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## Foreword

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**Christopher James Blythe** was the founding editor of the *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* between 2008 and 2011. After receiving his master's degree from Utah State University, he obtained a Ph.D. in American Religious History from Florida State University. He is currently a faculty research associate at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University, as well as the co-editor of the *Journal of Mormon History*. Blythe's first monograph, *Terrible Revolution: Latter-day Saints and the American Apocalypse* will be published by Oxford University Press in summer 2020.

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## FOREWORD

It is my honor to open this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of the *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies*. Reader, please appreciate just what an oddity that is in the world of student-run journals. The problem with student (and thus editorial staff) turnover is very real. The typical student journal lasts only a few issues before consistency in publishing begins to wane. The fact that the *IMW Journal* has remained afloat and regularly publishing for a decade is a monumental accomplishment for the program in Religious Studies at Utah State University and the staff of the journal. My congratulations.

There are at least three possible reasons I have been invited to write this foreword. First, in 2008, I became the founding editor of the journal, a position I held for three years. For me to write this foreword is a nod to the institutional history of the journal. Second, I am a scholar of Latter-day Saint Studies and the current editor of the *Journal of Mormon History*. That is to say, I am going to write about things that are in my wheelhouse. And, finally, I am married to the current editor of the journal, leading to the possibility that there is some nepotism underfoot. Regardless, it is my privilege to acknowledge the hard work of 10 years-worth of editorial staff, academic advisory board members, and student authors. Many individuals have contributed to, influenced, and shaped this project.

We wanted the *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* to be unlike other venues for student publication. Most importantly, we envisioned a journal that would subject undergraduate and graduate student research to the critique of leading scholars in the field. I fondly remember that initial team including my co-editor Jay Burton and managing editor Mark Rasmussen, working long days to get the journal up and running. I remember the thrill we felt as we invited scholars to participate in the first incarnation of IMWJ's academic review board and as we navigated, for the first time, the peer review process. While several

of the editorial staff have gone on to work with other journals, we did not have the benefit of their experience then. Instead, we had a hands-on education. The journal has professionalized over the past decade, including the addition of a professional editor to mentor the ever-shifting student editorial staff. I commend the Religious Studies program at Utah State University for their continued nurturing of the journal.

Now to turn our attention to the matter at hand: Mormon Studies, which has become a major subject in the field of American Religious History. A special issue on Mormonism is appropriate for a journal housed at Utah State University. It was Religious Studies at USU that in 2007 became the first program ever to acquire a Mormon Studies chair. Philip Barlow held the Leonard J. Arrington Chair of Mormon History and Culture until his retirement over a decade later. In 2018, the program was able to entice Patrick Mason from the Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies at Claremont University that he had held since 2011. (For more about Barlow and Mason, see their interviews published in this issue of the journal.)

The *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* has published several important articles on Latter-day Saints over the years.

Trenton Olsen, "Conflict of Church and State: Two Latter-day Saint Poets' Perspectives on the Utah War of 1857-1858," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 1 (2009): 1-21.

Joshua Wheatley, "The Prophet-Editor: Joseph Smith's Revisions to Two Revelations," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 1 (2009): 65-85.

Nate Olsen, "Marriage and Divorce in Islamic and Mormon Polygamy: A Legal Comparison," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 1 (2009): 87-106.

Benjamin E. Park, "'A Uniformity So Complete': Early Mormon Angelology," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 2 (2010): 1-37.

Justin R. Bray, "Excessive Formalities in the Mormon Sacrament, 1928-1940," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 4 (2012): 61-75.

Hadyn B. Call, "Mormons and Muslims—An Ongoing Encounter," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 6 (2015): 2-21.

If you enjoy this issue, you may also want to look back at these past contributions.

This issue consists of three student articles, a set of interviews with the two scholars who have held the Leonard J. Arrington Chair of Mormon History and Culture, and a section showcasing contemporary Latter-day Saint women's art. As I read the articles in this issue, I was impressed with just how central each topic was to current directions in the field of Latter-day Saint studies. Philippa Meek, a doctoral candidate at the University of Exeter, examines the legal implications of U.S. Supreme Court cases on inter-racial marriage and same-sex marriage and the impact it could have on laws that criminalize plural marriage. This is a fascinating subject that invites us to consider the continued impact of American law on polygamy-practicing Latter Day Saints. Meek's work also serves as a reminder that Mormonism is not one church but a religious tradition with many expressions, including contemporary Fundamentalist Mormons.

Charlotte Shurtz, an undergraduate at Brigham Young University, has written on Mormon women's reception of a goddess figure, referred to as Heavenly Mother. She argues that through artistic expression women have developed a vernacular theology about this feminine divine. The series of interviews that Shurtz conducted for this essay offer insight as to how belief in a Heavenly Mother figure is expressed and interpreted on the ground. Scholars of Mormonism have contributed to Feminist studies and women's history for the past few decades; however, it is only in recent years that we have begun to see a series of major publications devoted to the study of Mormon women.

Colby Townsend, who recently completed his master's degree at Utah State University, looks at the importance of textual criticism in historical analysis, particularly as it pertains to the early Latter-day Saint past. Townsend's critique is particularly focused on scriptural studies, which has become a growing topic in scholarship on Latter-day Saints and throughout American religion. Finally, Christine Elyse Blythe's selection of art from Latter-day Saint women artists represents the increasing attention paid to Mormonism and the Arts as well as to how lay Latter-day Saints creatively and personally navigate their religion.

I want to conclude by recognizing the effort it takes for a student-scholar to publish in a peer-reviewed journal like the *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies*. Our authors must possess more than an original insight into a topic related to religion. It requires courage for students to subject their ideas and their writing to the scrutiny of anonymous reviewers particularly so early in their career. It requires that students take revisions in stride and diligently revise and refine their work to meet the standards of the editor. It takes motivation and perseverance to see a submission through to publication. Such tenacity has resulted in more than 15,000 downloads yearly and over 122,000 over the life of the journal. We invite you to engage their work.

Here is to ten more years,

Christopher James Blythe, PhD  
Founding Editor, 2008-2011