THE CRISIS OF MORMON CHRISTOLOGY: HISTORY, PROGRESS, AND PROTESTANTISM, 1880-1930

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In the spring of 1882, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints faced a rising storm of prosecutions, disenfranchisement, and other legal actions by a federal government determined to stamp out the practice of polygamy. That year, John Taylor, the seventy-four-year-old president of the church, was a fugitive on the run from federal marshals. Nevertheless, he found time to compose a book of some 200 pages, which he entitled *The Mediation and Atonement of Jesus Christ*. The book's production under such circumstances, its reception among the Latter-day Saints, and its claims reveal the centrality of the person of Christ in mid-to-late-nineteenth century Mormon doctrine. The leading Mormon theologian of the period, B.H. Roberts, said of it that "[the] student of the great subject of the atonement, will find in President Taylor's work a most valuable collection of material." He also lauded Taylor for proving the historicity of the event.[1] Taylor's strong Christocentrism persisted through the end of the polygamy era in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and into the vigorous period of creative theological systematization that followed. In 1890, after decades of severe and growing pressure from the federal government and often violent popular anti-Mormon sentiment, Mormons gave up polygamy, a fundamental tenet of their beliefs. Wilford Woodruff, the fourth Mormon president, issued the "1890 Manifesto," which swore that Mormons were not teaching plural marriage or permitting them.[2] Federal lawmakers admitted Utah as a state a few years later, in 1896. A re-imagined vision of Christ was at the center of Mormon efforts to find a new place for their faith in the contentious world of turn-of-the

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[1] For the circumstances of the composition of *Mediation and Atonement*, and for a discussion of its style and argument, see B.H. Roberts, *The Life of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: Cannon & Sons, 1893), 367-9; quotations from 368. On Roberts's reputation, see Stan Larson, "Intellectuals in Mormonism: An Update," *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26 (Fall 1993): 187-9. The Edmunds Act, making polygamy a federal felony and authorizing disenfranchisement of Mormons, passed Congress in March of 1882. On this transition period in Mormonism in general, see Thomas Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1987), especially 3-16.

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[2] On the Manifesto in its context see B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

century American religion and society Ironically, perhaps, they drew on the language and imagery of American Protestantism—itself in the throes of adaptation—to do so

It should come as no surprise that Mormons centered their effort to adapt to the new religious and social era on the figure of Christ Richard Wightman Fox has noted that for all Christians, awareness of the divine is mediated through a Christ who is described in terms born of the culture that surrounds them [3] If Christ transforms believers, it also is the case that believers fashion their Christ after their own image and in response to the values and needs of their time As H Richard Niebuhr explained it, Christ is the focal point of all that moves between "the world to the Other, from the Other to the world   from time to the Eternal and from the Eternal to the temporal " For Niebuhr, Christ and culture thus were always in tension, locked in a mutually defining relationship that could take many forms, though the person of Christ himself was always the figure with whom Christians made the divine relevant to their times and situations Niebuhr outlines several approaches through which Christians have thought about and practiced this relationship, from setting Christ against their culture to celebrating him as its fulfillment [4]

This article explores how Mormon visions of Christ changed during a period in which their experience of culture was simultaneously destructive and creative   the tumultuous years around the turn of the twentieth century, which witnessed both the destruction of polygamy (and the utopian society that it represented) and a forcible reconciliation with the United States Following Niebuhr and Fox, it argues that the Christ of these Mormons can be seen as a microcosm of their transformation as a religious community, not only in theological developments but in a renewed understanding of themselves as individuals and a people Specifically, their self-identity, their conception of Christ, and their sense of place in American society evolved from sectarian towards denominational, and from counter-cultural towards identity with mainstream American and Christian identities

The Mormon Christ: Against Culture

The Christ of Taylor and his Mormon successors was first of all firmly rooted in the unambiguously divine Jesus of Mormon scripture, a Jesus who in the Book of Mormon is identified as the Son of God, the Creator of the earth, the God of Israel, a Jesus whose atonement is spoken of in objective, personal terms In this way, Mormonism from the beginning illustrated its strong devotion to the simple literality with which Joseph Smith imagined the supernatural [5] Smith wrote that the "fundamental principles" of his church

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[3] Richard Wightman Fox, *Jesus in America* (San Francisco HarperCollins, 2005), 29 Fox deals with Mormonism only in passing, though his general arguments about American Christianity are useful

[4] H Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York Harper and Row, 1951), 28-9

[5] In the Book of Mormon, Alma 11 39 identifies Christ as the "Eternal Father of heaven and earth," in 3 Nephi 11 14, Christ calls himself "the God of Israel " On the Book of Mormon's Christology,

were "Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven."[6] However, the Christ that Taylor marshaled reflected cultural and political concerns different from those of his successors. Taylor's Mormonism was isolationist and theocratic, disdainful of American society and fervently directed toward a literal reproduction of heaven on earth—achieved through the social order of polygamy. These Mormons, then, stood Christ against culture. As Niebuhr describes this attitude, "The line was sharply drawn between the new people and the old society, between obedience to the law of Christ and simple lawlessness; though some concession to the presence of divine government in and over cultural institutions is to be found."[7] This model has persisted in Christianity, in the early church, in the mendicants of the Middle Ages, and in other nineteenth century Christian utopians, such as Tolstoy.

Characteristically, the Christ described by Taylor was foreign to a democratic, individualist American culture. He was the Firstborn, clothed in the glory of divine royalty, heir to his father's heavenly kingdoms, and the key figure in a salvation narrative based on the promise of a hierarchy of polygamous kingdoms in the afterlife. Taylor's successors would write Mormon theology in the three or four decade period following the 1890 Manifesto that officially renounced polygamy. For them, Taylor's vision of a theocratic utopia would be shattered. They would strive for a new way of thinking about what Mormonism meant within an American context that had forced them to change. Abandoning the Old Testament-inspired narratives that polygamy had encouraged, they instead would be inspired by the optimistic theology of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Protestantism. Many turn-of-the-century Protestants had begun to embrace a Christ of culture, a Jesus manifested in human achievement, and in this new language Mormons would find a way to refashion and thus preserve their theological distinctiveness.[8]

The earliest Mormons did not think about Christ or atonement in ways much different from nineteenth century Protestants.[9] For a time Mormons embraced the

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see Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York Oxford, 2002), 198-201; and Melodie Moench Charles, "Book of Mormon Christology" in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, ed., Brent Metcalfe, (Salt Lake City Signature, 1993) Some, like Charles and Dan Vogel's "The Earliest Mormon Concept of God," in *Line upon Line Essays in Mormon Doctrine*, ed., Gary Bergera, (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1989), have argued that the Book of Mormon's Christology is more compatible with the modalist heresy, which identifies the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three manifestations of one God rather than either classical or Mormon trinitarianism. Givens, among others, disagrees with this position.

[6] Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 121.

[7] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture,* 45-83, 51.

[8] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture,* 83-116.

[9] See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 134-5 for a discussion of the lack of theological training among Mormon missionaries

dichotomous soteriology of heaven or hell common in their day. Joseph Smith and his counselor Sidney Rigdon themselves once answered the question "Will everybody be damned but Mormons?" with a resounding "Yes, and a great portion of them unless they repent and work righteousness." This was consistent with the image of the afterlife presented in the Book of Mormon, where vivid rhetoric of damnation and salvation presented a stark choice between a fiery hell and blissful paradise achieved through the sacrificial death of Jesus.[10]

Joseph Smith continued to refine his theology, however, and it quickly became apparent that in Mormon Christology atonement theory would be secondary to a new divine anthropology and a radically optimistic redefinition of what salvation was. By the time vigilantes in Nauvoo, Illinois, murdered Smith in 1844, Mormon theology taught that God was an embodied being, of the same cosmic race as humanity, exalted through obedience to and understanding of natural law; that Christ was the eldest and most gifted of God's spirit children; and that all human beings, as Christ's younger siblings, could aspire to such glory.[11] For many of Smith's critics (and their descendents) this anthropological redefinition of God and celestial redefinition of humanity violated the distinction between divine Creator and mortal creature that had defined Judaism and Christianity from the book of Genesis to the Gospel of John and the writings of church fathers like Augustine. It stunk of paganism.[12] Christians also had Christological concerns. The Christ of Smith's trinity was not the God who created the universe, but in

and leadership; also Philip Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible* (New York· Oxford, 1991), whose chapter 1, especially 33-6, discusses the sort of "assumed inerrancy" and naive assumptions about scripture and theology that early converts brought to Mormonism

[10] As cited in Thomas G. Alexander, "'A New and Everlasting Covenant': An Approach to the Theology of Joseph Smith," in *New Views of Mormon History*, ed., Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Salt Lake City. University of Utah Press, 1987), 54. For Book of Mormon rhetoric on heaven and hell, see particularly Alma, 36. Some have argued that this rhetoric reflects that of the revivalists of the Second Great Awakening. See, for example, Mark D. Thomas, "The Meaning of Revival Language in the Book of Mormon" *Sunstone* 39 (May-June 1983): 19-26; and Susan Curtis, "Early Nineteenth Century America and the Book of Mormon" in *The Word of God Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed., Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City· Signature, 1990), 81-92 The atonement theory of the Book of Mormon is similarly complicated; it frequently describes the atonement in terms of ransom theory (2 Nephi 2.27; 1 Nephi 9 10), for example, and contains verses consistent with a subjective, moral influence theory (Alma 7:11) The most extended Book of Mormon discussions of the atonement, however, describe it in legalistic terminology, meeting the inexorable demands of natural law See Alma 34 and 42

[11] For this aspect of Smith's theology, see his "King Follett Discourse" in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, eds., Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook (Provo, UT· Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University, 1980), 340-62.

[12] Terryl Givens, in *The Viper on the Hearth* (New York. Oxford, 1999), has made this argument most extensively.

some sense was among the created. It was axiomatic among orthodox Christians that only the God who transcended creation could redeem it. Mormons dismissed such concerns, using their own restorationist ideology and Protestantism's own rhetoric to lump Protestantism in with apostate Catholicism. They pointed to biblical passages such as Paul's claim that humans could become "joint heirs with Christ," and those in which Christ appears to pray to his Father, to defend their anthropology and theology of the trinity.[13]

Inspired by such biblical passages and by his own religious sense, Smith also began to use these raw materials to produce a new Christian story, one describing the soul's progressive journey from a pre-existent state toward godhood in the afterlife. For Mormons, this narrative quickly assimilated the familiar Christian story of the Fall and reconciliation. It left them with a vocabulary that shared much with other Christians but also was distinctive and expanded. Perhaps most ironically, given regular accusations of their lack of Christianity, it also stamped the Mormon belief system with a strong sense of literalism—about a personal God, about Christ's sonship, and about creation and atonement—that served as their lodestar in the rocky years of the early-twentieth century.

Thus, by the time John Taylor sat down to write *Mediation and Atonement*, the idea of a literal familial relationship between God and humanity was commonly accepted in Mormon thought. Though the term "Elder Brother" was occasionally used to describe Christ, for Taylor the primary connotation of the term was not that of a sentimental filial bond.[14] To describe Christ in this way was to describe his relationship to the Father rather than to humanity, and, not surprisingly, Taylor preferred the term "Firstborn." His reasons for this were related to the visions of heaven society common in nineteenth century Mormon theology, which increasingly revolved around polygamy. The salvation narrative of the polygamy period, as Thomas Alexander has noted, emphasized covenant relationships. Salvation was sought in this life through ordinances that established covenant and familial relationships patterned on the organization of the Old Testament's House of Israel. These relationships would be fulfilled in an afterlife of celestial kingdoms varying in size and glory. One's eternal progress depended upon the nature of one's earthly covenants. Many first generation Mormons of the nineteenth century, for example, were ritually sealed as adoptive children of prominent Church leaders rather than to their own non-Mormon parents, believing that this would ensure their inheritance

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[13] On Paul, see Romans 8:14-17; on Christ, John 17. For Mormon apologetics, see for example James Talmage, *The Great Apostasy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1903) and B.H. Roberts, *Outline of Ecclesiastical History* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1883), 241, in which Roberts states that the Reformers "left more truth in the Catholic church than they brought out with them." Talmage in *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1915), 608-9, argues that John 17 indicates that the Father and the Son are two distinct persons.

[14] Corbin Volluz, "Jesus Christ as Elder Brother," *Brigham Young University Studies* 45:2 (2006): 141-58.

in a noble kingdom in the afterlife [15] These heavenly distinctions were enshrined in Mormon scripture The 131st revelation in the collection of Joseph Smith's writings, known as the Doctrine and Covenants, states "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees, and in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage] And if he does not, he cannot obtain it " These promises not only define what one had to do to gain salvation, they also define what salvation is a form of heavenly sociality that could be imitated on earth The ordinances that Joseph Smith introduced to his followers (plural marriage, the "sealing" of earthly relationships to eternity, baptism for the dead) enacted both a description and a means of salvation, for all had to do with the formal organization of heavenly society [16]

Polygamy was the most important of these covenant relationships and was foundational to understanding all the rest As Apostle George Q Cannon argued, its goal was not merely a new familial structure, but a "new order of society " It was a way to separate true Christians from a corrupt American culture and erect a godly one in its place A vision revealed to Mormon Joseph Holbrook "endless suns and planets moving in their orbits, vast systems waiting only to be filled and governed This, a voice told him, was the reward to all eternity for those accepting the principle [of plural marriage] " Many historians have followed Cannon, arguing that polygamy created a sacred form of sociality intended to mirror on earth what was in heaven Some observers have argued, for instance, that polygamy served as a cultural bonding ritual, providing what B Carmon Hardy called "rituals of assurance" and Kathryn Daynes "ties of loyalty " Todd Compton refers to the dynastic nature of Joseph Smith's marriages, binding the leadership of the nascent church together into familial relationships Such theories emphasize the fundamentally communal nature of nineteenth century Mormon theology Lawrence Foster's thesis that polygamy was a rite of passage, guiding the Saints through a complicated transition away from the chaos of Jacksonian America to a new and more profound social order, gestures toward the multifaceted cosmological significance that the Saints placed upon what they called the Principle [17] As the great advocate of polygamy Orson Spencer argued, "the family order which God established with Abraham and the Patriarchs, was the order observed among celestial beings in the celestial

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[15] Gordon Irving, "The Law of Adoption One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900," *Brigham Young University Studies* 14 3 (Spring 1974) 291-5

[16] Alexander, "'A New and Everlasting Covenant,'" 1-2, brackets original

[17] George Q Cannon, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool R James, 1853-1886), 22 367, "Life of Joseph Holbrook" 1 40, Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah Cited in Hardy, *Solemn*, Covenant, 10, Hardy, *Solemn Covenant* 7, Kathryn M Daynes, *More Wives than One The Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System* (Urbana University of Illinois, 2001), 25-6 , Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City Signature, 1997), introduction, and Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality* (New York Oxford, 1981), 166-9

world…it is of perpetual duration." In short, plural marriage embodied the most powerful imagery of what salvation was, placing Mormons in covenantal relationships that they believed would allow them to find exaltation in the hereafter. It drove them to seek separation from the mundane social realities of America and replace them with a new society laid down along lines God directed.[18]

In the 76th and 132nd sections of the collection of revelations known as the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph Smith spoke of multiple kingdoms in heaven, varying in glory and closeness to God, of which all humanity would inherit some degree.[19] Mormons of the nineteenth century approached this theology with an almost feudal bent. They pictured an afterlife of hierarchy and rank, of kingdoms of greater and lesser size, all contingent upon the valor with which one pursued the ordinances of sociality on earth. Historian B. Carmon Hardy describes the heavenly realm depicted in section 132 "as a field for dominion by patriarchal families." To those who honored their covenants, verse 19 promised "thrones, kingdoms, principalities and powers, dominions, all heights and depths." Helen Mar Kimball, married to Joseph Smith as a plural wife in 1843 and later a prominent polygamy advocate, vividly illustrated what these words meant, describing the vision laid out by God for her mother Vilate when the concept of plurality was presented to her: "Before her was illustrated the order of celestial marriage, in all its beauty and glory, together with the great exaltation and honor it would confer upon her in that immortal and celestial sphere, if she would accept it and stand in her place by her husband's side. She also saw…the increase of her husband's kingdoms, with the power and glory extending throughout the eternities, worlds without end." This was the glory of heaven; it was what God and Christ ruled over and Mormons expected to participate in.[20]

It follows, then, that nineteenth century Mormons sought to interpret Christ's life and work in the context of the anthropology, covenants, and ordinances that they believed both described and won exaltation. Stephen Prothero has argued that in this period "Mormons focused on the living Christ more than the historical Jesus." It is probably incorrect to minimize Mormon use of sacred history to understand themselves, but it is certainly true that for the Mormons of this time, Jesus was the Christ exalted in heaven,

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[18] Orson Spencer, *Letters* 6th ed. (Liverpool: Budge, 1879), 192; for a great deal more on this theme, see also his *Patriarchal Order* (Liverpool: Richards, 1853).

[19] "The Vision," as it is called, frequently considered the greatest of Smith's revelations, is now canonized as section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Verses 39-44 discuss (near) universal salvation; the rest describes the three kingdoms of glory through which all humanity would eventually be distributed. This, of course, is a version of universalism, which had powerful advocates in the early-nineteenth century among Joseph Smith's contemporaries, most prominently Hosea Ballou. See Dan Vogel, "Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon," in Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon,* 21-52. The 132nd section of the Doctrine and Covenants describes the salvific function of plural marriage.

[20] Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 10; and Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1884), 58-9.

not the broken body on the cross [21] He was a model as much as a savior As Taylor wrote, "if he was the first born and obedient to the laws of His Father   was it not His particular right and privilege as the firstborn, the legitimate heir of God, the Eternal Father, to step forth?"[22] Indeed, in this language we can see Taylor endowing Christ with the majesty of the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and many Mormons used Christ's image to sanctify their faith's borrowings from the Old Testament

For instance, the new scripture produced by Joseph Smith recapitulates the creation story of Genesis several times over, these new narratives root Adam and Eve firmly in Christianity, baptizing and teaching them of the coming atonement Adam is even instructed to sacrifice in acknowledgment of Christ's impending death [23] John Taylor, building upon this sacred history, described the temple worship of both biblical and Book of Mormon peoples hundreds of years before the birth of Christ in the same way "Nephi and his successors were particularly careful in explaining that these ordinances, like all other rights of the Church of God, had their value in their association with or being directly typical of the great, infinite sacrifice of atonement to be offered up by the Lamb of God in His own person " Further, Taylor defined the covenant blessings Abraham gained from God as "the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal "[24]

Similarly, many nineteenth century church leaders argued that Christ himself was a polygamist, both following the patriarchs and foreshadowing Mormons' own beliefs Orson Hyde, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles under Brigham Young, used a particularly interesting rhetorical technique to elevate polygamy in the same language that Mormons used to justify baptism, arguing that Christ exemplified perfectly all of his Father's commandments toward salvation—thus equating the Old Testament practice with New Testament sacrament The apostle Orson Pratt maintained that Christ, being the most exalted of his Father's children, must of necessity possess the greatest and most populous kingdom in heaven—an achievement requiring plural wives [25] This narrative collapsed together Jesus and Jehovah, and the kingdoms of the Old Testament

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[21] Prothero also argues that this period featured "Jesus Lost" into "temple Mormonism," that is, that Mormons began to associate salvation less with a personal relationship with Christ and more with the rituals of temple worship This is true in some respects (Brigham Young, for instance, insisted that all Mormons undergo the ritual in the Nauvoo temple before the Mormons fled the city), however, it is also worth noting that the temple rituals contain multiple references to Christ, and that he remained an important model for the promises of salvation *American Jesus How the Son of God Became an American Icon* (New York Farrer, Strauss, Giroux, 2003), 178-84, 188

[22] Alexander, "'A New and Everlasting Covenant'", Taylor, *Mediation* 2, 112, 136

[23] See particularly Moses 6, in the Pearl of Great Price, in which Adam is taught in the rudiments of Christian theology

[24] Taylor, *Mediation*, 112

[25] Orson Hyde, *Journal of Discourses* 4 257, Orson Pratt, "Celestial Marriage," *The Seer*, 159

with the gospel of the New. Into it, a majestic ruling Christ—who was, as Brigham Young claimed, "the lawful heir pertaining to this earth"—fit perfectly.[26]

And yet, despite vigorous subscription to deification theology, Taylor stressed the transcendence of Christ's Godhood. Heavenly blessings came to humanity only "through a power which is superior to man." It was a result of participation in the correct covenant, but not of effort. Taylor repeatedly affirmed the distance between Christ and man, arguing that "He is the Elect, the Chosen....He may doeth what he seeth the Father do, while we only do that which we are permitted and empowered to do by Him...all power is given to Him in heaven and upon earth, which no earthly being could say. In the nearness of His relationship to the Father, He seems to occupy a position that no other person occupies." In conformity to the Mormon self-conception as the House of Israel, Taylor emphasized the atonement in Old Testament context, speaking of Christ as a "propitiation" and "expiation" for the sins of humanity, language borrowed from the sacrifices of the book of Leviticus. It also was reminiscent of the depravity of humanity central to Reformed Christianity's penal substitution model of the atonement.[27]

This Old Testament conception of the suffering of Christ was mirrored in the ways the Mormons understood their own suffering. As prominent polygamy advocate Helen Mar Whitney argued, fatalistically, "the Lord has said he will have a tried people...wronged, hated, and oppressed for righteousness's sake."[28] She compared the Mormons to the House of Israel under the judges and the kings, who were allowed by God to suffer in order to remind them of their covenant status, obligations, and loyalties. Characteristic of Niebuhr's "against culture" category, these Mormons denounced the "lawlessness" of their persecutors in the American government and instead touted the divine sanction they believed graced their own theocratic social order.[29] Zachary Largey has also found these ideas in the rhetoric of early Mormon leaders; his research reveals that the sermons of men like Joseph Smith and his counselor Sidney Rigdon emphasized the ways in which persecution bound the Mormons together into a communal identity, afflicted for the sake of their righteousness and protected by the ruling hand of Christ as the God of Israel. These Mormons understood suffering and persecution as signs of righteousness to be endured for the sake of their relationship with God and the hope of

[26] Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:144; Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, 21:369.

[27] Taylor, *Mediation*, 141, 136, 2, 112. On Mormon self-imagining as the House of Israel, see Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1985), 109-31.

[28] Whitney, "Why We Practice Plural Marriage," 8.

[29] See, for example, John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses*, 23:265, 24:111, 24:126-7. He describes the efforts of the American government as "illegal," waged by "force of power" alone in 24:43.

reward hereafter, an understanding structured on the Old Testament's depiction of the Children of Israel.[30]

Thus did Taylor and his contemporaries shape the raw material of Mormon cosmology—personal and communal identification as a new chosen people, some sort of familial relationship with deity, an afterlife of progress, the divine Christology of the Book of Mormon—into a Christ they could present both to their persecutors and their followers, a Christ designed to meet and justify the needs of the Mormonism of his time. They mirrored other advocates of "Christ against culture" in their separatism and in the theocratic, polygamist Christ they erected, one foreign to the Americans of their day.

Taylor's successors faced a new problem, however. They had lost polygamy's narrative of intensely communal salvation, and though they had chosen to participate more fully in American society, obstacles from the past lingered. In 1902, for example, Utah voters elected Reed Smoot, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (the second highest council of the LDS Church) to Congress as a Republican. But his effort to take his Senate seat in 1903 caused a national controversy and led to a four-year battle over whether a Mormon could serve loyally in the American government.[31] The confusion and uncertainty that the changes of the period fostered among Mormons proved to be a ground of creativity rather than despair, however. Mormon thinkers thought through the raw materials of Mormon theology again, now with an eye toward systemization and with fruitful new access to a burgeoning library of nineteenth century ideas about rationalism, science, and above all, optimism about progress.[32] And they again reinvented Christ in their own image, refocusing their faith around the brotherly, human Jesus of the New Testament, and away from the patriarchal monarch of the Old. In Niebuhr's terms, they "began to understand the transcendent realm as continuous in time or character with the present life" in which they found themselves.[33] For good or ill, Mormons had been forced to acclimate themselves to American culture. Their new task was to find the God they worshiped within it.

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[30] Zachary Largey, "The Rhetoric of Persecution: Mormon crisis rhetoric 1838-1871" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2006). See also Klaus Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[31] On Smoot, see Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[32] For a survey of the work of this generation, see Thomas Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine," *Sunstone* 10:5 (May 1985): 8-19. Alexander argues that thinkers like B.H. Roberts, John Widstoe, and James Talmage pursued two primary goals to reconceptualize the Trinity and the nature of man The first primarily involved asserting the personhood of the Holy Spirit; the second (and less institutionally successful) sought to assert the eternal nature of man Alexander also notes the reliance of these thinkers on contemporary philosophers, particularly Herbert Spencer.

[33] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 84.

The Mormon Christ: After Polygamy

The first step was to redefine the communal relationship of the church to its God. Just as Mormons of the polygamy era identified with the House of Israel of the Old Testament, so did the thinkers of the turn of the century revive and re-emphasize Joseph Smith's claim to have restored the church founded by Christ. Increasingly, Mormon historians and theologians began to emphasize what Paul Edwards has called the "episodal" or "intensity" theory of Mormon history, which defines the flow of history in terms of "event, not mere chronology," and posits that some periods of time are empirically more worthwhile or important than others.[34] Thinking of the past in this way brought the times in which Mormons found themselves into close proximity with the era of the New Testament. They emphasized the spiritual similarities between their own age and that era and downplayed what came between. This new temporal sensibility also allowed them to gracefully discard the millennialist and separatist utopianism of earlier decades.

The apostle James Talmage, for instance, collapsed into one chapter the history of Christianity between the fall of the primitive Church (dated, Talmage assumed, to the deaths of the original twelve apostles) and the career of Joseph Smith eighteen hundred years later (in a forty-two chapter biography of Jesus). After noting Christ's command to preach in his name, Talmage argued that "down to the third decade of the nineteenth century there was no church on earth affirming name or title as the Church of Jesus Christ." Christ's appearance to Joseph Smith in 1820, however, bridged the gap in a immediate and visceral way. The time in between was characterized by "silence between the heavens and the earth."[35] It was less real and less sacred than the deeper spiritual unity that linked together the New Testament and Smith's ministry. As the scholar and ecclesiastical leader B.H. Roberts argued, the "meridian of time," that period of Christ's ministry, was "made glorious by the personal ministry of Jesus." So also, Roberts taught, was the current dispensation made sacred by Christ's appearance to Joseph Smith.

Indeed, articles began appearing in church periodicals drawing explicit comparisons between the ministries of Joseph Smith and Jesus Christ, claiming what the writer Richard Young called "striking parallelism between the times, lives and missions of Jesus Christ and Joseph Smith."[36] Another writer announced that "[men] may scoff at Joseph Smith and at his mission, just as they scoffed at the Savior and his mission. They may ridicule and condemn the works of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as they did ridicule and

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[34] Edwards, "Time in Mormon History," 394.

[35] James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 752, 771.

[36] B.H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1930), xxv. The sociologists Gordon and Gary Shepard, studying the discourses given at the biannual General Conference of the Church note that themes of Mormons as "a covenant or chosen people" fall sharply after the polygamy period ended in 1890. *A Kingdom Transformed* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1984), 237

make light of and condemn the mission of the Christ " These writers compared the struggles of Joseph Smith with the struggles of Christ himself Talmage, for one, explicitly drew parallels of context, noting that the "Pharisees were the Puritans of their day," shaking his head over the "many sects and parties established" within Judaism by Christ's time [37] These words echoed chapters later when Talmage quoted Joseph Smith lamenting the "different religious parties" of burned-over New York back in the 1820s and 1830s Their church, Mormons now began to insist, restored the institution of the New Testament rather than the patriarchal order of the House of Israel [38]

This re-emphasis on the Christ of the Gospels opened the door to a Mormon engagement with contemporary theology As they struggled to sanctify the seemingly mundane age they found themselves in, they encountered the optimistic theology of American Protestantism at the time It was, if anything, more Christocentric than Mormonism itself, oriented toward an imminent Christ and an idealized image of the early Christian community Its language and message thus easily appealed to Mormons The exalted potential of a fully developed humanity had been on the ascendancy within American Protestantism throughout the nineteenth century, ever since the Unitarian William Ellery Channing proclaimed man's "Likeness to God" in 1828 In 1861, the liberal evangelical Horace Bushnell published a book exploring the possibilities of human development titled *Christian Nurture* And by 1897, the New York preacher Lyman Abbott could write that "[the] consummation of evolution, the consummation of redemption will not be until the whole human race becomes what Christ was What Jesus was, man is becoming " Evangelical Protestants continued to embrace visions of American progress and the coming Kingdom of God Such optimistic strains implied basic evolutionary ideas, a grand vision of human destiny, and a transformative sense of religion's potential [39]

As the century went on, however, Protestants faced challenges to their hopes They confronted scholarship which seemed to undermine the Bible, and they experienced a growing anxiety about the social dislocation, poverty, and unrest born of industrialization Some continued to emphasize the integrity of the Bible and familiar orthodox theory, but in ever more strident terms For others, the Christianity of the Reformation and its notions of a substitutionary atonement and a sovereign God

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[37] Richard Young, "Jesus and Joseph," *Improvement Era* 3 10 (August 1900) 721, "The Mission of Jesus Christ and His Prophet Joseph Smith," *Improvement Era* 13 12 (October 1910)

[38] Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 66-7, 704

[39] William Ellery Channing, "Likeness to God," in *William Ellery Channing Selected Writings*, ed David Robinson (1828, repr , New York Paulist Press, 1985), Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York Scribner, 1861), Lyman Abbott, *Theology of an Evolutionist* (New York Houghton, Mifflin, 1897), 75 Prothero correctly maintains that Mormon Christology after polygamy came to resemble that of other American Protestants in some ways, however, he fails to identify the ways in which Mormons also used such strategies to preserve their theological idiosyncrasies (*American Jesus*, 184-9)

increasingly seemed inadequate. Preachers like Henry Ward Beecher drew on Bushnell to cope, arguing that religious truths in Scripture and the creeds were better understood as poetic rather than historical, and better expressed through lived charity than abstract doctrine.[40] Liberal Protestants turned also to German thinkers, such as Albrecht Ritschl and his student Adolf von Harnack, who a generation before Abbott had begun unifying religion with new biblical scholarship, arguing that Christianity was best understood as the social system of justice and love taught by Christ, implemented by his Church, and uncovered through historical research.[41] They thus redefined salvation as the attainment of an idealized community of the Kingdom of God on earth, with Christ as its founder.[42]

This liberal strain within American Protestantism was exemplified perhaps no better than in Shailer Mathews's 1897 *The Social Teachings of Jesus*, which presented Christ in Ritschlian fashion as a benevolent teacher, the ultimate example of goodness, and the inspiration for a attainable and just kingdom of God on earth. For Mathews, "the cardinal doctrines of the incarnation, faith, atonement, justification, and immortality, cease to be abstract, and appear rather the formulation of…possibilities." That is, they were no longer unexplainable supernatural occurrences, but representations of what Mathews called "the Godward social capacities of mankind." To attain "salvation with Jesus…did not consist in living a detached life," but rather was "essentially social."[43] Christ himself was remolded as well. From the divine incarnation of the Word in orthodox theology, he became Mathews's minister to the unjust, a crusading social prophet in Albert Schweitzer's controversial biography, and an angelic child or kind sibling in the

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[40] See Bushnell's "Dissertation on Language," an introduction to his somewhat affective interpretation of the Trinity, *God in Christ* (1849; repr., New York: Scribners, 1876); Henry Ward Beecher claimed that "He who truly loves God and man is Christian, no matter in what church he is found." *Sermons* (New York: Ford, 1874), 249-50. Gary Dorrien argues that American liberalism's emphasis on humanitarianism grew in part out of the pastoral impulses of the pulpit; see Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology Idealism, Realism, and Modernity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 401-2.

[41] Ritschl defined Christianity as "the monotheistic, completely spiritual, and ethical religion, which based on the life of its Author as Redeemer and founder of the Kingdom of God, consists in the freedom of the children of God." Ritschl, *Three Essays*, trans. Philip Hefner (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 11-3 See also Gary Dorrien, *The Word as True Myth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 48-58.

[42] William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1976), 2, argues that Protestant modernism, the engine which drove the larger liberal school of the turn of the century, was characterized by a sense of progress, of God's immanence, and of willingness to adapt to social change. Pages 122-32 discuss the ways American liberals adapted German thought to their native optimism.

[43] Shailer Mathews, *The Social Teachings of Jesus* (New York: MacMillan, 1896), 31, 34. Dorrien, *Word*, 62-3.

sentimental novels of Lew Wallace and Elizabeth Phelps.[44] Thus did some Protestants refashion the nature of Christ and of salvation in tandem. Some also went beyond individualist Protestant notions of the transformative power of Christ to extend his reach from the broken soul to the turbulent and uneasy society of the turn of the twentieth century. Hard and fast distinctions between personal and social salvation did also not exist for some evangelicals. They believed that Christianity was at its core about social harmony. Alike, as historian Gary Dorrien notes, they were comfortable with the notion that the historical Jesus, the merely human Jewish prophet of the liberal scholars who taught charity and morality, was at the same time the Christ and eternal Son of God who was worth following to gain salvation.[45]

Viewing the message of salvation as a matter of personal moral development was appealing to Mormon thinkers who had been forced to re-imagine what eternal progression meant in the absence of polygamy. Now, much like Ritschl and Mathews had done, they came to define it in ways achievable within the world. For a generation of Mormons who had grown up in a world of formalized education, the appropriation of scientific terminology in the work of men like Mathews was even more attractive, given the Mormon theological heritage of expansive notions of truth and rejection of a mysterious God. However, a significant fault line remained: Armed with new scripture, doctrines of continuing revelation, and a supernatural founding narrative, Mormon thinkers drew a line at the rejection of the miraculous that liberal Protestants embraced. Liberal thinkers like Beecher believed they were fighting to preserve faith; for many, to paraphrase a later liberal, Harry Emerson Fosdick, the demands of science had left them with a choice between faith in religion as metaphor or no faith at all.[46] They argued that scripture was to be understood as myth, miracles as symbols, and Christ as savior in a subjective rather than an objective sense. Mormon thinkers, by contrast, were struggling to preserve what they could of a worldview still based on religious literalism. To insert the abstract, nearly pantheist liberal God into the Mormon plan of salvation would be to wreck their worldview; to deny a real Adam and a real Eve was to deny Mormon doctrine of creation and redemption; and to make Christ merely a teacher was to reject the clarity of Mormon canon.[47] Thus, B.H. Roberts, upon hearing Beecher's biblical mantra: "It

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[44] Albert Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1901; repr., Philadelphia· Fortress, 2001); Paul Carter discusses Wallace's "The Boyhood of Jesus" and Phelps's *Come Forth* in Paul Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* (DeKalb. University of Northern Illinois, 1971), 68-77

[45] Gary Dorrien, *Word as True Myth*, 60-1. For sentimental evangelicalism, see, for example, Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York· Knopf, 1977) and Richard Wightman Fox, *Trials of Intimacy Love and Loss in the Beecher Tilton Scandal* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003).

[46] Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Religion*, 359.

[47] On the need for an objective rather than subjective atonement in Mormon thought, see Lorin Hansen, "The Moral Atonement as Mormon Interpretation," *Dialogue A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27 1 (Spring 1994)· 201-2

cannot be history—it may be poetry," snorted "Such also were the views of the late Henry Ward Beecher, and in fact all of his school, which I am sorry to say is rapidly increasing in number "[48]

Their apprehensiveness of Protestant liberalism did not stop Mormons from drawing selectively on similar language and motifs Like Protestant liberals, they increasingly baptized evolutionary thought, drawing on the language and ideas of thinkers like Herbert Spencer and John Fiske, who exalted concepts like survival of the fittest and invested Charles Darwin's theory with an optimistic teleology However, they also reconciled secular ideas to the supernatural to a degree that would have made liberals uncomfortable For example, though the scientist and apostle John Widstoe cited Spencer's arguments about energy and progress enthusiastically, he used them to demonstrate that Joseph Smith's concept of God was rational B H Roberts treated Fiske and Lyman Abbott in a similar fashion, arguing that their ideas—as well as those of other Protestant thinkers—ultimately supported Joseph Smith's arguments about creation They also began to use the language of personal development and progress to describe the goals of their religious faith—the literal deification and resurrection of humanity—in a way that went beyond Niebuhr's description of "culture-Protestantism "[49] In doing so, they paralleled moderate and conservative Protestants, including many evangelicals, many of whom continued to share a general optimism and a social vision with more liberal Protestants

One way for Mormons to adapt liberal notions of human progress was to replace the social salvation of polygamy with an individualistic soteriology As the apostle Matthias Cowley wrote in the *Improvement Era*, "one of the saddest sights in the world is that of a soul which has been starved by indolence, an undeveloped, stunted man, who has never sufficiently exerted himself to unfold his godlike power, to cultivate his finer sentiments and faculties "[50] B H Roberts led the way in this new school of thought One of his favorite analogies was biological, describing a child, who, as he grows, "gradually obtains control over his limbs, and makes them obey his will, either to stand erect, walk or run " Similarly, Roberts said, "[Those] born in the Kingdom of God should grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth "[51] These sorts of organic metaphors for spiritual development were common among Protestants For Mormons, they were perhaps even more appropriate, because, as Roberts noted, just as humans developed command over

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[48] Roberts's dismissal of Beecher is in *The Gospel*, 3rd ed (Salt Lake City Deseret News, 1901), 271

[49] John Widstoe, *Joseph Smith as Scientist* (Salt Lake City Young Men's Improvement Association, 1908), 16, 104-7, B H Roberts, *The Truth the Way the Life*, ed Stan Larson (Salt Lake City, Signature, 1994), 9-13, see also Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* 108-11, for a critical discussion of the ways in which the Christ of culture lacks the supernatural foundations many deem essential to Christianity

[50] Matthias Cowley, "The Punishments of Indolence," *Improvement Era* 5 2 (December 1901) 104

[51] Roberts, *The Gospel*, 43, 206

their bodies, so too were they literally developing those divine traits which they had inherited from their true Father in heaven Indeed, the language of progress and development increasingly penetrated the entirety of what the Book of Mormon called the plan of salvation—the divinely conceived history of all creation, extending in both directions before and after earthly existence In his hugely popular novel *Added Upon* (1899), author Nephi Anderson had a heavenly messenger instruct pre-existent spirits that "ye have arrived at a point in this stage of your development where a change must needs take place   Your experiences have been wholly within the compass of spiritual life, and there is a whole world of matter, about which ye know nothing " The apostle John Widstoe echoed this sentiment when he noted that in their "primeval condition" humans began "to sense joy, began to study," and came to earth to continue doing so Thus, perhaps unintentionally, Mormons developed a popular theology of the pre-existence, investing what had been a somewhat abstract and nebulous concept for them in the past with values much like those with which they understood earthly life In this fashion, Anderson's novel described not only houses and gardens, but spirits cultivating various talents like singing and painting, studying to learn truth, and enjoying a literal familial relationship with heavenly parents and with Christ, whom Anderson called the Elder Brother [52]

Given these sorts of assumptions about the seemingly mundane relationship between the human and the divine, the Mormons in a way resolved theologian Martin Kahler's protest that the Jesus of history reconstructed by scholars could never hope to be the Christ of faith [53] Like liberal Protestant scholars, they asserted that their Christ was based on the rejection of false tradition in favor of proven fact, however, they unhesitatingly accepted the miracle narratives of scripture as fact The Mormon apostle James Talmage wrote matter-of-factly about the story of the virgin birth "It is the part of prudence and wisdom to segregate and keep distinctly separate the authenticated statements of fact, in so momentous a matter, from the fanciful commentaries of historians, theologians, and writers of fiction, as also from the emotional rhapsodies of poets and artistic extravaganzas wrought by chisel or brush " He went on to accept without question the gospel narrative of Luke and relied heavily on conservative scholars like Frederic Farrar and Alfred Edersheim [54]

The Mormons followed notions of Baconian reason similar to those of evangelical Protestants in their day They built logical arguments from the evidence they found, and

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[52] On the nebulous nature of the pre-existence, see Blake Ostler, "The Idea of Preexistence in Mormon Thought," *Line upon Line*, 127-45 Nephi Anderson, *Added Upon* (Salt Lake City Deseret News, 1898), 1-28, 14, and John Widstoe, *A Rational Theology* (Salt Lake City LDS Church, 1915), 29

[53] Martin Kahler laid out his argument in his *The So Called Jesus of History and the Biblical Christ,* trans Carl Braaten (1896, repr , Philadelphia Fortress, 1964)

[54] Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* 92 Talmage cites Edersheim and Farrer throughout *Jesus the Christ,* for example 89, 104, 171, 196, 303

merely accepted different forms of authority than their counterparts.[55] Roberts, for example, believed that while higher criticism was useful and necessary to correctly interpret the intentions of scriptural scribes, it was revelation that ultimately made God known to humanity. Therefore, though Scripture should be studied and understood in its context, the historicity of its narratives was not to be questioned, because it had been divinely authenticated. Roberts read higher critics like Charles Briggs and David Strauss, but also conservatives such as Charles Elliot, Farrar, and Edersheim. Mormons accepted the pronouncements of scripture—both the Bible and that produced by Joseph Smith—uncritically, but they also exalted reason alongside it and used the latter to extrapolate from and speculate upon the text of the former. This was quite similar to the exegetical methodology of the burgeoning fundamentalist movement, which read scripture like a complicated puzzle; its sacred veracity was unquestioned, but every piece was scrutinized, dissected, proof-texted, and used to construct a vast sacred history of humanity, from Eden to the end times.[56]

The Mormons thus combined the methodology of conservative evangelical Protestants with the concerns of the scholars of the liberal school. They did not share in fundamentalist eschatological preoccupations; rather, their optimism led them to seek in scripture proof of the divine potential of mankind. Like the liberals, Mormons used their exegesis to uncover a Jesus who lived as much as died, who learned and taught and exhibited admirable human qualities worthy of emulation. The turn of the twentieth century saw a resurgence of interest in the life of Christ among not only liberals, but Latter-day Saint thinkers as well, for precisely the same reason. Prominent Mormon intellectuals like Talmage and the writer Osborne Widstoe (brother to the apostle John Widstoe) produced biographies; B.H. Roberts began to consider anew the importance of the doctrine of incarnation; and in 1900, the writer William Morton even produced a book called *A Child's Life of Our Savior* for use in children's Sunday Schools.[57] And yet, the Jesus whose life these authors were interested in was not merely an apocalyptically minded Nazarene peasant; he was, in truth and fact, the Son of God, firmly rooted in history, the image both of his Father and, potentially, of humanity. Both Protestant

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[55] On this, for evangelicals, see Mark Noll, *America's God* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 93-114, and for Mormons, Truman G. Madsen, "B.H. Roberts. The Book of Mormon and the Atonement" in *The Book of Mormon First Nephi The Doctrinal Foundation* (Provo: Brigham Young University Religious Studies, 1988) 307-9.

[56] Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 114-7, discusses Roberts's response to higher criticism and reading habits, crediting him with "liberalized literalism." George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford, 2006), 42-62.

[57] James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 81; Osborne Widstoe, *What Jesus Taught* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1917) Roberts begins pondering the incarnation as early as *Mormon Doctrine of Deity*, 91-119; his ideas were published earlier in the *Improvement Era* 5:10 (August 1901): 786-97. William Morton, *A Child's Life of Our Savior* (Salt Lake City: Cannon & Sons, 1900).

liberals and Mormons saw Jesus as the perfect example of the good life The difference was that the liberals based the claim primarily on Christ's positions on social justice and charitable living, while the Mormons saw in his life the way to attain divinity, and like conservative Protestants continued to embrace miraculous and literal Scriptural authority As John Henry Evans wrote, "When we speak of an ideal we mean something that embodies all that we are striving to attain for ourselves Jesus is such an ideal "[58]

The works of both Morton and Widstoe embraced the somewhat unique chronology Talmage describes in the preface to his biography of Jesus "[In] addition to the narrative of the Lord's life in the flesh, [the biography] comprises the antemortal existence and activities of the world's Redeemer, the revelations and appearances of the glorified and exalted Son of God during the apostolic period of old and in modern times, the assured nearness of the Lord's second advent, and predicted events beyond—all so far as the Holy Scriptures make plain "[59] All three works presented Christ's full existence as something of an object lesson, depicting the plan of salvation in its entirety as Mormons themselves could expect to experience it Along these lines, Mormons developed a series of proof texts inviting prospective converts to identify with Christ in order to teach the concept of eternal progression A conversion story in Anderson's novel is based upon the appeal of pre-existence and eternal progression, and the scriptures that the missionary Signe uses (John 28 16 and 17 5, Job 38, and others) are echoed elsewhere in the Mormon popular literature They refer to Christ's pre- and post-mortal existence, and show him inviting his apostles to consider themselves as his joint heirs Signe's prospect Rupert readily concedes, that "Christ certainly existed as an intelligent being before He came to this earth," and from this reasoning comes to the conclusion that "man is, in fact, a child of God "[60]

So these thinkers did not merely hope to imitate the sincerity, kindness, or honesty of Jesus They wanted Mormons to strive to achieve Christ's divine traits Roberts directed his male listeners to empathize with Christ's weariness after performing miracles, for they too, after administering blessings, "have felt spiritual strength and life go out from you leaving you weak and almost helpless, but giving healthful life to the afflicted " Thus, he said, "our lives can touch the life of God "[61] Evans, after praising Christ's reasonableness, went on to celebrate the example of Christ's awareness of his own divine Sonship, noting that all Mormons should realize they are joint heirs with him This might have seemed audacious to Taylor, but Evans was not alone James Talmage explicitly closed the gap that Taylor had erected between the Firstborn and his siblings,

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[58] John Henry Evans, "The New Testament in Literature and History," *Improvement Era* 15 12 (October 1912)

[59] Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* iii Widstoe makes a similar clarification in *What Jesus Taught*, 14

[60] Nephi Anderson, *Added Upon*, 90, 96 See also citations of these verses in Roberts, *The Gospel*, 287-8, and John Nicholson, "The Origin and Nature of Man A Dialogue," *Improvement Era* 2 10 (August 1899) 768-70

[61] Roberts, *Doctrine of Deity*, 202, Evans, "The New Testament in Literature and History "

lauding in his *Jesus the Christ* "the humble offer of Jesus the Firstborn–to assume mortality and live among men as their Exemplar and Teacher, observing the sanctity of man's agency but teaching them to use aright that divine heritage."[62]

This idea of heritage, of divinity inherited through parenthood, prompted Roberts to call Christ "the revelation of God," but to mean by the term not merely the classical interpretation that Christ was the ideal way for God to communicate with humanity. Rather, Christ also revealed the necessary divinity of mortal life by partaking in it himself. As author Osborne Widstoe wrote, "to gain the gift of eternal life, men must learn to know God. Here, then, we discover the nature of Jesus's mission," to not only show people what God was, but to reveal that his nature was their own.

Like liberal Protestants who in fiction sentimentalized Christ's childhood or rustic life in Palestine, Mormons emphasized that Christ lived as a mortal. Widstoe, again: "You may be used to thinking of Jesus as a very wonderful boy, altogether different from other boys. This is not quite true. Jesus was a perfectly natural and normal boy."[63] For Talmage: "as to earthly birth Christ was born a child and lived to maturity as a man among men." As a human being, "He prayed to pray us to the same Father, we as brethren and Christ as our Elder Brother."[64] Again, scientific rhetoric of inheritance and heredity was summoned. Christ was not an ontologically different being; rather, he was as we are, for we are the literal children of God as much as he. The issue of this relationship was important enough that the First Presidency issued a proclamation in 1916, clarifying the relationship not only between the Father and the Son, but also between them and humanity. According to the First Presidency, "Jesus Christ is not the Father of the spirits who have taken or yet shall take bodies upon this earth, for He is one of them. He is The Son, as they are sons or daughters of Elohim."[65] As Roberts asserted, this relationship meant that Mormons must "think as Christ did, that it is no robbery to be equal to God," for they could claim the same inheritance as he.[66]

The proximity of this identification made it possible to revisit notions of suffering. The old communal narrative, which likened the suffering of contemporary Mormons to that of the tormented House of Israel, no longer sufficed to meet the needs of a newly prosperous, officially monogamous religion. Now, Mormons optimistic about the future and their own identities, strengthened by close identification with deity, reinterpreted suffering in the terms of individual salvation, represented by Christ. Again, they reached back to the original scripture of Joseph Smith. Section 122 of the Doctrine and Covenants, produced while Joseph languished in a Missouri prison, gently chastises the prophet himself: "if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know

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[62] Talmage, *Christ,* 8-9.

[63] Widstoe, *What Jesus Taught,* 17, 14; Talmage, *Jesus the Christ,* 285.

[64] Talmage, *The Vitality of Mormonism* (Boston: Gotham, 1919), 237.

[65] *The First Presidency and the Twelve,* "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition," in *Messages of the First Presidency,* ed. James Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-75), 5:25.

[66] Roberts, *Doctrine of Deity,* 75-7; *The Gospel,* 261.

thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good. The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" While Helen Mar Kimball and the preachers of early Mormonism had stressed that persecution was a signifier, a sign indicating to Mormons that theirs was the true religion, Mormons in the decades following polygamy reinterpreted the concept of suffering by redefining it in terms of the experiences of Jesus. The agony of Christ thus became the model for these Mormons as they strove to gain "experience." His rectitude, grace, and willingness to undergo pain informed them as they synthesized a new theodicy.

Douglas Davies has argued that Mormons today embrace Christ's experience in Gethsemane over the Cross for precisely these reasons. There, in the garden, Christ actively sought suffering to attain a higher good, proved himself under the strain, and drank of the cup offered through his own free will.[67] Following this, Widstoe emphasized the "vigorous exercise" that the trials of earthly life demanded. Brigham Young's daughter, Susa Young Gates, invoking Christ as an example of "humility," taught young Mormon women to "put one truth into your heart and keep it there: struggle makes us strong"—as individuals, the communal strength of the polygamous House of Israel having been displaced.[68] Roberts perhaps summarized these ideas most eloquently, stating that "I believe it consistent with right reason to say that some of the lowliest walks in life, the paths which lead into the deepest valleys of sorrow and up to the most rugged steeps of adversity, are the ones which, if a man travel in, will best accomplish the object of his existence in this world."[69]

Davies's observation about the importance of Christ's suffering indicates the particular quandary in which these thinkers found themselves as they approached the atonement. Most Protestant liberals of the age, following an optimistic trajectory of human progress, had backed away from traditional Calvinist notions of depravity and penal punishment for sin. Many had drifted toward a position going back to the medieval theologian Peter Abelard, describing the atonement in terms of its efficacy as an example of love and a lesson in sacrifice, consistent with their emphasis on Christ's life and model. For Henry Ward Beecher, Christ was the "Apostle of Love"; for Horace Bushnell, he was the embodied love of God whose death persuaded humanity toward the great law

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[67] Douglas Davies, "Gethsemane and Calvary in LDS Soteriology," *Dialogue* 34:3-4 (Fall-Winter, 2001): 19-29.

[68] Widstoe, *Rational Theology*, 38-9; Susa Young Gates, "Faith and Repentance," *Young Woman's Journal* 4:1 (October 1892): 29, 31.

[69] Roberts, *The Gospel*, 290. Gordon and Gary Shepard note that themes of "Experience" and "Eternal Progression" rose sharply in General Conferences of the 1890-1919 era compared to earlier periods. Similarly, "Exaltation" as a theme spiked in those years compared to both preceding and following. See *A Kingdom Transformed*, 242.

of sacrifice.[70] Many Mormons felt sympathetic to these motivations. However, due to their strong literal sense, they could not go all the way with the liberals. For Mormons, the metaphysical efficacy of the suffering and death of Christ remained essential. Mormon scripture (particularly the Book of Mormon and section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants) seems to require an objective atonement of some kind. [71] That is, something more actual than the inspiration of mere subjective emotion or sympathy. In resolving these problems, Mormons of this period tended to divide the atonement into what they called its "universal" and "individual" facets. Then, as now, they tended to emphasize the effect of the atonement, borrowing imagery and rhetoric indiscriminately from other theories rather than developing a particular mechanics of redemption, after the manner of the satisfaction theory proposed by the medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury or the penal substitution theory of the Reformers.[72]

In describing the "universal" effects of the atonement, Mormon thought was relatively unified and clear. Leaning heavily on First Corinthians and drawing on the imagery of the ransom theory of the early Christian fathers, Mormons emphasized Christ's conquest of death and hell in order to implement a universal resurrection. This conquest freed humanity from the effects of Adam's violation and made salvation in heaven possible. Consistent with their reliance upon the rational language of liberal Protestantism, they consistently described this feat in terms of natural law. Adam's fall had brought death into the world as the natural consequence of his transgression; it was therefore necessary that, as John Widstoe put it, "someone, in time, should reunite the broken wires and reestablish the flow of eternal life." A few thinkers, most prominently Widstoe himself, stopped there. In *A Rational Theology* he describes the atonement solely in this way, emphasizing that, given resurrection, human beings were freed from death and thus could merit further exaltation through overcoming sin by imitation of Christ's life and teachings. As he put it in a widely read pamphlet, *The Greatest of All*, "Jesus did more than atone for the transgression of Adam. He brought to earth the principles of truth

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[70] For Christ as the Apostle of Love to Victorian Americans, see William McLoughlin, *The Meaning of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 84-5; Fox, *Jesus in America*, 256-60. See also Horace Bushnell's *Vicarious Sacrifice* (New York: Scribner, 1871); Dorrien, *Making*, 399-401.

[71] Section 19 of the Doctrine and Covenants describes the Atonement in first person: its "suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink."

[72] Lorin Hansen, "The Moral Atonement as Mormon Interpretation," *Dialogue* 27:1 (Spring 1994): 201-2. On 195, Hansen notes and gives examples of Mormon tendencies toward thinking about the atonement in terms of metaphor and result rather than mechanics. For discussion of these various theories of Atonement, see, among others, Robert Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), esp. 79-101. Anselm describes his satisfaction theory in *Cur Deus Homo*. John Calvin discusses penal substitution in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, chapter 16.

for men's guidance into happiness in earth and in heaven."[73] Widstoe thus rationalized the relationship between the atonement and a humanity of progression and potential, eliminating any sort of dependence upon grace or implication of depravity. For Widstoe, Christ's sacrifice opened the gate to eternal progress; people were responsible for—and capable of—walking through it themselves. For other thinkers, however, this was unsatisfactory. Though they fully agreed with Widstoe's emphasis on human potential, for them scripture seemed to indicate that Christ died to pay for sin.

The question was debated through the opening decades of the twentieth century. All agreed with Widstoe that Christ taught the principles that led to eternal life. But was the human ability to follow these principles, or to repent after not following them, also predicated on the act of atonement? In the 1890s and first years of the twentieth century, Widstoe's position seemed to be most appealing to young Mormon thinkers flush with the confidence inspired of the congruence between liberal Protestantism and their own theology. Early in his career, for example, Roberts tended toward Widstoe's position, ascribing salvation from individual sin to the teachings rather than sufferings of Christ. In *The Gospel* he described resurrection, then wrote: "This is what the Atonement of Christ accomplished for man; but this is not all Messiah did for man, as we shall see when we come to speak of individual salvation." It was a key distinction. Other thinkers in the 1890s, such as LeRoi Snow, son of church president Lorenzo Snow, did the same, stating in the Mormon periodical *The Contributor* that "individual salvation is obtained by obeying certain principles and ordinances of the Gospel" taught by Christ, whose suffering and death provided us a release from the grave.[74]

Other theologians, however, seemed less satisfied with such a neat separation. Taylor, surely, had characterized the atonement as penal substitution for sin, and Mormon scripture seemed to clearly link repentance to the suffering of Christ. Talmage, for one,

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[73] Widstoe, *Rational Theology*, 34-5; John Widstoe, *The Greatest of All*, (n p., 1932), 2, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah Talmage describes "the glory of complete victory over death" that the atonement wrought; *Jesus the Christ*, 661, drawing on the language of the ransom theory, particularly in his descriptions of Christ visiting spirit prison. Joseph F. Smith also emphasizes this version of the atonement in *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City. Deseret Book, 1919), 16-8; as does Sterling McMurrin, *Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City· Signature, 1965), 82. Mormon thinkers of this period occasionally referred to Adam's curse as original sin, defeated by Christ's death. See Roberts, *The Gospel*, 165. On the ransom theory, see for example, Clement of Alexandria, an early theologian of the ransom school who describes Christ as working to "effect [our] release from the slavery, error, and captivity of the adversary." Philip Schaff, et al, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 2.226 As previously noted, this sort of language is prominent in the Book of Mormon; 2 Nephi 2:27 describes sinners as subject to "captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil," while 1 Nephi 9·10 praises the God who "delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil "

[74] Roberts, *The Gospel*, 28. LeRoi Snow, "Salvation," *Contributor* 17.2 (December 1895). 87

hewed more closely to traditional interpretations. In *Jesus the Christ* he claimed that Christ "took upon Himself the burden of the sins of mankind from Adam to the end of the world." However, he also became the first to explicitly place atonement for individual sin in the Garden of Gethsemane and thereby emphasizing Christ's active struggle rather than passive death—a motif appropriate for the theology of the period.[75] Roberts also, in his later work, began pondering more seriously the relationship between individual sin and the atonement, and, like Talmage, he developed a way of thinking about it that accommodated both penal substitution and his desire to find close identification between Christ and humanity. Beginning in his *Seventy's Course in Theology* and most completely in his final masterwork *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, he redefined the Calvinist notion of "vicarious atonement" in terms that had been earlier elaborated by Bushnell and the Scottish theologian J. McLeod Campbell. Christ suffered for our individual sins, Roberts argued, because of his great empathy for us. Much in the same way that a mother aches for a sick child, Christ agonizes for the penalty that, in a universe of law, inevitably follows sin. This agony, this atonement, was made possible only by his deep filial love for his brothers and sisters, and by the fullness of the mortality that he experienced. Roberts is less clear about how exactly this suffering atoned for sin; he continued to insist that "man's cooperation with God" was necessary for atonement, and he recapitulated medieval theories about satisfying God's violated honor. But, in his empathy theory, Roberts managed to reconcile his conviction for the necessity of an objective atonement with desire to preserve the familial likeness of humanity to God.[76]

The Mormon Christ and the Modernist-Fundamentalist Crisis

These reinterpretations of traditional penal substitution represent this period of Mormon Christology in its maturity. Mormon thinkers had preserved distinctly Mormon ways of thinking about Christ, salvation, the afterlife, and atonement through the trials of the loss of polygamy and the challenge of assimilation to a Protestant American culture. This achievement was based on their appropriation of the language of the latter to fill the gaps of the former. They began a transformation from a "Christ against culture" toward a "Christ of culture," refashioning their faith's soteriology in terms that Mormons newly integrated into an American culture of individualism and effort could embrace.

It was a brief heyday, however. By the 1920s, liberal evangelicalism had committed itself to modernism, in a self-conscious "modernist" attempt to adapt religion to the demands of modern science and society. Thinkers like D. C. Macintosh and even more a mature Shailer Mathews proved less willing than their predecessors to ascribe even poetic

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[75] Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 613.

[76] See Bushnell, *Vicarious Sacrifice* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1866) and J. McLeod Campbell, *Nature of the Atonement* (London: Clarke, 1856). Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life*, 516-20, 506. Alma 7:11 offers some scriptural basis for Roberts's theory.

truth to the miracles of scripture. As one historian states it, by 1930 "Mathews had no interest in the doctrines of the Trinity, the incarnation, or the atonement beyond whatever functional significance he was able to discover in them."[77] Christianity became a particular way of talking about finding meaning in the universe and relating to other human beings, for the modernists. The truth and falsehood of its particular supernatural claims were no longer relevant for them.[78] By the middle of the decade, "fundamentalist" Protestants were waging procedural warfare in an attempt to save their denominations from such heresy, and cultural spectacles such as the Scopes trial brought the battle into mainstream culture.

This horrified the Mormons. As these dramas played out, Mormons also began feeling pressure to defend the literalisms central to their theology. This had been central to their goals from the beginning, as their reluctance to wholeheartedly embrace liberal positions on Scripture indicates. Now, however, a more aggressive rhetorical tone emerged, and the human person of Christ began to recede once more into the majesty of divinity. Older Mormon enthusiasm for a fusion of Christ and culture began to fade. New Mormon leaders such as the apostle Joseph Fielding Smith began a spirited defense of Scriptural literalism, assaulting those "ministers and teachers [who] are denying that Jesus is the Christ...he who rejects the Son and denies the power of the resurrection knows not God."[79] In the January 1925 issue of *Improvement Era*, the Mormon intellectual J.M. Sjodahl scoffed at archaeologists who were attempting to reconstruct a likeness of Jesus Christ, stating that "the Evangelists have studiously avoided to draw (*sic*) any picture of the physical features of the Master, while they have placed before us a character, the divine features of which are unmistakable." For Sjodahl, it was clear that the importance of Christ rested less in his human characteristics than in the divine.[80] And in March 1926, Frederick Pack, a professor and collaborator of Talmage, Roberts, and Widstoe, took his own place on the battle line, denouncing "the modern denial of Jesus Christ...which robs Deity" of the dignity due him.[81] That same year Anthony Ivins of the First Presidency threw down the gauntlet in the biannual General Conference of the Church. Responding to the government of Norway, which recently had banned Mormon missionaries due to their departures from what that state deemed Christianity, Ivins declared that these "objectors...did not believe that Moses and Elias appeared to Peter, James and John, at the time of the transfiguration of the Redeemer....Nor did they believe Paul when he declared to King Agrippa and Festus, that as he journeyed toward Damascus, at noon day a light brighter than the sun descended." On the other hand, Ivins maintained, in contrast to the claims of Norway, "We believe in the immaculate

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[77] Dorrien, *Word as True Myth*, 65.

[78] See, for example, Shailer Mathews, *The Atonement as Social Process* (New York: MacMillan, 1930). Dorrien, *Word,* 62-70.

[79] Conference Report, April 1926, 226.

[80] J.M. Sjodahl, "The Supposed Likeness of Our Lord," *Improvement Era* 28:3 (January 1925).

[81] Frederick Pack, "The Modern Denial of Jesus Christ," *Improvement Era* 29:5 (March 1926).

conception of the Virgin Mary, and that the Child born at Bethlehem of Judea was in very deed the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. That he is our advocate with the Father, the medium through which we reach the throne of grace."[82] In short, those who attacked the orthodoxy of Mormonism also did not believe in the literal miracles of the Bible, in the mission of Paul and the apostles, or in a Christ who was truly divine. Who, then, Ivins asked, was truly Christian?

In their determination to claim the title, the Mormons shifted their own theological language again, re-imagining Christ again as distant and divine, savior and advocate, rather than personal teacher and example. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that this reassertion of what historian Kendall White calls Mormon neo-orthodoxy did not mean that the preceding three decades of theology were irrelevant.[83] Indeed, the position of Smith, Ivins, and Pack, and their very ability to defend literalism, was predicated upon what Roberts, Talmage, and Widstoe had made possible. These earlier thinkers had shepherded Mormon theology through a crisis period. By re-imagining the nature of their faith's Christ, they had been able to confront the wracking dislocations of history, of society, and even of human nature which the abandonment of polygamy and its related crises forced upon them. But this did not necessarily mean that they had compromised their faith. Though they used concepts which liberal Protestantism made available to them, by taking Protestantism's metaphors and poetics literally, they had preserved that which was unique of the theology of Joseph Smith.

In this way, then, Mormonism entered the middle of the twentieth century as a revitalized and still distinctive variation of American Christianity. Mormons had begun to move intellectually, spiritually, culturally, and socially from the margins of American society toward participation in its center. However, most American Christians still did not accept them as co-religionists, or even as fellow Americans, as Senator Smoot had discovered in 1903. In part this hostility was due to the proprietary nature of the claims that American Protestants made upon American culture. But Protestants' ability to marginalize the Mormons also gained force from the Mormons' own insistence upon continued their religious distinctiveness, an insistence that paradoxically went hand in hand with their quest for assimilation.

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[82] Conference Report, April 1926, 226-7.

[83] O. Kendall White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1987). The theology of the "Mormon neo-orthodox" White discusses is in some ways more similar to that of Protestant fundamentalists than such thinkers as Karl Barth or Reinhold Niebuhr; unlike those thinkers, Mormon neo-orthodox such as Joseph Fielding Smith subscribed to literal interpretation of the Bible's miracle narratives, the historicity of Adam and Eve, and so forth. However, White points out similar emphases of style and rhetoric: like Protestant neo-orthodox, these Mormon thinkers emphasized the absolute nature of God's qualities, the yawning void between divine and human abilities, and the importance of sin.