refer to God as having all knowledge and all power. The Church’s earliest major doctrinal exposition, the Lectures on Faith, actually uses the traditional Christian categories (borrowed from Greek philosophy) of omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence in describing God. It makes the explicit claim that “without the knowledge of all things God would not be able to save any portion of his creatures . . . and if it were not for the idea existing in the minds of men that God had all knowledge it would be impossible for them to exercise faith in him.”

Joseph Smith’s part in authoring the Lectures on Faith is still uncertain. They seem mainly the work of Sidney Rigdon, and some readers have suspected they reflect a very early stage of Mormon doctrinal expression about God, one still heavily influenced by traditional Christian creeds. For instance, God is described as a personage of spirit, only Christ as a personage of tabernacle, and the Holy Ghost not as a personage at all but as a kind of unifying mind of the Father and Son. Those who quote the Lectures on Faith have had to editorialize, to add footnotes and explanations in order to make it conform to later orthodox Mormon thought, as, for instance, Joseph Fielding Smith does at the beginning of Doctrines of Salvation. This problem was recognized in the inclination of Church authorities to revise the Lectures on Faith in the early 1900s, or at least to add a footnote, and then the 1921 decision instead to exclude them from the Doctrine and Covenants. But Joseph Smith never repudiated them. It is likely that, had they been written later, as his understanding developed, he too would have qualified or explained some of the terms and concepts used there, but I think he saw no inherent contradiction between them and his later understanding of God’s relationship to higher spheres of existence.

This understanding had been received and amplified over a number of years before it was most clearly, comprehensively, and publicly declared in the famous “King Follett Discourse,” given at that same April 1844 conference at which Hyrum Smith emphasized God’s perfection. The “King Follett Discourse” itself has somewhat questionable status because it was recorded only in the rather sketchy way possible then, in longhand—though by four scribes, whose work was later amalgamated. Joseph Smith nowhere in it states definitely that God is now progressing in knowledge and power, but both there and in the Doctrine and
Covenants he makes it perfectly clear that God is not everywhere supreme and does not have all power by stating that there are gods above him and by naming specific things that cannot be done, even by God: God cannot create elements, or anything else, out of nothing; he cannot create intelligences or force salvation on them. Joseph Smith also clearly describes an eternal process of learning and growth by which Godhood is attained, and he at least implies that that process continues for God himself:

First God Himself who sits enthroned in yonder heavens is a Man like unto one of yourselves—that is the great secret! ... The first principle of truth and of the Gospel is to know of a certainty that character of God, and that we may converse with Him ... that He once was a man like one of us.... You have got to learn how to make yourselves God ... and be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done by going from a small capacity to a great capacity, from a small degree to another, from grace to grace ... from exaltation to exaltation. [Jesus said], "I saw the Father work out His kingdom with fear and trembling and I am doing the same, too. When I get my kingdom, I will give it to the Father and it will add to and exalt His glory. He will take a higher exaltation and I will take His place and also be exalted, so that He obtains kingdom rolling upon Kingdom." ... All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement and improvement. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. God Himself found Himself in the midst of spirits and glory. Because He was greater He saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest, who were less in intelligence, could have a privilege to advance like Himself and be exalted with Him, so that they might have one glory upon another in all that knowledge, power, and glory.8

Notice the lack of traditional Christian absolutism here. The emphasis seems rather to be on God’s similarity to humans, on God as having the same kind of being as we do and making available to us a process of growth he himself has been engaged in and apparently is still engaged in, “whereby the less intelligent ... could have a privilege to advance like Himself.” The verb structure implies he still is advancing. God is a “greater” but not absolute intelligence; he is moving to “higher” and “higher” exaltations, not to some absolute state of the highest possible exaltation; one glory is added to another “in all that knowledge, power, and glory.”9

In the Winter 1978 issue of BYU Studies, which contains a newly amalgamated text of the “King Follett Discourse,” Van Hale demonstrates that the concept of the plurality of gods had been taught by Joseph Smith from 1835 and was clearly understood by his close associates, such as Hyrum Smith and Brigham Young. Hyrum himself is quoted in George Laub’s journal as teaching, on 27 April 1843, that there is “a whole train and lineage of gods.”10
In fact, in that very sermon Hyrum provides the basic scriptural text for the shift in perspective that makes it possible to talk about many gods, of ascending spheres of power and intelligence, and then to turn around and talk of one God, our God, perfect in intelligence and power and thus able to save his children on the earth. He begins his discussion with a quotation from 1 Corinthians 8:5–6: “There be gods many and lords many. But to us there is but one God the Father.” Despite the context of this scripture—a discussion by Paul of belief in idols—Brigham Young, B. H. Roberts, Joseph Fielding Smith, and many others have used it as a brief explanation of how it is possible to be both a Christian polytheist (technically a henotheist) and a monotheist: how we can talk sometimes in an adventuresome mode about multiple orders of godhood, and how we can consider the advanced spheres that exist in the infinities, and yet at the same time, without contradiction, we can talk in a worshipful mode about our one God and his perfect knowledge and supreme redemptive power in the sphere of our world.

Some Latter-day Saint prophets and theologians have believed the passage from Corinthians serves specifically to describe the difference between a way of talking and thinking that focuses on the multiple spheres of infinite existence where there are “gods many and lords many” and a way that focuses on the single sphere of our immediate existence where there is “but one God the Father,” the one to whom we are responsible and who is perfect and therefore not progressing in our mortal sphere. To me, this use of the passage by the prophets suggests as well that both ways of talking about God are true and orthodox—and complementary.

With this perspective we can understand how Hyrum Smith, when he proclaims, “I would not serve a God that had not all wisdom and power,” is talking in that second, single sphere mode in which “to us there is but one God the Father.” His concern, it is clear from the context, is with the Saints’ faith in Christ’s power to save, which had perhaps been undermined by too exclusive a focus on the first, multiple spheres mode:

I want to put down all false influence. If I thought I should be saved and any in the congregation be lost, I should not be happy... Our Savior is competent to save all from death and hell. I can prove it out of the revelations. I would not serve a God that had not all wisdom and power.

Brigham Young, like Hyrum Smith, used both ways of talking about God. At times, apparently when he felt his audience most needed the emphasis, he would speak in the single sphere
mode, focusing in classical Christian terms on God's sovereignty in our world. President Young often emphasized God's perfections, his knowledge and power absolutely sufficient to save us. But at many other times, especially in his ongoing debates with Orson Pratt, he spoke forthrightly in the multiple spheres mode, rejoicing in the expansive vision he had received from Joseph Smith of the "eternal progression" (a phrase he seems to have coined) that is the heart of activity and motivation for both gods and men:

The first great principle that ought to occupy the attention of mankind, that should be understood by the child and the adult, and which is the main spring of all action (whether people understand it or not), is the principle of improvement. The principle of increase, of exaltation, of adding to that we already possess, is the grand moving principle and cause of the actions of the children of men... the main spring of the actions of [all] people. ... Those who profess to be Latter-day Saints, who have the privilege of receiving and understanding the principles of the holy Gospel, are in duty bound to study and find out, and put in practice in their lives, those principles that are calculated to endure, and that tend to a continual increase in this, and in the world to come.

All their earthly avocations should be framed upon this principle. This alone can insure to them an exaltation; this is the starting point, in this existence, to an endless progression.\textsuperscript{11}

It is clear from other sermons that Brigham Young does not mean by "progression" mere \textit{quantitative} increase, in numbers of spirit children or kingdoms, as we sometimes now use the term "eternal increase" to mean. He said, "We shall never cease to learn, unless we apostatize. ... Can you understand that?"\textsuperscript{12} And this was not a peripheral notion. It was central to his theology:

\begin{quote}
Let us not narrow ourselves up; for the world, with all its variety of useful information and its rich hoard of hidden treasure, is before us; and eternity, with all its sparkling intelligence, lofty aspirations, and unspeakable glories, is before us.\textsuperscript{13}

When we have passed into the sphere where Joseph is, there is still another department, and then another, and another, and so on to an eternal progression in exaltation and eternal lives. That is the exaltation I am looking for.\textsuperscript{14}

When we have lived millions of years in the presence of God and angels... shall we then cease learning? No, or eternity ceases.\textsuperscript{15}

Brigham Young delighted in his expansive vision of continued, unlimited learning and experience. It was, for him, both the reason for and the means of continued existence, of eternal life. It led him to exult in the inclusiveness of the gospel:
\end{quote}

Every accomplishment, every grace, every useful attainment in mathematics... in all science and art belongs to the Saints, and they
should avail themselves as expeditiously as possible of the wealth of knowledge the sciences offer to the diligent and persevering scholar.\textsuperscript{16}

As Saints in the last days we have much to learn; there is an eternity of knowledge before us; at most we receive but very little in this stage of our progression.\textsuperscript{17}

Such enthusiasm led Brigham Young to completely reverse the medieval Faust legend, which implies that too much learning leads a Christian to blasphemy; he claims that only when we blaspheme, when we sin against the Holy Ghost, do we finally stop learning:

If we continue to learn all that we can, pertaining to the salvation which is purchased and presented to us through the Son of God, is there a time when a person will cease to learn? Yes, when he has sinned against God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—God's minister: when he has denied the Lord, defied Him and committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. That is the time when a person will cease to learn, and from that time forth, will descend in ignorance, forgetting that which they formerly knew. . . . They will cease to increase, but must decrease. . . . These are the only characters who will ever cease to learn, both in time and eternity.\textsuperscript{18}

His belief in endless progression in knowledge was not a speculative matter with Brigham Young, as some other matters clearly were. About some things, such as the exact status of Adam, he frankly said, "I guess" such and such, or this subject "does not immediately concern your or my welfare." But he clearly felt that the idea of eternal progression was indeed the mainspring of all action, including divine action, and that the central concepts he had learned from Joseph concerning progression in both humans and God must be kept alive in the Mormon heritage. He reprinted the "King Follett Discourse" a number of times and referred often to doing and teaching only what he had learned from Joseph. Only a few months before his death he testified,

From the first time I saw the Prophet Joseph I never lost a word that came from him concerning the kingdom. And this is the key of knowledge that I have today, that I did hearken to the words of Joseph and treasured them up in my heart, laid them away, asking my Father in the name of his Son Jesus to bring them to mind when needed.\textsuperscript{19}

The testimony of many of the Apostles who knew them both—and who like Brigham were taught and trained by Joseph in a concentrated way in the last two years of his life—was that Brigham Young indeed succeeded in remembering and teaching what Joseph taught.

A major motive for Brigham Young's continuing and remarkably public doctrinal disagreements with Orson Pratt was
his concern not only that Elder Pratt was wrong in insisting without qualification on God's absolute perfection and the impossibility of his further progression, but that such an influential speaker and writer would convince many to follow after him and leave to posterity the impression that only his view and emphasis had a place in Mormon thought. President Young felt it so crucial to keep before the Saints his own and Joseph Smith's emphasis as well that he pushed Elder Pratt to a public recantation in 1865. Then he published the recantation in the Deseret News along with a denunciation of specific doctrines of Elder Pratt signed by the First Presidency. When these documents were reprinted, signed by the other Apostles, Brigham Young specifically condemned a number of assertions Elder Pratt had taught in his book The Seer. The following beliefs of Elder Pratt were identified as not true:

1. There will be no being or beings in existence that will know one particle more than we know, then our knowledge, and wisdom, and power will be infinite; and cannot from thenceforth be increased or expanded in the least degree.

2. There will be nothing more to be learned.

3. The Father and the Son do not progress in knowledge and wisdom because they already know all things past, present and to come.

4. None of the Gods know more than another and none are progressing in knowledge; neither in the acquirement of any truth.

Part of Brigham Young's concern was with the presumption of actually limiting God while seeming to describe him as having limitless power and knowledge. In October 1856 he commanded the Saints, "Now do not lariat [rope off] the God that I serve and say that he cannot learn anymore; I do not believe in such a character." President Young's counselor, Jedediah M. Grant, developed the same image later that month: "[If God] is lariated out, as Orson Pratt lariated out the Gods in his theory, his circle is [only] as far as the string extends. My God is not lariated out." It was this concern that motivated the statement of Brigham Young I began with, the one that seems to contradict Hyrum Smith:

Some men seem as if they could learn so much and no more. They appear to be bounded in their capacity for acquiring knowledge, as Brother Orson has, in theory, bounded the capacity of God. According to his theory, God can progress no further in knowledge and power, but the God that I serve is progressing eternally, and so are his children; they will increase to all eternity, if they are faithful.

Brigham Young's concern was also with spiritual psychology, the importance, in motivating mankind toward salvation, of
their retaining a certain vision: that what was most rewarding in earthly progression would continue forever and would make celestial life, or Godhood, genuinely attractive. Godhood is not to be a mysterious stasis or a mere endless repetition of the same process of creating spirits and saving them. Wilford Woodruff, in 1857, gave pointed expression to this concern:

If there was a point where man in his progression could not proceed any further, the very idea would throw a gloom over every intelligent and reflecting mind. God himself is still increasing and progressing in knowledge, power and dominion, and will do so world without end. It is just so with us.25

Lorenzo Snow, who like Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff knew Joseph Smith’s teachings firsthand, provided the famous Mormon couplet that summarizes memorably the concept of a God who is in genuine relation to us humans and our process of progression: “As Man now is, God once was; as God now is, Man may be.”26 As President of the Church in 1901, President Snow also spoke clearly in the multiple spheres mode about eternal progression after Godhood is reached:

We are immortal beings. . . . Our individuality will always exist. . . . our identity is insured. We will be ourselves and nobody else. Whatever changes may arise, whatever worlds may be made or pass away, our identity will always remain the same; and we will continue on improving, advancing and increasing in wisdom, intelligence, power and dominion, worlds without end.27

In the twentieth century, some Church leaders began to use mainly the mortal sphere way of talking about God, which emphasizes his perfection and his ability to save us. Orson Pratt’s absolutism about God that harked back to the Lectures on Faith had been rejected and the Lectures themselves demoted in status, but President Joseph F. Smith, like his father Hyrum Smith, was concerned that some in the Church were inclined to demeán God, to reduce too much the distance between God and man and thus to undermine confidence in God’s saving power. (I remember some Mormons in my own youth who were so caught up with the vision of eternal progression that they could hardly wait to die to be like God!) Speaking in 1914 about those who would thus reduce God’s power and majesty, President Smith said:

Beware of men who come to you with heresies of this kind, who would make you to think or feel that the Lord Almighty, who made heaven and earth and created all things, is limited in his dominion of earthly things to the capacities of men. . . . They would, if they could, make you believe that the Son of God, who possessed all power . . . power to raise the dead, power to unstop the ears of the dead . . . did
not do such things. . . . There are just a few ignoramuses, "learned fools," if you please, who would make you believe, if they could, that the Almighty God is limited in His power to the capacity of man. . . . Don't you believe it, not for one moment. 28

Joseph F. Smith's son, Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., took a similar position. In his extremely influential book *Doctrines of Salvation*, he quotes the passage from his grandfather Hyrum, about not serving a God who was not absolute, and also the passages from the Lectures on Faith on the perfections of God. It is clear that his concern, like that of his father and grandfather, is with God's power in relation to humans. He asks, after that quotation from Hyrum, "Do we believe that God has all wisdom? . . . Does he have all power? If so then there is nothing in which he lacks. If he is lacking in 'wisdom' and in 'power' then he is not supreme and there must be something greater than he is, and this is absurd." 29

Clearly, Elder Smith is here speaking in the single, mortal sphere mode, the one bounded by the idea that *to us* there is only one God the Father. He of course knew that both his grandfather and Joseph Smith taught that in a particular sense there is "something greater" than God—that God is in fact (if we speak in terms of the multiple, eternal spheres) *not* supreme, that there are Gods above God, a Father of God who gave him salvation and a Father of that god and so on, apparently to infinity. In response to a question about "plurals gods," in the second volume of *Answers to Gospel Questions*, he quotes a long passage from Joseph Smith's discourse of 16 June 1844, the one most full and explicit about the challenging doctrine Joseph called "the plurality of Gods." There we can see the Prophet Joseph at ease with both modes of thinking, multiple and single sphere, because he uses in support and explanation that same passage from Corinthians that his brother Hyrum had used the year before. In the passage quoted by Joseph Fielding Smith, he states:

Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many. I want to set it forth in a plain and simple manner; but to us there is but one God—that is pertaining to us; and he is in all and through all. But if Joseph Smith says there are Gods many and Lords many, they cry, "Away with him! Crucify him!"

Joseph Smith then proceeds to some analysis of the Hebrew original of Genesis 1:1, after which he continues:

In the very beginning the Bible shows there is a plurality of Gods beyond the power of refutation. It is a great subject I am dwelling on. The word *Eloheim* ought to be in the plural all the way through—Gods. The head of the Gods appointed one God for us; and when you take that view of that subject, it sets one free to see all the beauty, holiness and perfection of the Gods. 30
After repeating this long quotation from Joseph Smith, Joseph Fielding Smith shows his own understanding of the two different modes:

It is perfectly true, as recorded in the Pearl of Great Price and in the Bible that to us there is but one God. . . . This Godhead presides over us, and to us, the inhabitants of this world, they constitute the only God or Godhead. There is none other besides them. [Here he cites that same scripture from Corinthians about gods many and lords many but to us one God the Father.] To them we are amenable, and subject to their authority, and there is no other Godhead unto whom we are subject. However, as the Prophet has shown, there can be, and are, other Gods.31

Joseph Fielding Smith clearly recognized both the multiple sphere and single sphere perspectives and the basis of both in the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, but he also shared his father's concern about belittling God and his grandfather's concern about the Saints losing faith in God's absolute power to save. He seems to have chosen to focus his own writing and talking about God in the single sphere mode.

However, during the same period as Joseph Fielding Smith's early writings others chose to emphasize the multiple spheres way of talking about God, particularly B. H. Roberts and John A. Widstoe, the two twentieth-century General Authorities probably most influenced by Brigham Young and in turn the ones most influential in preserving and developing the basic philosophical thought, the "eternalism," of Joseph Smith.

In his most lengthy discourse on the nature of God, Elder Roberts, after quoting extensively from Joseph Smith, states:

Of course, such views as those expressed above involve us in the reality of a pluralistic universe, and a plurality of Gods; . . . there have been appointed certain exalted, glorified and perfected intelligences, who have attained unto a participation in, and become partakers of, "the Divine Nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), who have been appointed as Presidencies over worlds and world systems, who function in the dignity of Divine intelligences, or Deities, even as to our world and its heavens there has been appointed a Godhead, as taught by St. Paul.32

He then goes on to quote that same passage from Corinthians used by Joseph and Hyrum Smith to demonstrate the two perspectives, the two modes of discourse: "As there be Gods many and Lords many—but to us (that is, pertaining to us), there is but one God."

In Elder Roberts's mind, the passage from Corinthians is strong support for his belief in a realm where there are many gods,
all progressing eternally; it is a complement rather than a contradiction to his belief in a realm where, to us mortals, there is but one God, perfect in every way. Earlier, Elder Roberts had taught:

Even with the possession of [the Holy Spirit] to guide us into all truth, I pray you, nevertheless, not to look for finality in things, for you will look in vain. Intelligence, purity, truth, will always remain with us relative terms and also relative qualities. Ascend to what heights you may, ever beyond you will see other heights in respect of these things and ever as you ascend, more heights will appear, and it is doubtful if we shall ever attain the absolute in respect of these qualities. Our joy will be the joy of approximating them, of attaining unto everincreasing excellence without attaining the absolute. It will be the joy of eternal progression.33

And in Roberts’s famous and influential Seventy’s Course in Theology, published by the Church and used as an official priesthood manual, he argued, harking back to Brigham Young’s concern about limiting God:

God’s immutability should not be understood as to exclude the idea of advancement or progress of God . . . an absolute immutability would require eternal immobility—which would reduce God to a condition eternally static . . . which from the nature of things, would bar him from participation in that enlargement of kingdom and increasing glory that comes from the redemption and progress of men. And is it too bold of a thought, that with this progress, even for the Mightiest, new thoughts and new vistas may appear, inviting to new adventures and enterprises that will yield new experiences, advancement and enlargement even for the Most High?34

John A. Widtsoe, the brilliant immigrant convert who had studied Joseph Smith’s thought in detail for his 1903 work, Joseph Smith as Scientist, emphasizes there the Prophet’s naturalism, his emphasis on God as organizer according to natural law and thus not truly omnipotent in the traditional absolutistic Christian sense. In A Rational Theology, Elder Widtsoe is even more explicit about the similar capability of both humans and God for eternal progression:

The essential thing is that man has to undergo experience upon experience, to attain the desired mastery of the external universe; and that we, of this earth, are passing through an estate designed wholly for our further education. Throughout eternal life, increasing knowledge is attained, and with increasing knowledge comes the greater adaptation to law, and in the end an increasingly greater joy. Therefore, it is, that eternal life, is the greatest gift of God . . . if the great law of progression is accepted, God must have been engaged from the beginning, and must now be engaged, in progressive development. As knowledge grew into greater knowledge, by the persistent efforts of will, his recognition of universal laws became greater until he attained at last a conquest over the universe which to our finite understanding seems absolutely complete.35
That last sentence shows that Elder Widtsoe was also concerned to give the single sphere mode of thought its proper due. He goes on with that single sphere emphasis even while talking of multiple spheres:

As more knowledge and power are attained, growth becomes increasingly more rapid. God, exalted by his glorious intelligence, is moving on into new fields of power with a rapidity of which we can have no conception, whereas man, in a lower stage of development, moves relatively at a snaillike though increasing, pace. Man is, nevertheless, moving on, in eternal progression. In short, man is a god in embryo. He comes of a race of gods, and as this eternal growth is continued, we will approach more nearly the point which to us is Godhood, and which is everlasting in its power over the elements of the universe.36

An emphasis on the multiple spheres mode, focusing directly on our adventure in forever progressing to higher realms, continues in the writings of President David O. McKay: "A man's idea of the significance of the words 'eternal progression' will largely determine his philosophy of life.... The great secret of human happiness lies in progression. Stagnation means death.... The doctrine of eternal progression is fundamental in the Church of Christ."37 President McKay quotes the passage from Brigham Young I gave earlier on the principle of improvement as the mainspring of all action, then comments:

Somebody has said, "Show me a perfectly contented man and I will show you a useless one." So there must be some other element with contentment, some other virtue. What is it? Progress. Contentment and progress contribute to peace. If we are no better tomorrow than we are today, we are not very useful.... so we want to experience two things: contentment and progress—progress intellectually, progress physically, but above all, progress spiritually; and the cognizance that we grow contributes to peace. You cannot remain stationary.38

Hugh B. Brown, President McKay's counselor in the First Presidency (1962–69), also emphasized this multiple spheres mode:

The time will come when all men will know something of the glory of God. But the time will not come when I or any other man will arrive at a point in knowledge, experience or understanding beyond which we cannot go. In other words, we believe in eternal progression.39

When we speak of eternal increase, we speak not only of increase of posterity, we speak of increase of knowledge and the power that comes with knowledge; increase of wisdom to use the knowledge and power wisely; increase of awareness and the joy that comes through understanding; increase of intelligence, which is the glory of God; increase of all that goes to make up Godhood.40
President Brown carried on the multiple spheres, adventurous mode of talking about God until his death in 1975. And some younger Mormon thinkers have continued to explore the implications of the unusual Mormon belief in a finite, learning God for our concepts of evil, time, prophecy, etc.41 Other influential voices in recent Mormon doctrinal writing, on the other hand, have emphasized the single sphere, worshipful mode, especially Elder Bruce R. McConkie and his son Joseph F. McConkie, a professor of religion at Brigham Young University.42 These two, and some others, have thought of the two modes as opposed, as mutually exclusive; but it seems more useful to recognize the authoritative base for both modes in Mormon thought and the evidence that advocacy of both modes by the prophets provides that God is not to be limited to mutually exclusive human categories.

A few authoritative Mormon thinkers have gone to great lengths to explain how these two ways of talking about God are complementary, how each mode can be useful and true, depending on which sphere of God’s existence and activity one is considering. The Doctrine and Covenants contains the key idea (including the very word “sphere”) that was used by Brigham Young to describe this harmony. Section 93, received by the Prophet Joseph in 1833, tells us that “all truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence” (v. 30). This passage seems to evoke a universe of coexistent (perhaps concentric or more likely hyperspatial, multidimensional) spheres of truth and intelligent activity. In such a universe, a statement such as that God has all knowledge and power can be taken to be true when applied to our sphere, in which God is not progressing, but it is not completely true when applied to larger or more advanced spheres, where God is progressing. Brigham Young expressed this precise understanding:

We can still improve, we are made for that purpose, our capacities are organized to expand until we can receive into our comprehension celestial knowledge and wisdom, and to continue worlds without end... [I]f men can understand and receive it, mankind are organized to receive intelligence until they become perfect in the sphere they are appointed to fill, which is far ahead of us at present. *When we use the term perfection, it applies to man in his present condition, as well as the heavenly beings.* We are now, or may be, as perfect in our sphere as God and angels are in theirs, but the greatest intelligence in existence can continually ascend to greater heights of perfection.

We are created for the express purpose of increase. There are none, correctly organized, but can increase from birth to old age. What is there that is not ordained after [such] an eternal Law of existence? *It is the Deity within us that causes increase.*43
B. H. Roberts, fully aware of the emphasis throughout the scriptures on the worshipful mode of discourse, the almost exclusive focus on God's perfection in our single sphere, developed an explanation, which I find persuasive, of why the other mode, the expansive vision of progress beyond this sphere, is used so rarely, even in modern scripture. He quotes the Doctrine and Covenants reference to many kingdoms, greater and lesser ones, filling all space (88:37), then points out that when God speaks to Moses, though he also hints of these other kingdoms, of many heavens that "cannot be numbered unto man," he informs Moses that he will give him only an account "concerning this heaven and this earth" (Moses 1:37, 2:1). Elder Roberts concludes that virtually all the revelations in the scriptures relate only to our earth and its heavens:

In other words, our revelations are local; they pertain to us and our limited order of worlds. It is only here and there a glimpse of things outside of our earth and its heavens is given. . . . This limited knowledge, these glimpses of the universe, were doubtless displayed by the Lord to these prophets at the heads of dispensations of truth, because of the influencing power which this knowledge of the nature of the universe upon man's conception of God would have; for undoubtedly such knowledge clearly influences conceptions of God.44

Elder Roberts also cites the expanding modern scientific awareness of a limitless universe and concludes:

This universe must be more than a mere creation for definite relationships to our earth . . . and God must be conceived of as having larger interests and immensely greater objectives than the affairs of the race inhabiting our world. . . . [T]he very limited revelations given concerning our earth and its heavens are not adequate as an explanation of the universe at large.45

Such an expansive vision of the cosmos, a vision also worshipful and deeply ennobling in its ultimate humility, seems to me vital to the Mormon spirit and to Mormon thought. It must not be lost in our very proper emphasis on the equally true and important vision of God's perfections and the human dependence on him for salvation. I appreciate the influence of those Mormon theologians who, speaking in the single sphere mode, might help correct, as Joseph F. Smith and Joseph Fielding Smith did, any tendency to belittle God or reduce faith in his saving power. But it is also important not to polarize Mormon doctrine about God or to obscure the grand vision of eternal progression that has traditionally energized it.

I do not expect that to happen. Modern writers as diverse in focus and orientation as Gerrit de Jong, Jr., and Hyrum Andrus
accept the reconciliation between the two modes of discourse suggested by Brigham Young, that is, that perfection in one sphere is possible, but then so is progress in a higher sphere or realm. With a little discussion, perplexed students, who encounter what seem to them contradictory statements by their Church leaders and other authorities, can be helped with analogies. For instance, a being who is learning and progressing in a four dimensional realm, or hyperspace, can at the same time have all knowledge and power that is available to beings in only three dimensions—and all that is necessary for their salvation. The anxiety often voiced against the idea that God is still learning—that he might therefore make disastrous errors or be unable to save us—can be calmed with the analogy that a person can know algebra perfectly and make absolutely no mistakes in using it, but can still be learning new things in calculus without endangering the realm of algebra. In a similar way, God can have all knowledge and power in our realm or sphere and still be learning in higher spheres, without in any way endangering his absolute ability to save us in this sphere. Or to rephrase Paul’s letter to the Corinthians: “In the cosmos there are a multitude of progressing Gods, but pertaining to us there is one God, with all knowledge and power.” We should be able to hear and appreciate the emphasis and the apostolic witness of both Hyrum Smith and Brigham Young, of both Hugh B. Brown and Joseph Fielding Smith. Mormon thinkers of various orientations can unite in this task, while continuing to use whichever way of talking about God is more appropriate to what they choose to emphasize in their ongoing struggle to know God: adventure or worship, potential or dependence, progress or perfection, the multiple spheres of our ultimate vision or the single sphere of our immediate concern.

I realize that thinking of God as genuinely progressing and therefore in some sense less than absolutely perfect is fearful. I feel that fear—that ultimate insecurity—myself when I think there is no source of all the answers, no final bulwark against all danger, and frustration, and change, and loss, nothing to prevent even God from weeping. But Enoch tells us that God does indeed weep (Moses 7:28), and the alternative to that weeping and my fear—the absolute, changeless, impassive, and thus necessarily impersonal God of traditional Christianity and of the philosophers—is even more fearful. I must accept the witness of the Prophet Joseph that the universe is ultimately open, an invitation to adventure and change, that the very divinity of God demands, as Brigham Young taught, not only dependence but creation and qualitative “increase,” and that my own related divinity demands the same.
NOTES

1Quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. by Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 5; from *History of the Church* 6:300.


3James R. Harris also attempts a reconciliation of seemingly contradictory statements from Church leaders about progression and perfection as they apply to God. He quotes conflicting statements in parallel columns and tries to explain how it can be that God is able “to ‘know all things’ and at the same time to progress eternally in ‘light and truth.’” But he does this with a move that seems to me untrue to the clear meaning of various leaders’ statements about the nature of God’s progression in knowledge and power (see James R. Harris, “Eternal Progression and the Foreknowledge of God,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 8 [Autumn 1967]: 37–46).

4See 2 Ne. 9:20; Alma 26:35; D&C 38:1–2, 88:7–13, 93:21, 26.

5Lectures on Faith, 44, in all editions of the Doctrine and Covenants before 1921.


7In editing the *History of the Church*, B. H. Roberts noted that the Lectures on Faith were “not of equal authority in matters of doctrine” compared with the regular sections of the Doctrine and Covenants because when they were originally presented to the Church for acceptance they had been separately designated as not inspired revelation, though “judicially written and profitable for doctrine” (*History of the Church* 2:176).


9Harris quotes one of these passages from the King Follett Discourse that implies progression but then goes on to define “eternal progression” as meaning God’s progression, by which Harris means merely God’s perfect union with “the Patriarchal Order of Exalted Fathers” and thus perfect access to their absolute power and knowledge. This, of course, removes the crucial element of change in any useful notion of “progression” (Harris, “Eternal Progression,” 37, 43–44). For more on Brigham Young’s belief in a progressing God, see Boyd Kirkland, “Eternal Progression and the Second Death in the Theology of Brigham Young,” in *Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 174–75.


11*Journal of Discourses* 2:90, 6 February 1853.

12Ibid. 3:203.

13Ibid. 8:9.

14Ibid. 3:375.

15Ibid. 6:344. These quotations were compiled by Hugh Nibley, “Educating the Saints,” in *Nibl...on the Timely and the Timeless*, ed. Truman Madsen (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 235.

16*Journal of Discourses* 10:224.

17Ibid. 3:354.

18Ibid. 3:302.

19*Deseret News*, 6 June 1877.


21*Deseret News*, 25 July 1865, 162–63. This statement, together with additional comments and signed as well by the Apostles, was reprinted in the *Deseret News* of 23 August 1865, 372–73.


24Ibid. 11:286, 13 January 1867.

25Ibid. 6:20, 6 December 1857.

26The origin of this covenent is explained in Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1884), 46, 47.

27Conference Report, April 1901, 2.

28Conference Report, April 1914, 5.

29Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:5.


31Ibid., 142.
Discourses of B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Press, 1948), 93–94.


John A. Widtsoe, A Rational Theology (Salt Lake City: General Priesthood Committee of the LDS Church, 1915), 30–31, emphasis added.

Ibid., 23–25.

David O. McKay, Pathways to Happiness (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1957), 260.


Hugh B. Brown, Continuing the Quest (Salt Lake City: Deseret Press, 1961), 4.


See Bruce R. McConkie's January 1974 address, "The Lord God of Joseph Smith," Brigham Young University Devotional Addresses 55 (Provo: BYU Press, 1972), 1–8, in which Elder McConkie states that God "has attained a state where he knows all things and nothing is withheld" (7); "The Seven Deadly Heresies," BYU Speeches of the Year (1980): 74–80, in which Elder McConkie lists belief in God's progression as one of the heresies; Robert L. Millet and Joseph Fielding McConkie, The Life Beyond (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 148–49, in which the authors declare, "Our Father's development and progression over an infinitely long period of time has brought him to a point at which he now presides as God Almighty, He who is omnipotent, omniscient, and, by means of his Holy Spirit, omnipresent: he has all power, all knowledge, and is, through the light of Christ, in and through all things."

Brigham Young, sermon preached in the old tabernacle, Salt Lake City, 13 June 1852, quoted in Hugh B. Brown, Continuing the Quest, 4, emphasis added.


Ibid., 93.


Nanking

Mother had little patience with us. She lived far away from the family she’d left in Nanking. On bad days, she’d teach us with chopsticks. Our hands never hurt until she grabbed the rolling pin, the one she used for dim sum on Saturday mornings: kwo teh and cha shiu bao. I think she was happiest then. A-po came to visit when I was four,

the last time mother saw her mother. The kitchen steeped in black tea leaves and eggs steaming in the rice cooker, shi-fan on the stove. Good for healing. When I was sick, mother brought instant soup to my bedside where she now sleeps alone on the other side of town. She knew of a home I’d never seen, taught me how to boil the shi-fan I take to her.

—Timothy Liu
Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism: Orthodoxy, Neoorthodoxy, Tension, and Tradition

Robert L. Millet

Much has been said in recent years about the development and "evolution" of thought and practice in Mormonism. Of particular interest to some is what is perceived to be a "reconstruction of Mormon doctrine," a movement on the part of the Church away from a traditional view of God, man, and salvation, toward a radical "progressive theology." In 1980 Thomas G. Alexander suggested that "the doctrines of God and man revealed in [the early publications of the Church] were not greatly different from those of some of the religious denominations of the time." Further, "the doctrine of God preached and believed before 1835 was essentially trinitarian, with God the Father seen as an absolute personage of Spirit, Jesus Christ as a personage of tabernacle, and the Holy Ghost as an impersonal spiritual member of the Godhead."^1^2

More recently, O. Kendall White has described what he calls a type of "Mormon neoorthodoxy."^3^ In White's view, a spirit of optimism gripped the nation in the years before the First World War, a spirit deriving from the Enlightenment; it was an era wherein a growth in science and technology had led to overly positive attitudes toward man and his potential. People began to conclude that no problems in society were beyond the reach of man's noble talent to resolve, and thus the first part of this century witnessed the growth of the "social gospel" movement, wherein attempts were made to engage the challenges of society with the positive and lifting teachings of Jesus. World War I brought about a massive change in perspective. It became obvious to modern man, especially many of the clergy, that man could not solve his own problems, could not deal humanely with his fellows, simply could not make it alone. These feelings of frustration, pessimism, and self-doubt began to be reflected in what came to be known

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as "neoorthodox" theology. Thus neoorthodoxy represented a "crisis theology," an attempt to deal with a threat to previously established belief systems. Theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr, Emil Brunner, and Karl Barth all recognized the need for a turn to a higher power, a return to the "orthodox" theology of the Reformation—an emphasis upon such doctrines as the sovereignty of God, the moral depravity of man, and salvation by grace.

From White's perspective, Mormonism emerged in the midst of Restorationism, with a theology not terribly unlike other Protestant faiths of the day. White believes, however, that in time Joseph Smith and the Mormons, especially as a result of such teachings as the King Follett Sermon, reached beyond their primitivist roots and developed into a progressive and expansive faith characterized by such beliefs as (and we note the contrast to Reformation thought) a finite God, the innate goodness of man, and exaltation by works. But with the expansion of the Church in the modern world, White proposes that a "crisis" in faith has taken place in the lives of many modern Mormons, particularly as they have engaged a growing secularization, more liberal ethical systems, accelerated efforts of anti-Mormons, or revisionist explanations for foundational events of Mormonism. He suggests that a form of "Mormon neoorthodoxy" has begun to develop—an attempt to return to a tighter "redemptive" theological system, based primarily upon a belief in the sovereignty of God, the moral depravity of man, and salvation by grace. Because Joseph Smith's progressive brand of Mormonism ingeniously linked the other-worldly with the here and now—because it pointed man in a positive and lifting direction, away from the pessimistic worldview of traditional Protestantism—White fears that "few things portend a more ominous future" for the Church than the growing trend toward a redemptive theology, what he calls Mormon neoorthodoxy.4

The work of the Restoration has unquestionably been a broadening and expanding process. Joseph Smith knew more about God and man in 1844 than he knew in the spring of 1820; both the Prophet's and the Church's understanding has come in a "line upon line" manner.5 However, I believe it is a mistake to accept in wholesale and uncritical fashion many of the presuppositions and conclusions of those, like Alexander and White, who propose a clear delineation between Joseph Smith's pre-1835 thought—especially the teachings of the Book of Mormon—and what came from the Prophet in the latter part of his ministry. The teachings of the Book of Mormon are not trinitarian, and the Prophet's pre-1835 theology was neither primitive nor Protestant. Further, while the recent reemphasis by the institutional Church on the teachings of
the Book of Mormon (and thus on a “redemptive theology”) may be an effort to strengthen the Saints in a day of cultural crisis, the idea that such a move represents a straying from the post-1835 thought of Joseph Smith is an unwarranted conclusion. On the key doctrines of God, man, and salvation, the Prophet’s early teachings did not differ markedly from that which he declared just prior to his death.

JOSEPH SMITH AND “TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY”

To suggest that the Book of Mormon reflects Joseph Smith’s “early thought” is to place the Nephite record within the developmental process of Joseph Smith and the Saints. It is, therefore, to accentuate the man, the translator, at the expense of the record. It is one thing to acknowledge that the words in the Book of Mormon reflect Joseph Smith’s language and background; this is as it should be, for the Book of Mormon is translation literature. It is quite another to suggest that the theology in the Book of Mormon reflects either the Prophet’s environment or his own religious worldview. We have little historical evidence to suggest that Joseph Smith had studied—or was even aware of—many of the great theological issues of his day. A hypothesis that posits an “expansionist” model of Book of Mormon translation (that much of the theology of the Book of Mormon represents Joseph Smith’s nineteenth-century expansion upon an ancient core source, the Nephite plates) or one that views the Book of Mormon as other than a theological “constant” tends to call into question the historicity of the record and its ancient contents. For Joseph Smith to use the English language with which he was familiar in recording the translation is historically consistent; to create the doctrine (or to place it in the mouths of Benjamin or Abinadi) is unacceptable and is tantamount to deceit and misrepresentation: it is to claim that the doctrines and principles are of ancient date (as the record itself declares), when, in fact, they are a fabrication (albeit an “inspired” fabrication) of a nineteenth-century man. We have every reason to believe that the Book of Mormon came through Joseph Smith, not from him.

Presumably those who believe the Book of Mormon presents a trinitarian concept of God assume that the book reflects the prevailing sentiments of the nineteenth century concerning God. This is worthy of at least brief discussion. Although the Book of Mormon prophets speak of the “oneness” of the members of the Godhead, this need not imply trinitarianism. There were, in fact, many people in the nineteenth century who believed in the oneness of the Godhead but rejected the mysterious notions associated with
trinitarianism. David Millard, a minister who organized an Eastern Christian Church, published a pamphlet in 1818 in which he attacked the prevailing view of the Trinity. He undertook a scriptural analysis of the New Testament to prove his point. "The whole tenor of scripture," he asserted, "concur[s] in the testimony, that Christ is verily the Son of God, as really so as Isaac is the son of Abram." Millard further stressed the illogicality of the Nicean concept: "Three Gods are not one God, any more than three times one are one or two and one are one: which not only destroys the rules of multiplication and addition, but is flat inconsistency." William Ellery Channing, known as the father of Unitarianism, declared in a famous Baltimore sermon in 1819, "We object to the doctrine of the Trinity." for "when we attempt to conceive of three Gods, we can do nothing more than represent to ourselves three agents"—meaning, of course, three different persons. In a letter dated 19 May 1835 concerning his beliefs prior to conversion to the Latter-day Saint faith, William W. Phelps no doubt reflected the views of other lay persons in nineteenth-century New England: "I was not a professor at the time, nor a believer in sectarian religion, but a believer in God, and the Son of God, as two distinct characters, and a believer in sacred scripture." There is no indication in Phelps's letter that such a belief was contrary in any way to the teachings of the restored Church; in fact, the statement implies that his preconversion beliefs were in harmony with the teachings of the Latter-day Saints.

In writing of the formative period of LDS history, Alexander notes that "there is little evidence that church doctrine . . . specifically differentiated between Christ and God. Indeed," he continues,

this distinction was probably considered unnecessary since the early discussions also supported trinitarian doctrine. Joseph Smith's 1832 account of the First Vision spoke only of one personage and did not make the explicit separation of God and Christ found in the 1838 version. The Book of Mormon declared that Mary "is the mother of God, after the manner of the flesh," which as James Allen and Richard Howard have pointed out was changed in 1837 to "mother of the Son of God."

Contrary to Alexander's claims, there is evidence to suggest that the Saints understood very early and very clearly the distinct and separate nature of the Father and Son. In 1831 John Whitmer wrote of an occasion wherein Joseph Smith "saw the heavens opened, and the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Father making intercession for his brethren, the Saints." In February of 1832 Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon beheld in vision the Father and Son as separate personages (D&C 76:20–23). To be sure, in his
1832 account of the First Vision, Joseph wrote, “I was filled with the Spirit of God and he opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord and he spake unto me.” However, Milton V. Backman, Jr., has rightly pointed out, “The thrust of the 1832 history was not who appeared but the Lord’s message to him.” It is interesting to note a statement by John Taylor in 1880 in which he declared that “as a commencement [to the work of restoration] the Lord appeared unto Joseph Smith, both the Father and the Son [note that John Taylor refers to both the Father and the Son as the Lord], the Father pointing to the Son said ‘this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.’”

The Book of Mormon also distinguishes between the Father and the Son in many instances. For example, in 1 Nephi 11:24 Nephi writes, “And I looked, and I beheld the Son of God going forth among the children of men.” Phrases such as “the Son of God,” and “the Son of the Everlasting God” occur scores of times throughout the remainder of the record. The presentation in the Book of Mormon is similar to that in the New Testament concerning the separateness yet oneness of the members of the Godhead. Although the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are separate and distinct individuals, they are infinitely more one than separate: one God, one Godhead, united in purpose, power, and glory (see 2 Ne. 31:21; Alma 11:44; Moro. 7:7). And yet they are separate persons. Consider the following points where the Book of Mormon distinguishes between the Father and the Son:

1. We pray to the Father in the name of the Son (2 Ne. 32:9; 3 Ne. 18:19–20; Morm. 9:27; Ether 4:15; Moro. 4:3; 5:2; 8:3; 10:4).
2. We worship the Father in the name of the Son (2 Ne. 25:16; Jacob 4:4–5).
3. Christ received powers from his Father (Mosiah 15:2–3; Hel. 5:10–11; Morm. 7:5).
4. Christ’s atonement reconciles us to God (Alma 12:33–34; Moro. 7:22, 26–27).
5. The voices of the Father and Son are distinguished (2 Ne. 31:10–15).
6. The entire ministry of Christ among the Nephites and his constant reference and deference to the Father evidence their separateness (3 Ne. 11:28).

In the final analysis, the Book of Mormon is about as trinitarian as the New Testament. Bernhard Lohse writes, “as far as the New Testament is concerned, one does not find in it an actual doctrine of the Trinity”; it was “well into the fourth century before the doctrine of the Trinity was dogmatically clarified.” As Backman has said, no one
has located a publication (such as an article appearing in a church periodical or statement from a missionary pamphlet) written by an active Latter-day Saint prior to the martyrdom of the Prophet that defends the traditional or popular credal concept of the Trinity. . . . Moreover, there are no references in critical writings of the 1830s (including statements by apostates) that Joseph Smith introduced in the mid-thirties the doctrine of separateness of the Father and Son.15

Only eleven days before his death, Joseph Smith said, "I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and the Holy Ghost a distinct personage or spirit, and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods."16 It seems unreasonable and out of character that Joseph Smith would have expounded a doctrine that was at variance with the teachings of a book he claimed to have received years earlier from God.

THE NATURE OF GOD: FROM THE LECTURES ON FAITH TO KING FOLLETT

Kendall White has suggested a shift in Joseph Smith’s teachings over the years regarding the nature of God—from a traditional Protestant view of God as an infinite and transcendent being to a “finite” being who was once a man as we are now. The two key texts for such a delineation are, of course, the Lectures on Faith, delivered to the School of the Elders in the winter of 1834–35, and the King Follett Sermon, delivered on 7 April 1844. As to the authorship of the lectures, Larry E. Dahl has written recently:

It appears that several of the brethren participated in writing the lectures. It is clear that Joseph Smith and perhaps others prepared them for publication after they were written. Undoubtedly, the lectures were, in the words of the Prophet John Taylor, "published with the sanction and approval of the Prophet Joseph Smith." It would therefore seem appropriate to use quotations from the Lectures on Faith and attribute the ideas, principles, and doctrine to the Prophet Joseph.17

"There are two personages," the School of the Elders was instructed,

who constitute the great, matchless, governing, and supreme power over all things, by whom all things were created and made, that are created and made. . . . They are the Father and the Son—the Father being a personage of spirit, glory, and power, possessing all perfection and fulness, the Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of tabernacle. (5:1–2)

This is a perplexing passage that has caused some confusion and may have contributed eventually to the decision to delete the
Lectures on Faith from the Doctrine and Covenants in 1921. 18 The problem lies in the fact that the Prophet appears to be teaching that God the Father is a "personage of spirit" while Jesus is a "personage of tabernacle." It is possible that Joseph Smith simply did not understand the corporeal or physical nature of God at the time the Lectures on Faith were delivered. His knowledge of things—like that of all men and women—was often incremental, and his development in understanding was therefore a "line upon line" development. As a result of the First Vision, the boy prophet knew that the heavens were no longer sealed; that Satan was more than myth or metaphor; and that the Father and Son were separate and distinct personages. But there is no mention in any of his four accounts of the First Vision of the fact that God has a body of flesh and bones. The earliest reference to the corporeality of God seems to come in a sermon on 5 January 1841. 19 It was not until 2 April 1843 in Ramus, Illinois, that the Prophet gave instructions on this matter that are the basis for D&C 130:22–23: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also. But the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit." 20

It is also possible, however, that Joseph Smith did indeed understand that God has a body but that the passage in lecture 5 has been misunderstood. What then could the phrase mean? To begin with, we should note that the complete expression is not "a personage of spirit" but rather "a personage of spirit, glory, and power." This may well be intended more as a description of God's divine nature—a statement regarding his exalted and glorified status—than of his physical being. The word spirit, as used, for example, in Moses 1, is a synonym for glory or power: God's Spirit is his glory (see Moses 1:9, 15). Thus it is that lecture 5 later speaks of "the Father and the Son possessing the same mind, the same wisdom, glory, power, and fulness—filling all in all; the Son being filled with the fulness of the mind, glory, and power; or, in other words, the spirit, glory, and power, of the Father, possessing all knowledge and glory" (5:2). Note that the phrase "spirit, glory, and power" is here used to describe what makes the Son one with the Father—the attributes of Godhood. 21

It is interesting that in the catechism following lecture 5 the response to the question, "What is the Father?" is given: "He is a personage of glory and of power." The rather obvious omission is any reference to the Father as a personage of spirit—perhaps because to say such would be repetitious; we have already established that he is a personage of power and glory, which to Joseph Smith may have been exactly the same as saying he is a personage of spirit. It is also worth noting in the catechism that all of the
scriptures cited to establish the Father as a personage of power and
glory speak of his attributes and his exaltation. Noticeably absent
is John 4:24 ("God is a spirit: and they that worship him must
worship him in spirit and truth")—the one passage from the Bible
that might have been used to establish clearly that God is a spirit.
But Joseph Smith would not cite this passage from the King James
Bible, since he had previously learned by revelation (some time
between November 1831 and 16 February 1832) that this verse
required an inspired translation: "The hour cometh and now is,
when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in
truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. For unto such hath
God promised his Spirit. And they who worship him, must worship
in spirit and in truth" (JST, John 4:25–26). It is possible, indeed, that
the inspired revision of the Bible had some impact on the Prophet’s
thought regarding the nature of God; that is to say, if he did not
know of the corporeality of God at the time of the First Vision, did
he know it by the time he had translated these verses in John?22

We are indebted to Milton V. Backman, Jr. for bringing to
light an important document—a description of Mormonism by a
Protestant clergyman in Ohio. Truman Coe, a Presbyterian minister
who had lived among the Saints in Kirtland for four years,
published the following in the 11 August 1836 Ohio Observer:
"They [the Mormons] contend that the God worshiped by the
Presbyterians and all other sectarians is no better than a wooden
god. They believe that the true God is a material being, composed
of body and parts; and that when the Creator formed Adam in his
own image, he made him about the size and shape of God him-
self."23 If a non-Mormon had observed as early as 1836 that the
Latter-day Saints were teaching that God has a body, it is certainly
possible that such things were known by Joseph Smith a year earlier
at the time the Lectures on Faith were presented.24

Finally, Joseph Smith’s teachings about Deity in no way
suggest that God is a finite being. Elohim is an exalted man, but he
possesses in their fulness the attributes of Godhood. We have no
indication whatever that Joseph changed his views on God’s
infinite nature between the time of the Lectures on Faith and the
King Follett Sermon. In short, I find no evidence to suggest that
Joseph the Prophet "outgrew" the lessons about God found in the
Book of Mormon (for example, 2 Ne. 9:20; Alma 26:35; Moro.
7:22) or the Lectures on Faith (4:11–19), or that he in some way
"progressed" beyond the notion that our Father in Heaven is, in fact,
God Almighty. M. L. Davis, a Washington correspondent for the
New York Enquirer offered this description of Joseph Smith in a
letter to his wife dated 6 February 1840:
My dear Mary:—I went last evening to hear "Joe Smith," the celebrated Mormon, expound his doctrine. I, with several others, had a desire to understand his tenets as explained by himself. He is not an educated man; but he is a plain, sensible, strong minded man. Everything he says, is said in a manner to leave an impression that he is sincere. There is no levity, no fanaticism, no want of dignity in his deportment.

He commenced by saying, that he knew the prejudices which were abroad in the world against him, but requested us to pay no respect to the rumors which were in circulation respecting him or his doctrines. He was accompanied by three or four of his followers. He said, "I will state to you our belief, so far as time will permit." "I believe," said he, "that there is a God, possessing all the attributes ascribed to Him by all Christians of all denominations; that He reigns over all things in heaven and on earth, and that all are subject to his power."

He then spoke rationally of the attributes of Divinity, such as foreknowledge, mercy &c.25

James Burgess recorded a sermon of the Prophet delivered on 9 July 1843 in which Joseph explains how God can be both omnipresent and at the same time "a personage of tabernacle." "What part of God is omnipresent?" Joseph asked. He responded: "It is the Spirit of God which proceeds from him; consequently, God is in the four winds of heaven, and when man receives intelligence is it not by the Spirit of God?"26 One is able to better appreciate Joseph Smith’s humility before the Almighty in a prayer offered on 23 August 1842:

O, thou who seeth and knoweth the hearts of all men; thou eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Jehovah, God; thou Elohim, that sitteth, as saith the Psalmist, enthroned in heaven; look down upon thy servant Joseph at this time; and let faith on the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to a greater degree than thy servant ever yet has enjoyed, be conferred upon him, even the faith of Elijah; and let the lamp of eternal life be lit up in his heart, never to be taken away. And let the words of eternal life be poured upon the soul of thy servant, that he may know thy will, thy statutes, and thy commandments, and thy judgments to do them.27

In 1842, just two years before his death, the Prophet explained concerning the Great God: "The past, the present, and the future were and are, with Him, one eternal now."28 Simply because God has not always been God, it need not follow that he is not now a possessor of that fulness of light, truth, and glory that constitute him as infinite.

In the Lectures on Faith, God is described as being the perfect and infinite embodiment of every good attribute and virtue. For example, he is said to possess a fulness of knowledge, faith or
power, justice, judgment, mercy, and truth. Indeed, the lectures explain that unless the Saint does know and acknowledge that God possesses these attributes in perfection he cannot exercise faith in him unto life and salvation (see Lectures on Faith, 4:1–19). But though God is absolute in the sense that he embodies and possesses the perfections of Deity, he is not absolute or transcendent in the classical creedal sense—in the sense that he is unapproachable, is "the wholly other," beyond the reach or comprehension of finite man. Rather, the God described in the Lectures on Faith, like the God spoken of a decade later in the King Follett Sermon, is one who can be known and understood, who can be approached and seen, even by mortal man. Lecture 2 declares:

Let us here observe that after any portion of the human family are made acquainted with the important fact that there is a God, who has created and does uphold all things, the extent of their knowledge respecting his character and glory will depend upon their diligence and faithfulness in seeking after him, until, like Enoch, the brother of Jared, and Moses, they shall obtain faith in God, and power with him to behold him face to face. (4:55)

Lecture 5 teaches that man can become a joint heir, a coinheritor with Christ to all that the Father has; further, he can, through the Spirit, become one with the Father and the Son, be "transformed into the same image or likeness" of "him who fills all in all." Thus, "as the Son partakes of the fullness of the Father through the Spirit, so the saints are, by the same Spirit, to be partakers of the same fullness, to enjoy the same glory; for as the Father and the Son are one, so, in like manner, the saints are to be one in them" (5:2–3). In short, the God of the Lectures on Faith is one who desires to glorify his children and make them even as he is.

MAN: DIVINE OR DEPRAVED?

In writing of the "orthodox" Mormon view of human nature, O. Kendall White observes that "if traditional Mormonism's concept of God deviates from classical Christianity, its assessment of human nature is an even more radical departure." Further, he claims that "traditional Mormon optimism is not limited to the denial of human contingency. It is boldly expressed in the claim that human nature is basically good, that an individual is 'a God in embryo.'" Then, describing what he has labeled the Mormon "neoorthodox" position, he writes: "Although acknowledging the Fall as necessary for human exaltation, Mormon neoorthodoxy typically emphasizes the negative consequences of the Fall" by adopting such language as "carnal man" and "evils of the flesh."
Since Mormon neoorthodox theologians work within the context of Mormon metaphysics, their concept of the human predicament is not identical with Catholic or Protestant doctrines of original sin. They accept the traditional Mormon belief in the innocence of infants and perceive the Fall as having at least some positive consequences. Disclaimers to the contrary, Mormon neoorthodoxy comes close to traditional Christian doctrines of human nature, though without abandoning important traditional Mormon beliefs.  

As early as his translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith knew that Adam’s was a “fortunate fall,” that Adam and Eve’s action in the Garden of Eden was as much a part of the foreordained plan as the atonement of Christ (2 Ne. 2:22–25). In addition, the Prophet recorded in his inspired translation of Genesis (November–December 1830) that God had forgiven Adam and Eve of their transgression in the Garden, that “the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt.” At the same time, and in the same revelation, the Lord made it clear that “inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts” (Moses 6:53–55). That is to say, Joseph Smith learned and taught that there was no original sin and that man does have the power to choose good in mortality; he also learned from the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 16:1–3; Alma 22:14; Ether 3:2) and his Bible translation, however, that there are real and noticeable effects of the Fall.

Modern scripture forcefully attests that those who take advantage of the atonement of Christ thereby rise above a carnal and fallen state. But those who love Satan more than God—who choose to come out in open rebellion against God and his ways—are carnal, sensual, devilish, enemies to God (see Mosiah 3:18–19, 16:1–3; D&C 20:20; Moses 5:13). We have no indication that Joseph Smith, either in private conversations or in public discourse, ever taught doctrine or expounded positions different from those found in the scripture that came through him. On some occasions he spoke of the nobility of man and on others of the fallen nature of man. The situation, the circumstances, the audience, and the specific point to be made were factors in determining what aspect of the doctrine of God, man, and salvation the Prophet chose to lay stress upon. For example, M. L. Davis, the newspaperman mentioned above, summarized the Prophet’s teachings on man and the fall as follows:

“I believe in the fall of man, as recorded in the Bible; I believe that God foreknew everything, but did not foreordain everything; I deny that foreordain and foreknow is the same thing. He foreordained the fall of man; but all merciful as He is, He foreordained at the same time, a plan for redemption for all mankind. I believe in the Divinity
of Jesus Christ, and that He died for the sins of all men, who in Adam had fallen." He then entered into some details, the result of which tended to show, his total unbelief of what is termed original sin. He believes that it is washed away by the blood of Christ, and that it no longer exists. As a necessary consequence, he believes that we are all born pure and undefiled. That all children dying at an early age (say eight years) not knowing good from evil, were incapable of sinning; and that all such assuredly go to heaven. "I believe," said he, "that a man is a moral, responsible, free agent; that although it was foreordained he should fall, and be redeemed, yet after the redemption it was not foreordained that he should again sin."31

Some three and a half years later, Joseph explained in Nauvoo that after God had created the heavens and the earth he came down on the sixth day and said: Let us make man in our own image. In whose image? In the image of [the] Gods created they them, male and female—innocent, harmless, and spotless, bearing the same character and the same image as the Gods. And when man fell he did not lose his image, but his character still [retained] the image of his Maker.32

Having sifted through these remarks, one might be prone to conclude that Joseph Smith believed and taught only that man was noble and Godlike. To draw such a conclusion, however, would be to ignore the Prophet's teachings on the other side of the issue and thus to misrepresent his whole theological view. For example, in a letter to his wife Emma on 13 October 1832, Joseph wrote:

This day I have been walking through the most splendid part of the city of New York. The buildings are truly great and wonderful to the astonishment of every beholder, and the language of my heart is like this: Can the great God of all the earth, Maker of all things magnificent and splendid, be displeased with man for all these great inventions sought out by them? My answer is, No, [he] cannot be, seeing these works are calculated to make men comfortable, wise, and happy.

But then the Prophet went on to say:

Therefore not for the works can the Lord be displeased, only against man is the anger of the Lord kindled, because they give Him not the glory; therefore their iniquities shall be visited upon their heads and their works shall be burned up with unquenchable fire. The iniquity of the people is printed in every countenance and nothing but the dress of the people makes them look fair and beautiful. All is deformity. There is something in every countenance that is disagreeable, with few exceptions. Oh, how long, O Lord, shall this order of things exist and darkness cover the earth and gross darkness cover the people? . . . When I reflect upon this great city, like Ninevah, not discerning their right hand from their left, yea, more than two hundred thousand souls, my bowels [are] filled with compassion towards them and I am determined to lift up my voice in this city and leave the event with God, who holdeth all things in his hands.33
In 1843 the Prophet declared simply that "there is one thing under the sun which I have learned and that is that the righteousness of man is sin." In the same year, he said, "I do not think there have been many good men on the earth since the days of Adam, but there was one good man and his name was Jesus."

Joseph Smith denied that man was by nature (because of the Fall) a morally depraved creature; he did not believe that Adam's "sin" was entailed upon his posterity through conception or birth. But he did teach that we live in a fallen sphere; that man is conceived into a world of sin; and that we have an obligation to respond to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, put off the natural man through the atonement of Christ, and be redeemed from and rise above the state of things on earth.

SALVATION: BY GRACE OR BY WORKS?

Kendall White claims that because of an optimistic assessment of human nature, "traditional Mormonism does not emphasize the grace of God":

In contrast with orthodox preachers who quote Paul's "by grace are ye saved," most Mormons rely more on James's "faith without works is dead." There is a significant absence of Pauline theology in traditional Mormonism, though Mormons often quote Paul. Mormons do quote Paul's moral exhortations, but typically reinterpret his concept of grace to mean that humanity will be physically resurrected through the gracious act of God.

The traditional Mormon doctrine of salvation is set apart from classical Christianity by its emphasis on merit and insistence upon the perfectibility of the individual. Individuals must participate in various sacraments, such as baptism, receiving the Holy Spirit, and temple endowments, must obtain the necessary secular and religious knowledge, and must develop the requisite moral character to become like God. In contrast with classical Christianity, Mormonism emphasizes human rather than divine responsibility.

Mormon neoorthodoxy, on the other hand, is characterized, according to White, by

an apparent lack of concern for the gradual development of character through the performance of good works... Its doctrine of salvation requires a sudden, permanent, and total regeneration of human nature. Moral behavior is secondary to a surrender of will through "spiritual rebirth." The central task for the sinner is to put off the "natural man" and become a saint through the atonement of Christ.

If "traditional Mormonism" is defined in terms of what many persons in the Church believe, then one might agree with White's
conclusion; it may well be that too many Mormons are possessed of a “works-righteousness” mentality. But if traditional Mormonism is defined in terms of the doctrines found in the scriptures delivered through Joseph Smith, then White’s thesis is seriously flawed. The Book of Mormon stresses that “there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Ne. 2:8). There was no question in the minds of the Nephite prophets that salvation (meaning exaltation or eternal life—the Book of Mormon does not make a distinction between the two) was “free,” freely available to all through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (see 2 Ne. 2:4, 8). Grace is definitely a central issue in the Book of Mormon. The prophets declared repeatedly that in the end man’s merits cannot deliver him from death and hell, but rather he must rely “wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (see 2 Ne. 31:19; Alma 22:13–14, 24:10; Moro. 6:3–4).

Yet one cannot conclude categorically that the teachings of the Book of Mormon and of the early Latter-day Saints were of grace alone. Works of righteousness—receiving the ordinances of salvation and enduring faithfully to the end—were seen as essential to salvation. Note the following statements from the Book of Mormon:

And it came to pass that I [Nephi] said unto them [his brothers] that it [the river of filthy water in Lehi’s dream] was a representation of things both temporal and spiritual; for the day should come that they must be judged of their works, yea, even the works which were done by the temporal body in their days of probation. (1 Ne. 15:32)

I say unto you [Alma speaking to the people of Zarahemla], can you imagine to yourselves that ye hear the voice of the Lord, saying unto you, in that day: Come unto me ye blessed, for behold, your works have been the works of righteousness upon the face of the earth? (Alma 5:16; see also v. 41)

Therefore, prepare ye the way of the Lord, for the time is at hand that all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been—if they have been righteous they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ; and if they have been evil they shall reap the damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivation of the devil. (Alma 9:28)

And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good.

And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil. Therefore all things shall be restored to their proper order. . . . (Alma 41:3–4)
Too often we fail to recognize the invaluable reconciliation of the grace-works issue in the Book of Mormon. Stated simply, grace is a necessary but insufficient condition; works is a necessary but insufficient condition; the works of man (those things we can do), when coupled with the grace of God (those things only the Lord can do), are sufficient for salvation (see 2 Ne. 25:23; Moro. 10:32).38

It is misleading to suggest that Joseph Smith and the Saints forsook the doctrine of salvation by grace in favor of a view of exaltation by works. I know of no place in the Prophet’s sermons where he dismisses or lessens the importance of the grace of Christ, or where he stresses the works of man to the exclusion of the redemptive labors of the Lord. In fact, he cautioned the leadership of the Church in Nauvoo against pride and self-sufficiency:

When the Twelve or any other witness of Jesus Christ stands before the congregations of the earth and they preach in the power and demonstration of the Holy Ghost, and the people are astonished and confounded at the doctrine and say that that man has preached a powerful discourse, a great sermon, then let that man or those men take care that they do not ascribe the glory unto themselves; but be careful that they are humble and ascribe the praise and glory to God and the Lamb, for it is by the power of the Holy Priesthood and the Holy Ghost that they have power thus to speak. What art thou, O man, but dust; and from whom [hast] thou received thy power and blessings but from God?39

The inspired translation of Romans 4:16 points up the mandatory union of divine assistance and individual deeds: “Therefore ye are justified of faith and works, through grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.”

A final comment is in order regarding Kendall White’s description of the neoorthodox position as one which has “an apparent lack of concern for the gradual development of character through the performance of good works” and instead “requires a sudden, permanent, and total regeneration of human nature.” Bruce R. McConkie (designated by White as being neoorthodox in his views) expressed the following ideas about sudden regeneration and gradual development in 1968:

A person may get converted in a moment, miraculously. That is what happened to Alma the younger. He had been baptized in his youth, he had been promised the Holy Ghost, but he had never received it. He was too worldly-wise; he went off with the sons of Mosiah to destroy the church... Alma was in this state, and then this occasion occurred when a new light came into his soul, when he was changed from his fallen and carnal state to a state of righteousness. In his instance the conversion was miraculous, in the snap of a finger, almost.... But that is not the way it happens with most people. With
most people conversion is a process; and it goes step by step, degree by degree, level by level, from a lower state to a higher, from grace to grace, until the time that the individual is wholly turned to the cause of righteousness. Now this means that an individual overcomes one sin today and another sin tomorrow. He perfects his life in one field now, and in another field later on. And the conversion process goes on, until it is completed, until we become, literally, as the Book of Mormon says, saints of God instead of natural men.\textsuperscript{40}

Some eight years later, Elder McConkie talked in similar terms about being born again:

We say that a man has to be born again, meaning that he has to die as pertaining to the unrighteous things in the world. . . . But that doesn't happen in an instant, suddenly. That . . . is a process. Being born again is a gradual thing, except in a few isolated instances that are so miraculous that they get written up in the scriptures. As far as the generality of the members of the Church are concerned, we are born again by degrees, and we are born again to added light and added knowledge and added desires for righteousness as we keep the commandments.\textsuperscript{41}

WHO (WHAT) IS ORTHODOX?

I wrote my doctoral dissertation at a university in the south-east under the direction of a former Presbyterian minister, now a scholar of some repute in the field of Religion in America, and one quite familiar with the history of the LDS church. When he finished reading the first draft of my dissertation, a study of the expanding concept of Zion in Mormon theology, he pushed the papers to the center of the long seminar table where we were working and said, "Bob, I don't think you are making your points strongly enough." I asked what he meant, and he offered observations to the following effect:

The Mormon position in the religious world is stronger than I think you realize. You people are able to pull off something that no other religious group has been able to do; you are able to reconcile the irreconcilable. The LDS faith is able to effect the union of the priestly and the prophetic—the static and the dynamic—elements of religion. You hold tightly to the beliefs and rites of ancient Israel and first-century Christianity with one hand and reach into the future through continuing revelation with the other. That's quite a feat. No one else has been able to do it!

He then suggested that I write with a bit more confidence and defend our position on particular matters with the zeal that had characterized Joseph and Brigham and the early Saints. I was both shamed and instructed, and the lesson has been taken to heart.
One meets with great difficulty in categorizing or rubricizing Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, or for that matter Mormonism as a whole. Was he a liberal thinker? Was he conservative? Do we take a literal or a figurative view of scripture? Because of our access to prophetic vision and revelation, it is nearly impossible to classify or even describe Mormonism adequately through already-established creeds or labels. Some models may be temporarily helpful in comparing and contrasting Mormonism with other social or religious phenomena, but when we force the phenomena to fit the model we may end up with a caricature rather than a characterization.

It is not so easy to determine what is "traditional" or "orthodox" Mormonism. Orthodoxy has to do with a straight and proper walk, with appropriate beliefs and practices. In our case, it may or may not be a course charted by Joseph Smith or Brigham Young or some Church leader of the past. Some who claim to be orthodox on the basis of following the teachings of Brother Joseph—for example, members of polygamous cults—are not in harmony with the Church's constituted authorities and are therefore not orthodox. "When the Prophet Joseph Smith was martyred," President Harold B. Lee said in 1964, "there were many saints who died spiritually with Joseph. So it was when Brigham Young died; so it was when John Taylor died. . . . We have some today willing to believe someone who is dead and gone and to accept his words as having more authority than the words of a living authority today."42

In a meeting of the Council of Fifty held on 10 March 1844, Joseph Smith gave an assignment to revise the Constitution of the United States so as to make it the "voice of Jehovah." Later in the week, John Taylor, as a representative of a special committee of three, responded that no progress had been made toward the preparation of a constitution for the kingdom of God. The Prophet acknowledged that he knew of the impossibility of drafting such a document; he had approached God in prayer and received the following direction: "Ye are my Constitution and I am your God and ye are my spokesmen, therefore from henceforth keep my commandments."43 "In the Church," Orson Pratt explained in commenting on this revelation, "we take the law of God and his priesthood as the constitution of his Church—here in this Council we have a living constitution, not a written one—which we must conform to."44 The Church is to be governed by current, daily revelation. "Are we then," Orson Pratt asked on a later occasion, "to be governed in all respects by those limited things that we were governed by in our childhood? Will there be no change of circumstances? Yes," he answered, "but these will all be in accordance
with the development made by the progress of the kingdom. . . .
New circumstances require new power, new knowledge, new
additions, new strength.45 To fix ourselves too tightly to the words
of a past prophet-leader—even Joseph Smith—is to approximate
the mindset of certain fundamentalist Protestant groups who reject
modern divine communication in the name of allegiance to the
final, infallible, and complete word of God found between the
covers of the Bible. Creeds and categories and constitutions often
prove to be more confining than comforting.

It was in Nauvoo in 1841, during the zenith of his ministry and
only three years before his death, that Joseph Smith made his now-
famous statement that the Book of Mormon is “the most correct of
any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion.”46 It would
seem that by that time in his life he could speak not only with
authority but also with perspective. After having received hundreds
of revelations from God, after having seen numerous visions and
preached a myriad of doctrinal sermons, surely the Prophet was in
a position to be able to place the Book of Mormon (and its
doctrines) in a proper theological context. Only the night before his
martyrdom,

Hyrum Smith read and commented upon extracts from the Book of
Mormon, on the imprisonments and deliverance of the servants of
God for the Gospel’s sake. Joseph bore a powerful testimony to the
guards of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, the
restoration of the Gospel, the administration of angels, and that the
kingdom of God was again established upon the earth.47

Such a scene certainly bespeaks more than sentimental attachment
on the part of the Prophet to the scriptural record that had come
through his instrumentality almost two decades earlier.

Kendall White is correct in detecting a movement afloat in
Mormonism in the latter part of the twentieth century. It is a
movement toward a more thoroughly redemptive base to our
theology, but a movement that is in harmony with the teachings of
the Book of Mormon and one that may be long overdue.48 These
recent developments may represent more of a retrenchment and a
refinement than a reversion. I believe that “few things portend a
more ominous future” for us than to fail to take seriously the Book
of Mormon and the redemptive theology set forth therein; the only
real “crisis” to fear would be attempts to build Mormonism upon
any other foundation.
NOTES


4Ibid., 176.


7*The True Messiah Exalted, or Jesus Christ Really the Son of God, Vindicated; in Three Letters to a Presbyterian Minister* (Canandaigua, N.Y.: N.p., 1818), 5–8.


9*The Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1 (May 1835): 115.


11F. Mark McKittrick and Roger D. Launius, eds., *An Early Latter Day Saint History: The Book of John Whitmer* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1980), 67, punctuation corrected. That it was Joseph Smith who saw the vision (it is unclear from the Whitmer account) is attested by Levi Hancock, who said of this occasion: "Joseph Smith then stepped out on the floor and said, 'I now see God, and Jesus Christ at his right hand, let them kill me, I should not feel death as I am now.'" (Levi Hancock, *Journal*, n.d., 33, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah).


15Backman, "Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” 29.


19Ehat and Cook, eds., *Words of Joseph Smith*, 60; see also statements on 16 February 1841 (p. 63) and on 9 March 1841 (p. 64).

20Ibid., 173.

21Bruce R. McConkie offered the following as commentary on this passage from lecture 5: "Each is a personage of spirit; each is a personage of tabernacle. Both of them have bodies, tangible bodies of flesh and bones. They are resurrected beings. . . . A personage of spirit, as here used and as distinguished from the spirit children of the Father, is a resurrected personage. Resurrected bodies, as contrasted with mortal bodies, are in fact spiritual bodies [See 1 Cor. 15:44; D&C 88:27]" (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985], 72–73).

22At an even earlier date, November–December 1830, the Prophet’s inspired translation resulted in detail concerning God that might have suggested his corporeality—that he had created man “in the image of his own body” (Moses 6:9).


2Quoted in Ehat and Cook, eds., Words of Joseph Smith, 32.

7Ibid., 230–31, spelling and punctuation corrected.

8Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1984), 536.

9History of the Church 4:597.

10White, Mormon Neoorthodoxy, 68–69.

11Ibid., 96–97.

12Ehat and Cook, eds., Words of Joseph Smith, 33, 6 February 1840.

13Ibid., 231, 9 July 1843, spelling and punctuation corrected.

14Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, 252–53, spelling and punctuation corrected.


16History of the Church 5:401.

17White, Mormon Neoorthodoxy, 101–2.

18Ibid., 104.

For a detailed discussion of an LDS view of grace and works, see my book By Grace Are We Saved (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989).

19Ehat and Cook, eds., Words of Joseph Smith, 7, 2 July 1839, spelling and punctuation corrected.

20Bruce R. McConkie, address at BYU First Stake Conference, 11 February 1968.

21Bruce R. McConkie, “Jesus Christ and Him Crucified,” 1976 Brigham Young University Devotional Speeches of the Year (Provo: Brigham Young University Publications, 1977), 399. President Harold B. Lee also taught that the new birth is generally a quiet but steady process (see Stand Ye in Holy Places [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974], 58–61).


26History of the Church 4:461.

27Ibid. 6:600.

President Ezra Taft Benson has reminded us that our failure to take seriously the Book of Mormon during the last sixty years has contributed to the condemnation spoken of in D&C 84:54–61, a scourge and judgment that still rests upon the Church (see A Witness and a Warning [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1988] for a summary of President Benson’s teachings on the subject. See also Grant Underwood, “Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology,” Dialogue 17 [Autumn 1984]: 35–74, for a discussion of how the Book of Mormon was utilized in the formative period of Church history).
Hotblood

What a horse Medio could have been—
Sixteen hands, eleven fifty
And grandson of Man-o-War
On his father's side
Red sorrel with two white feet
And a star,
A coat as fine as mouse fur
That rippled over thoroughbred lean.

Foaled in Montana as a remount,
Rough broke at three
Then turned out to grass
When the cavalry quit buying.

He was five when he came to me—
Gaunt from the railroad car
And hotblood wild—more untameable
Than any desert-caught mustang.

I was sixteen
And thought I knew my horses
From a Welsh pony
And a Morgan-Hambletonian cross.
I knew about gentling them down
With grain and curry comb,
And snubbing to a tame horse
And riding on plowed ground
And holding their heads up
So they couldn't buck.

But it wasn't enough.

I lost count of the times
He pulled his head loose
And threw me off.
And he ran away with me—
Two miles on a paved road,
Running like the leader in a race—
Paying no attention
To my seesawing the reins—
Until he was stopped by a brick wall.

Once we put him in a chute
To check his feet
And he kicked at one of us
And ripped his velvet hide
On a projecting nail,
And then frantic, he kicked again
And again and again—
Until the leg was ruined
And he had to be destroyed.

I’ve known men like that.

—John S. Harris

John S. Harris is a professor of English at Brigham Young University.
Science and Theology: A Search for the Uncommon Denominator

A. Lester Allen

Students in elementary math learn that to add fractions they must find a common denominator. Adding $\frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4}$ is difficult until the fractions are changed so they have the common denominator of 12: $\frac{1}{3} = \frac{4}{12}; \frac{1}{4} = \frac{3}{12};$ and $\frac{4}{12} + \frac{3}{12} = \frac{7}{12}$. The common denominator helps put together incompatible numbers or concepts.

Scholars have found it difficult to add science and theology because they lack a common denominator. The scientists’ theories of evolution and the theologians’ revelations of man’s creation could not be integrated harmoniously into a single, acceptable narrative because of the absence of a unifying concept. This essay relates my prolonged search for such a common denominator, a search that had its origin in the assumption that truths from science and from theology ought to blend—or at least ought not to conflict with each other.

When I first came to BYU in 1954, I was surprised to discover a feud in the university concerning creation and evolution. Its roots extended back half a century and even included some leading figures in the Church. In general, those with scientific training tended to favor at least some aspects of evolution, while those who were not trained in the sciences were prone to reject evolution. Feelings often ran high, and accusations of stupidity or lack of testimony sparked heated debates. I was disappointed that such a feud existed. I knew that all truths originate with the Lord and are mutually supportive. I was confident that science and technology had good track records for unraveling and applying truths of the natural world. I saw in light bulbs, plastic bags, and electronic calculators the handiwork of God. I also had faith in the revelations of God to his authorized prophets and had witnessed the divine guidance of his children.

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Of course, I was aware that there were some misinterpreted facts and false theories of science, as well as false doctrines and uninspired misinterpretations of scripture. But I was confident that earnest scholars who were well trained in science and also qualified to receive divine guidance could identify and sort out the truths and piece them together as a beautiful, comprehensive jigsaw puzzle. This would involve synthesizing evolution—the ancient story of our planet written in the rocks—with creation—the scriptural account of man's premortal origin and advent on the earth. I knew there were Latter-day Saint scholars who were well-qualified for this task, such as the former geologist-Apostle James E. Talmage, and the late, eminent Henry Eyring. I wondered why they hadn't provided an acceptable synthesis, and perhaps I should have been content to accept their efforts. But I was encouraged by their optimistic attitude toward God's continuing revelations of the natural world and his divine guidance of the prophets. I was also bold enough to think I could search for a common denominator and an acceptable synthesis. I was spurred on in this self-appointed task by statements from presidents of the Church that seemed to indicate there was still room for creative thought on these topics. David O. McKay once declared, "On the subject of organic evolution, the Church has officially taken no position."1 Spencer W. Kimball said, "The creators breathed into their nostrils the breath of life and man and woman became living souls. We don't know exactly how their coming into this world happened, and when we're able to understand it the Lord will tell us."2 I hoped I would soon be able to understand it and that the Lord would then tell me.

As I continued to study science and theology, and scientists' and theologians' opinions, I came to feel that we only needed improved learning and communication to share our common truths. (After all, scientists could receive revelation, and theologians could be logical, couldn't they?) I looked for missing links and even forged some myself, attempting to weld together some of the disparate evidence.

As a "theistic" evolutionist, I stood on what I assumed was middle ground of debated issues, such as the origin of the physical bodies of Adam and Eve. The scriptural descriptions of Adam's entry into mortality did not seem to relate well to the physical record displayed in the fossils and cultural artifacts. For example, the Lord told Moses that Adam, presumably around 4,000 B.C., "became a living soul, the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also" (Moses 3:7). Yet anthropologists and archaeologists had cultural evidences extending back thousands of years. I thought the issue could be resolved if we could just stretch the interpretations of the scriptures.
It seemed most "reasonable" to me that the earth with its plant and animal life had evolved—that the evolution story was generally correct. In the meantime the creation of our spirit bodies was performed in the spirit world: "For I, the Lord God, created all things, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth" (Moses 3:5). Then came the creation of Adam and Eve and their placement in the Garden of Eden as paradisiacal beings (see Abr. 5:7–8). From the Garden they fell, involving a change from the paradisiacal, immortal condition to the mortality of this world—perhaps a reversal of the process of translation of the Apostle John and the Three Nephites.

Another divisive issue was whether the holy writ indicated there was death of any living thing before the fall of Adam. Even Apostles of the Church were divided on this issue. Some felt that Lehi implied there was no death before the Fall when he said, "And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the Garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end" (2 Ne. 2:22). But I agreed with Elder Talmage, who wrote, "These [organisms] lived and died, age after age, while the earth was yet unfit for human habitation."\(^3\)

I thought the word "state" might have been used by Lehi to mean that all things God had created remained in a state of ineligibility for the resurrection unless Adam fell from immortality to mortality and thus became subject to death. So it seemed to me that harmony could be achieved, at least in the Latter-day Saint community, if we would accept some concepts and reject others, according to my interpretations.

But my proposals didn't settle anything. Scientists felt my allowance for the supernatural was an escape from reality. Believers thought my testimony was shaky. As Joseph Fielding Smith said, "The theistic evolutionist is a weak-kneed and unbelieving religionist, who is constantly apologizing for the miracles of the scriptures, and who does not believe in the divine mission of Jesus Christ."\(^4\)

And so the debate continued. I started to wonder if the differing points of view would ever be reconciled. But how could they not be? God was the creator of the earth and all the creatures that produced the fossils. He also created our spirits and the mortal bodies in which they were placed. The record interpreted in the rocks seemed to reveal truths, as did the interpretations of scripture. The different stories of our origin and history should have been mutually supportive. Then why was there not more concordance?
After pondering on these issues for many years, I have come to believe that the origin of the debate lies in the fact that the mind has two different processing systems. Knowledge from reason and knowledge from revelation don’t follow the same tracks. Reason and logic employ the temporal mind whereas revelation and faith employ the spirit mind. Our rational mind allows us to know facts, but revelation to the spirit mind lets us feel knowledge. We can prove facts to others, but knowledge of revelation can be accepted by others only on faith—it isn’t always logical. The two kinds of knowledge use mental tools that are not interchangeable. And they have no common denominator that would allow their synthesis.

Yet the ultimate source of all truth is the Lord, and this can serve as an uncommon denominator. When a prophet needs direction for the Church, or when a distraught mother is entitled to divine guidance for her child, the Lord transmits information to the qualified soul. Likewise, when the Lord needs to enlighten the world with a new truth, perhaps an invention to help set the stage for the millennium, a seeking, prepared mind receives a sudden “insight.” Much of the time what is called insight seems to be only the intelligent application of natural processes in the mind. But the Lord may also use this vehicle of mental enlightenment at times for his own purposes. Brigham Young said, “God has revealed all the truth that is now in the possession of the world, whether it be scientific or religious. The whole world are under obligation to him for what they know and enjoy; they are indebted to him for it all, and I acknowledge him in all things.”

The ways in which the two kinds of knowledge are tested for their validity are also profoundly different. The principle of a new invention may be passed on to others using only reason and logic, without prayer or further divine intervention, but the truth of a revelation to one person can only be accepted by another as a matter of faith. We may believe that the prophet has received a revelation, but if we want to know its truth for ourselves we must seek our own divine assurance. An experience of the temporal mind can be directly transferred to another person by reason, whereas an experience of the spirit mind must come through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Faith, alone, will not generate an understanding of temporal events as effectively as reason does, and revelation does not unfold to logical analysis. Furthermore, the dualism of the mind seems to create a barrier to mutual understanding, especially between those who rely principally on reason and those who rely on revelation for their understanding.

This may help us more clearly understand the causes of the debate between evolutionists and creationists. The concepts and
evidence for evolution are processed with rational tools while God's divine acts in the creation are comprehended through the spirit. The rational mind can know about God's dealings, but cannot know their reality. On the other hand, gaining knowledge of the fossil record is rational, not an act of spiritual faith. Thus we have two distinct systems of perceiving and assimilating knowledge. They do not have a common denominator and therefore can't easily be combined. But they do have an uncommon denominator: both knowledges have a divine origin. This gives us the assurance that they do—they must, somehow—work together. Yet it still may not be easy to see how they blend.

Perhaps we should not expect an understanding of how the two separate stories of evolution and creation—one read in nature and the other in scripture—relate to one another. They probably describe different events. They have been obtained through different media and are interpreted through our different minds. But it is my firm conviction, resulting from both reason and revelation, that they are not mutually exclusive. Through the use of the uncommon denominator they will eventually be harmonized. In the meantime, we keep trying to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. We may hope to be able to do this at a time in the future when "[t]he Lord ... shall reveal ... things of the earth, by which it was made, and the purpose and the end thereof" (D&C 101:32–33).

In addition to mind dualism, there is another barrier to harmonizing information from science with that from theology. We have some restrictions of our perception of reality. Our mortal minds are limited to the extent that we can comprehend only certain aspects of matter, space, energy, and time.

What is the nature of matter or substance? A "solid" table is made of minuscule atoms whose ultimate nature is still largely unknown, which evidently are mostly empty space containing extremely tiny particles and electrical charges. If we could view the table from the dimension of subatomic particles, we would see that solid matter is almost entirely empty space.

A consideration of other states of matter—paradisiacal, celestial, and spirit matter—is even more overwhelming. Joseph Smith said, "All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure" (D&C 131:7). The heavens and their angels apparently exist in states of matter that cannot even be discerned with our vision.

The nature of space is related to matter. The mortal mind cannot fathom space that is infinitely large or infinitesimally small. Our perception of space is related to our size. If we were a million miles tall or as small as an electron, our view of reality would be much different than it now is.
Further, our perception of space is limited to three dimensions, but perhaps there are more. In Edward Abbot's delightful little book *Flatland,* the inhabitants perceive only two dimensions. Objects have length and breadth but no height. If your body were to pass through their flat plane of existence, they would see only a circle or oval section of you, viewed from its edge. They would not know that there was more of you, up and down from their plane, because "up" and "down" would be inconceivable. An adventurous Flatlander escapes into Spaceland and discovers the wonderful reality of three-dimensional objects. On his return to Flatland, he tries to describe what he has seen, but the others cannot comprehend his experience and refuse even to consider the possibility of a third dimension. The adventurer later encounters Lineland, whose inhabitants' view of objects is limited to only one dimension. From the points they occupy along a line they can only see forward or backward. Linelanders would see only one line of you. They cannot conceive of there being a second dimension and angrily reject Flatlander when he describes it. Later, when Flatlander asks a three-dimensional Spacelander to consider the existence of a fourth dimension, the latter flies into a rage. Back home in Flatland, our adventurer tries to teach his countrymen of a three-dimensional world, but they think he is insane and put him in an institution.

Are we as smug in our three-dimensional world as the Flatlanders in theirs? Perhaps the Lord operates in more dimensions than we can envision. If we will acknowledge that he *could,* it becomes less compelling for us to demand to know all of his works. Then we need not try to force the descriptions of his activities in spiritual or paradisiacal kingdoms into our limited, finite models.

Consider the properties of *time.* Its onward flow seems to be one of the constants in our existence. But let us use our imaginations to change time as we look at our world through the eyes of visitors from two other realms. *Minim* is from a planet where ten thousand of his years are compressed into one second of our time. Suppose he comes into our world where you sit by a tree, tossing rocks into a pond. He would find everything absolutely motionless and conclude, "In all recorded history nothing has changed. Everything is absolutely still. This creature called man has never breathed or had a heartbeat. The water is standing in stationary waves. A leaf and a bird are suspended in the air. Gravity is different here." *Chronos* comes from another strange planet, where one of his seconds is ten thousand years of our time. How would he see the same scene? By the time he sat down, taking
sixty thousand of our years to do so, the pond and forest would have vanished. You would be invisible to him, since your entire lifespan would be less than 1/100 of one of his seconds. The earth would be a dangerous place for him, undulating as mountains are built up and worn down in minutes. The time concepts of these imaginary beings provide different perspectives of what we call reality.

Let our imaginations carry us further. What would it be like if time were to have another dimension. Our time seems one-dimensional—linear. It comes from the past and extends through the present into the future. Perhaps, in God’s view or in the spirit world, there exist added dimensions of time. A line has only one dimension. No matter how long it is, when viewed from the end, the second dimension, it occupies only a point. Perhaps our infinitude of time—eternity—occupies only a point as the Lord sees it. At least, the Lord need not be restricted by our mortal perception of time. Alma said, “All is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto man” (Alma 40:8). Neal A. Maxwell, discussing God’s foreknowledge of all events in our world, stated, “The past, present, and future are before God simultaneously—even though we do not understand how. . . . God does not live in the dimension of time as we do. . . . In ways which are not clear to us, he actually sees, rather than foresees, the future.”

In addition to matter, space, and time, another “unknowable” is energy. We don’t fully understand electricity, even though we have learned to harness and use it. Another form of energy that completely eludes our perception is priesthood—the energy we use when doing God’s work. We see manifestations of priesthood power as miraculous events and do not demand a complete understanding. As we try to understand the complete (physical and spiritual) world around us, we must remember that God is not limited to the “reality” we can perceive.

Now back to the story of my search for an “official BYU position” that would settle the arguments about evolution and creation. After some struggle, I decided to ask the Lord how the separate stories relate to each other. Even though I was surrounded by those superior to me scientifically, as well as spiritually, I was brash enough to hope the Lord would assist me in finding an answer. After personal preparation, I petitioned the Lord and asked, “What is the answer?” There came clearly into my mind the statement, “There is an answer.” I didn’t learn what the answer is, but it is reassuring to know that it all fits together. I have come to realize that I don’t need to know the answer now. Possibly I couldn’t understand it if I had it.
My awareness of the uncommon denominator for reason and revelation, for science and theology, for evolution and creation, has changed me from one who thinks he knows to one who knows he doesn’t know; from a position of hesitant uncertainty to one of admitted ignorance. I have developed a great appreciation for the unknown. While I don’t know what I don’t know, at least I am coming to realize that I don’t know what I don’t know! As de Hartog wrote, “Life and the universe are not only much more complicated than thou thinkest, they are more complicated than thou canst think.”

NOTES

1David O. McKay to Professor William Lee Stokes, 15 February 1957.
3James E. Talmage, The Earth and Man (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1931), 2.
5Journal of Discourses 8:162.
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Scott H. Duvall

ARTS AND LITERATURE

Critical Essays


Personal Essays


Music


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Book Reviews


Reviewed by W. Bryan Stout, software engineer with Martin Marietta Astronautics Group, Denver, Colorado.

The publication of *Prentice Alvin* brings us to the halfway mark of Orson Scott Card’s projected six-volume series *The Tales of Alvin Maker*, making a good point to evaluate what he has accomplished so far. I consider this to be a landmark work in contemporary fantasy and in Mormon fiction both; but before I go into detail, let me make a few general comments about fantasy.

As Tolkien took pains to explain in “On Fairy-Stories,” when someone reads a story that takes place in an enchanted world, he or she does not experience a “willing suspension of disbelief” but rather a “secondary belief.” If the author has done well, the reader can accept the world and its laws on his or her own terms, and believe in the story within that framework. This type of literary belief happens to some extent with all fiction, of course, but it is an essential element with fantasy.

There are several advantages to stories set in fantastic worlds. One is the sheer delight and marvel of events not possible in the real world. Another is the wonderful ideological neutral ground a secondary world can make. I can set aside my cosmology as I enter and accept a world where wizards cast true spells, or reincarnation happens, or several gods make occasional appearances, and there explore with the author some universal truths about morality and human nature. The elements that make up this other world may or may not have anything to do with the author’s own cosmology. C. S. Lewis populated his world of Narnia with talking animals and creatures from several mythologies and his own
imagination, but used the world as a place to explore basic Christian themes—Christ himself is a major character in the series, in the form of the lion Aslan. Lewis wondered, "Supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? . . . I thought one could."¹

And he did, for me. After finishing The Chronicles of Narnia, among other reactions I found myself with a much greater feeling for Christ as a personal, physical, intimate friend. This is one example of a principal value Tolkien saw in fairy-stories: "recovery . . . regaining a clear view . . . seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them."² As Lewis said about The Lord of the Rings, "By putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality: we rediscover it. . . . This book applies the treatment not only to bread or apple but to good and evil, to our endless perils, our anguish, and our joys. By dipping them in myth we see them more clearly."³

In The Tales of Alvin Maker, Card does the same thing for Mormonism that Lewis did for general Christianity in Narnia. But the world of the Tales is much closer to our own than Narnia is. This world is an alternate America in the early 1800s, an America with a slightly different history, a world where magic works.

The central character of the series is Alvin Miller, Junior, and Seventh Son is the tale of his birth and childhood. Alvin is a child with a powerful destiny, as witnessed at his birth when the very elements rise to kill him. He survives through the efforts of his family and a five-year-old girl named Peggy, a "torch" who can look into people's souls and see their thoughts, memories, and possible futures. As Alvin grows, it becomes apparent both that he has abilities exceptional even in a world with magic and that he has an unseen enemy that causes numerous deadly accidents to happen to him and that entices others to become his enemies as well.

Fortunately, he also has friends, both some other unseen power that saves him from the accidents and important human teachers. One teacher is an Indian who gives Alvin visions showing how not to misuse his power, and whom Alvin in turn heals. Another is Taleswapper, a wandering storyteller from whom Alvin learns the name of his power—he is a Maker, the first in thousands of years—and the nature of his enemy. Taleswapper names that enemy the Unmaker, a being who wishes to destroy everything, from personal relationships and individual integrity to the very fabric holding all matter together.
Alvin is this alternate world's analog for Joseph Smith, and his story is its version of the Restoration, a momentous time when God will once more "show his hand of power in this world." But Card is not content to deal only with Mormon themes. He uses this opportunity to recast the forging of America as well. The tales of the Founding Fathers in this world are different, but they are just as moving and capture their same spirit, vision, and heroism.

An important theme in Card's fiction is that true greatness of character requires concern for all people, no matter their gender, nation, family, language, or race. Red Prophet shows that as an author he practices what he preaches: the Indian side of the American experience is the major focus of this volume. The first third of it covers the same time period and some of the same events as Seventh Son, but from the point of view of the Indians and those who deal with them. The story then becomes a complex chessboard as Indian, settler, and French leaders all try to carry out their different plans or machinations. Alvin and his brother Measure are unwillingly caught in this turmoil and become major pieces in this game. They are involved in forces beyond their control, but they have an important part to play and are profoundly changed as the events build to their inventive, magical, and disturbing conclusions. But one of the most important events in the book happens halfway through it: the prophet of the title shows Alvin a vision of the Crystal City, the once and future place whose inhabitants live in harmony, with no poor among them.

In Prentice Alvin, Alvin's development again takes center stage, while the circle of Card's concern expands yet again, this time to include the blacks' side of American history. The story opens on a plantation where the Unmaker appears to the owner and increases the slaves' suffering through dark deeds sure to bear evil fruit. Then we see the torch Peggy, now a young lady hardened by the burden of her vision, in near despair at the miserable life she sees before her—until providence sends her way someone in desperate need of help, an act that changes the lives of all the characters in the story.

This volume is the story of Alvin's apprenticeship as a blacksmith, his growth as an adolescent, and his struggle to understand his power and calling in life. But it is Peggy's story as well, for she, like Alvin, must leave home and learn what she never could have learned otherwise. As she grows in graces and knowledge, Alvin grows in frustration at his ignorance and his near-slavery under an unfair master. His anger leaves him open to a direct assault by the Unmaker, but by mastering himself he gets a revelation giving him the first inkling of what it means to be a Maker, and he
is able to bear his lot with more patience until someone can teach him what he needs to know.

The scenes where Alvin comes into a comprehension and mastery of his power are the most thrilling of the series yet. Understandings of the nature of matter, energy, life, human relationships, spiritual rebirth, and true creativity are encompassed in a coherent whole in a way that made me feel as if I were at Alvin’s side learning with him, leaving an excitement that lasted days after I closed the cover. But not all is joyful. There are loss, and rage, and grief, as well as the gathering storm clouds of future persecution. The book ends on the dissonant chord of hope and menace.

The Tales show Card in his best form yet, with a mastery of all aspects of writing. The most obvious strength is his storytelling ability. Last Christmas, I gave the first two volumes to lots of friends and relatives, and the most common remark I’ve received is how engaging and enjoyable the stories are. Card knows how to pace events, raise tension, make climaxexes that work, and create satisfying conclusions.

Part of what makes the story important to the reader is the skillful characterization. Card’s characters are well-rounded people: there are heroic and villainous acts, and even heroes and villains, but no good guys or bad guys. Each character has his or her strengths and weaknesses, insights and blind spots. The narrator lets us into each of their minds, so we can see the world through their eyes, and even if some of them disgust us we understand them. They talk and think differently from each other, in ways appropriate to their personality and setting. We do not see people in the past with attitudes of the 1980s (a weakness of M*A*S*H). For example, even while a slave child’s adoptive mother fights fiercely for his education, she finds it unnatural to imagine blacks or women voting or holding office. The effect of this care on the author’s part is a responsive care by the reader: I have come to love the people in Alvin’s tales with an intensity seldom matched in my reading.

The narration is nearly always in the style of speech of the characters currently focussed on, and adapts well to their age, education, and culture. In fact, at certain codas in the story it can be lyrical, even in frontier speech, and sometimes breaks into meter. Alvin’s homecoming in Red Prophet and Peggy’s departure in Prentice Alvin are scenes of particular beauty.

I am very impressed with the craft Card uses in building the stories, the skill with which he gives natural justifications to events and makes diverse elements fit together. To bring Napoleon and La Fayette to Canada, where their separate schemes would play a
part in the Indian wars; to combine seamlessly American history with Book of Mormon events; to have a modern prophet figure taught indirectly through a variety of mortal angels—an itinerant William Blake, a young female seer, an Indian mystic and his warrior brother, the small son of an African princess and a slave-owner, an archetypal redbird—is adroit historical play worthy of Tim Powers. And although there are many symbolic actions in the series, they are the best kind of symbols, the kind that have a good sensible meaning as themselves before they stand for something else. The symbols are woven into the story with such care that many of them will be missed on first reading.

Card also knows how to handle magic. The magic of the different peoples is well researched, having a convincing wholeness and consistency; it is well thought out, including the implications and limitations such powers would have; it is well written, bringing the sense of awe and wonder magic should have. It appears safe to guess that part of the inspiration behind the Tales was the interest in the folk magic of Joseph Smith’s life and times prompted by the forged “Salamander Letter.” Perhaps Card wanted to give a fictional justification to this study and show how people could believe in magic and Christianity at the same time; perhaps he simply thought it was a great idea, and explored what it would be like in a world where folk magic beliefs were true. Whatever the motivation, it works. One of the benefits of a fantasy world is that magic can give a tangible, objective reality to the psychological and spiritual side of life. For example, the curse on the murderers at Tippy-Canoe makes the horror of what they did much more hard-hitting. This integration of the magical and the spiritual is evident throughout the series, as it is in all great fantasy. The magic gives beauty and expression to the psychological reality while the psychology gives depth and meaning to the magic.

Because of all these strengths, the Tales are an important work of fantasy. But they also add some new and important things to the genre. Most fantasy has been based on European mythology, Norse or Celtic or Greek. With passing time, authors have used other cultures for their inspiration, but Card is one of the first to use the beliefs, setting, and ideals of pioneer America as his basis. This alone adds a freshness and originality hard to achieve. Card is not quite the first to do this, however. Manly Wade Wellman has written a series of loosely-connected stories about a man named simply John, who wanders around modern Appalachia with a silver-stringed guitar, sharing and learning folk songs and the stories behind them, and encountering supernatural terrors. These stories, like Card’s, show a love of rural American life and
language. I suspect that Taleswapper owes at least as much to John as he does to William Blake. Be that as it may, it is interesting to note that Card, like Wellman, began publishing fantasies based on folk America after moving to North Carolina.

Card’s other major contribution to the fantasy genre is his explicit use of Mormon elements and themes—but I will consider this from the viewpoint of Mormon fiction.

A common fictional approach to Mormonism is the historical novel, often set in the nineteenth century; Card has done this himself in his novel Saints. By way of contrast, a fantasy such as the Tales does not focus so much on Mormonism’s historical aspects as on its mythical or archetypal ones. Mormonism has many ideas that have a profound effect on how we view life, some shared with traditional Christianity and some original, such as the pre-existence or the literal fatherhood of God.

The primary Mormon theme dealt with in the Tales is the Restoration, but there is scarcely a part of Mormon spiritual life that Card does not draw on. The Bible takes its place openly as part of Alvin’s world just as in ours. In addition, there are borrowings from Church history, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, priesthood ordinances, and the temple. Part of the joy of the series is to rediscover LDS themes powerfully presented in new trappings.

But do not think the Tales are simply a tract or a hidden-object puzzle. To read them as such would be a disservice to the books and reader both. They are principally stories, intended for a general audience, so the reader should simply lose him or herself in the events and characters, and let them teach and move in the way that only stories can. One alert LDS couple to whom I gave the books confessed with some embarrassment that they completely missed the Mormon elements, but also said they didn’t regret it, for they thoroughly enjoyed the stories in their own right. The series amply rewards rereading, and items missed the first time through can be picked up later.

Another reason not to read the series as a puzzle is that such a reading might look only for the images, and not the substance, of Mormonism. Card has always despised this superficial approach, and he does not fall for it himself, but rather makes the Mormon borrowings come alive both symbolically and factually in Alvin’s world. For example, one of the themes from the temple that he develops is the way Satan operates. The Unmaker is frighteningly subtle. He appears to chosen men, claiming to be the answer to their prayers. He deceives without lying, saying things that are factually true (with one or two exceptions) but stated in a way to be
misinterpreted. Worst of all, he structures his temptations to appeal to the targets’ noble and base desires at the same time, so in a perverse way they feel whole while carrying out his wishes.

The work Alvin has to do is not to restore a pure form of Christianity, though it is clear that the Christian church of Alvin’s world has been tainted. In fact, I suspect that those who think Mormonism teaches that all Christian ministers and even believers are corrupt dupes of the devil (an interpretation I have never been taught nor believed) may think Card is saying that himself, if they read carelessly and miss the many quiet ways in which Christianity is a force of power in the world of the Tales.

No, Alvin’s job as Maker is not to reform the Christian church, but to build the Crystal City. The series may or may not deal directly with the theme of expiatory redemption, but it does deal with why we are redeemed: so that by being cleansed and purified we may live in perfect harmony with one another and achieve our Godlike potential. Besides the theme of the Restoration, these two themes of Zion and the divine work of creation are at the center of the Tales. And this is one of Card’s most important insights: in Alvin’s world, creation and unity are inseparable. Makers and the Crystal City must go together. Just as the Unmaker wishes to tear everything apart, the job of the Maker is to help bind things together, whether particles or people. Rereading the first two volumes after finishing the third shows that this twin theme was quietly expressed many times, and also lay behind memorable events such as Ben Franklin’s one true Making, the ascension of Eight-Face Mound, and the weaving at Becca’s loom.

Half-way through the series, Alvin now has a basic understanding of what his job is and how to do it. What will come next? One can only speculate on details, but the general trends are clear. Spencer W. Kimball once said,

For years I have been waiting for someone to do justice in recording in song and story and painting and sculpture the story of the Restoration, the reestablishment of the kingdom of God on earth, the struggles and frustrations; the apostasies and inner revolutions and counter-revolutions of those first decades; . . . of the persecution days; of the miracle man, Joseph Smith, . . . [and] the great colonizer and builder, Brigham Young.8

Card has already done this directly in Saints and is doing it again indirectly in the Tales, though there may not be an analog to Brigham Young. It is certain there will be joy, frustration, and persecution. I am anxious to see how it will actually happen. If Card finishes the series with the same skill and caring he started it with, the best is yet to come.
Each volume of the series so far has ended with Alvin back at his home—the crises past, the changes made, the lessons learned—relishing the peace he finds there. This is fitting, for by taking us into Alvin’s world, Card has only taken us more fully to our family, our nation, our religion, our world, our home.

NOTES


4The best example of Tim Powers’s ability to play with and within history is The Anubis Gates (New York: Ace Science Fiction Books, 1983).

5The complete short stories about John have recently been published in John the Balladeer, ed. Karl Edward Wagner (New York: Baen Books, 1988).


7For example, see his letter to the editor in Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 18 (Summer 1985): 12.


Reviewed by Malcolm Thorp, professor of history at Brigham Young University.

This book appears as volume 4 in the University of Utah Press Utah Centennial Series. The letters printed in the present volume, edited by Professor Fred S. Buchanan of the University of Utah, are a substantial portion (140 out of 180) of a collection discovered in the home of James MacNeil in Ayr, Scotland, in 1964, and are now available at the University of St. Andrews. They represent letters written to the MacNeil family from friends and relatives in England, Scotland, the United States, Australia, Canada, and Burma. Professor Buchanan has carefully edited those letters that were written by Mormon emigrants in America from 1853 to 1904.

As we learn from Buchanan's helpful introduction, the MacNeil family that appear in these letters resulted from the marriage in 1847 of David MacNeil, a young miner, to Ann Beaton Boggie Thompson, a widow eighteen years his senior. Shortly after their marriage, the couple joined the LDS church at Airdrie, Lanarkshire. In addition to five step-children (John Thompson, the eldest, is the most important here, as he was to emigrate to America in 1856), the family soon expanded with the births of five children (John, born in 1847, and James, born 1855, were to become Utah settlers in the early 1870s). David MacNeil had started life in prosperous circumstances, only to see his prospects disappear following the deaths of his parents. Forced by pecuniary want into the iron mines, David and his large family appear to have led a marginal existence. Thus, the sons followed their father into the mines at early ages (John Thompson was at least fourteen).

Buchanan lays no claim that these letters are representative of the thousands of letters that must have been written in the nineteenth century. Yet few such letters have survived. For example, a search of the extensive archival files of the National Registry of Archives in London reveals the existence of only a few comparable Mormon letter collections, and these collections are far less extensive and less insightful than the MacNeil correspondence. The letters are especially valuable for the personal reflections on conditions in Utah by both faithful Saints and those who became disenchanted.

According to Buchanan, "these particular communications tend to defy common stereotypes that have portrayed all Mormons as alike in their responses to their church, their environment, or
even to their kith and kin" (xiv). These are not "faith promoting" (xv) letters of unwavering devotion to the Church. They also reflect a perception of Mormonsim as "al a humbug" (70). John MacNeil complained that "[a]ll they preach about hear is water ditches, field fences, canyon roads, cooperative Stores & Such like things" (105–6). Both John and his brother James witnessed much lying, deceit, drinking, swearing, and ill-education in Mormon society, although they also remarked that fornication was less prevalent in Zion than in the Old Country. Polygamy also appears as an issue, being passionately defended by John Marshall, a family friend, who nevertheless admitted that the practice "has been grossly taken advantage of By Damned mean Curses" (120). However, John MacNeil appears to have been disillusioned by this practice (see 182), and he wrote that there were more people in Utah who did not believe in polygamy than who did. Whereas John became disaffected ("there is a great deal of hokeypokey About it" [179]) and eventually completely rejected Mormonism, James was able to see goodness beyond human frailties and remained a faithful Saint to the end of his life.

The letters to the MacNeils represent the experience of common people who did not prosper yet who were always anticipating "a good time coming" in the future. Death and tragedy are major themes. Of the five MacNeil family members and friends who wrote back to Scotland, four met untimely deaths—three of these in the prime of life. Only John Marshall lived to see "a good time coming" in Utah. Marshall, an ironworker, was involved in a smelting furnace in Salt Lake City that brought him considerable success. On the other hand, James Brady, a young Irishman who knew the MacNeils in the Airdrie LDS branch and went to Utah in 1853, was killed in a rock slide at a quarry in Red Butte Canyon in August 1854. John Thompson left for Zion as a zealous convert in 1856, but never made it to Utah. After serving in the American Civil War, Thompson eventually settled in Illinois, plying the precarious trade of a coal miner and joining the Reorganized LDS movement. Thompson wrote in January 1874, "as Regards to our Prosperity in woredey things we have not Increased Much" (169). In 1875, he was killed from a fall in a coal mine. John MacNeil followed the call to Zion in 1870. The most frequent writer in this volume, he often saw prosperity on the horizon but never attained it. He too ended life a victim of accident, dying in 1903 in a cave-in at a Park City, Utah, mine. James MacNeil followed his elder brother to Utah in 1873. After suffering various ups and more frequent downs as a miner, James ventured into the Arizona Territory in 1881, where he prospered briefly as a teamster and farmer. But in 1884 he drowned
while trying to cross the swollen Gila River. One can only conclude that there is an element of pathos in these experiences, and this is reinforced when we learn that five out of the ten children of John MacNeil preceded their father to early graves.

Although the promise of material prosperity in Zion proved illusory, the letters reflect freedom from what the emigrants construed to be economic oppression in Britain. James Brady believed Scotland to be a “land of tyranny” (61). John MacNeil wrote, “Laying Mormonism aside, this is a better country for a poor man than the Old Country ten times over” (92). The impression here is that conditions in the mining industry were far superior to those they had encountered in Scotland, with higher wages and less arduous work demands. According to John MacNeil, “I have Got Some Life And Energy in Me here, which Seemed to be Dead in Me there [Scotland] After A days work” (142). Utah, however, had its drawbacks: “It is a hard life a miner [has] in this country. You may get pretty constant work for a few months, but you pay six or seven dollars for board here then lay idle for a few months. No, not idle but travelling about sometimes with a roll of blankets on your back. sometimes without, and all the time paying away money for railroad” (163). Competition with lower-paid Chinese laborers, strike-breaking initiatives by bosses, and economic recessions made mining a precarious trade. Coping with these reverses as well as the grinding physical demands eventually wore heavily on John MacNeil. He came to conclude, “This Mining in this Country is to rough a Life for A Man to Stand Long No Matter how Stout he is. It is beginning to wear Me Old” (218).

Buchanan has fulfilled his editorial task in an admirable fashion. His frequent footnotes reveal extensive reading of primary and secondary sources that allows him to illuminate the context of the letters. He also adroitly leads his readers through the labyrinth of colloquialisms and paleographical mazes, making these letters enjoyable to read. But some niggling points need mentioning. Buchanan states that John MacNeil became an agnostic, although there is no evidence for this. It would be more plausible to argue that MacNeil had drifted into infidelity, a pattern of rejection of organized Christianity that he was no doubt familiar with from his Scottish experience. The book is generally free from typographical errors and other such stylistic gremlins (one exception being the improper spelling of Thorpe on pages 12-13). But these minor points should not distract the reader from the significance of the letters or detract from Buchanan’s achievement as editor.
Zion in the Courts draws together under one cover the long history of both Latter-day Saint ecclesiastical courts and relations of Mormons with the tribunals of the land. The authors begin their narrative by discussing Mormon attitudes toward the Constitution and civil courts; then they move to the operation of the ecclesiastical court system in the East and Midwest. They follow this narrative with a second part that considers the relationship between the Latter-day Saints and the territorial court system in Utah. The third section deals with the operation of the Church court system in the Mountain West (not only the Great Basin as suggested by the title: "Part III: The Ecclesiastical Court System in the Great Basin").

That said, it is clear that the most valuable and original contribution of this volume comes in part 3, which draws on records of ecclesiastical court decisions housed in the LDS Church Archives and heretofore unavailable for serious scholarly research. The theoretical underpinning of the operation of the Church courts discussed in this section is already well known. Contrary to the statement of the authors (263), many scholars who have written on the subject have recognized that the Latter-day Saint courts generally assumed jurisdiction over civil matters within the community and that they imposed sanctions on members who ignored that jurisdiction. Both Mark Leone in The Roots of Modern Mormonism, which discusses a wide range of cases in nineteenth-century Arizona, and my discussion in Mormonism in Transition, which considers the changes that took place in the early twentieth century, were written on the assumption that adjudication of what we would consider civil matters before Church courts was mandatory for Church members in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, Firmage and Mangram go beyond such previous treatments to provide an excellent discussion of the broad range of matters adjudicated in Church courts and the sorts of judgments rendered. Moreover, the authors correct a misperception found in Leone's work that the Church courts did not consider precedent or apply standards except inspiration. By a careful consideration of a large number of cases, Firmage and Mangram demonstrate that in
addition to inspiration, Church courts relied on custom, scripture, and instructions from ecclesiastical leaders in arriving at decisions. Moreover, as the authors indicate in dealing with land disputes, "Beneficial use, prior occupancy, and community harmony, not legal rights were the guiding principles" (313). Similar doctrines of equity, community benefit, and reconciliation were applied in water, marital, contract, and other disputes.

If part 3 provides the reader with considerable insight by citing examples from nineteenth-century Church court records, the principal value of parts 1 and 2 of the book is to bring together under one cover a summary of information already found in a broad range of published secondary and primary sources. Except for an update on the issue of free exercise, the authors have reported in these sections virtually nothing that is not well known to those who have read such works as B. H. Roberts's edition of the seven volume History of the Church and his six volume Comprehensive History of the Church and Orson F. Whitney's History of Utah.

In many ways, the least satisfactory section of the book is the discussion of the treatment of polygamists by the federal courts during the late nineteenth century. There is little question, as the authors rightly point out, that the Utah federal courts exceeded their authority; and in a number of cases (for example, Clinton v. Englebrecht, In re Snow) the United States Supreme Court overruled the territorial judiciary's extraordinary zeal. Nevertheless, the authors would have served their readers better by building an argument from an understanding of nineteenth-century court practice and of the cultural attitudes of nineteenth-century Americans rather than by applying current norms. Citing present rules of evidence, for instance, the authors conclude that "in loosening the rules of evidence to serve Congress's policy of ensuring the punishment of polygamy, the courts undermined the elemental bases of judicial procedure and due process of law" (193). Before judging the nineteenth-century jurists by present standards, the authors should have determined whether those same standards generally applied in the period. Rulings of the United States Supreme Court cited in the text would lead to the conclusion that nineteenth-century jurists believed they did not. The authors are definitely correct in believing that the federal courts often went to absurd lengths to convict Mormons. Nevertheless, it is not true that they did not offer any standards or that "Utah courts continued to find the polygamists' efforts to terminate their unlawful relationships inadequate, and continued to refuse, at times almost gleefully, to specify what conduct would be lawful" (176).
Had the authors consulted the discussion of the 1889 William B. Bennett case in my article "Charles S. Zane, Apostle of the New Era" (Utah Historical Quarterly 34 [Fall 1966]: 290–314), they would have found that the Utah territorial third district court under Chief Justice Zane set a definite standard in such cases. In ruling Bennett elegible to vote in territorial elections, Zane ruled that parties could secure a Church divorce for time and remain married for eternity and thus meet the standard required under the Edmunds Act. Thus, as long as parties did not comport themselves as though they were married polygamously for time, they could continue to function as normal citizens in society.

The main problem with the discussion of the attempt of the federal government to eradicate polygamy is that it is written from a good guys (the Mormons) vs. bad guys (the federal government) perspective. The actions of federal officials such as Judge Zane and a number of others after President Wilford Woodruff issued the Manifesto in 1890 demonstrate that the federal government was not "nakedly" attacking a religious institution and imposing "civil punishments on an entire group of people solely for their religious beliefs" (202). As the court ruled in the Reynolds case, the antipolygamy statutes punished actions, not beliefs. After the Church leadership agreed to give up its practice of polygamy, domination of the economy, and unitary political practices, members were free to believe what they wished as long as they did not continue practices such as polygamy that were considered by the majority of Americans as subversive of good order.

Though one can push the argument too far, it is possible to see the Edmunds and Edmunds Tucker acts as analogous to the recently enacted Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act. In the opinion of a majority of Americans in the late nineteenth century, polygamy and the organization that supported it posed every bit as great a threat to the American home as illicit drugs do today. Like the Morrill, Edmunds, and Edmunds-Tucker acts, the RICO Act was designed to break up what most Americans then perceived as a criminal conspiracy by attacking its leadership and property. After the leadership agreed to give up the practices the majority of Americans found illegitimate and subversive of good order, the laws allowed the Church and its members to operate without fear of legal sanctions.

Beyond this difficulty, a major problem with the book is the lack of depth of research in collateral works on Mormon history that should have underpinned the study. For example, the authors assert:
From an external perspective there is little evidence to suggest that the Mormon hierarchy aspired to political domination over nonmembers akin to the religious domination exercised over members. Even if the Saints had established substantial political independence in Deseret, either with early statehood or actual independence, the Council of Fifty likely would have preserved substantial separation of church and state.

For this statement, the authors cite Klaus Hansen’s *Quest for Empire* (1967). More recent studies by Michael Quinn and others (for example, “The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945,” *BYU Studies* 20 [Fall 1979]: 163–97) demonstrate that the inclusion of Gentiles in the membership of the Council of Fifty was largely early window dressing and that by the Utah period its membership was exclusively Mormon. Moreover, in order to accept such an interpretation one would have completely to disregard statements from “an external perspective” by otherwise experienced local non-Mormon observers such as Charles S. Zane, Robert N. Baskin, and Jacob S. Boreman, who themselves suffered under political disabilities because they were non-Mormons.

Moreover, the failure to read more widely introduced some errors of fact into the book. The authors state, for instance, that William Marks, Sidney Rigdon, and James J. Strang united with Joseph Smith, III, in 1859 to form the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (46). In fact, Rigdon and Strang formed their own organizations and were not members of the Reorganized Church. They also date Zion’s Camp in 1831 instead of 1834 (53). They place Doctor Philastus Hurlbut’s first name in quotation marks (30–31). Doctor was his given name.

In spite of these lapses and the difficulty created by writing part 2 from a partisan point of view, I would unqualifiedly recommend the book. The first section brings together in a readily usable form a general discussion of Church courts in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. In spite of the antifederal bias, the section on the relations with the federal judiciary provides a good summary of the various cases and updates the Reynolds decision by citing more recent cases dealing with free exercise of religion. Most important, part 3 is an absolutely superb discussion of nineteenth-century Church court procedure and practice. This section will prove indispensable for those trying to understand the nineteenth-century Church judicial system and for scholars who need a basis for comparative work on intervening and current practices.
In London, on Sunday

Kensington Palace looked like Versailles. We fed the birds, laughed, talked tourist talk of Charles and Di. Fresh from church at Hyde Park ward, we glowed with brotherhood. Outside the gate, my friends and I chatted with a Cockney selling Flake, accent rich as his ice cream, who spotted us for Mormons. It was Sabbath; we didn’t buy.

A grimy, gap-toothed woman clutching a baby approached me, said something I couldn’t understand. I shook my head; she asked again. “Please, can ye spare a dollar to feed the baby?” I said I hadn’t brought money. Tucked inside my blouse, hanging on a ribbon like a noose, five pound coins weighed fifty. “But wait,” I said. Too late.

—Karen Todd

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