

Sacred Embers

A Reform Mormon Journal of Discourses



Volume I

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Preface

Reform Mormonism possesses no central pulpit, no binding creed, and no infallible authorities. Despite this deliberate absence of hierarchy, we nevertheless seek to continue on our tradition's heritage of spiritual exploration so that we may better know and emulate God. In our exploration, we have written sermons, given prayers, made proclamations, created poetry, and received revelation.

When we look to our Brighamite and Josephite predecessors, we see how they gathered their own writings and put them in the Journal of Discourses and The Saints' Herald. These publications held (and still hold) great cultural, historical, and theological significance. To emulate our predecessors, we are choosing to likewise gather our writing together and publish them as a collection, which we have chosen to entitle "Sacred Embers".

The canonical status of the Journal of Discourses has always been a topic of discussion, and in anticipation of this with our own writings, we would like to direct the reader to reach for Mike Richan's ["Book of Michael", particularly chapter 5](#). In this, Mike teaches us that all scripture is art, and when we restrict ourselves too tightly to one art it becomes idolatry. In light of this, we affirm that Sacred Embers is a work of art and a communally-created scripture. Instead of a single figure teaching the community, we are a community teaching one another. This is the publication where we declare "thus think we," "thus have we wrestled," "thus have we doubted," "thus have we healed", "thus have we rebuilt what we needed," and "thus have we let go of what we needed not."

We pray that our personal explorations will help our peers and our successors grow closer to Divinity and help them reach exaltation.

1. “The Mormon Theological Paradigm: How Reform Mormonism is Preserving Mormonism's Most Valuable Heirloom” By Rob Lauer

*Presented on Saturday, August 3, 2024, at the 2024 Sunstone Symposium,
held at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah*

In reading the title of my presentation, “The Mormon Theological Paradigm: How Reform Mormonism is Preserving Mormonism's Most Valuable Heirloom,” you may have two questions. Question one: “What do you mean by the Mormon Theological Paradigm?” And question two: “What in the devil is Reform Mormonism?” I’ll tackle question two first.

1.1. Reform Mormonism

Let me start by explaining what Reform Mormonism *is not*.

Reform Mormonism is not The Reformed Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Reform Mormonism has nothing to do with reforming the LDS Church.

Reform Mormonism has nothing to do with reforming Community of Christ.

In fact, Reform Mormonism has no connection whatsoever to any other existing church, sect, or organization within the Restoration movement. Nor do Reform Mormons have any interest in reforming, changing, or competing with any other existing church, sect, or religious organizations.

Reform Mormonism is its own distinct Mormon denomination. Reform Mormonism is not something new. In fact, Reform Mormonism began over 22 years ago and was legally registered and established in Washington state as a non-profit in 2002. Its central website, www.reformmormonism.org, has been online for over 22 years. I have been a Reform Mormon for over 20 years.

In February of 2004, I was a “homeless Mormon.” That’s not to say that I was a homeless person who happened to be a Mormon, but I was a devout believer in Mormonism’s unique, heterodox theology regarding the Human and the Divine, but I had no denominational home. A little over a year earlier, in January 2003, I had an intensely powerful, life-changing epiphany that crystalized and confirmed my Mormon faith while putting to rest, once and for all, my then 27-year-old denominational crisis with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I walked away from LDS Church membership, never once looking back or regretting the decision, but still feeling Mormon to my core. Over the next year, if I was asked about my religious affiliation, I would say: “I’m Mormon, but I’m no longer affiliated with the LDS Church—the big Mormon Church—with headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah.” Since most friends asking me about my

religion simply wanted to know if I went anywhere in particular on Sunday mornings, the typical response to my convoluted answer was a dazed look of confusion, followed by an “Oh...okay.”

Freed from the necessity of having to make my understanding of Mormon history, culture, and theology conform to the programs and policies of the LDS Church and the pronouncements of its leaders, I was immersing myself more joyfully than ever in studying the evolution of Mormon theology during its first two decades. This study wasn't merely academic—or the obsession of a religious history nerd (though I am most certainly that.) My continued study of Mormon theology gave me insights into life and the human condition. My approach was rationalistic, critical, and even scholarly, but the results were devotional in nature. Even though I was no longer in the LDS Church and rejected its truth claims, I could reflect on my decades of Church activity as profoundly meaningful in new ways. I certainly was no longer a Latter-day Saint, but I was more Mormon than I had ever been. So, what kind of Mormon was I?

One evening in February of 2004, I was online reading about a recently released film about a young closeted gay man who comes to terms with his sexuality while serving on an LDS mission. The film was entitled “Latter Days”—written and directed by BYU graduate C. Jay Cox, who just a year earlier scored a major hit writing the screenplay for the Reese Witherspoon romantic comedy “Sweet Home Alabama.” By February 2004, “Latter Days” was making movie history as the highest-grossing gay-themed film up until that time. As I surfed the web, reading about the film, at the end of one article, I came across a list of links to organizations that were accepting of Gay Mormons. One of them was Reform Mormonism.org.

“*Reform Mormonism.*” The name intrigued me. Made me think of Reform Judaism as opposed to Orthodox or Conservative Judaism. So, I followed the link to the website, where I was greeted by the following blurbs scrolling across the screen:

- Reform Mormonism: A new Mormonism for the modern mind Redefining Mormonism—a rational alternative
- A fresh approach to Mormonism
- Progressive, inclusive Mormonism
- Mormonism focused on the individual
- “As man now is, God once was. As God now is, man may become” Eternal Progression as a tenet—not a marketing problem.
- “The Glory of God is intelligence.” How much exploration have you done today?
- A Mormonism you can be proud of.
- Mormonism focused on Progression instead of rules. Holy Curiosity: Children of God who aren't afraid to question
- Mormons who never believed racism was sanctified by God.

- A non-paternalistic Mormonism.
- A non-homophobic Mormonism, Where gay bashing isn't condoned by Church leadership
- Where discussions about caffeine can be had over a cup of coffee.
- Where belief in the 6,000-year-old Earth theory isn't required.
- An excommunication-free zone. Gays, feminists, and intellectuals welcomed
- You don't have to be LDS to be Mormon. We're not Latter-day Saints—and we're proud of that.

Upon reading such statements, I dove headfirst into the website—which, at that time, was fairly massive. There were essays upon essays laying out the Reform Mormon approach to various topics, with titles such as:

- “Morality is more than a sexual code.”
- “The Freedom to explore and the insecurity of independence”
- “God is more than our objectification of him as a man.”
- “The power to act in God's name is not as scarce as some believe”
- “Scriptures contain a mixture of personal opinion, inspiration, and truth.”
- “Toward a Healthier Perspective of Joseph Smith”

There was even a *Reform Mormon Proclamation on the Family* that embraced all committed, loving marriages and families—regardless of gender or sexual orientation. There were ideas for incorporating the Reform Mormon Sacrament as part of one's Sabbath meal, which struck me as completely harmonious with the practices of Jesus's earliest followers.

Absent from the website were any hints of legalism, authoritarianism, scriptural literalism, or religious fundamentalism. While there were examples of how Reform Mormonism's approach to faith differed from those of the LDS Church, there was nothing of an anti-LDS Church nature—nothing criticizing or condemning the Church. In fact, the focus was not on any church at all. The focus was on the individual, pursuing knowledge, free agency, value formation, personal revelation, and Progression. The site encouraged those who identified as Reform Mormons to express their faith and values in any way they deemed honest and authentic—writing papers, starting study groups, engaging in local community improvement efforts, etc. The website invited anyone to submit essays, studies, or papers for publication. The essays on the website didn't focus on the LDS Church but on how individuals could find meaning for themselves in Mormon theology, myths, and traditions outside of the framework of an ecclesiastical institution.

In Reform Mormonism, I found a home. For the past 20 years, when anyone asks me about my religious affiliation, I simply reply, “I’m a Reform Mormon.” Usually, that is all I need to say. People seem to understand that I’m a Mormon but probably more progressive than many Latter-day Saints.

So, what is Reform Mormonism?

As I explained, Reform Mormonism—has no connection to the LDS Church, Community of Christ, or any other denomination tracing its origins to the early Mormon movement. Reform Mormonism is a distinct tradition that has reformed its approach to the Mormon faith in much the same way Reform Judaism has reformed its approach to the Jewish faith.

Reform Mormonism embraces the evolving nature of religious faith and the superiority of its ethical aspects to its organizational and ceremonial ones. It embraces the foundational Mormon doctrine of continuous revelation, seeing it as closely intertwined with human reason. Thus, Reform Mormonism embraces a non-literal approach to scripture and rejects the fundamentalist mindset as detrimental to the Eternal Progression of the Human Family. Reform Mormonism embraces secular religious scholarship and scholarly criticism of scriptural texts as necessary and valuable in understanding and finding meaning in scripture.

Reform Mormonism regards all ordinances as symbolic—not Divinely mandated legal requirements. Ordinances are created by humans to reveal aspects of Godliness, to illustrate concepts related to Progression, to celebrate spiritual and ethical commitments, and to mark significant turning points in life. An ordinance’s power and authority result from the faith, understanding, and Spirit the participants bring to its observance.

Theology is valued for establishing a paradigm—a figurative model—for exploring, understanding, and finding meaning in life and the ongoing revelation of existence. Theology also provides individuals and communities with concepts, stories, symbols, myths, terminology and language for sharing those understandings and meanings.

Reform Mormonism is committed to preserving Mormonism as a distinct religious tradition without sacrificing objective, critical scholarship and modern innovations. We embrace diversity while asserting commonality. (We’re all Mormons—black, white, male, female, gay, straight, rich, poor, etc.) We affirm our beliefs without rejecting those who doubt. In fact, those who doubt provide an important springboard for further exploration—and exploration is an essential tenant of Reform Mormonism.

While the teachings and character of Christ play a central role in Reform Mormon faith and ethics, it is understood that Mormonism does not share Christianity’s theological paradigm. Just as Christianity sprang from Judaism and evolved into an entirely new religion, Reform Mormons hold that Mormonism sprang from early 19th-century Christianity and evolved into an entirely new distinct religion. Therefore, we embrace the words “Mormon” and “Mormonism”—rather than “Christian” and “Christianity”—as more correctly and properly identifying us and our religion.

Reform Mormonism does not distance itself from early Mormonism's distinct theological innovations, nor does it try to force them to fit the theological paradigm of Christianity and Monotheism. Instead, we fully embrace those theological innovations and declare that they established a new theological paradigm—one offering a new understanding of human nature, human potential, and the value of the individual. Upon that foundation, we build and innovate our faith.

One's personal acceptance of Mormonism's distinct theological paradigm and commitment to living by its inherent values makes one a Reform Mormon—not accepting the claims of a specific church, the authority of particular ecclesiastical leaders, or submitting to rituals and ordinances.

For Reform Mormons, the Church is not a thing—not an “it” that one joins, attends, and gives time and money to. For Reform Mormons, “church” is a personal pronoun—a “they,” a “him,” a “her.” This understanding is reflected in the New Testament and “The Book of Mormon,” where personal pronouns are used when referring to churches. This understanding is also reflected in D&C 11: 67—68. Which reads, “Behold this is my doctrine: whosoever repenteth, and cometh unto me, the same is my Church. Whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me but is against me.” In harmony with Mormonism's earliest definition of “church,” Reform Mormonism holds that any individual who embraces the concept of Eternal Progression and strives to develop within themselves the virtues they envision God possessing IS the Church—whether they are alone or in community with others.

Therefore, in Reform Mormonism, there are no commands to “follow a prophet” or submit to outer authorities. There are no claims of “Priesthood Keys” or angelic ordinations. No one is claiming to be “One Mighty and Strong.” Reform Mormonism's completely natural origins were laid out by Michael Richan in his 2002 essay “Reform Mormonism: Leaving the Latter-day Saints and Reclaiming One's Tradition,” which was published on the now-defunct Zarahemla City Limits website.

In this essay, Mike Richan shared “how Reform Mormonism formed as a result of distinct personal needs that I see reflected within the ex-Mormon (and questioning Mormon) culture...how I came to terms with the draw of Mormon history and theology, and how I reclaimed my past.”

Mike's experience was like that of countless Latter-day Saints who were raised in the LDS Church but later questioned and left it. After serving a mission, Mike left the LDS Church simply because he no longer believed in its claims. He became an atheist and embraced the necessity of rational thought. But a decade later, when he discovered and delved into what was then being labeled “the New Mormon History,” he began reconsidering the role of faith and Mormonism in his life. Mike wrote:

“This draw to Mormon history and theology, especially my connection of its theology to other esoteric religious ideas from history, surprised me. I did not understand why, after ten years of atheism and a palpable dislike of Mormon society and culture, I would find myself so engaged with these materials...I can't describe my activities as a search for

God—that wasn't the motivation. I was after knowledge, the type of knowledge that comes from experience. My years of atheism had created in me a great respect for rationalism, and I searched for it within the religions I explored. While I was willing to admit that life seemed to exist somewhere between the "traditional" worldview and the "scientific" worldview, the idea of God was still, to me, the ultimate irrationality. Once I discovered Reform Mormonism and its approach to the divine—*that the search for knowledge was divine*—all of that changed; I was able to reconcile my necessity for rationalization with a view of God that I felt made sense."

It wasn't until his delve into Mormon history that Mike began to feel anger toward the institutional LDS Church. He wondered why, for so many like him, leaving the LDS Church in and of itself wasn't enough. He wrote:

"Why did so many people (myself included) feel the need to disparage the LDS faith upon leaving it. What about being involved in Mormonism sticks with a person even after they've left the LDS Church? What happens to that person whose formative years were steeped in Mormon society, culture, and theology, who later leaves one or two of these? Why are Mormon theology, society, and culture so interconnected, and can parts of it survive if not so connected? What happens to the person who, acting in harmony with their integrity, removes themselves from a belief system that they no longer have faith in but find that, due to the tight integration of Mormon theology, society, and culture, they have also removed themselves from their own personal history and tradition?"

Mike concluded that "a lifetime of investment in a particular tradition needn't be abandoned simply because one does not believe, or no longer believes, the formal teachings or rules " of a religious institution within that tradition. Of his anger at the LDS Church, Mike wrote:

"...really, my anger came from realizing that I had turned over control of my history and tradition to those who claimed the authority of my theology... my anger only subsided when I decided I would not allow my history to be removed from me ... I took back control of the terms of "Mormonism" and began to organize it in a way that worked for me; I quickly discovered that I was not alone in this need and these views...In returning to [Mormonism], I was determined to accomplish several things in the interest of my own religious future.

First, I was not willing to rebuild my faith upon a foundation that could so easily be dismantled by confrontation with simple facts—both historical facts about Mormonism itself or any other religion, and scientific fact... something within me told me that when I hit upon the real thing, they would naturally fit, that this shouldn't be a big deal.

Second, I was going to reclaim my history and tradition, and find a way to become at ease with it and eventually embrace and love it... I remember the moment when I found I was able to call myself a Mormon again (albeit a Reform Mormon... I felt a tremendous sense of completion and having "arrived home" when I said in my mind: "I am a Reform Mormon," and it felt good. It felt like restoration.

Third, I felt I could not involve myself with a religious structure, Church, or organization that functioned with a top-down dynamic, interested in exercising control over its adherents. I had rebelled against the authoritarianism of the LDS Church when I was within it; as an outsider, I found that authoritarianism repellent. My new view of spiritual and religious opportunity called for a church or organization to support my Progression through life, not dominate or control it. This required the organization— if it even was an organization—to place every adherent—including me—at the top of the chart and to exist under me as a constant and unfailing support, unwilling to remove itself from my life unless I chose to remove it.

Some will no doubt view this as...having constructed God to meet my needs. That is exactly what I have done. That is exactly what Reform Mormonism does. Laying out the ideas behind Reform Mormonism required a great deal of thought and rationalization: that is how it became rational. In that rationality was something I could call “home.” Others I showed it to found a home in it as well. I believe there are thousands of people—active LDS, non-active LDS, and non-LDS—for whom this rational approach may be a path that provides both the opportunity to reclaim their Mormon past and the opportunity to enhance Progression. To those for whom this path appeals, I believe it provides support in place on control; fresh air instead of suffocation; positive movement instead of warnings against exploration; opportunity instead of obligation; joy instead of fear.

...I realized it is not the fault of the LDS Church that there is nothing for those who refuse to have their tradition and history taken from them after leaving the Church, either voluntarily or not. It was up to me to create that, to create a way in which that retention could occur. I believe the desire for that and all the concepts behind Reform Mormonism had existed long before me and were active in the minds of people in the past and in the present. I merely chose to organize them in form and present them formally. I believe that they present an opportunity for good in many lives, and that belief became my motivation for sharing them.”

Reform Mormonism has brought immense good into my life. It has allowed me to maintain my Mormon identity in a way that makes sense to others; it has given me opportunities to meet and interact with other Reform Mormons online and in person. These Reform Mormons come from a variety of religious backgrounds. Many have never belonged to the LDS Church or Community of Christ but are drawn to Mormon theology. In February 2012, I participated in the Reform Mormon Endowment. Of the dozen people present, only three of us had ever been LDS. I’ve had the privilege of administering Reform Mormon Sealings. As a state-licensed marriage officiant in the Commonwealth of Virginia, shortly after the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015, I had the privilege of sealing in marriage a same-sex couple—one of them a Reform Mormon, the other a Baptist—in a beautiful ceremony that was witnessed by family members and friends, a few of whom were former LDS, the majority of whom had no connection with Mormonism.

One of the greatest blessings of Reform Mormonism is the freedom to delve into Mormon history, theology, and myth and share insights, speculations, and theories without fear of censor. Because Reform Mormonism is non-hierarchical and does not define itself as Christian or monotheistic, Mormonism's unique, heterodox theological paradigm can be explored and built upon unapologetically.

Which brings me to the first question some of you may have had when reading the title of this presentation: *What do I mean when I refer to the Mormon Theological Paradigm?* Before defining that term and exploring what it might offer to 21st-century seekers, I want to briefly share how Reform Mormons approach scripture.

1.2. Scripture as Art

What initially distinguished Joseph Smith's followers from others and earned them the name "Mormons" was that they accepted a book of questionable origin as scripture and that their understanding of what scriptures were differed radically from the Christian understanding.

Christianity had a closed scriptural canon: the Bible alone was the Word of God. "The Book of Mormon" in II Nephi 13 famously denounced those who hold such views as fools and embraced the idea of an open canon.

But what is most unique in the early Mormon understanding of scripture is what I have dubbed "The Mormon Doctrine of Scriptural Errancy." The Bible was seen as errant: I Nephi 13 declares that over the centuries, "many plain and precious truths" had been removed from it.

But "The Book of Mormon"—on its title page and in many passages throughout—acknowledges that it, too, contains human errors. The title page declares, "If there are faults, they are the mistakes of men."

I Nephi 19:6-7 explains that scriptural content is often determined by the writer's personal preferences.

Toward the end of the book, the character of Moroni writes: "Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been. (Mormon 9:31-33).

Rather than declaring that "The Book of Mormon" is inerrant, the characters recording the events in its pages constantly confess that they are struggling with limitations in knowledge and understanding when writing their scriptural accounts.

Beyond the Bible and "The Book of Mormon," II Nephi 29 presents divine revelation and the writing of scriptures as a global phenomenon. Every nation receives light from God, but it is received "according to their language, unto their understanding,"—leaving the door open to human errors in the writing of their scriptures.

How does this global phenomenon of inspiration and scripture-writing work?

According to D&C 9, the process is not automatic or mechanical and can't be forced. The writing of scripture involves mental exertion, pondering matters, thinking deeply, making decisions, and seeking emotional confirmation. Even after doing this, the writer might experience "a stupor of thought." But at some point, the ideas and words begin to flow; they feel right, and the writer feels "a burning in the bosom" and "knows" what is being written is "true."

According to D&C 9, this is the process by which "The Book of Mormon" was written. It is the same process that any author would use in writing a book or any artist would use in creating a work of art.

The act of creating art can seem spontaneous. But this spontaneity is an illusion. Consciously or subconsciously, artists choose what to include or not include in their art, what to emphasize or not emphasize—all of these choices are based on their particular point of view and what feels right to them individually. Artists, like all people, are profoundly shaped and limited by the cultures and times in which they live. Why should Divine inspiration preclude human limitations? Why should scriptures be inerrant?

Reform Mormonism holds that scriptures can never be inerrant because they are written by human beings; inspiration and revelation are filtered through the psyches, personal experiences, and preferences of individuals who are shaped by the culture and times in which they live.

In short, Reform Mormons affirm that all scripture is art and is most meaningful—spiritually, ethically, and intellectually—when understood as such.

If all scripture is art, does that mean all scripture is fiction? Some scriptures are pure fiction and myth, some are poetry, some are historical, and some are mythical embellishments of historical events.

Before dismissing scriptural fiction as somehow "less true," consider that Jesus taught using purely fictional stories—parables.

Consider, too, that there is no archeological evidence for a mass exodus of Israelites from Egypt or of an Israelite conquest of Canaan. The consensus among most Biblical archeologists and scholars is that the Biblical story of the Exodus is fictional—an Israelite/Judean myth. And yet, it is one of the most powerful, meaningful, and consequential myths in human history. For over 2000 years, the Jewish people have celebrated it with Passover. The Puritans who settled Massachusetts drew inspiration from it. So did 19th -century Abolitionists, as well as enslaved Black Americans escaping to freedom, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and '60s—not to mention those Mormons who followed Brigham Young to Utah.

In approaching scripture as art, concerns over historicity, infallibility, and inerrancy evaporate. Consider the music, poems, books, and films that have touched and inspired you. Were they infallible? That song that never fails to move you whenever you hear it—is it inerrant? The novel you read or the movie you saw—the one that stayed with you, that gave you new insights into human nature and life itself —was it historically accurate or "the most correct" of any other novel or movie?

Such questions make absolutely no sense when it comes to the spiritual power of art to give us insights into the human condition. According to Reform Mormonism, the same principle applies to all scripture.

Personally, I find “The Book of Mormon” meaningful because it is so obviously a product of early 19th century America—a time of great tension, hopefulness, and insecurity because, for the first time ever, a nation made up almost entirely of Christians chose to establish a representative government that was entirely secular with no established religion. “The Book of Mormon” was something of a cautionary tale for its time. Two hundred years later, the philosophic tensions between religious and secular thought are not only still present in America, but have intensified and gone global. So, for me, “The Book of Mormon” remains meaningful.

1.3. Historical Context

Joseph Smith and the new theology he developed can also be understood in context of early 19th-century America. It was a time marked by extreme philosophical tension, one demanding a prophetic response.

On the one hand, Americans embraced the concepts of natural individual rights embodied in The Declaration of Independence. Their Creator had endowed them with unalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

On the other hand, they felt the pull of Calvinism and the Christian concept of total human depravity, still echoing from Jonathan Edward’s fiery 1741 sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Individuals were free to do whatever they desired, but all human desires were products of a fallen nature and, therefore, inherently corrupt.

On the one hand, the Creator envisioned in the Declaration of Independence endowed each individual with self-determination and a just claim to their life and the pursuit of personal happiness.

On the other hand, they sensed the chastisement of Christianity’s God, warning them that self-determination was a worldly delusion; without submission to the Creator of Nature—a Deity beyond human comprehension, the delusion of self-determination would inevitably lead them to the everlasting Hell they by nature deserved. When a renewed call to return to Christianity’s God reached its zenith, it was dubbed The Second Great Awakening. To disciples of Enlightenment thinking, however, this so-called “Awakening” seemed like a return to the sleep of Humanity’s dark past.

The final decades of the American Enlightenment overlapped with the opening decades of the Second Great Awakening, sewing the ground for the American Renaissance in literature—an age filled with prophetic voices. Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickinson, Alcott, and Whitman sought to free the individual from the tangled web of Calvinism and Christian concepts of total human depravity. This prophetic attempt at untangling was also evident in the period’s plethora of new religious movements. Birthed in the fires of American revivalism, many

eventually broke ranks with Christian orthodoxy and even Christianity itself. And ultimately, nearly all of them failed.

Mormonism was an exception.

Taking elements from American Protestantism, New England folklore and folk magic, esoterica, the speculative theology, and the emerging science of his day, Joseph brought forth a new vision of the individual—uncreated, eternally autonomous, existing in the image of God, endowed with natural rights, capable of Eternal Progression and eventually, Godhood.

1.3.1. The Paradigm

This vision established a new theological paradigm, which I call the Mormon Theological Paradigm.

Because this paradigm contradicts the paradigm established by Monotheism, it sidesteps the issues raised by Monotheism. (For example, if God is omnipotent and good, why is there evil and suffering?) But, in rejecting Monotheism, Joseph Smith's theology has been labeled blasphemous and heretical by advocates of Christian orthodoxy—and from a Christian and monotheistic perspective, they are absolutely correct.

Because of these labels, the LDS Church, Community of Christ, and other denominations within the Restoration movement have, to varying degrees, distanced themselves from the radical Nature of the Mormon Theological Paradigm and retreated backward to Monotheism's paradigm. Reform Mormonism is the exception.

The move backward has been facilitated by the fact that Joseph Smith—and Mormonism's earliest theological innovators, such as Parley and Orson Pratt—used terminology derived from the Bible and the Christian landscape of their time. Only Anti-Mormon pamphleteers, philosophers such as Sterling M. McMurrin, and writers such as O. Kandle White have emphasized that although early Mormons and mainstream Christians used many of the same words, the definitions attached to these words were not only radically different but often contradictory. Since the late 1970s, the LDS Church, in particular, has taken advantage of this ignorance and has been so successful at distancing itself from the Mormon Theological Paradigm that, sometime within the next 30 years, the denomination may completely fade into the Protestant landscape.

It is my conviction that the Mormon Paradigm is the greatest theological innovation of the past one thousand years and is ideally suited as the basis for a vibrant religion that will appeal to rational people living in an age dominated by science, technology, and an ever-expanding view of human rights and individual freedom.

Let us now look at this paradigm. In what follows, I will cite scriptures, but not as proof texts in the traditional sense. No idea is true just because it appears in scripture. Instead, since these scriptures are art produced by Joseph Smith, I cite them to show that the theological propositions being made are consistent with those found in his writings and teachings.

1.4. The Three Natures

The foundation for any theological system consists of what I'll call "The Three Natures."

1. The Nature of Existence
2. Human Nature
3. The Nature of the Relationship of the Human to the Divine

1.4.1. The Nature of Existence

In Monotheism, all existence is dependent on one thing alone—God. God is the First Cause, the Creator of all that is, was, or ever will be. God is Omnipotent, Omniscient. God alone is self-existent. God alone is eternal—without beginning or end. Existence exists because God caused it to come into being. Because nature is a creation of God, God is superior to Nature—God is supernatural. And because God is envisioned as a conscious being, Monotheism is based on the primacy of consciousness over existence—of mind over Matter. The mind of God came first; God's mind created existence; God's mind controls existence; God can annihilate existence.

In contrast, Joseph Smith embraced the Primacy of Existence over Consciousness. Consciousness was an eternal entity within an uncreated cosmos without a beginning or end.

Doctrine & Covenants 93:33 states: "The Elements are eternal." Joseph Smith taught that the elements "can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed."

Each element has a distinct nature; each is different from all others; each is governed by the eternal, unchanging law of its identity. No one element need be—or ever can be—like another; no element should—or can—change its nature.

And because each element is eternally distinct, it can join with other elements to organize something new. One atom of oxygen sealed to two atoms of hydrogen forms water. If the nature of either element differed, water would cease to be.

Each element—each entity participating in any organization—retains its unique individual nature. No element, in joining with others, is required to change. Indeed, it must maintain its distinct nature and identity, or the attempted organization will fail.

In short, Pluralism is the foundation of all existence. The Eternal is not one thing alone. Variety, differences, contrasting natures, and Individuality are all Eternal.

The cosmos is not the creation of any one being or power; it is not dependent upon or controlled by any single being or power. The cosmos is a dynamic organization of many distinct, autonomous, eternal, self-existing elements and forces. The Eternal is Plural and Diverse. Diversity is predicated on the reality of Individuality, on recognizing and respecting differences—inherent differences and differences that are chosen.

There is no such thing as a “beginning” when one is dealing with the concept of existence itself. Existence simply is. It is eternal; it cannot be created or destroyed. Existence is primary and supreme. Everything—the elements, galaxies, black holes, planets, life forms, and God—are individual entities within the whole.

Stars, planets, solar systems, etc..., come and go; they may be organized, evolve, and decay. Moses 1:33-38 declares, “There are many worlds that have passed away...there are many that now stand, and innumerable are they to man...as one earth shall pass away, and the heavens thereof, even so shall another come.” However, because the elements and space are eternal, there is no “First Cause” or “Creator” as declared by Monotheism. The creation myth that Joseph put forth in Abraham chapter 3 presents the Gods (plural) as saying, “We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth...and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth.” While The Book of Abraham is not a translation of an ancient Egyptian papyrus, the physics of its creation myth are more in line with science than the two Bronze Age creation myths found in the first two chapters of Genesis.

Matter is eternal; it is self-existent. According to D&C 131:7-8, Joseph taught, “There is no such thing as immaterial matter.” To exist is to have a material existence. Even those things commonly referred to as “spirit” have, on some level, a material/chemical/atomic existence, though they may not yet be detectable by the senses—even with the aid of technology. Dark Matter would be an example of such a phenomenon.

1.4.2. Human Nature

We’ll move on to Joseph Smith’s view of Human Nature, drawing from the two most theologically-thick of his revelations: D&C sections 88 and 93—both of which draw from Biblical imagery to blur the distinctions between the Human and the Divine.

Regarding Human Nature, D&C 88:15 states: “The spirit and the body are the soul of man”—a view of human nature that is more harmonious with the ancient Hebraic conception than is the Christian/Platonic conception.

In D&C 88 and 93, and in many of his sermons, Joseph uses the words “spirit,” “mind,” “intelligence,” and “Light” interchangeably. The mind/intelligence/spirit combined with the body constitute the essence (the soul) of being human. Divide the two, and one no longer has a human being. Both are essential to life. The Spirit without the body is a ghost; the body without the Spirit is a corpse. There is no inherent dichotomy between the two, no intrinsic battle between the Spirit and the flesh. Both mind/spirit and body are essential for human happiness—or, in the words of D&C 93:33, “a fullness of joy.”

The human body is good. Joseph taught that embodied physical existence is superior to a mere spiritual existence.

Joseph famously rejected the Christian doctrine of Original Sin, which taught human nature was fallen and inherently sinful. In harmony with the ending of Genesis chapter 1, human nature was

seen as good. In II Nephi 2, Joseph turned the Christian interpretation of the so-called Fall of Adam and Eve on its head, presenting eating from the Tree of Knowledge as a step forward in human progress: “Adam fell that men might be. Men are that they might have joy.”

Not only is human life on earth good, but human life was presented as being God’s highest value. In Moses 2:39 (another of Joseph’s reworking of Genesis’s creation myths), God declares: “This is my work and glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.”

Because death is a reality, the myth of a future physical resurrection (whether taken literally or not) is consistent with valuing the human body and human life on earth. D&C 88:15-16 declares: “The Spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection of the dead is the redemption of the soul.”

Just as the elements are eternal, so is some aspect of an individual’s mind/intelligence/spirit—though it is in a constant state of evolution and Progression. No God or higher power created the individual mind/intelligence/spirit. (D&C 93:29)

Joseph Smith taught:

“The mind of man. Where did it come from? All doctors of divinity say that God created it in the beginning, but it is not so. The very idea lessens the character of man, in my estimation. I don’t believe the doctrine...’We say that God Himself is a self-existent God...Who told you that man did not exist in like manner, upon the same principle?... I take my ring from my finger and liken it unto the mind of man because it has no beginning or end...Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle...and there is no creation about it.....the mind of man is co-equal with God.”

No God or outside force controls the individual mind/intelligence/spirit. The individual is, by nature, completely autonomous. One’s mind is by nature free. Against its will, it bends to no force outside of itself, succumbing only to reason or the relinquishing of rational thought. A mind’s existence as a mind depends on this inherent autonomy. D&C 93:30 states that each intelligence “is independent to act in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself; otherwise, there is no existence.”

In his King Follett Discourse, Joseph proclaimed, “All spirits [minds]...are susceptible to enlargement.”

An individual’s mind is enlarged as it learns the Truth. Despite Joseph’s knowledge of and involvement in esoteric traditions, his definition of Truth is not mystical. He defined Truth in very rational terms. In D&C 93:23-25, he taught: “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come,” and, as if to keep his followers from delving into more subjective, spiritual, and mystical conceptions of Truth, he added: “and whatsoever is more than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning.”

Truth is a knowledge of the facts—an understanding of objective reality. Therefore, Truth, by its Nature, is non-contradictory. All Truth—regardless of its source—can be circumscribed into one great whole. Whereas Christianity held that humans were by their nature limited in what they

could know, Joseph, in D&C 93: 28, taught that a person could continually receive “truth and light until he is glorified and knoweth all things.”

According to D&C 130: 18-19, humans benefit eternally from whatever intelligence and knowledge they can gain in this life.

Individuals are always free to make decisions based on the knowledge they acquire. They are free to take any action, but they are not free to choose the consequences of their actions. According to Joseph, cause and effect is an eternal law. A “blessing” is not randomly bestowed according to the whims of God or some higher power. According to D&C 130:20-21, it is the natural outcome of “obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”

The purpose of the mind is to comprehend existence and the principles and laws governing nature. Since existence is eternal and infinite, the mind’s capacity for comprehension is also eternal and infinite. The human potential for Progression is endless. Because each individual is autonomous, Progression is individualized. No two individuals will gain the same knowledge or cultivate the same character traits at the same rate or in the same ways. Because individuals are self-directed and deal with individualized circumstances, at any given time, they will vary in the development of their talents and abilities; there will be degrees of accomplishment, insight, and knowledge. This, in essence, is the message of Joseph and Sidney Rigdon’s February 16, 1832, Vision of universal salvation, in which all individuals are glorified in varying degrees in accordance with their personal growth and development. There is nothing negative about this diversity; it results from individual autonomy. Because free will is not something God or some higher power gives the individual but is a part of one’s eternal nature, one never loses the ability to learn and progress. Individuals may redirect themselves, pursue new knowledge, and make different choices at any point throughout all eternity.

1.4.3. Defining God

Before considering the nature of the relationship of the Human to the Divine, we should first look at Joseph Smith’s most controversial teachings: those regarding the Nature of God.

The popular theory adopted by most historians is that because “The Book of Mormon’s” Christology is a mixture of Modalism and Trinitarianism, Joseph’s concept of God differed little from that of mainstream Protestantism until the Nauvoo period, which one Community of Christ scholar called “a theological trainwreck.” While the Nauvoo Period could certainly be called an *organizational* trainwreck, a *political* trainwreck, and an *ecclesiastical* trainwreck, complete with *clerical sexual abuse*, the theology in Joseph’s King Follet Discourse and in his final June 1843 sermon, in which he defended the Plurality of Gods, was consistent with many of his earliest teachings on the Nature of God.

For instance, though numerous “Book of Mormon” verses refer to God as omnipotent, Alma 43:22 teaches that God’s existence is dependent upon the existence of law and a balance between the principles of justice and mercy: “If not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.” In other words, God is not the originator of law, justice, and mercy; God’s existence as God is predicated on those pre-existing laws and principles.

Which begs the question: “Is something right because God says so, or does God say so because it’s right?” A monotheist would go with the first option, but in 1829, Joseph seemed to be arguing for the second.

Christianity emphasizes the ontological divide between the Human and the Divine. In contrast, III Nephi 12:48 (echoing the Sermon on the Mount) exhorts readers to be perfect like Christ and God the Father, while Moroni 7:48 (echoing I John) promises that when God appears, those who are filled with pure love will be like him, and “be purified even as he is pure.”

On February 16, 1832, this idea of humans achieving Godlike perfection and purity was taken even further with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon’s Vision of the Three Degrees of Glory—a vision of universal salvation in which humans may “overcome all things” and become “gods.” This universalist vision with polytheistic imagery was considered so heretical by some that Dan Vogel, in his 2023 book “Charisma Under Pressure,” cites it as the motive for the mobbing, tarring, and feathering of Joseph and Sidney five weeks later, on March 20, 1832. (CUP, p. 151).

But, in my opinion, Joseph’s most radical early definition of God is found in the Seventh Lecture on Faith, published in the first edition of Doctrine & Covenants in 1835. Emphasizing perfectionism and the human potential for becoming one with God, the Seventh Lecture on Faith redefines salvation as becoming like God; it declares that Christ is “a saved being,” and—most astounding of all—it defines God the Father as “the great prototype of all saved beings.” Nine years before the King Follet Discourse and a year before the Kirtland Temple dedication, Joseph was presenting God as the prototype of human potential. By 1835, ontological differences between humans, Christ, and God had collapsed within Joseph’s theology.

In a letter from Liberty Jail, dated March 20, 1839, Joseph was seemingly open to polytheism when he promised his followers “a time to come in which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be manifest.” (D&C 121:28)

Conceptually, then, it was a small leap to the understanding of God—and Gods—presented in his April 7, 1844, King Follett Discourse:

“God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret...I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man, for Adam was created in the very fashion, image, and likeness of God...the mind of man is co-equal with God...God never had the power to create the mind of man at all. God Himself could not create Himself...and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves...the same as all gods have done before you...by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one...”

1.4.4. The Nature of the Relationship of the Human to the Divine

Regarding the relationship between the Human and the Divine, the Mormon Theological Paradigm is best summed up by Lorenzo Snow's famous couplet, which, to be more inclusive, I will paraphrase: "As we now are, God once was. As God now is, we may become."

For decades, whenever someone asked me, "What do Mormons believe?" I would answer by reciting this couplet. It nearly always triggered a deeper conversation about Mormonism, and apart from a few conversations with devout Evangelicals, I can't think of a single instance when, at the end of the conversation, the person didn't seem favorably impressed by Mormonism's unique theology.

Often these same people would say something like, "But that seems so liberal. Why are all the Mormons I know [meaning LDS Church members] so conservative?" (In using the labels "liberal" and "conservative," these folks weren't referring to politics, but to personal attitudes. By "liberal" they seemed to mean being open-minded and embracing progress and change; while "conservative" referred to being somewhat close-minded, more guarded, and distrustful of progress and change.)

I think the great virtue of the Mormon Theological Paradigm is that it liberates one from the necessity of creating apologetics for Monotheism and Monism, and by discarding the ontological divide between Gods and humans, human life itself can be seen as Divine and human intelligence as "the glory of God." In a nation with a government founded on Enlightenment philosophic principles—a philosophy the Religious Right attempts to vilify by labeling it "Secular Humanism"—Joseph Smith developed a theology that one could call "Religious Humanism."

The Mormon Theological Paradigm places value on the individual, on the mind, on personal autonomy, on life here and now, on learning, progressing, and developing within one's self the virtues one envisions God possessing. It is forward-looking—and NOT to a future in the traditionally envisioned heaven (what Parley P. Pratt called "an immaterial fairyland") but to human life on this earth in an exalted state.

1.5. The Virtue of Playing God

Because of this, the Mormon Theological Paradigm embraces as valuable and virtuous things that many monotheists and Christians view with suspicion or dread. Historically, every advance in human knowledge, in the arts, in science, in technology, in the expansion of human rights, and in protections for individual autonomy have initially been viewed as encroachments on the God of Monotheism. If God is all-powerful, if Nature is His creation, if law is determined by His will alone, and if righteousness is defined as submission to His will, then Humanity's manipulation of the natural order—be it the building of a dam to irrigate a desert, the building of an airplane in order to break free of gravity's pull, the exploration of space, the use of certain procedures to battle infertility, the development of drugs and vaccines to combat disease—all of these endeavors which enhance and prolong human life on earth, could be—and have been seen as defiance of God Himself. The age-old cry has been that by advancing the interests of

the human race, we are treading on dangerous ground because we are attempting to “play God.”

But what if “playing God” is actually moral and virtuous? Especially if God is envisioned as a loving, gracious, merciful, and just being who loves Humanity as parents love their children?

According to the Mormon Theological Paradigm, the objective of human existence is to learn how to “play God.” In that sense, every human achievement is a testimony to the validity of Mormonism’s concept of the Divine. To revere that concept of the Divine is to reverence human achievement, progress, and virtue and to fully embrace human potential.

1.6. Absolute Power: A Limited God is a Moral God

Granted, the God envisioned by Mormonism is limited. To exist is to have a nature. To have a nature is to have limitations. A thing cannot be A and also B at the same time. This reasoning—applicable to everything that exists—can, within the Mormon Paradigm, be applied to God.

Gods do not create Matter. Gods are bound by the laws governing existence. Gods operate in a cosmos of opposition in all things.

The Mormon God is powerless against the Free Agency of the individual’s mind because He did not create that mind and cannot control it. According to Joseph’s March 20, 1839 letter from Liberty Jail, the powers of heaven “cannot be controlled nor handled only upon principles of righteousness.” The powers of heaven withdraw from any attempt to “exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the children of men in any degree of unrighteousness.” The powers of heaven only operate through “persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness and pure knowledge.” (D&C 121:36-42)

Constrained by the nature of the powers of heaven, God can only reason with humans and offer to enter into a covenant with them—in short, to treat them with respect as ontological equals. Regarding the Mormon Paradigm’s reverence of Free Agency, consider this: any attack on human autonomy—even for the sake of “the greater good”—could be regarded as “Satanic,” for according to Mormon myth, it was this very reasoning that led to Satan’s fall. (See Moses 4:1-4).

A God of limited power can be gracious in ways unavailable to the God of Monotheism. The God of Monotheism can damn humans to Hell; He can obliterate them. But even in being gracious and allowing them into His presence, He is still a being without equals, a God with no “helpmeet”—for the Creator can never experience what it is like to be a created thing—a creature. By virtue of its nature, the creature can only imagine, but never fully comprehend, what it is like to be the Creator. Ontology forever separates the two. And if the Creator is the supreme embodiment of love, mercy, justice, and Truth—then the creature is forever incapable of fully comprehending, much less developing, those virtues.

In Monotheism, God’s relationship to Humanity is based on power alone. God is omnipotent, and all-powerful; Humanity is powerless. God is a ruler, and humans are His subjects. God is the master, and humans are His servants/slaves.

And yet, those embracing the God of Monotheism must constantly defend their belief because *there is no evidence that only one Being, Power, or Force is actually controlling everything*—much less a single being or power envisioned as righteous, loving, and just. Their defense is usually that “God’s ways are not our ways,” or God’s righteousness, love, and justice are different from human concepts of righteousness, love, and justice. One could conclude that God, being all-powerful, can change the definitions whenever He wants.

In contrast, the Mormon God, being bound by the same laws governing humans, is involved in an actual friendship with Humanity. This God is a parent, a teacher, a guide, a mentor, and a moral example.

“God found himself in the midst of spirits and glory, and because he was greater, he saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have the privilege of advancing like himself—”

When Joseph Smith spoke those words in his King Follett Discourse, he referred to a God whose relationship with Humanity was based on benevolence, love, and empathy. No, this God did not create our spirits, but recognizing us as already sharing His Nature, He set about showing us the way we could develop, progress, and eventually be like Him. This limited God could not protect us from adversity any more than parents can shield their children from life’s difficulties, heartbreaks, and tragedies, but having lived through those things, this God can offer us hope, comfort, love, and a sense of meaning and purpose. And if we find it difficult to believe that such a being exists, we need only look at our fellow human beings. Most of us won’t have to look very far to find examples of people offering hope, comfort, love, and a sense of meaning and purpose to others. As these people, who you can see now are, God once was.

In 1982, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner caused a storm among theologians and believers when, in his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, he proposed that in the face of human suffering, the traditional God of unlimited power could in no way be considered a moral being worthy of human love and devotion. Kushner made the case that *in a world where tragedy and injustice are unavoidable realities, only a God of limited power could be considered truly moral*. Only such a God could provide truly meaningful comfort and strength to those suffering.

I remember reading Kushner’s book during my last semester at BYU and thinking that his ideas were totally consistent with those of Joseph Smith. The fact that Kushner’s book, despite harsh criticism from mainstream theologians, became a best-seller and is still in print 42 years later may give some indication of how people might respond to the Mormon Theological Paradigm and its concept of a limited God.

1.7. Closing

In closing, here are the seven points of the Mormon Theological Paradigm:

1. All scripture is art and is most meaningful—spiritually, ethically, and intellectually—when understood as such.
2. The Human and the Divine share a common nature. As we now are, God once was; as God now is, we may become.
3. We develop our Divine potential by fully embracing our Humanity and cultivating within ourselves every virtue we envision God possessing.
4. To better understand the human condition is to better understand God's past; to speculate about God's Nature is to envision Humanity's potential.
5. As the Human and the Divine share a common nature, all human history, all areas of human moral striving, and all fields of human knowledge are sacred, and studying them is beneficial to our eternal spiritual, ethical, and intellectual Progression.
6. All human beings are of sacred worth. Every individual human being— regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, class, or social standing—is eternal, exists in the image of the Divine, and is, by nature, a free agent capable of progressing eternally.
7. The elements are eternal—uncreated and without beginning or end; there is no such thing as “immaterial matter,” and all Spirit is Matter, but it is more refined. Consequently, this affirms eternal Pluralism, more than one ultimate principle, the reality of nature, and the Primacy of Existence.

2. “Warszawianka, Abinadi Edition” by Lincoln

Posted on the Reform Mormon Discord on February 11th, 2025

Verse 1:

Look all around at your ziff and your copper,
See every spoil that you’ve robbed from the poor?
You have perverted the law and the gospel
To build up your wealth and lie to the Lord.

Chorus:

Thus saith the Lord, abandon your evil,
No longer use the law to oppress.
Exploitation belongs to the devil,
Work one with another and your siblings caress.

Verse 2:

People of Nephi, see how they control you
With every gesture of false righteousness?
And though they deny it, they mock every statute
Which God has appointed to the workers for rest.

Verse 3:

God has commanded the end of oppression,
Prepare for Their glory with solidarity!
Lay waste to every unrighteous dominion,
And work out salvation in perfect charity.

3. Rob Lauer on Annalee Skarin

[Posted on February 23rd, 2025 in The Mormon Community \(Reform\)](#)

In January, I posted a couple of questions about mysticism, and in the conversation that followed, I mentioned Annalee Skarin (1899--1988) who was not only a Mormon mystic (probably Mormonism's only mystic) but also arguably the best-selling Mormon writer of non-fiction and inspirational works. Her first book, an inspirational, devotional work entitled "Ye Are Gods," was immensely popular with LDS Mormons when she self-published it in 1948--so popular in fact, that LDS "Apostle" Mark E. Petersen excommunicated her. A national publisher picked up "Ye are Gods" in the early 1950s and the book, along with the half dozen sequels that Lee wrote, became best-sellers in the theosophic/New Age genre. In fact, they are still in print!

The wonderful Stephen Carter, host of the "Sunstone Podcast" devoted a recent episode to the enigmatic Annalee Skarin--a woman long-forgotten by most Mormons who nevertheless remains, as Stephen posts out in his podcast, Mormonism's most successful writer of religious, inspirational works.

If you're interested in learning more about her, below is a link to this episode of "Sunstone Podcast."

In February 1978 (about six months after my baptism into the LDS Church), I accompanied a friend to the Edgar Cayce Association for Research and Enlightenment in Virginia Beach--about a half-hour drive from my hometown of Portsmouth, Virginia. This particular friend was a big fan of Edgar Cayce--a popular early 20th century clairvoyant, teacher and writer, dubbed "the sleeping prophet." I had no interest in Cayce but went with my friend primarily to check out the center's library and bookstore, which were both devoted to books on world religions, mysticism, and what would be dubbed in just a few years New Age Spirituality.

While in the bookstore, the title of a white and blue paperback caught my eye: "Ye Are Gods" by Annalee Skarin, published by Philosophical Library (New York, NY). During the two years that I studied Mormonism before contacting the LDS Church in 1977 and being baptized, Joseph Smith's radical theology regarding the shared nature of the Divine and the Human and the human capacity for Eternal Progression had become foundational to my personal faith. I was quite familiar with Psalm 82 and John chapter 10--the two scriptures from which the title of the book came, so I picked it up out of curiosity. There was no info about the author in the book except a brief editor's note saying that soon after the book's first edition was published, Annalee Skarin had undergone "a physical change known as 'translation,' such as did Enoch in Biblical days." Of course, I dismissed that claim as crazy--an opinion I maintain 47 years later. I had no idea that the book had any Mormon connection until I began to casually flip through the pages: they were packed with long extended quotes from the D&C, The Book of Mormon, and the teachings of Joseph Smith. And yet, oddly, there were no references to any church and no explanations regarding the origins of these scriptures or who Joseph Smith was. THAT intrigued me, so I purchased a copy.

That evening, I began to read the book, assuming I would find it interesting and amusing, and then put it back on my bookshelf after two or three pages. I COULDN'T PUT IT DOWN! Skarin's writing style was flowery, dramatic, and very much in line with that of early 20th century devotional works, but her ideas were a compelling mixture of Mormon theology and what I can only term Catholic sensibilities. In short, that night, I—a 19-year-old Mormon convert—knew I had stumbled across an authentic Mormon mystic. I devoured "Ye Are Gods," and began reading all of Skarin's other books.

There were things in Skarin's book that I found interesting but of no personal value to me. The celibacy that she and her third husband, Reason Skarin, embraced after their marriage struck me as too eccentric, boarder line nuts (okay, totally nuts), and more in line with medieval Catholicism than Mormonism. And, of course, I didn't take her ideas about translation seriously. But her overall theology with its emphasis on humanity's Divine potential, Eternal Progression, the Light of Christ, and the centrality of personal revelation in one's life—these ideas seemed to embrace the very essence of Classical Mormon Theology. In short, Annalee Skarin's books had a HUGE impact on my spirituality and personal theology. They cemented in place (maybe "sealed" would be a better word) my convictions regarding the distinct beauty, power, and, yes, truthfulness of Mormonism's distinctive theology. In the disillusionment with the LDS Church that came my way just a few years later as a student at BYU, I would have probably walked away from Mormonism completely had it not been for Annalee Skarin's lovely, heartfelt writings about the Light of Christ, personal revelation, and Humanity's Divine potential.

I read a 1990s "Sunstone" article about Annalee Skarin written by Samuel Taylor (another of my favorite Mormon writers) shortly after I returned to the LDS Church in 1994. Until then I knew absolutely nothing about Annalee other than what she shared/claimed in her books. Taylor article clarified much about Annalee while not changing the effect her writings had on me as a young adult and now. (Two years ago, I bought an autographed copy of her self-published, now very rare, first edition of "Ye Are Gods" for \$100 from Benchmark Books, but I haven't reread her books since I was a BYU student in the early '80s.)

The one thing I found troubling in Taylor's article was his rather terse statement from Annalee's daughter, Hope Hilton. In this episode of "Sunstone Podcast," Stephen Carter reads Hope's response to Taylor's article. She believed that her mother was completely sincere, that her books offered hope and help to many people, but that Annalee suffered from mental illness. I found Hope's statements about her mother extremely understandable, sensitive, and loving.

After listening to this podcast, I am convinced that Annalee probably did suffer from mental illness.

And yet, I've always been convinced that all true prophets (like all true artists) are probably more than a little mad.

<https://sunstone.org/e192-annalee-skarin-excommunicated-then-translated-yes-like-enoch>

4. “Welcoming and Opening Prayer” by Rob Lauer

[Given April 5th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Good morning, and welcome to this the very first Reform Mormon General Conference! My name is Rob Lauer and I have been a Reform Mormon for 21 years, So this conference today is something that I'm very excited about!

If you know nothing else about Reform Mormonism what you need to know is that Reform Mormonism truly is "big tent Mormonism". Regardless of who you are, where you come from, what your past experiences may be, what your current condition might be, regardless what church you belong to or don't belong to, or what you believe or what doubts or questions you may have - you are welcomed here.

And now before we start with the conference, let's bow our heads for a moment of prayer.

Our kind, gracious, and loving Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, we come before you as your children with hearts filled with thanksgiving and joy. We're so thankful for those who will be presenting talks today; who will be opening their hearts and sharing their honest beliefs, their doubts, their questions, their revelations, their understanding of things, their experiences. We thank you for them, for their openness, and for their willingness to share. And we ask that you will bless them.

We're also grateful for all of those who have worked to make this conference a reality, for those who have basically organized the videos, edited them and posted them, and gotten the word out. And we ask that you will continue to bless them.

We also ask that you bless everyone who is watching this conference, whether live today or in the future.

We ask that - we pray that whatever questions they have, doubts they have, needs they may have in their lives, they will hear something that will speak to their condition and give them light and encouragement to continue on.

We also give thanks for the wonderful experience of life on earth as human beings. Human beings who are able to grow into your image and likeness. We share your attributes. We're thankful for the gift of life and for all the blessings that that brings to us.

And now we ask that your spirit will be present throughout this day - throughout this conference - touching all of those who are speaking and touching all of those who are listening, and that we may come to better understand our purpose in life, find meaning in our lives, and find joy in living.

And we ask for all of these things in the name of Jesus Christ Amen

5. “The Changing Perspectives of God in the Restoration” by Evan Sharley

Given April 5th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference

1. Introduction

On April 7th, 1844, Joseph Smith Jr. proclaimed: “The first principle of truth and of the gospel is to know for a certainty the character of God”. However, from the earliest days in New York to his final sermons in Nauvoo, even Joseph’s understanding of God underwent significant shifts. Our collective journeying as a people didn’t stop with Joseph; many branches of Mormonism have continued to explore and reinterpret the nature of God over time and in their own ways.

Now, I realize that learning about the intricacies of these different perspectives may feel uncomfortable or even intimidating. However, I believe that understanding these different perspectives is an opportunity to connect more deeply with our Mormon heritage. We as a people have always strived to seek truth and light; boldly pressing forward with courage and humility. As we examine our old views of God, we might find new ways to expand our own understanding, to see the Divine with fresh eyes, and to feel empowered to pursue our own spiritual journeys.

Today, I invite you to join me in reflecting on some of the major understandings of God that have emerged within Mormonism, and conclude with you my own humble attempt to answer that eternal question: what kind of a being is God?

2. Modalism

2.1. Background

Joseph Smith once said that the Book of Mormon is “the keystone of our religion,” and so it is a natural starting point for understanding Mormonism’s relationship with God. Within the Book of Mosiah, the prophet Abinadi, while imprisoned by King Noah, delivers a profound lesson on the nature of God. He proclaims:

“I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son — The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son — And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.”

In this passage, Abinadi describes a God who manifests as both Father and Son, emphasizing their unity in purpose and essence. This portrayal of God aligns with Modalism, the theological idea that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are different modes or manifestations of a

single divine being. To illustrate Modalism, many use the analogy of water, which can exist as a solid, liquid, or gas. In this framework, God, like water, manifests in different ways—Father, Son, and even Spirit—depending on the context and need.

It's worth noting that some interpret this teaching as Trinitarianism, but a closer examination reveals key differences. Traditional Trinitarianism, often depicted with "The Shield of the Trinity," asserts that the Father is not the Son, nor the Spirit, but that all three are distinct persons united as one God. By contrast, Abinadi's words suggest that the Father and the Son are the same being, experienced in different forms. Thus, the Book of Mormon presents a modalistic view of God.

2.2. Usefulness

Modalism offers a lens through which to understand divinity that suggests that God meets us where we are in many different forms. This dynamic and flexible understanding of God can be deeply comforting. It reminds us that the divine is not bound by rigid definitions but adapts to reach us in the most meaningful ways. Modalism also invites us to reflect on how we, as children of God, might likewise embody different "modes" in our lives—serving as creators, redeemers, or comforters to those around us.

By this same token, Modalism fosters humility and curiosity by acknowledging that no single perspective can fully encapsulate the Divine. It encourages us to remain open to new revelations and experiences, enriching our understanding of God's nature and inspiring continual growth in our spiritual journeys. In this way, Modalism not only deepens our connection to the divine but also challenges us to transform and evolve in our faith.

3. Binitarianism

3.1. Background

The Doctrine and Covenants, which was first canonized in 1835, originally looked quite different from the versions we are familiar with today. The beginning of this scripture included a series of theological teachings called "[The Lectures on Faith](#)", which were considered the "doctrine," while the revelations that followed were the "covenants." These lectures served as theological lessons for the priesthood and as a catechetical tool for articulating core beliefs of the time.

In the fifth lecture, the Godhead is explained in detail. It asserts that there are only two personages in the Godhead: Jesus Christ, described as a physical person, and the Father, portrayed as a person of spirit. The Holy Spirit, according to this scripture, is not an independent person but is the mind shared by the Father and the Son.

This interpretation of the Godhead, emphasizing two distinct individuals unified by one mind, is commonly referred to as Binitarianism.

3.2. Usefulness

Binitarianism offers a compelling framework for understanding Divinity by emphasizing the profound unity between the Father and the Son while also respecting their individuality. By

presenting them as two distinct personages who share one mind—the Holy Spirit—this view highlights principles of harmony, cooperation, and shared purpose.

This theological model invites us to consider how we might cultivate similar connection, understanding, and unity in our own relationships and communities. It challenges us to transcend personal differences and work collaboratively toward shared goals, drawing inspiration from the Divine example of the Father and the Son.

4. Monolatry

4.1. Background

In 1836, Joseph Smith Jr. studied Hebrew under Joshua Seixas, where he learned that the Hebrew term for Divinity, "Elohim," is the plural form of "El." This insight profoundly shaped Joseph's theology, influencing the way he understood and described the Divine. This perspective is reflected in the Book of Abraham, where God is depicted as the head of a council of gods, yet remains the sole deity humans are commanded to worship.

Joseph further expanded on this concept in his later teachings, such as the King Follett Discourse and the Sermon in the Grove. In these sermons, he described God as a being who was once a mortal man who attained godhood and taught that this progression is possible for humanity as well.

Brigham Young developed these ideas further, proposing that Adam was the God of this Earth. He taught that Adam had previously served as a savior on another planet, much like Jesus did for Earth, and had also held the role of a Holy Ghost. In this framework, the titles "God," "Savior," and "Holy Ghost" were understood as priesthood offices, which individuals might hold in their progression through divine roles.

In essence, Monolatry is the worship of one God while acknowledging the existence of other gods. It blends elements of polytheism and monotheism.

4.2. Usefulness

Mormon Monolatry offers a transformative vision of divinity by presenting God as an example of what we can become. It reimagines God not as a distant, static, and unattainable being but as someone who once lived a mortal life, experiencing joys, struggles, and growth. This understanding fosters a deeper sense of connection to the Divine, as God is portrayed as intimately familiar with the human experience.

Monolatry also inspires hope by emphasizing that humanity is on a Divine path. It encourages us to view ourselves and others as "gods in embryo"—beings with immense potential for growth, creation, and transformation. This perspective invites us to see life as a sacred journey toward exaltation and encourages us to approach ourselves and others with reverence, patience, and faith in the capacity for progression.

5. Panentheism

5.1. Background

Although Community of Christ is formally a Trinitarian church, with many members leaning toward Modalism in practice, a compelling case for Panentheism emerges through the works of one of its most noteworthy figures, David Hyrum Smith. As the youngest son of Joseph and Emma Smith, David is widely regarded as one of Mormonism's most gifted artists and poets, and much of David's theological insights were expressed through his artistry. A talented painter, singer, and poet, his works often intertwined themes of divinity with the natural world, which he deeply admired. His 1872 treatise, *De Profundis* (Latin for "From the Depths"), eloquently outlines his understanding of God. While the work is lengthy, the following excerpt has been particularly pivotal in my own spiritual journey:

"There is unity in the universe. Man is a tide, a stream flowing over the earth; our individuality is only in part – members of a family, a state, a church, a race. No wonder that the prophet styles the nations "many waters", granules of a fluid, ere we dissolve, we impart our being and flow onward in posterity. Well for us if then our individuality be of that nature to gravitate to the host of the holy on high, to be in union with God and the lamb. ...

What is the inner meaning of the great Force? We cannot speak of it as a force, because it is one that comprehends all forces; as a power, because it embraces all powers; as an entity, because it moulds, moves, and handles all entities.

At the pushing forth of a grass blade; at the birth of a butterfly; at the waking of an earthquake; at the marshaling of millions of worlds; in you, and around you; it is there, and underlies them all.

Listen to its inner meaning, to the arcane of the ages, 'It is God!'

When we go out into the depths and look from afar at the wide realms they present to us, we are near Him; let us abide in Him, and He will put us forth to full fruition like a vine from its root. ... He was defined by some of the earlier church worthies to be 'that mysterious chain that binds all things together,' and its impress leaves the mark of its unity."

5.2. Usefulness

This perspective emphasizes that God is both immanent (present within every part of creation) and transcendent (existing beyond all that we can comprehend). This dual nature offers a sense of intimate connection to the Divine while preserving a transcendent sense of awe and wonder at the vastness of God's being.

Panentheism also underscores the sacredness of the natural world and encourages responsible stewardship of our environment. Afterall, if God is present in all things, then all of creation is

inherently sacred. This understanding challenges us to act with reverence toward the earth and its inhabitants, honoring the divine not only through worship but also through our actions.

Moreover, it invites us to view our relationships—with others, with nature, and with ourselves—as extensions of our relationship with God. This perspective encourages us to see the divine in every aspect of life, fostering a deeper sense of interconnectedness and responsibility.

6. Atheism/Humanism

6.1. Background

Within Mormonism, belief in God has often been framed as a central and defining aspect of the faith. However, as with any tradition, not everyone maintains this belief in the same way—or at all. While atheism may seem to stand at odds with Mormonism's theistic core, it can also be viewed as a legitimate path within the broader Mormon experience, similar to how some Reformed Jews embrace atheism while remaining deeply connected to their Jewish heritage and culture.

The path to Atheism or Humanism within Mormonism often begins with questioning foundational claims, such as the miraculous origins of the Book of Mormon or Joseph Smith's prophetic role. Many of us were taught growing up that "Either the Book of Mormon is what the Prophet Joseph said it is or this Church and its founder are false, fraudulent, a deception from the first instance onward". This mentality leaves little room for nuanced belief within certain expressions of Mormonism. For some, letting go of these claims leads naturally to re-evaluating the existence of God altogether.

6.2. Usefulness

Nevertheless, denying the existence of God does not necessarily signify a rejection of Mormon identity. After all, Joseph Smith Jr. once proclaimed that:

"Mormonism is truth; and every man who embraced it felt himself at liberty to embrace every truth. Consequently, the shackles of superstition... fall at once from his neck and his eyes are opened to see the truth."

After discarding the supernatural and superstitious parts of Mormonism, many are able to reinterpret the tradition to be a place of shared cultural heritage, including histories, songs, stories, and oftentimes values.

Some of these unique Mormons may still retain a love for traditional theistic concepts and stories in scriptures, but now view them as metaphors or symbolic and express deeper desires of the human condition. Some also find meaning in the rituals of their heritage which serve as rites of passage or as a way to extend comfort.

Within Atheism and Humanism, this life is the only one that we *know* that we have, and thus the need to use it wisely is even more important. These family and friends do not procrastinate

building equitable communities, fostering compassion, seeking knowledge, and uplifting the oppressed. These are values that are at the core of what it means to be Mormon.

And so, Atheistic and Humanistic Mormons are just as much rightful inheritors and stewards of the Mormon tradition as their theistic counterparts are. We should listen to their wisdom and learn from it.

6. Polytheism (my view)

After I left the LDS church, I had a tough time figuring out how to re-approach God. What gave me some solace was this quote that is attributed to Marcus Arrileus:

“Live a good life.

If there are gods and they are just, then they will not care how devout you have been, but will welcome you based on the virtues you have lived by.

If there are gods, but unjust, then you should not want to worship them.

If there are no gods, then you will be gone, but will have lived a noble life that will live on in the memories of your loved ones.”

And so, because of this I have felt the ability to explore and reinterpret my understanding of God. In my quest to find a myth that works for me, I have wanted something that is distinctly Mormon, and I have said for years “weird Mormonism is the best Mormonism”, and my own personal relationship with the concept of Divinity certainly fits within the realm of weird.

I think Mormonism’s doctrine of eternal progression to the point of godhood is incredible, and I love how Adam was made to be Heavenly Father, and thus Eve was Heavenly Mother. However, this has come with some very clear downsides, including male and heterosexual supremacy.

And so, I decided to reinterpret this myth that I like to make it even more palatable. Instead of an “infinite regression” of gods which are spirit-birthed through heterosexual celestial sex, I prefer a primordial “prime mover” which created a spiritual species called the Elohim. This species decided to experience multiple mortal probations, until they achieved the growth that they desired, and reached exaltation. The first of these who experienced mortality were Michael and Sophia, who became Adam and Eve, and then in their exalted state became known as El and Asherah.

Anyone can achieve this exalted state, just as They did. In this state, we can help those who are still working to achieve it, and in this way we serve as Heavenly Parents.

7. Conclusion

A willingness to embrace truth wherever it is found and a respect for the spiritual journeys of all people is at the heart of Mormonism. In 1842, we articulated this in the Articles of Faith, with the 11th declaring:

"We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may."

The various views of God we've explored today—Modalism, Binitarianism, Monolatry, Panentheism, Atheism, and Polytheism—are not merely intellectual exercises but expressions of our tradition. These views enrich the landscape of Mormon theology, providing opportunities for us to see God—and ourselves—with greater depth and clarity.

Ultimately, the nature of God will likely remain a mystery, but our collective exploration of these theological ideas bring us closer to one another and to the Divine, however we conceive it. May we each feel inspired to continue this journey, not just with our minds but with our hearts—seeking to better understand the Divine, to strengthen our communities, and to live lives that reflect the highest ideals of our faith. For in doing so, we honor the core of our Mormon heritage: a tradition of seeking, growing, and striving for exaltation in its many forms.

Thank you for joining me in this exploration. May your own path to understanding God—however you define or experience the Divine—be filled with insight, wonder, and connection.

6. “Reclaiming our relationship with Christ: God Gives Unconditionally to All” by John R. Crane

Written February 2025; [Given April 5th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Introduction

My name is John Crane. I live in Austin, TX. I was born into an inactive part-member family in the tiny town of White Salmon, WA, along the Columbia River. I grew up in Portland, OR and converted myself to the church and gospel, through my own reading. I served a mission to Sweden, married in the temple, have four grown children. I left the church at age 36. The church promised it could make me happy, but I was angry and miserable and sought a new life. I moved to California to work in Silicon Valley and the Los Angeles area. It was there I met Thomas Gibby, a 7-generation Mormon from Sacramento. We have been together 38 years, married 12 years

During our time together, I had the opportunity to co-found The Church of Jesus Christ of ALL Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Restoration Church of Jesus Christ. We started much the same as the Reform Mormon movement, but were under pressure to reorganize ourselves along the lines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was a huge mistake for us, because the same individuals who pushed us for the change, desired to make the church a power base instead of a gathering of followers of Christ. We were like Alma and his followers who fled into the wilderness, but were taken over by King Noah's priests. Before this happened, I had many opportunities to serve: as co-president, co-revelator, patriarch/evangelist, apostle, temple worker, and temple sealer. I mention these roles because I joined that church, primarily to serve. I received revelation teaching me how to fulfill those offices, and I can testify that when you seek the Lord's will, He will bless you with knowledge of how to properly fulfill your calling, authority to perform ordinances in His name, and the grace of the Spirit to perform those callings with the power of the Lord, which has nothing to do with the power of men.

The church was founded in 1985, apostatized in 1987, limped along until 2011. Today, in 2025, a team of people will undertake to write and publish the history of the church.

If you want to know more about me or the church, I have links in the comment section of this video:

- My interview with Bishop Richard Ostler
<https://soundcloud.com/user-818501778/episode-774-john-crane-late-70s-rm-believes-in-gospel-same-sex-marriage>
- My story in Latter-Gay-Stories
<https://lattergaystories.org/coming-out-all-the-pieces-fittogether/>
- A link to my blog <https://john144.com/>

- A link to a transcript of this talk
- A link to some software I wrote: a searchable database of all the LDS standard works, the Lectures on Faith, the Book of Commandments, the speeches and writings of Joseph Smith and other early church leaders, with links to Strongs Concordance, the Joseph Smith translation, King James cross-reference, the Gileadi translation of Isaiah, and Biblehub. <https://john144.com/2024/08/12/free-scripture-searching-software/>
- A link to Hidden Treasures & Promises, a collection of revelations given to the leadership of the church, and a new, contemporary testament of the dealings of Christ with all peoples in our day: even those who were rejected and disenfranchised from the traditional Restoration Churches. Did not the Lord say He was inviting all to come to his feast: first the wealthy and well-connected, then going out into the streets to gather the poor, the lame, and the rejected? Showing that the Voice of God is truly unto all peoples, and also showing that God speaks to both men and women, and to multiple people – not just a single mouthpiece, but to multiple witnesses, giving the people a shared vision. People must develop the mentality of one heart (love, ahava) and one mind (unity, echad) before Zion can be built.
https://john144.com/wpcontent/uploads/2019/08/http_08_2019.pdf

Speech

My Brothers and Sisters:

In the other conference, you will hear a lot about keys and hear a lot of threats about God withholding blessings. It all adds up to creating turmoil, discouragement, and yes, boredom.

I come to you today with a message of peace and encouragement. And hopefully excitement

In the First Vision, when he asked the Lord which church he should join, Joseph Smith was told:

I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: "They draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof." (JS 1:19)

These words echo the words of the prophet, Isaiah who said:

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: (Isa 29:13)

Men who claim to hold keys teach you to fear God. They teach you that if you have sinned, you must run and hide from God, like Adam and Eve were told to hide from God in the Garden. Men who claim to hold keys tell you that repentance is a long and painful process and you can't come to Christ unless you are worthy, and they are the people who get to decide whether or not you are worthy.

Keys are not monopolistic power. Keys are knowledge. Joseph Smith taught that a man is saved no faster than he gains knowledge.

Here are some keys that I have learned over the years that you can easily remember and use in your life right now. These are keys that teach you to love God, not fear him, because His heart is always turned to you. Take what you can use, now and keep the rest in your mind for later.

- God's love is not conditional. God does not use his favor to manipulate you. His love is constant and faithful, even when you place yourself beyond His ability to reach you.
- Always live true to the highest you know, not the highest that somebody else tells you. Never give in to the temptation to claim to believe something that you don't believe, or live lesser than the best you know.
- The desires and the intentions of our hearts are the key to opening the blessings of heaven. Works are important, but unless those works are motivated by real intent, they are counted as evil, because an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.
- Give thanks to the Lord for everything. Think of three new blessings every day. The more blessings you count, the more you will see in your life.
- Practice forgiveness – especially forgiving yourself.
- Satan knows you by your name, but calls you by your sins. Jesus knows your sins, but calls you by your name.
- Repentance means to turn and face the Lord – to come to Him, just as you are – sins and all.
- When you turn your back on the Lord, and His light, all you see is your own shadow.
- The Book of Mormon says that “The natural man is an enemy to God.” But, God loves His enemies the same way that He loves His friends.

People who really have keys will share those keys with you. People who use keys to keep you out of the kingdom of heaven don't have keys. They have locks.

God is not God because of what He can withhold. God is God because of what He can bestow. Everywhere he taught, Jesus handed out keys.

This reminds me of a dream I had about the Tree of Life in the Book of Mormon. Here is a brief reminder of the vision that Nephi had.

And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?

Notice that the angel doesn't tell Nephi what the tree means. He respects Nephi's free agency and lets Nephi figure it out for himself.

And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.

And it came to pass that I beheld that the rod of iron, which my father had seen, was the word of God, which led to the fountain of living waters, or to the tree of life; which waters **are a representation of the love of God**; and I also beheld that the tree of life was a representation of the love of God. (1 Nephi 11:21-22, 25)

Now, for the dream. I was in a marketplace back in the time of Jesus, and Jesus was sitting in a corner of the marketplace under a tree. I was struck by His humility. He was so humble that I felt struck down to the ground. He was humble beyond anything that I ever dreamed a person could be humble. He was sitting there under a tree offering the fruit of the Tree of Life to anybody who passed by, saw him, and asked for it. Nobody asked. Nobody noticed. Here I was in a group of people so busy buying and selling and trying to make their way through the market that they never noticed the Lord right there in front of them. But, I noticed, and I was on my knees.

If somebody tells you that you should fear God, ignore them and turn your heart to God. The only thing you should fear is the effect of not turning your heart to God. Perfect love casts out all fear.

I follow Christ. I have been seeking Him for decades. We have been carrying on a personal dialog for decades. I have received thousands of pages of personal revelation. Not for the purpose of gaining popularity, wealth, or followers, but for the purpose of knowing Him and doing His will. He is the Vine and we are the branches. We need constant nourishment, constant connection, constant flow, or else we will wither and die a spiritual death. That is, until we repent, turn and face the Lord, and renew that connection. The power plug is in our hands, not His.

Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, **immediately** shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you. (Alma 34:31)

Not after a period of probation. Not after a period of not partaking of the sacrament – the very gift that connects us to Christ – **immediately**.

And, in all these messages from the Lord and answering my questions, revealing the mysteries, the strongest message I have received is this: Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but to save it.

Anybody can experience the love and saving grace of God. God is not God because He plays favorites and denies His favor to all but the chosen few. God is God because He is no respecter of persons and because He is willing to bestow His grace and favor upon all: young and old, male and female, bond or free, black or white, Jew or Gentile.

He doesn't see you as a member of a particular religion, race, ethnicity or sexual or gender identity. He sees you as you, just as you are. He has known each of us for far longer than we

realize. I would invite each of you to make a connection with the Lord, and be amazed at how much He really does know you and love you. It will change your life, but not in the way you were taught. Remember, He said: "The whole have no need of a physician." He will save the part of you that needs saving and bless everything about you and make you a better version of yourself.

It is imperative to understand that when you are truly baptized into Christ you become part of a new creation. By taking on the life and mind of Christ, you increasingly view yourselves and others from a changed perspective. Former ways of defining people by economic status, social class, sex, gender, or ethnicity no longer are primary. Through the gospel of Christ a new community of tolerance, reconciliation, unity in diversity, and love is being born as a visible sign of the coming reign of God.

As revealed in Christ, God, the Creator of all, ultimately is concerned about behaviors and relationships that uphold the worth and giftedness of all people and that protect the most vulnerable. Such relationships are to be rooted in the principles of Christ-like love, mutual respect, responsibility, justice, covenant, and faithfulness, against which there is no law.

If the church more fully will understand and consistently apply these principles, questions arising about responsible human sexuality; gender identities, roles, and relationships; marriage; and other issues may be resolved according to God's divine purposes. Be assured, nothing within these principles condones selfish, irresponsible, promiscuous, degrading, or abusive relationships. (CoC D&C 164)

I want to close with a story that was shared with us yesterday. I will tread very lightly because this story is very sacred and personal to this family, but there are some points which must be shared. An elderly matriarch of an Hispanic family in our neighborhood recently passed away. She was a devoted Catholic, a devoted follower of Jesus, and a woman devoted in service to her family and the entire community. She was a widow of over 30 years, but she had a young grand-son who was her constant young friend and companion for his entire life and her remaining three years. He is your typical 3-year-old, but has the face of an angel. When his grandma had her first heart attack, he was at her side and alerted the rest of the family. When he first saw a picture of his grandpa, he said "This is the man who is going to come and take grandma." When the time finally came for her to pass, the entire extended family was gathered around her. She saw across the veil. She saw the angels coming to greet her. She saw Jesus and her beloved husband, called out his name, and reached for him. The little boy saw them, too. She sang one last song of praise to the Lord that she loved to sing, then the Lord reached out and received her. She got a smile on her face that was frozen in death.

This goes without saying, but I am going to say it again. God is no respecter of persons. Young and old. Regardless of our religion. He inspires people to serve Him with all their hearts and invites us all to come unto him.

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt 18:10) In His Name, Amen.

7. “Reclaiming our Humanity” by Rob Lauer

Given April 5th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference

Seven years ago, I heard a friend quote the Living Bible's translation of Ecclesiastes 7:29 in a sermon he was delivering. It was slightly different from other modern English translations of that verse, but it immediately struck me and stuck with me. It reads:

"This is all that I have learned: God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated."

I was shocked by how deeply this resonated with a conviction I have had since age 15—a conviction that has been the guiding star in my intellectual, spiritual, and ethical development over the past 50 years. This conviction was the result of a childhood and youth spent absorbing and contemplating the teachings and stories of Jesus in the New Testament and the ancient Jewish writings of the Old Testament.

My conviction was simply this: human beings exist in the image of God, and God loves them unconditionally in the same way that all good parents love their children. Like all good parents, God wants his children to have this same love for one another; to help one another through hard times, protect one another from danger, and forgive one another when disagreements and conflicts occur. When we hurt one another's feelings or wrong one another—intentionally or unintentionally—we should remember that we are still a family and do all we can to be reconciled. My conviction was that no human being is inherently evil or good because regardless of the rightness or wrongness of past choices and actions, we are always free, at any moment, to change our course, to see and feel differently about things, to form new values—to renew our minds and have a change of heart. People's choices in no way lessen God's love for them. And since all human beings exist in God's image, Godlike love should be the foundation of human relationships. Years before I became aware of "The Book of Mormon" and read II Nephi 2:11's declaration that "it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things," it seemed perfectly evident to my young mind that life was inherently difficult, confusing, painful, and complicated at times. Despite that, I never doubted that life here and now on earth was worth living or that human beings, by their nature, have within themselves everything they need to lead meaningful lives and develop a Godlike character. To me, the self-evident truth was that life is complicated, but human beings are plain and simple—that, in harmony with Genesis 1:28 and 31, God blessed human nature and considered it good.

It came as a shock when, as an adolescent, I was asked to make a profession of Christian faith, and I discovered that my convictions regarding Humanity—convictions rooted in Biblical literature as a whole—were not only somewhat different from those of Christianity but the polar opposite.

According to Christian theology, sin isn't merely doing something wrong or committing an evil act; sin is the condition into which all humans are born. Because human nature itself is fallen

and sinful, the gulf that forever separates us from God is our Humanity, and nothing we do—no good works or good deeds—can bridge that gulf. In fact, because human nature itself is seen as sinful, it is believed that humans are incapable of doing anything good. All human attempts to act righteously, justly, and lovingly are doomed to failure. Only God Himself can transcend the gulf separating us from Him—and He will only do this if we throw ourselves on His mercy, confessing that our nature is utterly corrupt and undeserving of his love and admitting that our so-called righteousness is like filthy rags.

If God is to be thought of as our parent, my first response to this was that if any parent treated their child this way, we would consider it emotional abuse and call Child Protective Services.

I was also struck by how different this understanding of human nature seemed from that found in the story of Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler. When the young man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus doesn't tell him that he's fallen, inherently sinful, and can do nothing worthy of eternal life. Instead, Jesus tells him precisely what he should do to inherit eternal life—by referring only to those six of the ten commandments concerning human relationships. And when the young man says he's kept all those commandments, Jesus doesn't tell him that his righteous works are like filthy rags. In fact, Jesus's reaction was quite the opposite. Mark 10:21 reads, "And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, 'You lack a single thing.'"

What was that single thing? Jesus didn't say the "single thing" the young man lacked was a proper confession of his fallen sinful state and acceptance of God's undeserved saving grace. Instead, Jesus told the young man to do something that he was perfectly capable of doing: "Go, sell whatever you possess and give to the destitute, and you shall have a treasury in the heavens, and come follow me." But the young man sadly walked away because he had many possessions. (See Mark 10:17—21, DBH Translation). What kept the young man from eternal life was that he valued his possessions more than other human beings.

In no way does this story and any other Biblical story teach that the fault lies in human nature itself—in our Humanity. Instead, the fault lies in our inhumanity toward one another. This is more than evident in Matthew 25—the only New Testament account of a final judgment. Are people judged by whether or not they confessed their inherent sinfulness and professed belief in God's undeserved saving grace? No. They are judged by how they treated other human beings. Did they feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those in prison? Most revealing, they are told that whatever they did or did not to others, they did or did not do it to the Son of Man who stands as their Divinely-ordained judge.

I walked away from Christianity because its demonization of human nature and Humanity is not supported by the Bible.

Some churches and religions teach the importance of "good works." But usually, those "good works" consist of becoming a member of a particular community or organization, supporting its programs, following its leaders, performing required rituals, strictly adhering to specific interpretations of scripture, and obeying an increasingly difficult series of commandments that the church or religion will usually admit are contrary to our nature. Thus, as in traditional

Christianity, these religions also designate human nature itself—our shared Humanity—as that which separates us from God. They teach commandments that "have a form of godliness," but they deny that we humans, in and of ourselves, have the power to be godly.

Other spiritual disciplines teach that human individuality itself—that one's sense of being a separate entity, distinct from other people and from God—is not only an illusion but the primary problem. Humans are inherently selfish, and so one's ego must be annihilated; all personal preferences, loves, desires and earthly attachments must be laid aside so that one's pure essence can be absorbed back into the one Divine essence from which everything originally emanated.

Then there are philosophies dating back to the ancient Greeks, which hold that human beings have two distinct, incompatible natures that are eternally at war with each other: an incorruptible, immaterial, other-worldly spirit and a corruptible, fallen, oh-so-worldly physical body. The spirit must overcome the flesh so that, in the end, one can leave behind this life of suffering on earth's fallen, corruptible physical plane and ascend to a spiritual realm that is our "true" home.

Concerning human nature, religions and spiritual disciplines typically gravitate toward one of these understandings or teach a confusing mixture of all four. Either way, the message is clear: human nature—our Humanity—is the problem. Human nature is something that God (however God is envisioned) expects us to overcome, to conquer.

But can anything overcome its nature? How can anything stop being what it is and still exist? To require human beings to overcome human nature is not only requiring them to do the impossible, it is profoundly perverted and sadistic. It is as perverse and cruel as punishing a fish because it can't live out of water and fly like a bird—or punishing a bird because it flies, must breathe air, and cannot survive underwater.

The so-called "ideals" that too many religions and spiritual disciplines seek to impose on us are not ideals at all. For something to be a human ideal, it must be suited to human nature; the ideal must be humanly achievable.

For instance, many religions, while commanding us to love God, declare that God is a being, power, or force that is totally beyond human comprehension and understanding. How can we love someone or something that we can never hope to understand?

It is taught that God is all-powerful, controlling everything that exists. It is also taught that God perfectly embodies love, justice, mercy, and goodness. And yet, if we ask how an all-powerful God can perfectly embody those virtues while allowing innocent humans to suffer, we are typically given two answers (or excuses.)

The first answer is that God's ways are not our ways. God's love is not the same as human love. God's love is beyond human comprehension. Likewise, God's justice, mercy, and goodness are different from human justice, mercy, and goodness. This begs the question, "If God's love is different in nature from human love, then why use the word 'love' at all?"

The other answer to the question of why an all-good God allows innocent people to suffer is that no human being is truly innocent in God's eyes. In some way beyond human understanding, their suffering is justified in God's eyes. This again begs the question, "If God's justice is different in nature from human concepts of justice, why use the word 'Just' at all when describing God?"

It has been taught that Humanity's relationship to God is like that of a clay pot to a pot maker. The clay pot is, by its nature, different from the pot maker. Clay pots can never understand the pot maker. This analogy fails because clay pots cannot act, feel, think, or understand anything. But we humans can. By nature, we are nothing like pots; we live, feel, think, imagine, act, and create. In every way, we are like the pot maker. The pot maker is human. The pot is not.

It has been taught that human willfulness, our capacity to think independently, make judgments for ourselves, and act upon those judgments, separates us from God. We should obediently submit to God's will—however it is defined—laying aside and sacrificing the fundamental, driving force that makes us human. Again, human nature—our Humanity is taught to be the problem.

No wonder so many people of integrity have turned from religion—from deep-thinking, highly-rational intellectuals to average men and women who are simply doing the best they can from day to day while trying to make sense of their lives. Rather than giving people tools to deal with life's complexities, too many religions offer just enough comfort to get believers it through the week, and just enough guilt to bring them back next weekend. And looking at history, everyone can see that religion, faith, and concepts of God have too often been deployed to manipulate, terrorize, subject, and control people.

And yet, walking away from religion does not change the fact that we human beings are hungry to understand ourselves and to have some narrative—literal or figurative—to help us make sense of our lives and our place in the cosmos.

I have found such an understanding in a very different religious narrative—a narrative that includes concepts of the Divine, but when compared to prevailing religious narratives, is heretical—even blasphemous.

In one early Mormon sermon, "The King Follet Discourse," we find this statement: "If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves."

According to traditional monotheism, God is incomprehensible, so right away, the notion that humans could ever comprehend God probably sounds ridiculous to many. But Mormonism was birthed amidst claims that the established order of the day considered ridiculous.

Many in Mormonism's founding generation seemed to intuitively understand a great truth: our beliefs about God—our sense of what is Holy, Sacred, and Divine—establishes the framework and context in which we understand ourselves, the nature of the cosmos, and our place in it.

Some traditions have taught that as we look within ourselves and start to understand ourselves better, we might begin to partially understand the nature of the Divine.

But some early Mormons came from the opposite direction: if we're going to embrace the idea of God, that idea has to be clear; it must make sense. The big ideas we believe to be true must not contradict what we know to be true by virtue of experience and reason.

Like their Christian and Jewish predecessors, the first Mormons believed that we humans exist in the image of God—going so far as to declare that if we were to see God, we would see a human being like ourselves. As evidence, they pointed to Genesis, chapter one, in which humans were made in the image and likeness of God, were blessed by God, and declared to be good. In doing this, a traditional theological barrier separating the Human and the Divine was removed.

Christianity claims that though God initially declared that humans were good, when they ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they rebelled against God's will. Thus, human nature became corrupt, fallen, and inherently sinful.

But for the first Mormons, the story of Adam and Eve eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil symbolized a foundational step in human progress. If it was a fall, then it was a fall upward. The story symbolized our species becoming fully human; it symbolized the igniting of human consciousness, self-awareness, abstract thinking, and imagination. It symbolized the point at which humans realized that they were mortal and subject to death—when they began judging matters in terms of right and wrong and acting in accordance with those judgments. By eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Eve grew up. They became capable of acting rationally and not merely being acted upon, and they realized that they could be held morally responsible for their choices. In becoming what we now recognize as fully functional human beings, they became—as the Genesis story confirms—like Gods, knowing good from evil. Initially organized in the image of God, they could now think and reason and act like Gods.

Christian theologians such as Augustine and Calvin rejected such a notion. Adam and Eve fell, and the human heart is unspeakably evil.

Anne Frank famously believed the opposite, writing in her diary: "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart." What makes this so compelling is that she was cruelly murdered in a Nazi concentration camp.

The fact of the matter is that there is much in human history and in our current world that—when taken out of context—could be used as evidence for either of these views.

To me, however, both views present a false dichotomy. Human beings are neither inherently good nor inherently evil; human beings are inherently free. I once heard a former Catholic priest say something that struck me as oh-so-true: "You don't need a devil to explain the existence of evil in the world; all you need are billions of people, each of them with free will."

The good news of Mormonism—the Mormon Gospel, if you will—is that every human being is born innocent—under no penalty, under no curse, in the image of God, and with the same ability to freely think, reason, imagine, and act that God possesses. True, humans exist within the limitations of time, space, and natural laws, but so do all things that exist—including God. Such limitations are not sinful; they are not weaknesses. They are simply the parameters of existence.

Human nature is not inherently conflicted. We are not each a battlefield on which our spirits and physical bodies are constantly waging war for dominance. As the Doctrine & Covenants teaches, "The body and the spirit are the soul of man," and "Spirit and element, inseparably connected, receive a fullness of joy."

The Spirit and body are not separate entities but are intertwined. Together, they constitute the essence—the soul—of what it means to be fully human. Ancient Greek philosophers may have believed the spirit entering the body at birth was analogous to entering a prison and that death frees the spirit from the earthly realm of misery and woe. But early Mormonism taught that birth was a step forward, that a physically embodied spirit was superior to a disembodied spirit, and that death, in agreement with I Corinthians 15:26, was "the last enemy that will be destroyed."

In Mormonism, one's body is as much one's soul as one's Spirit. An 1840 Mormon missionary tract entitled "Intelligence & Affection" discouraged readers from praying that their physical desires and affection be lessened, subdued, or eliminated. Instead, readers were encouraged to pray that their physical desires and affections would be strengthened and used in ways that would bring joy to their lives and those of their loved ones.

As for the human Spirit, early Mormonism taught that human intelligence—the human mind—is "co-equal with God" and exists on the same principles as God Himself. God never had the power to create the human mind because God could not create Himself. Our minds are eternal, uncreated, existing before our birth, existing beyond death, and always possessing the innate ability to understand, gradually by degrees, all truth. In Mormonism, this pursuit of Truth—defined as a knowledge of what was, what is, and what will be—is the key to human growth, progression, flourishing, and joy. The human capacity to understand all things has no boundaries. As early as December 1832, Mormonism promised that for those continually embracing more intelligence, truth, and light, the day would come when they would "comprehend even God."

This brings us back to something I referenced earlier—the 1844 Mormon teaching that "if men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves." Nearly a decade earlier, The Seventh Lecture on Faith defined God as "a saved being" and "the prototype of all saved beings."

When I first read that, two things jumped out at me.

The first was that the word "prototype" was not only around in the mid-1830s but that it was then being used in the theological lectures of a small church in rural Ohio.

The second was that "prototype" was the word I had been searching for to describe my understanding of Humanity's relationship to the Divine. If we humans are made in the image of the Divine, then God must be the prototype for human potential. We humans are what God once was; God is what we humans have within ourselves to become.

The Human and the Divine share a common nature. Humanity and Deity are currently at separate points on the same spectrum. Divine love, Divine justice, Divine mercy, Divine righteousness are by nature the same as Human love, Human justice, Human mercy, Human

righteousness—but with a greater, more mature capacity. Salvation is not about going somewhere when we die. It is about growing, progressing, and becoming to a greater degree like God. Salvation isn't a destination; it's the process of being fully human in all the ways the Spirit calls and entices us to be.

This process begins by acknowledging that every single human being—regardless of who they are, what they have done in the past, or what their current situation may be—already, by nature, bears the Divine image; that God is constantly encountering us in the person of other human beings; that the truth and knowledge required from us to become Gods ourselves comes not only by study and faith but, most importantly, through our relationships with others—all others: family, friends, and even those who we might initially think of as adversaries—even enemies. In the crucible of human relationships, we can choose to become more human, more humane, and, thus, more like God.

So, let us lay aside traditions, customs, beliefs, and superstitions that would undermine a healthy understanding of human nature—a nature that all of us share with God. Let's lean into the reality of being human. Let's reclaim our Humanity, in the Name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

8. “The Deplorables” by Adam M. Shaffer

Given April 5th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference

Hello, my siblings in Christ! My name is Adam Shaffer, and I am an unordained Teacher in Community of Christ, reaching out to you, from the shores of the mighty Columbia River, here in the Tri-Cities of Washington State.

As a Teacher, I feel led by the Holy Spirit, to give a short sermon to the conference, even though I do NOT have a direct message from God, provided by revelation or prophecy, nor have I had a direct witness of the divine by a vision or visitation. But what I can provide is a message of the gospel which I have learned by study, and which we can reason upon together.

The title of my talk is: The Deplorables—and now, I need to provide a trigger warning for my sermon today, since it will contain depictions of people who often wrongly:

- Advocate for violence
- Threaten or bully others
- Demean others, and knowingly, or even more often, unknowingly, launch personal attacks and microaggressions by:
 - name calling,
 - using hostile sarcasm,
 - Judging the worthiness or sincerity of others, and
 - Questioning, denying, or diagnosing the lived experience of others.

So, in short, the subject of my talk today, is about Bigots— those people who personify the evils that still exist in our society, which includes, but is not limited to, queerphobia, racism, sexism, and ableism. In my talk today, I will be using Sweeping Generalizations about them, and often referring to them in both charitable and quite Pejorative terms.

So, if you are still with me, lets begin with a scripture reading starting within the Book of Luke in Chapter 10, verse 25, which I will read from the New International Version of the New Testament Bible:

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

27 He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’[a]; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[b]”

28 “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

36 “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

37 The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

So, this is a moving parable which Jesus gave, which is still salient today, but in order to feel its true import, we should adapt it to our circumstances. And since this was a work of fiction, I feel justified in doing so:

To begin, let's think of a few groups of people we trust and respect today, such as talented anti-racist authors, caring and insightful therapists, and community building activists. It is not hard to imagine such respected people passing the man by as he lay suffering and dying. They would have good reasons to do this. They would be on their way to important conferences, book readings, counseling sessions, or important protests. And after all, they are not first responders, and have not been adequately trained to help the man, remembering that moving someone without training could cause more physical trauma.

The Samaritan, on the other hand, Would not care about any of that. Jesus depicts him as being ideologically tainted, maybe even a member of a cult, which at the time was based on a racial divide. So, in our modern context, I see him as a homophobic christian nationalist, member of the alt-right, and a white supremacist.

Riding up in his truck, with its fascist bumper stickers and truck balls, he probably shook his head knowingly. He didn't mind trouble, or getting his hands dirty—he could take it or leave it, but that day, the man suffering didn't seem to merit his fate, so he wrestled him up into the bed of his truck, covered him in an old tarp, and drove him into town. Once there, he made sure the man got some help, and when the urgent care clinic asked if the man had insurance, he pushed a substantial amount of cash across the counter, to ensure the man wouldn't be discharged too soon.

So, now that I have respun this parable, this is your opportunity to protest the liberties that I have taken with this tale. How could someone so misguided, who endorses such hurtful politics and candidates, do right by his fellow man in this instance? The answer is that each of us is complex— none of us are all good, or all evil. And the politics we endorse come in a wide spectrum of benefits and harms.

I am assuming that the Samaritan would not have joined in beating the man, if he had showed up a bit earlier that day, but would we still blame him if he was willing to help the victim, but partly blamed the victim for his injuries, or was glad that the victim did not live in his neighborhood?

My children are of mixed race, and I have always sought to protect them, and give them the best start in life. So, when we were moving to Washington, I diligently compared crime statistics to find the safest neighborhood here in the Tri-Cities to move to. After we lived here for about five years, one day my kid asked me why I had moved them to the one place in town that was the most “white bread”--- I was stunned. At the time, I had been studying the historical practice of real estate red-lining, and how systemic racism has pitted minorities against each other, for my state service job sensitivity training, but I hadn’t imagined how my desire for the security of my own residence actually fits into that socio-economic tapestry.

Jesus calls us all to reform ourselves, whether our blind spots are induced by large harmful popular movements, or by the fears we use as an excuse, which we gained in our youth, from earlier generations. And you have to admit that Jesus frequently employed this sort of social ambiguity, and radical acceptance, in His examples, to teach us these truths.

In Luke Chapter 21, verses 1 through 4 of the New International Version of the Bible we read:

1 As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. 2 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

I love this example because the widow was a real person, but Jesus saw her differently than anyone else. He was able to discern her real circumstances and motives. Have you seen many of the paintings that depict this? It shows a modest and demure woman, who seems to glow with her own inner light, willingly extending her hands with the money she was giving. I wonder what she would think of these depictions. So often, we imagine that she ran away from a well-appointed household for love, only to be widowed young, when her loving and sensitive husband was killed by some accident, maybe by some ancient scaffolding, or even by sudden horrific violence dealt by the Roman authorities, leaving her destitute, through no fault of her own.

However, we don’t know anything about this woman, aside from the fact that she was widowed and poor. Who are the poor among us, who seem most set on supporting church leaders and their funding initiatives? Usually they are those poor deluded people who send in money to

tele-evangelists, and their donations are too often used by men who sow hate, and build mega-churches where only some types of people are welcome.

I hope the poor widow will forgive me for my depiction. I believe that none of the disciples would have given her a second glance if Jesus hadn't pointed her out to them. She was probably beaten down by life for many years after her husband was taken. She was probably cynical, unhappy, and set in her ways, with little else than religious practices as a ballast during her last days. This is how I perceived my own grandmother when I visited her in my youth. She was a devout Catholic who was still angry at my Mother, her daughter, for having converted to Mormonism. She still kept her home exactly as it was when my grandfather had died before I was born.

So we, all of us really, no matter how politically, socially and morally enlightened we are, only seem to see the deficiencies in others, rather than their too-often hidden nobility. We are ready to write people off, and reject them, when we see them as our enemies. And we may be right to fear them! They often endorse policies that dehumanize us, or our loved ones, and they may attack us with the awful apparatus of an unjust state. We don't owe them an explanation of who we are, and we must stand against policies that destroy, but what did Jesus say we should do with our enemies themselves?

Luke Chapter 6 verses 27 and 28 and 32 through 36, in the NIV, say:

27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

These words mean just as much today as they did then. In fact, I would argue that this message means more to a world divided in half, with the other side seen as our sworn enemies. So don't let our struggle against injustice, whether against a tyrannical church, or political party, or an unjust state, with its kangaroo courts, and illegitimate use of force, turn you against everyone who made this awful crisis possible.

Love others radically, unconditionally, knowing full well that they mean you harm— seek to help and bless those who have been fed lies about us, and pray desperately that what they do to us can be forgiven, and they can be healed, so that when we are found broken by the evils of this world that their hearts will soften towards us, enough to help us on their way, and this can be the means of healing this world, when the current storms of life, with all their potential for despair, have passed us by.

Remember that such storms in the past have taken little more than a decade to subside, when our grandparents were left with a broken world in need of healing, and it served no one to seek

revenge then, instead our forebears rebuilt the cities and lands that the imperialists and the fascists had controlled, and used, for their awful work of destruction. We can and must survive our current conflicts, with our love of God and man intact, to build our world anew.

And I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

9. “Covenants, Queerness, and Exaltation” by Lincoln Fullmer

Given April 5th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference

“As man now is, God once was. As God now is, man may become.” - Lorenzo Snow

So goes the famous summary of one of the most unique and expansive teachings of Mormonism—that Humanity and Divinity, rather than being ontologically at odds with one another, are merely different rungs on an eternal ladder of upwards progression. Growing up as a mainstream Brighamite Mormon, this teaching, affirming the divine core of all humans and promising the eventual inheritance of all things, was among my most cherished; and yet, this theology that has brought so much joy to me has also wrought heartache and anguish for so many of God’s children—and why is this? Because traditionally, this theology has been inextricably tied to notions of racialized heteronormative patriarchy and authoritarian control; only available to properly married heterosexual partners—often polygamous and white, always patriarchal, and ideally with many children—who accept the unbending authority of a central church body. Unfortunately, this rigid, unyielding structure has denied many thousands of Saints access to the Godhood that they were taught is their birthright. While there are many issues at play that need to be addressed to fully welcome all those who have been excluded from exaltation, I would like to specifically offer ideas to free this theology from its heteronormatively patriarchal cage and boldly offer space for Queer people, no matter if they are members of an institutional church or not, and hopefully create a viable framework for others to fully address the other issues mentioned.

It has long been the conventional wisdom both within and outside of the Latter Day Saint Movement that Mormonism—and especially the Brighamite variety—is fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed to Queerness and anything deviating from the cis-heteropatriarchal norm, and that any project attempting to make room for Queerness in a Mormon context is foolhardy and misguided. But as I’ve learned from the books *Tabernacles of Clay* and *Queering Kinship in the Mormon Cosmos*, both about gender and sexuality within the LDS church, by the chair of Kalamazoo College’s department of Religion, Dr. Taylor G. Petrey, the contemporary views of the same that seem so rigid, eternal, and stable are really anything but. For example, rather than gender being an eternal characteristic as is currently taught, Dr. Petrey demonstrates in *Tabernacles* that some earlier LDS leaders taught that spirits both chose their gender of their own accord (1) and can lose it in the future as a consequence of wickedness (2); in *Kinship*, rather than homosexuality being firmly counter to LDS thinking, he proposes that the belief in a Godhead consisting of three men perfectly united to one another in love and mind can be interpreted as a same-sex union—and the most holy in all of Mormonism (3). Because of these demonstrations and many others throughout his work, for which I highly recommend reading his books, I feel no reservations whatsoever in trying to develop new ideas of Mormon theology to fit Queer people.

Now that we know that Mormon theology indeed has a Queer potential, how can we create a consistent conception thereof that's both proudly Queer and uniquely Mormon? This can doubtless be done in several ways, but for my purposes here, I propose now to follow the traditional Plan of Salvation, as taught within the Brighamite church, stopping at each point of Queer exclusion to examine how they might be resolved.

The first step of this plan is the organization by our Heavenly Parents of eternal and uncreated intelligences into fully formed spirit children. At this stage, the main issue touching on Queerness is the assignment of gender to these spirit beings. As mentioned earlier, most current LDS leaders teach that this gender was assigned from God, is unchangeable, and is always identical to birth sex, but others have taught that intelligences proper are in fact genderless, only becoming gendered when an organized spirit child chose it for themselves—however, they still taught that deviation from that chosen gender was sinful. By taking this earlier teaching as inspiration, we can affirm genderqueer people with the understanding that gender or the lack thereof is a fundamental characteristic of spirit beings who constantly re-choose and reexamine their gender experience, casting aside the normative teachings that God chose this experience for them, or that, even if self-chosen, the choice was permanent.

After the organization of spirits, the next step is to send them down to Earth to be tested and taught to progress into Godhood. According to the teachings of the LDS church, this is done by entering into and remaining faithful to a series of covenants within the context of LDS priesthood authority, often nicknamed “the covenant path” in recent years by LDS leaders—namely, baptism, confirmation, priesthood ordination for men, the temple endowment, and sealing—and within this traditional view, each covenant or saving ordinance is absolutely necessary to enter into the exalted glory of God precisely because they were instituted for that purpose before the creation of the world. Making and keeping these covenants is thus, by definition, the only way to truly experience God's presence. Furthermore, the last three of these rungs are all tightly bound to gender norms—only men who are either celibate or in a sexual relationship only with their wife can receive the priesthood; the current text of the Endowment narrative continues to place women on a plane firmly beneath the authority of men (the seating is even gender segregated!), although there have been some significant improvements recently, and also commands a version of sexual purity that unequivocally excludes Queer relationships; and the eternal marriage bond through sealing is restricted to heterosexual couples. And just as appalling, since the LDS conception of covenants requires the institutional authority of a specific church, Queer people trying to seek their own connection to God outside of an organization that denies their full participation are viewed as horribly misguided apostates who have completely rejected all that is good. Thus, to open wide the door to exaltation to all people, two things must be done: reimagining each of these covenants with Queer inclusion baked in, and a brand new covenant framework that is not so strict, exclusive, and authoritarian.

While the issue with “worthy” male-only priesthood can be comparatively easily rectified by simply allowing all people who live ethically, by which I mean living in such a way so as to engender respect for the wellbeing of all people, to equally receive priesthood ordination and the full exercise thereof, the anti-Queerness in the ordinances specific to the temple is deeply rooted enough that serious changes to the theology must be made. With regards to the

endowment ceremony, my solution was to closely go through the entirety of the text to reform it to support my own ritual needs, such as, among many other things, gender equality and true ethical living—a major endeavor considering how fundamental the opposite is within the traditional ceremony—as well as designing more modified ceremonies, but even so, a fully inclusive and theologically consistent view of sealings is yet more challenging, and requires the new covenant framework alluded to earlier. Namely, I propose that covenants, as opposed to the traditional view described earlier, are better conceived as formalized ways to bind an individual to their own conception of Deity and practice Godhood, engage in ethical and Zionite community with the world, and form deeper connections with one's people. Since Humanity and Divinity are ontologically identical within Brighamism, with Humanity being merely less refined while Divinity more, any deep and healthy connection with another human—irrespective of religious tradition, institutional organization, or perceived normativity—can serve to refine one's soul into divinity. With this in place, the theological significance of the sealing ceremony can be revitalized: as opposed to the traditional idea that the sealing of a man and a woman creates the possibility for exaltation because it sanctifies with God's authority the biological power of reproduction, which is then sacralized into the method behind the organization of spirit children—obviously a theology highly dependent upon heterosexuality—we can rather proclaim that the selfless union of a marriage sealing imbued with the blessing of Deity leads to the exaltation of a family unit through their continual striving to gradually realize the divinity present within themselves, thereby rejecting and replacing the biological essentialism contingent in earlier theologies.

Furthermore, this new covenant framework of working in Zionite community to reveal the ontological Divinity already present in Humanity, notwithstanding its already profound utility in rejecting Queer exclusion and institutional uniqueness, has yet more applications—chiefly, the idea of covenant creativity, meaning both continual reworkings of current covenants (for example, the several modifications of the endowment ceremony that people such as Evan Sharley, Rob Lauer, myself, and others have written and planned to suit our own needs) and the freedom to create more. Given that the goal of covenants in this view is to provide divinely centered relationships, any formal recognition of a true healthy relationship could be formalized into a covenant if a person or a community so chooses to do so, thus opening up the possibility for more theological innovation in the future from anyone wishing to participate—perhaps some people, for whom close friends have become just as or even more dear than family, could find value in performing a covenant of friendship to express their deep and abiding commitments to each other. As such, taken as a whole, this new covenant framework affirms the birthright of all human beings to define their own spirituality and allows the participation of historically marginalized people in the revelatory process of theology, and I hope that more people will be able to make effective use of this framework to create further exciting reimaginings of Mormonism.

The goal I hope to accomplish from this talk is not to provide the authoritative framework for Queerness or covenants within Mormonism—plenty of people smarter than I am have already been working through this, and I'm not so presumptuous as to assign myself such great importance—but I do hope that my own, unapologetic, personal exploration and redefinition of Mormon thought to better serve the needs of myself and my community inspires more people to

realize that not only does Mormonism have so much more potential than what it is currently being used for by the institutional Brighamites in Salt Lake City, but also that every Mormon, every Latter Day Saint, every believer within this rich movement founded in Palmyra, New York in 1830, has their own God-given mandate to boldly pursue their own conceptions of the world and self to spread forth human flourishing abroad. This I offer in the name of my dear Heavenly Parents, whose love I feel in my life constantly. Amen.

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10. “Reclaiming The Power Of Selfless Service” by Paul

[Given April 5th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Hi there. My name is Paul, and I'm a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I live in Melbourne, Florida and when I heard about this conference for Reform Mormonism I asked whether or not that I could record a video tape talk for the conference, and so I'd like to speak to you for just a couple of minutes on the subject, “Reclaiming the Power of Selfless Service”. I testify to you that it's important for us to model the example of Jesus in everything that we do, and that we should meet the needs of people for who they are, as they are, where they are. Makes no difference what their color is whether they have faith or no faith at all; rich, poor, straight, gay, lesbian, transgender; [it] makes no difference where you find people in this world. You meet the needs of people for who they are as they are where they are.

I'm reminded of a quote from John Wesley, the founder or one of the founders of the United Methodist Church. He said:

Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, for as long as you ever can.

And it was Voltaire who said:

Every man is guilty of all the good that he did not do.

Then Edmund Burke came along and he said

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

I believe that we should model the example of Christ in all that we do. Jesus Christ modeled that example in everything that he said and everything that he did. From the multiplying of the loaves and fishes to the 5,000, to the woman taken in the act of adultery when people that were there were mostly people from the religious community and basically they were looking at Jesus and laughing and they were basically saying “which of us should stone her first?” And Jesus said to them, he said, “Ye who are without sin cast the first stone.” And then as he reached down and he began to write in the dirt - and scripture doesn't bear this out, but I'm convinced of it, just simply in my opinion nothing more, that he was able to write in the dirt everything that those men standing around with the woman taken in the act of adultery, that he was able to write in the dirt everything that those men had ever done. And then he turned and he looked at the woman and he said, “where are your accusers?” And she said, “Lord, there are none.” And he said, “neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more”.

That is truly selfless service to others. To know that a person is going through difficult times in their life and for Jesus to say, go and sin no more. He met the needs of that woman taken in the act of adultery. He met her needs for who she was, where she was, as she was. And he said, "neither do I condemn thee."

We serve Jesus, who is the happy God, who is the savior of all and the condemner of none.

And you know, Dennis Prager said:

Goodness is about character, integrity, honesty, kindness, generosity, moral courage, and the like more than anything else. It is about how we treat other people.

Dr. Martin Luther King said:

The time is always right to do what is right.

And he also said that:

Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.

I leave you my witness, my good brothers and sisters watching this video, that we need to be true servants of Jesus Christ in everything that we say and everything that we do. Model through our words and not just our words, through our actions, what the true, pure love of Christ is all about. The Book of Mormon calls charity the pure love of Christ. That is what we need to model to others, the pure love of Jesus Christ.

And in the end, as Paul the Apostle said:

There are but three things: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.

Of these things, I bear you my witness and do so humbly in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

11. "I was born on an Island" by Lincoln

[Posted on Latter-day Saint Texts on April 5th, 2025](#)

Part 1

I was born on an Island -

It was a happy Island; verdant and green, awash with sunshine. It had great rivers and small streams, towering mountains and low shores, and the whole of it was filled with beauty.

Society on the Island was nurturing and pleasant, for we had the kindest Island elders who always, we boasted, demonstrated perfect love and compassion in helping every Islander grow, reach fulfillment, and serve their neighbors, and their efforts truly helped the Island feel like a paradise for all. Through their work, they kindly taught us how uniquely perfect our Island was - how the beauty of other islands paled in comparison with our harbors, forests, mountain paths, and united community - and we all felt truly blessed for being the lucky few to have discovered a most blissful dwelling place.

My family had lived on the Island for generations, helping to build it up and maintain it for everyone to enjoy ever since they first discovered it centuries ago, and several of my grandfathers and relations had been esteemed and respected Island elders. Knowing that the beauty of the Island, with its kind but firm elders, communal society, and stunning landscapes, was due in large part to the ceaseless efforts of my ancestors helped me to feel a strong sense of belonging and love among the other islanders.

The Island was a refuge - it was placed in a vast ocean that often had strong squalls, inflicting danger throughout its vastness, but we always felt safe and secure surrounded by the loving, protective embrace of our Island. And we were always heartbroken knowing that, somewhere out there in the sea, there were travelers without the safety of our Island to shield them from the buffets of the undulating waves, knowing how happy and secure they would have been with us.

The sea was a busy one - travelers and itinerants would float by our Island every day, always adventuring or seeking refuge somewhere new. They came from other islands in the sea which we heard of but knew little else about. Our elders explained to us that while no one ever left our Island because of its beautiful perfection, these poor travelers had left their unhappy islands because they realized how lacking they were and were searching for something better. Knowing of the happiness the travelers would have if they could only come to our Island, the elders asked every brave man and woman, upon reaching adulthood, to consider becoming a guide on the waters, taking up the mantle to daily risk going out into the sea to persuade passersby to come and live on the Island with its bountiful joys and safety, and the vast majority of the young adults living on the Island heeded this glorious invitation after having come of age. Most travelers ignored our invitations, but many others were convinced to accept our refuge and hospitality and come to live on our Island. And every time a newcomer arrived, we all lovingly

welcomed them in with open arms, as if they had been an Islander their whole life, and taught them patiently how to live life here. We were so happy to share our happiness with curious new arrivals and were proud that our little and most perfect Island was growing day by day, especially as we had heard that many other islands around us were shrinking, and I couldn't wait to grow old enough to participate in this most exciting and meaningful work myself one day. There could truly be no greater joy than to bring about such pure happiness for so many of my fellow human beings.

But if nothing were so exquisite as sweet as our joy of receiving newcomers, so too were nothing so exquisite and bitter as our pain when an Islander left. Notwithstanding our Island being more beautiful and friendly than any other in the sea, as our elders consistently explained to us with loving smiles, every so often, an Islander would sadly choose to leave - going off to abandon their secure homeland and live in the dangerous waves. None of us could understand why anyone would want to depart from such a community as we had here, so the elders would explain that they left being misled by pride and arrogance that the Island in its protection and bliss was small and provincial, while the waves and the sea in their treachery and unforgiving nature seemed exciting and new. They also warned us that many of those who abandoned the Island tried to come back and trick others into following them into danger, so we must be vigilant and wary when coming across such people. Each time this occurred, we all mourned the loss of our community members to such gross pridefulness and, with great heartache, resigned ourselves to the terrible truth that they, in their foolishness, were lost from us forever and were now doomed to a miserable life in the maw of the ocean when they could have remained happy and secure on the Island forever.

But except for the sad moments when a treasured friend abandoned the Island, life was truly happy and blissful. And thus I lived in security and contentment on this Island for the space of many, many years.

Part 2

But one day, this began to change. Because I loved my Island so much, I decided to learn about its geology and history as I grew older. And as I learned, I discovered the first blow to my perfect understanding of my world - that our island was just one of hundreds of similar islands within an expansive archipelago, all emerging from the same magma plume bursting through the ocean floor, and sharing many of the same geologic features that I had come to believe were sacredly unique to my own home.

"If this is true," I wondered, "and we are just one manifestation of this cyclic and ancient phenomenon, then how can we claim our Island as the epitome with none like it? For if we continue to make this claim, we deny the validity of these many other islands that are just as beautiful as our own, and denying someone their validity is a most painful and cruel act."

For a while, I desperately tried to ignore this gradually consuming unease, but suddenly I could no longer. I soberly came to understand that my integrity demanded that I accept the facts, no matter how uncomfortable. As a youth, I believed these untruths in ignorance, but to willfully

accept them now would mean consciously choosing to cast the truth aside and deny other people their validity - a position I could not bear to take. As such, I decided that while I could no longer justify my community's claim of uniqueness, I could still affirm my Island as the happiest and best place for me within my own personal context.

Knowing of the beauty of these other islands, I began to notice the base corrosiveness that this belief in our superiority was wreaking upon our community. People everywhere were so self-satisfied that they smugly dismissed all others as merely "false" islands, barely deserving of respect - if they even cared to realize that these islands so similar to ours existed at all! This hurt me deeply, as I now knew of the profound beauty of these other communities even though I had never seen them personally, and it stung me to realize that I formerly peddled the same hurtful ignorance. For the first time in my life, I felt ashamed of my Island.

To help me make sense of these strange and confusing facts, I decided that there was a difference between the Island and the culture of the inhabitants thereof. Sure, these people could sometimes be horrifically rude and misunderstanding, but they were usually my kind neighbors, family, and friends. Besides, anyone can be rude. And the Island itself was still so wonderful and beautiful.

So I continued to stick it out.

Throughout this period, I began increasing my studies of every aspect of the Island, for who knew what else I might uncover? Sadly, my next major discovery was more painful than I could have ever imagined.

While wandering through the pleasant forests lazily carpeting the majestic mountainside at the heart of our Island, I noticed the placement of several vents spewing noxious gases scattered across the Island, seemingly deriving from the underlying volcanic activity that produced the islands of our archipelago. Curiously, I had never noticed these before, nor seemingly had anyone else I knew, as the gas was mostly odorless and harmless to most people - but, as I soon uncovered to my great horror, to a select few, it was anything but. The small minority of people affected by the gas would invariably lose their ability to breathe without severe pain, gradually wither away from want of food, and become covered in blistering sores. The only cure seemed to be abandoning their home and setting off into the waves, a frightful prospect for anyone, but all the more especially for those part of a culture like ours that believed their Island was the most perfect of them all and that leaving was a fate worse than death. Worst of all, because these great afflictions were caused by the Island itself and because of the nature of the cure, I discovered that these suffering souls were malignantly demonized by the Island elders as faithless traitors, cutting them off from their previously close friends and family, as well as their community more broadly. As these sufferers came to the devastating realization that they were no longer welcome in the place they blissfully called home for an entire lifetime, they were sadly compelled to leave for their own safety.

Pondering this further, I sorrowfully understood that the masses of people I had been conditioned to view as traitors in my childhood for abandoning the Island for their own selfishness were often only after the hope that they might be cured from their terrible afflictions amidst the loss of everyone who ever loved them - and all because of the harm the precious Island, both mine and theirs, caused them. I entered a state of profound remorse then, such as I had never experienced in my life. I was full of indescribable grief, knowing I was complicit in these vulnerable people's exquisite pain, and I even began to fear that I couldn't live on an island that could be so deadly and inhospitable to the very people I was taught it was self-evidently the most embracing and loving of.

And yet, the Island was still so lovely and beautiful and I couldn't even smell the gas that was so cruel! And since this harm did not affect me personally, I was finally able to push these concerns aside.

To my great surprise, even as I felt my worries and concerns mounting higher and higher, I recognized that I still had great love and conviction for the most basic nature of my island and the rest of the expansive archipelago within which it was a key part - the mountains and streams, the moistened dirt beneath my feet as I walked along river beds - it was all incredible.

This commitment settled even deeper into my heart one day when I decided to voyage to our sister islands to see for myself the beautiful places I had only read of in my bookish studies. During my expedition, I found the same exquisite beauty I was used to from my own island scattered throughout all these many isles. At one atoll in particular, I remember I stopped by a gathering of locals and asked if I could participate briefly. To my delight, they graciously granted me the opportunity, and I walked carefully into their small gathering place. As I watched them congregate, laugh, and pray, I felt the strong feeling wash over me that for all the heartache and failure on my island, there was still profound value within that I should continue to prize within my life. That lovely feeling persisted throughout the rest of my trip - and I hope I shall always treasure it.

Early on the last morning of my voyage back home, I contemplated the prospect of sailing to one of the smaller islands in the archipelago and making a home there - after all, they seemed to avoid many of the pitfalls my homeland had - but just as I did, I saw a sight that stole my breath. In the calmness of the early morning, the full majesty of my island suddenly came into view, and I saw something I had never seen before - a vibrant rainbow of coral beneath the water, teeming with all manner of shimmering fish and mollusks, such as could be found on no other island in the entire sea. And in that moment, I remembered all the powerful ties that bound me in love on my island - and I decided I would try to preserve my right to exist within my community for as long as I could.

Throughout all this time, I was very careful not to discuss my growing concerns with any but my most trusted confidants, for I knew that it would permanently tarnish my relationships and social

standing in my ancestral community. I especially feared speaking to an elder on this matter, for they could potentially exile me if sufficiently concerned about the well-being of the community – which I did not want at all. I felt I was doing alright, but the strain of having to constantly defend my true self from exposure on all fronts was beginning to take a soul-thrashing toll. To further complicate matters, I reached adulthood in the midst of this crisis - the age at which each able Islander is asked to serve as a guide to passersby in our sea. And in gross spite of myself, I found my juvenile desire to brave the winds and the sea and invite lost seekers to our island beginning to burn in my heart once more, even with the bitter complexities that had recently arisen. Knowing that I wouldn't be able to shake the feeling without following it through, even though I knew it would be painful, I steeled myself and decided to pay my local Island elder a visit and ask if I could be permitted to serve as a guide.

The elder was exceedingly happy to see me, as he suspected I would ask him for permission to be a guide and thus fulfill my island duty - but his happiness soon melted into concern and dismay when I admitted that I no longer shared a commitment to most of the Island's traditional narratives. I had hoped that my love of the island and the broader archipelago would be enough regardless, but he resolutely refused this of me for he feared that my newly constructed thoughts would be irreconcilable with the hard-set traditions we would be expected to profess. And although I knew he was right, the official declaration that I was no longer fit to be a proper member of the community deeply, irrevocably stung me.

With this blow only just behind me, I soon encountered something far more dreadful than I ever could have imagined...

While taking a midnight stroll one crisp and pleasant night, led unconsciously by the vagrances of my feet, I inexplicably arrived at a familiar place – the home of the most prestigious and respected of all the island elders, where the faint refrain of hushed voices diffusing softly through the back window, and naturally, I carefully approached. To my great horror, I listened as all the most venerable elders discussed their efforts to grow a noxious weed in the Island cave networks to “soften the hearts” of those who were to breathe it in. It seemed this was a regular meeting to explain the recent progress of the project. They further explained that although harmless to most, the weed had been recently found to cause grave and incurable injuries to some of those who had had long term exposure, but that the unpleasant effect could not be avoided and was not a significant enough concern to desist from using the plant as a method of control. Upon hearing this, and realizing that the terrible pain that I'd seen cruelly inflicted upon innocents was not merely a tragic but natural aspect of the Island's ecology, but rather a carefully calculated measure instituted by the elders who were meant to protect us, I became exceedingly sick – first in metaphor and then in fact, as I noticed with increasing terror the early symptoms of people afflicted by the gaseous disease. From that time forward, I knew I had to leave.

Part 3

The next day in secret, I gathered together wood, ore, water, deseret, and other provisions to prepare to build a boat – but before I did, I opened my mouth to God in prayer, seeking Their guidance. “O, God,” I said, “hear the words of my mouth. Here I am, preparing to leave behind my history, my family, my community, to which I’ve given my life, my talents, everything which which You have blessed me, and truly all I’ve ever known, and this I do in search of a new way of life so I can avoid the pain and suffering that the only thing that ever mattered to me threatens to inflict upon me in a gross betrayal. If I stay here, I will surely die. Lord, I feel so lost. What must I do?” And They responded to me, saying “Our dear son, you know you are correct in preparing to leave, yet you also feel fear and great loss. Remember the positive aspects of life here and take them with you to rebuild wherever you may land. Go, collect a pure jar of dirt, unblemished by the evil toxins, and carefully preserve it on your journey. It will serve as a comfort to you and as a reminder of the good this place has done you, in spite of its derelictions, and when you land, plant that first as inspiration to build your on community without the trauma of this place. Go to, for We are with you and will be an aid to you. Thus saith We, the Lord your God.”

Armed with this powerful inspiration, I did as I was commanded and gathered a jar of dirt from the graveyard of my foreparents, a corner of the Island wholly without the reach of the toxic caves. And, before I left, I wrote letters of love and sadness to all my friends and family. That done, I stepped into the harbor with my boat laden with provisions, tearfully whispered goodbye to my dearest and loathsome home island, and sailed away. Crossing the edge of the atoll, I suddenly caught one final glimpse of the coral reef whose beauty so captivated me all that time ago. I knew I could not take it with me, but the memory of the ideal I should always strive for was permanently etched into my heart.

It has been many months since that bittersweet day. I do not not know quite where I am or where I’m going, but I’m following the principles of my heart, the directions of nature, and the lovingkindness of my Gods every step of the way. There are many other sailors here, some lost like me, others with a clear destination in mind, and others laboring to persuade us to follow them to their own “perfect” island. They all have interesting things to say, but I fear I will be wary of such travelers forever more. I just hope that I’ll be able to find a place where I can labor in service of my fellow man and my Gods someday in a state of security and stability. But for now, I’m adrift in the sublunary sea.

12. “Priesthood as Your Divine Birthright” by Sarah Williams

[Given April 6th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Hi, I'm Sister Sarah Williams and I want to talk to you about priesthood, but more specifically my experience of priesthood, and in order to do that I need to start at the beginning of my story.

It's important for me to convey that I can't really remember a time that my faith wasn't important to me. I was born to a recent convert family. I was born in the late '80s they had converted in the early 80s to kids - to teenagers 15 and 16, unmarried.

When I was eventually explained this it wasn't pitched to me as something that was shameful. My granny - I was raised by my grandparents, my dad's parents - my granny told me that she just thought that it meant that my Heavenly Father had needed me at a certain age at a certain time in these latter days and he just couldn't wait anymore. She would tell me with pride about a member of the 70 visiting our branch in Arkansas and seeing my mom - before she had told anyone that she was pregnant - and telling her that the one she carried was special.

This was all presented to me as sign as evidence of calling and I took it all very seriously from a very young age. I remember before even starting school I was very prayerful, always trying to make sure that I was living up to whatever my calling was.

My family did fall away from the church, but when I got to high school I found I had a Mormon classmate and she invited me to church and I invited my family and they were moved or embarrassed enough to go. From that point I became very active. I began to serve as the second counselor in my priest Quorum, my pop got a calling cleaning the chapel and then working at the food bank and then building for the Church Ranch in the in the Deseret Ranch in Florida.

I was always right there with him, you know? I was very eager to go home teaching with him. I always wanted to be a assisting however I could with preparing, passing, and eventually blessing the sacrament. I remember blessing the sacrament right next to my pop and how emotionally powerful that was for me, and still how that memory is for me. It just it meant a lot to me to be able to live out my calling, to do the things that I had been told told that my Heavenly Father needed me to do. I'd been ordained to the priesthood in the Church of my father and I felt the weight and the glorious attraction of doing the work - of being a priest - and of using that priesthood power to lighten the load of other Saints, to heal, to teach, to comfort, and to cast a light.

So it was devastating to me when I realized that I didn't fit in. I didn't fit in in a number of ways, but the one that would become the most troublesome to serving any calling in the LDS church was my gender. As a transwoman, church just was no longer a very welcoming place for me,

and I became aware of this years before I was brave enough to come out. I spent years - almost two decades - investigating other spiritualities looking to fill a hole that had been left by my church being lost to me. I studied druidry, Celtic spirituality, Daoism, Buddhism, and some really out there ones like Jediism, but there was always something missing, you know? I couldn't find what I was really seeking.

The entire time I continued to study Mormonism and its schisms and dissidents in the Restoration movement, and on back through you know primitive Christianity, through Canaanite religion, Sumerian religion, and along that path I started to find my Heavenly Mother as Asherah.

Asherah is a Canaanite goddess, the wife of El. She actually shows up in the Bible, but if you're only reading the King James version you might not know it, because Her name gets mistranslated as "groves" in the King James version, after trees which were a sacred object for Her. We find evidence of this in prohibitions about planting Groves too close to shrines to El - or Yahweh - all through the Old Testament. We see evidence of Her in Jeremiah, where Jeremiah is criticizing the people for praying to the Queen of Heaven and they answer to him that they're going to do it anyway; we see this in Jeremiah 44:17-19. It says "We will certainly do everything we said we would. We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and we will pour out drink offerings to Her just as we and our ancestors, our Kings and officials, did in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and we were all well off and suffered no harm, but ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to Her we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine." The women added "When we burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to Her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes impressed with Her image and pouring out drink offerings to Her?" I just found that very powerful, and when I got my new scriptures I actually highlight that passage very first.

I also found evidence of our Heavenly Mother in the Shekhinah which is this kabbalistic concept of the feminine nature of God, and following this concept back I found um Astarte, Ishtar, Isis, Inanna, which all these same sort of energy; this mother goddess energy. In fact, in regards to Inanna, the earliest writings that we have by an author whose name that we know of are by an author named Enheduanna, and she was writing hymns for Inanna. Those are very special hymns to me too.

So I began to feel like I'd been trained as a priest in my father's house just so that I could find my Heavenly Mother, and that maybe my calling lay there. I felt I hadn't been welcome in my father's house, but that my Mother was welcoming me with arms wide, and I could feel Her love when I would pray to Her.

My best friend Laura and I, on Mother's Day in 2001, published a document announcing the formation of "A Church of Mother", but still something was missing for me.

So let's talk about priesthood. I stand before you as someone who was ordained in the house of my father, but found herself unwelcome there, and when I left the church I felt as if I had lost access to my priesthood; that by stepping into my true self I had surrendered something sacred.

However, it was hard to feel it as a loss, because I felt such liberation, and I came to understand that my priesthood was not something that was ever theirs to take or to give; it had always just been mine.

So we're taught that priesthood is "power and authority to act in God's name", but that authority is only as real as the power behind it, and true power doesn't come from institutional permission but it comes from our Heavenly Parents and our Divine nature as their children; as "gods in becoming". Doctrine and Covenants 121:36 states, "the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of Heaven cannot be controlled nor handled; only upon the principles of righteousness." The key word here is "inseparably". If the priesthood is truly inseparable from the powers of Heaven, then no mortal institution can take it away; it cannot be severed from those who live in righteousness.

Even the adversary himself retains power. Doctrine and Covenants 76: 25-27 speaks of Lucifer who held authority in Heaven before his rebellion, and we learn - and those who have been through Temple ordinances know - that Satan retains his priesthood. So, if even Lucifer, who had engaged in open rebellion against God, can retain his priesthood, then clearly it's not something that can be taken away.

So, if that's the case, then people who are practicing in righteousness even beyond the bounds of the church, there's no way that they could lose access to their priesthood.

The scriptures also show us examples of those who have exercised their priesthood without institutional approval. Alma the Elder in Mosiah 18:12-14 baptized himself and others without being formally ordained by the established religious authority. His priesthood was validated not by an institution, but by his personal righteousness and the spirit of God. This suggests that priesthood is not about hierarchy at all, but about Divine connection. So, if you believe and accept that we are children of God with potential to become like our Heavenly Parents, then priesthood is not an external grant of power but rather an intrinsic part of our Divine nature. As Christ himself says in John 10:34: "Is it not written in your law, I said ye are Gods?" This means priesthood is not something that we must wait to be given; it is already within us, just as Divinity is already within us. When we limit our priesthood to institutional authority we limit our understanding of who we truly are. Priesthood is not just about governance or ordinance; it is about Divine light, the power to comfort, to bless, to heal, and to lead. It is the authority to love and to have compassion. It's the authority of bringing forth light.

Moses 7:18 tells us that "The Lord called his people Zion because they were of one heart and one mind and dwelt in righteousness, and there was no poor among them." Zion is not built through institutional control, but rather through unity, love, and righteousness. If we are to live our lives as our Heavenly Parents would seem to wish for us, we must recognize that our priesthood is not about exclusion, but about bringing forth the power of Heaven in our actions.

So, I wanted believed that my priesthood was something fragile; something that could be taken away from me if I stepped outside of the institution that had ordained me. When I came out as transgender I feared that I had lost it, but then something happened. I had to flee an abusive situation, and when traveling to my new home I got a chance to go through Utah for the first

time, and through Salt Lake City, and I went to the Temple Square - to the temple bookstore - and I got my new set of scriptures with my name right on the cover, and that was just a moment of reclaiming my faith for me. I also got a holy oil container, like the one my pop had carried. I got these, because I knew that these were items that were important to me, and that the priesthood was something that was important to me, and that I was kind of coming back into that but I didn't really understand the path of it yet.

I started to really study. I went through this period where I was as deep in study and prayer as I've ever been in my life, and every day I found myself talking about the gospel to someone, and never really forcing the issue but it was just happening.

My dog got really sick and it looked like she might lose the ability to walk. She hadn't walked in over a week, and I was praying on it, and I felt the spirit move me. It was like, "Hey, you got the oil. Give her a healing blessing." and so I did. I anointed her, I knelt down, I put my hands on her on her head, and I let the Spirit speak to me and I spoke to her. She's here right now. That dog has been with me for nine years, through homelessness, and good times and bad. The very next day after blessing her, she was walking again. I had to keep her from running she was feeling so much better. She was just wanting to play! In that moment I realized that clearly my priesthood was intact, that it was mine, that that connection was still there, that it never belonged to a church, that it was a gift from my Heavenly Parents. It was my birthright.

If that's true for me, then it's true for you. How many have been cast out and told they are unworthy or led to believe that they are powerless? How many have been deceived into thinking that they must seek permission to exercise the gifts that they already hold? That these gifts can be denied them for how they were born, who they love, or who they are? To those who have been told they are unworthy, who have felt cast out, who have wondered whether they are now beyond the reach of Divine power, I say this: you are not beyond it, for it was never beyond you! Your priesthood was never something they could take! It was never something they could deny! Your right to have it is always within you, a part of your Divine nature as a child of Gods. Awaken to it, and it is yours. Those who would deny you this, what they fear the most is not that you might be lost but that you might awaken to your own immediate connection to the Divine that needs no intermediaries; just love.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father does not withhold inheritance from the wayward child; he welcomes him back with open arms, recognizing that his son never ceased to be his son. So too do our Father and Mother in Heaven see us; they do not take away what is ours by birthright, they only wait for us to claim it. That's my invitation to everyone listening today. Regardless of gender or orientation: claim what has always been yours. Step into the fullness of what priesthood has always been meant to be; not a tool of control, but a birthright of Divine power and creation.

In the end I did find what was missing for me: it was this final truth that my Heavenly Father had never rejected me. As I prayed to my Mother in Heaven, gradually she opened my heart to that final piece of my personal puzzle that I had spent decades in assembling.

Those who claimed that I was an abomination, that my Father had no place for me when I was living my truth, they did not speak on behalf of God but rather on behalf of their own entrenched patriarchy and power. They have no authority to tell me that I am not what I am, nor that I have no place in my Parents' house.

There is a place for you in the House of God, not just in the walls of the church but in the vast eternal expanse of Divine love. You do not need permission to be powerful! You do not need approval to be worthy! You already are! May we walk forward with the knowledge that we are Divine, that we are called, and that nothing can separate us from the power of Heaven that already resides within us.

In conclusion, I just want to add that I was terrified to come out as transgender to my pop. He is who baptized me, who conferred the Aaronic priesthood over me. I didn't think he would take it well, so he was the last person I told in my family. However, when I told him, he was immediately supportive. He told me "If this is what is going to make you feel better, then I want to be there. I want to support you 100% of the way." He told me he didn't really understand it but then he didn't even understand it to accept it. Even that was beyond what I could have hoped for. He came back to me a couple days later, and he told me that he had prayed on it and that he had had a dream wherein Heavenly Father had showed him that trans people get to live out in our perfected bodies in eternity as the gender that we know ourselves to be, and that the only reason that we're not here in mortality is as a special test. He told me that God had shown him that in Heaven I would be me. It is my testimony that this is true, that our Heavenly Parents made some of us trans for the same reason that they have made wheat but not bread, and grapes but not wine. Amen.

13. “Non-theism in Restoring the Restoration”

by Istvan Jamrik

Given April 6th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference

Hello and welcome to everyone attending the first Reform Mormon general conference! My name is István, and I would like to thank everyone for the opportunity that I can speak here today.

I am not an expert in the field of the topics I would like to talk about today, so I would say the main goal of my talk is to facilitate meaningful discussion and hopefully bring us all a bit closer together. My topic is the possible role of non-theists – like myself – in the community of Reform Mormons, but I hope my points are applicable in general to any type of community that is open to a wide range of beliefs or non-beliefs within their ranks.

I would like to talk a little bit about myself. I live in Canada, but I was born and raised in Hungary, a country in Central Europe. Unlike many of the people interested in Reform Mormonism, I did not grow up Mormon; in fact, I did not grow up religious at all. My dad was a staunch atheist, and my mom is more of a mildly spiritual person. In my teenage years, I got caught in the frantic search for my identity. As a result of that, instead of experimenting with other substances, I experimented a bit with Catholicism, Islam, and then I bumped into the Mormons in my hometown, and I ended up joining them. My disillusionment with institutional Brighamite Mormonism - the only kind that truly has a footprint in Hungary – led me to leave a few years later, but my fascination with any and all things Mormon never left me, even as I finally reconciled with being an agnostic atheist.

So, what am I doing here, you may ask? I asked myself the same question many times. Some people I know who are interested in a kind of Mormonism that works for them are people with Mormon ancestry going back many generations, people who feel like they are a part of Mormonism and its wider cultural context regardless of their theological beliefs or ecclesiastical affiliation. I am not such a person. I converted to LDS at age 17 and my family tree is overwhelmingly Catholic. Then there are people who enjoy some of the ritual aspects of Mormonism. Perhaps they like initiatory or endowment ceremonies and they would like to keep practicing those on their own terms. I confess that I am not really one of those people either, although there are ritualistic practices that I do see as potentially very useful. So, what is it that draws someone like me to this initiative?

The first element of that comes from my mindset expanding even after my journey back to atheism. As many new atheists, and also as many people who leave a religious organization that eventually did not work out for them, I did think of religion, especially theistic religion, as a universally harmful phenomenon. Eventually, exploring the ideas of people like John Hamer, a pastor of Community of Christ, or Dan McClellan, a religious scholar and a member of the mainstream Brighamite LDS Church, changed my views about this fundamentally. As difficult as

it was to deconstruct my previous literalistic, black-and-white religious views, it was perhaps even harder to deconstruct the idea that equates religion in general with those literalistic, all-or-nothing type worldviews. Thus, I came to see religion, or at least a belief in the supernatural and the quest to find a higher meaning in life, as something that is most likely an inherent characteristic of human beings, one of many such characteristics. Seeing religion in this light made me realize that letting these innate human needs go completely unexplored may, in some cases, be almost as unhealthy as letting them run completely amok, regardless of consequences. My old atheism, almost like an abstinent, prohibitionist view, thinking that belief in a god or gods is poisonous at any concentration, evolved into an atheism that accepts that as much as religion had caused endless destruction and pain in the world, maybe the solution is trying to practice it together in a safer way, as opposed to the impossible task of extinguishing it.

But how does this make me relate to Reform Mormonism specifically? As I mentioned before, I was a bit of a truth-seeker in my teenage years, which made me relate very deeply to Joseph Smith when I first heard his story. Now, I do not believe he literally communed with gods and angels. I do believe that he, as a young boy, felt suffocated by the religious environment around him when he was growing up, and he needed an outlet for that. He was tired of hearing “you can’t believe it this way; you can’t do it that way”! He needed to do religion on his own terms. Now, while deconstructing my previous beliefs, I also came to realize that after becoming the leading figure of this community, Joseph abused his power in many ways that are absolutely inexcusable. Still, I find that I can relate to the person young Joseph was, and as someone who rejects dogmatism entirely, I believe that exploring religion on our own terms, like he and his fellow early Mormons did, can be a healthy exercise, as long as it is done responsibly. Something that Dan McClellan said once, and I am paraphrasing this, is that humanity never really drew absolute morality from religion. We always used our common moral framework to shape religion to our image and then pretend that we did it the other way. My question is this: why would we not do this in an honest way instead, and form communities with people that share commonalities with our moral framework, even (or especially) if we see religion itself in a thousand different ways?

Another idea that piqued my interest, that I believe first came to me upon watching an interview Evan Sharley and Rob Lauer, was the idea of restoring the Restoration. The rapid growth of Mormonism in Joseph Smith’s time proves that there was a subset of people in the area where it all started who were not satisfied by the mainstream Christianity of the time anymore, and they were drawn to something experimental that claimed to restore some original ideas from the Bible that were not practiced in mainstream Christianity anymore. These movements were called Restorationists, and Mormonism was one of the most successful ones out of them. Obviously, as it often happens, eventually some unfortunate human hierarchies took over, like they previously did with many other religious movements, and parts of Mormonism calcified themselves into the dogmatic systems they were trying to get away from. I started wondering, what did Mormonism get right about this so-called Restoration, and what did they get wrong? Also, in a similar way, since there are people attached to Mormonism in some way, but also not satisfied by its mainstream manifestations: could the Restoration itself be restored, as in, trying to trace back to the good ideas Mormonism started off with, and then go from there?

In my view, there were many good things in the early parts of Mormonism. There was a very communitarian aspect of it, the theory of which I believe to be worth exploring, regardless of how it was eventually abandoned by most Mormon denominations. There was a diversity of voices trying to innovate and bring fresh ideas to the table – of course, with Joseph focusing on the hierarchical nature of the church and putting himself in the centre, many of these opposing voices were silenced, but what could have been if they were not?

There are some later ideas of Mormonism that I also find interesting. Although I do not believe in a literal progression of humans into gods or divine beings, I have always felt like the idea that once we just fulfilled our obligations, we are done, did not work for me on the long term. I do believe in a kind of eternal progression that concerns every human being to ever live to leave their mark on the continuum of humanity's existence, from ancient times to a hopeful far future. I believe there can be a benefit in trying to synthesize these ideas with each other in our mission to redefine what divinity even means to us.

This brings me to the last thing I would like to discuss, the seeming absurdity of an atheist trying to define what divinity is. Although it may look strange at first, I do not believe that coming from a non-theistic point of view is impossible to reconcile with concepts of the divine. On the contrary, I believe that humanity has already explored in great depth and breadth the theistic ideas of the divine, and in my opinion, it is high time to start offering alternative perspectives on this. Most importantly, I think non-theists as members of open religious movements can help balance out some of the harmful magical thinking that often plagues new movements and encourage healthy discussion and disagreement. In my opinion, demystifying the divine can actually help with understanding it even more, because removing the magical elements tends to help explain it more on the basis of the human condition and human behaviour. Although I believe that being non-theist or atheist does not mean "a person dedicated to fight against anything and everything religious" but also atheists have been on the forefront of fighting against the harmful aspects of religion, and I believe that a type of uncompromising view that sets the alleviation of human suffering before any divine goals does have a place in an open religious movement that seeks similar goals. I do believe that non-theists engaging in healthy discussion with theists, deists, pantheists, etc. can provide counterpoints and balances that are not always present in a group that only has different flavours of theists.

Starting from a point of view that does not have an already preset axiom about God's existence and God's attributes can actually lead to newer understandings of what divinity even means, or how the divine can be meaningful to people, or how it relates to a simple innate morality if we accept that humans are inherently good, and create sacred things that are not merely dependent on reinterpretations of previous religious dogmas. Regardless of our type of individual belief systems, we are all parts of communities and systems that experience common outcomes, therefore if there are people with different belief systems who are seeking the same or similar outcomes, it is actually quite valuable for these people to support each other as part of the same community, and to define what sacredness or divinity could mean to them together. For example, as a Queer person, the experiences, the feelings, the needs of all of my Queer siblings are sacred to me. Not tolerated, not reluctantly accepted, but sacred.

Finally, I am reminded of a story that is circulating on the Internet in different forms, and originally comes from the Hasidic Rabbi Moshe Leib, discussing why God created atheists. Obviously, the Rabbi was a theist, and his position was that even for believers, it is better if they act towards their fellow humans as if there was no God at all, and the only people able to help their fellow humans were themselves. In a similar way, I interpret the story of the death of Jesus similarly, from a non-theist point of view. To me, nothing could be a more beautiful interpretation of the Jesus message than the one that says: do not look for me to save the world single-handedly! I was crucified, I died, and I left my holy spirit to guide you. Now you have to look within yourselves to find me, meaning that now, you have to take on the mantle of saving the world, by listening to your inherent human morality, forming safe communities, and going forth with love and compassion.

Thank you.

14. “Reclaiming Our Conscience” by Rob Lauer

[Given April 6th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

On September 11, 1857, fifty devout Mormon men brutally murdered in cold blood at least 120 men, women, and children—including infants—at Mountain Meadows, near Cedar City, Utah. In the immediate aftermath, many of the men were horrified and guilt-ridden by what they had done. Witnesses said that a day later, when the Stake President who had given the final order to exterminate the California-bound wagon train, visited the massacre site and saw the 120 mutilated bodies scattered across the valley, he broke down into tears, sobbing, "I didn't know there were so many of them! I didn't know there were so many." Only one man—John D. Lee—was ever tried, convicted, and executed for the Mountain Meadows Massacre. A handful of the local Church officials who ordered and/or led the massacre spent the rest of their lives as fugitives hiding from Federal authorities. After committing what was until 1995 the worst act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history, most of the murderers simply returned to living their lives—caring for their families, raising children, working at their jobs, serving in church callings, and generally being regarded as honest, upright members of their communities. However, beneath this façade, most were haunted until the day they died by the memory of the horrors they had committed. Outward appearances aside, their consciences seldom gave them a moment's peace.

How could a people who had themselves been victims of ridicule, discrimination, prejudice, and violence—a people who had trekked a thousand miles across the North American continent to escape these things—so quickly, within less than a decade after arriving in their new promised land, commit an act of violence on a scale more massive than any they had suffered? How could seemingly good people not only perpetrate this massacre but also believe—or at least act as if they believed—that God approved of such a thing? The pangs of conscience that overtook many of the murderers in the aftermath of the massacre—where were these pangs in the days, hours, and minutes leading up to the atrocity?

Later, some secretly confessed to a select few that before the murders, they struggled with their consciences—their personal, internal sense of right and wrong. In the end, however, they silenced or ignored that inner voice and chose to follow the steady stream of outer voices: sermons of grievance ringing from pulpits, self-assured Church leaders issuing commands from on high, fervent calls for unquestioned unity and obedience, the presentation of scripture as the Word of God, directives to close one's eyes, ears, and mind and simply believe and obey. These disparate voices came together in perfect harmony to create one diabolical refrain:

Look without, not within...

Trust what is outside of you, not what is within you...

Stop thinking for yourself; let superior minds do the thinking...

You are lost; follow another because he knows the way...

Your feelings can't be trusted; adapt to the emotional temperature of the room...

Ignore what you know; you don't have the complete picture...
Doubt your doubts, and just believe...
Don't think, just do; don't criticize, just obey...
Ignore what you see before you because someone else can see around corners...
God is inaccessible to you personally; look to a leader, an organization, or a book.

The Mountain Meadows Massacre was just one in the long line of inhumane atrocities that have bedeviled the human race since the time we humans became capable of thinking in terms of life and death, good and bad, right and wrong. Our shared natural capacity to think in those terms ignited what we have traditionally called our conscience. All inhumane acts are the result of individuals numbing, silencing, ignoring, or failing to give due consideration to their conscience. All forms of tyranny begin as campaigns against the conscience of the individual—the subtle manipulation or blatant demand that a person ignore their inner voice—the voice that says, "This doesn't feel right, this doesn't make sense."

Yet, according to the Mormon understanding of Genesis's opening chapters, this inner voice was awakened when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This inner voice—the aspect of human consciousness that is aware of time, life, and death, and thus is capable of judging things as being either good or bad, true or false—is so obviously an attribute of the Gods that in Genesis 3:24, the LORD God says of Adam and Eve, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good from evil."

By progressively deepening our understanding of what is good and bad, right and wrong—and learning by degrees to live according to that deepening understanding, we grow into more humane and, thus, Godlier individuals. This is why we were born, and each of us has within ourselves everything that we need to fulfill that purpose.

Unfortunately, religions have too often persuaded people that they lack the ability to determine what is right and wrong on their own. They teach a perverted understanding of human nature, pointing to our natural limitations, our failures to live up to ideals, and our sins and shortcomings as proof that we cannot trust ourselves or human reasoning.

However, the view presented in the Hebrew scriptures is that God confidently engages with humans rationally. Isaiah 1:18 reads:

"Come now, let us reason together ... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool."

Moroni 7:15-16 declares,

"It is given unto [us] to judge, that [we] may know good from evil...with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to [everyone], that [they] may know good from evil..."

Religions often point to things outside of ourselves as guides that should supersede our conscience: things such as long-held traditions, the consensus of the community, leaders whom

they claim possess Divine knowledge and keys that God has not given to us, or scripture that they claim is the infallible "Word of God."

But the Word of God is not a book. Nowhere does the Bible declare itself to be "The Word of God." Instead, Hebrews 4:12 reads,

"The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing so deep as to separate soul and spirit."

Hebrew scripture describes the Word of God as a living and active voice that spoke to Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 20:9, Jeremiah himself describes the Word of God as being "in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones."

The Word of God is what Elijah heard after the fire, earthquakes, and whirlwind—what we traditionally call "the still small voice," but what a more faithful translation of the Hebrew would describe as "a sound of sheer silence."

III Nephi 11:3 describes this voice as being neither "harsh" nor "loud" but a "small" voice that can "pierce" one "to the very soul" and "cause [the] heart to burn."

II Nephi 29 and 31 teaches that God speaks to all nations, commanding them to write, giving "light unto the understanding," and speaking to them "according to their language, unto their understanding."

But, human understanding is influenced by culture and even by one's personal preferences. So it is that "The Book of Mormon's" author says in I Nephi 19:6-7:

"I do not write anything...save it be that I think it be sacred...if I do err, even did they err of old; not that I would excuse myself because of other men, but because of the weakness which is in me...the things which some men esteem to be of great worth, both to the body and soul, others set at naught and trample under their feet."

This is why Reform Mormonism holds that all scripture is art. It may be inspired and inspiring, comforting or challenging, a product of a specific time, place, and culture, yet capable of conveying timeless, universal insights. But in the end, one's scriptures cannot replace one's conscience.

As Parley P. Pratt wrote in 1840 in a statement now found in The Reform Mormon edition of Doctrine & Covenants,

"It is not then to a book, however true or sacred or useful it may be, that we would point to as the fountain of knowledge; but rather to the great fountain of Light and truth enthroned in the midst of the heavens; the revealer of secrets and the author of all truth in existence, whether written or not. Knowledge from this source can only be derived by means of direct revelation." (Doctrine 2:11-12)

The Word of God, to which we should look as a guide for conscience, is, by its nature, enwrapped in our conscience. As is taught in Doctrine & Covenants:

"...You shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is Light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ. And the Spirit giveth light to every [person] that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every [person] through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit. And every [person] that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father. And the Father teacheth him of the covenant which he has renewed and confirmed upon you...not for your sakes only, but for the sake of the whole world." (Covenants 30:2-8)

"And the Light which shines, which gives you Light, is through him who enlightens your eyes, which is the same Light that quickens your understandings; Which Light proceeds forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—The Light which is in all things, which gives life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God... The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not; nevertheless, the day shall come when you shall comprehend even God, being quickened in him and by him. Then shall ye know that ye have seen me, that I am, and that I am the true Light that is in you, and that you are in me..." (Covenants 40: 11-13, 49-50)

"All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself...otherwise, there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the Light." (Covenants 41:30-31)

The Light to which we must look, the Light which we should receive, is by nature within each of us. This inner Light is "the law" that should govern all aspects of our lives. This Light is "the power of God" within us—a God who has declared, "This is my work and glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." This is a God whose highest value is Human life. This is the God of Heaven described in the Prophecy of Enoch who weeps when He looks on the earth and sees that human beings, rather than loving one another, "are without affection" and "hate their own blood."

The Prophecy of Enoch also teaches that the personal connection that every human being has to this God is an internal spiritual reality:

"Therefore, it is given to abide in you the record of heaven, the Comforter, the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the truth of all things, that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things, that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment." (Prophecy of Enoch 1:29)

John Taylor once famously declared that "the day is coming when no one will be able to live on borrowed light," but the fact of the matter is it has always been that day. In the end, each of us will stand or fall, progress or regress, grow or not grow, depending on whether we were true to

the Light that we have each received. No person can reveal that Light to another; no one else can serve as our conscience.

In our daily lives, in our relationships, in all of our studies and reading, in all of our endeavors, may we always—when all else is said and done—learn to be still and to the still small voice of conscience, the whispering of the Spirit, the Light of Christ at work within each of us. I leave these things with you in the Name of Christ, Amen.

15. “My Coming out story: Reclaiming my Life” by John Crane

[Given April 6th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

My coming out story is a long one. It doesn't end until I met the love of my life, and all the pieces started to fit together.

Ever since I can remember I had been fascinated by girls. All through kindergarten and early grade school, I always had a couple of girlfriends. My first and only fight was when I punched out a kid for making a pass at my girlfriend in the third grade. When she transferred to another school, I was devastated. But all that changed when puberty hit. I changed my attention to boys. I remember going on campouts and Aaronic Priesthood events and forcing myself not to look. I would go to the store and see a guy and get a crush on him, hoping that he would also fantasize about me. But, what did I fantasize about? I knew nothing about sex. I was very sheltered. All I could think about was just being around him. Other than just being there, I had no idea what I might do.

These fantasies persisted for several years. I tried to suppress them, but they kept coming back to haunt me. I thought I was going crazy. I thought this wasn't happening to anybody else but me. This was the late 50's and early 60's, and this was something you just didn't talk about, or even ask about. I saw pictures in the paper of guys in drag or outrageous clothing, protesting or getting arrested, and I felt that this wasn't who I was, but I didn't know what I was. The boys in high school were always bragging: “I went to a movie, and some queer touched my leg, and I beat the sh*t out of him”. I didn't know where to turn for information. There was nobody I could talk to or confide in. I wanted to talk to my parents about it, but I was afraid. We never discussed sex of any kind in the family. I wanted to read something, but all the good books in the library were behind the librarian's desk, and there were no Walden Book Stores in the mall with their “Gay Studies” section.

I went on a mission to Sweden. Back on those days, few of the apartments where we lived had showers or hot water, so we would go to the public baths each week. Again, I was tempted, and I promised myself I wouldn't look. But we actually met an investigator in the sauna. We told the mission president about him. The president told us to ask him if he was gay, and if so, we should not teach him. The president said, “Gays feel the Spirit and are attracted to us, but we can't teach them.” I thought about Peter when he saw the Holy Ghost fall upon the Gentiles, so he taught and baptized them, so why not gays as well? But we asked this brother whether he was gay, and he said “No.” Eventually, he moved away, met a couple other elders, got baptized, and rode his bike a hundred miles to tell my companion that he joined the church.

After my mission, I got married, and had four children, all the while fighting these feelings inside of me. It took me thirteen years of marriage to realize that I actually was gay, and I needed to choose what to do about it. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was going through the classic

stages of the “theoretical model of homosexual identity formation” articulated by psychologist Vivienne Cass in 1979. (This came only a few years after the APA declared that homosexuality was not a mental disorder.) I am grateful to Dr. Michael Adam Ferguson for pointing these out in a Facebook post. These are the stages:

1. Identity confusion
2. Identity comparison
3. Identity tolerance
4. Identity acceptance
5. Pride
6. Identity synthesis

At that stage of my life I was someplace between confusion and comparison. I needed information. I have always been a spiritual person, and had a very strong relationship with God, so I didn’t want to do anything to jeopardize that relationship, but I also wanted to do what was right for me. I started reading and I also went to the bars and the baths to meet gay men, and talk with them. I heard their stories, and discovered that we had a lot in common. They weren’t sleazy society misfits, but strong, intelligent, resourceful, talented, spiritual, and upstanding members of the community. I will never forget attending a concert of the Seattle Men’s Chorus. I love and appreciate music, and I know what it takes to be a singer or musician. I realized that if these guys could be talented and accomplished and gay, then why not me? This was a great process of discovery for me. For being a shy loner, I found that I could actually relate to these men. And for spending most of my life living inside a cloud of anger and distrust, I discovered that I actually liked people, and they liked me. I also discovered how desperately they needed love, and found out how much I desperately needed to give love.

This is an amazing discovery for a person at age 36 to make. Another amazing discovery for me was the ability to make my own decisions and take responsibility for them. This idea completely changed my life. After all these changes and insights, I felt like the Ugly Duckling who realized he really was a swan.

I also realized that if I let it, this would take over my entire life, my time, and my attention. I realized that I had to re-invent parts of myself because, at the same time, the rest of my life was still there and waiting, and I had other goals to fulfill. When I used the term “identity” in connection with these six points, I only mean PART of my identity. The rest of me was still very much intact. I had fought hard to educate myself and develop a career, and to develop a knowledge of the Gospel and a relationship with Christ, and I wanted nothing to interfere with that. Of course, I believed at first that I could “pray away the Gay”, but I soon realized that this wasn’t going to change me. I was very active in the church, went on a mission, went to BYU, married in the temple, paid my tithing, read the scriptures regularly, and stayed super faithful. All to no avail. And I did none of it out of a sense of duty. I did it because I loved the Gospel, and it made me happy to live it. I had some wonderful teachers in the church as a youth, and at BYU. I

paid attention and learned the Gospel. I had to play a lot of catchup because my family was part member, and not very active, and most of my friends were from old families in the Church, and they knew their stuff. But I got very interested, drove myself to study, and basically converted myself to the Gospel.

Eventually I moved out of the house, my wife filed for divorce, and I was excommunicated from the church. I learned that my excommunication trial was far different than most. I really dressed up for my trial and approached the whole thing with the utmost respect and dignity. No screaming. No fighting. No recriminations. No pleading. I had made my peace with God and was determined to take whatever I had coming. I even reached the point in my own mind, and I think we all must do this, where I was even ready to defy God, if necessary. At the trial, I felt a lot of love and concern from the brethren. Even the man who was supposed to testify against me cried and pleaded that I was a good man, and should not be excommunicated. The Spirit told them all that they should not do it, but in the end, the handbook won, and the Spirit lost.

I was out of the church, but I was surprised that I didn't feel too badly about it. My relationship was with God, not the church. I still had the Spirit, and I felt the assurance and the will to make it and to fight my way back, whatever "back" meant.

But, just to do a little reality check on myself, I thought about these words from Mosiah and asked myself how they applied to me:

2:37. I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

2:38. Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.

2:39. And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore, his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment.

I didn't really know at this time how God felt about any of this, but I was prepared to stand before Him and not shrink from His presence, but instead say: "This is my choice. I know it's right for me. If you don't like it, then send me away, and I will take whatever punishment you see fit to give me." Now remember, this was before I ever sought the mind and will of God of this matter. But I had made a choice, and I made that startling realization that for the first time in my life, I made a choice on my own behalf, and not to please somebody else.

I later realized that God never left me, and I felt like I could confidently walk into His Presence, and he would welcome me. I did not think myself an enemy to God. In fact, I always saw God as my Friend, and He still was. I just needed a space to step back and rethink our relationship, and make sure it was built on rock, not sand. He gave me that space. This was really a test for me to

see whether I was willing to take a leap of faith, out into the darkness, not seeing the road ahead. The song "Runner" by Twila Paris says is best, and it was my inspiration during this time.

Runner when the road is long
Feel like giving in, but you're hanging on
Oh runner, when the race is won
You will run into His arms.

I was still searching and trying to determine if this was the right thing to do for me. I was in the Tolerance stage, working on Acceptance. One summer, I decided to drive alone down from Seattle, where my family was living, to San Francisco to check out things for myself. This was the height of the 80's and being gay in San Francisco was like being Irish on St. Patrick's Day. It was the thing to be, even if you weren't gay or Irish. I saw gay restaurants. I saw gay bars with big picture windows open to the street. I saw people who were gay who were friends all through high school, and were now young adults who never had to go through the indecision and turmoil I was now going through. I saw a couple walking down the street together, happy and carefree like a couple of children. When I saw that picture, things started to jell in my mind. I wanted to have a companion and to have us both feel like that. This was a long way from just a teenage crush years before. Then, the words to this popular song from back then, "The Voice" by Moody Blues came over the car radio:

Cause out on the ocean of life my love.
There a so many storms we must rise above.
Can you hear the spirit calling, as it's carried across the waves?
You're already falling; it's calling you back to face the music.
And the song that is coming through.
You're already falling; the one that it's calling is you.

Make a promise take a vow.
And trust your feelings it's easy now.
Understand the Voice within.
And feel a change already beginning.

This was it. I needed to learn to know myself. I needed to face the music. I needed to listen to the inner Voice. Instead of denying my feelings, I needed to listen to them.

Then, on the way back home, I stopped at a gay bar in Seattle. It was July 4th weekend. On a blackboard, on the wall, somebody had drawn a picture of the American flag and the words: "Gay, Proud, and American". That clinched it. I could honestly say I was all the above. Stage Six done. Stage Seven to come. My makeover was nearly complete. I was living a new life. I was experimenting, and is the case with experimentation, there are break throughs and there are mistakes. I had lived in a relationship with several people in Seattle, moved to San Francisco and got a job in Silicon Valley, and was now living in Los Angeles.

"Make a promise take a vow." God wants to know that you will listen to him and covenant to follow him no matter where the road may lead. A crisis is not just that something bad happens to

you. A crisis is when circumstances force you to come to a point in life where a decision must be made. I reached that point in April 1985.

This was a real down point in my life. I had just been robbed; a relationship had failed miserably; and I had just broken my wrist. To make matter worse, I sensed that something illegal was going on at work. I remember laying on my bed and praying to God. I basically said:

I have made such a mess of my life trying to do things on my own, and living my life for myself. From now on, I am going to dedicate my life to you and your service. I'm not asking you to take over my life and make decisions for me, but I, here and now, make a covenant to dedicate my life to your service. I'll go where you want me to go. I'll say what you want me to say. I'll do what you want me to do. I'll be what you want me to be. I'll see what you want me to see.

Asking nothing in return, and not expecting any special favors, I needed a new focus in life. I opened myself up and made myself completely vulnerable and pliable in the Lord's hands, come what may. I was ready to make that kind of commitment. I am not the kind of person to take a promise lightly. My boss once said: "Once, you make a promise, you will move heaven and earth to keep that promise." Yes, I will. It's a matter of personal pride. I wouldn't be the person I am if I did any less. A general authority once said in Conference: "It is better to be trusted than to be loved." I always wanted to be the kind of person that people could trust.

Then, in the coming months, things started unfolding. I got laid off from work because I was complaining too much. I later found out that I was working, not for a software company, but a giant international money laundering operation. I got out just in time. They gave me a very generous severance and sent me on my way. Immediately, I was contacted by another former employee who wanted to go into business developing software. We had a fairly successful business creating what is now called GPS software, like Garmin and Tom Tom. We were one of the early pioneers in the business. With our product, you could use a touch screen to get detailed driving directions from any address in the US or Canada to any other address or point of interest. We later went out of business and sold the company, but we had a good run while it lasted.

I was also receiving a great deal of inspiration and spiritual guidance. I wanted my wrist to heal up, and once, while attending a prayer service at one of the local gay churches, I was standing in a circle, praying for a healing for my wrist. I felt a surge of the Spirit in my wrist, a sense of warmth and high vibration, and I heard my bones literally go "crack" and "crunch". And I knew my wrist had been healed, and I praised God. I visited my orthopedic surgeon for a follow-up visit a week later, and he said it was completely healed, and then proceeded to congratulate himself and tell me what a great doctor he was. I'm sure he was a great doctor, but there were other forces at work here, as well. I trusted the Lord and followed Him wherever that path led me.

I joined the local LA Affirmation chapter. Being a stranger in town, I met some friends in Affirmation and read some excellent pamphlets that Affirmation put out. One was about excommunication, which the pamphlet explained, doesn't mean the end of the world. You still

have a life and God still loves you. That was a great comfort and source of information to me. In Affirmation I met a couple of men who were thinking of starting a study group and meeting to study the Gospel and partake of the Sacrament together in each other's homes. I thought this might be a good idea, but I wanted to pray about it, so I did.

This is how my prayer was answered. One day I was sitting alone in a gay restaurant in West Hollywood, sipping a beer and checking out a guy as he walked across the room. Suddenly, the Spirit came over me and confirmed that I should take part with this group. But, think about it! God was sending me a message in the most vivid way possible. According to traditional church teachings, I was in the wrong place, drinking the wrong beverage, and thinking the wrong thoughts. But the Holy Ghost cut through all that clutter and told me what was really important. All the trivial do's and don't's are not important in the eyes of God. What God is looking for are people who trust Him and obey His voice.

We began meeting as a little group, then suddenly, several of us began receiving revelation, just like Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery did in the early days of the church. What's it like to receive a revelation? First you sense something like a point of tension building and building in your spirit. It's like a dam ready to burst. Then, are you instantly receive a huge block of understanding, all in an instant. You feel like a piece of knowledge or intelligence is about to flood over you. Joseph Smith aptly described it as pure intelligence flowing through you. Another teacher described it as "the flashing forth of intuition."

You want to write it all down. You want to write while in the Spirit as Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon did while receiving the Vision of the Three Degrees of Glory. During that time, you struggle to get your multi-dimensional holographic image down in a one-dimensional stream of words. You struggle to find the right word, or sometime the correct words just come to you. But some things simply can't be written. Either you feel it is not appropriate to write, or you have no frame of reference with which to relate it to others. (This is why it takes revelation of your own to understand revelation coming through others.)

While in the Spirit like this, you feel like you could ask God any question and get an answer. You feel like God knows what you are going to ask even ever before you ask it. Unfortunately, the vision eventually closes, though you wish it would last forever. I use the word "feel", which is a word normally associated with emotion. But, this it not emotion. It is intuition.

I learned in the little study group that evolved into a church that we are all entitled to revelation and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, concerning our callings and stewardship, regardless if the stewardship is our own life, our family, our church callings, our job, or even a venture such as we felt called to embark upon.

In all the revelations given to our group, God begins them by conveying his great love for us. This is something we all need to hear, and especially the gay community. Yeah, He really does love all of us a lot, and that is probably the scariest thing about God and the hardest thing to handle. His love. Stop thinking you don't deserve it, because if you think that, all you do is cut yourself off from Him. It's not God cutting you off from him; it's because you are cutting yourself off from God.

Not content with taking anybody else's word for it, and realizing that everybody had presumed to know how God felt about homosexuality, but never bothered to ask. I decided to ask. To give you a quick summary of what I received, I learned that when it comes to sexual relations, God is no respecter of persons. The same rules about adultery and fornication apply to everybody, regardless of sexual orientation. To God, it is irrelevant and immaterial whether the couple is same-sex or opposite-sex. He loves all of us. Not especially because you are gay, or especially because you are straight. It's all irrelevant. We're all special in our own way, but nobody is any more special than anybody else. I talk a lot about dreams and revelations, but does that make me special? No. I figure God will talk to anybody who has faith, sets aside his fears and prejudices, and really listens.

I found out that cheating is cheating. Gay or straight makes no difference. Sex is deep and intimate communication that takes place on many levels, and it can destroy a couple or friendship, or it can create a bond that must be preserved in a relationship that is secured by a deep interpersonal covenant, made in connection with the Holy Ghost.

It's OK to have a same-sex relationship. In fact, the Lord specifically recommended that you form relationships. But you must be responsible; you must make sacred covenants with Him and with each other; and you must live by them. Back then, nobody dared dream that same-sex marriage would eventually be legal, and if the Lord knew it was going to happen, he never told me. But, the thing about revelation is you only get to see the path a few steps ahead of you. If you aren't ready for the full picture, you don't see the full picture. But, the two things that came across to me as being of paramount importance were (1) Follow the Spirit, and (2) Make and keep covenants.

With this new knowledge, I changed my behavior immediately. I had been running around, so to speak, but I received the personal message, in no uncertain terms, that this was wrong.

We collected all the revelations we received, except the ones that were too personal, and put them together in a book. Unlike most books that come out today, purporting to be scripture, this was not some warmed-over ancient translation or sealed portion. This was a modern-day testament, given in the 80's, that God has not forgotten us, and we are equally loved along with everybody else.

In my personal life, I longed for the spiritual companionship of the Lord, but I also longed for the physical and emotional contact with somebody I could, as Joseph Smith put it, "it is pleasing for friends to lie down together, locked in the arms of love, to sleep and wake in each other's embrace and renew their conversation." (Yes, he actually said that, but he was specifically referring to the resurrection.) But to be able to experience this with a choice companion is what I wanted with all my heart.

A couple of months later, I received a revelation that God had somebody especially prepared for me to come into my life. He would be somebody I never considered or expected, but he would come into my life and we would be a blessing to each other. It also stated that being together would be "the key to your success". I waited.

Things were not going too well for our little group, and I was on the verge of leaving. We began in August 1985, and it was now October 1986. We had a great beginning with a wonderful Spirit in attendance, but over the months, egos started to get in the way. Now, we were going to have a missionary meeting on a Saturday, but I wasn't sure if I was going to participate or ever return to the organization again.

All that week before the meeting, I had a different dream each night. I dreamt about missing a plane. Then I dreamt about missing an elevator. Finally, on the Friday night before, I dreamt about missing the proverbial boat. I took them all as warning messages and decided to attend the Saturday meeting. Just as I showed up and began to walk up the sidewalk to the porch of the private home where we were to meet, Thom, who was at the meeting, decided to come out on the porch to get a breath of fresh air. He saw me coming, and he said time stood still for him. I came up and gave him a hug, the same as I would do for anybody in the group. But, this time, I especially wanted him to feel all the love of God in that hug. Later on, he says that he felt it was God hugging him, and he never felt safer in anybody's arms.

Throughout the meeting, we kept looking across the room at each other. It was getting embarrassing because other people started to notice, and I tried not to look at the most beautiful face I have ever seen in my life. But I realized later that looks were irrelevant. I finally met a person who understood me, and that's not easy to do. We can also totally be ourselves around each other, and a person like that is hard to find.

Thom had been staying with some church members all that week, but nobody told him about me and nobody told me about him. It was literally love at first sight. The song "Some Enchanted Evening you may see a stranger across a crowded room" doesn't do justice to how we both felt. In fact, all the love songs started making sense to me. It turns out he was the son of a Mormon bishop. He had been staying in town with church members for a couple of weeks. He had to leave Sacramento and had a choice of either going to San Francisco or Los Angeles. He didn't like either choice, but for some reason he chose Los Angeles. I knew somebody was coming down from Sacramento to Los Angeles and needed money for a bus ticket. I donated the money, but I didn't know who the money was for, and he didn't know that I donated the money. It wasn't until years later that we realized that I paid for his ticket, and made it possible for us to meet.

Like me, he also had a very tough birth, but unlike me, he was born premature. He was handicapped with cerebral palsy. It only affected how he walked. He was so intelligent he got accepted into Stanford right out of high school, and so good looking that a model agency wanted him to come work for them. But he gave all that up and more to serve a mission because he wanted to please an ungrateful and abusive father. He never told me all at once about his life before we met, but he has gradually unfolded it for me over the years, confiding in me things he has never told anybody else. I don't mind not knowing everything, but, I don't think he could tell me anything that would not make me love him, and if I were to tell only part of his life, you would be amazed, and it would also break your heart,

I still wonder whether you can tell at an early age whether children are gay, but I have seen early pictures of Thom. I didn't have any trouble picking him out from his brothers and sisters.

He was the brightest, the happiest, with the biggest smile, and had a certain sparkle about him. I wanted to know him, even as a child.

We moved in together as soon as we could find a place. But, before that, I didn't want him to feel stuck in any situation and not able to get out of it, so on our first date, I went to the ATM and gave him some money right on the spot. No questions asked. When we moved in, we decided not to have sex until we held a commitment ceremony at the church. It was difficult holding off about three weeks, but we made it. Nobody believed us, but we made it.

Not even waiting to move the furniture into our new apartment, we slept the first night together on the floor. We each had the same dream. I dreamt that we were sitting beside each other, and a man sat across from us at a desk or table. He was showing us a big photo album of our future life together, slowing turning page by page. Next morning, I told Thom about the dream, and he said he had the exact same dream.

As the years went by, we found we had a lot in common. He was physically, but not mentally, handicapped. I was visually handicapped. From the moment I met him, I just knew exactly how he wanted to be treated. No sympathy. No coddling. No special treatment. If he falls down, he doesn't want any help getting up. When we haul in the groceries, he always picks the heaviest load. He used to wear leg braces, but he threw out his braces shortly after we got together and doesn't need them anymore. I call that a miracle.

Once, when I was praying at bedtime, I heard a distinct voice saying: "The key to your success is that you both remain together." I know this is right, and that God wants us to remain together, and both of our lives have changed in a very significant way after we got together. I had actually forgotten that the Lord had said that to me earlier before we even met. He was just reminding me what he said earlier.

When I was a little kid, my mom used to take me to the children's hospital to see the eye doctor. I remembered seeing the little crippled kids at the children's hospital and always included in my childhood evening prayer to "bless the poor little crippled boys and girls". Without knowing or realizing it, I was praying for him.

We have been together 38 years, married 12 years. Before marriage was legal, we saw a group of gay and Lesbian attorneys here in town to draw up our wills and powers of attorney. I am not generally an emotional person, so I didn't realize what an impact drawing up a will together would have on me emotionally. To finally meet people out in the business world who understood us and our concerns exactly, and the fact that we were making our mark together, out in the external world made me suppress a tear or two. Now that we are married, I never feel more married than when we file our taxes together. We have both our parents' marriage certificates hanging on the wall, and our own hanging on the wall in the foyer. It's the first thing you see when you walk in the front door.

Both of us are excommunicated. Neither of us has plans to ever return. Thom refuses to attend, but I will visit occasionally, when a family member is getting blessed or baptized. Some of our families accept us, while others don't. Many accepted us as a couple until we got married. So

long as our relationship was abstract, it was OK with them. But, when our relationship became real and tangible by legal recognition, they couldn't handle it. But on the bright side, we have had members of both families tell us "We have never seen you happier." We have also been told by couples in both families that we are the inspiration and example for their straight marriage. And when my brothers' wives get together at a reunion, they always ask Thom "How can we get our husbands to treat us the way John treats you?"

My Patriarchal Blessing talks about "the greatest blessing that will come into your life ...[being]... your companion forever". He truly is the greatest blessing that has come into my life. All the trials and pains and uncertainty were worth it. I feel like King Aragorn in "Lord of the Rings", who, after his long trials and labors, finally married the person he loved. And, for me, this is a testimony that God loves us; He is always mindful of us; and when we listen, and when we covenant to obey Him, he hears and answers prayer. In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

16. "All the Voices of the Restoration"

by Steve Pynakker

[Given April 6th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Well hello there! This is your Evangelical fanboy of the all things Restoration, and I want to thank the Reformed Mormonism movement for allowing me to just say a few words here briefly for your first General Conference and first of hopefully many.

I've just kind of been reflecting on what does it mean um to be "a fanboy of the Restoration?" but more importantly what the work that the Mormon Book Reviews channel has been doing is listening to all the voices of the Restoration, so I'm going to title this "All the Voices of the Restoration".

As I peruse my most recent edition of the Book of Mormon that I just received - this hasn't been published yet, it's about ready to be. It's the very first, world's first almost-indestructible waterproof Book of Mormon. Matter of fact, you can't even tear the pages.

Then I go through and I look at different expressions of the Restoration and their Books of Mormon - including the Church of Jesus Christ, which I'll get to shortly. Then of course another expression of the Restoration: The Chronicles of the Children of Araneck by prophet, seer, and revelator Matthew Gill in England.

Then I get to hear even outsiders' expressions and voices through a book such as "A Pentecostal reads the Book of Mormon: A literary and Theological Introduction" by Christopher Thomas, who's one of the leading Pentecostal theologians in the world. He was also the founding president of the Book of Mormon Studies Association, and that's been doing a very important work. So there's also this interfaith um aspect that's going on.

There is a lot of really new cool expressions that are happening now in the information age - the age of the internet - and there's just a lot of people talking to each other that in the past weren't. I really feel part of it was that I was called to enter into this space to facilitate dialogue between all the different branches of the Restoration, but then also extend it out to all other groups within the Restoration.

That's why I think Reform Mormonism is a really important expression in the Restoration, because it deals with people who often are on the fringes; the people who maybe are not accepted by some of the mainstream churches, but are believers in the Restoration, are believers in the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and in the Restoration as a whole. Maybe its because they're Queer, or they're trans, or any number of reasons why they don't feel welcome in other branches of the Restoration. This movement's been around for a couple decades, or a few decades now I believe, but now it's kind of

organizing in such a way that you're having a General Conference and allowing all those other voices to come and be heard, including mine.

Actually, Evan Sharley, who's one of the facilitators of this group, reminded me - probably about a year ago or so - she said "Steve, you ARE part of the Restoration". I never thought of it that way but that really hit me, that in one sense I'm as much of a product of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith as I owe owe a lot of my identity to him as much as a person who's a member in the Restoration. That really struck me, and I just really want to commend the work that Rob and Evan are doing. These are two important people who've been on my show multiple times, and just to see the evolution of this movement and including me. I even encouraged Evan to maybe engage this group and then eventually she got involved after departing from Community of Christ, and then of course we've been able to document that journey in this space as well, which I think is a really important journey and an important voice and that's what we try to do here.

Now I do get push back for having certain people on, and it comes it's bipartisan. There are people on the right and people on the left that say "Why in the world are you having this person on?? Why are you platforming them??" My thing is that even people who are controversial often do represent the views of millions of people, so you just can't ignore these these individuals and what they have to say, but also more importantly is that what we try to do here is try to model how dialogue can be done in such a way in which you can have people from two disparit camps that are antagonistic to each other and find ways to build bridges and bring people together. One of the first things that God showed me when I first started this channel was He went to me, put me in a place where on one side of the street I'm on with my people holding up signs and across the street there was another group of people holding up signs in opposition to my group, and God said "See those people across the street?" and I said "Yeah", and He said "Just remind yourself those are fellow image bearers." Fellow image bearers.

So I even have people on this program that I wildly disagree with - and in some cases may not even personally like them too much - but I think that their voices are very, very important. Those are kind of the founding principles of this whole thing: just to listen to all the voices recognize that we all, all, all are image bearers, and also recognize that Jesus hung out with the with the people on the fringes; the destitute, the prostitutes, and even the tax collectors. Oh my goodness! The point being is that He loved people where they were at and wasn't afraid to affiliate with them, and I think that's the most important thing, and also to take on the religious establishment that is judgmental towards people and is very much about "in-group, out-group" thinking. Jesus went into their Temple - in His own Temple - and turned over the tables.

As Dr. Kyle Beshears - a fellow Evangelical who is also a highly regarded scholar in the Mormon space - said once on Gospel Tangents: he said "Jesus didn't go into Samaria and turn over the tables in their Temple; He went and did it in the Temple in Jerusalem." The point being is that a lot of this antagonism that Evangelicals have directed towards the Restoration is not really biblical. We need to, rather than focus on the speck in your eye, if you will, we should focus on this plank hanging out of ours in many ways.

I think it's more important that, in my sense, being part of the Evangelical community, to be a voice of not opposition, but maybe - and I don't even want to say prophetic voice - but just be a voice that's pushing back against the the current direction that it's heading in.

So I think these kinds of conversations can be very informative and I just want to thank Evan and Rob for all the work that they've been doing. I want to thank all the people who are going to be participating in this; many of you I know, I'm friends with, been in communication with, maybe some of you have probably been on my program. I just want to let people know what we're doing here at Mormon Book Reviews is not to censor people, not to tell other people or cancel or whatever, but more "Let's just all talk to each other and try to find some commonality." In this time, in this country's period where we have so much division and so much strife and it's literally tearing our country apart, and who knows where this all goes, I think it's really important that we have communities that can model how it can be done. How we can come together even when we do strongly disagree with each other, and do it in a way that can show that Christ is operating in our lives and in our movements.

Again, if you don't see those fruits, I don't know if Christ is there. That's just my opinion. If you don't see striving towards communications, loving, turning the other cheek, loving your enemies, all these things - if you're not seeing these things and instead you're seeing "Attack! Attack! Attack! Attack! Attack!", you have to ask yourself "Is Jesus in the center of that individual's endeavor or that movement?", and I think that's really the most important thing.

The Reform Mormonism movement is radical. It's bold and audacious, but I think we need that. Many times it's the people on the fringes that often do push the conversation and push things in those directions. I always tell people "Always look at the fringes! Don't look at the center, look at the fringes and see what's going on" because eventually those fringes often can become very important movements. I'm hopeful that the Reform Mormonism expression will inform these conversations for the future and show that all the voices of the Restoration are included and people can contribute and it' be a beautiful thing.

So I want to thank again the organizers of the Reform Mormonism movement for allowing my voice to be heard today, and I really wish you well in this groundbreaking conference that's happening.

I also wanted to point out too that in addition to uh The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints having their General Conference, there are other expressions within the Restoration that are also having General Conferences, and one of the very first General Conferences that I will be attending will be April 11th in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, which is the headquarters of the world conference of the Church of Jesus Christ. Now, I think it's wonderful that the very first church of the Restorations' doors that I darkened was the Church of Jesus Christ, and I think it's really appropriate that the very first General Conference I attend would be the Church of Jesus Christ. So I want to thank my brothers and sisters in the Church of Jesus Christ for inviting me to attend their sacred space and their General Conference which is April 11th through the 13th, and I'm looking forward to engaging that lovely community and their wonderful people.

I also want to just thank the wonderful people in the Reform Mormon as a movement, and all the other expressions including Community of Christ which is having their World Conference in the first week of June; maybe we'll get to that I don't know. Really it's just important that this is the time of year when the various groups of the Restoration comes together, and maybe one day all of them will come together as one. Alright thank you so much everybody, and God bless!

17. “The Importance of Music in Reform Mormonism” by Roman

[Given April 6th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Greeting:

Hello, my name is Roman. I'm a 6th generation mormon.

Introduction:

Friends in the Restoration, today I want to speak about the sacred and transformative power of music. Music is not just an art or a form of entertainment—it is a divine gift from our Heavenly Parents, a means of worship, and a source of spiritual enlightenment. Since the early days of the Restoration, music has uplifted and united us, and it continues to inspire us today as we seek to build a faith rooted in personal revelation, reason, and love.

1. Music as a Form of Worship

From the earliest revelations, we see that music holds a sacred place in our spiritual practice. In Doctrine and Covenants 25:12, we read:

"For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads."

This reminds us that music can be an act of prayer—one that transcends words and speaks directly to the Divine within us. Whether we are gathered in fellowship, singing in our homes, or reflecting in solitude, music has the power to lift our spirits and deepen our connection with the sacred. It is not limited to hymns or traditional religious music—any song that moves our hearts toward goodness, compassion, and wisdom can be an offering of worship.

2. Music Unites and Strengthens Us

Throughout history, people of faith have turned to music for strength in times of hardship and celebration. Early Latter Day Saints sang as they journeyed westward, finding hope in lyrics that reminded them of their resilience. One of their most well-known hymns, “Come, Come, Ye Saints”, carried the message:

"All is well, all is well!"

Today, music continues to unite us—not only within our congregations but in our broader communities. Whether through choirs, family singalongs, or the stirring harmonies of great musical traditions, music reminds us that we are never alone in our faith. Reform Mormonism celebrates the diversity of spiritual expression, and music is one of the most powerful ways to experience that unity in diversity.

3. Music as a Teacher of Truth and Inspiration

Music is one of the most effective ways to internalize deep truths, at least for me. While we may forget the exact words of a sermon, the melody and message of a song stay with us.

When we sing “I Am a Child of God”, we affirm the Divinity within each of us. When we listen to songs that speak of love, justice, and the beauty of creation, we are reminded of our responsibility to act with kindness and integrity. Reform Mormonism teaches - or can teach - that personal revelation is ongoing, and music often becomes a medium through which we receive inspiration and insight.

President Heber J. Grant once said:

“The singing of our sacred hymns, written by the servants of God, has a powerful effect in converting people to the principles of the Gospel, and in promoting peace and spiritual growth.”

(Improvement Era, Sept. 1940, 522)

In Reform Mormonism, we might expand this idea to say that music creates space for revelation in its many forms—whether we call it the Spirit, personal intuition, or simply the profound emotional resonance that leads us to greater understanding.

4. Music in Our Daily Lives

Music is not just for sacred gatherings—it can be a daily source of peace, reflection, and joy. Listening to uplifting or thought-provoking music can center us in times of stress. Singing can help us express emotions that words cannot fully capture. In both moments of sorrow and celebration, music can be our companion.

Reform Mormonism encourages us to embrace joy, learning, and individual spiritual practice, and music can be an essential part of that. Whether through hymns, classical compositions, folk ballads, or modern songs that inspire us, music can be a way to nurture our souls.

In my family, we have a tradition of talent shows and playing songs on pianos, guitars, ukuleles, and even a jug band. My grandmother was in the then-called Mormon Tabernacle Choir when I was younger. She has always encouraged everyone in my family to pursue any sort of musical talent and use it as a way to connect with others. My family has rough patches like any other family, but we have always connected through music.

Conclusion:

My dear friends in the Restoration, music is a profound and sacred gift. It strengthens our faith, unites us as a people, teaches truth, and opens our hearts to divine inspiration. Let us embrace its power—not just in worship, but in every aspect of our lives. Let us sing with joy, listen with intention, and allow music to deepen our journey of faith and understanding.

To conclude, let us reflect again on the words of scripture:

"The song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads."

May we use music to express our love for truth, our devotion to growth, and our commitment to a faith that seeks wisdom, compassion, and joy. In the name of all that is good and holy, amen.

And let me close with an arrangement of "Brightly Beams".

Capo 2

C F

1 Brightly beams our Parent's mercy

D7 G7

From Their lighthouse evermore;

C F

But to us They give the keeping

C G7 C

Of the lights along the shore.

Refrain:

F C

Let the lower lights be burning!

D7 G7

Send a gleam across the wave!

C F

Some poor fainting, struggling sailor

C G7 C

You may rescue, you may save.

C F

2 Dark the night of sin has settled,

D7 G7

Loud the angry billows roar;

C F

Eager eyes are watching, longing,

C G7 C

For the lights along the shore. [Refrain]

Refrain:

F C

Let the lower lights be burning!

D7 G7

Send a gleam across the wave!

C F

Some poor fainting, struggling sailor

C G7 C

You may rescue, you may save.

C F

3 Trim your feeble lamp, dear neighbor!

D7 G7

Some poor sailor, tempest-tossed,

C F

Trying now to make the harbor,

C G7 C

In the darkness may be lost. [Refrain]

Refrain:

F C

Let the lower lights be burning!

D7 G7

Send a gleam across the wave!

C F

Some poor fainting, struggling sailor

C G7 C

You may rescue, you may save.

18. “The Sacredness of the Transgender Experience” by Evan Sharley

[Given April 6th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

1. Introduction

I have a niece who is deutan colorblind, meaning she can't see the color green and has trouble seeing the color red. Even when she and I are looking at the same things, we see them drastically differently because of our bodies - specifically our eyes. I don't see our difference as a deficiency, and in fact, I am fascinated at hearing how she experiences the world. She has a unique perspective, and while I will never experience it, I try to understand it. At family gatherings, I occasionally ask her about some of her experiences and have looked up some simulators online to see what things would look like if I were colorblind like her.

In this same way, transgender people, having quite unique experiences, have a unique perspective on life. As a transgender Mormon theologian, I feel I am in a position to articulate what value and insights transgender folks provide for the human family. While most of you listening will likely never experience being transgender, I pray that you will be curious about our differences and strive to learn from them.

2. Eternal Progression and the Fluidity of Gender

The doctrine of eternal progression means that we are eternal beings who will be constantly growing and changing for eternity. Yet, paradoxically, some claim that there are things that are entirely immune from change throughout eternity and thus are immune from progression. One of the common things that people latch onto is gender. As I examined yesterday, even our understanding of God has not been eternal and unchanging, so why would something like gender be immune from change? Within this life, some certainly have an unchanging sense of their gender identity. However, there are others whose eternal progression includes learning what their true gender identity is.

I am one of these people. I was told since birth that I was to be a man because of how my body looked. However, this ended up not being applicable to me because as I progressed, through studying and pondering, I found that I am, in fact, a woman. Part of this pondering was allowing myself to express masculinity alongside femininity and seeing how each felt. I came to find that I looked forward to the days when I would be expressing myself more femininely, and my masculine days increasingly made me feel uncomfortable. My enjoying femininity is called “gender euphoria,” and me having an aversion to expressing or being perceived as masculine is called “gender dysphoria.” This phenomenon has not been unexamined within our tradition: the book “Queer Mormon Theology” by Blaire Ostler suggests that the Spirit communicates through the body and uses feelings to confirm truths. In this way, gender dysphoria and euphoria could be seen as the Holy Ghost prompting people to recognize their identity.

Some assume that we must fit neatly within the gender binary, but creation itself urges us to reconsider. On the First Day of Creation the binaries of day and night were created, yet dawn and dusk also came into existence. On the Third Day, land and sea were separated, yet marshes and beaches blur these distinctions. Likewise, on the Sixth Day of Creation the gender binary was established, and yet, like the other acts of creation, there are people who are not part of those initial binaries.

None of these are mistakes or exceptions; they are integral to the beauty of the earth. Each one may be understood to be a certain way at a particular time, but none are rigid, and all are fluid and able to change, for the very nature of reality is progression.

3. What Perspectives We Bring

Transgender and non-binary people walk a sacred and holy path. Our lives offer unique insights into Divinity and humanity, revealing facets of the human experience that many cisgender individuals may never encounter or even consider.

For example, most people live their entire lives predominantly experiencing the effects of either estrogen or testosterone, unaware of how these hormones shape not only their bodies but also their minds and emotions. Transgender individuals who undergo Hormone Replacement Therapy, however, often experience life with both hormones in significant phases of their lives.

In my personal experience, when my body predominantly had testosterone, I struggled to cry. I would feel emotions deeply, but my body resisted the act of crying, leaving me frustrated and unable to access the relief that tears can bring. Many assumed my difficulty crying was due to social conditioning—that I had been taught to suppress my tears to appear “manly.” But that wasn’t entirely the case, because the physical influence of testosterone in my body played a big part in this. I recall a day several months after I began hormone replacement therapy when I had a tough day at work. I sought comfort from my wife, cried, and in a matter of minutes, I felt better - I remarked to her how much crying helped relieve my emotional state.

This experience taught me something profound: our emotions and their physical manifestations are influenced by our biology in ways we don’t always recognize. For me, having experienced both of these hormones, I am able to provide a valuable insight into the effects of these to my cisgender family and friends. For the men in my life, I can empathize more deeply with their experiences, because I once felt similarly constrained by testosterone’s effects. Likewise, I can help cisgender women better understand some of the emotional barriers that men may face, fostering more compassionate and meaningful conversations.

This dual perspective of having experienced life through the lens of both hormones has deepened my understanding of the human condition. It’s one of many ways that transgender people enrich humanity - we offer insights into the complexities of body, mind, and spirit.

4. Conclusion

The prophet Moroni counseled us to “take heed... that ye do not judge that which... is good and of God to be of the devil.” Too often, difference is met with fear rather than curiosity. Fear of

what is unfamiliar can lead to isolation, misunderstanding, and even violence. In the same chapter, Moroni taught us a good rule of thumb to know good from evil: “that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.”

When I speak with my niece about her colorblindness, I don’t approach her experience as something broken or lesser—I approach it with curiosity, seeking to understand an experience that is different from mine. I may never see the world as she does, but by listening to her I gain new insights as to what it means to be human. Her colorblindness is neither a flaw nor a mistake—it simply offers a different way of experiencing the world that is good and godly.

In the same way, transgender and non-binary people experience the world through a lens that cisgender people do not. Our differences are not deficiencies; they are invitations—opportunities for you to see the richness and complexity of human existence in ways you may never have even considered. When you take the time to listen to our experiences, you are not just showing us kindness; you are gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to be human. Our trans-ness is good and godly.

In light of this, I would like to make a proclamation, and I encourage you to contact me at ReformMormon@gmail.com so you can sign your own name to this proclamation:

We believe that gender, like all aspects of our eternal journey of progression, may also be a process of self-discovery. While some experience an unchanging sense of gender identity, others come to understand their true gender identity over time.

We believe that just as dawn and dusk exist between day and night, and marshes and beaches blur the boundaries of land and sea, so too does gender exist beyond a rigid binary. These variations are not mistakes or exceptions but integral to the Divine order, for all things are in motion, reflecting the eternal principle of progression.

We believe that experiences of Gender Euphoria and Gender Dysphoria are forms of Divine revelation, prompting individuals to recognize their gender identity. As we listen to these promptings, we come to understand more fully who we are meant to become.

We believe that those who transition genders gain unique perspectives. Their insights foster empathy, bridge divides between genders, and enrich conversations about the complexity of the human experience.

We believe that transgender and non-binary individuals should be welcomed, respected, and affirmed in all spaces - public and private - without fear of exclusion, discrimination, or violence. As the Prophet Moroni taught, all that invites love and goodness is divinely inspired. We reject fear-based judgment and seek to build a world where all people are seen, valued, and celebrated.

So, now that this proclamation is made, I ask you: Will you choose curiosity over fear? Will you, like I do with my niece, seek to understand perspectives different from your own? Will you join

me in building communities where all - cisgender, transgender, and non-binary alike - are seen, valued, and embraced as part of God's Divine creation?

This sacred work has already begun. The path has been laid before us. I invite you to walk it with me - with open hearts, open minds, and an unwavering commitment to love, affirmation, and grace.

19. “Closing Prayer” by Sarah Williams

Given April 6th, 2025 at the First Reform Mormon General Conference

Hello, I'm Sister Sarah Williams and on behalf of the entire Reform Mormon community, I have been asked to extend our sincere and heartfelt gratitude to all of the participants who have joined us here, both our speakers and attendees. It has been an honor and a blessing to share in this time of reflection, testimony, and reclaiming our faith with all of you.

This is a tradition that we are excited to continue our next general conference will be held in October and anyone who feels called to submit a talk can find all the information on how to do so at our website ReformMormon.com.

The work of seeking truth and deepening our faith doesn't end here though, and I hope that as we leave this General Conference we can continue to question, to study, and to uplift one another in the spirit of Reform.

Again, thank you to everyone who's participated, and if you would now join me in a closing prayer.

Our beloved Heavenly Parents, we come to you in the spirit of gratitude for the time we've been able to share here together, for the wisdom of those who have spoken, and for the spirit that has moved amongst us.

We ask that your presence remain among all of us who have gathered here, and that you guide us in strengthening our faith, guide us in our questions, and help us to ever walk the path of truth with courage and love.

As we depart from this gathering we ask that You will stay with us and help us to go forth and work ever to build a more loving, a more just, and a more holy world with the inspiration that You have given us and that we have here received.

We ask for these things, and any other blessings that you see fit to give us, in the name of Christ. Amen.

Thank you for joining us.

20. Rob Lauer on Priesthood

[Posted May 9th, 2025 in The Mormon Community \(Reform\)](#)

I've been thinking recently about the church/community described toward the end of "The Book of Mormon's" narrative -- particularly what some today would call the offices, officers, ministerial, priesthood, or leadership positions. Of course, "The Book of Mormon" does not describe any elaborate hierarchy of Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthood offices. In fact, only three positions are described in what "The Book of Mormon" presents as its ideal for a church/community-- and those three positions were the same that originally existed in the first Mormon communities in New York in 1830: ELDER, TEACHER and PRIEST.

Even though "The Book of Mormon" describes ceremonial laying on of hands ordinations and settings-apart, the text clearly implies that any Divine authority or powers came from the indwelling Holy Ghost-- which was equally accessible to all members of the community. The ordinations could be taken merely as formal communal acknowledgments, not bestowals of Divine power and authority.

That understanding resonates with principles laid out by Joseph Smith in one of his letters from Liberty Jail: priesthood may be conferred on someone, but the powers of heaven can only operate on certain principles of righteousness that are incompatible with pride, arrogance, coercion, and desires for control, prestige, or the acclaim of others.

What strikes me about the three (for lack of a better word) "offices" mentioned in "The Book of Mormon," is that every human community has Elders (those who by virtue of age or experience are valued), Teachers (those who are gifted at educating community members in its traditions, history, values) and Priests (those who conduct communal ceremonies, voice prayers on behalf of the community). There is no hierarchy involved. All three roles are equally valuable in any community. And though the community might officially delegate individuals to serve in the capacity of Elder, Teacher, or Priest, their effectiveness is not guaranteed and is a matter of individual gifts and effort. Even in communities where Elders, Teachers and Priests are not formally ordained, set apart, or organized, individuals will organically assume those roles.

Since its inception in 2002, Reform Mormonism has embraced what many might call the Priesthood of all believers. The Priesthood is the right of individuals to approach God for themselves and receive revelation, as well as the authority to bless and serve others in the name of God when they honestly deem themselves Divinely led.

This Priesthood authority is inherent in all human beings by virtue of the eternal, uncreated nature of the human mind and the indwelling Light of Christ, which illuminates and quickens the minds of all who are born into the world. Each individual's most sacred obligation is to be true to the leadings of the Light of Christ within.

21. "Then What am I"

by Roque Esperanza Nielson Alvarez

Written May 25th, 2025

"You're not mormon."
A plea from one for whom
"mormon" was a cage
A suffocation, of expectations
Limitations
Self-hatred and pain.
She seeks to free me
But she cannot see

The words of Moroni still heal my heart
And I kneel in prayer to my Parents above
As the comforter warms me and
Sets me apart

If I am not Mormon
What am I?

But perhaps she is right.
My temple corrupt (adorned)
With piercings (decor) and tattoos (murals).
We (she) believed it an insult to our Father, our faith.
She sought them to prove she was free
But she cannot see:

My body is mine. A gift divine.
A project in tandem with beings enshrined,
I mold it with hormones, needles, and ink
Not as insult, but testament, least that's what I think.

If I am not Mormon
What am I?

"Look at yourself," she insists,
I, surrounded by herbs, cards,
Incense and inverted stars.
They whisper "satanic," or "pagan" or "witch."
"Led Astray," she would say, while still in their grip.

Incense, burned by my aunt,
As she speaks through the veil.
Cards used by my ancestors
on the pioneer trail.
The five pointed star that shines in Nauvoo.
I try to explain that these are Mormon too.

If I am not Mormon
What am I?

A tranny? A dyke? A good old fashion queer?
My pronouns (they/them) might fill mormons with fear.
Far from straight, far from chaste, far from holy,
They say. Barred from temples, from bathrooms,
From callings, oh dear!

But my Father, my Mother, my Savior (my brother),
Are with me each day. They won't go away.
I believe, I believe, I believe, I have faith!
In angels, in seer stones, prophets and fate.
Gold Plates and visions, captains and kings,
These fables are mine, despite everything.

My God is defined by the stories I loved,
The secrets I whispered, the songs that I sung,
I cannot escape Him for He will not leave me.
And I cannot find Her beside other deities.

And so I ask once more, scriptures in hand,
Mission tag, garments -- I'm taking the stand.
Bearing my testimony, I cannot lie.

If I am not Mormon
What the Hell am I?

22. Poem by Daniel K. Williams

[Posted on June 17th, 2025 in The Mormon Community \(Reform\)](#)

I walk with God, both Mother and Father,
Creators born of star and fire.
They shaped the worlds with love and grace,
And set all beings in their place.

With Jesus Christ, my Brother true,
I seek the good I'm called to do.
He taught the way of peace and Mercy,
And lights the path I humbly claim.

The Bible and the Book of Mormon,
Shine with truths to build upon.
Yet Spirit speaks through wind and tree—
And truth flows wild, forever free.

I honor wisdom, old and new,
In every shade, in every view.
The sacred lives in many streams,
In songs and visions, signs and dreams.

I trust the voice that stirs within,
The still small light beneath the skin.
No gate shall block, no creed shall bind,
The truth that every soul can find.

All love is holy, bold, and bright—
Queer or straight, all shine with Light.
For in God's eyes, there is no fear—
All are beloved, all are near.

With wand and prayer, with circle cast,
I walk in joy, both free and fast.
The moon above, the earth below—
Through all, the seeds of heaven grow.

I vow to walk the path of Eternal progression,
To seek, to change, to live and bless.
With open heart and mind set free—
I claim my truth, Blessed Be!

23. “Revelation of Chastisement, Condemnation and Comfort” by Evan Sharley

[Posted on June 23, 2025 on Gileriodekel.com](https://gileriodekel.com)

Within the span of 17 days, Evan Sharley witnessed:

- [Donald Trump be accused of being a sexual predator by a close confident;](#)
- Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) abduct innocent people off the streets;
- Protests ignite in [Los Angeles](#) and [Portland](#);
- [Public servants in Minnesota be struck down in political assassinations;](#)
- [The largest protest in American history, which denounced the king-like pretensions of Donald Trump;](#)
- [A shooting in Salt Lake City where the wrong man was arrested;](#)
- [The nations of Iran and Israel exchange missiles in civilian-populated areas;](#)
- [An extremist event in Evan’s hometown of Boise, Idaho;](#)
- [The United States destroy 3 nuclear Iranian facilities, which Iran received as a declaration of war.](#)

Evan’s heart was heavy and filled with anxiety due to the severity and frequency of these events. A weekend with her partners, seeing friends, the honesty of yard-work, and the solace of a cool shower could not disperse the dread.

So, on June 22nd, 2025 she turned to Her Heavenly Parents for solace, and these are the words she received. The words did not come to her through an audible voice or visitation, but through pondering.

1

A. Our daughter Evan has seen the state of the world and has come to Us for comfort.

B. The messages We have to give are 2-fold: one from your Father and one from your Mother.

Father

2

A. Alma the Elder warned that when anyone esteems themselves above another, they soon believe they are meant to rule.

B. Mosiah likewise declared that iniquitous kings pervert righteousness, make wicked laws, and spill blood to preserve their seat of power

C. Amalickiah then demonstrated how such individuals flatter others to gain power, and how they will deceive and even murder to obtain it.

3

A. You have been taught that these things were spoken for your day and age.

B. You have been taught how these things are of great worth to you.

4

A. Despite this, your nation has elevated my son Donald, who believed himself superior and destined to rule.

B. Your nation saw how he disregards prophets and saints who sue for peace, heard him advocate for wicked laws, and brag how he is willing and eager to kill those who oppose him.

C. Yet, your nation did not learn from the Nephites and Lamanites, and made Donald its ruler. After much trial and heartache, Donald was dismissed as your ruler. Then, unlike the Nephites, the Amalickiah was brought back to be king.

5

A. Due to this foolishness, the pillars of your republic crumble, and confidence in its governance erodes from both within and without.

B. Donald has instructed his armies to invade his own lands, arrest and abduct his own neighbors, and many are harmed or killed. The most vulnerable of your people quiver in fear for their lives.

C. He orders parades to glorify his name to feed his pride, yet when resistance rises, he kindles the flames of war.

D. Having loosed violence upon the Earth, he dares invoke My name, imagining that I sanctify his evil works.

E. These things are abominable to Me, and it is by the foolishness of your nation that they have come to pass.

6

A. You have been taught that these are portentous times, and the lives of many are being sacrificed unnecessarily to the gods of war, greed, and avarice, and that you must be at the forefront of the opposition.

B. Those who opposed Donald and his armies before he rose to power the first time, the second time, and those who continue this fight now are commended.

C. Nevertheless, you must know that you are all image-bearers, and the loss of life is egregious. Therefore, seek to oppose wickedness in all that you do, but do not slay another.

—

Mother

7

A. Evan, I have heard the cries of my children affected by this wickedness, and I know their pain, including yours.

B. My heart aches to lift every burden, yet I can not annul the gift of agency, even when some twist it toward harm.

8

A. Still, know this: nothing can seal you away from My embrace. When hatred shouts, come hide in the hollow of My chest, and let My whisper steady your breath so that you will know you are seen, you are beloved, and you belong.

B. Yet My Presence alone is not enough in a wounded world. Therefore, I appoint each willing heart to be My outstretched arm. You are to mourn with every soul denied dignity, shelter those pushed to the margins, and encourage them to rest and watch over them as they do. You are to become mothers to them all.

9

As you lift one another, you will feel love and deepen kinships, which is a sure sign that Heaven has already burst forth over the earth.

—

10

A. Evan – and all those who read this – We, your Heavenly Parents, even Asherah and El, say unto you that your feelings are justified; the world is in turmoil.

B. Seek comfort from Us, and We will comfort thee. You may come to Us in prayer at any time, and you may seek revelation as needed.

C. Seek the comfort in your loved ones, and be patient with them when they may not fully understand.

24. "Response" by Rob Lauer

Written July 3rd, 2025 in The Mormon Community (Reform)

This is in response to Steve Pynakker's post, "Are Mormons Christian?" and John Robert Crane's subsequent post about the validity of Mormonism as actual restoration of the original church given the data now available thanks to modern scholarship.

First, my thoughts on early Mormon theological development: Joseph originally articulated (and "The Book of Mormon" reflects) what was largely traditional Pauline theology and Christology--with a greater emphasis on the importance of doing good works, what would later be called "the Social Gospel" (evidenced in his vision of building a City of Zion) Sanctification (evidenced in calling his followers Saints rather than Christians), and progressing in holiness toward Christlike Perfection (the latter two being Wesleyan concepts that Joseph embraced during his [much ignored] involvement with Methodism in the mid-to-late 1820s.)

The only radical theological break found in "The Book of Mormon" was the re-envisioning of the Garden of Eden myth in II Nephi, which was one of the last sections of the book that Joseph dictated. Nevertheless, because II Nephi appears so early in the book's narrative, it establishes a radically heterodox (traditional Christians have since called heretical) context for the traditional Pauline theology that followed in the book's narrative.

BUT in the first edition of "The Book of Mormon," its recasting of the so-called Fall of Adam (actually a reversal of it) and its message that opposition in all things is an existential necessity not only for human salvation but also the very existence of God were found in the lengthy first chapter of II Nephi. (This was before Orson Pratt's divided the book's texts into shorter chapters delineated according to theological points.) It's unlikely that most of those who read the first edition of "The Book of Mormon" and converted to the movement even picked up on this radical (aka heretical) break with traditional Pauline Christianity. But by the time Joseph was winding up his dictation of "The Book of Mormon," he had either moved beyond Pauline Christianity's doctrine of the Fall, or he had never believed the doctrine and was finally able to articulate the theological implications of his own philosophy.

I think that once Joseph became associated with Sidney Rigdon and moved to Ohio (away from rural upstate New York), he quickly began publicly distancing himself from the folk religion and magic folklore that, in "The Book of Mormon," he had freely (and naively) mixed with Pauline Christianity. (This is why by 1832, he was refusing to elaborate on the angel and gold plates narrative when invited to do so in church meetings.)

With Rigdon, Joseph began what was at that time a more critical study of the Bible. This continued as other Biblical scholars--including rabbis--were hired to teach classes at Kirtland's School of the Prophets (This was a title used by colleges and seminaries of the day; both Yale and Harvard were called "Schools of the Prophets" because, among other things, they trained clergy.) In the Kirtland school, Joseph learned a little Hebrew and Greek. He learned that the

Hebrew word "Elohim", traditionally translated into English as "God" (singular), literally means "Gods" (plural). He probably also learned that the Hebrew phrase "bene elohim," found throughout the Old Testament and traditionally translated as "the sons of God," actually referred to lower-ranked gods, demigods. He may have learned that the Greek word "daimōn" which appears throughout the New Testament as "demon" and traditionally understood as referring to evil spirits under the control of the devil were, in the Second Temple period, understood to be less powerful demigods--something more like "godlings." He would likely have found these tidbits of knowledge astonishing--as do many Evangelicals and Christian Fundamentalists today when they learn of them. Today, many Evangelicals and Christian Fundamentalists retreat into apologetics when confronted with this knowledge because it undermines their strict monotheism. But Joseph did not.

Evangelical Christianity was then in its infancy, and Joseph, though raised as a Biblical literalist, had developed his personal beliefs outside of the leading denominations of his day. In a way, he was never a true monotheist. In Joseph's day, monotheism was, historically speaking, still a relatively newer concept. It hadn't been coined until 1660. But Joseph had been raised by parents who still embraced various aspects of New England folk-traditions in which the one Almighty God was constantly at battle with very real devils, witches, demons, and evil spirits--beings that could be seen as demi-gods. Until Joseph teamed up with Sidney Rigdon, he remained fully engaged with people who embraced this magical worldview. He had first made a name for himself for having the ability to deal with supernatural beings and forces believed to be more powerful than mere mortals, but not as powerful as God. In short, ancient Hebraic concepts of demigods and polytheism — references to divine Sons of God and celestial assemblies of Gods that were still found in Biblical texts — did not repel him or demand that he respond with monotheistic apologetics. He embraced the idea that the ancient Hebraic and Jewish understanding of Deity was more correct than the Pauline Christian theology taught by the denominations of his day.

In Kirtland, Joseph was also taught aspects of Kabbalah, in which he likely saw more connections to and parallels with the magical world view he knew from New England folk traditions. After Joseph bought Egyptian papyrus, he came to realize that the religious traditions of the Egyptians and the Hebrews had once been more intertwined than Christians of his day believed.

All of this inspired him to quickly begin developing a theological paradigm that was utterly at odds with Pauline Christianity. I don't think Joseph fully understood how completely at odds it was, or what its theological and philosophical implications were.

Joseph and Sidney's attempts to "restore" the church structures/organizations of the first century were (historically speaking) laughable because they were so clearly of 19th-century America. For one thing, Sidney's concept of restoring "THE church" as it existed in the days of the first apostles is based on the fiction and fallacy that there originally was "ONE church." THERE NEVER WAS. The word "church" is the English translation of the Greek word "ekklesia," which was used for centuries throughout the Hellenized world for a meeting, gathering, or assembly of a city's citizens. There were MANY churches in the days of the first apostles

because a church was nothing more than a local gathering of Jesus's followers. Each "church" was an independent gathering or community. For most of the first century, most of Jesus's followers were Jews or Gentile "God-Fearers" whose communal life was centered in the local synagogue (alongside other Jews who did not follow Jesus) and in communal dinners held in their homes (from which eventually evolved differing traditions regarding the sharing of wine and bread and what those elements symbolized, from which came various rituals (Eucharist, Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Sacrament.) During the second century, the actual meals became merely symbolic rituals that were enacted in designated places outside of private homes. This evolved into the tradition of building chapels, sanctuaries, and church buildings for entire communities to come and partake of the now symbolic meal.

As for restoring the ancient Priesthood, the question from a historical perspective would be, WHICH priesthood? The Mushite Priesthood of the priests descended from Moses in the Northern Kingdom of Israel? The Aaronide (Aaronic) Priesthood of the priests descended from Aaron in the Southern Kingdom of Judea? The priesthood of the Jebusites who were descended from Melchizedek--the legendary CANAANITE priest/king of Salem (later Jerusalem)? Or the Hasmonean Priesthood of Second Temple Judaism (aka Herod's Temple of Jesus' day, in which, according to the Book of Acts, his apostles and "church" worshipped daily after Pentecost)? The Hasmonean Priests were descendants of Aaron, but they assimilated into Greek culture, rejected belief in a resurrection, and worked in conjunction with the Roman authorities in Jerusalem. Certain Essene sects believed the Hasmonean Priesthood was apostate and had defiled the Temple. But according to the New Testament gospels and the Book of Acts, Jesus, his apostles, followers, and Paul—unlike the Essenes—worshipped in the Temple, which meant bringing sacrifices for the Hasmonean Priesthood to offer on its altars.

But laying aside the restoration "the" Priesthood or "the" original "true" church, Joseph's theological paradigm (embracing a plurality of gods and theomorphic humans) actually IS closer to that of ancient Israel, Judea, and in many respects, even Paul.

25. “A Micro-Sermon for Times of Fear and Uncertainty” by Sarah Williams

Beloved community,

In moments when darkness seems to press in from all sides, when fear whispers that we are alone and vulnerable, I want to remind you of words that have sustained our people through generations of trials:

"Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." These words from Joshua 1:9 were not spoken to the comfortable or the powerful, but to a people facing an uncertain future, preparing to enter unknown territory.

The Book of Mormon teaches us that "men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). Not conditional joy, not joy when others approve of us, but joy as our fundamental birthright and purpose. This joy cannot be legislated away or voted out of existence.

When we face scapegoating and fear, remember that our Savior himself was misunderstood, rejected, and stood with the marginalized. In 3 Nephi 12:44, we read: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you." This is not passive submission—this is the radical courage to remain whole, to refuse to let hatred diminish our capacity to love.

Our spiritual resilience does not come from being accepted by the world, but from knowing—deeply knowing—that we are beloved children of God. As it says in Doctrine and Covenants 18:10: "Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God."

Your worth is not up for debate. Your belovedness is not contingent on others' opinions. Your light cannot be extinguished by fear.

We are not alone. We have each other, we have the divine spark within us, and we have the promise that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

Stand tall. Love boldly. Let your light shine.

Amen.

26. "The Temple: A Proclamation to the Saints" by Harper McKinney

Revelation from Heavenly Parents to Sis. Harper McKinney on August 21, 2025

Revealed to Sis. Harper McKinney, a plan for a physical temple in the State of Washington and an affirmation from Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father on the holiness of their children, yea, even the queer ones.

1. Our children are unique; in our wisdom we created our children to encompass diversity. We have created much beauty within our children: gay, straight, pan, bi, ace, aro, trans, non-binary, polyamory, and many more iterations of gender and love. We affirm that queerness is holy.
2. Temples are where we abide on Earth. Temples are for worship and communion with our children.
3. Some of our children on Earth have been denied entry into our Holy Home based on traits we have blessed them with, specifically the queer divine and love out of the bounds of monogamy.
4. While we acknowledge that the Temple is but a physical representation of the holiness that abides in every Saint's soul, some Saints would be made more spiritually whole by visiting a physical temple and worshipping in the way of their birthright.
5. We reveal to Sister Harper that Queer and Poly Saints are worthy to enter the temple. The barrier is in place not because of Us, but because of Man.
6. We further reveal to Sister Harper that a physical temple will be constructed in the State of Washington to allow all Saints to partake in this Holy worship and restore access to the Lord's house, wrestled away from worthy Saints through ecclesiastic violence and tyranny.
7. We love our queer children, and they are worthy of the temple. Though the CoJCoLDS interferes with their right to holy spaces, they are deserving and will be restored to be able to worship in the temple once more.

27. “Revelation on Temples and Tabernacles” by Evan Sharley

[Posted on August 21st, 2025 on Gileriodekel.com](#)

Sister Evan Sharley had been pondering on how Temples may function amongst her community for several months, and had been working on a revelation to present to her community.

*On August 21st, 2025 Sister Harper McKinney released her Temple Proclamation.
Feeling as if the Spirit was moving amongst her community,
Evan considered her revelation complete and released it that same day.*

1

- A. Verily, Evan, thou hast again inquired of the Heavens concerning holy places.
- B. Thy Mother hath already spoken that any place may be set apart, yea, even for a season, for the purposes of Temple worship.
- C. Yet thou hast beheld thy cousins in Missouri and in Utah, who possess houses consecrated for these purposes alone, and thy heart hath yearned for the same.
- D. Therefore, behold, We give unto thee further light and knowledge, that thy soul may be soothed, and that the souls of others who long for a holy place may likewise be comforted.

2

- A. Thou hast studied those who went before thee, even the Restoration Church of Jesus Christ and the elders of the Reform Mormon community. In this thou art wise, for their works and patterns are accepted of Us.
- B. They called their places a Temple, a Structure, an Enclosure, a Tabernacle, and a Holy of Holies.
- C. These were fashioned of modest materials, and might be borne from place to place. This was pleasing in Our sight; for We detest great and spacious buildings, for in their raising the poor are robbed, and the oppressed are made low.
- D. Nevertheless, because thou desirest to know more perfectly how thou mayest worship in a Temple in thine own day, behold, We give unto thee this instruction.

3

- A. Thou mayest continue to sanctify whatsoever space thou hast, as oft as need require.
- B. Yet if thou desirest to raise a structure, let it be after the manner of the ancient Tabernacle of Israel, which was divided into three parts: the Holy of Holies, the Inner Court, and the Outer Court.
- C. The Holy of Holies may be erected within a dwelling or a tent in the wilderness; and the Courts may be arranged according to thy circumstance.

4

- A. Concerning the Holy of Holies: fashion thou a frame in length and in breadth and in height, according to the measure of thy need; and hang thereon curtains of pure white, that the world may be shut out, and the heavens opened.
- B. Upon the veil of entrance set the marks of the priesthood, even the Square and the Compass, the Navel and the Knee, for they are symbols of the Heavens.
- C. Illuminate this chamber, that thy worship may be seen of thee and of Us.
- D. In the midst thereof set an altar, for kneeling and prayer; and when sealings are performed, let mirrors flank the altar so the sealed may gaze into eternity with one another.
- E. Set upon the altar standings stones as tokens of Our presence, even as in days of old in the Temple at Tel Arad.
- F. When thou enterest therein, cast off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.
- G. And if thou be in the wilderness, lay a carpet to comfort and protect thy feet.

5

- A. Beyond the Holy of Holies shall be the Inner Court.
- B. Place here an Altar of Incense; and offer frankincense unto the Fathers, and keneh bosem unto the Mothers.
- C. Place also a table with a lampstand of four branches, to signify the four covenants of the endowment, that its light may be unto thee as the counsel of the non-gendered Heavenly Parents.
- D. Place also a table of shewbread and of sustenance for the people, that it may be unto thee as the nourishment of the multi-gendered Heavenly Parents.
- E. And if the people gather in the wilderness, let the entrance, if it be possible, face eastward.

6

- A. Beyond the Inner Court shall be the Outer Court.
- B. Place here an Altar of Water and Oil, where thou shalt conduct thy washing and anointings.
- C. And beyond, place an Altar of Fire, for thy sacrifices, thy libations, and thy dances of rejoicing.
- D. And if thou be in the wilderness, mark the bounds of the Outer Court with light, that all may discern where holy ground beginneth; and let the tents of the people be pitched round about, with their doors facing toward the Sanctuary.

7

- A. The Endowments shall be performed betwixt the Inner Court and the Altar of Fire.
- B. When ye draw nigh unto Our presence, ensure the altars are well-maintained and renew them if need be; then each soul shall enter alone into the Holy of Holies to pray, and then they shall depart, that another may do likewise.

8

- A. Behold, thy predecessors dedicated such spaces for wise purposes.
- B. The Tabernacle and the Temples of Solomon and of Herod bore witness that We dwelt among Israel.
- C. The Kirtland Temple was dedicated to be a house of learning, glory, and order.
- D. The Nauvoo Temple was dedicated to be a house for washing, anointings, and endowments.
- E. The Salt Lake Temple was dedicated to be a house of prayer and worship.
- F. The Independence Temple was dedicated to be for the pursuit of peace, reconciliation, and for healing of the spirit.
- G. Even so, your Temples shall be dedicated for the building up of love, community, and fellowship.

9

- A. Concerning the number of Holy of Holies: build only according to the need of thy community.
- B. If thou art called to raise one, and to be steward thereof, gather thy people therein for worship. None shall be forbidden entry, for to bar a soul from holy ground is an abomination before Us.

- A. Remember: revelation hath no end, neither is the Restoration sealed in one moment of time.
- B. Therefore, go forth and worship and connect with the Heavens, so that ye may know Us and all thy Heavenly Parents.
- C. Even so. Amen.

28. Opening Prayer for the Second Reform Mormon General Conference by Adam M. Shaffer (he/they)

[Given October 4th, 2025 at the Second Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Father, Mother, Heavenly Parents,

We come before you at the beginning of this Reform Mormon Conference and ask for a special blessing. Please help the speakers to be able to express the truths that you would have us know and be able to draw spiritual strength from during the next months before the next conference is convened.

And we thank you for all the blessings that you have bestowed upon us. And for the fellowship that we've found with each other.

Please help us to do your will.

And we say these things in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, amen.

29. “Exploring Mormon Ancestral Veneration” by Roque Esperanza (they/them)

[Given October 4th, 2025 at the Second Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Hello, my siblings and friends,

I've been pondering for some time about the spirit world, and our relationship with our ancestors.

I was raised believing that after death, and before the final judgement, spirits reside on a plane that is parallel to our physical earth. Rather than a separate heaven - or spirit paradise - and hell - or spirit prison - all the spirits exist in the same plane, in different states of peace or torment. I was taught that occasionally, the veil that separates our physical forms from the spirit world can be breached, and we can connect with our ancestors who are watching over us from the other side.

I can't say whether this is a common Mormon belief or if it's just something my dad found in an obscure book, but it is the understanding of the spirit realm that I was raised with, and the one that I now subscribe to in my spiritual practice. I grew up hearing about family members who communicated with deceased loved ones, through temple visits, dreams, promptings, songs, and more. The belief in ghosts was something taken very seriously in my home, with my dad regularly calling on his priesthood authority to banish anything haunting the bedroom I shared with my sisters, although it's possible he was just trying to calm our the anxiety, as we had a tendency to interpret the smallest disturbance as potential ghost interference. Regardless, I was very much aware of this idea of ghosts and how they fit into the Mormon cosmology and doctrine while I was growing up.

In recent years I've been exploring various spiritual practices, including the folk magic practiced by the communities that my ancestors came from. My dad is descended from Brighamite pioneer stock, and my mom immigrated to the US from Spain, where her family has lived as far back as we can trace. Although officially, the LDS church and the Catholic church frown on anything that looks like 'magic' or 'idol worship' - and often discourage or criticize the ancestral veneration that is commonly practiced among other cultures - both communities include a reverence for ancestors, and small ways in which they are honored. Catholics celebrate All Saints Day, set on the same day as the ancient Celtic holiday Samhain. All Saints day also merged with pre-Colombian Central American traditions to create Dia de Los Muertos. All three of these holidays are centered on the idea that the veil thins around the end of October and the beginning of November, as we move from fall to winter. Although each holiday has its own history and traditions, they all encourage us to remember our loved ones who have passed with rituals, including lighting candles for them, putting offerings for them on a grave or an altar, and spending time remembering them, as well as protecting ourselves from spirits who might have ill will toward us.

Mormons don't traditionally celebrate any such holiday, but we do encourage learning about our ancestors through genealogy. I remember going to the Family History Center in Salt Lake City when I was around 14 to print out one of those fan charts that shows your family back 7 generations. In the Brighamite Latter-day Saint tradition that I was raised in, we were encouraged to take family names to the temple, to perform ordinances - like baptism and endowment - for spirits on the other side, to give them an opportunity to move from a state of prison to one of peace. I have heard people share beautiful spiritual experiences of performing temple work for their ancestors, but I never had the opportunity to stand as proxy for anyone who I had a connection with, and although I loved my time in LDS temples, something about the procedural efficiency of it all left me feeling that something was lacking. It is hard to feel a spiritual connection, or to breach the veil, when a list of names you've never heard before is being read off as you get submerged in water 5-10 times in a row. Performing initiatory rites or the endowment allows for more time spent with one ancestor, but often times all you know is their name and the time period in which they were alive, which isn't a lot to start a conversation, and, in my opinion, not nearly enough to even begin reaching across the veil.

The more I explored my family histories, the more I found this connecting thread of yearning for our ancestors, without many formal traditions to encourage and foster that connection. So, I sought out advice from a book that explores various ancestral veneration practices entitled: *Honoring Your Ancestors* by Mallorie Vaudoise, hoping to find something that resonated, that would help me meet this spiritual need. I was surprised when I found that much of what I read aligned with things I had already believed about spirits while also giving me a greater vocabulary and understanding of the ways ancestors can touch our lives. Vohdwah helps ancestral veneration feel more accessible to the average person, saying that "Ancestor veneration can refer to any ritual or spiritual practice that reconnects you with the people who came before. Doing genealogical research, cooking your grandmother's favorite recipe, learning the folk music and dance from your cultural background, and speaking to the dead in your dreams are all examples of ancestor veneration. Ancestor veneration practices can be secular, magical, or both. They complement a wide variety of spiritual paths." The first three things on that list - doing genealogical research, cooking family recipes, and learning music and dance - are all encouraged by the LDS Family Search Website. The last one - speaking to the dead in your dreams - is something that I have heard of prophets doing. This helped me feel like pursuing ancestor veneration didn't mean I was appropriating from other traditions, or betraying my own, but rather expanding on principles that are already practiced and encouraged within my Mormon culture.

Vohdwah comes from a variety of spiritual traditions, including Catholic, espiritismo, and African diasporic traditions. She uses her experience from those to establish general guidelines that can be incorporated by anyone into their personal worldview and spiritual practice. She says "Ultimately, your ancestor veneration practice is your own. You are already the high priest or high priestess of this religion. That means you have the freedom and the responsibility to honor your ancestors in a way that works for both you and them."

Vohdwah explains that the word "ancestors" can be used to refer to a variety of relationships and connections one might have with those in the spirit world. Firstly, there are blood ancestors,

those to whom we are biologically related. These are important because "they created our bodies with their bodies. And because the body is the foundation for all other work in this lifetime, both in ancestor veneration and other pursuits." This principle seems to correlate with the Mormon belief that a primary purpose of coming to earth was to gain bodies, and that saving ordinances require a living body - which is the reason we perform them in proxy for spirits who are currently incorporeal, waiting for the resurrection when they can have a body again. There is something special about bodies, and honoring the people who share our DNA is important.

We inherit many things through our blood ancestors, and although much of our inheritance can be beautiful and exciting, our ancestors can also pass on their trauma.

Ancestors who never healed from their trauma, or who left this earth with unfinished business, could be what Vohdwah classifies as Ghosts. She says "I was taught growing up that ghosts were spirits of the dead who were disturbed by some business from their lives that had been left unfinished, and which they no longer had the power to address. This could be anyone from a murder victim seeking justice to a mother whose young children were depending on her when she died. The problem with ghosts is the degree to which they seek resolution through the living, often by replicating the problems they failed to resolve in their own lives."

To me this sounds like what Mormons refer to as spirit prison. Spirits who are unable to repent - or heal - and are not able to access the peace that our Heavenly Parents want to give us. In the Brighamite tradition, this is why we do temple work for the dead, to give them a chance to access Christ's atonement.

Vohdwah has a whole chapter exploring ancestral trauma, and the complexity of forgiving our ancestors who may have committed terrible atrocities. That is an extremely important and difficult topic that I will save for another time, however I did want to share some of a ritual that she recommends for "Elevating a troubled ancestor." It's quite simple, all you need is a white cloth, a glass of water, nine white candles, eight books of roughly the same size, and a picture or signifier of the ancestor who needs help.

The ritual starts by placing the white cloth on the floor, with the glass of water and the picture on top. The first candle is lit and a simple prayer is said, calling to the ancestor and saying "may you find the peace in death that you never knew in life. We raise you up to the light." This is repeated for nine days, each day adding a book underneath the white cloth, raising the ancestor little by little out of the darkness.

To me, this is a perfect parallel to temple work for the dead. While traditional Mormon practice centers this narrative on accepting Jesus Christ and having ordinances done for you with the 'correct' authority, Vaudoise's approach gets at the heart of these kinds of practices. Some spirits are hurt and struggling, and we have the power to try and help them heal. And "When we reach backward, they reach forward, and the generations in between fall in line." To me, this sounds a lot like the blessings that Mormons believe will come as we turn the hearts of the children to their fathers. Vohdwah encourages us to remember that "we continue to evolve after death." This contradicts many mainstream Christian beliefs about the finality of Heaven and hell,

but perfectly fits with a Mormon framing of the spirit world where spirits are constantly working to improve, to teach each other, and to repent.

Our biological ancestors are not the only spirits who can aid us from the other side. There are also lineage ancestors, people who do not share our blood, but who we are tied to in another way. This could be adopted family members, or the family of a partner or spouse. This also feels in line with Mormon belief and tradition, it reminds me of the early days of temple sealings, when people would get sealed to their friends as siblings, forging a spiritual connection that solidified their bond as family. Whether spouses, siblings, or parent and child, a sealing on earth doesn't just tie two people together, but it merges them both into each other's family lines, making their ancestors your ancestors.

Lineage ancestors can also refer to people who belonged to the same spiritual practice as you. This kind of group is usually joined by completing some kind of initiation ritual. An example of this in Mormonism could be the belief that we are adopted into a tribe of Israel when we are baptized, which is then revealed in our patriarchal blessing, or the now mostly abandoned practice of priesthood holders keeping track of their priesthood lineage. Vohdwah uses this section to talk mostly about closed practices - spiritual groups who only allow the initiated to participate in their practices, and often keep parts or all of their traditions secret to outsiders. Although I think most Mormons would not consider our religion a closed practice - after all, LDS meeting houses say "visitors welcome" - the rituals we participate in in our temples fit this definition. One must first complete the initiatory rituals - first baptism, and then the part of the temple that is literally called 'initiator' - before you can participate in an endowment and then a sealing. That sounds like a closed practice to me. Anyway, my point is that if you have been endowed in the Mormon tradition, by this definition, you could consider anyone else who has been endowed one of your lineage ancestors.

The next group is Affinity ancestors. These are people who share your vocation or cultural identity. Unlike lineage ancestors, this group doesn't have any kind of ceremony tying them together. Vohdwah recommends reaching out to these ancestors for things that are related to the group you share in common. So, a member of the LGBTQ community could reach out to Marsha P. Johnson when in need of support facing persecution, or a computer programmer could reach out to Ada Lovelace when they need inspiration to solve a problem at work.

Vohdwah also includes Saints among the ancestors. Although she has experience with Catholic Saints, she encourages people to work with the spirits of spiritual leaders from their own traditions. Although Latter-day Saints don't have formal people from our history that we revere as "saints" because we consider all followers of Christ who are doing their best worthy of the title "saint", and we generally don't practice any kind of veneration of saints, I do think that there are multiple amazing people throughout Mormon history who could qualify under this definition of a spiritual leader who remains accessible to people on earth. I once saw a booth at a Provo Pride fair selling devotional candles with images of Mormon feminist icons such as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Claudia Bushman, Maxine Hanks, Carol Lynn Pearson, Judy Dushku, and Chieko Okazaki. Although these candles may be a bit tongue-in-cheek, I think they're a great example of Latter-Day Saints that might be looked to for inspiration, strength, and advice.

The last category of ancestors we'll talk about today are spirit guides. These spirits can come from any or none of the previously mentioned categories. What sets them apart is that they have chosen specially to walk with you throughout this lifetime, to guide and teach you. I have a vague memory of my dad telling me about spirit guides when I was a kid, beyond the idea that my great-grandparents were watching over me, something about a group of spirits who were dedicated to keeping me safe. Like a guardian angel, but a group of them, rooting for me. I don't know if this actually happened or if it was some kind of dream, but learning about spirit guides now always brings up this feeling of mysterious familiarity. I talked with another magically inclined Mormon about spirit guides and she gave me some advice on how to connect with them. While ancestors from the other categories can often be researched and sought out by name, spirit guides must make themselves known to you, but first you have to demonstrate that you are prepared to connect with them and listen. This can be done through quiet meditation, walks through nature, or other practices that help you feel open spiritually. In these states, you can call out to your guides and begin to build a relationship.

My fellow magical Mormon said at this point that you have to start keeping your eyes open, your ears open, for little promptings. Basically the same kinds of things that you would expect to get from the Holy Ghost, but in some ways you'll come to notice the difference between the Holy Ghost and other spirit guides helping you through this life.

Some Mormons may worry that ancestral veneration looks too much like idol worship. After all, we generally eschew the Catholic practice of praying to Saints, and are encouraged to keep our prayers focused on Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus Christ - in the mainstream Brighamite tradition, we are told not even to pray to our Heavenly Mother. However, our history is rich with tales of people - from prophets to children - receiving revelation from the spirits of their deceased loved ones. How can we expect them to reach us if we have never called out to them? I believe that our Heavenly Parents are not threatened or offended by us developing our spiritual relationships with others, just like my relationship with my earthly mother is not diminished by my relationship with my sister. Building trust and connection with a variety of ancestors will not lessen your connection to our Heavenly Parents. On the contrary, strengthening your ties with those who lived before will likely increase your faith, compassion, and patience, helping you to be more like our Heavenly Parents. Vohdwah claims that "The lack of ancestor veneration practices in [the broader American culture as a whole] is unusual and unhealthy ... Healing our personal relationship with our ancestors is one small but powerful way we can address these collective wounds."

I am still new at developing my ancestral veneration practice, however even with the small and inconsistent rituals I have done, I have had profound experiences.

Taking a moment to meditate and call out to my ancestors - I don't know really how to describe it. I learned from my mom some deeper things about the story of her mother and her grandmother, and I was able to try and call out to my great-grandmother, understanding some of the trauma and tragedy that she went through, and I felt her in the room with me. I felt her grief. I felt that reach out that Vohdwah describes, and it was terrible, her pain, her anguish, and her loneliness, but it was also cathartic, and it was healing to have this understanding of the

ancestral trauma that's been passed down through the women on that side of my family, and to start in little ways to hold that trauma and help my great-grandmother let it go.

I know ancestral veneration isn't going to be for everybody. I know that not everyone believes in literal spiritual practices, and I think that's one of the great things about Vohdwah's book is that she invites us to take her information and recommendations and use them however to fit our own lives, and our own practices, and our own traditions. But even if you think ancestral veneration might not be for you, I would urge you to learn more about the lives of your ancestors. They don't have to be your blood ancestors; they can be, but they can also be lineage and affinity ancestors - anybody that you feel some kind of connection to, that their life somehow resonates with you or is connected to yours.

I truly believe that staying connected to our past and understanding where we come from and how we got where we are is healing and crucial. I invite you to seek out ways to honor your ancestors in whatever manner makes sense to you and resonates with you.

I share this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

30. “My Calling as Matriarch” by Evan Sharley (she/her)

Given October 4th, 2025 at the Second Reform Mormon General Conference

History of Matriarchs

My calling is to be a Matriarch, which is the feminine version of "Evangelist" or "Patriarch". Evangelists are a sub-section of High Priestess/Priestx/Priest.

The first Patriarchs in the Restoration were Joseph Smith Sr. and Hyrum Smith, and their chief duties were to generally act as parental figures for the church and give special blessings. These blessings served as a sort of cold reading/fortune telling where spiritual promises were made. Additionally, these blessings "declared your lineage", meaning what tribe of Israel someone was "from".

After the Successionist crisis it took a bit of time for Patriarchs to find their places in the Restoration again. In the LDS branch, the role of Evangelists did not expand, and their chief function in the community was to give these blessings. In the RLDS branch the role of Evangelists was magnified quite a bit, and it is chiefly through the lens of this tradition that I see my call as Matriarch.

RLDS D&C 125, which was given by Joseph Smith III on April 15th, 1901, laid the modern foundation for the duties of Evangelists. This revelation said that Evangelists are to preach, teach, expound, exhort, to be a revivalist, comfort the saints, be a parent to the church, give counsel for those who seek it, and impart Evangelist's blessings. It also clarified that Evangelists are to remain free from administrative duties, which is a point of doctrine that the Josephites share with the Brighamites. Within the RLDS tradition, Evangelists are to be fully included in priesthood meetings, and their perspectives and opinions are to carry weight, despite not having administrative sway. While the office of Presiding Patriarch was done away with in the LDS church in 1979, the Presiding Evangelists of Community of Christ continue to be well-respected figures in Church life. These Evangelists have written a great deal over the years, even producing entire books of theology and poetry.

In addition to the guidance offered by the Josephites, the Restoration Church of Jesus Christ also offered a trove of knowledge in their book “Hidden Treasures and Promises”, specifically from “The Lost Revelations”. One interesting thing about these revelations is that the guidance that is given is chiefly for Matriarchs with the understanding that it also applies to the masculine and non-gendered counterparts as well. The 7th “Lost Revelation” speaks of how Matriarchs are to have a special interest in Temple work. Amazingly, this is also a point of doctrine that is shared with the Josephites; in RLDS D&C 157:4, a Patriarch is specifically called to assist in the work of building the Temple and developing its ministries.

Roles of the Matriarch

In the mid-90s, RLDS Presiding Evangelist Everett S. Graffeo distilled the duties of Evangelists down into 4 points, and in the early 00s Danny A. Belrose added a 5th. I think these 5 roles are a perfect explanation of what I feel my role as a Matriarch should be, and I'd like to explore them with you today. That said, I feel like the titles of the 5 roles could be modified to come closer in line with scriptural terminology, and so I will do so. These five roles are:

1. Teaching Learner
2. Living Sanctuary
3. Soul Friend
4. Revivalist
5. Pastoral Presence

Teaching Learner

Matriarchs are meant to be wise elders who have lived deeply enough to taste the richness and meaning of life, with its many joys and pains. They are attuned to savor the presence of the Holy in places it is often overlooked or disregarded.

They are also well educated in not only the Mormon tradition, but also about other traditions and in secular matters. Life-long learning and sharing that knowledge is treated as a sacred practice.

These educations equip them to:

- give guidance and counsel to those who are in want of it
- lend wisdom to those whose zeal exceeds their judgment.
- Direct seekers to resources that will enrich their understanding.
- Give life advice based off of personal experience

The Matriarch does not argue or debate, but instead invites, hints, and encourages others.

Living Sanctuary

As living sanctuaries, Matriarchs embody the baptismal covenant:

"bear one another's burdens, that they may be light: ... mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort... even until death" (Mosiah 9:9 (RefMo) | 9:39-40 (RLDS) | 18:8-9 (LDS))

Matriarchs actively resist oppression in all its forms - sexism, racism, classism, ableism, ageism, genderism, and religious intolerance. They use their voice to condemn unjust systems and offer solace to the wounded.

At the same time, they provide safety, refuge, and nonjudgmental presence - becoming a harbor in life's stormy seas. As they provide this solace, they listen to others' life stories, and consider it an honor and a privilege to hear these. The Matriarch also understands that when another

person is sharing their story, the focus should not be on the matriarch but on the person telling their story.

Soul Friend

Early Celtic Christianity had a community role called "anam cara" or "soul friend", who were companions with whom you could share vulnerabilities, loneliness, weaknesses, fears, and hopes, and they would respond with love and affirmation in such a way that makes you feel safe, blessed, and understood. The Matriarch is called to be such a friend to those in her communities.

Being a soul friend requires:

- listening deeply, and resisting the impulse to fix or advise prematurely
- discerning needs, and when uncertain, asking what is most needed
- protecting confidentiality, since broken trust discourages future sharing.

A particularly sacred part of this role is offering Matriarchal blessings. These blessings come during times of transition and are preceded by weeks or months of friendship-building and dialogue, and are meant to give the blessed guidance and solace. The Matriarch prays, ponders, and writes out what she would like to say during the blessing, which ideally is done by laying hands on the blessee's head. She records the audio of the blessing, and provides a transcript of the blessing to the blessed, keeps one in her own records, and provides another to a historical archive (with a 15 year seal). Many who receive such blessings cherish them as personal scripture.

As a note, when I give Matriarchal blessings, I have decided not to "declare a lineage". At best, being designated as a tribe was like being sorted into a house in Harry Potter and only provided a weak sense of belonging. At worst this practice essentially re-maps Jewish identity onto a Mormon framework where "Israel" is not the Jewish people but a symbolic covenant group where Mormons see themselves as central. In light of these problems, I opt to not declare lineage in the blessings I give, which is the now-standard practice in Community of Christ.

Revivalist

Matriarchs are called to be revivalists. Danny Belrose explored how the word "revivalist" can make folks a bit uncomfortable, as it invokes images of tent revivals and fire and brimstone. However, within Mormonism revivalist ministry involves cultivating an adventurous spirit and exercising a prophetic imagination. Matriarchs see beyond the present moment and seek to inspire communities toward a hopeful future.

As revivalists, Matriarchs breathe new life into old traditions, helping people rediscover their vitality. This can take many forms:

- Rekindling enthusiasm for sacred stories and practices.
- Reinterpreting old rituals or creating new rituals that speak powerfully in contemporary contexts.

- Inspiring fresh excitement about Temple work, whether in building Tabernacles, crafting new liturgies, or preparing people for their Endowment.

At its core, revivalist ministry is not about spectacle but about sustained transformation. The Matriarch inspires communities to reawaken their dreams and gives them courage to live into those dreams with hope and energy.

Pastoral Presence

The ministry of the Matriarch is grounded in pastoral presence, the simple practice of consistently showing up in the life of the community. During her deliberate efforts to be present, she discerns the community's needs and gently guides them toward growth, while also giving special attention to newcomers so they feel welcomed and integrated. Though not dramatic, through repeated acts of being there, listening, and participating, the Matriarch embodies Christlike care, offering stability, comfort, and the assurance that the community is never alone.

Closing

In embracing my call of Matriarch, I see myself as accepting a communal role that has always been with the Restoration. This calling is not only about wisdom or blessing but about nurturing - about standing beside the weary, cradling the wounded, and defending those who live at the margins of society and faith. To be a Matriarch is to create sanctuaries where all may feel safe, to walk as a soul friend with the vulnerable, and to raise a prophetic voice against oppression in every form.

This ministry dares to believe that communities can be healed, that hope can be revived, and that God's love is most powerfully revealed in the care we extend to one another. In this way, the Matriarch both honors the wisdom of the past and inspires a future where compassion, justice, and blessing are woven deeply into the life of the Restoration.

31. Joriz Montes's Conference Talk

Given October 4th, 2025 at the Second Reform Mormon General Conference

Hi guys, I'm Joriz Montes. I'm 29, I'm a Filipino, and I'm a Latter-day Saint. I'm a dancer. I'm an artist, and I'm a YouTuber, and I am so humbled and so grateful to be a part of this one big family, this great movement.

It was sealed by so much blood, sweat, and tears of all who had gone before us, most especially the prophet Joseph Smith.

You know, I'm so grateful for this opportunity that you would let me, if you will, allow me to share my testimony.

Way back then things are going fine for me and it seems like I would be like that for the rest of my life. I had a lot of friends. I had a lot of money. But way back then when I was still affluent, I'm not yet in love with the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. I was with another religion that is against it.

But you know, God really talks to us so hard if we really go against him. Like it was a big slap on my face. It was a big cold water to me when I lost everything. I lost my friends. I lost my money. And I was finding myself begging, like literally begging at every single church that I could see, thinking that I might get God there. I might see God there. That He may have mercy on upon me.

And that was when I got really thinking that I hated the prophet Joseph Smith. I hated the Restoration. And it was then that I began rethinking my stand on the Restoration and on the prophet Joseph Smith, and I learned to embrace it. I learned to love it. And I became a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And I was so happy!

And really what pulled me into this church is because it was so fascinating to know that the United States has an origin story, and that origin story is the Book of Mormon. And I was also very sympathetic with how prophet Joseph Smith and many other people like the pioneers have suffered so much just for their faith in this.

So, I got into the mainstream Latter-day Saint Church, but sadly, I don't know um this is how it went with any one of you, but sadly fate has it that I got a very very strict local leader, local authority. Like at first they were so nice to me, they were so welcoming to me. But when they found out that I am a dancer...

I want to have my videos done properly, neatly done. That I must have much light. If you're following videos. But how my house is built, as you may have noticed, doesn't allow me to neatly perform my dance videos, because the light isn't properly coming in. So I had to go elsewhere to do my dance videos properly, where where it is impolite. The only place here in my town where I could do it is our local ward meeting house, where there is ample light.

Sadly, I began using, slightly, our ward meeting house for my dance videos, and sadly my local authority had found that out, and he was so very strict, and he kicked me out. He really changed the way he treats me - like I'm a nobody and I no longer matter to him anymore because he was indicting me that I purportedly "broke the chastity rule of the church".

He said I mustn't be wearing revealing and provoking clothes, which is what I do in dance. I wear scantily dance wear. I wear almost nothing. I'm almost bare naked in my dance videos, because that's the only way in which I feel comfortable. That's the only way I feel able, fully capable, to properly conduct my dance videos, and I cannot even dance properly with much clothes on.

So my local leader have ejected me out of the church because he thinks - he claims - that I'm purportedly "provoking immorality" because of my dancing.

You see, conservative people appreciate classical art, old art, which most of the time depicts scantily-clad people, people who are almost bare naked, and they appreciate it. They just say "It's just art", but they don't appreciate being bare naked if it's done actually. They're insisting that we should always wear temple clothes every single time. I think that's very self-contradictive. It's very inconsistent and we must change that.

You see, I don't throw away my confession. The church is still good for me. It's still wonderful. I will never exchange my witness of the Restoration, and of my Savior, and of the prophet Joseph Smith, and of the Book of Mormon for anything else.

But sadly, there are people who think that they could just do anything - just make us live in fear just because they think they have authority and they think they have all the power in the world, that God allows them to make us all live in fear and without trust. They don't create confidence, and they don't build relationships with all of us. That's just one of the many things we have to change in this movement.

We must also be open. We must have full communion with other Christian churches. Let's no longer only pretend that we're friendly to them. We've been friendly to them, but we don't allow them to take the sacrament. We don't accept them fully into our orders (recognize their priesthood). We don't let them preach and officiate in us, and they don't let us govern and administer in their places. Well, that must change because we are all Christians. We all confess Jesus Christ, but if we still keep our boundaries from one another, like we think "this people" or "that people have some deadly disease and that we shouldn't be even associating with them", I don't think that's right. And all these claims of ecumenism will be for nothing, just because we refuse to enter into full communion with these churches. We must recognize them and they must recognize us. We must be no longer different than each other. Yes, we keep our identities, but we must work together. We must learn and begin to work together, because we are all Christians.

And also I would like to ask all of you Latter-day Saints that, as much as we must be open, we must also be receptive to new scripture, right? The prophet Joseph Smith said that if the Lord doesn't reveal more to him, then let the world discover it. Well, thus saith the Lord! Because

Joseph Smith said that, let the world discover it! And many of our cousins in this big Restoration movement have already discovered many, many scriptures, far ahead of our individual respective jurisdictions, and we don't accept those scriptures that are not of our jurisdictions just because they're not of our jurisdictions. Again, we're all Christians. We must change that and we must be receptive to new scripture.

We must be receptive to new revelation, and sadly also I see that there are many churches who *claim* to be Latter-day Saints, but I strongly believe in the tradition of living prophets and living apostles, and sadly some who claim to be Latter-day Saints do away with these and they think they could just go directly to God. Yes, we could all go directly to God, but sometimes that might be misled. These same people who pretend to be Latter-day Saints claim that even the prophets and the apostles are themselves misled, and that they refuse such leadership. They refuse to be organized with such leadership, because they think that prophets and apostles are imperfect people. Well, who of us are perfect? None of us is. No.

We must be open to new scripture. We must be open to new revelation. And we must be open to our fellow cousins, to the leadership of our companions here in this movement. Let us accept the leadership of prophets and apostles.

Well, there must be checks and balances. There must be transparency. We must never ever lose that. That's one of our identities. That's what makes us peculiar. Just one of the many things makes us peculiar.

And again, we must not make people live in fear. Like our Lord, we must be merciful. Céline Dion said, "love doesn't always follow the rules". Our lord Jesus Christ himself went bare naked for us when he died and rose again for us. Why don't we do that, right? All the more we can remember Christ just by being bare naked! Most especially if you are an artist like me. We don't lose divine guidance if we go bare naked. All the more we will invoke that, because that is a gesture of presenting ourselves as an emulated sacrifice before God.

My faith will not change. My testimony is still strong. But sadly, some people exercise unrighteous authority and unrighteous dominion. We must change that.

And also we must reaffirm that the United States - with all of its imperfections - is still the land choice above all other lands, because God expects us Americans to be beacons of light, of kindness, of mercy and compassion. He has given us a very special mission, and the greatest manifestation of that love and mercy of God for the United States is giving us the prophet Joseph Smith, and this work, and this wonderful movement. We must reaffirm that we must rise to this great blessing of our calling. We must accept it. We must embrace it. We must do good in it. We must be very aware of it. I testify of that.

I testify that God lives. I testify that Jesus is the Christ. And as much as we must and will be exalted with God, we must also understand that it is not wrong to revere the saints. It is not wrong to revere the real presence of our Lord in the holy eucharist. It is not wrong to revere images and statues of Christ and the saints. It is not wrong to revere Mary as our Heavenly

Mother, Mary Magdalene as the blessed spouse of our Lord. It is not wrong to revere Joseph Smith as the incarnate Holy Spirit. It is not wrong because that is our destiny.

It is a big disservice to those who went before us, especially if they sacrificed a lot, if we think that God is a credit grabber, self-centered, and that He doesn't care anymore about all of us. That thinking, that God doesn't care anymore about us, is sin in people who exercise unrighteous authority over us who are trying to live our faith with good intentions.

I know that God lives. I know that Jesus is the Christ. I know that Joseph Smith is Their prophet. And I know that Mary lives. She knows and She loves us. She is our Heavenly Mother. That Mary Magdalene and all the other saints - John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, all of them, the apostles, the prophet Joseph Smith - they all live. They all know and love us, and they share with Christ in this work. They stand at the head of this dispensation. They direct us. They love us.

I know that if we do these things that God will be happy with us. We will be able to realize our calling more than we ever think we could ever do.

My heart goes out to everybody who is like me and has been a victim of unrighteous dominion. I urge you to never lose your faith in the Restoration. There's still good out there. There's still good! Just hold on to Mary. Just hold on to the saints. Hold on to the sacrament, to the eucharist. And if we do that, if we open our hearts, if we be open, if we be transparent, you will realize that there's nothing good if you throw this entire identity away. People are imperfect. People come and go, but Mary still remains. Mary lives, the saints lives, the eucharist lives, and you will be exalted as they are. That's your destiny. No one can take that away from you.

You just do these things. You just be open. You just be kind. You just be humble. Sadly, many people in the movement think that they're so skillful that they don't need these things anymore. They could just go away from all of these things and still be proud and arrogant, just as the mainstream church does. This must stop, and it must stop now! Hopefully we all work together, God helping us to stop it. I know that we could do this, and that this is the will and the word of the Lord.

I love you guys. Thank you so much. And I say these things are true in the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

32. “Personalizing Mormonism for Today” by Roman (they/them)

Given October 4th at the 2025. Second Reform Mormon General Conference

Hello, my name is Roman, and let me share with you today my talk on making Mormonism personally meaningful.

Reform Mormonism is rooted in the understanding that our faith is not about conformity to a single path, but about empowering each of us to chart our own journeys of Eternal Progression. Each person brings unique life experiences, insights, and creativity to the table. As we share these with each other, our diverse contributions can expand the living tradition we share.

One way I personally practice a traditional Mormon principle in a new way is by expanding the concept of eternal families. In the church I grew up in, this teaching was tightly linked to Temple ordinances and legal definitions of a nuclear heteronormative family. For me now, it means consciously building my chosen family through bonds of love, care, and mutual responsibility. I see “eternal”, not as a contract sealed in a single moment, but as the ongoing work of sustaining relationships across time, space, and circumstances. Whether it is friends who have become siblings to me, mentors who have guided me like my elder kin, or communities that have embraced me as their own, I honor these connections as sacred. In blessing meals, offering words of comfort, or gathering for shared rituals, I am enacting the principle of eternal family in a way that reflects my lived understanding and my values.

One way Mormonism can become personally meaningful for all of us is through storytelling and by openly sharing our lived experiences. When we speak about what faith has meant in the struggles, transitions, and joys of our lives, we invite others to see the gospel not as something rigid or imposed, but as something living and adaptable. Our stories bear witness that Mormonism can nurture us as we are, not only as we are told to be.

Reform Mormonism gains personal meaning through the ordinances and rituals we create for ourselves. Sacred action is not limited to a small list of authorized ceremonies. Many Reform Mormons have written blessings for life milestones, consecrated relationships, celebrated gender transitions, honored ancestors, or marked personal achievements through ritual. These practices affirm our dignity, our agency, and our worth. They remind us that Eternal Progression is not only a cosmic doctrine, but also a daily reality we can embody with intention.

Equally important to me are the new insights that we can all uncover in the principles and texts we inherited. When we revisit scripture, familiar sayings, or traditional Mormon teachings with new understanding, we find deeper meaning. A verse once used to restrict can become a source of liberation. A principle once applied narrowly can be expanded to embrace broader human experience. What was once an obligation can be transformed into a source of joy.

Giving Mormonism personal meaning is a creative act. This isn't about abandoning tradition or blindly repeating it, but about connecting with it in light of who we are today. Reform Mormonism invites us to be not only recipients of this tradition, but also authors of it.

As we watch today and to those watching after, let us share our stories, our rituals, our insights. Let us celebrate the diverse ways we make Mormonism our own. In doing so, we continue the great work of Eternal Progression, becoming more fully ourselves, more deeply connected with our planet and the communities we are a part of.

Thank you, and amen.

33. “The Gift of Revelation”

by Evan Sharley (she/her)

[Given October 4th, 2025 at the Second Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

1. What Is Revelation?

1.1. Introduction

Many Abrahamic religions argue that Divine gifts such as prophecy and new revelation are relics of the past that ceased with the apostles. This perspective is known as “Cessationism”. Some famous cessationists are Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Charles Hodge. In contrast, there are those who believe that these gifts continue into our day, which is a perspective called “Continuationism”. Some famous continuationists are John Wesley, George Fox, and Joseph Smith Jr.

However Mormonism, which was largely started by Joseph Smith Jr., is unique among the continuationists, because these communications are not held merely as appendices to ancient scripture, but are often considered or even canonized as modern scripture.

Yet, despite its centrality to our tradition, revelation remains a concept that eludes easy definition. What exactly is revelation? Is it the very words of God dictated to a prophet? Is it a profound impression upon the soul? Is it reserved only for those in authority, or does it belong to all who seek it? These questions are not new—they have shaped our history, our doctrine, and our identity as a revelatory people. In light of these questions, it is wise to take time to define what we mean by “revelation” today. Furthermore, as a people who seek divine guidance, we must also be vigilant against the misuse of the gift of revelation, because while our history has shown that revelation can inspire and uplift, it also has been invoked to justify oppression and division.

As we explore revelation, we must do so with humility, recognizing that the sacred has always been mediated through human experience. Whether plenary or conceptual, general or special, revelation is ultimately an invitation—not merely to receive, but to discern, to wrestle, and to grow. Our task is not merely to ask, “What is revelation?” but to seek, as Joseph did, the wisdom to interpret and apply it in our lives today.

1.2. Plenary VS Conceptual Revelation

With this understanding in place, we turn to an essential question: how does revelation function? Throughout our history, revelation has been understood in different ways—sometimes as a word-for-word dictation from God (plenary revelation), and at other times as a divinely inspired concept that someone expresses in human language (conceptual revelation).

It would be wise to examine both of these perspectives as they pertain to our past and present and how we want to understand revelation as we move into the future.

1.2.1. Plenary

“Plenary” means “complete” or “full.” In the context of revelation, plenary revelation typically refers to the belief that the Divine directly dictated the words which are recorded in scripture. Under this view, the written document is comprehensive, all-encompassing, and a perfect disclosure of Divine knowledge and truth.

One of the most well-known instances of revelation that is considered plenary would be the 10 Commandments, which scripture states were inscribed by the very finger of God upon stone tablets (Exodus 31:18). However, even within Mormonism we have had our own instances of belief in plenary revelation. For example, Joseph Smith Jr.’s September 1830 revelation says:

“thou shalt give heed unto all [of Joseph Smith Jr.’s] words, and commandments, which he shall give unto you... for his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth”

This passage suggests that Joseph Smith Jr. intended his revelations, and consequently the Doctrine and Covenants, to be regarded as plenary in nature.

Within the Reorganization there continued to be a persistent belief in a plenary understanding. For example, many voiced a fair amount of opposition when the 1966 “Revised Authorized Version” of the Book of Mormon was announced, as it made some minor grammatical and linguistic changes to make it more understandable. The reason for this opposition was that they believed that the 1908 Authorized Version was a plenary translation of the Golden Plates, and to modify the text, even to make it grammatically correct or more accessible to a modern audience, would be to corrupt the word of God.

1.2.2. Conceptual

“Conceptual” pertains to ideas, concepts, or mental constructs. Conceptual revelation, therefore, is the process by which Divine knowledge and truth is revealed as general concepts, leaving writers to articulate these insights in human language. Such writings may or may not be canonized as scripture.

While Joseph Smith Jr. asserted a plenary view of revelation, there are notable passages of scripture that call this into question. One of the strongest arguments for a conceptual understanding is the evolution of Smith’s revelations over time, with significant alterations in meaning. For example, Joseph’s April 1829 revelation underwent substantial changes that reflect a shift in interpretation:

<u>Earliest Extent</u>	<u>Book of Commandments</u>	<u>Doctrine and Covenants</u>
now this is not all for thou hast another gift which is the gift of working with the sprout Behold it hath told you things Behold there is no other power save God that can cause this thing of Nature to work in your hands for it is the work of God	Now this is not all, for you have another gift, which is the gift of working with the rod : behold it has told you things: behold there is no other power save God, that can cause this rod of nature , to work in your hands, for it is the work of God	Now this is not all thy gift; for you have another gift, which is the gift of Aaron : behold it has told you many things: behold there is no other power save the power of God that can cause this gift of Aaron to be with you; therefore, doubt not, for it is the gift of God, and you shall hold it in your hands, and do marvelous works; and no power shall be able to take it away out of your hands; for it is the work of God

Early versions of this revelation affirmed Oliver Cowdery's gift in the use of dowsing rods, a practice associated with folk magic and divination. Later revisions altered the meaning, distancing the text from its original implication. Such modifications indicate a move away from plenary revelation toward an implicit acceptance of conceptual revelation.

The Josephites in particular have had an overt transition to a conceptual understanding of revelation. The Reorganization's first major engagement with conceptual revelation came during the 1880s Gurley Reformation, led by Jason W. Briggs and Zenas H. Gurley Jr.. These reformers opposed a plenary view and saw the RLDS First Presidency as attempting to seize more ecclesiastical power through World Conference Resolution #215. While Resolution #222 introduced ambiguity just the next year, it ultimately was not persuasive enough and the reformers resigned in 1886, citing the church's stance on scripture. In response, the RLDS passed Resolution #308 which explicitly rejected a plenary view and solidified its commitment to conceptual revelation—a stance still in effect today.

This choice would go on to be expounded upon by later theologians. For example, in 1967 F. Henry Edwards said:

“The idea of plenary inspiration... no longer stands the test of careful scrutiny”

In 1969 the Basic Beliefs committee for the church all but eliminated any doubt on if a conceptual understanding of revelation reigned supreme in the church when they said:

“Such [Divine] disclosure is experienced in the hearts of men rather than in the words by which the revelation is interpreted and communicated.”

Several RLDS presidents have attempted to articulate what their revelatory process was like. Wallace B. Smith explained his perspective in the Herald article “The Prophetic Experience” and prefaces of the last 20 or so CoC Doctrine and Covenants sections speak of this process.

However, perhaps the most thorough exposé on the modern Josephite revelatory process comes from Steve Veazey's article in Restoration Studies XI entitled "Stepping into the River of Revelation in the Restoration Tradition". In this article Veazey explores the collaborative development of CoC Doctrine and Covenants 163, thus illustrating a conceptual model of revelation. Perhaps the most tangible ways that the Josephites interact with conceptual revelation today is through the evolution of the sacrament prayers:

<u>Moroni 4 (1830 BoM)</u>	D&C 17	<u>D&C 17 (Combined)</u>	<u>Contemporary</u>	<u>Contemporary (Combined)</u>
O God, the Eternal Father,	O God, the eternal Father,	O God, the eternal Father,	Eternal God,	Eternal God,
we ask thee in the name of	we ask thee in the name of	we ask thee in the name of	we ask you in the name of	we ask you in the name of
thy Son Jesus Christ,	thy Son Jesus Christ,	thy Son Jesus Christ,	your Son Jesus Christ,	your Son Jesus Christ,
to bless and sanctify this bread	to bless and sanctify this bread	to bless and sanctify this bread and wine	to bless and sanctify this bread	to bless and sanctify this bread and wine
to the souls of all those	to the souls of all those	to the souls of all those	to the souls of all those	to the souls of all those
who partake of it , that they	who partake of it , that they	who partake of them , that they	who receive it , that they	who receive them , that they
may eat in remembrance of	may eat in remembrance of	may eat and drink in remembrance of	may eat in remembrance of	may eat and drink in remembrance of
the body of thy Son,	the body of thy Son,	the body and blood of thy Son,	the body of your Son,	the body and blood of your Son,
and witness unto thee ,	and witness unto thee ,	and witness unto thee ,	and witness to you ,	and witness to you ,
O God the Eternal Father,	O God, the eternal Father,	O God, the eternal Father,	O God,	O God,
that they are willing to	that they are willing to	that they are willing to	that they are willing to	that they are willing to
take upon them the name of thy Son,	take upon them the name of thy Son,	take upon them the name of thy Son,	take upon them the name of your Son,	take upon them the name of your Son,
and always remember him,	and always remember him	and always remember him	and always remember him,	and always remember him
and keep his commandments	and keep his commandments	and keep his commandments	and keep the commandments	and keep the commandments
which he hath given them,	which he has given them,	which he has given them,	which he has given them,	which he has given them,
that they may always have	that they may always have	that they may always have	that they may always have	that they may always have
his spirit to be with them. Amen.	his Spirit to be with them. Amen.	his Spirit to be with them. Amen.	his Spirit to be with them. Amen.	his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

1.2.3. Conclusion

The tension between plenary and conceptual revelation has shaped the way we understand Divine communication throughout our history. While plenary revelation asserts a fixed, word-for-word transmission from God, conceptual revelation allows for divine truths to be interpreted, adapted, and expressed in human language, and even be seen as products of their time and culture.

Although Joseph Smith Jr. initially framed his revelations in a plenary manner, the historical record suggests an approval of a conceptual understanding—both in the modifications of Smith’s revelations and in the broader trajectory of some Mormons such as the Josephites. The shift to conceptual has allowed for greater theological flexibility and adaptation, as seen in the ongoing evolution of scripture, doctrine, and sacramental language.

As we move forward, this broader understanding of revelation leads us naturally to another important distinction: the difference between general and special revelation. While plenary and conceptual frameworks describe the mechanism of revelation, general and special revelation describe its scope. This next section will explore how revelation is experienced on both a universal and a personal level, helping us better understand how God communicates across different contexts.

2.1. General VS Special Revelation

When exploring what revelation is, the teachings of the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas stand as a cornerstone. Within his framework, he defined two distinct modes of Divine communication: “General revelation” and “Special revelation.” These two modes both bring insight and meaning to our understanding of God, and so it is wise to explore these in more depth.

2.1. General

In Genesis 6:66 of the Inspired Version/Joseph Smith Translation of the bible, we are taught that:

“...all things are created and made to bear record of [God]; both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath, all things bear record of [God].”

The natural world is a glorious creation of God, and like all art, it serves as a teacher regarding the nature of its Creator. We study and learn from the Divine by using our senses, instruments, and reason, and in doing so we are able to make observations and discoveries. These revelations are consistent and universally accessible and self-evident regardless of location or religious beliefs.

Those who seek these general revelations are called scientists. They specialize in countless ways, such as medicine, biology, cosmology, and physics. The writings of these wise teachers benefit the whole of humanity, and the goodness that they bring should be held in esteem. Apostle Orson Pratt once taught that:

“The study of science is the study of something eternal. If we study astronomy, we study the works of God. If we study chemistry, geology, optics, or any other branch of science, every new truth we come to the understanding of is eternal; it is a part of the great system of universal truth. It is truth that exists throughout universal nature; and God is the dispenser of all truth—scientific, religious, and political. Therefore let all classes of citizens and people endeavor to improve their time more than heretofore—to train their minds to that which is best calculated for their good and the good of the society which surrounds them.”

Joseph Smith Jr.’s 1833 revelation commands us to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith,” urging us to embrace all sources of wisdom that lead to greater understanding. To neglect the discoveries of science is to turn away from a vast, unfolding testament of God’s handiwork. Therefore, scientific writings should be regarded with the same reverence as canonized scripture, for both are revelations of divine truth—one written by prophets, the other inscribed into the fabric of creation itself.

2.2. Special

While general revelation unfolds through the observable world, special revelation manifests through direct and personal experiences. These experiences can take many forms, including visions, dreams, trances, angelic visitations, entheogenic encounters, and moments of profound inspiration. Our tradition is filled with such accounts, such as Joseph Smith’s First Vision in the Sacred Grove.

Unlike general revelation, which is accessible to all through reason and observation, special revelation is deeply personal and subjective. Since special revelation is personal and not universally verifiable, it carries a different weight than general revelation. It is often received within the context of faith communities and interpreted through theological and cultural lenses. While one person’s vision may serve as a guiding light for many, others may see little value in it. Even within shared religious traditions, interpretations of divine experiences can vary widely, leading to diverse expressions of faith and belief.

The power of special revelation lies not just in the experience itself but in how it is communicated and received. Throughout history people have shared their revelations in ways that inspire and uplift, but also in ways that invite ethical reflection. As we explore revelation further, it is crucial to consider the responsibility that comes with claiming Divine insight. In the final section of this talk we will discuss the ethics of revelation—how to discern, share, and interpret these experiences in ways that are constructive, compassionate, and spiritually enriching.

3. The Ethics of Special Revelation

Despite revelation being such a foundational part of the Restoration, there is very little written about how to have ethical and responsible revelation. Since the gift of revelation is one that is given to all, it is especially pressing that this education be obtained.

The inability to determine what an ethical revelation looks like has led to some hurtful and downright violent acts to be done in the name of the Divine within Mormonism. Our founder, Joseph Smith Jr., also fell prey to his baser instincts and wielded revelation as a means to obtain what he wanted. For example:

- He told Martin Harris to sell his home to fund the Book of Mormon printing, and Harris was left without a home when the Book of Mormon was not a commercial success.
- He prevented everyone else from having revelations except him
- He claimed the Kirtland Safety Society was Divinely ordained [\(1\)](#) [\(2\)](#)
- He used revelation to get his followers to build him a mansion
- He used revelation to send husbands away so he could also use revelation to coerce their wives into marrying him.

Outside of our founder it has also been used for nefarious purposes, such as:

- W. Wallace Smith's revelation that called non-monogamous families inherently sinful (CoC D&C 150)
- The Restoration Church of Jesus Christ's revelation which non-consensually dissolved sealings between consenting adults and may have contributed to a suicide.
- Thomas S. Monson / Russell M. Nelson's revelation to enact the November Policy of Exclusion of LGBT people and their children which absolutely led to suicides.
- [Ron Lafferty's revelation to murder his sister-in-law and infant niece](#)

This may sound like I don't care for revelation; on the contrary I have written quite a few revelations and adore many that others have written. However, our tradition has clearly illustrated that the gift of revelation can be abused in the most horrific ways. This makes the need for an education on ethical and responsible revelation even more pressing.

I would like to propose several things to keep in mind when writing your own revelations:

1. **Check motives:** before writing your revelation, ask yourself why you are doing so. Revelation should never be used as a tool to claim dominion over another, as all people have access to the heavens and they can seek revelation for themselves. Instead, revelation should be a way of building community, helping all lead fulfilling lives, and be inclusive.

2. **Invite community discernment:** Share your drafts with your friends, and ask for their feedback. Allowing the community to take part in the revelatory process is a form of common consent. Welcome and accept insights, critiques, and revisions with humility.
3. **Root in Tradition and Service:** Our tradition is full of spiritual leaders - including and especially Jesus - who have conveyed many wise things to us. The best of what they have created centers the vulnerable and is anchored in service. See if your revelation does this as well.
4. **Consider the fruits:** Consider how your revelation will impact the community. Will it help people along their spiritual path, or will it create road blocks? Does it strengthen, comfort, and uplift others, or does it degrade and control others?
5. **Understand scope:** Your revelation, by definition, is a conceptual special revelation, and it is inseparably the product of you and your time period and culture. While it may be meaningful to you it may not be to everyone. Honor people's diversity of experience and belief.
6. **Brevity:** 2nd Nephi teaches "my soul delighteth in plainness: for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men. For the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding: for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding.", and it would be wise if your revelations did the same. If the message could be conveyed more concisely, explore doing so.
7. **Know the facts:** Having a revelation that the sky is actually purple does not make it so. Likewise, if you are unfamiliar with things such as Mesoamerican archeology, don't claim that you do through revelation. It is important to speak on things which are true and you have knowledge about.
8. **Consider your mental health:** Revelation - like any creative or intuitive process - is influenced by your mental and emotional state. If you are in a period of crisis, exhaustion, or instability, what feels like inspiration may be more about processing your own stress than offering something helpful for others. Pay attention to your well-being, and if needed, take time away from religion and spirituality to rest, reflect, or seek professional support. A healthy mind is better able to produce guidance for your community that is clear, constructive, and less likely to cause harm.
9. **Be honest when revising:** If you put your revelation out there for people to read and then modify it later, that is perfectly acceptable, but you should note what changes you made to it.

These are the minimum ethical considerations to keep in mind when writing and claiming revelation. Beginning here will not prevent all abuses, but it will help mitigate the worst impulses and direct the revelation toward healing rather than harm.

If you feel called to write revelation, remember that you are claiming to give voice to Divinity on earth. To take up this calling is an act of profound courage and the birthright of the Restoration,

but it is also an act of grave responsibility. When revelation is used to dominate, coerce, or deceive, it becomes the very definition of taking God's name in vain. When it is rooted in humility, compassion, and service, however, revelation can be one of the greatest blessings our tradition offers.

The Restoration has shown us both the perils and the possibilities of special revelation. Let us choose the latter. May we be a people who approach revelation with care, who honor the Spirit's voice without weaponizing it, and who use this gift to comfort, to liberate, and to build Zion among us.

34. Closing Prayer for the Second Reform Mormon General Conference by Mars (she/they)

[Given October 4th, 2025 at the Second Reform Mormon General Conference](#)

Heavenly parents,

Thank you for this day and for all the days of the year that thou hast given us.

Please, in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, guide us to old truth and keep us throughout this day.

In thy name, Amen.

35. Rob Lauer's post in the Mormonish Podcast facebook group

[Posted in the Mormonish Podcast facebook group on October 8th, 2025](#)

In her excellent post below, Cara Bullinger O'Sullivan wrote about Bruce R. Conkie's famous 1982 BYU devotional warning of the dangers of trying to have a personal relationship with Christ.

I remember McConkie's so-called "devotional" talk oh so well. It was during my last year at BYU, and it was that so-called "devotional" that was the final nail in the coffin as far as my membership in the LDS Church was then concerned. At the end of that so-called "devotional," I made the conscious decision to leave the LDS Church as soon as I got my diploma from BYU. Which I did.

I saw at the time that the LDS Church was culturally drifting theologically toward Protestant Neo-Orthodoxy, and honestly, I was NOT on board with that.

Having been raised as a progressive mainstream Protestant (United Methodist), I was socially and intellectually progressive but had rejected the core theological concepts of Christian orthodoxy (aka Monotheism, the Trinity, Creation Ex Nihilo, Original Sin, the Virgin Birth, salvation by faith, Heaven and Hell, Eternal Damnation, sola scriptura). In the developmental phase of early Mormon Theology (1829-1844), I found ideas that I thought--and STILL think--laid the foundation of an enlightened, rational belief system perfectly suited for our modern times (our "latter days" if you will.)

During my three years at BYU, I struggled with the religious legalism of LDS culture, its distrust/fear of the outside world (the world Jesus commissioned his disciples to actively engage with), and particularly the LDS Institution's dishonesty about Mormon history and Mormon doctrinal development. (I talked about this in my first "Mormonish" interview with Rebecca and Landon.)

McConkie took all of that to a new level when in his so-called "devotional," he warned Latter-day Saints against cultivating a "personal relationship with Christ" and instead told them that if they wanted a sure guide, they should "stay in the mainstream of the Church." (I think that's an exact quote, but as I don't have my copy of his talk with me, I may be off by a word or two.)

The idea that staying in the mainstream of any society or group was in and of itself a virtue seemed completely antithetical to the teachings of Jesus, the writings of the Hebrew prophets, and the central theme of "The Book of Mormon's" plotline. But McConkie leadership philosophy and style were those of a narcissist, so this idea served his purpose.

I was a native of the same Virginia city (Portsmouth) where CBN (The Christian Broadcasting Network) was founded and where Pat Robertson and Jim and Tammy Bakker became

international celebrities. Their stars were rapidly ascending during the same years that I began studying Mormon history and theology and joined the LDS Church. Most members of my ward were converts, so we were regularly criticized, challenged, and verbally attacked by Evangelicals. Everyone dealt with it, memorizing Biblical proof texts that supported ideas such as the plurality of Gods, the Fatherhood of God and the human capacity to become Gods, and the necessity of good works and not merely faith. At the same time, the belief in the necessity of everyone receiving personal revelation necessitated a personal relationship with God and Christ.

This was during the late 1970s in Virginia (then called "the Mission Field", as opposed to Utah, AKA "Zion"), BEFORE that God-awful "Priesthood Correlation" took total control of all LDS congregations worldwide, with its dumbing-down of Church educational manuals, its emphatic denials of historical facts, its deconstruction of early Mormon theology, and its draconian measures to subvert individualism within the LDS institution.

This subversion of individualism is what McConkie's so-called "devotional" represented to me. Sure, I get how he could be rankled by the emerging use of Evangelical phrases, such as "having a personal relationship with Christ." But despite his rhetoric, I don't think his problem was with prioritizing a relationship with Christ over one with Heavenly Father.

I think what rankled McConkie the most was the idea of the PERSONAL and the primacy of ANY personal relationship in one's life. I mean, look at what he taught was a sure, safe guide: to stay in the mainstream of the LDS Church. In other words, follow the group.

Or, as he so unbelievably wrote to Eugene England in 1981: "It is your province TO ECHO WHAT I SAY OR REMAIN SILENT."

I assumed McConkie was an educated, well-read man. If he was, then he apparently forgot that the word "echo" was the name of a central character in the classical Greek myth of Narcissus and Echo. The deluded man was actually demanding that Gene play the role of the cursed wood nymph Echo to his role as Narcissus! It's laughably pathetic, but it shows this so-called "Apostle's" apparent complete lack of self-awareness and introspection.

Well, the LDS institution and seemingly the majority of its members have followed McConkie's so-called "counsel." They have continued to set aside the "personal" and look outside themselves for a guidance in the mainstream.

For LDS members that has meant following the dictates of LDS institutional leaders; of ECHOING what they say, even to the ridiculous extreme of rejecting the names "Mormon" and "Mormonism" (names that PRE-DATE "Latter Day Saints" by four years.)

For the LDS institutional leaders looking for guidance in the mainstream has meant hiring marketing experts, doing endless surveys of popular opinions, and seeing what words, images, ideas, and THEOLOGY will appeal to mainstream Americans shopping in the religious marketplace. Since the loudest voices selling in the U.S. religious marketplace are Evangelical, the LDS institution is rapidly assimilating into that demographic. Since "having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ" and continually referencing "Jesus," "Jesus Christ" and "the

Saviour" are tried-and-true tropes in that particular marketplace, so they are now central to the LDS institution's marketing/missionary programs and the correlated dumbed-down, elementary-school-level pap it publishes and tries to pass off as educational material.

So, by following the "counsel" that McConkie gave in his so-called "devotional," the LDS institution and its members are now embracing the same exact external shows of religiosity that he so famously decried.

Because those shows of religiosity were never REALLY a problem for McConkie. Individuality, the personal, and those who refused to echo whatever he said were the problem.

And thus, whatever was uniquely good and theologically hopeful in early Mormonism has been euthanized and buried within the LDS Church. Latter-day Saints are truly Mormons no more. Which is as it should be. They are unworthy of the name.

36. “Jesus Was Married (To Women and Men)” by Evan Sharley

[Posted on September 25, 2025 on Gileriodekel.com](#)

People often reshape Jesus into their own image – ethnically, politically, socially, and spiritually – through selective interpretation of scripture and artistic representation. This makes Jesus – and Divinity as a whole – feel close and relevant to a culture’s experiences. This reshaping of Jesus has been done countless times across history, but one particularly striking example to me is the Mormon portrayal of him as a married polygamist.

In [1854](#), Orson Pratt taught that the marriage at Cana of Galilee was actually Jesus’s own wedding, and that he had multiple wives including Mary of Bethany, Martha of Bethany, and Mary Magdalene, and that he fathered children from these unions. Pratt would go on to affirm this claim in [1855](#) and [1857](#). Decades later, Ogden Kraut’s 1969 book [Jesus Was Married](#) took the argument further, contending that Jewish law required marriage, and that Jesus could not have fulfilled all righteousness without it. For Kraut, this meant Jesus was not only married but necessarily lived plural marriage, following the pattern of Abraham, Jacob, and other patriarchs. Suffice it to say that while the LDS church has long since abandoned this notion, it remains a living tradition in fundamentalist circles.

On its face, I find little objectionable in such a telling, so long as it imagines Jesus and his wives as consenting adults. But as a Queer Mormon, another question presses on me: was Jesus necessarily straight? Surprisingly, this question has been raised for centuries.

The Gospel of John describes John as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” John lays on Jesus’s chest as they eat together (John 13:23), remains with him at the crucifixion (John 19:26), is entrusted to care for Jesus’s mother (John 19:27), and is among the first to be told of the empty tomb (John 20:2–4). These are not incidental details but signs of intimacy, devotion, trust, and covenantal love. This love has been depicted in works of art such as [“Christ and Saint John the Evangelist” \(1300-1320\)](#), [“St John at the Last Supper” Stained glass detail from a window in the Sacred Heart \(Dahlgren\) chapel in Georgetown University \(1893\)](#), and [“The beloved Disciple” by Ruben Ferreira – Fine Arts \(2024\)](#).

Many may dismiss Jesus’s and John’s connection as mere friendship, but again, people have always reshaped Jesus, and [the question of Jesus’s sexuality has long been contested](#). Some see him as a celibate asexual, others see him as heterosexual, and his connection to John also suggested homo- or bisexuality. I believe that this phenomenon is yet another example of how Jesus is reshaped in the image of those who behold him.

In that tradition, I reshape Jesus again – not to diminish him, but to acknowledge the fullness of love he embodies. I see him as polyamorous and bisexual, married and sealed to Mary of

Bethany, Martha of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, and John the Beloved. In this, Christ is not a distant and aloof figure; he is a man who had a family that looked like mine.

37. “Testimony at the end of my 37th year” by Sarah Williams

Posted in the Reform Mormon discord on October 26th, 2025

I do not fear God.

Rather, I love God, my Heavenly Parents, and I feel Their love as made manifest by the Holy Spirit, who is Love. Love and Fear are antithetical.

I do not place faith in books or prophets.

Rather, I place my faith in reason and conscience that God has given me, and in the still small voice through which the Holy Spirit moves me to act with love and compassion in all things. Blind Faith and Right Action are at odds.

I do not find salvation in the Cross.

Rather, I know the crucifixion for an act of murder by state power enacted on a rebellious voice for speaking truth to power, and that Jesus’ death has not saved me but rather inspires me to do what is right, even unto death. Innocent blood can never atone the guilty.

I do not require Salvation.

Rather, I require growth and refinement— born out across multiple mortal probations, lives of learning and return, wherein I get opportunity to confront and overcome the demiurgic urge toward control and greed that resides in all who are born human. I am not saved but forged.

I am here to distill out the base and leave only the perfected,
and to seek and nurture the kind of Love that exalts one to godhood,
and to thus become uplifted into Exaltation and my destiny as a child of living Gods

38. “Prayer and Revelation” by Sarah Williams

Received November 17th, 2025

As I, Sarah, suffered a panic attack and read scripture for comfort I found I could not shake my fear and unease, and it felt as if my heart would stop from panic or else that I would be rendered unable to do the things that I needed to accomplish. Frustrated with my lack of success I decided to pray directly to my Mother in Heaven, the Author of comfort, so that I could find peace in Her. As I prayed I meditated upon a white stone which I held in my hands and which had been gifted me at my Endowment by a high priestess and Matriarch I hold in esteem.

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O Goddess Mother, your handmaiden, Sarah, priestess cast far from home and terrified in the storm, calls upon you in humble need. I stagger and fall under the weight I must bear, and fear for my life and safety from those who hate me without knowing me and the winds of winter without shelter. For why was I given such additional trial? Why must life be such a struggle in so many ways? For why am I disabled and must rely on others in fearful doubt? I know I'm made of worn, imperfect clay, but I will trust thee, O my Eema, for You are the Artist shaping me into my full glory and inheritance.

Please give me Your handmaiden, O God, some insight, but lo, what is needed most is strength and executive function, even if just for a while. For even when I see my burdens enumerated I cannot then take up the first to make way for the second, and the second sits upon the third. And what was three becomes nine and then several score.

O Heavenly Parents, Eema and Abba, please give me this so that I may suffer less in my struggle. For so I ask, not for me alone but for the family and the loving friends I have made, and the light that they tell me I am and beg that I not lose. Please, O God, please. Please. In the name of Christ and the Holy Spirit, Amen,

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O My Sarah, faithful even in exile, your cry is not unnoticed. The storm may strip your warmth and leave you trembling, but your words have become a flame offered in the ancient cadence of faith under pressure. You have named yourself clay and called upon the Artist; “Why was I given such additional trial?”

Not as punishment, My daughter, for you are being forged and shaped carefully and fearfully, like iron that must first be drawn through fire. You are not forgotten in this, nor cast aside. This is no idle shaping for it is purposefully done, with perfect love, in sorrow and in hope. The cracked clay holds light too, and never stops being the work of My hands.

Know also, O Sarah, that the eyes of the Mother see all Her children who struggle as you do. Each one, trembling under their own storms, is known, and none are overlooked. They too shall

know My love and receive gifts of strength, clarity, and mercy, and glory shall be added upon their heads for their endurance.

You ask for strength; be blessed that it may come in small mercies; one meal, one call upon a friend, one step with one foot in front of another at a time. You ask it on behalf of others and I say unto you that this honors the Holy Priesthood.

Hear this, daughter, My handmaiden and scribe. Be thou and all Our struggling children blessed to know what We ourselves know the weight of: strength enough, clarity enough, mercy enough to survive warmthless nights and storms and doubts. Let Sarah not lose sight of her Name which she has received and the light that tells her "I also Am." And remember, O Daughter, endure always in faith, for they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.

For such is My covenant with thee and all of My children who struggle in this day of tribulation, that your trials are to credit and not to scorn you, and that if you shall endure you shall know what gifts Heaven gives to those who carry light through a storm and lose it not, and shall have glory added upon your head for time and eternity. And know that all who struggle with faith and life in the furnace of trials shall be counted among My children for whom glory is multiplied. For My works are endless, as are My words and My priesthood, and My blessings as sure as the dawn which rises always in the east, and they flow like the river which breaketh every dam and earthwork set against it. And none of My children are forgotten. In the name of the Holy Spirit that gathers all weary prayers into one stream of strength, Amen.

39. “Christmas Testimony” by Istvan Jamrik

Given on Beyond the Walls on December 14th, 2025

Hello everyone, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on Beyond the Walls. I am always happy to be here.

Although I live in Canada now, I grew up in Hungary, a Central European country, in the 1990s. Hungary is a historically Roman Catholic country with a significant Calvinist Reformed minority. Yet, by the time I was born, it was a secular state, and other than my great-grandmother, a past boyfriend of my aunt's, and one of my classmates in elementary school who was an altar boy, I knew very few people who were actively religious. Certainly, a very important reason for this is the fact that from 1949 to 1989, we were a part of the Eastern Bloc as the Hungarian People's Republic, a communist state, where atheism was a part of the state ideology. Although this did not stop everyone from believing in God or associating with religion, it made not practicing any religion a lot easier, since one's religious identity was no longer tied to any rights or privileges they would enjoy in their lives.

Nevertheless, the celebration of holidays like Christmas was largely unaffected by the regime's ideology – after all, even in the midst of the worst Stalinist oppression of the 1950s, the government knew that taking away public holidays from the populace is generally not a popular or successful move. My grandparents were not religious, but my family celebrated Christmas every year all the same, as did the vast majority of Hungarians. Although by the time I was born, Hungary was a secular democratic country, Christmas was still the same as my parents and relatives described the Christmases of their childhood, except with a bit more of the religious flavour finding its way back into it. On December 6th comes the Mikulás, the local manifestation of Saint Nicholas, or Téliapó (“Father Winter”), a European folk figure who was completely syncretized with St. Nick by the end of the 20th century. A jovial, kind figure in a generally red outfit, and with a long, white beard, visits all the children. On the night of the 5th, the kids put their clean winter boots up on the windowsill, and by the morning, Mikulás would fill it with candy, tangerines, and other treats. Kids who misbehaved through the year get golden willow tree branches as a punishment instead, but I wouldn't know – I was always one of the good kids!

While in many parts of Europe and North America, Santa Claus (or a similar character) sticks around until Christmas to deliver gifts that day, but in Hungary, his job is done after bringing treats in early December. After that, we would start making nativities in school (that we'd just call “Bethlehems”) and learn classic Hungarian Christmas carols, like Dicsőség (“Glory”), Mennyből az angyal (“The Angel from Heaven”), or Csordapásztorok (“Shepherds”). Sometime mid-December, we would buy our Christmas tree, and store it until the time to set it up, which is the morning of the 24th. Imagine my shock when I learned that in Canada, many people have their tree up in November already! It took me years to get used to that one. In Hungary, some of us would spend the morning of the 24th with setting up and decorating the tree, while some would work on the Christmas meal in the kitchen. Then by the early afternoon, the family would

all sit down together for our meal, and then move to the living room with desserts, where the distribution of the presents would begin. Traditionally, in Hungary, the Christmas gifts are brought to the house by the Baby Jesus. Although we would not literally believe this, we would still refer to Christmas gifts as “whatever Jézuska brought this year”. In practice, our presents would all be hidden under a blanket, and my dad would pull out one gift at a time, hand it to its recipient, and we would all wait until the present got opened until moving on to the next one. As I grew older, we would both hand out the presents, going back and forth between my dad and me. It was always the most exciting part of Christmas.

It is still hard for me to describe what Christmas truly means to me. My parents divorced when I was 9 years old, mostly amicably. Yet, Christmas was one of the few times of the year when despite everything, all of us got together, and for the most part, all of us got along. The dinner, the music, the presents, they were all great for sure, but more importantly, as we were all together, Christmas always felt like the fabric of the world healed a little bit, even if just for a short time each year.

It may seem odd that I am speaking in church, yet the things I talked about hardly seemed to have much to do with Christ. My personal beliefs are not really focused on believing in a deity or following commandments to a letter, but I do have my own understanding of the divine, although I see the divine and the mundane as two sides of the same coin. Getting together, communing with each other, sharing a meal, keeping traditions or establishing new ones – these do not have to be explicitly religious acts, and yet they can be divine all the same. The Jesus of the Gospels was, like all humans, a social being. He loved communing with people. He showed who he was, not just through performing miracles and fulfilling prophecies, but simply just by being with others, sharing a meal, forgiving people, meeting others’ needs in simple ways that any of us can do. So, my Christmas testimony is this: you don’t need to perform miracles. Be with your family – genetic, adoptive, or chosen – and if you can, seek out those who have none. When isolation and loneliness are so common and the fabric of society is as weak as it is today, seeking fellowship is one of the most divine acts possible.

Thank you.

40. “The Reclaimed Temple” by Sibling Sol

Received December 20th, 2025

One morning, a few weeks ago, I awoke from sleep with a scene completely formed in my mind, not quite sure if I had been dreaming or whether it came to me immediately upon waking but one that stuck with me as I went about my day.

I saw a city in ruin. Buildings had fallen away into emptiness and desolation. Pavements were broken, stonework cracked, and weeds pushed upward through every place that had once been orderly and maintained.

At the center of the city stood a Mormon temple, itself damaged and weathered, its stone worn, vines and moss growing up its sides, surrounded by overgrown trees and shrubs. Across the temple front hung a white, tattered banner, hung with intention. Upon it was spray painted in green the Reform Mormon compass, the V set within its circle. It was obvious that the temple was inhabited, being used as a safe place.

Within, I saw books, many books, symbols from multiple and many religions and spiritual beliefs drawn upon the walls. I saw people living as refugees. They had no rank or office. They simply contributed where and as needed. They were caring for one another in practical, intimate ways. Food was shared. Injuries were tended. The temple facilities were still used, but only as tools of service. Washing, anointing, sealing, teaching, and gathering had become acts of mutual care rather than rites of exclusion.

No one was turned away for unworthiness. The only boundary that existed was against behavior that stirred contention or caused harm. No one held power over another. Decisions were made together, and made only in good faith and with care for everyone's wellbeing. Responsibility moved fluidly among them. They lived as family and community.

This scene filled me with a feeling of contentment. I felt certain, although I've been feeling this way for a while now, that the work we are engaged in as Reform Mormons is worthy. I understood that this work does not depend on permanence of institutions or the survival of old structures. It endures because of our commitment as children of God to one another through mutual collaboration, cooperation, care, and eternal growth and progression.

I had a sense that there may come a time when the hierarchies that once felt stable shall crumble and pass away. Even then, the spirit of God's children will remain unbroken. Again and again, they will gather. They will build shelter where there was ruin. They will choose love over dominion. They will make temples together. And they will endure!

This dream has been on my mind often since then. It reminds me that community and care are sacred, and that the future of our faith is not found in control, but in love unfeigned and freely given.

41. “Sealing Vision” by Harper McKinney

Received December 22nd, 2025

Amongst the timbers towering over the great, green forest, stands a white temple. Even a sacred temple, the House of the Almighty. One great spire stands tall at the apex, a single point upward to heaven. The House of the Lord contrasting so delicately to the creation set forth by Heavenly Mother and Father.

Nauvoo stars delicately adorn the temple, encircling the very top of the rectangular and regal edifice. A circular sunglass adorns the belfry. A small set of steps leads to the oak doors.

Inside, a beautiful foyer with the finest chairs and couches feels like heaven. Calm transcends all, as if Heavenly Mother herself is ever present in spirit.

Beyond the foyer lies a deep, royal blue sealing room. The blue velvet covering the altar at the center of the room cushions the knees of two eternal souls. Temporally and spiritually: one raven-haired, divinely feminine, Northern Hemisphere. One curly-haired, beautiful human—Liahona souled and in holy transcendence beyond the feminine and masculine, Southern Hemisphere. Northern had pulled Southern through the veil.

A high priestess - Matriarch - wields the sealing power in the tradition of Melchizedek. The two souls sealed together for all time and eternity, in the azure sealing room.

Heavenly Mother's presence fills the space. Each Child of God present rejoices spiritually in the binding on Earth and Heaven for eternity. Eternal progression upon eternal progression.

Direct revelation on this vision received from Heavenly Mother Jan 1, 2026

“My dear children, this is how we always meant it to be.”

42. "Cascadia" by Sarah Williams

Posted on December 28th, 2025

Lo, Here I've seen Your Zion, nestled in the mountains
girdled round about here with fountains, mists, and falls
Rivers here so beautiful that it could break your heart
Oh, God, I've seen Your temple here outside of any walls

Lo, Here I've seen Your people work with love to conquer fear
They make space for each other, the queer, and the oppressed
They try their honest damnedest to never let hate win
I have seen love in the eyes of these tired and distressed

O God, I've seen Your future and what beauty begins here
How hope is won from deepest fear, and dawn reclaims the night

O God, oh, here is where You found me and then welcomed me anew
I pray that time will return me here to home, when it again is right

O Lawetlat'la and Kalama, be with me through the night