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Entry 10

The Enoch Text: Change and Continuity in Mormon Thought

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Scholar Terryl Givens, this year's speaker at the annual Arrington Lecture, examined one of Joseph Smith's earliest revelations known as the Enoch Text. Givens stated that the purpose of his lecture was "to argue for the centrality of this vision [the Enoch Text] to all that Joseph would hereafter accomplish." Givens argues for this thesis by demonstrating the weighty impact the Enoch Text had on both early LDS doctrine and Joseph Smith's vision of the Restoration. In terms of doctrine, Givens convincingly demonstrates that many of the most distinctive LDS doctrines such as the doctrines of pre-mortal existence, deification, and the concept of a vulnerable God, all had their inception in the Enoch Text. This argument is important not only for the explicit reasons that Givens delineated in his talk, but also for several implicit reasons as well. Givens's argument addresses historiographical and theological debates in Mormon Studies concerned with the questions of how, or to what degree, Mormon theology has changed over time. These questions are also of vast importance because they affect how Mormons themselves view change, practice their religion, and believe in God. It will be argued that Givens's conclusions about the role of the Enoch Text points to surprising continuity of Mormon theology rather than radical change, and that this may lead to important historical, doctrinal, and practical contributions in Mormon Studies.

In 1945, Fawn M. Brodie, in her monumental biography of Joseph Smith, highlighted the ostensible problem of continuity of Smith's historical and doctrinal evolution. She first acknowledged this problem in her analysis of the *History of the Church*, a document written by early Mormon leaders that recounts the history of the Mormon movement. In Brody's view, "It [History of the Church] was all of one color, a succession of miracles and revelations, and in no

sense [was] an evolution."¹ This was a problem for Brodie: there seemed to be little explanation for change where change unequivocally existed. Furthermore, Brodie identified a similar problem with the Thirteen Articles of Faith which were written in 1842. Brodie was surprised to find that the document did not discuss any of the newer and more radical developments in Mormon doctrine. She writes that, except for the Book of Mormon and the doctrine of continuous revelation, the Articles of Faith "Ignored the Order of Enoch, which had figured prominently in the Church's early history...It did not mention the doctrine of plurality of gods, which was one of the pillars of the new philosophy. And it did not even hint at the new and rapidly developing temple ritual." Brodie was sensing a Mormon Church that was very different by the 1840s than it was in its inception. This realization has proven to be influential on subsequent scholarship.²

While Brodie was one of the first scholars to point to the differences in earlier and later Mormon theology, Jan Shipps may have been one of the first to categorize the differences.³ Shipps organizes these differences in theology by dividing them into three layers. In her view, Mormon doctrine in its earliest days consisted of a layer of primitive Christianity, which she argues differed negligibly from other Christian denominations in 1830; a second layer added shortly which was comprised of Hebrew or Old-Testament influence; and lastly, a final layer that was made up of Joseph Smith's more radical and esoteric teachings such as temple ritual, theosis,

¹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man knows My History: the Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 275.

polygamy, and the idea of a plurality of Gods.⁴ Implicit in Shipps's assessment, is a sense of chronology of these developments. And while she does not focus on explaining the causes or sources behind these layers, she nevertheless identifies distinctive qualities in each strata. Here, Terry Givens, offers a fresh perspective with his analysis of the Enoch Text. Because the earliest revelations contained the seeds of all three layers of development, the chronology that Shipps presents may merit reconsideration.

Givens's thesis is also important because it contributes to the debate about whether Joseph's early and later theology are fundamentally consistent with one another. A superlative example this, and one that Givens addresses in his lecture, is that of the theological development of the nature of God. Historically, the juxtaposition of early texts like the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's later sermons such as the King Follet Discourse and the Sermon in the Grove, have pointed some scholars to see Mormonism's early and later theology as fundamentally different. Aware of this evolution, these scholars have argued that the Book of Mormon teaches a seemingly Trinitarian God, while in 1844 Joseph was teaching the doctrine of a plurality of gods.⁵ Other scholars, however, have sought to reconcile the doctrines of 1830 and 1844 as compatible rather than mutually exclusive ideas--like a restoration of a portrait rather than the creation of two entirely different paintings. Givens's Enoch thesis enters into this discussion as well. The contents of Joseph Smith's Enoch Text, Givens argues, suggests that many of the controversial ideas Joseph taught about God by 1844 were already in nascent form by 1830 (the

⁴ Shipps, Jan, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 289-301.

⁵ Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: of God and God's*, (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008), 38. See note 38. See also Kurt Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, 1830—1915*, (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000)

year the Mormon Church was organized). In effect, Givens contests that the seeds of the ideas of plurality of Gods, deification, and God's passibility, existed in the earliest days of Mormonism. Therefore, this may imply that no real fundamental changes occurred in Mormon theology. Givens, however, is not the first scholar to notice the striking parallels between the Book of Moses and Smith's later theology.

Blake Ostler and David L. Paulsen, for example, have argued for similar conclusions as Givens. Ostler, has recently argued that the dialogue between God the Father and Jesus Christ in the Book of Moses casts the deities as two separate beings: "Thus, the Book of Moses treats the plural pronouns as true plurals and interprets the discussion as a dialogue between the Father and the Son as divine persons planning the creation." Moreover, Ostler concludes that by 1830 in Mormonism "the notion of plurality in unity was already present."⁶ While these scholars have noted the importance that the Book of Moses played in the conception of Mormon deity, Givens takes his hypothesis further: he argues that the Book of Moses influenced later Mormon theology in ways that many scholars have not been aware. Most provocatively, he argues that the story of Enoch was the source behind the idea of the whole Restoration.

Furthermore, Givens thesis also enters the theological conversation of causes and sources of Mormon doctrines. In Givens's view, the Enoch Text is the source of the future development of theology. Other scholars, however, have also presented different theories that argue that that different sources spurred the theological developments. Michael Quinn, for example, was one of the first scholars to argue that the magic worldview of Joseph Smith influenced his later doctrinal

⁶ Oster, 15-17. See also, Ari Bruening and David L. Paulsen, "The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Early Mormon Modalism and Other Myths." 69-109

and theological ideas.⁷ In addition to Quinn, John L. Brooke takes Quinn's thesis further. In his book, *The Refiner's Fire*, Brooke argues that the Hermitic beliefs that were associated with the treasure seekers of the early 19th century were the source of later Mormon theology (i.e. temple worship, the plurality of gods, and polygamy).⁸ And although it is possible that the Enoch Text itself may have been influenced by Hermeticism, Givens's thesis may contribute to this discussion by presenting an alternative source.

Finally, Givens's thesis enters the conversation of change versus continuity in Mormon thought. Givens's demonstration of continuity in Mormon thought may have a subsurface presupposition. For many, including scholars, there are things to be won or lost when considering to what degree Mormon doctrine has evolved. For Mormons who strictly accept the axiom "God is the same yesterday, today, and forever"; evidence of change can be paradigmatically damaging. However, there are others in the tradition who see God revealing "line upon line, and precept upon precept"; and thus change and development are welcome. For many Mormons, a marriage of both axioms is seen as permissible because both concepts are taught in the tradition. Blake Ostler, for example, admits that even if the earliest revelations taught a Trinitarian view of God, "such a view could be squared with a commitment to ongoing revelation."⁹ The question then is whether past revelations contradict newer ones. And while

⁷ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic Worldview [Revised and Enlarged]* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

⁸ John L. Brooke, *The Refiners Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology 1644-1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁹ Ostler, 17

Givens did not explicitly mention this topic in his lecture, it is doubtful that he is blind to these issues.

Other scholars have taken a different approach to considering change in Mormon thought, rather than to try to identify causes or influences of doctrine. Their approach is one that tries to understand the nature of change in Mormonism by learning how Joseph Smith viewed change himself. These scholars point out that Smith seemed to have fully embraced the idea of change within his own revelations and inspired translation of the Bible. Scholar Philip L. Barlow has noted the malleable process of Joseph's inspired translation of the Bible of which the Book of Moses was a part. Joseph seemed to have no problem making changes to his version of the Bible, and even sometimes going back and altering his original changes either to something else and even in some cases back to the original text.¹⁰ Evidence of this process comes from the manuscripts themselves.¹¹ Joseph, however, engaged in this process openly: he did not see changes as any kind of paradox or as a lack of continuity, but rather as the aggregation of new understanding. In addition, some of the changes seem to have different purposes from one another. Barlow points out six different types of changes, such as changes in wording and cadence, the excision of confusing words or phrases, and the addition of entirely new revelations such as the Book of Moses. Joseph's process of inspired translation was one familiar with malleability.

¹⁰ Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and The Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991),

¹¹ Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Mathews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible Original Manuscripts*, (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004.)

In addition to his translation of the Bible, recent studies of Joseph's revelations, such as the Joseph Smith Papers Project, reveal the process of change and redaction that went into the revelations.¹² When new revelation or clarity came on a particular idea, word, or principle, Smith took no issue making changes that represented the new understanding. Smith seems to have acknowledged the process himself in Section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Here, Joseph is writing a letter to the Church about the details of the temple and soteriological work for the dead. To make his point, he uses a biblical scripture in Malachi. After the quotation he states, "I might have rendered a plainer translation of this, but it is sufficiently plain to suit my purpose as it stands." For Smith, changes in revelations or scriptural text were not shunned; rather they were part of the process.¹³ The Mormon prophet also did not seem to have difficulty expanding and adding details to historical events as time went on. Joseph's accounts of the First Vision, for example, exemplifies a process of change and expansion that went into Joseph's thinking about history.¹⁴

Givens's argument is additionally important because this idea of change in Mormon doctrine also affects how and in what Mormon's believe. How we deal with change is also reflective of how we see God, and how we see God is reflective of how we view change. An example of this is the different views scholar Eugene England and Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie held. McConkie was an advocate of doctrinal continuity and therefore evidence of change or flux were problematic to him. Correspondingly, McConkie believed in an absolute

¹² Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Mathews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible Original Manuscripts*, (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004.)

¹³ Doctrine and Covenants Section 128: 17-19.

¹⁴ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rollin: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 150.

God who could never change because it would undermine his perfect nature.¹⁵ Perhaps these two views informed one another. In contrast, Eugene England, a professor of English and a careful student of Mormonism, saw God in a different way. England's God was a being that was progressing in perfection, and thus was not all-powerful. England took Joseph Smith's doctrine of the possibility of an individual's eternal progression and deification seriously. England reasoned that an individual could not progress eternally and become a god, if God himself was still not still progressing. For England, God had to progress in some way, in order for humans to do the same.¹⁶ Although England was not a general authority, he employed statements from earlier church leaders and thinkers including John A. Widstoe, B.H. Roberts, Brigham Young, and even Joseph Smith to corroborate his argument. Both of these views, albeit contradictory, have been very important in contemporary Mormon doctrine and practice and Dr. Givens's thesis may have interesting insights that future theologians may use to contribute to such topics. Dr. Givens's argument for the role of the Enoch Text in early Mormon thought, therefore, proves to permeate several areas of scholarly as well as practical discussion.

¹⁵ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1958).

¹⁶ Eugene England, "Perfection and Progression: Two Complementary Ways to Talk about God" *BYU Studies* 29, no.3 (Summer 1989): 31-47.

Introduction

"Joseph Smith was immersed in scriptural insufficiency." The Book of Mormon was the most important early event in Joseph's prophetic life. The Book of Mormon's content, however, had negligible impact on early LDS doctrine, but it pointed to the insufficiency of the bible and the impending restoration of lost biblical truths. These future revelations that would restore the plain and precious things came soon after the production of the Book of Mormon. Already in 1830, Joseph started to receive the revelations of things that were lost, he made emendations to the Genesis text. Givens articulates his thesis for the lecture as: "to argue for the centrality of this vision to all that Joseph would hereafter accomplish." He argues that the passages of Enoch in were central to nearly every other part of the restoration. It portends of things yet to come. Most distinctive and vibrant doctrines for Given's were those of a passable deity, of theosis, and of pre-mortal existence.

Doctrinal impact of Enoch

The idea of a passable God was not accepted from the early church up to the late 19th century. The idea of the passable God erupted "out of the blue" in early Mormonism with no apparent cultural influences. The evidence for this is found in the Enoch text with the weeping god, Enoch discovers that God weeps when looking upon destruction. This idea of a vulnerable God even predated the idea of an embodied God which Mormonism is better known for- Given's calls this a disservice to the tradition.

Pre-mortal existence first stems from the Enoch text. God says that he created the spirit of man before he created the flesh. From this concept it logically follows that there would be a pre-mortal existence. Joseph Smith Papers has also provides evidence of the Aman revelation, and Enoch Hymn which depend heavily on the Enoch Revelation.

the Enoch text models a version of theosis. Enoch says though has made and that Enoch has a right to the throne. There is evidence of equality with God in the Enoch text. The Enoch text was source for arguing for the doctrine of theosis for Parelly P. Pratt. "Divine origin suggests a divine future." Enoch saw things through God's eyes. It enacts what a process of divinization actually looks like.

Future impact of the Enoch text on Joseph Smith and the Church

Givens argues that the Enoch text was the impetus for the cause of Zion and it presented an example of the purpose and the future direction of the movement as a whole.

- Joseph Smith's Seeker background introduced him to the idea of scriptural insufficiency.
- The Book of Mormon text is replete with declarations of the Bible having issues: pure and precious things were removed from the bible (this would make sense with the reception of later revelations as well as a project of revision of the bible).
- The Book of Mormon had negligible doctrinal impact, but it did however, set the stage for the acceptance of future revelations
- Joseph Smith rushed especially the revelation of the Book of Moses to the printing press, rather than other revelations that had already been recorded.
- The main point of Givens's thesis is the centrality of the Enoch Text.
- From the Enoch Text came many of Mormonism's most unique and vibrant doctrines
- The Enoch Text revealed a God fundamentally different than previous Christian conceptions of God. Givens describes the most important difference to be God's passability: that God has human emotions and is therefore vulnerable.
- He describes a passage in Moses 7 to illustrate this point.
- He argues that it wasn't until the late 19th Century that other theologians began to accept the passability of God. Even the early Church fathers didn't accept such a thing
- Theologians before that time argued for a God without passions or desires, (Presbyterian theologian said this),
- The Enoch Text also contained the impetus for future doctrines such as theosis and preexistence
- He argues for how all of these theological concepts are already contained in the Enoch Text itself.
- Givens also points out the ways in which early leaders used the revelation and the role it played on doctrinal development
- Joseph Smith's code name was actually Enoch. This may be because he saw himself as an prophet like Enoch, a builder of Zion.
- Joseph Smith in his prophetic role was probably more like Enoch rather than Moses.
- The whole idea of Zion may have come from Enoch
- Enoch's Zion was similar to the Zion that Joseph was trying to create

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