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Spirits in Zion: Dissenting Acts of Spirit Communication as Sources of Authority in
Contemporary Mormonism

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to both my family and the various Saints of the Mormon Restoration. In different ways, they both taught me the power of belief.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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From Joseph Smith's earliest interactions with spiritual beings, Mormonism established a framework for communication with spirits. This often manifests in encounters with the spirits of deceased ancestors or loved ones, experiences that often lead to a feeling of comfort or renewed faith in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, spirits, both literal and metaphorical, are also sources of disruption that have the potential to lead individuals into apostasy. Within Mormonism, communication with spirits is largely accepted, as long as it does not lead to alternative claims to authority apart from the institution. As such, the boundary between benign spirit communication and apostasy is based on the question of authority and who holds access to the power of God. This dissertation uses five cases studies of Mormon groups who navigate the established boundaries of spirit communication in Mormonism—The Church of Zion (Godbeite), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, LDS women seeking spiritual authority through alternative practices, Christ's Church (Peterson group), and the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days (TLC).

These groups, and the spirits they interact with, complicate Mormon history and lead to a reevaluation of what scholars mean when they write about “Mormonism.”

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Introduction:

Mormon Spirits and the Challenge of Authority

On a warm morning in April 2017, about 200 people gathered from across the United States and Canada to participate in Sunstone Short Creek, a regional meeting of the Sunstone Education Foundation that seeks to bring a range of Mormon groups together for an afternoon of dialogue, debate, and historical inquiry. The gathering met in the old Sunday School building of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS), a Mormon fundamentalist group led by Warren Jeffs, a prophet currently serving a life sentence at the Louis C. Powledge Unit in Palestine, TX for aggravated sexual assault. Although the building is no longer operated by the FLDS, and is actively used by members of the Timpson group, a small fundamentalist group on the northern Arizona border, for their Sunday meetings, an image of FLDS prophet LeRoy Johnson continues to hang near the pulpit. On this particular day, members of a variety of Mormon groups including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Apostolic United Brethren, Centennial Park, Timpson group, Christ's Church, Blackmore group, and former members of the FLDS entered the building to participate in an event unlike any other. Each of these groups identify as Mormon.

The groups that entered the building claim divine origin and, to some extent, the only true priesthood. The priesthood is synonymous with the power of God and grants authority to act on behalf of the divine for the benefit of human beings. For many of these groups, their claims are supported by a historical narrative that traces their priesthood lineage to Joseph Smith's restoration of the priesthood. However, other narratives are

more complicated because they circumvent historical lineage through the disruptive presence of gods and spirits. One such group is the Latter Day Church of Christ (Kingston group), a group based in Davis County, UT known for its focus on the United Order, a consecration program in the early days of Mormonism.

On this particular day in April, members of the Kingston group entered the building to participate in the event and lead a session on the history of fundamentalism. The men wore dress shirts and slacks and the women wore brightly colored blouses, statement necklaces, and soft curls. According to members of this group, they are the true church on earth and hold sole access to God's priesthood power. As I briefly spoke with one of their leaders, I asked about the history of the group and whether they trace their lineage to the Council of Friends, an organization of Mormon leaders that began in the 1930s and serves as the foundation for many Mormon fundamentalist claims to authority. He shook his head and explained the story of Charles W. Kingston, a faithful LDS man who grew concerned about perceived apostasy in the LDS Church after the formal end to new plural marriages.¹ Although he was familiar with members of the Council of Friends, it was a vision that altered the trajectory of his life. During his prayers, he was met by Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, similar to Joseph Smith's experience in the Sacred Grove. The heavenly beings visited him to confirm that the LDS Church was in apostasy,

¹ While the LDS Church marks 1890 Manifesto as the end to plural marriages, the date is contested because of subsequent memos ending the practice. The Second Manifesto in 1904 marked the beginning of excommunications because of the practice. For many within fundamentalism, this date marks the true end.

and a new lineage of authority was necessary to preserve the true principles of the Church.

Following in the footsteps of his father, Charles Kingston's son Elden Kingston, began receiving revelations. In 1935, through revelation, he determined that the early Mormon consecration program, the United Order, was necessary for the contemporary Church. Although Eldon claimed that he was called as a successor to leadership in the Mormon fundamentalist movement, his calling was only officially confirmed when he was visited by divine messengers, resurrected beings who conferred authority to Kingston and affirmed that a new dispensation had begun. Through the interaction with the spirits that visited Elden Kingston a new Mormon group was formed. The Latter Day Church of Christ and Davis County Cooperative Society are the legacy of Eldon's interaction with spirits that visited him to confer the authority of God. Today, this group is among the most financially profitable Mormon organizations in Utah.²

The formation of this new group was based on the Mormon idea of priesthood, a term that is used to denote both the power of God and the bodies that are ordained to act on behalf of this power. This power operates through various priesthood keys, the permissions and stewardships to exercise the power of God, that worthy men preside over

² See Nate Carlisle, "Utah defendants in alleged Kingston Group fraud were tipped off to 2016 federal raid, paid bribes, were on way to Turkey, prosecutors say." *The Salt Lake Tribune*, August 28, 2018. Accessed January 23, 2019. <https://www.sltrib.com/news/polygamy/2018/08/28/defendants-alleged/>. Beginning in August 2018, Utah residents became aware of the financial success of the Kingston group when their organization made headlines for fraud allegations. Two Kingston brothers, and sons of the current prophet, own Washakie Renewable Energy (WRE), a producer of biofuel. A federal judge connected the brothers and their organization to a \$511 million fraud scheme.

and employ. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), the apostles hold these keys, with the President of the Church in the position to operate them.

Contemporarily, the LDS Church affirms that the keys were passed in an unbroken chain from Joseph Smith to the current President of the LDS Church, Russell M. Nelson.

For the LDS Church, Eldon Kingston's interaction with divine messengers was not the primary concern. Heavenly messengers and divine witnessed are part of Mormon history and the lived experience of Mormons. The concern, for LDS leadership, was that the messengers carry authority contrary to the dominant LDS narrative of priesthood and bestowed this authority on a man outside of the LDS hierarchy. The challenge with this concern is that Mormonism began with a resurrected being conferring authority to a young man seeking spiritual insight. Joseph Smith's interaction with resurrected beings created a precedent for interaction with divine messengers and an avenue for young men to repeat this sacred experience.

A Precedent for Spirits

Spirits are disruptive forces that altar history and historical narratives. Their presence, and their interlocutors, offer divergent ways to tell similar stories, seek justice, and give voice to communities that are marginalized. Accounts of modern spirit communication frequently begin with the Fox sisters, who first encountered spirits in Hydesville, New York in 1848. While sleeping in their family's home, the sisters began to hear raps and knocks during the night. These events continued until the youngest daughter, Leah, snapped her fingers and waited until the disembodied knocks repeated her snaps. Not only did the knocks repeat the sounds she created, they also began to

provide a response to questions about the young girls' lives. Through continued communication with the knocks and raps, the family concluded that the sounds came from Mr. Splitfoot, the spirit of a man who died in the house previous to the Fox family's arrival. As accounts of the young girl's interactions with the spirit begun to circulate, the girls garnered the attention of both neighbors and the press. According to religious studies scholar John B. Buescher, the appearance of a spirit in upstate New York was not necessarily novel for this time, but important nonetheless because it constituted a mutual communication between the living and the dead; within the interactions between the Fox sisters and Mr. Splitfoot, the girls participated in an "intimate conversation between heaven and earth."³ For the young girls, and those who came to believe in their experience, spirits were not only present, but willing to speak.

Spirits, however, haunted the American religious landscape long before the incident in Hydesville; the history of American religion abounds with spirit communication and the haunting presence of the dead. Members of Ann Lee's Shaker movement and early Quakers tell the story of individuals visited by the deceased, who brought messages of comfort and spiritual insight.⁴ Looking to the context within which American spiritualism emerged, historian Ann Braude argues, "Spiritualism was in the air. It was available when it was needed, answering the religious needs of many who did

³ John B. Buescher, Buescher, *The Remarkable Life of John Murray Spear: Agitator for the Spirit Land* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 63.

⁴ Catherine L. Albanese, "Communion of Spirits," in *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*. (Yale University Press, 2007)

not contribute to it as a movement.”⁵ Spiritualism offered a way to understand and interact with the world based on a system of practices that brought the dead into contact with the living.

In an article published on the relationship between Spiritualism and early Mormonism, Michael W. Homer writes that, although some Mormons were interested in Spiritualist practices and many Spiritualists viewed Mormon visions as born from Spiritualist manifestations, the similarities between these movements were “superficial.”⁶ Much of his argument centers on the objections to Spiritualism from Church leadership and reified distinctions between the Utah Church and various Mormon movements that emerged out of dissatisfaction with Brigham Young’s leadership. Embedded within this critique is the question of one’s own identification and the many religious identities that people inhabit. This includes, but is not limited to, members of Mormon movements that advocated for spiritualism, the identified Spiritualists who demonstrated interest in Joseph Smith’s movement, and the many members of the Church who believed that Mormon doctrine created a precedent for the possibility of communication with spirits. The complexity of Mormon interactions with Spiritualism demonstrates a religious framework in which the differences are more complex than a simple categorization. At

⁵ Ann, Braude. *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon University Press, 1989), 8.

⁶ Homer, Michael W. “Spiritualism and Mormonism: Some Thoughts on Similarities and Differences,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Spring 1994) 171-190.

the same time, the complex interactions between Mormonism and Spiritualism problematize the definition of “Mormon” and the Restoration groups that claim this title.

The history of Mormonism began twenty-eight years prior to the Fox sister’s encounter with Mr. Splitfoot. In frequent accounts of the formative years of Mormonism, the starting point is marked by a theophany, the appearance of God and Jesus Christ to Joseph Smith in a small grove on the burnt-over ground of Palmyra, New York. In these early accounts, the young Joseph Smith entered into a forest about ten miles from the Fox family home in Hydesville to pray about the truthfulness of religion and which sect of Christianity to join. In the midst of his prayer, Joseph Smith was met by a pillar of light that he described as “the brightness of the sun at noon day.”⁷ As he recounted his experience with the pillar of light, Smith recalled seeing the Lord, who announced the forgiveness of the young man’s sins and the truthfulness of the Gospel. Later accounts of this vision elaborate on the message given to Joseph in the grove. Specifically, the teaching that all churches were corrupt; for this reason, Smith was instructed to join none.

Further instruction was delivered to Smith on the night of September 22, 1823 as Smith lay in bed to petition God for the forgiveness of his sins. Unlike Joseph Smith’s previous encounter with otherworldly beings, the spirit on this night was not divine, but the specter of an indigenous man who served as a prophet and military leader while in mortality. In the 1832 telling of his story, Smith described:

“...I called again upon the Lord and he shewed unto me a heavenly vision for behold an angel of the Lord came and stood before me and it was by night and he called me by name and he said the Lord had forgiven me my

⁷ Joseph Smith. "History, circa Summer 1832," The Joseph Smith Papers. <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/1>, 3.

sins and he revealed unto me that in the Town of Manchester Ontario County N.Y. there was plates of gold upon which there was engravings which was engraven by Moroni & his fathers the servants of the living God in ancient days...”⁸

The plates, which were later translated into the Book of Mormon, recount the Mormon historical narrative of an indigenous peoples of the Americas, the Nephites, and their early interaction with the divine. Mormon, a prophet of the Nephite people, compiled the written record of these indigenous communities and buried the plates until their recovery years later by the young Joseph Smith.

In his work on early Mormon interactions with magic, D. Michael Quinn asserts that the earliest accounts of the interaction describe Smith interacting with a spirit, rather than an angel. He cites Abigail Harris, wife of Martin Harris, who wrote “They told me that the report that Joseph, jun. had found golden plates, was true... revealed to him by the spirit of one of the Saints that was on the continent, previous to its being discovered by Columbus.”⁹ Although the vision of Moroni is marked as an angelic visitation, early accounts of a spirit visting Smith are significant for their consistency with broader cultural narratives and participation in spirit communication. Framing this account as a moment of spiritualist practice offers early insight into the continual importance of the spectral in Mormon history, as well as the possibility of spirits being used as authoritative forces. Moroni, as an indigenous specter and his interactions with Joseph Smith, speaks to the

⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁹ D. Michael Quinn, *Mormonism and the Magical Worldview* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 138. Quinn notes that similar reports on the interaction between Smith and the spirit of Moroni were made by the *Palmyra Freeman* in the fall of 1827 and the *Rochester Gem*.

broader nineteenth-century context that frequently dealt with indigenous specters. Speaking to the native spirits that occupied space in this period, Renee L. Bergland writes of the indigenous specter as one that haunts both the worlds of the living and the dead as a reminder of the past that is continually buried and reimagined.¹⁰ In the case of Moroni, the narratives surrounding the indigenous are reimagined as both the redeemable descendants of the Biblical world and the fallen other.

By the nineteenth century, ghosts had already undergone significant removal in the American imagination. However, despite attempted elimination, the ghost did not disappear but was reimagined.¹¹ Despite the ghost's attempted removal through the Reformation's elimination of purgatory and the Enlightenment's attempt to remove specters entirely, the actions of the ghost persisted and created a haunted people.¹² In their explanation on the history of modernity, Peter Bust and Andrew Stott echo the importance of the continued reliance and centrality of ghosts in the construction of secularism. They write, "Even in a 'dis-enchanted' world, ghosts are still invoked when there is some uncertainty about the believability or authenticity of an event or experience

¹⁰ See Renee L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000).

¹¹ Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, and the Return of the Dead* (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2007), 15. For Davis much of this reimagining came in the form of internalization and placing the ghost into the mind of the subject.

¹² Davis' work presents a framework for Hauntology that asserts all people as haunted subjects. People are not isolated from their past, but continually reminded of it through memory and the psyche. In addition, through new technologies of television and film, the deceased and the past remain even more present and accessible. This reflects the hauntings in Victorian culture during the emergence of the telegraph, electricity, and ghosts in machines.

in the material world—hence phantom pregnancies, limbs, and phone calls, ghost-writers, ‘a ghost of a chance’, tele-visual ghosting, and so on[.]”¹³ Within this secular context, the ghost is metaphorical and illuminates modernity’s relationship to the past, history, and enchantment. That the ghost was not removed in its entirety demonstrates how linear trajectories of history fail. Rather, histories, including the history of modernity, is much more complicated and involves critical engagement with the past.

For Joseph Smith and members of the early Mormon community, the authoritative spirit of Moroni confirmed a temporal question, the corrupt churches of America. Without alternative sources of confirmation in the present, the past and other worldly beings were brought forth for consideration and allowed for resolution. Joseph Smith’s First Vision was the first of many communications with authoritative spirits on the other side of the veil, beyond the permeable boundary between life and death. During the life of Joseph Smith and the early formation of the Church, spiritual beings were the primary conduits of spiritual authority and the transmission of priesthood keys, the right to use the spiritual authority given by God on earth. This includes the spirits of John the Baptist, the Apostles Peter, James, and John, as well as Moses, Elias, and Elijah. Each of these figures reimagines the traditional Christian narratives surrounding angelic spirits and their origins to add prophetic and spiritual authority to their appearances. Within the early Mormon worldview angels were not creatures distinct from humanity, but connected through the shared experience of mortality. The angelic beings central to the Restoration

¹³ Peter Buse and Andrew Stott. *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1999), 3.

of the Gospel and the Priesthood had lived mortal lives and passed into the eternities. Rather than remain in a static space between life and death, the spirits of these deceased returned to offer spiritual power to the living.

The story of Joseph Smith's interaction with the authoritative spirits of the past presents an account of a haunted subject who participated in dialogue with apparitions and narratives from the past.¹⁴ More than simply the return of the bodily dead, the return of Moroni and early Mormon spirits demonstrated the possibility of ideas and histories returning and haunting the present as disruptive forces.¹⁵ Speaking to the nature of secular histories, historian Molly McGarry argues, "Whereas linear, secular history demands the transcendence of the past, Spiritualist practice collapsed time and refused to accept the past as over."¹⁶ Individuals practicing spirit communication, like the ghosts at their tables, disrupted the process of history by collapsing temporal and material designations. Rather than work linearly, history is punctuated by moments of

¹⁴ Joseph Smith's interaction with Moroni represents an interaction with the past that lies in a liminal space. Rather than die without the possibility of resurrection, the spirit of Marx is marked by continual return and acts as an entity that disrupts the present moment. As effective spirits, the ghost is lived with and dealt with in the present, whether the ghost is a literal apparition of a past ancestor or a specter of history. Nineteenth-century Mormonism offers an understanding of spectrality that demonstrates the intimate way that specters are accommodated.

¹⁵ In Mormonism, the idea of a history that returns and speaks is found in 2 Nephi 26:16, "For those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them out of the ground, and their speech shall be low out of the dust, and their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit; for the Lord God will give unto him power, that he may whisper concerning them, even as it were out of the ground; and their speech shall whisper out of the dust."

¹⁶ McGarry, Molly. *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 6.

remembrance and the return of the dead into the present.¹⁷ In his work on the spectral turn, critic Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock writes of the importance of these spirits, “The ghost is that which interrupts the presentness of the present, and its haunting indicates that, beneath the surface of received history, there lurks another narrative, an untold story that calls into question the veracity of the authorized version of events.”¹⁸ Embedded within the nature of the ghost is the way the ghost effects the lives of their subjects.

Benign or Apostate

From Joseph Smith’s earliest interactions with otherworldly subjects, Mormonism constructed a world where individuals receive personal revelations and communications from the spiritual world. In many instances, these moments of communication strengthen the individual testimony of the Church and its leadership. In these instances, the communication is considered non-threatening and even useful for the institution. However, an investigation of communities outside of the traditional structure of the LDS

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” trans. by Dennis Redmond *Gesammelten Schriften* 1.2 (Frankfurt, 1974). In “On the Concept of History,” Walter Benjamin illustrates punctuating moments in the history of messianic Judaism through the use of Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*. Describing the painting and the image of the angel looking toward the past and represents the historical, he writes, “The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise...” (4) Much like the image of the historical linguistically painted by Benjamin, history is punctuated by moments of remembrance and return that face the past, but are increasingly pushed into the present.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “from Introduction: The Spectral Turn,” in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, edited by María Del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 63.

Church demonstrates that spirits are also significant in the authentication of Mormon movements outside of the LDS Church, such as the Latter Day Church of Christ. Spirits, both literal and metaphorical, offer a lens to understand Mormon history as a complex phenomenon that allows for schism and disruption.

As I began my research, Mormons frequently asked about my interests. To this question, I would usually answer by explaining that I was interested in Mormons who communicate with the dead. This answer was often met with confusion, sometimes derision. To clarify, I would explain that I heard many stories of people interacting with their ancestors in the temple or other sacred spaces. In each of these interactions, the previously concerned individual would follow up with a personal account of communicating with ancestors “on the other side of the veil.”¹⁹ “Talking to the dead” and “communicating with spirits” are similar phrases, but they carry different connotations within a Mormon context. The first is viewed as strange or out of line with Church teaching, the other as an edifying source of comfort. In these instances, the line between “talking to the dead” and “communicating with spirits” falls on the question of reverence

¹⁹ In an *Ensign* article written in 1980, Neal A. Maxwell wrote, “We define the veil as the border between mortality and eternity; it is also a film of forgetting which covers the memories of earlier experiences. This forgetfulness will be lifted one day, and on that day we will see forever--rather than ‘through a glass darkly’ (1 Cor. 13:12).” (Neal A. Maxwell, “Patience” in *The Ensign of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, October 1980: 31.) The veil in Mormonism refers to both the veil in the temple and the veil of forgetfulness. In the temple, the rooms representing the earth and the Celestial Kingdom is separated by a veil, a thin and permeable fabric that Mormon pass through in order to represent their movement into the afterlife and toward exaltation. In addition, Mormon representations of God’s plan for humanity includes a veil that separates the temporal and eternal.

and the way members of the Church speak of sacred and spiritual experiences, especially as they relate to experiences in the temple.

However, the larger question surrounding communication with spirits is which spirits are speaking and what they have to say. From the first spirit interaction between Joseph Smith and the spirit of Moroni, authority was a central concern in the interaction. In Mormonism, “angelic messengers,” or spirits, can carry authority. Practically, this means that any man who holds the priesthood can receive a revelation from an angelic messenger that grants authority apart from the LDS Church. In a tradition with a centralized hierarchy and a narrative of priesthood authority that operates in a singular trajectory from Joseph Smith to the current President of the Church, interactions with spirits that grant authority are cause for concern.

I argue that the line between benign interactions with spirits and interactions that lead to apostasy, broadly defined as acting in opposition to “correct” authority, is largely based on concern over correct authority within Mormonism. Within the LDS Church, interaction with spirits of ancestors and departed loved ones is acceptable. These interactions are viewed as positive because they offer insight into the spiritual world and often strengthen testimonies of Mormonism. However, problems arise when the spirit is one that historically carried authority and returns to transfer that authority to someone outside of the established hierarchy. The primary difference between an interaction with a deceased relative and the deceased Joseph Smith is that one holds the potential to transform someone into a prophet and alter Mormon history to include a new Mormon group.

Methodology

In order to tell the story of multiple groups under the umbrella of Mormonism, I relied on an interdisciplinary and multi-sited approach that involved both ethnographic and archival sources. The most important archives for this dissertation were those connected to the churches represented in this project. This includes documents housed in the Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. The LDS Church's archive retains a policy that all sacred, private, and confidential materials remain closed to research. These guidelines are vague and leave a lot of room for interpretation. Generally, items regarding the temple, minutes from meetings of Church leaders, and legal documents involving minors are examples of documents falling under this policy. In addition, I learned that documents from excommunicated members are often restricted. Although special exemptions are permitted, this policy is enforced. This policy presented a challenge for documents dealing with Amasa Lyman, William Godbe, and members of the Church of Zion movement because documents relating to these individuals and groups are closed to research. For this reason, secondary sources were foundational for writing about dissent against Brigham Young by the Church of Zion movement.

In addition, resources available on the website for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were helpful to understand the contemporary historical narrative of the LDS Church. This includes transcripts and video recordings of General Conference, teaching manuals, and histories of early church leaders. When referencing scriptures, I chose to use the scriptures produced by the Church, which are readily available on their website.

Although the fundamentalist groups I worked with do not have a formal archive, they retain records of their history, including old teaching materials, and writings from their past leaders. When working with Christ's Church, I was given copies of all past magazines and proselyting pamphlets for reference. I had access to revelations given by Gerald W. Peterson Sr., the founding prophet, and a copy of his historical account of the group's inception. The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days (TLC) did not offer written records or historical documents from their group. Primary source material for this group was gathered through the group's website that was archived in 2015, after the organization closed down their internet presence, and proselyting materials that were given to me from other fundamentalists who were in contact with the group in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Beginning in 2015, I spent time with Mormons. This included Mormon meetinghouses, Institutes of Religion, General Conference meetings, and homes of church members in California, Utah, and Nevada. During the time spent with the Mormon groups represented in this research, I participated in Church meetings and activities and took notes in the spaces of my involvement. I recorded and transcribed 20 formal interviews and countless conversations and correspondences. In almost all instances, pseudonyms are used and identifying information is omitted. Exceptions were the names of LDS General Authorities and Church leaders and previously published names from secondary literature for the Chapter on the TLC. In each environment, I was welcomed by the community as a known outsider interested in the faith of members. Although I spoke with some individuals in leadership positions, most of my interactions

and interviews were with members of their respective communities. All communities were informed about my research and understood my position as a researcher, who was writing a dissertation on Mormon practices of spirit communication and authority. In many instances, my lack of membership in the Church became a point of interest, with many wondering why a Roman Catholic was interested in Mormonism, and how research on the Restoration did not end in conversion.

Although I am an outsider to Mormonism, my position in the field is not without bias. Much of my research was informed by my work at the Sunstone Education Foundation and activism in organizations that work with members or former members of fundamentalist groups that seek aid and removal from their community for various reasons. One of the mottos of the Sunstone Education Foundation is “More Than One Way to Mormon,” a phrase that became increasingly relevant as I formulated a project that brought multiple churches into the same project. Throughout this project, I refer to all the groups I worked with as “Mormon.” In 2018, the LDS Church issued a statement on the name of the organization and asked that they no longer be referred to as “Mormon.” However, many of my informants choose to continue to identify in this way, even expressing disagreement with the current Church leadership. Historically, the LDS Church has attempted to claim that only they are Mormon, and other groups are not, even referring to them as “polygamist cults,” as describe by LDS President Spencer W. Kimball over the pulpit in his October 1974 General Conference address.²⁰ Recognizing

²⁰ Spencer W. Kimball, “God Will Not Be Mocked,” General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 1974. Importantly, Spencer W. Kimball was the nephew of John W. Woolley and cousin to Lorin C. Woolley, early

the difficulties and controversies that stem from naming practices, I chose to honor the self-identification of individuals and groups.

Through my professional and volunteer work, I was given access to groups that do not frequently speak with outsiders and developed relationships with these communities. At the same time, it is worth stating that I am a white woman, an identity that affords me privilege and the ability to navigate patriarchal spaces, many of which continue to use race as a marker of religious identity. Despite this, my position in the field was not always without controversy. In one specific instance at the semi-annual meeting of Christ's Church, an older man in the community testified that he saw a phone in my pocket and became convinced that I was a spy. The accusations were eased by the group's prophet who welcomed me into the community, even speaking my name over the pulpit during a recorded meeting, placing my identity in the group's scriptures and solidifying my acceptance in the group.

My limited interactions with the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days (TLC) were similarly fraught and raised ethical concerns about the role of scholars in documenting criminal behavior, especially when perpetrators are still alive. I do not have good answers for these questions other than the story of the TLC is foundational to the story of Mormonism and, despite the risk, needed to be told.²¹ Prior to my first trip to Manti, I was told stories of abuse and criminal behavior by members of

leaders in the Mormon fundamentalist movement. Polygamy and fundamentalism was not far from Kimball, but he retained a sharp boundary between "correct" Mormonism.

²¹ For more on taking risks as a methodological practice in ethnography see *If Truth Be Told: The Politics of Public Ethnography*, edited by Didier Fassin. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

the group. While I did not witness abuse or criminal behavior, these stories framed my experience with the group and the interviews with former members.

Much of my methodology was based on the assertion that people, and their faith, should be taken seriously.²² This is especially true when working with Mormon fundamentalist communities, many of which continue to carry a stigma that began in the 1970s, as the LDS Church grew increasingly concerned with Mormons joining these groups.²³ On April 13, 2018, Robert Orsi took a tour of the Jordan River, Utah temple and spoke to a small group about real presence and its place in the conversation on sex abuse. During the discussion, a historian questioned the place of the real presence in academic work and whether presence is actually real at all. To this comment, Orsi simply asserted, “Of course it’s real.” In my own research, I found myself frequently sitting with people as they explained divine interactions or communications with spirits. Rather than approach the statements with skepticisms or doubt, I asked what the spirit had to say. This was a welcomed response, and one that many individuals represented in this research had been waiting their entire life to hear. Ultimately, my methodology involved asking to go to church with people and taking their claims seriously as I sat in the pews.

²² Jeremy McClancy, “Introduction: Taking People Seriously,” in *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines*, edited by Jeremy McClancy (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 4.

²³ See *Confessions of a Mormon Historian: The Diaries of Leonard J. Arrington, 1971-1997, Volume 2: Centrifugal Forces, 1975-80*. Edited by Gary James Bergera. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2018). Arrington’s 1976 diary reveals insight into the view LDS leaders held about the fundamentalist groups that came to prominence in the twentieth century. On January 30, 1976, he discusses individuals appointed to work with Mark E. Peterson on a committee to address the problem of fundamentalism and individuals tempted to join these movements.

Chapters

To explore the nature of spirit communication in Mormonism, this dissertation relies on five case studies. Chapter 1, “‘Our Prophet has come to life’: Spirits of Authority and Dissent During the Presidency of Brigham Young,” seeks to unpack the ways in which communication with the deceased was central to the Mormon succession crisis of 1844, as well as the rise of multiple Mormon groups that all sought to harness the charismatic authority of the late Prophet. Drawing from diaries and records of the succession, this chapter argues that the central claim to authority by Brigham Young was the ability to act as a spiritual medium on behalf of Joseph Smith’s spirit. At the same time, this chapter incorporates accounts from members of the Church of Zion, a dissenting Mormon movement that invoked the same authoritarian spirit of Joseph Smith to legitimize their movement. Central to this chapter is a theorizing of spectral authority and a delineation between the benign spirit communication of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who incorporate spirits to validate the truth claims of the Church and testimonies of dissenting members who are marked as Apostate for the same practice.

Chapter 2, “The Veil Was Thin: Spirit Encounters Among Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” incorporates both archival and oral accounts of members of the LDS Church, who actively engage in communications with the deceased or those “beyond the veil.” These accounts seek to demonstrate the continued interactions with spirits among members of the Church and the ways in which these interactions are memorialized. Because the LDS Church doctrinally affirms the continued

presence of those within the spirit world, members of the Church feel affirmed in their ability to interact with their dead ancestors. This is especially true within the walls of the temple where sacred ordinances are performed on behalf of the dead. This chapter seeks to demonstrate the extent to which spirit communication is practiced among LDS Mormons and articulate the possible ways in which this practice is perceived as a harmless expression of religiosity to those in positions of established authority.

In Chapter 3, “Come to the River: Women and Spiritual Power in Contemporary Mormonism,” I demonstrate how the memory of the past and metaphorical spirit of women’s authority is used by women to navigate their place in Mormonism. Within Mormon restoration movements, the priesthood is synonymous with the authority of God and is given to all worthy adult men. The men who hold the priesthood are endowed with the ability to bless, heal, and perform sacred ordinances necessarily for eternal exaltation. This gendered understanding of priesthood authority presents an image of God that is inherently masculine, to the detriment of Mormonism’s doctrine of Heavenly Mother, and raises questions about women’s religious experiences within the Church. In recognition of the gendered nature of spiritual authority within the institutional Church, Mormon feminists have sought increased representation by seeking female ordination and encouraging further discussion of the divine feminine. Outside of institutional channels, many Mormon women have begun to look toward alternative practices to harness the power of God in their lives. This includes leaving the LDS Church.

In Chapter 4, “The Testimony of a Prophet,” the focus is on the use of spirit communication within a small group of fundamentalist Mormons gathering to create Zion

in rural Nevada. The history of this group begins in 1977, when Rulon C. Allred, physician and Prophet of the Apostolic United Brethren (AUB) was murdered on the order of Ervil LeBaron. For the Saints gathering in rural Nevada, this moment marked a turning point in the lineage of the Priesthood. Following the murder, a successor stepped forward to claim that Rulon Allred laid his hands upon him and ordained him to the office of High Priest Apostle. In addition, on a different date, the Prophet of the Nevada group was directed by Rulon, through an appearance from the other side of the veil, to reorganize the Church. Since this time, the community has developed a complex Priesthood line that involves spirits from late Prophets, who continue to interact with the community as both sources of legitimization and healing.

Chapter 5, “Communications of Pure Doctrine: The Manti Church and the True Order of Prayer,” continues the discussion of Mormon fundamentalism through an investigation of a group in Manti, Utah. Unlike the Nevada group, which holds Priesthood authority within a traditional fundamentalist lineage, the group in Manti began following a ritual practice in 1994 in which leaders from beyond the veil appeared in the living room of a Mormon Sunday School teacher to confer priesthood keys. This group is significant because of its institutional use of spirits in their temple ritual. In addition, this group offers an important perspective for understanding the potential dangers that arise from an institution validated by the spiritual world. This includes the groups’ history with fraud and violence.

Taken together, these case studies complicate the traditional telling of Mormonism. By writing about multiple groups together, as expressions of the same

tradition, this research seeks to broaden the meaning of Mormonism and include religions that were previously absent from American religious history. In the conclusion of *The Other Catholics: Remaking America's Largest Religion*, Julie Byrne writes, “Maybe we can start talking as if Catholicism includes all Catholics.”²⁴ In a similar way, this project seeks to expand the scope of Mormonism by encouraging further questions about the meaning behind “Mormon.” Mormon history is anything but linear, it is a study of schism and the way in which competing claims to authority manifest in the contemporary and mark out space for their adherents. Spirits are one way to tell this story.

²⁴ Julie Byrne, *The Other Catholics: Remaking America's Largest Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 292.

Chapter 1:

“Our Prophet has come to life”: Spirits of Authority and Dissent During the Presidency of Brigham Young

Ephrata, Pennsylvania, 1967

On July 21, 1967, a group gathered at Camp Silver Belle, a Spiritualist summer camp in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, to participate in a seminar with a trance medium from Cobourg, Canada. Founded by medium Reverend Ethel Parrish-Post, Camp Silver Belle became known for its phantasmal manifestations and materialization séances. The camp was particularly known for the manifestation of its bodily namesake, Silver Belle, an “Indian guide” who emerged out of an ectoplasmic mist during a séance led by the camp’s founder. Until its closing in 1988, the camp drew people from across the United States to participate in Masters and Teachers seminars in which spiritual leaders from the past emerged to instruct followers in the present.

As the audio recording of the 1967 summer seminar opens, the recorder begins the voice test with an introduction to himself and the events of the evening. In the midst of his introduction, the static of the recording machine crackles in the background. The static continues minutes after the voice test until it is halted by a group recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. Following a long exhale, the trance medium begins to speak with the voice of Father Pierre, a Catholic priest who passed away in 1783, but returns to guide people in the path to higher knowledge. He welcomes the guests and announces, “Tonight I bring to you many who will be of a great interest to you. So I myself am going to enjoy this little séance myself and I am going to sit beside my instrument and enjoy. So let us

go ahead with the other ones that are coming. Now I will just take maybe a second or two for them to come.”²⁵ The priest fades and one by one, religious and political leaders from history speak through the medium and offer insight into both spiritual and temporal matters. The speakers for the evening range from John F. Kennedy to Master Hilarion of Atlantis. Throughout the hours of audio, the group of men and women listened to the messages brought to them from the spectral voice of the medium.

Following one of many long exhales, the voice of Joseph Smith comes forward, and the crowd begins to murmur. In an excited and high-pitched tone, the nineteenth-century Mormon leader and prophet exclaims, “You didn’t expect a Mormon would come in tonight, did you? I haven’t brought all my wives along with me either, but you remember that I had a number.”²⁶ Already within the first minutes of the prophet’s message, the specter of polygamy enters the space as a reminder of its continued presence in the American religious imagination. The prophet continues by recounting the centrality of the Book of Mormon and the ministry of Jesus to the indigenous population of the Americas. Through a recounting of this narrative, the prophetic figure confirms the historicity of the text and an indigenous belief in the Christian narrative of redemption.

Unlike many of the other voices invoked by the medium, the audience is quick to interject and converse with the Mormon prophet, who manifests in the trance. A man from the audience, Mr. Lane, asks if the prophet would take questions before he fades into the static. Following an affirmative response from the prophet, Mr. Lane begins with

²⁵ Spiritualist Meeting, 1967, audiotape, Dennis C.S. Threlfall, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁶ Ibid.

the preface that it is his understanding that Mormons are guided by the Divine and have “communication with the Spirit.”²⁷ The prophet confirms this sentiment and begins to explain how spirit communication continues in the present within the Holy of Holies of the temple. He describes that once an individual passes into the area of the temple reserved only for full members of the Church, “That is where the séances are held.”²⁸ As the audience exclaims how wonderful it is that these events still occur, the prophet further offers details on the practice of spirit communication within the walls of the temple and acknowledges that mediums have entered into these spaces, but only once they are blindfolded. The excitement in the room continues to stir as the man inquiring of the prophet asserts, “In our own history of Spiritualism there was a branch of, or should I say a segment of Mormons that went down to San Bernardino.”²⁹ There is a pause in the room, and the ghost responds, “Yes, that is quite true my friend.”³⁰

Joseph Smith’s appearance as a specter at Camp Silver Belle illuminates a broader history of Mormonism’s interaction with spirit communication as a source of spiritual authority. In his 1967 appearance, Joseph Smith, speaking through Reverend Dennis Threlfall, offered affirmation of a Mormon movement in San Bernardino, likely led by Amasa M. Lyman, an apostle who practiced spiritualism and oversaw the church’s early

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. The religious identities of each individual at the Masters and Teachers seminar is not known. However, based on the entire tape, it seems as though the individuals did not have Mormon backgrounds. The camp hosted mediums and audiences from a variety of traditions. Its sister camp, Camp Chesterfield, remains in operation.

²⁹ Ibid. For more on the San Bernardino Mormons, see Edward Leo Lyman’s *San Bernardino: The Rise and Fall of a California Community* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996)

³⁰ Ibid.

settlement in California. Lyman's interest in these practices culminated in his eventual participation and leadership in the Church of Zion, a Mormon movement guided by the prophetic leadership of William S. Godbe, who actively practiced spiritualism and raised voices of dissent against the Utah Church led by Brigham Young. For members of the Church of Zion, the spirit of Joseph Smith was invoked as a spectral authority that justified alternative forms of spiritual power within the Mormon Restoration. Throughout this time, and continuing through his appearance in Pennsylvania, the spirit of the Mormon leader was used by Mormons and Spiritualists alike to garner authority or speak against the dominant Church narratives of spiritual authority through the Priesthood.

Within the Mormon history, the spirits used by various Mormon communities to speak to the question of Mormon authority were largely the same; most often the spirit of Joseph Smith. In settings where communication with spirits was considered either authoritative or a source of dissent, the ghost was used to authenticate the claims of multiple groups and leaders, some as acts of dissent against the dominant LDS narrative. It was within these interactions with spirits that the demarcation between benign spirit communication and apostasy was made apparent.³¹ These interactions are particularly interesting when the same spirit, namely the ghost of Joseph Smith, was used by both the mainline Church and dissenting groups for similar purposes. I argue that the division

³¹ Within Mormonism, "apostasy" is used to describe a state where an individual or community has turned away from the gospel. The LDS Church makes a distinction between a general apostasy, such as the Great Apostasy that occurred prior to the restoration, and personal apostasy. Following the designated leaders of the Church is one way that individuals refrain from falling into apostasy. When individuals discontinue sustaining the leadership, or seek spiritual authority elsewhere, apostasy may ensue.

between benign interactions with the deceased and apostasy was based on authority and whether the interactions afforded spiritual authority outside of the LDS Church.

More than simply a historical footnote, instances of spirit communication constitute moments in which the spiritual world is made truly present in the lives of believers. In his recent work, Robert Orsi speaks to the possibility of writing history in a way that acknowledges the supernatural realities in people's lives. He writes, "The study of religion is or ought to be the study of what human beings do to, for, and against the gods really present—using 'gods' as a synecdoche for all the special suprahuman beings with whom humans have been in relationship in different times and places—and what the gods really present do with, to, for, and against humans."³² Interactions between the living and the dead, whether mundane or extraordinary, changed the lived reality of Mormons throughout the nineteenth century and into the present. A full representation of Mormon history is, therefore, not possible without reference to these moments and the spirits who reentered the temporal world to guide the lives of the Saints and alter Mormon historical narratives.

The history of Mormon spirits, and spectrality as a historical framework generally, offers an important framework to examine American religious history.³³ Spirits are disruptive and alter historical trajectories. For traditions that underwent schism and succession, specters allow for multiple perspectives of the same narrative and an

³² Orsi, Robert A. *History and Presence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 4.

³³ For more on spectrality as a historical framework, see María Del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren's *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

awareness of other. Mormonism is particularly interesting for consideration of spirits as a historical subject because it is a tradition that is doubly haunted. First, it is haunted by the literal specters of the past that return to remind, guide, and warn.³⁴ As historical subjects not bound by temporality, the spirits of the past continually punctuate the present across multiple centuries as seekers of justice or entities that demand a response from those residing in the present. Within the historical context of Mormonism, authoritative spirits offered justification for Mormonism. Within the present, the same spirits from the past continually make themselves known in attempts to offer validation for Mormon groups and traditions outside of the dominant LDS framework.

In another way, Mormon history is marked by the disruption of the present by the past. In Roberto Osri's work on presence in Roman Catholicism, he speaks of "abundant events" as moments where the divine interact with the living.³⁵ This includes interactions with Marian apparitions or encounters with Saints. Similarly, Mormonism is marked by "abundant events" in which history is altered by interactions with spirits or deities. Accounts of Mormon specters, such as Joseph Smith's spirit interacting with the living, demonstrate the ways in which Mormon belief and practice obstructs linear narrative by invoking a past that is continually brought into the present by both believers and dissenters. Like many historical spirits, the spirits of Mormonism are not meant to be

³⁴ Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The state of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. (New York: Routledge, 2006) Derrida uses the concept of the specter to illuminate the haunting presence of Marx following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Within his narration, Derrida utilizes the ghost of Hamlet's father as a figure that returns into the present to demand justice.

³⁵ Orsi, Robert A. *History and Presence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 73.

expelled, but lived with and welcomed. In its most literal sense, Mormonism allows for the possibility of spirits that exist within a liminal space beyond the veil to return as a source of comfort and insight into the unseen world.³⁶ While the most frequent interactions with the dead, which come in the form of ancestral spirits returning to loved ones still in mortality; interactions with authoritative and angelic spirits are common occurrences in Mormon history that offer spiritual authority or the foundation for new Restoration movements. Joseph Smith's personal interactions with spirits, as well as his own spectral presence following his death, illuminates the nature of spectral authority within Mormonism and the ways the same spirit can both author and dissent against a majority movement.

Joseph Smith, a Spirit of Authority

The earliest moments of Mormonism began with spiritual visitations, both from the divine and spirits of the righteous dead. These spirits included biblical figures, such as the Apostles, and Book of Mormon prophets such as Moroni. Much like the spirits of Moroni and the Apostles that visited Joseph Smith as a source of authority and confirmation, the spirit of Joseph Smith became a similar means of harnessing prophetic power after his death. On June 27, 1844, following his death, the body of the prophet Joseph was quickly moved to ensure care was taken to avoid desecration. Despite the

³⁶ Throughout Mormon doctrine and practice, the symbolism of the veil is used to describe the boundary between life and death. This is most clearly depicted in temple imagery and the teaching that each individual passed through the veil between their premortal life and their current estate. Archival records and personal accounts of spirit communication frequently refer to the veil as “thin” when speaking of the possibility of interacting with the deceased.

absence of the physical body, his spirit lingered among the Saints as they began to wrestle with the question of succession. In an attempt to secure the prophetic authority of the late leader, various saints sought to capture the memory of Joseph Smith.³⁷ This sentiment is emphasized in Christopher James Blythe's work who underscores apotheosis as a means for the routinization of charisma.³⁸ Drawing on the way charisma functions after the death of a leader, Blythe presents Smith as an individual whose role in the LDS Church was only amplified his death.

Within the framework of apotheosis, Smith's spirit became part of "an invisible hierarchy" that was accessed by individuals seeking to succeed the prophet.³⁹ Individuals who sought spiritual authority by invoking the memory and spirit of the early leader were in the best position to garner control over Church leadership. For the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, a governing body of the Church in which the appointed men serve as apostles and act as prophets, seers, and revelators, this attempt at invocation manifested in claims that the keys to the kingdom of God were left behind and the spirit of Joseph Smith was present in their meeting. Ultimately, by replicating Smith's charisma and harnessing the spirit of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young emerged as the second President

³⁷ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling, A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (Salt Lake City: Vintage, 2007), 555.

³⁸ Christopher James Blythe, "Would to God Brethren, I Could Tell You Who I Am!': Nineteenth-Century Mormonism and the Apotheosis of Joseph Smith," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 18, no. 2 (2014): 5-27, 6. While not becoming necessarily deified, Smith's presence was amplified by his death.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), the majority Mormon movement.⁴⁰

Following the election of Brigham Young as the leader of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, many of Young's initial followers gave accounts of Young's speech having the same voice and mannerisms as Joseph Smith, as if Smith was speaking through Young who acted as a vessel for the spirit. For Young, and those who witnessed this act of mediumship, the spirit of Joseph Smith remained an authoritative and prophetic voice that manifested itself amongst the Saints as a source of legitimization for Young's future Presidency of the LDS Church.⁴¹ These manifestations offered a sign that confirmed Young's election and affirmed that the prophet remained invested in his people. For the early Saints, the invocation of the prophet was connected with power and confirmed the widely held belief that the veil between heaven and earth was strikingly thin.

The archival record surrounding Brigham Young's ascent to power is often marked as the transfiguration, the moment of Young invoking Smith's spirit in the grove in Nauvoo, Illinois on August 8, 1844. This moment is widely remembered in diaries and affidavits of early Saints who claimed to witness the events that solidified their assurance

⁴⁰ Although Young became the President of the Church with the largest numbers, Young was not the only individual to gain a following through the spirit of Joseph Smith. This remains true into the contemporary moment as leaders of Mormon groups seek spiritual authority through a direct priesthood lineage with Smith.

⁴¹ This same authoritative spirit was later channeled by Spiritualists who wrote to Brigham Young on both spiritual and temporal matters relating to the creation of Zion, indicating the use of the same spirit for multiple purposes and in a diverse range of communities.

of Young's leadership. Historians often note that written recollections of the transfiguration were not recorded until much later, most in the early twentieth century. At the turn of the century, the question of correct authority was paramount, especially in light of schism and the emergence of new leaders claiming authority from the Church's founding prophet. Eye-witness accounts served to validate a particular faith claim and solidify the early years of Church history as linear and unquestionable. For this reason, these accounts are significant despite their recording years after the event.

Robert Crookston was twenty-two years old when he witnessed the events of this historic day. In an affidavit written in Logan, Utah on February 3, 1903 he wrote, "I saw Brigham Young stand up and speak to the people, and he spoke with the voice of Joseph Smith. I further testify that I was well acquainted with the prophet Joseph Smith and heard him speak many times. Among the many sermons I heard him preach was at the funeral of King Follett. I also heard him deliver his last adieu to the Nauvoo Legion."⁴² Crookston continued his account of the transfiguration with a testimony of Young's leadership, a testimony connected to the invocation of the prophet, "As to Brigham Young, I know of a surety that he spoke with the voice of Joseph Smith, and I was convinced then and have never doubted during all the intervening years that have passed that Brigham Young was chosen and ordained of God to lead the church..."⁴³ Although this account, as with others like it, was written years after the transfiguration, the memory

⁴² Robert Crookston, affidavit, February 3, 1903, Photocopy of typescript, George Teasdale Papers, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁴³ Ibid.

of this moment constituted a source of evidence for those who believed. For Saints in Nauvoo, the dead were not wholly absent from the living. Rather, they stood on the other side of a thin boundary that was permeable. This permeability allowed for a world in which the spirits of the deceased can return and interact with the living. In the case of the deceased Prophet, the spirits were called upon to grant authority and bolster claims to power.

Accounts of Young's ascent to power in Nauvoo give particular focus to Young as the *correct* leader for that particular period of the Church. This was done in opposition to others who testified of their rightful place in the order of succession. The detailed way in which Young acted as a medium for the spectral authority of the Prophet Joseph Smith was central to testimonies by those present in the grove. Benjamin F. Johnson recalled the physical feeling of his experience with the transfiguration as one that "thrilled his whole being" and felt "as vivid and real as the glare of lightning."⁴⁴ His letter on the transfiguration presents a unique account of the interaction that occurred between the living Saints and their late Prophet. He wrote:

The Prophet's lost tooth, to which I alluded, was, as generally understood, broken out by the mob at Hyrum, while trying to pry open his mouth to strangle him with acid; for which time, until a tooth was replaced by [a] dentist neighbor, a year or two previous to his death, there had been a whistle-like sound to accompany all his public speaking; which I again plainly heard at the time of which I write.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Benjamin F. Johnson, letter to George F. Gibbs, 1903, Microfilm. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Within Johnson's account, the voice of the Prophet Joseph spoke directly through Young, who acted as a trance medium that brought forth the actual voice of the deceased.

Johnson's memory of Young's conjuring moment is demonstrative of the ways authoritative spirits are invoked as sources of legitimization for power. His narrative makes no mention of Young's speech or the language used to pursue the Presidency. Rather, the importance of the transfiguration is found in Joseph Smith as a spectral voice that communicated through the vessel of Brigham Young.

In addition to auditory manifestations, witness testimonies also recalled the physical transformation of Young during his speech. While visual manifestations of Joseph Smith's spirit are not present in the historical accounts of this event, Young became the source of physical evidence needed to demonstrate the reality of Smith's presence. In a letter to her son, Eliza Westover testified of her experience as a fifteen-year-old who was concerned about the absence of a Prophet to lead the Saints following Joseph Smith's death. After witnessing Sidney Rigdon vie for the leadership role, she offered her testimony of Young, "I was at the meeting when he said he was our Prophet and Seer. [sic] When he spoke it was in Brother Joseph's voice. I gave a jump off my seat and said, 'Our Prophet has come to life. We have our President back.'"⁴⁶ Following the auditory manifestation given by Young, she wrote, "I looked up and there stood Brother Joseph just as plain as I ever saw him alive. For a minute I heard Brother Joseph's voice and saw his features; then a mist seemed to pass from Brother Brigham's face and go up;

⁴⁶ Eliza Westover, letter to Lewis Westover, July 2, 1916, Microfilm, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

then there stood Brother Brigham talking to us.”⁴⁷ Westover was sure to specify that she knew the appearance of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Not only had she met them both in mortality, she was also a witness to their bodies as they lay in their coffins with bullet marks still visible.

Within each of these accounts from the August 1844 transfiguration, the testimony of the truthfulness of the Church is made stronger through the witness of a spirit. Joseph Smith’s spiritual return and communication brought power to the individual who controlled access to the specter’s voice. Robert T. Burton furthered this perspective in his testimony of Joseph Smith’s spirit returning to the Saints as a spectral authority and mediator of the priesthood. In his 1905 statement he wrote about physically rising from his seat to view the likeness of the deceased Prophet. He stated, “The likeness was so marked that I could hardly make myself belief that the Prophet had not himself returned; not that there was a resemblance between the two men. I am not going to say why this was other than I received it, as an evidence to the people that God had chosen Brigham Young as successor to the Prophet Joseph Smith Jr.”⁴⁸ Similar to other recollections of the event, the words of Young were not centrally important, nor remembered in written statements. The importance was found in the return of the past Prophet to make himself known in the present.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Robert T. Burton, Robert T. Burton statement, July 28, 1905, Microfilm, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

The early Saints were not alone in obtaining spiritual witness and communication with the spirit of Joseph Smith during the period of Brigham Young's Presidency. Throughout Young's leadership of the LDS Church in the Salt Lake Valley, authoritative spirits on the other side of the veil were invoked as a means of harnessing spiritual power to communicate a message to those in positions of power. While, Church leaders were accessible to general members and outsiders at this time, the invocation of Joseph Smith offers insight into how the spirits were perceived as authoritative by the individuals who sought their assistance. In an anonymous letter on January 28, 1871, a non-Mormon couple practicing spiritualism through the use of planchette boards wrote to Brigham Young with an account of communication with the prophet Joseph Smith. During this manifestation, the spirit of the first Prophet appeared with a message of warning and fear for the safety of the Saints over the annexation of Utah. He further expressed concern that Brigham Young would not believe a message if it were sent directly to him.⁴⁹ In a similar account, Mrs. Peacock, a medium writing to Young from Reno, Nevada used automatic writing as a means of harnessing the authoritative spirit of Apostle Heber C. Kimball to speak to Young.⁵⁰

The letters to Young from individuals practicing spirit communication indicate the authority found in Joseph Smith's spirit, not only by Mormons, but by those outside

⁴⁹ Anonymous Letter, January 28, 1871, Microfilm, Brigham Young Correspondence, 1839-1877. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁵⁰ Mrs. Peacock letter, May 5, 1877, Microfilm, Brigham Young Correspondence, 1839-1877. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

the Mormon tradition who seek contact with religious innovators. For those with no priesthood authority, such as the Spiritualist women writing to Young on behalf of the deceased Prophet, their mediumship and ability to harness the power of the Prophet allowed them to speak authoritatively to the Mormon Leadership in Salt Lake City. Much like Young, who stood before the crowd of Saints as a trance medium speaking authoritatively with the voice of an unseen reality, the individuals who spoke with and on behalf of the deceased Prophet asserted an ability to control the spiritual world and harness power from beyond the veil.

Joseph Smith, a Spirit of Dissent

Central to the examination of Joseph Smith's continued manifestation in early Mormonism are the contradictory messages found in his appearances and the multi-vocal nature of the specter to both legitimize and dissent against the majority Church led by Brigham Young. Because spirits always exceed human boundaries, even those of life and death, a historical reading of Mormonism in which spirits are made present in the lives of the Saints allows for the complexity of human experience and considers the possibility of a world in which the boundaries between legitimization and dissent are unclear. While removing the disruptive spirits of early Mormonism aids in the construction of simplistic and linear Priesthood structures, as well as historical narratives that sustain them, the testimonies of those who garnered authority through the dead is instructive to the nature of Mormon authority.

No figure encapsulates the interactions between Mormonism and spiritualism to a greater extent than Amasa M. Lyman, the Mormon colonizer of San Bernardino,

referenced by the participants in the Camp Silverbelle séance. Lyman was an early convert to the Church who quickly rose through the ranks of LDS leadership, eventually being elevated to a position in the First Presidency under Joseph Smith. In his work on the life of Amasa Lyman, Edward Leo Lyman writes of Lyman as one of the most significant religious figures in “his (and Utah’s) version of Mormonism.”⁵¹ However, in Church accounts of important founding leaders, Lyman is markedly absent. Much of this is attributed to his eventual excommunication for apostasy, a charge based on his preaching sermons contrary to orthodox interpretations of the Atonement. Although not explicitly mentioned in Lyman’s statements on his removal from the Utah Church, his unorthodox beliefs developed alongside a growing dissatisfaction with the leadership of Brigham Young. For Young, and those present at the excommunication hearing, spirit communication was not the primary cause for disciplinary action. The central concern for Church leadership was unorthodoxy and spiritual dissent against the centralized authority of the LDS Church. Much of the dissent came at a time when Lyman gained increased interaction with the spirits, including the spirit of Joseph Smith.

Accounts of Lyman’s early involvement in the LDS Church depict an image of a man devoted to both Joseph Smith and the message of the Restoration. He was among the first to receive the endowment and sealing ordinances, temple rituals necessary for salvation in Mormon cosmology, acted as an early adopter of plural marriage, and was rebaptized with the Apostles in an act of rededication in August 1847. Given Lyman’s

⁵¹ Edward Leo Lyman, *Amasa Mason Lyman: Mormon Apostle and Apostate, A Study in Dedication* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009), xi.

admiration of Joseph Smith while he was still in mortality, the spectral visitations of the prophet to Lyman during interactions with the spirit world is not surprising. Central to the life of Lyman, and other Mormons who participated in Spiritualist practices, are the ways in which spirit communication was not separate from their Mormon identity. Rather, the practices of spirit communication were tailored to create a dynamic Mormon movement that found authority in the spirits and the permeable space between mortality and eternity. However, unlike the transfiguration in Nauvoo which worked toward the construction of a centralized spiritual authority, the Joseph Smith that haunted Lyman allowed for the possibility of spiritual dissent and rupture in Priesthood lineage.

A survey of Lyman's diaries indicates that his interest in spiritualism began during his missionary work in San Bernardino, California.⁵² On August 14, 1853, Lyman recorded his first of many references to the practice of spirit communication, "To day br [sic?] [Charles C.] Rich preached. [M]y health is still poor. Preached to day on the subject of spiritual communication."⁵³ Considering the influences on Amasa Lyman's religious practices, Edward Leo Lyman argues that two events in Lyman's life appear directly responsible for the increased interest in séances and communication with the deceased; his son's healing from a long-term illness while participating in spiritualist

⁵² In Spring of 1851, the first group of Mormons left for San Bernardino, seeing the California settlement as a possible source of resources for the new establishment in the Salt Lake Valley. Amasa M. Lyman, then Mormon Apostle and member of the Council of Fifty, was charged with acting as the first mayor. Much of his diaries from this period deal with the concerns of his work as a leader of a new settlement.

⁵³ Amasa M. Lyman, *Thirteenth Apostle: The Diaries of Amasa M. Lyman* edited by Scott H. Partridge (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 2016), 139.

practices and the number of spiritualists already present in San Bernardino at this time.⁵⁴ Although direct reference to spiritualism and séances did not begin until the late 1860s, the remainder of Lyman's diary entries during his time in San Bernardino reference his frequent attendance in prayer circles. During the period of his increased involvement in these practices, Lyman remained a full member of the Utah Church and held various leadership positions under the Presidency of Brigham Young.

Although Lyman remained a devoted member of the Utah Church, despite his interest in communication with spirits, the spread of spiritualism outside of New York and into the West did raise concerns for some members of Church leadership. In correspondences between members of LDS leadership, interactions with deceased relatives that punctuated the lives of nineteenth-century Saints do not make notable appearances. However, spirits that presented themselves as a possible form of authority raised cause for concern. On November 20, 1852, Apostle Orson Pratt wrote to Brigham Young from Missouri about unusual occurrences in the St. Louis area. Speaking of these spiritual encounters he wrote, "The Devil is, indeed, exerting his power. Many large and popular papers are being published, devoted to the supernatural spiritual development. The spirits are not only rapping, but they seize upon their media and force them to

⁵⁴ Edward Leo Lyman, *Amasa Mason Lyman: Mormon Apostle and Apostate, A Study in Dedication* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009), 205. Throughout the 1850s, Spiritualists began to move West and establish institutional structures to support their work.

rite [sic?] their revelations.”⁵⁵ He further wrote, “Poetry and the most eloquent and sublime effusions are being revealed by the spirits in all parts of the land. In almost every school and family are to be found persons, old and young under the influence of the invisible powers.”⁵⁶ For Pratt, the spiritualism prevalent in Missouri was a problem when it led to revelation outside of LDS priesthood channels. For LDS Church leadership, beginning with Joseph Smith, the distinction between harmless spirit communication and apostasy raised the question of authority and who holds special access to the unseen world that is authoritative beyond the scope of personal revelation.⁵⁷ This becomes especially significant when presented alongside contemporary communities seeking spiritual authority outside the LDS Church through interactions with spirits. Communication with those on the other side of the veil became a problem when it involved a transfer of power and the legitimization of multiple Mormonisms outside the bounds of the LDS Priesthood.⁵⁸

Throughout the nineteenth century, communication with spirits was a source of both spiritual insight and authority. Catherine Albanese’s work on the metaphysical world of the nineteenth century illustrates the ways that Spiritualism, and spirit communication broadly, spoke to the religious landscape of the time and incorporated

⁵⁵ Orson Pratt, Orson Pratt Letter, November 20, 1852. Microfilm, Brigham Young Correspondence, 1839-1877. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 50:129.

⁵⁸ As with other Christian traditions, there is also a concern about deception and communication with evil spirits who seek to lead the faithful astray. During the course of my research, concern over communication with evil spirits only came up once.

aspects of Transcendentalism, Mesmerism, and Swedenborgianism.⁵⁹ As with many of these traditions that incorporated communication with spirits into their religious practice, spirits became central to Mormon belief and practice. As Lyman indicated in his diaries, spirit communication was not a separate practice, but connected to his Mormon religiosity.⁶⁰ This was not only true for lay members of the Church, but leaders who considered the possibility interacting with the deceased living as a means of authenticating the truthfulness of the LDS Church. At the April 7, 1853 General Conference, Parley P. Pratt stood at the pulpit and delivered a sermon on the subject beginning with the nature of the dead and the connection between intelligent spirits and the entire human family. While Pratt is careful to note a variety of spirits within the spirit world, he indicated that certain spirits are able to offer wisdom to the living; specifically those that have been “raised from the dead, and clothed with immortality, all that have ascended to yonder heavens, and been crowned as Kings and Priests...”⁶¹ Of these individuals, Pratt specifically cited Peter, James, Joseph, Hyrum, Joseph Smith Sr., as well as all Saints, ancient and modern. Speaking authoritatively on the nature of these individuals, Pratt proclaimed, “We have no dead! Only think of it! Our fathers are all

⁵⁹ Catherine L. Albanese, “Communion of Spirits,” in *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion*. (Yale University Press, 2007)

⁶⁰ Amasa M. Lyman, *Thirteenth Apostle: The Diaries of Amasa M. Lyman* edited by Scott H. Partridge (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 2016), 580. On December 27, 1868, Lyman wrote of attending he wrote about attending his usual Sunday School meetings followed by an interaction with a fellow member of the Church who spoke with him on the relationship between spiritualism and Mormonism, indicating commonality between the traditions.

⁶¹ P.P. Pratt, April 7, 1853, *Journal of Discourse*, 26 vols. (London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854-86), 1: 12.

living, thinking, active agents; we have only been taught that they are dead!”⁶² To demonstrate this belief, Pratt offered an account of his own personal experience while laying the cornerstones of the Salt Lake City Temple. As he worked on the building that would become the House of God, he described a deep feeling that Joseph Smith and the prophet’s associates were actively present in the space above the temple, hovering over the foundation as the Saints worked. Similar to the transfiguration moment, the feeling Pratt described indicated a spiritual witness to the truthfulness of the LDS Church. For this reason, the communication was considered harmless, even helpful, to the cause of Mormonism.

Unlike these helpful moments of spirit communication, Lyman’s benign interaction with spiritualism took a turn in 1869 when he began frequent correspondence with William S. Godbe, a dissenter against Brigham Young. This marks a shift between the Church’s edifying interactions with familiar spirits and the communication with spirits that leads toward apostasy. Similar to Lyman, William S. Godbe was a convert to Mormonism who was drawn to the faith of Joseph Smith. In his work on Godbe and the movement he founded, Ronald W. Walker writes of Godbe as a man drawn to the restoration movement because of its emphasis on “direct spiritual evidences” and the lay individual’s ability to communicate with spiritual entities, both human and divine.⁶³ Rather than rely solely on the experiences and testimonies of leadership, Godbe

⁶² Ibid., 14.

⁶³ Ronald W. Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Social and Religious Protests of the Godbeites against Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press and Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2009), 23.

understood the Mormon movement as one that allowed all people to interact with the spiritual world. Godbe's interest in the democratization of the spiritual world was central to his concern over prophetic infallibility and the establishment of a new Mormonism, The Church of Zion, based on the authority found in spirit communication. In many instances the authority came specifically from the voice of Joseph Smith, who would appear at séance tables, prayer circles, and homes of members to affirm the practices of the new Church. Through membership, and later leadership, in Godbe's movement, Lyman's interest and use of spiritualist practices increased to the point of participation in daily séances.⁶⁴ His diaries also reflect increased interest in other metaphysical traditions that flourished in the nineteenth century, including animal magnetism and phrenology.⁶⁵

On January 31, 1871, Lyman attended a private séance where he expressed his interest in communicating with the spirit of Joseph Smith. During the communication, the

⁶⁴ In addition to the increased number of séances, Lyman gained an interest in other spiritualist practitioners. This was only amplified following his excommunication. His diaries reflect interaction with Andrew Jackson Davis, James M. Peebles, and John Murray Spear, who he met with during a six-day period in September 1870. He also noted interactions with Hannah Brown, President of the American Association of Spiritualists. These interactions were indicative of the way in which the boundaries between spiritualism and Mormonism were easily negotiated by Lyman. Of particular importance was an instance on September 22, 1870, where John Murray Spear acted as a medium for the spirit of Joseph Smith.

⁶⁵ L.N. Fowler, Phrenological Character of Mr. Amasa Lyman, August 31, 1860. Microfilm, Amasa M. Lyman Collection, 1832-1877. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. On August 31, 1860, Lyman visited L.N. Fowler, a practical Phrenologist out of Liverpool. In the report received by Lyman, he was informed of his strong physiology. Interestingly, he was told of his inability to tell stories well and communicate with others. Additionally, he was told his faith in spiritual matters was "average."

specter of the prophet expressed amusement for the group working with “the principles that I would have taught had I been permitted to stay on Earth.”⁶⁶ The prophet continued:

Keep on in the good work; follow our your own counsel. Give my kindest love to brothers [Elias] Harison and [William] Godbe and accept the same yourself. Altho I have passed away from your midst still I retain all the good feeling I had for my fellow men. I heard you speak to night about ^th^ avenging of my blood. No! I answer it a thousand times no! I almost spoke through the medium and told you so nut could not quite control her. Farewell my Brethren and Sisters have courage, from your friend and brother Joseph Smith.⁶⁷

In this account, as with Smith’s later visit to Camp Silver Belle in 1967, the spectral voice affirmed the work of the spirit communication as a valid means of acquiring authority. As the voice of the prophet who restored the keys to the priesthood, the spirit also authenticated the spiritual authority found at the séance table for the Mormons who sat listening to the voice of their late spiritual leader echo from a spiritual medium.

Joseph Smith offered a similar message on the evening of March 21, 1871.

Entering into the room and hovering over the table where the Saints awaited spiritual insight, the voice of the prophet spoke through the medium, “I am glad to see you at the table I think it is the best way to improve your time. I am here often. Do not ^sit too long^ at one time. I think you have held most of your meetings about right and may you be prospered in trying to get the people interested in spiritualism. Good Night. Joseph Smith.”⁶⁸ The following week, Smith offered Lyman further messages that affirmed the

⁶⁶ Amasa M. Lyman, *Thirteenth Apostle: The Diaries of Amasa M. Lyman* edited by Scott H. Partridge (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 2016), 640.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 640-64. The Godbeite movement became known for its opposition of violence, particularly the teaching of blood atonement. For this reason, it is not surprising that the spirits would speak out against the practice.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 650

importance of continued spirit communication and the diligent work of bringing the higher knowledge of spiritualism to individuals in mortality. Throughout his diaries, Lyman does not refer to the other spirits that entered the rooms, tables, and circles where Saints gathered. His central focus on the prophet denotes the continued importance on Mormon spiritual power in the life of Lyman.

During the time of Lyman's increased spiritualist practices, he made frequent mention of the Utah Church and continued sporadic attendance at both Institute and Sunday meetings. In addition to attendance at LDS Church gatherings, Lyman also made occasional reference to his involvement at meetings for the "Josephite" Church, a historic reference to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, now Community of Christ, that split from the LDS Church after the death of Joseph Smith. Although his involvement would decrease over the course of his life, Lyman remained ever invested, to various degrees, in the Mormon Restoration. Even as a later critic of the Church, Mormonism remained interwoven in the language Lyman used to understand the spiritual world and his relationship with the divine. This is most notable in his use of "Summerland," the term given to the ethereal plane of the afterlife in nineteenth-century spiritualism.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Lyman's use of spiritualist language was most common in describing events that surrounded death. On August 16, 1876 Lyman attended the funeral of Noah Willis Bartholomew; of this event Lyman wrote, "We laid the body of our friend away to its final rest and bade farewell to his toil-wearied spirit as it took its airy flight to the bright sumerland of happy immortals. And we stil toil on in ^our chequered path of joy and sorrow to the same hapy land of rest and home of our dear ones departed.^" (Lyman 925) He further used the language of spiritualism to address the premature death of his grandchildren, writing, "They survived their birth but an hour and passed away to Nature under the kindly and humane institutions of the bright land of Sumer in the hap[p]y

Following his excommunication, there is little evidence that indicates a shift in Lyman's personal identification as a Mormon.⁷⁰ Followers of the Church of Zion did not call the doctrinal positions of the Church into question. Rather, the central concern was based on leadership and the nature of spiritual authority within restoration movements. This is particularly true of E. L. T. Harrison who frequently wrote on the question of authority and the problem of one individual holding sole access to the keys of the priesthood. For members of the Church of Zion, the vision of Zion within the LDS Church had become "an anachronistic vehicle for Brigham Young's personal power."⁷¹ In their Manifesto, printed in *Utah Magazine* in 1869, the men wrote, "For some years past we have felt that a great encroachment of power was being made by the ruling Priesthood of our Church, beyond that allowed by the spirit and genius of the Gospel."⁷² Unlike the "one-man power" exercised by the LDS Church leadership, Godbe and

beyond." (Lyman 925) For Lyman, spiritualism was available to when it was needed most. Beyond a source of authority that justified his movement away from the leadership of Brigham Young, it also acted as a source of comfort and knowledge that the deceased could still be reached.

⁷⁰ On March 16, 1862, Lyman preached a sermon in Dundee, Scotland that alluded to Jesus' death being unnecessary for the Atonement. Much of his frustration with the teachings on the Atonement came from the death displacing the need for any human effort in the work of salvation. Although Lyman apologized for his supposed blasphemy, he continued preaching the messages of the sermon and, for this reason, was removed from his position as an Apostle. Following the removal of his title, Lyman began working alongside Godbe. His activism within the movement and throughout the Salt Lake Valley led to his eventual excommunication.

⁷¹ Ibid., 106.

⁷² Manifesto from W.S. Godbe and E.L.T. Harrison. From the *Utah Magazine*, November 27, 1869. William S. Godbe, 1833-1902 Collection, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1.

Harrison argued for a Church in which all individuals, specifically men, could seek truth.⁷³

For Godbe and his Church, spirit communication constituted a legitimate means of accessing the truth they sought. In the Manifesto on the new Church, Godbe and Harrison made nuanced distinctions between spiritualism and the Church they founded. While they acknowledged that spiritualism held the possibility to entertain truth, they placed communication with the dead through the “Controlling Powers, or the Holy Priesthood” as the highest form of spirit communication.⁷⁴ Within this explanation, the surrounding mediums outside of Mormonism were not necessarily wrong in their practice, but replicated the power offered through the authority of God. As with Lyman, and LDS leadership that used spirits as a source of authentication, the spirit of Joseph Smith was once again central. The most pertinent example of the use of spiritualism as a source of Mormon authority within The Church of Zion movement came when Godbe and Harrison received a message from Joseph Smith beyond the veil on the necessity of spiritual revolt against Young during a trip to New York in 1868. Ronald W. Walker notes that the trip was designated for business, specifically working on the *Utah Magazine*. However, at the time of the trip, the men left Utah in the midst of their dissatisfaction toward Young’s economic policy. It was during this trip that the men participated in several Spiritualist activities that solidified the course of dissent they later

⁷³ Ibid., 2. While not directly referencing the Church as “Mormon,” then men did present tenets which correspond specifically with a Mormon belief system. This includes reference to the divine mission of Joseph Smith, the restoration of the Priesthood, and the principle of plural marriage.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4.

took over Brigham Young. These interactions were never published, but esteemed as highly as revelation. Speaking authoritatively as a prophet, Smith proclaimed:

You are instructed and sent on this mission by one that you once knew (Hebe C. Kimball), and he [was] sent to you by others that he never knew (this is, in the flesh), and they by others that they never knew, and so on, link after link, until we reach the Highest Authority, all saying unto you: ‘Go and redeem Zion. Go and feed the people with rich ripe corn in the kernel, instead of the husks with which they have so long been fed.’

Remember this: and reflect well upon it: and thousands upon thousands will surround you, and greet you with sons of joy at your entrance to the immortal world, for the work you have accomplished for suffering humanity.⁷⁵

In addition to Joseph Smith, the Apostle James, who conferred of the priesthood onto the prophet, made an appearance at the New York séance table to confirm the work of William Godbe and The Church of Zion. Jesus also came forward in the Spiritualist circle to affirm, “You are not working alone. You are working with a force behind you impelling you to free the children of Zion.”⁷⁶ Through these interactions, Godbe and his movement were confirmed as a Restoration movement based on a Mormon understanding of authority. The Church of Zion had Joseph Smith, the Apostle that conferred the priesthood onto Smith, and Jesus alongside them in the dissent against the majority Mormon Church of Utah.

As with many Mormon leaders who dissented against the Utah Church and formed Mormon movements outside of LDS priesthood authority, William S. Godbe was excommunicated one year prior to the disciplinary hearing of Amasa Lyman. For both

⁷⁵ Ronald W. Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Social and Religious Protests of the Godbeites against Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press and Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2009), 121.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

men, their apostasy was partly based in speaking to Joseph Smith as a dissenting voice against one of his many priesthood successors. Looking back on his disciplinary hearing and excommunication, Godbe wrote to E.W. Tullidge in 1875, “A believer in republicanism and its destiny, I am necessarily opposed to Theocracy, holding that it is of the past and will play no important part in the future yes non better than yourself, my dear friend can understand me when I say that it is difficult to realize I am an ‘apostate’ in the Mormon sense.”⁷⁷ His challenge with accepting the outcome of his disciplinary hearing stems from the fact that Godbe never denounced his Mormon faith, but simply moved onto a new version of Mormonism. Speaking to the LDS Church as a step toward higher knowledge, and his new label as “apostate,” Godbe continued:

Accustomed as I long have been to circles in which my Mormon faith was regarded as something worse than fanatical, I have not now become frightened of an ugly name, really when I think of the long list of illustrious ones who from the earliest ages have by adherence to their convictions won for themselves this epithet I feel a little proud of the association. The truth is I have not seceded from my former faith but out grown it—instead of “backsliding—from the Mormon Church I have gone through it.⁷⁸

Like many individuals and groups who continue to seek spiritual witness and authority outside of LDS Church leadership, Mormonism was a step in his faith formation.

“Surely the day is not distant when the people of Utah will cease to regard all as enemies who change their religious opinions—Who can gauge the conscience of another

⁷⁷ William S. Godbe, William D. Godbe letter, June 13, 1875. Godbe, William Samuel, 1833-1902, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

on determine the motives from which his actions sprang?”⁷⁹ With this statement, Godbe’s closed his letter to E.W. Tullidge. While maintaining that his interests remained similar to individuals within the Utah Church, Godbe expressed important insight into the possibility for diversity within the Mormon Restoration. For Godbe, whose version of Mormonism was marked by dissent against authority through the spirit of Joseph Smith, this diversity includes those who hold divergent visions of power and priesthood. To people practicing alternative spiritual practices or seeking authority outside of LDS priesthood channels, Godbe’s life of dissent and insight into the nature of spiritual authority remain important considerations.

Spirits allowed Godbe an alternative to the LDS model of spiritual authority. This became necessary for Godbe as he became increasingly disenfranchised with the leadership of Brigham Young, but sought to retain his Mormon identity. This model was justified through the familiar voice of his late prophet, who encouraged Godbe to continue his movement away from the mainline Mormon Church and embolden others to do the same. The nature of his apostasy, as deemed by the LDS Church and manifest in his excommunication, was not his communication with the deceased, but his willingness to disrupt traditional Priesthood structures through the use of their messages and harness his own spiritual authority outside of Brigham Young’s Church.

Although excommunicated, Lyman’s standing in the Church was restored in death. In 1877, Lyman’s spirit stood on the other side of the veil as his son, Francis

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Marion Lyman, prepared to be baptized by proxy for his soul in the baptismal font of the Salt Lake City Temple. The Genealogical Society of Utah reported:

Today is the 69th anniversary of the birth of President Francis Marion Lyman, who was this day baptized in the font in the Salt Lake Temple for and in behalf of his father, Amasa Mason Lyman, who was formerly one of the Twelve Apostles, but had been excommunicated for apostasy May 12, 1870, and died in Fillmore, Millard County, Utah, out of the Church, February 4, 1877.⁸⁰

With this baptism, all former sealings and blessings were restored to the Apostle.⁸¹ His proxy baptism was indicative of the importance the LDS Church placed on the intimate communication between the living and the dead. At the same time, as Francis M. Lyman was lowered into the water, the act of proxy baptism served as a demonstration of Mormon spiritual authority that extends into the realm of spirits. Even in his death, Lyman was unable to escape the complicated questions surrounding Mormon authority.

Conclusion

The spectral voice of Joseph Smith that entered the room in Ephrata, Pennsylvania in 1967 was not an isolated occurrence. The prophet remains closely associated with those who believed in his authority from the moment of his death and into the present. Just as Eliza Westover listened attentively to the voice of the prophet echoed from beyond the grave during the transfiguration and Amasa M. Lyman invoked

⁸⁰ Genealogical Society of Utah Report of Reinstatement of Amasa M. Lyman, January 12, 1909. Genealogical Society of Utah (1894-1944), Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁸¹ Within the Mormon faith, individuals and families are “sealed,” or bound together through a liturgical practice within the walls of the temple. With excommunication, the sealings are dissolved, as if one was never baptized. With rebaptism, the sealings to one’s family are once again restored.

the spirit of Joseph Smith during séances throughout the 1870s, the Spiritualists at the Masters and Teachers seminar in 1967 were similarly attentive to the spirits who continually return to mark spaces of authority within Mormonism.

Whether Mormon or Spiritualist, or a Mormon who participated in spirit communication, nineteenth-century acts of spirit communication were indicative of the ways in which the spectral and the “visible invisible” are sought as sources of justification and authority.⁸² At the same time, these instances demonstrate how a religious community’s past is never fully absent in the present. Within each account of spirit communication, it was often the case that the returning spirits told more about the community that invoked them than the spirit itself. For active Spiritualists seeking political and social reform, the spirits spoke with power in favor of abolition, temperance, and women’s suffrage. In a similar way, Saints who both favored and dissented against Brigham Young sought after spectral authority as a means of legitimizing their movement.

Mormonism allows for the spirits of past Saints to remain present and active in the lives of believers as agents that never truly die. The foundational moments of the Church are marked by the appearances of spirits to restore authority once deemed lost. Interactions only continued as subsequent leaders of the Church sought to harness the authority of late prophets and authorities. These moments of communication with spirits on the other side of the veil continue to influence Saints, both within and outside of the

⁸² Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, “Spectrographies” in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* edited by María Del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 38.

mainstream LDS Church as they navigate their spiritual lives and the boundaries of authority within their religious system.

Chapter 2:

“The Veil Was Thin”: Genealogy, Temples, and Interactions with the Dead in the LDS Church

The Veil is Thin

On the North side of Temple Square, the Conference Center for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) stands prominently as the largest conference facility of its kind. The building is central to the LDS faith as the meeting place for the biannual General Conference, where members of the Church gather to hear their leaders offer counsel and guidance. Walking through Temple Square, it is not uncommon to see marquees that explain the various buildings in the complex; when the conference center appears, the words, “See Where Prophets Speak” flashes onto the screen. As a space of prophetic revelation, the center draws tourists from around the world, who congregate in the main entry of the building for missionary-led tours of the 21,200 seat auditorium.

Elder Young is one of these many missionaries. He is in his mid-60s and stands tall behind Door 17, the main visitor entrance of the space, in a dark suit and traditional name tag. As he began his afternoon tour, he excitedly showed the main center and pointed out the architectural feat of the seating. While not noticeable upon first glance, the chairs in the facility are not uniformly separated. Rather, all the chairs are slightly off center in order to allow every individual an unobstructed view of the speaker. He continued by proudly pointing out the organ which, though not as large as the one in the Tabernacle across the street, is one of the largest in the United States. Moving through

each floor of the Conference Center, he guided guests past the busts of late Prophets and paintings of current Church leaders. In each room, he offered his insight into the art that scatters the space, as well his testimony of its spiritual significance. He paid particular attention to the glass sculpture that represents the Miracle of the Seagulls, a symbol of God's providence for the settlers of the Salt Lake Valley.⁸³ As the tour came to a close, we passed by a painting that instantly caught my attention. In the center of the painting is a woman in blue with her head bowed in prayer. Above her head, individuals clothed in white pour from Heaven with outreached arms, as if to offer her a blessing and remind her of their continued presence. As we stopped in front of the painting, I asked David for his thoughts on the meaning of this LDS piece of art that not only hangs in the Conference Center, but also in the homes of many Church members. He paused, looked at the painting, and grew emotional as he brought his hand to his face. In a hushed tone, he stated, "The veil is thin."

⁸³ According to Mormon folklore, the Miracle of the Seagulls occurred in 1848 when seagulls miraculously appeared to save the Mormon settlers' crops from thousands of swarming crickets. The event is often cast in Biblical terms, by referring to the plague of locusts that struck God's chosen people in the Exodus narrative. Today, statues of images of the event are prominent across the Salt Lake Valley and the story is told by Temple Square missionaries and in Church meetings as a metaphor for God's salvific power and control over the elements for the benefit of humanity.



Figure 1: Brian Kershisnik, She Will Find What Is Lost

Throughout my time with members of the LDS Church, I was continually told that the boundary between life and death is both strikingly thin and permeable. In Church meetings and interactions with members, the presence of the dead was made decisively clear. While individuals pass into the eternities, they are never wholly absent from the families they leave behind. For many, this knowledge is a source of comfort. For others, the spirits of the deceased testify to the truthfulness of the Gospel and the reality of a particularly Mormon afterlife. In both cases, the insight gained from interactions with the deceased provides members of the Church with the assurance that their faith is grounded in a truthfulness that extends beyond death.

Much like interactions with the divine, or any aspect of the spiritual world, expectations and limits for communications with the deceased are carefully set by the institution and leadership of the LDS Church; this is usually done to mitigate or quell disruption. In his work on spiritual power and liturgy, Jonathan Stapley wrote of the disruptive force of the divine that Mormonism harnessed through the formation of religious institutions and hierarchies. “This shattering of heaven’s silence was cacophonous,” says Stapley, “and Joseph Smith sought to harmonize the outpouring of God’s power ecclesiastically in the revelation of priesthood bureaucracy.”⁸⁴ Just as the power of God was consolidated into a hierarchical structure, the ability for members of the Church to interact with spirits was placed within the Church’s priesthood structures to ensure that spiritual entities only bolstered the claims of the dominant Church narrative.⁸⁵ Routinization of spirits in the LDS context manifests in the Church’s interest in genealogy and focus on sealing eternal families. In these spaces, which center on the temple, individuals are afforded the opportunity to interact with the deceased, but in a way that affirms a specific Mormon narrative. While these moments can push the boundaries of acceptable Mormon practice, Church leadership sets limits for the practice. These limits are based on the boundary between benign interactions with the deceased and apostasy, a broad term that encapsulates many things; most of which fall on the question of correct authority.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Jonathan Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 15.

⁸⁶ The term is most concisely outlined in the Official handbook of Instruction 1, which defines apostates as those who, “1. Repeatedly act in clear, open, and deliberate

LDS spirit communication offers members the benefit of a direct experience that legitimizes and validates their faith, similar to those who witnessed the transfiguration of Brigham Young and the validating spirit of Joseph Smith. However, in the daily life of an LDS believer, an interaction with the deceased Prophet is not a standard occurrence. Often, this type of interaction raises cause for concern because of the authority that may proceed such an experience. Rather, spirits of deceased ancestors serve as mediators between the seen and unseen world. For LDS leadership, these interactions are acceptable, and even welcomed, as sources of individual testimony of the Church. These interactions also demonstrate the ways in which the contemporary Church subsumed the spiritual world and put it to use in order to benefit their claims.⁸⁷ Within the LDS context, the spirits do not raise questions up and against the dominant priesthood, but supplement claims to spiritual power. In short, the Church allows for encounters with the spirit world, but only when they are carefully managed for acceptability along the lines of correct authority.

The Presence of the Dead

From its earliest moments, Mormonism was concerned with the possibility of overcoming the finality of death. This concern stemmed from both an American context

public opposition to the Church or its leaders. 2. Persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after they have been corrected by their bishop or a higher authority. 3. Continue to follow the teachings of apostate sects (such as those that advocate plural marriage) after being corrected by their bishop or a higher authority. 4. Are in a same-gender marriage. 5. Formally join another church and advocate its teachings.” (Church Handbook of Instruction, Section 6.7.3)

⁸⁷ Emily Ogden, *Credulity: A Cultural History of US Mesmerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 71.

where death was ever present and a religious leader who was intimately acquainted with the reality of death through his own family's experiences.⁸⁸ In his work on early Mormonism and its relationships with death, Samuel Brown writes, "Early Mormons made theological and imaginative war with the threat of decay; their theologies of resurrection and embodiment represent answers to the grotesque liminality of the corpse and the persistent spectre of decomposition."⁸⁹ This concern manifest in theologies of both bodily resurrection and exaltation, doctrines that address the both spiritual and physical decay. Mormon doctrine asserts that the spirit does not end at the point of death. Rather, the spirit is released from the body and enters either spirit paradise or spirit prison. The spirit dwells in this in-between space until it is reunited with the body at the resurrection. In this space, the spirits can further their knowledge of the Gospel and potentially interact with the living. While death loomed over human existence, and continued despite attempts at delay, the traditions that emerged in the nineteenth century sought to respond to this pervasive reality and help the living deal with its consequences.

Mormonism transformed death into a liminal space through its teaching on the spirit world.⁹⁰ Within this doctrine, the dead pass into their final resting place only after

⁸⁸ Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, lost 6 children during the course of her life. In addition, Joseph Smith was deeply affected by the death of his brother, Alvin. In subsequent years, Alvin was present in visions and connected with later revelations on the state of the dead and importance of temple ordinances for the deceased.

⁸⁹ Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as it is On Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 38.

⁹⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 138. During a talk given during the Semiannual General Conference on October 4, 1918, President Joseph F. Smith spoke on a vision he received of the spirits of the dead. In his vision, the dead who passed with a hope in resurrection were visited by Jesus who preaches to the souls. These souls rejoiced, while

the resurrection.⁹¹ In the time between death and the resurrection, individuals who lived faithfully dwell in spirit paradise and await the reception of their renewed body. In contrast, those who did not live faithfully enter what Mormons refer to as spirit prison, a place where spirits have the opportunity to learn the Gospel and accept saving ordinances that will grant them entry into one of the three Heavenly Kingdoms. In either case, the spirits that reside on the other side of the veil are not completely absent. They wait, learn, progress, and accept saving ordinances done on their behalf. In one of his many funeral sermons, Joseph Smith declared that the spirits of righteous people who have died are “not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained therewith.”⁹² While absent from the body and awaiting the resurrection, members of the early Church affirmed that spirits remain very much alive and active among the living. This belief offered a foundation for testimonies by both leaders and laity on interactions with the deceased.

Today, accounts of interaction of the deceased remain a central component for Mormon testimonies of the Church. In *Latter-day Lore: Mormon Folklore Studies*, Eric A. Eliason, and Tom Mould write, “Contemporary Mormons’ lives are suffused with and

the souls who did not share in this hope did not receive a similar visitation. In either case, the souls of the dead are not completely absent.

⁹¹ The resurrection is the moment where the spirit is reunited with the body. This joining is inseparable and the being becomes immortal; a saving from both physical and spiritual death. The LDS Church teaches two resurrections, the resurrection of the just and the unjust. At the point of resurrection, the individual is judged and assigned its eternal state in either one of the three Kingdoms or, rarely, Outer Darkness. The Church teaches that certain individuals have already experienced resurrection and attained their eternal state. This includes the Old Testament Patriarchs.

⁹² Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Edited by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 326.

surrounded by stories of prophetic warnings or ‘promptings’ by the spirit, of appearances of dead relatives who deliver messages of peace and comfort, of spirit children waiting to be born who announce their impending arrival, and of spirits of demons cast out by priesthood authority.”⁹³ For many members of the Church, these accounts constitute instances of real presence that permeate the everyday life of believers and produce an enchanted world.⁹⁴

In the sociology of religion, enchantment, as a state of the modern world, is often understood by its opposite. In the Talcott Parsons’ transition of Max Weber’s “Science as a Vocation,” *disenchantment* was used to articulate his definition of modernity by implying a past that was marked by spirits and magic.⁹⁵ However, recent writings on modernity demonstrates that the distinction between an enchanted past and a disenchanted present are not necessarily useful because spirits, gods, and magical worlds never actually disappeared. The modern world is both a reaction to enchantment and a product of its continued manifestations.⁹⁶ With this in mind, much of contemporary religion, including Mormonism, deals with the effects of enchanted worlds that are

⁹³ Eliason, Eric A. and Tom Mould, *Latter-day Lore: Mormon Folklore Studies* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2013), 15. In the introduction to this work, the authors clarify the use of folklore to mean

⁹⁴ Orsi, Robert A. *History and Presence* (Chicago, Harvard University Press, 2016), 4.

⁹⁵ Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Routledge, 1948), 139.

⁹⁶ For more on modernity and secularism’s relationship to the metaphysical see John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011) and Robert Orsi, *History and Presence* (Chicago, Harvard University Press, 2016).

difficult to maintain and control. Enchantment, and the subsequent interactions it produces, requires management.⁹⁷

Although spirits are pervasive, there are correct avenues for interaction according to LDS leadership. Within the LDS Church, genealogy and temple worship offer opportunities to engage with the spirit world in ways that are productive and useful for the LDS Church. Stories of interactions with the deceased, that would otherwise be dismissed, become subsumed by the institution and put to use in bolstering the claims of the dominant Church narrative.⁹⁸ In her work on Mesmerism in the United States, Emily Ogden, scholar of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature, uses “modern enchantment” to describe the spaces where occult practices remain permissible in a secular age. She argues that the occult did not have free reign over the modern, but became a place where “the secular age worked out what enchantment’s uses might be.”⁹⁹ Within the LDS Church, spirits are used to testify to the truthfulness of the dominant Mormon narrative and maintain institutional power. Because of this, interactions that produce alternate avenues for authority become problematic. These interactions are quickly expunged and labeled apostate through disciplinary councils, disfellowshipment, or excommunication.

⁹⁷ Emily Ogden, *Credulity: A Cultural History of US Mesmerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 54. In her work on Mesmerism and credulity, Ogden argues that to be “modern” is not to be free from credulity, but to manage it correctly. Similarly, the LDS Church is a modern religious institution that manages encounters with enchantment to ensure authority remains in the Church hierarchy.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

Within the spirit world, the dead are not idly present, but actively seek recognition and aid from the living. In response, Mormons are encouraged to learn about their ancestors and participate in genealogical study of their families. In General Conference and local wards across the world, members of the Church are taught the urgency of family history research and subsequent work on behalf of the dead in the temples. Mormonism teaches that all individuals must receive the saving ordinances of baptism, endowment, and marriage in order to enter into the Celestial Kingdom, the highest degree of glory in heaven according to LDS cosmology. However, because many people die before receiving this ordinance, temples are constructed for living relatives to perform saving ordinances by proxy. This falls within the Church's four-fold mission of perfecting the Saints, proclaiming the Gospel, redeeming the dead, and caring for the poor and needy. To fulfil the religious obligation of redeeming the dead, Mormons are encouraged to research their family lineages for more precise information on the spirit they will baptize.¹⁰⁰

Like many aspects of Mormon theology, the concern for the deceased began through a revelation given to Joseph Smith. On January 21, 1836, while in the Kirtland temple, Smith received a vision, now canonized in Section 137 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In this vision, Smith witnessed his deceased brother, Alvin, who died prior to

¹⁰⁰ In Doctrine and Covenants 128, Joseph Smith speaks on the importance of baptism for the dead, for both the living and the dead. He states, "And now, by dearly beloved brethren and sisters, let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, as Paul says concerning the fathers—that they without us cannot be made perfect—neither can we without our dead be made perfect." (Doctrine and Covenants 128:15)

Smith's reception of the gold plates. Because he died before the commencement of the Restoration, he did not have the opportunity to accept baptism. Having not received any saving ordinances, Smith was surprised to see his brother in an exalted state. In response to this surprise, Smith recorded, "Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God..."¹⁰¹ It was not until Smith's 1840 revelation on baptism for the dead that the method by which all individuals, including his late brother, could attain salvation and exaltation despite the time and place of their death was fully realized.

In his 1840 writing on baptism for the dead, Smith asserted a universalist view of salvation based on his belief in the "great Parent of the universe" who looks upon all of humanity with care and concern for their eternal soul. He wrote that within Christianity, it is held that "the destiny of man is irretrievably fixed at his death; and that he is made either eternally happy, or eternally miserable that if a man dies without a knowledge of God, he must be eternally damned; without any mitigation of his punishment, alleviation of his pain or the most latent hope of a deliverance..."¹⁰² However, turning to his knowledge of the Scriptures, and the example of baptism for the dead in I Corinthians, he asserted that "there are sins which may be forgiven in the world to come; although the sin of blasphemy cannot be forgiven."¹⁰³ The following year, Smith revealed plans to

¹⁰¹ Doctrine and Covenants 137:7

¹⁰² Joseph Smith. "Baptism for the dead," circa 1840. Microfilm. Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Joseph Smith was likely drawing on Matthew 12:31, which notes that all sins are forgivable, except for blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

construct the temple in Nauvoo which would hold a font for the purpose of baptizing the dead by proxy.

Smith's vision of his late brother, and subsequent revelation on the deceased, set a precedent for future interactions with the dead based on the Church's concern for the eternal state of humanity. One example of this comes from Gordon, an archaeologist who was raised Mormon and continues to participate in the field of Mormon history. When I first met Gordon, I sat with him as he shared his journey away from the LDS faith because of doubts he accumulated throughout his life and career as an archaeologist. He expressed that this was challenging for his family, especially his mother who remained an active member of the Church until her death. During our conversation, he offered recollections of his childhood visits to the cemetery on Memorial Day with his mother and grandmother, women whom he described as deeply interested in genealogical work and salvific work on behalf of their ancestors. He recounted a large part of those days spent etching graves to better identify the information of the deceased. He recalled, "A big part of it was just the etching of the graves, you know, basically using charcoal or, you can use crayons, or something, with a piece of paper you put over the grave... some of these graves have been really worn down and obscured so to get the print. These kind of tricks that you can use to kind of see the unseen."¹⁰⁴

However, in some instances there were no headstones and the process of locating unmarked graves became more complex. He explained, "And that's where she introduced

¹⁰⁴ Gordon. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Snowbird, Utah, June 12, 2016.

the, you know, witching for graves as she called it. And we would use, as she taught it, we would use welding rods.... And you would walk through the area where you think there might be a grave and when there was, there's a kind of influence on the rods from the body. The rods cross."¹⁰⁵ Although he raised some doubt about the experience, he noted the often magical outcome of the process, "And certainly in my experience walking, eventually the rods would cross."¹⁰⁶ For Gordon's mother, the rod's crossing was an indication of an unmarked grave. As a young man, these interactions were not strange, but part of growing up within a Mormon context. It was not until later in life that he returned to his mother to inquire about the practice and learn more about his childhood experience with divination. This interest further led to his return to the cemetery to relearn the practice from his mother and hear stories about her teaching others this method of finding graves at Ricks College, now Brigham Young University, Idaho.

Although she never had a paid career, Gordon's mother volunteered in the genealogy library to help others find their ancestors. He recalled, "And so she would always have these stories about how she encountered ancestors either in the written records or in the temple and really believed that ancestors communicated with her."¹⁰⁷ Most often the communication from the spirits came in the form of aid or assistance in finding information for her genealogical work, "Kind of like not knowing quite where to

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Not only does this practice speak to the concern over spirits, it also refers back to the use of divining rods by early leaders and lay members of the LDS Church. See D. Michael Quinn's *Mormonism and the Magical Worldview* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987) for more on the use of divination in early Mormonism.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

look and then she gets this kind of thought, ‘oh maybe I ought to look over here,’ and then finds something. And she interprets that as the ancestors communicating to her through that, through that act.”¹⁰⁸ He also described learning that ancestors expressed gratitude for the work she finished for them in the temple. The gratitude she felt validated her faith in the Church because the spirits testified to the importance of its mission and method for administering to the deceased. At the same time, a Church auxiliary institution, Ricks College, validated her spiritual work through employment as a teacher of an extracurricular program on genealogy.

The haunting presence of the deceased, and a traditionally occult method of seeking their presence, was not separate from Gordon’s mother’s Mormon identity. Rather, Mormonism informed her interest in ancestors and offered an avenue for communication. In addition, although unconventional in method, the methods for finding the dead offered confirmation of the truthfulness in Mormonism. At every point in her work, the spirits confirmed her practice as divinely inspired. They also offered gratitude for her devotion to genealogical research. Importantly, the term “witching” was never considered a term with negative connotation because the Church adopted divination practice as its own. Gordon’s mother only ever equated the practice with the spirit of God and the work of the Church, despite its name.

Because family history work is central to the Mormon ideal of the eternal family, stories of genealogical research pervade testimony meetings in LDS wards across the world. These meetings normalize interactions with the deceased and set parameters on

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

acceptability. On August 8, 2016, I attended a ward, or local LDS congregation, in Provo, Utah. On this particular Sunday, three of the testimonies focused on the importance of the temple and the family history research necessary to accomplish this work. One of the last women to offer a testimony on this particular Sunday was a woman in her late twenties. As she approached the podium, she carried a baby carrier that was gently set on the floor in front of the podium before she climbed the steps to stand before her congregation. She grew emotional as she recalled a previous testimony from several years ago on the temple and the importance of sealing families together for eternity. As she listened to this testimony, she explained that she heard a faint voice say, “Family history will be what saves you.”¹⁰⁹ This message left her determined to learn about her family and take the names of these individuals to the temple to perform the ordinances needed for them to attain exaltation.

The woman at the podium continued her testimony with the story of her great grandmother, who used all the money she saved from her wedding to cross the ocean to come to the United States at the height of World War II. She left twelve sisters and a brother behind. Pausing, the woman latched on to a tissue as she explained that a month after her great grandmother got to the United States, her family were killed in Jewish concentration camps. Despite great grief and sadness at learning that her family lost their lives in the Holocaust, the woman at the podium shared that she found solace in her Patriarchal Blessing, which indicated that she would find all documents necessary to finish the temple work for all the members of her family. She immediately contacted a

¹⁰⁹ Fast and Testimony Participant. Provo, Utah, June 12, 2016.

woman in her stake, a congregational unit in the Mormon hierarchy composed of multiple wards, who was called to aid members of the Church with their family history. As they worked through names and dates, finding previously unknown family members, the woman called to help with this work exclaimed, “Look at them, they are probably shouting up there for joy.”¹¹⁰ As she worked through the names and subsequent temple work, she felt their presence and the power of genealogy. She testified, “If you have any struggles in your life, anything that you wish to rid out of your life, throw yourself into family history. I can testify, personally, that it will save you and it will save those who’ve passed on. And I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.”¹¹¹ For this woman, participating in Mormonism sparked interest in the deceased. In turn, her interest in the dead reinforced her Mormon worldview.

In a broader sense, the practice of genealogy and work for the dead reinforces Mormonism’s place in a “secular” world because it offers a service that extends beyond the Church meetinghouse. This includes access to genealogical databases and the formation of genealogical services by members of the Church who created platforms, partly inspired by their faith. The most notable moment of Mormonism using its interest in genealogy for this purpose came in 2013, when Ancestry.com announced a partnership with FamilySearch International, owned by the LDS Church. This collaboration opened up the possibility for individuals, both within and outside of the LDS Church, to access billions of digitized family records. It also made Mormonism an avenue for access to

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

history for people who use genealogical platforms. Just as Mesmerism was put to use by powerful institutions for specific purposes, the LDS Church puts the metaphysical to use to support their place within the modern world.¹¹² Genealogy became a way to interact with the metaphysical, specifically interactions with the deceased, in the modern world and managing LDS interactions with the dead to ensure they remain within the boundaries of authority established by Church leadership.

Spirits in the Temple

The temple is the highest point of Mormon religiosity.¹¹³ In the temple, members of the Church gain valuable insight into the unseen world, commune with the divine, and become Saviors on Mount Zion. Taken from the book of Obadiah, “And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s,” this phrase is linked with the restoring of the Keys of Elijah, which contemporary Saints associate with sealings and the eternal nature of family.¹¹⁴ Because of these Keys, temple ordinances are not bound by mortality, but transcend into the

¹¹² Emily Ogden, *Credulity: A Cultural History of US Mesmerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 70-73. Using the example of slave revolt on plantations and women working in factories, Ogden shows how occult practices were used by individuals in positions of power to quell revolt and impose submission. Rather than provide a way of subverting authority, these practices became a tool of the powerful.

¹¹³ Jonathan Stapley’s *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) argues that the creation of rituals in early Mormonism was a means of harnessing the power of God. This is evident in temple rituals that use Priesthood to mediate a tangible and open heaven.

¹¹⁴ Obadiah 1:21. Recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 110, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery recorded a vision in which the Old Testament Prophet Elijah appeared to confer the Keys referenced in the Gospel of Matthew; the keys that bind heaven and earth. Through these keys, the Prophet was given the power to solidify all earthly ordinances in heaven.

unseen world. As Sam Brown writes, “All the exegetical theology, metaphysical energy, and earnest perfectionism of Smith’s temple system served the end of creating a sacerdotal heaven family that would be stronger than the caprice of death and the Protestant God.”¹¹⁵ Because of the centrality of the afterlife in this space, the temple is not only a place of worship and learning, but a space where heaven and earth are indistinguishable and the veil is thin.

More than simply thin, the veil is permeable and, within the walls of the temple, the spirit world intermingles with the temporal. This is most clearly depicted in the LDS endowment ceremony where members of the Church pass through a veil that represents the separation between this life and the next, symbolically enacting the moment of death and entry into the spiritual realm. As individuals pass through this veil, they are met with the familiar faces of family and friends, who patiently await their entry and celebrate their place in the hereafter. Their presence is also a physical manifestation of the eternal bonds of kinship that are constructed in sealing rooms. Speaking on the nature of the temple and the vision of heaven it contains, Jonathan Stapley notes, “This heaven was not a future reward for the faithful or the elect; it was a material heaven on earth, constructed welding link by welding link on the anvil of the temple altar.”¹¹⁶ By making this reality tangible to participants, the temple also makes those on the other side of the veil tangible beings. Those who pass wait in a state of expectation for their loved ones to enter into the

¹¹⁵ Brown, Samuel Morris. *In Heaven as it is On Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 146.

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 17.

temple and interact with their spirits through proxy ordinances and prayerful contemplation. In the walls of the temple, heaven collides with earth in such a way as to symbolically dissolve the boundary between the living and the dead through the use of ritual practices.

Steven is a bishop in central Utah. He is the father of six children and faithful to the LDS Church and its teachings. When he returned from his mission, he was called as a Family History Consultant at his local ward. He fondly recalled having the opportunity to check the records of his family to make sure all proxy ordinances for his family was finished. In addition to sharing the importance of his family's records, he also recalled an additional story that remains central to his testimony of the Church and the closeness of the deceased. Importantly, he clarifies that this story involves temple work for individuals who are not relatives, a practice that is no longer permitted. While serving as a Family History Consultant, Steven decided to check the status of his most beloved philosophers. As a philosophy major, he became deeply interested in both the theories of these great thinkers, as well as their personal lives. As he searched through names, he found that Friedrich Nietzsche and his sister's temple rituals were incomplete. For Steven, it was important that both he and his sister were finished at the same time because of their closeness in life. After the research was completed, he asked his family to go to the temple with him to finish the temple work for a list of philosophers he compiled during the course of his research. As he shared his experience in the temple, he described the endowment ritual and standing alongside his sister at the altar, while he stood for Nietzsche by proxy. For Steven, who attended the temple regularly, this was a normal

occurrence, and he did not anticipate anything spectacular. However, once the family entered the Celestial Room, the final room in the temple ritual that represents Celestial Kingdom, he learned that his sister stood alongside him in place of Nietzsche's sister, seemingly by complete coincidence.

However, for Steven, it was not coincidence, but divine and spiritual intervention. As he continued to share the story of entering into the Celestial Room, and learning that Nietzsche and his sister stood together in place of well-known historic siblings, he grew emotional at the prospect of the spirits present in the temple on that day. He explained, "The fact that they were in the same session. Their names were in the same session, they stood next together in the prayer circle is not coincidence... And the fact that she [his sister] and I are brother and sister and you know... it gets moving. It's not random. It's not circumstance."¹¹⁷ Steven understands the temple as a place of expectation. In the walls of the temple, the deceased wait on the other side of the veil for their living counterparts to stand in their place and embody their presence. For Steven, there is no place closer to the spiritual world and the presence of the deceased than in the temple, embodying the name of a spirit while performing sacred work that binds together the entire human family. By standing in place of his deceased relatives, who assumedly are present in the walls of the temple, the rituals construct an eternal reality and strengthens the Church's vision of an afterlife in which spirits wait with gratitude and expectation on

¹¹⁷ Steven. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Provo, Utah, August 12, 2016.

the other side of the veil. Within the temple spirits are really present and a deity who ordained the temple to house the work of eternity.

Because of its rituals, the temple is often a place of intense emotional response. For many women, particularly those who leave the Church, the temple liturgy is not always recalled positively. However, the act of interacting with the dead and binding families often remains a positive memory. Emma is no longer a member of the LDS Church. However, despite her status, she holds vivid memories of her work in the temple and personal revelation that came through these experiences. As a child, she defined herself as someone who took religion and spirituality very seriously, even describing herself as someone with acute scrupulosity, a pathological preoccupation with religious matters. She recalled early morning youth trips to the temple to perform baptisms and confirmations for the dead. As she prepared for these trips, she spent the morning in prayer, preparing herself to be “worthy enough to enter the temple to do this work, asking for a blessing for those people who I was doing the work for.”¹¹⁸ Recalling her experience performing proxy baptisms, she remembered the smell of chlorine and the feeling of her wet hair falling on her white jumpsuit and how the entire experience involved “this mantle and this responsibility.”¹¹⁹ As a young woman in the Church, Emma felt drawn to the idea of fulfilling important work. Temple work satiated this longing and offered young people like herself the opportunity to accomplish work with eternal consequences.

¹¹⁸ Emma. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Orem, Utah, August 4, 2016.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

As she recalled standing in the water, she stated, “I remember those early mornings and I took it very seriously and I remember vividly picturing these women who I was doing that work for and imagining that they were getting into the water with me. This proxy work was, in a lot of ways, a very literal work. I was binding them to the people that they love.”¹²⁰ Much like approaching the veil for adults going through an endowment, the temple ritual that prepares adult Mormons for the afterlife, entering the water of the baptismal font offers young members of the Church an opportunity to experience the permeability of the temporal and spiritual realm. Within Mormonism, baptism symbolically represents death and rebirth. By stepping into the water, the individual steps into death alongside the Savior and their ancestors, breaking the barrier between life and death and allowing for an interaction with the spirit world, even for just a brief period when the name of the deceased is called.

For Emma, the temple is a place that both binds people on heaven and earth and a place where the veil is thin. In our discussion, she described the death of her best friend and the moments where she “felt her very close... and it wasn’t necessarily her in a physical way or anything that it was like her, but changed a little bit.”¹²¹ In these instances, she described knowing in an undeniable way that she was present with her, as if their “souls could recognize each other.”¹²² Although Emma is no longer a member of the Church, the temple provided a means of dealing with loss at a time when this was most important and relevant. While the interaction did not bolster her faith in the Church,

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

this interaction with the dead offered comfort and support after grave loss. In the walls of the temple, the dead are present and interaction is possible.

Not all interactions with the deceased are as personal as Emma's. Many interactions, such as Steven's, involve individuals whom the Church actively discourages members from baptizing. Even in a tradition that supports interactions with the deceased, there are moments that push boundaries of acceptability. Most notably, the Church has released multiple statements condemning the proxy baptism of Holocaust victims, who are not direct relatives. In one such statement on using the names of these victims, the Church stated, "While no system is foolproof in preventing the handful of individuals who are determined to falsify submissions, we are committed to taking action against individual abusers by suspending the submitter's access privileges. We will also consider whether other Church disciplinary action should be taken."¹²³ As a general rule, the Church only encourages temple work for direct relatives. In cases where the name is not a relative, the Church requires family permission for anyone who died within the last 110 years.

However, this regulation is not always heeded. This is particularly true when it comes to the names of indigenous people, a group with a complicated historical relationship to the LDS Church. On September 3, 2016, I sat with a woman named Lucy as she recounted her testimony of the Church and her passion for its third mission, redeeming the dead. Lucy is a convert, who initially joined the Church after reading the

¹²³ "Church Statement on Violations of Proxy Baptism Policy." Mormon Newsroom, February 21, 2012. Accessed September 12, 2017. <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/violations-of-proxy-baptism-policy>

Book of Mormon, and more importantly, the Doctrine and Covenants. Speaking about her conversion, she recalled opening the Doctrine and Covenants to a passage written by Joseph Smith about the Last Days. As she read the passage she described the spirit rushing over her and gold letters jumping off the page. She was taken back to her childhood interest in the Book of Revelation and running to her mother after hearing the voice of God tell her, “You will live to see these events occur.”¹²⁴ For Lucy, the words of Joseph Smith were confirmation of this childhood experience and opened the door for her later baptism. While she does not remember the moment of her baptism in great detail, she has detailed memories of her Patriarchal Blessing, a blessing through the laying on of hands that identifies the tribe of Israel the individual stems from, offers insight into the person’s spiritual gifts, and foretells future experiences and blessings. As the hands fell onto her head and the Patriarch began to speak, she recalled the words, “You will become wise and influential in the midst of Zion.”¹²⁵

Following an account of her early years in the Church, Lucy quickly shifted to an event that left a lasting impression on her religious life. As a 30-year-old woman she dreamt of entering a LDS ward and meeting an indigenous man at the podium. She followed the man into the meadow behind the meetinghouse and found herself standing before six others, dressed to reflect their particular indigenous community. The man she met in her initial encounter spoke to her saying, “You must choose your spirit guide.”¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Lucy. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Provo, Utah, September 3, 2016.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

She recalled, “I went and stood in front of this first man and there was so much love and light coming off of his face that I couldn’t see his features. But I could see that he was dressed in a bone breast-plate, that’s the best I could see. And then I went and stood in front of each of these ones and they were so differential, but none of the light show. So I came back to the Indian who brought me there and said well I guess it’s the first one.”¹²⁷ Following this encounter, Lucy found herself at the library immersed in every text she could find about the indigenous communities of the Americas. As she poured over all the library had to offer, she was surprised to find an image of the man from her dream and the community he helped lead while in mortality.

Lucy recalled this experience as distant memory until one night in 2006 when she was leaving an endowment session at the temple with a close friend. As she left the temple, her friend turned to her and said, “My dear did you know there’s a red Indian following us?”¹²⁸ With wide eyes she recalled turning to her friend and inquiring of his name. Pulling the image of her “spirit guide” out of her purse, the friend confirmed that the specter at the temple was the ghost that had previously visited her in a dream as a child, offered to be her spirit guide as an adult, and now stood at the doors of the temple. For Lucy, this was a clear sign, “So one of my first thoughts was I wonder if his temple work has been done. So I look and find that in 1909 in the Manti temple somebody did part of his work and never finished it.”¹²⁹ The proxy temple work of this man was

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

eventually finished by Lucy and friends she asked for assistance with the work, along with 2,000 other indigenous people.

Lucy's account of the redemption of indigenous souls is part of the historical Mormon narrative concerning the potential redemption of indigenous peoples. As a religion that emerged in nineteenth-century New York, accounts such as these participate in the wider American narrative of spectral Native Americans and the haunting presence of indigeneity. In her work on the indigenous presence that haunts the American landscape, Renee Bergland argues, "The American subject... is obsessed with the originary sin against Native people that both engenders that subject and irrevocably strains it. Native American ghosts haunt American literature because the American nation is compelled to return again and again to an encounter that makes it both sorry and happy, a defiled grace upon which it must continually rebuild the American subject."¹³⁰ As Bergland suggests of the American subject, the cultural haunting of the ghost aids in the establishment of Mormon subjectivity. Through a recognition of this visible invisible object that permeates the present through a reminder of the past, the subject strengthens its own identity.

The specter of indigenous death and violence hang suspended in Mormon narrative and create the space for remembering the past and initiating redemption. In her work on cultural haunting, Gordon Avery notes:

Haunting... is about reliving events in all their vividness, originality, and violence so as to overcome their pulsating and lingering effects... When you touch the ghost or the ghostly matter (or when it touches you), a force

¹³⁰ Renee L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000), 22.

that combines the injurious and the Utopian, you get something different than you might have expected. To be sure, haunting terrorizes but it gives you *something you have to try for yourself*.¹³¹

Much like the early American narratives of Providence, indigenous removal for Mormons was a signal of gathering; the creation of Zion needed space. However, the indigenous were never fully disappeared. Like the all too common colonial practice, those not redeemed in life held the possibility to be redeemed in death. However, in death the Lamanite could return and make their presence known. Throughout the nineteenth century, and into the present, the LDS Church participated in this project through the continued identification of the Lamanite as both the redeemable descendants of Book of Mormon prophets and a fallen other.¹³²

For Lucy, this often takes shape in the walls of the temple where indigenous spirits make their need for redemption apparent. Lucy recounted kneeling at the altar in a

¹³¹ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 134.

¹³² In 1830, the Book of Mormon was first published as a Scriptural document that sought to reveal the history of North America and give an account of the continent's indigenous communities. In this earliest edition, Smith proclaimed, "Wherefore it is an abridgment of the Record of the People of Nephi; and also of the Lamanites; written to the Lamanites, which are a remnant of the House of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile; written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of Prophecy and of Revelation." As a text written for a specific people, the early Book of Mormon intended to serve as a vehicle of the divine message of redemption. As is often pointed out, this message of redemption was racialized and would later inform policy on the creation of a racialized vision of Zion; 1 Nephi states, "And he had caused the cursing to come upon them, yea, even a sore cursing, because of their iniquity. For behold, they had hardened their hearts against him, that they had become like unto a flint; wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them." (1 Nephi 5:21) Although this sentiment is not narrated by Lucy and others who work toward the redemption of indigenous souls, she expressed the importance of sharing the Book of Mormon with various native communities because "it is theirs."

sealing room during a session where the work on behalf of several indigenous people was finished. As she knelt across the altar, the man on the other side asked if it was an appropriate time to share the story of the time he was adopted into specific indigenous community whose temple sealings were in process of completion. She recalled staring across the altar with wide eyes and feeling confirmation pour over her. Later that afternoon, the man at the altar told the Temple President about the interaction. She stated, “Well, he knew the temple president at the time and went down and told him what happened. So, that Temple President, when he would go out to do firesides [evening talks given in LDS congregations], would tell that story and say, ‘Come to the temple; miracles occur.’”¹³³

For Lucy and others who practice proxy temple work for the indigenous dead, the saving ordinances do not go unnoticed on the other side of the veil. Lucy recalled, “Recently I had a dream where I was being shown that he was actually being initiated into a higher priesthood on the other side.”¹³⁴ This is also reflected in historical accounts of visions from the other side where confirmation of the importance of these ordinances is received. Speaking on the proxy temple ceremonies and completing all ordinances for the deceased, Lucy explains, “Well I think it’s astonishing. The work is... I mean it’s so much bigger than we even realize, you know? But it’s such a simple act you know it takes about what an hour and a half to do everything and we’re freeing people to go up to

¹³³ Lucy. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Provo, Utah, September 3, 2016.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

higher realms and... sealing families together and couples together.”¹³⁵ When asked about the Church’s past doctrinal racism and history of displacement, Lucy responded that the Church has done a lot for the indigenous, and this was the pinnacle of that relationship. For her, the work of the temple is more significant than any earthly injustice because of its eternal consequences. This reflects early Mormon settler belief in the importance of reaching the “Lamanite,” regardless of outcome.

The Second Comforter

A central question within the discussion of spirit interaction is which spirits are permitted to interact with the living. The most significant, and concerning spirit, is Jesus Christ. Although Mormonism bestows divinity to Jesus, he is separate from Heavenly Father and his body was entirely human. While Mormons assert that he attained his exaltation and now sits beside God in the eternities, his visitations are still common among members of the Church.¹³⁶ This event is often referred to as the Second Comforter, with the recipient becoming a special witness of Jesus Christ.¹³⁷ Within the LDS Church, there is an underlying assumption among members that the men called as Apostles and Prophets receive a Second Comforter experience where they have the

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ While Jesus Christ is distinct from other spirits, his presence among the living is central to the discussion of permissibility and boundary formation within the practice of spirit communication.

¹³⁷ The Second Comforter is sometimes referenced alongside the Second Anointing, a rare temple ordinance that prepares a married couple for their death and assures them of future exaltation. For more on the Second Anointing, see David John Buerger, “The Fulness of the Priesthood’: The Second Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice Vol. 16 No. 1 (Spring 1983) pp. 10-46.

opportunity to learn from the Savior in a face to face interaction. This is sometimes alluded to in veiled language, such as Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's April 2013 General Conference talk when he concluded with, "These things I declare to you with the conviction Peter called the 'more sure word of prophecy,'" a statement historically synonymous with a visitation from Jesus Christ.¹³⁸

However, although rarely spoken, members of the Church often have these types of experiences. When Emma spoke with me about the temple, she expressed her deep concern over the lack of female representation and a feeling of betrayal as she approached the altar and was asked to veil her face during the prayer circle that happens during the endowment ceremony. However, despite her frustration, she continued going to the temple monthly. As she described the veiling, she remembered a time after her best friend had died and her young daughter was diagnosed with club feet. Within a six-month timeframe, her life began to fall apart and nothing, not even Church, was a source of comfort. In this moment, she veiled her face and remembered feeling relief for the first time. She remembered, "And I just imagined like Jesus Christ's face on the other side of that veil and it was this deeply personal, holy space where I could see God's face in a way. I could physically see Jesus."¹³⁹ Emma explained that this experience made her consider possible reasons for women veiling their faces in the temple. She specifically

¹³⁸ Jeffrey R. Holland, "Lord, I Believe," General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 2013.

¹³⁹ Emma. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Orem, Utah, August 4, 2016. According to LDS doctrine, the Second Comforter is not only a visitation of Jesus, but the assurance of salvation. Emma's account did not specify the assurance of her salvation.

wondered if this offered women a private experience where they could “show their hearts to God.”¹⁴⁰ As she pondered this out loud, she wondered why men were not also afforded this opportunity. For her, veiling remains a troubling aspect of the temple.

In instances where claims to authority are within the confines of established LDS leadership, the Second Comforter experience is welcomed. The most well-known of these interactions comes from a brief article published in 1933 in the *Improvement Era*. In this article, Lorenzo Snow’s son reflected on his father’s experience with the resurrected Jesus while he served as the President of the Salt Lake temple. At this time, then president Wilford Woodruff’s health was in decline, and Snow worried about the mantle leadership falling onto him. Out of this concern, at the age of 86, Snow “went to his room in the Salt Lake Temple, dressed in his robes of the Priesthood, knelt at the sacred altar of the Holy of Holies in the House of the Lord and there plead to the Lord to spare President Woodruff’s life, that President Woodruff might outlive him and that the great responsibility of Church leadership would not fall on his shoulders.”¹⁴¹ Despite his prayers, Woodruff died on September 2, 1898. In response, Snow again returned to the altar of the temple to seek answers and insight.

Bowing his head to heaven, Snow recited the words of Jesus in the Gospels, “Thy will be done.”¹⁴² After waiting for a reply to no avail, he stood from the altar and passed into the Celestial Room. As he walked through the veil, he was met with a “glorious

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ LeRoi C. Snow, “An Experience of My Father’s,” *Improvement Era*, Volume 36. Number 11, September 1933. pg. 677 and 679, 677.

¹⁴² Ibid.

manifestation.”¹⁴³ In his vision, recounted by his daughter, Allie Young Pond, Snow was instructed to reorganize the First Presidency and told that he would succeed Woodruff as President of the Church. Pond ended her memory of the events as follows, “Now granddaughter, I want you to remember that this is the testimony of our grand-father, that he told you with his own lips that he actually saw the Saviour, here in the Temple, and talked with Him face to face.”¹⁴⁴

At the funeral of Wilford Woodruff, attended by the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, leadership of the LDS Church, Elder F.D. Richards gave a prayer to open the event. His prayer spoke thankfully for the Presidency of Woodruff and the blessings that awaited the family. Following the prayer, the choir stood and sang “O My Father.” In the *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star’s* description of the events, the author noted, “During the musical exercises, the phrase Being Dead Yet Speaketh, was displayed by means of electric lights, the same appearing just over a life-size likeness of President [W]oodruff and having an excellent effect.”¹⁴⁵ The glowing words that hung over Woodruff’s casketed body served as a reminder of the LDS belief that, even in death, Woodruff remained present and active among the Saints.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. See John P. Hatch, “From Prayer to Visitation: Reexamining Lorenzo Snow’s Vision of Jesus Christ in the Salt Lake Temple.” *Journal of Mormon History*. Vol. 42 No. 3 (July 2017). Hatch notes that the account from LeRoi C. Snow is the only written or recorded account of Lorenzo Snow’s interaction with Jesus Christ. Allie Pond, though quoted, does not have a record of the event. LeRoi C. Snow asserts that Heber J. Grant, Anthon H. Lund, and Arthur Winter testified of the event, but no minutes discussing the event exists.

¹⁴⁵ “Consigned to the Tomb: Remains of the Late President Wilford Woodruff Laid to Rest with Impressive and Imposing Ceremony” in *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* No. 39, Vol. LX (Thursday, September 29, 1898), 612.

John P. Hatch's article on the subject of Snow's visitation describes a conflicted interaction among the Twelve Apostles after the funeral, when the succession and restructuring of the hierarchy was being determined.¹⁴⁶ In the midst of the discussion, Snow first shared of his divine interaction. For the men in leadership, this witness confirmed his calling as the successor to Woodruff.¹⁴⁷ The interaction was not deemed controversial because, although unusual, it was experienced by a leader in the Church, in an appropriate setting, and affirmed the hierarchy of the institution. For these reasons, Snow's Second Comforter experience remains in the realm of benign, though extraordinary, spirit communication.

Outside of accounts from Church leaders, no contemporary interaction with the resurrected Jesus is more popular and controversial than the one experienced by Denver Snuffer.¹⁴⁸ Although similar, the outcomes of the event differs greatly and demonstrate the limits of spiritual communication and the extent to which authority plays a key role in the validation of such experiences. Denver Snuffer is a Utah-based lawyer and Latter-

¹⁴⁶ John P. Hatch, "From Prayer to Visitation: Reexamining Lorenzo Snow's Vision of Jesus Christ in the Salt Lake Temple." *Journal of Mormon History*. Vol. 42 No. 3 (July 2017), 160-162.

¹⁴⁷ However, despite its significance as an assurance of Snow's calling, an account of the experience was not disclosed or recorded until years later in the *Improvement Era*. (Hatch, 164)

¹⁴⁸ In online forums and lay debates on Denver Snuffer, his experience and movement is often equated with Julie Rowe, an LDS woman who publically speaks on her near-death experience and entry in the spirit world. Her time in the spirit world allowed her to see the end times as a way of warning people. Because many of her claims are prophetic, and often deemed "extreme," some have questioned her standing in the Church and lack of discipline by leaders. Many who support alternative religious practices claim that her good standing in the Church is solely based on her support of the institution and unwillingness to question the authority of its leaders.

Day Saint. He is also a writer and, most recently, leader of one of the newest Mormon movements, the Remnant (Snufferite). The controversy began in 2006 when Snuffer published *The Second Comforter: Conversing with the Lord Through the Veil*. Based on John 14:18, where Jesus tells his followers that, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you,” the book offers readers an outline for receiving this gift, which Snuffer asserts is available to everyone who believes in Jesus and the Gospel.¹⁴⁹ Joseph Smith also expounded on this passage to validate the possibility of the resurrected Jesus’ appearance to contemporary disciples. In this writing, Smith explained:

When any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even He will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God...¹⁵⁰

The writings of Joseph Smith, and subsequently Denver Snuffer, allowed for all people to experience the same interaction with the spiritual world as the early Apostles. As witnesses of the resurrected Jesus, all individuals with this experience are afforded the same assurance of their salvation as anyone in designated Church leadership. For Snuffer and his followers, Jesus is an equalizer and the Second Comforter is the greatest moment of religious democratization. Snuffer’s writings asserted that the veil was equally thin for all people, they just need to approach it. In an attempt to further democratize the process,

¹⁴⁹ John 14:18.

¹⁵⁰ Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, edited by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 150.

Snuffer's text outlines a method for receiving this gift. This includes faith, receiving the ordinance of baptism that was restored by Joseph Smith, and keeping the commandments.

Although the outline presented in the book assumes the author proceeded through the process on his own, it was not until his later book, *Passing the Heavenly Gift* that Snuffer affirms his own experience with the Second Comforter when he wrote, "The Lord does still personally appear to mankind. I am a witness of this fact. He first appeared to me February 13, 2003."¹⁵¹ The problem with this interaction, as with other Mormon experiences with spirits and gods was not the experience with the divine. Rather, it was the subsequent claims against the LDS Church and its authority. Outlining changes undergone by the LDS Church, Snuffer concluded that the institution failed to "secure the fullness of the Priesthood" over the course of its history.¹⁵² Rather than follow Priesthood leaders, Snuffer argued that believers should seek after Jesus and follow the commandments laid out in the Scriptures. Much like fundamentalist assertions, he claims that the Church was ordained by God, but was "out of order," a phrase often used by fundamentalists to assert that the Church is in a state of disarray or operated under incorrect authority. It was because of this assertion that Snuffer was called into a disciplinary council by his Stake President, the lay leader that oversees the stake level of the Church. He was subsequently excommunicated a month later in September 2013. His

¹⁵¹ Denver Snuffer, Jr., *Passing the Heavenly Gift* (Salt Lake City: Milcreek Press, 2006), 452.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 44.

subsequent appeal of the council's decision was denied. For his interaction, and subsequent claims against the LDS Church, Snuffer was labeled an apostate.

Like many Mormons who appeal to the divine and encounter spirits in ways leading toward apostasy, as understood by the LDS Church, Snuffer's role in Mormonism did not end following his excommunication. Rather, his writings and admonition that all believers can encounter the divine led to the birth of a new Mormon movement. Members of this loosely defined organization meet in homes and outdoor locations across the country to partake of the sacrament, share their testimonies, read the scriptures, and discuss the significance of the Restoration. As their name indicates, followers of this movement share the common sentiment that there was an original form of Mormonism that was lost; most often the period of loss is placed at the time of Brigham Young's Presidency. As a perceived remnant of the original Church founded by Joseph Smith, members of Snuffer's movement seek their own spiritual experience and esteem themselves as the chosen vessel of God's power. Currently, this group appeals to individuals who believe in the truthfulness of the Restoration, but are disaffected with the institutional Church. While most members of the Remnant movement have not experienced an interaction with the resurrected Jesus, they wait in hopeful anticipation that they will be worthy of this encounter.

Unlike Lorenzo Snow's interaction with Jesus, the interactions among members of the Remnant movement do not affirm the authority of the LDS Church and its leaders. Rather, these interactions affirm the individual as the primary locus of spiritual authority. Because of this, many members of the movement have undergone their own disciplinary

councils from the institutional Church. In an untitled document, a new Stake President expressed concern over an individual who, while knowledgeable and devoted to God, criticizes the hierarchy and was writing a book series on the topic. This book included the contrarian ideas that a Prophet is not necessary, the Church is a product of human beings, and the only way to attain salvation is through a witness of the Savior.¹⁵³ For this Stake President, the individual's beliefs in the particulars of the Restoration are not the primary concern. The concern is the questioning of authority and sympathy his beliefs garnered from others in the ward. In the notice, a review of the book concludes, "The fact that [name redacted] is recruiting people to his views is of great concern."¹⁵⁴ Again, the beliefs are not concerning, the problem is encouraging people away from "correct authority." The notice ends with Section 6.6.3 (When a Disciplinary Council is Mandatory) of Handbook 1 and the Church's definition of apostasy.¹⁵⁵

The first time I met Denver Snuffer was in 2016 during the annual Sunstone Symposium. He wore a white, short-sleeved, button-down shirt and khaki pants. His hair was dusty white and his wife stood by his side as he answered questions and distributed copies of his newest writing, "Was There an Original?" I subsequently attended each of

¹⁵³ "Untitled document," *MormonLeaks*, 1-2.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* According to the LDS Church, apostasy refers to any member who: 1. Repeatedly acts in clear, open, and deliberate public opposition to the Church or its leaders. 2. Persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after they have been corrected by their bishop or a higher authority. 3. Continue to follow the teachings of apostate sects (such as those that advocate plural marriage) after being corrected by their bishop or a higher authority. 4. Are in a same-gender marriage. 5. Formally join another church and advocate its teachings. (Church Handbook of Instruction 1)

his annual Sunstone Symposium presentations over the next two years and witnessed the size of his audience increase, which was difficult given that his lectures are always filled to capacity with people standing in the doorways hoping to hear of Snuffer's insight and divine interactions. In each subsequent year, Snuffer continued to present and speak on his faith in the Restoration and potential for all people to witness Jesus. In 2018, during the Sunstone Summer Symposium, Snuffer once again stood before a crowd to profess his experience, unashamed of his excommunication. Following his presentation, audience members were invited to ask questions of the man that many believe is the Davidic servant, the individual who will come from the line of David in the last days to prepare the way for the return of Jesus.¹⁵⁶ A man stood and simply asked, "Have you seen Jesus?" In response, Snuffer simply replied, "yes."

Although excommunicated, Snuffer remains a devoted believer in the truth claims of Mormonism. In addition to his faith in the tradition, his conviction that any individual can experience an interaction with the resurrected Jesus Christ earned him a following that is rapidly accumulating followers from across the Mormonism.¹⁵⁷ For this reason, many members of the Remnant formally resign from their previous institutions or face disciplinary councils. In all cases where disciplinary councils are summoned, the cause

¹⁵⁶ Along with the title, "One Mighty and Strong," (Doctrine and Covenants 85) this name is used by leaders of small Mormon movements as a means of legitimizing their perceived calling.

¹⁵⁷ To date, Snuffer has followers from the LDS Church, Community of Christ, Temple Lot, and independent groups. Because of his denial that Joseph Smith practiced polygamy, and his groups' aversion to the practice, no polygamists have formally joined the movement. In interviews, members of the Remnant state that polygamist families would need to split up in order to be in full fellowship with the community.

for excommunication, or “disfellowship,” is apostasy. To those who faced these outcomes, while remaining faithful to the beliefs and practices of Mormonism, the cause appears obvious; opposition to the established authority of the LDS Church. As with the interactions of less widely known spirits, the communications are benign and unworthy of action until they cultivate claims to power.

Conclusion

“Everyone has a story of talking to a deceased relative in the temple.” This phrase, affirmed by many over the course of this research, encapsulates the prevalence of the LDS practice of interacting with the deceased among members of the Church. Through this practice, individuals and families are afforded comfort and assurance of their ancestors and relatives continued presence among the living. However, this practice does much more than offer comfort. By interacting with the deceased, truth claims of the LDS Church are reinforced and made tangible. This includes the belief in a spirit world and the importance of saving ordinances done in the temple. Through the expectation and gratitude of the deceased, the importance of these foundational teachings is also made tangible. As a member of the Church receives a spiritual witness from the other side of the veil, they are also strengthened in their resolve of the institution that lays claim to the mechanism of these witnesses.

While Mormonism asserts the possibility of spiritual presence, this presence is carefully managed by leaders in the Church to ensure the spirits remain in the confines of acceptability that is drawn along the lines of spiritual authority. In order to manage spiritual communication, spirits were put to use through the outlets of genealogical and

temple work. In these spaces, the spiritual interactions that affirm the hierarchy of the Church are deemed authentic moments of divine guidance and interaction by the Church leadership. Through temple work, the spirits and their communicators were given institutional approval because they offered a way for people to retain their connection to the spiritual world, while still supporting the institutional Church. Unlike the spirits of fundamentalism and “apostate” groups, the spirits in the temple testify of the institution and its religious structures as much as they testify of divinity.

Although some interactions with the deceased push the boundaries of acceptability, such as Lucy’s interactions with indigenous spirits and Steven’s baptism of Nietzsche, both individuals remain in good standing with the Church and their encounters are legitimized as valid forms of LDS religiosity. Although some Mormons may not agree with Lucy and Steven’s practices, the Church is not in a position to enforce discipline because these instances support the truth claims of the Church and fit within hierarchy spiritual narrative. It is not until an encounter raises questions confronting the leadership of the Church that the interaction is marked apostate and deemed unacceptable by the leadership of the LDS Church. Of course, the particular spirit and context of the interaction matters. However, regardless of the particulars, the experiences of both members and former members of the Church demonstrates that the boundaries of acceptability, when it comes to spirit communication, and occult practice generally, are drawn on the lines of access to authority and spiritual power.

Chapter 3:

The Haunting Presence of Women's Authority in Contemporary Mormonism

The Spirit of Mormon Women

In June 2016, I knelt in the laundry room of my apartment building in Utah County. I had spent the week in the Church History Library reading accounts of Mormon spiritualism and doing fieldwork at the meetinghouse down the street. As I sorted laundry, the front door to the basement opened and a woman in her thirties, Zina, walked through the door. She looked down to ask who I was and how long I had lived in the apartment next door to her. I explained that I had just moved to Utah and was researching Mormonism. At this remark, she excitedly told me that she was Mormon. In a moment of poor judgment, I responded by telling her that was fine, but I was interested in Mormons who interact with the deceased. Without hesitation, she looked at me and responded, "Oh, I do that." I stared at her, unsure how to respond as she explained that she organizes a women's group that meets on a regular basis. The women who participate in these meetings are mediums, healers, and empaths. They are women who speak to Heavenly Mother and have close relationships with their deceased ancestors, whom they believe are still present in their lives. After our brief conversation, she was sure that I had been sent to her by the spirits and invited me to participate in her women's group for the remainder of the summer.

The women met in a rented space in an apartment complex in Utah County on Sunday evenings.¹⁵⁸ At the first meeting I attended, fifteen women began by sitting in a circle and introducing themselves to all new attendees. Each of the women comes from a Mormon background and was raised in the LDS Church. Although not all of the women are currently active members, they all describe themselves as Mormon, whether actively attending Church, inactive, culturally Mormon based on heritage and ancestry, or fully believing in the teachings of the Church. As the women introduced themselves, they shared various stories that led to their participation in group and their attendance at the particular meeting. One woman shared that she had just experienced a miscarriage and was so grateful for the small necklace she received at the group meeting the week before. Everyone's eyes shifted to the delicate chain around her neck with a circular pendant at the bottom. The pendant encircles a small tree made of neatly woven crystals. She had prayed in the midst of her anguish and asked God to allow Heavenly Mother to touch the necklace and infuse it with her presence. Since receiving it from the women's group, it has become both a great comfort and a means of reconnecting with her Heavenly Parents. The woman next to her began to cry as she explained that she is newly pregnant, but finds herself angry with the Church and God. She was concerned about her anger because she was unsure how it may affect her pregnancy. She explained that she is working toward

¹⁵⁸ Since my first meeting with these women, their meetings have expanded to necessitate the rental of an event and reception venue. They meet monthly, corresponding with the new moon. In order to supplement the rental and supply costs, a fifteen-dollar donation is requested from all participants. In addition to monthly gatherings, they also hold yearly retreats that attract women from across the state, many of whom are not regular attendees.

reconciliation with the Church through a renewed relationship with her Heavenly Mother. This relationship, which was common among the women in the group, manifested in the frequent singing of a poem, reimagined as a Mormon hymn directed toward their *Mother in Heaven*:

*The river is flowing
Flowing and growing
The river is flowing
Down to the sea*

*Mother carry me
Your child I will always be
Mother carry me
Down to the sea*

The meeting of the women in the Utah Valley recalls the broader story of Mormon women gathering together, bound by spiritual authority to bless, heal, and perform ordinances. Although the history of women's authority has only been at the forefront of Mormon studies research in the last three decades, the legacy of this history is invoked by Mormon feminists, who desire greater participation and involvement in the Church, including formal ordination. Many of the women who met in the rented apartment space in Utah County, are involved in these movements and participate in actions that seek greater female representation at all levels of the Church. However, unlike many Mormon feminists who seek spiritual authority through the institutional channels of the LDS hierarchy, the women who meet in Utah County are claiming authority parallel to the Church, citing the history of women's power as a force of legitimization and an unseen presence that pervades the lives of believing Saints.

In her work on eternal polygamy, Carol Lynn Pearson described polygamy as the visible invisible that reappears time and again as a reminder of the past and warning to future women as they enter into the sealing ordinance of marriage.¹⁵⁹ However, polygamy is not the only thing that haunts Mormons and calls out for justice. Just as plural marriage acts as a haunting presence that pervades Mormon doctrine, history, and cultural norms, the entirety of Mormonism is haunted by its women and their legacy of spiritual power that is lost in the contemporary LDS Church.¹⁶⁰ Many Mormon women recall a time when their female ancestors were priests, prophets, healers, and seers. Historical accounts of early women are somewhat controversial because their lives support multiple claims. Because they were never formally ordained, and male leaders asserted that they never ordained women, many scholars and believers denounce the idea that women once held

¹⁵⁹ Carolyn Lynn Pearson, *The Ghost of Eternal Polygamy: Haunting the Hearts and Heaven of Mormon Women and Men*. (Pivot Point Books, 2016). Although not formally practiced, the doctrinal and scriptural support for polygamy remain in the LDS canon. In addition, Pearson and other Mormon feminists note the inequality of the sealing practice. Men are still permitted to be sealed to more than one woman, on the condition that the first spouse has passed away or a civil divorce is obtained. However, women are unable to be sealed to more than one man under any condition. This gendered difference in the sealing ordinance has revived discussion about eternal polygamy and the continued practice of plural marriage in the afterlife.

¹⁶⁰ The concern over women's spiritual authority is not unique to the LDS Church. Across the spectrum of Mormonism, women discuss the possibility of ordination and their place in the community as healers. In some fundamentalist groups, these conversations are complicated by the public discussion of the Second Anointing, a temple ritual that many argue grants women priesthood authority. Although this ritual is only seldom discussed and practiced in the LDS Church, it remains a central part of temple worship within fundamentalism. On one occasion, at a Solemn Assembly meeting with Christ's Church in Nevada, I was impressed by the talk given by the group's Relief Society President. When I expressed my interest in her talk, a member of leadership explained that she speaks with the authority of the priesthood and mentioned her Second Anointing as the avenue by which she received that power.

priesthood authority. However, because of the multiple accounts of blessings, healings, and revelations from women, many believe there is some historical basis for the ordination of women. The authority of these historical figures is invoked every time they lay hands on one another's heads or sing to their Heavenly Mother. In the same way that male leadership across Mormonism is surrounded by literal spirits that offer legitimization and vindication, the spirit of women's authority acts as a figurative specter that is invoked each time a woman claims the priesthood or asserts a religious authority apart from the LDS hierarchy.

Since my initial interactions with the women's group in Utah County, many of these women have chosen an inactive status in the Church or formal resignation, removing their name from the records and publicly disassociating from the institutional Church. However, although they are no longer actively members of the Church, many of these women still claim a Mormon identity. Through interactions with inactive and resigned women, it became apparent that leaving the institution, while still claiming a Mormon identity, is an aspect of women's authority that is often overlooked. Even the act of leaving, for both early women and contemporary Mormon women of Utah County, is done through the use of Mormon language and symbolism. The women who leave, juxtaposed with the women who choose to stay and claim spiritual authority within the Church, demonstrate the range of ways that women attempt to claim power in Mormonism by invoking the spirits of their ancestors, including their Heavenly Mother, and the metaphorical spirit of women's authority that surrounds contemporary debates over the place of women in the Church.

The Specter of Women's Authority

In her work on cultural haunting in literature, Kathleen Brogan writes about history as a means of bringing the dead back to life. The cultural haunting she articulates functions to construct identities through an “imaginative recuperation of the past and to press this new version of the past into the service of the present.”¹⁶¹ Although her writing primarily deals with the construction of ethnicity through the language of ghosts and haunting, she notes the way that haunting is a significant narrative tool for the discussion of women and their historical absence. However, more than simply invisible, the ghost represents a figure that is both powerless and powerful. It represents both the visible and invisible, the seen and unseen. For Mormon women, this language is particularly compelling because it encapsulates the way women's authority functioned for a majority of Mormon history and continues to function through the women who invoke its memory in the present. This is especially true for Ordain Women, an organization founded in 2013 to advocate for women's ordination in the LDS Church. As the organization grew and sought ways to explain their position to faithful members of the Church, they produced literature on women's authority to support their position and campaign for the priesthood.

Prior to the start of the October 2013 priesthood session of General Conference, Kate Kelly, the founder of Ordain Women, stood before a group of women who sought to enter the temporarily male-only space of the conference center in Salt Lake City. Earlier that year, Ordain Women launched a website that highlighted profiles of women who

¹⁶¹ Brogan, Kathleen. *Cultural Haunting: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1998), 4.

sought the priesthood. The profiles highlighted the lives of faithful Mormon women who, over time, began to see the withholding of the priesthood from women as both unequal and historically unfounded. Within the Mormon movement, the priesthood is “the eternal power and authority of God.”¹⁶² In the official teaching manuals on the nature of the priesthood, the Church states that, “Through the priesthood He created and governs the heavens and the earth. By this power the universe is kept in perfect order.”¹⁶³ The teachings found in these manuals stem from the Book of Moses, a book found in the Pearl of Great Price, which presents the priesthood as the only avenue through which eternal life and immortality are possible.¹⁶⁴ The importance of the priesthood is further emphasized throughout the Church Education System as teachers proclaim to LDS students that, “Our Heavenly Father delegates His priesthood power to worthy male members of the Church. The priesthood enables them to act in God’s name for the salvation of the human family.”¹⁶⁵ Acting in God’s name includes performing the sacred ordinances of baptism, confirmation, administering the sacrament, and conferring temple sealings. In addition, the priesthood is essential to guide the Church. For Mormons, just as apostles and elders acted through the power of the priesthood within the early Church, the same power exists in a restored form through the men who govern the current institution.

¹⁶² “Chapter 13: The Priesthood,” *Gospel Principles* (2011), 67-71.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Moses 1:39

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

The definition's inclusion of gender is significant because only men are currently permitted priesthood ordination in the LDS Church. However, despite the gendered restriction, the historic definition and implementation of the priesthood presents challenges to the narrative of an unbroken chain of authority passed through worthy men that began on the banks of the Susquehanna River on May 15, 1829. On this day, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery met on the banks of the river to pray about the ordinance of baptism. According to the accounts of Smith and Cowdery, their prayers were met by John the Baptist, a resurrected being who entered the temporal world to offer the men the authority necessary to baptize. Similar to the first moments of Church history, where Smith was met by the spirit of Moroni to receive the gold plates that became the Book of Mormon, the authority that structures the Church was given by a spirit. With this newly received authority, the men baptized each other in the waters of the river. No instructions or restrictions on ordination were recorded on that day.

Jonathan Stapley's recent work on the priesthood and its place in Mormon cosmology demonstrates the complexity of the priesthood and its evolution in Mormon thought. Speaking on Mormon liturgy, he differentiates between the ecclesiastical priesthood, marked by offices and ordination, and the temple or cosmological priesthood, which was more complex and far reaching. Within the temple, the cosmological priesthood was a means of "materializing heaven" and forging eternal bonds.¹⁶⁶ It was the force that cemented earthly relationships and solidified the human family through a

¹⁶⁶ Jonathan Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 11.

complicated web of dynastic sealing. For the cosmological priesthood to function, women's participation was not only welcome, but vital.¹⁶⁷ Because it was familial in nature, the priesthood in the temple required women's participation.

Although the cosmological priesthood is not an explicit aspect of contemporary Mormonism, the priesthood of the temple continues to raise questions about the place of women, especially in spaces where “women perform rituals by priesthood authority without actually having any priesthood.”¹⁶⁸ By “having the priesthood,” Stapley and others refer to the centrality of formal ordination as a way to receive the power of God. While the priesthood power is beyond human containment, the ability to wield its authority is only possible through the laying on of hands, a motion enacted in the initiatory period before the endowment ceremony, referred to as the washing and anointing.¹⁶⁹ During the initiatory ritual, officiators symbolically wash and anoint the body, in an act of consecration to prepare the person to receive the sacred blessings of the temple. As with a majority of the temple liturgy, men and women are separated with male and female officiators preparing and aiding temple participants.

Most of the women who shared their temple experience with me expressed some frustrations at the gendered language of the temple and the phrasing of the covenants made by women, which are distinct from male phrasing. However, every woman

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 26.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁶⁹ On January 2, 2019, the LDS Church released an official statement on changes to the temple ceremony. Changes were made to the initiatory, endowment, and sealing, which offered greater inclusion and equality for women in the temple. While many women are pleased with the changes to both dress and language, some do not feel as though the changes went far enough.

expressed the sacred nature of the initiatory, particularly the moment where a woman placed their hands on the heads of other women and state, “having authority...”¹⁷⁰ In some instances, this experience led women to assert that the priesthood was something they possess because of their temple experience, making formal ordination unnecessary.¹⁷¹ Emma, a woman who later left the Church, recalled the initiatory fondly, particularly the way the physical body is incorporated into the ceremony, which made the ritual personal and as if the sacred experience was her own. She explained, “It really just felt like very sacred to me and I loved that it was a woman doing it to me. And it just felt like, ‘This is for you.’”¹⁷² Unlike other ordinances, no particular priesthood is invoked during this ritual. But, this solemn act and the simple phrase that invokes authority affords women the unique experience of calling upon a power once prominently held by women in the Church; a power that pervades the entire temple experience and temporarily allows women an avenue for exercising priesthood.

¹⁷⁰ Jana Reiss, *The Next Mormons: How Millennials Are Changing the LDS Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 59. The comments by women about the initiatory are consistent with interviews conducted by Jana Reiss on millennial Mormon’s views of the temple. Her research reveals that many women view this ritual as a space where “women’s authority is celebrated.” (59)

¹⁷¹ Ordination of women in Mormonism is a divisive subject. Many women who participated in Ordain Women recalled death threats for their participate in the movement. In addition, many Mormon women countered the claims of Ordain Women claiming that they did not want the priesthood, that priesthood was not meant for women, or that those arguing for greater representation were not faithful enough to the teachings of the leaders. The tension over the subject was dramatized on HBO’s *Big Love*, with Barbara claiming spiritual authority, and one of her sister wives rejecting her over this. The show revealed the ways in which members of the same family hold different beliefs about this issue and how the issue was divisive in both LDS and fundamentalist communities.

¹⁷² Emma. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Orem, Utah, August 4, 2016.

For the women who submitted profiles to Ordain Women, the inability for women to participate in formal ordination was viewed as inherently unequal. In expressing this sentiment, many referred to the often quoted feminist adage that women are not equal until they are equal in all spheres. Of course, the women who engaged in actions understood that they were going against cultural norms in the Church, which do not frame women's lack of priesthood as an inequality because of women's ability to be mothers, a calling that is culturally deemed equal to priesthood.¹⁷³ This sentiment is often expressed in ward meetinghouses, especially at Young Single Adult Wards, where young people navigate the world of Mormonism, many for the first time without the presence of their parents and families. In one instance, in January 2015, a young woman named Helen stood before her Young Single Adult Ward in southern California as a speaker for the week's sacrament meeting. Helen is in her early twenties and served as the event coordinator for her ward. Her sacrament talk for the day was based on Elder Nelson's talk "What Will You Choose?" This talk, originally given in Hawaii in 2013, addressed young adults as the bearers of God's standards on earth. As she concluded a summary of his message, she bore her testimony, "We are all foreordained in the primordial world to either bear the priesthood or act as co-creators on earth."¹⁷⁴ This single statement illustrates the assigned duties of men and women in the Church, based on gender, which

¹⁷³ Jana Reiss, *The Next Mormons: How Millennials Are Changing the LDS Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 98. Although the equating of motherhood with priesthood remains a dominant cultural narrative, new research indicates that 59% of millennials in the Church are bothered by a lack of women's inclusion in priesthood. This figure is based on Jana Reiss' Next Mormon Survey.

¹⁷⁴ Riverside YSA Ward Sacrament Meeting Participant. Riverside, California, January 25, 2015.

is understood as eternal.¹⁷⁵ Within this framework, the possibility of holding the priesthood is eternally tied to gender.

As Ordain Women became more visible, the impetus behind their organization came into question. This was especially true following the excommunication of Kate Kelly in 2014.¹⁷⁶ Many wondered why the women of this organization wanted the priesthood and where they got the idea that asking for it was an option. To this question, some organizers responded that the premise behind the movement was grounded in history and the reality of women's power that looms over contemporary Saints. This looming spirit of women's authority disrupts traditional narratives by uncovering the things that are both lost and hidden, in this case, the power of women.¹⁷⁷ By encouraging women to know their history, Ordain Women began publishing historical accounts of

¹⁷⁵ The teaching on gender identity was solidified as divine revelation when it was spoken by the President of the Church, Gordon B. Hinckley at the general meeting of the Relief Society in September 1995. Speaking authoritatively, President Hinckley asserted, "All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose." (The Family: A Proclamation to the World)

¹⁷⁶ On June 22, 2014, a disciplinary council was held on behalf of Kate Kelly. Although she chose not to attend, she was later notified that the council convened and determined that she be excommunicated for "conduct contrary to the laws and order of the Church" based on her activism. Her excommunication shocked many Mormon feminists who did not believe that the Church would formally discipline her. However, Kelly's excommunication is reflective of LDS policy toward feminist activism. In 1979, feminist activist Sonia Johnson was excommunicated for her outspoken support for the Equal Rights Amendment. For more on Johnson and Kelly, see Colleen McDannell's *Sister Saints: Mormon Women Since the End of Polygamy*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)

¹⁷⁷ See "Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities" in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* edited by María Del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013)

women blessing, healing, and acting with priesthood authority. They also published a booklet of significant quotes that point to a historical lineage of women in leadership, beginning with the wife of the founding prophet, Emma Hale and the women's organization she led. Through these publications, the organization aimed to demonstrate that women holding the priesthood was not radical, but a historic reality that stood in the background of Mormon history all along.

Much of the historical framework for the ordination of women came from minutes, diaries, and accounts from the first fifty years of the Relief Society, the women's auxiliary organization of the Church.¹⁷⁸ Following the formation of the Church in 1830, Joseph Smith received his first revelation directed toward his wife, now canonized in Doctrine and Covenants 25. In this revelation, Smith refers to Emma as an "Elect Lady."¹⁷⁹ In her role as an Elect Lady, Emma Smith served as the first President of the Relief Society and became a hallmark of women's leadership. At the same, her position and title foreshadowed a legacy of women that sought spiritual authority based on her calling.¹⁸⁰ According to Smith the society Emma Hale led was not intended to be like the other women's societies that were popular at the time. This organization was

¹⁷⁸ See Colleen McDannell's *Sister Saints: Mormon Women Since the End of Polygamy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) for a history of the way in which the Relief Society began as an independent organization and became increasingly subsumed by the priesthood as an auxiliary organization of the Church.

¹⁷⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 25:3

¹⁸⁰ Clair Barrus, "Religious Authority, Sexuality, and Gender Roles of the Elect Ladies of the Early Republic: Jemima Wilkinson, Ann Lee, and Emma Smith," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 38, no. 2 (2018): 112-139, 112.

intended to be a “Kingdom of priests,” similar to the days of Enoch.¹⁸¹ Although not explicitly delegating the priesthood to women, the early members of the organization recognized their central place in the Kingdom of God and their divine role, which often manifest in healings and blessings that were administered through the power of God at the hands of women.

When contemporary Mormons discuss the historic authority of women, it is usually in terms of healing, a ritual that did not require the presence of a priesthood holder in the early years of the Church. The distinction between blessings that necessitated the priesthood and those that did not was based on the differentiation between priesthood and spiritual gifts available to all members of the Church, a differentiation that that historically lacked sharp boundaries.¹⁸² This lack of distinction led to the proliferation of women healers, some of whom became the most well-known and sought after healers in Mormon history.¹⁸³ In addition to blessings and the use of spiritual gifts for healing, women also utilized the folk remedies popular in the nineteenth century, including the herbal treatments of Samuel Thomson who influenced many to adopt the use of “Thomsonian medicine” during the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ “Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, March 31, 1842,” p. 22, The Joseph Smith Papers. <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book>

¹⁸² Jonathan Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 81.

¹⁸³ Jonathan Stapley notes that Zina Young, second President of the Relief Society, was the best documented healer in Mormon history, having performed healing blessings and offering remedies for many within her stewardship.

¹⁸⁴ Jonathan Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 119.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Mormonism instituted the Priesthood Correlation Program, colloquially referred to as “correlation.” During this time, Church programs became increasingly subsumed under priesthood offices, shrinking the women’s organization of the Church. As a result, women increasingly participated less in ecclesiastical modes of blessing and healing within the institutional Church, they nevertheless continue the practice on their own. For many contemporary Mormon women, healing blessings and anointing with consecrated oil have been replaced by energy work and the use of essential oils. This is the case for many of the women I met over the course of my research who looked to Mormon history for insight on herbalism, midwifery, and healing blessings. In many instances, Church leadership has become increasingly aware of this, even labeling it a “serious situation” at times.¹⁸⁵ One particular document, leaked from a Utah Stake President in 2017 is indicative of the supposed problem of women invoking their power to heal outside of the formal priesthood. In this document, a Stake President indicates his concern for five individuals who were being “led astray” and causing others to wander.¹⁸⁶ Two of these individuals were reported as having confessed to their bishops of “actions leading to apostasy.”¹⁸⁷ Central to the Church’s concern is the emerging Mormon movement under the leadership of Denver Snuffer, a former member of the LDS Church who was excommunicated for his message

¹⁸⁵ “Stake President Reports of Apostasy” released March 31, 2017.
https://mormonleaks.io/wiki/index.php?title=File:Stake_President_Reports_Apostasy.pdf

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

of seeking the divine apart from the institutional Church. However, a secondary concern in the documents that is slightly more complex.

These documents suggest that such healing practices are, in their language, a “gateway drug,” which leads people to join sectarian and fundamentalist movements.¹⁸⁸ In this view, the “drug” includes holistic healing, energy treatments, herbalism, etc. As an example, the document gives one specific incident of the Church’s concerns: “The family was struggling with a son who had emotional issues and wasn’t sleeping at night. The (secondary) family introduced them to energy treatments and showed them how to use prayer to ‘shield’ their son from the influence of the adversary. The treatments worked and lead the family to trust this group even more.”¹⁸⁹ The incidents cited in the document reveal similar trajectories across a number of families. Each incident begins with a woman participating in spiritual practices that fall outside the scope of contemporary LDS religiosity. Although these practices do not always lead to apostate behaviors, accounts of participation in these movements frequently involve the experience of women seeking spiritual authority outside of the LDS Church that denies them spiritual authority.

The concern over women exercising religious authority to bless and heal was further expressed in April 2017 when the Church released an official statement on such practice in response to a retreat in Southern Utah that was marketed toward empathic women in the Mormon community. As empathis, these women identify as specially

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸⁹ “Stake President Reports of Apostasy” released March 31, 2017. https://mormonleaks.io/wiki/index.php?title=File:Stake_President_Reports_Apostasy.pdf

attuned to the emotional and spiritual state of their surroundings. The spokesperson for the Church, Eric Hawkins, stated, “We urge Church members to be cautious about participating in any group that promises-in exchange for money-miraculous healings or that claims to have special methods for accessing healing power outside of properly ordained priesthood holders.”¹⁹⁰ This statement was later repeated during the October 2017 General Conference during a talk by Elder M. Russell Ballard.¹⁹¹ From the Church’s statement, the practice of healing only constituted a genuine concern when done outside of traditional method of the priesthood, which is inherently gendered and based on the Church’s teachings on the nature of men and women which is spoken of in local Church meetings and internalized by members.

As women continue to claim spiritual authority, they embody a history that the institutional Church continually must address. Attempts to address the subject culminated in a 2015 essay on women and the priesthood that sought to quell concerns over inequality and put to rest the historic arguments for women’s ecclesiastical authority. While indicating that Joseph Smith used the “language associated with the priesthood,” the Church furthered their position that women have never held this particular spiritual power based on the argument of formal ordination. The essay explained, “On these points, Joseph’s actions illuminate the meaning of his words: neither Joseph Smith, nor any person acting on his behalf, nor any of his successors conferred the Aaronic or

¹⁹⁰ Daniel Woodruff. “The business behind Christ-centered energy healing.” *KUTV*. September 21, 2018.

¹⁹¹ M. Russell Ballard, “The Trek Continues!,” General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 2017

Melchizedek Priesthood on women or ordained women to priesthood office."¹⁹² The essay further explained that the decline of women healing and blessing the sick was based on the Church's decision to align itself with the New Testament command to call upon elders for healing, a position that women are not permitted to occupy. However, despite institutional claims of a decline in women's healing practices, the reality is much different. While it is true that women no longer participate in institutionally sanctioned healing and blessing rituals, Mormon women continue the practices on their own terms, sometimes creating tension between the hierarchical institution and the lived experience of Mormon women.

Ordain Women continues to seek priesthood ordination through the institutional channels of the Church, largely based on an argument of historical continuity and the concern for women's equality in the Church. Through the production of historical pamphlets and public events, these women continue to invoke the spirit of women's authority that was diminished during the concretization of the Church's spiritual hierarchy in the twentieth century.¹⁹³ However, many women began to lose hope in

¹⁹² "Joseph Smith's Teachings about Priesthood, Temple, Women" (October 2015) <https://www.lds.org/topics/joseph-smiths-teachings-about-priesthood-temple-and-women>

¹⁹³ Clair Barrus, "Religious Authority, Sexuality, and Gender Roles of the Elect Ladies of the Early Republic: Jemima Wilkinson, Ann Lee, and Emma Smith," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 38, no. 2 (2018): 112-139, 113. Barrus' work argues for the significant role of women in the formative years of American religion and the ways women negotiated their authority within patriarchal environments. At the same time, he argues that the patriarchal institutions they inhabited ultimately shaped their legacy.

institutional change and began claiming spiritual authority on their own terms.¹⁹⁴ In many instances, women began to claim that they had the priesthood and did not need the Church to give them something that they already possessed. These women also looked to history for the justification of their practices, but also began seeking spiritual fulfillment elsewhere as they gathered across Utah to participate in gatherings and rituals. During these meetings, the spectral authority of women was present as they summoned the divine feminine and the authority that they believe women possess from simply being daughters of God with divine potential.

Women of Utah County

In July 2016, I sat in a room with the Utah County women's group as they shared artwork they had created to represent themselves and the experience of being a woman in Utah and in a predominantly Mormon culture. The walls were covered with red cloth and various pieces of art punctuated the space. As women tearfully shared their stories, I was

¹⁹⁴ Following the excommunication of Kate Kelly, some women turned to the Community of Christ as a new spiritual home. The Community of Christ, formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (RLDS) is a Restoration movement that traces its history to Joseph Smith. Rather than follow Brigham Young to the Utah territory, a group of early Church members stayed behind and followed Joseph Smith III. Emma Smith became the most well-known member of this Church and a contemporary icon of their movement. Unlike the LDS Church, the Community of Christ began ordaining women to the priesthood in April 1984. Since 1984, women in Community of Christ have participated in almost every level of leadership, including ordination into the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In addition to the full inclusion of women, the Community of Christ ordained black members from its earliest years, did not practice polygamy, and is inclusive of the LGBTQ community. For its progressive positions on theology and religious practice, many individuals who leave the LDS Church, but still want to retain membership in an organization that traces its history to Joseph Smith, find a spiritual home in the Community of Christ.

struck by a specific piece of art that hung against the red backdrop. It was a white piece of cloth with faint white embroidery. In the dimly lit room, the image of a woman was barely visible. When it was time to explain the meaning of the cloth, a blonde woman in her early thirties subtly raised her hand. The woman, Emma, began to explain her art piece as a veil that hangs as a symbolic representation of herself and her transition away from being an orthodox member of the Church. As Emma described her life, she articulated a trajectory followed by women across Mormonism, and a path for life that was made clear from childhood; Daughter of God, Temple Bride, Mother in Zion, Queen and Priestess unto their husbands for eternity. For Emma, this path became increasingly complicated to navigate and ended in her decision to become an inactive member of the Church. In her view, a veil became the most useful symbol to make sense of her journey.

As she motioned to various aspects of her veil, she read from a document that told its story. In the center of the veil is a nude woman, representing both Emma's shifting perspective on herself and the Mormon doctrine of Heavenly Mother. She is holding bees and Sevo Lilies, symbolic of Utah, the pioneers of the early Church, and the spirit of perseverance. As she continued to explain, the room's attention shifted to the bottom of the veil and the faint lettering. The letters were not in English, but Brigham Young's Deseret Alphabet. They spelled out the name of the Second Token of the Melchizedek Priesthood, the last lines repeated in the temple before passing through the veil into a room representing eternal celestial glory. She lingered over the words of the token as she slowly repeated, "power in the Priesthood be upon me."

When I spoke with Emma about her veil, she shared that she wanted a way to understand and mark her transition away from orthodox Mormonism. She explained the veil acts as a visual representation of liminality, “my life as an orthodox Mormon woman and this space where I can reevaluate what is sacred to me and what I want to take with me and what I want to leave behind into this new life, which you could say this afterlife that I was creating of my own with those things and bringing them with me.”¹⁹⁵ Central to her understanding of the veil is its permeability and the choices involved in moving between the spaces separated by the fabric. At the same time, the veil serves as a reminder of the Mormon vision of death and the temple ritual that instructs members of the Church on the afterlife. In Emma’s own words, her death will be a mallet hitting a metal frame covered in a white cloth, the imagery in the temple immediately before entering into the room that symbolizing the Celestial Kingdom.

Prior to her grandfather’s passing, Emma would sit next to his bed, considering his weekly temple attendance of over 50 years. Considering how important this ritual was for him, she was led to believe, “How everything we do in the temples is preparations for our deaths and how I never really realized that before but every single thing that we learn there, that we do there, is how to die and what to expect when we die.”¹⁹⁶ As part of the ritual that prepares individuals on “how to die,” members of the Church act out the biblical narrative and stand in the place of Adam and Eve. Through the bodily enactment of these stories, members of the Church become part of sacred history as they recall

¹⁹⁵ Emma. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Orem, Utah, August 4, 2016.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

particular moments in time when human beings are afforded spiritual authority through interactions with the divine.

When Emma finished telling me about her inspiration for the veil and the weight of enacting her death, I asked if she personally felt as though the temple prepared her to die. Although she answered with a definitive “No” and explained that she had not attended often enough for it to have prepared her for her own journey into the space beyond the veil, she did express a deep sense of importance from participating in the ritual enactment of resurrection and exaltation. She explained, “I think the most beautiful thing that it gave me was the sense of binding me to the people that I love. And I see that as a gift, whether that is real or not real. Anytime that you can feel bound to those people who came before you and who will come after you I think that that’s beautiful and that’s something that I feel is very sacred.”¹⁹⁷ For Emma, the connection she holds with the entities beyond the veil; her ancestors, the women before her, and her history, allows her to carry a Mormon identity that moves beyond her institutional affiliation. This connection also affords her the ability to move outside of institutional lineages and offers her the power of the priesthood, despite it never being formally conferred.

For many of the women at this gathering, Mormonism is a central part of their identity, despite their inactive status or formal resignation. They describe Mormonism as their spiritual language and the way they most clearly connect with the divine. Some refer to themselves as ethnically Mormon, drawing on their shared culture and lineage to the same handful of individuals who led the early Church. Moreover, despite their difficulties

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

with the institution, many of these women continue to feel an affinity for the beliefs and practices of the tradition, particularly the Church's teaching of a Heavenly Mother.

For many women who are contemporarily claiming spiritual authority in Mormonism, the spirit of Heavenly Mother is invoked to navigate their place as women in predominantly male spaces. Although the power of God is gendered male in Mormonism, the entity that the power stems from is both male and female in Mormon cosmology. Unlike other Christian traditions, Mormonism asserts that God is married and that *God* is a title used to describe Heavenly Parents. Through the Mormon teaching of exaltation, women are taught that they can become like their Heavenly Parents, giving women an eternal perspective for their gender. However, although there is discussion of becoming like one's Heavenly Parents, Heavenly Mother is not explicitly named.

The lack of naming reflects contemporary prophetic revelation that asserts Heavenly Mother is not to be directly addressed in prayer, nor is her name invoked in ordinances or blessings. Most notably, President Gordon B. Hinkley's word on the matter became well-known when he spoke at the October 1991 General Conference and recalled comments he made earlier that year to regional leaders of the Church, "However, in light of the instruction we have received from the Lord Himself, I regard it as inappropriate for anyone in the Church to pray to our Mother in Heaven."¹⁹⁸ For many Mormon women within my ethnographic work, the feeling of absence that stems from knowing there is a

¹⁹⁸ Gordon B. Hinckley, "Daughters of God," General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 1991.

figure that exists, but remains invisible. This feeling was most clearly encapsulated by Melissa, a Mormon woman and mother of three. Thinking of her Heavenly Mother's place in Mormon cosmology and her eternal fate, she said, "My eternal future is to disappear." These same words were reiterated by countless women as they considered the eternal place of women in Mormonism.

Despite institutional suppression, these women in Utah County continue the practice of ritual blessings and healings as a means of articulating their spiritual authority. The hymn sung to Heavenly Mother during the first gathering of women gained increasing importance toward the end of the summer as the women of the group gathered for an "immersion ceremony" at the base of a canyon in Utah County. Driving up to the mountain, Eliza, a woman in her early 30s, described her experience growing up in the Church and what led her to attend this event. Eliza was raised in Utah, and grew up active in the Church, attended BYU, married a returned missionary in the Manti temple, and is currently raising three young children. She explained that everything was in order until she began to learn about the history of the Church, particularly the Battle Creek massacre. She grew emotional as she recalled learning of indigenous women huddling together in the snow with their children as members of the Mormon Militia stormed their Shoshone encampment. She had never learned this story in her Seminary and Institute classes, leading her to feel both saddened by the history and betrayed by an institution she thought she knew. Her newfound interest in history led to her further investigation of early Mormonism, where she uncovered countless stories she never knew, including the stories of women as healers, seers, and prophetesses.

Eliza was challenged by the history of her Church. However, despite these challenges, she sees herself in a long history of powerful Mormon women who held a spiritual authority that was eventually revoked. Although not contemporarily visible, this authority looms over women in the Church and validates their practices, even though they are institutionally condemned. As she explained her interactions with historical women, the woman in the passenger seat began to weep as the car drove onward toward the river. She had a similar Mormon upbringing and was also in a difficult place with the institutional Church. She is still a member of the Church, and has been her entire life. She also went to BYU and married in the Manti temple. Like many of the women in the group, she is a gifted herbalist and sees herself as carrying on a lineage of Mormon women who healed through homeopathic remedies. As we continue our drive, she also expresses a concern for the history of the Church, but finds comfort in the history of women, a legacy she continues through her membership in the Church and raising her daughter as a Mormon woman, though not necessarily tied to the institutional Church in traditional ways.

As the car approached a small grove near the entrance of the river, we were met by women changing into the clothes they would wear to the immersion ceremony. Sylvia was one of these women. She is in her forties and has dark black hair and a tall frame. As with many women present, she comes from a long lineage of Mormons— she is proud to be one of the great grand-daughters of John Taylor, the third President of the Church. Although some aspects of the Church are challenging to her, she remains an active member and attends the temple weekly to participate in endowment sessions for the

deceased. Like many of the women, she is particularly interested in the initiatory ordinance and the power she feels as a woman in that space. Her love of the temple was reflected in the dress she chose to wear for the immersion. It was a long-sleeved white dress that grazes the floor. It has no beading or elaborate ornamentation. She explained that it was her temple dress, the one she wears weekly in the Salt Lake City temple to receive the ritual washing and anointing. For Sylvia, the immersion ceremony for which they brought white clothes was as sacred as the experiences in the temple, and worthy of the same attire.

Rather than compartmentalize this event as distinct from their Mormon identity, the language and clothing surrounding this event was uniquely Mormon. As we changed, the women continued their conversations on Church history, including the rebaptisms that occurred during the Mormon Reformation under Brigham Young during the 1850s. At the height of concerns over loyalty in an institution undergoing immense transition, Young required his followers to rebaptize themselves as a symbol of their devotion to the Church and its leaders. Although the LDS Church no longer permits members to participate in such practices, and considers rebaptism outside of the LDS institution grounds for disciplinary action, the immersion in the river refers back to this Mormon principle and the history of the Church that lingers near the river.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Since the formation of Denver Snuffer's Remnant group, rebaptism in "living water" has become common for many members of the LDS Church who also align themselves with the teachings of Snuffer. For members of this group, rebaptism is not necessarily a symbolic act contrary to the authority of the LDS Church, but a symbolic renewal of their initial baptismal covenants and a way to reaffirm their belief in the Mormon restoration.

As the women walk toward the river and slowly step in to the cold water, they began to move toward each other and stand with arms linked in a circle to stabilize each other in the midst of the rushing water. Without prompting, the women begin to sing to Heavenly Mother with joy and tears. One by one, a woman entered into the circle. The women share brief stories about their journey to this moment and ask a particular woman to help guide her into the water. In some instances, all the women in the circle lay a hand onto the woman entering the water as if to offer a blessing and confirm the sacred nature of the event taking place. Mary enters into the circle and calls to Hannah, a close friend who had helped deliver her child, to help her into the water. Hannah holds Mary by the hand while also drawing their faces close to one another so her blessing can be heard over the sound of the water. As she tilts her into the water, Hannah clearly states, “Mary, I baptize you.” Hannah began to cry as she was lowered into the water and emerged to cheering and the embrace of the other women participating in the sacred ordinance of that Saturday afternoon.

To onlookers who hiked past the immersion site, the priesthood was not present in the river that flowed through Utah County on that day. However, for many of these women, the institutional authority needed to perform sacred ordinances is made possible by the spiritual power they gain through simply being a child of Heavenly Mother and the history of Mormon women who used their spiritual gifts to bless and heal. As Mormon women, the history of their ancestors and tradition is part of themselves and the spirit of these ancestors is present in their rituals as a source of validation.

Although the history of Mormon women gave rise to feelings of power and authority, some remained troubled by their history and did view the many Mormon specters as entities they needed to expel. Following the immersion in river, the women returned to the rented apartment space that became a staple throughout the summer. While sharing a meal, the women spoke of their experience that day and how they felt leaving the water. Eliza, who spoke in the car about learning Church history, continued to share some of her story. She explained that, despite her sadness and feelings toward the institution, she continues to attend Sacrament meeting every Sunday. She would be in attendance the morning after the baptism ceremony. Her husband currently serves as the Elders Quorum President of their ward and works at BYU. For Eliza and her husband an inactive status was simply not an option. But these days, following Sacrament Meeting, Eliza takes her children outside for the remainder of the meetings and reads to them; she no longer participates in Sunday School or Relief Society. When asked what the ordinance in the river meant to her, she elaborated on the discussion she had on the drive to the river, on the history of her Church, her ancestors, the place of women, and Heavenly Parents. Thinking through these themes that pervade the minds of all the women in the room, she stated, “I have been haunted all day and now I feel free.”

Since her 2016 immersion in the river, Eliza no longer attends Church. Like many of the women who participated in the immersion ceremony in the river, she no longer felt that she could reconcile her personal beliefs with the institution.²⁰⁰ In discussing

²⁰⁰ Jana Riess, *The Next Mormons: How Millennials Are Changing the LDS Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 224. Again, the women in this research correspond with national trends among Mormons in their age group. Riess’ survey shows

resignation among women in the Church, the life of Emma Smith is frequently in the background of the conversation. On March 17, 1892, the Relief Society held their Jubilee celebration in the Salt Lake City tabernacle. The report from the celebration described the scene as one of grandeur, “The large organ was draped with stars and stripes, the flags extending across and a large oil painting of Joseph the prophet hung high in the center, below it an immense key made of the most beautiful flowers...”²⁰¹ Below the image of the Prophet Joseph were three additional paintings of the women who led the early years of the organization; Emma Smith’s portrait was directly below Joseph with Eliza R. Snow on her right and Zina D. H. Young on her left, all three sealed to the Prophet. By the time of the Jubilee celebration, each of the women represented in these portraits had served as President, Zina Young presiding on the day of the festivities. In the midst of the festive celebration Emmeline Wells, suffragette and heir to the priesthood, announced, “All humanity proclaims this the woman’s era.”²⁰²

Although not bodily present, the spirit of these women lingered in the room at the Jubilee, in the same way that they continue to be present in the lives of contemporary Mormon women. Emma Smith had not traveled West with the Saints and her representation at the celebration was not without contestation. Rather than follow Brigham Young, Emma Smith asserted her own spiritual authority in choosing to not

that the inability to reconcile personal beliefs with the Church is the number one reason why millennials choose to resign from the Church or become inactive.

²⁰¹ *The First Fifty Years of the Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History*, edited by Matthew J. Grow, Kate Holbrook Carol Cornwall Madson, and Jill Mulvay Derr (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016), 591.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 610.

follow the new prophet and successor to her husband, while still remaining faithful to the beliefs that had shaped her adult life. In doing so, Emma Smith paved the way for other women to do the same; to exercise spiritual authority through leaving the institution while framing it within a Mormon context. Many of the women I met over the course of this research referred to the women of Mormon history as if they were present figures, who never passed beyond the veil. Just as Emma's spirit hung suspended over the events of the Jubilee celebration, her spirit is also prevalent each time a Mormon woman participates in spiritual authority that she is denied by the institution.

Conclusion

In her work on the history of Mormon women, Colleen McDannell paints a picture of women that are more than “polygamist or pioneers.”²⁰³ Mormon women have always been actively involved in the construction and transmission of their tradition. However, as women continue to learn more about Mormon history and the complex place that women occupied in the past, the contemporary role of women is becoming increasingly contested. More and more, active women in the Church find that the definitions of priesthood and authority are not as linear or black and white as portrayed in Church manuals and institutional materials. Conference talks and officially sanctioned writings on the subject fail to capture the historical complexity of women and their authoritative place within the institutional Church's history.

²⁰³ Colleen McDannell, *Sister Saints: Mormon Women Since the End of Polygamy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), xi.

With this in mind, many women have begun to invoke the spirit of their history as a means of validating their search for authority within the institution, petitioning Church leaders and formally appealing to leaders. Increasingly, however, many Mormon women are also seeking spiritual authority on their own terms or claiming it as something they already possess. This includes meeting with other women to perform blessings, healings, and ordinances apart from the institution or supplementing their Mormon practices with additional gatherings that support women's authority.

Early records of the Church present a picture of women actively engaged in the work of healing, washing and anointing, laying hands, organizing, and participating fully in temple ordinances. Within each of these callings and practices, the women of the Church were preparing Zion and building the Kingdom of God on earth. Although never formally ordained, the work these women engaged in was not separate from the priesthood, but worked alongside the office of men to advance the Mormon movement. Although the contemporary moment is rife with controversy over the nature of women's leadership, and the extent to which they maintain spiritual power, women in Mormon movements seek legitimization of their authority through interactions with a spectral past that lingers in the background of their meetings.

Chapter 4:

“The Testimony of a Prophet”: Spectral Authority in the Formation of New Mormon Traditions

Christ’s Church and Their Prophet

The rural cities of Western Nevada are known for their sunsets and stargazing. But, under the Celestial light of the expansive sky, a work of equal fascination is taking place; the Saints are gathering to construct Zion.²⁰⁴ For the Mormon group gathering in Nevada, known as Christ’s Church, the vision of Zion is part of the broader story of Mormon fundamentalism and the desire to preserve the unchanging principles of Joseph Smith’s Restored Gospel, including the Adam-God Doctrine, Plural Celestial Marriage, and the Law of Consecration.²⁰⁵ Guided by prophetic revelation, and the call to serve God with a “broken heart and contrite spirit,” the families of Christ’s Church actively seek to preserve the teachings of the nineteenth-century Prophet, which they believe the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) strayed from beginning with the acceptance of

²⁰⁴ Although the Nevada group is distinct from the LDS Church, they nevertheless identify as Mormon. Within this dissertation, “Mormon” is used broadly to describe any group that falls within the Restoration tradition, stems from the teachings of Joseph Smith, and chooses to identify as Mormon.

²⁰⁵ Although many changes to the LDS Church are cited as reasons for Apostasy, these three doctrines and practices continually appear in the writings of Christ’s Church as the three most profound grievances. In an interview with two members of the Church leadership, they mentioned that while this list does not reflect the only problems with the mainline Church, they remain the central concerns. The changes to the temple ordinance and garment are cited almost as frequently. Today, members of the group continue to teach and believe the Adam-God Doctrine, as taught by Brigham Young, and live the Principle of Plural Marriage. While not fully consecrated as a United Order, the group is working toward living in full consecration through a system referred to as a United Effort.

the Manifesto ending plural marriage in the United States in 1890.²⁰⁶ As the mechanism for preserving the higher laws of the Restoration, the group sees their role as a “branch” of the LDS Church that allows the power of God to continue in the temporal world amidst the Apostasy found in other Mormon communities.

For members of Christ’s Church, the need for a “branch” is based on the belief that the LDS Church fell into a gradual Apostasy that occurred in stages of doctrinal change.²⁰⁷ Although many changes to doctrine and practice are mentioned within Church meetings and writings, Official Declaration 2, now canonized in the scriptural text of the Doctrine and Covenants, is most often cited. This statement from the First Presidency, given at General Conference on September 30, 1978, offered all worthy men the ability to receive the priesthood, regardless of race. Up until this moment, individuals of African descent were not permitted to enter the temple to participate in saving ordinances or receive priesthood ordination. Many Mormon fundamentalists viewed the lifting of the priesthood and temple ban as the final moment when the LDS Church lost all authority on earth. Prior to this moment, many Mormon fundamentalists believed that the LDS Church was God’s chosen gathering on earth, but was out of order because of their decision to end plural marriage and other uniquely Mormon doctrines. Instead of

²⁰⁶ Gerald Peterson Sr. “August 16, 1983 Revelation.” Publication of Jesus Christ’s Church of the Latter Days, 1.

²⁰⁷ To protect the anonymity of group members, the leader of the group gathering in Nevada is referred to simply as “the Prophet.” Members of the community expressed concern over his identity, which is concealed in Church writings as “The Living Prophet.” Much of this concern stems from the murder of past leaders within their community and the continued persecution that many members feel because of their lifestyle.

establishing churches, fundamentalists asserted that the LDS remained the Church, but the authority of God rest with those upholding the fundamentals of the Gospel. With the pronouncement of Official Declaration 2, this shifted and fundamentalists began establishing their own churches to replace the one lost to apostasy, making the issue of race the most significant reason for schisms in Mormonism during the twentieth century. The contemporary position of Mormon fundamentalists on the priesthood and temple ban, including their continued restriction, is the basis for accusations of racism against Mormon fundamentalists.²⁰⁸

Writing on the LDS Church's steps toward Apostasy, the late Prophet of Christ's Church wrote, "THE FINAL BLOW. Bestowing the Priesthood on the forbidden race, is like digging up a decaying body and shooting it a couple of extra times to make sure it's [sic] dead. It really didn't make any difference, the Church had already long since lost the priesthood it once held and this defying act just reconfirmed the destruction of the Church, its own choice, that was previously predicated."²⁰⁹ This quote, like many offered

²⁰⁸ Mormon fundamentalists understand contemporary concerns over accusations of racism. In 2017, the Latter Day Church of Christ, or Kingston group, was named a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center for teaching the one drop rule, using inflammatory language, and condemning interracial marriage. In light of this, and general accusations, many groups have shifted their language from race to lineage, arguing that lineage is more concrete and tangible, while race is constructed. In doing so, these groups subsumed the contemporary language of racial construction to support their claims. During one visit to Christ's Church branch in Spanish Fork, I received a pamphlet on the groups' teaching about the priesthood ban. I was instructed not to share the pamphlet out of concern for accusations of racism. This moment demonstrates fundamentalist cognizance of allegations and concern over being labeled "racist," despite their continued support of racist doctrines and practices.

²⁰⁹ Gerald Peterson Sr. "L.D.S. Apostasy Foretold: Seven Steps to Fulfillment" in *The Branch Magazine* Volume 1.9. Publication of Jesus Christ's Church of the Latter Days, 31.

by the late prophet of the group, references the 1978 decision to grant black members of the LDS Church the priesthood and lift the temple ban. While this is not considered the first or only mark of Apostasy, it marks fundamentalists' end to authority within the LDS Church. This position stems from Brigham Young's teachings, as well as the teachings of other nineteenth-century religious leaders, that black skin was synonymous with the mark of Cain and curse of Ham.²¹⁰ In addition, many Mormons began teaching that physical appearance is a manifestation of the spirit's preexistent life; blackness came to be associated with a "less valiant" spirit. In response to nineteenth-century teaching, Brigham Young forbade the priesthood from black members beginning in 1852. This restriction further disallowed black members from receiving ordinances necessary to attain salvation and exaltation. Contemporary fundamentalists, including members of Christ's Church, continue this teaching by affirming that it is only in the millennium, or after all white men are given the opportunity for ordination, that black members will be offered the Priesthood.

Although the lifting of the priesthood and temple ban were not the only changes that spurred the formation of new fundamentalist groups, Christ's Church sites the lifting of the ban on black members receiving the priesthood and entering the temple as the final

²¹⁰ The mark of Cain stems from Genesis 4 when the sons of Adam and Eve offered sacrifices to God, Abel offering livestock and Cain offering grain. God favored Abel's contribution, angering Cain who retaliated and killed his brother. In response, God cursed Cain and marked him to prevent anyone from killing him. Historically, many Christian groups, associated the mark with black skin. Similarly, the curse of Ham originated from Genesis 9 and Noah's curse upon his son, Ham, for uncovering him while intoxicated. Early Mormons, as well as other Christian leaders, taught that the curse manifest in black skin.

moment of God's presence within the mainstream Church. In articulating this position, contemporary fundamentalists continue to maintain nineteenth-century Mormon perspectives on race, based in Biblical racism, as espoused by Brigham Young. At the same time, in preserving these teachings, these groups act as reminders of the LDS Church's own troubled history with race and white supremacy. Among the group's new publication is one titled "For What Purpose? The Doctrine of Lineage and Race." Within this pamphlet, the teachings of past prophets on the issue of race and the priesthood is made clear. This includes the nineteenth-century Mormon teaching that skin color is determined by one's level of valiance in the preexistence. When I inquired of the continued relevance of this teaching, I was informed that the group holds to the idea that individuals of African-descent will receive the priesthood after all worthy white men have had the opportunity. This group, unlike some others, allows black Saints to receive baptism. One man in leadership shared that he understands the teaching in terms of Jewish identity; he stated, "You can become Jewish, but you can't become a Cohen." Outside of baptism, all other ordinances are unavailable. This includes the opportunity of a sealing to ensure an eternal marriage.

For Christ's Church, the lifting of the priesthood ban was the final end to LDS authority. With this end, a new lineage was necessary. In the same way that the LDS Church believes leadership and authority transfers through a line of succession, fundamentalist Mormons often trace their priesthood lineage through generations of men

passing the “keys of the priesthood,” to worthy successors.²¹¹ Referring back to the biblical narrative that depicts the last days of Jesus’s life, the keys of the priesthood refers to the authority to govern or act on behalf of God, in the same way that Jesus was said to give the keys to the Apostle Peter. However, as the history of Mormonism demonstrates, linear models of succession are only an ideal; they are rarely the norm. Instead, priesthood lineages within Mormonism are marked by disruption and schism. The most notable moment of fracturing occurred during Brigham Young’s appointment to the role of President and Prophet, when Sidney Rigdon, James Strang, Alpheus Cutler, and others, all made claims to their rightful place as Smith’s successor. These men went on to start their own Mormon movements, each continuing in the present to some extent. However, unlike Brigham Young, none of these men were successful in capturing an authoritative position within the LDS Church. This is largely because of Brigham Young’s ability to capture the charisma and invoke the spirit of Joseph Smith during the 1844 transfiguration.²¹²

²¹¹ Within the Mormon system of authority, women are not offered the Priesthood, but are esteemed as individuals who magnify the priesthood and its glory. This relates to the teachings surrounding plural marriage and the role of women within this marital system. For Christ’s Church, the role of women as magnifiers of the priesthood is cited. In a meeting with the prophet, he spoke of the number three as particularly significant because it is the number of God. This number reflects the number of wives many of the worthy men in the community have in order to fully magnify the Priesthood. Within the current gathering, a Holy of Holies is absent from the temple. It was revealed that the group cannot break ground to construct a Holy of Holies until there are seven men with three wives all in accord.

²¹² Christopher James Blythe writes on the importance of charisma in the succession crisis in “Would to God Brethren, I Could Tell You Who I Am!”: Nineteenth-Century Mormonism and the Apotheosis of Joseph Smith,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 18, no. 2 (2014): 5-27.

For many LDS Saints who acknowledge Brigham Young as the authoritative successor, the moment of transfiguration remains a central narrative that validates priesthood claims.²¹³ However, the problem with spirits is that they cannot be contained to an isolated narrative or used for a singular purpose. Describing the nature of presence within the Roman Catholic context, Robert Orsi argues, “This is the Church’s problem with the real presence: controlling access to it. Such control is one of the surest grounds of ecclesiastical and political power, not only over the laity but over the rulers of nations, too. Yet presence continually exceeds the Church’s efforts to contain it.”²¹⁴ The transfiguration of Brigham Young through the spirit of Joseph Smith could act as a unilaterally authenticating moment of authority if the apparitions ended in 1844. However, for the Prophet of Christ’s Church and the group he leads, this is not the case. Brigham Young’s transfiguration, and subsequent interactions with spirits, validated the possibility of continued interaction with spirits that provides historical support of spiritual authority through interaction with spirits.

In Nevada, on the small ranch where the Saints live and work amidst their Prophet, the spirits are intimately present in the lives of believers and testify to the truthfulness of their priesthood claims over and against the dominant LDS narrative. I contend that these spirits, particularly Joseph Smith and Rulon Allred, offer legitimization for an otherwise marginalized Mormon group and demonstrate the ways in which contestation over authoritarian succession does not end at the moment of death. At

²¹³ See references to affidavits and diary entries from Chapter 1.

²¹⁴ Orsi, Robert A. *History and Presence* (Chicago, Harvard University Press, 2016), 2.

the same time, the spirits present within the early moments of Mormon fundamentalist group formation demonstrate the distinction between simple interactions with the deceased and spirit communications deemed Apostate. This line is based on group understanding of correct authority and who holds access to that authority.

On September 24, 2017, I attended Sunday meetings with Christ's Church at their site of gathering in the western Nevada desert. The drive to the ranch took seven hours, beginning in Salt Lake City, Utah, and grew increasingly remote as we progressed. On this trip, as with the others that followed, I was accompanied by the missionaries of the group. These men, who travel "without purse or script" and offer unlimited amounts of time to distributing tracts and offering volunteer services, were my point of access into the community.²¹⁵ Approaching a turnoff from the main highway, I was instructed to look into the distance at a small grove of trees just beyond a large solar farm that powers much of Las Vegas. Faintly behind the trees, a series of small trailers were barely visible. Approximately 40 homes sit atop the ranch, where just over 100 Saints offer their time and talent to establish Zion. As with many life decisions, including when and whom to marry, the decision for an individual or family to move to Nevada and join the gathering comes through "the will of the Lord," at the instruction of the Prophet.

²¹⁵ Traveling without purse or script is a reference to Luke 10:4 and Jesus' sending the seventy-two to preach the Gospel. Modeled after these instructions, missionaries from the group are instructed to take no money and limited personal possessions on their travels. *Tracting* is frequently used by missionaries from many different Mormon communities as a term to describe all the work involved in evangelizing missions. This includes door-knocking, stopping people in public spaces to share the Gospel, going to events with the purpose of engaging individuals in conversations about the faith, and handing out literature.

In the center of the community is a large blue trailer that houses the temple, as if to affirm the central place of the divine within the community. This building also holds the Church meeting room, the Relief Society room, and a large Relief Society kitchen where food is prepared for the community.²¹⁶ Hanging prominently in the front of the meeting room is the Mormon image of Jesus clothed in red, descending at the Second Coming to commence the resurrection. This same image is found in Mormon meetinghouses across the intermountain West.²¹⁷ To the right of the painting are four folded chairs and a small podium. Splitting the room at its center is a large green recliner with a red plaid blanket neatly folded over the arm. As everyone began to sit and quiet their children, four men entered the room from a small door at the front of the building. The final person to enter the building was an elderly man with white hair wearing a black suit. He held a black cane, but walked with a confident gait. As he walked, he stopped at three distinct families and shook hands with the matriarch of each group. These women, his wives, hold an esteemed place within the community and bodily represent the importance of the number three as the number of heaven.²¹⁸ As he began his final

²¹⁶ The prophet of Christ's Church designated Saturdays as a day of "work parties," where members spend the day working to build up the community. During my second visit, the men spent the day laying concrete while women canned food for the winter and to store as part of the United Effort. In a single Saturday, the women canned around 50 jars of pickles and 100 jars of beets.

²¹⁷ The woman I stayed with shared the story of how the group attained the images. When the temple was being built, members of the group reached out to the distributor that supplies images for Mormon temples and meetinghouses. When they requested images to furnish their newly consecrated building, they were surprised at the willingness of the LDS distributor to aid in the furnishing of a fundamentalist building.

²¹⁸ When asked about the importance of three women, the prophet of the community explained that there are three members of the godhead, indicating three as a

approach to the front of the room, James, the son of the Prophet and President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, gestured toward me with an outstretched arm. The elderly man reached out his hand, shaky yet stern, and looked me straight in the eye as if to peer into my soul. He welcomed me into the community and expressed his gratitude at my willingness to visit the gathering place of the Saints. For members of the community, this elderly man who walks with a cane and sits before his people in a green recliner delivering the messages of God is the living Prophet and Key Holder on earth.²¹⁹

Following the meeting, which resembled a typical Mormon Sacrament meeting with hymns and talks based on the Scriptures, the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles approached me as I spoke with an elderly woman about the nature of the current astrological age and the birthing of a new era.²²⁰ I reached out my hand to thank him for allowing me to spend time with the community and participate in their Sacrament meeting. He stopped me mid-sentence to explain that, while unprecedented, the Prophet requested I visit his home to speak with him about my interest in the faith.²²¹ I was

divine number. Other fundamentalist leaders have expressed the significance of an odd number of wives, beginning with the writings of Lorin C. Woolley.

²¹⁹ In Mormonism, the Key Holder is the individual who holds the power of God on earth. Within the LDS Church, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles hold all the keys, with the President having special privileges to exercise all of them. Within fundamentalist history, many groups argue that the LDS Church may hold some keys, but the sealing keys are in the hands of those keeping all principles and ordinances. In the case of Christ's Church, the prophet holds all the keys necessary to preside the power of God on earth.

²²⁰ Although not explicitly part of the group's teachings, many members of the group expressed interest in astrology and numerology to various degrees. Some offered explanation from the Scriptures about the importance of the stars and other Celestial objects.

²²¹ Following my meeting, the woman I stayed with shared that she was unable to meet with the prophet prior to her baptism into the group. The man who serves as the

escorted from the temple, and as we walked up to the small home next door, I noticed the bright green lawn and a burlap wreath hung on the front door. At the door, James welcomed me into his mother's home. She was one of the wives of the prophet, the Sarah of the family.²²² Walking into the home, I was met with pictures of family, jars of home-canned grape juice, and decorations that made the space a home.

The prophet was already seated on a large chair at the center of the living room with his wife on his left. I sat on a small floral couch to the right of the prophet, beside the current scribe and member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. This man, Andrew, converted to the group from the LDS Church when he was a newly engaged man. After meeting his fiancé, a member of the group, he was encouraged to study the teachings of the community. After an extended period of study, he drove with his fiancé to southern Utah to meet the prophet.²²³ At this meeting, he was immediately converted and sealed to

security for the prophet shared a similar story. When I asked about new members having the opportunity to meet with him, many explained that there is a concern about people basing their testimonies and conversion on him, rather than on the message of the Gospel. The group aims to ensure that new converts believe in the principles of the Gospel, even before believing in their new prophet.

²²² Within this community, the first wife is referred to as the "Sarah." This title refers back to the wife of Abraham, who encouraged her husband to take another woman in order to fulfill the promise of God. Within Mormon fundamentalism, the consent of the first wife for her husband to take another is referred to as the "law of Sarah." This language stems from D&C 132, which lays the foundation for Mormon plural marriage.

²²³ Prior to gathering in Nevada, the group gathered and built a temple in southern, in a place they called *Paiquin*, meaning God Power. However, under the direction of the Prophet, the group moved to Nye County, Nevada, a county with no common law marriage. Because of the marriage laws in this county, their plural marriages are not technically criminalized and they can maintain a position of abiding by the laws of the land. Following the move, the original temple was desecrated by an unworthy man ?? entering the space. It is no longer used for ordinances by members of Christ's Church.

his fiancé. He remains a faithful member, who actively practices the Principle of Plural Marriage and participates in building the United Order.²²⁴ The missionaries sat across from me in folding chairs, leaning forward as they awaited their prophet to speak. Although they are part of the community, they are not afforded much time with their prophet because of their frequent traveling and his declining health.²²⁵ I felt the silence in the room as we all looked to the prophet to begin the interaction. When he finally spoke, he looked to me and sternly inquired, “The first Principle of the Gospel is to know for certain the nature of God the Eternal Father and his Son, Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Do you believe this?” I looked around the room, unsure of how to answer the question. I responded that I was Catholic and, doctrinally, we believe in God, just maybe not in quite the same way. He looked sufficiently pleased with my response and invited the conversation to continue. Over the next two hours, the prophet spoke of his life as both a pilot and homeopathic physician, his testimony in the Fullness of the Gospel, and the importance of gathering as a central tenet of the Mormon faith.²²⁶

²²⁴ Although there are not seventy men in the First Quorum of the Seventy, they serve as witnesses of Jesus Christ and the Restoration, similar to the Quorums of the LDS Church. Within Christ’s Church, a scribe is delegated to write down the words of the prophet. This is most often done during priesthood meetings and Solemn Assembly. Similar to early Mormonism, the words of the prophet are held in high esteem and viewed similarly to Scripture. When I attended Solemn Assembly, I was informed that his talk will be recorded much like the Journal of Discourses, a collection of public sermons given by LDS leaders published from 1854 to 1886. The Journal of Discourses is still viewed as Scripture by members of Christ’s Church.

²²⁵ When I spoke with a member of the community about the health of the prophet, I was told that he “has been the Key Holder for a long time.” It was made apparent that his role is not only an emotional burden, but also physically affects the body of the group’s leader.

²²⁶ “Fullness of the Gospel” is used across Mormonism to refer to the entirety of the work of redemption and salvation. It is used to encapsulate all laws, ordinances,

As the meeting moved toward a close, I was caught off guard when the Prophet again looked to me and asked my greatest fear. I stumbled with my speech as I responded that I was afraid of flying. He looked at me with kind eyes and responded as both a prophet and homeopath. He explained that fear is located within the liver and I should include more herbs such as comfrey into my diet.²²⁷ Immediately following the herbalist suggestion, he looked to me and kindly asked, “Do you have any questions you would like to ask of me?” I felt everyone’s eyes dart toward me and, despite having a question in my mind based on my research, I felt unsure how to inquire about the nature of their spirit communication. Finally, I looked into the kind eyes of the man who is believed to hold all authority of God on earth and asked, “Do you speak with your father on the other side of the veil in the same way that he communicated with Rulon Allred once he had died?”

Rulon Allred was a Mormon fundamentalist leader who was murdered on May 10, 1977. When I was first introduced to this group’s history, members emphasized Allred as a foundational leader and the man who passed the priesthood keys to Gerald W.

commandments, and power that was established to aid human beings in the cause of salvation. Within Christ’s Church, the phrase is further used to mark a distinction between their Church, which maintains all restored principles, and the LDS Church. In particular, this phrase is used to reference a Mormonism that includes the Law of Consecration, the Law of Plural Celestial Marriage, and the Adam-God Doctrine.

²²⁷ Herbalism is common across Mormon fundamentalism. Within the Latter Day Church of Christ, or Kingston group, there are stories of followers consuming “green drink,” a concoction made with comfrey that was revealed to the leadership through revelation. In the Dairy Store at Short Creek, there is a small table across from the register with herbal remedies to most ailments, including formulas designed for weight loss. In Christ’s Church, many members consume “anti plague” to ward off any potential disease. The bitter mixture of garlic, comfrey, marshmallow root, and various tree barks is heralded as a mechanism to ward off almost any potential illness.

Peterson Sr. This transfer of power happened through communication with the spirit of Allred, in visions and manifestations, who appeared to Peterson throughout his life to guide and offer instruction for the community. He looked at me with a strong sense of surety and responded that he communicates with his father frequently, in the same way that his father looked to Rulon Allred. From his response, it was made apparent that like many fundamentalist leaders before him, the Prophet relies on communication with deceased leaders to govern his Church.²²⁸

Joseph Smith and Patriarchal File Leaders Beyond the Veil

Joseph Smith is a spectral figure in contemporary Mormonism. His instructions and teachings continue to linger among the Saints and frame much of the contemporary debate on the place of Mormonism in the American religious landscape. His image hangs in Church buildings and his accolades are sung in hymns, such as “Praise to the Man.” Although now disembodied, Smith is ever present in the lives of his followers as a presence that followers do not seek to expel. As an enduring figure, Smith reminds believers of their need to grapple with the past, while simultaneously guiding the way toward the present.²²⁹

²²⁸ The prophets are not the only appearances that prophet has experiences in his time as the leader of Christ’s Church. During our meeting he briefly mentioned the time he was taken up to the Heavens and met with Michael, the God of this world. To this story, one of the missionaries asked who led the introductions during the meeting. The prophet said that Jesus Christ introduced them, a further indication of the importance of File Leadership and the inability, of even the prophet, to circumvent the chain of authority that leads back to God.

²²⁹ Peter Buse and Andrew Stott. *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1999) Buse and Stott’s work on haunting presences illuminates the way Joseph acts within contemporary Mormonism as a figure

Smith's spectral presence is found across multiple forms of Mormonism. However, for fundamentalists, the spectral nature of Smith is not only figurative, but literal. In one particular meeting with Christ's Church, delivered at the semi-annual Solemn Assembly, the literal nature of Smith as a ghostly figure was made apparent during a talk by the groups' Mission President on the nature of Michael the Archangel, who is understood within Mormon fundamentalism as embodied as Adam and deified as the God of this world.²³⁰ As he began to read through various Scriptures that described the Godhead, he approached a whiteboard and wrote the names of the gods in descending order beginning with Elohim. Following Elohim, he wrote the names Jehovah, Michael, and Jesus. The final name written was Joseph Smith. Within this community, as with other fundamentalist sects, Smith is not only a specter in the literary sense, but also the disembodied form of the Holy Ghost.²³¹

that stands between the past and present, while also looking toward the future. They write, "In the figure of the ghost, we see that past and present cannot be neatly separated from one another, as any idea of the present is always constituted through the difference and deferral of the past, as well as anticipations of the future." (Buse and Stott, 11)

²³⁰ In the Journal of Discourses, Brigham Young frequently taught that Adam is not only the father of human bodies, but also the father of spirits. Further expanded by later prophets and fundamentalist leaders, the doctrine asserts that Michael the Archangel descended into a lower estate and took the body of Adam. Adam, as a resurrected being now occupies the office of God, the Father of this world. In a similar way, the salvific office of the Godhead is occupied by Jesus. This teaching is often referred to as the Adam-God Doctrine. While the LDS Church no longer teaches this doctrine, they continue to assert that Michael the Archangel descended to earth and took the body of Adam.

²³¹ Unlike the theology of the LDS Church, fundamentalism asserts that the Holy Ghost is not a static individual, but an office held by different resurrected beings through time.²³¹ In the LDS Church, Heavenly Father and Jesus have physical bodies, while the Holy Ghost is yet to attain one. Some assert that he will gain a physical form in the millennium. Because of the central importance of a body for exaltation, fundamentalism asserts that the Holy Ghost attained a body in this dispensation; Joseph Smith. In each

As a man who served as the mouthpiece of God in this dispensation, a period in which God assigns a particular individual to hold the Keys to the Kingdom of God, Smith's calling was to serve as the Witness and Testator of Truth, a title given to the Holy Ghost in each dispensation.²³² Because Mormonism asserts that death is not final, but a shift from matter to spirit, the role he held in life continues in death. Andrew, the member of the Quorum of the Seventy who I sat by when I first met the Prophet of the community, described Smith's role as the Holy Ghost as follows, "The Holy Ghost is the Witness and Testator of Truth. So, he reveals truth and basically is the fact checker to say 'yup, that one's true.' And that's what Joseph Smith did on earth. He was Witness and Testator of the Father and the Son."²³³ Although the Holy Ghost serves many functions within Mormonism, the most significant is offering reassurance of truth. During his earthly life, Joseph Smith is portrayed as the individual who affirmed truthfulness and acted as a final authority on both spiritual and temporal matters. No longer bound by temporality, the spectral personage of Joseph Smith continues to testify to the truthfulness of the Restoration in an exalted role just below Jesus Christ and guides the

subsequent world, the Holy Ghost will take the body of the individual who acts as the Witness and Testator. Modern fundamentalists cite early Church leaders who argued that the position of the Holy Ghost was a calling and Joseph Smith's comment that if he were to share all he knew of the Kingdom of God, he would be killed.

²³² Mormonism is a dispensationalist tradition which asserts that God functions in stages that are led by assigned earthly leaders. The final dispensation within Mormonism is the current dispensation that began when Joseph Smith restored the Priesthood.

²³³ James and Andrew. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted over Skype, November 24, 2017.

current leadership of the Church through Patriarchal File Leadership, a system by which leaders are organized linearly and receive revelation from their superior.²³⁴

For Christ's Church, the ordering of leadership through Patriarchal File Leadership was first articulated by Gerald W. Peterson Sr., the first Prophet of the group. Practically, this doctrine involves a line of priesthood leaders, each presiding over the other in an unbroken chain of authority. As illustrated in Figure 1, Michael the Archangel, the God of this world, stands at the head of the chain. He is followed by His Son, Jesus Christ. The chain continues in descending order through every deceased Prophet, culminating in the living Prophet who interacts with those who have gone before him in an act of spectral succession. This structure provides the hierarchical order of the Church and organizes male members into the Order of the Priesthood. This order is manifest during bi-annual Solemn Assembly meetings, similar to LDS General Conference, where members of the community are physical seated based on their position in the Priesthood, with the family of the Prophet in the front rows.²³⁵

²³⁴ As the Holy Ghost, Smith stands just below Jesus Christ in the order of the Priesthood. In Volume 7 of the *Journal of Discourses*, a sermon recorded by Brigham Young titled, "Intelligences, etc.," delivered on October 9, 1859" in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle addresses the continued importance of Joseph Smith from beyond the veil. In this talk, Young offers the clearest articulation of Smith's continued importance beyond the veil. He asserts that, "No man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith...He holds the keys of the Kingdom for the last dispensation—the keys to rule in the spirit-world..." (7:289)

²³⁵ Maintaining the order of file leadership is esteemed so highly that one's participation in the order appears on the temple recommend questions for the group. Question 15 asks, "Do you seek to understand and comply with the law of Patriarchal File Leadership, accepting righteous counsel from your file leader, while safe guarding the rights of those placed within your stewardship?" (Christ's Church, Temple Recommend Questions. Pdf.) One who steps out of order acts in contradiction to the priesthood and the order of heaven.

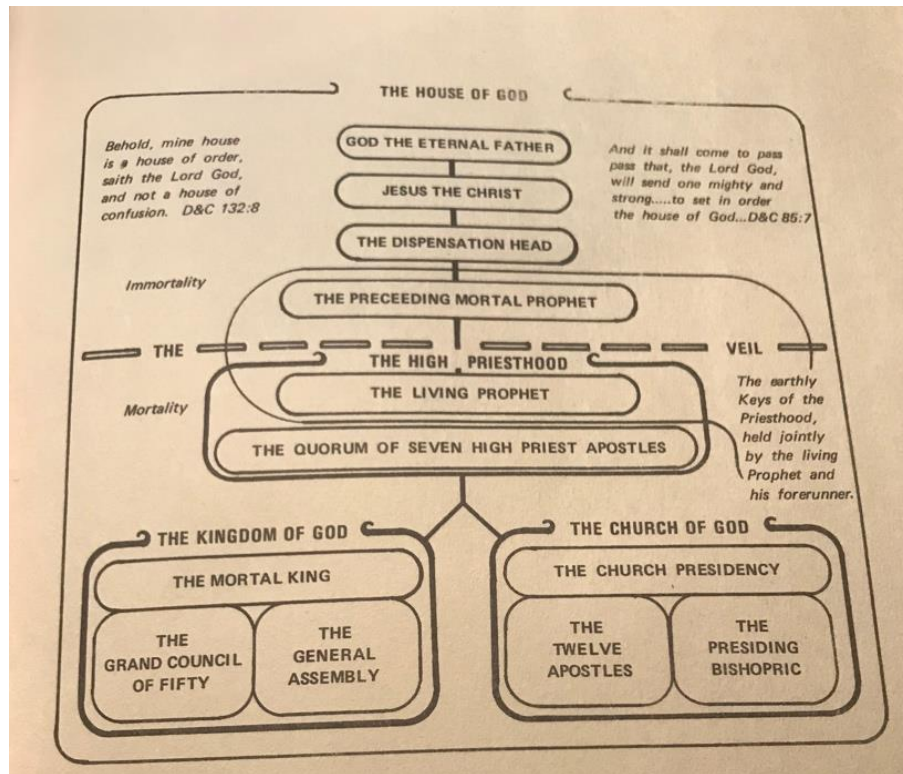


Figure 2: The House of God

In his elevated position as the Holy Ghost, and as the head of this dispensation on the other side of the veil, an interaction with the spirit of Joseph Smith is not made available to everyone, but to those in an authoritative position to receive his special insight into the spiritual world. For the general membership of the group, an interaction with Smith may never be part of their spiritual lives. However, within the order of the Priesthood, the leadership of the Church interact with the late Prophet as he breaks through time and space to maintain the order of Christ's Church's, even 178 years after

his death.²³⁶ In the descending order of the Priesthood, Smith most frequently interacts with the preceding mortal Prophet, who then communicates with the living Key Holder. These interactions are most often accomplished through visions of the deceased or revelations from God given through past leaders as mouthpieces.

In Mormon fundamentalist history, the most pivotal moment of Smith's continued interaction with leadership from the other side of the veil happened on September 27, 1886 during a special meeting called by John Taylor, then President of the LDS Church. For Christ's Church, the events of 1886 reflect the postmortem authority of Joseph Smith and the importance of correct priesthood succession, even when it strays from normative practice. The events surrounding the 1886 revelation also reflect the power of prophetic authority, even in death, to disrupt linear models of priesthood lineage. At a time of heightened persecution for the practice of plural marriage, Taylor received a revelation, referred to as the 1886 Revelation or Eight Hour Meeting by believers. This revelation countered any future end to the practice of polygamy, stating, "I have not revoked the law nor will I for it is everlasting and those who will enter into my glory must obey the conditions thereof, even so, Amen."²³⁷ One of the witnesses to the occasion was Lorin C.

²³⁶ Mormon fundamentalists often refer to the LDS Church as being "out of order." For this reason, remaining in order is essential for the preservation of the group.

²³⁷ "A Revelation on Celestial Marriage, Given Through President John Taylor, at Centerville, Utah, on September 27th—John Taylor Papers, Church Historians Office" in *John Taylor and the Revelation of 1886: An Account of the Visitation of Jesus Christ and the Resurrected Prophet Joseph Smith at a Meeting on September 27th 1886*. Christ's Church, 2012., 23. While photographs of the document exist, there are not physical copies of the revelation despite Lorin C. Woolley claiming five copies of the revelation were distributed to members of the Council of Friends. Because of the lack of physical copies and no copy appearing to be written in the hand of President John Taylor, the LDS Church does not acknowledge the authenticity of the revelation. However, in the diaries

Woolley, a bodyguard of Taylor's and later leader of the modern Mormon fundamentalist movement. Reflecting on the evening, Woolley recalled John Taylor exiting his visitation with Jesus and Joseph Smith and proclaiming, "Brethren, I have had a very pleasant conversation all night with Brother Joseph [Smith]." ²³⁸ Because of the structure of Patriarchal File Leadership, John Taylor required an introduction to Jesus through his File Leader, Joseph Smith. In a similar way, the current leader of Christ's Church navigates a series of introductions in order to receive guidance from priesthood leaders outside of his stewardship. These introductions include both living and deceased priesthood leaders. ²³⁹

of Leonard J. Arrington, the former Church Historian asserts that the revelation was "most certainly genuine." (Confessions of a Mormon Historian: Volume 2, 137)

²³⁸ "The Sworn Statements of Lorin C. Woolley and Daniel R. Bateman" in *John Taylor and the Revelation of 1886: An Account of the Visitation of Jesus Christ and the Resurrected Prophet Joseph Smith at a Meeting on September 27th 1886*. Christ's Church, 2012., 17. In addition to the prophet Joseph Smith, Jesus Christ was present in the meeting with John Taylor. Central to the revelation is the idea of eternal law. In the revelation, God speaks to Taylor and says, "Thus saith the Lord: All commandments that I give must be obeyed by those calling themselves by my name unless they are revoked by me or by my authority." (Woolley and Batement, 22) The Lord further proclaims, "I have not revoked this law nor will I for it is everlasting and those who will enter into my glory must obey the conditions thereof, even so, Amen." (Woolley and Batement, 23) Following the meeting, Taylor placed each man in the meeting under a covenant that they would protect the Principle. He further participated that at the time of the seventh President of the Church, the Church would fall into "bondage both temporally and spiritually" until the One Mighty and Strong appears. This revelation reflects the larger concern over the changes to LDS doctrine.

²³⁹ Deceased Church leaders are not the only appearances that the prophet relies on. During our meeting, the prophet of the community mentioned a time when he was taken up to the Heavens and met with Michael, the God of this world. He explained that Jesus Christ introduced them, a further indication of the importance of File Leadership and the inability, of even the prophet, to circumvent the chain of authority that leads back to God.

Within the context of Mormonism, broadly speaking, spirits are often sought as a means of dissent or acquiring power outside of the traditional structure. During the 1886 event, the spirit of Joseph Smith disrupted the trajectory of the priesthood keys, which were supposed to pass to Wilford Woodruff, the fourth President of the LDS Church and next in the line of succession. However, in this moment, the spirit dictated the keys pass in an alternate direction, granting spiritual access and authority to individuals in a minority and marginalized position. This moment is foundational as a marker of God's intervention in the Priesthood, when necessary, and an example of the spirit's ability to intervene and fracture historical lineage in multiple directions. However, internally, many Mormon fundamentalist groups function in much the same way as the LDS Church. As established organizations, the spirits of Mormon fundamentalism now protect the institution and affirm its claims to truth; spirits are democratic, until they are routinized and organized for the purpose of the institution. A breach in this order constitutes apostasy across all forms of Mormonism.

The events of 1886 are central to most modern Mormon fundamentalist communities. For Christ's Church, this is reflected in the writings of the first Prophet, who frequently addressed the importance of this historical moment as emblematic of the current practice of Patriarchal File Leadership. Although now out of print, Christ's Church published a newsletter for two years from 1979 through 1981 that acted as a proselyting tool and avenue for the President to discuss important historical and

contemporary topics.²⁴⁰ Addressing the history of the group, the President of the Church frequently described the place of Smith as a figure who continues his work in death, even into the present. In Volume 1.1 of Christ's Church's publication, the late Prophet wrote, "He, Joseph, is the one, under the Direction of Jesus Christ, who through the 'veil', from Heaven, in plain words, is setting the House of God under the direction of a man in the flesh, who can receive Divine guidance, and will do the will of the Father!"²⁴¹ Even in the death, the priesthood only functions through continued interaction with Joseph Smith and other late leaders of the community. Without these interactions, the chain of leadership that descends back to God would break and the authority to act on behalf of the divine is lost.

Volume 1.6 of the group's magazine specifically cited John Taylor's interaction with the deceased Smith as evidence for the system of Patriarchal File Leadership. Offering a narrative of the events, the late Prophet wrote, "A special meeting was held in

²⁴⁰ Although this magazine is now out of print, many members of Christ's Church still have copies from this period. A full set of the magazine is housed in Nevada with several digital copies circulating among members. They are sometimes referenced by current leaders seeking to address specific topics, but remain fairly unused in the contemporary Church. Today, new pamphlets are used that address the contemporary issues surrounding fundamentalism, including the nature of God as Adam, plural marriage, the priesthood ban, and the identity of Zion.

²⁴¹ Gerald Peterson Sr., "Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ" in *The Branch Magazine* Volume 1.1. Publication of Jesus Christ's Church of the Latter Days., 7. The magazines of the Church are out of print and no longer circulated among members. However, during the time of the late prophet Gerald W. Peterson Sr., the magazine was widely circulated among members and used as a proselyting tool to convert individuals from the LDS Church and other fundamentalist groups. The magazine's focus is outlining the Apostasy of the LDS Church, presenting concise explanations of Christ's Church's doctrine, and updating membership on the community's growth.

Centerville, Utah, September 27, 1886, at which time the resurrected Joseph Smith Jr. presided over the meeting, and instructed John Taylor to set apart five men with the Keys of the Priesthood...”²⁴² These men, later known as the Council of Friends, are not recognized as figures of authority within the LDS Church because they were not part of the succession order. Their authority stems from this single interaction with the spirit who affirmed their religious system, which was contrary to the LDS Church. The same spirits continue to interact with leaders of Christ’s Church who still seek their counsel for insight into the direction of Christ Church’s organization.

In order to offer a historical basis for the doctrine, James, the President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained the foundations of the teaching found in the life of Joseph Smith. He explained that when Joseph Smith became the head of the dispensation, he was given priesthood Keys that demonstrate various aspects of his authority. These Keys were not given to him by living individuals, but deceased Prophets and Apostles who each serve as a file leader on the other side of the veil. For members of this group, the Restoration of the Gospel happened through the doctrine of Patriarchal File Leadership and the handing of Keys from one leader to another, even across the veil. Members of the group also point to Brigham Young’s interactions with the deceased Joseph Smith as a source for their doctrine. He explained, “You see the example that Brigham Young had, where Brigham Young indicated that he talked to Joseph Smith and worked with him on a regular basis, both in life and then after Joseph had passed over the

²⁴² Gerald Peterson Sr., “The Priesthood” in *The Branch Magazine* Volume 1.6. Publication of Jesus Christ’s Church of the Latter Days., 3.

veil, and so we've continued those traditions and indicate that again if we're part of a Restoration, once it's restored, it remains."²⁴³ By using the example of Brigham Young interacting with Joseph Smith, Patriarchal File Leadership is framed as part of a widely accepted Mormon history, beyond this small group. In both purpose and function, it is similar to the transfiguration of Brigham Young, the moment the spirit of Joseph Smith spoke through Brigham Young as a means of defining correct authority within the Church. By using the same method of authority as Young, this small group demonstrates the ways in which similar moments of spirit communication are used across the Mormon Restoration to validate contested lineages.

Within broader history of Mormon fundamentalism, the spirits offer legitimization to groups that are devalued or delegitimized by the dominant Mormon narrative. However, within these small groups, spirits usually act in accordance with leadership and affirm the claims of the particular community. This is particularly compelling given that many of these small groups began as schisms that were validated through this form of spiritual authority, such as the 1886 meeting. Similar to the LDS Church, fundamentalist communities enforce boundaries to the extent to which spirit communication is deemed acceptable. These boundaries reflect the common Mormon concern for correct authority and the ability of individuals to circumvent the hierarchical leadership of the Priesthood. For Christ's Church, spirit communications are deemed acceptable when they occur within the order of Patriarchal File Leadership and when they are consigned to faith-promoting interactions with deceased relatives and leaders. Just as

²⁴³ Ibid.

within the LDS Church, interactions that could lead to further schism or oppose the direction of the prophet are deemed apostate.

Just as William Godbe and his followers sought the authority of Joseph Smith to validate their claims to authority and Mormon identity, Christ's Church similarly seeks the authority of Smith as a means of placing themselves within Mormonism. Like all Mormon traditions, Christ's Church asserts their place as the true Church with exclusive access to the entirety of truth. Because they are much smaller and newer than the LDS Church, these claims are met with opposition, particular by members of the LDS Church who come in contact with Christ's Church missionaries. In light of this opposition, appealing to the authority of Smith and previous Church leaders remains central for making their claim as the truest form of Mormonism. For leaders within the LDS Church, who do not maintain the authority of the 1886 event and ensuing revelation, accounts of interaction with Smith are suspect and a boundary is drawn between interacting with ancestors versus the spirit of Joseph Smith on the lines of authority. Unlike ancestors who visit families in spaces such as the temple or meetinghouse with messages of affirmation toward the dominant LDS narrative, Smith seldom appears as a simple source of comfort in times of distress. Following the transfiguration and Presidency of Brigham Young, Smith's spirit is most often a source of disruption and validation for claims counter to the dominant LDS trajectory. The spirits of past prophets who fall outside of the LDS lineage are doubly contested because they make claims to alternative forms of Mormon identity that are marked as Apostate by the mainline Church, but are legitimized through access to the spiritual world.

The Continued Specter of Prophetic Authority

Within Mormon fundamentalism, Joseph Smith is the only spiritual personage to hold the office of the Holy Ghost, and act as a literal ghost that guides the temporal Church. But he is not the only spectral prophet capable of manifesting in the present to offer validation for authoritative claims. Rather, his appearance in 1886 and admonition to John Taylor to pass the keys to John W. Woolley, instead of Wilford Woodruff, is indicative of the kinds of apparitions that continue within Mormon fundamentalism. For the group in Nevada this is particularly true because the group began with an apparition.

On April 20, 2017, a conference was held in the former home of FLDS leader Warren Jeffs in Hilldale, Utah.²⁴⁴ At this meeting, members from multiple fundamentalist communities across the intermountain West attended to discuss their shared history and beliefs. During the event, I sat in the midst of several groups and watched as members of the communities raised their hands as their group was called to mark their community's representation at the event. The final name called was the LeBaron group. "LeBaron

²⁴⁴ Warren Jeffs is the current prophet of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS). In 2011, he was convicted of two felony counts of sexual assault of a minor and is currently serving a life sentence in Palestine, Texas. Although some faithful FLDS families continue to live in Short Creek, the historic home of the community, most have moved to different cities across the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Today, most of the business and government operations are run by apostates and members of Centennial Park, the fundamentalist community that broke off from the FLDS after the death of LeRoy Johnson, the leader prior to Warren Jeffs' father's tenure as prophet. Many of the homes in Short Creek are foreclosed and remain empty. The historic home of Warren Jeffs, the location of this Sunstone meeting, was recently purchased by The Dream Center in Phoenix, AZ to be renovated into a rehabilitation center. (Rehabilitating what exactly?)

group” references any group connected to the LeBaron family name. Alma Dayer LeBaron was the patriarch of the family and had a connection to fundamentalist leader Joseph Musser. He and his family were excommunicated from the LDS Church for their practice of plural marriage. In 1955, Alma’s son Joel founded the Church of the First Born with the belief that the LeBaron family held the priesthood Keys. However, in the 1960s, another of Alma’s son, Ervil, began teaching that he was the correct successor and founded his own Church, the Church of the First Born of the Lamb of God. To maintain his authority, Ervil ordered the murder of Joel LeBaron, Rulon Allred, and their supporters. Because of the ordered murders and killings during the 1970s, many fundamentalist groups maintain a fear of various Mormon groups that stem from the LeBaron family.²⁴⁵ As the name was called, heads turned and hushed whispers filled the room, but no hands were raised. Seated next to me, I noticed as young members of Christ’s Church offered concerned glances upon hearing the name. After the event, I inquired about the reaction. “They murdered our Prophet,” one said. Others simply nodded in agreement.

After asking the young men about their reaction to the LeBaron name, one young man in his late teens dressed in a gray vest and blue shirt reached into his satchel and pulled out a small pamphlet. On the front of the fifteen-page document was the image of a sunset with the silhouette of a man kneeling in prayer while grasping a cowboy hat. Above the image were the words, “The Testimony of a Prophet.” Inside the pamphlet, the

²⁴⁵ See Ben Bradlee Jr. and Dale Van Atta, *Prophet of Blood: The Untold Story of Ervil LeBaron and the Lambs of God* (New York City: Putnam Publishing Group, 1981).

first line offered further insight on the information it contained, “Extracts from the history and testimony of Gerald W. Peterson Sr., concerning the succession of the Keys of the Priesthood.”²⁴⁶ Before I could continue reading, an older man from the community asked what brought me to Short Creek. I shared my general interest in the history of Mormonism, particularly as it relates to spirit communication. His eyes met mine as he informed me that I needed to read the pamphlet immediately and learn about the origins of his Church.

The murdered prophet referenced by the young men from Nevada during the conference in Short Creek was Rulon C. Allred, a homeopathic physician and chiropractor based in Murray, Utah. For many fundamentalists, Allred is celebrated as a heroic figure who sought to maintain all principles of the Gospel, at any cost. In life, he was imprisoned for bigamy and led what became one of the most well-known fundamentalist groups in the United States, the Apostolic United Brethren (AUB).²⁴⁷ On May 10, 1977, Allred was working in his medical office when two disguised women entered the facility and opened fire, killing Allred. During the trial, it was established that the women were affiliated, one through marriage, to the prophet of another polygamist

²⁴⁶ Gerald W. Peterson Sr., “The Testimony of a Prophet by Gerald W. Peterson Sr.” Publication of Jesus Christ’s Church of the Latter Days., 2.

²⁴⁷ In recent time, this group became a household name through reality television and involvement in Utah politics. Members of the community appear in *Sister Wives* and *My Five Wives*. Their involvement in television and politics was largely a response to the arrest of Warren Jeffs and an attempt to present a normalized view of Mormon fundamentalism. Unlike the FLDS, members of the AUB and other fundamentalist groups, dress similar to anyone else in their surrounding environment. They work at companies across the intermountain West and often attend LDS Church meetings to supplement their own religiosity.

group based in Mexico, Ervil LeBaron.²⁴⁸ For members of the AUB, and groups that split from the AUB following the death of Allred and disputes in leadership, this moment was an act of martyrdom. For members of Christ's Church, the death of Allred did not mark the end of Allred's stewardship and ministry on earth. Rather, his death and subsequent apparitions marked the beginning of a new fundamentalist group that began one month prior to the announcement of Official Declaration 2 by LDS President, Spencer W. Kimball. This group was led by the recipient of the apparitions, Gerald W. Peterson Sr. until his death in 1981.

As a group that does not fall within the dominant LDS Mormon narrative, Christ's Church faces a challenge felt across multiple forms of Mormonism; harnessing an authority that is authenticated by the broader Mormon system. Within these marginalized spaces, where claims to the correct priesthood lineage are contested, spirits are particularly compelling. Whereas claims based on seniority and ordination require a linear model of priesthood, spirits offer disruptive alternatives that are equally powerful for those who believe in the Mormon teachings of the spirit world. Mormonism has a long history of the disruptive spirits of powerful figures altering the course of history, particularly at the earliest moments of the Restoration when Peter, James, John, and John the Baptist all appeared to confer priesthood keys in a time of religious distress. This moment and others present a historic basis for claims to apparitional authority. Because

²⁴⁸ For a time, Allred had moved to Mexico and lived as part of this group. However, he later returned to Utah and served as the Prophet of the AUB. At the point of his death, Allred left behind at least seven wives. However, the exact size of his family is difficult to know because he was sealed to several widows prior to his death.

Mormonism is a religious tradition that maintains a belief in the continued connection between the living and the dead, these interactions are not disregarded as unfounded, but heralded as edifying moments that point toward eternal truths.

What makes fundamentalist spirits a challenge for the LDS Church is not their apparitions, but their allowance for the questioning of authority and seeking of spiritual power outside of traditional channels. In these instances, according to the LDS Church, spirit communication enters into the realm of apostasy. However, designations of apostasy are multifaceted and come from multiple directions. Speaking on the Manifesto that ended the practice of plural marriage, Gerald W. Peterson Sr., the first prophet of Christ's Church, wrote:

“Since 1890, the changes (apostasy) of the Mormon LDS Church have been a gradual but consistent process which has caused the Lord, even Jesus Christ, to withdraw His favor and Priesthood from the Church, thus making the ordinances and saving power of the Church and Priesthood, in the Church, of no avail with God!!!”²⁴⁹

As a man who believed in the Restoration, and the divine promise that the Keys of the priesthood would not be taken from the earth again, Peterson acknowledged that alternative routes of priesthood succession were not only possible, but necessary. For

²⁴⁹ Gerald W. Peterson Sr., “Brief History of the Church of Jesus Christ” in *The Branch Magazine* Volume 1.1. Publication of Jesus Christ's Church of the Latter Days. 3. In Volume 3.2, Peterson wrote of the event in light of Moroni's warning stating, “That time is none other than the period from 1890 when the Church began its official shame of the Gospel of Christ until 1978 when the Church culminated the ‘times of the gentiles’ (D&C 45:29-31) by extending the Priesthood to the Canaanites.” (Peterson, 12)

Peterson, fundamentalism is an act of preservation accomplished through prophetic authority, both living and deceased.²⁵⁰

Despite Peterson's claims later in life, he was not always certain about the nature of Mormon authority. Gerald W. Peterson Sr. was born in Lusk, Wyoming on October 8, 1917. Like many young adults in Utah, Peterson was led to join the LDS Church after meeting a woman, who later became his wife, at the age of 16. In his written testimony, Peterson was confident at a young age that he received the gift of the Holy Ghost through the LDS Church. This afforded him the spiritual ability to receive spiritual gifts, such as prophecy and visions. Despite his many spiritual experiences as a faithful member of the LDS Church, his view of the Church began to change in 1928 when, through continued interaction with divine revelation, he felt a call to "find the Keys of the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood, in the hands of a man, living in the flesh."²⁵¹ According to his accounts, the divine revelation he received assured him that the man he had come to know and revere as the prophet of the LDS Church, Heber J. Grant, was not the true Key Holder on earth.

Like many fundamentalist leaders before and after Peterson, many Mormon groups assert that authority left the LDS Church at the end of Joseph F. Smith's

²⁵⁰ See D. Michael Quinn. "Plural Marriage and Mormon Fundamentalism." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* Vol. 31.2 (Summer 1998): 1– 68.

²⁵¹ Gerald W. Peterson Sr., "The Testimony of a Prophet by Gerald W. Peterson Sr." Publication of Jesus Christ's Church of the Latter Days., 2. Across Mormonism, this term implies the highest level of spiritual authority and would be recognizable to most members of the LDS Church as the President of their Church. By using this term, Peterson implies that the LDS Church is not led by the true Prophet, but that this leader is alive and leading faithful Mormons elsewhere.

Presidency. In accordance with the 1886 Revelation, indicating the importance of the Saint's continuing to practice plural marriage and predicting an increase in apostasy at the time of the Seventh President, the Keys were handed to John W. Woolley through the Priesthood Council established by John Taylor under the guidance and the deceased prophet Joseph Smith. Speaking of his new insight that came through divine revelation, Peterson wrote, "Many have never considered the fact that there are two ways, not one way, in which a man may receive authority... 1. By the 'traditional' way of it descending upon the next man in line of ordination. 2. By the direct intervention of God."²⁵² Linear priesthood models of succession through seniority afforded Heber J. Grant the status of Church President in 1918. However, for fundamentalists who acknowledge the power of disruptive spirits to alter history, the divine establishes opportunity to allow any worthy man to harness the keys of the priesthood on earth regardless of place within the order of successors.²⁵³ This is similar to biblical prophets and patriarchs who were understood as regular men until they were called by God.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ See Max Weber, "The Types of Authority and Imperative Co-Ordination" in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* translated by A.M. Henderson and edited by Talcott Parsons (Eastford: Martino Fine Books, 2012). Peterson's experience with the divine and his subsequent promotion as a prophet and leader of a religious community, mirrors Weber's work on charisma and charismatic authority.

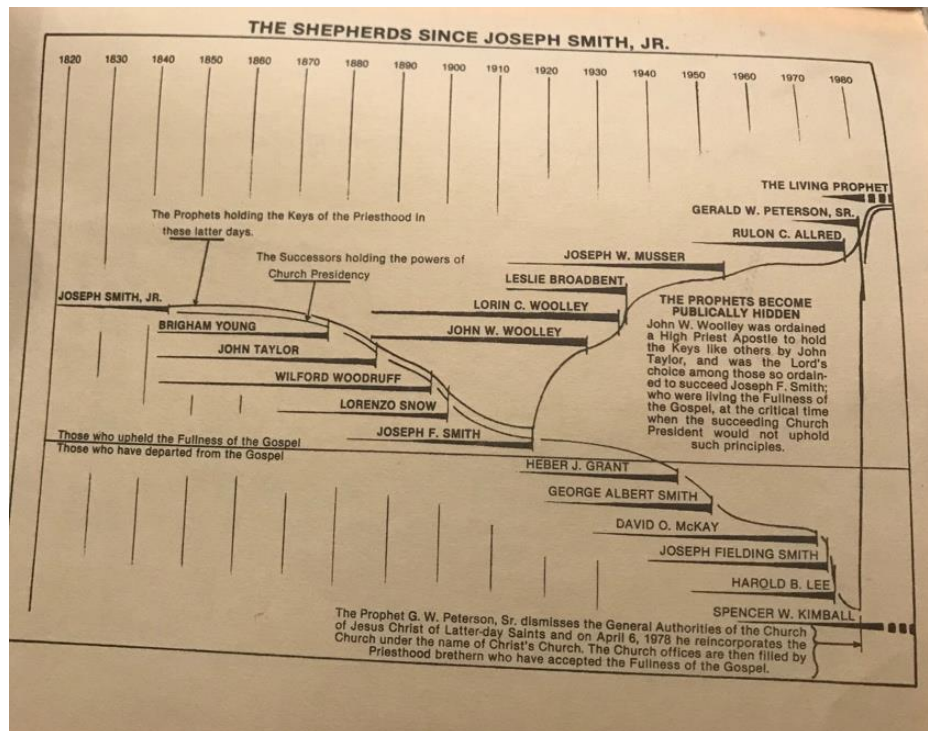


Figure 3: *The Shepherds Since Joseph Smith, Jr.*

In 1964, Peterson was hired to work in a medical facility in Murray, under the direction of Rulon C. Allred. Although not much information is available regarding the events that transpired over Peterson’s tenure in this position, it was during this time that he became both a close associate of Allred and a member of his Priesthood Council. As a member of the Priesthood Council, he recalled Allred telling him that a great mission was in store and together the two men “would stand side by side, throughout this life and the next.”²⁵⁴ Peterson recounted that his mission was later affirmed by a divine visitation in which he was instructed that he would serve greatly in his life and bring many souls to the Gospel. Peterson recalled:

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 5.

Rulon Allred, did lay his hands upon my head, and ordain me to the office of a High Priest Apostle, a Patriarch in Israel, and gave unto me the Keys of the Holy Priesthood and the Keys of Elijah the Prophet, with all the rights, keys, powers, and authority pertaining to the office of one like unto Moss, who is supposed to lead the Priesthood and Church in these last days, and to lead the escaped of Israel, back to the ‘Promised Land’ of Jackson County, Missouri, prior to the coming of the Savior in the clouds of Heaven.²⁵⁵

Even though a successor was already in place for Owen Allred, Peterson’s testimony indicates that Allred knew the Keys would not remain with the AUB following his murder. Rather, another successor was necessary and would manifest through the power of divine intervention to address the apostasy of the community and lead the faithful in a new direction. Members of Christ’s Church assert that apostasy began to take place in the AUB following Allred’s death and a new lineage became necessary to maintain the existence of the temporal Church. Following the death of Allred, the AUB came under the leadership of Allred’s brother, Owen Allred. For many members of the AUB, this was the rightful succession and Peterson’s claims are considered Apostate. When I spoke with individuals familiar with the succession who joined Christ’s Church, many referenced grievances with Owen Allred’s leadership as an indication that the Keys had truly left the AUB. Adam, a member of the group currently living in Nevada spoke with me about the events as I baked cinnamon rolls with his wife. In particular, he mentioned concerns that Owen began splitting up marriages and dividing wives from their husbands following the

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 7. In Doctrine and Covenants 57, Independence, Missouri is named as the site of Zion’s establishment. Mormon fundamentalism continues to place emphasis on gathering the Saints together to create Zion. Many believe Missouri is the correct location for the final gathering because of this scripture.

death of Allred. For Adam, this was not indicative of a true priesthood holder and a sign of a failing in their priesthood leadership

This ordination event was not the last time Allred appeared to Peterson to make his successor known. On the day of Allred's death, Peterson was working in his medical office in Provo, Utah. An hour after Allred's murder at the command of Ervil LeBaron, at 5:00pm, Allred was seen entering Peterson's office to finalize the calling of the new prophet.²⁵⁶ Although surprised to see his late prophet, Peterson wrote of the interaction as though it was a standard occurrence. He listened attentively as the spirit spoke, "Jerry, I have come to re-confirm your calling and to tell you to begin the mission which you have been waiting for"²⁵⁷ Once the purpose of the visit was clarified, the spirit "then laid his hands upon my head, and I felt them as real as if they had been fleshly hands."²⁵⁸ The feeling of Rulon's hands was so clear to Peterson that he recalled moving to reach for the telephone and being thrown back into his seat and scolded by the specter, who was not finished with the priesthood ordination.

Of the 1977 ordination event, Peterson testified, "I had received a witness I can never deny. Rulon lives!"²⁵⁹ For Peterson and his followers, this moment solidified the doctrine of Patriarchal File Leadership, that includes spirits of the deceased. More than simply personal experience with the doctrine, this belief was confirmed as divinely

²⁵⁶ Although the individual witness was not named within the testimony, Peterson clarified that at the time the testimony was recorded in 1980, the individual was still alive and would "sustain this evidence." (11)

²⁵⁷ Gerald W. Peterson Sr., "The Testimony of a Prophet by Gerald W. Peterson Sr." Publication of Jesus Christ's Church of the Latter Days., 11.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

revealed doctrine through the writings of Gerald W. Peterson, now rendered scripture among the community. Speaking of his relationship with the deceased Allred, he wrote, “He has never left me to this day and continues to activate the Keys through the veil. He told me that the Keys consist of the one who previously held the Keys, directing the one who holds the Keys in the flesh through the veil, and thus it went back to Joseph Musser, and on back through each one to Joseph Smith, and Jesus Christ.”²⁶⁰ Peterson’s understanding of Keys and spirits reveals the continued importance of disruptive forces within Mormon Priesthood lineage. Although members of the AUB sustained Owen Allred following the death of their leader, the spirits offered an alternative. Much like the events of 1886 when Joseph appeared to John Taylor and instructed the Keys pass to a Priesthood Council, the lineage shifted and a new fundamentalist group was born at the ghostly appearance of a late prophet.

For members of Christ’s Church, the continued interactions with the spirit world and spirits most often serves as markers of authentication and sources of legitimization of the group’s leadership and their present gathering. The presence of spirits and spiritual manifestations is particularly compelling to converts of the religion, who cited the lack of spiritual presence within the LDS Church as a reason for seeking the Priesthood elsewhere. Patty is one such convert. She is a woman in her mid-forties who lives in Christ Church’s gathering place. She is knowledgeable about Mormon history, homeschools many of the children in the group, and leads much of the food preparation

²⁶⁰ Peterson Sr., Gerald. “The Writings of Gerald W. Peterson, 1 Gerald 1. Publication of Jesus Christ’s Church of the Latter Days., 8.

for the United Effort, a communitarian program setting the foundation for full communal living. During my visits to Nevada, I stayed with Patty and her newly married daughter and son-in-law. Prior to her conversion to Christ's Church, Patty was a member of the LDS Church. Upon researching Church history and doctrinal changes throughout the years, she began seeking spiritual authority elsewhere. Even before meeting the man who became her prophet, Patty and her husband were baptized into the group and sealed, married eternally under the priesthood, through the authority of Christ's Church. Following their sealing, they took two additional wives into their family and proceeded to live Fullness of the Gospel, including plural marriage, consecration, and a belief in the Adam-God Doctrine. Although she offered several accounts of the Principle of Plural Marriage as a challenging doctrine, Patty expressed a deep love for her sister wives and the life they lived. When her husband and sister wives chose to leave the group, Patty stood by her testimony in the Gospel and continued her faithful journey in Christ's Church. Patty's husband chose to leave the group because he no longer believed the prophet was the man who holds the priesthood keys. When he and Patty's sister wives left the group, they remained a family. They still believe in fundamentalism, but not in the leadership of Christ's Church. They are now independent fundamentalist, meaning they maintain the fundamentals, but are not members of a distinct organization.

The first time I stayed in Patty's home, she sat with me after a dinner of split-pea soup to share her conversion story and experiences in the group. As she moved through her life, she noted the absence of spiritual manifestation in the mainline LDS Church. Many members of fundamentalist groups note that the early Church under Joseph Smith

was filled with accounts of healing, speaking in tongues, and miracles; markers of spiritual authority that are largely absent in contemporary LDS Church meetings. She shared that prior to moving to the gathering in Nevada, she lived at the group's previous site in southern Utah, the location of their first temple.²⁶¹ One night, she noticed one of the youngest daughters in the family staring out the window in the direction of the temple. As the young child smiled toward the temple, Patty inquired about what she saw. The daughter looked up and explained that she was looking at the beautiful people hovering over the temple. For Patty, the spiritual witness of children is taken seriously because they testify to things that are often overlooked by adults. Much like the similar experience in LDS temples, the witness of spirits by this child solidified the small group's temple as the house of God on earth.²⁶²

Accounts such as Patty's are not isolated instances or reserved for the individual. Rather, interactions with spiritual entities are called upon in communal settings as sources of encouragement for the group. At the group's October 2017 Solemn Assembly, at their gathering place in Nevada, the prophet took the microphone as the final speaker for the semi-annual meeting. Speaking without notes or written guidance, he shared stories and doctrinal insights to a silent audience. The insights he shared were ones of encouragement and would likely appear mundane to outsiders. For example, after

²⁶¹ The group originally gathered on a farm in southern UT, given to Gerald W. Peterson Sr. by Rulon C. Allred. This site is referred to as Paiquin, which is believed to mean "God Power" in the Adamic language. While people continue to live in this gathering place, the official site of gathering was moved following the desecration of their temple. The temple still stands in Paiquin, but is not currently used for ordinances.

²⁶² In her telling of this account, Patty explained the importance of childlike faith and how children are often more spiritually attuned than adults.

offering an overview of the weekend's events, he spoke of the need to continue food preparation and his preference for goat milk because of its health benefits. He also thanked his leadership, who were sustained the previous morning. Around the room, the faithful sat on the edge of their seats, some furiously writing every word the prophet spoke. On several occasions, he paused to inquire whether people were tired from listening to him speak. To this, he was met with an uproar from his followers begging him to continue. As he concluded, he offered the microphone to members of the community to share their testimonies. Over half of the testimonies included interactions with the spirits of Rulon Allred and Gerald W. Peterson Sr., the founding leaders of the community.

The first person to offer a testimony of the spirits came from an older gentleman in his seventies with gray hair and an ill-fitting white suit. He recalled being a member of the community since its first earliest days in southern Utah and attending meetings and temple sessions frequently in the groups' original pyramid-shaped temple prior to the group gathering in Nevada. He recalled one particular session where he stood at the bottom of the stairs and looked toward the ceiling following the completion of an endowment session. As he gazed upward, he was struck by the appearance of Rulon Allred and Gerald W. Peterson Sr., standing together at the top of the stairs clothed in light. As the man shared his testimony of the temple, which came from this experience, a smile came over the face of the prophet who shook his head in affirmation. Smiles washed over everyone in the room as he shared how this experience strengthened his testimony of File Leadership and his belief that the prophets stand on the other side of the

veil to guide the temporal Church. He concluded his testimony by bearing witness to the prophets that remain intimately close to their people, even after death. His testimony fulfills the writings of Gerald W. Peterson Sr., who wrote that he and Rulon Allred would stand together on the other side of the veil and minister to the faithful in both life and death.²⁶³

As people continued to share their stories, the microphone was handed to an elderly woman in the front row. She was seated on the far left, indicating her elevated position within the Order of the Priesthood. The man next to me leaned over and explained that she was one of the wives of Gerald Peterson Sr. and frequently interacts with the spirit of her late husband. Everyone turned toward her as she began to speak about one summer, early in the Nevada gathering, when the group was finishing the construction of the sidewalk outside the temple during a Saturday work project. She recalled feeling a sudden pain in her ribs as she bent down to lay the cement at the doors of the temple. As the pain continued she began to pray that she would be touched with healing. As she prayed, she felt the hand of her late husband reach out and touch her ribs. She knew these hands in life and affirmed that the feeling was as if they had never left her side. As she felt the touch of her husband, the pain in her ribs dissipated. She was assured that not only does her husband continue to live and minister beyond the veil, but that he was a true prophet of God who was sent to heal a disorganized Church.

²⁶³ Peterson Sr., Gerald. "The Writings of Gerald W. Peterson: 1 Gerald 1." Publication of Jesus Christ's Church of the Latter Days, 3.

While many of the instances were met with praise and affirmation, clear boundaries were drawn by leaders. In one instance, a woman began to explain a time when she was sure Gerald W. Peterson Sr. was in her presence. Rather than a conversational interaction, or a simple vision, she indicated that Peterson was seen “flying around the ceiling.” As she waved her arms to demonstrate the way the spirit moved around the ceiling, the microphone was taken by the prophet’s son, who quickly moved to another individual, implying the account of the spirit flying was disrespectful or outside the bounds of normalcy within the group. Although no words were exchanged, the reactions in the room indicated the importance of reverence for deceased leaders. Within this context, likening them to secular ghosts that fly around a room is not considered appropriate. Unlike “other” spirits that do not testify of truthfulness, the deceased leaders of the Church are only ever referred to as spiritual beings sent by God to aid in the direction of the Church.

In the canonical writings of Gerald W. Peterson, the late prophet wrote of a particular spiritual experience that affirmed the accessibility of spiritual aids who appear in death to guide the living. In his vision, he was taken to the Celestial realm to meet Father Michael, or God, by way of Jesus Christ, in the order of Patriarchal File Leadership. Peterson was told that his work in life would be extraordinary, but his ministry would extend beyond mortality. Writing on his own immortal future, and the immortality of all worthy Priesthood holders, Peterson offered the Saints assurance,

“Former saints will return and assist mortals in the last days.”²⁶⁴ More than assistance in daily tasks, the spirits reenter the lower sphere to acknowledge their chosen flock and affirm that the gathering in Nevada is the true branch of God’s Church in the last days.²⁶⁵ This teaching assumes that deceased Saints will only appear to current Saints. As such, they provide a testimony and reassurance that the group they visit is the true Mormonism on earth.

When I spoke with the son of the current prophet of Christ’s Church about File Leadership, I was particularly interested in the extent to which members of the community can interact with past prophets in the same way as the men in leadership positions. In response, the prophet referenced the wife of Gerald W. Peterson Sr., who shared the healing of her ribs at the hands of her late husband during Solemn Assembly. He explained, “But, you know that some of the wives of Gerald Sr. have had Gerald Sr. appear to them. I don’t think that there is anything wrong with that so long as whatever they’ve received isn’t to change or direct the Church.”²⁶⁶ While their interactions can lead to personal revelation, the insight they receive does not apply to the entire Church. Just as in the LDS Church, the limits to which members of the group can exercise their ability to

²⁶⁴ Peterson Sr., Gerald. “The Writings of Gerald W. Peterson, 1 Gerald 1.” Publication of Jesus Christ’s Church of the Latter Days., 4.

²⁶⁵ Mormon doctrine, generally, asserts that the current period is the last days and human beings are in a period of preparation before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This period began at the beginning of the dispensation when the Gospel was restored. As a community preparing for the Second Coming, Christ’s Church is actively working to build Zion, a place where Jesus Christ will dwell with his chosen people. Building Zion is both a spiritual and physical practice; a temple and surrounding community were constructed and people are called to serve with “one heart and one mind.” (Moses 7:8)

²⁶⁶ James and Andrew. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted over Skype, November 24, 2017.

experience spirits has boundaries and the line between benign spirit communication and apostasy are clearly marked. Individuals are welcome to interact with the deceased as a source of comfort and affirmation, but a desire to exert spiritual authority equal or above the current prophet raises concern. Gerald Peterson's interaction with Rulon Allred and other leaders, that led to a new Mormon group is unique in that it cannot happen again without concern over apostasy, as defined by the leaders of the group.

The men in leadership are particularly aware of these limits. Speaking to the possibility of interacting with deceased leaders above one's own File Leader, James shared, "I would be very wary of anybody that would say, 'Hey Gerald Sr. came to me and said such and such.' Because it's not how we see it done Scripturally or otherwise."²⁶⁷ Within the order of File Leadership, everyone has the ability to receive personal revelation. However, the extent to which individual and personal revelations affect the broader community is questioned. Andrew explained this distinction within the context of stewardship:

"So, you're given a responsibility that you're to lead and to guide. And so we believe that you can receive direction in regards to your stewardship and that may through prayer, reliving it as inspiration from the spirit. It may be that a being, whether it be Gerald Sr. or someone else comes to you to give you guidance and direction, within the stewardship which you have received... God works through the order of the Priesthood and through the stewardships that he's established in order to give his direction."²⁶⁸

Much like the veil between this world and the next, which is strikingly thin, so too is the line between benign spirit communication and apostasy, even within communities largely

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

considered apostate by the LDS Church. For a group that began as an “apostate” sect of the LDS Church, guided by apparitions, the uncontrollable nature of spirits and the possibility of dissent through their interactions is not a distant concern. Within Christ’s Church, many faithful members assert that Priesthood lineages do not last past a certain time; a group will either Apostatize or be translated, the process of changing from a mortal to immortal being, similar to the broader Christian understanding of being raptured. Like the Biblical example of Enoch, who did not die, the group asserts that the righteous and worthy Saints of God will be translated, or lifted up, in the end times to avoid the destructions. This doctrine is similar to Protestant views of the “rapture.” On two different occasions, members of the group shared that the time of either Apostasy or translation is approaching for Christ’s Church.

Despite this concern that is reflected in all Mormon groups, the importance of spirit communication for Christ’s Church lies in its support of the marginalized. Within a religious system that demands correct lineage and authority, the spirits offer alternatives and validation to those outside of the dominant LDS narrative. Although the internal logics of the community dictate correct practice for communicating with the spirit world, the spirits act as subversive and dissenting forces to those on the outside. While there are many spirits and competing voices, the choice of which spirits to follow is dependent on the experience of the practitioner. The Saints gathering in Nevada, like many fundamentalist communities existing up and against the LDS Church, are vindicated by their specters.

Conclusion

Spirits remain ever-present within the lives of Mormons. As such, spirit communication is a Mormon practice, regardless of group affiliation. Within the walls of the LDS temple, where Saints gather to perform proxy ordinances for loved ones waiting on the other side of the veil, the practitioner often feels a deep connection with their deceased relatives. Oftentimes these connections lead to manifestations and personal interactions with the spirits of the deceased. Across various forms of Mormonism, individuals offer accounts of spiritual presences as a source of comfort in times of grief or mourning. However, just as the closeness of spirits brings comfort to the individual, the uncontrollable nature of the specter raises challenges for leadership who recognize the disruptive potential they hold. This concern is especially present in communities that widely accept the importance of spirits within their own history.

Within Mormonism, spirits are especially concerning when they testify to the power of individuals outside of traditional Priesthood channels. The LDS Church relegates instances where individuals are offered Priesthood authority through interactions with the deceased to moments of apostasy, punished by excommunication. In these instances, leadership is not reprimanding interaction with the deceased, but the claims to authority that arise from these interactions. For the LDS Church, this is precisely the problem that Mormon fundamentalism presents, an alternative to a historically based model of Priesthood and exclusive claims to truth. The line between acceptability and apostasy, in short, is the questioning of priesthood authority and the democratization of spiritual power that stems from interaction with the deceased. This is

a difficult line to maintain within a tradition where the veil is particular thin and spirits frequently break into the temporal world to interact with the living.

Beginning with Joseph Smith's appearance to John Taylor, and continuing with Rulon C. Allred's interactions with Gerald W. Peterson Sr., the spirits of Mormon fundamentalist leaders offer alternatives to the LDS Priesthood and validate Mormon belief systems outside of the dominant LDS narrative. These spiritual claims are necessary for Saints who see signs of apostasy within the LDS Church and seek spiritual power elsewhere. For these communities, the spirits affirm their belief and offer an alternative that is validated by the spiritual world. Christ's Church began with one such apparition of validation. For Gerald W. Peterson Sr., who made claims to succession even before the passing of Rulon C. Allred, his calling was not official until the spirit of Allred confirmed the ordination. This spirit both disrupted the traditional modes of succession and led to the emergence of a new fundamentalist group.

Gerald W. Peterson's interaction with a spirit, and the subsequent interactions among his followers, demonstrates the extent to which spirit communication is acceptable across the Mormon spectrum. Within each community spirits remain present in the lives of the Saints and are willing to speak when addressed. However, these spirits also test the limits of apostasy because they bring into question the nature of spiritual authority and the extent to which personal revelation is permissible. Unlike spirit communication within the broader context of American religion, the spirits of Mormon fundamentalism do not always seek out the marginalized, but work in favor of those in power. By bearing witness to the truthfulness of one form of Mormonism, which relegating others to

apostasy, the spirits both validate and condemn. Their message is simply dependent on the context within which they are invoked.

Chapter 5:

“Communications of Pure Doctrine”: The Manti Church

Manti

Every June, hundreds of people gather from across Utah to witness the Mormon Miracle Pageant on the lawn of the LDS Manti Temple in Manti, Utah. During the pageant, children reenact the story of the Book of Mormon, the First Vision of Joseph Smith, and the establishment of the LDS Church. However, the LDS Church is not the only Mormon group in Manti. Several blocks from the Manti Temple, tourists and pageant guests walk past a two-story, brick-colored building with no noticeable signs and locked doors. Although the building is unremarkable, the one immediately behind it offers a bit more detail; it is also red, but a large sign reading “Assembly Hall” hangs above the door. Both buildings were once owned and operated by The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days (TLC), a Mormon movement that rose to prominence in the 1990s and came to a startling decline following the death of their founding Prophet, James D. Harmston, and accusations of spiritual and sexual abuse.

On my first trip to Manti, unable to reach anyone affiliated with the group, I stopped inside the local newspaper office to ask about the ownership of the buildings and where all the members went. Prior to my trip, individuals from various Mormon groups told me stories of ritual abuse and self-inflicted traumatic brain injury. A tall, man in his early 30s was at the front desk and explained that he had not seen anyone in the red building in months. The group was not comfortable with the local press and no one would speak with reporters. However, he noted that on some Sundays, a few families were seen

in the parking lot behind the old Assembly Hall. He discouraged me from attending, but was sure that some members still live in Manti and meet under the direction of a contemporary faction of the former TLC. Today, there are two factions that each claim true succession to Jim Harmston's, the founder and Prophet of the Church.

Steve is the leader of one of these groups. He lives in a large, one story, beige house about two blocks from the Manti temple. He shares his home with his wife and two elderly women who live in the basement. These women joined his group following the death of Harmston. One of these women is Harmston's first wife, Elaine. Former members of the TLC describe him as an industrious and faithful man who received all his ordinances from Harmston prior to his death. Over the screen door of his home, a plaque reads "Holiness to the Lord," the same phrase that is engraved above the entry to Mormon temples and marked consecrated buildings in the early Church. Steve's wife is tall and wears a long skirt and white button-down blouse. She has short brown hair and a kind demeanor. As she opens the door, she immediately directs me into the left side of the home. We pass through a long hallway dotted with children's toys and serene paintings on the wall; at the end of the hallway is a door, slightly ajar. As we approach, I see the altar, made of dark wood and red velvet. Two elderly women sit on a floral couch facing the altar with a large green recliner and smaller chair at the front of the room. The closet is open and temple clothes, ritual clothing used during the Mormon temple ceremony, hang in a neat row. As we enter the room, the elderly women stand and greet me. I sit on the floral couch, not realizing that all other women remained standing. I quickly stood as Steve entered the room. He was also wearing a white button-down shirt

and appeared about a foot taller than everyone in the room as he entered the space. He was in his 40s, clean shaven, and had a very sharp jawline. As he entered the room, the women take their seats on a floral couch, and he approached a green armchair on the other end of the room.

Looking to me, Steve calmly and emphatically stated, “You want to know about the true order of prayer.” Steve assumed correctly. Like all Mormon groups who have an endowment ceremony, the true order of prayer is a central component of the ritual. During this segment of the endowment, which appears as any Christian prayer circle with accompanying gestures, participants pray in a way that they believe offers greater blessings and revelation than the standard prayers said through the day. For Harmston’s group, this is also the case. However, within the TLC endowment, the true order of prayer also offers members the ability to participate in spiritual interactions. During the prayers, the veil between life and death temporary disintegrates and the dead return with messages for the living. It was through this ritual that Harmston first received his divine call to lead a small group of Mormons and preach against the perceived Apostasy of the LDS Church. This practice continues today in TLC homes that build altars to communicate with “heavenly messengers,” including the divine, angels, and spirits of the deceased.

Over the course of his time as Prophet of the TLC, Harmston became widely known for both innovative theology and legal battles. As a charismatic speaker, Harmston developed the Models, a series of seminars in which Harmston would speak in a trance-like state while expounding on the “pure doctrine” of the Gospel. Central to his

teachings were the apostasy of the LDS Church, the process by which humans attain exaltation through the doctrine of Multiple Mortal Probations, an early Mormon doctrine similar to reincarnation, and the potential for receiving spiritual insight through the true order of prayer. Although the Models were widely available throughout the 1990s, with people traveling from across Utah to attend or watch video footage, the Models and the information they contain are no longer accessible to outsiders. This is also true of Harmston's revelations, referred to as the Manti Revelations by believers. At the same time as Harmston was expounding on doctrine and developing a gathering place for the Saints, the TLC became notorious for complications with the law. This includes a criminal case citing fraud against Harmston and allegations of underage marriages.

Today, the history and legacy of the TLC presents an interesting juxtaposition; while many people fondly recall personal interactions with the group and its Prophet in the 1990s, the group's current schism and denial of entry to outsiders has made it the subject of widespread rumor and speculation. However, because of the role it played in Mormonism during the 1990s, I contend that it is an illuminating example to understand Mormon authority and the ability for male members of Mormonism to attain positions of spiritual authority through the priesthood. At the same time, the TLC is significant because it presents an alternative lens to Mormonism and the study of spirit communication by offering insight into the outcomes of spirit communications that produce failed prophecies or the potential for the spiritual world to justify criminal practices. In addition, given the absence of a historic precedent for spiritual authority, Harmston and the group he founded demonstrates the way in which religious innovation

that centers on spirit communication and the dead grants legitimization to an otherwise fringe or small movement.

The True Order of Prayer

Mormon prayer circles began as early as 1833. In these early years, largely drawing on the practice of “prayer rings” within the context of the First and Second Great Awakening, the prayer performed in circles were not conducted as part of an elaborate ritual, but were used to petition the heavens for divine aid and blessing.²⁶⁹ With the development of Mormon temple liturgy, the prayer circle transformed and became part of Mormonism’s most central ritual, the endowment. In this ritual, first taught to Smith’s closest associated in 1842, Smith instructed his followers on the “ancient order of things,” which would grant spiritual power to believers.²⁷⁰ As early as 1831, God revealed to Smith that he would give his laws and commandments to his people and, in doing so, they would be “endowed with power from on high and sent forth.”²⁷¹ Two years later, this promise became closely connected with the building of the temple, the space where the endowment is performed in the LDS Church.

²⁶⁹ D. Michael Quinn, “Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles,” *Brigham Young University Studies* Vol. 19, No. 1 (Fall 1978) pp. 79-105, 83. Quinn’s article on the development of prayer circles cited the revivalist practices of the Second Great Awakening, well as the Apocryphal Acts of John, for early Mormon support of the prayer circle. See Catherine Cleveland’s *The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1916) for the use of prayer circles in nineteenth-century revivals.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ Doctrine and Covenants 38:38.

On June 1, 1833, Joseph Smith received a revelation, “I gave unto you a commandment that you should build a house, in the which house I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high.”²⁷² Because the temple was not constructed in Smith’s lifetime, the rituals of the temple took place elsewhere, indicating that the space itself was not what made the ceremony sacred.²⁷³ Rather, the Priesthood that Smith conferred onto his followers sanctified the space and made the prayers powerful. For this reason, the true order of prayer was permitted outside of the formal liturgical prayer circle beginning at the time of Smith’s Presidency. For example, Quinn notes that the endowment and meetings of the Quorum of the Anointed, a body of men and women initiated into the temple ritual by Joseph Smith, met in the Mansion House, Smith’s Homestead, the Assembly Room over Smith’s red brick store, and the home of Brigham Young in the period before the temple was constructed.²⁷⁴ Within fundamentalist communities, for those who do not have the funds to construct a temple, the use of the home as the central place of worship is common. One member of Christ’s Church, Seth, explained that “it is the Priesthood power and faith which sanctifies the

²⁷² Doctrine and Covenants 95:8.

²⁷³ D. Michael Quinn, “Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles,” *Brigham Young University Studies* Vol. 19, No. 1 (Fall 1978) pp. 79-105. Quinn notes that the endowment and meetings of the Quorum of the Anointed met in the Mansion House, Smith’s Homestead, the Assembly Room over Smith’s store, and in the home of Brigham Young in the period before the temple was constructed. The use of homes continues in fundamentalist communities who do not have the funds to construct a temple. While this group constructed temples beginning with their earliest gathering in southern Utah, they permit ordinances outside of the walls of the temple.

²⁷⁴ For more on the Anointed Quorum see Devery S. Anderson’s *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed, 1842–1845* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005)

temple, not the other way around. Therefore, a temple is a holy place because of the prayers and ordinances within it, not that the prayers are made holy by the place they are said.”²⁷⁵ While this group constructed temples beginning with their earliest gathering in southern Utah, they permit ordinances outside of the walls of the temple.

In December 1845, all members of the Church were admitted to participate in the endowment, including women.²⁷⁶ By allowing all individuals to participate in the endowment, Smith made the power of God available to everyone. This widespread offering of power continued to extend outside the walls of the temple, as long as correct Priesthood was invoked. In the late 19th century, and continuing into the 20th century, members of the Church were encouraged to pray the true order of prayer as a family. This included the use of home altars. In addition, altars were common in Stake Centers, where members of the High Council would gather to petition God on behalf of those within their stewardship.

However, in 1978 the Church released an official prohibition on the use of home altars and the true order of prayer outside of the prescribed endowment ceremony. Speaking on prayer circles, offered with special intention at the local level, outside of the temple, the letter states:

Because of the increasing number of requests for such prayer circles, viewed in light of the rapid growth of the Church, and because of the complications that holding prayer circles in temples on Sunday have created and their tendency to take the participants away from their families and their other Church responsibilities, the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve has decided that all such prayer circles,

²⁷⁵ Seth. Personal communication, Salt Lake City, UT, Coralville, IA, October 15, 2018

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

whether held in the temples or outside the temples, be discontinued immediately.²⁷⁷

The admonition to discontinue the true order of prayer outside of the temple was not a statement condemning the practice entirely, or making claims to its lack of validity as an important LDS practice. Rather, the restriction of the ritual to a specific space, under a specific level of leadership, indicated that the restriction dealt with concern over the democratization of the practice. For believers, the true order of prayer opens the heavens and allows the individual to peer beyond the veil into the spiritual world. For leaders, this practice poses a potential risk because it allows all individuals the same access to the divine. The concerns in Mormonism is that when complete access to authority is granted, the perceived need for ecclesiastical authority is often diminished.

Despite council from Church leaders, many members continued to use altars and home prayer rituals to supplement their LDS practices. The reasoning for this was based on early theology of the temple and the meaning behind the altar. In the booklet, *Further Light and Knowledge: Understanding the Mysteries of the Kingdom*, independent fundamentalism Gary Barnes wrote extensively on the importance of the altar and true order of prayer for all individual believers.²⁷⁸ In the booklet, he outlines the quest of the

²⁷⁷ “Letter to All Stake Presidents and Bishops,” (Office of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, May 3, 1978)

²⁷⁸ Gary Barnes was active in the fundamentalist community throughout the 90s, but never aligned with a particular group or Priesthood leader. While this booklet is attributed to him and was originally published in 1990 by Ogden Kraut, many believed

first humans, Adam and Eve, to return to God once they were cast from the Garden of Eden. In his telling of their search for God, they constructed an altar to pray and sought “angelic messengers” that would grant them insight into their lives’ journey.²⁷⁹ At the altar “their quest ultimately brought them to the limits of the veil, standing, knocking, waiting as they had been commanded, to receive further light and knowledge by conversing directly with their Lord. He heard their request and spoke to them from within the veil.”²⁸⁰ Through the true order of prayer, Adam and Eve found a way to meet with God and spirits who taught them the way back to God. Just as the temple endowment teaches all people that they are to consider themselves as Adam and Eve, the pamphlet encourages all people to emulate the first humans and construct altars to uncover unseen truths. The method for this uncovering is the true order of prayer.

Although the pamphlet does not include the exact words or gestures used in the true order of prayer, due to its sacred nature, it does outline the steps necessary to conduct this ritual, which the author describes as “the most proper way to pray... the ideal way in which prayer should be offered.”²⁸¹ The description of the practice is based on Matthew 7:7, which states, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”²⁸² For those who continued to practice the true order of prayer in

that James D. Harmston was the actual author of the text. This is a compelling theory given the content of the pamphlet and the centrality of the true order of prayer to Harmston’s group.

²⁷⁹ Barnes, Gary. Gary Barnes, *Further Light Further Light and Knowledge: Understanding the Mysteries of the Kingdom*. PDF., 1.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁸² Matthew 7:7.

homes, the signs and symbols used in prayer was the method of knocking to open down the boundary between the temporal and spiritual.

When done correctly, the true order of prayer opens the veil and allows for spirit communication and interaction with the divine. According to a pamphlet published by the TLC, “In the endowment, after we have fulfilled all of our covenants and offered up the True Order of Prayer, we converse with the Lord through the veil.”²⁸³ Through the true order of prayer, the divine is not the only spirit that comes forth to offer communications. Fundamentalist commentary of the practice notes the presence of angelic messengers and spirits that appear to offer assurance of the Church’s temporal work and to confer authority. However, the same fundamentalists also note the potential dangers of the practice. If correct methods are not enforced, visitations from dark forces, demons, and satanic spirits are possible. Cautions include only acting with correct authority, wearing the garment and temple robes, casting out Satan from the space before the ritual begins, facing the direction of the temple, and making the correct signs and symbols to open the veil.²⁸⁴

James D. Harmston was an LDS man, who continued the true order of prayer despite counsel from leaders to end the use of the prayer circle and home altar. Harmston was born on November 6, 1940. As a faithful member of the LDS Church, he served a

²⁸³ “A Warning Testimony” (Manti: The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days), 33.

²⁸⁴ Up until fundamentalists began construction of their own temples, many were encouraged to either face east or toward the temple. In this direction, they would pray that the doors to the temple would be opened to them and the LDS Church would once again fall into order.

mission in Nauvoo and attended all of his weekly Church meetings. As he got older, his interest in Church history and doctrine only intensified, leading him to in-depth study of Church history and doctrine. As part of his seeking, he established a study group with other members of the Church that met in his home. Harmston's teaching and charisma quickly garnered the attention from Mormons all over the state, including fundamentalists, who drove from all across Utah to listen to Harmston's insights on historical Mormon teachings no longer taught in the LDS Church.

During the 1990s, LDS study groups were not uncommon and members readily gathered to learn about the "deep doctrines" of the Church that were not taught in Sunday School classes.²⁸⁵ In many instances, these groups took a turn toward schism, with male leaders of the group claiming divine instruction to begin new Mormon groups. The emergence of new Mormon Prophets with no historical lineage to another group or Priesthood leader was not uncommon throughout the mid-1900s. It was also not uncommon for these groups to end in disenfranchisement or violence. One of the more well-known cases was Robert Crossfield, a convert to the LDS Church. In 1961, Crossfield received a revelation that he was the true Prophet. Within seven years, he compiled a book of revelations and garnered a following that he referred to as the School of the Prophets. Although small, his group gained national attention when two of his

²⁸⁵ "Deep doctrine" is most often used to discuss teachings of the Church that are no longer publically taught or were revoked. This includes the eternal nature of polygamy, the Adam-God doctrine, the intricacies of exaltation, etc. Many of these doctrines remain central to fundamentalist theology and practice, despite their absence in the LDS Church.

followers, Ron and Dan Lafferty, murdered their sister-in-law and young daughter.²⁸⁶ Using the language of revelation and blood atonement, a nineteenth-century Mormon teaching, the Lafferty brothers justified their actions. After the conviction, Crossfield's group dwindled in size until there were only a few members that met occasionally in Salem, UT. As of early 2018, Crossfield and the School of the Prophets are once again meeting in an undisclosed location in Utah.

In response to the schism and rise in fundamentalism that stemmed from these groups, LDS leaders warned members from participation. A remnant of this warning is still present in Church Handbook of Instruction 1, meant for Stake Presidents and Bishops. In Section 17.2.9, the Handbook specifically calls out groups that offer increased self-awareness, self-esteem, or spirituality. These concerns are still common, as noted in Chapter 3, especially in instances where men and women offer healing outside of the Church's priesthood channels. In response to the claims of these groups, the Handbook is emphatic that they are not endorsed by the Church.

Like many of the study groups that emerged during the 1990s, Harmston's quickly initiated a schism from the LDS Church. Early in the formation of their group, Harmston dedicated a room in his home to conduct temple rituals and prayer. This included the use of the true order of prayer, which Harmston asserted was central to communication with the divine. During these ceremonies, members testified that the heavens were opened and the veil between the temporal and spiritual became nonexistent.

²⁸⁶ See Jon Krakauer. *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of a Violent Faith* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003)

Accounts of face to face interactions with God were not uncommon and the deceased would frequently return to offer spiritual insight to the living.

The interactions with spirits through the true order of prayer took a turn November 25, 1990. On this evening, Harmston and his wife, Elaine, dressed in their temple clothing to perform the ritual. Draped in white robes, they knelt at their altar and raised their arms to prayer. As they began to recite the words necessary to open the veil, Harmston recalled the boundary between life and death parting and the spiritual world colliding with the temporal. Continuing in their prayers, recollections of the events state, “Jim Harmston had four Angels appear to him and lay hands on him, thus ordaining him to the power and authority of the Apostleship. These four beings were the resurrected patriarchs, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Moses.”²⁸⁷ With this interaction, Harmston no longer led a simple study group, but successfully claimed that the Keys of the Priesthood were transferred away from the LDS Church and now resided under his jurisdiction. With this claim, Harmston became the Prophet of God.

Anne Wilde is the founder of Principle Voices, an organization advocating for legal rights for polygamist families, and a well-known independent fundamentalist who married Ogden Kraut and co-authored numerous books on Mormon history with him.

²⁸⁷ “About the True & Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days” (Manti: The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days). Just as the differences between angels and spirits were contested in early Mormonism, the difference between angels and resurrected beings who hold spiritually authority continues to present challenges to understanding contemporary Mormon fundamentalism. Because human beings hold divine potential and the ability to resurrect, the distinction between angels, spirits, and prophets is hard to parse out. In many instances, the angels that return to confer spiritual direction are resurrected human beings who take on different names in different times and places.

She recalled the early days of the group. Ogden Kraut was an independent fundamentalist who was excommunicated from the LDS Church in 1972 for his public teaching of polygamy. As an outspoken proponent and teacher of the “fundamentals,” Kraut became known as the Bruce R. McConkie of fundamentalism, indicating his importance in the realm of apologetics. While he believed in the fundamentals, Kraut and his wives never joined a formal group or advocated for a certain man as the prophet. He never claimed special authority or sought to form his own group.²⁸⁸ Anne Wilde and Ogden Kraut frequently visited Manti and knew Jim and his wife well. Early on, she remembers inquiring whether a new group was forming. To this question, she consistently received an emphatic, “no.” However, at the 1994 meeting of the annual Sunstone Symposium, an annual event of the Sunstone Education Foundation where scholars and practitioners come together to discuss Mormon history, culture, and practice, she recalled seeing Harmston standing outside amidst cameras and news reporters. Despite the affirmation that a new group was not forming, Jim chose the annual Sunstone Symposium, an annual event where academics and members of the community meet to discuss Mormon history, culture, and art, as the venue to announce the beginnings of his new group.

The choice to announce the new group was an important moment for Harmston because controversy was already stirring about the Mormons in Manti. Prior to the announcement of the group, rumors began to circulate about a controversial doctrine,

²⁸⁸ Shortly after the formation of the TLC, Ann Wilde recalled Harmston approaching Kraut about becoming a member of the First Presidency. Kraut declined, affirming his belief that a living man did not hold the power to govern a temporal organization.

referred to as Hearts and Flowers. This teaching, promoted by several of the High Priests in the study group, encouraged plural families to participate in orgy-like sexual practices, “just as a bee goes from flower to flower to flower.”²⁸⁹ Colloquially, this teaching became known as the “Three in a Bed Doctrine” by outsiders who criticized the practice and distanced themselves from both Harmston and the study group because of it. However, Harmston never advocated this teaching, even calling it “blasphemous and totally beyond the bounds of the will of the Lord regarding marital relations.”²⁹⁰ By formally starting a group, Harmston not only exerted his authority as the true prophet, but also successfully separated himself from the individuals who were discrediting his new movement.²⁹¹

Although not discussed publicly, many members of the study group began seeking an alternative to the LDS Church since the changes to the endowment in 1990.²⁹² While there were changes prior to this year, members believed that the alterations made

²⁸⁹ Thomas. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted by phone, October 2, 2018.

²⁹⁰ Becky Johns. “The Manti Mormons: The Rise of the Latest Mormon Church,” *Sunstone* (June 1996) pp. 30-36, 32.

²⁹¹ One former member recalled when an advocate of this teaching stood before the congregation to testify of its truthfulness. As he stood before the congregation and began explaining the metaphor behind the name, he vomited over the pulpit. For many, including the former member who witnessed the scene, this moment was a sign that the doctrine was false. Following the formation of the group, those who participated and promoted the doctrine did not join or sustain Harmston as their leader.

²⁹² In the LDS endowment ceremony underwent revision. Because the ceremony is sacred and considered unchanging to many people, the revisions marked a moment of Apostasy in the LDS Church. While this was not the first time the ceremony underwent changes, the changes in 1990 were considered so drastic by members of the TLC, that the Priesthood and ceremonies were made invalid. The most drastic changes were the removal of the penalties associated with the signs and tokens and the removal of the lecture at the veil.

in 1990 invalidated the priesthood and ordinances contained in the LDS Church. In the words of Jim Harmston, the LDS Church became apostate, likened to a “modern Catholic Church.”²⁹³ In response, the TLC encouraged followers to abandon the LDS apostasy and gather to Zion, Sanpete County, UT. In a pamphlet summarizing the positions of the Church and their view of apostasy, the Apostles of the groups wrote, “In conclusion, we bid adieu to our former brethren and sisters of the LDS Church who in self-righteous piety and darkness will soon enough end their mortal probations in a fiery departure to spirit prison for becoming errant sons and daughters who have broken faith with the True and Living God.”²⁹⁴ Harmston’s belief in the complete apostasy of the LDS Church set him apart from other Mormon groups that continued to assert that the LDS Church retained some authority or continued to act as if it were the institution by which God reached humanity. Their feelings toward the LDS Church, coupled with Harmston’s lack of historic lineage, differentiated his group from other Mormon fundamentalists. Unlike members of fundamentalist groups that trace their lineage to the 1886 Revelation or the Priesthood Councils of the 1930s and 1940s, Harmston asserted that he was initiating a re-Restoration by which the authority that was lost through the LDS Church was fully

²⁹³ For many Mormons, the Catholic Church is the “Great an Abominable” discussed in the Book of Mormon. Because it continued to exist after the death of the final Apostle, it was also complicit in the Great Apostasy that swept the Christian world prior to the Restoration. By removing the ordinances, Harmston asserted that the LDS Church had become no better than its apostate counterparts.

²⁹⁴ “... They have Transgressed the Laws, Changed the Ordinances, Broken the Everlasting Covenant... Isaiah 24:5” (Manti: The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days), 14.

restored to the earth. In short, through divine visitation, he became the Joseph Smith of the twentieth century in the minds of his followers.

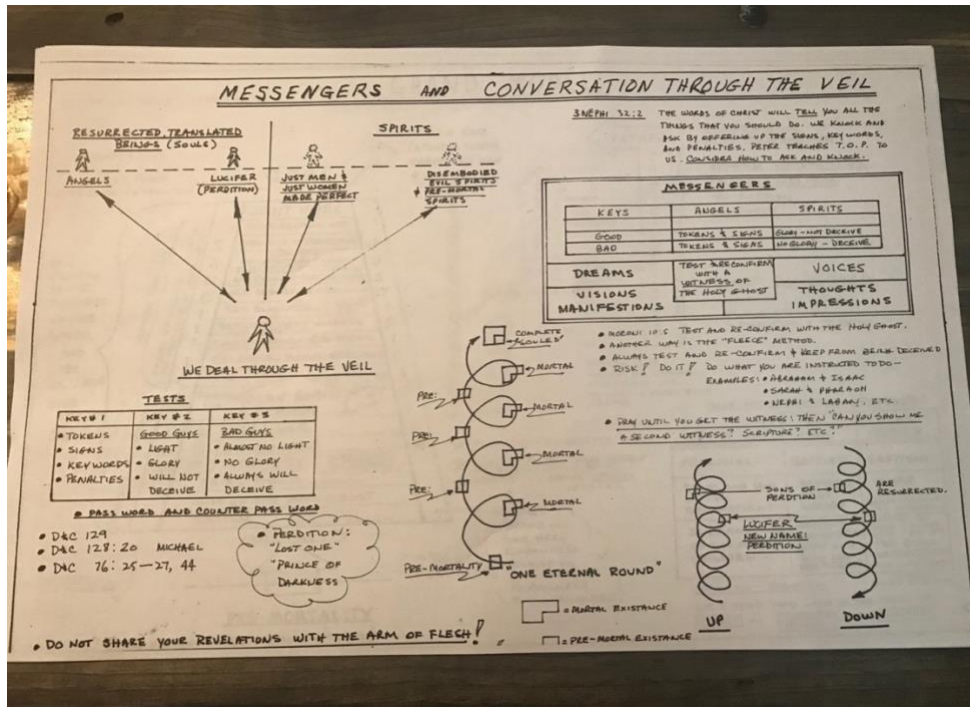


Figure 4: Messengers and Conversation Through the Veil

For Harmston, the temple ritual was the center of Mormon religious practice. In the temple, the individual receives the knowledge necessary to return to God and communicate with spirits. According to the TLC, the endowment needed to be restored to its original in order to restore the power lost when the ritual was shortened by the LDS Church. As part of the restoration of the original, the TLC became known across Mormonism for their unique implementation of the true order of prayer. In the walls of the TLC temple and endowment house, men and women dressed in the robes of the Priesthood raised their arms symbolically to represent the distinct postures necessary to

interact with the divine. As they repeated the names associated with the signs, the deceased readily entered into the realm of the living for baptism interviews and ordinance work. When asked about the specifics, Thomas, an early member of the group explained, “We identify a certain person by name and a date in history, for example as somebody already interviewed or somebody who we already know about, or maybe nobody in particular that we already contacted... And so you offer up the signs, which means to open the veil, and then you invite so and so to step forward.”

Thomas was not born into the TLC, but joined the group in 1998. Prior to joining, he was a member of the LDS Church and did not feel like he was changing religions when he chose to follow Harmston. Rather, he found the true restoration that his Church had abandoned. He explained, “I was still deeply connected, at the time, to my roots, and my beliefs, and nothing there changed. I just felt a tremendous sense of discovery and excitement, and also betrayal in that what I was brought up to understand about what we called the restored gospel was not the way it was.”²⁹⁵ At the time of his joining, the TLC had an active website with 13 proselyting pamphlets, all geared toward LDS individuals seeking deeper spiritual growth and understanding. As he read and studied the pamphlets, he frequently cross-referenced the sources with the history of Mormonism and determined that the TLC was the truest to the original teachings of Joseph Smith. In response, he moved to Sanpete County to gather with the rest of the members, was initiated into the Church of the Firstborn, and remained an active member until

²⁹⁵ Thomas. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted by phone, October 2, 2018.

Harmston's death. Despite disenfranchisement by the current movement, he maintains that Harmston was the prophet in the last dispensation.

During our discussion of his life with the TLC, Thomas vividly recalled the events of the TLC endowment and the intricacies of the ritual. During the TLC endowment, special spiritual gifts were necessary to complete the ordinances. This included an individual acting as a mouthpiece, or medium, for the spirits that entered the temple following the true order of prayer. These individuals were said to have special "revelatory abilities" and could recite back the messages from the spirits. As the interactions with the spirits began, the mouthpiece would first ask the spirit if they were willing to submit the priesthood authority on this side of the veil. If the spirit responded in the affirmative, they were asked if they are a member of the Church of the Firstborn. For the TLC, the distinction between the temporal Church and the Church of the Firstborn was crucial and heavily outlined by Harmston throughout his ministry. The temporal Church was the TLC, the living body of believers that gathered on Sundays to partake of the sacrament and bear their testimonies about the Savior and the immanent millennium. In contrast, the Church of the Firstborn was an elite inner circle of men and women who received their Second Anointing in the temple and were sealed to eternal life by Harmston and his Apostles.²⁹⁶ In this ceremony, a man and his wives are sealed with

²⁹⁶ The Second Anointing is performed in all Mormon groups. Within the LDS Church, the ritual is reserved for men in leadership and their wives. The ritual is seldom discussed publicly and most members of the Church are unfamiliar with its history and contemporary practice. In contrast, Second Anointing ceremonies are common in fundamentalism, although generally reserved for members living the higher laws of plural marriage and consecration.

their eternal state being guaranteed. Once this is accomplished, the only thing that jeopardizes the family's place in the Celestial Kingdom is murder or denying the Holy Ghost. For many women, this ceremony is particularly important because it is when they are finally able to act with the priesthood. During the ceremony they wash the feet of their husbands, reminiscent of the woman in the Gospel of Luke that washes Jesus' feet to prepare him for his death, and offers a blessing to the husband to guarantee his exaltation. In the TLC, the individuals who underwent the Second Anointing were deemed Saints by the community while still alive and were guaranteed exaltation. During the meetings of these individuals, apart from typical Sunday meetings, they participated in services that broke down the boundaries between life and death. As a heavenly order, the Church of the Firstborn meeting was not overseen by Harmston, but by Adam, the first man who was exalted and became God.²⁹⁷

Once the spirit was interviewed, they disappeared back into the temple veil at the altar and the next spirit stepped forward. Thomas explained that members would usually finish about 5-10 names per session, with ambitious practitioners completing around twenty. Once the process ended, the names were entered into a spreadsheet that outlined the proxy ordinances completed for the individual spirits. Like many practitioners of spirit communication throughout history, the TLC was particularly interested in famous spirits. Sitting Bull, Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, and George Washington were particularly memorable and each stepped forward to receive their temple ordinances.

²⁹⁷ Like most fundamentalism groups, the TLC affirm the Adam-God doctrine, the idea that the Archangel Michael took on a physical body and became Adam. After his earthly probation, Adam attained exaltation and now presides as the god of this world.

Well-known LDS leader and theologian, Bruce R. McConkie, even entered into the TLC temple to ask for his correct temple work and undergo the spiritual interview process necessary for his salvation. But, one of the most well-known and remembered was Benjamin Franklin, a “probation of the Witness/Testator,” a title given to the Holy Ghost. According to the TLC, Franklin was one of the many incarnations of the Holy Ghost throughout history. For members, his place in the godhead was evident by the pivotal role he played in his lifetime and the way he guided humanity toward advancement.

The Grand Model

During the 1990s, most people who joined the TLC were first captivated by Harmston through the “Models,” a seminar series in which Jim expounded on doctrine and often spoke in a trance-like state. The series got its name from “little pictograph icons” used to portray a meaning.²⁹⁸ Although confusing to the uninitiated, the images that went along with the discussions acted as a recollection device and allowed members to retain the material better than simply listening. Those who witnessed the Models recalled them as a “gradual course in Restoration theology” and a means of teaching the true principles that were lost when the LDS Church fell into Apostasy. Many also noted his skillful teaching and charismatic style that was used to present the content of the seminars. In videos of the Models, Harmston wore white and stood alone behind a podium with arms raised in grand gestures. As he spoke, his tone was sure and cadence indicated that he was the only teacher and those listening were the students.

²⁹⁸ Thomas. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted by phone, October 2, 2018.

Over a period of 3-4 days, individuals spent hours listening to Harmston's doctrines. Many witnessed the Models more than once, noting that they were different every time. However, despite minor differences, the goal remained the same, to teach people the path necessary to become a God, or perfected men and women. This Model, which focused on the path to godhood was referred to as the "Grand Model" by the TLC. For Harmston, the method by which people become gods is the process of exaltation, similar to the teachings of the LDS Church. However, unlike his LDS counterparts, Harmston offered specific insights into the method of attaining godhood through a diagram called Jacob's Ladder. In this diagram, the ladder ascends from premortality to God.²⁹⁹ At each rung of the ladder, Harmston instructed people on the various ordinances necessary. This included the TLC's specific ordinances of translation and resurrection, ordinances that were never attained in Harmston's life.

According to Harmston's theology, translation was essential for all people to attain their final Celestial state, which includes receiving an immortal body and gaining increased knowledge of the divine. In order to attain translation, passage through a series of steps or "gates," was necessary. First, the individual must go through the gate that is presided over by the Witness and Testator, otherwise referred to as the Holy Ghost. Through the Holy Ghost, the individual is brought into the telestial world, understood as the earth, and meets the Savior. According to Harmston, this is the current state of all

²⁹⁹ In Genesis 28, Jacob's Ladder is a vision given to Jacob while he slept. The ladder symbolically represents the path toward heaven. Historically, Christian Church Fathers used the ladder as a metaphor for ascetic life or the work of Jesus as a bridge between the temporal and the divine.

human beings who must meet the Savior during their life to attain salvation. After meeting the Savior, Harmston encouraged all individuals to pass through the gate that he presides over, which allows passage to the terrestrial world. For the TLC, passing through this gate implies translation, being perfected and receiving an immortal body. Once the individual passes through this gate and enters into the terrestrial world, the Savior introduces the individual to the Father. It is only through this meeting with the Father that the final ordinance necessary to become a Celestial Being is revealed. This is the ordinance of Resurrection. Throughout his time as the prophet of the TLC, Harmston alluded to his future translation and the ability for human beings to open the veil and receive the ordinance of translation. This was one of the many promises that Harmston made to his followers in exchange for loyalty and tithing.

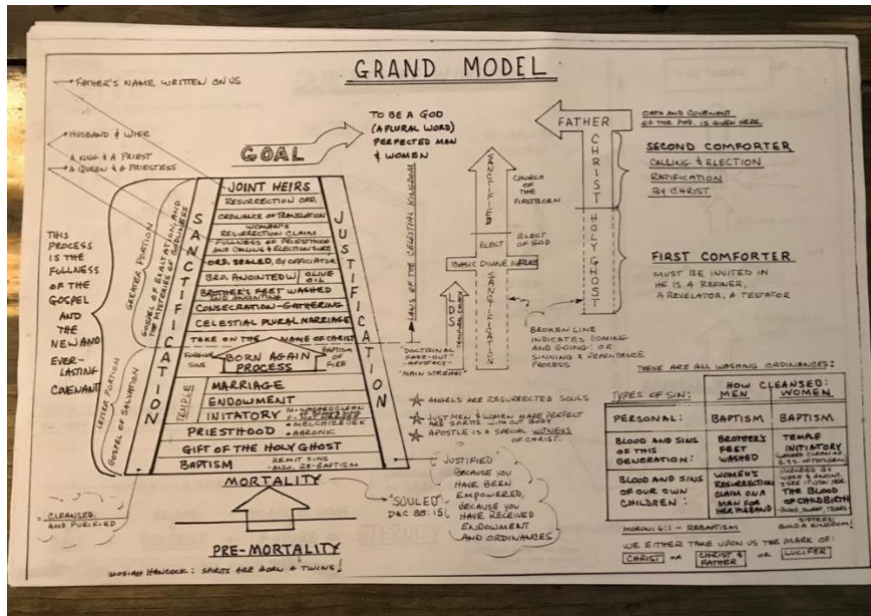


Figure 5: Grand Model

In an effort to receive the ordinance of translation, Harmston taught members of the Church of the Firstborn a practice called the “run on the throne room,” the first of which occurred on March 25, 2000. During this ritual, members of the Church of the Firstborn make an attempt to approach God and speak to Him face to face through the true order of prayer. In doing so, members believed that God would “reveal himself in power and everything would be fulfilled in glory.”³⁰⁰ Members wore their temple clothes and stayed up all night praying, bearing their testimonies, and forgiving one another. They would practice the true order of prayer for hours, seeking to open the veil and interact with the spirit world. Each time the ritual was enacted, Harmston would tell his followers that the veil momentarily opened, but was shut once more. According to Harmston, the closing of the veil was due to the unfaithfulness of members.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

Much like other failed apocalypses in American religious history, such as the Millerite's Great Disappointment in the nineteenth century, the failure of the run on the throne room to open the veil between heaven and earth was devastating to the community. Prior to the first iteration of the practice, Harmston offered his people a revelation in which he asked God for assurance that the veil would open and Jesus would return, along with the Three Nephites, if the Church of the Firstborn met and prepared themselves adequately.³⁰¹ In his revelation, he spoke with Father Adam, who told the people, "Yes! Tell the gathered saints to come to Me in solemn prayer asking for them to and I will grant their faith filled request. I will give to them witnesses so that they have the faith to allow this to come to pass."³⁰² Anticipating the opening of the veil, the translation of Harmston, and the return of the Savior, followers of the TLC sold all of their possessions in early 2000 to prepare for the end of the world. Many maxed-out credit cards and amassed large debt. Much of this debt went to paying for lavish items that would be used to furnish the Manti temple once it was cleansed from LDS décor and Apostasy.³⁰³ While receiving a revelation on the events of March 25, 2000, Harmston

³⁰¹ In 3 Nephi, the Book of Mormon speaks of Jesus meeting the Nephites in the Americas. As he ministers, he calls twelve men as disciples. Of these twelve, three are said to have received the same blessing as John from the New Testament. This blessing is associated with their immortality. Because they receive the gift of immortality, Mormon folklore is filled with stories of visitations and encounters with the Three Nephites. One of these Nephites, Kumen, became particularly important to Harmston and the TLC. When Harmston received the revelation of March 25, 2000, he communicated with Kumen to ensure the events would unfold following the obedient prayers of the Church of the Firstborn. During the course of Harmston's life, he claimed to receive revelation from all three Nephites.

³⁰² James D. Harmston "March 25 Revelation."

³⁰³ In my meeting with Steve, he frequently gestured to the Manti temple, which prominently stood over his home. He explained that in the end times, Salt Lake City

recorded the words of God stating, “Yes. I am pleased with you and we, too, look forward to the Solemn Assembly and Reunion there. I bless you will all you need this day. Amen.”

Logan recalled his disappointment when he first learned of the revelation. Unlike others who gathered in Sanpete County in the 1990s, he joined in August 2001, right before the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers. For Logan, the events that transpired on 9/11 were assurance that the end was near and confirmed his decision to join the gathering of the Saints in Sanpete County. Logan was a convert to the LDS Church. After meeting with missionaries and getting baptized, he was eager to learn everything he could about the Church. His search led him to the work of Fred Collier, a well-known fundamentalist who secretly published archival documents that the LDS Church sought to keep hidden. At this time, he also found the TLC website and immediately traveled across the country to view the Models and learn from Harmston.

It was not long after joining that Logan learned about the failed revelation. In his telling of the story, he recalled the nonchalant way in which leaders told him and the deception he felt. In his telling of the story, the March 25, 2000 failed prophecy was not the first time Harmston told his followers to prepare for the Apocalypse that never happened. In November 1999, Harmston prophesied that the Assyrian, based on Isaiah’s prophecy, would come and bring about the war of God and Magog from the Book of

would be destroyed, along with Manti. During the destructions, the Manti temple would flatten and a new temple would rise from the rubble. This temple, run by the future of the TLC, would enact all ordinances and serve as the true House of the Lord during the millennial reign.

Ezekiel. These events would usher in Armageddon and the events of the Last Days would unfold. Of course, these events did not literally occur. However, for followers of Harmston, the events are rationalized as having happened because November 1999 was when the terrorists from the 9/11 events first entered the country. While this was not as dramatic an event as Harmston's telling, this rationalization perpetuated Harmston as a true Prophet who foretold future destruction. For the leadership that remained faithful, the prophecy was not necessarily a failure, it just did not occur in the way the people had anticipated. In attempts to justify the failure, some individuals sought their own revelatory explanations.³⁰⁴ For example, many began teaching that the prophecy will come to pass through a special ordinance that would allow time to turn backward. Through this ordinance, Harmston would be permitted to enter the future to ensure the prophecy unfolds correctly. For many, these revelations were confirmation of higher ordinances that would unfold in the end times. However, many, like Logan, began to refer to this revelation as "time travel," implying a disdain for the doctrine as fictitious, and slowly lost faith in the group.

Despite failed revelation, followers remained faithful to Harmston until the end of his life. After struggling with heart problems, he finally passed on June 27, 2013, the anniversary of Joseph Smith's martyrdom. For many outside of the TLC, the date of

³⁰⁴ See Paul Boyer *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Belknap Press, 1994). In his work on prophecy and apocalyptic writing, Boyer notes that prophecy is fluid and can shift to address new realities for the individual and community. This includes individual members of the community who use the flexible nature of prophecy to make sense of their new realities once revelation fails.

Harmston's death was nothing more than a coincidence. However, for members who believed in the faith claims of the group, this was a significant indicator of a belief that Harmston espoused from the earliest moments of gathering. Beginning in 1994, Harmston began testifying that he was an incarnation of Joseph Smith and served as the Witness and Testator in this period of time. Most fundamentalists affirm that by testifying and restoring the Gospel in this dispensation, Joseph Smith acted as the Holy Ghost and occupied that "office" in the godhead. By proclaiming that he was Joseph Smith incarnate, Harmston was affirming that he was a member of the godhead who returned to earth to lead the chosen people of God.

At the same time, Harmston's claim to be a member of the godhead was also a tangible implementation of a controversial belief among the group. Central to the Grand Model, and the TLC generally, is the belief in Multiple Mortal Probations (MMP). MMP, likened to reincarnation, refers to the teaching that souls continually return and take bodies until they are ready to attain their exaltation. For members of the TLC, this belief is different than what they understand as reincarnation because the spirit can only take a body of the same gender and species as they held in previous lives, reaffirming their belief in the eternal nature of gender and species. During the 1990s, the TLC became well-known for the belief in MMP. Today, they remain one of the only fundamentalist groups that continues to affirm the centrality of this doctrine.

Scriptural references for the teaching are sparse. The most often cited passage comes from Doctrine and Covenants 88 which states, "And they who remain shall also be quickened; nevertheless, they shall return again to their own place, to enjoy that which

they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received.”³⁰⁵ For the LDS Church, this passage is associated with agency and the choice that each individual has to decide their own eternal fate. However, for individuals who espouse MMP, importance is placed on “they shall return again,” as an indication that people are embodied spirits that make eternal returns until they choose the only logical course of action, salvation and exaltation.

Because of the sparse scriptural references, members of the TLC most often point to the writings of early LDS Church leaders, including Heber C. Kimball, who became an importance source of authority on the subject of MMP. In two specific sections of the *Journal of Discourses*, Kimball offers the possibility of the spirit embodying other bodies throughout eternity in order to train the spirit for exaltation. Speaking in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle on November 14, 1852 Kimball explained, “I ask, then, if it is your spirits that must be brought into subjection? It is; and if you do not do that in these bodies, you will have to go into another estate to do it. You have got to train yourselves according to the law of God, or you will never obtain your resurrected bodies. Mark It!”³⁰⁶ Several years later, in 1857, Kimball further reflected on the teachings of Smith stating, “Joseph always told us that we would have to pass by sentinels that are placed between us and our Father and God. Then, of course, we are conducted along from this

³⁰⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 88:32

³⁰⁶ Kimball, Heber C., Nov. 14, 1852, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854-86), 1:354-358.

probation to other probations, or from one dispensation to another, by those who conducted those dispensations.”³⁰⁷

Most commonly, MMP is a means of explaining the process of exaltation. What individuals do not learn or attain in this life, they are able to receive in their next probation, or mortal state. At the same time, the doctrine is also used to explain difficult doctrines, such as the nature of God. Within TLC theology, god is a title given to three distinct offices; the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of these offices is occupied by a different individual in varying probationary periods. To demonstrate the way in which individuals move through various offices, one former believer explained that all men would be required to act as Saviors of their own world in a future probation. Prior to their full exaltation, all men pass through a salvific probation where they occupy the office of “the Son.” Not only does this doctrine explain the future of all humans, this it also explains the deity of Jesus within TLC. In one probation, Jesus took on the salvific office of the godhead. Now, in his final exaltation, Jesus has attained the full office of God.

As a member of the TLC, each individual has the opportunity to learn about their past lives through their Patriarchal blessings. Unlike the LDS Church’s Patriarchal Blessings, which focuses on lineage and future experience, the TLC Patriarchal Blessings add insight past probations. In most instances, people were told that they were famous or noteworthy individuals who made a significant impact on history. Thomas, a former member of the TLC, explained the powerful experience of being told his past probations

³⁰⁷ Kimball, Heber C., Nov. 14, 1852, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854-86), 6:63-69.

and the figures that his spirit once embodied. He explained that the figures were relatable to his own experience and he was easily able to understand his life through the lens of their historic people. In addition, the knowledge that all members were previously significant figures made sense in light of their current view that the TLC was the final Church that would bring forth the Last Days. He explained, “We truly viewed ourselves as this tiger team, which is an air force term for the specialists highly trained, to go ahead and do a certain, narrowly focused job. And once we were able to get the power on the ground, so to speak, at that point then we can go out to the world and take care of everybody else.”³⁰⁸ As members of an elite group, the TLC felt their call was to prepare themselves and their group for the return of Jesus. Given this mentality, “it stands to reason that many of us would have played certain important roles in history and so forth.”³⁰⁹

For members of the TLC, the doctrine of MMP also made sense of Harmston and his claims to authority. In the standard telling of Harmston’s claims, the spirits of Noah, Moses, Enoch, and Abraham each appeared and conferred the Keys of the Priesthood. However, within the TLC, the names of these entities were titles given to powerful spirits who embodied different beings throughout history. According to the TLC, temporal time is divided into dispensations of 6,000 years. To date, there have been about 6 or 7 dispensations, depending on the individual explaining the doctrine. Each of these dispensations has a “dispensation head,” with Adam, or God, being the first.

³⁰⁸ Thomas. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted by phone, October 2, 2018.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

Subsequently, Enoch, Noah, Moses, and Abraham all led dispensations leading up to the dispensation headed by Jesus Christ. According to the TLC, the four dispensations after Adam were all manifestations of Jesus Christ in different probations. At the atoning death of Jesus Christ, the historical person of Jesus stopped receiving a new body and attained exaltation.

The final dispensation that most Mormons acknowledge was led by Joseph Smith, who initiated the last days and served as a body to the Holy Ghost. However, for the TLC, there is another dispensation. In the last days, Joseph Smith returned and embodied Harmston to make sure the true remnant of God's faithful had a worthy leader to lead them through the Millennium. Thomas explained, "I still believe most likely that Jim Harmston was indeed Joseph Smith because... and I don't know that and I don't say that as a matter of faith or doctrine. Just that their personalities are so similar in certain key ways."³¹⁰ Through the teaching of MMP, Harmston did not only teach the communication with spirits, but also their embodiment and the subsequent power that stemmed from the return of spiritual beings to guide the Church.

Thomas believes that some members of the TLC leadership "poisoned" the doctrine by using it as a means of acquiring power. For this reason, many other groups are wary of the doctrine's contemporary implementation in Mormon cosmology. In the case of the TLC, the power that Harmston exerted as the incarnate manifestation of Joseph Smith was dangerous and serves as an important case study for instances where leaders, and the spirits they harness, create harm. As the embodied Joseph Smith,

³¹⁰ Ibid.

Harmston often invoked the spirit of the late leader, a claim that offered Harmston unquestionable authority in the group. Along with this authority, Harmston became known for fraud, coercion, child marriage, and rape.³¹¹

The End of the TLC

In 1996, independent scholar Becky Johns visited Manti and published a brief article on her experience with Harmston and the Mormons in Manti. At the end of her article, she asked what the future holds for the TLC and whether it would move forward in schism or unity.³¹² While many would respond that the TLC ended in schism, the reality is much more complex. Toward the end of Harmston's life, the group became the source of great controversy over claims of fraud and scandal. Most of the issues stemmed from Harmston's leadership and the spiritual power he exerted over the people within his stewardship. As a result, many members left following the death of Harmston and the rise of Dan Simmons and the new prophet, someone that former members claim was never meant for that role. Some were excommunicated, but many experienced a religious disappointment that caused them to leave on their own. For the individuals who joined

³¹¹ See Sanjiv Bhattacharya, "The True and Living Church," in *Secrets and Wives: The Hidden World of Mormon Polygamy* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2013) and John R. Llewellyn, *Polygamy's Rape of Rachel Strong* (Scottsdale: Agreka Books, 2006).

³¹² There are currently at least two groups operating as the true continuation of the TLC. One Church is run by Dan Simmons, a former Apostle of Harmston who meets with his congregation of 50 in the historic TLC meetinghouse. However, Simmons' claims are dubious for many who never saw him formally sustained as the new leader of the group. For a small group of others, including two of Harmston's former wives, the true continuation of the TLC is run by Chris Layton, also a former Apostle who was excommunicated by Simmons after Harmston's death. Their group meets in Layton's home.

the TLC from the LDS Church, the late controversies tainted their view of the entire fundamentalist movement.

The challenges for Harmston and his religious movement began in 2005 when, despite prophecy and claims of divine visitation, the return of Jesus Christ did not arrive. When members determined that the end of the world was not commencing and that they were unable to experience a promised direct interaction with Jesus, many became disillusioned. Logan explained, “A lot of people were pissed. They were, understandably. You know, making a false prophecy and then they would run up their credit cards or put their whole lives in jeopardy.”³¹³ What made the fraudulent claims particularly difficult was the economic position of most members. Logan continued, “But, like when I was there, I was just lucky to find a minimum wage job, which I hated. I worked for Western Watts, which was a call center that did market-research surveys, but it was an awful job, I hated it. You would really struggle. I love Sanpete County, it’s a beautiful county. And I love the Sanpete Valley. But, there’s just no jobs there.”³¹⁴

While few spoke of their disappointment in the movement’s founder, Kaziah May Hancock and Cindy Stewart offered outsiders a glimpse into their story through a public trial that began in 1998 and settled in 2005, *Hancock vs. The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days*. The plaintiffs claimed that they had given the Church a substantial amount of money, including liquidating retirement savings, in exchange for property, support, and religious experience. Particularly, in exchange for

³¹³ Thomas. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted by phone, October 2, 2018.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

money, Hancock was promised a face to face encounter with Jesus Christ.³¹⁵ Eventually, Hancock was asked to leave the Church and, her co-plaintiff, Stewart, was excommunicated. Their removal from the TLC was the catalyst for the trial. It was not until 2002, after an initial dismissal, that the case was taken to a jury, which moved in favor of the plaintiffs. However, this too was later overturned, with the jury dismissing claims of “fraud, constructive fraud, negligent misrepresentation, fraudulent conversion, racketeering, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.”³¹⁶ In a 2005 appeals court, the jury sided with the plaintiff and the TLC settled for \$60,000, which came out of tithing money.

While the TLC became widely known for monetary fraud and incorrectly predicting the end of the world, the group’s Prophet simultaneously became known for abuse and underage marriages, crimes that became the source of speculation rumor even in the contemporary. As I spoke with LDS individuals and families about the TLC, I was continually met with stories of ritual abuse, likened to the Satanic Panic that plagued the LDS Church in the 1980s. Some claimed that the TLC broke into the LDS Manti temple to perform their rituals. As with many Mormon groups, the use of recovered memory therapy has led to multiple accusations against the TLC. One woman shared about growing up in Manti and befriending a young girl whose family were members. This young girl recalls horrific acts of violence that occurred in her family home, on their family altar. While claims of ritual abuse are not isolated to fundamentalism, I have

³¹⁵ *Hancock vs. The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days*, No. 20030984-CA. (2005)

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

found that fundamentalists are often the focus of these claims when they live in close proximity to members of the LDS Church. This is only intensified when the groups act in secret and are known for rituals that are outside the norm of LDS worship.

Sanjiv Bhattacharya, a British journalist and author of *Secrets and Wives: The Hidden World of Mormon Polygamy*, first went to Manti in search of answers to address the darker sides of Mormon fundamentalism—namely, forced marriage, underage marriage, abuse, and incest. By the time he entered Sanpete County, the TLC were widely known for their participation in such crimes. During his time in Manti, he became acquainted with Angie, a valuable source of insight into Harmston, as well as the informant that ended Bhattacharya’s chances of an interview with the Prophet. Angie was 16 when she was sealed to Harmston as a plural wife. At the time of the marriage, he was 57. In order to lower suspicion with the surrounding community, Harmston arranged for Angie to civilly marry one of his sons, Jacob. However, this cover-up was not entirely necessary. In the state of Utah, underage marriage is both common and legal. Women as young as sixteen can enter into a marriage with parental consent; fifteen if a signature from the Juvenile Court is obtained. In religious systems where entire families hold the same beliefs about marriage, these regulations do very little to protect young women. Because Angie’s mother was a member of the TLC, a parental consent form would have been easy to obtain.

The cover-up of the ceremony is not unique to the TLC, a tradition with a history of “lying for the Lord,” common across fundamentalism. Within criminalized groups, withholding the truth from outsiders becomes part of the very doctrines they espouse.

Speaking specifically about the marriage of Angie to Harmston, Thomas explained, “It [the sealing] really got out there, even though we denied it initially to protect the Kingdom.” He further explained, “And you can go into the doctrine and history of the church... Joseph Smith said, ‘People accuse me of having many wives, as many as 7, but I can only find 1.’ Of course, he was lying through his teeth. But, it was better for the Kingdom. Of course, Abraham lied to Pharaoh about his wife. That also justified it. It’s that lying for the Lord stuff.” From my interactions with fundamentalist communities, the necessity to lie is based on the safety of members, who have a history of persecution.³¹⁷ However, fear often translates into secrecy and creates environments that are conducive to violence.

According to Bhattacharya’s telling, Angie entered the TLC “emotionally scarred.”³¹⁸ She came from a difficult family life with a mother who became pregnant at fifteen and married several times before joining the group and settling in Manti. For Angie’s mother, Manti offered stability and respite from her difficult life. This was not uncommon. Thomas explained, “A lot of people come there. I’ve heard some non-members describe some of our people as ‘trailer trash.’ And I hate to say it, but a lot of

³¹⁷ When I first visited Christ’s Church, for example, I was approached by very young children who wanted to introduce themselves while we worked to pick vegetables for the subsequent day of canning. I asked who their parents were, to gauge whether I had interacted with their families. Feeling comfortable, one of the little girls started naming her mothers. At this, the other little girl quickly grabbed her arm and explained, “We aren’t supposed to talk about that with strangers.” Like many fundamentalists, these children continue to live in fear of their parents going to jail or losing their jobs because of their faith.

³¹⁸ Sanjiv Bhattacharya. “The True and Living Church,” in *Secrets and Wives: The Hidden World of Mormon Polygamy* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2013), 273.

that is true. Or people with no experience and with hardship.”³¹⁹ Within the TLC, the quest for stability had a cost: submission to Harmston and his spiritual authority. In instances of desperation, the community that the TLC offered was appealing.

Although Angie’s marriage became the source of great speculation, it was the marriage of Rachel Strong that brought the group the most attention. Much of this attention came from a book, written by Strong and her attorney, *Polygamy’s Rape of Rachel Strong: Protected Environment for Predators*, which documented her story. Rachel was sixteen when she was first married to another member of the group. As stated previously, this marriage was not technically illegal. Months before, her mother, Pauline, had married Harmston as a plural wife. After her marriage, Rachel recalled receiving the instruction not to become pregnant and being put under the care of two women in the group, Gail Romero and Laura Brokaw. Both women had a history of crimes against children.³²⁰ Because of their past crimes, Rachel’s lawyer infers a level of grooming that occurred in the group, a claim commonly made against fundamentalists. To Rachel’s surprise, she became pregnant shortly after, leading to chastisement by her husband, Harmston, and the women placed over her. At the advice of the Prophet, Rachel’s husband removed her from his home, leaving her without a home and in need of care. By

³¹⁹ Thomas. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted by phone, October 2, 2018.

³²⁰ Prior to joining the TLC, Brokaw and Romero were members of Zion Society, a fundamentalist group based in Ogden and led by Arvin Shreeve. Until his death in 2009 at the Utah State Prison, Shreeve ran a group that became well-known for sexually-based doctrines involving children. At its height, the group had approximately 100 members. In 1991, warrants were issued for the arrest of 12 members for the involvement of crimes against children. After Shreeve’s conviction, some of his former wives joined the TLC. Shreeve would have been eligible for parole in 2012.

her account, it was at this time that Harmston informed her that her only chance at “progression” was a sealing to himself, her step-father and prophet.³²¹ At the age of twenty, Rachel knelt across the altar in the TLC endowment house and was sealed to the 64 year-old Harmston. This sealing raised questions about coercion in groups where Mormon leaders offer assurance of exaltation in exchange for marriage. Within Mormonism, sealings are distinct from civil marriages and do not require a certificate of marriage. Because sealings are not legal marriages, sealings of underage girls to men significantly older constitutes statutory rape, a crime that the TLC became known for.

As the embodied Joseph Smith, Harmston occupied unquestionable authority. Through the power of Harmston’s spiritual encounters, Harmston received a perceived sense of entitlement over his followers. Together, his unquestioned authority and power over the people in his community created a system in which crimes went unreported and his followers turning their heads away from the victims. Speaking to the crimes of priests in the Catholic context, Robert Orsi writes, “Their privileged intimacy with God really present endowed predator priests with a sense of entitlement over the bodies and souls of children and adolescents and contributed to their impunity.”³²² From a young age, Mormons are taught that Joseph Smith is the Prophet of the Restoration, a being who saw the unseen and spoke on behalf of God. As the embodied Prophet, Harmston occupied this same space. He made God present to his people and held a level of access unknown

³²¹ John R. Llewellyn, *Polygamy’s Rape of Rachel Strong* (Scottsdale: Agreka Books, 2006), 29.

³²² Orsi, Robert A. *History and Presence* (Chicago, Harvard University Press, 2016), 219.

to his followers. It was his belief in his personal access to the spirits and gods, and his ability to make those entities accessible to others, that made him able to wield unquestionable power.³²³

Outsiders often wonder how so many people, aware of the crimes, never reported or seemingly took issue with Harmston's actions. Looking back on the announcement of Angie's marriage, and subsequent cover-up, Thomas explained, "I had mixed emotions. It didn't bother me morally or doctrinally. It would now. It didn't at the time because I knew that Joseph Smith and many other of the Mormon leaders married young girls, and they were even younger than that. And so, it didn't bother me per se."³²⁴ He further explained, "But, you know when you were raised with it [underage marriage] as I was, even though I would never directly involve with it growing up, I was so constantly exposed to it from different ways... the only thing I regret at the time was the negative publicity it would bring, and it did."³²⁵ Logan offered a similar explanation for his position, "I think probably at the time I probably would have said, 'Well, you know the law of marriage,' or perhaps I would have justified it with to Joseph Smith's day. There were just certain things that were in certain circles... and my knowledge of what was going on, even though I was there, my knowledge was limited."³²⁶

³²³ For more on the connection between access to revelation and unquestionable power in a Mormon fundamentalist context see John Krakaur, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of a Violent Faith* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003)

³²⁴ Thomas. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted by phone, October 2, 2018.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Logan. Interview by Cristina Rosetti. Ethnographic interview. Conducted by phone, September 18, 2018.

Conclusion

James D. Harmston became a Prophet in 1994 during a temple ceremony held in his home that combined religious innovation and interactions with spirits. Through this ritual, Harmston succeeded in making the spirits tangible realities that interacted with both himself and his followers. Through these interactions, Harmston transformed his small study group from a gathering of fringe members of the LDS Church into an elect order that held unimaginable power and influence. In addition, through the harnessing of the spirits, Harmston embodied a reality that many within the LDS Church know to be true: through the Priesthood, the power of God resides in all men and any man is capable of becoming a Prophet. Harmston acted on this reality.

However, Harmston's ministry and tenure as prophet also demonstrates the ways in which spirits individuals in positions of power use spirits as justification for harmful behavior. More than abstract beliefs, the spirits and gods that manifest in TLC endowment houses created an environment where criminal behavior was justified. Through the doctrine of Multiple Mortal Probations, Harmston transformed himself into a vessel that the spirit of Joseph Smith occupied in this dispensation. The embodiment of spirits through this doctrine compounded Harmston's own authority and gave his followers a sense of importance that was inseparable from the teachings of the TLC. As both a source of religious innovation and a Mormon group that became notorious for abuse grounded in religion, Harmston and his following are central and instructive for understanding the formation of new Mormon groups and the ways the unseen world acts as a potentially supporting authority for their movement.

The invocation of the spiritual world created an organization where Harmston was the sole access to the divine for members of the group. While some former members explained that others in the group possessed certain levels of leadership, it was ultimately Harmston that acted as the intermediary between the group and the gods. This, coupled with the obedience from members, led to a level of spiritual authority that was without regulation. Without regulation, Harmston was able to act without oversight and participate in harmful and criminal behavior.

Steve remains faithful to Harmston as the current leader of a small group of TLC that gather in his home on Sunday mornings. On the day I arrived in his home, I was told that I could stay until the Church of the Firstborn began. That is, until the veil parted and the spirits entered the small room to begin their instruction. Over the course of our meeting, he shared his testimony regarding Harmston and his ardent belief that Harmston continues to lead the Church on the other side of the veil, the same phrasing used by other fundamentalists to explain the current role of Joseph Smith. However, for Steve, Harmston has undergone other probations that further elevated his status in the cosmological order. For this small group in Manti, Harmston is no longer just a man who happened to offer a body to the late Joseph Smith, he now resides in the fully exalted to Godhood. If Harmston had unquestionable authority in life, he has even more in death.

Conclusion:

The Continuation of Spirits

In the time I spent writing this dissertation, I became aware of three new Mormon movements emerging out of divine guidance and communication with spiritual beings. Many of the people involved in these movements remain faithful members of the LDS Church, while simultaneously advocating for teachings and practices outside of the mainstream institution. Throughout my research, I often explained that people join fundamentalism every day, and the impulse for men to start their own sect of Mormonism is not rare. These interactions with the spiritual world raise questions as to the limits of spiritual experiences within religious traditions, especially those that began with spiritual encounters that confer authority and encourage religious innovation.

Beginning with Joseph Smith's first interaction with the resurrected Moroni, Mormonism constructed a world where the temporal and eternal were separated by a veil, a partition that allows for interaction between the beings on either side. In reference to the communication between either side, members of the Church often describe the veil as thin. These interactions vary, and are often categorized as either edifying moments of spiritual experience or apostate by those in positions of power in the LDS Church. To demonstrate this demarcation, chapter 1 placed the transfiguration in conversation with the spirit communications of William S. Godbe and Amasa Lyman. Both of these accounts involved communications with the spirit of Joseph Smith. However, Godbe and Lyman's interactions were deemed apostate and cause for excommunication, largely

because they countered the prevailing authority structure of the Church. I argue that even when the same spirit is invoked, the question of authority remains the primary concern.

In contemporary Mormon culture/practice, communications with spirits are not uncommon. In chapter 2, I looked at the experiences of faithful members of the LDS Church, who interact with the deceased in the sacred space of the temple and during prayerful moments in Mormon homes; here, spirits of deceased ancestors come forward to offer comfort and spiritual insight to the living. For the LDS Church, these interactions are edifying to the institutional Church because they support the Church's doctrine of the afterlife and uphold the belief that there is life after death. At the same time, this chapter offered the example of Denver Snuffer, a faithful member of the Church who was excommunicated for his interactions with Jesus Christ and his subsequent questioning of the need for a hierarchy.

In addition to literal spirits, metaphorical spirits are often invoked as a means of garnering authority that is otherwise unavailable. For people who seek answers apart from the leaders in the LDS Church, like women or other marginalized communities, the spirit of Mormon history acts as a haunting presence that looms over Mormonism and offers alternatives to traditionally understood authority. Chapter 3 uses the language of haunting to ask how the spirit of women's authority and the memory of a more equitable institution acts as a visible invisible that permeates the lives of some LDS women. This memory is often invoked and used to support claims that stand in opposition to contemporary LDS teachings. In the case of many of these women, these spirits helped initiate their exit from the institutional Church.

At other times, the spirits are very literal for Mormons who attempt to act in opposition to the LDS Church and claim separate forms of authority. In chapter 4, I used the example of Christ's Church, a Mormon group currently gathering in Nevada, the spirit of Joseph Smith and other Mormon leaders continue to interact with the living to offer guidance and support through the doctrine of Patriarchal File Leadership. At the same time, these spirits affirm the correct authority found in this group and its significance as the truest expression of Mormonism. These claims have led to the excommunication of many members from the LDS Church.

Finally, in chapter 5, I covered James D. Harmston's rise to power and the emergence of the TLC. Harmston made use of XX to justify his own Mormon experience, which differed from the dominant the Mormon narrative. Through communications with resurrected beings, Harmston became a prophet and led a small group with unquestioned control. In Harmston's case, the spirits not only justified Mormonism but also acts of abuse and violence. In relationship to the LDS Church, the TLC was deemed apostate. The source of apostasy was not the interaction with divine messengers, but Harmston claiming that the LDS Church was actually the institution in apostasy.

Taken together, these case studies demonstrate the boundary between benign interactions with spirits and apostasy. For the LDS Church, spirits are acceptable as long as they support the dominant church and its narratives. The moment they act in opposition to the LDS structure, the spirit and its interlocutor is labeled apostate, a vague term that encompasses a range of actions. This same authorization is then repeated by

“apostate” groups that attempt to regulate communications within their own traditions. However, regulation of spirits is often futile—by nature, spirits avoid regulation and refuse to be controlled. The result are multiple groups that trace their history to the communication of spirits and the authority the spirits confer.

While this dissertation is about Mormon history and the way scholars talk about Mormonism, it is also centrally about authority and the way authority is structured and managed within religions. Mormon history is not linear and does not trace a single lineage from Joseph Smith to the current leader of the LDS Church. Rather, Mormon history is punctuated with divine and spiritual interactions that alter the course of history and manifest in multiple Mormon groups, which all claim authentic succession and sole access to the priesthood and divine. In short, the LDS Church is not Mormonism. While it has a dominant place within Mormonism and the telling of Mormon history, Mormonism is not complete unless it includes reference to all the groups that trace their lineage to Joseph Smith.

In placing multiple forms of Mormonism into the same project, and allowing them to self-identify as Mormon, I not only argued for diverse avenues of authority within Mormonism, but greater diversity within the religion. Mormonism is not a monolith. The inclusion of groups outside the LDS Church raise questions about claiming Mormon identity and who counts as Mormon. At the same time, the inclusion of multiple forms of Mormonism into the literature adds to the study of American religion, generally. While these groups are small and historically marginalized and criminalized for their marital practices, they are foundational for understanding the way religion interacts with

the law, the construction of whiteness, the American family, and the continued importance of schism in the construction of America's religious landscape.

Undoubtedly, Mormonism will continue to grow and new movements will form. Given the history of this phenomenon, many groups will stem from communications with the deceased and resurrected messengers sent from heaven. These new groups, and the spirits that guide them, will be labeled apostate by the LDS Church, which continues to control the dominant narrative of what it means to be Mormon. However, for the groups that make use of spirits, to either form new religions or leave their existing tradition, the interactions with the gods and spirits assurance and legitimization.

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