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The First Vision. Stained glass, 84" x 60", 1913. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art. The artist has included spring flowers and even Joseph’s hat to show that this was a real boy, in a specific location, in the midst of a historical event, being visited by real embodied beings. The context of light is dramatically expressed through rays and clouds.
The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives

David L. Paulsen

When the Savior shall appear we shall see him as he is. We shall see that he is a man like ourselves. . . . The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. (D&C 130:1, 22)¹

So Joseph Smith definitively declared on April 2, 1843. The doctrine that God the Father and God the Son are embodied persons, humanlike in form, has rich implications for both philosophical anthropology and theology,² and it is one of the most distinctive teachings of the Restoration. While believers find the doctrine elevating and inspiring, critics have challenged it as being non-Christian and philosophically incoherent. I believe the critics are mistaken on both counts.

¹Section 130 is a composite of instructions given by Joseph Smith on Sunday, April 2, 1843, in Ramus, Illinois. The first seventeen verses were given after the Prophet heard Orson Hyde preach in the morning meeting.” Robert J. Woodford, The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants, 3 vols. (Ph. D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1974), 3:1710. In the morning sermon, Orson had said, “It is our privilege to have the Father and Son dwelling in our hearts.”

²Apparently, Joseph wanted to make sure that Orson’s statement would not be misunderstood. He thus distinguished the Latter-day Saint understanding of God, which held God to be embodied in humanlike form and hence unable to dwell literally in one’s heart (D&C 130:3), from the god of the classical creeds, who, being immaterial, could dwell anywhere and everywhere. Joseph Smith Jr., History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 5:323–24.

³For instance, belief in an embodied God is interconnected in Mormon thought with many of its most paradigmatic ideas, including such basic LDS teachings as the divine nature and destiny of human beings as God’s children, the
In this paper, I trace the restoration of the doctrine of divine embodiment, showing that the doctrine was clearly articulated from the beginning of the Restoration. Then, I argue that the earliest Christians widely believed that God is embodied, and finally, I examine major philosophical objections to the idea of God having a body of any kind, showing them to be un compelling.

Throughout this discussion, it is important to keep certain usages in mind. In the western theistic tradition, spirit is primarily equated with immateriality. As I show in this paper, however, in all LDS discourse (as well as in early Judaic and Christian sources), spirits are not understood to be immaterial but rather to be composed of refined matter, and thus they are bodies (see Ether 3:16). Accordingly, I use the term corporeal to mean having a body of any kind, including those comprised of spirit matter as well as flesh and bone. Likewise, I use the term embodied to mean having any sort of body, whether spirit, mortal, or exalted. Conversely, I use the terms incorporeal, immaterial, and unembodied to signify being without a body of any kind. Although the term anthropomorphism is often used to refer to any ascription of humanlike characteristics to God (for example, passions), I use it primarily in reference to God having a body, humanlike in form.

purpose of mortal life, the eternal worth of the body, and the physical resurrection. Within Christian theology generally, the LDS doctrine also makes possible a coherent understanding of the Incarnation—the affirmation that God the Son was numerically identical with Jesus of Nazareth. Christian theologians have often subscribed to an idea of God as transcendent in every way, having no properties in common with man: "God is qualitatively different from man in the extreme. There is no greater divide in the ontology of the Bible than that between creator and creature." This idea has led many such theologians to reject the Incarnation as being a logical and metaphysical impossibility. Thomas V. Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 18-19.

Portions of this part of this article were previously published as "Early Christian Beliefs in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," Harvard Theological Review 83 (1990): 105-16 and as "Reply to Kim Paffenroth's Comment," Harvard Theological Review 86 (1993): 235-39. Reprinted by permission.

Much of the material in this part was previously published as "Must God Be Incorporal?" Faith and Philosophy 6 (1989): 76-87. Reprinted by permission.

Part I

Restoration of the Doctrine of Divine Embodiment

One of the most distinctive insights consistently taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith is that the members of the Godhead are embodied persons.

The understanding that the Father and the Son are fully embodied persons was clearly stated by the Prophet Joseph Smith in his 1843 declaration of that doctrine. This declaration was first included in Doctrine and Covenants 130 in 1876, and it was part of the 1880 edition, which was officially accepted by Church members in the October 1880 general conference as revelation “from God, and binding upon us as a people and as a Church.” On these points, there is consensus. But what Joseph Smith and fellow Church members believed about divine embodiment in the 1830s is a matter that requires close examination. In this section, I trace the origin and development of the doctrine of divine embodiment in the revelations and reflections of Joseph Smith, showing that the doctrine was both explicit and implicit in these and other data from the beginning of his ministry. Only the doctrinal clarification that the Father’s humanlike body is composed of exalted flesh and bones cannot be clearly shown to have been understood prior to the Nauvoo period. I draw my evidence primarily from the Book of Mormon, Joseph’s inspired revision of the Bible, his several accounts of the First Vision, and the Lectures on Faith, with brief mention of some of the external evidence and the historical context.

My reading of the evidence leads me to reject two propositions: (1) that the doctrine of divine embodiment was articulated for the first time in 1838, and (2) that prior to 1838 Latter-day Saints understood God to be an immaterial being. I call the first conjecture the late development theory and the second the immaterialist theory.

Although LDS historians have not spoken in exactly these terms, some of their statements may be understood as espousing one or both of these theories. Three factors drive this understanding (or possible misunderstanding).

Woodford, Historical Development, 1:91-92.
First, some writers have tended to diminish any differences between LDS teachings and other Christian doctrines in the 1830s. For example, James B. Allen asks:

What did the Mormons believe about the nature and character of God in the 1830's? . . . Perhaps the most significant observation to be made about the pre-Nauvoo concept of God held by ordinary Mormons is that it was not radically different from some other Christian perceptions.7

In what respects were LDS and other Christian teachings "not radically different"? Allen explains:

Many ordinary Christians . . . probably thought of God and Christ as separate entities, though they may not have thought of the Father as having corporeal existence (i.e., a tangible body of flesh). Some, at least, emphasized the idea that God was a person, though . . . this did not imply physical shape, form, or place.8

This does not mean that Allen understood early Mormon ideas to be identical to these Christian teachings, especially to those that denied that God had a body of any kind. He is silent on that point.

Second, authors have not been careful to define clearly what they mean by such terms as spirit, absolute spirit, material, materialistic, corporeal, body, person, personage, or personal being. Allen, for instance, states that the fifth Lecture on Faith specifically separated the persons of the Father and the Son, though in terms that did not impute corporeality to the Father. The lecture implied quite the opposite. . . . The distinction between the Father as a "personage of spirit" and the Son as a "personage of tabernacle" certainly suggests that the Father was not thought of as having a physical, material body.9

But then Allen does not clarify whether the early Saints thought of God as being an immaterial person, having no body at all, or as having a nonphysical body, albeit still material. Without careful definition of the critical terms, Allen may be easily construed as espousing the immaterialist theory.

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8Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental," 48; italics in the original.
9Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental," 49.
Third, some writers affirm the late development theory quite explicitly, apparently overlooking contrary data. For instance, the claim that "the first printed description in Mormon sources of an anthropomorphic corporeal God"\textsuperscript{10} appeared in 1838, apparently overlooks the fact that the idea of divine embodiment was already present in many respects in the Book of Mormon.

These three factors surface particularly in Thomas G. Alexander’s article, “The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine,” which states:

The doctrine of God preached and believed [in the LDS Church] before 1835 was essentially trinitarian. . . . The Lectures on Faith . . . did not define a materialistic, tritheistic Godhead. . . . [Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Latter-day Saints at that time] believed in an absolute spiritual Father. . . . Certain ideas which developed between 1832 and 1844 were internalized after 1835 and accepted by the Latter-day Saints. This was particularly true of the material anthropomorphism of God and Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{11}

Such statements allow little room for an early LDS belief in an embodied God of any kind.

That the immaterialist and late development theories have enjoyed some currency is evidenced in Grant Underwood’s review of Milton Backman’s The Heavens Resound:

Those who have kept abreast of developments in the field of doctrinal history will wonder, for example, why Backman retains the older view that Kirtland Saints understood God the Father to have a material body, when James Allen, Thomas Alexander, and others have

\textsuperscript{10}Allen, “Emergence of a Fundamental,” 50, referring to Pratt who wrote, “We worship a God who has both body and parts: who has eyes, mouth and ears.” Parley P. Pratt, Mormonism Unveiled: Zion’s Watchman Unmasked and Its Editor, Mr. La Roy Sunderland Exposed: Truth Vindicated: The Devil Mad, and Priestcraft in Danger (New York: Parley P. Pratt, 1838), 29. Allen recognizes that while there was still no creedal statement on divine corporeality at that time, “it is likely that many Mormons held an anthropomorphic view.”


persuasively demonstrated that they certainly regarded God as a per-
sonage of spirit.\textsuperscript{12}

Similarly, Underwood takes another historian, David Brion Davis,
to task for not thinking "that the Saints in the 1830s held views of
the Godhead much closer to those of their neighbors."\textsuperscript{13}

Yet what evidence is there for the late development and immate-
rialist theories? Surprisingly, given the weight these theories have
been accorded, I find not one piece of direct evidence that the
Prophet Joseph Smith ever asserted that God is nonembodied.
From the literature, I have been able to extract only two arguments,
which I call (a) the argument from God-as-spirit, and (b) the argu-
ment from creedal terminology. The first argument starts with the
premise that Joseph and his LDS contemporaries referred to God
(or, at least, to God the Father) as a spirit. If so, they must have
understood him to be an immaterial or unembodied being.\textsuperscript{14}
The second argument is a much broader version of argument (a). It
begins with the premise that until at least 1835, Mormons often
referred to God (or at least God the Father) in language reminis-
cent of classical Christian creeds. Therefore, they must have understood
him to be an immaterial or unembodied being.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12}Grant Underwood, "Sounding Brass or Tinkling Cymbal?" \textit{Sunstone} 10, no. 9 (1985): 43; Backman, p. 232, states that the \textit{Lectures on Faith} "implied that the Father and Son are material beings in a form like created man" and that "Joseph Smith undoubtedly understood in the 1830s that spirit is matter."


\textsuperscript{14}Alexander cites two sources for the claim that early Mormons referred to God as an absolute personage of spirit: (1) The Book of Mormon (with Abinadi's sermon "in Mosiah chapters 13 and 14 [being] a good example"), and (2) the \textit{Lectures on Faith} (discussed below). Alexander, "Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine" (1985), 8–9. I find no such reference in Mosiah 13 or 14. In Mosiah 15:1-5, Abinadi gives different names to two aspects of Christ's existence, identifying Christ's sonship with his flesh (his incarnation) and Christ's fatherhood with his spirit; but the contrast here is between spirit and flesh, not between spirit and body. Book of Mormon writers explicitly equate being a spirit with being embod-
ied in humanlike form, as is discussed below.

\textsuperscript{15}As evidence for the second premise, Alexander cites (1) an 1832 article in the \textit{Evening and the Morning Star}: God "is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth and all things which are in them"; (2) a letter by Warren A. Cowdery published in an 1834 issue of the \textit{Messenger and Advocate}: God "is a great first cause, prime mover, self-existent, independent and all wise being . . . immutable in his purposes
Before proceeding further, it will be worthwhile to clarify the logic of these arguments. First, construed as deductive arguments, both are nonsequiturs—their conclusions do not follow logically from their respective premises. Second, understood as inductive arguments, (a) and (b) are weak, and both depend on a third argument (c), which is only implicit. It asserts that in the first several years of the Restoration, there is no record that Joseph taught or Mormons believed that God is embodied. Therefore, no such teaching or belief existed. This argument, which is an argument from silence, is critical to the claim that before 1838 Church members believed God to be immaterial. Only if there were no (or maybe very scant) direct evidence of early belief in an embodied God would a weak inductive inference to a belief in nonembodiment have any credibility. Conversely, if there were considerable direct evidence for early Mormon belief—especially on the part of Joseph Smith—in an embodied deity, the arguments from God-as-spirit, from creedal terminology, and from silence would all be refuted.  

What, then, does the record show?

The Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon, translated by Joseph Smith in 1829 and first published in 1830, provides early revelatory data affirming divine embodiment. While some 283 passages in the Book of

and unchangeable in his nature"; and (3) numbers 5 and 6 of the Lectures on Faith: the Father is "the only supreme governor, an independent being, in whom all fulness and perfection dwells; who is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient; without beginning of days or end of life." Alexander, "Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine" (1985), 9. The analogical inference from (a) "Some early Mormons in some respects apparently held views of God similar to those of classical Christians" to (b) "Therefore, like classical Christians generally, they also believed God to be nonembodied" is weak.

In challenging the late development and immaterialist theories, I am not questioning the general thesis that Joseph's (and Latter-day Saint) understanding of God was enlarged over time. Indeed, in this article, I suggest that we do not know, before the Nauvoo period, how much Joseph understood concerning the Father's humanlike body consisting of flesh and bones.

All Book of Mormon scriptures quoted in this subsection have been checked against and found consistent with the original manuscript or (where necessary) the printer's manuscript. Royal Skousen, ed., "Book of Mormon Critical Text Project," Department of English, Brigham Young University.
Mormon text refer directly to either God's body or his body parts,\textsuperscript{18} three passages recording divine appearances are especially explicit. The first two confirm that God the Son (or Jesus Christ) was embodied in humanlike form in both his premortal and his postmortal (resurrected) states, and the third apparently affirms that the Holy Ghost is also embodied. The Book of Mormon is seemingly silent on whether God the Father is also embodied.\textsuperscript{19}

1. The account in 3 Nephi 11 of the visit of the resurrected Christ to the Nephite and Lamanite survivors in Bountiful shows the postmortal Lord to be a humanlike, embodied being. His first appearance was announced by God the Father: "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him" (3 Ne. 11:7). In response to the Father's announcement, the survivors

\begin{quote}
  cast their eyes up . . . toward heaven . . . [and] saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them. . . . [And] he stretched forth his hand and spoke unto the people saying: Behold, I am Jesus
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18}See Susan Ward Easton [Black], "Book of Mormon: Nature of God," Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

\textsuperscript{19}This conclusion is based on a social trinitarian reading of the Book of the Mormon. Social trinitarianism holds that the Godhead consists of three separate and distinct persons, or centers of consciousness, who together constitute one perfectly harmonious social unit. This I understand to be LDS doctrine. However, some writers, such as Dan Vogel, deny that the Book of Mormon reflects a social trinitarian notion of God. Rather, they take the Book of Mormon writers, as well as the earliest Mormons, to have a modalistic view of God. See Vogel, "Concept of God," 24-25. Modalism is the view that God is one individual person who appears in three different modes: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But such a modalist interpretation of the Book of Mormon would also imply that God the Father is embodied in humanlike form: qua Father, God is embodied as a premortal personage of spirit; and qua Son, he is embodied as a personage of flesh and bones. A full discussion of modalism in the early Church is outside the scope of this paper, but I believe Vogel's claim is mistaken. As Vogel himself acknowledges, modalism is seemingly inconsistent with much data (24)—for example, with Joseph's 1830 revision of Genesis 1:26-27: "And I God said to mine Only Begotten, let us make man" and the Father's introduction of his "Beloved Son" to the Bountiful survivors (3 Ne. 11). I believe that the social trinitarianism model of the Godhead as set out in the 1916 First Presidency declaration on the Father and the Son more comprehensively and illuminatingly coheres with all the Book of Mormon references to God and the Godhead, satisfactorily accommodating the apparently modalistic passages. Of course, this discussion by no means implies that Joseph and his contemporaries understood the relevant passages the same way.
Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world. . . . Come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet. . . . And . . . the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet. (3 Ne. 11:8-10, 14-15)²⁰

A popular (though unorthodox) Christian notion exists that Christ was resurrected with a body of flesh and bones (which is certainly the clear witness of the New Testament record)²¹ but disembodied himself when he ascended into heaven after his forty-day ministry.²² The Book of Mormon, however, affirms that the postascension Christ has a body: "And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, . . . after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them—Showing his body unto them, and ministering unto them" (3 Ne. 10:18-19).²³ The Book of Mormon thus shows that God the Son is embodied, even after his ascension.

2. The book of Ether tells of the appearance of the Lord in his spirit body to the brother of Jared long before the Incarnation

²⁰See also 3 Nephi 10:18 and 28:12.
²²On the ascension of Christ, see Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11; and Ephesians 4:8-10. The New Testament writers did not deduce from the Ascension that Christ transcended his body. See J. G. Davies, He Ascended into Heaven: A Study in the History of Doctrine (New York: Association Press, 1958), 60-68. The orthodox (Catholic and mainline Protestant) teaching is that Christ is in heaven with his resurrected body today.
²³Since Christ was and is commonly understood to have lived thirty-three years, the phrase "in the ending of the thirty and fourth year" augments the post-ascension dating of the American visitation. For a discussion of the dating, see S. Kent Brown and John A. Tvedtnes, When Did Jesus Appear to the Nephites in Bountiful? (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1989); and John W. Welch, The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 29-33. Christ ended his first visit to the Nephites and Lamanites by ascending into heaven (3 Ne. 18:38-39). However, when he visited them again the next day, he still had a body. In each of his subsequent visits, Christ was still embodied. Mormon writes, "And after that he did show himself unto them oft, and did break bread oft, and bless it, and give it unto them" (3 Ne. 26:13). Therefore, the Book of Mormon indicates that Jesus Christ continued to have a body. Furthermore, the nature of Christ's ascension in the Book of Mormon is different from the orthodox view of the New Testament ascension. In the Book of Mormon, Christ returned or ascended to heaven several times and, rather than transcending physical limits, visits locations in time and space.
(Ether 3:6–18). The brother of Jared presented the Lord with several stones and asked him to make them luminous (Ether 3:1–4). In response,

the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger. And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood. (Ether 3:6)

Indeed, so striking was the finger's resemblance to flesh and blood that the brother of Jared mistook it for the same. The Lord then revealed himself more fully to the brother of Jared, specifically identifying himself as Jesus Christ (Ether 3:14). He declared:

Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image. Behold this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh. (Ether 3:15–16)

Moroni editorially commented that “Jesus showed himself unto this man in the spirit, even after the manner and in the likeness of the same body even as he showed himself unto the Nephites” (Ether 3:17).

From this text, the following points seem evident: (1) Jesus Christ is God (Ether 3:18); (2) as a spirit, prior to his incarnation, he was nonetheless embodied; (3) his body, though not yet composed of flesh and bones, was strikingly similar in both form and appearance to a human body; and (4) our bodies of flesh and bones are created in the very image of his premortal spirit body, which is thus humanlike in form. From these points, a very significant conclusion can be drawn: both Moroni anciently and presumably Joseph Smith in 1829 as the translator of Moroni's account understood a spirit to be an embodied person, humanlike in form, even if less tangible than one of flesh and bones. This understanding also finds support in Joseph's cultural context, as will be shown below. Thus, one would be mistaken to infer that, early on, Joseph (and his LDS contemporaries) must have believed that God is a nonembodied being simply because they referred to him as a spirit. Unlike classical Christians generally, Latter-day Saints did not equate spirit with immateriality.
3. In a third notable passage, the Book of Mormon tells of Nephi’s encounter with “the Spirit of the Lord” and explicitly describes “the Spirit” as being embodied in humanlike form, thus further refuting argument (a)’s equation of “spirit” with non-embodiment in early Mormon doctrine. Somewhat problematic, however, is the question of referent. Whom does the phrase “the Spirit of the Lord” denote? While it might refer to the premortal Christ\textsuperscript{24} or a spirit messenger from the Lord, Sidney Sperry has argued that it refers to the Holy Ghost.\textsuperscript{25} In considering Sperry’s arguments, let us first note the context in which the reported encounter is set. The encounter ensued when Nephi sought personal confirmation of his father’s spiritual manifestations.

I . . . was desirous also that I might see, and hear, and know of these things, by the power of the Holy Ghost. . . . As I sat pondering in mine heart I was caught away . . . into an exceedingly high mountain. . . . And the Spirit said unto me: Believest thou that thy Father saw the tree of which he hath spoken? And I said: Yea, thou knowest that I believe all the words of my father. And when I had spoken these words, the Spirit cried with a loud voice, saying: Hosanna to the Lord, the most high God. . . . And blessed art thou, Nephi, because thou believest in the Son of the most high God. . . . And . . . thou shalt also behold a man descending out of heaven, and him shall ye witness; and after ye have witnessed him ye shall bear record that it is the Son of God. (1 Ne. 10:17; 11:1, 4–7)

Observe that the Spirit shouts “Hosanna to . . . the most high God” and commands Nephi to witness and to bear record of “the Son of the most High God,” referring in the third person to each of these members of the Godhead.

When the Spirit showed Nephi the tree of life, Nephi asked
to know the interpretation thereof—for I spake unto him as a man speaketh; for I beheld that \textit{he was in the form of a man}; yet nevertheless, I knew that it was the Spirit of the Lord; and he spake unto me as a man speaketh with another. (1 Ne. 11:11; italics added)

Nephi reports that while the Spirit of the Lord “was in the form of a man,” he was a divine being and therefore not a mere man.

\textsuperscript{24}If “the Spirit of the Lord” who appeared to Nephi is the premortal Christ, then this text augments the Book of Mormon teaching that even as a spirit, he has a body, humanlike in form.

\textsuperscript{25}Sidney B. Sperry, \textit{Book of Mormon Compendium} (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 116–18.
That he was in "the form of a man" indicates that the Spirit of the Lord was embodied. Thus it seems that Nephi saw the spirit body of the Holy Ghost just as the Brother of Jared had seen the spirit body of Christ.

To support his conclusion that "the Spirit of the Lord" who appeared to Nephi is the Holy Ghost, Sperry gives four arguments—all of which are internal to the text. First, Nephi specifically sought personal confirmation of Lehi's manifestation "by the power of the Holy Ghost" (1 Ne 10:17); he seemed to have meditated upon the powers and functions of the Holy Ghost at considerable length before the desired manifestation was given him (1 Ne 10:17-22). Second, Nephi said he was caught away "in the Spirit of the Lord" (1 Ne 11:1). The same expression with the phrase "of the Lord" deleted is used in the chapter in relation to Mary and to the Twelve Apostles.26 In both instances, the references to the Spirit seem obviously to point to the Holy Ghost, not to the premortal Christ (compare 1 Ne. 11:19 with Matt. 1:18). Third, the phrase "Spirit of the Lord" occurs some forty times in the Book of Mormon, and in no passage where it occurs does it clearly represent the premortal Christ instead of the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, many occurrences seem to refer only to the Holy Ghost.27 Fourth, whenever Nephi unquestionably refers to the premortal

26 And it came to pass that I [Nephi] beheld that she [Mary] was carried away in the Spirit" (1 Ne. 11:19). "And I also beheld twelve others following him. And it came to pass that they were carried away in the Spirit from before my face, and I saw them not" (1 Ne. 11:29).

27 For example, in no instance where the phrase was written down after the appearance of the resurrected Christ on this continent does it refer to his premortal person: "The Spirit of the Lord did not abide in us" (Morm. 2:26), "The Spirit of the Lord hath already ceased to strive with their fathers" (Morm. 5:16), and "I fear lest the Spirit of the Lord hath ceased striving with them" (Moro. 9:4). Similarly, consider Nephi's vision of Gentiles (evidently Columbus and others) coming to America: "And I beheld the Spirit of the Lord, that it was upon the Gentiles" (1 Ne. 13:15). Certainly "the Spirit of the Lord" does not refer to the premortal Christ because in this context Nephi envisioned a time long after Christ's resurrection. Also, the phrase is used in passages where it clearly refers to the functions of the Holy Ghost rather than the power that emanates from deity: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy" (Moshi-ah 4:3); and "the Spirit of the Lord did no more preserve them; yea, it had withdrawn from them because the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples" (Hel. 4:24; compare Rom. 8:9, 11 and 1 Cor. 3:16).
Christ, he never calls him the "Spirit of the Lord."²⁸ Sperry concludes that "inasmuch as there is no single instance in the Book of Mormon where the term, 'Spirit of the Lord,' can be unequivocally equated with the pre-existent Christ," we may reasonably believe that it refers to the Holy Ghost.²⁹ If Sperry is correct, then written revelatory data from as early as 1829 suggests the embodiment of the Holy Ghost.³⁰ But, however this matter is resolved, the Book of Mormon apparently affirms that the Holy Ghost has a body and unequivocally affirms that God the Son is an embodied being in both his preincarnational and postascensional states.

**Joseph Smith's Inspired Revision of the Bible**

That Joseph understood the doctrine of divine embodiment at least as early as 1830 is strongly corroborated by passages from his inspired revision of the Bible, the Joseph Smith Translation (hereafter JST).³¹ Work on the revision was underway in June 1830,

²⁸For example, when Nephi had his first visitation from the Lord, he said, "I did cry unto the Lord; and behold he did visit me" (1 Ne. 2:16). Subsequently, when referring to the prophet Isaiah, Nephi said, "He verily saw my Redeemer, even as I have seen him" (2 Ne. 11:2). In other verses of the same chapter, he refers to the coming Redeemer as the Christ.


³⁰This data also suggests that the Holy Ghost is a person distinct from the Father and the Son. Of course, from the fact that Joseph Smith translated this text it does not follow that he immediately understood all of its theological implications. On the other hand, in June 1844, Joseph himself claimed that he had distinguished three separate persons in the Godhead from the beginnings of the Restoration:

I wish to declare I have allways—& in all congregats. when I have preached it has been the plurality of Gods it has been preached 15 years—I have always decld. God to be a distinct personage—J.C. a sep. & distinct pers from God the Far. the H.G. was a distinct personage & or Sp & these 3 constit. 3 distinct personages & 3 Gods.

(Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* [Salt Lake City: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980], 378 [hereafter cited as WJS])

when Joseph recorded the visions of Moses, which now constitute Moses chapter 1 in the Pearl of Great Price. Joseph’s report of Moses’ visions begins:

The words of God, which he spake unto Moses at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceedingly high mountain, And he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses: therefore Moses could endure his presence. (Moses 1:1–2)\(^{32}\)

In his revision of Genesis chapter 1, completed between June and October 1830,\(^ {33}\) Joseph changed the King James translation (here-after KJV) of Genesis 1:26–27 to read:

And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and it was so. . . . And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them. (Moses 2:26–27)\(^ {34}\)

Two important points, the second dependent on the first, emerge from Joseph’s revision. First, while the KJV also indicates a plurality of creators, the JST identifies who they are—God the Father and God the Son.\(^ {35}\) Second, the JST discloses that man was created in the image and likeness of God the Father as well as that of God the Son, thus implying that the Father is also an embodied being, humanlike in form.

One could object, of course, that biblical passages telling of Moses seeing God “face to face” and of man’s being created in

\(^{32}\)Except for minor punctuation and bracketed changes, this text and the following passages from Moses read the same as “Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible,” Old Testament Manuscript 2, in RLDS Library-Archives, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, p. 1, lines 2–5; italics added. Thanks to Robert J. Matthews, whose photographs and typescript of Old Testament Manuscript 2 were used to check the passages.

\(^{33}\)Matthews, Joseph Smith’s Translation, 26–27.

\(^{34}\)Old Testament Manuscript 2, p. 4, lines 26–33.

\(^{35}\)This datum, which discloses two divine individuals (God and his Only Begotten), contradicts Vogel’s hypothesis that at this stage the prophet understood the Godhead to consist of only one individual or person who appears in three different modes (modalism). Other changes in the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) may suggest modalism, but when changes such as the one just quoted are taken into account, the issue is less than clear. Based on an analysis of Book of Mormon passages, Van Hale also cautions against too quickly asserting that the early Mormon concept of God was modalistic. Van Hale, “Defining the Contemporary Mormon Concept of God,” in Bergera, Line upon Line, 13.
God's own image have long been construed so as to avoid any implication of divine embodiment. As discussed below, for example, Origen argued that it is not our body, but only our inner man or spirit that is created in God's image and that biblical references to God's body must all be understood metaphorically. Joseph Smith repudiated these de-anthropomorphizing biblical constructions, however, in his very significant emendation of Genesis 5:1–2, which was completed on November 30, 1830. In these verses, Moses says, "In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; in the image of his own body, male and female, created he them" (Moses 6:8–9; italics added). 36 Evidently, Joseph added the clarifying phrase, "of his own body," to distinguish his understanding of the text from any incorporealist construction. From Joseph's revision of these biblical texts, it appears clear that in 1830 he understood that both the Father and Son are embodied and that man's body was made in their image. Moreover, Joseph's revisions cohere tightly with the passages from the Book of Mormon already discussed. Taken together, they show that Joseph understood the doctrine of divine embodiment at least as early as 1830. He may well have learned it some ten years earlier when the Father and the Son appeared to him in the grove near Palmyra, New York—the starting point of the Restoration.

The First Vision

Joseph Smith's account of the appearance of God the Father and Jesus Christ to him in the spring of 1820 near Palmyra, New York (the First Vision) has long been understood as initially grounding his belief that both the Father and the Son are embodied. 37

36 Old Testament Manuscript 2, p. 11, lines 16–18.
37 For instance, after retelling Joseph's account of the First Vision, Elder David B. Haight stated, "Joseph now knew God is in the form of a man. He has a voice, he speaks, he is kind, he answers prayers. His Son is like the Father—but a separate and distinct person." David B. Haight, "Joseph Smith the Prophet," Ensign 19 (November 1979): 23. Similarly, in 1883, First Presidency member George Q. Cannon said, "Joseph saw that the Father had a form; that He had a head; that He had arms; that He had limbs; that He had feet; that He had a face and a tongue with which to express His thoughts." "Discourse by President George Q. Cannon," in Brigham Young and others, Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 24:372 (September 2, 1883). But Allen argues

Smith's depiction of the visit of God the Father and God the Son to the Prophet Joseph Smith treats the resurrected beings' corporeality matter-of-factly, neither under- nor overemphasizing it.
Indeed, Joseph's official account of the visitation, first dictated in 1838, makes that understanding very plausible.

Just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—"This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!"

(JS-H 1:16-17)

Joseph saw two personages—the Father and the Son—standing above him in the air. For one accepting on faith both Joseph's veracity as a witness and the reliability of his memory of such an epochal event, perhaps no more is needed.

But some have challenged the historicity of this account, claiming it to be inconsistent with Joseph's earlier accounts and nothing more than a pragmatic reconstruction, deliberate or otherwise, designed to serve Joseph's ever-enlarging theological views. Whatever credence might be given to such a conjecture, it is irrelevant here. On the issue of divine embodiment of separate deities there would be no need for reconstruction, for, as already shown, this doctrine is clearly evidenced in 1829 and 1830. Any ambiguities in documents later than 1830 should then, reasonably, be resolved in light of these earlier statements.

According to Joseph's 1838 account, he saw the Father and the Son in 1820. Though he reportedly told some of his acquaintances of the vision soon after it occurred, no contemporaneous record exists of the descriptions he gave. Indeed, Allen argues that the

it was not until the 1840s that the First Vision was seen to have these implications. Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental," 54-61.

The account was part of Joseph's history of the Church, which was published serially in Times and Seasons beginning March 1, 1842.


Some few days after . . . this vision," Joseph Smith told a Methodist minister. Joseph Smith, "History of the Church," A-1, 3-4, Joseph Smith Papers, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, quoted in Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," BYU Studies 9 (spring 1969): 290. See also Joseph Smith-History 1:21-22. Joseph may also have told his mother (he did tell her, "I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true"). Jessee, "First Vision," 290-94. See also Joseph Smith-History 1:20.
vision was not widely known until after it was reported in several publications in the 1840s. Nonetheless, Joseph’s two known pre-1838 accounts of the vision, while not so explicit or detailed as the official version, do reflect his understanding that God is embodied.

The earliest known account was written in 1832 by Joseph Smith. The other is a journal-style entry in Joseph’s history. The entry, written by Warren A. Cowdery, bears the date of Monday, November 9, 1835. These accounts differ somewhat in the details they mention, but both are compatible as partial descriptions of the same event. The 1832 account (with original spellings but not typographical sigla) reads:

A pillar of light above the brightness of the Sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the Spirit of God and the Lord opened the heavens upon me and I Saw the Lord and be Spake unto me Saying Joseph my Son thy Sins are forgiven thee. go thy way walk in my Statutes and keep my commandments behold I am the Lord of glory I was crucified for the world.

While this account does not explicitly assert the Lord’s spatiality or embodiment, both are reasonably implied. For Joseph “saw” the Lord, apparently within a pillar of light, and the Lord “spake” to him. Though traditional exegetes have long construed similar biblical passages figuratively, there is no reason to think that Joseph meant them other than literally, for in 1832 he already understood the Father and the Son to be embodied.

Joseph’s 1835 account of the First Vision reads:

A pillar of fire appeared above my head; which presently rested down upon me, and filled me with unspeakable joy. A personage appeared in the midst of this pillar of flame, which was spread all around and yet nothing consumed. Another personage soon appeared like unto the first: he said unto me thy sins are forgiven thee.

41Allen, “Emergence of a Fundamental,” 43–53.
43Jessee, “First Vision,” 283; and PJS, 1:124.
44Quoted in Milton V. Backman, Joseph Smith’s First Vision: The First Vision in Its Historical Context (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 157; italics added.
45See point 4 of the section on Origen as witness.
Although in this report, Joseph does not explicitly identify the two personages by name, the second personage's declaration, "thy sins are forgiven thee," apparently identifies him with the Lord of the 1832 account. The Lord (or Jesus) appears after the first personage, and both personages appear spatially "in the midst of this pillar of flame."

It is significant that Joseph refers to the Father and the Son by the term, personage, as opposed to the more generic terms, being, or even person, for Joseph and his contemporaries apparently understood personage to specifically signify an embodied person. This accepted meaning is corroborated by examining, in context, contemporaneous uses of the term and by consulting dictionaries of the period. The following instances are especially enlightening in helping us see how the term was used.

[June 24, 1834; recorded between 1842 and 1844] I left Rush Creek the same day in company with David Whitmer and two other brethren, for the western part of Clay county. While traveling, we called at the house of Mr. Moss for a drink of water. The woman of the house shouted from the door, that they had "no water for Mormons," that they were "afraid of the cholera," etc., at the same time throwing out her arms as if defending herself from the cholera in the form of personage. (Smith, History of the Church, 2:115; italics added) [By virtue of being a personage, something has a specific form, impliedly humanlike.]

[October 2, 1841] The angel that appeared to John on the Isle of Patmos was a translated or resurrected body [i.e., personage], Jesus Christ went in body after His resurrection, to minister to resurrected bodies. (Smith, History of the Church, 4:425; italics added; brackets and bracketed language in original text.) [By virtue of being or having a body, impliedly humanlike in form, one is a personage.]

[January 29, 1843]. . . The sign of the dove was instituted before the creation of the world, a witness for the Holy Ghost, and the devil cannot come in the sign of a dove. The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in sign of the dove. (Smith, History of the Church, 5: 261; first italics added) [By virtue of being a personage, one has a specific bodily form, not dove-like but impliedly humanlike.]

[Recorded in 1839]. . . A personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor. He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. . . . His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist; so, also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare. (Smith, History of the Church, 1:11; italics added) [A human-like embodied being is a personage.]
In an InfobasesTM search of Church historical documents for the period 1830 to 1844,47 I found 103 distinct occurrences of the term *personage*. In every instance, the term was used to denote what was explicitly, or in context impliedly, an embodied being. *Personage* was used to describe a distinguished man or woman 28 times, a member of the Godhead 28 times, a resurrected being or angel 21 times, a body 17 times, and an embodied being but not one having flesh 9 times.

Joseph's and his fellows' employment of the term apparently reflected contemporary usage. For example, Noah Webster's 1828 edition of *An American Dictionary of the English Language* provides the following as the first two entries under *personage*: "1. A man or woman of distinction; as an illustrious *personage*"; and "2. Exterior appearance; stature; air; as a tall *personage*; a stately *personage*."

By way of contrast, in his 1838 account of the First Vision Joseph did not describe Satan as a personage. Rather, he referred to him as "some actual being from the unseen world," "some power," and the "enemy" (JS-H 1:15-16). None of these expressions connote a visible, bodily being, though Joseph's descriptions of Satan's actions, such as, "seized upon" and "influence over me as to bind my tongue" sound very tactile (JS-H 1:16). Immediately after his description of his encounter with this unseen actual being, Joseph told of seeing "two personages." It does not appear that Joseph called them personages for lack of a better word. Rather, the contrast in descriptions indicates that *in this vision* Joseph experienced the beings differently—the Father and the Son as visible, fully embodied beings (and, hence, as personages) and Satan as an unseen but actual being.49

49From this it should not be inferred that at this time Joseph did not understand that Satan is embodied. Rather, on this occasion, Joseph Smith did not experience him as such. It is easily deduced from Joseph's later theological statements that Satan has a spirit body.
Other recorded accounts of the First Vision in the 1840s clearly show, of course, that in those years Joseph understood God to be embodied. For example, in his Wentworth Letter, written for non-Mormons, Joseph attests: "I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon-day."\(^{50}\) Compare Orson Pratt's 1840 version, the first known published account of the First Vision, "[Joseph] saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in their features or likeness."\(^{51}\) The words *features* and *likeness* are unintelligible as references to formless beings. These must be taken as direct indications that the Father and the Son are embodied.

This conclusion no longer need rest on inference when we examine other accounts of the First Vision. Consider, for example, the description of the vision given by Alexander Neibaur, a teacher who instructed Joseph Smith in German and Hebrew. He recorded in his personal journal, dated May 24, 1844, the following account as related to him by Joseph:

[Joseph Smith] went into the Wood to pray kneelt himself down... saw a fire towards heaven come near and nearer saw a personage in the fire light complexion blue eyes a piece of white cloth drawn over

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\(^{50}\)Joseph Smith composed this letter "at the request of Mr. John Wentworth, Editor and proprietor of the *Chicago Democrat.*" It was published in Nauvoo, Illinois, in *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1, 1842): 706. Reproduced in Jessee, "First Vision," 296; and *PJS*, 1:430.

\(^{51}\)Orson Pratt, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions* (Edinburgh: n.p., 1840), 5, in *PJS*, 1:391. This account is almost identical to Orson Hyde's 1842 account: "Two glorious heavenly personages stood before him, resembling each other exactly in features and stature." *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste, eine Stimme aus dem Schoose der Erde* (A Cry from the Wilderness, A Voice from the Dust of the Earth), trans. Marvin H. Folsom (Frankfurt, Germany: n.p., 1842), quoted in *PJS*, 1:408-9. In an interview with Joseph in 1843, the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* (September 23, 1843) reports him as stating, "I kneeled down, and prayed, saying, 'O Lord, what Church shall I join?' Directly I saw a light, and then a glorious personage in the light, and then another personage, and the first personage said to the second, 'Behold my beloved Son, hear him.'" "The Prairies, Nauvoo, Joe Smith, the Temple, the Mormons, &c.," *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* 58 (September 15, 1843): 3, quoted in *PJS*, 1:444.
his shoulders his right arm bear after a while a other person came to the side of the first.52

While the later first- and second-hand accounts of Joseph's first vision differ in the details they provide, all of them are plausibly read as consistent with Joseph's very early understanding that the Father and the Son are embodied persons.

**The Lectures on Faith**

The *Lectures on Faith* were prepared in the fall of 1834; presented to the School of the Elders in Kirtland, Ohio, in November and December 1834; edited in 1835; and published in the fall of that year.53 The published lectures, especially Lecture 5, show that the idea of an embodied God, introduced at least as early as 1829-30, continued to be affirmed in the mid-1830s.

The lectures were initially prepared by a committee of presidning Church officers, which included Joseph Smith. While authorship

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52Alexander Neibaur Journal, May 24, 1844, photographically reproduced and edited in *PJS*, 1:461-62. Interestingly, an account that the Father actually touched Joseph's eye appears in an independent recollection of a separate report of the experience given by Joseph. Charles L. Walker (1855-1902) made the following entry in his diary:

2nd February, Thursday, 1893, Attended Fast Meeting. ... Br. John Alger said while speaking of the Prophet Joseph, that when he, John, was a small boy he heard the Prophet Joseph relate his vision of seeing The Father and the Son, *That God touched his eyes with his finger and said, 'Joseph this is my beloved Son, hear him.'* As soon as the Lord had touched his eyes with his finger he immediately saw the Savior. After meeting, a few of us questioned him about the matter and he told us at the bottom of the meeting house steps that he was in the House of Father Smith in Kirtland when Joseph made this declaration, and that Joseph while speaking of it put his finger to his right eye, suiting the action with the words so as to illustrate and at the same time impress the occurrence on the minds of those unto whom he was speaking. (A. Karl Larson and Katherine Larson, eds., *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker* [Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 1980], 755-56; italics added)

Jesus Christ Appearing to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple, by Gary E. Smith (1942–). Oil on canvas, 36" x 42", 1980. Courtesy Blaine T. Hudson. The Latter-day Saint knowledge concerning the embodiment of the resurrected Savior was reinforced by the appearance of Christ to Joseph and Oliver in the first LDS temple. Joseph Smith described Christ’s appearance in this way: “His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun” (D&C 110:3).
issues are not fully resolvable now, research to date indicates that Joseph Smith, William W. Phelps, Sidney Rigdon, or Parley P. Pratt may have contributed as authors to lecture 5.\textsuperscript{54} Regardless of actual authorship, Joseph prepared the lectures for publication, and they were published in 1835 with his sanction and approval in the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Joseph, along with the other committee members, signed his name to a preface published with that edition, which states:

We have, therefore, endeavored to present, though in few words, our belief and when we say this, humbly trust, the faith and principles of this society as a body.

We do not present this little volume with any other expectation than that we are to be called to answer to every principle advanced. [Italics in original]

That said, for present purposes I will refer to the ideas in the lectures as if they were advanced by Joseph. The \textit{Lectures on Faith} were retained in subsequent editions of the Doctrine and Covenants until 1921, when they were removed by the First Presidency.\textsuperscript{55}

As evidence of Joseph's 1834-35 understanding of divine embodiment, lecture 5, paragraph 2, asserts:

There are two\textsuperscript{56} personages 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


\textsuperscript{56}Since Joseph Smith here explicitly affirms that two personages exist in the Godhead (the Father and the Son), some commentators have suggested that at this time, Joseph's understanding of God was binitarian (see Vogel, Alexander, and Kirkland in Bergera, \textit{Line upon Line}). I am not persuaded, since the same lecture repeatedly refers to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit separately and as three. Headway toward resolving this puzzle can be made by remembering that
and the Son—the Father being a personage of spirit, glory, and power, possessing all perfection and fullness, the Son, ... a personage of tabernacle, made or fashioned like unto man, or being in the form and likeness of man, or rather man was formed after His likeness and in His image; He is also the express image and likeness of the personage of the Father.

The meaning seems clear: both the Father and the Son have human-like bodies, for both are referred to as personages. And just as man “was formed after [the Son’s] likeness and in His image,” so also is the Son “the express image and likeness of the personage of the Father.” As already shown, the JST and book of Moses indicate Joseph understood image to signify bodily image.

This conclusion is further reinforced by a still closer analysis of the text, for Joseph not only refers to the Father and the Son as personages, but he also asserts that the Son is in the express image of “the personage of the Father.” How should the phrase, “personage of the Father” be understood where personage does not refer to the Father but apparently to something that can be predicated of the Father? Here, I believe, the term refers directly to the Father’s body. Compare the second entry under personage in The Oxford English Dictionary:

Joseph used the term personage to refer to a visible, human-like, embodied being. While Joseph Smith at this time understood the Holy Ghost to be an actual being, he apparently did not yet understand him to be embodied in human-like form (despite Nephi’s description of the “Spirit of the Lord” as embodied). Thus, Joseph describes the Godhead as consisting of three beings but only two personages. These formulations in lecture 5, which sound like Campbellite theology (Vogel, “Concept of God,” 27), may have originated with the former Campbellites Sidney Rigdon or Parley P. Pratt. Parley P. Pratt Jr., ed., The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 13–14. Even in his canonized 1843 description of the Godhead where Joseph explicitly extended the category personage to include the Holy Ghost, he still distinguished the Holy Ghost’s mode of embodiment from that of the Father and the Son. He says, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit” (D&C 130:22). For a helpful discussion of the status of the Holy Ghost as presented by the Lectures on Faith, see Robert L. Millet, “The Supreme Power over All Things: The Doctrine of the Godhead in the Lectures on Faith,” in Dahl and Tate, Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective, 231–34.

5Lecture 5’s static description of Christ as a personage of tabernacle resolves the mostly answered objection that Christ disembodies when he goes to heaven.
2. The body of a person; chiefly with reference to appearance, stature, etc; bodily frame, figure; personal appearance. . . .

1559 R. Hall *Life Fisher* in *Fisher's Wks.* (E.E.T.S.) II. p. lxiii, Doctor Ridley (who was a man of verie little and small personage).

1606 Bryskett *Civ. Life* 32 Well borne, vertuous, chaste, of tall and comely personage, and well spoken. . . .

1785. Cowper *Let. to Lady Hesketh* 20-24 Dec., Half a dozen flannel waistcoats . . . to be worn . . . next to my personage.58

Consistent with Joseph’s 1830 revisions of Genesis 1:26–27 and Genesis 5:1–2, the *Lectures on Faith* reaffirmed in 1834 that man is created in the image of the body of both the Father and the Son.59

What, then, shall be made of the lecture’s referring contrastingly to the Father as “a personage of spirit” and to the Son as “a personage of tabernacle”? Again, Webster’s 1828 dictionary is helpful. It lists “our natural body” as one use of the term *tabernacle.*60 Our natural body, I take it, is a body of flesh and bones. If so, the lectures affirm that God the Son has a flesh-and-bones body, humanlike in form, while God the Father has a spirit body, also humanlike in form.61 As mentioned, Joseph later knew that the Father, as well as the Son, has a glorious, incorruptible body of flesh and bone.62 No doubt, his understanding of the mode of the Father’s embodiment was enlarged and refined as he continued to receive and reflect on revelation.

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58*The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “personage.”

59Alexander relies on the *Lectures on Faith* as his principal evidence for the late development and immaterialism theories. In my view, careful textual and contextual analyses of the lectures disconfirm these theories.


61As further evidence for my position, note that Joseph in 1841 used the same phrase, “personage of spirit,” to describe the Holy Ghost in contrast to the Father and the Son, both of whom he then described as personages of “tabernacle.” *WJS*, 64. The month previous, Joseph asserted that the Holy Ghost had a spirit body. *WJS*, 62–63. Clearly, Joseph understood a “personage of spirit” to be embodied. Compare, above, the brother of Jared’s description of the humanlike body of the premortal Christ as set out in Ether 3 and Tertullian’s description of the soul.

62Based on a semantic study of the word *spirit* in lecture 5 and other Joseph Smith writings and scriptures, Millet has considered the possibility that even at this time, Joseph Smith may have understood that the Father had a body of flesh and bones. Millet, “The Supreme Power,” 225–28. See also Millet, “Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism: Orthodoxy, Neoorthodoxy, Tension, and Tradition,” *BYU Studies* 29 (summer 1989): 55–56.
External Corroborative Evidence

That the members of the Godhead are embodied persons and that Joseph Smith understood this fact are clearly indicated in the earliest recorded evidence of Mormon discourse. Yet for the pre-1838 period, questions still remain. Was this understanding merely confined to Joseph and other Church leaders or merely embedded in the revelatory discourse awaiting later extraction and explicit articulation? How widely and fully did the membership at large understand the doctrine? The answers to these questions are not so clearly indicated in available documents. However, there is some significant evidence that the doctrine was communicated and accepted within Church circles generally.\(^{63}\) I summarize that evidence here.

1. Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of the Prophet, in an 1830 conversation with a group of three delegates from a council that was determined to stop the further publication of the Book of Mormon, acknowledged that Mormon belief in an embodied God had already provoked Methodist attack. In her history, she recounted, "the different denominations are very much opposed to us. . . . The Methodists also come, and they rage, for they worship a God without body or parts, and they know that our faith comes in contact with this principle."\(^{64}\)

2. Truman Coe, a Presbyterian minister who had lived among the Saints in Kirtland for four years (1832–1836), confirms Lucy's statement. In a letter that was published in the Ohio Observer on August 11, 1836, he wrote:

[The Mormons] contend that the God worshipped by the Presbyterians and all other sectarians is no better than a wooden god.

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\(^{64}\)Lucy Mack Smith, The History of Joseph Smith, ed. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 161. Lucy apparently dictated this account of the conversation in 1845. Dan Vogel asserts that such a statement "does not mean that in 1830 Mormons were teaching that the Father has a body like the Son's," since this doctrine was introduced much later. Rather Vogel claims that Lucy Smith was "more likely" saying that the Methodists objected because Book of Mormon modalism implied to them that it was God the Father who became incarnate in the flesh. Vogel, "Concept of God," 24. Since, as has been shown, there is no credible basis for the claim that the doctrine was not introduced until much later, Vogel's assertion begs the question.
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 himself.\textsuperscript{65}

Both Truman Coe and Lucy Mack Smith refer to what they take to be the beliefs of the community ("they believe"); "our faith" as contrasted with views held by individual Mormons only.

3. John Murdock and Zebedee Coltrin, two members closely associated with Joseph in Kirtland, both claim to have witnessed appearances of deity in the winter of 1832–33, and their descriptions are decidedly anthropomorphic. Coltrin related a divine manifestation, which occurred in Kirtland in February or March 1833.\textsuperscript{66} He reported:

Joseph having given instructions, and while engaged in silent prayer, kneeling . . . a personage walked through the room from East to west, and Joseph asked if we saw him. I saw him and suppose the others did, and Joseph answered that this was Jesus, the Son of God, our elder brother. Afterward Joseph told us to resume our former position in prayer, which we did. Another person came through; He was surrounded as with a flame of fire. [I] experienced a sensation that it might destroy the tabernacle as it was of consuming fire of great brightness. The Prophet Joseph said this was the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I saw him . . .

He was surrounded as with a flame of fire, which was so brilliant that I could not discover anything else but his person. I saw his hands, his legs, his feet, his eyes, nose, mouth, head and body in the shape and form of a perfect man. He sat in a chair as a man would sit in a chair, but This appearance was so grand and overwhelming that it seemed that I should melt down in His presence, and the sensation was so powerful that it thrilled through my whole system and


\textsuperscript{66}Coltrin said that this visitation occurred "about two or three weeks after the opening of the school [of the prophets]." This would place the experience in February of 1833, since the school commenced on January 23, 1833. October 3, 1883, \textit{Salt Lake School of the Prophets: Minute Book 1883} (Palm Desert, Calif.: ULC Press, 1981), 39. On the other hand, it is possible that after half a century, Coltrin's recollection may have been thrown off by a month. Such a theophany occurred in the School of the Prophets on March 18 according to First Presidency member Frederick G. Williams's minutes of that meeting. Williams wrote, "Many of the brethren saw a heavenly vision of the Savior, and concourses of angels, and many other things, of which each one has a record of what he saw." Milton V. Backman Jr., \textit{The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838} (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 267.
I felt it in the marrow of my bones. The Prophet Joseph said: “Brethren, now you are prepared to be the apostles of Jesus Christ, for you have seen both the Father and the Son and know that They exist and that They are two separate personages.”

Murdock was in the first group to be ordained high priests by Joseph Smith in 1831. While in Kirtland, Murdock’s wife died shortly after giving birth to twin boys. These were the twins that Joseph and Emma took into their home to raise. Murdock claimed to see the Lord sometime during the winter of 1832–33 while living in Joseph’s home. In his abridged history taken from his journal, he wrote:

During the winter that I boarded with Bro[ther] Joseph . . . we had a number of prayer meetings, in the Prophet’s chamber. . . . In one of those meetings the Prophet told us if we could humble ourselves before God, and exersise [sic] strong faith, we should see the face of the Lord. And about midday the visions of my mind were opened, and the eyes of my understanding were enlightened, and I saw the form of a man, most lovely, the visage of his face was sound and fair as the sun. His hair a bright silver grey, curled in a most majestic form, His eyes a keen penetrating blue, and the skin of his neck a most beautiful white and he was covered from the neck to the feet with a loose garment, pure white, whiter than any garment I had ever before seen. His countenance was the most penetrating, and yet most lovely. And while I was endeavoring to comprehend the whole personage from head to feet it slipped from me, and the vision was closed up. But it left on my mind the impression of love, for months, that I never felt before to that degree.

67 Statement of Zebedee Coltrin, *School of the Prophets*, 38–39; italics added. Since this witness is apparently based on personal reminiscence, it does not provide, by itself, compelling evidence that the Saints in 1832–33 believed God to be embodied. Possibly, he read a later-acquired understanding into his account of his earlier experience. However, given the 1829–30 evidence already presented supporting divine embodiment, Coltrin’s testimony properly becomes part of a cumulative case.

68 Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1925), 220–21.

69 “An Abridged Record of the Life of John Murdock: Taken from His Journal by Himself,” typescript, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. 13; italics added. The experience recounted here, unlike most of the other events described in Murdock’s record, is not specifically dated. This lacuna raises the possibility that the account is a personal reminiscence that Murdock has added to his abridged journal entries and not an abridged journal entry itself. Even if this is the case, in the context of the evidence already presented, such a personal reminiscence is also part of the cumulative case.
The direct evidence supporting the claim that from Restoration beginnings Mormons generally understood God to be embodied is corroborated by an examination of the historical context in which the Restoration unfolded. This examination controverts any claim that Joseph’s cultural contemporaries, both in and out of the Church, were largely immaterialists. As Phillip L. Barlow has persuasively argued, Joseph read the Bible literally, even before the organization of the Church.70 And so did many other Christians. In his sociological study of Mormonism, Thomas F. O’Dea found that “i[n] the Book of Mormon itself there is already a concrete conception of God somewhat anthropomorphic in implication. Yet this was little more than the literalness of evangelical Protestantism.”71 Even Joseph’s later explicit teaching that all spirit is material (D&C 131:7–8) was evidently widely believed in the early nineteenth century. Ronald W. Walker writes that “Mormonism was . . . born within an upstate New York matrix that combined New England folk culture with traditional religion.”72 The “traditional religion” component of Joseph Smith’s environmental “matrix” was far from the idealism and immaterialism of classical Platonism. In fact, O’Dea informs us:

The culture of New York may have imparted an extreme literalness and materiality to Joseph’s reports of his visions. Yet anthropomorphism in the conception of God and especially in imagining what God might be like was certainly widespread and hardly seems to have been restricted to one sect or group. The same may be said with regard to a literal understanding of the Bible, which tended to support such human representations of God.73

Many participants in this folk culture “longed for tangible experience with the supernatural” and “yearned for a religion that they

73O’Dea, The Mormons, 125.
could experience physically." In this context, the distinction between spirit and matter was only one of degree, not of kind.

Thus it seems the cultural matrix of upstate New York in the 1820s reinforces the direct evidence cited that many of Joseph Smith's earliest Mormon contemporaries generally also understood that God is embodied. This is not to say that the doctrine of divine embodiment was derived from Joseph Smith's environment. As Richard Bushman reminds us, "Joseph learned early to trust his own experiences above the influence of established authorities and institutions. His vision, instead of bringing him into the evangelical mainstream like most conversations, set him on a course of his own."  

While the evidence is quite compelling that the doctrine of divine embodiment was articulated in the earliest revelatory discourse and was understood by Joseph and his fellow Latter-day Saints, the doctrine was apparently not strongly emphasized at that time. On the other hand, by 1838, members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles had privately and publicly taught divine embodiment as a doctrine of the Church. From the early forties onward, the idea was vigorously publicized and promoted not only by Joseph

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75 Bushman, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism, 59.

76 I draw this conclusion from the relative paucity of mention of the doctrine in the popular Mormon publications of that day.

77 In a personal letter, Wilford Woodruff wrote, "Their [sic] is a whole generation worshiping they know not what, whether a God without mouth, eyes, ears, body parts or passions as he does not reveal himself unto them, but their is not deception with the Saints in any age of the world who worships the living and true God of revelation." Wilford Woodruff to Asahel H[art], Scarborough, Maine, August 25, 1838, quoted in Robert H. Slover, "A Newly Discovered 1838 Wilford Woodruff Letter," BYU Studies 15 (spring 1975): 357. Note that Woodruff attributes the belief to "the Saints" and asserts that it is grounded in revelation.

In a missionary effort, Parley P. Pratt wrote and published that "we worship a God who has both body and parts: who has eyes, mouth and ears, and who speaks when he pleases." Pratt, Mormonism Unveiled, 29; italics added. Grant Underwood has argued that Pratt was merely parroting other sects of the time who believed that the Father had a body. Grant Underwood, "The New England
but by Mormon missionaries, including Orson and Parley Pratt, as a most distinctive and attractive doctrine of the Restoration.\textsuperscript{78}

To the staunch immaterialist, it may seem strange that the doctrine of divine embodiment would be an attractive one. However, in January of 1841, Joseph Smith not only taught that God is embodied but that his body, far from demeaning him, is a crucial aspect of his glory: "That which is without body, parts and passions is nothing. There is no other God in heaven but that God who has flesh and bones. . . . All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not."\textsuperscript{79} Hence, God's having a body of flesh and bones is crucial to his having power over all beings. Likewise, Joseph denies that spirit is immaterial:

The body is supposed to be organized matter, and the spirit, by many, is thought to be immaterial, without substance. With this latter statement we should beg leave to differ, and state the spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body; that it existed before the body, can exist in the body; and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be mouldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection, be again united with it.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{78}See, for example, Parley P. Pratt, "Immortality and Eternal Life of the Material Body," in \textit{An Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York, Letter to Queen Victoria, (Reprinted from the Tenth European Edition,) The Fountain of Knowledge, Immortality of the Body, and Intelligence and Affection [Nauvoo: John Taylor, 1840], reprinted in The Essential Parley P. Pratt (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 104–30. Parley P. Pratt's main thesis is that "all persons except materialists must be infidels, so far at least as a belief in the scriptures is concerned . . . man's body is as eternal as his soul" and "the idea of a 'God without body or parts' . . . [is among] errors of the grossest [sic] kind" (104). See also Orson Pratt, \textit{Absurdities of Immaterialism; or, A Reply to T. W. P. Taylder's Pamphlet, Entitled, "The Materialism of the Mormons or Latter-day Saints, Examined and Exposed"} (Liverpool, England: R. James, 1849), quoted in David J. Whittaker, ed., \textit{The Essential Orson Pratt} (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 61–108.

\textsuperscript{79}\textit{TPJS}, 181. This is the first extant, explicit statement made directly by Joseph himself that the Father has a body of flesh and bones.

\textsuperscript{80}\textit{TPJS}, 207.
Having a body is also crucial to our happiness: "Spirit and element, inseparably connected receive a fulness of joy" (D&C 93:33).

We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body and herein is his punishment. He is pleased when he can obtain the tabernacle of man, and when cast out by the Savior he asked to go into the herd of swine, showing that he would prefer a swine's body to having none.81

So critical is a body to the happiness of a person that Satan, an unembodied spirit, envies even the bodies of swine. This concept of the body as a glorious and empowering prize, not a wretched prison, is essential to understanding the teaching that God is embodied.

81TPJS, 207. Joseph Smith taught the doctrine of divine embodiment on several occasions during the Nauvoo period. For example, he is reported to have said the following: "Concerning the Godhead it was Not as many imagined—three Heads & but one body, he said the three were separate bodys [sic]" (WJS, 63) and "The holy ghost is yet a Spiritual body and waiting to take to himself a body." WJS, 382. In his King Follett discourse, Joseph taught, "If you were to see him [Elohim] today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man." Discourse, April 7, 1844, Nauvoo, Illinois, in TPJS, 345; see also Donald Q. Cannon and Larry E. Dahl, The Prophet Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse: A Six Column Comparison of Original Notes and Amalgamation (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1983).
The Good Shepherd Separates the Sheep from the Goats. Mosaic, ca. 520 A.D. Saint Apollinare Nuovo Church, Ravenna, Italy. Courtesy Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y.

In the years after Constantine took control of the Christian Church, two traditions in Christian art competed for primacy—the Oriental (Near Eastern) and the Greco-Roman. The depiction of Christ in this mosaic reflects the Greco-Roman tradition. Christ is shown as a beardless youth or young man. The figure type and the design of Christ's halo reflect earlier depictions of Apollo, the sun god of the classical world. The Apollonian visual pattern for the depiction of Christ eventually lost out but was partially revived when the Italian Renaissance looked to the classical tradition for both aesthetics and ideas. Thus for the Sistine Chapel Last Judgment, Michaelangelo follows the early Apollo model for Christ but pushes that model further by depicting Christ seminude.

The medium of mosaic accentuated a style reinforced by the Neoplatonism that had become part of Christian theology. This tradition down played the physical world because the physical was transitory and fallen. Mosaic as a medium maintains the integrity of the surface plane of the picture and diminishes the depth of vision with the result that figures become almost two dimensional instead of three dimensional. Thus the figures are kept as symbols while their corporeal reality is reduced.
Part II

Early Christian Belief in an Embodied God

Ample evidence, especially that from early Christian immaterialists, shows that biblical peoples, Jews, and early Christians understood God to be an embodied person.

The view that God is incorporeal, without body or parts, has been the hallmark of Christian orthodoxy for centuries, yet Joseph Smith claimed that he restored the doctrine of divine embodiment found in the primitive Christian understanding. In this section, I argue that Joseph is correct; that is, not only did the very earliest Christians believe God to be embodied in human-like form, but this belief continued to be widely held by Christians for at least the first four centuries after the death of Jesus Christ. The belief was gradually abandoned as Platonism became more and more entrenched as the dominant metaphysical world view of Christian thinkers.

Some of the evidence I cite is indirect and circumstantial, but when all is considered cumulatively, it seems quite convincing. Ironically, much of this evidence is drawn from the writings of two of the most uncompromising incorporealists, Origen and Augustine. Given their strong opposition to the doctrine of divine embodiment, the evidence they provide is particularly persuasive.

Primitive Christian Belief in an Embodied Deity

That the earliest Christians believed God to be embodied is admitted by the noted Church historian Adolph Harnack, though he buries this admission in two footnotes in his seven-volume


work, *History of Dogma*. Writing about first-century believers, he explains:

God was naturally conceived and represented as corporeal by uncultured Christians, though not by these alone, as the later controversies prove (e.g., Orig. *contra Melito*; see also Tertull. *De anima*). In the case of the cultured, the idea of a corporeality of God may be traced back to Stoic influences; in the case of the uncultured, popular ideas co-operated with the sayings of the Old Testament literally understood, and the impression of the Apocalyptic images.84

He further concedes, "In the second century . . . realistic eschatological ideas no doubt continued to foster in wide circles the popular idea that God had a form and a kind of corporeal existence."85

Harnack identifies several possible sources of primitive86 Christian belief in an embodied deity including popular religious ideas, Stoic metaphysics, and Old Testament scripture, literally construed. It is common knowledge that ordinary persons, including the early Greeks,87 have always (as Harnack suggests) naturally conceived God (or the gods) to be embodied. Further, Harnack proposes that Christians influenced by Stoic views could have reached the same conclusion on metaphysical grounds. From the Stoic beliefs that only matter is real and that God is real, it follows that God is a material being.88

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88Stoicism, founded by Zeno of Citium, ca. 300 B.C., was mostly a closely knit system of logic, metaphysics, and ethics. . . . From the theological point of view, however, what was most remarkable about it was its pantheistic materialism. The Stoics reacted vigorously against the Platonic differentiation of a transcendent, intelligible world not perceptible by the senses from the ordinary world of sensible experience. Whatever exists, they argued, must be body, and the universe as a whole must be through and through
Whatever the impact of popular belief and Stoic metaphysics on the primitive Christian understanding of God, perhaps a more significant influence was the Hebrew Bible. J. N. D. Kelly informs us, “from the apostolic age to the middle of the second century . . . there was as yet no officially sanctioned New Testament canon.”89 Indeed, “for the first hundred years, at least, of its history the Church’s Scriptures, in the precise sense of the word, consisted exclusively of the Old Testament.”90 And as Harnack has reminded us, the Old Testament literally construed describes God in decidedly anthropomorphic terms. For example, Edmond Cherbonnier has shown that the God of biblical revelation, in contrast with the deity of Platonist metaphysics, was personal, not abstract; invisible as a matter of choice, not inherently; everlasting or enduring through time, not timeless; and ethically constant, not metaphysically immutable. He concludes that in many respects, the God of the Bible has more in common with the gods of the Greek and Roman pantheon than with Plato’s idea of ultimate Being or Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover.91

More to the point, many biblical passages straightforwardly describe God as embodied. For instance, Genesis 1:26 records that God made man “in our own image, after our likeness.”92 Even more explicit are the many references to God’s body parts, such as “I [Jacob] have seen God face to face” (Gen. 32:30); “they saw the

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90Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, 52.
92Umberto Cassuto explains that “there is no doubt that the original signification of this expression in the Canaanite tongue was, judging by Babylonian usage, corporeal, in accordance with the anthropomorphic conception of the godhead among the peoples of the ancient East.” Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 1:56.
God of Israel: and there was under his feet" (Ex. 24:10); “the Lord spake unto Moses face to face” (Ex. 33:11); and “I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen” (Ex. 33:23). God also appears embodied in New Testament accounts of divine appearances. For instance, Acts 7:56 tells of Stephen seeing God and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.93 It is hard to imagine a being with a face, feet, hands, and back parts but without a body.

Though on the basis of scriptures such as these, early Christians no doubt simply took it for granted that God has a body similar to man’s, this belief does not mean they thought of God as similar to man in all respects. Unlike man, for example, God is holy, as Hosea 11:9 states: “For I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee.” Cherbonnier acknowledges that a considerable variety exists in scripture and that this and similar passages do point away from an overly simple anthropomorphism. However, these passages do not indicate that the later biblical prophets gave up the ideas that God has a body and that man’s body was created in his image. To the contrary, Cherbonnier claims that modern scholarship, “by restoring these [anthropomorphic] passages to their context and so recovering their original meaning, reverses such an interpretation.”94

Only after divine embodiment was rejected on philosophical (primarily Platonist) grounds was the image of God identified with the soul or the rational aspect of the soul, and biblical passages referring to God’s body or bodily parts were explicitly given figurative interpretations. While the philosophical critique of anthropomorphic conceptions of deity has its roots in ancient Greece and while there is evidence that anthropomorphism was an issue for the translators of the Septuagint,95 a Jewish Platonist educated

93Consider also the postascension appearances of the resurrected Christ to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-7), to John the Beloved on the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:10-18), and to many others who saw the resurrected Lord (1 Cor. 15:5-8).
94Cherbonnier, “Biblical Anthropomorphism,” 188.
in Alexandria named Philo Judaeus (20 B.C. - A.D. 40) appears to be the first who applied allegorical interpretations to the anthropomorphic passages in the Old Testament. Philo's views were not generally accepted by his mainstream Jewish contemporaries. However, Albinus, a second-century non-Christian and middle-Platonist, did follow Philo's lead and, in turn, greatly influenced Origen and later Christian thinkers.  

Aside from direct revelation as a source for the primitive Christian belief that God is embodied, Harnack fails to mention another, no doubt powerful, influence—the understanding of God within the first-century, Jewish communities out of which Christianity first emerged. According to J. N. D. Kelly,

Judaism was the cradle in which Christianity was nurtured, the source to which it was uniquely indebted. It left a deep imprint, as is generally agreed, on the Church's liturgy and ministry, and an even deeper one on its teaching. In evaluating this impact, we must take account both of Palestinian Judaism and of the Hellenized version current at Alexandria. The former can be dealt with quite briefly, for the heyday of its influence falls outside this book in the apostolic age, when it moulded the thought of all New Testament writers. Yet, in spite of the early rupture between Christians and Jews, it would be a grave error to dismiss it as a negligible force in our period. Until the middle of the second century, when Hellenistic ideas began to come to the fore, Christian theology was taking shape in predominantly Judaistic moulds, and the categories of thought used by almost all Christian writers before the Apologists were largely Jewish.

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97Kelly, "Early Christian Doctrines," 6. Jacob Neusner has cautioned against the presumption that this "Judaistic mould" was all of one piece. He asks:

Can we identify one Judaism in the first centuries BCE and CE? Only if we can treat as a single cogent statement everything all Jews wrote. That requires us to harmonize the Essene writings of the Dead Sea, Philo, the Mishnah, the variety of scriptures collected in our century as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, not to mention the Gospels! This is to say, viewed as statements of systems, the writings attest to diverse religious systems, and, in the setting of which we speak, to diverse Judaisms. There was no one orthodoxy, no Orthodox Judaism. There were various Judaisms. (Jacob Neusner, "Judaism and Christianity in the First Century: How Shall We Perceive Their Relationship?" in A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on
Those early Jewish (and subsequently Christian) categories, based as they were upon a literal reading of the Hebrew scriptures, were unabashedly anthropomorphic.98 For instance, James Drummond admits that even as the Jews advanced theologically to a higher conception of God, “we can hardly doubt that the mass of the people would be satisfied with [the scriptures’] literal meaning, and that their idea of God was the purest anthropomorphism.”99 Similarly, George Foot Moore claims that Palestinian Judaism was “innocent . . . of an ‘abstract’ or ‘transcendent’—or any other sort of a philosophical—idea of God.”100 Indeed, he asserts, “the philosophical horror of ‘anthropomorphisms’ which Philo . . . entertained was unknown to the Palestinian schools. They endeavored to think of God worthily and to speak of him reverently; but their criterion was the Scripture and the instinct of piety, not an alien metaphysics.”101 Thoroughly influencing the basic concepts of formative Judaism was, indeed, the understanding of God’s “incarnation,” which Jacob Neusner describes “as a commonplace for Judaisms from the formation of Scripture forward.”102 By incarnation, Neusner means “the representation of

Jewish and Christian Literature and History, eds. Philip R. Davies
and Richard T. White [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press,
1990], 256)

Nonetheless, E. P. Sanders argues that there was, at least within first-century Palestinian Judaism, a common theological core underlying all this rich diversity of thought and practice. Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE to 66 CE (London: SCM, 1992), 240–78.


99James Drummond, Philo Judaeus; or, The Jewish-Alexandrian Philo-


100George Foot Moore, Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era:
The Age of the Tannaim, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927),
1:421. For a recent treatment of this topic see Elliot R. Wolfson, Through a Specu-


102Jacob Neusner, The Incarnation of God: The Character of Divinity in
God in the flesh, as corporeal, consubstantial in emotion and virtue with human beings, and sharing in the modes and means of action carried out by mortals, ... doing deeds that women and men do in the way in which they do them.”¹⁰³ So powerful and natural was Judaism’s “rich legacy of anthropomorphism”¹⁰⁴ that Rabbi Hoshiaiah could tell a story about the time when God came to create man and how the ministering angels mistook Adam for God: “What did the Holy One, blessed be he, do? He put him to sleep, so everyone knew that he was a mere man.”¹⁰⁵ Of course, in this portrayal of divinity the purpose was never to confuse God with man but rather to teach an understanding “that draws humanity upward and does not bring God downward.”¹⁰⁶

Nowhere is this Jewish anthropomorphism more evident than in the teachings of several classical rabbis. For instance, in his recently published study, Alon Goshen Gottstein claims:

In all of rabbinic literature [covering both the tannaitic (70–200 A.D.) and amoraic (220–500 A.D.) periods] there is not a single statement that categorically denies that God has body or form. In my understanding, the question of whether the rabbis believed in a God who has form is one that needs little discussion. ... Instead of asking, “Does God have a body?” we should inquire, “What kind of body does God have?”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Neusner, Incarnation of God, 12, 17.
¹⁰⁴ Neusner, Incarnation of God, 6.
¹⁰⁵ Genesis Rabbah 8:10, quoted in Neusner, Incarnation of God, 3. In addition, it was reported at a 1995 conference in Jerusalem, sponsored by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, that an unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls fragment, 4Q416 frg. 1, speaks of God as a creature of flesh. Although the Dead Sea Scrolls are not necessarily a part of the rabbinic tradition, we await publication and further analysis of that fragment by T. Elgvin.
¹⁰⁶ Neusner, Incarnation of God, 3. The tractate Shi’ur Koma (The Measure of the Body) describes God’s body in huge proportions. See Encyclopaedia Judaica, 14:1417, s.v. “Shi’ur Koma.” A widely acknowledged source for studies of Jewish anthropomorphism, this tractate is from the period of the Tannaim and is associated with Kabbalah, but its concepts are known in rabbinic midrashim.
¹⁰⁷ Alon Goshen Gottstein, “The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature,” Harvard Theological Review 87 (1994): 172. See also Arthur Marmorstein, The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God (1937; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1968), which deals with the literal versus allegorical interpretation of scripture in rabbinic tradition. While Marmorstein suggests that the rabbis were generally moving away from anthropomorphic conceptions of God, he does not indicate that they were moving away from the idea that God is embodied.
Gottstein further contends, "The bodily meaning is the only meaning of zelem [image] in rabbinic literature. This suggestion is borne out in all tannaitic and amoraic sources." 108

The rabbinic interpretation of the image of God as referring to the body is clearly shown in this representative selection, a story about Rabbi Hillel:

His disciples asked him: "Master, whither are you bound?" He answered them: "To perform a religious duty." "What," they asked, "is this religious duty?" He said to them, "To wash in the bath-house." Said they: "Is this a religious duty?" "Yes," he replied, "if the statues of kings, which are erected in theatres and circuses, are scoured and washed by the man who is appointed to look after them, and who thereby obtains his maintenance through them—nay more, he is exalted in the company of the great of the kingdom—how much more I, who have been created in the Image and Likeness." 109

Rabbinic anthropomorphism so strikingly contrasts with later (third century on) Christian immaterialism and so closely parallels Joseph Smith’s understanding of God that it will be helpful to summarize Gottstein’s account of the rabbinic concepts in some detail.

First, Gottstein shows that rabbinic anthropomorphism was not a crude notion in which God’s body (or even Adam’s body created in its image) was seen as identical or very similar to our present fallen human bodies. 110 For example, one rabbinic account describes Adam’s body as one of great beauty and light:

Resh Lakish, in the name of R. Simen the son of Menasya, said: "The apple of Adam’s heel outshone the globe of the sun; how much more so the brightness of his face! Nor need you wonder. In the ordinary way if a person makes salvers [servants], one for himself and one for his household, whose will he make more beautiful? Not his own? Similarly, Adam was created for the service of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the globe of the sun for the service of mankind." 111

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108Gottstein, “Body as Image of God,” 174; italics in original. Gottstein acknowledges that in the later Tanhuma literature, several paraphrases expand the meaning of zelem to include eternal life, divine glory, and righteous behavior. None of these expansions overrides the older understanding of zelem as body but rather are derived from it (174 n. 9).


111Leviticus Rabbah 20:2, in Midrash Rabbab, 4:252. Other texts corroborate Adam’s possessing a body of light: Genesis Rabbah 12:6, in Midrash Rabbab,
Thus Adam's original body was more radiant than the sun, but
God's body, in whose image Adam's was made, is still more bril-
liant and beautiful;\(^\text{112}\) though it resembles the human body in form,
it differs from it in function. Gottstein quotes a passage from Peter
in the Jewish-Christian \textit{Pseudo-Clementine Homilies} that parallels
notions found in \textit{Sefer Yezira}:

He has the most beautiful Form for the sake of man, in order that the
pure in heart shall be able to see Him, that they shall rejoice on
account of whatever they have endured. For He has stamped man as
it were with the greatest seal, with His own Form, in order that he
shall rule and be lord over all things, and that all things shall serve
him. For this reason, he who having judged that He is the All and
man His image (\textit{eikon})—He being invisible and His image, man, visi-
ble—will honor the image, which is man.\(^\text{113}\)

Next, Gottstein proposes a model for reconciling apparently
contradictory rabbinic passages pertaining to the issue of whether
man, as the result of sin, lost the image of God:

As we have seen, Adam's \textit{zelem} is his luminous body. In other
sources, such as the story of Hillel washing his body, the \textit{zelem}
referred to the physical body. \textit{Zelem} can thus refer to various levels,

\(^{1}\text{91; Ecclesiastes Rabbah 8:1, in Midrash Rabbah, 8:213; and Deuteronomy Rab-
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\textit{bah 11:3, in Midrash Rabbah, 7:173.}

\(^{112}\) Compare Joseph Smith's description of the brilliance of God's body. In
his 1838 account of the First Vision, he told of a light "above the brightness of the
sun" and attempted to describe the Father and the Son "whose brightness and
glory defy all description" (JS-H 1:16-17). Compare also the language that Zebe-
dee Coltrin (Joseph's LDS contemporary) used to describe God (for example,
"surrounded as with a flame of fire," "consuming fire of great brightness," and
"flame of fire which was so brilliant") with the rabbinic descriptions of the divine
body. Statement of Zebedee Coltrin, October 3, 1883, \textit{School of Prophets}, 38.
A fuller description of Coltrin's theophany is set out in point 3 of the section on
external corroborative evidence.

\(^{113}\) This passage is from a section of the homilies recently translated and
discussed by Shlomo Pines in "Points of Similarity between the Exposition of the
Doctrine of the Seferot in the Sefer Yezira and a Text of the Pseudo-Clementine
Homilies: The Implications of this Resemblance," \textit{Proceedings of the Israel Academy
of Sciences and Humanities} 7 (1989): 64-65. "Pines . . . considers the last
sentence a later gloss, for it contradicts the possibility of seeing the divine form."
Gottstein, however, conjectures that "invisible' may refer to the ordinary state,
and not to the exceptional condition that the pure-hearted ones attain." Gott-
stein, "Body as Image of God," 173 n. 5.
or aspects, all of which bear a resemblance to the physical body. I would propose that these various levels, or various bodies, reflect one another. The physical body is a reflection of the body of light. . . . [A] kind of graded devolutionary process . . . may be a model for two ways of talking about zelem. The zelem in its original form may be lost, but the dimmer reflection of this form is extant in the physical body, which may still be spoken of as zelem.  

Finally, Gottstein ventures a partial explanation of why the rabbinic interpretation of image is exclusively bodily compared with the subsequent nonbodily interpretations given by Christian immaterialists. Rabbinic anthropology did not consider the soul to be immaterial or radically distinct from the body, as Platonists held it to be. He elaborates:

Rabbinic anthropology differs . . . from Hellenistic and later Christian anthropology. The distinction between Spirit and matter is not known in Rabbinic literature. . . . metaphysically soul and body form a whole, rather than a polarity. Crudely put, the soul is like the battery that operates an electronic gadget. It may be different and originally external to the gadget, but the difference is not one of essence. . . . More significantly, the gadget and its power source ultimately belong together, rather than apart. Thus, the soul is the vitalizing agent, whose proper place is in the body, not out of it.  

114Gottstein, “Body as Image of God,” 188.
115Compare Doctrine and Covenants 131:6–7: “There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All Spirit is matter, but it is more fine and pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes. We cannot see it; but when our bodies are purified, we shall see that it is all matter.”
116Gottstein, “Body as Image of God,” 176–77. Compare Doctrine and Covenants 93:33: “For man is spirit. The elements are eternal, and spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fulness of joy.” Joseph further explained his beliefs about spirit:

In tracing the thing to the foundation, and looking at it philosophically, we shall find a very material difference between the body and the spirit; the body is supposed to be organized matter, and the spirit, by many, is thought to be immaterial, without substance. With this latter statement we should beg leave to differ, and state the spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body; that it existed before the body, can exist in the body; and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be mouldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection be again united with it. (TPJS, 207)
Consistently, then, in rabbinic eschatology “the future life takes the form of resurrection of the dead, rather than the eternal life of the soul.”\textsuperscript{117}

Even in first-century Alexandria, where Hellenistic ideas were already firmly entrenched, Jewish incorporealism was a minority position. For example, Harry Austryn Wolfson, author of the standard biography of Philo, tells us that in his writings Philo often opposed a traditional school of Alexandrian Judaism, which interpreted the scriptures literally. In Wolfson’s words, these traditionalists “display a self-confidence and self-contentment which flow from . . . a faith in the loyalty of their adherents among the great masses of Alexandrian Jews.”\textsuperscript{118} Later, he adds:

The great mass of believers who will have not felt the impact of the foreign philosophy will see no need of any reconciliation between them. This great mass of believers will either remain indifferent to the innovations of the philosophic reconcilers, or will superciliously look upon them as mere triflers, or, if given provocation, will militantly oppose them as disturbers of the religious peace.\textsuperscript{119}

In the end, Wolfson admits that despite Philo’s effort to synthesize Jewish belief and Greek thought, “Alexandrian Judaism at the time of Philo was of the same stock as Pharisaic Judaism, which flourished in Palestine at that time.”\textsuperscript{120} Thus apparently in the first century the Jews in Alexandria, as well as in Palestine, almost universally believed in an embodied God.\textsuperscript{121} And, as Kelly has reminded us, first-century Jewish thought was the mold in which primitive Christian theology took shape.

Though data pertaining to Christian belief during the earliest period of Christian history is meager, that data strongly supports the thesis that the earliest Christians generally believed God to be

\textsuperscript{117}Gottstein, “Body as Image of God,” 177.


\textsuperscript{119}Wolfson, \textit{Philo}, 1:72.

\textsuperscript{120}Wolfson, \textit{Philo}, 1:56.

\textsuperscript{121}It is interesting that Wolfson asserts “[t]he Jewish God indeed is incorporeal and free from emotions as is the God of the philosophers,” despite his implication that “the great masses of Alexandrian Jews” believed otherwise. Wolfson, \textit{Philo}, 1:26.
embodied. Thus Joseph’s claim that his doctrine of divine embodiment was a restoration of primitive Christian understanding seems well corroborated.

Second and Third Century Belief in an Embodied God

Immaterialism was introduced into Christian theology at least as early as the mid-to-late second century, with Clement of Alexandria (about A.D. 150–213) being perhaps the first to unequivocally refer to God as immaterial. Immaterialists ultimately triumphed, but not without a three-century-long struggle with Christians who held tenaciously to the primitive doctrine of divine embodiment.

Origen as Witness. The writings of Origen (about A.D. 185–253) provide substantial evidence that Christians in the second and third centuries continued to widely believe in God’s embodiment—despite the efforts of Platonists both within and without the church to persuade them otherwise. Origen, himself a Christian Platonist, was one of the most influential thinkers of the early Church, second perhaps only to Augustine. Like Philo, he was born and enculturated in Alexandria, on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. The city was founded in 331 B.C. by Alexander the Great, and up through Origen’s time it continued to be a center of Hellenistic intellectual culture.

The first of nine children of Christian parents, Origen received first a literary education, which consisted of studying the Greek classics. He later studied philosophy under the renowned middle-Platonist Ammonius Saccas, who later taught Plotinus, the thinker usually credited with founding Neoplatonism. Origen also knew and respected the works of a number of second-century non-Christian middle-Platonists, including Numenius, whose most important contribution to the tradition was his Platonic doctrine of God. Numenius taught that a first God exists who is ineffable, incorporeal, unmoved, and utterly separated from sensible reality. This first God, through the mediation of a second God, communicates eternal order to the sensible world.

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Origen found Numenius’ doctrine of God helpful in his attempts to describe the Father and his relationship both to his son Jesus and to the created world. Origen adopted the Platonistic metaphysics of his culture. He then devoted his life to the exegesis of biblical texts in an effort to construct and clarify Christian doctrine to fit his incorporealistic concept of God.\textsuperscript{123} His devotion to this task gives great significance to his reluctant admissions, explicit and tacit, that his Christian contemporaries widely believed in an embodied God. In at least six ways, Origen’s writings support the thesis that his contemporaries believed in a corporeal God.

1. In his most important theological work, \textit{De Principiis} (On First Principles), Origen enumerated the doctrines that he claims were delivered to the Church by the Apostles. Significantly, he did not include the doctrine of divine incorporeality on the list.\textsuperscript{124}

2. Origen explicitly acknowledged that when he wrote (around the middle of the third century A.D.), the issue of divine embodiment had yet to be settled in the Church: “How God himself is to be understood,—whether as corporeal, and formed according to some shape, or of a different nature from bodies”—is “a point which is not clearly indicated in our teachings.” He thus proposed to make the issue a matter of rational and scriptural investigation with a view to formulating a coherent body of doctrine “by means of illustrations and arguments,—either those . . . discovered in holy Scripture, or . . . deduced by closely tracing out the consequences and following a correct method.”\textsuperscript{125}

3. Origen discussed certain first- and second-century word usages, ignorance of which had contributed to misunderstanding of some biblical and other early texts. For example, he pointed out


Pancreator (Christ the Almighty). Mosaic, ca. 1100 A.D. Daphné, Greece. Courtesy Foto Marburg/Art Resource, N.Y.

This piece represents the Oriental (Near Eastern) tradition in early Christian art, which became the primary tradition in Christian art. The Oriental sage model for Christ invariably portrays him with long hair and a long beard. That is why the standard depiction of Christ usually includes these elements.

A common denominator between the Oriental and Greco-Roman traditions was Neoplatonism, which substituted nonmaterialism for the original Christian theology. Artistically, this theological shift resulted in a conscious movement to eliminate perspective and make images more two dimensional. This objective was accomplished by manipulating three elements. Midrange shadows were eliminated. Mosaic tile was used to simplify the image. And gold tile was used to enhance the reflectivity of the background. When a bright, shining background is used, the background advances, further reducing the perception of three dimensions. The net result is a greatly simplified and flattened image that stylistically eliminates the corporeality of the image.
that nowhere in the Bible is God explicitly described as incorporeal; the Greek term for incorporeal, *asomatos*, does not appear there. Even where that term does appear in early nonscriptural Christian writings, Origen claimed that it does not have the same meaning that Greek and Gentile philosophers assigned to it. Rather, he asserted, Christian writers simply used the term to refer to a material body that is much finer and less palpable than those perceivable through the senses. For example, he explained that in the treatise called *The Doctrine of Peter*, where the resurrected Jesus is quoted as saying to his disciples, “I am not an incorporeal demon,” this statement

must be understood to mean that He had not such a body as demons have, which is naturally fine, and thin as if formed of air (and for this reason is either considered or called by many incorporeal), but that He had a solid and palpable body. Now, according to human custom, everything which is not of that nature is called by the simple or ignorant incorporeal; as if one were to say that the air which we breathe was incorporeal, because it is not a body of such a nature as can be grasped and held, or can offer resistance to pressure.126

Among the early Christian writers who described God as *asomatos*, Origen was the first (with the possible exception of Clement of Alexandria) to consistently use the term in its technical Platonist sense. In doing so, Origen followed the lead of second-century non-Christian middle-Platonists such as Albinus.127

More unexpectedly, Origen informs us that the New Testament passage “God is a spirit” (John 4:24)—the proof text now most frequently cited in support of the doctrine of incorporeality—was initially understood as evidence against it:

I know that some will attempt to say that, even according to the declarations of our own Scriptures, God is a body, because . . . they find it said . . . in the Gospel according to John, that “God is a Spirit, and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” . . . Spirit, according to them, [is] to be regarded as nothing else than a body.128

128Origen, *De Principiis*, in *ANF*, 4:242. For an instance of this, see point 1 of the section on Tertullian as witness. Wolfson admits that “in Scripture . . . there is no indication that by spirit and soul were meant any such principles as form or immateriality.” Wolfson, *Philo*, 2:95.
This surprising statement is easily explained: (1) *pneuma* (translated “spirit”) literally meant air or breath—thus implying that spirit is composed of a material substance, one of the four basic elements, and (2) since Christian Stoics believed that existence was confined to material bodies, God (being spirit) was only the purest of all bodies.\(^{129}\)

4. Origen engaged in sustained polemics against those who affirmed God's humanlike embodiment. His argument has two parts. First, he tried to show that corporeality is logically incompatible with philosophical (Platonist) conceptions of the divine nature. Second, by means of painstaking exegesis and allegorical interpretation, he labored to convince his fellow Christians that the scriptures, notwithstanding their literal import, do not disprove divine incorporeality. It is instructive to consider some instances of the latter argument because they indicate the popular Christian understanding of the scriptures that Origen inveighed against.\(^{130}\)

Origen argued that if scriptural passages that describe God as spirit, light, fire, and so forth were literally understood, they would erroneously suggest that God is corporeal. Consequently, he advocated a metaphorical interpretation.\(^{131}\) For example, Origen argued that Genesis 1:26, properly interpreted, does not show God to be corporeal:

We do not understand, however, this man indeed whom Scripture says was made “according to the image of God” to be corporeal. For the form of the body does not contain the image of God, nor is the corporeal man said to be “made,” but “formed,” as is written in the words that follow. For the text says: “And God formed man,” that is fashioned, “from the slime of the earth.”

But it is our inner man, invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal which is made “according to the image of God.” For it is in such qualities as these that the image of God is more correctly understood. But if anyone suppose that this man who is made “according to the image and likeness of God” is made of flesh, he will


\(^{130}\)For an excellent analysis of the centrality of the doctrine of divine incorporeality to Origen's theology and his sustained polemics against anthropomorphic conceptions of God, see Stroumsa, “Incorporeality of God,” 345–58. “Although Origen does not explicitly name his opponents here, they are, obviously, Christians” (346).

\(^{131}\)Origen, *De Principiis*, in *ANF*, 4:242–45.
appear to represent God himself as made of flesh and in human form. It is most clearly impious to think this about God.\textsuperscript{132}

Origen also made light of an anthropomorphic interpretation of Genesis 1:26 by showing the absurdity that results from interpreting other passages the same way:

In brief, those carnal men who have no understanding of the meaning of divinity suppose, if they read anywhere in the Scriptures of God that "heaven is my throne, and the earth my footstool," that God has so large a body that they think he sits in heaven and stretches out his feet to the earth.\textsuperscript{133}

Origen acknowledged that "the Jews indeed, but also some of our people supposed that God should be understood as a man, that is, adorned with human members and human appearance," because in many scriptural passages God is described as speaking to men. But since, as Origen maintained, "the philosophers despise these stories as fabulous and formed in the likeness of poetic fictions," he attempted to show how God can speak to men without the physical ability to perform the function of speaking:

But in this manner God is said to have spoken to man: he either inspires the heart of each of the saints or causes the sound of a voice to reach his ears. So also when he makes known that what each one says or does is known to him the Scriptures says that he "has heard"; and when he makes known that we have done something unjust, it says that he "is angry"; when he censures us as ungrateful for his benefits, it says he "repents," making known indeed these things by these dispositions which are common to men, but not performing them by these members which belong to corporeal nature.\textsuperscript{134}

Origen suggested that just as a human voice can be understood because the tongue repels the air, so the voice of God might be understood as air being reverberated by the will of God. However, God often communicates his word to prophets without the sound of a voice. In this case, the mind of the prophet, which has been illuminated by the Spirit, is directed to words.


\textsuperscript{133}Origen, \textit{Homilies}, 63. As a matter of fact, some believers of this period did conceive of God as having a body of such cosmic proportions. Stroumsa, "Forms of God," 269–88.

\textsuperscript{134}Origen, \textit{Homilies}, 90–91.
Origen's criticism of his fellow-Christians' belief in divine embodiment was no doubt connected with his Platonistic low estimation of matter and the body. He considered it "most clearly impious" to "represent God himself as made of flesh and in human form."\(^{135}\) His choice, as a young man, to castrate himself testified of his contempt for the body, although it seems he later judged this action rash.\(^{136}\) Origen believed that the body was a humiliation—a punishment for the fall from the presence of God. Nonetheless, it served as a means of training whereby we may return to God's presence.\(^{137}\) Thus, in Origen's view, the body had an instrumental value, but the spiritual life after the body's death was much to be preferred:

I think that they love God with all their soul who with a great desire to be in union with God withdraw and separate their soul not only from the earthly body but also from everything material. Such men accept the putting away of the body of humiliation without distress or emotion when the time come[s] for them to put off the body of death by what is commonly regarded as death.\(^{138}\)

Since Origen saw even human embodiment as a humiliation, he vigorously contested divine embodiment.

5. Origen specifically included Melito as among the prominent second-century Christians who taught that God is embodied. Not much is known about Melito's life. Neither his date or place of birth nor his date of death are known, although he was probably dead by A.D. 197. He was active during the imperial reigns of Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138–161) and Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180). Though he apparently spent some of his earlier life in Syria, he was made bishop of Sardis in Lydia in about 168 or 169. As bishop, he was polemically engaged as a Quartodeciman in the controversy concerning Easter.\(^{139}\) The only complete text that remains from Melito, *Peri Pascha*, deals with Easter.

\(^{135}\)Origen, *Homilies*, 63.


\(^{137}\)Trigg, *Origen*, 106.


\(^{139}\)Richard C. White, *Melito of Sardis: Sermon "On the Passover*" (Lexington, Ky.: Lexington Theological Seminary Library, 1976), 4–6. A Quartodeciman is "one of a group in the early church esp. in Asia Minor who during the 2d century and until the Nicene Council in 325 observed Easter on the 14th of Nisan when the Jews slaughtered the Passover lamb no matter on what day of the week that date occurred." *Webster's New International Dictionary*, 3d ed., s.v. "quartodeciman."
Melito was a prolific writer, authoring some eighteen to twenty works. Of these, only five or six are definitely known to us, and these are mostly in fragments.\textsuperscript{140} The extant fragments provide no affirmation of divine corporeality. However, Origen's testimony, recorded about fifty years after Melito's death, explicitly identified Melito as among the Christians who taught that God has a human-like body.\textsuperscript{141}

Some have suggested that Origen was mistaken in attributing a corporealist view to Melito. They claim that Origen had no basis for this attribution other than a very weak inference from the title of a treatise, \textit{On the Corporeality of God},\textsuperscript{142} which Eusebius included in his enumeration of Melito's works. The title of this work could also be translated as \textit{On God Incarnate}. Thus one commentator, while admitting that "it is not at all impossible that a writer as orthodox as Melito . . . held the opinions which Origen imputes to him," nonetheless questions Origen's claim:

Here occurs the doubt: Had Origen himself read the treatise of Melito, or did he know nothing but the title, and rashly jump to the conclusion that Melito held views akin to those which he was at the moment combating? If Melito be the author of the Syriac apology no fault can be found with the spirituality of his conceptions of God.


\textsuperscript{141}Et Dixit Deus: Faciamus hominem ad imaginem nostram et simil-tudinem. Prius discutendum est ubi consistat illud, ad imaginem, in corpore, an in anima. Et in primis videamus, quibus utantur qui prius asserunt; e quo-rum numero est Melito, qui scripsa reliquit, quibus asserit Deum corporeum esse ["And God said, 'Let us make man in our image and likeness.' We must determine beforehand where the 'image' resides, whether in the body or in the soul. And let us first see what evidences the first writers on the subject used; among these was Melito, who has left treatises asserting the corporeality of God." Daniel W. Graham, trans., Department of Philosophy, Brigham Young University]. Origen, \textit{Selections on Genesis}, in J.-P. Migne, ed., \textit{Patrologia Graeca}, 161 vols. (Paris: Migne, 1857-), 12:94. See also Origen, \textit{Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Romans}, in Migne, \textit{Patrologia Graeca}, 14:870-71, where he continues his polemics against Christian anthropomorphites: \textit{qui in Ecclesia positi imaginem corpoream hominis Dei esse imaginem dicunt} ["those members of the Church who say that the corporeal form of man is the image of God." Henry Chadwick, trans., \textit{Origen: Contra Celsum} (Cambridge: University Press, 1965), 416 n. 3].

It does not seem possible now absolutely to determine the question. We are ourselves inclined to believe that Origen made a mistake, and that the subject of Melito’s treatise was the Incarnation.\textsuperscript{145}

Such speculation appears unwarranted. Given Origen’s vigorous efforts to persuade his fellow Christians to give up their corporealism, it seems totally incongruous that he, without having read Melito’s book and without any further evidence, would have attributed this view to a respected bishop of the Church. Moreover, Origen’s testimony is further corroborated by Gennadius who, writing in about A.D. 425, affirmed that Melito was responsible for a sect of Christians who followed him in the belief that the body of man is made in the image of God.\textsuperscript{144} Further, since the doctrine of divine incorporeality eventually became entrenched as Christian orthodoxy, the fact that Melito taught God’s corporeality could help to explain the otherwise mysterious disappearance of this work and other writings.\textsuperscript{145}

6. Finally, it was Origen who has preserved the testimony of Celsus, a second-century middle-Platonist and non-Christian. Celsus wrote a comprehensive critique of Christianity (about A.D. 178) entitled \textit{Aletbes Logos} (True Doctrine), which was later suppressed or destroyed. It is known only through quotations in Origen’s work, \textit{Contra Celsum}, composed seventy years later. Celsus attempted to demonstrate the inadequacy of Christian doctrine, especially the doctrine of God, on the basis of assumptions drawn from Platonist philosophical theology.\textsuperscript{146}

According to Origen, Celsus argued “at length” against what he understood to be the Christian belief that God “is corporeal by nature and has a body like the human form.” In his discussion of Celsus—

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143\textit{A Dictionary of Christian Biography}, 1882, s.v. “Melito.”
146See the introduction to Henry Chadwick, trans., \textit{Origen: Contra Celsum}, 9–32. For an attempted reconstruction of Celsus’s work from the quotations in Origen’s \textit{Contra Celsum}, see Celsus, \textit{On the True Doctrine: A Discourse against the Christians}, trans. R. Joseph Hoffmann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Though by his own admission, Origen has omitted Celsus’s sustained ant corporeality arguments, Hoffmann claims to have reconstructed several pages of these arguments (103–15).
wishing to give to the idea of divine corporeality as little credibility as possible—Origen did not spell out Celsius's sustained anticorporeality arguments, explaining that if Celsius

invents out of his own head ideas which he heard from nobody, or, to grant that he heard them from somebody, notions which he derived from some simple and naïve folk who do not know the meaning of the Bible, there is no need for us to concern ourselves with unnecessary argument.\(^{147}\)

Interestingly, in responding to Celsius—a fellow Platonist whose objections to divine corporeality he shared—Origen feigned ignorance of any Christians actually teaching the doctrine. But as already shown above, Origen elsewhere reckoned the learned bishop

\(^{147}\) Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 416. This passage continues: “The Bible clearly says that God is incorporeal. That is why 'no man has seen God at any time' [John 1:18], and 'the firstborn of all creation' is said to be an 'image of the invisible God' [Col. 1:15]—using ‘invisible’ in the sense of ‘incorporeal’” (416). Colossians 1:15 is one of four places where Paul uses the Greek word *aoratos*, which is usually translated “invisible.”

However, Origen’s claim that Paul meant *incorporeal* here when he wrote *invisible* is dubious. In their translation of and commentary on Colossians, Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke suggest that Origen’s interpretation is not the proper way to understand *aoratos*.

*Aoratos* is usually translated as “invisible.” But the verbal adjective in the biblical Greek not only designates a possibility or impossibility, but is also used in a factual and pragmatic sense: the *agnostos theos* in Acts 17:23 is the “unknown God,” not the “unrecognizable” one; as also the *aniptoi cheires* (Matt 15:20) are the “unwashed hands,” not the “unwashable” ones.

It is recommendable in Col 1:15 to translate *aoratos* in this pragmatic sense. This corresponds to the OT usage because there is no Hebrew equivalent of *aoratos* with the meaning of “invisible.” According to the proclamation of the OT, God is not invisible; it is simply not within the capacity of human beings to see Yahweh. . . . It is unlikely that Paul fostered different notions and cannot be demonstrated. In 1 Cor 13:12, he speaks of a “time” when we will no longer look as though through a mirror, but rather “from face to face.” Obviously, he does not presuppose an “invisible God.” (*Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Astrid B. Beck [New York: Doubleday, 1994], 195–96)

Paul was then suggesting not that God is unseeable, only that he is unseen. Whether humans can see or have seen God is a separate issue because even if no man had ever seen God the Father, this fact in no way entails that God is incorporeal.
Melito among the Christian teachers of the doctrine, and throughout his writings he engaged in sustained polemics against his fellow Christians who believed the doctrine. Thus, it seems clear from the evidence in Origen's own writings that Celsus was neither misinformed nor did he misrepresent second-century Christians' belief that God is embodied. From Origen's testimony, it is clear that this belief continued to be widely held in the third century as well.

**Tertullian as Witness.** Origen's implication that contemporary Christians who believed God to be embodied were confined to simple and naïve folk is contradicted by one of the most cultured of all his Christian contemporaries—Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus (about A.D. 150–220). Tertullian stoutly maintained his belief that God is embodied and passionately resisted attempts by immaterialists to platonize Christian doctrine. Tertullian not only believed in an embodied God, but he wrote profusely on this and related doctrines. Moreover, he claimed to express the views of the churches of his day, which were derived from the original apostolic churches. He articulated in rich detail a unified corporealist understanding of Christianity.

Tertullian was a lawyer who converted to Christianity in about 197.¹⁴⁸ According to Jerome, Tertullian became an ordained priest. He was born in Carthage and apparently spent most of his life there, though he had more than a passing acquaintance with Rome. Tertullian was well educated in literature as well as law,¹⁴⁹ his writings show an impressive familiarity with the philosophical and literary classics of his time. He was a genius with language and wrote prolifically and fluently in both Greek and Latin.¹⁵⁰ Many have considered him the father of ecclesiastical Latin—though this claim is disputed.¹⁵¹

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¹⁵⁰Though the period of time during which Tertullian wrote was relatively short (ca. 197–218), thirty-one of his works are extant, and at least a dozen others were written but did not survive. Barnes, *Tertullian*, 30–41.

As far as is known, Tertullian was the first to coin the Latin *trinitas*.\(^{152}\) His genius with language allowed him to craft brilliant polemical theological treatises, which contributed profoundly to the clarification of Christian doctrine on topics such as the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the Sacraments.\(^ {153}\)

Tertullian was active in a Christian movement known at the time as the New Prophecy.\(^ {154}\) This movement attempted to recover the prophetic revelation and spiritual gifts characteristic of the apostolic age, to preserve pristine Christian doctrine against philosophical intrusions, and to prepare a people for Christ’s second coming, which was believed to be imminent. The movement apparently began about A.D. 170 in Mysia, a remote village in Phrygia, when a man named Montanus began to prophesy, claiming revelation through the Paraclete (or Holy Ghost). Soon after, he was joined by two prophetesses, Prisca (or Priscillia) and Maximilla:

All three spoke as the mouthpieces of God himself: their possession was truly divine, not the doing of a mere angel or messenger from heaven. In them God spoke, the Almighty, The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The prophets played a consciously passive role as God's instruments: they were the lyre which the Spirit plucked like a plectrum. Through them God spoke directly to the world, and especially to the humble, in order to give them the courage to die as martyrs. The end of the world was approaching, and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1 ff.) would descend on Pepuza in Phrygia. In a word, Montanism was a millenarian movement.\(^ {155}\)

Despite opposition from some Asian churches who declared Montanus' prophecies "to be inspired by the Devil, excommunicated adherents, and vilified them in slanderous pamphlets,"\(^ {156}\) the movement spread rapidly to Rome, to Alexandria, and even to Gaul.

\(^{152}\)Morgan, *Importance of Tertullian*, 23.

\(^{153}\)For a fuller account of Tertullian's significance in relation to contemporary theology, see Morgan, *Importance of Tertullian*, 148-65.

\(^{154}\)Clear signs of Tertullian's involvement appear in his writings starting ca. 206-7. Barnes, *Tertullian*, 46-47. Much later, adherents of the New Prophecy were called Montanists after the name of the movement's founder, Montanus. They were most often called Cataphyrians by their opponents, the title indicating their geographical origin. See Ronald E. Heine, trans. and ed., *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1989), ix.

\(^{155}\)Barnes, *Tertullian*, 131.
It achieved its greatest success in Carthage, where Tertullian became a partisan, as Timothy Barnes explains:

Since Christianity was a revealed religion, [Tertullian] was unwilling to believe that revelation had ceased in the Apostolic age. Inexorably, therefore, he was led on to espouse the Montanist cause. The issues were simple in his eyes. Recognition of the Paraclete, whom God has promised to send (Jn 14.16), severed him from the ‘psychici.’ The Paraclete, the ‘deductor omnis veritatis’ (Jn 16.13), gave necessary counsel to every Christian. Its promptings preserved doctrinal orthodoxy from the assaults of heresy.157

Tertullian himself sought to preserve original Christian doctrine, as founded on revelation, against the encroachments of Platonistic immaterialism. His understanding of Christianity included at least six points that support divine embodiment. He argued that (1) God, like all that is, is embodied, (2) beings of spirit may take on solid bodily form, (3) Christ in the Incarnation specifically took on flesh that was unqualifiedly human, (4) human flesh is a sacred and glorious substance, (5) the same fleshy body that falls in human death rises in the Resurrection, and (6) Christ’s resurrected body is an everlasting and crucial attribute of the Godhead.158 These complementary points form part of Tertullian’s unified explication of his corporealist Christian faith.

1. Tertullian believed that God is and has always been a material body.159 He also believed that all things that exist are

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156Barnes, Tertullian, 131.
157Barnes, Tertullian, 131–32. Although the Montanists were called heretical by later Christians, their differences from their contemporaries were in matters of practice, not theology. Barnes, Tertullian, 42. Likewise Tertullian’s “orthodoxy in matters of doctrine remained impeccable” during his Montanist years, as before.
158For a summary of Tertullian’s views on God, see Norris, Early Christian Theology, 81–105.
159Tertullian did not use the phrase “material body” to describe God, but simply “body” (Latin corpore). In fact, Tertullian used the Latin materia, cognate to the English “matter,” to refer specifically to the matter of the world in contradistinction to God’s eternal substance. Tertullian, Against Hermogenes, in ANF, 3:477–502. (In addition to referring to the chapter and book [if any] of Tertullian’s works, I cite the page number from Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian, ANF, 3.) He also specifically distinguished God and matter as “two words and two things.” Tertullian, Ad Nationes, bk. 2, ch. 4, ANF, 3:133. Likewise, he said that the human soul
material, though not all material is the rough stuff we interact with in daily life. In an apologetic work addressed to pagans hostile to Christianity, Tertullian expressed approval of Zeno’s model, which “separates the matter of world from God . . . [in which] the latter has percolated through the former, like honey through the comb.” Addressing heretics who taught that the Word was immaterial (A.D. 210), Tertullian defined God’s materiality as a more fluid or

is formed “by the breathing of God, and not out of [non-divine] matter,” clearly distinguishing God from the matter of the world. Tertullian, A Treatise on the Soul, ch. 3, ANF, 3:184. Although Tertullian did not apply the term material to God, the properties that he ascribed to God are what we now consider to be the defining properties of matter: spatial location, extension, shape, and “even a certain tangibility.” Morgan, Importance of Tertullian, 182. Hence I describe Tertullian’s conception of the soul and of God as materialistic. It is nevertheless important to remember that Tertullian distinguished between created, perishable, sensible matter and the uncreated, imperishable, insensible substance (matter) of God. Tertullian, Ad Nationes, ch. 4, ANF, 3:132.

Morgan, Importance of Tertullian, 15. This notion appears explicitly in Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 7, ANF, 3:187; and implicitly in Tertullian, Against Praxeas, ch. 7, ANF, 3:602. Although Tertullian closely agreed with the Stoics on this and many other beliefs and methods, we should not thereby conclude that Stoicism was the source of his belief. See Morgan, Importance of Tertullian, 10–16. While Tertullian employed Stoic explanations, arguments, and beliefs, he exercised discrimination in doing so.

For example, Tertullian used arguments of Stoic and other philosophers to support his belief in the corporeality of the soul, particularly agreeing with the Stoics’ description of the soul “almost in our own terms.” Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 5, ANF, 3:184–85. Yet elsewhere, Tertullian pointed out that the Stoics do not believe in the restoration of the body, condemned them as the source of Marcion’s and Hermogenes’ heresies, and denounced broadly the teaching of Zeno as making the matter of the world equal with God. Tertullian, On Prescription against Heretics, ch. 7, ANF, 3:246; and Tertullian, Against Hermogenes, ch. 1, ANF, 3:477. On this last point, Tertullian criticized precisely the Stoic materialism that some say was the basis of his own belief. Morgan, Importance of Tertullian, 182.

While Tertullian acknowledged that his beliefs sometimes coincided with those of this or that philosopher, he used philosophical authority strictly as a supplement to the ultimate authority of biblical and continuing revelation. He held that “all questions” should be referred “to God’s inspired standard.” Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 2, ANF, 3:182–83. The discrimination Tertullian showed in regard to philosophical doctrine precludes a simple explaining away of Tertullian’s materialism as due to inability to transcend Stoic prejudices (although Morgan suggests this explanation in Importance of Tertullian, 16). For further discussion of Tertullian’s relationship to pagan philosophy, see R. Braun, “Tertullien et la philosophie païenne. Essai de mise au point,” Bulletin de L’Association Guillaume Budé 2 (June 1971): 231–51.

Tertullian, Ad Nationes, bk. 2, ch. 4, ANF, 3:133.
subtle mode of matter than that which comprises the world. He is also "a body, although 'God is a Spirit,'" for Spirit "has a bodily substance of its own kind."\textsuperscript{163}

To support his claim that the creator of the material earth must be a body, Tertullian presented an argument reminiscent of modern versions of the so-called mind-body problem.

How could it be, that He Himself is nothing, without whom nothing was made? How would He who is empty have made things which are solid, and He who is void have made things which are full, and He who is incorporeal have made things which have body? For although a thing may sometimes be made different from him by whom it is made, yet nothing can be made by that which is a void and empty thing.\textsuperscript{164}

This argument attempts to show that the Word, by whom the worlds were made (Heb. 1:2), must be a material body. The same argument applies to the Father, thus supporting Tertullian's understanding of the Father as Spirit and therefore materially embodied, although in the original text, Tertullian presented the Father's corporeality as needless of argumentative support; he gave the Father's corporeality as another reason to believe in the Son's corporeality.\textsuperscript{165}

Tertullian's notion of material Spirit included attributes of location, extension, shape, texture, rarity, and density. In arguing against Hermogenes and others misled by Plato and the Stoics (in A.D. 206),\textsuperscript{166} he described how God's breath, which is a portion of his Spirit,\textsuperscript{167} condensed and became Adam's soul:

After God hath breathed upon the face of man the breath of life, and man had consequently become a living soul, surely that breath must have passed through the face at once into the interior structure, and

\textsuperscript{162}To date Tertullian's writing, I rely on Barnes's chronology. Barnes, \textit{Tertullian}, 55.

\textsuperscript{163}Tertullian, \textit{Against Praxeas}, ch. 7, \textit{ANF}, 3:602. This interpretation of John 4:25 was noted by Origen. See point 3 of the section on Origen as witness.

\textsuperscript{164}Tertullian, \textit{Against Praxeas}, ch. 7, \textit{ANF}, 3:602.

\textsuperscript{165}While some may find this argument persuasive, my point in presenting it is to illustrate Tertullian's understanding of God, not to suggest that this understanding is demonstrated by this reasoning. Tertullian, \textit{Against Praxeas}, ch. 7, \textit{ANF}, 3:602.

\textsuperscript{166}See Barnes, \textit{Tertullian}, 123.

\textsuperscript{167}Tertullian cited Isaiah 24:5 as teaching that man's soul is a condensation of the Spirit or breath of God: "My Spirit went forth from me, and I made the breath of each. And the breath of my Spirit became soul." Tertullian, \textit{Treatise on
have spread itself throughout all the spaces of the body; and as soon as by the divine inspiration it had become condensed, it must have impressed itself on each internal feature, which the condensation had filled it, and so have been, as it were, concealed in shape (or stereotyped). Hence, by this densifying process, there arose a fixing of the soul’s corporeity; and by the impression its figure was formed and molded. Thus is the inner man, different from the outer, but yet one in the twofold condition. It, too, has eyes and ears of its own.\textsuperscript{168}

Thus before its impression in the body, the Spirit of God apparently has no \textit{fixed} shape, but it has extension and position so that it can pass through Adam’s face and flow through his body before condensing and transforming into soul.

Even in his earliest writings (between A.D. 198 and 203), Tertullian represented the Spirit of God explicitly as “\textit{subtlely}” material, having location and form, although its shape may not be fixed. He described the Spirit of God as corporeal, although not human in form:

The Spirit of God, who since the beginning was borne upon the waters, would as baptizer abide upon waters. A holy thing in fact was carried upon a holy thing—or rather, that which carried acquired holiness from that which was carried upon it. Any matter placed beneath another is bound to take to itself the quality of that which is suspended over it: and especially must corporeal matter take up spiritual quality, which because of the subtlety of the substance it belongs to finds it easy to penetrate and inhere.\textsuperscript{169}

2. Tertullian thought it nothing strange that a being of subtle spirit should take more solid bodily form. He considered the human spirit to be one of the inseparable faculties of the human

\textit{The Soul}, ch. 11, \textit{ANF}, 3:191. Hence man’s soul was once a part of God. This concept is especially significant because Tertullian expressly asserted elsewhere that the matter out of which God formed the world had a beginning when God created the world out of nothing. Tertullian, \textit{Against Hermogenes}, ch. 33, \textit{ANF}, 3:496. In this book, he contrasted creation out of nothing with creation out of God’s own substance. Tertullian, \textit{Against Hermogenes}, ch. 2, \textit{ANF}, 3:477. Hence, Tertullian made the human soul of eternal, uncreated, divine substance in contrast with created and perishable matter.


soul,¹⁷⁰ which has the same form as the body of flesh it inhabits. He used reason, religious experience, and biblical revelation to support this belief.

Criticizing Plato, Tertullian argued rationally that the soul must be corporeal in order (1) to sympathize and interact with the body, (2) to move the body, and (3) to be described as departing the body at the time of death.¹⁷¹ Then he reasoned that since the soul is corporeal,

We shall not be at all inconsistent if we declare that the more usual characteristics of a body, such as invariably accrue to the corporeal condition, belong also to the soul—such as form and limitation; and that triad of dimensions. . . . What now remains but for us to give the soul a figure [effigiem]²¹⁷²

To his rational argument that a soul must have humanlike form, Tertullian added evidence drawn from the religious experiences of a contemporary Christian woman associated with New Prophecy. She claimed:

There has been shown to me a soul in bodily shape, and a spirit has been in the habit of appearing to me; not, however, a void and empty illusion, but such as would offer itself to be even grasped by the hand, soft and transparent and of an ethereal color, and form resembling that of a human being in every respect.¹⁷³

Finally, he rounded out his case for the humanlike form of the soul by an appeal to biblical authority. For instance, he relied on the New Testament account of Lazarus and the rich man in hell (Luke 16:23–24): "[The soul], too, has eyes and ears of its own . . . [;] it has, moreover all the members of the body. . . . Thus it happens that the rich man in hell has a tongue and poor [Lazarus] a finger and Abraham a bosom."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 10, ANF, 3:190.
¹⁷¹Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, chs. 5–6, ANF, 3:185.
¹⁷²Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 9, ANF, 3:188. The word that Tertullian uses for figure is cognate with the English effigy, which roughly means a copy of something.
¹⁷³Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 9, ANF, 3:188.
¹⁷⁴Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 9, ANF, 3:189. In this passage, Tertullian also refers to Paul hearing and seeing the Lord (2 Cor. 12:2–4). For other arguments based on scripture, see Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 7, ANF, 3:187.
Tertullian believed that angels, though beings of spirit, appear in temporary solid bodies. Furthermore, addressing heretics who claimed Christ's corporeality was illusory (about A.D. 206), Tertullian even attributed to the Holy Spirit the power to take literal bodily form:

The Gospel of John... declares that the Spirit descended in the body of a dove, and sat upon the Lord. When the said Spirit was in this condition, He was truly a dove as He was also a spirit; nor did He destroy His own proper substance by the assumption of an extraneous substance. But you ask what becomes of the dove's body, after the return of the Spirit back to heaven, and similarly in the case of the angels. Their withdrawal was effected in the same manner as their appearance had been. . . . Still there was solidity in their bodily substance, whatever may have been the force by which the body became visible.175

3. Tertullian believed that the Word took on human flesh when he was born as the son of God. He wrote an entire book, *On the Flesh of Christ*, to argue that Christ's flesh was very much human flesh; that the soul, which gave that flesh life, was of the same sort as inhabits other human bodies; and that Christ's humanity was essential to the purpose of his life and work on earth. He affirmed that Christ's was a flesh “suffused with blood, built up with bones, interwoven with nerves, entwined with veins, *a flesh* which knew how to be born, and how to die, human without doubt, as born of a human being.” Such a flesh was necessary so that Christ could suffer and die to redeem mankind. While fully divine in spirit, Christ was fully human in body: “The powers of the Spirit, proved Him to be God, His sufferings attested the flesh of man. If His powers were not without the Spirit in like manner, were not His sufferings without the flesh.”176

4. In no way did Tertullian consider it degrading for God to take bodily or even human form. As part of his multifaceted argument that Christ really dwelt in human flesh, Tertullian argued vehemently for the worthiness of human flesh. To those who considered the flesh a shameful thing, Tertullian said of the condition of being clothed in flesh:

And are you for turning these conditions into occasions of blushing to the very creature whom He has redeemed, (censuring them), too,

us unworthy of Him who certainly would not have redeemed them had He not loved them? Our birth He reforms from death by a second birth from heaven; our flesh He restores from every harassing malady; when leprous, He cleanses it of the stain; when blind, He rekindles its light; when palsied, He renews its strength; when possessed with devils, He exorcises it; when dead, He reanimates it,—then shall we blush to own it?177

Far from an embarrassment, he considered the body and its process of generation to be sacred, calling it a “reverend discourse of nature.”178 Elsewhere he reiterated that “nature should be to us an object of reverence, not of blushes.”179

Tertullian also denied that the flesh is the source of sin:

[The soul] suffuses even the flesh (by reason of their conjunction) with its own shame. Now although the flesh is sinful, . . . yet the flesh has not such ignominy on its own account. For it is not of itself that it thinks anything or feels anything for the purpose of advising or commanding sin. . . . It is only a ministering thing.180

Thus Tertullian held that the soul is the origin of sinful impulses and that the flesh is sinful only as an abettor in the commission of the sins the soul initiates.181

Far from being a degrading substance, Tertullian maintained that earthly flesh is a glorified substance, since God created it:

You have both the clay made glorious by the hand of God, and the flesh more glorious still by His breathing upon it, by virtue of which the flesh not only laid aside its clayey rudiments, but also took on itself the ornaments of the soul.182

He further compared the flesh to splendid gold, which similarly derives from the refining of earth.183

5. Tertullian believed that the resurrected rise in a body of flesh. Against those led by philosophy to deny bodily resurrection, Tertullian argues, using Christ as the paradigm (about A.D. 206):

For the very same body which fell in death, and which lay in the sepulchre, did also rise again; (and it was) not so much Christ in

177Tertullian, On the Flesb of Christ, ch. 4, ANF, 3:524; italics in original.
178Tertullian, On the Flesb of Christ, ch. 4, ANF, 3:524.
179Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 27, ANF, 3:208.
180Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 40, ANF, 3:220.
181Tertullian, Treatise on the Soul, ch. 40, ANF, 3:220.
183Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, ch. 18, ANF, 3:557-58; and ch. 6, ANF, 3:549.
the flesh, as the flesh in Christ. If, therefore, we are to rise again after the example of Christ, who rose in the flesh, we shall certainly not rise according to that example, unless we also shall ourselves rise again in the flesh.\textsuperscript{184}

To clarify Paul’s teaching regarding the Resurrection—“It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15:44)—Tertullian explained the difference between natural and spiritual bodies: “As therefore the flesh was at first an animate (or natural) body on receiving the soul, so at last will it become a spiritual body when invested with the spirit [of God].”\textsuperscript{185} Thus Tertullian believed that resurrected flesh is flesh similar to mortal flesh, but the spiritual body of the resurrection is a fleshy body that has been purified by accepting God’s Spirit.

In a similar manner, our (fleshy) bodies may become spiritual even in mortality:

First of all there comes the (natural) soul, that is to say, the breath, to the people that are on the earth,—in other words, to those who act carnally in the flesh; then afterwards comes the Spirit to those who walk thereon,—that is, who subdue the works of the flesh; because the apostle also says, that “that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural (or in possession of the natural soul), and afterward that which is spiritual.”\textsuperscript{186}

The fact that a person’s body can become a spiritual one while it is still mortal further clarifies that the spiritual body is material. Clearly, for Tertullian, the spiritual body of the Resurrection is a body of flesh, purified by the Spirit of God.

6. Tertullian believed that the Word not only took on human flesh when he was born as the son of God, but that he also will retain that flesh forever in its resurrected, glorified state:

He who suffered “will come again from heaven” (Acts 1:2), and by all shall He be seen, who rose again from the dead. They too who crucified Him shall see and acknowledge Him; that is to say, His very flesh, against which they spent their fury, and without which it would be impossible for Himself either to exist or to be seen; so that they must blush with shame who affirm that His flesh sits in heaven void of sensation, like a sheath only, Christ being withdrawn from

it; as well as those who (maintain) that His flesh and soul are just the same thing, or else that His soul is all that exists, but that His flesh no longer lives.\textsuperscript{187}

Without his body, Christ could not have accomplished his mission on earth, and deprived of it, he would not be Christ. Insofar as Christ and his mission contribute to the glory of the Godhead, so contributes the flesh. Tertullian’s belief clearly contrasts with interpretations of the Resurrection that explain away Christ’s eternal embodiment.

Tertullian’s defense of God as materially embodied, of the Resurrection of the flesh, and of the soul as humanlike in form is part of a larger effort to preserve what he understood to be pristine Christian doctrine and to defend it against attempts by late second-century and early third-century Christian Platonists to recast it within an immaterialistic, metaphysical framework.\textsuperscript{188} Since Christianity is a revealed religion, Tertullian insisted that discus-sants must refer “all questions to God’s inspired standard.” This standard included the Old Testament, the words of the Apostles, and the tradition of the churches that the Apostles established. Tertullian cited all three in support of his doctrines.

While combating heresy, Tertullian maintained that the apostolic tradition had been well preserved. The “many” and “great” Christian churches that continue in “one and the same faith” evidence that the tradition is strong.\textsuperscript{189} Moreover, his own doctrine “has its origins in the tradition of the apostles” and the churches they organized, being “in no respect different from theirs.”\textsuperscript{190}


\textsuperscript{190}Tertullian, \textit{On Prescription against Heretics}, ch. 21, \textit{ANF}, 3:252–53; italics in original. Although this work stands on its own as a general statement on heresy and orthodoxy, it also serves as a preface to a series of Tertullian’s works addressed to particular heresies, including \textit{A Treatise on the Soul, Against Praxeas, On the Flesh of Christ, On the Resurrection of the Dead, Against Hermogenes, and Against Marcion}. Note also the many places where Tertullian refers to his appeal to apostolic authority as a criterion for distinguishing orthodox Christian doctrines: \textit{On Prescription against Heretics}, chs. 31, 34, \textit{ANF}, 3:259–60; \textit{Against Marcion}, bk. 5, ch. 1, \textit{ANF}, 3:429; and \textit{Against Hermogenes}, ch. 1, \textit{ANF}, 3:477.
Tertullian thus implied that from the beginnings of Christianity to his day, there had been a unified body of Christians who, faithful to the apostolic tradition, affirmed that God is embodied.\textsuperscript{191}

As an educated Christian, Tertullian was in a position to resist philosophical intrusions into Christian doctrine in a way that unlearned Christians could not. After his conversion, Tertullian devoted all of his efforts to the defense of Christianity.\textsuperscript{192} Tertullian asserted that philosophy is the parent of heresy and posed the trenchant questions that have continued to haunt classical Christian theologians through the centuries:

\begin{quote}
What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from “the porch of Solomon,” who had himself taught that “the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart.” Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition!\textsuperscript{193}
\end{quote}

**Fourth and Fifth Century Belief in an Embodied God**

Tertullian’s vigorous attempt to preserve within Christianity the understanding that God is embodied was, of course, ultimately to fail. But the triumph of immaterialism came about only gradually. Indeed, significant pockets of Christians, resisting Hellenistic influences, continued to believe in an embodied deity as late as the fourth and fifth centuries. That this is so is evident in the writings of Augustine (A.D. 354–430), an uncompromising advocate of incorporealism.

Augustine was born at Thagaste in North Africa in 354. His mother, Monica, was a Christian. During his youth and early adulthood, Augustine apparently understood that Christians believed


\textsuperscript{192}As a new convert, Tertullian devoted himself to the obvious threats to Christianity outside the Christian community. His earliest writings defended Christianity against pagans and Jews. However, as he became more deeply involved in the issues threatening Christianity, Tertullian turned to internal threats, which he saw as the most significant dangers.

God to be embodied; by his own admission, it was this very doctrine that for many years constituted an insurmountable stumbling block to his acceptance of the Christian faith. He said that as a youth, he was much embarrassed by the doctrine and thus succumbed to the logic of those who maligned it:

My own specious reasoning induced me to give in to the sly arguments of fools who asked me . . . whether God was confined to the limits of a bodily shape, whether he had hair and nails. . . . My ignorance was so great that these questions troubled me, and while I thought I was approaching the truth, I was only departing the further from it. . . . How could I see this when with the sight of my eyes I saw no more than material things and with the sight of my mind no more than their images? I did not know that God is a spirit, a being without bulk and without limbs defined in length and breadth. . . . Nor had I the least notion . . . what the Scriptures mean when they say that we are made in God's image.194

At first unable to accept Christianity because of its doctrine that God is embodied in humanlike form, Augustine was much attracted to the Manichaean sect, which endorsed a nonanthropomorphic, though still material, deity.

I had lost hope of being able to find the truth in your Church, O Lord. . . . The Manichees had turned me away from it: at the same time I thought it outrageous to believe that you had the shape of a human body and were limited within the dimensions of limbs like our own. . . . For when I tried to fall back upon the Catholic faith, my mind recoiled because the Catholic faith was not what I supposed it to be . . . but, O my God . . . I thought that this was a more pious belief than to suppose that you were limited, in each and every way, by the outlines of a human body.195

Eventually, Augustine's career as a teacher of rhetoric took him from his native Africa to Italy, first to Rome and then to Milan. There, under the influence of Bishop Ambrose, he became acquainted with Latin translations of Platonist writings and with the possibility of God's being a "purely spiritual being" in the sense of being totally immaterial, invisible, and incorporeal.196 This view of God dissolved his long-standing aversion to Christian

195Augustine, Confessions, bk. 5, sec. 10, pp. 104-5.
196Stroumsa, "Incorporeality of God," 352.
doctrine and was a major factor in his conversion in 386. The following year, at age thirty-two, he was finally baptized a Christian. In his newly found Platonic understanding of God, he exulted:

I learned that your spiritual children . . . do not understand the words *God made man in his own image* to mean that you are limited by the shape of a human body, . . . nevertheless I was glad at this time I had been howling my complaints not against the Catholic faith. . . .

O God, you who are so high above us and yet so close, hidden and yet always present, you have not parts, some greater and some smaller. You are everywhere and everywhere you are entire. Nowhere are you limited by space. You have not the shape of a body like ours. . . .

Your Catholic Church . . . I had learnt [sic] . . . did not teach the doctrines which I so sternly denounced. This bewildered me, but I was on the road to conversion and I was glad. . . . [I] had no liking for childish absurdities and there was nothing in the sound doctrine which she taught to show that you, the Creator of all things, were confined within a measure of space which, however high, however wide it might be, was yet strictly determined by the form of a human body.197

From these passages, it is evident that in his youth and probably until his early thirties, Augustine understood Christians to believe that God is embodied.

In two ways, Kim Paffenroth has recently challenged this reading of the quoted texts. He claims that young Augustine’s references to Christian belief in an embodied deity are either merely allusions to the Incarnation or misunderstandings caused by Manichaeans who, intent on discrediting Christian beliefs, misrepresented them.198 However, the fact that young Augustine understood that Christians believed that God was embodied, and not merely as the incarnate Son, seems beyond dispute, for according to Augustine’s own account, the scriptural warrant for Christian belief in divine embodiment was largely found in the Old Testament and, hence, was not merely based upon the Incarnation. For instance, he disclosed that it was only after he met Ambrose in Milan that he learned that God’s “spiritual children . . . do not understand the words *God made man in bis*

197Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. 6, secs. 3–4, pp. 114–15; italics in original.
own image to mean that [God] is limited by the shape of a human body.”

Moreover, that Augustine, as a result of Manichaean misrepresentations, for many years just misunderstood what Christians of his acquaintance believed seems incredible. How could he be so radically mistaken when his own mother was a Christian, when he grew up among Christians, and when he even studied Christian catechism? But quite apart from inference, Augustine provided considerable evidence of Christian belief in an embodied deity.

Augustine discussed “the carnal and weak of our faith, who, when they hear the members of the body used figuratively, as, when God’s eyes or ears are spoken of, are accustomed, in the license of fancy, to picture God to themselves in a human form.” Though Augustine found these Christians’ belief that God has “a human form which is the most excellent of its kind” laughable, he nonetheless found it more “allowable” and “respectable” than the Manichaean alternative. Moreover, unlike the Manichaeans, Augustine said that these “carnal” Christians are teachable and, with proper instruction in the Church, may gradually come “to understand spiritually the figures and parables of the Scriptures.”

Further, Augustine provided a catalogue of heretical Christian communities or sects. He identified two Christian communities, contemporary with himself, who explicitly taught that God is embodied in humanlike form. Members of the first community were called Audiani (sometimes Vadiani). They were followers of a Christian deacon, Audius of Edessa, and were located primarily in Syria and Mesopotamia. Members of the second community were called the Anthropomorphites and were located in Egypt. John Cassian, a Christian monk who spent about fifteen years (about A.D. 385–400) in the Egyptian monastic communities, corroborated

199 Augustine, Confessions, bk. 6, sec. 3, pp. 114; italics in original.
201 See Liguori G. Müller, The De Haeresibus of Saint Augustine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1956). Müller says, “It becomes evident immediately in the De Haeresibus that Augustine envisioned a heresy as a concrete sect, not a heretical proposition, since he speaks of the individual members of the sect rather than of the tenets they hold” (50).
Augustine's testimony with respect to Egyptian anthropomorphism. Although Cassian was an Origenist and an incorporealist, he nonetheless made it clear that for late fourth-century Christian monks in Egypt, anthropomorphism was the long-established norm and incorporealism was the innovation.²⁰²

Cassian records that Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, sent a letter in 399 to the Egyptian churches to set the dates of Lent and Easter. In that letter, Theophilus included a condemnation of anthropomorphism, which

was received very bitterly by almost every sort of monk throughout all Egypt. . . . Indeed, the majority of the older men among the brethren asserted that in fact the bishop was to be condemned as someone corrupted by the most serious heresy, someone opposing the ideas of holy Scripture, someone who denied that almighty God was of human shape—and this despite the clear scriptural evidence that Adam was created in His image.²⁰³

Even the monks in Scete, "who were far ahead of all the Egyptian monks in perfection and knowledge,"²⁰⁴ and all the priests except Paphnutius—an Origenist in charge of Cassian's church—denounced the bishop's letter. Those in charge of the three other churches in the desert refused to allow the letter to be read or publicly presented at their assemblies.

Cassian chronicled the particular struggles of one monk, Serapion, in accepting the view that God is not embodied. According to Cassian, Serapion had long lived a life of austerity and monastic discipline that, coupled with his age, had brought him into the front ranks of the monks. Despite the persistent efforts of Paphnutius to dissuade him, Serapion had held fast to his belief that God is embodied.

The concept [of a nonembodied God] seemed new-fangled to him. It was something unknown to his predecessors and not taught by them.

²⁰²Otto Meinardus concludes that "anthropomorphists appear to have outnumbered the liberal party [the Origenists who preferred allegorical interpretations of the Scriptures] by at least three to one." Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts, rev. ed. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1989), 53.
²⁰⁴Luibheid, Cassian: Conferences, 26.
By chance a deacon named Photinus came along. He was a very well-versed man. . . . In order to add strength to the doctrine contained in the bishop’s letter he brought Photinus into a gathering of all the brethren. He asked him how the Catholic churches of the East interpreted the words in Genesis, “Let us make man in our own image and likeness” (Gn. 1.26).

Photinus explained how all the leaders of the churches were unanimous in teaching that the image and likeness of God should be understood not in an earthly, literal sense but spiritually. He himself demonstrated the truth of this in a lengthy discourse and with abundant scriptural evidence. . . .

At last the old man was moved by the many very powerful arguments of this extremely learned man. . . . We stood up to bless the Lord and to pour out our prayers of thanks to Him. And then amid these prayers the old man became confused, for he sensed that the human image of God which he used to draw before him as he prayed was now gone from his heart. Suddenly he gave way to the bitterest, most abundant tears and sobs. He threw himself on the ground and . . . cried out: “Ah the misfortune! They’ve taken my God away from me. I have no one to hold on to, and I don’t know whom to adore or to address.”

According to Owen Chadwick, Cassian’s description of Sarapion’s capitulation greatly understated the resoluteness of Egyptian resistance to Theophilus’s decree proscribing anthropomorphism. Chadwick writes:

Were Cassian the sole authority, the impression would be left that, despite the fierce opposition of great numbers, the decrees of Theophilus were ultimately accepted by the Egyptians. We hear nothing in Cassian of the riots in Alexandria, of the bishop’s submission, of the expulsion of Origenism.

Except in Cassian’s community in Scete, where Paphnutius succeeded in bringing round his congregation to the Origenist viewpoint, a violent agitation arose. A band of monks repaired to Alexandria and caused riots. Theophilus had courage. He went out to meet the approaching band, and, as soon as he could make himself heard, “When I see you,” he said, “I see the face of God.” “Then,” said the leaders, “if you really believe that, condemn the works of Origen.” Theophilus, whom Palladius nicknamed “Mr. Facing-both-ways,” consented on the spot to condemn the Origenists. . . . He sent letters to his suffragans ordering the expulsion of the Origenist monks from the monasteries and the desert. There appears from

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205 Luibheid, Cassian: Conferences, 125–27.
this moment a drift out of Egypt by some members of the now con-
demned Origenist party. 206

Finally, Augustine also provided evidence that fourth- and
fifth-century Christian anthropomorphism was not confined to
priests, monks, and laity. For instance, in "A Letter of Instruction
to the Holy Brother, Fortunatianus (Epistle 148)," written in A.D.
413, Augustine discussed a brother bishop, not named, who was
teaching that we are able, or at least will be able after the Resur-
rection, to see God with the eyes of our bodies. In a prior letter,
without mentioning the bishop by name, Augustine had sharply
rebuked those who held this view, and the bishop had been
offended. Augustine asked Fortunatianus's intercession on his
behalf in seeking the bishop's forgiveness and in effecting recon-
ciliation. Nonetheless, Augustine said he had no regrets about hav-
ing written the letter. For his intent was to

prevent men from believing that God Himself is corporeal and visi-
ble, as occupying a place determined by size and by distance from us
(for the eye of this body can see nothing except under these condi-
tions), and to prevent men from understanding the expression 'face
to face' as if God were limited within the members of a body. 207

Thereupon, Augustine argued at length against the bishop's view.

On the basis of the evidence detailed above, it seems clear
that Christians, from the very inception of the faith up until at least
the early part of the fifth century, widely believed God to be an
embodied being. This belief continued despite the fact that it was
challenged by both Christian and non-Christian Platonists from at
least the time of the second century. As Platonism became
entrenched as the dominant Christian world view, the idea of an
embodied God gradually faded into obscurity.

206 Owen Chadwick, John Cassian, 2d ed. (Cambridge: University Press,
1968), 28–29. On the causes of the controversy and the subsequent expulsion of
Origenists, see Elizabeth A. Clark, The Origenist Controversy (Princeton: Univer-
sity Press, 1992). Chapter 2 focuses on anthropomorphism. For a tentative ques-
tioning of the generally accepted view that the Egyptian monks believed in an
embodied God, see Graham Gould, "The Image of God and the Anthropomor-
phite Controversy in Fourth Century Monasticism," in Origeniana Quinta, ed.
207 Philip Schaff, ed., The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine (Grand
Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956), 498. Note also that the bishop's basis for his
belief was apparently Old Testament, not incarnational, passages about God.
*The Small Crucifixion*, by Matthias Grünewald (ca. 1470–1528). Oil on panel, 24¼" x 18½", 1511–1520. Samuel H. Kress Collection. © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. Few artists in the European tradition have communicated the agonies of corporeality more powerfully than Grünewald’s depictions of the crucifixion of Christ. The wounds from the crown of thorns and the lashing are prominent. The cross is expressively bowed from the twisted distortions of the hands and feet that emotionally express Christ’s agony and the actuality of the sacrifice. The dark background emphasizes Christ’s bleakness and loneliness, and the body is the receptor for Christ’s pain and suffering.
Part III

Philosophical Arguments Regarding Divine Embodiment

Philosophical arguments purporting to prove that the concept of an embodied God is incoherent are themselves logically uncompelling.

Though the earliest Christians believed God to be embodied, thinkers within the classical Christian tradition have for centuries reasoned that on logical grounds God must be incorporeal—without body or parts. In this final section, I meet these thinkers on their own terms, apart from the historical arguments of the preceding two sections. I examine the most common rational arguments against divine embodiment and show that none of them is sufficient to prove God's incorporeality. Hence, no such argument ought be a stumbling block to rational acceptance of the Father and the Son as embodied persons.

The pattern of reasoning that these philosophical arguments typically follow was set out by Anselm as early as the eleventh century. Anselm defines God as "that than which none greater can be conceived." From this general definition, he deduces not only that God exists (by means of his famous ontological argument), but also what God is like. In particular, he argues that "x is the greatest conceivable being" logically entails "x is incorporeal." It will be helpful to outline his position in some detail, before using it as the main representative of the arguments refuted below.

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208Many Christians nonetheless affirm that God (the Son) was incarnate in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, was crucified and raised from the dead, and exists now everlastingly with a resurrected (though gloriously transformed) body. These views apparently conflict, for if God must be incorporeal, then the resurrected Christ cannot be God. The problem can be expressed in terms of an inconsistent triad: (1) Jesus of Nazareth exists everlastingingly with a resurrected body; (2) Jesus of Nazareth is God; and (3) N (if x is God, then x is incorporeal). The conjunction of any two propositions of the triad entails the negation of the third. In this section, I argue that (3) is false. If my argument is successful, it removes possible stumbling blocks to rational acceptance of both the Incarnation and the Resurrection.

In defining the term "greatest conceivable being," Anselm makes it clear that by *conceivable* he does not mean psychologically imaginable—otherwise, God's greatness would not exceed the limits of human thought. Rather, by "greatest conceivable being," he means a being than which no greater being is logically possible.

As to what he means by *greatest*, Anselm explains that the greatest conceivable being would lack nothing that is good and would be whatever it is better to be than not to be. Contemporary commentators have plausibly suggested that in this context, the value terms (greatest, good, and better) are best understood as signifying religious values. According to this view, when Anselm refers to "the greatest conceivable being," he means "that than which a no more worthy of worship is logically possible." The formula is often shortened to "the most worthy object of religious worship" or "the most adequate object of religious attitudes." I will take these shortened formulae to be equivalent to that stated by Anselm. This bit of analysis provides the backdrop for six separate arguments for divine incorporeality, which I will now examine.

**The Argument from Divine Infinity**

From the formula "x is the greatest conceivable being," Anselm first derives "x cannot be limited in any way." As a rationale for Anselm's conclusion, J. N. Findlay argues that it is

wholly anomalous to worship anything *limited* in any thinkable manner. For all limited superiorities are tainted with an obvious relativity, and can be dwarfed in thought by still mightier superiorities, in which process of being dwarfed they lose their claim upon our worshipful attitudes. And hence we are led on irresistibly to demand that our religious object . . . should tower *infinitely* above all other objects.\(^\text{210}\)

From the inference that God cannot be limited in any way, Anselm concludes that God cannot be corporeal. He argues:

But everything that is in any way bounded by place . . . is less than that which no law of place . . . limits. Since, then, nothing is greater than thou, no place . . . contains thee; but thou art everywhere . . .

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For altogether circumscribed is that which, when it is wholly in one place, cannot at the same time be in another. And this is seen to be true of corporeal things alone. But uncircumscribed is that which is, as whole, at the same time everywhere. And this is understood to be true of thee alone.\textsuperscript{211}

Anselm's argument can be summarized as follows:

1. God = the most worthy object of religious worship.
2. The most worthy object of religious worship cannot be limited in any way.
3. If God were corporeal, he would be limited in that he could not be, as a whole, at the same time everywhere.
4. Hence, God cannot be corporeal. (1) (2) (3)

As a first objection to premise 2, if it is understood literally, Anselm himself cannot consistently affirm it. For if God were absolutely unlimited, he would have to be the whole of reality and thereby not the Creator-God of theistic theology who is ontologically distinct from his creations and who gives his creatures some measure of independence from himself. It is the existence of the Creator-God, I take it, that Anselm is attempting to prove. Similarly, if God were not limited in any way, God could not possess any determinate attributes, either positive or negative. For example, if God were immutable he would be limited in that he could not be mutable or if he were atemporal he would be limited in that he could not be temporal. Indeed, Findlay suggests that an absolutely unlimited being may well entail "a deific absence of anything definite." But Anselm employs his deity-formula to generate some eighteen divine attributes.

Findlay's assertion that it is absolutely anomalous to worship a being limited in any thinkable manner seems to imply mistakenly that a limitation, as limitation, is thereby a defect. But surely this assertion depends on the nature of the limitation. Obviously, a limitation in something that is not admirable, such as ignorance, selfishness, or cruelty, would be a good thing. Anselm makes it clear that the greatest possible being would be absolutely unlimited only in every admirable or great-making attribute. But even here we have long recognized that it is possible to have too much of a good

\textsuperscript{211}Deane, Basic Writings, 19–20.
thing. A virtue taken to excess may become a tragic flaw. One may be too trusting, too generous, or too helpful. Limitations, as limitations, are value neutral. Moreover, not all values—especially in their superlative form—are logically compossible, such as unlimited compassion and unlimited bliss. Nor do all great-making properties or perfections admit of completion. For example, the virtue of veracity admits of completion, but an attribute such as creativity does not. Thus divine perfection cannot coherently be understood as being complete in all respects.

No doubt what Anselm meant, or should have meant, then, is 2': the most worthy object of religious worship must be unlimited in every respect in which to be so (a) is possible, (b) is admirable, and, when conjoined with other excellences, (c) maximizes worship worthiness. (Hereafter, I shall use \( WWM \), short for worship worthy maximizing, to denote conditions [b] and [c].) But if in Anselm's argument one replaces premise 2 with 2', the argument is no longer valid.

The Argument from Divine Omnipotence

Now, in order to try to make Anselm's argument work, I shall have to supply some additional premise(s). More specifically, I will need to show some particular respect in which God must be absolutely unlimited that is both possible and \( WWM \) and, at the same time, incompatible with his being corporeal. It may seem that unlimited power or omnipotence would satisfy these conditions; that is, it may seem that the following proposition is true:

\[
5. \quad \text{It is both possible and} \ WWM \text{ to be absolutely unlimited in power.}
\]

Using 5, one can construct the following argument for divine incorporeality:

1. God = the most worthy object of religious worship.

2'. The most worthy object of religious worship must be absolutely unlimited in every respect in which it is both possible and \( WWM \) to be so.

5. It is both possible and \( WWM \) to be absolutely unlimited in power.

6. N (if x is corporeal, then x is not absolutely unlimited in power.)

7. Hence, God cannot be corporeal.

The symbol N signifies a purported necessary truth.

I must now consider whether premise 5 is true. And the first question I must ask is, Is it possible for God to be omnipotent in the sense of having absolutely unlimited power? The answer is clearly negative. Indeed, the logical paradoxes generated by the notion of absolutely unlimited power are well known. For example, the notion seemingly entails the incoherent conclusions that God could create a stone so large that he could not move it or that he could simultaneously create both an irresistible cannonball and an unbreakable lamppost.215 To salvage a rationally coherent view of God, thinkers have been compelled to opt for definitions of omnipotence considerably more restricted than its etymology would suggest. Recently, for example, Anthony Kenny has proposed that omnipotence be understood as “the possession of all logically possible powers which it is logically possible for a being with the attributes of God to possess,” where “attributes” refers to “those properties of Godhead which are not themselves powers.”214

Given Kenny’s proposal, how can the attributes that God possesses be determined? If these are to be determined by Christian revelation and if this revelation confirms that God the Son has a resurrected body, then omnipotence must be understood in terms of the logically possible powers that are also logically possible for an embodied God to have. So understood, there would be no conflict between divine power and divine embodiment.

If, on the other hand, the divine attributes must be ascertained by reasoning from Anselm’s formula, one must ask: (1) how much power must the most worthy object of religious worship possess? and (2) could an embodied being coherently possess that much power?

215For further explication of the problems with absolutely unlimited power, see Kent E. Robson, “Omnipotence, Omnipresence, and Omniscience in Mormon Theology,” in Bergera, Line upon Line, 67–75.

When we consider the first question, it seems evident that from a religious point of view, the matter of God's power relates to our practical needs for individual help, protection, and preservation. We look to God for forgiveness of our sins and for power to repent; for strength to cope with and to be refined by our adversities; for comfort in our trials; and above all, for salvation and eternal life. We trust that God's power is sufficient to satisfy these needs and expectations and to fulfill all his purposes and promises. For this to be assured, it seems as if God must be supreme and have power over all things so that no one or no thing can thwart the fulfillment of his will.

The term *almighty* can be used to refer to the power described, which is how the third Lecture on Faith describes God's omnipotence. This lecture delineates God's character as described in revelation and then explains why this character is necessary for the object of religious faith. Of omnipotence, it says:

An acquaintance with these attributes in the divine character, is essentially necessary, in order that the faith of any rational being can center in him for life and salvation. For if he did not, in the first instance, believe him to be God, that is, the creator and upholder of all things, he could not center his faith in him for life and salvation, for fear there should be a greater than he who would thwart all his plans, and he like the gods of the heathen, would be unable to fulfill his promises; but seeing he is God over all, from everlasting to everlasting, the creator and upholder of all things, no fear can exist in the minds of those who put their trust in him, so that in this respect their faith can be without wavering. (3:19; italics in original)

If I grant—and it seems I must, at least from the perspective of the ordinary believer—that in order to be the most worthy object of religious worship it is necessary that God be almighty, must I also grant that his power is sufficient? It seems so. God's worship worthiness connects most essentially with his personal and moral attributes: holiness, loving kindness, compassion, long-suffering, justice, equity, and veracity. These attributes are faithfully and steadfastly expressed in his personal dealings and relations with us as father, creator, savior, exemplar, and friend. His power is also relevant but only to the extent that it is needful to accomplish those ends that he, as a perfectly loving and righteous father, freely chooses. To suppose otherwise is to affirm that power itself has something worship worthy about it, quite apart
from the good ends it makes possible. That some may, in fact, value or even worship power for its own sake, I don't doubt. But such worship is neither religiously nor morally required.

If my reasoning is correct, then, it is neither possible nor \textit{WWM} for God to be absolutely unlimited in power, and thus proposition 5 is false. But my analysis also supplies the following more satisfactory alternative to 5:

5'. The most worthy object of religious worship must be almighty.

Next, to make Anselm's argument work, one must also show:

8. \textit{N} (If \(x\) is corporeal, then \(x\) is not almighty.)

But the truth of 8 is by no means self-evident. Some further premise(s) must be supplied to show why a corporeal being cannot be almighty. Anselm's argument suggests a possible connecting link—that is, his argument suggests that if God is almighty, he must be omnipresent and that if he were omnipresent, he could not be corporeal. With these claims, I can again reconstruct Anselm's argument.

\textbf{The Argument from Divine Omnipresence}

The argument can now be stated as follows:

1. God = the most worthy object of religious worship.
2. 5'. The most worthy object of religious worship must be almighty.
3. 9. \textit{N} (If \(x\) is almighty, then \(x\) is omnipresent).
4. 10. \textit{N} (If \(x\) is omnipresent, then \(x\) is not corporeal).
5. 11. Hence, God cannot be corporeal.

To properly evaluate this argument, one must understand more clearly what is meant by the claim that God must be omnipresent. Anselm suggests that if God is omnipresent, then he is present, as a whole, at the same time everywhere. This notion is less puzzling when considered in its religious setting. Perhaps the idea is nowhere better captured than in the hymn of the Psalmist:

\begin{quote}
Lord, thou hast examined me and knowest me.
Thou knowest all, whether I sit down or rise up. . . .
Where can I escape from thy spirit? Where can I flee from thy Presence?
If I climb up to heaven, thou art there;
\end{quote}
if I make my bed in Sheol, again I find thee.

If I take my flight to the frontiers of the morning or dwell at limit of the western sea,

even there thy hand will meet me and thy right hand will hold me fast. (Psalm 139:1–2, 7–10, New English Bible)

Religiously, the affirmation of God's omnipresence is the assurance of God's constant watchful care, his loving awareness of all that is transpiring, and his ability to intervene in human history and in our individual lives to fulfill his purposes and promises. Thus it seems that divine omnipresence is crucially related to his power and knowledge and that if he is almighty then he must be omnipresent.

This understanding brings me to consider premise 10. Is it true that an embodied being could not be omnipresent? The question has recently been carefully examined by Grace Dyck [Jantzen]. 215 She correctly points out that the claim "an embodied being cannot be omnipresent is ambiguous between 'His body is not everywhere,' which," she says, "is true but harmless, and 'He is not everywhere,' which is not necessarily true." 216 The harmless truth follows analytically from the meaning of the word body. By definition, a body is spatially locatable and can be in only one place at one time. But if a being is omnipresent, there is no place where it is not. Thus it appears that the notions of omnipresence and corporeality are mutually exclusive. 217

Dyck rebuts this conclusion by carefully analyzing the meaning of the relevant sense of presence and then, derivatively, of omnipresence. Most critical to her analysis, she shows that (1) it is not the case that I am present only in the volume of space occupied by my body, and (2) to be present at x means, most essentially, to be aware of what is going on at x and, perhaps, to be able to some extent to influence it. In support of (1), a person would surely say of a speaker addressing the Senate that he is present in the Senate chambers even though it is not the case that the spatial

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217 Dyck, "Omnipresence and Incorporeality," 85–86.
coordinates of his body are coextensive with those of the chambers. And as to (2), how would a senator who slowly falls asleep as a bill is read and remains so throughout the ensuing debate correctly answer the question, Were you present when the measure was considered? Or suppose a hearing on a bill to eliminate veteran’s benefits is held in a hospital ward of comatose veterans. Could they correctly be said to be present for the hearing? 2218

On the basis of her analysis, Dyck concludes that, if God has a body that is spatially locatable somewhere in the universe and if, from that position, he knows and is able to influence everything that is going on, then he could properly be said to be omnipresent. If this conclusion is correct, then premise 10 is false, and the argument from omnipresence fails.

But one may still feel constrained to ask, How would it be causally possible for God to be spatially located in the universe and yet be aware of and able to influence all that is going on? I don’t know. This, I take it, is a question for the theologian or for future revelation. But perhaps two brief suggestions will shed further light. First, Dyck points out that modern mathematicians have shown that three-dimensional geometry is not the only possible geometry, indicating that it is merely a limitation of our conceptual structure that we perceive only three spatial dimensions. Dyck thus conjectures that God may occupy or be localized in dimensions outside our ordinary experience from which he may express his thereeness in every part of the universe. 219 Second, a glorified body may be the source and locus from which emanates the divine spiritual influence everywhere in the world.

The Argument from Divine Indestructibility

Anselm suggested a further argument for incorporeality when he wrote:

For, whatever is composed of parts is not altogether one, but is in some part plural, and diverse from itself; and either in fact or in concept is capable of dissolution. But these things are alien to thee, than whom nothing better can be conceived of. 220

218 My illustrations are similar to and suggested by those of Dyck.
220 Deane, Basic Writings, 24.
The following seems to capture this line of Anselm's reasoning:

1. God = the most worthy object of religious worship.
2. The most worthy object of religious worship cannot be destructible in fact or in concept.
3. N (If x is corporeal, then x is composite).
4. N (If x is composite, then x is destructible, in fact or in concept).
5. Hence, God cannot be corporeal.

When we consider premise 12, it seems evident that the most worthy object of religious worship cannot be destructible in fact. And let us grant, arguendo, that a corporeal being would be, of necessity, in some sense be composite. What about premise 14? Is it true that whatever is composite is thereby destructible in fact? Plato's *Phaedo* notes that natural or physical bodies are composite and are often observed to be destroyed through a process of decomposition. From this observation, it is concluded that all bodies, being composite, are likewise destructible. This conclusion, of course, does not deductively follow. And even if all "natural" bodies are liable to decomposition, it does not follow that a "divine" body is. Finally, even if a divine body were not inherently indestructible, it would not follow that God could not everlastingly sustain that body in being. In sum, I find no conceptual incoherence either in the notion of Christ's body being raised incorruptible or in the notion of an incorruptible body per se.

But what about Anselm's worry that a body, even if not destructible in fact, would nonetheless be destructible in concept? Are all bodies destructible in concept? I suppose this depends on our concept. If a body is thought of as merely a composition of little bits of matter, then it seems as if its being decomposed can be imagined. On the other hand, if a body (especially a divine body) is thought of in other terms such as a force field, the idea of its being decomposed is not so readily grasped. But even if we granted that the destruction of any body is consistently thinkable, what difference would it make? Our faith in God and in his promises is ultimately grounded in the integrity of the divine will and character and not in the mesh of conceptual necessity. Thus it seems that divine indestructibility does not require incorporeality.

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Plato, *Phaedo*, 78b-80c.
The Argument from Divine Self-Existence

H. P. Owen provides two additional arguments against divine corporeality. He claims that corporeality is logically incompatible with both self-existence and moral perfection. His argument from divine self-existence is very tersely stated:

God's incorporeality can also be proved from his self-existence. . . .
No material entity can be self-existent; for each is a determination, or mode, of being. Consequently we can always ask of any such entity: "What are its causes and conditions?"222

His argument seems to be this:

1. God = the most worthy object of religious worship.
16. The most worthy object of religious worship must be self-existent.
17. N (If x is self-existent, then x is not a determination or mode of being).
18. If God were or had a material body, he would be a determination or mode of being.
19. Hence, God cannot have or be a material body.

Premises 17 and 18 seem open to doubt or, at least, in need of clarification. Concerning 17, Owen has not explained what he means by a "determination or mode of being," but apparently he means something like a species or category of being, but as contrasted with what? Totally undifferentiated being? If so, it seems that 17 proves too much, for personality, as well as corporeality, appears to be a mode or determination of being. By parity of reasoning, then, it would follow that a personal being could not be self-existent. But I see no basis for such a claim. Owen apparently provides the following argument for premise 17:

(1) Of any determination or mode of being, one can always intelligibly ask, What are its causes and conditions?
(2) Of a self-existent being, one can never intelligibly ask, What are its causes and conditions?
(3) Hence, a self-existent being cannot be a mode or determination of being.

Premise (2) appears to be analytically true and (3) apparently follows from (1) and (2), but premise (1) seems questionable. What one can intelligibly ask (for example, without self-contradiction) is a function of the syntax and semantics of one’s language. For example, the reason why a person cannot intelligibly ask about the causes and conditions of a self-existent being is that self-existent simply means “without cause or condition.” Premise (1) does not appear to be analytically true. If I understand “determination or mode of being” correctly, it does not grammatically imply “must or could have a cause.” Whether some particular mode or determination of being is caused or uncaused is dependent on the nature of reality, not on the meaning or structure of language. Thus, it seems, this support for premise 17 fails, and so the premise remains inconclusive. The argument from self-existence thus fails to prove that God must be incorporeal. 223

The Argument from Moral Perfection

Owen’s final argument for divine incorporeality is based on the claim that pure spirit is the most perfect form of being. He says:

Moreover, if a dualistic view of mind and matter is correct we can see, not only that God’s pure spirituality is possible, but also that it is the most perfect form of being. All human behavior approaches perfection to the extent that it expresses wisdom, goodness and love. Yet although the body aids these spiritual properties in so far as it offers a medium for their expression, it also inhibits them in many—and some tragically frustrating—ways. Hence only pure Spirit can constitute an absolutely perfect form of personal existence. 224

His argument can be summarized as follows:

1. God = the most worthy object of religious worship.
20. The most worthy object of religious worship must constitute an absolutely perfect form of personal existence.
21. Only pure spirit can constitute an absolutely perfect form of personal existence.

223Certainly, ordinary believers do not believe Christ’s resurrected body to be self-existent since its history began on the first Easter morning. Rather, they affirm that the divine person, who rose from the dead on that Easter morning, is self-existent and antedated both his resurrected and mortal bodies. It is perfectly consistent to think of God as a self-existent person with some acquired properties.
224Owen, Concepts of Deity, 19.
22. N (If x is pure spirit, then x is incorporeal).
23. Thus, God cannot be corporeal.

Owen acknowledges that the cogency of this argument depends on the Cartesian view that mind and matter are ontologically distinct—a view he does not attempt to justify. But Owen admits that unless it can be validated, there is no basis for affirming pure spirituality in God, since the concept could not be given any referent or reference range. It is significant to note that most contemporary arguments for divine incorporeality do not consist of positive arguments for it, but rather attempt to salvage the notion of a totally unembodied deity from charges that incorporeality is either cognitively meaningless, logically incoherent, or contra-indicated by the weight of psychological, physiological, and other evidence. I will not rehearse the arguments and evidence here. Suffice it so say that the Cartesian anthropology on which this argument rests does not appear to be rationally compelling.

Assuming arguendo that there could be a totally unembodied mind, why should this be considered the most perfect form of personal existence? Owen suggests that human behavior approaches perfection to the extent that it expresses wisdom, goodness, and love, and that the body inhibits these spiritual properties in "many—and some tragically frustrating—ways." Unfortunately, Owen does not explain just how the body acts as or constitutes such an inhibiting agency. Personally, I find the idea hard to grasp. Certainly, the body is not an independent agency that might override decisions or choices made by the mind. Might it then somehow be the source of all those desires or wants that may incline or tempt one to choose contrary to that which is wise, good, or loving? But to assign all these negatives to the body and nothing but honorific attributes to the mind seems entirely gratuitous and without ground in reason or experience. (Ironically, in orthodox Christian theology, the most maliciously evil person—Satan—is also supposedly an unembodied mind or pure spirit.) It seems much more reasonable to predicate all attributes (praiseworthy and blameworthy) to the person, not to disparate parts of the same.

But suppose we grant that a body is a causally necessary condition of one's ability to feel certain desires or inclinations such as
the desire for food or sexual gratification. Assuming that such desires and inclinations are not intrinsically evil, would they nonetheless necessarily inhibit a person from always choosing rightly? I don't see why. The New Testament describes the mortal Jesus as one who was tempted in all points such as we but without sin. It might well be wondered whether one who has fully confronted temptation in all its forms and guises and who has conquered them all is not more worthy of admiration and worship than one who has never experienced a conflict. It seems then that premise 21 is false, and for all the reasons given, this argument, too, fails to demonstrate that God must be incorporeal.

In sum, it appears that none of these typical arguments for divine incorporeality considered here is sufficient to prove it; thus none of them ought be a stumbling block to rational acceptance of the Father or the Son as embodied persons.

Conclusion

Joseph Smith revealed the doctrine that God is embodied, beginning even before he organized the Church in 1830. As evidenced in the writings of influential early Christian thinkers, the earliest Christians widely believed in an embodied God, and that belief persisted into the fourth and fifth centuries but was lost thereafter. The rational arguments of classical Christian immaterialists, however, fail to demonstrate that God must be incorporeal. Hence, neither historically nor philosophically compelling reasons exist for Christians to doubt the message of modern revelation that God is embodied.

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Personal Essay

Gentle Father

George Bennion

One of the earliest recollections about my father has to do with his scent. Not unpleasant, it communicated security and well-being. It was subtle and absolutely person specific. My father was gone a lot and, because of that, was an overwhelming presence when at home. In my memory, he was clearing land with a team of horses about three or four miles from our house and probably for some need of my mother's had me in tow. I have no memory at all of the main part of the day. I am sure it was summer because, although it was dark by the time we started home and we were at about 5,800 feet elevation, we wore no coats. It was chill but not cold. I remember he put me on one horse just back of its collar so that I tried without confidence to keep my position by clinging to the harness. He tied the rope of the other horse to the tail of the first and then swung up behind me, one large, warm arm across my front, and drew me against his stomach. His arm provided all the stability I wanted, and I let go of the harness, but it was his scent, soft and reassuring, that made me secure.

That scent was fixed in me forever. If it came to me now, I would smile inwardly and look around for him. Once when I was six or seven, we had moved from the country to the city, and the house we were living in was not yet home to me. I was having an unpleasant dream. My bed was jostled a little, and a kind of fear took me in my dream. My father had gotten into bed with me. He had been away from home for some reason and, out of any expectation of mine, had returned. Perhaps one or two of the younger children had gotten into bed with our mother, and he had found my bed the simplest and quickest way to sleep. As he settled into bed and put his arm around my waist and that known scent penetrated my
dream, the fear vanished, contentment flowed over me, and the unfamiliar place became home.

Yet I did not always feel entirely safe around my father. This was more than just the fact that he was big and I was little. My juvenile occupations gave me ample reason to expect punishment. But the difference in us, he a grown man and I a child, was a factor. To me, his strength was beyond comprehension. Once in a while, as we children romped around him and clumsily bumped into his back or knee, we bounced off as though he were a rock or a large tree trunk. He was gentle and tender and welcoming, yet still, he had that hardness of body and that towering strength—we had seen him lift the back end of our old Ford and hold it up with his knee while he got blocks under its axle. Although I didn’t articulate the ideas, encountering or thinking of him was accompanied by a nebulous sense of risk. He governed us more by look than by word. He never spoke angrily or shouted at us. We knew from his face when something had gotten out of bounds. Signs of approval were equally silent and equally clear. It’s hard to say exactly what they consisted of, these countermeasures to the scowl—a softening in his face, a deepening of lines at the corners of his eyes—but we had no uncertainty.

In 1933 he started a homestead and in May 1934 took two of my brothers and me there for the summer. Two unusual and revealing incidents occurred. We planted a cherry tree, a summer apple, currant bushes, and a kitchen garden in the little hollow where he built a one-room cabin of lumber carefully salvaged from a garage dismantled near our home in the city. (It has taken me fifty years to quit saving used nails and bent bolts.) Soon after the cabin was finished and the summer work outlined, our father left for an editing job he had taken in the city. The hollow had enough pitch to it that water ran down the furrows readily, making a mess of the cow trail of a road that ran beneath our garden. To protect the road, we shoveled a catch basin between the garden and the road, maybe twenty-five feet long, ten feet at the widest, and waist deep. It was only a small second step, whenever there was enough water in the “pond,” for us to take a dip. On one hot, gusty July weekend, our father came out to spend a few days. We had been working very hard. The catch basin was full. When we came in from the fields,
we boys were stripped off in minutes and paddling and splashing in the cool water. I suddenly looked up at my father standing twenty or thirty feet away, obviously yearning to get in the water. Although I was unfamiliar with the term Victorianism, I knew why he didn’t join us and was vaguely saddened by his longing.

The other incident occurred just before school summoned us to town. The weather had turned suddenly cold, a warning to us and all animals. Again our father was there, and while the four of us were standing in the garden, a half-grown coyote entered at the bottom of the garden. In no time, he was eating windfall fruit, and then while we watched, he began digging parsnips. I disliked parsnips and was amazed at the coyote. Our father told of coyotes commonly eating any such sugar-bearing foods in preparation for winter.

The homestead was in the midst of sheep winter range, and the sheep were a great trial to us. Our water came through miles of small ditches from several mountain springs, the ditches hoed out and maintained endlessly. Particularly in the fall and spring, when sheep herds were coming out or going back, the sheep tromped our ditches flat almost daily. The word sheep became a curse word. Now, with the young coyote absorbed in his bonanza, one of us was sent quietly up to the cabin for the .22, and our father shot the pup. It dropped like a bag of water no longer held. That’s all there was. To my view, the coyote was innocent and beautiful. The simple equanimity with which my father dispatched it startled and confused me. I said so. As though he were explaining why loose teeth must be pulled, he passed it off with a couple of instances of coyote depredations, but then half in humor and half seriously, he said, “I should have left him; no telling how many sheep he would have killed in his lifetime.” It was a side of my father I had not noticed before.

But it was also at the time we started that homestead that I discovered one of the choicest manifestations of his gentleness. It was as delightful to work with him as it was to be around him when work was done. From infancy I had no great love affair with hard work, but when he was there, explaining the purposes and the skills and especially any principles of physics that were involved, even the tasks at the bottom of my detesting had charm. In the first year of that undertaking, we scratched and clawed
mile on mile of ditch, bringing pathetic little streams across hard-packed gravel ridges, their rocks cemented together by the gradual accretion of lime. Hoe blades wore down; handles broke; our hands took on the shape of our tools. We never went anywhere without at least a shovel. After the basic job of ditching was finished, we routinely went up each ditch muddying the water to silt up the little interstices through which our precious water seeped away. And in later summer, we were forever scraping out moss and grass. On these tasks, I loaded more ill will than I ever did on the piano or the violin. But my father’s presence and conversation so beguiled those times that when he came out I genuinely hoped for such tasks. My perception of the settlement of the Great Basin, my leaning toward humanism, whatever capacity I have for critical thinking—all of this had its beginning in his talk at such times.

In my later teens, I learned to disregard his gentle guidance. It did not always compete well against the flashy and the gaudy. When I was nineteen and my father was still at his editing job, I got a job at a bank. One of the tellers owned a major truck stop at which he employed his brother as manager. This teller fancied himself not only a model of grace and charm, but also of shrewdness and acuity. His manner with elder female customers was something to behold. They would wait in line for his window when some tellers had no line at all. Suave and dapper, he saw himself above the rest of us—and we ourselves probably believed it a little bit, sometimes. Of course we joked about him when he was not present, but his beautiful clothes and his polished and confident ways nevertheless made us easy marks for him.

One day he confided to me that he was about to marry and that a motorcycle he owned would be out of harmony with his new estate; he added confidentially that he would consider selling it for a good deal under its value if he could find someone who would care for it well. In those days, I rode the streetcar whenever my destination was beyond easy walking distance. After thinking over the confidence carefully (all of ten minutes), I told him that if I could reach his price, I should like to have his bike. Somehow we managed to work it out.

That evening I spoke of the matter to my father, expecting him to share my excitement and to congratulate me on my shrewd
deal. We were standing in the lane that circled our home. It was a warm spring evening just after sunset. He stood silent long enough that I thought the temperature had dropped. "I wouldn't bother with it. Motorcycles, especially on gravel, slide too easily from under their riders and let them go, trading flesh for gravel, scraping their way into a ditch or against a tree." Of course, I had been imagining myself sailing smartly along beautiful mountain roads or getting to work quickly, passing the unpleasant streetcar with neither regret nor difficulty. He turned and we walked, without speaking, up the lane toward the house. His point was compelling. Still, I was nineteen—lots of people in those days were saying that was old enough to vote. Plus, confound it, that bike and picture of unrestrained flight were too much for me.

When I got to work the next morning, I was in turmoil, and the teller, for some reason, said he had decided not to sell me his bike. I saw that as a trick to get a better price and made some dark suggestion to that effect. But when the bank closed that afternoon, he took me to his truck stop and showed me the motorcycle. It did not fit my picture of it at all. It was old and scuffed up. When I looked at him in surprise, he merely shrugged and called his brother. We walked around back where there was an old sawhorse. The teller said, "Sit on the end of this so that you're hanging over a little. Ed, here, will throw gravel in your face, and I'll kick your butt. That'll give you a good idea of what riding a motorcycle is really like, and you will get off without any serious injury."

"By some chance," I asked, "do you know my dad?" I went home chagrined. Gentleness cannot always manage foolishness. I was lucky.

Another time when I disregarded my father's gentle reproach I was not so lucky. This time I was not fetched by the flashy, but by something far more grievous—my ego was under stress. I was much older but apparently not much wiser. I was homesteading with my father. I was aware of his disapproval at once, and affected by it, yet I bullied stubbornly ahead, just as with the motorcycle.

We had been homesteading for ten or so years with just enough financial success to keep us hoping and struggling. I was also teaching and had located my family near the university, about a hundred miles from the farm. In the summers, I visited my family
on weekends, and when school was in session, I visited the farm once or twice a month. My father had brought cattle to the venture and a few badly needed, but worn, pieces of equipment. Lately things had taken a bad turn. It was doubtful that we could get fuel to run the irrigation pumps. I had tried to raise operating money from banks, insurance companies, and merchants, but got nowhere. One Saturday in early spring, I took a load of groceries out to my father and the hired man; we talked about the prospects at some length. My father quietly urged me to be satisfied with a career at the university. He said, "It looks hopeless to try any longer. Other years we would be irrigating by this time."

I wanted to avoid such negative thoughts. Success there meant at least as much to him as to me, and though our situation looked bleak, I was unwilling to consider giving up. "Dad, there are fuel dealers everywhere. They have just as much need to sell as we have to buy. There's got to be a way to work this out." On the way home that night, it occurred to me that the fuel dealer himself might extend credit. I called on him the next day after school.

He was a giant of a fellow, about six six, and was on a delivery when I got there. I waited. We exchanged greetings, and, as he always did, he told me how much he loved to go out into the desert, how he admired "our pioneering spirit," and how he loved to see someone "make the desert blossom as a rose." This triteness was standard, a kind of opening exercise not to be hurried. When the ritual was finished, he got down to business: "Is there something I can do for you?"

"I need fuel."

"I've got fuel. How much do you want?"

"Forty-five hundred gallons, to start. Uh, I'm broke, Jerry. I can't pay till summer."

He put me "on hold"; his I-love-the-desert music started again while he seemed to be assessing, imagining the near future. "I'd love to take my son-in-law and my son, the only one still in the roost, and get out for some shooting. How are the rabbits out your way? . . . Why sure, Brother Bennion, what are friends for? We at this plant take it as a pleasure to help someone out. I think I can slip out early next Saturday. You wouldn't mind if I and my boy walked around on your land, would you? You know, since my
bypass surgery, I'm supposed to walk five miles every day. Saturday, for once, I'll do my work first and my walking second."

I had not heard of his heart trouble. We worked through the details of that, and I started to leave. "Uh, Brother Bennion, uh, in order to keep good neighbors good neighbors, uh, I'll have to take a crop mortgage."

"That's fine, Jerry." It struck me as a little false for him to have such difficulty saying it. The instrument was crude:

4500 gal #2 diesel

To be pd out of first crop hay

Neither a due date nor a dollar amount, and I did not care. I was getting fuel.

By Friday the weather turned bad; a persistent rain began to fall, and the temperature to drop. I called Jerry to remind him that the last seven miles to my place was clay and would be like grease under the rain. The weather worsened. It froze every night, but under the bright spring sun, the road was slick again by ten every morning. Two weeks later, I took groceries to the farm. Somehow the fuel dealer had slipped out. His tracks in the clay were eloquent warning to any traveler. I left the pickup where the clay road began and walked in for a tractor to carry the supplies. At supper my father said, "You're paying too much for the fuel." He got the invoice and pointed to the price—"$0.169 per gallon."

"That's a clerical error—most likely. I'll bring it to his attention Monday after class." For a long time the price had been $0.135; I was a little unsettled but quite sure it was a mistake.

"That's no error. That's our price."

"My gosh, Jerry, the price has been thirteen and a half for the last three years. You set it yourself. Don't you think you should have told me? That's a big jump—a 25-percent jump."

He didn't take that well. Possibly if I had not been under such stress, diplomacy might have emerged. His voice gained an assertive edge: "Brother Bennion, we have to make a profit in this business. Besides," he concluded, "you didn't ask, so I assumed you didn't care." With that he slowly uncoiled his great length, standing over me a brief moment and then, turning his back, began filing papers. I waited a short while, moving from surprise to anger. He
said nothing further, and I left, scalped. I hadn’t asked. I had been careless, and I had my reward.

The cold, rainy weather continued, keeping the alfalfa dormant and blessing the weeds. Conditions were the same all over the state. I heard it on the news and saw it in fields everywhere. Some farmers cut their hay and just raked it off the fields. Others burned their fields. I left mine, hoping to salvage something.

Eventually summer came, and we cut and baled, the crop maybe worth the price of baling wire. One Sunday in mid-June, the fuel dealer called me at my home, “I know you’ve baled your hay, and I want my money.”

“Jerry, the crop is worthless. It couldn’t be called feed by any stretch. You’ll have to wait till the second crop.”

“There’s no waiting. Bring in a load this week. I’ll have a buyer.”

I tried to make him understand, but he was not to be put off. I agreed to bring three tons as a sample. He gave me the location of a dairyman who he said would be glad to get it.

“No dairy cow will touch that trash; it’s good for nothing but bedding,” I warned, but I might as well have talked to the wind. Saturday came, and the dairyman, very much against his will, gave me a check for $75.00. Jerry was there, of course, and eased the check from my fingers.

The dairyman, who, like me, owed money to the fuel dealer, finally asserted himself: “That stuff ain’t feed. It would cut milk production to nuthin’ in no time,” he said.

Jerry knew another dairyman who would take the whole crop and “be glad of it”; he himself would come out next Thursday, early, with his own flatbed and the dairyman with a one-ton. They would continue that arrangement until my bill was paid. I felt shame for this second dairyman and no small anger at the fuel dealer. But, as he had promised, they arrived at my fields about nine o’clock Thursday morning with two trucks. The fuel dealer, this heart victim, understandably did not help load the trucks but walked alongside, making jokes and in general having a great time. I was smarting badly. Though I told myself I should be glad my trash was paying the fuel bill, the pretense that it was a marketable product and the fact another struggling farmer was forced to pay money for it were stingingly humiliating. The fuel dealer’s exercise
of raw power without human consideration, as I saw it, was especially galling. I could think of little else.

When the loads were secure and the trucks beyond my gate, I headed for the cabin, where smoke signaled the noon meal. I had gone only a few yards when I stopped short. Making some quick calculations, I cried out from excitement and then in a cold tone, "Jerry, you dumb cluck! You've played right into my hand." I hurried to the cabin and, as we started the meal, told my father and the hired man just what I had in mind. I was trembling, my voice unsteady. My father looked at me as at a stranger. He said nothing. The hired man was delighted and congratulatory, which alone was condemnation. By supper nothing had changed. My father remained silent throughout the meal. Without finishing my food, I went out, but even the night air did not relieve my distress. Nevertheless, in spite of the clear warning of my father's quiet hurt, I determined to stick with my plan.

The weeks went by, and then one Sunday the fuel dealer called and said, "We'll be out for the last load next Thursday. I'll be glad to get everything settled, and I suppose you will too, right?"

"Jerry," I said, with no great confidence, "You needn't make the trip. You've already got a little more than you had coming."

There was a pause. I waited.

"What do you mean? The bill was so much. The bales weighed an average of so much, right? We agreed on that. And we hauled this many bales each load for five loads, right? And at $25.00 a ton I have one more load coming, right?"

"Not right, Jerry. You're wrong on the price. It's $31.30."

"No! The price is $25.00. It has been for two or three years."

"Jerry," I said, struggling to keep my voice steady, "The price is $31.30. We have to make a profit in this business. Besides, you didn't ask, so I assumed you didn't care."

The silence was absolute, and long. I feared his heart. Eventually he spoke, fully composed. "The trouble with you is you don't know who your friends are. Gather up your papers, and get down here. I'll have your crop mortgage ready, and we'll be done."

"I'll do that, and it's true that I've had some confusion about who my friends are, but, Jerry, how soon could I get another load of fuel, and what would the price be?"
That last was quite unnecessary. But I had got into the spirit of the thing and couldn’t let go. When I did let go, my thoughts, as in the matter of the motorcycle, focused on my father, the hurt I had given him. His notion of what it was to be a human was so clean and so basic that he found it superfluous to speak of it. I had walked on that. My scheme, brought off without a hitch, now unraveled and turned to something nasty in my mouth. Both in the motorcycle affair and the fuel deal, something unwholesome had welled up in me and stolen my wits. My father was not saddened because I took a different course from his but because my different course could not bear scrutiny. Characteristically, he said nothing, but I knew his mind on it, and I think he was aware that I did.

That business with the fuel dealer turned me to wondering about the difference between my father’s life and my own. He had once mentioned a birthday party his mother gave him when he was very little. There would not have been another family close enough for any convenience in this matter, no one within miles. Probably, the mothers of the guests made a day of it and planned quilting or other practicalities while they visited. In fact, his account mentioned only two friends at the party, a girl and a boy, each from a different family. They would have been two hours or more in a buggy getting there. There was no lawn, no park, no playground. There was the house, of course, and, naturally, since parks and lawns were outside their experience, the lack was no impediment. At some point, they began a joyous game in the vicinity of the barn. My grandfather had cleaned out the part of the barn where he milked. The result was quite a steep mound of blue-black manure, firm enough to hold its shape but soft enough to be very slippery. The partying children scrambled and clawed their way to the top of this delight and then, squealing their excitement, made precarious descent. In no time, the splendor of their party attire was sullied beyond redemption. Sounds of merriment carried to the hills, and, more importantly, to the mothers, prompting investigation. The party was over, my grandmother responsible. I have been told that she manifested anger, that she said some memorable things. I suspect, however, that there was also silence, sobering and sufficiently ambiguous that the little boy examined many possible consequences, both the speech and the silence sufficiently
impressive to be important in the formation of my father's gentle and largely silent correction of his children.

All I have left of the sudden end of that celebration is that without taking time to heat the water, my grandmother washed my father vigorously and then for some period of time equipped him with a dress outgrown by an older sister. Of course, under the circumstances, he manifested a certain reluctance to see his guests off. It was only because his brothers suggested he might lose even the dress that he appeared, eyes averted, for supper. If, in fact, my grandmother's treatment of him then influenced him toward gentleness, I memorialize her now for it.

Once as we were ditching together, he said that when he and his brothers were just little fellows about the farmyard, they had some amusement at the expense of the roosters that crowed them out of bed. One of these was a small game cox, not half the size of the others, though it was their boss, a strutting little tyrant that routinely bloodied their combs.

A feature of the yard was a pond, where close-kept livestock watered. Once when the bantam's tyranny particularly offended the boys, those small gods of the farmyard, they caught him and threw him in the pond. He survived the water but not all its effects. He came out bedraggled, misbegotten, so unrecognizable and to the other roosters so in need of being pecked that they lit into him and drove him off. I suspect that even in his own view, he was now ridiculous and unfit. When he rejoined the flock, it was at the bottom of the pecking order. Naturally a new leader emerged, also encumbered by an inclination to tyranny. It was not long until the boys found it necessary to throw him into the pond, also. Then followed a succession of hen-yard governors who, as often as their governance became unbearable from the boys' Olympian perspective, were successfully baptized into the brotherhood of the dethroned. Gentle? Compared with what? The boys let no blood. They stood for justice, I would say, like the God of the Old Testament but were scarcely so dangerous.

An incident from his twenties shows a capacity outside my perception of him—way beyond gentle. His partner in this affair was a young man his age from a town some forty miles off. It was he who told the story. Before the days of Taylor Grazing, he and his
partner were running a herd of about fourteen hundred head of cattle on the open range. Cows were disappearing faster than animal predation could explain. There were consultations, the county sheriff was visited, and eventually a man was brought to trial. To the partners' outrage, he was acquitted for lack of evidence. Their losses had been significant, and now it appeared the trial would not only fail to stop the thefts, but might also encourage worse. In the courtroom, the partners held a quick council and then separated. One of them stationed himself menacingly at the main exit of the courtroom to discourage the defendant from leaving by it, and the other got their Model T Ford to the back, where they expected him momentarily. He did come out; they quickly hustled him into their machine and drove to the scene of their losses. In all the drive, perhaps two and a half hours, no one spoke. They found a tree suitable to their purpose, threw a rope over a branch and fixed a noose around the fellow's neck. Before they broke silence, they drew him up until he was breathing only poorly by standing on the tips of his toes: "If we even so much as see you again in these parts, we'll finish this job." They turned him loose, and their losses fell away to normal.

I know of nothing in my father's ways, jovial or sober, that could be companion to that tale, yet his former partner told it like an old love remembered. I tried to imagine my father having a "past" which, with his marriage and our coming, he had jettisoned, but the idea was so preposterous that I jettisoned it. He has been gone now these many years. I will never know.

All these events occurred long after his gentle, Victorian nature was established at the most basic and unexamined level of my assumptions. Yet thinking about it now, I do remember some things that argue for a nature more complex. When I was about ten, my parents and I—perhaps others—were driving on a straight stretch of fine graveled road. Suddenly, altogether without preamble, Mother asked if she might learn to drive, a great surprise to me, possibly even more to my father. There was a wait before he responded. The implication of course was huge. I felt it intensely. I was amazed at my mother and enormously pleased with her, too. But frightened. I wanted success for her but feared it; she was a
short woman and could scarcely see over the dashboard; more than that, something unconscious in me was signaling alarm.

Being able to drive, especially then, was more than just liberating and enabling. Probably at that moment, such ideas were affecting each of my parents in different and powerful ways. I knew nothing of women’s suffrage movements, but even a little daydreaming kid cannot be totally unaware of who has privilege and authority and what the symbols are. My father stopped the machine, got out, walked around to the passenger side, and helped Mother out. He did this without uttering a word, which in itself was portentous. He delivered a step-by-step description of the starting of the engine and of the engaging of the clutch, all of which Mother performed nervously but faultlessly. However, words like slowly and carefully are far too vague for the one who must actually let out the clutch pedal. That comes only with practice. It is in the class of things that people even of a low order of intelligence can learn to do well but that few of us do well at first. The feel and the sounds are the real teachers. Mother let out the clutch pedal “slowly” and “carefully” but, even so, faster than the other operating factors could accommodate. The car bucked and stopped, bucked and stopped, a disorienting and confusing experience to all first-timers. She had interrupted a perfectly satisfactory travel down the highway. Or was it the sociopolitical structure that she was interrupting? And she was, in a way, asking to be elevated from an inferior station determined at least partially by skill at driving. This was risk taking at its purest. She had a lot to gain but too much to lose. I regretted her self-imposed vulnerability. I am sure that if they had been home some evening, reading together, talking a little of this and that, my father would have agreed and would have brought it off gracefully and been pleased with her. But now, with the car bucking and clunking and his being caught off guard, he made unusual noises, perhaps muffled expletives. Sixty years later, I remember the sentence that followed and the unaccustomed tone carrying it: “Lucile! Confound it, you might as well hit the transmission with a double jack!”

The car had brought itself to a complete stop. Mother opened the door, got out, and walked around to the passenger side, which by then my father had vacated. She did this without uttering a
word. To the end of her life, she never again asked to drive—and never complained about having to take the streetcar. Gentle? Hardly. But dramatic moments surprise us into dramatic speech and acts.

Even on the rare occasions when my father lectured me—twice on long automobile trips when I was ten or twelve, just he and I in the car, and one other time as we walked in the desert when I was seventeen—he never spoke that way to me. My older brother and I, at seventeen, had been putting up hay all summer. Our father came once or twice a month. We got along well while he was gone, but when he was there, we competed for his attention. On this occasion, early morning, my brother and I were getting the horses ready for the hay wagon. One of them stepped on my brother’s foot, and he was certain I had pushed the horse to produce that result. There was a burst of ugliness, and I left, heading west across the desert. Actually there was nowhere to go, and by the time I thought about that and began to wonder how to go back to the cabin without looking a fool, my father, following my tracks, found me seated on a rock, lost between self-justification and shame, not in the least mindful of what fears I may have imposed on my brother nor of the position I may have put him in with our father.

Each of those lectures was about fundamental family and human values, quietly and courteously delivered but in such a way that I had no doubt that I was being taught and what had occasioned each.

When my father and I began homesteading together, he was already sixty, afflicted with some pretty consistent discomfort from old injuries and some new problems that would afflict him to the end. I have since felt sure that they were major causes of what I saw as a loosening of self-control. His reserve was visibly eroding.

We had drilled a well four hundred fifty feet deep and had installed on it a turbine pump capable of a flow of about three-and-a-half second-feet of water. The engine was a new Caterpillar, one hundred horsepower, to be cooled by water in a tank above the front of the engine; two-inch pipes that ran the water from the pump to the tank, then to the engine, and then back to the pump completed the system. It was great to have cold water from the well
cool the engine, but there was this drawback: the engine had to have water before the pump could be started, yet the engine had to be running to get water from the well. As a reservoir, we temporarily used a fifty-five-gallon drum previously used for mixing pesticides. This was the day of DDT and chlordane.

My older brother had come, and we were going to start up the pump and show him the wonder of the water. He had driven forty-five hot, dusty miles. Ignorant of the history of the drum, he got a drink from it. Just as he finished his drink, our father turned and, realizing what had occurred, sure that he had lost a son, offered a great sizzling oath equal to his fear of the moment and to all the pain and frustration besides.

So my father, articulate and instant, knew all the words.

Still, for me, adamantly now because of his aging, my father was gentle. He must have known all the words all the time, may have had a “past,” but he governed himself. I had never before heard him unload like that, had never seen him violent, had never witnessed the occasional anger so common in other men. I had never seen him beat or otherwise abuse any animal. Yet he was intense, and there were moments and situations.

One of them came still later in his life. He didn’t walk well anymore, and his frame had become quite stooped. When we took beeves to auction, he never got in on the driver’s side as he always had before, and often, when our animals were sold and we drove around to get provisions, he sat in the truck and waited.

One time when we had run a few head through the auction, he just went directly to the truck while I collected the proceeds of the sale. Then as I was crossing the parking lot, someone behind me called out, “Mr. Bennion? Mr. Bennion.” When I turned to see what was wanted, the speaker said, as though I were something he wanted to avoid stepping in, “Not you! Your father. Mr. Bennion? Mr. Bennion, do you remember me? I’m Corbin Huffaker.”

I knew the speaker, not well, but enough. He had inherited substantially when his folks died, and in addition to his being manager of a farm supplies business, he made well-secured loans at usurious rates. He had laughed a good many neighbors out of his home when, in almost anyone else, their need would have inspired sympathy if not help. In these and other ways, he had managed an
unsavory reputation around town. In both lending and collecting, he had shown himself a coward when pressed and a bully when permitted. Everyone called him "Dog."

My father appeared not to have heard. "Mr. Bennion, I was at your cabin on Indian Mountain one fall in '44. It was roundup. Do you remember?"

No response. In spite of the fact he had brushed me aside, seeing Mr. Huffaker trying so hard to be acknowledged embarrassed me.

Without looking at him, my father said, "No. I can't say that I do. What did you say your name was?"

"Corbin. Corbin Huffaker. Don't you remember? That night in your cabin? There was Jake Winters and Ev Rydalch from over in Erickson Pass."

"Anyone else?"

"No. Nobody. Some kids. Four or five, hanging around for the roundup. From down around here."

Even if relations were congenial, calling kids "nobody" would have made him detestable to my father.

"Ev I know, and Jake Winters, and I remember that bunch of young fellers, good hands, all of 'em, but I don't recall anyone by the name of Corbin." My father was manipulating, deliberately not looking at the man. I was at the point of saying something to ease the situation because this man, often so wretched to others, was now so pathetic. But before I did, he spoke again, his need awful and urgent. "That night you told stories about Stansbury and Frémont, when they were mapping and exploring around western Utah. We had venison. One of them kids got a deer. I'm sure you can remember that night."

"I'm remembering some, but I have no recollection of anybody named Corbin. Huffaker? Huffaker I know. Corbin. Corbin. I connect that name to nobody." My father had returned the ugly word Huffaker had put on the boys. Mr. Huffaker moved off a bit and shuffled his feet, his whole demeanor a kind of begging. "Corbin is a name I don't know," my father continued. "Would there have been some other name you went by?" Now my father looked directly at Huffaker. At first he seemed so preoccupied his mounting intensity escaped me. But now there was in his face
judgment and contempt, something that took me back to childhood and the old disapproving looks aimed at my misbehaviors, except that where that had been parental and guiding, this was final and damning.

I was pained—perhaps more than Mr. Huffaker—and amazed. Also, although I had no respect for Mr. Huffaker, I was affected by his agony and wanted to be away from there. He squirmed, cast his eyes down at his feet, and abjectly said, “They call me Dog.”

My father faced back to the dashboard. “Yes,” he said. “Now I know you.”

Mr. Huffaker was standing clear of the truck. I hit the starter button, shoved the transmission into low, and made for the parking-lot exit. After a time, I sneaked a look at my “gentle” father, marveling both at what he had just done and also at the consummate skill with which he had done it. Before we quite reached the homestead, it occurred to me that what he had just done to Dog Huffaker bore a remarkable similarity to what I had done a year or two earlier to Jerry, the fuel dealer. In a rush of shame, I recognized the idea as an attempt to justify myself. That night in my sleep, an image formed in my mind of a small boy-god throwing a banty rooster into a pond.

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Fig. 1. *First Vision*, by Tiffany and Company. Leaded stained glass, 145" x 54", 1892. Located in the Salt Lake Temple. Photograph courtesy LDS Church Archives.

Realizing that the Tiffany artists would depict the First Vision using traditional iconography unless otherwise instructed, architect Joseph Don Carlos Young carefully spelled out the visual details. The resulting art piece set the precedent for stained-glass windows depicting the First Vision.
“Ye Shall See the Heavens Open”: Portrayal of the Divine and the Angelic in Latter-day Saint Art

An art historian offers a tour of several LDS images of the divine and the angelic that stand in sharp contrast to much of the previous fifteen hundred years of Western religious art.

Richard G. Oman

Most art expresses religious themes. One need only look at African masks, Hopi kachinas, the Sistine Chapel frescos, paintings in the tombs of Egypt, sculpture from the Parthenon of Athens, the windows of the Cathedral of Chartres, and virtually all of the sculpture of India to see the reality of this claim. A people’s art traditions tell us much about their religious faith and something of the gods they worship and their relationship with those gods—their visions and epiphanies. The selection of iconography used in artistic renditions of epiphanies can tell us a great deal about the core beliefs of a people.

The Latter-day Saint faith is based on revelation—especially on contacts between heavenly beings and early LDS leaders. These epiphanies or visions were concentrated in the life of Mormonism’s first modern prophet, Joseph Smith Jr. (1805–1844), between his fourteenth and thirty-first birthdays. During these years, Joseph received visitations from God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ; an ancient American prophet named Moroni; John the Baptist; three of Christ’s early Apostles, Peter, James, and John; as well as several other heavenly beings, including those who appeared to him in the Kirtland Temple (see plate 1; see also p. 29). Because of the significance of these visions to the Mormon faith, they are reflected in Latter-day Saint art. This article looks at some of the art.
Fig. 2. Inception of Mormonism—Joseph Smith’s First Vision, etching in T. B. H. Stenhouse, The Rocky Mountain Saints: A Full and Complete History of the Mormons (New York: D. Appleton, 1873). Courtesy Rare Books and Manuscripts, Brigham Young University. This is probably the first depiction of the First Vision.
that depicts the heavenly beings seen in these visions, particularly God the Father, his son Jesus Christ, and the angel Moroni.

The First Vision

The major theophany of the LDS tradition is the appearance of God the Father and his son Jesus Christ to the fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820. The vision occurred in a grove of trees, probably the family woodlot, on the Smith family farm near Palmyra, New York. This seminal experience shaped the Mormon understanding of the nature of the Godhead. The First Vision, as it is called, also set in motion a series of epiphanic events that led to the translation of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods, and the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Over time the First Vision has become a favorite theme in Mormon art. It has not been treated as a dream or a metaphor. Instead, the vision has been depicted as a real event with specific participants, location, and time. Joseph Smith is shown as a boy. God the Father and Jesus Christ are shown as physically embodied beings standing in the air, usually surrounded with light.

One of the first published visual representations of Joseph Smith’s first vision was not produced by a Mormon. It is a small print published in T.B.H. Stenhouse’s rather uncomplimentary 1873 history of the Mormons. The print, titled Inception of Mormonism—Joseph Smith’s First Vision (see fig. 2), is one of several depicting Joseph’s visions. Their inclusion indicates the author’s understanding of the importance of these epiphanies to the faith to which he had previously adhered, although the prints themselves are aesthetically and technically very modest works.

The first known painting of Joseph’s first vision is by the Danish immigrant artist Carl Christian Anton Christensen (1831-1912). In 1878 he began work on his Mormon Panorama, which depicted Mormon history from 1820 to 1847. Each of the twenty-three paintings in the Panorama was over six feet high and almost ten feet wide. They were stitched together and rolled like a scroll. Christensen displayed the paintings around the Mormon West and accompanied the display with a lecture on Church history.
The first painting in the series (now lost) was *The First Vision*, depicting the Father and the Son appearing to the young Joseph Smith. George Manwaring (1854-1889), a poet who wrote early LDS hymn lyrics, was so taken by the painting that after seeing it he wrote the lyrics for the famous LDS hymn “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer.”

One of the most significant early depictions of the First Vision is a magnificent Tiffany art-glass window in the Salt Lake Temple (see fig. 1). Because the Tiffany studio artists were not Latter-day Saints, Joseph Don Carlos Young, the architect for the Salt Lake Temple, wrote them a letter carefully spelling out the iconographical elements for the commissioned window. This is perhaps the earliest authoritative instruction to artists on how this most significant of all Mormon epiphanies should be depicted. Because of its specificity and rarity, it is published here in full.

Salt Lake City, Utah
Sept. 20th 1892

Tiffany and Co
Art Glass Manufacturers:
Gentlemen: —

When your Mr. Coulson was here a few months ago, the committee appointed to determine the character and extent of ornamental and artistic work to be done in the Temple, had not arrived at any decision as to whether art glass would be employed or not. Since that time the matter has been reconsidered. It is now decided to have some of your work to adorn the interior of this majestic Edifice and a subject has been selected for your artist to sketch out, and submit for approval. The subject is the first vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith. This vision was received early in the spring of 1820 in Manchester, Wayne Co New York when he was in the 15th year of his age. The scene which this remarkable vision opened before the youthful “Seeker after God” I will proceed to describe as graphically as I can. And to do this it will be necessary to narrate briefly the more salient points leading to the divine manifestation which he on this ever memorable occasion received.

It was on the morning of a beautiful clear day that this young man retired to the woods near his father’s house, to a spot of ground which he had previously selected to offer up in fervent prayer his desires, that God would make known to him which of the many Christian Churches was the right so that he might become a member of that Church. As the distractions and confusion arising out of a revival held in the neighborhood had very much disturbed and unsettled his mind. Upon reaching the place he had chosen, he
looked around and saw that he was alone. He knelt down and commenced to call upon God in great earnestness to grant him the knowledge he needed: believing fully that it would be given to him. He had but just commenced when he was seized by a power that brought with it the most dreadfull apprehension of sudden destruction. He struggled to appeal for deliverance, and when he felt that he was about to be engulfed in darkness and despair, a sudden change was wrought within him, and an indescribable calm swept over his whole being. Simultaneously with this change of feeling he opened his eyes and saw a pillar of light exceeding the brightness of the sun descending immediately over his head. This pillar of light descended so low that he became enveloped by it. And in this pillar of light he saw two heavenly personages whose brightness and glory defy all description standing standing [sic] above him in the air, in such close proximity as to hear one of them speak to him, calling him by name and pointing with his finger to the other personage, saying "This is my beloved Son hear him" One of the personages unfolded in this vision the benighted condition of the whole Christian world and imparted to Joseph such information as to fully answer all his enquiries of the Lord in prayer.

With this brief recital of the circumstances that brought about this marvelous event. It will now be proper to group together some of these circumstances and some particulars relating to the youthful Prophet and the heavenly beings who visited him, as elements of which to make the picture

The Scene is in a wood. The foliage of which would indicate the time of early spring of the year 1820. The first object to distinguish is a boy in the 15th year of his age clad in the ordinary garb of a farmer's son kneeling in the attitude of prayer similar to young Samuel of old. His position in the picture should be such as would express earnestness and deep humility. The facial expression should also be modestly turned upward: not a daring but in an imploring manner. To produce this effect, the head and face should also pose at such an age to the observer that these expressions can be seen. The features of his face may be conceived approximately correct from a study of accompanying likeness which was taken in later years. The color of his hair was brown. He had a full blue eyes and at that period (15 years old) of his life he would be light complexioned. His general appearance would suggest that he was a healthy boy of good habits and of a thoughtful turn of mine destined for future greatness in the world.

The next part of the heavenly vision to be described are the two personages which will form the crowning work of the artists in this inspiring and heavenly Scene. As previously stated. There were two Personages who descended in the Pillar of Light: The brilliancy of which exceeded the brightness of the Sun. And the Halo of glory which immediately surrounded them defy all description. They stood above him some distance in the air, but in such close proximity that
every feature of their countenances were seen. They were clothed in robes of exquisite whiteness, reaching to the ankles, and the arms were covered nearly to the lower parts of the wrists. The feet were also covered with a sort of shoe apparently of the same kind of material as the garments. The hair was of snowy whiteness and worn more after the early oriental style. It is not said that the heads were covered therefore they will appear uncovered. The faces of both these Celestial Beings were adorned with full grown Beards, also, of pure white color. One very remarkable circumstance connected with these two personages was, that they were the exact likeness of each other and the express image of one another, so much in that they could not be distinguished the one from the other, excepting in one particular only, and that was: this: the countenance of the one indicated that He was older than the other, as the countenance of a father is distinguished from that of a son and this impression was confirmed. When the older pointed with his finger to the other, saying "This is my beloved son hear him." These personages stood beside each other facing the supplicant. The Son being on the right hand of the Father, but elevated above him (Joseph) with their heads bowed sufficiently forward to enable the Boy to behold their countenances in full, and both were without wings. It is desirable as far as possible to human skill and the inspiration of art to do it, that the bearing and characteristics of these two Personages be so pronounced as to awaken reverence in the minds of observers such as we could conceive it to be proper to sense, of the presence of omnipotence, concealed by the radiance of infinite condescension and love. Of course it is understood that such perfection of design and execution is expected only within the limits of artistic knowledge and mechanical possibilities. You will fill out the picture with so much foliage as will become the space allowed you, bearing in mind that it is to be the foliage of early spring in the state of New York upwards of 70 years ago. I enclose you a tracing of a sketch of the opening where this picture is to go. I trust that I have clothed the conceptions of this heavenly vision in such language as will enable your artists to grasp the Scope of the subject. If you discover any defects in the description here given, you will kindly make such corrections as are necessary to make the picture in glass as perfect a piece of work as can be done. We will be pleased to get a sketch of this design at your earliest convenience. With this sketch please send an approximate cost of such a piece of work.

Also please return the sketches you have as there are other parties who wish to see them, as they intend donating some of this kind of work to embellish our Temple.

Respectfully
Jos. D. C. Young Architect
per G. G. Bywater
Supt Machinery
Temple Block
This letter is very precise about contextual and narrative details. Young mentions the age of the forest, the season, and the state in which the vision occurred. He carefully describes the faces, beards, hair color, and costume of the Deities. He specifies Joseph Smith's age and the type of clothing he might have been wearing. Young clearly describes the sequence of events and the physical position of each of the figures in the narrative.

Tiffany's completed window was placed in the most sacred part of the Salt Lake Temple. The window's placement expresses the centrality of Joseph Smith's youthful theophany to the foundational history and faith of the Latter-day Saints.

**Depicting Glory and Immanence**

Some artistic renditions of these early sacred visions of the Latter-day Saints have been more successful than others. The artistic challenge revolves around visually expressing the sublime exaltation as well as the close presence of Deity. Because written descriptions of the visions and of their significance in the development of LDS doctrine preceded any visual representations by many years, many of the details of the visual expression are predetermined.\(^{12}\) A tight narrative has a tendency to produce a tight naturalistic image. Little artistic license exists to generate further symbolism that communicates the power of the Almighty. Art styles come and go (see pp. 40, 54, and 80), but Young's letter makes it comprehensible why LDS art dealing with sacred epiphanies remains mostly narrative. The context of these LDS epiphanies is historical. Narrative art is the traditional vehicle of history. That is not to say that simplification of style and visual elements is not possible. Most LDS folk art of this subject does just that. But it does mean that all the key elements must be depicted. A good example of this constraint is the First Vision batik by Pranoto reproduced on the back cover. The artist has depicted the Father, the Son, and young Joseph. But the Sacred Grove has been reduced to one flamelike bit of foliage, which is there because the setting for the vision was a grove of trees.

In LDS theology, light is the most consistent symbol of the glory of God (see fig. 3). Nowhere is this symbolism better articulated
This is the only painting of the First Vision that I am aware of that depicts the departure of the evil spirit upon the arrival of the Father and the Son. The faces of God the Father and Christ are heavily stylized. The artist uses light and dark to communicate good and evil. He contrasts the brightness of the defined physical forms of the Father and the Son with the ambiguity and darkness of the cloud-like form representing the evil spirit. This contrast emphasizes the LDS theological idea that corporeality is ultimately positive.
than in section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The omnipresence and revelatory aspect of Christ are expressed as light, "that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth; Which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ" (D&C 88:6-7). Light expresses power, life, and sacred law—all these things emanate from God through the medium of light:

Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things. (D&C 88:12-13)

The first thing that Joseph Smith described about the appearance of the Father and the Son was the quality of the light that surrounds them. Light has been a consistent aspect in the descriptions of all early Mormon visions. Because creating and communicating with light is the essence of stained glass, among the most successful depictions of the First Vision, in my opinion, are those done in this medium. It is illuminating (literally) that the first major art commission of the First Vision by the Church was the Tiffany stained-glass window. The First Vision windows in the chapels of the Salt Lake Seventeenth Ward, the Salt Lake Second Ward (see front cover), and the Brigham City Third Ward (see plate 2); continue this tradition (see also p. 6). Stained-glass windows depicting the First Vision seem to me a perfect wedding of sacred history, theology, and artistic medium. There is a gentle, poetic consistency in using real light filtered through the medium of colored glass to try to communicate the glorious and loving radiance of Deity.

Communicating the majesty of God through art has sometimes also been achieved with sculpture. One of the more successful examples used by the Church is a replica of the Christus (see fig. 4)—a sculpture by the great neoclassical Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1768-1844), who was not LDS.13 The Christus is not a sentimental Christ. This is the commanding, triumphal Christ of the Resurrection. The muscular, outstretched arms and the strong masculinity of the figure give the sculpture power. The neoclassical style slightly simplifies the form, in an effort to make the image timeless and heroic. This piece speaks of Christ's power and majesty.
Fig. 4. *Christus*, by Bertel Thorvaldsen (1768–1844). Carrara marble, 11'1" high, ca. 1965, replica of 1821 original, 3.36 m. Located in the North Visitors’ Center, Temple Square, Salt Lake City. The placement and size of this statue lead the viewer to contemplate Christ’s role in the world and the universe. This experiential context plus the muscular masculinity of the figure impart a timeless, heroic power to the figure.

The Church has placed copies of this marble statue in many of its visitors’ centers to communicate the centrality of Latter-day Saint belief in Christ. Some of the placements of the sculpture work better than do others. By far the most successful placement is in the rotunda of the North Visitors’ Center on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. This *Christus* powerfully communicates the exalted nature of the Savior for a number of reasons. The eleven-foot sculpture, set on a massive base at the top of a circular ramp and weighing several tons, is genuinely imposing. The medium is white Carrara marble. This lends a sense of quality and classical permanence to the image that substitute materials cannot match. The setting of the figure is crucial. The statue has been placed in a large, round room capped with a dome. The curved wall behind the figure and the dome
above are painted with the cosmos. The height of the sculpture on its base forces the viewer to look upward. It is impossible to look up at the sculpture without also seeing the painting of the heavens. One wall of the room is glass looking out onto the manicured grounds of Temple Square. The painting and the outside view link the image of Christ with the world and the universe.

Another challenge facing an artist in creating a work of art depicting Deity is communicating immanence. Depicting the nearness and presence of God the Father or Jesus Christ is always very difficult. Each person has had different experiences with God and Christ and has different visions of them—not only as omnipotent Creator of the universe, but also as loving Father and as personal Savior. We somehow expect each work of art to express all our personal experiences and expectations at once. Ultimately the transcendance belongs to God, but the immanence comes from our own experience.

Rembrandt's depictions of Christ are, for me, some of the most successful at communicating immanence. He did this by means of light. He put the face of Christ, especially the eyes and corners of the mouth, in shadow. Since these are the most illuminating features in a portrait, obscuring them causes the viewer to fill the features in, subconsciously expressing his or her personal feelings about the Lord. This is one reason why Rembrandt's portraits of Christ seem so psychologically and spiritually penetrating—he allows the viewer to be part of the creation, to see his or her own relationship with the Savior.

Many LDS paintings depict the Savior. A painting familiar to many Latter-day Saints is The Lord Jesus Christ by Del Parson (b. 1948). Prints of this painting are regularly seen in Church offices and in Mormon homes. The painting is a very straight illustration that attempts to tread a middle ground between exalted glory and immanence. The image of Christ is parallel to the picture plane. He is definitely masculine. Both these elements give some visual strength. The close-up image of Christ (he is depicted from the chest up) creates some physical intimacy, but the tight handling of the face leaves little latitude for personal involvement by the viewer in the creation of the painting. Parson's painting illustrates some of the artistic challenges in attempting to create tight portrait-type images of the Lord.
A work of art by Latter-day Saint artist John Hafen (1856–1910) expresses a spiritual immanence that strikes me as very compelling. It has seldom been seen publicly, and I doubt that many Latter-day Saints know of its existence. It is part of a series of paintings Hafen created to illustrate what is perhaps Mormonism’s best loved theological hymn, “O My Father.”15 This painting (see fig. 5) depicts our Father in Heaven as a kind and loving father, dressed in a black Edwardian suit and lovingly leading a child. This is not a painting about physical appearances. No Mormon that I have ever talked to believes that God walks around heaven wearing a black suit. Rather, this is a symbolic painting about how a real relationship with our loving Father feels. The work by Hafen expresses the warmth, comfort, protection, and intimacy that comes from narrowing the distance between man and God.

More recently, artists schooled in non-European traditions have also created a collection of LDS epiphanic art, some of which springs from traditional folk art (see plate 3, and back cover). Using traditional folk mediums, techniques, and styles, artists have maintained the integrity of the narrative of the vision but have sometimes modified landscape and costume to express their own native traditions, narrowing the distance between the historical experience and their own lives and culture (1 Ne. 19:23).
Angelic Visits and the Depiction of Angels

The second painting in C.C.A. Christensen’s *Mormon Panorama* (see plate 4) depicts the young Joseph Smith receiving from the angel Moroni the gold plates from which he later translated the Book of Mormon. This vision occurred in 1827 and was one of a number of visitations by Moroni to the young prophet. While Christensen’s artistic depiction of the angel Moroni is rather primitive, it radiates mature masculine power. Moroni is shown as a grandfatherly figure with white hair and a full white beard, not as an angelic child. Sanctification is communicated by brilliant, unstylized light radiating from Moroni, who is standing in the air. This approach in depicting the appearance of Moroni to Joseph became the norm for portraying angels in Mormon art.

Christensen’s painting is a major departure from the conventions governing the depiction of angels in European art. Over the centuries, the European tradition had developed some fairly consistent iconography for angels. They usually had wings. They almost always had halos. They sometimes wore white robes. But they were invariably young and rather androgynous. This angelic androgyny is quite consistent. I am unaware of any Christian visual images of angels with beards outside of the Latter-day Saint art tradition. Neither do mature male and female faces and bodies seem to be part of angelic iconography in the European art tradition.

The tradition of angelic androgyny in European art becomes apparent in depictions of Gabriel’s appearance to Mary at the Annunciation. Gabriel is clearly identified as an adult male in the scriptures. Yet the depictions of Gabriel in European art are not very masculine (see fig. 6 and 7). The Gabriel figures are very slender, without broad shoulders or beards. If the artist’s intention is to depict a male figure, its age appears to be about fourteen or fifteen. If the figure is a female, it is prepubescent. The hair styles of these European angels tend to be more feminine. The faces appear feminine. An androgynous image for “the man Gabriel” (Dan. 9:21) seems rather consistent in the European tradition of depicting angels. Obviously, the separation of the spiritual from the physical had consequences for the perception of gender. The physical came to be seen as unworthy and “fallen” despite the centrality of
The angel Gabriel holds an olive branch, the symbol of peace. Lilies symbolize Mary’s purity. The beardless angel has long, curly hair and a feminine face in contrast to other paintings by this artist (for example the Way to Calvary, c. 1340), where men are depicted with beards and short hair. This late medieval Italian work was originally created as an altarpiece for the Sienna Cathedral. It is one of the finest examples of fourteenth-century Italian art.
Fig. 7. *The Annunciation*, Jan van Eyck (active from 1422–1441). Panel transferred to oil on canvas, 36⅛" x 14⅞", 1434/36. Andrew W. Mellon Collection, ©Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

The young angel is dressed in robes advertising the cloth weavers of Flanders. The immanence of the event for the original viewers is enhanced by setting the scene in the local cathedral. The femininity of the angel is in marked contrast to some of the male figures on the Ghent Altarpiece done by Jan and his brother.
the physical resurrection of Christ to Christian faith. This theo-
logical shift yields depictions in European art of the angel Gabriel that
are quite different from the Gabriel described in holy writ. 19

The LDS depiction of Gabriel is quite different from the Euro-
pean tradition (see plate 5). The Mormon Gabriel follows the bib-
lical description quite literally (Dan. 9:21). He is a male angel. His
masculinity and maturity are communicated with the white hair
and beard. A monumental painting of the Annunciation hangs in
the North Visitors’ Center on Temple Square in Salt Lake City.
While not painted by a Latter-day Saint artist, it was directly com-
misioned and approved by Church leaders. Gabriel is a broad-
shouldered, wingless, bearded angel in a glowing white robe. This
painting of an angel is clearly within the LDS painting tradition
begun by C.C.A. Christensen almost a hundred years before.

In LDS art, angels look very corporeal. They appear to have
real bodies. They do not have wings. They often glow with light—
a frequent and literal expression of the heavenly presence. This
light has not been symbolically reduced to a halo resembling a
small round metallic hoop.

Portrayed epiphanies are geographically anchored in specific
locations. For example, in Christensen’s painting of Moroni deliv-
ering the gold plates to Joseph Smith, it is clear that this event took
place on a hill. The hill is almost reduced to a visual symbol in its
simplicity. Specific location is important because Moroni had placed
the gold plates in a box which he had buried in the Hill Cumorah.
Since the narrative of the event had a specific geographical con-
text, Christensen felt obliged to depict it. “Where” mattered as
well as “who” and “what” because this was a historical event, not
a dream, a metaphor, or a feeling.

Most LDS art about angels focuses on the angelic visitations
of the early years of this dispensation. These visits include those of
Moroni (see plates 6 and 7), who revealed the record of the Book
of Mormon, and John the Baptist, who appeared as a resurrected
being to restore the Aaronic Priesthood. Likewise Peter, James, and
John returned to restore the Melchizedek Priesthood (see plates 8
and 9; see also pp. 162, 169, 174, and 187). Moses, Elias, and Elijah
appeared as angels to bring back respectively the keys of the gath-
ering of Israel, the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, and the
Plate 1. *Christ's Appearance in the Kirtland Temple*, by Reid Parkinson (1914—). Oil on canvas, 4'5" x 3'10", 1990. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

During the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the Savior appeared, standing on the breastwork of the pulpits. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery witnessed this theophany. Joseph described the location of the Lord thus: "We saw the Lord standing upon the breastwork of the pulpit, before us; and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber" (D&C 110:2).

Billowing clouds enhance the sense of light in this window. The scene is almost entirely hand painted and fired rather than being fashioned of individual pieces of colored glass.

The artist, like more than half of all Latter-day Saints, lives outside the United States of America. A branch president in Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia, Susanto learned the art of batik from his father-in-law, Hadi Pranoto. Indonesian art embellishes that which is most important in a work of art. That is why the figures in the scene have such elaborate surface patterns. Also, like most non-Western artists from around the world, Susanto stresses continuity and community roots. Thus this piece is similar to a painting of the same subject by Ted Henninger.

Plate 5. *The Annunciation*, by John Scott. Oil on canvas, 7' x 11', 1975. Located in the North Visitors' Center, Temple Square, Salt Lake City, Utah. Note that Gabriel and Mary are both mature adults.

The artist is from Curitiba, Brazil. His family originally emigrated from Europe, where marquetry reached its highest levels of development in the eighteenth century. Marquetry is a technique that employs veneers of various woods to make patterns and pictures. The artist used ten different unstained Brazilian woods, primarily from the state of Paraná, to create this work of art reflecting his faith, culture, and nation.
Plate 7. Detail from *Angel Moroni Delivers the Gold Plates to Joseph Smith on Hill Cumorah*, by Lewis Ramsey (1875–1941). Oil, 65" x 41", 1923. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art.

Joseph described Moroni as wearing a brilliant white robe and being surrounded by a brightness like the noonday sun. Impressionism, the essence of which is to capture the effects of light, allowed Ramsey to give the light surrounding and emanating from Moroni artistic form. By depicting Moroni and Joseph in the darkened woodland of the Hill Cumorah, Ramsey was able to show a brilliant light about the angel without overpowering the quiet contemplative nature of the scene.
The artist has depicted the resurrected apostles Peter, James, and John the moment after they have ordained Joseph Smith to the Melchizedek Priesthood. Peter and James stand above the Prophet, their hands still outstretched from the ordination. John reaches down to touch Joseph assuringly, and their gazes meet. Oliver kneels, awaiting his turn to be ordained. The style, the composition, and Southey’s expression of the immanence of the epiphany make this one of the great works of Latter-day Saint sculpture. It was commissioned by the Museum of Church History and Art.

Even though the Cuna Indians from the San Blas Islands of Panama, may seem far removed from Salt Lake City, the composition of this mola is similar to that of the other images of the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood featured in this issue. Folk artists are very conservative. They tend to repeat forms and images from within their culture. Thus this mola shows the identification of the artist with the Church. Molas are textile panels that use reverse applique. The panels are made by Cuna women to decorate the fronts and backs of their blouses.
sealing powers to unite the human family. These angels returned to
earth as heavenly messengers to restore specific religious knowl-
dge and divine authority to act in the name of God.20

Each of the angels in these epiphanies had previously lived
rich full lives as mortal men on earth. They returned to the earth
as resurrected or translated beings to pass on specific religious
authority that they held as the result of their earlier earthly com-
missions from the Lord. They had received their keys and authori-
ties when they were adults. Hence these angelic visitors have
always been portrayed as adult males. That is not to say that there
are no female angels. It is to say that the central visions in early
Mormon history have involved only male angels, and, as a result,
male angels have dominated angelic depictions in LDS art. The
most obvious way to depict mature maleness is with a full beard.
This iconographical symbol springs easily from the historical expe-
rience.

There are some exceptions to the LDS depiction of a strong,
masculine Moroni. A stained-glass window in the Salt Lake Temple
depicts a beardless, long-haired Moroni dressed in robes resem-
bling those in paintings of angels during the European Baroque
period. This window was also done by Tiffany and Company in
New York City. I have never found any specific instructions from
the Church architect to Tiffany and Company like Young’s letter of
instructions for the First Vision. This might explain some of the
window’s lack of continuity with the LDS art tradition. Another
departure is a painting by Minerva Teichert (see fig. 8). Teichert’s
angel looks as if it were modeled after Tiffany’s angel. At least one
other painting (Moroni Appearing to Joseph Smith in His Bed-
room by Tom Lovell), commissioned by the Church but not done
by an LDS painter, also depicts Moroni as beardless, but he is
clearly a masculine figure.

Another iconographical element is costume. The visions have
occurred to specific people at specific times. Since the earthly par-
ticipants wore costumes appropriate to their age, location, and
historical period, angels dressed in white robes were easily distin-
guishable. Nineteenth-century formal and work clothing did not
look like the loose-fitting, white robes of the angels. Because the
epiphanies were almost always depicted in a narrative context,

This is one of the rare depictions of a beardless Moroni in Latter-day Saint art. Teichert was possibly influenced by the Tiffany window of the same subject in the Salt Lake Temple. The artist was raised in Idaho, where she “proved up” on a homestead. She studied art in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York City. Minerva and her husband built a cattle ranch in Wyoming, but she continued painting each evening after the chores were done. Virtually all of her paintings celebrate the pioneers, the West, and her religious faith.
clothing styles flowed naturally into the art, reinforcing the narrative and the contrast between heaven and earth.21

Latter-day Saint theology narrows the distance between God and mortals.22 Latter-day Saints acknowledge God as our Father and each of us as his children. They acknowledge the reality of visions in our time as well as the physicalness of God the Father and Jesus Christ and their angelic messengers. Art depicting modern-day contacts between heaven and earth is part of the visual expression of faith and proximity to the sacred that Latter-day Saints feel. These historical epiphanies of our time, not philosophical speculation, are the beginnings of Latter-day Saint understanding of heavenly beings. As a result, LDS portrayal of these heavenly beings stands in sharp contrast to much of the previous fifteen hundred years of Western religious art and has produced a new Christian-art tradition.

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NOTES

1Latter-day Saint theology does not pejoratively separate the physical from the spiritual. Joseph Smith taught that the soul is made up of the union of the spirit and the body (D&C 88:15–17). God has sent modern revelations regarding physical health (D&C 89). Latter-day Saints are commanded not to defile their bodies through adultery or fornication. The goal is to exalt the body through sanctification. Gender is not to be avoided, but is given divine purpose. Joseph taught that “the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also” (D&C 130:22). These teachings, combined with Joseph’s visions, created a theological foundation for the sanctification of corporeality and gender. LDS works of art depicting epiphanies reflect this theology.


3Stenhouse also includes a small print entitled Discovery of the Gold Plates depicting Moroni delivering the gold plates to Joseph Smith. Stenhouse, Rocky Mountain Saints, 19. The third epiphany print in Stenhouse is The First Mormon Baptism, showing Joseph Smith baptizing Oliver Cowdery in the Susquehanna River. In the background is a bearded John the Baptist in long white robes surrounded by a mandala of light. Stenhouse, Rocky Mountain Saints, 29.

4Stenhouse, an English convert to Mormonism, had been involved in missionary work to the English and French people before emigrating to Utah. After he emigrated to the Salt Lake Valley, he became disillusioned and eventually
apostatized from the Church. He wrote *Rocky Mountain Saints* after his separation from the Church.


4These paintings are part of the collection of the Museum of Art, Brigham Young University.


6Joseph Don Carlos Young, the son of Brigham Young, was the first formally trained architect in Utah. He succeeded Truman O. Angell as Church architect in 1887. Allen Kent Powell, ed., *Utah History Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 21.

7This detail was not followed by the Tiffany artists.

8Young’s emphasis.

9Joseph Don Carlos Young, Letterpress Copybook, 1888–1893, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, published with permission.

10For example, thirty years before Stenhouse’s book was published, Orson Pratt published *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (New York: Joseph W. Harrison, 1842).


12Painted by Sidney E. King, about 1965.

13The “O My Father” series of paintings is part of the collection of the Museum of Art, Brigham Young University. The entire series will be published in a forthcoming issue of *BYU Studies*.

14Jensen and Oman, *C. C. A. Christensen*, 92.

15In Daniel’s vision, Gabriel is mentioned by name and referred to as “he” (Dan. 8:15–17). In Luke 1:26, “the angel Gabriel was sent from God” to Mary. In Luke 1:29, Mary says that when “she saw him, she was troubled at his saying.”

16Many paintings of the Annunciation are among the greatest artistic masterpieces of Western Civilization. As such they are part of our collective artistic patrimony. But theologically these images are somewhat flawed. Perhaps this is part of the price paid for the Neoplatonist philosophical take-over of Christian theology that happened even before Constantine took organizational and political control of the Christian church.

17Philosophical and theological ideas that eventually took over the Christian church also carried over into the art depicting the Nativity. Mary is usually shown as a very young, almost prepubescent girl. Joseph is usually depicted as an elderly grandfather. Thus the historicity of the marriage could be acknowledged while insuring that there was never even a hint of the possibility of a later conjugal relationship between husband and wife. This iconographic depiction exists despite the clear listing of the brothers of Jesus in the New Testament. “Is not
this . . . the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?” (Mark 6:3); “then came to him his mother and his brethren” (Luke 8:19); “he went down to Capernaum, he [Jesus], and his mother, and his brethren” (John 2:12).


21Other than the individual paintings mentioned earlier, the one major exception to the strongly male depiction of Moroni is the more contextually abstracted figure of the angel that adorns the spire of the Salt Lake Temple. The iconography of Angel Moroni statues on temples is a large enough topic for another paper.

22One of the more precise early LDS expressions of man’s relationship to God is a discourse given by Joseph Smith at the funeral of King Follett, a man who was killed during a construction accident on the Nauvoo Temple. Joseph Smith, The Prophet Joseph Smith’s King Follett Discourse: A Six Column Comparison of Original Notes and Amalgamations with an Introduction and Commentary, eds. Donald Q. Cannon and Larry E. Dahl (Provo, Utah: BYU Printing Service, 1983).
Waiting for Alejendro

The alley was filled with weather-beaten shacks, little more than lean-tos with tin roofs, dirt floors, fire pits at the entrances where beans continually cooked in blackened pots. The street was littered with chickens, goats, ragged children. And here he sat, on an orange crate, in a slightly damp suit, scraping mud off his Rockports with an old tin lid.

He was thirsty but didn’t dare ask for water. He picked up a smooth pebble from the ground. The faucet in his room seldom had pressure, but when it did, the water ran a thick, reddish brown. A bus screeched to a clumsy stop and then, with gears grinding, lumbered off, spewing fumes. The smells were another thing.

A child, dressed mostly in dust, wandered over, chewing on a tortilla. Her eyes were black, unblinking. He smiled, quickly withdrew a flat balloon from his pocket, blew it up, twisted it into the shape of a dog. The child took the balloon without smiling, continued to stand there, chewing, watching him.
He could see his companion coming out of the corner store with two Cokes. It was always Coke. They would drink while they waited, waited for Alejendro, who wanted to know more.

He threw the pebble into the brackish puddle next to his foot. It looked like the same water that came from his tap. He peered closely at the puddle, searching for the face of God on the water. After a while, it was his face he found.

—Marilyn Darley Williams
Henry Caswall (1810-1870). Caswall’s account of visiting Nauvoo and tricking Joseph Smith was published widely in the nineteenth century. Courtesy Kenyon Archives, Kenyon College, Ohio.
Henry Caswall: Anti-Mormon Extraordinaire

Passionately devoted to the Church of England and envious of the LDS Church's successes, Rev. Caswall wrote several influential publications deriding the Latter-day Saints and their prophet.

Craig L. Foster

In the spring of 1842, a young Englishman arrived in Nauvoo with an important mission. An Anglican clergyman, he had set aside his clerical apparel and was dressed as an ordinary traveler. In his possession was an ancient Greek psalter with which he planned to prove, once and for all, that Joseph Smith, the American prophet, was a fraud. Henry Caswall would later claim he had proved that not only was Joseph Smith not a prophet, but he was not even a religious man! To the contrary, Joseph was an impostor of an evil kind!

Who was Henry Caswall, and why was he so important to the critics of Mormonism? In describing his own profession, Caswall wrote in 1854 that a vicar is one who, "under God, [is] the friend of the poor, the instructor of the ignorant, the comforter of the afflicted, of the suffering, and of the dying." These were high standards for a man to set for himself. However, Henry Caswall took upon himself this task, devoting his life to what he believed to be the true work of Jesus Christ. Part of this work, as he saw it, involved defending the Church of England against the Latter-day Saints. Thus it was that Henry Caswall, a little-known professor of divinity and a vicar, became an outspoken critic of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its doctrines. At the height of his anti-Mormon activities, Caswall's colleagues considered him a powerful witness of the turpitude of Joseph Smith and his religion; the Mormons considered him the epitome of sectarian deceit. He was,
in fact, one of the most influential anti-Mormon writers of the nineteenth century. But, for all that has been written or said about his books and tracts, we know very little about his life. He has remained somewhat enigmatic to Mormon scholars.

Henry Caswall was born into a prominent Anglican clerical family in Yately, Hampshire, England, in 1810. His father, a vicar, descended from Sir George Caswall of Leominster and married the niece of Thomas Burgess, Bishop of Salisbury. Caswall was the eldest son. In 1827, Caswall met Bishop Philander Chase of Ohio, who was on an extended tour of England to collect money for the fledgling Kenyon College, located in what later was named Gambier, Ohio. Kenyon College was the first Episcopal seminary west of the Allegheny Mountains. At the urging of Bishop Chase, Caswall sailed to America to attend the newly founded college. He arrived in New York City on September 18, 1828, and then traveled to Ohio.

Bishop Chase's interaction with English society and members of the Anglican Church was reflective of his era. Beginning in the last part of the eighteenth century, English churches increased their missionary activity. They published and distributed tracts, commenced social and religious societies, and expanded missionary work in both England and America. While the Anglican Church was slower to display a missionary zeal than the nonconformist denominations, it too began to exhibit an evangelical fervor by sending money and missionaries throughout Britain and to other parts of the world.

It was in this spirit of missionary work that Caswall traveled to Ohio, where he spent the next three years at Kenyon College. There he assisted Bishop Chase in various duties such as traveling through Ohio distributing Bibles. Apparently, he soon became a close friend to the bishop. In 1830 he married Chase's niece, thus solidifying his ties to the dynamic Bishop of Ohio. In the autumn of 1830, six months after the organization of the LDS Church, Caswall received his divinity degree from Kenyon College. After a short time of study in Boston, he returned to Ohio, where he was ordained a deacon on June 12, 1831.

For the next six years, Caswall held minor clerical positions in Ohio and Kentucky, including Professor of Sacred Literature at a
theological seminary in Lexington, Kentucky, from 1834 to 1837. In 1837, Caswall was appointed to be the pastor of a small congregation in Madison, Ohio, where on July 2 of that year, he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Jackson Kemper.6

Caswall took his appointment in Madison with great enthusiasm. The Episcopalian periodical, *The Spirit of Missions*, printed a January 1838 letter from Caswall stating that there were twenty-two communicants in his congregation and that plans were under way for the construction of a church.7 But by April, Caswall, who was suffering from ill health, had also experienced personal tragedy with sickness in his family and the death of his youngest son. He also noted that attendance at religious services had been “exceedingly small.”8

The small attendance at the religious services was the result of at least two factors. First, in England the Anglican Church’s monopoly on religion was eroding away as the church became just one of many denominations competing for souls. This erosion was brought on, in part, by real and perceived corruption among the Anglican clergy, as well as the zealotry and millenarian message of the nonconformists. Secondly, the problems of Anglican missionary work in America were compounded by the perception that the Episcopal Church was nothing more than an agent of the Anglican Church and its members, anti-American monarchists.9

Nevertheless, Caswall worked hard to build a congregation in Madison. While his next letter again mentioned sickness in his family, Caswall proudly announced the laying of the cornerstone for the new church.10 By August 1838, Caswall’s family was in such a poor state of health that he wrote, “My wife is now lying dangerously ill at her brother’s house . . . and my little boy is in a very delicate state of health.”11 He found a replacement pastor for the small congregation in Madison and in September moved with his family to Brockville, on the shores of the St. Lawrence River in Upper Canada, where he hoped the cooler climate would help restore their health. However, shortly after their arrival in Canada, the Caswalls lost another son in death.12

Because Caswall had been ordained in the United States, he was prevented from becoming a rector in Canada, so he taught in
a school and performed clerical duties until a rectorship opened across the river in Morristown, New York:

A vacancy, however, occurring in the Rectorship of the Church in Morristown, N.Y., immediately opposite Brockville, Mr. Caswall was called to fill it, and having two good boats, and being very fond of both sailing and rowing, he had great pleasure in fulfilling his international duties. He had to be careful, however, while offering up the prayers for those in authority lest he should pray for Queen Victoria in Morristown, or for President Martin Van Buren in Brockville!13

In 1841, Bishop Kemper used his influence to have Caswall return to the United States to become professor of sacred literature and Hebrew14 for theology students at the newly founded Kemper College about six miles west of St. Louis, Missouri, which was under the jurisdiction of Bishop Kemper.15 The Caswall family arrived in St. Louis on November 15, 1840, where they took up residence in two rooms of the Planter's Hotel for $90.00 a month. Although the professorship at Kemper College had some potential for success, it, like the college itself, did not live up to the expectations of either Caswall or Bishop Kemper.16

Although Caswall had been appointed to teach divinity students, none ever arrived at the college. Thus he was relegated to officiating at the Sunday service, conducting daily prayers, and teaching a class on scriptures. Caswall's account of his stay in St. Louis gives the reader an understanding of the frustration that he must have felt at the lack of duties available to him.17 In June 1843, the college announced that the missionary Rev. H. Caswell [sic] (Caswall may have pronounced his name Caswell because the name is spelled this way on several occasions) was then abroad.18 Caswall and his family had returned to England to collect money for the struggling college.19

It is unclear whether or not Caswall had originally planned to return soon to America. The Spirit of Missions notice sounded as if he would shortly return, but the fact that Caswall took his family with him suggests he planned to stay in England for an extended time.

In England, Caswall met with the same difficulties in finding an ecclesiastical appointment that he had encountered in Canada—as a clergyman ordained in the United States, he was prohibited
from taking any permanent position in England. Through the efforts of the archbishop of Canterbury, William Gladstone, and other influential men, a private act of Parliament granted Caswall an exception, and on October 16, 1843, he was appointed curate of Figheldean. 20 Five years later, in 1848, he became a vicar. 21

Figheldean is a parish located in the county of Wiltshire near the town of Amesbury in southwest England. An 1865 county directory calls the parish a vicarage, valued at £182 10s, which was a fairly high salary. The vicarage was under the jurisdiction of the treasurer of the Cathedral Church of Salisbury, of which Caswall's late uncle, Thomas Burgess, had been bishop. The population of the parish was 472 inhabitants. 22

During his tenure as vicar, Caswall was actively involved in the work of the church that he loved. As vicar, he oversaw the building of a new parish school, the refurbishing of the parish church, the distribution of funds to numerous charities, and the collection of monies for the Society for Propagating the Gospel, which published religious tracts as well as provided financial and physical support for Anglican Missions in America and other parts of the world. 23

Caswall had a special interest in missionary work. In 1853, a delegation of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel visited New York City. This delegation included Henry Caswall. 24 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society helped support Caswall's work during his return visits to the United States. 25

By the 1860s, Caswall had reached the height of his power and prestige. In addition to his vicarage, Caswall had been awarded honorary degrees from Oxford University and from Trinity College in Connecticut. He was also the prebendary of Salisbury Cathedral as well as the author of several books. 26

Caswall was, however, experiencing serious health problems. 27 In 1868, he received a leave of absence and returned to America, where three of his grown children were then living. He settled in Franklin, Pennsylvania, and lived there for two years. He then returned to England but was so ill that his family decided to take him back to Franklin, where he died on December 17, 1870. He was buried at Nashotah, Wisconsin, four days later. 28
Caswall left behind a legacy that particularly interests those of the Mormon faith. In late 1842, Caswall publicly claimed to have visited the Prophet Joseph Smith and exposed him as a fraud. He published these claims in tract form under the title *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo, in 1842*. Caswall subsequently retold the story in various other books and tracts, making it one of the most common arguments by British anti-Mormons.29

According to Caswall, he obtained "an ancient Greek manuscript of the Psalter written upon parchment, and probably about six hundred years old."30 On Friday, April 15, he boarded a steamboat for Nauvoo, taking with him the Greek psalter, and he arrived there Sunday morning.

He then proceeded to observe Nauvoo and describe its inhabitants. His language and descriptions, as is the case with other polemic works, are filled with bias. In relating his first meeting with the Saints, he writes:

I perceived numerous groups of the peasantry of old England; their sturdy forms, their clear complexions, and their heavy movements, strongly contrasting with the slight figure, the sallow visage, and the elastic step of the American.

There, too, were the bright and innocent looks of little children, who, born among the privileges of England’s Church, baptized with her consecrated waters, and taught to lisp her prayers and repeat her catechism, had now been led into this den of heresy, to listen to the ravings of a false prophet, and to imbibe the principles of a semi-pagan delusion.51

The frequently cited incidents of conflict with deluded Mormons and comments on their lack of intelligence and honesty encompass the first twenty pages of the tract. At this point in the text, Caswall explains the purpose of his taking the medieval Greek psalter with him. He writes that on Monday, April 18, he crossed over the river from Montrose, Iowa, where he was staying, showed his psalter to a member of the Church, and asked to have Joseph Smith look at it. He was not able to show the Prophet the psalter until the next day. He records that he used the time, however, to expose the ignorance of the Mormon leaders and confound them in their beliefs and that his presence attracted the attention of the city’s inhabitants.
On the following morning, he again crossed the river with several Mormons, including a Mormon doctor who discussed the missionary work in England. At this point, Caswall writes, “I observed, that I had reason to believe that the conquests of Mormonism in Britain had been principally among the illiterate and uneducated. This, he partially admitted.” By this time, they had reached the home of the Prophet, followed by a crowd of curious Mormons who were hoping to get a glimpse of the mysterious book.

He met Joseph Smith a short distance from his home and was informed that he could have an interview with him. He then gives a detailed description of Joseph Smith:

He is a coarse, plebeian person in aspect, and his countenance exhibits a curious mixture of the knave and the clown. His hands are large and fat, and on one of his fingers he wears a massive gold ring, upon which I saw an inscription. His dress was of coarse country manufacture. . . . I had not an opportunity of observing his eyes, as he appears deficient in that open, straightforward look which characterizes an honest man.

Caswall then proceeds to recount his visit with the Prophet and how he showed Joseph the Greek psalter. Upon seeing the psalter and hearing Caswall explain that he thought it might be Greek, the Prophet supposedly said:

No, . . . it ain’t Greek at all; except perhaps, a few words. What ain’t Greek, is Egyptian; and what ain’t Egyptian, is Greek. This book is very valuable. It is a dictionary of Egyptian Hieroglyphics. . . . Them figures is Egyptian hieroglyphics; and them which follows, is the interpretation of the hieroglyphics, written in the reformed Egyptian. Them characters is like the letters that was engraved on the golden plates.

He claims that Joseph wanted to buy this valuable record, but Caswall refused his offer. After a walk to Joseph’s office to look at the papyrus and after some penetrating questions by Caswall, Joseph disappeared. He was seen driving quickly away from Nauvoo in a light wagon. Caswall and the multitude that had followed him then engaged in a debate, in the middle of the street, on doctrine and the Prophet Joseph Smith. In his own eyes and writings, Henry Caswall won the debate.

Henry Caswall’s tract was of great importance among anti-Mormon writers. Hugh Nibley portrays Caswall’s story of his visit
to Joseph Smith and the Greek psalter as the "most effective single contribution to anti-Mormon literature." 37 Before Henry Caswall's publication, English writers had to depend upon the newspaper articles and other anti-Mormon materials that they could obtain. However, with the publication of Caswall's tract, they had an Englishman who claimed to have personally seen and talked with the Mormon Prophet. Better yet, he claimed to have not only visited the Prophet, but also proven that he was a fraud. For the opponents of Mormonism, this was, indeed, a coup.

Caswall's claim of having visited Nauvoo is corroborated in the *Times and Seasons*. The October 15, 1843, edition states:

It will be recollected by some, that a Mr. Caswell, professing to be an Episcopal minister, came to this city some twelve or eighteen months ago. He had with him an old manuscript [sic], professing to be ignorant of its contents, and came to Joseph Smith, as he said, for the purpose of having it translated. Mr. Smith had a little conversation with him, and treated him with civility, but as the gentleman seemed very much afraid of his document, he declined having any thing to do with it. 38

Caswall's account, first published in 1842, however, has some serious problems. The *Times and Seasons* article contradicts Caswall by stating that he introduced himself as an Episcopal minister. Caswall, on the other hand, claimed that he had taken off his clerical clothing to visit the Mormons. 39

Second, Caswall's description of Joseph Smith contradicts other contemporary descriptions of him, which tend to describe him as a tall, handsome, muscular man. Third, Caswall's supposed quotation by Joseph Smith wherein he used poor grammar describing the Greek psalter and Egyptian hieroglyphics stands in stark contrast with other examples of the Prophet's grammar and speech patterns. While Joseph Smith did not have much of a traditional education, he was well read and articulate as an adult, especially by the Nauvoo period. These two factors further put into jeopardy the veracity of the whole story. Fourth, according to the *Times and Seasons*, Caswall's nervousness about the Greek psalter discouraged Joseph Smith from pursuing the matter further. 40 Thus, it is obvious that, although Henry Caswall visited Nauvoo and could very well have met Joseph Smith, the famous interview with the Prophet was not as Caswall described it. 41
Whether or not the other writers who used Caswall’s story and those who reviewed his works were aware of this fact will never be known. In all probability, they did not know. Several reviews applauded Henry Caswall for his integrity in writing about Mormonism, the “most extraordinary heresy and [of] its vile founder,” whose recent converts had been “directly from England—sound, enlightened, Protestant England.”

Henry Caswall’s influence on numerous anti-Mormon and other writers was strong and long lasting. As was the practice with many polemic writings, including Caswall’s, an informal network passed information and stories to other writers who then incorporated them into other tracts. In 1865, Elder William Lewis, a missionary in Shropshire, wrote about clerical anti-Mormon activity: “Others are ‘disgusted with the character of that dreadful man,’ Joseph Smith, a respectable minister (Henry Caswall) having written a tract to ‘prove him a murderer, thief, adulterer; and everything that is bad.’ Some scholars have also used the Greek psalter story in their writing of Mormon history. As recently as 1979, Fawn Brodie repeated Caswall’s story in the second edition of No Man Knows My History.

While Henry Caswall’s accusations are presently relatively unknown, the significance of them has not been lost on critics of Mormonism, nor have they gone unnoticed by defenders of the faith such as Hugh Nibley. In his book, The Mythmakers (1961), Nibley identifies Caswall as an important anti-Mormon and then proceeds to attack his account on several points. His approach is to create a hypothetical interview in which he, as the unnamed interviewer, engages Caswall in a rhetorical joust. In Nibley’s book, Caswall is portrayed as a liar who had falsely portrayed Joseph Smith, exaggerated and embellished the details of his visit to Nauvoo, and modified his story each time it was published. While the hypothetical interview is entertaining and informative, pointing out minor discrepancies in Caswall’s various published versions of the incident, the narrow “cross-examination” approach hampers a more detailed look at Henry Caswall and his works. Also, while Nibley claims that there was no mention of Caswall’s visit in contemporary official or personal journals, the Times and Seasons corroborates Caswall’s claims of visiting Nauvoo. The visit,
including the presence of a Greek manuscript, was also verified by John Taylor during an 1850 debate in which he participated in France.\textsuperscript{47} Therefore, while Nibley correctly identifies the problems with Caswall’s story, such as the ridiculous description of the prophet’s physical and grammatical characteristics, his defense has problems that need to be further researched and evaluated.

Why did Henry Caswall write against Mormonism? Why did he devote so much time and energy publishing several books, tracts, and articles against Joseph Smith and the LDS Church? As is the case with most other enigmatic individuals, the full answer will probably never be known. Thus, the historian must surmise based upon available facts.

Henry Caswall’s life could be described as one of intense devotion, great hope, disappointment, sorrow, and failure. As a missionary in America, Caswall not only suffered from sickness caused by the rude living conditions of frontier life, but also witnessed the early deaths of two of his sons. Added to the pain of personal tragedy were the setbacks experienced in the work that he sincerely believed to be of the Lord. With the faltering and eventual demise of Kemper College, Caswall’s dreams of the growth of the church he loved, as well as the honor and recognition that he believed he deserved, were crushed.

Added to the gall of failure was the success of Joseph Smith and the Mormons in the same region. Viewing Joseph as a false prophet and a usurper, Caswall aptly expressed his own feelings of envy over the success of the Mormons and frustration for the failure of his college and the Church of England’s lack of success:

As a Churchman, I feel almost ashamed for my Church, when I reflect upon the heavy discouragements which are suffered to afflict the amiable and patient missionary bishop of Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin. . . . Why is Kemper College, the first and only institution of the Church beyond the Mississippi, permitted to languish, while the Mormon temple, and the Mormon university, offer their delusive attractions to the rising generation? Why is the venerable bishop of Illinois permitted to labour almost alone, while the missionaries of Joseph Smith, with a zeal worthy of the true Church, perambulate his diocese and plant their standard in every village?\textsuperscript{48}

Several years after returning to England, Henry Caswall had to face yet another personal tragedy, which must have filled his mind
with humiliation and despair. His younger brother, Edward, like others in his prestigious family, had become a clergymen. However, Edward, a graduate of Oxford University and curate of Stratford-sub-Castle near Salisbury, apostatized from the Church of England and converted to Catholicism in January 1847. A younger brother, Thomas, had become a Catholic a few months earlier. In the ensuing years, Edward became an outspoken defender of his newly found religion.49

The personal anguish that Henry must have felt at the apostasy of members from his own family can only be surmised. Even so, one is able to get just a glimpse of Henry’s inner turmoil by reading the conclusion to Mormonism and Its Author (1854). After warning British citizens about the evils of Mormonism, he ends his text by stating:

And, lastly, do not suffer yourselves to be led away from the Church, even though the Church should be called to pass through fiery trials for her correction and purification. Rather let it be your endeavour to understand and appreciate the wonderful system of the Church in which you were baptized. . . . The worship of the Church of England is scriptural in its doctrine and in its language, and most holy and edifying to those who really join in it with a purpose of devotion. If religious difficulties perplex you, if the arguments of false teachers harass and distract you, recollect that, under God, the minister of your parish is the person to whom you ought to apply for information and instruction.50

Henry Caswall attempted to fulfill the duties of the office to which he had been called. For Caswall these duties included the defense of the Church of England against what he perceived to be heretics and usurpers. Though he often failed in his efforts, Henry Caswall became one of the most influential anti-Mormon writers in the nineteenth century.

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NOTES


3. The Episcopal Church began as the American branch of the Anglican Church (Church of England), with direct ties to the mother church in England. Eventually those ties were broken and the Episcopal Church became independent, but its roots remain in the Anglican tradition.


8. Henry Caswall to Domestic Committee, April 1, 1838, Proceedings of the Domestic Committee, *The Spirit of Missions* 3 (June 1838): 174. Caswall’s son was buried on March 6, 1838.


15. Kemper College was situated on 125 acres of land about six miles west of St. Louis. The school included one large, three-story brick building, a library, and dormitories, according to “Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Kemper

10Henry Caswall, *America and the American Church*, 310.
11Henry Caswall, *America and the American Church*, 310.
13Henry Caswall, *America and the American Church*, 329. It is not known how successful Caswall was at his attempt to collect funds for the college. In September 1845, Bishop Kemper announced the closing of Kemper College. Domestic, *The Spirit of Missions* 10 (September 1845): 301.
15K. H. Rogers to Craig L. Foster, March 6, 1989, in possession of Craig L. Foster; Robert C. Caswall, "Memoir," 5. A description of Caswall's appointment to the curacy and the special act of parliament is also found in the *Times and Seasons* 9 (October 15, 1843): 364-65. A curate was an assistant to a rector of a parish in the Church of England. A curate was lower than a vicar, who, in turn, was lower than a rector. Serving in a parish in the place of a rector, a vicar was given immediate jurisdiction over one parish and received a stipend from the tithes of only that parish. At that time, rectors could have jurisdiction over more than one parish. Indeed, more influential rectors controlled as many as ten parishes and the tithes that came from them. John Richardson, *The Local Historian's Encyclopedia* (1986; reprint, New Barnet, Eng.: Historical Publications, 1989), 189-90.

16J. G. Harrod and CO.'s Postal and Commercial Directory of Wiltshire . . . (London: Thomas Danks, 1865), 359. See also, Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Guide of England* (London: S. Lewis, 1831). The 1851 census of the parish of Figheldean shows Caswall as being forty years old, while his wife, Mary, was forty-four years old. Five children were listed living in their home, as well as two pupils and two maidservants. The oldest child, a daughter, was seventeen years old (Public Record Office, Census Returns for 1851, County of Wiltshire).
17Henry Caswall to the Parishioners of Figheldean, January 1, 1859, 3. This was a three-page letter of activities to the parishioners. I thank the Wiltshire County Record Office for providing me with a photocopy of this and other materials concerning Henry Caswall and his tenure as vicar of Figheldean.
20Caswall, "Memoirs," 6. A prebendary was a clergyman who received a stipend from a cathedral, acted as a clergyman or canon within its chapter, and performed or officiated at services within the cathedral.
21Caswall, "Memoirs," 7. Between 1863 and his death in 1870, Henry Caswall suffered from yellow jaundice, paralysis, two strokes, and "softening of the brain." In the last years of his life, Caswall was unable to perform much activity.
28Times (London), January 6, 1871, 1; Caswall, "Memoirs." 8.
29Caswall’s publications that include this story are America and the American Church, 2d ed. (London: John and Charles Mozley, 1851); The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo, in 1842 (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1842; 2d ed., 1843); Mormonism and Its Author; or, A Statement of the Doctrines of the "Latter-Day Saints" (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851); and The Prophet of the Nineteenth Century; or, The Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Mormons, or Latter-Day Saints (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1843). For a list of other authors who used Caswall’s story in their own publications, see note 45.
30Henry Caswall, City of the Mormons, 5.
31Henry Caswall, City of the Mormons, 9.
32Henry Caswall, City of the Mormons, 34.
33Henry Caswall, City of the Mormons, 35.
34Henry Caswall, City of the Mormons, 35, italics in original.
35Henry Caswall, City of the Mormons, 35.
39Henry Caswall, City of the Mormons, 5.
40For a lengthier analysis of Henry Caswall’s visit to Nauvoo and subsequent writings, see Niblery, Myth Makers, 193–287, in CWHN 11:304–406.
42The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art 45 (May, November, December, 1842): 901. The article was originally copied from the Irish Ecclesiastical Journal.
44Andrew Jenson, Journal History of the Church, June 3, 1865, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. See also Correspondence, Millennial Star 27 (August 5, 1865): 494. Caswall’s influence on British anti-Mormon writers was significant. Among the writers who used his story in their own publications were F. B. Ashley, Mormonism: An Exposure of the Impositions Adopted by the Sect Called “The Latter Day Saints” (London: John Hatchard, 1851); A Cambridge Clergyman, Mormonism or the Bible? A Question for the Times (Cambridge: T. Dixon, 1852); R. Clarke, Mormonism Unmasked; or, The Latter-Day Saints in a Fix (London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1850); Charles Day, The Latter-Day Saints, or Mormons: Who and What Are They? (London: Wertheim and Macintosh, n.d.); John Frere, A Short History of the Mormonites; or, Latter Day Saints: With an Account of the Real Origin of the Book of Mormon (London: Joseph Masters, 1850); W. S. Parrott, The Veil Uplifted; or the Religious Conspirators of the Latter-Day Saints Exposed (Bristol: Taylor and Sons, 1865); and W. W. Woodhouse, Mormonism an Imposture; or, The Doctrines of the So-Called Latter-Day Saints, Proved to Be Utterly Opposed to the Word of God (Ipswich: N. Pannifer and J. M. Burton, 1853).


47"Three Nights' Public Discussion between the Revs. C. W. Cleeve, James Robertson, and Philip Cater, and Elder John Taylor of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, at Boulogne-Sur-Mer, France" (Liverpool: John Taylor, 1850), 32.

48Henry Caswall, *City of the Mormons*, 57.


Peter and John, Shortly after Dawn

But they had seen him lose, like everyone else;
Seen the wisdom and courage drain out of him in the end onto spikes
and wood, just like the ones beside him.
Others he saved. Himself?
It was what they had expected.
So why does she intrude upon their proper grief with indecent stories?
Has she no respect for the dead?
And the town is dangerous for them now.
Still. Still.

The panting run through the watchful streets,
The stooping and entering (one hesitating for fear of ghosts)
In, into the borrowed tomb,
suddenly cool and echoing and twilit after the flat morning heat;
The catching of breath,
The groping for the winding sheet, bodiless;
The reeling from the pungency of myrrh and aloes scattered
violently, joyfully, a cockcrow ago.
Then the realization: He was here.
The heat of him lingers in the charged and burdened air.
But he is gone, and this is now a useless place, a foolish place,
A place for laughing.
What did they do then, these new believers, his burial clothes dropping forgotten from their astonished hands? Did they fall to their knees groaning, souls suddenly awash with the enormity of their belief? Did they shuffle their feet and look away, reluctant to gloat at Death's defeat, abrupt and all unlooked for? Or did they throw back their heads And laugh aloud at their friend's victory And boom hosannas at the impotent walls until the vacant tomb trembled with embarrassment?

—Tim Slover
John the Baptist returned to the earth to restore the Aaronic Priesthood. The event took place on the banks of the Susquehanna River in the spring of 1829. The artist was commissioned by the Church Public Communications Department to create this painting. Lovell has carefully painted a strong, adult male angel appearing near the river in the springtime. The gender and maturity of the angel, as well as the time and place of the vision have all been respected in this work of art.
Priesthood Restoration Documents

A surprisingly large number of early Church documents impressively record crucial details about the restoration of both the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods.

Brian Q. Cannon and BYU Studies Staff

Introduction

Few events in the history of the Restoration are as consequential as the bestowal of the priesthood upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. The following excerpts from early Church documents recount all of the known direct statements from the first twenty years of Church history specifically concerning the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods. In addition to compiling the descriptions that were written or dictated by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, this collection also includes the accounts by contemporaries of Joseph and Oliver up to the time of Cowdery’s death in 1850. Reflecting information that was probably gleaned from conversations or unrecorded discourses of Joseph and Oliver, a few of these statements offer details unavailable elsewhere. Additionally, these statements help to reveal early Church members’ understanding of the restoration of the priesthood and show how they described the priesthood restoration to others.

Long before he received the priesthood, Joseph Smith learned of it from Moroni. According to an account of Oliver Cowdery published in 1835, Moroni appeared to Joseph in September of 1823 and informed him, “When they [the golden plates] are interpreted the Lord will give the holy priesthood to some, and they shall begin to proclaim this gospel and baptize by water, and after that they shall have power to give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands.” While it is unclear to what extent this retrospective account may contain details that were actually learned after 1823,
Joseph definitely learned more about the priesthood as he translated the Book of Mormon in 1829. From the golden plates, Joseph learned that power was necessary to perform ordinances including baptism (3 Ne. 11:22), the sacrament (3 Ne. 18:5), and conferring the Holy Ghost (3 Ne. 18:37; Moro. 2:1-3); that this power was conferred by the laying on of hands (3 Ne. 18:38; Moro. 2:1; 3:2); that one could be ordained to the calling of disciple or elder, who in turn could ordain priests and teachers (Moro. 3:1); and that elders or disciples, unlike priests and teachers, could confer the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands (Moro. 2:1-2). Additionally, a passage in Alma 13 discussed the calling and ordination of high priests including Melchizedek to the “high priesthood of the holy order of God” (Alma 13:6, 14, 18).

Having learned through the writings of ancient prophets that baptism by proper authority was necessary, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery sought that ordinance. In response to their supplication, John the Baptist appeared and conferred the priesthood of Aaron upon them. At a later date, Peter, James, and John appeared and bestowed what is known today as the Melchizedek Priesthood.²

The Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood

The historical record clearly identifies the circumstances surrounding the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, including the date that it occurred, and unambiguous evidence links Joseph and Oliver’s quest for that priesthood to knowledge that they gained while translating the Book of Mormon. An 1829 document in Oliver Cowdery’s handwriting entitled “Articles of the Church of Christ” testified that Cowdery had been given power to baptize “of Jesus Christ” (document 1 below), and Cowdery made similar statements in 1830 (documents 20, 21).

Details regarding the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, including John the Baptist’s role in that event, were seldom if ever shared prior to 1832, though, “owing to a spirit of persecution,” as Joseph Smith indicated in 1838.³ Two of Joseph and Oliver’s close associates, David Whitmer and William McLellin, recalled in the late 1870s or mid-1880s that they first learned of John the Baptist’s appearance two to four years after the Church’s organization.⁴
In writing, Joseph Smith first referred to this event in 1832 (document 5), describing “the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministring of Aangels to adminster the letter of the Gospel.” Oliver Cowdery offered the first detailed, recorded account of the restoration of the lower priesthood in 1834 (document 22). The following year, Cowdery specified the date and location of the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood (document 24). Joseph Smith’s fullest account of the event (document 12) corroborated Oliver’s record and added new details: for instance, Joseph recorded words used by John regarding the nature of the keys that he bestowed; explained that John had acted under the direction of Peter, James, and John; and indicated that John promised them that later they would receive power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. In 1844 (documents 17-19), Joseph Smith referred to the preparatory priesthood as “the power of Elias” and indicated that John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Savior, was “the Spirit of Elias.”

Early members read Joseph’s and Oliver’s testimonies regarding the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood and used the information in their missionary work. For instance, Orson Hyde (documents 49, 50) quoted directly from Oliver Cowdery’s 1834 account (document 22), while Reuben Miller in an 1847 publication (document 66) relied on Joseph Smith’s accounts of John’s visitation (documents 12, 14). Many accounts mention John the Baptist by name (documents 4, 12, 27, 30, 65, 68, 69); others call him “the angel John” (document 24), “the angel of the Lord” (document 41), simply “the angel” (documents 10, 13, 14), or some other similar appellation (documents 7, 12, 28, 67).

Despite detailed accounts by Joseph and Oliver, some errors crept into the record: William Appleby, for instance, erroneously indicated in a tract published in 1844 that the power to baptize had been restored in 1830 (document 61). Additionally, ambiguity and imprecision arose through leaders’ and members’ frequent use of the phrase “the holy priesthood” to refer to the Aaronic Priesthood on some occasions (document 22), to the Melchizedek Priesthood on others (documents 7, 24, 57, 70), and to the priesthood in general on yet other occasions (documents 25, 29, 37, 47-48, 58, 61-62). Still, the documentary record demonstrates that detailed accounts of the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood
were available to members of the Church as early as 1834 and that early members used those accounts in teaching others about the Aaronic Priesthood’s restoration.

The Events of the Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood

The written record regarding the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood is less complete. Although repeatedly testifying that Peter, James, and John had appeared to them and restored this high priesthood authority (documents 4, 12, 15-16, 30) or referring alternatively to “apostles” (document 6), “Peter” (document 27), “angels” (documents 5, 28), or “those held in reserve” (document 7), neither Joseph Smith nor Oliver Cowdery specified the date of that restoration or reported the words used by Peter in ordaining them to this priesthood beyond “declare[ing] themselves as possessing the keys” (document 16; see also 40). Oliver Cowdery’s accounts concerning the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood corroborate the accounts of Joseph; whereas Oliver Cowdery provided the earliest detailed report of the visit of John the Baptist, his accounts of the visit of Peter, James, and John seldom add new information.

Significant evidence suggests that the Melchizedek Priesthood may have been restored in connection with the translation of the Book of Mormon. A revelation dated June 1829 (documents 1, 3) referred to the apostolic calling of David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery, likening their calling to that of Paul, although the revelation did not detail the restoration of priesthood authority or any ordination in connection with that calling. Additionally, David Whitmer recalled in 1887 that he was “baptized, confirmed, and ordained an Elder” in June 1829 and that “previous to this, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery had baptized, confirmed and ordained each other to the office of an Elder.” The Book of Mormon, which was being translated at that time, described the ancient ordination of disciples, known as elders, who had power to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost (3 Ne. 18; Moro. 2–3). Inasmuch as the translation of 3 Nephi 11 had made Joseph and Oliver sensitive to their lack of power to baptize and impelled them to seek that power, it is possible that the translation of 3 Nephi 18 and Moroni 2–3 had a similar effect upon
them, motivating them to pray to receive by the laying on of hands the additional power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The first printed reference to Joseph’s and Oliver’s ordination as apostles appeared in 1831. It indicated that Joseph and Oliver were “called of God and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ” (document 2). In 1833, Joseph Smith discussed the restoration of apostolic authority in greater detail. Thereafter, most of his and Oliver’s written accounts expressly mentioned that angels played a role in the restoration of apostolic authority and of the power to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost. In 1833 (document 6), Joseph Smith testified that he had seen “the Apostles” and could perform miracles. The following year, Joseph met with the Kirtland Stake High Council. On February 12, 1834, he discussed “the dignity of the office which has been conferred upon me by the ministration of the Angel of God” (document 8). While this might have been a reference to John the Baptist, it is also possible that Joseph was referring to Peter’s role in conferring the Melchizedek Priesthood upon him. Five days later he instructed the same group that anciently “the apostle Peter was the president of the Council and held the keys of the Kingdom of God.” In a blessing which Oliver Cowdery dated 1833 and recorded in 1835, Joseph Smith referred to the reception of “the holy priesthood under the hands of those who . . . received it under the hand of the Messiah” (document 7).

In 1835 the original edition of the Doctrine and Covenants gave the first precise published account of the appearance of Peter, James, and John to Joseph and Oliver. This edition indicates that the three ancient apostles had “ordained” and “confirmed” Joseph and Oliver as “apostles” and granted them “the keys of your ministry” (document 4). In subsequent statements, Joseph reiterated the role of Peter, James, and John in the restoration of “the priesthood” and “the keys of the kingdom” (documents 15, 16) and indicated that the angelic ministrants’ voices had come to them “in the wilderness” between Harmony, Pennsylvania, and Colesville, New York (document 16). Following the Prophet’s death, Oliver Cowdery testified repeatedly and fervently that he had received the higher priesthood under the hands of angelic ministrants (documents 27–30). In 1846, he mentioned only Peter’s role in the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood (document 27),
but in 1849 he confirmed that James and John had also been present (document 30).

Supplementing Joseph's and Oliver's own accounts in several respects are Addison Everett's recollections, written in 1881, 1882, and 1883, of statements he had heard Joseph Smith make in a conversation in 1844. According to Everett's longest account, Joseph Smith indicated that while translating the Book of Mormon in Harmony, Pennsylvania, he and Oliver had been arrested; after escaping from a courtroom, they spent the night in the woods eluding their enemies. At daybreak, Peter, James, and John appeared to them and "ordained us to the Holy Apostelship and gave unto us the Keys of the Dispensation of the fullness of times." 11

The foregoing accounts all seem to describe a single event: a restoration between Harmony and Colesville of what came to be known as the Melchizedek Priesthood under the Savior's direction by Peter with the assistance of James and John. However, the draft and final version of an 1839 account by Joseph Smith may describe a separate set of events connected with the restoration of "the Melchesidek Priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost" (documents 13, 14). Those documents indicate that, after Joseph and Oliver had prayed for this authority, "the word of the Lord" came to them in a second location, the Whitmer home in Fayette, commanding them to ordain one another to the office of Elder once they had "called together our brethren and had their sanction" and then to "attend to the laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost." 12

No single document written by the principals discusses both the appearance of Peter, James, and John and the revelation received in the Whitmer home, specifying the chronological order of these revelations, but the revelation described in documents 13 and 14 was definitely received prior to the organization of the Church, since Joseph Smith carried out its instructions on April 6, 1830. Joseph Smith's history indicates that he and Oliver ordained each other on April 6 "according to previous commandment." 13

In their written accounts, most of which were produced for didactic purposes, many early members compressed all the events of priesthood restoration into a general reference to a visitation by a holy messenger or angel (documents 33-35, 39, 43-49, 51-52,
54–55, 59–62). Although a published revelation (document 4) referring to separate ministrations by John the Baptist and by Peter, James, and John was widely disseminated and readily available beginning in 1835, more details were circulated about the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, probably because that authority was more immediately relevant to the issue of conversion and baptism. Under these circumstances, it is possible that some members regarded the restoration of the authority to baptize as the primary facet of priesthood restoration and therefore focused on that restoration in their teachings.

It is also likely that some writers focused on a single messenger’s role in the restoration of the priesthood in order to simplify the Restoration for hymns or missionary work, particularly when they desired to draw a parallel between the other angel mentioned in Revelation 14:6 and the Restoration of the gospel. Charles Thompson, for instance, borrowed heavily from John’s prophecy in Revelation when he wrote, “God sent an holy angel from the midst of heaven, with the Priesthood and authority of Jesus Christ, to preach the everlasting Gospel unto them who dwell on the earth, and to every nation, kindred, tongue and people” (document 52).

Statements by William McLellin (document 67) and David Patten (document 41) demonstrate that some members who had studied Doctrine and Covenants 27 understood clearly that the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods were restored on separate occasions. Similarly, other missionaries and leaders including Brigham Young (document 69) and Reuben Miller (documents 65, 66) referred to two separate appearances in their sermons and writings.

The accounts by Joseph’s and Oliver’s contemporaries show that early members arrived at different conclusions regarding the timing of the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood. In the 1880s, Everett calculated that it probably occurred in August 1829. Although William McLellin recognized the importance of Peter, James, and John’s visitation (document 67), he seems to trace the reception of the Melchizedek Priesthood to the ordination of Joseph and Oliver as elders on April 6, 1830 (document 68). Hiram Page, one of the Eight Book of Mormon Witnesses was convinced that Joseph and Oliver received the Melchizedek Priesthood from Peter, James, and John “before the 6th of April 1830” (document 70).
Agreeing with Hiram Page, in 1853 and again in 1874, Brigham Young emphasized that Joseph Smith received apostolic power from Peter, James, and John prior to the organization of the Church. D. Michael Quinn's reading of Brigham Young to the effect that "Peter, James, and John came to him [Joseph Smith] in Kirtland" omits key words and contextual information found in that discussion by President Young concerning several revelations regarding the priesthood.  

Modern readers have also arrived at divergent conclusions regarding the timing of the Melchizedek Priesthood restoration and Joseph Smith's early understanding of the distinction between the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods. Two recent interpretations are illustrative. Larry C. Porter, a professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University, maintains that "the evidence suggests a date near the end of May 1829" and "certainly before the organization of the Church on 6 April 1830." In support of this conclusion, Porter highlights the revelation received prior to June 14, 1829, and first printed in the "Articles of the Church of Christ" (documents 1, 3) that identifies Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer as apostles who are "called even with that same calling" as "Paul mine apostle." As evidence that this call to the apostleship included priesthood authority, Porter highlights the Prophet's preface to a later publication of this revelation: "The following commandment will further illustrate the nature of our calling to this Priesthood, as well as that of others who were yet to be sought after" (document 14). Porter also notes that Joseph and Oliver conferred the gift of the Holy Ghost upon members of the Church on April 6, 1830, and assumes that they used the priesthood that they had received from Peter, James, and John to do so. Based on Joseph Smith's later recollections of instructions he had received in 1829 from John the Baptist, Porter infers that by April 1830 "Joseph Smith recognized the limitations of John's power" and thus would not have conferred the Holy Ghost on members unless he had already received the power to do so from Peter, James, and John. To support this view, Porter cites Joseph Smith's 1844 statement:

John's mission was limited to preaching and baptizing; but what he did was legal; and when Jesus Christ came to any of John's disciples, He baptized them with fire and the Holy Ghost.
We find the Apostles endowed with greater power than John... John did not transcend his bounds, but faithfully performed that part belonging to his office.  

Whereas Porter identifies the spring of 1829 as the time for the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, free-lance historian D. Michael Quinn concludes that Joseph Smith did not receive the higher priesthood from Peter, James, and John until July 1830. He acknowledges the 1829 reference to the calling of apostles (documents 1, 3), but he argues that the revelation merely likens Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer to Paul. Then, overlooking Paul’s assertion in 1 Timothy 2:7, “I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not).” Quinn suggests that Paul may have been an unordained “charismatic apostle and special witness” rather than an ordained apostle, citing the LDS Bible Dictionary for general support. Quinn argues that Cowdery and Whitmer as witnesses of the Book of Mormon were called apostles in that sense prior to 1830. Quinn admits that elders were ordained as early as mid-1829, but he suggests that those ordinations and all confirmations prior to that time might have been performed solely on the basis of the revelation received in June 1829 instructing Joseph and Oliver to ordain each other (documents 13, 14). He suggests further that the ordinations carried out on April 6, 1830, were reordinations.

Quinn looks mainly to documents 9 and 16, and to the 1881 and 1882 Addison Everett accounts to support his conclusion that the Melchizedek Priesthood was formally restored by Peter, James, and John in July 1830. In document 9, Joseph Smith mentions the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood and the pouring out of the gift of the Holy Spirit upon the Church after referring to the Church’s organization. Quinn infers that this document as well as document 16 (also found in D&C 128:20) are a chronological listing of events. But document 16 helps Quinn’s case only if one assumes that one can date to June 1830 the event referred to in document 16 as “the voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light.” While he acknowledges that the date specified by Everett for the restoration of the higher priesthood is 1829, Quinn notes that this date does not match the events that Everett described surrounding
Joseph’s arrest and court trial, which occurred in June and July 1830. Thus, for Quinn, Everett’s account “seems to confirm the July 1830 date.”

While Porter acknowledges the statements by Everett and believes that “Addison Everett was a man of veracity,” he is more skeptical of Everett’s statements because thirty-seven years had passed between the time that Everett heard the Prophet’s statements and the time that he recorded them, and because Everett admitted his limitations and “lack of technical skills” as a historian. Porter concludes that “portions of his [Everett’s] remembrance are inconsistent enough to warrant some obvious cautions when attempting to reconstruct the sequence of events surrounding the restoration process from his citations.”

**Conclusion**

The fact that the historical record can be used to support different interpretations demonstrates how puzzling any fragmentary record of the past can be. Because Joseph and Oliver never identified a date for the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, they left room for speculation about the date of that priesthood’s restoration. Further complicating the task is our inability using extant documents to determine with certainty Joseph Smith’s full understanding of the nature of the priesthood at the time of the Church’s organization.

While the documentary record is fragmentary regarding the date for the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, the record is extensive and rich in many other respects. It strongly shows that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery repeatedly testified that they received power from on high to perform ordinances, first from John the Baptist and then from Peter, James, and John. Their testimonies began early in Church documents and intensified as these first and second elders drew closer to their own impending deaths. The powerful thrust of these accounts, corroborated by numerous statements from other early members of the Church, is intellectually challenging and spiritually invigorating.
Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, by R.M. Hadi Pranoto (1932–). Dyed fabric batik, 55" x 31", 1985. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art. Pranoto is former branch president of the Yogyakarta Branch and works in one of the most prestigious batik studios in Indonesia.
The Documents

The following collection of historical sources seeks to display every known statement directly concerning the restoration of the Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthoods that was made during the lifetime of Joseph Smith (who died in 1844) or Oliver Cowdery (who died in 1850). About half of these documents are firsthand declarations by Joseph or Oliver or secondhand reports of their words. In most other cases, Joseph or Oliver could have known of the statement. The documents are arranged by author (or speaker) in chronological order. The authors appear in the order of their earliest priesthood restoration statement. The statements by that author are then grouped in chronological order. A few later or additional statements appear in the footnotes. In a few documents, punctuation has been added for clarity.

1. Articles of the Church of Christ (1829)

A commandment from God unto Oliver how he should build up his church & the manner thereof. . . . I command all men every where to repent & I speak unto you even as unto Paul mine apostle for ye are called even with that same calling with which he was called Now therefore whosoever repenteth & humbleth himself before me & desireth to be baptized in my name shall ye baptize them And after this manner did he command me that I should baptize them Behold ye shall go down & stand in the water & in my name shall ye baptize them And now behold these are the words which ye shall say calling them by name saying Having authority given me of Jesus Christ I baptize you.25

2. Doctrine and Covenants 20 ([1830]/April 1831)

The rise of the Church of Christ in these last days, being 1830 years since the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the flesh, it being regularly organized and established agreeable to the laws of our country, by the will and commandments of God, in the 4th month, and on the 6th day of the same, which commandments were given to Joseph Smith, jun. who was called of God and ordained an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church, and also to Oliver Cowdery, who was also called of God an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church, and ordained under his hand, and this according to the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be all glory both now and ever—amen.26
3. Doctrine and Covenants 18 ([June 1829]/1833)

And now Oliver, I speak unto you, and also unto David, by way of commandment: For behold I command all men every where to repent, and I speak unto you, even as unto Paul mine apostle, for you are called even with that same calling with which he was called.27

4. Doctrine and Covenants 27 ([September 1830]/1835)

. . . which John I have sent unto you, my servants, Joseph Smith, jr. and Oliver Cowdery, to ordain you unto this first priesthood which you have received, that you might be called and ordained even as Aaron. . . . And also with Peter, and James, and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry; and of the same things which I revealed unto them: unto whom I have committed the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times.28

5. Joseph Smith (1832)

A History of the life of Joseph Smith Jr. an account of his marvulous experience and of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Chist the son of the living God of whom he beareth record and also an account of the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time according as the Lord brought forth and established by his hand firstly he receiving the testamony from on high seconndly the ministering of Angels thirdly the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministring of Aangels to administer the letter of the Gospel—the Law and commandments as they were given unto him—and the ordinences, forthly a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood after the holy order of the son of the living God power and ordinance from on high to preach the Gospel in the administration and demonstration of the spirit the Kees of the Kingdom of God confered upon him and the contiuation of the blessings of God to him &c.29

6. Joseph Smith (March 2, 1833)

The following Curious occurrence occurred last week in Newburg about 6 miles from this Place [Cleveland, Ohio]. Joe Smith the great Mormonosity was there and held forth, and among other things he told them he had seen Jesus Christ and the Apostles and conversed with them, and that he could perform Miracles.30
7. Joseph Smith ([December 18, 1833]/1835)

These blessings shall come upon him according to the blessings of
the prophecy of Joseph, in ancient days, which he said should come
upon the Seer of the last days and the Scribe that should sit with him,
and that should be ordained with him, by the hand of the angel in
the bush, unto the lesser priesthood, and after receive the holy
priesthood under the hands of those who had been held in reserve
for a long season, even those who received it under the hand of the
Messiah while he should dwell in the flesh, upon the earth, and
should receive the blessings with him, even the Seer of the God of
Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saith he, even Joseph of old, by his hand,
even God. And he shall inherit a crown of eternal life, at the end; and
while in the flesh shall stand up in Zion and assist to crown the tribes
of Jacob; even so. Amen.31

8. Joseph Smith (February 12, 1834)

Thursday evening, February 12, 1834. This evening the high Priests
and Elders of the Church in Kirtland at the house of bro. Joseph
Smith Jun. in Council for Church business. The council was orga-
then rose and said: I shall now endeavor to set forth before this coun-
cil, the dignity of the office which has been conferred upon me by
the ministring of the Angel of God, by his own will and by the voice
of this Church.32

9. Joseph Smith (April 21, 1834)

Jun. . . . then gave a relation of obtaining and translating the Book of
Mormon, the revelation of the priesthood of Aaron, the organization
of the Church in the year 1830, the revelation of the high priest-
hood, and the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon the Church,
&c. Take away the book of Mormon, and the revelations, and where
is our religion? We have none.33

10. Joseph Smith (December 5, 1834)

The reader may further understand, that the reason why High Coun-
sellor Cowdery was not previously ordained to the Presidency, was,
in consequence of his necessary attendance in Zion, to assist Wm. W.
Phelps in conducting the printing business; but that this promise
was made by the angel while in company with President Smith, at
the time they received the office of the lesser priesthood.34
11. Joseph Smith (March 27, 1836)

Joseph Smith Jun. testified of the Angel of the Lord’s appearing unto him to call him to the work of the Lord, & also of being ordained under the hands of the Angel of of [sic] the covenant.35

12. Joseph Smith (1839)

While we were thus employed, praying, and calling upon the Lord, a Messenger from heaven, descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying unto us; “Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministration of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.” He said this Aaronic priesthood had not the power of laying on of hands, for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on us hereafter and he commanded us to go and be baptized, and gave us directions that I should baptize Oliver Cowdery, and afterward that he should baptize me.

Accordingly we went and were baptized, I baptized him first, and afterwards he baptized me, after which I laid my hands upon his head and ordained him to the Aaronick priesthood, and afterward he laid his hands on me and ordained me to the same priesthood, for so we were commanded. The messenger who visited us on this occasion and conferred this priesthood upon us said that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist, in the new Testament, and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James, and John, who held the keys of the priesthood of Melchisedeck, whi[ch] priesthod he said should in due time be conferred on us. . . . we were forced to keep secret the circumstances of our having been baptized, and having received the priesthood; owing to a spirit of persecution which had already manifested itself in the neighborhood.36

13. Joseph Smith (1839—Draft)

We now became anxious to have that promise realized to us, which the angel that conferred upon us the Aaronick Priesthood had given us, viz, that provided we continued faithful, we should also have the Melchesidec Priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We had for some time made this matter a subject of humble prayer, and at length we got together in the Chamber of Mr Whitmer’s house in order more particularly to seek of the Lord information, and if possible obtain what we now so earnestly desired. After some time spent in solemn and fervent
prayer, the word of the Lord came unto us, in the Chamber, commanding us, that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, and that he also should ordain me to the same office, and that after having been thus ordained, we should proceed to ordain others to the same office, according as it should be made known unto us, from time to time, also commanding us, that as soon as practicable we should call together all those who had already been baptized by us, to bless bread, and break it with them, also to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them doing all these things in the name of the Lord, but to defer our own ordination until we had called together our brethren and had their sanction, and been accepted by them as their teachers, after which we were commanded to proceed to ordain each other and call out such men as the Spirit should dictate unto us, and ordain them, and then attend to the laying on of hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost.

The following commandment [Doctrino and Covenants 18] will further illustrate the nature of our calling to this Priesthood as well as others who were yet to be sought after.57

14. Joseph Smith (1839)

We now became anxious to have that promise realized to us, which the Angel that conferred upon us the Aaronick Priesthood had given us, viz: that provided we continued faithful; we should also have the Melchesidec Priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We had for some time made this matter a subject of humble prayer, and at length we got together in the Chamber of Mr. Whitmer's house in order more particularly to seek of the Lord what we now so earnestly desired: and here to our unspeakable satisfaction did we realize the truth of the Saviour's promise; "Ask, and you shall recieve, seek, and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you;" for we had not long been engaged in solemn and fervent prayer, when the word of the Lord, came unto us in the Chamber, commanding us; that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ, And that he also should ordain me to the same office, and then ordain others as it should be made known unto us, from time to time: we were however commanded to defer this our ordination until, such times, as it should be practicable to have our brethren, who had been and who should be baptized, assembled together, when we must have their sanction to our thus proceeding to ordain each other, and have them decide by vote whether they were willing to accept us as spiritual teachers, or not, when also we were commanded to bless bread and break it with them, and to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them, afterward proceed to ordain each other according to commandment, then call out such men as the Spirit should dictate, and ordain them, and then attend to the laying
on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, upon all those whom we had previously baptized; doing all things in the name of the Lord.

The following commandment [Doctrine and Covenants 18] will further illustrate the nature of our calling to this Priesthood as well as that of others who were yet to be sought after. 58

15. Joseph Smith (1839)

The Priesthood is everlasting. The Savior, Moses, & Elias—gave the Keys to Peter, James & John on the Mount when they were transfigured before him. The Priesthood is everlasting, without beginning of days or end of years, without Father, Mother &c,—

If there is no change of ordinances there is no change of Priesthood. Wherever the ordinances of the Gospel are administered there is the priesthood. How have we come at the priesthood in the last days? They it [sic] came down, down in regular succession. Peter James & John had it given to them & they gave it up. 59

16. Joseph Smith (September 6, 1842)

And again, what do we hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an Angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets—the book to be revealed. A voice of the Lord in the wilderness of Fayette, Seneca county, declaring the three witnesses to bear record of the book. The voice of Michael on the banks of the Susquehanna, detecting the devil when he appeared as an angel of light. The voice of Peter, James, and John, in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna county, and Colesville, Broom county, on the Susquehanna River, declaring themselves as possessing the keys of the kingdom, and of the dispensation of the fulness of times. And again, the voice of God in the chamber of old Father Whitmer, in Fayette, Seneca county, and at sundry times, and in divers places through all the travels and tribulation of this Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints! And the voice of Michael, the archangel, the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael, and of divers angels, from Michael or Adam down to the present time, all declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty and glory, and the power of their priesthood. 40

17. Joseph Smith (March 10, 1844)

Showing the difference between the Spirit of Elias, Elijah and the messiah. J Smith P[rophet]. of the spirit of Elias I must go back to the time at Susquehannah river when I retired in the woods pouring out my soul in prayer to Almighty God. An Angel came down from heaven and laid his hands upon me and ordained me to the power of Elias and that
authorised me to batbise with water unto repentance. It is a power or  
a preparatory work for something greater. you have not power to lay  
on hands for the gift of the holly ghost but you shall have power given  
you hereafter, that is the power of the Aronick priesthood.11

18. Joseph Smith (March 10, 1844)

On Sunday March 10 Joseph the Priest delivered the following con-  
cerning the Spirits & Powers of Elias Elijah & of Messiah The power of  
Elias is not the power of Elijah related the vision of his ordination to  
the priesthood of Aaron on the Susquehannah river to preach the  
preparatory gospel. This said the Angel is the Spirit of Elias.42

19. Joseph Smith (March 10, 1844)

I went into the woods to inquire of the Lord by prayer his will con-  
cerning me— & I saw an angel & he laid his hands upon my head &  
ordained me to be a priest after the order of Aaron & to hold the keys  
of this priesthood which office was to preach repentance & Baptism  
for the remission of sins & also to baptise but was informed that this  
office did not extend to the laying on of hands for the giving of the  
Holy Ghost that that office was a greater work & was to be given  
afterwards but that my ordination was a preparatory work or a going  
before which was the spirit of Elias for the spirit of Elias was a go-  
ing before to prepare the way for the greater, which was the Case  
with John the Baptist.35

20. Oliver Cowdery (November 16, 1830)

About two weeks since some persons came along here with the  
book, one of whom pretends to have seen Angels, and assisted in  
translating the plates. He proclaims destruction upon the world  
within a few years,—holds forth that the ordinances of the gospel,  
have not been regularly administered since the days of the Apostles,  
till the said Smith and himself commenced the work. . . . The name  
of the person here, who pretends to have a divine mission, and to  
have seen and conversed with Angels, is Cowdroy.44

21. Oliver Cowdery (December 7, 1830)

Mr. Oliver Cowdry has his commission directly from the God of  
Heaven, and that he has credentials, written and signed by the hand  
of Jesus Christ, with whom he has personally conversed, and as  
such, said Cowdry claims that he and his associates are the only per-  
sons on earth who are qualified to administer in his name. By this
authority, they proclaim to the world, that all who do not believe their testimony, and be baptised by them for the remission of sins... must be forever miserable.\textsuperscript{45}

22. Oliver Cowdery (1834)

From his [Joseph Smith’s] hand I received baptism, by the direction of the angel of God—the first received into this church, in this day... On a sudden, as from the midst of eternity, the voice of the Redeemer spake peace to us, while the vail was parted and the angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the gospel of repentance!... [O]ur eyes beheld—our ears heard. ... We listened—we gazed—we admired! 'Twas the voice of the angel from glory... we were rapt in the vision of the Almighty!... [W]e received under [the angel’s] hand the holy priesthood, as he said, “upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer this priesthood and this authority, which shall remain upon earth, that the sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto the Lord in righteousness!”... The assurance that we were in the presence of an angel; the certainty that we heard the voice of Jesus, and the truth unsullied as it flowed from a pure personage, dictated by the will of God, is to me, past description.\textsuperscript{46}

23. Oliver Cowdery (February 21, 1835)

Brethren you have your duty presented in this revelation. You have been ordained to the Holy Priesthood. You have received it from those who had their power and authority from an angel. You are to preach the gospel to every nation.\textsuperscript{47}

24. Oliver Cowdery (October 2, 1835)

The following blessings by the spirit of prophecy, were pronounced by Joseph Smith, jr. the first elder, and first patriarch of the Church: for although his father laid hands upon, and blessed the fatherless, thereby securing the blessings of the Lord unto them and their posterity, he was not the first elder, because God called upon his son Joseph and ordained him to this power and delivered to him the keys of the kingdom, that is, of authority and spiritual blessings upon the Church, and through him the Lord revealed his will to the Church: he [Joseph Smith] was ministered unto by the angel, and by his direction he obtained the Records of the Nephites, and translated by the gift and power of God: he was ordained by the angel John, unto the lesser or Aaronic priesthood, in company with myself, in the town of Harmony, Susquehannah County, Pennsylvania, on Fryday, the 15th day of May, 1829, after which we repaired to the water, even to the
Susquehannah River, and were baptized, he first ministering unto me and after I to him. But before baptism, our souls were drawn out in mighty prayer to know how we might obtain the blessings of baptism and of the Holy Spirit, according to the order of God, and we diligently sought for the right of the fathers and the authority of the holy priesthood, and the power to admin[ister] in the same: for we desired to be followers of righteousness and the possessors of greater knowledge, even the knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. Therefore, we repaired to the woods, even as our father Joseph said we should, that is to the bush, and called upon the name of the Lord, and he answered us out of the heavens, and while we were in the heavenly vision the angel came down and bestowed upon us this priesthood: and then, as I have said, we repaired to the water and were baptized. After this we received the high and holy priesthood: but an account of this will be given elsewhere, or in another place. Let it suffice, that others had authority to bless, but after these blessings were given, of which I am about to write, Joseph Smith, Sen. was ordained a president and patriarch, under the hands of his son Joseph, myself, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams, presidents of the Church. These blessings were given by vision and the spirit of prophecy, on the 18th of December, 1833, and written by my own hand at the time; and I know them to be correct and according to the mind of the Lord.58

25. Oliver Cowdery (October 1835, relating Moroni’s instructions to Joseph Smith on September 22, 1823)

When they [the gold plates] are interpreted the Lord will give the holy priesthood to some, and they shall begin to proclaim this gospel and baptize by water, and after that they shall have power to give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of their hands.59

26. Oliver Cowdery (April 1836)

The least among us values more highly his profession, and holds too sacredly that heavenly communication bestowed by the laying on of the hands of those who were clothed with authority, than all that frail, worse than thread-bare hypocritical pretention, which came down through the mother of abominations, of which himself [a reverend] and all others of his profession can boast.50

27. Oliver Cowdery (March 23, 1846)

I have cherished a hope, and that one of my fondest, that I might leave such a character as those who might believe in my testimony, after I shall be called hence, might do so, not only for the sake of the
truth, but might not blush for the private character of the man who bore that testimony. I have been sensitive on this subject, I admit; but I ought to be so—you would be, under the circumstances, had you stood in the presence of John, with our departed brother Joseph, to receive the Lesser Priesthood—and in the presence of Peter, to receive the Greater, and look down through time, and witness the effects these two must produce.  

28. Oliver Cowdery (October 21, 1848)

The priesthood is here. I was present with Joseph when an holy angle from god came down from heaven and conferred or restored the Aronic priesthood. And said at the same time that it should remain upon the earth while the earth stands. I was also present with Joseph when the Melchesideck priesthood was conferred by the holy angles of god—this was the more necessary in order that which we then confirmed on each other by the will and commandment of god. This priesthood is also to remain upon the earth until the Last remnant of time.

29. Oliver Cowdery, as reported by George A. Smith (October 31, 1848)

Oliver Cowdery, who had just arrived from Wisconsin with his family, on being invited, addressed the meeting. He bore testimony in the most positive terms of the truth of the Book of Mormon—the restoration of the priesthood to the earth, and the mission of Joseph Smith as the prophet of the last days; and told the people if they wanted to follow the right path, to keep the main channel of the stream—where the body of the Church goes, there is the authority; and all these lo here's and lo there's, have no authority; but this people have the true and holy priesthood; "for the angel said unto Joseph Smith Jr., in my hearing, that this priesthood shall remain on earth unto the end." His [Oliver Cowdery's] testimony produced quite a sensation among the gentlemen present who did not belong to the Church, and it was gratefully received by all the saints.

30. Oliver Cowdery (January 13, 1849)

While darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people; long after the authority to administer in holy things had been taken away, the Lord opened the heavens and sent forth his word for the salvation of Israel. In fulfilment of the sacred Scripture the everlasting Gospel was proclaimed by the mighty angel, (Moroni) who, clothed with the authority of his mission, gave glory to God in the highest. This Gospel is the "stone taken from the mountain without hands." John the Baptist, holding the keys of the Aaronic Priesthood; Peter, James and John, holding the keys of the Melchisedek Priesthood,
have also ministered for those who shall be heirs of salvation, and with these ministrations ordained men to the same Priesthoods. These Priesthoods, with their authority, are now, and must continue to be, in the body of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Blessed is the Elder who has received the same, and thrice blessed and holy is he who shall endure to the end. Accept assurances, dear Brother, of the unfeigned prayer of him, who, in connection with Joseph the Seer, was blessed with the above ministrations, and who earnestly and devoutly hopes to meet you in the celestial glory.54

31. Painesville Telegraph (December 7, 1830)

Those who are the friends and advocates of this wonderful book [Book of Mormon], state that Mr. Oliver Cowdry has his commission directly from the God of Heaven, and that he has credentials, written and signed by the hand of Jesus Christ, with whom he has personally conversed, and as such, said Cowdry claims that he and his associates are the only persons on earth who are qualified to administer in his name. By this authority, they proclaim to the world, that all who do not believe their testimony, and be baptised by them for the remission of sins, and come under the imposition of their hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost . . . must be forever miserable.55

32. The Reflector (1831)

They [missionaries] then proclaimed that there had been no religion in the world for 1500 years,—that no one had been authorized to preach &c. for that period—that Jo Smith had now received a commission from God for that purpose. . . . Smith (they affirmed) had seen God frequently and personally—Cowdery and his friends had frequent interviews with angels.56

33. William W. Phelps (December 25, 1834)

The next item I shall notice, is, (a glorious one,) when the angel conferred the “priesthood upon you, his fellow servants.” That was an august meeting of men and angels, and brought again, upon earth, the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom of God.57

34. LDS Hymnal (1835)

Hymn 26. P.M.

And an angel surely, then,
For a blessing unto men,
Brought the priesthood back again,
In its ancient purity.58
35. Parley P. Pratt (1835)

SONG III. Long Metre.

The Opening of the Dispensation
of the Fulness of Times.

A voice commissioned from on high,
Hark, hark, it is the angel’s cry,
Descending from the throne of light,
His garments shining clear and white.

He comes the gospel to reveal
In fulness, to the sons of men;
Lo! from Cumorah’s lonely hill,
There comes a record of God’s will!

Translated by the power of God,
His voice bears record to his word;
Again an angel did appear,
As witnesses do record bear.

Restored the priesthood, long since lost,
In truth and power, as at the first;
Thus men commissioned from on high,
Came forth and did repentance cry.59

36. Parley P. Pratt (1840)

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS was first organized in the State of New York, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty, on the sixth day of April. At its first organization, it consisted of six members. The first instruments of its organization were Joseph Smith, jun., and Oliver Cowdery, who profess to have received their authority and priesthood, or apostleship, by direct revelation from God—by the voice of God—by the ministering of angels—and by the Holy Ghost.60

37. Parley P. Pratt (January 1842)

Some of those who held the holy priesthood in ancient times, the priesthood which is after the power of an endless life, without beginning of days or end of years—some of those, I say, being raised from the dead, and others translated, still hold the apostleship and priesthood; and it has pleased God to send them as holy angels to earth to reintroduce the pure gospel, and to commission and ordain the first instruments of the Latter-day Saints.61
Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, by C.C.A. Christensen (1831–1912). Lithograph print, 18" x 14", 1887. Printed by F. E. Bording, Copenhagen, Denmark. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art. John the Baptist appears as a mature adult with a physical body. Note, for example, the drapery on John’s right knee. The artist had this image printed in Copenhagen while he was on his fourth and final mission to his native Scandinavia. He sent fifteen hundred copies of this print back to his families in Utah so his wives could sell them and help support themselves while he was away.
38. Orson Pratt (June 26, 1836)

June 26th [1836]. Being the Sabbath preached in Antwerp village in the forenoon and also in the afternoon upon the faith once delivered to the saints, the falling away of the church, the losing of the authority of the priesthood, the restoration of the church by Ministering of an Angel, Rev. [1]4th chap. In the afternoon at 5 o'clock the members of the church with several others that were favorable met together. The sacrament was administered and also confirmation was administered to three.62

39. Orson Pratt (1840)

Also, in the year 1829, Mr Smith and Mr Cowdery, having learned the correct mode of baptism, from the teachings of the Saviour to the ancient Nephites, as recorded in the "Book of Mormon," had a desire to be baptized; but knowing that no one had authority to administer that sacred ordinance in any denomination, they were at a loss to know how the authority was to be restored, and while calling upon the Lord with a desire to be informed on the subject, a holy angel appeared and stood before them, and laid his hands upon their heads, and ordained them, and commanded them to baptize each other, which they accordingly did. . . . In the foregoing, we have related the most important facts concerning the visions and the ministry of the angel to Mr Smith; the discovery of the records; their translation into the English language, and the witnesses raised up to bear testimony of the same. . . . We have also given an account of the restoration of the authority in these days, to administer in the ordinances of the gospel; and of the time of the organization of the church; and of the blessings poured out upon [t]he same [while yet] in its infancy.63

40. Orson Pratt (September 30, 1848)

A revelation and restoration to the earth of the "everlasting gospel" through the angel Moroni would be of no benefit to the nations, unless some one should be ordained with authority to preach it and administer its ordinances. . . . But why not confer authority by ordination, as well as reveal the everlasting gospel [referring to Moroni]? Because in all probability he had not the right so to do. . . . How then did Mr. Smith obtain the office of an apostle, if Moroni had no authority to ordain him to such office? Mr. Smith testifies that Peter, James, and John came to him in the capacity of ministering angels, and by the laying on of hands ordained him an apostle, and commanded him to preach, baptize, lay on hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and administer all other ordinances of the gospel as they themselves did in ancient days. . . . If Mr. Smith had pretended that
he received the apostleship by the revelation of the Holy Ghost, without an ordination under the hands of an apostle, we should at once know that his pretensions were vain, and that he was a deceiver. . . . Did John predict the restoration of the gospel by an angel? It is included in Mr. Smith's system. . . . Can any man show that the gospel will not be restored by an angel?64

41. David W. Patten (July 1838)

[Referring to Rev. 14:6-7, previously mentioned in the text.] The authority connected with the ordinances, renders the time very desirable to the man of God, and renders him happy, amidst all his trials, and afflictions. To such an one, through the grace of God, we are indebted for this dispensation, as given by the angel of the Lord. . . . And they who sin against this authority given to him—(the before mentioned man of God,)—sins not against him only, but against Moroni, who holds the keys of the stick of Ephraim. And also with Elias, who holds the keys of bringing to pass the restitution of all things, or the restoration of all things. And also John, the son of Zacharias which Zacharias Elias visited, and give promise that he should have a son, and his name should be John, and he should be filled with the spirit of Elias, which John I have sent unto you, my servants Joseph Smith Jr. and Oliver Cowdery, to ordain you to this first priesthood, even as Aaron. . . . And also, Peter, and James and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you, and confirmed you to be apostles, and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry, and of the same things I revealed unto them; unto whom I have committed the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last time, and for the fulness of times.65

42. Oliver Granger (September 10, 1839)

Br. [Oliver] Granger occupied the fore part of the day, and gave a very interesting account of his life; of the administration of angels, who testified of the work of God in the world; a vision of the Book of Mormon, the means by which he was brought into the church, and then bore testimony to the restoration of the Priesthood.66

43. John Taylor (February 11, 1840)

11 [February 1840] Tuesday. . . . Mr Bradshaw said he could tell if [a] man had the Holy Ghost—yet could not tell how. We shewed him a Man might have the Gift of Wisdom, etc. and he not see it—told him he did not know what the H.[oly] G.[host] was. Mr. M[atthews] asked Bro. [John] Taylor where he got his Authority. Ans: By Prophecy
and laying on of hands of those who had Authority, etc. This came by
the Ministration of an holy Angel. Bro. T.[aylor] then asked where he
got his. Ans: from the Bishop of Lincoln, and that was as good as his
Angel, "and you have no more Power than I have and if you have, let
us see it. I say if you have any Power shew it, either from Heaven or
Hell. I don't fear you. I say if you have any Power from Heaven
or Hell shew it." We said we were sent not [to] shew Signs but to call
on all to repent, Priests and People.67

44. Erastus Snow (December 1840)

(Erastus Snow to Benjamin Winchester, Letter, December 1840,
Philadelphia.) Little more than ten years has passed since the organi-
zation of the church of Christ in these last days; since the angel of the
Lord said to our much esteemed brother J. Smith, and his faithful
companion, O. Cowdery, "To you my fellow servants am I sent to
confer this priesthood, that through you it may be conferred upon
others." The morning that heavenly messenger executed this impor-
tant mission, is one long to be remembered by all the saints.68

45. Erastus Snow and Benjamin Winchester (1841)

We also believe and testify, that the Lord has renewed the gospel dis-
ensation and in fulfilment of numerous predictions of the prophets
and apostles, sent his holy angel to commission men to preach the
fulness of the everlasting gospel to all nations.69

46. Benjamin Winchester (February 15, 1841)

God does not send his angels to act as priests on earth, but to bear
his messages to men; also to make known his covenants to them. It is
not said that this angel in person should preach the gospel to all
nations [referring to the angel prophesied of in Rev. 14:6–7]; but that
he should come with it, or have it to preach to all nations. It is the
work of the servants of God, to preach the gospel to all nations.
Indeed, in consequence of apostacy, the Lord has taken the priest-
hood, or authority from the church; therefore, this angel was to be
sent to restore this authority, or commission men to preach the
gospel to all nations.70

47. Benjamin Winchester (April 1, 1841)

As soon as the Book of Mormon was translated, the Lord sent his
holy angel with the holy priesthood, which was conferred upon
men; thus fulfilling the saying of John: "I saw another angel fly in the
midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, &c." . . . the Book of Mormon has come forth on this land, and the Lord has sent his angel to confer the holy priesthood upon his servants once more, or renewed the gospel dispensation, and organized his kingdom, &c. . . . the Lord has sent forth the Book of Mormon, also his angel to confer the holy priesthood and organized his church.71

48. Benjamin Winchester (1843)

Soon after this Book was discovered, the Lord sent His angel with the Holy priesthood, which was conferred upon Mr. Smith, and O. Cowdery who as a scribe assisted in the work of translation: they immediately baptized each other, and also others that believed the work.72

49. Orson Hyde (June 15, 1841)

I began with the Priesthood, and showed that the saints were not under the necessity of tracing back the dark and bloody stream of papal superstition to find their authority, neither were they compelled to seek for it among the floating and transient notions of Protestant reformers; but God has sent his holy angel directly from heaven with this seal and authority, and conferred it upon men with his own hands: quoting the letter and testimony of O. Cowdery.73

50. Orson Hyde (1842)

While calling upon the Lord with a desire to be informed on the subject, a holy angel appeared, stood before them, and laid his hands upon their heads and ordained them. Then he commanded these two men to baptize each other, which they did accordingly. [Hyde then gives Oliver Cowdery's 1834 Messenger and Advocate account of the Aaronic priesthood restoration.]74

51. Heber C. Kimball and Wilford Woodruff (September 15, 1841)

[The Lord] sent a holy angel, who hath committed the everlasting Gospel, and restored the priesthood.75

52. Charles Thompson (1841)

Immediately after it was translated God sent an holy angel from the midst of heaven, with the Priesthood and authority of Jesus Christ, to preach the everlasting Gospel unto them who dwell on the earth, and
to every nation, kindred, tongue and people, saying, with a loud voice, fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come; and worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water. And this Priesthood and authority has been conferred upon many men, (and will be conferred upon many more,) who have escaped the corruptions that are in the world through lust.76

53. George J. Adams (1841)

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was first organized in the State of New York, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty, on the sixth day of April. At its first organization, it consisted of six members. The first instruments of its organization were Joseph Smith, Jun. and Oliver Cowdery, who received their authority and priesthood, or apostleship, by direct revelation from God—by the voice of God—by the ministering of angels—and by the Holy Ghost.77

54. George J. Adams (1849)

Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery] were at a loss to know how the authority was to be restored, and while calling upon the Lord with a desire to be informed upon the subject, a holy angel appeared—stood before them—laid his hands upon their heads—ordained them—and commanded them to baptize each other, which they accordingly did.78

55. Ebenezer Robinson (January 1, 1842)

These preachers profess no authority from antiquity to administer gospel ordinances, but say that an angel has come down from the midst of heaven, and conferred on them the priesthood and authority to preach and administer the everlasting gospel unto them that dwell on the earth.79

56. Alfred Cordon (April 18, 1842)

Monday 18th [April 1842] . . . as soon has [sic] I got home I discovered that Mr Brabazon Ellis, Incumbent of St Pauls Church Burslem, had sent desiring to hold a little conversation with one or more of the Latter Day Saints, immediately I went Elder Wm Lloyd accompanied me we found another Minister with him, and after the usual compliments he said let us pray we kneeled down and he prayed that the Lord would enlighten both our hearts that we might be blessd with wisdom and Intelligence, and I felt in my heart to say—Amen—After Prayer He asked me who Ordained me in the Church
of Latter Day Saints I told him Wm Clayton, I then said and Sir, Who ordained you He answered The Bishop, He then asked me who Ordained Wm Clayton I answered Heber C. Kimball, I then asked him who Ordained the Bishop; He answered; Another Bishop; He then asked me who Ordained Heber C. Kimball; I answered, Joseph Smith and said I; Joseph Smith was Ordained by Holy Angels that were sent by commandment from the Most High God.80

57. Warren Foote (August 29, 1842)

29th [August 1842] We returned home, satisfied with sectarian nonsense, and feeling thankful to the Lord for the revelation of His gospel through His servant Joseph Smith, on whom he bestowed his Holy Priesthood through the laying on of hands of the ancient Apostles’ Peter James and John thereby opening up the way whereby mankind can be saved and exalted in His Celestial Kingdom, through repentance and baptism and the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost, by those ordained into this Holy Priesthood.81

58. Moses Martin (1842)

I, now, as a living witness of God, feel it my indispensable duty, to declare to all men, who may chance to peruse this little work, that the Angel of God has committed the everlasting gospel, with the Holy Priesthood, unto man, in fulfillment of John’s prediction: that God has now a church on earth, organized after the apostolic order, with all the gifts and graces which belong to it.82

59. James Henry Flanigan (April 14, 1844)

Sunday 14 [April 1844] Mr Fishers ____ 21, & 22 verses of 28 cptr of Isa ________ Book of Mormon, Gathering of Israel, 2nd coming of Christ, restoration of ________, Resurrection of ________, Milenium, & the manner & means _____ will make use of bringing ________ about, for _____ by giving ________, sending his Angel with ________ Priesthood, ___ up a Prophet, sending Fishers & hunters to gather sons of Israel & build up Zion &c &c.83

60. Lorenzo Snow (1844)

I now bear testimony, having the highest assurance, by revelation from God, that this prophecy [Rev. 14:6] has already been fulfilled, that an Angel from God has visited man in these last days, and restored that which has long been lost, even the priesthood,—the keys of the kingdom,—the fulness of the everlasting Gospel.84
61. William I. Appleby (1844)

In the year 1830, after the Book was translated and published, the Angel of God according to promise conferred the Holy priesthood upon Mr. Smith, and gave unto him commandments to Baptize with water in the name of Jesus, and build up the Church of Christ; which accordingly was organized April 6th, A.D. 1830, with six members.85

62. William I. Appleby (December 30, 1848)

He [Oliver Cowdery] was one of the first Apostles in this Church, and baptised Br. Joseph the Prophet at first, and then Br. Joseph administered to him the same ordinance, after they had both received the Holy Priesthood from under the hands of the angel of God.86

63. Jedediah M. Grant (1844)

After he had obtained and translated the ancient American Records, (commonly called the Book of Mormon,) and had received authority from the Legates of Heaven, delegated and sent unto him by the Lord to ordain him to the Holy Priesthood, giving him the right to ordain others, that the Gospel might be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.87

64. Quorum of the Twelve (April 6, 1845)

The great Elohim, Jehovah, had been pleased once more to speak from the heavens, and also to commune with man upon the earth, by means of open visions, and by the ministration of HOLY MESSENGERS.

By this means the great and eternal High Priesthood, after the order of his Son (even the Apostleship) has been restored or returned to the earth.

This High Priesthood or Apostleship, holds the keys of the kingdom of God, with power to bind on earth that which shall be bound in heaven, and to loose on earth that which shall be loosed in heaven; and, in fine, to do and to administer in all things pertaining to the ordinances, organization, government, and direction of the kingdom of God.88

65. Reuben Miller (September 1846)

Who was Joseph Smith? A man appointed of God to lay the foundation of this, "The Dispensation of the fullness of Times." He was ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood by John the Baptist, and received the keys of the kingdom and the keys of "the Dispensation of the
fulness of Times” from Peter, James and John: and the restoring power of the Melchisedek Priesthood from Elias, and the sealing and binding powers of the same from Elijah.69

66. Reuben Miller (1847)

[Miller briefly retells Joseph Smith’s account of the Aaronic priesthood restoration as given in the Times and Seasons, then] ... Now when I speak of the Melchisedek priesthood, I wish so to be understood. And when I speak of the Aaronic, I do not wish the reader to understand that I hold its jurisdiction or authority as being over that of the greater, or Melchisedek. They are two priesthoods and when restored to earth through Joseph, by different angels, and at different times ... He [Joseph Smith] received from John the Baptist, according to promise, the priesthood after the order of Aaron, on the 15th day of May, 1829, in the manner and form as I have already shown. And a short time after, the Melchisedek priesthood from Peter, James, and John, the ancient Apostles.70

67. William E. McLellin (March and April 1847)

[The Church] very soon increased in numbers, and branches of it were organized and established in various places, by the labors, and through the instrumentality of its first Ministers, who had received their authority direct from Heaven—from the great Head of the Church—even Christ the Lord; as did men in days of old—by the ministrations of holy Angels, and by the direct commandments of God from heaven. ... Joseph was first called by an holy angel, Strang was first called by Joseph—not a like here Again, when the holy angel visited and ordained Joseph, Oliver was with him, that it might be as the Lord had said: “In the mouth of TWO or three witnesses shall every word be established.” 2 Cor. 13:1. Who was with Strang, when he was ordained? No person. Not alike here. “And also with Peter and James and John, whom I have sent unto you [Joseph and Oliver,] by whom I have ordained you, and confirmed you to be Apostles, and especial witnesses of my name.”71

68. William E. McLellin (March 1848)

We hold that JOSEPH SMITH and OLIVER COWDERY, in May 1829, received the authority of the lesser priesthood, and the keys of it, by the visitation and the administration of the angel John, the Baptist: and that on the 6th day of April, 1830, the day on which the church was organized, they by a revelation from JESUS CHRIST by the unanimous consent and vote of those whom they had baptised, and by the laying on of hands Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith were ordained to the
office of Elder, in the high priesthood: And that on the same day JOSEPH SMITH was ordained under the hands of O. Cowdery, to the offices in the Melchisedek priesthood.92

69. Brigham Young (August 15, 1847)

When Brother Joseph received the Priesthood He did not receive all at once, but He was A prophet Seer & Revelator before He received the fulness of the Priesthood & keys of the kingdom.

He first received the Aronick Priesthood and Keys from under the hands of John the Baptist. He then had not power to lay on hands to confirm the Church but afterwards He received the Patriarchal or Melchisedick Priesthood from under the Hands of Peter James & John who were of the Twelve Apostles & were the Presidency when the other Apostles were Absent. From those Apostles Joseph Smith received every key power, Blessing, & Privilege of the Highest Authority of the Melchezedick Priesthood ever committed to man on the earth which they held.93

70. Hiram Page (March 4, 1848)

In the beginning we find the first ordinations were by Peter James and John they ordained Joseph and Oliver; to what priesthood were they ordained; the answer must be to the Holy priesthood on the office of an elder or an apostle which is an additional grace added to the office of an elder these offices Oliver received from those holy messengers before the 6th of April 1830.94

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NOTES

1Messenger and Advocate (October 1835): 199. Further words given by Moroni at that time, now found in Doctrine and Covenants 2, were provided by Joseph Smith in 1838: “Behold, I will reveal unto you the Priesthood, by the hand of Elijah” (D&C 2:1).
As Gregory Prince has observed, the earliest occurrences of the word *priesthood* in written Mormon sources outside the Book of Mormon begin in 1831 (27). Moreover, although priesthood authority had been restored prior to that time, the terms *Aaronic Priesthood* and *Melchizedek Priesthood* "were not adopted until 1835" (14). Gregory A. Prince, *Having Authority: The Origins and Development of Priesthood during the Ministry of Joseph Smith* (Independence, Mo.: Independence Press, 1993). William E. McLellin's journal entry for October 25, 1831, speaks of "the High-Priesthood" and "the lesser Priest-Hood." Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1994), 45, 283.


While remaining true to his testimony as a witness to the Book of Mormon, David Whitmer rejected any aspect of the Restoration that recognized or promoted central Church authority. In 1885, Whitmer stated:

I moved Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to my fathers house in Fayette Seneca County New York, from Harmony, Penn. in the year 1829, on our way I conversed freely with them upon this great work they were bringing about, and Oliver stated to me in Josephs presence that they had baptized each other seeking by that to fulfill the command—And after our arrival at fathers sometime in June 1829, Joseph ordained Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder, and Oliver ordained Joseph to be an Elder in the church of Christ and during that year Joseph both baptized and ordained me an elder in the church of Christ. . . . I never heard that an Angel had ordained Joseph and Oliver to the Aaronic priesthood until the year 1834 5. or 6—in Ohio.

Notwithstanding numerous attestations to the contrary by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer in 1885 maintained, "I do not believe that John the Baptist ever ordained Joseph and Oliver as stated and believed by some." Zenas H. Gurley, Interview, January 14, 1885, Gurley Collection, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives), quoted in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 154–55. Earlier, Whitmer had been very impressed, however, by Oliver Cowdery's testimony regarding the visitation of Peter, James, and John; see note 10 below.

In 1878, William E. McLellin wrote:

In 1831 I heard Joseph tell his experience about angel visits many times, and about finding the plates, and their contents coming to light. . . . But I never heard one word of John the baptist, or of Peter, James, and John's visit and ordination till I was told some year or two afterward [that is in 1832] in Ohio.

Part of a revelation dated August and September 1830 (D&C 27) and published for the first time in 1835 stated that Elias had informed the father of John the Baptist that John would “be filled with the spirit of Elias” (D&C 27:7).

David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ: By a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon (Richmond, Mo.: By the author, 1887), 32.

Kirtland High Council Minutes, February 17, 1834, LDS Church Archives.

These verses did not appear in the earlier text of the revelation printed in the Book of Commandments, 1833. Joseph Smith recalled in 1839 that all of section 27 was received as a revelation in August 1830 but that most of the revelation, including these words, was not recorded until September 1830. Dean C. Jesse, ed., The Papers of Joseph Smith, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–), 1:320–21 (hereafter cited as PJS).

This passage mentions “the voice of Peter, James, and John” but does not discuss a physical ordination. The reason is that this is part of a response to the preceding question, “What do we bear?” (italic added).

David H. Cannon reported an 1861 visit with David Whitmer during which Whitmer allegedly recalled yet another testimony given by Cowdery regarding the appearance of Peter, James, and John:

The thing which impressed me most of all was, as we stood beside the grave of Oliver Cowdery the other Witness, who had come back into the Church before his death, and in describing Oliver’s action, when bearing his testimony, said to the people in his room, placing his hands like this upon his head, saying “I know the Gospel to be true and upon this head has Peter James and John laid their hands and conferred the Holy Melchesdic Priestood,” the manner in which this tall grey headed man went through the exhibition of what Oliver had done was prophetic. I shall never forget the impression that the testimony of... David Whitmer made upon me.


Addison Everett wrote:

A few days Before Br Joseph & Hiram ware caled to Carthage By Gov. Ford I wus Passing the Mansheon House I observed Bro Joseph & Hiram & some five or six Brethren in earnest conversation Before the Door of the House. I opened the gate and steped in... Br Joseph Ex[p]resed Greate sympathy for Br Oliver saying Poor Boy[,] Poor Boy[,] casting his eyes to the ground. And then Said as they Ware Tran[s]lating the Book of Mormon at His Father In Laws in Susquhanah County Penny. T[h]ey ware thretned By a Mob and in the same time Father Kn<i>ghts came Down from Cole[s]vill[e] Broom[e] County New York and Desired them to go home with him and preach to them in his Neighbourhood And on Account of the Mob Spirit prevailing they concluded to goe. And they Ware teach[n]g And preaching the Gospele they ware taken with <a>
writ and Before a Judge as fals[e] Prophets. And the Prossecuting Atorny had conceived in his own Mind That A few simple qu[e]stions would Convince the Court By the Answers Bro Joseph would giv[e] <to> that <the> charge was Correct. So he calls out Jo which was the first Merical Jesus rauft[?] Why <said Br Joseph> we read He Created the worlds And what He done previous to that I have not as yet Learned. This answer completely confounded the Prossecuting Atorny that he requested the Judge to Dismis the case. and went out To Organ<ize> the Mob that was on the Out Side. At about this time a Lawyer By the Name of Reed I think was his name came in to the court and Stated He was Mr Smiths Atorney and wished to see him <in> a Private room And was <put> in to <a> Back room and when in he hoisted a window and told Br Joseph & Oliver to flee in to the forest which was close at hand. And they wanderd in a dense Forest all Night and often times in Mud and water up to thare Knees. And Brother Oliver got quite exausted in the After Part of the Night and Brother Joseph had to put his arm arround him and allmost carry him. And Just as the day Broke in the East Brother Oliver gave out Entirely and he[.] Br Joseph[,] leaned him against an Oak tree Just out side a field fence[.] Br Oliver Crying out how long O Lord O how Long Br Joseph hav[e] we got to suffer these things[?] Just this moment Peter James & John came to us and Ordained to<u>us to> the Holy Apostleship and gave <unto> us the Keys of the Disp<ensation of the fullness of times. And we had some 16 or 17 miles to goe to reach our place of residence and Brother Oliver could travel as well as I could <after the Endowment>. Now as to time and Place. I heard the Name of the Banks of the Susquehanah river spoken <of> But whare it was pla[c]ed I cannot till. No doubt the Oak tree and the field fence was adjacent to the river. As to time I cannot Be Very Explicit. But as the Mob spirit had not abated when they returned they had to remove to Father Whitmores <at Fayet[te] Seneca Co> to finish the Translation. I should <jud[ge]> it to <Be> the Latter part of August.

Now Beloved Brother I am Not Writing as wone of the Lords Historians But as your friend reproduc<i>ing the last words I heard our Beloved and Gods Holy Prophet Speake before his depart[ure] Into the Eternal Heavens to Dwell with the Holy & Eternal gods forever & Ever!

Addison Everett to Joseph F. Smith, January 16, 1882, Joseph F. Smith Collection, Personal Papers, LDS Church Archives; underlining in the original, quoted in Porter, “Restoration,” 8. Angle brackets <> designate material inserted by Everett above the line. See also Addison Everett to Oliver B. Huntington, February 17, 1881, recorded in “Oliver Boardman Huntington Journal no. 14,” under backdate of January 31, 1881; and “Oliver Boardman Huntington Journal no. 15,” entry for February 18, 1883, Archives and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as BYU Archives), quoted in Porter, “Restoration,” 7. The 1881 entry reads as follows:
Joseph went on to state that "at Coalville he & Oliver were under arrest on charge of Deceiving the people & in court he stated that the first miracle done was to create this earth. About that time his attorney told the court that he wanted to see Mr. Smith alone a few moments. When alone Mr. Reid said that there was a mob in front of the house, & ho[i]sting the window, Joseph & Oliver went to the woods in a few rods, it being night, and they traveled until Oliver was exhausted & Joseph almost carried him through mud and water. They traveled all night and just at the break of day Olive[r] gave out entirely and exclaimed "O! Lord! How long Brother Joseph have we got to endure this thing."

Brother Joseph said that at that very time Peter, James, & John came to them and ordained them to the Apostleship.

They had 16 or 17 miles to travel to get back to Mr. Hales his father in law and Oliver did not complain anymore of fatigue."

Compare these comments with the early history of Joseph Smith by Joseph Knight, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," ed. Dean Jessee, BYU Studies 17 (autumn 1976): 37–38.

12The first ordinations to the office of elder occurred in 1829. On April 6, 1830, Joseph and Oliver reordained one another as First and Second Elder and then "laid our hands on each individual member of the Church present, that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and be confirmed members of the Church of Christ." History of the Church, 1:78. Both Joseph and Oliver were elders prior to this time. See Porter, "Restoration," 3.

13History of the Church, 1:77–78.

On April 6, 1853, President Young said, "I know that Joseph received his Apostleship from Peter, James, and John, before a revelation on the subject was printed, and he never had a right to organize a Church before he was an Apostle." Brigham Young and others, Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 1:137 (hereafter cited as JD). On June 23, 1874, Brigham Young indicated:

[Joseph Smith] received the Aaronic Priesthood, and then he received the keys of the Melchisedek Priesthood, and organized the Church. He first received the power to baptise, and still did not know that he was to receive any more until the Lord told him there was more for him. Then he received the keys of the Melchisedek Priesthood, and had power to confirm after he had baptized, which he had not before. He would have stood precisely as John the Baptist stood, had not the Lord sent his other messengers, Peter, James and John, to ordain Joseph to the Melchisedek Priesthood. (JD, 18:240)

In 1861, in a discourse on the priesthood, President Young said:

How came these Apostles, these Seventies, these High Priests, and all this organization we now enjoy? It came by revelation. Father Cahoon, who lately died in your neighbourhood, was one of the first men ordained to the office of High Priest in this kingdom. In the year 1831 the Prophet Joseph went to Ohio. He left the State of New York on the last of April, if my memory serves me, and arrived in Kirtland
sometime in May. They held a General Conference, which was the first General Conference ever called or held in Ohio. Joseph then received a revelation, and ordained High Priests. You read in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants how he received the Priesthood in the first place. It is there stated how Joseph received the Aaronic Priesthood. John the Baptist came to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. When a person passes behind the vail, he can only officiate in the spirit-world; but when he is resurrected he officiates as a resurrected being, and not as a mortal being. You read in the revelation that Joseph was ordained, as it is written. When he received the Melchisedek Priesthood, he had another revelation. Peter, James, and John came to him. You can read the revelation at your leisure. When he received this revelation in Kirtland, the Lord revealed to him that he should begin and ordain High Priests; and he then ordained quite a number, all whose names I do not now recollect; but Lyman Wight was one; Fathers Cahoon and Morley, John Murdock, Sidney Rigdon, and others were also then ordained. These were the first that were ordained to this office in the Church. I relate this to show you how Joseph proceeded step by step in organizing the Church. At that time there were no Seventies nor Twelve Apostles. (JD, 9:88–89)

Readers may judge for themselves if the Kirtland revelation referred to here was the visit of Peter, James, and John or the revelation instructing Joseph Smith to begin ordaining High Priests. Likewise, when Brigham Young said that Joseph Smith "was taken in the spirit to the 3rd heavens & all this with the aronic priesthood" (Quinn, Mormon Hierarchy, 26) before he was ordained an apostle, Brigham need not have been referring to the Vision of the Three Degrees of Glory received by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in February, 1832, as Quinn argues. It was common for people to use the phrase "third heaven" from 2 Corinthians 12:2 in connection with Paul's gift of vision in general, as in History of the Church, 5:30, but this phrase is ambiguous.

16Porter, "Restoration," 3.
18Quinn, Mormon Hierarchy, 22.
19Quinn, Mormon Hierarchy, 10.
20Quinn, Mormon Hierarchy, 10; "Apostle," in LDS Bible Dictionary.
21Quinn, Mormon Hierarchy, 10, 27–30. Quinn argues that Joseph and Oliver could have felt justified in ordaining elders using the authority that they received from John the Baptist because they did not at that time associate the office of elder exclusively with the Melchizedek Priesthood. In support of this position, Quinn indicates that Joseph Smith conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood upon several who had previously been ordained elders in June 1831. At the October 1831 conference in Kirtland, "the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood was manifested and conferred for the first time upon several of the Elders." History of the Church, 1:175–76. A September 1832 revelation specified that "elder and bishop are necessary appendages belonging unto the high priesthood" (D&C 84:29).
Quinn dates this event only by indirect association with two other events. Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 23.

Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 25. Quinn also cites a discourse by Erastus Snow in 1882:

In due course of time, as we read in the history which he has left, Peter, James and John appeared to him—it was at a period when they were being pursued by their enemies and they had to travel all night, and in the dawn of the coming day when they were weary and worn who should appear to them but Peter, James and John, for the purpose of conferring upon them the Apostleship, the keys of which they themselves had held while upon the earth, which had been bestowed upon them by the Savior. This Priesthood conferred upon them by those three messengers embraces within it all offices of the Priesthood from the highest to the lowest. (JD, 23:183)


Oliver Cowdery’s 1829 manuscript, “A Commandment from God” (or “Articles of the Church of Christ”), LDS Church Archives, quoted in Robert J. Woodford, “The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants,” 3 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1974), 1:288. This document ends with the declaration: “Behold I am Oliver I am an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God the Father & the Lord Jesus Christ.”

All manuscript sources, unless otherwise attributed, are found in the Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (LDS Church Archives), and are used with permission.

“The Mormon Creed,” *Painesville (Ohio) Telegraph*, April 19, 1831, 4. The same text with minor changes was also published in the *Evening and Morning Star* 1 (June 1832): 1; and *Book of Commandments* (1833), ch. 24, pp. 47–48. For a listing of early printings of this text, see Woodford, “The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants,” 1:296–97. In addition to changes in punctuation, the Book of Commandments and the *Evening and Morning Star* versions contain the following differences from the *Telegraph* printing: Both later renditions spell out the dates instead of using numbers and write “sixth day of the month” instead of “sixth day of the same.” In these versions, the last names “Smith” and “Cowdery” are omitted, and the repeated phrase is “elder of this church” instead of “elder of the church.” They do not contain the words “God the Father,” but read “Lord and Savior” instead of just “Lord.” They close with the word “forever” as opposed to the “ever” of the earlier version. Furthermore, the Book of Commandments rendition opens with a lowercase “church of Christ,” and the *Evening and Morning Star* capitalizes “Elder,” “Apostle,” and “Amen.”

Book of Commandments (1833), ch. 15, p. 35.

*Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints*, comp. Joseph Smith and others (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams, 1835), 180; see also *Evening and Morning Star*, March 1835, 78; May 1836, 155; *Times and Seasons* 4 (March 1, 1843): 122; *Millennial Star* 4 (February 1844): 151. These verses did not appear in the earlier text of the revelation printed in the Book of Commandments, 1833. Joseph Smith recalled in 1839 that all of Section 27 was received as
a revelation in August of 1830 but that most of the revelation, including these verses, was not recorded until September of 1830.

Early in the month of August Newel Knight and his wife paid us a visit at my place in Harmony; Neither his wife nor mine had been as yet confirmed, it was proposed that we should confirm them, and partake together of the sacrament, before he and his wife should leave us—In order to prepare for this I set out to procure some wine for the occasion, but had gone only a short distance when I was met by a heavenly messenger, and received the following revelation, the first paragraph of which was written at this time, and the remainder in the September following. (*PJS*, 1:320-21)

No manuscript copy of these verses dating from before the publication of the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835 has been identified. See Woodford, “The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants,” 1:395-97.

29Joseph Smith, History (dated by Dean C. Jessee between July 20 and November 27, 1832), in *PJS*, 1:3.


31Patriarchal Blessings, Book 1 (1835), 12. The end of this blessing contains this information about its origin: “Oliver Cowdery, Clerk and Recorder. Given December 18th, 1833, and recorded in this book October 2, 1835.” This particular blessing was evidently given for Oliver Cowdery, but the name specifying the recipient has been omitted. This passage comes from the last sixth of the blessing.

32Kirtland High Council Minutes, February 12, 1834, 27. Compare the further report by Orson Hyde of the following testimony by Joseph Smith:

Brother Joseph observed to Bishop that he knew he had lied before he confessed it; that his declarations were not only false in themselves, but they involved a false principle. An angel, said Joseph, may administer the word of the Lord unto men, and bring intelligence to them from heaven upon various subjects; but no true angel from God will ever come to ordain any man, because they have once been sent to establish the priesthood by ordaining me thereunto; and the priesthood being once established on earth, with power to ordain others, no heavenly messenger will ever come to interfere with that power by ordaining any more. He referred to the angel that came to Cornelius and told Cornelius to send for Peter; but if there had been no Peter with keys and power to administer, the angel might have done it himself; but as there was, the angel would not interfere. Saul was directed to go to Ananias for instruction and to be administered to by him; but if there had been no Ananias with power and authority on the earth to administer in the name of Christ, the Lord might have done it himself. You may therefore know, from this time forward, that if any man comes to you professing to be ordained by an angel, he is either a liar or has been imposed upon in consequence of transgression by an angel of the devil, for this priesthood shall never be taken away from this church.
This testimony was delivered in an upper room, in the southwest corner of the White Store and dwelling-house, formerly occupied by Whitney and Gilbert, situate on Kirtland Flats. (Millennial Star 8 [November 20, 1846]: 139)

3Joseph Smith, History, 1834-1836, in PJS, 1:21.

3Stephen Post, Journal, Stephen Post Papers, March 27, 1836, microfilm.

3Joseph Smith, History, 1839, in PJS, 1:290-91, also published with minor changes in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in Times and Seasons 3 (August 1, 1842): 865-66.

3Joseph Smith, History [1839 Draft], in PJS, 1:238-39.

3Joseph Smith, History, 1839, in PJS, 1:299-300, reprinted with only slight changes in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation in Times and Seasons 3 (September 15, 1842): 915.

3Joseph Smith, Sermon (ca. 1839), Willard Richards Pocket Companion, in The Words of Joseph Smith, comp. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 9; also, James Burgess apparently had access to and copied this passage into his own journal around 1841; James Burgess Journals, 1841-1848. See also History of the Church, 3:387. On March 22, 1839, Joseph Smith had affirmed in a letter from Liberty Jail to Isaac Galland the following related general principle: “We believe that no man can administer salvation through the gospel, to the souls of men, in the name of Jesus Christ, except he is authorized from God, by revelation, or by being ordained by some one whom God hath sent by revelation.” Dean C. Jessee, comp. and ed., The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 421.

3Joseph Smith to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, September 6, 1842, Nauvoo, Illinois, in Times and Seasons 3 (October 1, 1842): 935-36; Doctrine and Covenants 128:20-21.

3Joseph Smith, Sermon, March 10, 1844, recorded by James Burgess in his notebook, in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 332-33. For an 1870 recollection of these words of Joseph Smith, see “Biography of David Osborne, Senior,” typescript, BYU Archives, 63-64:

He spoke of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Moses, The patriarchs and some of the Prophets, telling what keys each one held, and the work he accomplished in his day, down to Jesus and the apostles. Now, says he, having told you so much about these ancient men of God, I will proceed to tell you something of myself. . . . He told us that Peter, James, and John, having held the Keys of the Kingdom in their day had come and conferred the same upon him and his brethren.


3Joseph Smith Sermon, March 10, 1844, recorded by Wilford Woodruff in his journal, in Ehat and Cook, Words of Joseph Smith, 527.

45The Golden Bible,” Painesville (Ohio) Telegraph, November 16, 1830, 3.

45Painesville (Ohio) Telegraph, December 7, 1830.
46 Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, September 7, 1834, Norton, Ohio, in *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 14-16.

47 Kirtland High Council Minutes, February 21, 1835. The occasion was the blessing of several new members of the Twelve Apostles. Following their blessings, Oliver Cowdery gave them this charge.

48 Patriarchal Blessings, Book 1 (1835): 8–9. The end of this blessing contains this information about its origin: “Oliver Cowdery, Clerk and Recorder. Given in Kirtland, December 18, 1833, and recorded September 1835.”

49 *Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, 199.


52 Reuben Miller Journal, October 21, 1848, 14. Report of “Conference held on Misqueto Creek Council Bluffs October 21st [‘21st’ may have been added later as it was written in a different color ink] 1848.”

53 George A. Smith to Orson Pratt, October 20 and 31, 1848, Carbonca, Council Bluffs, Iowa, photocopy of typescript; reprinted, with a few minor differences, in Manuscript History of Brigham Young, October 31, 1848, 77–78.

54 Oliver Cowdery to Elder Samuel W. Richards, January 13, 1849, in *Deseret Evening News* 17 (March 22, 1884): 2. The location of the original letter is unknown, but scholars find little reason to doubt the authenticity of this piece and its 1849 date.

55 *Painesville Telegraph*, December 7, 1830.

56 *The Reflector* (Palmyra, [N. Y.]), February 14, 1831, 102.


58 Emma Smith, *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for The Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams, 1835), 33; also published in *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints*, selected and published by David W. Rogers (New York: C. Vinten, 1838), 12; and in Benjamin C. Elsworth, *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of Christ of the Latter Day Saints* (N.p.: Benjamin C. Elsworth, 1839), 13. See also LDS Hymnal (1835), Hymn 72: The keys which Peter did receive, / To rear a kingdom God to please. / Have once more been confer’d to man, / To bring about Jehovah’s plan; and LDS Hymnal (1835), Hymn 76: Such blessings to the human race, / Once more are tender’d by God’s grace; / The Priesthood is again restor’d, / For this let God be long ador’d. See further *A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Use of All Saints*, selected by a Committee in a Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Austin: New Era Office, 1847), 77, Hymn 55: The chosen of God and the friend of men, / He [Joseph Smith] brought the priesthood back again.


60 Parley P. Pratt, *Late Persecution of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (New York: J. W. Harrison, 1840), iii.

Elden Jay Watson, comp., The Orson Pratt Journals (Salt Lake City: Watson, 1975), 84–85.

Orson Pratt, Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), 23–24.

Orson Pratt, Divine Authority; or, The Question Was Joseph Sent of God? (Liverpool: R. James, September 30, 1848, 1851), 4–5, 7; an almost exact duplicate of this is in The Frontier Guardian 1 (February 7, 1849): 1.

David W. Patten, “To the Saints Scattered Abroad,” Elders’ Journal of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints 1 (July 1838): 41–42. This passage includes a quotation from what was at that time section L in the Doctrine and Covenants.


Joseph Fielding Diary, typescript, BYU Archives, 55.


Erastus Snow and Benjamin Winchester, An Address to the Citizens of Salem and Vicinity, photocopy of original, BYU Archives (N.p., [1841]), 5.

The Gospel Reflector 1 (February 15, 1841): 89.


Orson Hyde to President [Joseph] Smith, Times and Seasons 2 (October 1, 1841): 551.

Orson Hyde, Ein Ruf aus der Wüste, eine Stimme aus dem Schoosse der Erde (A Cry from the Wilderness, a Voice from the Dust of the Earth) (Frankfurt: O. Hyde, 1842), typescript, 27; translated from the German by Justus Ernst.


Charles Thompson, Evidence in Proof of the Book of Mormon Being a Divinely Inspired Record (Batavia, N.Y.: D. D. Waite, 1841), 144–45. Similarly, Benjamin Winchester held that Revelation 14:7 “relates to the renewal of the gospel covenant, the restoration of the priesthood.” The Gospel Reflector 1 (February 15, 1841): 86.


80 Alfred Cordon, Reminiscences and Journals, April 18, 1842, microfilm, 77–79.
81 Warren Foote, Autobiography and Journals, August 29, 1842, typescript, BYU Archives, 53. Because this diary appears to be a combination of reminiscences and other texts copied from a journal that was kept earlier, it is difficult to ascertain whether this is a reflection or a contemporary observation.
83 James Henry Flanigan Diaries, April 14, 1844, 105. Much of this section is in a form of shorthand and undecipherable to this writer. Blank lines have been inserted in those areas that cannot be read.
84 Lorenzo Snow, The Only Way to Be Saved (London: F. Shephard, 1844), 11–12.
86 William I. Appleby, Biography and Journal, December 30, 1848, microfilm, 247.
87 Jedediah M. Grant, Collection of Facts Relative to the Course Taken by Elder Sidney Rigdon (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking, and Guilbert, 1844), 1.
88 Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. To all the Kings of the World, to the President of the United States of America; to the Governors of the Several States, and to the Rulers and People of all Nations (Liverpool: Wilford Woodruff, dated April 6, 1845), 1–2 (written by Parley P. Pratt from New York).
90 Reuben Miller, Truth Shall Prevail: A Short Reply to an Article Published in the Voree Herald (Reveille), by J. C. Bennett and the Willful Falsehoods of J. J. Strang (Burlington, Wis.: n.p., 1847), 7, 9.
91 The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ 1 (March and April 1847): 2, 31.
92 The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ 1 (March 1848): 67.
Daughter, in April

Today, rain washing at the surface of things, you come in after your two-mile run with the blonde grace of your solitude. Memories stay like separate rooms—no hallway to connect where you are now: A fisher's vest you wore at five, hoarding old keys, acorns, and bottlecaps. The path your running made on the backyard slope. The times you walked and walked going nowhere when weather turned you indoors.

How you regretted school, and your sleep's fidelity turned to something else, your jaw squared itself into what came: Years of A's, of nightmares. Working out in any sport. Coaches begging at the door. You turning them away for time alone.

Sometimes I think you have grown like bamboo—something secret to keep you straight, becoming polished without reaching out. So many times it has felt like this . . . little I can do except iron these tall-sized shirts with the pockets you love, add vegetables to soup, study your vigilant silence.

—Dixie Partridge
Book Reviews


Reviewed by Paul H. Peterson, Associate Professor, Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University.

It had to come! Two well-known sleuths of early Mormon history have written what might be called their final testament—the end result of two-and-one-half decades' tedious research into Mormon origins. Presbyterian pastor Wesley Walters had been researching early Mormon history since the late 1960s. Lapsed-Mormon Michael Marquardt's interest in Mormon beginnings and Joseph Smith stretches back at least half that long. When Walters died in 1990, Marquardt finished the book and dedicated it to him.

Regardless of what agenda motivated this volume, it merits a careful reading by students of Latter-day Saint history. The text is comparatively brief but highly detailed (almost tediously so in places). The accompanying notes and appendixes are useful, and the bibliographical essay is especially helpful. It is apparent the authors have paid their research dues, having painstakingly combed through sundry archives, searching for obscure tax and assessment records and censuses to supplement the often familiar statements by contemporaries who remembered the Joseph Smith family. Much of the authors' information and many of their arguments are familiar, some dating as far back as the late 1960s. But in this culminating study, they have added some new wrinkles, tightened their prose, and, in their minds, further buttressed their basic arguments.

They have also made every effort to defuse the polemics. Walters and Marquardt, deservedly or not, are sometimes categorized as anti-Mormon writers. Their earlier monographs and articles on
Latter-day Saint history sought to expose and disprove Mormonism, but *Inventing Mormonism* has a slightly different ring to it. The authors (possibly this is the influence of Marquardt) at least make a pretense of extricating themselves from their formerly rigid and dogmatic methodology and strive to approach their subject with more historical sophistication. I was both surprised and pleased when I read the following among the authors’ conclusions: little is to be gained from promoting a “prophet-fraud dichotomy” (197), Joseph honestly believed he spoke with supernatural beings, and the young prophet was an important figure in the development of western religious history.

This book can be divided into three parts. The first part (and potentially the one most challenging to orthodox conceptions), consisting of chapters one and two, maintains that the familiar chronology of the early history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is flawed, that the Smiths did not move to Manchester from Palmyra until after 1820, that there was no major revival that could have motivated Joseph in 1820 in Palmyra, and therefore, that Joseph could not have had the vision he claimed he had in 1820. The second section, chapters three through six and chapter eight, examines the social, cultural, and religious milieu in which the Smiths functioned and endeavors to assign them their proper role in Palmyra-Manchester society. The third part, chapter seven, maintains that the Church was organized in Manchester, not Fayette, and postulates that the change of location sites in 1834 was part of a larger strategy by Church leaders to evade creditors.

**When Did the Smiths Move to Manchester?**

The authors begin by dissecting a fundamental text in Mormonism—Joseph Smith’s 1838 account of the First Vision. The chronological challenges in this account are obvious to any careful reader. Joseph talks of the move to Palmyra, presumably around 1816, notes that the Smiths moved to Manchester “in about four years” (JS–H 1:3), and then dates the revival which led to the First Vision “in the second year after our removal to Manchester” (JS–H 1:5). Yet traditional accounts maintain that the First Vision occurred in 1820. Marquardt and Walters propose a new chronological scheme to solve this apparent contradiction. First, they
maintain the Smiths likely moved to Manchester as late as 1822. Second, they claim that there was no major revival in Palmyra in 1820 and that the revival which Joseph describes in his 1838 account could refer only to the great revival of 1824–25.

Historians have typically (and admittedly somewhat superficially), dealt with the apparent Palmyra-Manchester discrepancy by suggesting that the Smiths moved to Manchester in 1818, not 1820. But Marquardt and Walters claim that the relocation to Manchester can be “establish[ed] with reasonable certainty” (2) by examining certain contemporary documents including road-tax records and assessment rolls. Such documents, they maintain, do not support an 1818 move to the Manchester farm but rather compel a date of 1822.

The date of the revival that motivated Joseph to seek God has been controversial since Walters first raised the issue in 1967. Marquardt and Walters insist that only the revival of 1824–25, a tumultuous and well-documented season of religious fervor in Palmyra and adjoining communities, satisfies Joseph’s 1838 description of “unusual excitement” when “great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties” (JS–H 1:5). They point out that mainline churches in Palmyra all showed significant growth in 1824–25 but that contemporary records reveal no appreciable church growth resulting from a presumed revival in Palmyra in 1820. Indeed, they claim there is no indication of any 1820 revival in Palmyra, deflecting or blunting historian Milton Backman’s argument that Joseph’s reference to religious excitement encompassed a larger regional area than just Palmyra.1 The authors suggest that Joseph could have referred to only Palmyra when he mentioned excitement in “the place where we lived”; that Pastors Lane and Stockton, who supposedly played a role in the revival, were not around in 1820; and that both Joseph and his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, made statements that imply a close-to-home location.

While the chronological framework established by the authors, both with regard to the move to Manchester and the dating of the revival, is based on solid research and cannot be arbitrarily dismissed, there are alternative ways of interpreting the evidence. Neither of the two basic accounts—Joseph Smith’s nor his mother’s—precisely identify when the Smiths first moved to western
New York and when they moved from Palmyra to Manchester. Joseph said in his 1838 history that his family went to the Palmyra region in his “tenth year, or thereabouts” (JS-H 1:3). That could have been when he was nine years old, which would have been in 1815. He added that they moved to Manchester in about four years. That could place the move in or about 1819. Moreover, Lucy Mack Smith noted in her history that the family moved to Manchester two years after their arrival in Palmyra.\(^2\) We know that Lucy and the children arrived in Palmyra some months after Joseph Sr. Assuming that Joseph Sr. came in late summer or early fall of 1816 (an assessment held by many historians), Lucy probably arrived in late 1816 or possibly early 1817. If, indeed, she did arrive in Palmyra in 1817, and the family moved to Manchester about two years later, as indicated in her account, that move could have taken place in 1819. Thus one can argue—admittedly somewhat tentatively but contrary to the Marquardt-Walters thesis—that both Joseph’s and Lucy’s accounts allow for a move to Manchester by at least 1819.

One can augment this 1819 thesis with additional sources. The federal census record of 1820 places the Smiths in Farmington (Manchester), and various statements of contemporaries indicate that they moved to Manchester well before 1820. For example, Pomeroy Tucker—local historian, editor of the *Wayne Sentinel*, and Mormon critic—claimed to be “well acquainted with ‘Joe Smith,’ the first Mormon prophet, and with his father and all the Smith family, since their removal to Palmyra from Vermont in 1816, and during their continuance there and in the adjoining town of Manchester.” Tucker maintained that the Smiths lived in Palmyra for “two and a half years” before moving to Manchester in 1818. There, he added, they “remained . . . some twelve years, occupying as their dwelling-place, . . . a small, one-story, smoky log-house, which they had built prior to removing there.”\(^3\) Another contemporary critic of Joseph Smith, Manchester resident Orsamus Turner, recalled that the Smiths occupied their “rude log house” as early as 1819.\(^4\)

And finally, one can further supplement the early-move-to-Manchester thesis by putting a different twist on Lucy’s statement regarding the “third harvest.” In her narrative, Lucy mentioned that the Smiths “enjoyed their third harvest on the farm.”\(^5\) By tying in
Lucy's statements with events in 1823, Marquardt and Walters correctly conclude Lucy had reference to the harvest of 1823. Therefore, they insist, the first harvest could not have been earlier than 1821. But Lucy's statement could also be used to argue for an earlier move. Don Enders, a student of Mormon origins in New York, told me that many farmers in western New York in the early nineteenth century planted winter wheat. If, indeed, the Smiths planted winter wheat, that would push planting to the fall of 1820. In addition, they would have needed a year to clear the land before they planted—possibly moving the timetable to 1819. Indeed, Enders has argued cogently that, of necessity, the burning of trees would predate any tilling and that clearing the land would predate tree burning and therefore the Smiths "could not have moved to the Palmyra-Manchester town line any later than mid-1819 if they were to have a 'third harvest' on the farm in the fall of 1823."

A key issue, of course, has to do with when the Smiths actually started to work the land. Enders, referring to the research of early-nineteenth-century, western-New York historian William Siles, remarked that in this era verbal arrangements and agreements were sometimes entered into months before actual contracts were signed. Marquardt and Walters observe that until July 1820, land agent Zachariah Seymour did not have power of attorney to grant permission for the Smiths to work the land. However, in an age when contractual agreements were often casual, it is possible that Seymour (or whoever the agent might have been), knowing that his clients were desirous of selling their land, might have worked out a verbal agreement with the Smiths that granted them permission to work the land as early as 1818 or 1819.

And is the revival of 1824-25 the only one that could satisfy the requirements of Joseph's account? Not quite. Opponents of the Marquardt-Walters thesis note that the 1838 account does not mention the word "revival" but rather religious "excitement" (JS-H 1:5, 21). Various meetings associated with the annual Methodist Genesee Conference of 1819 or 1820 could have sparked Joseph's religious interest. Orsamus Turner remembered that Joseph caught "a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting" somewhere along "the Vienna road." Or quite possibly, Methodist stirrings in the spring of 1820 around Palmyra itself could have motivated him. Walter
Norton's doctoral dissertation on contemporary newspaper coverage of early Mormonism and other religions notes that Palmyra newspaperman Timothy C. Strong "reported in the spring of 1820 that there was a Methodist camp ground near Palmyra where 'Camp Meetings' were frequently held." It is important to understand, as both Backman and especially Norton have observed, that often local revivals did not receive newspaper coverage. I am satisfied that the actual revival or rush of religious excitement that stirred Joseph indeed could have taken place sometime in 1820.

But I am also persuaded that Marquardt and Walters have a strong case in claiming that the 1824-25 revival satisfies all of the elements of Joseph's 1838 history more adequately than any other account. Certainly the effects of the revival fit more comfortably into an 1824-25 context. Historian Marvin Hill some years ago reconciled the seemingly contradictory evidence presented by Walters. To some, however, Hill's reconciliation and accommodation required giving up some sacred space. Hill noted that the earlier 1832 account of Joseph's religious experience is likely more accurate than the "streamlined" 1838 account. A revival in 1824, he noted, causes problems for the 1838 account but not for the earlier one. Hill allows that Joseph, writing so many years after the event, could have unintentionally ascribed elements of the later revival into an earlier time frame when he fashioned his history in 1838. Most historians, aware of the perils of memory lapses, have little difficulty with this notion. Even Walters and Marquardt admit that "memory at times conflates events" (32).

But what are the implications of all of this? The authors claim that the issues they introduce are fundamental. If the move to Manchester was as late as 1822 and if the revival motivating Joseph Smith took place in 1824, how does one deal, they ask, with the annual visits Joseph claimed he had with Moroni at the Hill Cumorah? Luke Wilson of Gospel Truths Ministries goes a step further, concluding that the issues raised in Inventing Mormonism could affect the faith of some Mormons as it allegedly provides "airtight and inescapable evidence" of Smith's dishonesty." Clearly, such confidence on the part of all three is unwarranted, and Wilson's statement can only be regarded as so much twaddle. The interesting and even plausible claims of Marquardt and Walters have little potential for wave making. Ultimately, the only real issue
for most Church members is whether or not Joseph did indeed see God. As Larry Foster noted some years ago, "whether or not an error was made in dating precisely when a vision occurred has no necessary connection with whether it occurred . . . or what specifically occurred."\(^{13}\)

What Was the Social and Cultural Standing of the Smiths in the 1820s?

The second division of *Inventing Mormonism*, comprising those chapters that deal with the social, cultural, and religious world of the Smiths, requires less comment. From Fawn Brodie's time on, apologists and opponents have debated the poverty of the Smiths, their progressive nature or lack thereof, their penchant for treasure hunting, and so on. Marquardt and Walters note or imply that the Smiths had limited educations, generally hired themselves out to others as laborers, and by and large were never able to make a decent living. They provide evidence that the family was poor, that they sometimes ran into financial complications and occasionally had problems paying off debts (especially Joseph Sr. and Hyrum), that at least some members of the family drank cider, and that perhaps Joseph Smith Sr. had a drinking problem.

Despite the seemingly neutral tone of these chapters, I detected what I felt was a not-so-subtle agenda. There were, after all, Palmyra and Manchester neighbors who actually had good things to say about the family of Joseph and Lucy. Why were they not quoted? Don Enders has argued, persuasively I think, that the Smiths were thrifty, industrious, and at the middle of their socioeconomic scale.\(^{14}\) The impression one gathers from *Inventing Mormonism* is of a dull, shiftless family, never able to cut a swath in respectable society.

Not surprisingly, the major focus of these middle chapters is on the involvement of the Smiths in the religious-magical world that existed among certain social classes in upstate New York. The authors conclude that all of this world of treasure hunting and magic—a world in which the Smiths were involved—was played down by Joseph in his official history. Informed students of Mormon history will likely find little new here. Clearly, the Smiths did hunt treasure when Joseph was in his teens and early twenties;
Joseph did use a seerstone; his initial interest in the gold plates was at least in part motivated by material concerns; and, quite possibly, loyal friends like the Knights were first drawn to Joseph because of their interest in money digging. Marquardt and Walters overplay their hand, however, exaggerating both Lucy Mack Smith's and Joseph Knight's fascination with treasure hunting. I also remain unconvincing by the authors' claims that Joseph was preoccupied with treasure hunting without a seerstone after 1827.

**Was the Church Organized in Fayette or in Manchester?**

I personally found the third section of the book to be the most engaging, perhaps because the arguments are of more recent vintage. Here Marquardt claims that the bulk of early evidence indicates that the Church was actually organized in the Smith log home in Manchester, New York. His corollary is that the shift to the Fayette location (25 miles east of Manchester) was somehow part of a concerted attempt in 1834 to confuse creditors and thereby avoid paying off debts.

Undeniably, there is fair evidence for a Manchester location (see the accompanying chart, pages 222–25 below, prepared by the staff at BYU Studies). Marquardt notes that the six revelations in the Book of Commandments given to six individuals who were in attendance at the organization meetings on April 6, 1830, were received, according to their headings, at Manchester. He points out that all references in the *Evening and the Morning Star* before 1834 refer to Manchester as the location. He suggests the likelihood, based on circumstantial evidence, that Hyrum Smith was in the vicinity of Manchester on April 6 and notes that the description of the site of an early baptism associated with the organization meeting fits Hathaway Creek in Manchester. To soften the fact that David Whitmer, who was present at the organization meeting on April 6, later located it at Fayette, Marquardt gives at least plausible evidence that Whitmer, who made the observation at least three times but over forty years removed from the actual event, could have confused organizational details with later Church conferences held at Fayette in June and September 1830.

Unfortunately, there is little likelihood this issue will ever be settled to the satisfaction of most historians. No New York certificate
of incorporation for the Church exists, and we must largely rely on memoirs and remembrances. With the advantage of hindsight, we can understand the pivotal importance of the meeting to organize the Church. Likely, Saints in New York in 1830 did not view the event in watershed terms; they clearly saw little need to document it. Regrettably, in those early years, Mormons were not in the habit of documenting most events. But from the records that do exist, we can assume that something of importance occurred at Manchester on the same day the Church was organized. Seemingly, Elder John Carmack recognized Manchester’s importance when he suggested that “the reference to Manchester as a place of birth for the Church may have merely been a recognition that Manchester played a key role as a meeting place where details for the formal Church organization were worked out.”

Proponents of Fayette as the site of the formal organization of the Church, of course, have reliable witnesses and sources of their own. Joseph Smith and David Whitmer, two principals who were there, ultimately identify Fayette as the location. Possibly, Joseph, in Kirtland, was not in a position to correct the proofs of the early revelations listing Manchester as they came from W. W. Phelps’s press in Independence in 1833; and Fayette was listed as the organization location in the minutes of a meeting held in May 1834 as recorded in the Evening and Morning Star. In the various editions of Remarkable Visions, Orson Pratt eventually shifted the organization site from Manchester to Fayette (see Marquardt and Walters, 159–60). Elder Carmack is quite correct that the trend in both official and unofficial sources has been to accept Fayette as the official location.

Seeking for an explanation of this confusion between Manchester and Fayette, Marquardt suggests that Joseph and possibly other leaders shifted locations in 1834 as part of a strategy to frustrate creditors. Marquardt sees implications in the May 1834 meeting at which Fayette for the first time was listed as the site of the Church’s organization. In attendance at the meeting were leading elders including all members of the United Firm. Just weeks previous, the bankrupt United Firm had dissolved and separated into two firms. At this May meeting, the elders decided to change the name of the Church from the Church of Christ to the Church of the Latter Day Saints. By obscuring the identities of United Firm members, by changing both the name of the Church and the location of its
organization, Church leaders hoped to somehow, according to Marquardt, frustrate the efforts of creditors to collect monies owed them. It is not clear, however, how such an open and public change of name would deter, or if it ever did impede, the efforts of any creditors to collect their money. Until Marquardt can come up with more evidence, a need he himself readily acknowledges, the notion must be regarded as an essentially dubious speculation.

I say dubious for good reasons. While I agree with Marquardt that the burden of debt was an ominous one, I am not persuaded that at this point, Joseph Smith and other Church leaders were as desperate as the author would have one believe. Moreover, Joseph's divine marching orders in regard to debt were quite clear—pay them. Doctrine and Covenants 104, received in April 1834, counseled Joseph to "pay all your debts" (D&C 104:78) and promised deliverance from bondage if he were faithful. If, indeed, Joseph deviously schemed to avoid paying debtors, he was pursuing a course contrary to revealed instruction. There is also the distinct possibility that practical considerations, more particularly the commonality of the name "Church of Christ," played a role in the name change.

Perhaps an even more compelling reason for the name change has to do with Sidney Rigdon's influence in the early Church. Richard Van Wagoner suggests that Sidney persuaded Joseph Smith and the high council to change the name of the Church in order to place greater emphasis on the nearness of the Millennium. Finally, I am curious how the debt-creditor problem escaped being picked up by at least some of the dissidents who left the Church in the 1830s, and more especially, how it escaped the critical eye of E. D. Howe, whose Mormonism Unvailed included every possible designing and devilish charge against Joseph in particular and Mormonism in general. In short, we must take Marquardt at his word that at present "the evidence is too sketchy to reach a decisive conclusion" (165).

Of all of Marquardt's arguments, his contention that Manchester played a primary role as the actual organization site merits most consideration. As indicated, Elder Carmack modestly allows for the possibility that Manchester could have been the location of an organizational planning meeting. But it could well have played a more significant role. Manchester could have served as one part of
a two-part organizational scheme. Or, even more likely, the organization could have taken place in one location in the morning and been repeated later in the day at the other.

Clearly, Manchester cannot be routinely dismissed as a possible organizational site. In my estimation, key points in Marquardt's argument have to do with the likelihood that a baptismal service was held the same day the Church was organized, that the service might well have taken place in Manchester, and that some who participated in or witnessed the baptism were also in attendance at the organization. Lucy Mack Smith indicates the baptismal service was held in the morning, but Joseph Smith and Joseph Knight suggest it took place after the organizational meeting, which would make it late afternoon or evening. As Marquardt points out, Manchester neighbors C. R. Stafford and Benjamin Saunders recalled seeing Joseph Sr. and others baptized into the Church. Granted, it is possible a small group of believers could have held a baptismal service in the morning in Manchester (assuming that Lucy was correct) and then either walked or traveled by wagon the twenty-five miles to Fayette for the organizational meeting, but that is hardly the most likely scenario. Of those who later penned an account of the organization, none mentioned a trip from Manchester to New York.

But even if Marquardt is right or partly right about Manchester, the implications are far from life threatening. Except for those who are inextricably bound to tradition, the adjustment could be made with little anguish. Both sites are significant to the LDS tradition, and if Manchester played a role, however large or small, in Church organization—so be it.

I conclude with two very different observations. First, I recall years ago hearing the late T. Edgar Lyon lament that the dart-throwing of Reverend Walters and others was required to move Mormon students and scholars (with some notable exceptions) out of their easy chairs and into the archives to learn of their own origins. While clearly much has been done during the past twenty-five years to deepen our knowledge of the New York period in Church history, we may still have done more talking than walking. Whatever the motivation of Marquardt and Walters, we must admit they have searched and scoured through obscure, but occasionally
important, records in musty basements and nondescript court-
houses with more diligence and thoroughness than most of our
own LDS historians.

Second, I like to think I could take many of the evidences
contained in this volume but come up with different conclusions.
I would not title the volume *Inventing Mormonism*, an unfortu-
nate title because it implies that Joseph literally manufactured his
religious experiences—a notion that most serious historians reject.
Instead, I would portray Joseph as a developing, growing human
being who in his lifetime spent as much time on earth as he did in
heaven and who throughout his life had occasion to modify his
behavior and repent (sometimes the Lord even dictated that he do
so). I would allow for the fact that he grew up in a poor family, that
some members of his family and maybe Joseph himself occasion-
ally drank cider (what person did not drink cider in upstate New
York in the 1820s?), and that in his early years, along with other
family members, he did pursue treasure with the use of seerstones.
I would allow for the possibility that when he walked out of the
Sacred Grove as a mere youth his knowledge of the precise nature
of the Godhead was incomplete. I would allow for Joseph to move
beyond some aspects of his culture, to realize in his mature years
that some of his activities fifteen or twenty years earlier, while not
malicious, were frivolous and less than ennobling, and then, realiz-
ing their insignificance, to underplay them in his official history
written over a decade later. In short, I would allow Joseph Smith
the luxury of personal growth and development and the opportu-
nity for doctrinal expansion. For those willing to allow Joseph
such accommodation, this volume will not only be informative but
will cause little discomfiture.

NOTES

1 Milton V. Backman Jr., "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District: New
303, 309-10, 320.

2 Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith*, ed. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake
City: Bookcraft, 1979), 65.


8Donald L. Enders, conversation with author, Salt Lake City, November 1994.


16I assume this is largely Marquardt's contribution because of his earlier article, "An Appraisal of Manchester as Location for the Organization of the Church," *Sunstone* 16 (February 1992): 49-57.


18Carmack, "Fayette: The Place the Church Was Organized," 19.


## Accounts of the Organization of the Church

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<th>source and date</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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</thead>
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<td><strong>source</strong></td>
<td>Book of Commandments, 1833</td>
<td>Evening and Morning Star, March/April 1833</td>
<td>Evening and Morning Star, May 1834, published minutes of May 3, 1834, conference</td>
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<td><strong>date</strong></td>
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<td>1833</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<td><strong>location</strong></td>
<td>Manchester (revised to Fayette in 1835 ed. of D&amp;C)</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td>Fayette, Seneca County</td>
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<th>who was present</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>names</strong></td>
<td>Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Knight, Hyrum Smith, Joseph Smith Jr., Joseph Smith Sr., Samuel Smith</td>
<td>six members</td>
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<table>
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<th>date and time of meeting</th>
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<th>3</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>date</strong></td>
<td>April 6, 1830</td>
<td>April 6, 1830</td>
<td>April 6, 1830</td>
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<th>3</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>name</strong></td>
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<td>Church of Christ</td>
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<th>3</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joseph Smith, 1838 (draft)</td>
<td>Joseph Smith, 1838 (published version)</td>
<td>Joseph Knight, after September 1835 and before February 1847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>house of Mr. Whitmer [Fayette]</td>
<td>house of Mr. Whitmer [Fayette]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>six in number</td>
<td>six in number</td>
<td>six members</td>
</tr>
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<td>April 6, 1830</td>
<td>April 6, 1830</td>
<td>April 6, 1830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>prayer</td>
<td>a. prayer</td>
<td>a. prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>sustaining vote</td>
<td>b. sustaining vote</td>
<td>k. instructions to build up Church, exhorted to be faithful in all things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>O. Cowdery ordained elder</td>
<td>c. O. Cowdery ordained elder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>J. Smith ordained elder</td>
<td>d. J. Smith ordained elder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>sacrament passed</td>
<td>e. sacrament passed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>all members confirmed</td>
<td>f. all members confirmed</td>
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<td>g.</td>
<td>outpouring of Holy Ghost, prophesying</td>
<td>g. outpouring of Holy Ghost, prophesying</td>
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<td>h.</td>
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<td>h. revelations received</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>i. revelations received</td>
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<tr>
<td>j.</td>
<td></td>
<td>j. some called and ordained to priesthood offices</td>
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<td>The Church of Jesus Christ</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints</td>
<td>Church of Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Church of Christ</td>
<td>The Church of Jesus Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Church of Jesus Christ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Smith</td>
<td>Martin Harris</td>
<td>Father Smith</td>
<td>Old Mr. Smith (Joseph Smith Sr.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Smith²</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother Smith/Martin Harris</td>
<td>Martin Harris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shortly after meeting</td>
<td>shortly after meeting/about the same time</td>
<td>evening, small stream</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>source and date</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>source</strong></td>
<td><em>Times and Seasons</em>, March 1, 1842. Wentworth letter</td>
<td>Lucy Mack Smith, 1845, pub. 1853</td>
<td>David Whitmer, December 1877</td>
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<td><strong>date</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>where meeting was held</strong></td>
<td>Manchester</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oliver Cowdery Hyrum Smith Joseph Smith Jr. Christian Whitmer David Whitmer John Whitmer about 40-50 present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>who was present</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>date and time of meeting</strong></td>
<td>April 6, 1830</td>
<td>April 6, 1830</td>
<td>April 6, 1830, about noon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **events of meeting** | j. some were ordained  
k. some preached  
l. many repented and were baptized  
i. had visions  
h. prophesied  
o. cast out devils  
p. healed the sick |       |    |
| **name attributed to the Church** | Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints |       |    |
| **who was baptized** | Mr. Smith  
Martin Harris |       |    |
<p>| <strong>when and where baptisms were performed</strong> | morning |       |    |
| <strong>who performed baptisms</strong> | Joseph stood on shore while his father was baptized |       |    |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Whitmer, June 1881</td>
<td>Ben Saunders (Manchester resident), 1884</td>
<td>David Whitmer, January 1887</td>
<td>C. R. Stafford, (Manchester resident), January 1888</td>
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<td>Seneca County [Fayette]</td>
<td>Peter Whitmer's [Fayette]</td>
<td>Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, Hyrum Smith, Joseph Smith Jr., David Whitmer, John Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, plus about 50 other members (about 20 from Colesville, 15 from Manchester, about 20 from Fayette)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 6, 1830</td>
<td>April 6, 1830</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. exhorted to teach nothing except the Old and New Testaments and the Book of Mormon</td>
<td>q. believed Martin Harris was ordained an elder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Church of Christ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>old Brother Smith, old Mrs. Rockwell</td>
<td></td>
<td>old Jo Smith, his wife Mrs. Rockwell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Cowdery</td>
<td></td>
<td>Joseph Smith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source Data for Table

Note: Numbers 1-13 correspond to columns 1-13.

1A Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized according to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830 (Zion [Independence, Mo.]: W. W. Phelps, 1833), chapters 17-22.
2Evening and Morning Star 1 (March 1833): 76, and (April 1833): 84.
3Evening and Morning Star 2 (May 1834): 160.
7Times and Seasons 3 (March 1, 1842): 708.
8Lucy Mack Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 151.
10David Whitmer, interview by Kansas City Journal reporter, June 1, 1881, Richmond, Mo., Kansas City Journal, June 5, 1881, in David Whitmer Interviews, 65. See also David Whitmer, interview by Zenas H. Gurley, January 14, 1885, Richmond, Mo., Gurley Collection, LDS Church Archives, in David Whitmer Interviews, 154-55 (information not included on chart—April 6, 1830, six elders, 50-60 members).
12David Whitmer, interview by Edward Stevenson, January 2, 1887, Richmond, Mo., diary of Edward Stevenson, LDS Church Archives, in David Whitmer Interviews, 214. See also David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ (Richmond, Mo.: David Whitmer, 1887), 33.
13Highly Important Facts about Mormonism,” Naked Truths about Mormonism 1 (January 1888): 3, original publication in the Yale University Library.
Notes

1Another instance of revising the site occurred in a pamphlet by Orson Pratt. The 1840 edition of the pamphlet designated Manchester as the place where the Church was organized. Orson Pratt, *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), 23–24. The 1848 edition of the pamphlet listed Fayette as the place of organization. Orson Pratt, “Remarkable Visions,” in *Writings of an Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Mormon Heritage Publishers, 1976), 12. In addition, William E. McLellin in 1847 recounted the events of the organization and noted Manchester as the place where the meeting was held:

The Church of Christ was organized on the 6th day of April, 1830, in the township of Manchester, and the State of New York; with only six members, viz. Joseph Smith, sen., Lucy Smith his wife, Joseph Smith, Jr., Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. *(The Ensign of Liberty of the Church of Christ* 1 [March 1847]: 2)

2A marginal note by James Mulholland says, “Father Smith Martin Harris baptized this evening 6th April. Mother Smith and Sister Rockwell 2 or 3 days afterward.” Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 243.

KENT W. HUFF. *Brigham Young's United Order: A Contextual Interpretation*. Provo, Utah: By the author, distributed by Theological Thinktank (available by special order through Deseret Book), 1994. xviii; 647 pp. Tables, charts, appendix. $15.95.

Reviewed by Warner Woodworth, Professor of Organizational Behavior at Brigham Young University.

These two volumes contain wide-ranging perspectives on the economic history of Mormonism. Both are authored by Kent W. Huff, an attorney and computer consultant who has worked for several agencies of the United States government and the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Finance.

The earlier book, *Joseph Smith's United Order*, attempts to explicate the economic ideas and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at Kirtland, Missouri, and Nauvoo. Huff traces the United Order Firm's creation, financial transactions, and eventual replacement by a new business unit, a corporate trustee-in-trust that centralized the collection and distribution of Church funds. The implication is that the original structure of the united order, which was essentially a partnership, evolved into a corporate model for managing the business affairs of the early Church.

Believing that many Latter-day Saints lack a solid understanding of Joseph Smith's economic ideas and methods, Huff intends this book to correct public assumptions and delineate "a structural and operational overview" (2) of methods by which early leaders managed business dealings, obtained supplies, launched businesses, and purchased and sold land for thousands of new converts.

While the bulk of the book emphasizes facets of the united order, approximately the last third traces the origins and history of the principle of tithing. In contrast to the oft-heard view that tithing was instituted later as a substitute when members ceased to live the united order, Huff argues the opposite—that the Saints' material donations from 1830 on were actually tithes: "Large amounts of personal resources were devoted to gospel projects . . . chiefly in
the missionary and gathering process and building the Kirtland Temple. The use of funds for those activities was designated by the Lord as tithing” (293).

Another unusual argument is that Joseph’s united order was a great success in its day, not a failed experiment as is widely held in Mormon lore. Huff claims the united order was a practical strategy for solving the relevant problems of the early Church and thereby succeeded admirably.

The 1994 volume, *Brigham Young’s United Order*, gives an extensive treatment of the Utah period. Perhaps in response to the recent emergence of splinter groups in Manti, Utah, and other areas of the United States, the book is a bit defensive at the outset. Huff begins the preface by declaring himself to be an LDS member “in good standing, orthodox in all the things that matter” (vii). There follows an extensive review of the economic history of united orders in St. George, Brigham City, Orderville, and Salt Lake City, Utah. In contrast to Arrington’s classic study, *Great Basin Kingdom*, Huff emphasizes the doctrinal concepts which gave rise to the united order. Drawing primarily on the *Journal of Discourses*, huge sections of material now available electronically are cited with key points underlined. The result is a bulky, voluminous manuscript of well over six hundred pages broken up into sixty chapters.

Unfortunately, I suspect that most readers will be put off not only by the intimidating length of the book, but also by the wide range of subjects it addresses. These include chapters on a hodgepodge of diffuse topics that will likely confuse readers who seek a clear portrayal of the Utah-era united order. Despite its title, *Brigham Young’s United Order* also includes eleven chapters on other LDS pioneer leaders’ views on the ideal economic system for Latter-day Saints. Readers may feel they have lumbered through a gigantic maze.

Nevertheless, both books address a critical challenge facing the Church—indeed the whole world—namely, the problem of economic injustice. According to the Doctrine and Covenants, “it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin” (D&C 49:20). Such injustice is not a troubling problem only for Joseph Smith’s day or for early Utah. It is an increasingly important dilemma for the
contemporary Church as it expands into the impoverished nations of the world. One is strongly inclined, however, to take exception to certain of Huff’s historical interpretations. Perhaps the most troubling is his assertion that Brigham Young’s model for the Utah united orders focused too much on communalism and on attempts to rectify economic inequality. Thus, Huff implies that while the Prophet Joseph’s ideas were “non-communalistic” in the 1830s and ‘40s, Brother Brigham’s bordered on socialism. Huff hypothesizes several reasons for this difference. First, Brigham was a later convert to the Church, missing some of the Kirtland-era utopian proposals of Alexander Campbell, Sidney Rigdon, and “the family,” a group of believers who had all things common, in harmony with Christians described in the book of Acts. Nor was Brigham present when Joseph refuted communism and debated the socialists who visited Nauvoo.

The implication for Huff is that “this skewing of experience may account for some of the differences in doctrines taught during the two periods marked by the presidencies of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young” (Joseph Smith’s United Order, 42). Further, Huff claims, “there are indicators of a substantial loss of data and experience in the transition from the administrators of Joseph Smith’s time to the Twelve who carried on afterward. . . . There is little reason to wonder then at the doctrinal drift that seems to have occurred on matters affecting economics” (Joseph Smith’s United Order, 42; see also 22–30, 40–45).

Accusing Brigham Young of being out of touch and naive or in other ways lacking the doctrinal insights of the Prophet Joseph seems extreme. In this respect, Huff’s books are similar to the small volume by Lyndon Cook, Joseph Smith and the Law of Consecration. Both books present an extremely narrow view of Joseph Smith’s economic values, recoiling at anything which parallels the broad, egalitarian ideals of most utopians, whether socialists or otherwise. By distancing oneself from socialism so completely, one tends to overlook the comprehensiveness of God’s united order and to impose modern political categories on the analysis of the temporal teachings of pioneer prophets. It would be more constructive to portray what the united order is in its fullness, rather than to primarily point out what it is not.
Mormonism's nineteenth-century leaders as well as those of recent decades have clearly understood the essential contrasts between state-run communism and gospel teachings about temporal matters. The Brethren have always been in general harmony with the big picture of the united order—its values and its purposes and methods for creating jobs, lifting the group, avoiding materialism, benefiting the poor, and dignifying one's labors. To discard such a comprehensive system in favor of a narrow form of individual capitalism and imply it to be God's complete will ignores themes from that stretch from Gordon B. Hinckley and Ezra Taft Benson back to the Zion of Enoch.

NOTES


2For a more balanced discussion of both the law of consecration and the united orders, see Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation among the Mormons (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

Reviewed by Lynn D. Wardle, Professor of Law, J. Reuben Clark Law School, Brigham Young University.

*Differing Visions* is a collection of biographical and analytical essays about dissenters from various branches of Mormonism and about the phenomenon of dissent in Latter-day Saint religious history. The core of the book consists of seventeen biographical chapters by different authors succinctly describing the experiences of seventeen dissenters from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), as well as a leading contemporary dissenter from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). The foreword by Leonard Arrington and the introduction by Roger Launius and Linda Thatcher paint with broader brushes—analyzing Mormon dissent as a general social phenomenon occurring in a particular religious context.

Technically, the book is well done. The biographical chapters are basically arranged in chronological order and, for the most part, are capably written and edited. The chapters are adequately researched—some are very well researched. An effort to be balanced and fair to the individual subjects is evident, though some chapters seem more sympathetic to the subjects than scholarly. Generally, however, the tone is respectful and professional.

**Summary of Contents**

Ronald Romig begins with the tale of David Whitmer. What stands out in this account is Whitmer’s apparent resentment of what he perceived to be the Prophet Joseph Smith’s ambition when the grand scope of the Restoration began to be realized. As the restored Church grew much larger than many first imagined, Whitmer apparently feared losing control of, or his prominent position in, a good, small thing.

The focus of Kenneth Winn’s chapter is summarized in the title: “Such Republicanism as This: John Corrill’s Rejection of Prophetic Rule.” Elected a Missouri legislator by the Saints, Corrill apparently
cherished the checks and balances of the political government and thought that the Church's government needed such a system. He resented the alleged abuse of Mormon dissenters by zealots such as the Danites and so opposed the communal principles of the law of consecration that he became a bitter Missouri opponent of the Prophet and wrote a vindictive "history" of the Church.

Richard Howard chronicles the poignant odyssey of William McLellin in one of the better chronological partial histories in the volume. A talented if erratic leader, McLellin moved through a variety of alternative Mormon groups until "he had become a crank" (97) and died alienated from all with whom he had tried to associate.¹

Richard Saunders's chapter on Francis Gladden Bishop describes how a charismatic evangelical convert's "allegiance to the Restored Gospel was crowded aside by the importance of his personal experiences with divinity" (104). What resulted was a surprisingly large "number of failed followings Bishop began" (111) before he immigrated to Utah and to the main body of the LDS Church just months before his death.

In "James Colin Brewster: The Boy Prophet Who Challenged Mormon Authority," Dan Vogel outlines the fascinating religious career of "perhaps the most prolific" of the "would-be prophets to leave the Mormon fold during Joseph Smith, Jr.'s, lifetime" (120). Brewster was only ten when he reported receiving revelations in 1836. At age eleven, he proposed to the Kirtland High Council "a plan for the better organization of the Church in temporal affairs," which he said an angel had delivered to him (121). At least five years later, after publishing a number of the books of Esdras (an ancient Israelite prophet whose writings Brewster claimed to receive in vision), Brewster was excommunicated. For the next eighteen years, Brewster preached and published his millennialistic revelations, led followers from Missouri to New Mexico, and possibly reached California before he became lost to history. Vogel attributes Brewster's "initial success" to Joseph "Smith's ultimate failure to satisfy the yearnings of some of the early Mormon converts for adequate millenarian leadership" (134).

William B. Smith, the Prophet's brother, is described by Paul Edwards as a man who was "always vocal, sometimes belligerent," frequently in "confrontation against existing authority" (140) and
who saw himself as part of a “Smith family . . . royalty” (141). As an Apostle and “Patriarch to the whole church” (144), William’s refusal to subordinate his roles to the leadership of the Quorum of Twelve threatened Church unity and led to his excommunication. His career as a church leader thereafter foundered in several other branches of Mormonism.

Alpheus Cutler participated in laying the foundation for the Far West Temple and served on the Nauvoo High Council. Danny Jorgensen identifies Cutler’s distraction as an apparent emphasis on a mystical “Lamanism” and his refusal to gather to Salt Lake with the main body of Latter-day Saints (164-65). Jorgensen briefly recounts the futile efforts of Brigham Young to keep Cutler and his followers in the Church.

One of the most analytical essays is Guy Bishop’s chapter on Stephen Post, which traces the spiritualism, millennialism, and opposition to polygamy that attracted Post to Rigdonism. After the death of Joseph Smith, Post investigated a number of new orders of Mormonism and became convinced that Sidney Rigdon was the “true shepherd” (187). Post succeeded Rigdon in 1876 as the leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion, a group that fell apart upon Post’s death.

Richard Holzapfel’s well-written chapter, “The Flight of the Doves from Utah Mormonism to California Morrisitism: The Saga of James and George Dove,” describes a group of English converts caught up in the Mormon Reformation of the 1850s who followed Joseph Morris, another British convert, in establishing a significant schismatic organization in South Weber, Utah. During a violent confrontation with lawmen resulting from the Morrisites’ forcible detention of dissenters from their own group, Joseph Morris was killed. The Morrisites scattered throughout the West, and eventually the Doves succeeded Morris as leaders of the movement, organizing the Church of the Firstborn in San Francisco in 1865. They preached throughout the western states, frequently in Utah, but by 1910 their church disintegrated.

Another Utah schismatic movement is traced in John McCormick and J. R. Sillito’s essay on Henry W. Lawrence. An orthodox Utah Mormon, Church leader, successful businessman, respected politician, and polygamist, Lawrence joined the dissenting “Godbeites” in
1869. Rankled by Brigham Young’s vision of a united Zion, the temporal activities of the Church, and what he saw as a “lack of freedom of expression” (223), Lawrence spent thirty years in anti-Mormon politics. This very interesting chapter presents Lawrence as an idealist committed to a particular brand of late-nineteenth-century philosophy (libertarian egalitarianism) that led him out of the LDS Church and into a succession of political associations, including the Liberal party, the Populist party, and the Socialist party. How a successful entrepreneur of that era who rejected communitarian cooperative principles could advocate such proletarian politics is a curiosity that deserves further exploration.

Kenneth Godfrey suggests that the key to Frank J. Cannon’s dissent was psycho-familial. For this son of George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency, “seeking parental approval became almost an obsession. . . . He was a highly emotional, often insecure man who seemed to never have believed that he could live up to his father’s expectations” and who “seemed always in the shadow of his apostle brother Abraham H. Cannon” (243). Although he could apply his talents very effectively to building and defending the Church—for instance, he allegedly ghostwrote *The History of Joseph Smith the Prophet* for his father, and he successfully assisted in lobbying for Utah statehood—his weaknesses for alcohol, sexual immorality, and positions of honor plagued him throughout his life. He was one of Utah’s first two senators, but after he was denied reelection, Cannon turned his intense anger against the Church and its leaders. He eventually moved to Denver and wrote numerous anti-Mormon books and articles until his death in 1933.

Martha Sonntag Bradley examines the life of Joseph W. Musser, a second-generation Mormon polygamist who came of age when the LDS Church was in the process of abandoning plural marriage. Musser claimed that, several years after the Manifesto, Lorenzo Snow selected him to take more wives and “help keep the law of Celestial marriage alive among the Saints” (265) and that “in 1915 an unnamed apostle conferred upon him the ‘sealing power of Elijah, with instructions to see that plural marriage shall not die out’” (266). Musser became a leader in the fundamentalist movement and appointed his physician and fellow fundamentalist, Rulon Allred, to succeed him, which caused his followers to split into two rival factions.
Newell Bringhurst describes Fawn McKay Brodie as an intellectual who felt liberated from the constraints of faith and culture that defined the Mormon society in which she grew up. When she went to the University of Chicago, "the confining aspects of the Mormon religion dropped off within a few weeks. . . . The sense of liberation I had at the University . . . was enormously exhilarating. I felt very quickly that I could never go back to the old life, and I never did." (283). However, the Church apparently was indispensable to Brodie's identity; for the rest of her career, she constantly defined herself against or in contrast to Mormonism and thrived on criticizing Church programs, leaders, and theology.

Jessie Embry contributes an exacting short study of Maurine Whipple, whose career resembles Brodie's in many ways. Both were members of what has been called "Mormondom's lost generation" of intellectual and literary figures. In their fledgling years of higher education, both Brodie and Whipple experienced, or at least expressed, the exhilarating sensation of self-perceived intellectual superiority. When Whipple left St. George to attend the University of Utah, she (like Brodie) was dazzled by the glamour of a non-Mormon lifestyle: "They seemed to have 'more money, and all pledged the best sororities.' The boys also had better manners" (303–4). Indeed, Whipple recalled that "the high point of my college career [was] the night of my gentile date" (304). Whipple was a talented writer whose book about Mormon polygamy, The Giant Joshua, won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Prize in 1938, although the book was unpopular in Utah because it focused on some negative aspects of polygamist family life. Whipple forever complained about slights, perceived injuries, lack of appreciation, and financial stress. In fact, her Church-related comments seem not so much those of a dissenter-on-principle but of a chronic complainer, perfectionist, and pessimist. Yet Whipple, like Brodie, could not sever her ties to the LDS community of faith. Unlike Brodie, however, Whipple reportedly was never even disfellowshipped, and she acknowledged that "we come back because Zion is worth occasional discomfort. We come back because Zion is the most unpredictable, exciting, satisfying place in the world to live" (315).

Readers who might be unfamiliar with trends in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints will be interested
in William Russell’s enlightening chapter on “Richard Price: Leading Publicist of the Reorganized Church’s Schismatics.” Price is described as the most effective leader of a group of fundamentalist dissidents who believe that since 1958, RLDS leadership has been compromising its beliefs in exchange for liberal Protestant theology and yearning for Protestant acceptance. The Reorganized Church moved very cautiously against the dissidents, but eventually Richard Price was formally expelled. He “continues to enunciate his beliefs and to serve as the chief spokesperson for the fundamentalist cause” (337).

Jerald and Sandra Tanner, prolific anti-Mormon publishers, were both raised in LDS families, and both converted to Protestantism. Laurence Foster describes the Tanners as “career apostates” (355) rather than dissidents, and the label makes sense. He candidly notes some of the inconsistency of principle in the Tanners’ work: “They always assume the worst possible motives in assessing the actions of Mormon leaders” (350), they take an “ends-justifies-means approach” (351) to criticizing LDS Church leaders and actions, and they violate the same principles they criticize Mormon leaders for having violated. Furthermore, “the techniques by which their materials have been acquired appear to leave much to be desired, ethically speaking” (352). Nevertheless, Foster summarily asserts that through their one-sided attacks on Mormonism, the Tanners have “sometimes played a positive role” in challenging Mormons to study their history and live up to their ideals (358).

The final chapter by Alice Allred Pottmyer is about Sonia Johnson, the ERA battle, and Johnson’s eventual excommunication. This rendering of the Johnson story gives the reader very little new information. Perhaps because the incidents are so recent, the heavy slant of this journalistic chapter is very apparent.

Analysis

The foreword and introduction of Differing Visions present an analysis of dissent in Mormon history. In his brief foreword, Leonard Arrington observes that dissent has been a “neglected phase of the [Mormon] church’s history” (ix), and he commends the recovery of “little-known information about the lives of the
people profiled” (x). He identifies several common themes reflected in the historical biographies, including the rich variety of potential interpretations of the work of Joseph Smith, the motivation of conscience rather than self-service that generally characterized the dissent of the individuals studied, and the inability of the dissenters to “ever fully reject the [Latter-day Saint] movement once having been associated with it” (xi). Arrington’s short overview would have nicely introduced the seventeen biographical chapters of the book. However, it is separated from the historical text by the editors’ long introduction.

Roger Launius and Linda Thatcher’s introduction, “Mormonism and the Dynamics of Dissent,” attempts to connect Mormon dissenters to the great dissenters of Christian history. Thus, the story of Anne Hutchinson’s early-American religious dissent is compared with the phenomenon of Mormon dissent. The editors’ desire to “offer an honest assessment . . . about the dissenting tendency in Mormonism” (15) is identified as the goal of the book. Joseph Smith, they claim, started his career as a religious dissenter, “bound to torment society,” and they suggest that “the irony of the tormentor becoming the tormented, within Mormonism, is too rich to be ignored” (4)—one of several debatable, but undeveloped, observations in this chapter.

The editors note that more than a hundred known “schismatic movements have emerged from [Mormonism] since 1830” (6), and they sympathize with the “honest searchers for truth” who “found themselves” outside the acceptable bounds of the Church (7)—though the biographical chapters repeatedly describe deliberate decisions and intentional choices, not the mere happenstance of people who woke up one morning and “found themselves” outside the fold. The editors assert that fear of “authoritarianism” and “concern over what they thought was the development of a tyranny in the church” have been alienating concerns of many dissenters (8-9), and they see most Mormon dissenters as highly principled individuals. On the other hand, they claim the Mormon community has a low tolerance of dissent and a penchant for character assassination of those who do not conform. The introduction suggests that dissent is inherently neutral and that it has made positive contributions to Mormonism.
The identification of modern Mormonism with Brigham Young's interpretation of Joseph Smith's work, rather than that of William Smith or any other nineteenth-century dissenter, is compared to the identification of modern Christianity with Paul's interpretation of Jesus' teachings rather than the Gnostics’. "Either side could have won," and it was only "over the years" that the currently orthodox position prevailed (16). While much of this book is thoughtfully written, I was mildly disappointed with the introduction. It seemed to me to evade hard questions too often and to settle for giving standard, simplistic apologies for dissent.

Although the introduction contains some broad reflections that deserve full (and fuller) consideration, I thought it read much better the second time—after I had read the main biographical chapters. It should serve as a concluding chapter rather than an introduction. Moreover, it sets a tone that is somewhat disjunctive from, rather than conjunctive with, what follows: It is general and analytical while the chapters that follow are specific and descriptive. It emphasizes psychological nonfault assessment, while some of the chapters lay bare some personal flaws and tragic decisions obviously not unrelated to the paths of dissent.

The biographical chapters suggest that a focal issue for many dissenters was *power*. Some apparently had felt (or witnessed) the sting of abuse of power in their lives, and their fears about the potential for abuse of power led them to fight against "the kingdom of God com[ing] with power" (Mark 9:1). In many cases, the dissenters had other grievances. Often there were personality conflicts with Church leaders, or there had been some mistake committed by a person holding Church office, or the dissenter was aware of some hardship caused by Church policies or programs. There was legitimate cause for some dissatisfaction and frustration. Such is life among mortal human beings. Forgiveness and patience would seem to have been the appropriate remedies in most cases. But the wounds festered, the injuries were harbored, immediate justice was expected, and things that matter most were sacrificed for things that, in the long run, matter least.

It is a very serious thing to our Father in Heaven to "offend one of these little ones which believe in me" and cause them to leave the kingdom wherein salvation is to be found (Matthew 18:6).
The diligent efforts of Brigham Young and others to keep William Smith and Alpheus Cutler in the Church are examples of the kind of extra effort that can be made to reach out and bring back the dissenters, to strengthen, support, and bear with them.

Curiously, polygamy did not figure as a more significant cause of dissent. Polygamy appears to have been a focal point for many dissenters’ grievances—a rallying point upon which many could find common ground to criticize or persecute the Church or justify leaving (and persuade others to leave). Seldom, however, does the practice of polygamy appear to have been the motivating cause for dissenters to leave the Church; it seems to have been an excuse or last-straw occasion for leaving, rather than the underlying reason for doing so.

Regrettably, some chapters are marred by literary “drive-by shootings,” taking gratuitous passing shots at Joseph Smith, other LDS prophets, LDS Church policies, and Church structure. These detracted from the scholarly quality of the book, but overall the historical chapters achieve a fair level of balance.

The editors and several of the authors make an effort to show that dissenters have “built” the kingdom and contributed to the improvement of Zion. But there are two problems with those generic claims. First, specific examples are not usually identified or documented. Second, even where it is demonstrated that dissenters advocated a change that was later adopted as Church policy, proof of causation is lacking. Mere association is not necessarily causation. It could be argued at least as plausibly that criticism of a Church policy by impatient critics actually impedes the improvement of Zion. Untimely reform can confuse, offend, or alienate many precious sons and daughters of God; unduly enhance the stature of some misguided, self-vaulting agitator; or mislead members about the process by which revelation comes (comparing it to pressure politics) or the persons through whom it comes. Certainly, if a high degree of unity in the Church is necessary before sensitive kingdom-building revelation can be received, criticism and dissent can hardly be said to “contribute” positively to the revelation and establishment of Zion.

Some of the harder questions about dissent that might be asked are: How does a group of disciples become “of one heart and one
mind" (Moses 7:18, A of F 10)? In a world that prizes individual liberty, especially the radical individualism of America at the end of the twentieth century, how can any group of people realistically aspire to “come in the unity of the faith” (Eph. 4:13), to “be one” (John 17:11, 21), that they may be “of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32), “perfectly joined together” (1 Cor. 1:10), of “one spirit, with one mind striving together” and “of one accord” (Philip. 1:27, 2:2)? What is the relationship of dissent to apostasy? How do those two concepts/activities differ? When the Savior and his Apostles foretold latter-day apostasy (Matt. 24:4-5, 10-13, 23-24; 2 Thes. 2:1-11; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 2 Pet. 2:1-22; Rev. 13:6-7), did they refer to some activities of dissenters? What do the scriptures say and suggest about dissent? How should apprentice disciples of the Lord respond to dissenters in the Church? How are Mosiah 26 and Doctrine and Covenants 42 relevant to contemporary LDS dissent?

From the parable of the sower (Luke 8:5-15), we know there will be people who fall away—there always have been and will be dying leaves on the green branch. The parable teaches that there is a real adversary who “taketh away the word” from some, that others “have no root . . . and in time of temptation fall away,” and others “are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life.” There are a multitude of ways in which spiritual seeds can wither in an individual’s life—as the seventeen biographical chapters of Differing Visions illustrate.

Perhaps the main obstacle to united discipleship and the main cause of dissent are contained in one word—submission. King Benjamin said that the follower of Christ must become “as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father” (Mosiah 3:19). In our day, teaching the importance of submission may seem utterly foolish to a generation that celebrates empowerment; self-made, independent adults are not attracted to the counsel to become like a little child, and a fatherless generation (separated socially if not physically from their fathers) weaned on antipatriarchal ideology may not relate to the counsel to submit “as a child doth submit to his father.” The part of King Benjamin’s testimony that causes me to tremble most is “willing to submit to all things which the Lord
seeth fit to inflict upon him." The word "inflict" suggests suffering and pain. King Benjamin seems to be saying that suffering and enduring real pain are unavoidable as we struggle to submit to all that the Lord will inflict upon his disciples. Many will balk and some will turn away when that painful process of refinement begins. Is not the trial of submission the main wellspring of dissent?

So the question remains: how is a growing, dynamic, worldwide Church to develop the unity necessary to be worthy of revelation from, the advent of, and personal association with Jesus Christ, the Creator, Savior, and Redeemer of the world? What is the role of dissent in that unity-creating process? Is dissent a cleansing process? Is it a self-selecting-departure-to-make-the-remainder-more-united process? Or is dissent a "cry for help" from those who need an extra measure of patience, tolerance, love, and encouragement, without whose return to the fold the flock will not be "one," worthy of the acceptance of the Shepherd, who has atoned for us all? I hope that the study and discussion begun in *Different Visions* will continue until these troubling questions have been fully and appropriately considered.

NOTE

Brief Notices


Like a wagon-train scout of the American West, H. Donl Peterson has gone before us and done much of the work in tracing the history of the Book of Abraham. In The Story of the Book of Abraham, he has provided a guidebook for those who follow. Writing for both the first-time traveler and the seasoned veteran, Peterson gives the general lay of the land as well as indicates points of departure for new territory.

With an open and candid style, he includes background information on ancient Near Eastern culture, copious notes, and precise details of his research. He also adds many of his personal insights, opinions, questions, and stories about the Book of Abraham. The Story of the Book of Abraham reads like a personal notebook that not only allows us to learn what the explorer has learned, but also lets us see the man behind the work. H. Donl Peterson’s love of the gospel, the scriptures, and his research area can be felt throughout the book.

At times the details may be a bit overwhelming for the general reader, and the background might seem elementary to those acquainted with the field. But these elements work together to produce a book for everyone. The overall presentation is balanced and engaging. Peterson creates a work that explains past discoveries and points the way for further exploration.

—David K. Geilman

Plain and Precious Truths Restored: The Doctrinal and Historical Significance of the Joseph Smith Translation, edited by Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews (Bookcraft, 1995)

In this collection of papers presented at the 1995 BYU Symposium, “As Translated Correctly,” participants emphasize the value of the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) and its relationship to the standard works. Much of this information will be new to most readers.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks warns against the “spiritual dangers of ignoring or neglecting the prophetic teachings” in the JST and advocates its use in personal scripture study, Church teaching, and scholarship (4).

Larry E. Dahl shows that 50 percent of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants came as a direct result of the Bible translation. This relationship is displayed in a detailed chronology.

Thomas E. Sherry contrasts the LDS and RLDS views of the JST. While the RLDS Church has moved
away from foundational beliefs regarding the JST, the LDS Church has become progressively more committed to them. Many early LDS Church members saw the Inspired Version as a divinely guided, yet unauthorized, publication, mainly because of its incompleteness. However, since the 1950s, scholars, primarily Robert J. Matthews, have compared the published Inspired Version with the manuscripts and verified its integrity. Furthermore, the LDS edition of the Bible—the standard Bible of the Church—includes JST references and excerpts.

Robert J. Matthews discusses the eternal worth of the JST as well as its role in the Restoration. He answers questions regarding the use, completion, and translation of the JST. Matthews asserts that a knowledge of the JST will increase the perception “of the nature of scripture, of the nature of revelation, and of the value of reading scripture to obtain revelation from God” (38).

—Michelyn Lyster

*Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of “Creation Out of Nothing” in Early Christian Thought*, by Gerhard May (T & T Clark, 1994)

The original German text of this book appeared in 1978 with the title *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts: Die Entstehung der Lehre von der creatio ex nihilo*. Only minor changes occur in the English text. The thesis focuses on the origin and roots of the doctrine of creation “out of nothing.” However, Gerhard May also emphasizes the interplay between ideas about creation and other facets of theology. The key players in the debates are philosophers, theologians, and clerics.

In the second century A.D., many Christian doctrines were unsettled. Even God’s omnipotence and the question of whether he existed alone or in company with other gods were debated. Was the creator the supreme God or a lesser god? Would an omnipotent god create evil? Similar debates concerned the nature of creation. Are man and the cosmos evil or good? Could matter be eternal without itself possessing godhood? If matter is eternal, isn’t God merely an artist? Each of these issues impacted on the doctrine of creation.

Christian Gnostics, under the leadership of Basilides, advanced the concept of creation out of nothing in a form that closely resembled the doctrine later adopted by the mainline church. Gnostic ideas about creation, however, contained other elements that were offensive to a majority of church leaders. Shortly before A.D. 200, an orthodox approach to creatio ex nihilo was initiated by Theophilus of Antioch and was expanded upon by Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus refuted gnostic philosophy with clear, simple statements about God and His powers but joined Theophilus and the Gnostics to proclaim that God created earth and the cosmos out of nothing. With the blessing of orthodoxy, the doctrine spread quickly throughout the church.
Although Gerhard May's style is scholarly, any interested reader can gain much from this volume. The topic remains central to LDS studies of the doctrinal changes that occurred in early Christianity.

—R. Grant Athay

Turning Hearts: Short Stories on Family Life, edited by Orson Scott Card and David Dollahite (Bookcraft, 1994)

This collection of stories written by LDS authors provides readers with ideas about how healthy families function and how parents and children can resolve problems in positive ways to strengthen individuals, heal schisms, and bind families together. It is also a collection of stories about adults acting in adult roles.

These are in many ways faith-promoting stories. The protagonists come away with new insights about their lives: parents and children face intergenerational misunderstandings; widowed adults find a second opportunity to love; fathers and sons as well as mothers and daughters are forced to examine their relationships; a young African American convert struggles to find her place both at church and within her family.

Instead of ending in divorce court, sexual infidelity, family dissolution, or abandonment, these stories end with healing, repaired misunderstandings, and new ways to interpret difficult family situations. They offer patterns for living: fulfilling obligations to aging parents, repairing wounds from childhood, teaching teenagers to keep the Sabbath, and dealing with the struggles of being overworked young mothers and fathers.

Still, these heroes are not larger than life: a bishop begins with arrogance in his new calling; a father is, at least initially, full of self-pity and quick to anger; a girl is a self-absorbed teenager. These are authentic stories. The events, the situations, the people—while sometimes a little contrived or one-dimensional—for the most part ring true. By turning the hearts of readers, these stories give hope for family life.

—Stefinee Pinnegar
Reno-Bentine Site

I'd read accounts of Custer—
How he had courage
But no other noticeable virtues.
It made a moral tale—
A proper comeuppance
For white man's arrogance.

And I traced the route he took—
As close as blacktop would allow
From Fort Abraham Lincoln in Dakota—
On his punitive expedition
To make the Black Hills safe
For proper gold seekers.

I came to the hills above
The Little Bighorn before daylight
On a clear summer morning.
And passed the scattered stones
That mark where Armstrong—
As George was called by family—
And his younger brother Tom—
A hero in his own right,
With two Medals of Honor—
And the others went down—
Outnumbered, outgunned,
And outgeneraled, too—
Shot, and then butchered
By squaws' skinning knives.

On the hill beyond, Reno and Bentine,
With other companies of the Seventh,
Waited that hot June afternoon.
They saw dust and heard shots and knew
They were too late and too few
To mount a saving charge.
And fearing for their own hair
Dug rifle pits around the hilltop
And waited for the dark.

The dark was safe because
Indians who died in the dark,
Went to a dark hunting ground—
Or so it was said, but you never knew,
So the night was long.
I too waited for sunup—looking down
On Little Bighorn Coulee.
The willows along the winding creek
The only green against the pale grass.

There are washes and draws
Leading up from the river—
A thousand places of concealment
Just out of rifle range—
And the memory of shots and dust
And distant yells yesterday afternoon.

And five thousand Sioux and Crow
And Cheyenne led by Sitting Bull,
Crazy Horse, and Gaul waiting
For just the right moment, and
Trapdoor Springfields reload slow.
The light came late.

It’s a fearsome place to be
Alone at summer dawn.

—John Sterling Harris

This poem is selected from Second Crop, a book of John Sterling Harris's poetry published by BYU Studies.
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