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Mormonism and the Family (Forum)

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Forum

As a regular feature of *Religion and American Culture*, the editors invite scholars to comment from different perspectives upon an issue or problem central to the study of religion in its American context. This FORUM format is designed to foster the cross-disciplinary study of religion and American culture and to bring to the readers of the journal the latest thoughts of scholars on timely, substantial topics. Contributors to the FORUM are asked to present brief essays or “thought pieces” instead of carefully documented articles.

Contemporary Mormonism: America’s Most Successful “New Religion”

For this issue’s FORUM, we asked our participants to comment on contemporary Mormonism from the perspective of their respective disciplines, fields of study, and research. For the purposes of this FORUM, the editors have assumed that Mormonism is “America’s most successful ‘new religion.’” Each of the four participants in the FORUM has been asked to reflect on that judgment as well as on one of four particular aspects of the Mormon experience: Mormonism and the family, Mormonism in popular culture, Mormons and gender issues, and Mormonism and politics.

Our decision to select this topic for the FORUM was triggered by a variety of contemporary developments as well as by the powerful and significant group of scholars who are at work in the area of Mormon studies and in the larger field of American religious history. We thought it an appropriate moment in time to reflect on the contemporary situation of the Mormon community.

TERRYL L. GIVENS

Mormonism and the Family

When we speak of the family in Mormonism, the term can mean many things. There is an idealized Mormon family, the one

described in church magazines, General Conference talks, and Mormon public service commercials. There is the family of the Mormon theological tradition, stretching endlessly off into the eternities, bound together with temple ordinances, the forever family of Mormon bumper stickers. There is another family, product of a more speculative bent in Mormon theology, which comes of an eschatological reading of the Abrahamic covenant, and which imputes to a temple-sealed Mormon couple the right to an endless seed, a posterity that they will sire and raise in worlds to come. Yet another concept of family is the heavenly family of which humanity is a part, presided over by a Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. There are other Mormon families, buried in past layers of theology and praxis. Dynastic priestly families, linked together through temple sealings of priesthood leaders to Joseph Smith and subsequent prophets. And there are the storied families of Mormon polygamy, Brigham and Heber and Parley with their multitudes somberly arrayed in compact lines for the photographer, without clear generational demarcations between the faces ranged among aged patriarchs and suckling babes.

For two generations, Mormonism managed to reconcile its theological underpinnings with a system of plurality. With the advent of the twentieth century, however, Mormons came to match, and then outstrip, the American ideal of domesticity and companionate marriage. If the contemporary American family is undergoing paroxysms of realignment, of which the iconoclastic sixties now seem tame precursor rather than culmination, Mormonism, from a distance, looks like a ship passing in the opposite direction, having moved from radical outlier to ultraconventional (and heterosexually) monogamist. It is perhaps surprising that an institution so firmly associated in the public mind with the defense of the traditional family has itself been so variable in its conception of just what the family's ideal form is. The shifting configurations of the Mormon family, however, only throw into stark relief the underlying principle of Mormon thinking about the family which has never changed—the eternal nature of those bonds that constitute family organization. In a December 2007 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life national survey, "How the Public Perceives Romney, Mormons," Americans offered "polygamy" and "family values" as their leading impressions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS).

This theological component to Mormon thought on the family is important because it underlies an entire sensibility, even if contemporary trends and sociological arguments condition Mormonism's engagement with family politics at any particular moment. A brief survey of the theological foundations is therefore appropriate before

we proceed to discuss the current scene. One of Joseph Smith's most significant doctrinal innovations, against the background of nineteenth-century Christianity, was a return to an early Christian teaching most famously associated with church father Origen. In its simplest formulation, Smith declared that "man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be" (Doctrine and Covenants [hereafter D&C] 93:29). Such co-eternal existence was the first step in a sustained collapse of what Kierkegaard had considered a nonnegotiable foundation of Christian thought: the infinite qualitative difference between God and man. Smith initially described a kind of adoption, whereby God entered into relationship with human spirits, nurturing them in the ways of divinity. At the time of Smith's death, Mormonism's first theologians, Parley and Orson Pratt, were already describing that relationship as a literal spirit birth, whose understanding Brigham Young and subsequent Mormon leaders accepted.

Hand in hand with Mormon development of human premortality, Smith articulated a vision of human theosis—a literal understanding of human participation in the divine nature alluded to by Peter. This meant that Mormonism developed two interconnected ideas about eternal families in tandem. If we were sired premortally by a divine person, and we have the potential to someday replicate the role and function of such a creator, then, based on the model God implemented in the Garden of Eden, deity must, in some, sense be dualistic.

As recorded in the *Journal of Discourses* (1851–1886), Orson Pratt taught in 1871: "When we get there we will behold the face of our Father, the face of our mother, for we were begotten there the same as we are begotten by our fathers and mothers here, and hence our spirits are the children of God, legally and lawfully, in the same sense that we are the children of our parents here in this world" (14:241–42). A few years later, he referred to the process of exaltation as one in which earthly children, growing to the likeness of their parents, is an echo of adults growing into the knowledge and likeness "of our Heavenly Parents" (ibid., 18:292).

By 1884, the language was even more anthropomorphic. As reported in the *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, counselor in the First Presidency George Q. Cannon lectured that "God is a married being, has a wife," and "we are the offspring." (David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, "'A Mother There:' A Survey of Historical Teachings About Mother in Heaven," *BYU Studies* 50 [2011], is the most comprehensive survey of the subject.) In 1885, Erastus Snow echoed the teaching: "it is not said in so many words in the Scriptures, that we have a Mother in

heaven as well as a Father. It is left for us to infer this from what we see and know of all living things. . . . The idea of a Father suggests that of a Mother." Snow took the additional step of effectively redefining "God" in the language of celestial parents: "'What,'" says one, 'do you mean we should understand that Deity consists of man and woman?' Most certainly I do. If I believe anything that God has ever said about himself, and anything pertaining to the creation and organization of man upon the earth, I must believe that Deity consists of man and woman. . . . I have another description: There never was a God, and there never will be in all eternities, except they are made of these two component parts; a man and a woman; the male and the female" (*Journal of Discourses*, 26:214; 19:266).

In 1909, the church officially proclaimed in "The Origin of Man" that "all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother and are literally the sons and daughters of deity." Again, in 1916, the First Presidency affirmed in "A Doctrinal Disposition" that we are born of "glorified parents [who] have attained exaltation." In recent decades, references to a heavenly mother have been muted—in part a reaction to feminist initiatives in the church to include the Heavenly Mother in prayer and worship. Nevertheless, the church officially reaffirmed the doctrine as recently as 1995 in its "Family: Proclamation to the World," which states we are beloved children "of heavenly parents."

All of this theological background conditions Mormon attitudes toward the contemporary family insofar as it undercuts the position that the family is purely a convention, a product of social, cultural, and economic motives operating through history. Certainly, it would be simplistic to overinterpret the exact configuration of the heavenly template. At the same time, Mormons take seriously Smith's teachings that the earthly conforms to the Heavenly (D&C 128:13). In other words, "that which is earthly conform[s] to that which is heavenly," or "that which is temporal [is] in the likeness of that which is spiritual," not just the other way around (Joseph Smith quotes Paul to this effect in D&C 127:13 and D&C 77:2). And of special relevance to the limits of family redefinition, Mormons understand the heavenly family to be intractably configured in dualistic, heterosexual terms. Mormons read the biblical creation account in that context. When God created man and woman, God brought them together. That a man should cling to his wife and she to him, on the way to becoming "one flesh," was a pattern and order established while they were still in paradise. It was not a compensating comfort for their passage through a fallen world. Marriage is a heavenly order, patterned on a divine template—a relationship that may be sealed on earth in order to be

“bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19, NRSV). A few questions, nonetheless, persist in contemporary Mormon thinking about family—and marriage—configurations. Two, in particular, seem most urgent. First, how far does—or should—theology go in impinging on the political? Second, does Mormon theology itself contain a space for alternative configurations of the family?

While the LDS church maintains official political neutrality and does not endorse candidates, like other churches, it campaigns actively for issues that, in its opinion, cut across religious and moral lines. Defining marriage is one such issue. Even the church’s participation in the anti-Equal Rights Amendment initiative did not arouse the internal divides and the external hostility provoked when Mormon leaders urged members to contribute time and money to the passage of California Proposition 8. Passed on November 2008, the ballot initiative was called the California Marriage Protection Act, designed to restrict marriage to opposite-sex couples. The initiative passed 52 to 48 percent but was overturned as unconstitutional by a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Considerable outlays of Mormon money (generally reported at about \$20 million) most likely turned the tide in favor of the proposition, even though Mormons are a small minority in the state (less than 2 percent) and were in coalition with Orthodox Jewish, evangelical, and Catholic groups. Critics are certainly correct who argue that Mormon conceptions of heavenly parents, and eternal, companionate heterosexual relationships, cannot be imposed on nonbelievers. Mormon theology does place heterosexual marriage at the summit of its salvation scheme, teaching that those who inherit eternal life will enjoy a continuing marriage relation and “a continuation of the seed forever,” that is, the capacity for eternal procreation. However, Mormon opposition to gay marriage is based on the same logic cited by the lone dissenter in the proposition’s defeat on appeal: Judge Randy Smith argued that “the family structure of two committed biological parents—one man and one woman—is the optimal partnership for raising children.” An official church statement in support of Proposition 8, “Preserving Traditional Marriage and Strengthening Families,” claimed a pattern rooted in divine mandate but ultimately circled back to a sociological concern: marriage is “ordained of God,” the “formation of families is central to the Creator’s plan,” and “children are entitled to be born within this bond of marriage.” The church’s February 10, 2012, press release on the proposition’s repeal, “Proposition 8 Statement,” was even more carefully couched in a political language entirely shorn of the religious: “Millions of voters in California sent a message that traditional marriage is crucial to society.

They expressed their desire, through the democratic process, to keep traditional marriage as the bedrock of society."

Any church that does not aspire to transform the state into a theocracy recognizes the rights of its members to dissent from whatever political guidance it propounds. "I teach them correct principles and let them govern themselves," Smith famously said. In 1933, Mormon president Heber J. Grant urged members to support Prohibition. Utah, dominated by teetotaling Mormons, resisted his appeal and voted for repeal. So, too, some Mormons may support church doctrines on the family while resisting their political application. Hence, some Mormons opposed Proposition 8 in dissent from the official position, holding that, while Mormon theology may be valid, the church's sociological analysis of the perils of gay marriage is not.

A small minority of Mormons, however, urges a reconsideration of the theological, as well as sociological, support for the single ideal of a heterosexual couple presiding over a nuclear family. This leads us to consider the second Mormon question of the moment: does Mormon theology itself contain a space for alternative configurations of the family? They may point not only to polygamy as precedent but also to a period in LDS history when kinship itself, rather than sexually determined relationships, was the basis for building extended families. Richard Bushman has referred to Joseph Smith's "lust for kin" as a motivating factor in his quest for establishing such large and complex networks of filiation through temple ordinances, and, for a considerable time in Mormon history, men were sealed to other men in a kind of dynastic chain of being. Christ's great intercessory prayer, offered in the privacy and intimacy of the Last Supper rather than the public arena of the Sermon on the Mount, petitioned God to bless the disciples with a friendship, a love and unity, that paralleled his own relationship to his Father. "The glory that you have given me I have given them," he prayed, "so that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17:22, NSRV). Smith called friendship "the grand fundamental principle of Mormonism" and referred to a celestial world characterized not just by continuing families but also by "the same sociality which exists among us here" (*The Words of Joseph Smith* [Orem, Utah: Grandin, 1994], 234; D&C 130:2). So, obviously, other relationships than heterosexual union constitute important, and eternal, modes of connection in the eternities.

Two other developments factor into the discussion. First, gender and gender roles are viewed today by most scholars as social constructs rather than essential elements of human identity. And

second, family organization and government have themselves undergone significant transformation in Mormon teaching and culture. The conception of patriarchy has continued to evolve in substantial ways, moving from a masculinist conception of family government toward a more egalitarian model. Smith's early project envisioned a remarkably equitable place for women, the problems raised by polygamy notwithstanding; he structured the women's Relief Society as a counterpart to the male priesthood, not an auxiliary supervised by it, as it came to be under Young (after a period during which he shut it down completely). And modern scholars of plural marriage, including Kathleen Flake (2009 Leonard J. Arrington Lecture), have emphasized the extent to which the system of plurality empowered women by conferring upon them priestly powers and prerogatives. Not only did they acquire a greater degree of independence than their monogamous counterparts (they "seem to have the entire management, not only of their families, but their households, even outside business affairs, as if they were widows," remarked one astonished observer); they also came with their husbands to participate in "mutually interdependent, priestly identity," a shared authority that descended to both from "Holy Progenitors" (quoted in Flake's 2009 lecture). Within this larger context, contemporary developments represent a return to some aspects of Smith's progressivism, even if these developments have been triggered by modern feminist sensibilities. President Ezra Taft Benson, in the August 1985 issue of the church magazine *Ensign*, referred to patriarchy as "family government." Robert L. Millet, in the March 1998 issue of the same magazine, defined the Melchizedek priesthood as the "new and everlasting covenant of marriage," which itself is a patriarchal order of "family government presided over by a father and mother, patterned after what exists in heaven." James E. Faust taught that "every father is to his family a patriarch and every mother a matriarch as coequals in their distinctive parental roles," and Elder Russell M. Nelson declared that "Eve served in a matriarchal partnership with the patriarchal priesthood" (see the May 1996 and November 1987 issues of *Ensign*). Finally, in the April 10, 2004, *LDS Church News*, apostle L. Tom Perry emphasized that "there is not a president and vice-president in a family" but "co-presidents working together eternally for the good of their family . . . united in word, in deed, and in action, as they lead, guide, and direct their family unit. They are on equal footing." If there is a consistent direction in Mormon conceptions of the family, it is in the direction of a more egalitarian, companionate view of marriage. (My thanks to Rachael Givens for these examples).

For all of these reasons, some insider voices can be heard equating the current LDS position against gay marriage with the church's nineteenth-century ban against black priesthood. In that case, civil rights era critics were eventually vindicated in their opposition to a practice that the church now treats more as an unfortunate policy than as inspired doctrine. Apostle Spencer Kimball, who reversed the ban as president in 1978, even publicly sought God's forgiveness for "the possible error." So does a vocal minority within the church today assert that the barriers in Mormon culture against gay marriage will similarly fall as cultural bias gets weeded out from doctrinal essentials.

Such a scenario is not likely. The priesthood ban arose under murky circumstances, abruptly intruding into a culture that, under Smith's leadership, had been moving in the opposite direction (he supported emancipation and ordained blacks to the priesthood). The ban received no clear invocation of prophetic authority (it first appeared in a statement Young made to the territorial legislature) or any doctrinal foundation. Nor was it indissolubly connected—as heterosexual marriage is—to Mormon conceptions of the divine, or to the highest ideal of Mormon religious and cultural aspiration. In any case, the point is likely moot. All trends suggest that the traditional family will not have its privileged legal status much longer. Debates about gay marriage, like those about abortion, will recede to the extent that the issues are legislatively or constitutionally decided.

What is not likely to happen is any substantial impact on Mormon marriage or Mormon family practices themselves. Reverting again to the abortion analogy, Mormons have proven themselves unusually resistant to larger cultural trends. The legalization of abortion, which opened the floodgates to the practice nationally (it is now one of the most common medical procedures in America), registered virtually no change in the active Mormon community. And while some Mormon feminists show dissatisfaction with a patriarchal church, some 90 percent do not. In place of protest, a new breed of Mormon feminists has arisen to counter the notion of socially constructed and oppressive gender identity with a view of femaleness that is both essentialist and empowering. The same kind of accommodation is likely to emerge as the family continues its evolution in American culture. Mormons will, by and large, continue to grow in their tolerance and acceptance of new ideological positions, without fully embracing them. We can well anticipate that most Mormons will continue to view the family—a traditional family headed by a father and mother whose shared goal is raising children—as their personal ideal, for this life and for the eternities.

KATHRYN LOFTON

Mormonism in Popular Culture

Nobody ever defers to popular culture for accurate renderings of anything. Yet people do derive from popular culture their inaugural sense of almost everything. Scholars of the American South and Appalachia know this well, as do students of evangelicalism, Islam, and Judaism in America, all of whom need to combat cultural presumptions about their subjects gleaned in part from the redactions of popular culture. Given the history of anti-Mormonism in the United States—and given the historical display of ethnic, regional, religious, and sexual identities in popular culture—nobody would predict that Mormons would get a fair shake. As David Brion Davis, Leonard Dinnerstein, Jenny Franchot, J. Spencer Fluhman, or Patrick Mason would explain, bigoted portrayals of minority religious groups appear on cue whenever such outsider groups seem to gain insider political power. Being depicted wrongly, grossly, cruelly, or dumbly in the popular culture seems the entrance fee for your assimilation. Take your punches, the logic seems to go, and eventually, maybe, the presidency could be yours.

If the history of blackface minstrelsy or convent tales tells us anything, it is that such ersatz entertainments can have immediate—and sometimes violent—real-life consequences. In the contemporary period, the consequences seem to be mainly emotional. On January 12, 2012, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released its poll “Mormons in America,” which it published on its website with the subheading, “Certain in their beliefs, uncertain of their place in society.” The study revealed that 54 percent of Mormons are dissatisfied with the way the LDS faith is represented in movies and on television. In response to the Pew study, Michael Purdy, director of media relations for the church, said he could think of no accurate representations of Mormons on TV or in the movies. “In the end,” he remarked, “I suppose most people realize that what they see on TV and in movies is entertainment and does not necessarily reflect reality.”

Purdy offers here an invitation to think through the meaning of such unreal representations. To paraphrase Tzvetan Todorov, everybody knows that works of art follow rules that have no counterpart in nature. Everybody takes dramatic plots and characters with a grain of salt, knowing that, in real life, car chases rarely end triumphantly and that, in real life, Anna Wintour isn’t probably *that* mean. And despite the truckload of pop culture evidence to the contrary, most people know that Mormons are not polygamous patriarchs, closeted homosexuals, or winsome naïfs. But how do we know this?

How can we suppose that people will know rightly even when their popular cultures portray something so wrongly?

The answer is that we don't. We trust it, believing that readers, viewers, and consumers can reason the difference between the conventions of art and the rules of nature. But without a substantive representation of Mormons in the public sphere, it is impossible to argue that there is a substantive sense of Mormons among the American public. This is, in part, why the church has worked hard to distribute positive images of a plural community through their "I'm a Mormon" campaign, a series of public service announcements that showcase Mormons from various walks of life and offer colloquial explanations of Mormon practices (<http://mormon.org/people/>). The need to publicize representations of Mormon normalcy suggests the extent to which the church believes its circulating presence is one of aberrancy.

Yet the Mormons' simplified identity in the broader American popular culture does not mean that it is an altogether weakened or only derogatory one. Stereotypes always diminish the humanity of the stereotyped, but they also magnify aspects of their social perception. The latter is always a form of bigotry; it is also a form of description. How are Mormons described in the popular culture?

I discern five different types of Mormons circulating in contemporary U.S. popular culture. The Mormon is a crowded signifier in popular culture, too crowded to occur as anything other than a signal figure defined through his or her Mormon identity. The five types to follow are summaries of the appearances of Mormons in popular culture, a broad arena that I have narrowed to emphasize Mormon appearance in ostensibly nonreligious entertainments. Although popular culture might include evaluations of political figures and celebrities, consumer packaged goods, and sporting events, to explore this particular representative function I focus on the kinds of objects ("on TV and in movies," as Purdy mentioned) that develop substantive characterizations in the public sphere. I am not arguing these condensed types are accurate to the life or theology of a Latter-day Saint; I am arguing they are present in our entertainment landscape. Although I describe these types as isolated and flattened figurations, within a given character, several types may converge. Even caricature can exist within art, and often multilayered stereotypes emerge in the characterization of a given actor or an interpretation of a particular author. One final proviso: this analysis does not take up the robust Mormon film or music industries or Mormonism's sectarian literary and comedy scenes. The popular culture of Mormonism is worthy of serious analysis to explore its resonances with and dissent from

secular entertainment, especially as it works, in part, to counteract the stereotypes to follow.

The first type of Mormon, the *pioneer* Mormon, is perhaps the most preponderant. This is a figure deriving from the symbolic power of nineteenth-century Mormon migration into the American West in which a mass number of Christians traveled into the purportedly heathen frontier to create Zion. Such a figure is depicted in such classic Westerns as *Brigham Young* (1940) and *Wagon Master* (1950) in which a band of bravely pious Mormons traveling west is lionized amid typical cowboy-and-Indian shenanigans. This pioneer Mormon transcends that particular geographical journey, however. The pioneer Mormon is any Mormon character who is an eager stranger in a strange land, a missionary naïf in a world of indigenous unknowns, heathen Gentiles, and decadent cosmopolites. This is the way that *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone deploy the figure of the Mormon in their 1997 movie, *Orgazmo*, and their 2011 Broadway musical, *The Book of Mormon*. Whatever the particular theological and historical inaccuracies of their depictions, Parker and Stone promote the image of the pioneer Mormon to heighten the stakes of contemporary situations. In both works, Parker and Stone place Mormon missionaries in contexts depicted as depraved. And in both contexts, they satirize Mormon resilience against the battery of counterarguments and countercontexts to their religious certitude. In *Orgazmo*, a Mormon is sent on mission to Los Angeles only to become an accidental porn star. In *Book of Mormon*, two missionaries are sent to Uganda only to become embroiled in civil war and the formation of a new religion. The pioneer Mormon is reliable for pop culture as a naïvely stalwart, and sometimes inadvertently gallant, hero.

Sometimes the *chaste* Mormon is paired with a pioneer. Like the pioneer, the chaste Mormon is situated in a world fraught with bodily temptation and social corruption. Yet the chaste Mormon does not possess a missionary zeal to reform that world; rather, he or she is merely an emblematic exception in it. The drama of chaste Mormons is their resistance. This may be an articulated celibacy or it may be a more implied innocence of obscenities. Their dignity is often conveyed through quietude or through a comic leitmotif that compares their steady asceticism with the confused frenzy of those less sure in their relational negotiations. This is what allows the opportunity for the elaborate erotics of restraint displayed in Stephanie Meyer's popular *Twilight* series as well as in the Mormon-produced *Pride and Prejudice: A Latter-Day Comedy* (2003), which transplants the studied romantic etiquette of Jane Austen to the campus of Brigham Young University. In a national climate where the Catholic schoolgirl is

a presumptively corrupted trope, the chaste Mormon is the reliable virtuous icon amid a sea of adolescent sexualization and adult wantonness.

The *primitive* Mormon is the Mormon who continues to practice some form of polygamy and who is represented consequently to suffer economically and socially. These Mormons persist poorly in modernity due to their primal dependencies, and they are shown to reproduce, squabble, and enact violence upon one another in irrational excess. The sense is that their bigamous practices somehow contribute to their poverty and depravity. This is how Mormon fundamentalism appears within popular culture: as a sort of Neanderthal soap opera with bickering wives, abusive megalomaniacal men, and an excess of related children wandering about unattended. One can read about such primitive Mormons in Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven* (2003), and they can be seen in the relatives residing at Juniper Creek on the HBO drama *Big Love* (2006–2011). With polygamy outlawed by the Church of Latter-day Saints, these depictions suggest the lurking id within the church's ostensibly hypermodern assimilation.

The primitive Mormon is a familiar trope of popular culture, one recognizable to those who have studied the histories of African Americans, Jews, and Roman Catholics. All of those groups have had as a component of their circulation some attribution of endemic violence and sexual excess, whether it is in tales of perverse religious authorities, ritual degradation, or blood libel. Like those groups, Mormons have also experienced more sophisticated slander, especially in the representation of *crippled* Mormons. Here, I use the word *cripple* to describe a person who has been psychically damaged and for whom their damage includes the use of their Mormonism as a shield either to protect themselves from critical exposure or to deflect attention from their misdeeds. These delusive Mormons might be seen in Neil LaBute's *bash: latterday plays* (1997), in which the four main characters are Mormons who seem, initially, warm and friendly but are revealed to be sociopathic murderers. Likewise, in Martha Beck's memoir, *Leaving the Saints* (2005), she describes the sexual abuse she received at the hands of an upstanding Mormon father. Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (1993) depicts Mormonism as a stranglehold on two of its main characters, forcing one to be in a sexual closet and the other to find respite in drug abuse. A masterpiece of modern theater, *Angels in America* suggests that the orthodoxy of Mormonism contorts its believers away from their true selves. Only through breaking from the church could Mormons heal themselves of this crippling.

Finally, the *uncanny* Mormon is, like the crippled Mormon, often one who lives a double life. Yet, unlike the crippled Mormon, the uncanny Mormon isn't exactly suffering, or causing harm, due to this duality. Uncanny Mormons are the Mormons who seem very relatable yet suggest, through their very cheer, efficiency, and wellness, that something is off. The uncanny Mormon is discomfiting, though it's hard to pinpoint exactly why. On the surface, the uncanny Mormon is the face of Mormonism as the corporate entity that produced "7 Habits" guru Stephen R. Covey, cheerful temple tour guides, and patriarchic family portraits of campaigning politicians. In popular culture, one could point to *American Idol* runner-up David Archuleta or all-time *Jeopardy* winner Ken Jennings, both of whom were pioneer Mormons in their moral success yet still inspired many an online commentator to suggest that something seemed awkward about their consistent goodwill. In the realm of fiction, Brady Udall's novel *The Lonely Polygamist* (2010) and the HBO series *Big Love* deploy the uncanny Mormon to exemplary effect, pressing the reader (or viewer) to think about the relationship between the apparent and the real. The uncanny Mormon is a powerful provocation to wonder not merely at Mormonism but also at the surfaces that maintain our own lives.

The intrigue of these types is their overlapping effect, leaving the viewer or reader with a sense of Mormonism that is not altogether denunciatory. In an era lacking clear heroes, clear gender roles, and with plural pathways to personal wellness, Mormonism has provided a palette from which authors and producers pull tropes of idealized heterosexuality, blind patriotism, unconscious whiteness, and unmitigated missionary ambition. Invoking Mormonism, writers conjure handsome heroes in plain clothes seeking simple resolution to a world resistant to all simplicities. Whatever Mormonism actually is, it exists in the popular culture as a kind of vicarious pleasure for a population wearied by political correctness. Watching these fictional Mormons offers a viewing audience looks at the truth behind picket-fence domesticity and the ironies within epistemological clarity. Just as *Downton Abbey*, the *Sopranos*, and *Mad Men* invite us behind the scenes of hierarchic insular worlds (of the aristocracy, of the Mob, and of the man in the gray flannel suit), the imagined landscape of Mormon social culture is a secret its audiences hunger to experience and debunk.

In reply, Mormons offer testimonies in their "I'm a Mormon" campaign that offer their secret as a kind of happy humdrum. The dairy farmer in New Zealand chortles about his dislike of office work. The carpet layer in Seattle plays the harmonica and remarks that his

wife likes to kiss him a lot. Every campaign ad builds a picture of Mormons as determined through their relationships, their good humor, and their religious identity. "I'm a journalist. I'm a daughter. I'm a Mormon," says one. "I'm a wife. I'm a mother. I'm an architectural technologist. I'm a Mormon," says another. Being a Mormon in these advertisements is the explanatory glue. It explains, for example, why the young couple seems so happy even though they have three young toddlers. It explains why the Fox journalist smiles so easily even though her father abandoned her when she was twelve. It explains why a man who sustained a childhood brain injury could be, in adulthood, a model human being. "I believe that God loves all of us and we need to love one another," he says as the camera records his service to his community, handing out food to the poor, concluding: "I'm a father, son, friend, lover, and I'm a Mormon." These Mormons seem relatable in their experiences, yet somehow above the fray.

The "I'm a Mormon" campaign does not only contradict Mormon stereotypes. In many ways, these stories confirm the image of the pioneer Mormon, the chaste Mormon, and the uncanny Mormon. They are just like us except they are not quite; they are, unlike us, ostensibly always certain and impossibly cheerful. The "I'm a Mormon" public service announcements try to debunk the suspicions of those who believe Mormons are crippled by their faith or primitive in their outlook. Mormons are, in this depiction, utterly of the moment and wholly liberated by their faith to be the best them that they can be. Such a campaign has also been conducted by the Church of Scientology (see www.scientology.org/video/meet-a-scientologist) and the Roman Catholic church (www.catholicscomehome.org/real-people-real-stories), groups that also seek to argue their normalcy against suspicions of deviancy and abuse.

What, in the end, would make for a satisfying representation of a Mormon? Here, we enter the realm of aesthetic more than religious estimation, since popular culture tends not to be as helpfully estimated through the latter as it is through the former. I would make just one minor comment on the subject of satisfying representations, which is to point out that the *fondest* representations of Mormons have been on reality television programs, where the Mormon contestant (marked, inevitably, as The Mormon Contestant) shows up, smiles more broadly than any other competitor, and then wins (or not) with orderly obedience to the rules, good sportsmanship, and easy friendliness. Such a character—in life and in fiction—asks for a great novelist or filmmaker to explore it, not to debunk its falsity, or lavish in its heroism, but to do what all great art does for us: to find what within that smile is powerfully human and to discern what in it is truly free.

LAURIE MAFFLY-KIPP*Mormons and Gender Issues*

There are short and long versions of gender dynamics within contemporary Mormonism. In the short account, Mormons adhere to a distinctive understanding of male and female roles and purposes. Since 1995, official LDS teaching has declared that gender roles are both essential and eternal characteristics of individuals that shape domestic, ecclesiastic, and sacramental obligations. Ideally, a woman's highest calling is motherhood, and her duty, if possible, is to stay home and care for her children while her husband earns a living, supports the family, and serves as its spiritual head. Within the church, males may serve in the priesthood, an office linked to specific ritual functions, and men comprise the organizational hierarchy. Women serve church offices as well through the female Relief Society and callings in localized settings. In its ideal form, this short version of gender describes a religious community in which sex-specific roles are organized into parallel (if not entirely equal) structures and determine the most basic of daily activities. Young boys and girls are educated and socialized into roles within the church and family that stress their differing religious and familial obligations.

For practical purposes, Mormon understandings of male and female roles are not unlike those in many conservative Christian churches that celebrate the primacy of the nuclear family and the complementary roles of men and women. And as in other churches, the importance of adhering to these roles has increased dramatically within Mormon communities since the 1970s, as feminism, gay rights, and other related social issues have prompted clearer articulation of gendered boundaries by those dedicated to upholding distinctive roles for men and women.

The "church history" narrative that accompanies the short form of gender is, like nearly all church history was until the 1970s, a tale of male authors and male authority. Even a cursory reading of the Book of Mormon might lead one to think that only a handful of women lived in the ancient Americas. Subsequent church history (at least for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) has remained largely the purview of male scholars, at least, in part, because historical scholarship has been closely tied to ecclesiastical offices. As early as 1968, Leonard Arrington lamented the "male bias" in Mormon history. While much has changed in the last several decades, thanks to the pioneering work of Jill Mulvay Derr, Claudia Bushman, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Kathryn Daynes, and others who have made way for a new generation of scholars of Mormon women's history, male

leadership still remains front and center in most narrative accounts. Even further off the radar in Mormon studies—and in need of greater exploration—is gender as a subject that defines Mormon masculinity as an object of study, although recent attention to homosexuality within the church may begin to shift attention toward how both maleness and femaleness are inhabited and performed.

It would be misleading, though, to end the story there. A longer, more textured explanation reveals the fractures and nuances in gendered ideals and outlines the fissures through which multiple voices within the LDS church (as in other Christian churches) push back against prescribed roles. In the last decade, Mormons have engaged in increasingly vocal debates over homosexuality, equal rights for women, and women's access to the priesthood—all issues that are critical not simply because they denote desirable collective norms but also because they point to the heart of the theological definition of gender as an eternally prescribed designation.

The impetus for renewed debates over gender norms, it should be noted, has not come entirely from outside the faith. Mormons have not simply responded to cues from the sexual and social revolutions in American culture. They also have found much within their own history and doctrines to bolster alternative readings of women's and men's proper roles. First, there is the radical potential some followers see within the notion of the human similitude to God: according to Mormon teachings, God was once like human beings are now, and, therefore, human beings must strive toward an exaltation that will allow them to become like God. Because this exaltation can only be achieved within the bounds of marriage, it stands to reason that God must have a wife. This Mother in Heaven, although mentioned very infrequently in official teachings, has been the object of much speculation by Mormon women seeking role models and a rationale for understanding the divine power of females. In like manner, Mormon scholars have debated whether women in the early years of the church held greater ecclesiastical standing, including the right to perform some priesthood offices, than they do today. Liberal Mormons who call for increased gender equality (and some of whom advocate for women's right to hold the priesthood) cite these theological and historical reasons to question the inevitability of patriarchal authority. Flora Walker's feminist universe imagined in the *Book of Morma* is one example of the reappropriation of sacred narratives put to the purpose of refiguring gender roles.

There is still more, however, in the Mormon past that has been mined for unique understandings of gender. Mormon roles have long been shaped by a legacy of migration and frontier settlement.

Visitors to Utah in the nineteenth century denounced what they saw as the backwardness of Mormon polygamy, but they also marveled at the fortitude and self-sufficiency of Mormon women. Homesteading, making do for long periods of time without men when they were sent on missions, and crafting a culture at a substantial distance from eastern settlements, Utah Mormons prided themselves on female self-reliance. This trait is still recognized in historical modes that jostle uneasily with characterizations of women as subservient or dependent. Within Mormon rhetoric today one hears multiple strains: a sentimental rhetoric of women's (particularly mothers') place as creatures of reverence and a valorization of female endurance, ingenuity, and strength in the face of hardship.

Mormon women seeking to challenge a logic of female delicacy and need for protection by males draw on this legacy of female strength, instantiated materially in the early formation of the Female Relief Society in 1842. As has been the case in other Christian churches, where women's missionary organizations served as evidence of women's abilities and became symbolically important loci of disputes over gendered authority, this independent and female-led organization reflects the centrality of women's roles to the church structure and simultaneously defines the limits of female leadership. Through the Relief Society, women engage in some of the most important facets of religious work both within the ward (local congregation) and beyond through welfare and outreach. Leaders are organized into presidencies in the same manner as male priesthood holders. But women at the highest levels of the organization, despite their relative standing among women, are still subject to the authority of male bishops. The highest presidency of the Relief Society, similarly, is not considered a general authority of the church because that role is reserved for males. In this way, women's political standing within the faith is separate and hierarchical but technically not equal to that of men. How Mormons feel about these gendered power arrangements, of course, varies widely. In periods of greater feminist activity in the United States, such as the 1890s and the 1970s, liberals in the church have referenced the Relief Society as proof of female ability and used it to argue that women's roles must remain equal—if not identical—to those of men.

Fissures between official teachings and everyday practices abound, as they do in every religious community. Mormon women, like Mormon men, are encouraged to educate themselves and develop their minds, a directive that holds the potential to sow the seeds of disenchantment with life as a stay-at-home wife. So, too, missionary service, while an option for both men and women, has

never been encouraged for women. In practice, women who select a missionary calling are considered by some Mormons to be engaged in a secondary enterprise, one chosen only by those who cannot or will not marry a worthy Mormon man. Single women, while rhetorically encouraged and accepted in local wards, also can experience themselves as less than complete because of their marital status. More so than in any of the other Christian churches, marriage is critical to the fulfillment of gender roles for both men and women in Mormon communities.

In many respects, then, gender ideals within Mormonism can be (and are) challenged from within the tradition itself. One important mitigating factor, however, is the persistence of anti-Mormonism and a legacy of insularity that encourages loyalty to the religious community. For good reason, Mormons over the past two centuries have been enjoined to "follow the Brethren" and to prize consensus over debate as a way of implicitly countering negative stereotypes. It should be emphasized that anti-Mormon images, as is the case with anti-black and other negative portrayals of cultural "outsiders," have almost inevitably included gendered slurs, be it the oversexed Mormon male or the imprisoned Mormon female. Edward Tullidge's 1877 full-scale treatment, *The Women of Mormondom*, represented only the first attempt to disseminate counter-images of Mormon women, to rescue Mormons from the gendered biases promoted by detractors. That he went far in the opposite direction, placing Mormon women on a pedestal from which they might never fall, was an understandable rejoinder to a larger society that vilified their religious choices. But this culture of consensus also exerts considerable pressure on many people not to challenge openly the church leadership.

All of this is to say that Mormon critics of the idealized gender roles promoted by church leaders often have spoken in delicate tones because of conflicting loyalties: They have sought to walk a fine line between satisfying and expressing desires for individual freedom and fitting into the larger (Mormon) whole. Their labors raise a more general question: Is it possible to belong to a close-knit religious community and to follow the dictates of individual desires, especially when the two seem to conflict? One senses longings for reconciliation of competing values in many debates surrounding gender in Mormondom. A quick glance at the summer 1971 issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* reveals such yearnings. Established five years previously by a group of Mormon scholars, the masthead of that issue, emblazoned on a bright pink background, reflected the predominance of male participants: all ten members of the board of advisors, nine of the twelve members of the editorial board, and

thirteen of the sixteen editorial staff were male. The content itself, however, was devoted to women's issues, and the contributors included several women who would become the driving force in the nascent field of Mormon women's history, notably Claudia Lauper Bushman and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. Bushman's introduction simultaneously celebrated and soft pedaled the significance of gender, as did front matter that included the provocative query: "The Women's Movement: Liberation or Deception?" Punctuated by sidebars and epigraphs from male Mormons about the sanctity of motherhood, articles in the volume registered a thoroughgoing acceptance of male authority, took pleasure in the domestic roles of wife and mother, and downplayed any comparisons to the "radical" voices of "women's lib." But authors also voiced subdued but insistent concerns that the dictates of Mormon leaders and the norms of the community might not completely satisfy them and that they found themselves roaming uneasily between two sets of competing expectations.

The pull of liberal individualism, of gendered self-expression, and the range of options for gender identity have only become more pressing over the last forty years, and these broader cultural trends also have influenced debates among Mormons. The current discussion of female dress code modesty within Mormon circles indicates the competing values held by members who are increasingly well assimilated into broader social spheres. Yet many are also dedicated to Mormon communities and cognizant of the need to counter negative stereotypes of their faith. Their discussions of gender, aside from expressing tugs in multiple directions, also reveal the ways that Mormon female bodies serve as important symbolic landscapes for the expression of collective religious values. Katie Clark Blakesley has demonstrated that, only since 1950, has female clothing become a contentious issue for Mormons. Church leaders increasingly have enjoined women to adhere to modest dress (the precise signs of modesty have changed over time), but simultaneously to display their femininity through the wearing of tasteful makeup and jewelry. These markers on bodies serve multiple functions: they signal that women are different from—and, importantly, attractive to—men, in keeping with Mormon theology, but they also mark Mormon women as separate from the broader cultural norms of skimpy clothing and wayward piercings. Analogously, "Lady missionaries," called to the field in the early twentieth century to counter dominant stereotypes of trapped polygamous wives, were trained in comportment, dress, and makeup skills that highlighted a particular style of feminine civility. Female bodies (and likely male bodies as well, although there has been considerably less study of male behavior and dress), in

important ways, have served as a key battleground as Mormons moved from an insular subculture to an international religious movement.

Reactions to LDS church involvement in the same-sex marriage debate, particularly the campaign in California to inscribe the primacy of heterosexual marriage in Proposition 8, also reveal competing values discussed within the Mormon community and suggest a distinctly Mormon take on homosexuality. Church leadership, in keeping with its continued commitment to chastity outside of heterosexual marriage as the only path to salvation, has consistently stressed that homosexual activity is sinful. Practicing homosexuals are still disfellowshipped or excommunicated if they do not repent. But in recent years, the fractures within Mormon communities have become more apparent, ranging from the open disagreement evidenced by church members marching in gay pride parades to the cautious qualifications of church leaders who now more cautiously parse the distinction between the practice of homosexuality and “sexual identity.”

The most notable example of the latter is the calling of Mitch Mayne, described (by himself and others) as an “openly gay Latter-day Saint,” to a church leadership position in the San Francisco Stake of the LDS church in 2011. This appointment immediately raises the question of what a “gay identity” is, since Mayne himself has said that as an unmarried man he is abiding by the LDS rules of chastity. The salient point is that church leaders have been willing to take that step as well, although doing so might be interpreted as implicitly problematizing the eternal nature of masculine identity. So, too, has the notoriety of Josh Weed, another Mormon who describes himself as “gay” but has been happily married to a woman for the last decade, complicated Mormon leaders’ communication about the absolute nature of gender. These examples, while they may be seen as outliers that don’t challenge basic church policies or as semantic conveniences, certainly raise questions about the theological rationale underlying Mormon understandings of gender difference. In this respect, Mormon elders may be pulled along by a new generation of Mormons: BYU students have been among the most active in discussing the place and role of gender within religious settings.

It is impossible to discuss the importance of these rising debates without noting the centrality of technology that gives the world access to previously internal Mormon discussions. LDS men and women have taken to blogging with a vengeance, and doing so, in turn, builds virtual communities that enable certain kinds of discussions unfiltered by the LDS hierarchy. Online, in the world created by

Google, all opinions appear equally valid, lined up in neat lists with accessible links. Sites such as *Feministmormonhousewives*, *Affirmation*, *Zelophehad's Daughters*, and the *Exponent* now jockey for ideological space with the LDS church, and, as a result, they expand the range of opinions about legitimate understandings of Mormon gender roles.

Another, less well-understood factor in understanding gender is the multiplication of cultures within the globalizing LDS church. It will be intriguing to see the effects that notions of masculinity and femininity in other societies might have on predominant Mormon representations. The recently deceased Chieko Okazaki, the first non-Caucasian woman to serve in the Relief Society general presidency, gained a steadfast following among Mormon women. Doubtless, much of her popularity stemmed from the adroit ways that she wove her identity as the daughter of Hawaiian-born Japanese parents and a former Buddhist into her rise as an inspiring example of Mormon womanhood. And it seems likely that her "outsider" status also made it possible for her to be accepted as a female role model while introducing delicate subjects, such as ethnic difference and sexual abuse, into her writing and speaking. Much more study of the ways that gender roles enable and hinder adaptation into Mormon communities (both in the United States and abroad), as well as the degree to which newly introduced gender ideals are reshaping Mormonism itself, will illuminate gender as a central element of religious identity.

Finally, a discussion of Mormonism and gender would not be complete without acknowledging the diversity of Mormon expressions. The Community of Christ, another offshoot of the original Mormon restoration movement, began ordaining women to the priesthood in 1984. Unfettered by a history of polygamy and concomitant anti-Mormon sentiment, the Community of Christ took its commitment to the restorationist tradition of Joseph Smith, Jr., in a very different direction, creating an ecclesiastical structure in which men and women share priestly offices. Comparative work on the significance of gender in the LDS church, the Community of Christ, and other branches of the Mormon restoration might yield a wealth of information about how male and female identities are formed and practiced and how they endure over time within religious bodies.

In this moment of dramatic transition, anecdotes serve best as a means of gaining some purchase on how Mormons think about, inhabit, and discuss issues of gender. Liberal optimists have hailed the newest signs—feminist Mormon bloggers and LDS gay pride march participants alike—as the dawning of a new era in Mormon

understandings of gender roles. I'm enough of a historical cynic to be cautious about heralding a new religious moment. But if a flourishing of animated and robust scholarship and debate is any indication, Mormons, like many other religious groups in recent years, are looking long and hard at the complexities of gender and religious experience.

PATRICK Q. MASON

Mormonism and Politics

Perhaps the single most important cause for the recent rise in public attention to Mormonism has been the prominence of Mormons in politics. Though Latter-day Saints have long been in politics—Senator Reed Smoot was considered by many to be the most powerful man in Washington in the first third of the twentieth century—the elevation of devout Mormons to the head of the Democratic-majority Senate (Harry Reid) and the Republican Party (Mitt Romney) has helped bring a new spotlight to their religion. This has brought whiffs of the old accusations of an impending Mormon theocracy, but I would suggest that, in fact, precisely the opposite is occurring, or rather has already occurred.

Politics has served as a principal vehicle for Mormon secularization. This may seem a jarring statement, since, typically, the relevant historical narrative has been cast as “Americanization” or “accommodation” or “assimilation.” All of these terms are useful, and I do not wish to argue against their individual and collective utility (though we should recognize, of course, that they each mean slightly different things). Scholars have rarely used the term “secularization” to frame the development of Mormonism over the course of its nearly two centuries of existence. Although using politics as a lens to view contemporary Mormonism will not illuminate the entire religion, especially the spiritual self-understanding and lived experience of its members, it does reveal a long process of secularization that has helped define Mormonism's negotiation with modernity.

First, a few words about secularization. No doubt, one of the reasons that the term has rarely been invoked in Mormon studies is a certain resistance to it by faithful insiders (including many scholars) who would be uncomfortable with language implying an all-or-nothing proposition that the church had become “secular.” The fact that, for much of the twentieth century, secularization theory was largely defined by social scientific predictions that religion was well on its way to its ultimate demise confirmed the term's pariah status

among believers; secularization became “anti-religion.” My use of the term is informed by the wave of recent reinterpretations by scholars such as Talal Asad, Charles Taylor, and José Casanova. In particular, I follow Casanova’s definition of secularization in *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994): “a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular spheres—primarily the state, the economy, and science—from the religious sphere and the concomitant differentiation and specialization of religion within its own newly found religious sphere” (19). According to this view of secularization, religion continues to exist, and even exerts influence in the public sphere, but it only exercises authority in its own differentiated sphere.

Since its earliest years, Mormonism has, in fits and starts, been undergoing a process in which the sacred is privatized and differentiated from a public sphere that, by and large, has been ceded to the realm of the secular. Through their willful participation in politics, Mormons have necessarily engaged in this secular realm. In so doing, they have, perhaps unwittingly, abetted the deep and largely invisible processes of secularization that have subtly but definitively transformed the religion and, in no small part, allowed for its present success as a influence-wielding church rather than a marginalized and persecuted sect. By asserting that Mormonism has undergone (and continues to undergo) a process of secularization, I am not suggesting that Mormonism is secular, in the sense of being the opposite of sacred. Furthermore, my argument makes no claim about whether or not the LDS church is “true”—a theological declaration beyond the scope of historical or social scientific inquiry. In short, I employ secularization intentionally, but I deploy it descriptively rather than normatively.

The world elucidated in Joseph Smith’s early revelations does not contain differentiated spheres in which politics, economics, and science are emancipated from religion. Early Mormonism was a totalizing religious system—I like the term “sacred cosmos”—in which there was no clear distinction between the religious and the secular, the sacred and profane. In a revelation received just a few months after the organization of the church in 1830, Smith recorded God as pronouncing, “All things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal . . . for my commandments are spiritual; they are not natural nor temporal” (D&C 29:34). Smith and the early Mormons interpreted this to mean that all things fell under the scope of God’s authority. This understanding provided the foundation for their remarkable experiment in not just religion-making but world-making as well: the Latter-day Saints’ Zion was an all-encompassing political, economic, social, and spiritual kingdom.

Yet from almost the very beginning of Mormonism, there appeared cracks and fissures that would be harbingers of what emerged later as substantial ruptures in the sacred cosmos. In Smith's earliest prophecies, the nation-state played no special role and was, in fact, rarely mentioned, except as the stage for ungodly violence and wickedness. The Book of Mormon offers a privileged place for the New World as a land of promise and freedom under God, but its prescriptions for the inhabitants of the Americas are more spiritual than explicitly political. Following their violent persecution in Missouri beginning in 1833, and prompted by new revelations to Smith, Mormons began to appeal to the government for redress. In so doing, they explicitly acknowledged the authority of the nation-state and differentiated God's sovereignty from the state's. An 1835 declaration on government, later canonized in LDS scripture, reified the division between "human laws," which regulate "our interests as individuals and nations," and "divine laws given of heaven," which are limited to "spiritual concerns, for faith and worship" (D&C 134:6). The distinction was clear: God ruled over spiritual matters and properly constituted governments ruled over earthly affairs. This is a textbook definition of differentiation—and, thus, of secularization—dating back to the church's earliest years and originating in the Mormons' engagement in the political sphere. Mormon children reify this position as they memorize one of the church's thirteen Articles of Faith, composed in 1842 by Joseph Smith: "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law."

Beyond this largely inevitable capitulation to the logic of the nation-state, a number of political developments charted the course for Mormon secularization. When Joseph Smith campaigned for the presidency of the United States in 1844, he did so under the moniker "General Smith" (referring to his commanding rank in the Nauvoo Legion, the Mormon militia organized under legal authority granted by the state legislature ostensibly to protect the citizens of Nauvoo). Touting his military credentials, though assiduously avoiding mention of his lack of actual military experience, Smith presented himself not as the Mormon prophet, or even as the mayor of a bustling frontier city, but rather as a military leader, a secular candidate in the tradition of a Washington or a Jackson. Downplaying his identity as the "Prophet Joseph" was a strategic and pragmatic move, which also marked an accommodation to the differentiated spheres of religion and politics.

Secularization is never a linear process: Brigham Young's kingdom in the West, especially in its early phase, constituted

a genuine resistance to differentiated spheres and attempted to instantiate a comprehensive Mormon cosmos on earth. But even Young could not prevent his kingdom from crumbling under the increasingly heavy weight of pluralism as introduced by Gentiles moving to Utah, coercion from the federal government, and liberalizing elements within Mormonism itself. Within a generation of Young's death, Mormonism had embraced the church-state, sacred-secular distinction characteristic of post-Westphalian political order and articulated most famously in an American setting by Thomas Jefferson. In the political sense, at least, modern Mormonism is more Jeffersonian than Smithian or Youngian, more secular than religious.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, and particularly throughout the twentieth century, a politically wrought Mormon secularization picked up speed. In the 1890s, in the wake of severe federal pressure, the LDS church gave up the hallmarks of Young's kingdom. This exceeded the oft-cited abandonment of polygamy and communitarian economics. After eschewing direct participation in the Mexican-American and Civil wars, Mormons enthusiastically sent their sons to die and kill for the nation in the Spanish-American War. In the arena of electoral politics, Mormons dissolved their own political party in 1891 and joined the national parties. Numerous anecdotes from the period tell of grassroots Mormons, accustomed to following their church leaders in political matters, waiting to be told which of the two parties to join, with bishops sometimes resorting to dividing congregations down the middle church aisle. Although most Mormon elites gravitated toward the Republican Party, the rank-and-file leaned heavily Democratic, voting for Franklin Roosevelt all four times—this despite vehement and vocal opposition to Roosevelt's politics from the church president at the time. Indeed, this grassroots revolt from ecclesiastical dictation in politics led the church leadership to adopt a studied silence from that time forward on endorsing particular candidates—a marked departure from the carefully choreographed politics of Brigham Young's Utah. Nowadays, the only party politics Mormons will hear from their leaders in the pulpit is an annual declaration of the church's nonpartisanship—including a refusal to endorse any particular political candidates, including Mormon ones—and a generic though sincere encouragement to vote and otherwise engage in the secular civic realm.

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, Mormons overwhelmingly repented of their Rooseveltian politics and embraced modern conservatism. To a large degree, their shift paralleled that of evangelical Christians and whites in the American South, Midwest, and West, and it might suggest a retreat from secularization and

a return of a religious-political unity. There were a number of good reasons that the political and cultural right began to look more attractive to Mormons in postwar America, especially after the cultural transformations of the 1960s. The standard bearer of a particular brand of far-right conservatism for much of this period was Ezra Taft Benson, simultaneously one of the LDS church's twelve apostles and Dwight Eisenhower's secretary of agriculture, who eventually became president of the church from 1985 until his death in 1994. Benson was a champion of free markets and small government and viewed the steady expansion of federal power under the New Deal, New Frontier, and Great Society as an existential threat to the Jeffersonian republican ideals that made America a free and prosperous society. He railed against godlessness and "creeping socialism," and he famously stumped for the far-right anticommunist John Birch Society in the 1960s.

Benson's conservative ideology, which is largely shared by many if not most contemporary Mormons (though not with the same vehemence), was rooted, in part, in the traditional libertarianism and hostility toward encroaching government control that were characteristic of many Western farmers. Even more, however, Benson believed that his fight against liberalism, socialism, and communism (which he believed were simply different stripes of the same ravenous animal) fundamentally entailed a battle over the moral agency and freedom of the individual, often called "free agency" in Mormon parlance. Current ideological battles were nothing more nor less than a continuation of the cosmic battle between Jesus Christ and Satan that took place in the "war in heaven" before the earth was formed, in which Satan sought to enslave humans and Christ guaranteed their freedom as moral agents. Benson almost always invoked the rhetoric of cosmic war in addressing the importance of the fight against communism and big government; it remains quite common for Mormons today to cite free agency and the war in heaven as the foundations of their political philosophy. (An oft-forgotten stain on this Mormon commitment to freedom was the LDS church's general capitulation to totalitarian Nazism, though Mormonism was too small in Germany to have any meaningful impact either way.) Though freedom means different things to different people, contemporary Mormons of all political bents have been ardent supporters of international religious freedom, a political position rooted not only in their memory of having been denied it in the nineteenth century but also in numerous LDS scriptural and prophetic statements—including an Article of Faith—that unequivocally endorse religious liberty.

Another cornerstone of modern Mormon conservatism is an ardent Constitutionalism and deep commitment to American

exceptionalism. Mormons are fond of stating a passage from a December 1833 revelation to Joseph Smith in which God endorses the American Constitution as a guarantor of “the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles; that every man may act . . . according to the moral agency which I have given unto him. . . . And for this purpose have I established the Constitution of this land, by the hands of wise men whom I raised up unto this very purpose” (D&C 101:77–80). With the bicentennials of American independence in 1976 and the Constitution in 1987, a distinctive brand of Mormon hyper-patriotism came into fashion, led in no small part by Ezra Taft Benson, who, in his capacity as the prophet and president of the church, delivered a series of addresses on the divine origins of the Constitution and the godly mission and Christian character of the Founders. American exceptionalism blended with old-fashioned millennialism when Benson uttered his conviction in *The Constitution: A Heavenly Banner* (1986): “When the Lord comes, the Stars and Stripes will be floating on the breeze over this people” (33). Though hardly unique to Mormonism, a particularly LDS-inflected commitment to American chosenness has been significant in shaping the political and ideological worldview of generations of modern Mormons—including Mitt Romney, whose 2010 book, *No Apology*, was originally subtitled *The Case for American Greatness*.

One cannot help but recognize the profound ironies in some of these expressions of conservative ideology and super-patriotism among contemporary Mormons. After all, America is not just the nation of the religion’s nativity but also the land where it was violently and legally persecuted; to some degree, Brigham Young reveled in the mass destruction of the Civil War, interpreting it as God’s punishment on the nation for the blood of the Saints. In the Book of Mormon, America is a land of promise but also a land of holocaust when the people turn from God. Furthermore, Mormonism is no longer just an American church—indeed, church membership rolls now list more Latter-day Saints outside the United States than inside. Hundreds of thousands of Mormon men and women have participated in missionary work in foreign countries and know firsthand of the globalizing aspects of the faith. But for the most part, American Mormons remember their ancestors’ nineteenth-century troubles as a conflict among individuals and local communities rather than as an existential conflict between their religion and their nation. And despite its global presence, the LDS church remains a deeply American church, with the vast majority of its upper echelons of leadership hailing from the United States. Furthermore, there is a clear emphasis on unity in the global church, precipitated by a headquarters-driven

program of "correlation" rather than robust inculturation in non-American settings.

On the surface, the relationship of Mormonism and politics over the past half century would seem to provide a counternarrative to secularization: American Mormons' fierce commitment to free agency is rooted in LDS theology and undergirds their conservatism and libertarianism; furthermore, America is portrayed as a chosen land and the Constitution as an inspired and sacred document. Sacralizing not only the nation but also the struggle against big government and for religious freedom makes politics a sacred duty. Mormon coalitions with conservative evangelicals and other religious groups as part of the politics of morality beginning in the 1970s only seem to reinforce this position. No doubt, many, if not most, Mormons viewed their political battles against abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, and same-sex marriage as genuine religious vocation (and even cosmic battle) as much as civic engagement.

But the rhetoric and even self-understanding of a religious motivation to enter the political sphere only masks what is, in fact, a functional differentiation and, thus, secularization. Since the 1960s, many Mormons have felt, along with other religious conservatives, that they are fighting the onslaught of advancing secularism; but procedurally, they are operating within a secularization framework in their political and cultural battles. As soon as early Mormons recognized the temporal sovereignty of the state and chose to seek political and economic goods through the mechanisms of democratic politics, the process of differentiation commenced. Exercising influence rather than dictating terms is precisely the logic of democratic politics, which is based on a premise of a pluralistic and contested public sphere in which second-order, and usually secular, arguments must be made in order to sway those who do not share one's particular religious commitments. This is a far cry from the theocratic (or theodemocratic) politics of Joseph Smith in Nauvoo or Brigham Young in early Utah.

Contrast the legalization of polygamy (technically, polygyny) in early territorial Utah to the ban on same-sex marriage in twenty-first-century California. In both cases, the Mormon response to non-traditional forms of marriage was shaped (if not dictated) by LDS church leadership, and, in both cases, the ecclesiastical structures of the church were mobilized to achieve their ends through the political process. However, in public discourse, nineteenth-century Mormons framed plural marriage in primarily religious terms, secondarily invoking secular arguments about demographics, women's and children's welfare, and prostitution. Indeed, the Mormons' defense

of polygamy before the Supreme Court in 1878 rested principally on religious freedom, not the common good. In the battle over same-sex marriage in California in 2008, by contrast, Mormon leadership used religious language when speaking internally but relied upon coalition politics, popular sovereignty, and social scientific studies in making their public arguments in favor of Proposition 8. This represented not only pragmatic necessity, given the demographic realities of California, but also an implicit recognition of the functional differentiation and specialization of religion within its own sphere even as religious actors remain engaged, for religious reasons, in the secular public sphere.

In the twenty-first century, Mormons—like other believers—continue to bring their religion to their politics, though they will typically only admit to doing so when it involves “moral issues.” There remains a tug within the soul of Mormonism for a sacred cosmos, and Mormons will occasionally vocalize a pining for a coming millennial kingdom of Christ when religion and politics will once again be united. On a day-to-day level, however, modern Mormons—and the official LDS church—have come to peace with a differentiated worldview in which, by and large, religion and politics each do their own separate work in their own separate spheres. Mormons remain a highly unified electoral bloc, having supported George W. Bush with 88 percent and 85 percent of their vote in 2000 and 2004, respectively, exceeding his support rate even among white evangelicals. Similarly, through a combination of shared ideology and a striking persistence of Mormon tribalism, Mitt Romney’s popularity among Mormons equals or exceeds Barack Obama’s among African Americans. But when the twenty-first-century LDS church dogmatically asserts its political neutrality, and repeatedly emphasizes that it offers no specific political guidance to its members as voters or politicians, and when Mormon politicians of all stripes disavow that their private religious beliefs dictate their public politics, then the process of secularization, at least in the differentiated and specialized realm of politics, is virtually complete.