

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE HERMENEUTICAL
VIABILITY OF THE INTERPRETIVE PRACTICES OF
THE LDS (THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF
LATTER-DAY SAINTS)

**A Thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

by

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Supervised at London School of Theology

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the various uses of the Bible by the LDS church. In the first chapter, I note the danger of oversimplification for the task at hand, the complexity of the LDS church, and the lack of a published LDS hermeneutic. In chapter two, I investigate two prevailing LDS presuppositions evinced in their literature. The first presupposition is an asymmetrical perspective on the Bible, whereas the second concerns “continuing revelation.” Given the conceptual scaffolding afforded by these introductory matters, the subsequent five chapters examine the church’s specific hermeneutical approaches to the Bible.

Chapter three details a prevalent insistence on “literal” interpretation. Although ostensibly literal, I will argue that these LDS readings are, in fact, “literalistic.” Chapter four is an examination of LDS allegorical interpretation that is more accurately labeled “allegorization.” This is followed by a sociological exploration in chapter five. In the initial decades of the movement, a sociological reading purported to legitimize the separation of the LDS church (a “new reform movement”), from the existing church of the 19th century (the “parent community”). Chapter six describes what I have called “emendatory” interpretation, where the modern LDS church not only claims to restore the ancient biblical text, but also, at times, clarifies the meaning of phrases from the KJV. In the penultimate chapter, I investigate a “re-authoring” of the Bible that amounts to “locutionary reassignment,” where a phrase or word is lifted from its original biblical context, and re-used with a new meaning. On account of this reassignment, “re-authoring” is, in actuality, *non-interpretive*, in contradistinction to the four *interpretive* categories examined in the previous four chapters. Nevertheless, this final category merits discussion, as it details a frequent approach to the Bible by the LDS. Finally, in chapter eight, I discuss specific insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer, in order to evaluate these five uses of the Bible by the LDS church—literal, allegorical, sociological, emendatory, and “re-authoring.” A Gadamerian hermeneutic initially appears to align with the interpretive practices of the LDS, given his emphasis on presuppositional matters, the community in interpretation, and the importance of application in the interpretive process. However, Gadamer’s hermeneutical flexibility ultimately fails to lend credibility to LDS hermeneutics.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations follow the *SBL Handbook of Style* with the addition of the following:

LDS sources

AoF	<i>Articles of Faith</i>
BoM	<i>Book of Mormon</i>
D&C	<i>Doctrine and Covenants</i>
EMS	<i>Evening and Morning Star</i>
HC	<i>History of the Church</i>
JD	<i>Journal of Discourses</i>
JST	<i>Joseph Smith Translation</i>
LDS ^C	<i>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, The</i>
MA	<i>Messenger and Advocate</i>
PGP	<i>Pearl of Great Price</i>
TS	<i>Times and Seasons</i>

Non-LDS sources

DJG	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> . Edited by Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
DNLT	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i> . Edited by Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
DNTB	<i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> . Edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
DOTP	<i>Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets</i> . Edited by Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012.
DPL	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> . Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
DTIB	<i>Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible</i> . Edited by Kevin Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier and N.T. Wright. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
JTI	<i>Journal of Theological Interpretation</i>
PNTC	<i>Pillar New Testament Commentary</i>
ZECNT	<i>Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>

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CHAPTER I

LDS HERMENEUTICS AND CRITICAL REALISM

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, otherwise known as the Mormons, casts the interpretive net widely in their reading of the Bible. They interpret the biblical text literally, as well as allegorically and sociologically. An additional interpretive practice can be labeled “emendatory.” As we will see, this is similar to a paraphrastic Targum, or a midrashic clarification. There is also a “re-authoring” of the text. An explanation of what constitutes “re-authoring” will be given in due course. Although it is impossible to shoehorn every use of the Bible by the LDS into one of these five approaches—literal, allegorical, sociological, emendatory and “re-authoring”—these offer a general overview of the complex and expansive reality of LDS^C hermeneutics.¹ I will argue in this investigation that despite implicit and explicit claims by the LDS^C to the contrary, their uses of the Bible go beyond accepted norms and parameters of mainstream scholarship.

I. The investigation of LDS^C hermeneutics

The investigation of the degree to which the LDS^C operates with functional hermeneutics is a valuable and fascinating pursuit for a number of reasons. Firstly, the extent to which the LDS^C is aware of their hermeneutical activity is unclear. Secondly, it appears that the primacy of biblical interpretations by the Mormon Prophet holds significant sociological ramifications. Thirdly, the presence of potentially conflicting views on the condition of the text of the Bible has important hermeneutical ramifications. Finally, a tendency toward novel, modern-day revelation emerges that, 1) not only overshadows the Bible, but also, 2) is the lens through which the Bible is interpreted. These issues

¹ I will use “LDS^C” to refer to the institutional “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” and “LDS” for individual “Latter-day” saints. Furthermore, the five categories are simply my summary of their hermeneutical activity, and are by no means reflective of any position, officially sanctioned or otherwise, of the LDS church.

demonstrate that the uses of the Bible by the LDS^C are fertile ground for a hermeneutical study.

It is axiomatic that every interpretation of the Bible, LDS or otherwise, should be held accountable. I will investigate the breadth of the hermeneutical activity of the LDS^C with the five proposed categories, as well as an inquiry into presuppositional matters, historical considerations, linguistic realities, application issues, and the role of community in interpretation. This exploration will be carried out with the assistance of Critical Realism, one of the prevailing philosophical frameworks in the arena of theological scholarship. The hermeneutical insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer will also help me gain clarity. For reasons that will become apparent, a Gadamerian hermeneutical framework offers the most promising avenue for legitimacy, should the LDS^C wish to establish itself in the mainstream hermeneutical academy.

1.1. Initial, brief description of the LDS^C

Because of the alleged, pervasive apostasy of the Christian church shortly after the death of the apostles in the first century, it is argued by LDS^C thinkers that the church of Jesus Christ needed a complete “Restoration.” When Joseph Smith, Jr. (hereafter Joseph Smith), purportedly received a personal visit from God in 1820, the Restoration occurred. This divine visitation, referred to as the First Vision, inaugurated the revelatory focus of the Mormon church. Their teaching is based mainly upon the reception of “continuing revelation,” with individual as well as prophetic aspects of this revelation. The modern scriptures of the *Book of Mormon* (at times referred to as BoM), the *Doctrine and Covenants* (D&C), as well as the *Pearl of Great Price* (PGP), supplement the Bible as LDS^C scriptures. Although the church warns against the hazards of a confining creed or statement of faith, basic parameters of their thinking are contained in thirteen “Articles of Faith.” These Articles were written by Joseph Smith and are found in the *Pearl of Great Price*. The church claims a “rapid and sustained growth,” with a million new members added every three years.² Decades ago,

² ‘Growth of the Church,’ LDS newsroom, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/topic/church-growth>; accessed Apr 2017. According to this official LDS website, in 1969 there were 3 million members, and today there are more than 16 million members worldwide. The Association for Religious Data says, however, that in 2010 (the latest date for data) membership in the LDS church was at 6 million, while in 1969 there were 2 million members (‘Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,’ Association for Religious Data Archives, http://www.thearda.com/denoms/D_1117.asp; accessed Apr 2017). Regardless of the exact figures, there has been significant growth in the LDS church.

based on then-current growth rates, non-LDS sociologist Rodney Stark projected exponential growth for the LDS^C—estimating as many as 265 million members by the year 2080.³ Some observers are beginning to speak of the LDS^C as a *world* religion.⁴ In view of such growth, an investigation into their uses of the Bible is warranted.

1.2. Challenges in the investigation of LDS^C hermeneutics

1.2.1. Oversimplification

In some publications, non-LDS authors have succumbed to the temptation of evaluating the LDS^C with simplistic reductions, caricatures, stereotypes, distortions and misinformation.⁵ Opponents have occasionally pigeonholed their doctrine,⁶ and given “outdated portraits of Mormon doctrine.”⁷ Dangers to be avoided in this dissertation, then, include a narrow mindset,⁸ a simplistic methodology that fails to do justice to the totality of the evidence,⁹ or an oversimplification that presses the evidence to fit a prior theory.¹⁰ LDS authors also acknowledge that theological investigations by their very nature isolate and elevate only certain factors, and thus as “abstractions, they necessarily oversimplify.”¹¹ Although the primary purpose of this dissertation is the

³ See Rodney Stark, ‘The Rise of a New World Faith,’ *Review of Religious Research* 26.1 (1984) 18-27; Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Mormonism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 2; cf. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007) 381; Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen (eds), *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 61-71. However, see John Dart, ‘Counting Mormons: Study says LDS Numbers Inflated,’ *Christian Century* 124.17 (Aug 21, 2007) 26-29.

⁴ Peter A. Huff, ‘A Gentile Recommends the Book of Mormon,’ *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43.2 (Sum 2010) 206-212, citing 211; Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵ For reactions by LDS authors, see Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* (2nd edn; Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992) 340. For other responses, see Davis Bitton (ed.), *Historical Dictionary of Mormonism* (2nd edn; Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2000) 3; Robert L. Millet and Gregory C. V. Johnson, *Bridging the Divide* (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Book Publishing, 2007) 173; Robert S. Michaelsen, ‘Enigmas in Interpreting Mormonism,’ *Sociological Analysis* 38.2 (Sum 1977) 145-153; Jan Shipps, in Eric A. Eliason (ed.), *Mormons and Mormonism: An Introduction to an American World Religion* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001) 147.

⁶ See Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) x.

⁷ Beckwith et al., *New Mormon Challenge*, 29.

⁸ See Michael J. Gorman, ‘A “Seamless Garment” Approach to Biblical Interpretation?’ *JTI* 1.1 (2007) 117-128, citing 122, on the tendency toward narrowness.

⁹ Concerning a simplistic approach, see N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 118-119.

¹⁰ On the danger of a pre-determined theory, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 39-40.

¹¹ Lyndsey Nay and John W. Welch, in Jacob T. Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads of Philosophy and Theology: Essays in Honor of David L. Paulsen* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012) 168.

investigation of the uses of the Bible by the LDS^C, it will be necessary to examine the wider context of the Mormon church, that includes theological, epistemological, sociological, and historical considerations. My goal is to give the church a fair hearing and avoid a simplistic, reductionistic evaluation. Although their uses of the Bible are not monolithic, there are patterns of hermeneutical behavior that can be evaluated with some clarity.

1.2.2. *The complexity of the LDS^C*

LDS author Jacob Baker claims that the complexity of their church inhibits straightforward classification.¹² For example, according to one outside observer, “(o)ne cannot even be sure if the object of our consideration is a sect, a mystery cult, a new religion, a church, a people, a nation, or an American subculture; indeed, at different times and places it is all of these.”¹³ Others have concluded that the LDS^C is “neither a church nor a sect, but rather a near nation, or a ‘quasi-ethnic’ group in the isolated Intermountain West.”¹⁴ Too often Mormonism is presented as monolithic and homogenous.¹⁵ The theological language used by the LDS^C is often distinct from other Bible believers, so that “conventional theological categories do not always accurately translate from mainline Christianity to Mormonism.”¹⁶ One author admits “(a)ny attempt to describe Mormon doctrine is fraught with peril.”¹⁷ Additionally, “(i)n the Mormon Church, official doctrines, speculative theories, and personally held beliefs have always co-existed. For many outsiders, this curious phenomenon defies explanation.”¹⁸ In this investigation, I will be focusing on the complex

¹² Jacob Baker, in *ibid.*, xiv; cf. Loyd Ericson, “The Challenges of Defining Mormon Doctrine,” *Element* 3.1 & 2 (Spring and Fall 2007) 69-87. A “careful” observer of the LDS^C will quickly realize this complexity (see Philip L. Barlow, “Before Mormonism: Joseph Smith’s Use of the Bible, 1820-1829,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57.4 (Wint 1989) 739-771, citing 739). For Stephen Webb, it is ironic that many opponents simplistically pigeonhole the LDS^C, in light of this complexity (Stephen H. Webb, *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 24).

¹³ See Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (2nd edn; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 508.

¹⁴ Cardell K. Jacobson, John P. Hoffmann, and Tim B. Heaton (eds), *Revisiting Thomas F. O’Dea’s ‘The Mormons’: Contemporary Perspectives* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008) viii; cf. Thomas F. O’Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957) 115.

¹⁵ Beckwith et al., in *New Mormon Challenge*, 21.

¹⁶ Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) Kindle Edition, *Preface*.

¹⁷ Simon G. Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004) 3.

¹⁸ Kurt Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution 1830-1915* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2000) 157. A specific example, challenging for outsiders, is that “Mormonism’s doctrine of God is spread around

hermeneutical activity of the Salt Lake City, Utah church of Latter-day Saints, and will attempt to consider their distinctive use of theological vocabulary as it pertains to hermeneutical concepts.

1.2.3. *The lack of an official LDS^C hermeneutic*

The absence of any published academic work on LDS^C hermeneutics is an added challenge in this investigation. Numerous LDS authors describe this lacuna. Anthony Hutchinson admitted decades ago that there was little, if any, official LDS^C hermeneutical work.¹⁹ In 2013, Philip Barlow stated “(t)he majority of Mormons remain in a hermeneutical Eden, innocent of a conscious philosophy of interpretation.”²⁰ A recent LDS scholarly article by Julie Smith concurred: “Currently, there is great debate but no consensus regarding LDS hermeneutics.”²¹ In another writing, because of the lack of “a formal LDS hermeneutic,” Smith describes members as “plodding along with unexamined assumptions about what is and what is not legitimate to do when interpreting the scriptures.”²² Richard Hopkins even questions hermeneutical reflection, since such reflection will not automatically ensure accuracy in interpretation.²³ Another LDS author considers it problematic “to assume that systemic philosophical thought—even the application of hermeneutical categories—

several works regarded as scripture” (Francis J. Beckwith and Stephen E. Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991) 37).

¹⁹ Anthony A. Hutchinson, ‘LDS approaches to the Holy Bible,’ *Dialogue* 15.1 (Spr 1982) 99-124, citing 99. See, however, some basic hermeneutical guidelines, such as looking at the literary context as well as application of the text, in the following LDS books: Richard R. Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism: Responding to Evangelical Criticism of LDS Theology* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 2006) 33-34; Joseph Fielding McConkie, ‘The “How” of Scriptural Study,’ in Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (eds), *By Study and by Faith: Selections from the Religious Educator* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009) 51-68; LDS^C, ‘How Do I Study Effectively and Prepare to Teach?’ in *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004) 17-28; James E. Faulconer, *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* (Salt Lake City: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999).

²⁰ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 248. Barlow’s book is an attempt “to correct this deficiency” (see Paul Gutjahr, ‘Measuring the Measuring Stick,’ *Dialogue* 25.4 (Wint 1992) 205-206, citing 205). However, Barlow doesn’t speak specifically of an LDS^C hermeneutic.

²¹ Julie M. Smith, ‘Five Impulses of the Joseph Smith Translation of Mark and Their Implications for LDS Hermeneutics,’ *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 7 (2015) 1-21, citing 2.

²² Julie M. Smith, ‘LDS Hermeneutics,’ Times and Seasons website, <http://timesandseasons.org/index.php/2004/04/llds-hermeneutics/>; accessed Jan 2015.

²³ Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, 33. One assumes, however, that Hopkins considers his own hermeneutical reflection (as implied in the title of his book) as ensuring accurate biblical interpretation. Although Hopkins lists certain hermeneutical guidelines (e.g., looking at the context, knowing the original languages, etc.), he asserts that LDS interpreters rely on “common sense, spiritual insight, and respect for the plain language” in order to produce a “satisfactory hermeneutic” (*ibid.*, 34).

ought to be employed in order to clarify the content of revelation.”²⁴ The practice of “modern biblical scholarship” (which presumably includes a theory of interpretation) is disputed by some in the Mormon tradition: “The Bible need not be subjected to such rigorous examination; to do so [is] to ‘look beyond the mark’ or give too much credence to the philosophies of men.”²⁵ In addition, Ian Barber sees that “the conservative Protestant hermeneutic proceeded from an unrealistic expectation of the revelatory process,” since the Bible was recorded by “an imperfect human agent.”²⁶ Since Barber questions this “Protestant hermeneutic,” he implicitly casts doubt on hermeneutical reflection. Non-LDS observers agree with these observations concerning the lack of an official LDS^C hermeneutic: “Most Mormons remain aloof from such questions as the philosophy of interpretation or the principles of hermeneutics.”²⁷

There are various reasons advanced for the lack of a published LDS^C hermeneutic. Given their views concerning ongoing, continuing revelation from God, they generally avoid official pronouncements, since such declarations could become obsolete. In a sense, “everything the LDS Church teaches *now* is official *now*, but that may all change later, as it has in the past.”²⁸ LDS author Terryl Givens explains that “Mormon doctrine is by definition impossible to fix; reflection on the meaning of this living, evolving tradition is, therefore, inescapably a lively and contested theological enterprise.”²⁹ Givens continues: “All attempts to capture the essence of Mormon thought, as is true of any living tradition, are limited and provisional.”³⁰ LDS^C scriptural corroboration is given in *Doctrine and Covenants*, where God claimed the prerogative to “command and revoke, as it seemeth me good” (D&C 56:4).

The very nature of LDS^C thinking evades scholarship or official

²⁴ James Siebach, in David L. Paulsen and Donald W. Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2007) 467.

²⁵ See Sheldon Greaves, ‘The Education of a Bible Scholar,’ *Dialogue* 42.2 (Sum 2009) 55-78, citing 74. Greaves does not necessarily agree with such a stance.

²⁶ Ian G. Barber, ‘Beyond the Literalist Constraint: Personal Reflections on Mormon Scripture and Religious Interpretation,’ *Sunstone* 20 (Oct 1997) 20-26, citing 21.

²⁷ Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 297.

²⁸ This is the viewpoint of non-LDS author Ronald Huggins. See Ronald V. Huggins, ‘Lorenzo Snow’s Couplet: “As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be”’: No Functioning Place in Present-Day Mormon Practice? A Response to Richard Mouw,’ *JETS* 49.3 (Sept 2006) 549-568, citing 561, emphasis by author.

²⁹ Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, Kindle Edition, *Preface*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22; cf. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 237; Robert L. Millet, ‘What Do We Really Believe? Identifying Doctrinal Parameters Within Mormonism,’ in James M. McLaughlan and Loyd Ericson (eds), *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities* (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2007) 265-281; O. Kendall White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987) xxi.

declarations, for, according to James Faulconer, “revelation is *the* Latter-day Saint theology.”³¹ In another writing, Faulconer discloses that they “may have a greater tendency to morph more than other faiths. Considered diachronously, some accounts of Mormonism and Mormon belief may be contradictory, and there is perhaps no synchronous account without unexplained or nonintegrable gaps. There may be no one, satisfactory story of Mormon belief.”³² Modern claims may be “inherently inimical” to the articulation of what the church believes, since any such articulation would be viewed as “excessively rigid and unchangeable.”³³ There is always “more to know” —consequently, a “complete system of doctrine” cannot be articulated.³⁴ Sterling McMurrin proposes that they do not wish to be “overencumbered with creeds and official pronouncements.”³⁵ As compared to other religious perspectives, the LDS^C exhibit “a relative lack of precision and sophistication” and refrain from “a rigorous attempt to systematize” their doctrine.³⁶ According to LDS author Nathan Oman, their thinking, despite some important exceptions, “has largely eschewed closely reasoned systematic theology.”³⁷ This would include a

³¹ James E. Faulconer, ‘Review of “Rethinking Theology: The Shadow of the Apocalypse,”’ *The FARMS Review* 19.1 (2007) 175-199, citing 180, emphasis by author.

³² James E. Faulconer, ‘Advice for a Mormon Intellectual, Part 2,’ Patheos website, <https://www.patheos.com/Mormon/Advice-Mormon-Intellectual-James-Faulconer-12-12-2013.html>; accessed Aug 2014.

³³ Mauro Properzi, *Mormonism and the Emotions* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015) 5.

³⁴ See LDS author Brian Birch in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 52.

³⁵ Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965) 112.

³⁶ Cky John Carrigan, ‘The Mormon Mirage: A Closer Look at the Teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,’ *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 46.2 (Spr 2004) 1-14, citing 4. However, according to Evangelical authors Paul Owen and Carl Mosser, the LDS^C is building a “contextual superstructure necessary for a proper interpretation of the Bible” (Paul Owen and Carl Mosser, ‘Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?’ *Trinity Journal* 19.2 (1998) 179-205, citing 200).

³⁷ Nathan Oman, ‘The Living Oracles: Legal Interpretation and Mormon Thought,’ *Dialogue* 42.2 (Sum 2009) 1-19, citing 1. Of course, I am not interested in a systematic theological assessment of the church, but a strictly hermeneutical one. Nonetheless, this statement by Oman highlights the lengths to which the LDS^C avoids systematized articulations of their faith. In spite of his statement, however, Oman points out the writings of LDS theologians B.H. Roberts, David Paulsen, and Blake Ostler. The latter two will be referenced extensively in our investigation. Other exceptions include *Element*, a journal launched in 2005 by the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology (<http://www.smpt.org/element.html>), and the LDS^C-sponsored Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship (<http://mi.byu.edu/>). In addition, Brigham Young University recently launched a New Testament Commentary on the Bible, with three volumes published by late 2016 (<http://www.byunewtestamentcommentary.com/>). There are also many theological resources on the official LDS website (<http://lds.org/>), as well as numerous publications by University of Utah Press (<http://www.uofupress.com/>); Signature Books (<http://www.signaturebooks.com/>); and Greg Kofford books (<http://gregkofford.com/>). Interestingly, a recent LDS publication stated that Oxford University Press “has supplanted the University of Illinois Press as the dominant publisher of Mormon-related academic books” (Patrick Q. Mason (ed.), *Directions for Mormon Studies in the Twentieth-First Century* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016) 6).

systematic presentation of their hermeneutic.³⁸ Sheldon Greaves writes of a surprising lack of LDSC^C scholarship as it relates to biblical criticism, by noting that a LDS scholar with a “Ph.D. in biblical studies from a major university,” eschewed theories of interpretation and biblical criticism in his academic classes at Brigham Young University, and instead emphasized “evangelical gospel teaching.”³⁹ In general, then, the church’s scholars are suspicious of any use of philosophy and reasoning (i.e., the articulation of an official hermeneutic) that would potentially obscure revelation.⁴⁰

A further reason for the absence of an official hermeneutic is a pragmatic, experientially driven ethos. An LDSC^C self-understanding is described as “concerned more with praxis than dogmatic theology.”⁴¹ In addition, while Nathan Oman acknowledges literally millions of pages of published LDSC^C works, “the overwhelming majority of this work is homiletic and is meant to inspire and motivate its audience rather than provide them with careful conceptual analysis.”⁴² LDS author Charles Harrell points out that “Jesus himself never left a systematized theology, but rather it was said of him that he ‘went about doing good’ (Acts 10:38).”⁴³

To summarize, we note that theological, epistemological, historical and sociological factors demonstrate the complexity of the LDSC^C. In light of the past tendency of outside observers to oversimplify their conclusions concerning the LDSC^C, a broader approach to methodological aspects must be used.

1.3. Methodology and perspective: The role of empathy

Human understanding does not follow strict principles or fixed rules of interpretation.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, to a certain extent, methodological *parameters* are

³⁸ When theology is separated from biblical studies, according to N.T. Wright, one is left with an approach that “lapses into a mere *ad hoc* use of the Bible, finding bits and pieces to fit into a scheme derived from somewhere else,” with interpreters “finding a proof-text, or even a proof-theme, from the Bible” (Wright, *People of God*, 138).

³⁹ See Greaves, ‘Education of a Bible Scholar,’ 66.

⁴⁰ See the discussion in Properzi, *Mormonism and the Emotions*, 2-7.

⁴¹ Jacob Baker, in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, xiii.

⁴² Oman, ‘Living Oracles,’ 2; cf. Alonzo L. Gaskill, ‘Clothed in Holy Garments: The Apparel of the Temple Officiants of Ancient Israel,’ in Jeffrey R. Chadwick, Matthew J. Grey, and David Rolph Seely (eds), *Ascending the Mountain of the Lord: Temple, Praise, and Worship in the Old Testament* (Sperry Symposium 2013) (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013) 85-104, citing 85-86.

⁴³ Charles R. Harrell, *“This is My Doctrine”: The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011) 505.

⁴⁴ Stanley E. Porter and Matthew R. Malcolm, ‘Remaining Hermeneutical Issues for the Future of Biblical Interpretation,’ in Stanley E. Porter and Matthew R. Malcolm (eds), *The Future of Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013) 157-165, citing 159.

helpful, even essential, for any hermeneutical investigation. Such parameters have to include what Bernard Lonergan calls a “self-correcting process of learning that spirals into the meaning of the whole by using each new part to fill out and qualify and correct the understanding reached in earlier parts.”⁴⁵ For example, in chapter two, the context-providing description of two foundational presuppositions of the LDS^C will fill out and qualify their specific uses of the Bible outlined in later chapters. Robust assistance, in the form of methodological parameters, is needed to navigate between hermeneutical despair and hermeneutical arrogance. The former could lead to hasty declarations of the impossibility of any discernible meaning, while the latter dogmatically proclaims one’s own perspective as the final word, with no dissenting discussion allowed.⁴⁶ Jean Grondin comments that Gadamer did not intend any “sharp opposition between truth and method,” and neither insisted on nor prohibited the utilization of methodological parameters.⁴⁷ Gadamer was against the “dogmatic assertion that there can be no truth outside of method,” yet acknowledged that “(c)ertainly truth can be achieved by way of method.”⁴⁸

Understanding biblical texts, as well as another religious tradition, is a complex process that necessitates a level of interdisciplinary study. Effective methodological parameters would eclectically employ various academic disciplines—including, for example, psychology, with its questions about “selfhood, self-interest, and self-deception,”⁴⁹ as well as philosophy, exegesis, and criticism.⁵⁰ Also needed is the consideration of the “many sub-fields of theology, biblical studies and philosophical hermeneutics,” along with the sociological issues related to diverse religious communities.⁵¹ The investigation

⁴⁵ Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1971) 159.

⁴⁶ See Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009) 10.

⁴⁷ See Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 132.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd rev. edn; New York: Continuum, 2011) Kindle Edition, ch. 1, ‘Transcending the Aesthetic Dimension.’ Gadamer criticized “method’s attempt to exercise a monopoly on the notion of truth” (see Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. Kathryn Plant (London and New York: Routledge, 2014) 3).

⁴⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 4.

⁵⁰ See Stanley E. Porter and Jason C. Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) Kindle Edition, ch. 10, ‘Theological Hermeneutics: Anthony Thiselton and Kevin Vanhoozer.’

⁵¹ See Rosalind M. Selby, *Comical Doctrine: An Epistemology of New Testament Hermeneutics* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006) 4, 8-9. Also, many biblical and theological scholars in the past have kept abreast of contemporary progress in the sciences and humanities (see Moisés Silva, in Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (rev. and exp. edn; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) 301).

of a specific text would examine matters of “textuality, epistemology, ontology, reference and genre.”⁵² However, lest I advocate for an over-emphasis on academic approaches,⁵³ understanding also demonstrates an artistic aspect, as opposed to an exact science. Such an artistic approach will exhibit experiential knowledge and even intuition.⁵⁴ Thus, while I expect to utilize varying fields of study in a methodological approach, it is impossible to mandate an overly narrow methodology. My intention is not to offer the LDS^C a set of rules for interpretation, but rather, a critically well-founded assessment of the potential alignment between LDS^C hermeneutics and mainstream theological and hermeneutical scholarship.⁵⁵

1.3.1. Methodology and worldview

In order to understand the “other,” “patient and attentive listening”⁵⁶ is necessary. An empathetic comprehension of the “other” stands at the very heart of hermeneutics,⁵⁷ and true dialogue presupposes the need for “epistemic humility.”⁵⁸ Just as the practice of hermeneutics calls for vigilance and critical thinking, as well as a warning against easy answers,⁵⁹ so also with the process of evaluating the hermeneutics of another religious tradition. There should be a “steadfast refusal to take anything for granted,” and every axiom must be put to the test and verified.⁶⁰ It is difficult to “orient oneself in the vast field of present-day philosophy” and one must “make the attempt again and again.”⁶¹ This is true, also, of the investigation into the considerable field of LDS^C hermeneutics.

Furthermore, I recognize that “all study, all reading of texts, all attempts to reconstruct history, take place within particular worldviews.”⁶² The LDS^C worldview will need to be investigated—their deep-level perception of reality

⁵² Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 236.

⁵³ This is especially the case since hermeneutics has traditionally been seen as a “theory that promised to lay out the rules governing the discipline of interpretation” (Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 1).

⁵⁴ See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 1, ‘Transcending the Aesthetic Dimension.’

⁵⁵ Although my study of LDS uses of the Bible is intended as descriptive and not as normative, my critique and evaluation will inevitably elicit implicit normative tendencies.

⁵⁶ See Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, xx.

⁵⁷ Ernst Fuchs in Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 6.

⁵⁸ Donald Musser, in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 44.

⁵⁹ Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 12.

⁶⁰ Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986* (2nd edn; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 29, 276; cf. William Schweiker, ‘Sacrifice, Interpretation, and the Sacred: the Import of Gadamer and Girard for Religious Studies,’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55.4 (Wint 1987) 791-810.

⁶¹ Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 8.

⁶² Wright, *People of God*, 125.

and the framework, or grid, through which their world is perceived.⁶³ Published LDS^C thinking also hints at this study of worldviews: “The doctrinal tenets of any religion are best understood within a broad context, and thoughtful analysis is required to understand them.”⁶⁴ Donald Musser mentions “disciplined reflection on the key concepts of a religious tradition.”⁶⁵ An official LDS^C publication encourages this: “Getting at the heart of Mormonism is best undertaken not by narrowly focusing on controversy and getting mired in esoteric theological debates, but through a more imaginative examination of the worldview that inspires its members.”⁶⁶ Thus, at the outset, I recognize the need for worldview investigation, as well as patient, consistent listening, in an effort to avoid simplistic generalization and oversimplification.

1.3.2. *Methodological questions and parameters*

I will inquire as to whether the LDS^C worldview holds to unexamined assumptions that induces “implicit structures of discursive privilege.”⁶⁷ For example, the foundational LDS^C presupposition of “continuing revelation” may illegitimately privilege their *modern* discourse. On the other hand, mainstream traditions may exhibit a discursive privilege by silencing this LDS^C perspective on “continuing revelation.” Furthermore, I will evaluate the place and impact of “continuing revelation,” in comparison to the ancient and fixed state of the Bible. An assessment of an LDS^C hermeneutic will need to be as comprehensive as possible, since the relationship between the LDS^C and the Bible has been described as “composite, layered, surprising, evolving, not uniform among adherents or across time, and partially obscure to both believers and observers.”⁶⁸ The possibility of “hidden scaffolding” in their worldview will be

⁶³ See *Ibid.*, 122-125, for various perspectives on worldviews.

⁶⁴ ‘Approaching Mormon Doctrine,’ LDS newsroom, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/approaching-mormon-doctrine>; accessed Apr 2017.

⁶⁵ Donald Musser, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 2. Although Musser is a non-LDS author, he is well versed in LDS^C thinking, having co-edited *Mormonism in Dialogue* with LDS author David Paulsen.

⁶⁶ ‘A Mormon Worldview,’ LDS newsroom, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/a-mormon-worldview>; accessed Mar 2017.

⁶⁷ See the discussion of the “discursive privilege” of atheism as the intellectual baseline inherited as an unexamined legacy of the Enlightenment, that has resulted in making “religious belief alone [as] something which is to be explained or defended,” in Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, Douglas V. Porpora, *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (London: Routledge, 2013) 5.

⁶⁸ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, xxviii.

considered.⁶⁹ In addition, the acceptance of the BoM, the D&C, and the PGP as *additional* scriptures will be explored as I examine the uses of the Bible by the LDS.⁷⁰

I will briefly consider the process of reading itself, and how the LDS^C has been reading the biblical text. All religious traditions, LDS or otherwise, need to attend carefully to the processes involved in their reading.⁷¹ Every reader brings significant assumptions to the biblical text. The operative presuppositions of an LDS interpreter of the Bible will be explored. Concomitantly, the role of the LDS community in interpretation will be investigated.⁷² Since each biblical text comes from an ancient, historical “locatedness,” this needs to be acknowledged, along with the modern “locatedness” of individual interpreters and communities. Does the LDS^C sufficiently acknowledge the “locatedness” of the ancient biblical text, as well as their contemporary “locatedness” and worldview? Recognition of my own limited, “located” perspective will be necessary as I approach their hermeneutic.

Many other hermeneutical considerations are at play in this investigation. LDS author James Faulconer writes: “Scripture is more important than rational explanation.”⁷³ There appears to be significant epistemological ramifications and hermeneutical consequences in this ambiguous statement, given that “rational explanation” was used in the assertion. Regarding biblical interpretation, whether by the LDS^C or a mainstream tradition, the question “must always be asked, whether scripture is being used to serve an existing theology or vice versa.”⁷⁴ Could the LDS^C (or my own religious perspective), be described as “more of an all-embracing ideology, a Procrustean bed, an *a priori* system that simply discounts or reinterprets any evidence that might call its fundamental veracity into account”?⁷⁵

⁶⁹ See the concept of “hidden scaffolding” in Craig G. Bartholomew, “Three Horizons: Hermeneutics from the Other End—An Evaluation of Anthony Thiselton’s Hermeneutic Proposals,” *European Journal of Theology* 5.2 (1996) 121-135, citing 130.

⁷⁰ Philip Barlow admits that in the case of Mormonism, the issue of scripture is “complicated by oral scripture, private scripture, noncanonized scripture, [and] temporary scripture” (Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, xii).

⁷¹ See Wright, *People of God*, 9.

⁷² Concerning all church communities, Daniel Treier explains that ecclesiology is a “crucial issue” concerning the interpretation of Scripture (Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 32).

⁷³ Faulconer, ‘Rethinking Theology,’ 180.

⁷⁴ N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (New York: Harper Collins e-books, 2013) 71.

⁷⁵ See Carl R. Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010) 98, 103.

The assumed influence of the apostasy of the early church, as well as the Restoration initiated by Joseph Smith, will be important considerations. This pervasive apostasy is called the Great Apostasy.⁷⁶ The role of the Great Apostasy in LDS^C thinking cannot be exaggerated. I will note the effect of the Great Apostasy in LDS^C interpretations of the biblical text.⁷⁷ In addition, I will investigate whether or not the Great Apostasy has taken on “a life of its own as a monolithic reification” that “short-circuits the kind of careful textual analysis, empirical study and interpretive synthesis” that is found in the best historical scholarship.⁷⁸

The historical-critical method in the field of biblical studies has been the prevailing hermeneutical methodology for at least a century.⁷⁹ Yet, the past few decades have exhibited enormous “breadth and depth”⁸⁰ of change in this field, with many distancing themselves from the historical-critical perspective. Whether or not the LDS^C is interested in such a change is a pertinent consideration. The feasibility of an academic, systematic investigation being perceived as relevant in their thinking will also be explored.⁸¹ Are outside corroboration, verification, and falsifiability legitimate parameters for the investigation of their tradition?⁸² Finally, an approach to LDS^C thinking must

⁷⁶ Robert L. Millet, Camille Fronk Olson, Brent L. Top, and Andrew C. Skinner (eds), *LDS Beliefs: A Doctrinal Reference* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2011) Kindle Edition, “Apostasy, Great.”

⁷⁷ Historical investigation is a complex endeavor, and there is no such thing as “mere history” (see N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996) 6). Carl Becker notes that the modern historian does not stick to the facts, but “the facts stick to him” (Becker in E. Earle Ellis, ‘Perspectives On Biblical Interpretation: A Review Article,’ *JETS* 45.3 (September 2002) 473–95, citing 492). The writing of history is never an impartial recounting of the basic facts. It is rather a *re-presentation* of the past. Human historical actions are “always complex and impossible to reduce to single causes, intentions, or motivations” (Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies*, 106). Thus, we all face increasingly difficult hindrances as contemporary investigators trying to understand documents from the past (Stanley E. Porter, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Responsibility,’ in Porter and Malcolm (eds), *Future of Biblical Interpretation*, 29–50, citing 32–33). According to James Barr, “(h)istorical analysis is not an objective science but produces only hypothetical reconstructions of what might have been the case” as well as “(f)ar from being scientifically objective, historical analysis may be heavily indebted to ideological factors” (James Barr, ‘Allegory and Historicism,’ *JSTOT* 69 (1996) 105–120, citing 106).

⁷⁸ See the concept of monolithic reification in Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies*, 146.

⁷⁹ Joel B. Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011) I.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 2; cf. Emmanuel Nathan, ‘Truth and Prejudice: A Theological Reflection on Biblical Exegesis,’ *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 83.4 (Dec 2007) 281–318, especially 281–282, 298–302.

⁸¹ This is even more poignant given the “methodological tendency of scholars to systematize ideas as fully as they can, indeed...(to)...oversystematize them” (Douglas J. Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace and Glory* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2000) 71).

⁸² LDS author Grant Palmer believes that some observations by non-LDS critics are unreliable, yet he recognizes the need to listen to outsiders, for “(y)our friends don’t always tell

take into account their view that “(t)rue religion is a thing of the heart as well as the mind, and when we tread there we tread on holy ground, ground that must not be trampled or harrowed up unnecessarily.”⁸³ These methodological parameters, as well as others, will guide my investigation and evaluation.

1.4. Utilization of Critical Realism

The philosophical framework (i.e., methodological parameter) to be employed is Critical Realism (CR), brought to New Testament studies by Ben Meyer, following the work of Bernard Lonergan.⁸⁴ In light of the numerous challenges of this investigation into the complexity of LDS^C hermeneutics, the “philosophical parameters” of CR translate into a useful framework.⁸⁵ CR is a methodology/framework that combines the strengths of a variety of approaches.⁸⁶ It demonstrates reflection and critical judgment, perception of relevant objects and ideas, a search for intelligible patterns, and reasonable, balanced judgment.⁸⁷

In the words of leading proponent Roy Bhaskar, CR includes the three concepts of ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgmental rationality.⁸⁸ It assumes literary texts, as well as the world, are truly “out there” and are independent of how we would evaluate them. There genuinely exists empirical, “real” data outside of ourselves (hence, “ontological realism”) that we investigate and evaluate.⁸⁹ Our entire framework is labeled “realism” because of

you what you need to hear” (Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002) viii). Similarly, D. Michael Quinn states that “primary emphasis must be given to direct evidence from friendly sources. Nevertheless, it is misleading to ignore or reject out-of-hand direct evidence from unfriendly sources” (D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987) xvi).

⁸³ Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, xxii. This focus on the heart is not the exclusive territory of the LDS^C. As non-LDS scholars point out, the Bible was not written as an academic textbook, but “out of a burning experience of the reality of God as made manifest in Jesus Christ, and as a means by which a like experience could be communicated to the readers” (Neill and Wright, *Interpretation*, 236).

⁸⁴ See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, *passim*; Ben F. Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament* (San Jose: PickWick Publications, 1989); cf. James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 110.

⁸⁵ See Andrew Wright’s views on philosophical parameters in Andrew Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism: Ambiguity, Truth, and Theological Literacy* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 3.

⁸⁶ Thorsten Moritz, ‘Critical but Real: Reflecting on N.T. Wright’s *Tools for the Task*,’ in Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, Karl Möller (eds), *Renewing Biblical Interpretation* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2000) 1:172-197, citing 179-182. Concerning other approaches, Moritz mentions phenomenology and positivism, and to a limited extent, romanticism.

⁸⁷ See these insights of Bernard Lonergan in Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 152.

⁸⁸ Roy Bhaskar, in Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 9.

⁸⁹ See, e.g., Archer et al., *Transcendence*, 1; Meyer, *Critical Realism*, xi; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 110. Hence, a limited compatibility between CR and positivism should be noted (see Moritz, ‘Critical but Real,’ 179).

its insistence on the existence of empirical data. It is “critical” in its emphasis on the possibility of located individuals investigating and evaluating this data. Using a framework such as CR allows me to view the LDS^C worldview as a reality that exists independently of my perception of it. CR also requires the biblical interpreter to view the text as external and independent. As soon as any text is authored, it embodies conceptuality that is “other” than either the author or the interpreter. This external “other” is then interpreted. Ontological realism results in texts having “a *prima facie* claim on the reader, namely, to be construed in accord with its intended sense.”⁹⁰ This “intended sense” is tethered to the text itself, and must be the controlling factor in interpretation, since the text is the only entity available to the interpreter.

However, because of the epistemic relativism of what it means to be human (Bhaskar’s second concept), the intended sense of the text will not be objectively accessible.⁹¹ We can, indeed, apprehend the text—yet only as mediated through our own perspectives and experiences.⁹² A theory of reading is needed that does justice both to the reader as a particular human being and to the text as an entity on its own—and not something to be used at the reader’s whim.⁹³ While CR recognizes that, ontologically, there is an “objective world,” it admits that there is no truly objective view.⁹⁴ We know through our experiences, and “it is inconceivable that sound judgment results from looking ‘objectively’ at the world of experience.”⁹⁵ Indeed, “Gadamer exposes as fantasy the notion of ‘sheer objectivity’ wherein one would see, with no expectations or anticipations, what is simply there—‘the facts.’”⁹⁶ He is at variance with the “old hermeneutical objectivity.”⁹⁷ CR, then, is a useful framework as it describes knowledge not as simplistic “reading and seeing,” but rather a conjunction of experience, understanding and judging.⁹⁸ It emphasizes the locatedness of

⁹⁰ Meyer, *Critical Realism*, xi. In Meyer’s book, see especially chapter two, ‘The Primacy of the Intended Sense of Texts’ (ibid., 17-55).

⁹¹ See Thorsten Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright (eds), *DTIB* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) 147-150, citing 149.

⁹² Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 18; cf. Wright, *People of God*, 35; Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 147.

⁹³ Wright, *People of God*, 62.

⁹⁴ See Archer et al., *Transcendence*, 1-2.

⁹⁵ Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 148.

⁹⁶ Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, Graham Ward (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 512.

⁹⁷ Robert Detweiler and Vernon K. Robbins, ‘From New Criticisms to Poststructuralism: Twentieth-Century Hermeneutics,’ in Stephen Prickett (ed.), *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 225-280, citing 240.

⁹⁸ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 110.

interpreters, including their communities, and the grid (or lens) that they view reality through.⁹⁹ However, the subjective lens used by individuals or communities is not necessarily a negative prejudice or limiting presupposition that distorts the object in view. The “notion of subjectivity in interpretation per se is not an evil to be rejected or lamented; it is to be welcomed as an aspect of human creationality...In this sense interpretation has to be subjective to be relevant.”¹⁰⁰ In fact, following late modernity’s insights on hermeneutical reflection, we are now more conscious of being perspectival and of possessing potentially helpful pre-understandings.¹⁰¹

As we approach a perspective other than our own, CR insists that we “be aware” of our “own viewpoint.”¹⁰² Additionally, “human self-knowledge” is not only a “prerequisite of” but also a “continuing factor” in the complex process of interpretation.¹⁰³ Gadamer echoes this: “Es gilt, der eigenen Voreingenommenheit innewohnend, damit sich der Text selbst in seiner Andersheit darstellt und damit in die Möglichkeit kommt, seine sachliche Wahrheit gegen die eigene Vormeinung auszuspielen.”¹⁰⁴ There should be “a heightened degree of self-reflective awareness, especially with respect to one’s own chronic inauthenticity and well-rehearsed habits of self-evasiveness.”¹⁰⁵ James Dunn’s reminder that a faith tradition “which regards all critical scrutiny of its historical roots as inimical to the faith can never hold up its head or lift up its voice in any public forum,”¹⁰⁶ is equally applicable to evaluating scholars and their own faith traditions, as it is to the faith community whose hermeneutics is being evaluated. This self-awareness should then be coupled with an awareness of “historical intentionality.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, an “authentic subjectivity” would ensure that an interpreter is not only self-aware, but also cognizant of the historical intention of the ancient text.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ See Wright, *People of God*, 36; cf. Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 147.

¹⁰⁰ Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 149; cf. Meyer, *Critical Realism*, xiii.

¹⁰¹ See Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 17. This emphasis on subjectivity causes a critical realist to sympathize with phenomenology (see Moritz, ‘Critical but Real,’ 179).

¹⁰² See Wright, *People of God*, 66, 138; cf. Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 165.

¹⁰³ Ben F. Meyer, *Reality and Illusion in New Testament Scholarship: A Primer in Critical Realist Hermeneutics* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1994) 92; cf. B.H. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 39; Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 13.

¹⁰⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1990) 274.

¹⁰⁵ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 188.

¹⁰⁶ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 101; cf. D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 20.

¹⁰⁷ See Moritz, ‘Critical but Real,’ 189.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

After an investigation into the ontological realism of external texts, filtered through the epistemic relativity of the interpreter, there follows critical reflection, or a judgmental rationality (Bhaskar's third concept). This includes an empathetic understanding of what was observed.¹⁰⁹ Our framework exhibits its "critical" nature here because it never assumes that theological conclusions are exact representations of the empirical data. It is an attempt to approximate reality, and it recognizes the impossibility of "a final statement of theological truth; the process of validation and improvement never ceases."¹¹⁰

As N.T. Wright argues, CR is the theory best suited to doing justice to the complex nature of texts and history.¹¹¹ It accomplishes this by "taking seriously the storied nature of knowledge and interpretation."¹¹² Other methodologies may claim to see a text "straight" with instant access to the raw data of the text and the accompanying ability to make complete, objective judgments about its meaning.¹¹³ Such positivistic, naïve realism ignores the epistemic relativism addressed by CR. This naïve realism is overly optimistic, as it "tends to identify the way things are with the way they appear."¹¹⁴ Also, CR is not phenomenalist in the sense of obscuring the ontological realism of the text or implying that a reader's own sense data is the only concrete, accessible reality in the interpretation process.¹¹⁵ Neither is CR a full-blown postmodern perspective that exaggerates epistemic relativism by implying that only the *interpretations* of texts actually exist.¹¹⁶ Instead, it postulates that because of ontological realism, every literary text exists externally from the interpreter, and therefore, should not be "re-authored" to become an individual's personal interpretation.¹¹⁷ CR avoids a scientific mentality that claims epistemic

¹⁰⁹ See Wright, *People of God*, 36.

¹¹⁰ See Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (2nd edn; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006) 398; cf. Craig Blomberg, 'The Historical-Critical/Grammatical Response,' in Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (eds), *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012) 142-155, citing 145.

¹¹¹ See Wright, *People of God*, 64.

¹¹² Moritz, 'Critical but Real,' 185-186.

¹¹³ Thus, Critical Realism is differentiated from positivism (Wright, *People of God*, 32-33; cf. Moritz, 'Critical Realism,' 148).

¹¹⁴ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 299.

¹¹⁵ Wright, *People of God*, 34-35.

¹¹⁶ See Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 112.

¹¹⁷ A "re-authoring" is distinct from any interpretive notion, for it describes the creation of a completely new text. It often becomes "unaccountable to historical plausibilities" while at the same time denying the appropriateness of any empirical research to facilitate an accurate interpretation of the implied world of the text (see Thorsten Moritz, 'Scripture and Theological Exegesis,' in Michael F. Bird and Michael W. Pahl (eds), *The Sacred Text* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2010) 119-140, citing 133).

certainty. The empiricist and idealist hegemony inherited from the Enlightenment denies the ability of the judgmental rationality of CR to make reasoned (though provisional) conclusions.¹¹⁸ This empiricism claimed that “authentic knowledge” resulted from objective purity that was uncontaminated “by the subjectivity of local place, specific time and particular culture.”¹¹⁹ As mentioned, CR acknowledges a subjectivity of place and time; an epistemic relativity, given that every interpreter stands somewhere. At the same time, it does not claim to advance “pure objectivity,” as if such a construct existed in the realm of interpretive possibility. Instead, it sets forth a qualified rationality based on and aimed at reasoned conclusions and assumptions that are subject to hermeneutical scrutiny.

In sum, a critical realist framework of ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgmental rationality will be a helpful guide since I am a “located” interpreter seeking to understand a separate faith tradition than my own. For Wright, CR is a useful framework to guide interpreters through the “labyrinths of NT study.”¹²⁰ This also holds true for the complexity of the LDS^C uses of the Bible.

1.5. Outlook: LDS^C hermeneutics as the object of critical investigation

My argument is that despite implicit and explicit claims by the LDS^C to the contrary, the church’s use of the Bible goes beyond accepted norms and parameters of mainstream scholarship. In the following chapter, I discuss two foundational presuppositions that appear critical to their worldview. These presuppositions uncover hermeneutical tendencies that distance the LDS^C from the mainstream academy. Given the religious aspect of our study, coupled with the apparent hermeneutical “otherness” of their worldview, this first step of investigation seems warranted. In a broad work such as this, I have tried to be thorough in choosing my conversation partners. These partners include dozens of LDS authors, past and present. In the end, however, I have had to be somewhat selective. Nonetheless, my argument will concentrate on their uses of the biblical texts. Therefore, in chapters 3-7, I will consider what appear to

¹¹⁸ See Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 3, 13. For Selby, “(a)bsolute certainty based on objective knowledge,” although assumed by many, has been shown to be “castles in the air” (Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 221).

¹¹⁹ Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 4; cf. Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 34, 85.

¹²⁰ See Wright, *People of God*, 45.

be the five most crucial interpretive practices of LDS^C: literal, allegorical, sociological, emendatory and “re-authoring.” Following chapters five and seven, I will present a case study of a biblical text, in order to explore whether or not the LDS^C allows for the ontological realism of biblical texts, and whether or not interpretation occurs in accordance with its intended sense. Then, in chapter eight, as a final component of my argument, I will examine important facets of philosophical hermeneutics, especially the insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer, since Gadamer’s contribution to scholarship holds some promise to legitimize LDS^C hermeneutics.

CHAPTER 2

TWO FOUNDATIONAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

The investigation of presuppositional matters is the requisite conceptual scaffolding needed to survey more clearly the five categories of biblical interpretation by the LDS^C. At the same time, these presuppositions matter hermeneutically, and contribute to my argument. The first relevant presupposition is the epistemological asymmetry illustrated in their perspective on the Bible. There is a consistent elevation, as well as a diminution, of the Bible. The second presupposition concerns “continuing revelation,” that is, ongoing communication from God to humankind. In our discussion, some features of this chapter touch on theological issues and their ramifications. This theological focus is necessary to help determine the appropriate context of our study. Without these theological matters, it would be difficult to understand the specifics of LDS^C hermeneutics.

2.1. Epistemological asymmetry in how the LDS^C approaches Scripture

An important component of LDS^C hermeneutics is the elevation of, and respect for, the Bible. This elevation highlights a seriousness with which they approach the Bible. However, a problem emerged in the early years of the LDS^C movement, when the Bible was *claimed* to be “plain” and understandable, but was found by Joseph Smith to be anything but “plain.” Therefore, many LDS^C writings highlight a negative perspective on the Bible, including the challenge of correct interpretation. Therefore, a diminution of the Bible, alongside its elevation, is also an important aspect of LDS^C hermeneutics.

2.1.1. *Elevation of the Bible*

“The Bible stands at the foundation” of the LDS^C church.¹ Robert Millet proclaims that their “doctrines and practices are in harmony with the Bible.”² All of their doctrines are “biblical,” suggests Richard Hopkins.³ In addition, “Latter-day Saint doctrines are eminently defensible from the Bible.”⁴ The ninth President of the LDS^C, David McKay, spoke of the “harmony of the doctrines of the Church with the Bible.”⁵ A surprising affirmation by outside observer Harold Bloom is that Mormonism “is truly a biblical religion, whereas Judaism and Christianity never were that, despite all their passionate protestations.”⁶ Bloom concludes that Mormonism, as the “American Religion,” is “unlike Judaism and Christianity” and “is actually biblical, even when it offers and exalts alternative texts.”⁷ The Bible is seen as the “foremost” and “first among the books” that are used as “written guides in faith and doctrine.”⁸ The testimony of Joseph Smith is consonant with these acutely positive views on the Bible: “We teach nothing but what the Bible teaches. We believe nothing, but what is to be found in this book.”⁹

Concerning the Book of Mormon,¹⁰ early LDS author James Talmage wrote that its arrival *supported* the Bible.¹¹ The BoM functioned “as (a) second

¹ Victor L. Ludlow, ‘Bible,’ in Daniel H. Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: MacMillan, 1992) 104-108, citing 105.

² Robert L. Millet, *Getting at the Truth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 2004) Kindle Edition, ch. 5, ‘The Scriptures.’

³ Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, 35.

⁴ Stephen D. Ricks, “Latter-day Saint Doctrines and the Bible,” Review of Richard R. Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, *FARMS Review* 14.1 & 2 (2002) 337-340, citing 338.

⁵ See Richard L. Evans (ed.), *Gospel Ideals* (Salt Lake City: The Improvement Era, 1953) 25.

⁶ Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (2nd edn; New York: Chu Hartley Publishers, 2006) 71-72. Bloom views the Oral Law in Judaism “set forth by great rabbis of second century of the Common era” as overriding the Hebrew Scriptures, while “Christianity is the religion of the Church Fathers and of the Protestant theologians who broke with the Church” (*ibid.*, 72).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 2010) Kindle Edition, ‘The New Testament and the Restoration.’ For other positive examples of early LDS^C use of the Bible, see Gordon Irving, ‘The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830s,’ *BYU Studies* 13 (Sum 1973) 473-488, citing 473, 488.

⁹ Joseph Smith, in George Albert Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (2nd edn; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1950) 4:78. The LDS writing *History of the Church* (HC), also titled *Documentary History of the Church*, is a 7-volume summary of the events of the early Mormon church, including the writings and teachings of early LDS leaders.

¹⁰ The *Book of Mormon* is “a sacred record of some of the indigenous population who lived on the American continents between about 2000 b.c. and a.d. 400” (LDS^C, *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009) 46. See also the article on the LDS website on the ‘Book of Mormon,’ found at <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bofm?lang=eng>; accessed Nov 2016. In addition, see Paul C. Gutjahr, *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Brent Lee Metcalfe (ed.), *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993); John Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1996); Robert Boylan,

witness to the Bible’s testimony that Jesus is the source of salvation for all.”¹² It even “came forth to prove the Bible.”¹³ Underscoring the importance of the Bible in the early years of their movement, Grant Underwood claims that early publications quoted the Bible “anywhere from 19 to 40 times as often as the Book of Mormon.”¹⁴ It may seem counterintuitive that the appearance of the BoM would serve to elevate the status of the Bible. Yet, the BoM was considered proof that “the biblical saga had been revived and was continuing in the person of Joseph Smith and the experience of latter-day Israel.”¹⁵ The message of the BoM to its readers was clear: “God has spoken again.”¹⁶ In many ways, then, the LDS^C elevates the Bible.

2.1.2. *Diminution of the Bible*

However, the Bible is also “lowered” in their thinking.¹⁷ There exists a deviation and “sophisticated redaction” of it.¹⁸ According to the LDS^C, the tumult of the 19th century precipitated a diminution of the Bible. False interpretations led to “chaos,” and the Bible “in the possession of those who misinterpret its true meaning... [induced] confusion and misunderstandings.”¹⁹ The use of James 1:5 at the beginning of the Mormon movement illustrates this diminution (as well as elevation): “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all

‘On Not Understanding the Book of Mormon,’ *FARMS Review* 22.1 (2010) 181-189; Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1997); Robert A. Rees, ‘Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance,’ *Dialogue* 35.3 (Fall 2002) 83-112; John-Charles Duffy, ‘Mapping Book of Mormon Historicity Debates—Part I: A Guide for the Overwhelmed,’ *Sunstone* 151 (Oct 2008) 36-62.

¹¹ See James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1899) 240, emphasis added.

¹² Kathleen Flake, ‘The Four Books of Mormonism: The Bible Plus,’ *Christian Century* 129.17 (Aug 22, 2012) 28-31, citing 28.

¹³ Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1985) 395; cf. D&C 20:11 and its views on the BoM: “...proving to the world that the holy scriptures are true.” Such “holy scriptures” refer to the Bible.

¹⁴ Grant Underwood, ‘Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology,’ *Dialogue* 17.3 (Autumn 1984) 35-75, citing 53.

¹⁵ Scott Kenney, ‘The Triumph of Conservative Biblical Criticism,’ *Dialogue* 28.2 (Sum 1995) 163-166, citing 163. Also, along with the proclamations of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon and the Prophet exhibited “a symbiotic relationship of mutual credentialing” (Gutjahr, *Book of Mormon*, 61).

¹⁶ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, xxxi; cf. George Bartholomew Arbaugh, *Revelation in Mormonism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932) 98; Flake, ‘Four Books,’ 28. Additionally, the LDS^C routinely emphasizes that they are the “Church of *Jesus Christ*” (emphasis added) with the Bible as the primary source. The elevated view of the Bible is further demonstrated by the LDS^C self-awareness of fulfilling and restoring the narrative of the Bible (to be investigated in chapter four under allegorical interpretation).

¹⁷ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 110, 242.

¹⁸ Flake, ‘Four Books,’ 28.

¹⁹ Alvin R. Dyer, *The Meaning of Truth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1961)

men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jas 1:5, KJV).²⁰ On the one hand, 15-year old Joseph Smith fervently believed the message of the verse, and earnestly sought the wisdom that James mentions. Years later, Smith recounted the impact of the verse: “Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did.”²¹ The remarkable result, according to LDS author Bruce McConkie, was that James 1:5 “has had a greater impact and a far more reaching effect upon mankind than any other single sentence ever recorded by any prophet in any age.”²² The elevation of the Bible is clearly evident in these views concerning James 1:5. On the other hand, the reason that Smith sought wisdom was because of the many competing, mutually-contradictory interpretations of Scripture during his time. The Bible, although purported to be “plain” and understandable, was found by Smith to be anything but “plain”:

Rather than the balm for all ills and the answer to all questions, the Bible as preached had become the source of Protestant confusion. Each denomination taught that the Bible was clear in its message and was dogmatically convinced of its correct interpretation. Since there was little room for equivocation where the plain Bible was concerned, these multiple versions of truth acted as a deterrent for Smith.²³

Thus, the possibility of understanding the Bible (other than James 1:5) was in serious doubt. Smith’s apparent suspicions were confirmed when he received the sought-after wisdom, and was told that competing interpretations of the Bible were all in error.²⁴ Therefore, the LDS^C was launched by the asymmetrical phenomena of, on the one hand, heartfelt devotion to the Bible (seeking and

²⁰ The official version of the LDS^C is the King James Version. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references are from the KJV. This verse from James will be studied more in depth in chapter three as an example of “literal” interpretation by the LDS^C.

²¹ Joseph Smith—History 1:19, *Pearl of Great Price*, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp?lang=eng>; accessed Nov 2016. These historical recollections of Joseph Smith are considered scriptural (in contradistinction to the *History of the Church* mentioned earlier).

²² Bruce McConkie, in LDS^C, *New Testament Seminary Teacher Resource Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999) 230. The hyperbolic nature of many of McConkie’s statements will be noted throughout this investigation.

²³ Lydia Willsky, ‘The (Un)plain Bible: New Religious Movements and Alternative Scriptures in Nineteenth-century America,’ *Nova Religio* 17.4 (May 2014) 13-36, citing 20.

²⁴ See Joseph Smith—History 1:12; 19, PGP; cf. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 110. In addition, concerning the sought-after wisdom, Smith wrote: “I had found the testimony of James to be true, that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided” (Joseph Smith—History 1:26, PGP). Again, his words imply an elevation of the Bible.

receiving the wisdom of James 1:5), and on the other hand, an accentuation on the limitations of the Bible—specifically on the possibility of correct interpretation.²⁵

After the death of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young became the President of the church, and the imbalance and asymmetry concerning the Bible continued. Young attempted to subordinate the importance of the Bible, while Mormon apostle Orson Pratt consistently endeavored to attach LDS^C teachings to the Bible.²⁶ Pratt argued that Mormonism was to become a religion primarily bound to the Bible, in contradistinction to Young's position of Mormonism being led by the "living oracles."²⁷ Indeed, Young was amused by the exaggerated, almost idolatrous veneration that the Bible received.²⁸

Article of Faith #8 states: "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly."²⁹ LDS scholars admit this is a "bit of a qualifier" and claim that, although the "essential message of the Bible is intact," errors have been introduced through the centuries.³⁰ Other authors explain,

²⁵ See Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 6. It is important to note, that for thinkers in the past such as Philo, Origen, and Chladenius, hermeneutical reflection became necessary because of problematic passages and supposed contradictions in Scripture (see Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 24, 30, 51-52). Similarly, hermeneutical reflection should come to the forefront as I investigate the uses of the Bible by the LDS^C—especially since the beginning of their movement was precipitated by the challenge of correct interpretation of the Bible.

²⁶ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 80, 87-88.

²⁷ I.e., the Mormon Prophet. For Brigham Young's positive views on the Bible, however, see *Journal of Discourses* 16:43, where Young announced, "We will start out with the Bible alone taking it as the standard. All that the Bible teaches for doctrine and practice we will take for our guide" (Brigham Young, 'Unbelief,' Journal of Discourses website, <http://jod.mrm.org/16/40>; accessed Mar 2016). The *Journal of Discourses* (JD) is a 26-volume collection of sermons of early Mormon leaders. For more on Young vs. Pratt, see Gary J. Bergera (ed.), *Conflict in the Quorum: Orson Pratt, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002); John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012) 235; Breck England, *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985) 188-193, 209-211; Mark A. Noll, 'Review of *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion*, by Philip L. Barlow,' *Modern Theology* 9.1 (January 1993) 103-104, citing 104.

²⁸ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 87; cf. Brigham Young, JD 3:335-338, 13:264 <http://jod.mrm.org>; accessed Mar 2016.

²⁹ As indicated earlier, the thirteen Articles of Faith are contained in the *Pearl of Great Price*. Joseph Smith originally prepared the Articles of Faith in 1842 in response to a journalist's question concerning the beliefs of the LDS^C. See, e.g., Bitton (ed.), *Dictionary of Mormonism*, 7-8; cf. David J. Whittaker, 'The "Articles of Faith" in Early Mormon Literature and Thought,' in Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (eds), *New Views of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987) 63-92. For Article #8 and the view that Smith probably meant "transmitted" instead of "translated" see Robert J. Matthews, 'A Plainer Translation: Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible' (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young Press, 1975) 7; cf. John K. Carmack (ed.), *The New Testament and the Latter-day Saints* (Sperry Symposium 1987) (Orem, UT: Randall Book Company, 1987) 2, 19, 20.

³⁰ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 5, 'The Scriptures'; cf. McConkie, *New Witness*, 395; Matthew Burton Bowman, *The Mormon People* (New York: Random House, 2012) xvii; for the dissenting views of a non-LDS author, see Ronald V. Huggins, 'Joseph Smith's "Inspired Translation" of Romans 7,' *Dialogue* 26.4 (Winter 1993) 159-182, citing 165.

“we believe in the authenticity of any portion of the Bible only so far as it is transmitted and then translated correctly.”³¹ According to Joseph Smith, “(i)gnorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.”³² The Bible for Joseph Smith did not come “in its original completeness and clarity.”³³ In the process of writing and compiling the Bible, the LDS^C conclude that “anything placed in the stewardship of human hands” was “susceptible to error.”³⁴ In the translation process, “terms were taken out of context and twisted.”³⁵ Bruce McConkie bluntly asserts:

Aside from the sorry state of the text due to scholastic incompetence, there was a far more serious problem, namely, the theological bias of the translators. This caused them to change the meaning or paraphrase texts that were either unclear or embarrassing to them. Concrete terms in Hebrew came out as abstract terms in Greek. Expressions were changed or toned down or deleted entirely. Passages... were simply assumed by the translators to be false and were translated, paraphrased, and changed accordingly.³⁶

Therefore, a diminution of the condition of the Bible is evidenced by the “contradictions” and other problems resulting from its translation.³⁷

There are additional aspects to the diminution of the Bible by the LDS^C. The Book of Mormon states that “there are many plain and precious things

³¹ Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2015) Kindle Edition, Introduction, ‘The Relevance of Paul’s Writing for the Modern Disciple.’

³² Joseph Smith, in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 107; cf. Kent P. Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints: a Dynamic Scriptural Process,’ in Frederick Mathewson Denny and Rodney L. Taylor (eds), *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985) 63-83, citing 66; Heikki Räisänen, ‘Joseph Smith as a Creative Interpreter of the Bible,’ *Dialogue* 43.2 (Sum 2010) 64-85, citing 68-69.

³³ Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 5; cf. Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 82.

³⁴ Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints,’ 71-72.

³⁵ Edward J. Brandt, in Carmack (ed.), *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, 62.

³⁶ McConkie, *New Witness*, 403. Although McConkie summarizes the purported hermeneutical conclusions of the ancient translators, he gives no evidence, manuscript or otherwise, for these conclusions. The speculation by McConkie regarding “embarrassing” or “unclear” passages illustrates the LDS^C tendency to point out the erroneous hermeneutical practices of others, while, at times, excusing themselves from interacting with their own hermeneutical assumptions.

³⁷ See also Anthony A. Hutchinson, ‘A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered,’ *Dialogue* 21.4 (Winter 1988) 11-74, citing 13, 28, 29, 30, 49; cf. Barber, ‘Literalist Constraint,’ 21; Ben McGuire, ‘Understanding the Book of Mormon? He “doth protest too much, methinks,”’ *FARMS Review* 22.1 (2010) 163-180, citing 176; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 36, 108-109, 244. In stark contrast to these strong generalizations, see the chapter by LDS author Ted L. Gibbons, ‘Paul as a Witness of the Work of God,’ in LDS^C, *Go Ye into All the World: Messages of the New Testament Apostles* (31st Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium) (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002) 27-40. In this chapter, Gibbons cites over 100 NT scriptures, yet never mentions any potentially corrupt or suspect passage. Gibbons takes at face value the writings of Paul, and refrains from questioning even one of them. Here we note the elevation of the Bible by an LDS author, in spite of the numerous examples of LDS^C diminution of the Bible.

taken away from” the Bible (1 Nephi 13:28). Just as “ignorant translators” committed many errors in the copying process, they also took out many passages.³⁸ According to Robert Matthews, the “bigger problem” is not what is in the Bible, “but rather the omissions and the missing parts that constitute the problem.”³⁹ Because of the pervasive impact of the Great Apostasy, some early believers “taught ideas from their old pagan or Jewish beliefs,” instead of “the simple truths taught by Jesus” that were found in the Bible.⁴⁰ From the LDS^C perspective, then, there was a widespread neglect of the straightforward, “simple truths” of the Bible. Terryl Givens explains that Bible believers added “...layer upon layer of accretions to religious institutions.”⁴¹ Although some LDS authors allow for limited positive influences during the centuries previous to the Restoration by Joseph Smith,⁴² the Great Apostasy negatively impacted not only the condition of the Bible, but also its interpretation. In fact, the ability “to interpret scripture was no longer on earth.”⁴³ In addition, early LDS leaders had “deep misgivings about the ability of human language to capture God’s thoughts. Words were too small to convey omniscience.”⁴⁴ Although the Bible was important, it was not “all important.”⁴⁵ Neither the Bible, nor any other document or collection was all-sufficient “for redemption, for salvation,

³⁸ See W.D. Davies, ‘Reflections on the Mormon “Canon,”’ *Harvard Theological Review* 79.1-3 (1986) 44-66, citing 46.

³⁹ Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 8. Concerning these omissions, one might wonder why this holds importance in a hermeneutical study. However, since the LDS^C takes upon itself to restore the flawed text (see especially chapter six with the exploration of LDS^C emendatory practice), I can glean interpretive insights from what they are doing.

⁴⁰ LDS^C, *Gospel Principles*, 91.

⁴¹ Givens, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 102.

⁴² E.g., at the end of the 3rd century, “with the return of persecution came an awakening and a renewal in Christian devotion” (James Edward Talmage, *The Great Apostasy Considered in the Light of Scriptural and Secular History* (Independence, Missouri: Press of Zion’s Printing and Publishing Company, 1909) 84, cf. *ibid.*, 151, 158). Also, “(w)e owe an immense debt to the protesters and reformers who preserved the scriptures and translated them... They kept the flame alive as best they could” (President Boyd K. Packer in Millet, *Truth*, ch. 1, ‘Reaching Out’). Through the centuries, there was still “some light in the world” (Stephen Robinson in Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 72). Finally, “mankind was not left in total darkness or completely without revelation or inspiration” (Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Apostasy, Great’).

⁴³ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 6, ‘God and Man’; cf. Joseph Smith—History 1:19, PGP; Talmage, *Great Apostasy*, 26-27; Siebach, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 464. The Great Apostasy was due, in part, because of the infiltration of Greek philosophy into the church (see, e.g., Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church* (5th edn; n. p.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996); cf. Richard R. Hopkins, *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God* (2nd edn; n. p.: Horizon Publishers, 2009); Millet, *Truth*, ch. 6, ‘God and Man’; Robinson, *How Wide*, 128, 138; LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 142).

⁴⁴ Gutjahr, ‘Measuring Stick,’ 205; cf. various LDS leaders in JD 1:117, 2:314, 3:99-102; 9:311; 16:335, <http://jod.mrm.org>; accessed Mar 2016.

⁴⁵ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 78.

for complete enlightenment, or for the perfecting of the soul.”⁴⁶ As noted, the LDS^C postulate the existence of other books as scripture, and the Bible merely “constitutes one of its standard works.”⁴⁷

A further relativizing example comes from the concept of “derivative revelation” as a description of *written* Scripture. Stephen Robinson writes, “direct revelation to a prophet or an apostle is immediate and primary, and this is the word of God in the purest sense—as *word* and *bearing* rather than as *text*.”⁴⁸ There are similar notions with LDS author Blake Ostler, who “appears to argue that scripture itself is not, strictly speaking, revelation, but rather a human record of revelatory experience.”⁴⁹ Concomitantly, the LDS^C distinguishes between “Scripture” and the Bible, for “Scripture...is one thing; the Bible is quite another. Scripture is as broad as eternity, as comprehensive as the limitless bounds of truth.”⁵⁰ Indeed, they expand “the definition of scripture itself.”⁵¹ An LDS^C scripture states: “And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture” (D&C 68:4).⁵²

The LDS^C maintains that the focus should be on God—not on the Bible. They emphasize that God, not scripture, is perfect.⁵³ Early LDS author Parley Pratt pointed out that the “central defect” with Alexander Campbell (and other Protestant Reformers in the 19th century) was a “narrow fixation on the Bible,” because they failed to understand that the “Bible simply pointed beyond itself to the God who was the final arbiter of ultimate things.”⁵⁴ Lydia Willisky claims that “(t)he Bible itself inspired Smith to seek truth outside its

⁴⁶ See W.D. Davies and Truman G. Madsen, ‘Scriptures,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1278.

⁴⁷ Ludlow, ‘Bible,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 105. As mentioned previously, other standard works include the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*. In light of such views, it is natural to concur with non-LDS author W.D. Davies, who wrote of the LDS “attitude” toward Scripture as “unusual—undeniably radical if not unique” (Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 44).

⁴⁸ Robinson, *How Wide*, 57, emphasis in text.

⁴⁹ See Paul Owen and Carl Mosser, ‘A Review of “How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation,”’ *FARMS Review of Books* 11.2 (1999) 1-102, citing 20; cf. Kathleen Flake, ‘Translating Time: The Nature and Function of Joseph Smith’s Narrative Canon,’ *Journal of Religion* 87.4 (Oct 2007) 497-527, citing 507.

⁵⁰ McConkie, *New Witness*, 395.

⁵¹ Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 18.

⁵² This verse from D&C 68:4 (‘Doctrine and Covenants,’ LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament?lang=eng>; accessed Nov 2016), initially appeared in the *Evening and Morning Star*, and was later canonized in *Doctrine and Covenants*. The *Evening and Morning Star* (hereafter *EMS*) was an early LDS monthly newspaper from 1832-1834 that was “commissioned to announce salvation” (see Richard Abanes, *One Nation Under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002) 103; cf. *EMS* 1.5:35, ‘A Revelation, Given November 1831,’ <http://www.centerplace.org/history/ems/vol1.htm>; accessed Mar 2016).

⁵³ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 117.

⁵⁴ See Richard T. Hughes, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 30.

pages, and it was without the plain Bible that he set out for the woods in search of God, spiritual direction and truth.”⁵⁵ The chief function of the Bible was to “demonstrate the divine power,” and thus, the LDS movement “pointed not to a book but to the divine power behind all books.”⁵⁶ Other Protestant Reformers wanted to get back to the first century church, but for many in the early LDS^C, such Protestants “missed the divine reality.”⁵⁷ Mormonism, on the contrary, “had no interest in patterning their faith and practice after a particular time, but looked instead to God who had worked wonders in all times.”⁵⁸ The message of the Bible “essentially meant soaring with the gods while others groveled on the earth.”⁵⁹

Skepticism regarding the process of canonization of the New Testament illustrates an additional diminution of the *current* condition of the Bible. While issues of canon and canonicity are not strictly interpretive issues, LDS thinkers frequently discuss the process of canonization, and in the process, advance a relativization of the Bible. LDS authors assert: “Our understanding remains hazy about how some books were declared authoritative.”⁶⁰ Canonization was “accomplished unevenly by uninspired men,”⁶¹ who were “hundreds of years removed from the time of Christ.”⁶² It was a “haphazard process;”⁶³ accomplished by “disagreement and debate” as well as “contention, compromise, and confusion.”⁶⁴ In 1877, William McLellin, one of the original twelve LDS apostles, maintained that the process was “all conjecture,” and there is now “great uncertainty relative to who wrote the books that are now in our Protestant Bible. We know not who gathered them up and put them together...but it was done by uninspired men so far as we now know.”⁶⁵ The

⁵⁵ Willsky, ‘(Un)plain Bible,’ 20.

⁵⁶ Hughes, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 30.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 38. This LDS quest for the “infinite,” in actuality, “made no sense” to those governed by the “rationalism of Common Sense” (i.e., the Protestants) (see *ibid.*, 36).

⁶⁰ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Canon of Scripture.’

⁶¹ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 210.

⁶² David L. Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?: Reassessing Joseph Smith’s Theology in His Bicentennial,’ *BYU Studies* 45.1 (2006) 35-128, citing 50 n54; cf. Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1991) Kindle Edition, ch. 5, ‘The Canonical or Biblical Exclusion.’

⁶³ Orson Pratt, in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 95; cf. various LDS leaders in JD, 7:22-38, 14:257-260; 16:218; 17:268-270, <http://jod.mrm.org>; accessed Mar 2016.

⁶⁴ McConkie, *New Witness*, 406.

⁶⁵ Stan Larson and Samuel J. Passey (eds), *The William E. McLellin Papers, 1854-1880* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007) 295, 308.

LDS^C disassociate themselves from other churches that believe in a “closed” and “sterile” canon.⁶⁶

I have noted numerous examples of LDS^C diminution of the Bible. These include the influence of mutually contradictory interpretations, translation discrepancies, removed passages, the Great Apostasy negating the ability to interpret, the limitations of human language, written Scripture as derivative, a focus on God instead of the Bible, and finally, skepticism in regards to the process of canonization. It is important to note, that strictly speaking, many of these concepts are not *interpretive* issues. However, I reiterate, although these are *theological* issues, this discussion is necessary to help determine the appropriate context of our study. Without these theological matters, it would be difficult to understand the specifics of LDS^C hermeneutics. Their regard for the Bible, either positively or negatively, imports for assessing their skill in Bible interpretation.

2.1.3. *The hermeneutical effect of the epistemological asymmetry in the LDS^C approach to Scripture*

The LDS^C elevates and respects the Bible, illustrated prominently in their interpretation of James 1:5. In addition, there is some wisdom in their writings regarding an exaggerated focus on the Bible. Many Christians recognize the problem of bibliolatry, and would distance themselves from it.⁶⁷ A measure of “careful reflection” will prevent an overstated focus on the Bible, for God and the Scriptures “are both authoritative,” yet “the latter is an authority because of and on behalf of the former.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Carmack (ed.), *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, 11. In addition, the LDS^C position is not “a finalist and minimalist view,” i.e., “one canon is enough” (Davies and Madsen, ‘Scriptures,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1278). This differing canonical understanding and the subsequent argumentation can humorously be described as scholars “firing more than one canon at each other” (See Martin E. Marty, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, vii). Additionally, the LDS^C seldom utilizes the term “canon”—because of its connotations of finality and completeness. Rather they speak of “the Standard Works of the Church” (see Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 7; Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 63). However, alongside the negative LDS^C views on the process of canonization, see the more balanced perspective by LDS author James Faulconer, who writes that “(c)anonization wasn’t arbitrary...It was a combined judgment of many thoughtful people over almost 300 years, and we assume that judgment was led by the Holy Ghost” (James E. Faulconer, *The New Testament Made Harder* (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2015) Kindle Edition, ‘Lesson 45’).

⁶⁷ See G. Goldsworthy, ‘Relationship of Old Testament and New Testament,’ in T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (eds), *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 81-89, citing 84; cf. Graham A. Cole, ‘God, Doctrine of,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 259-263, citing 261-262.

⁶⁸ Edith M. Humphrey, ‘Jesus and Scripture,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 358-363, citing 360; cf. Wayne A. Grudem, ‘Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a

The perspective of LDS author Ostler cited above, that “scripture itself is not, strictly speaking, revelation,”⁶⁹ could potentially align with the theological advances of Karl Barth, who viewed written scripture as a *witness* to revelation. According to Barth, “the Bible is not in itself and as such God’s past revelation.”⁷⁰ Instead, it “bears witness to past revelation.”⁷¹ He continued: “witnessing means pointing in a specific direction beyond the self and on to another.”⁷² Thus, “we do the Bible a poor honor...when we equate it” with revelation.⁷³ According to Barth, “divine revelation occurs only in Jesus Christ,” although we know this revelation of Jesus “from Scripture.”⁷⁴ Barth saw “an event of revelation” that was “behind the Bible.”⁷⁵ These considerations also echo Robinson’s perspective quoted above on “derivative revelation.”⁷⁶

While the LDS^C perspective could potentially align with Barth’s view, the end result is dissimilar, because of the LDS^C tendency to relativize the Bible. Barth maintained the authority of the Bible and did not hold to the ambitious views of the LDS^C concerning the problem of translation. He made “central the Bible’s instrumental function of mediating God’s revealed mind to each generation of the church.”⁷⁷ He saw the “testimony of the biblical writings” as “elect witnesses to the divine word.”⁷⁸ He consistently elevated the Bible.⁷⁹ For Barth, although a “witness to revelation is not itself revelation,” the

Doctrine of Scripture,’ in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (eds), *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992) 15-60.

⁶⁹ Ostler, cited in Owen and Mosser, ‘Review of “How Wide the Divide?”’ 20.

⁷⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume 1: The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 1*, trans. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) III.

⁷¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.2.513. Barth viewed the biblical text as “a human witness to revelation” and as “testifying to revelation” (see John Webster, ‘Karl Barth,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 82-84, citing 83).

⁷² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.2.513.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ See these views of Barth in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1995) 64-65.

⁷⁵ Gordon H. Clark, *Karl Barth’s Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1963) 165. For a discussion concerning Barth and how “religious language” faces inherent difficulties in describing “what is a revelation and what is not,” see Graham White, ‘Karl Barth’s Theological Realism,’ *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 26.1 (1984) 54-70, citing 55, 59.

⁷⁶ Robinson, *How Wide*, 57.

⁷⁷ J.I. Packer, ‘Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics,’ in Carson and Woodbridge (eds), *Scripture and Truth*, 325-356, citing 326.

⁷⁸ See Webster, ‘Karl Barth,’ 83.

⁷⁹ This is seen most clearly in his commentary on Romans, first published in 1919 (see Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933)). In subsequent years, “Barth’s chief preoccupation was not with questions of the nature or authority of the Bible,” it was actually “with its content, expounded in lengthy lecture series on, for example, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians, the Sermon on the Mount, John, James, and 1 Peter” (Webster, ‘Karl Barth,’ 83).

Bible sets before its reader what it is witnessing.⁸⁰ Therefore, he claimed: “we have heard in this book the Word of God.”⁸¹ Barth did, indeed, see a danger in equating the Bible with the Word of God, which comprises “the freedom of God,” for “God and God alone speaks for God.” In fact, “God is the subject, God is Lord. He is Lord even over the Bible and in the Bible.”⁸² The “Word of God” was not “tied to the Bible,” but the other way around.⁸³ Therefore, the Bible witnessed to the Word of God. Ultimately, the consistent diminution of the Bible by LDS^C authors distances the church from Barth’s positive views.

I mentioned previously the assumed influence of the apostasy of the early church. The Great Apostasy appears to be a grid through which they view church history, and through which they interpret the Bible.⁸⁴ Careful textual analysis is short-circuited if the Great Apostasy was as pervasive as they claim—negatively impacting the condition, and therefore, the interpretation of the Bible. This perspective strains credibility as most observers maintain that the study of history and its influence on biblical interpretations needs to be more nuanced and balanced.⁸⁵

The LDS^C has determined that, in the process of transmission, many biblical texts were corrupted. Yet, the process used to arrive at this conclusion represents “a hermeneutic act of the first order.”⁸⁶ In spite of the lack of a published hermeneutic, then, they are acting hermeneutically by judging the ancient biblical text to be corrupted. This activity is not sufficiently acknowledged. In similar fashion, there are strong LDS^C views against a “closed” and “sterile”⁸⁷ canon that was decided upon “haphazardly.”⁸⁸ Yet at the same time, they assert that their doctrines are “biblical.”⁸⁹ It is important to note at least three issues in our discussion on the diminution of the Bible: the current condition of the biblical text, the process of canonization, and actual interpretation of the Bible. The relevancy of the latter two issues could be questioned, as they are not interpretive issues. However, the LDS^C assertion of

⁸⁰ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 67.

⁸¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1.2.530.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1.2.513.

⁸³ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 74.

⁸⁴ For a non-LDS response to the Great Apostasy, see Craig Blomberg, in Beckwith et al., *New Mormon Challenge*, 318-319.

⁸⁵ See Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 6; Becker in Ellis, ‘Perspectives On Biblical Interpretation,’ 492; Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies*, 106; Porter, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics,’ in Porter and Malcolm (eds), *Future of Biblical Interpretation*, 32-33.

⁸⁶ See the topic of determining corrupt texts in Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 51.

⁸⁷ Carmack (ed.), *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, 11.

⁸⁸ Pratt, in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 95.

⁸⁹ Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, 35.

their doctrines as “biblical” legitimizes this discussion. How are they “biblical,” yet, at the same time, questioning the condition of the Bible, as well as the canon? The latter two issues impugn upon the validity of the former. Concomitantly, if there are errors, contradictions and problems *in* the Bible,⁹⁰ as well as considerable content taken *out* of the Bible,⁹¹ how does the Bible stand “at the foundation” of their church?⁹² LDS authors do not adequately acknowledge these potential discrepancies.

In an important entry in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, the LDS^C appears to *partially* respond to the presuppositional matter of the asymmetrical perspective on the Bible:

Latter-day Saints have continued to trust in the general accuracy of the biblical texts even though they know that the text may not always be correct. Thus, they study and revere the Bible, especially in the context of other scriptures and modern revelation, which have much to say about the Bible and how it is to be interpreted, and as they study they ponder and pray that they may receive inspiration from God and come to understand the Bible’s messages as they need to be applied in their lives.⁹³

The LDS^C answer to the asymmetry, then, is found in 1) modern scriptures that show “how [the Bible] is to be interpreted,” and 2) personal revelation and interpretation that allows an LDS member to “come to understand” the Bible.⁹⁴ Thus, the challenges wrought by the asymmetrical perspective on the Bible are not considered insuperable, given the existence of other LDS^C scriptures, as well as personal revelation and individualized interpretation. I discussed in the previous chapter the need to be self-aware and even self-critical when approaching a text (or another religious tradition). Although the LDS^C claim to value the Bible highly, there is also devaluation since “other scriptures” appear to hold an authoritative position over it,⁹⁵ delineating “how it is to be interpreted.” These modern scriptures are not *only* interpreting the Bible, as any Bible reader does, but, implicit in the words of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, are a type of filter through which correct interpretation occurs.

⁹⁰ See e.g., Joseph Smith, in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 107.

⁹¹ See LDS^C views in Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 8.

⁹² Ludlow, ‘Bible,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 105.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁹⁴ These two hermeneutical assumptions—biblical interpretation by LDS^C modern scriptures, and personal revelation/interpretation—will be covered in detail in the following section, as well as in chapter six under emendatory interpretation.

⁹⁵ Another author states that the Bible is viewed as a “dim light”—with modern revelation as the “brilliance of the noonday sun” (McConkie, *New Witness*, 411).

This does not align with their elevation of the Bible. In many ways, then, the asymmetrical perspective on the Bible by the LDS^C yields several questionable implications, and goes beyond accepted norms and parameters of mainstream scholarship.

2.2. Continuing revelation as personal and prophetic

2.2.1. Foundational role of continuing revelation

The second foundational presupposition is ongoing communication from God to humankind.⁹⁶ We have already seen the views of LDS author James Faulconer: “revelation is *the* Latter-day Saint theology.”⁹⁷ Revelation is considered “the chief constituent of Latter-day Saint doctrine.”⁹⁸ Article of Faith #9 announces: “We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.” The BoM concurs: “Unto him that receiveth I will give more” (2 Nephi 28:30). In addition, “(r)evelation is the rock of Latter-day Saint belief.”⁹⁹ Early Mormon leader W. W. Phelps mused that “new light” was “occasionally bursting in to our minds.”¹⁰⁰ For Kent Jackson, one will stand or fall on this issue.¹⁰¹ Faulconer agrees: “*Continuing revelation is primary to Mormonism*. Since Latter-day Saints insist on continuing revelation, they cannot have a dogmatic theology that is any more than provisional and heuristic, for a theology claiming to be more than that could always be trumped by new revelation.”¹⁰² Given this perspective on continuing revelation, Joseph

⁹⁶ Though commonly referred to as “continuing revelation,” it is also denominated “living revelation,” or simply “revelation.” See Hutchinson, ‘LDS approaches,’ 113; cf. Steven C. Harper, “That They Might Come to Understanding: Revelation as Process,” in Scott C. Esplin, Richard O. Cowan, and Rachel Cope (eds), *You Shall Have My Word* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012) 19–33. For a study on LDS and other “revelation-producing” groups in the early 19th century, see David Holland, *Sacred Borders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁹⁷ Faulconer, ‘Rethinking Theology,’ 180, emphasis by author. See above, p. 6, ch. 1.

⁹⁸ Paulsen, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 10.

⁹⁹ Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’ 39; see similar words by Joseph Smith, in Joseph Fielding Smith (ed.), *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977) 274. Also, see *EMS* 1.2:9, ‘Revelations’: “If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation” (<http://www.centerplace.org/history/ems/vol1.htm>; accessed Mar 2016).

¹⁰⁰ LDS^C, *Messenger and Advocate* (June 1835), 1.9:130. The *Messenger and Advocate* was an early LDS monthly newsletter from 1834–1837 (<http://www.centerplace.org/history/ma/vol1.htm>; accessed Mar 2016).

¹⁰¹ Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints,’ 81. Throughout the history of the LDS church, there has been a “steadfast reliance on the principle of continuing revelation” (see Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 7).

¹⁰² Faulconer, ‘Rethinking Theology,’ 179, emphasis by author. There are numerous LDS examples of how continuing revelation results in what could be labeled a *developing* doctrine. For instance, Joseph Smith’s concept of God evolved from monotheism, to a belief in two personages as a godhead, and finally to a plurality of gods (see Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 21). In other words, the LDS^C moved from their “earliest theological position as a strict monotheistic

Smith and others responded to their detractors with a pointed challenge—if revelation is dismissed in the present, how “could they defend revelation in the past?”¹⁰³ This is reiterated by Terryl Givens: “To repudiate divine revelation as a principle would be to undermine the basis of Christianity itself.”¹⁰⁴

The LDS^C claims that the Father and the Son appeared to Joseph Smith in 1820, as he was seeking for the wisdom mentioned in James 1:5. This became known as the “First Vision” (FV), and is the foremost example of continuing revelation.¹⁰⁵ From this event, they concluded that “divinity still communicate[d] with humanity,”¹⁰⁶ and that God was “in fact a literal person such as biblical prophets claim[ed] to see and speak with.”¹⁰⁷ James Talmage wrote that “the silence of the centuries was broken; the voice of God was heard again upon the earth.”¹⁰⁸

Joseph Smith testified about the FV: “I had seen a vision, I knew it, and I knew that God knew it.”¹⁰⁹ Brigham Young also described the epistemological implications of revelation: “I know that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God... Who can disprove this testimony?... I have had many revelations, and know these things are true, and nobody on earth can disprove them.”¹¹⁰ Givens explains the significance of the FV: “It is easy to see why [Smith’s] personal encounter with a conversing Deity would ground his own sense of epistemological certainty. But he clearly saw his own experience as a

Christian sect to the cosmic henotheistic religion it is today” (Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God*, 6).

¹⁰³ See Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’, 39.

¹⁰⁴ Givens, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 110.

¹⁰⁵ See Joseph Smith—History 1:12–17, PGP; cf. Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 747. As to the aforementioned idea that, while seeking the wisdom mentioned in James 1:5, Smith received knowledge that none of the denominations were correct, the earliest accounts of the FV do not mention this problem with competing churches. Rather, they focused on Smith’s sorrow for his sins (see Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 22; Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 252). Interestingly, according to LDS author Grant Palmer, this change, far from exhibiting a potentially damaging discrepancy, is proof that Smith “reinterpreted his experience to satisfy institutional needs” (Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 240). We will note the importance of “institutional needs” throughout this investigation.

¹⁰⁶ Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987) 32.

¹⁰⁷ Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 6. Non-LDS author Paul Owen concedes the possibility that the FV was perhaps “something like” what Paul experienced as recorded in 2 Corinthians 12, for “(w)hether it was ‘in the body or out of the body’ is not always easy to determine in an ecstatic state” (Owen, in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 114).

¹⁰⁸ James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2006) 763. The “silence of the centuries” was due to the Great Apostasy.

¹⁰⁹ See Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin and Richard L. Bushman (eds), *Joseph Smith Papers: Histories, Volume 1* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012) 218; cf. Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints,’ 78. Additionally, since the Father and the Son came to Joseph Smith, he was viewed as a prophet that had direct connection with God (see Beckwith et al., *New Mormon Challenge*, 41; cf. Dean L. May, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 49).

¹¹⁰ Brigham Young, ‘Unbelief, etc.,’ JD 16:46, <http://jod.mrm.org/16/40>, accessed Mar 2016.

prototype to which others could—and should—aspire.”¹¹¹ Therefore, the FV, “with all its epistemological fullness and certainty, betokened an order of knowledge that was the right and destiny of all faithful Saints.”¹¹² Givens also states that, “(c)ertainty is a term that frequently appears in the ministry of Joseph Smith...[for he] never admitted a particle of possible self-deception.”¹¹³ Indeed, in a famous sermon months before his death, Smith proclaimed that it was “the first principle of the gospel, to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another.”¹¹⁴ In LDS^C thinking, then, the reception of revelation appears to be combined with epistemological certainty.

The FV established a basic assumption about how God is known—by revelation—and not known—by disputation and rational enquiry.¹¹⁵ The FV also underscored that revelation had “replaced the long and inordinate reliance on reason.”¹¹⁶ It was postulated that “reason can never trump revelation.”¹¹⁷ The early LDS leaders balked at how other leaders, like Protestant restorationist Alexander Campbell, “were rational to the core, applying human reason to the biblical text and limiting authentic religion to that sphere.”¹¹⁸ In contrast, “Mormonism sought to transcend the cognitive and the rational and to soar with the gods in the realm of the infinite and the eternal.”¹¹⁹

On account of continuing revelation, the LDS^C claims an advantage over other Bible believers. Joseph Smith boldly proclaimed that other churches were “bound apart by cast-iron creeds, and fastened to set stakes by chain-cables,

¹¹¹ Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 22.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 23. Givens continues: “the rhetoric of certainty and fullness are still distinguishing features of Mormon religious culture. During testimony meetings that occur on the first Sunday of the month, LDS members ‘bear a testimony’: ‘I *know* Christ lives; ‘I *know* Joseph Smith was a prophet of God; ‘I *know* the church is true.’” Thus, “central to Mormonism is this affirmation of absolute certainty” (*ibid.*, 26, emphasis by author).

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹⁴ This sermon is called the “King Follett Discourse.” See Joseph Smith, ‘The King Follett Discourse,’ BYU website, <http://mldb.byu.edu/follett.htm>, accessed Nov 2016.

¹¹⁵ Siebach, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 464. Based on the FV, the LDS saw a new “experiential knowledge of God” (Kathleen Flake, ‘Re-Placing Memory: Latter-day Saint use of Historical Monuments and Narrative in the early Twentieth century,’ *Religion and American Culture* 13.1 (Wint 2003) 69-109, citing 90).

¹¹⁶ Neal A. Maxwell, ‘From the Beginning,’ *Ensign* 23 (Nov 1993), LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/%0201993/11/from-the-beginning?lang=eng>, accessed Nov 2016.

¹¹⁷ Dallin Oaks in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 68 n61. Similarly, according to James Faulconer, “(r)evelation trumps reason” (Faulconer, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 473).

¹¹⁸ Hughes, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 32.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

without revelation.”¹²⁰ James Siebach expresses that “in place of Nicea I and the disputational manner in which it arrived at a doctrine of the Trinity, the LDS church asserts pure revelation.”¹²¹ They do not “limit divine revelation to the past,” and are in a “unique position,” because God “will yet reveal many great and important things.”¹²² The ability to receive revelation is one of the features of the “true church.”¹²³ Other LDS authors speak of their uniqueness: “Mormons find themselves in an isolated position...[because] Protestant evangelicals...find it impossible to accept the Mormon concepts of an open canon, continuing revelation, or ‘inspired’ improvements of the sacred text.”¹²⁴

There is a particularly interesting argument concerning continuing revelation and the passage of time. According to the LDS^C, new revelation from God will be needed and expected, as “changing circumstances in the world necessitate new communication from God.”¹²⁵ They hold to a “profound belief that God has meaningful things to say to humankind in our present age.”¹²⁶ Early in their movement, Apostle Orson Hyde claimed that words given to one generation did not serve for another.¹²⁷ The eleventh President of the LDS^C, Harold Lee, explained that Noah did not receive the same revelation as Adam, nor the same as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul or Jesus—they “all had revelations for themselves.”¹²⁸ The LDS^C conclusion, then, is “so must we.”¹²⁹ Parley Pratt argued that the “old revelations were not suited to the present condition of mankind,” and in order to “meet the needs engendered by a more civilized state of society...fresh revelations were needed.”¹³⁰ According to David Paulsen, the Spirit who inspired ancient Scripture also speaks today about contemporary

¹²⁰ Smith, in George Albert Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:74.

¹²¹ Siebach, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 465; cf. Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 4, ‘The Historical or Traditional Exclusion.’ For Bruce McConkie, “no creed transcends the creed of revelation” (McConkie, *New Witness*, 16).

¹²² ‘Divine Revelation in Modern Times,’ LDS Newsroom, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/divine-revelation-modern-times>; accessed Jan 2015. They also believe that “(r)evelation permeates the entire Church—bottom top and in between” (ibid.); cf. Dallin H. Oaks, ‘Scripture Reading and Revelation,’ *Ensign* 25.1 (Jan 1995), LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1995/01/scripture-reading-and-revelation?lang=eng>; accessed Jan 2015.

¹²³ LDS^C, *Primary 5: Doctrine and Covenants; Church History, ages 8-11* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996) 2:7.

¹²⁴ Davis Bitton and Thomas G. Alexander, *The A to Z of Mormonism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009) 18.

¹²⁵ Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints,’ 63.

¹²⁶ Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’, 52; cf. D&C 124:41; Robinson, *How Wide*, 71; Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, Epilogue, ‘The New Testament and the Restoration.’

¹²⁷ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 88.

¹²⁸ See Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 58.

¹²⁹ Ibid., cf. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 778.

¹³⁰ See William Shepard and H. Michael Marquardt, *Lost Apostles* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2014) 94.

issues “of significant concern, for example, the use of contraceptives, abortion, liberation, ecological irresponsibility, equal rights, euthanasia, nuclear proliferation, global genocide, economic and social justice.”¹³¹ It is noteworthy that these LDS authors desire, at least implicitly, to be in continuity with the Bible, as modern day revelations ostensibly follow the biblical pattern of revelations given to Noah, Adam, and the other biblical characters.

The LDS^C also contends that no passage of Scripture explicitly prohibits continuing revelation. In fact, Joseph Smith asserted that “(t)o say that God never said anything more to man than is there recorded [in the Bible], would be saying at once that we have at last received a revelation.”¹³² Robert Millet asks, “Does the Bible itself suggest that there will never again be revelation and vision and prophecy through God’s chosen servants? Does God love the people of our day any less than he loved those to whom he manifested himself in [biblical] times?”¹³³ The LDS^C believe it is ill-advised to presume the end of revelation, for only a fool would “close the mouth of God and say his words should cease.”¹³⁴ In spite of the aforementioned desire to be in continuity with the Bible, the argument from silence presented here connotes an epistemological inconsistency. On the one hand, revelations given to specific Bible characters are used to endorse modern day revelations, yet on the other hand, select LDS authors revert to an argument from silence, seemingly invalidating their focus on biblical content. This suggests that the driving factor in their reasoning is not, in fact, Scripture, but is derived from somewhere else.

2.2.2. *Personal revelation and interpretation as an illustration of continuing revelation*

We have seen that the LDS^C movement began when Joseph Smith retreated to the woods alone and sought wisdom from God concerning competing scriptural interpretations. As a consequence, the vital importance of *personal* revelation was underscored in LDS religious experience.¹³⁵ In fact, “Personal Revelation is a sacred and deeply embedded tradition in the theology, religious practice, and daily life of the Latter-day Saints.”¹³⁶ It is open to all members of the church.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’, 50.

¹³² Joseph Smith, in Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’ 39.

¹³³ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 8, ‘Joseph Smith and Church History’; cf. McConkie, *New Witness*, 483. Whether or not God’s love can be predicated upon the frequency of manifestations, ancient or modern, is a *non sequitur* beyond the subject of this dissertation.

¹³⁴ McConkie, *New Witness*, 463.

¹³⁵ See Chauncey Riddle, ‘Revelation,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1225-1228, emphasis added.

¹³⁶ Tom Mould, *Still, the Small Voice* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2011) ix.

Stephen Robinson states that “individuals within the Church may receive personal revelation, even on doctrinal matters, for their private benefit.”¹³⁸ The individuality of the movement is stressed as each member is encouraged “to independently strive to receive their own spiritual confirmation of the truthfulness of Church doctrine.”¹³⁹ There is “considerable leeway for individual scriptural evaluation.”¹⁴⁰ According to one observer, the “distinguishing feature of Mormon faith” is that “its devotees profess to be in possession of a certain power of the spirit, which places them in direct communication with God and his angels, endowing them with the gifts of revelation and prophecy.”¹⁴¹ In addition: “Personal revelation makes every man a prophet, every woman a prophetess, to know the voice of the Lord...Oh, how personal revelation pulls down intellectual tyranny, priestcraft, and private interpretation of scripture!”¹⁴² McConkie underscores its importance: “...until men receive personal revelation they are without God in the world...Men may study about religion, about God, and about his laws, but they cannot receive that knowledge of them whom to know is eternal life except by revelation from the Spirit of God.”¹⁴³

We have seen that Joseph Smith experienced personal revelation. Other LDS leaders have reported similar experiences. Robert Millet received a revelation and was “filled with the warmth of the Holy Spirit from head to toe.”¹⁴⁴ Retired LDS philosophy professor Chauncey Riddle (with a Ph.D. from Columbia University), was devastated as a youth when faced with secular criticism of the church. He was besieged by doubts: “Oh how I prayed to know

¹³⁷ McConkie, *New Witness*, 488-489; cf. Barber, ‘Literalist Constraint,’ 24; as well as passages in the BoM: Moroni 7:30-32, 36-37; Alma 12:9-10; 13:22-26.

¹³⁸ Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 2, ‘The Exclusion by Misrepresentation.’ It is probably no accident that the equality and fairness generated from the concept of personal revelation stimulated early growth in the 19th century LDS, as a reaction to a perceived hegemony on access to the Almighty by professional clergy. Indeed, the “theme of equality appears constantly throughout the Book of Mormon,” and Joseph Smith proclaimed the right of everyone to “enjoy a more intimate relationship with God” (see Gutjahr, *Book of Mormon*, 41).

¹³⁹ LDS, ‘Approaching Mormon Doctrine,’ LDS newsroom.

¹⁴⁰ Terry L. Givens and Philip L. Barlow (eds), *Oxford Handbook on Mormonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 127; cf. May, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 63. Givens and Barlow pass over quickly the potential arbitrariness of such “individual scriptural evaluation.”

¹⁴¹ Thomas Kirk, in J. Spencer Fluhman, *“A Peculiar People”* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) 51.

¹⁴² Chauncey C. Riddle, ‘Letter to Michael,’ *Ensign* 9 (Sept 1975), https://www.lds.org/ensign/1975/09/letter-to-michael?lang=eng&_r=2; accessed Apr 2015. The irony apparently is lost on Riddle as “personal revelation” is to prevail over “private interpretation of scripture.”

¹⁴³ Bruce McConkie, in Draper and Rhodes, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ‘The True Wisdom of God (2:6-8).’

¹⁴⁴ See Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 58; cf. Robert L. Millet, *Within Reach* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1995).

for myself if there were such a thing as personal revelation. Then...it came...I began to feel something special in my breast...ideas that appeared in my mind. These new ideas told me how to interpret passages of scripture.”¹⁴⁵ Lorenzo Snow, the 5th president of the LDS^C, experienced a “moment of revelation” and a “personal religious enlightenment” in the woods when he “received by perfect knowledge that there was a God...and that Joseph the Prophet had received the authority which he professed to have.”¹⁴⁶ Snow knew by “positive knowledge” that the gospel had been restored, for “the Holy Ghost imparted to me a knowledge as physical and demonstrative as that physical ordinance when I was immersed in the waters of baptism.”¹⁴⁷ From these reflections on personal revelation, basic epistemological assumptions are illustrated. For one LDS author, the “principle of epistemology” involves the “things of the Spirit.”¹⁴⁸ The “fullest knowledge of God [comes] through revelation rather than the exercise of human faculty of thought or reason or observation.”¹⁴⁹ There is an “insistence that the things of God can only be fully and truly known through revelation.”¹⁵⁰ Analysis of these epistemological assumptions is given below.

How does the theological issue of personal *revelation* impact LDS personal *interpretation* of the Bible? As Riddle implies,¹⁵¹ it is upon the reception of personal revelation that personal interpretation of ancient Scripture occurs. The conduit, as it were, through which personal interpretation of the Bible occurs, is personal revelation. Thus, in order to obtain an “in-depth, sound understanding of the doctrines of the gospel,” LDS authors write of the “personal responsibility” of their members to “search the scriptures.”¹⁵² Bruce

¹⁴⁵ See White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, 133. As a philosophy professor, Riddle only gave the highest grade to his students when he himself received a “revelation that the student had received a revelation or inspiration about the assignment” (see Chauncey Riddle, <http://chaunceyriddle.com/welcome/>; accessed Nov 2016). The subjectivity inherent in such an approach demonstrates the length to which personal revelation extends in LDS thinking.

¹⁴⁶ See Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 23;

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., cf. Clyde Williams, *Teachings of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984) 193-194. One would prefer to hear some epistemological reflections from Snow as to the precise meaning of “perfect knowledge”/“positive knowledge.” However, such reflections do not appear.

¹⁴⁸ See Matthew Burton Bowman, ‘History Thrown into Divinity: Faith, Knowledge, and the Telling of the Mormon Past,’ *Fides et Historia* 45.1 (Winter/Spring 2013) 76-91, citing 87.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 90.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 91.

¹⁵¹ “These new ideas told me how to interpret passages of scripture” (see White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, 133).

¹⁵² Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Standard Works.’

McConkie agrees with this private searching of the scriptures, so as to “interpret the Bible by revelation.”¹⁵³

To defend this perspective, LDS authors introduce an additional term. Personal understanding of Scripture is through the “*spirit of prophecy*.” The prophet Nephi in the BoM calls his readers to “give ear unto my words; for because the words of Isaiah are not plain unto you, nevertheless they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy” (2 Nephi 25:4). The LDS^C conclude from this passage that “the spirit of prophecy” is an essential component in “grasping the correct understanding of scripture.”¹⁵⁴ While others in his time were advocating similar interpretive assistance by the Spirit, Joseph Smith differed from “the historic Protestant tradition” by “making the Holy Spirit’s intervention external and propositional.”¹⁵⁵ LDS authors often refer to the spirit of prophecy as simply “the Spirit.” McConkie asserts that there is “absolutely no way” to understand the Bible “except by the power of the Spirit.”¹⁵⁶ An LDS^C writing expresses that “(a)s we read, ponder, and pray about the scriptures and ask God for understanding, the Holy Ghost will bear witness to us of the truth of these things.”¹⁵⁷ Similarly, Richard Hopkins writes, “acceptance of any interpretation requires the reader to seek spiritual confirmation from the Holy Spirit through prayer.”¹⁵⁸ Brigham Young agreed that scripture had to be interpreted “by the Spirit.”¹⁵⁹ In order to understand the scriptures, the “Holy Ghost” is “the only sure and universal communicator.”¹⁶⁰ The Holy Spirit “unlocks the Scriptures.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵³ McConkie, in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 207. However, McConkie qualifies this private interpretation, since individuals should interpret by revelation “only as long as their interpretations and perspectives [are] in harmony with those of Church leaders” (ibid.).

¹⁵⁴ M. Catherine Thomas, ‘Scripture, Interpretation within Scripture,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1284.

¹⁵⁵ Christopher C. Smith, ‘Joseph Smith in Hermeneutical Crisis,’ *Dialogue* 43.2 (Sum 2010) 86-108, citing 91.

¹⁵⁶ McConkie, *New Witness*, 400.

¹⁵⁷ LDS^C, *Gospel Principles*, 49; cf. Joseph Smith Translation—Matthew 1:37, PGP (a short section of the JST (‘Joseph Smith—Matthew’) is included in the *Pearl of Great Price*). According to Joseph Smith, the difference between Mormons and other Christians was “the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Smith, in George Albert Smith, *History of the Church* 4:42; cf. Hutchinson, ‘LDS Approaches,’ 113, 115; Bruce D. Porter, ‘Gift of the Holy Ghost,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 543-544; D&C 20:27; 121:26-32; 42:61; 59:4; 76:5-10; for BoM corroboration, see Alma 5:45-56 and 2 Nephi 25:4). One wonders if understanding here is less about interpretation, and more about confirmation of church doctrine.

¹⁵⁸ Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, 35.

¹⁵⁹ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 104, cf. 205-206; Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr., ‘Review of “Power from on High: the Development of Mormon Priesthood,”’ *Church History* 66.2 (Jun 1997) 382-383.

¹⁶⁰ Edward J. Brandt, in Carmack (ed.), *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, 64.

¹⁶¹ Roger R. Keller, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 42.

While personal Bible interpretation through the Spirit is advocated, Dallin Oaks nevertheless cautions against an “over-emphasis on study for interpretation.”¹⁶² This can result in a “lesser portion” of the Bible. This phrase comes from a BoM prophet named Alma. Oaks explains, “(i)f we depend only upon our own reasoning or the scholarship or commentaries of others, we will never obtain the understanding that can come only by revelation. Persons in that circumstance will be left forever with what Alma calls ‘the lesser portion of the word.’”¹⁶³ Oaks warns the reader of the Bible not to “reject continuing revelation,” nor to “limit learning to academic study,” because such a reader will receive only this “lesser portion.”¹⁶⁴ Joseph Smith believed that study and learning were admissible, as long as one did not neglect to “hearken unto the counsels of God.”¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, in the early years of the movement, “logical thinking” as well as “analytical thought” were at times rejected in favor of “supernatural experience.”¹⁶⁶ Many early converts received confirmation of the LDS^C faith not through investigation and study, but “through revelations and visions.”¹⁶⁷ The *sine qua non* experience was a “manifestation of the Spirit,” the still, small voice, i.e., “some kind of inner confirmation.”¹⁶⁸ While study and learning are encouraged, personal revelation and its subsequent interpretation, accomplished through the Spirit, remains paramount.¹⁶⁹

2.2.3. *Prophetic revelation and interpretation as an illustration of continuing revelation*

Prophetic revelation and interpretation also holds prominence. “The First Presidency maintains the exclusive authority to interpret scripture and doctrine for the whole church.”¹⁷⁰ The Mormon Prophet “alone can give authoritative interpretations of scriptures that are binding on the Church...He alone is the

¹⁶² Oaks, ‘Scripture Reading,’ LDS website.

¹⁶³ Ibid. See Alma 12:10: “And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word” (cf. Alma 12:11; Moses 5:58).

¹⁶⁴ Oaks, ‘Scripture Reading,’ LDS website. One wonders if his words and commentary are to be included in this caution.

¹⁶⁵ See David P. Wright, ‘Joseph Smith’s Interpretation of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon,’ *Dialogue* 31.4 (Wint 1998) 181-206, citing 206 n53.

¹⁶⁶ See Abanes, *One Nation*, 104

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 41.

¹⁶⁹ See Davies and Madsen, ‘Scriptures,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1280. In other passages, the BoM exhorts its reader to attain knowledge by inspiration, i.e., revelation (e.g., Moroni 10:4) and warns about being learned (e.g., 2 Nephi 9:28; 26:20; 28:4,15).

¹⁷⁰ Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young (eds), *Standing Apart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 13. The “First Presidency” is composed of the Mormon Prophet and his two counselors, which in turn is modeled on the biblical precedent of Peter, James and John (Matt 17:1; Mark 5:37; 14:33). For the start of the “First Presidency” by Brigham Young, see Abanes, *One Nation*, 209; Robinson, *How Wide*, 58, 65, 140.

mouthpiece of God to his people.”¹⁷¹ In fact, in “every dispensation, Jesus Christ has sent prophets to teach His gospel to God’s children on earth.”¹⁷²

The truth of the declarations of LDS^C authorities, including biblical interpretation, is generally unquestioned.¹⁷³ However, most LDS members would distance themselves from the extreme statements of “When the prophet speaks, the debate is over”;¹⁷⁴ or “When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done. When they propose a plan—it is God’s plan. When they point the way, there is no other that is safe.”¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, they hold that their prophets have the authority to provide “doctrinal and application insights for the Saints,” and they “happily defer to them in that divinely appointed role.”¹⁷⁶ LDS scholar Robert Millet asserts that “doctrinal truth” does not come “through scholars but through the revelations of God to apostles and prophets. And if such a position be labeled as narrow, parochial, or anti-intellectual, then so be it. I cast my lot with the prophets.”¹⁷⁷

Since Scripture is “commonly misunderstood,” the LDS^C depends on “the prophets’ and apostles’ interpretations” of Scripture in order to avoid misunderstandings.¹⁷⁸ Without “a living prophetic voice” to interpret the Bible, the “range of possible misunderstanding is significantly increased.”¹⁷⁹ Early LDS leaders distanced themselves from other churches, because “(w)ithout

¹⁷¹ Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 54; cf. Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 244; Oman, ‘Living Oracles,’ *passim*. Today, LDS members even “celebrate the [prophetic] office with rousing anthems such as ‘We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet.’” By doing so, they “publicly avow their support of the living tenant of that office of ‘prophet, seer and revelator’” (Givens, *People of Paradox*, 15). Not only does the Prophet interpret Scripture for the church, he also receives new revelations concerning beliefs and doctrine. This is, however, outside the purview of this dissertation.

¹⁷² LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 13. Throughout history, one of the features of a “true church” was the presence of “Living Prophets and Apostles” (LDS^C, *Primary* 5, 2:7).

¹⁷³ See Jacob Baker, in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 38.

¹⁷⁴ N. Eldon Tanner, in D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997) 872.

¹⁷⁵ LDS^C, ‘Ward Teachers’ Message, ‘Sustaining the General Authorities of the Church,’ *Improvement Era* 48.6 (June 1945) 354. *Improvement Era* was the official magazine of the LDS church from 1897 to 1970, and can be found at <https://archive.org/details/improvementera>; accessed Nov 2014. Concerning the statement of “the thinking has been done,” LDS President George A. Smith later responded that it grossly misrepresents the “true ideal of the church” (see Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 831-832; cf. Givens, *People of Paradox*, 18; White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, 129).

¹⁷⁶ Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, Introduction, ‘The ‘Good News’ is Still Good News.’

¹⁷⁷ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 2, ‘How We Know.’ This apparent desire to be anti-intellectual (by intelligible reasoning no less) and “side with the prophets” does not provide much confidence for academic dialogue. Furthermore, one wonders if *his* words contain “doctrinal truth,” considering their source.

¹⁷⁸ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 22. Apostles are Mormon leaders that assist the Prophet. See Siebach, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 464.

¹⁷⁹ Davies and Madsen, ‘Scriptures,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopædia of Mormonism*, 1279.

prophets—without authority—the gates were unbolted and thrown open to the whirlwinds of scholarly second-guessing and one-upmanship.”¹⁸⁰ Given the LDS^C view that their church is “a living, dynamic constitution,” and even “a living tree of life” (D&C 1:30), they are “commanded to pay heed to the words of the living oracles (D&C 90:3-5).”¹⁸¹ The Prophet becomes the fulcrum on which the interpretive weight of the church rests, for “...what God has said to apostles and prophets in the past is always secondary to what God is saying directly to his apostles and prophets now.”¹⁸² A preference for the living prophet is further verified by “the New Testament model”:

For Latter-Day Saints, the church’s guarantee of doctrinal correctness lies primarily in the living prophet, and only secondarily in the preservation of the written text. This is, after all, the New Testament model. The ancient apostles and prophets themselves were the primary oracles...[but] what makes Scripture...inspired...is not its written character but its revealed character. Writing it down preserves the inspired revelation and makes it accessible to the wider church, but that is secondary to the original revelation itself. The [prophetic] record of revelation cannot logically be more authoritative than the experience of revelation.¹⁸³

The LDS^C frequently focuses on the Prophet over and against that of the ancient Scriptures, because of their belief that a “living voice is generally richer than any writing.”¹⁸⁴ Brigham Young even postulated that books were “nothing to me now” because they “do not convey the word of God direct to us now.”¹⁸⁵ Millet states: “We love the scriptures, but ours is a living Church; not all of the mind and will of the Almighty can or should be written down.”¹⁸⁶

Prophetic authority began with the life and ministry of Joseph Smith. At an early stage in the LDS^C movement, Hiram Page professed to receive a

¹⁸⁰ Stephen D. Ricks, in Susan Easton Black (ed.), *Expressions of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1996) 179.

¹⁸¹ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 1, ‘Reaching Out’; cf. Wilford Woodruff, in Oman, ‘Living Oracles,’ 1.

¹⁸² Robinson, *How Wide*, 59; cf. Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 57; Oaks, ‘Scripture Reading,’ LDS website.

¹⁸³ Robinson, *How Wide*, 58. These ideas are obviously in consonance with the LDS^C concept of the Bible as *derivative* revelation, mentioned above (Robinson, *How Wide*, 57).

¹⁸⁴ Davies and Madsen, ‘Scriptures,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1279. According to the LDS^C, it is regrettable that other Christian traditions seemingly gag the prophets and hustle them “off-stage” once they have written down their message (see Robinson, *How Wide*, 58).

¹⁸⁵ See Arbaugh, *Revelation*, 3. Brigham Young also asserted, “I would rather have the living oracles than all the writing in the books” (see Davies and Madsen, ‘Scriptures,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1278; cf. Rodger M. Payne, ‘Review of *Mormons and the Bible* by Philip Barlow,’ *Church History* 63.1 (Mar 1994) 163-165, citing 164).

¹⁸⁶ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 5, ‘The Scriptures.’

revelation on behalf of the entire church. However, Smith received a revelation in response: “no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church excepting my servant Joseph Smith” (D&C 28:2; cf. D&C 26:2; 107:64-67, 91-92).¹⁸⁷ As a result of this revelation, as well as the FV, Smith “felt his access to Deity was more direct than the written word itself; his authority was therefore at least as great as the text’s.”¹⁸⁸ This authority continued throughout his life and ministry.¹⁸⁹ He combined his reading of the Bible with his “appeal to an authority none could challenge—that of direct revelation from God” in order to “cut the Gordian knot of religious uncertainty.”¹⁹⁰ He “streamlined interpretation and removed the onus from the individual believer to glean the ‘plain’ message of scripture.”¹⁹¹ Therefore, “without Smith and the future Prophets, there could be no way to know and understand the Bible.”¹⁹² According to David Paulsen, in order to arrive at the meaning of biblical passages, instead of using reason to exegete biblical passages, “Joseph bypassed any such hermeneutical exercise, instead claiming divine revelation and authority.”¹⁹³

The perspective on continuing revelation, then, with its specific manifestations of personal and prophetic revelation, is a crucial presuppositional matter that illuminates the LDS^C worldview. After noting a number of hermeneutical effects of this presuppositional matter, I will explore how, and why, an “exclusive” prophetic interpretation can exist simultaneously alongside of personal interpretation.

¹⁸⁷ In the same revelation, however, the LDS^C doctrine of “common consent” is defended: “For all things must be done in order, and by common consent in the church...” (D&C 28:13). Though seemingly at odds, there exists a “sustaining voice of the members of the Church,” alongside the authority of the Prophet (see Robert T. Quinn, ‘Common Consent,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 297-299, citing 298).

¹⁸⁸ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 78-79.

¹⁸⁹ Anecdotal, a startling event in the early years of the movement captures the authoritative atmosphere surrounding Joseph Smith. In the state of Ohio, after being tarred and feathered by disillusioned former members, Smith was scheduled to preach the following morning. After his wife laboriously scrubbed and cleaned him most of the night, he ascended to the pulpit, still carrying scars and bruises: “With a true instinct for the occasion, he thundered no denunciations, but preached as usual, and the quiet dignity of his sermon added to the aura of heroism fast beginning to surround him” (Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (2nd edn; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971) 119-120).

¹⁹⁰ Kenneth H. Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 51.

¹⁹¹ Willsky, ‘(Un)plain Bible,’ 19; cf. 22. It is unknown to what extent individual Bible readers of Smith’s day desired the removal of such onus.

¹⁹² Willsky, ‘(Un)plain Bible,’ 19.

¹⁹³ Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’ 128.

2.2.4. *The hermeneutical effect of continuing revelation*

Joseph Smith claimed to be epistemologically one with God: “I had seen a vision, I knew it, and I knew that God knew it.”¹⁹⁴ Such an assumption, however, is highly speculative, and in spite of the words of Givens,¹⁹⁵ propels Smith to the realm of self-interest and potential self-deception. The views of Gadamer are instructive: “There is no claim of definite knowledge, with the exception of one: the acknowledgement of the finitude of human being in itself.”¹⁹⁶ The absolute epistemic certainty that Smith exhibits runs afoul of more intuitive thinking on the matter. Since each person in a dialogue is “the not-being of the other,” Friedrich Schleiermacher recognized that, “it is never possible to eliminate non-understanding completely.”¹⁹⁷ In the previous chapter, I mentioned a scientistic mentality that claimed epistemic certainty and an objective purity uncontaminated by subjectivity. This was an empiricist and idealist legacy inherited from the Enlightenment.¹⁹⁸ Smith’s strong assertions reflect these same negative tendencies. In this chapter, we have seen the claim that the “fullest knowledge of God” comes through revelation.¹⁹⁹ However, this epistemological assertion is passed over quickly. Indeed, significant epistemological concerns are collapsed into simplistic declarations, e.g., “I had seen a vision...and I knew that God knew it,”²⁰⁰ or Lorenzo Snow’s “perfect knowledge”/“positive knowledge.”²⁰¹ The lack of engagement with the complexities of epistemology, as well as their strident views on epistemic certainty, illustrate the departure of the LDS^C from accepted hermeneutical perspectives.

There is a disconcerting comparison between revelation and reason. The foundational belief of knowing God by revelation is the result of a rational

¹⁹⁴ See Jessee et al., (eds), *Joseph Smith Papers*, 218.

¹⁹⁵ Smith “never admitted a particle of possible self-deception” (Givens, *People of Paradox*, 22).

¹⁹⁶ H.-G. Gadamer, ‘The Science of the Life-World,’ in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.), *The Later Husserl and the Idea of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1972) 173-185, citing 185.

¹⁹⁷ See Wolfgang Iser, *The Range of Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000) 47; see also the “universal potential for misunderstanding” in Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 71.

¹⁹⁸ See Wright, *Christianity and Critical Realism*, 3-4, 13.

¹⁹⁹ Bowman, ‘History Thrown into Divinity,’ 87-91.

²⁰⁰ See Joseph Smith in Jessee et al., *Joseph Smith Papers*, 218.

²⁰¹ See Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 23; cf. Williams, *Teachings of Lorenzo Snow*, 193-194.

conclusion concerning the nature of the FV.²⁰² That is, the external data of a revelatory event, the FV, is analyzed, summarized and evaluated rationally, with the resulting epistemological judgment that God is known only through revelation, and not reason.²⁰³ This partly responds to the issue mentioned in the previous chapter concerning the epistemological ramifications and hermeneutical consequences of LDS author James Faulconer's seemingly ambiguous statement of "Scripture is more important than rational explanation."²⁰⁴ The utilization of *rational explanation* by Faulconer is employed to disparage *rational explanation* and elevate Scripture.

Furthermore, the bifurcation of revelation from reason, far from elevating Scripture over against that of human reason, presents numerous epistemological challenges: "the sharp distinction between the 'supernatural' and the 'rational' *is itself a product of Enlightenment thinking*, and to emphasize the 'supernatural' at the expense of the 'rational' or 'natural' is itself to capitulate to the Enlightenment worldview."²⁰⁵ This capitulation to a scientific perspective is an unintended consequence of LDS^C thinking on revelation. Furthermore, the affirmation of the centrality of Scripture does not automatically discount reason. A simplistic view, at times evident even in historic Christianity, is the "Bible only" perspective. Yet, in response, Richard Hooker, writing in the 16th century, "insisted that all reality is governed by natural law, which is itself supremely rational, deriving from, and being the expression of, God's own supreme 'reason.'"²⁰⁶ For Hooker, reason was not "an entirely separate source of information, which could then be *played off against* scripture and/or tradition."²⁰⁷ Hooker concluded, "not that scripture should be judged at the bar of 'reason' and found wanting, but that in reading and interpreting scripture we must do so

²⁰² On the historical importance of the FV during the early years of the 20th century, see LDS author Flake, 'Re-Placing Memory,' 81-85. She relates how continuing revelation, along with a new emphasis on the FV, became prominent only after 1905. This was due to the official repudiation of plural marriage in 1890. There was a need to shore up potential member loss after this repudiation: "The First Vision contained all the elements necessary to fill the historical, scriptural, and theological void created by the abandonment of plural marriage" (ibid., 83). Further investigation into plural marriage is covered in chapter three.

²⁰³ However, it should be noted that some mainstream Christians operate under similar assumptions. Priority is given to human reason. Demonstrating a legacy from the Enlightenment, biblical criticism has come to mean an assumption that the critic had a right to pass judgment on the truth claims of the Bible (Moisés Silva, in Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 282).

²⁰⁴ Faulconer, 'Rethinking Theology,' 180. Similarly, Mauro Properzi writes that "Mormonism makes direct revelation the supreme source of its epistemology" (Properzi, *Mormonism and the Emotions*, 5).

²⁰⁵ Wright, *People of God*, 10, emphasis by author.

²⁰⁶ See Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 79.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 82.

not arbitrarily, but with clear thinking and informed historical judgment.”²⁰⁸ The priority of revelation by the LDS^C at the expense of reason is a challenging assertion to maintain.

There are additional hermeneutical ramifications of this presupposition of continuing revelation. Given the need for relevant and timely revelation for contemporary issues, the likely instinct of the LDS^C is to avoid the meaning of the ancient text, and seek contemporary significance. This focus on significance initially aligns itself with E.D. Hirsch’s views, especially given Hirsch’s separation of meaning from significance.²⁰⁹ However, by insisting on hermeneutical objectivity—that the author is the determiner of textual meaning,²¹⁰ and that the task of interpretation is to discover what the author meant²¹¹—the views of Hirsch are distanced from the hermeneutical activity of the LDS^C. He was significantly more tethered to the text than Joseph Smith and other LDS authors.²¹² The issue of meaning vs. contemporary significance is a hermeneutical topic that many LDS authors appear to ignore. Furthermore, there may be inherent dangers in the focus on new and novel revelation. It is axiomatic that that “which is new is always exciting, and there is an inevitable tendency for its importance to be overestimated.”²¹³ It appears that the LDS^C assumptions on relevant revelations is at least a partial answer to the question in the previous chapter of how to evaluate the place and impact of “continuing revelation,” especially in contrast to the ancient and static state of the Bible. The novelty of modern appears to obscure the relevancy of the ancient.

The LDS^C claims that other traditions convey to God, essentially, “no more” revelation. The implication is that while other Bible believers are communicating this limitation to God, they allow God to continue speaking.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. Also, Wright mentions Tertullian’s famous question of “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” A similar question would be, “What has reason to do with revelation?” In fact, Wright postulates that reason, clarity of thought and discourse “make their contributions to Christian understanding” (Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 78-79).

²⁰⁹ See Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 496; Burhanettin Tatar, *Interpretation and the Problem of the Intention of the Author: H.-G. Gadamer Vs. E.D. Hirsch* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1998) 117-118.

²¹⁰ See E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) 249. “If the meaning of a text is not to be the author’s, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to the meaning of the text” (ibid., 15).

²¹¹ See Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 48. For a response to Hirsch’s views, see ibid., 48-53; Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 137-138; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 495-497. For Hirsch’s contribution concerning the meaning intended by the author at the time of the composition of the text, see Moritz, ‘Critical but Real,’ 176-178. Moritz also sees similarities between the critical realist approach of Wright and Hirsch’s views (ibid., 182-183).

²¹² Having said that, in his quest for authorial intention, Hirsch ironically moves outside of the text.

²¹³ Neill and Wright, *Interpretation*, 161.

This “permission” is based on the fact that the Bible doesn’t explicitly “end” the process of revelation. However, we have noted the epistemological difficulty with arguments from silence. Current LDS^C thinking, then, is established by biblical content (or lack thereof). Hermeneutically speaking, the ancient text simultaneously tempers its relevance by first describing (and then emphasizing) continuing revelation, yet also legitimizes its validity by being interpreted and applied.

A highly individualized interpretation of Scripture is an integral part of LDS^C hermeneutics.²¹⁴ Nonetheless, we have seen that literary texts exist externally from the interpreter. There is conceptuality embodied in the text that is “other” than the interpreter. Yet, the individualistic interpretation espoused by the LDS^C engenders a strong possibility of masking the ontological realism of the biblical text. The conceptuality embodied in the text is potentially obscured, with individualistic interpretation ignoring the content of the external text. In the previous chapter, I noted a full-blown postmodern perspective that exaggerates epistemic relativism by implying that only the *interpretations* of texts actually exist.²¹⁵ Personal interpretation mirrors this postmodern perspective. Similarly, knowledge of the Bible essentially becomes individualized, and is reduced to mere sensory experience. The reduction of the ancient text to sense data (i.e., the “spiritual confirmation of the truthfulness of Church doctrine”²¹⁶), leaves open the question of whether the external world exists—which, as we have seen, is an important aspect of our framework of Critical Realism. Therefore, we note a consonance between the personal interpretation advocated by the LDS^C and phenomenism, where the ontological reality of the text is essentially ignored, and the focus instead bends back to the interpreter’s perception of the text.²¹⁷ The subjectivity of LDS^C personal interpretation highlights numerous problems inherent in an individualistic approach to the Bible.

The aforementioned ability of Joseph Smith to “bypass” hermeneutical activity²¹⁸ reflects a lack of awareness of many current hermeneutical notions. For instance, although not commenting on anything directly related to the

²¹⁴ The LDS^C is not alone here, given the “common [individualistic] devotional reading by thousands” in conservative Christian traditions, as well as the “cavalier approaches to interpretation”—especially in typical church Bible studies (see Silva, in Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 291, 310).

²¹⁵ See problems with this in Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 112.

²¹⁶ LDS^C, ‘Approaching Mormon Doctrine,’ LDS newsroom.

²¹⁷ See the perspectives on phenomenism in Wright, *People of God*, 34-35.

²¹⁸ Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’ 128.

LDS^C faith, George Stroup wrote decades ago that “(t)o confess Christian faith is to engage in a hermeneutical activity—an exercise of reason and intellect that entails interpretation and understanding.”²¹⁹ Furthermore, the “process of reconstructing personal identity in the context of the faith narratives of the Christian community is a hermeneutical activity.”²²⁰ LDS^C views are in direct contradiction to Stroup. The possibility of bypassing any and all hermeneutical exercise in the interpretation of the Bible is an unsustainable premise.²²¹

It is important to note the striking priority of prophetic revelation, and the resultant subordination of the biblical text—precisely because of an interpretive use of the text itself—“the New Testament model.”²²² The Bible itself is used to point to something else—the “living prophet.” Yet, this “living prophet” appears to take precedence over the Bible. The “New Testament model” purportedly describes the “experience of revelation” of the living prophet as more authoritative than the “written text.”²²³ This assertion, however, as the result of a *biblical* interpretation, curtails the legitimacy and relevancy of the Bible.

I noted the views of Millet: “doctrinal truth” does not come “through scholars but through the revelations of God to apostles and prophets. And if such a position be labeled as narrow, parochial, or anti-intellectual, then so be it. I cast my lot with the prophets.”²²⁴ Millet emphasizes freedom and flexibility. However, interpretation is suppressed, or at least minimized, by this freedom of personal revelation. In fact, his statement implies an avoidance of interpretation, since he eschews “doctrinal truth”—which would presumably result from interpretation. He desires to avoid the constricting confines of “doctrine,” but in the process, the preference for freedom in personal revelation precludes him from an interpretive focus on ancient Scripture.

An additional difficulty evidenced here is the stark subject-object distinction implied in both personal and prophetic interpretation. The “subject,” whether the individual or the prophet, receives what is considered the “object”—a revelation or an interpretation. Yet, the emphasis remains on the subjecthood of the prophet or individual interpreter. While this notion

²¹⁹ George W. Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1964) 200.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ This will be further explicated in chapter eight under the section: “The inescapability of interpretation.”

²²² See Robinson, *How Wide*, 58.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 2, ‘How We Know.’

would be acceptable as part of a reader-response hermeneutic,²²⁵ for critical realists, it does not show appropriate respect for the rights of the text. This idea of a sovereign subjecthood is a “myth of the Enlightenment.”²²⁶ There are problems with this “continued reliance on the subject-object epistemological model.”²²⁷ It represents a discredited model of biblical interpretation where an interpreter acted as a “detached subject” who could survey the past, including biblical texts, “from a great height.”²²⁸ The all-knowing subject was seen as controlling a passive object. However, a detached subject is not in dialogue, but rather, carrying on a monologue. A true dialogue, strongly advocated by current hermeneutical thinking, occurs when interpreters are addressed by the ancient texts. Both the interpreter and the text have their own roles to play in dialogue.²²⁹ A responsible hermeneutic will avoid a stark subject-object distinction.

2.2.5. An additional hermeneutical effect: Priority of prophetic interpretation over personal interpretation

Prophetic interpretation apparently overrides personal interpretation. This discrepancy, however, is acknowledged by LDS authors: “In an inexplicable contradiction, Joseph was designated as the Lord’s prophet, and yet every man was to voice scripture, everyone to see God. That conundrum lies at the heart of Joseph’s Mormonism.”²³⁰ Roger Terry comments: “...the modern Church, as it was initially established, was both a theocracy and a democracy.”²³¹ Givens notes the paradoxical nature of their faith being “(f)ounded on the radical premise that direct revelation is the province of every individual, [although] Mormonism quickly ordered the flow of revelation in a kind of federal channeling of prerogatives that remain rigidly hierarchical even as every person

²²⁵ E.g., see Robert Detweiler (ed.), ‘Reader Response Approaches to Biblical and Secular Texts,’ *Semeia* 31 (1985) 8; cf. Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 478-482; Robin Parry, ‘Reader-Response Criticism,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 658-661; E. V. McKnight, ‘Literary Criticism,’ in Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (eds), *DJG* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992) 473-480, citing 476.

²²⁶ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, viii.

²²⁷ Ibid. On this subject-object distinction, see also Fred Lawrence, ‘Review of *Truth and Method*,’ *Religious Studies Review* 3.1 (Jan 1977) 35-44, citing 40.

²²⁸ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 55; cf. Tatar, *Interpretation*, 115.

²²⁹ Gadamer, in McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 187.

²³⁰ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005) 175.

²³¹ Roger Terry, ‘Authority and Priesthood in the LDS Church. Part 1. Definitions and Development,’ *Dialogue*, 51.1 (Spr 2018) 1-37, citing 13.

is invited to seek unmediated access to God.”²³² LDS authors ponder: “How can Mormonism simultaneously be authoritarian yet individualistic, orthodox yet creedless, objectively imposed yet subjective, unified yet endlessly pliable and diverse?”²³³ Every believer may read and interpret the Bible, yet “doctrinal finality rests with apostles and prophets.”²³⁴ Notwithstanding these tensions, both personal and prophetic interpretation of ancient Scripture are foundational in their thinking. It is noteworthy that LDS authors admit this conundrum as an unavoidable aspect of their worldview. However, the issue is passed over quickly. The prophets are granted ultimate authority to interpret, yet all LDS members are encouraged to strive for their own personal revelations. The simple acceptance by the cited LDS authors of this “inexplicable contradiction”²³⁵ is another indication of the lack of hermeneutical and epistemological reflection by the LDS^C.

2.3. Potential label of a hermeneutical filter: “Systemic parameters”

At this point in our investigation, and before concluding our evaluation of the two foundational presuppositions, it is important to introduce the concept of “systemic parameters.” This final piece of conceptual scaffolding is needed to survey more clearly the five categories of uses of the Bible by the LDS^C. This term describes the phenomenon of a multi-faceted LDS^C “system,” composed of numerous overlapping, yet underlying matters—epistemological, historical, theological, ecclesiological, and sociological—all of which are crucial to the maintenance of the system and fuel the interpretive process itself. These foundational matters enable their hermeneutical activity, and could be described as a hermeneutical filter of the LDS^C. Both the lack of a published hermeneutic and the scarcity of discussion of many hermeneutical issues are challenges that involve an element of speculation in many of my assessments, hence, the phrase “systemic parameters.”

This comprehensive system, or “system-in-place,” means that, while the LDS^C is neither monolithic nor homogeneous, there are aspects that are

²³² Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 41-42.

²³³ Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, *A Kingdom Transformed* (2nd edn; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016) 5.

²³⁴ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Only True Church.’ This is curiously written, since it is from scholars.

²³⁵ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 175.

indicative of a closed system. The system can be viewed as a structure upheld by a number of supporting columns. Each column is crucial to the viability of the system itself. Such columns include the Great Apostasy and the subsequent need for Restoration, the supposed possession of the “fullness” of the Gospel, as well as continuing revelation and modern scriptures. Other columns include the following. The Bible remains one of their “Standard Works,” although, as we have seen, they claim that it has been tainted. The existence and legitimacy of the Book of Mormon is essential. Also included is the life of Joseph Smith, along with the First Vision, his prophetic authority, his later plural marriage, his murder, and the influence of the 19th century context on his life.

The 19th century context evidenced, among other realities, a frontier mentality; the question of the salvation of the indigenous peoples in the Americas (which was partially resolved with the publication of the BoM); and a freedom from authority, not only ecclesiologically, but also politically.²³⁶ The 19th century also evinced an anti-institutionalism, an anti-creedalism, and an unstable American religious culture that was “contentiously pluralistic, eclectic, and syncretistic from the outset.”²³⁷ This lack of stability created widespread denominational infighting. All of these 19th century realities played a part in the life of Joseph Smith and the early LDS^C. Additionally, at the time of the inception of the movement, the resolution of painful issues was urgent—whether high mortality rate for infants, or the question of a “capricious” God sending people to hell. The ability to provide answers was a significant aspect of early recruitment of members.²³⁸ Therefore, again, the 19th century context is an important column in the LDS^C system.

Also indispensable is the priesthood, which only male LDS believers possess. In addition, “legal administrators” are needed to lead the church and direct a centralized headquarters. The Temple ordinances and sealing power are also integral to their system. Finally, there is a focus on the pragmatics of faith.

The system as a whole, then, labeled as “systemic parameters” and composed of a number of essential columns, is a hermeneutical filter that drives much of their interpretation of the Bible. LDS author Philip Barlow implies the existence of a Mormon system when he writes that “(u)nless one understood

²³⁶ “The bases of social order were in a state of disarray, and as a result of the nation’s having cut its ties with England and her history, a clear lack of grounding in the past was evident” (Shipps, *Mormonism*, 34).

²³⁷ Shepherd and Shepherd, *Kingdom Transformed*, 15.

²³⁸ See Beckwith et al., *New Mormon Challenge*, 43-48.

Mormon theological insights, one did not really understand and believe the Bible.”²³⁹ That is, if one does not comprehend the characteristics of the system before interpreting the Bible—proper understanding will not occur. Early Mormon leader Lowell Bennion said that a requisite for understanding the Bible was being “in line with gospel fundamentals.”²⁴⁰ These are implicit admissions by LDS authors of the need for a hermeneutical filter. The structure supposes that all columns are in place, and all features of the system are assumed to be true, relevant and valid. However, the main interest at this point is not to evaluate the hermeneutical ethics at play here, but to introduce a speculative concept that appears to drive their uses of the Bible.

2.4. Hermeneutical dynamics of LDS^C presuppositions

I have attempted to establish the external data of two important LDS^C presuppositions. I have demonstrated an asymmetry concerning the Bible as well as the doctrine of continuing revelation. These presuppositions give us important insights into their worldview.

In sum, a number of hermeneutical dynamics are present with these presuppositions. As I wrote in the first chapter, presuppositions are not necessarily negative or an indication of a distorting prejudice. However, we have seen how continuing revelation leads directly to interpretive assumptions about how ancient scripture speaks specifically of continuing revelation. This is problematic, as it reflects a simultaneous validation and relativization of ancient scripture. We have also encountered hermeneutical inconsistencies that are partly explained by the church’s asymmetrical view of the Bible. An interpretive posture is manifestly evident—at times irrespective of the ancient context of the biblical text. The question remains as to the validity, applicability and legitimacy of the LDS^C filter of “systemic parameters”. Whether or not their commitment to this filter results in displacing hermeneutical accountability will continue to be a major subject of our investigation.

Following this inquiry into presuppositional matters, the following five chapters describe specific uses of the Bible by the LDS^C.²⁴¹ Our first four categories (literal, allegorical, sociological and emendatory interpretation) allow me to keep the focus in the *interpretive* realm. To a certain degree, these four

²³⁹ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 104.

²⁴⁰ Bennion, in *ibid.*, 223.

²⁴¹ See Appendix #1 for a succinct summary of the biblical examples of these categories.

categories respect the ancient text, even if LDS interpreters engage in an emendation or allegorization of the biblical text. However, the fifth category of “re-authoring,” is *non-interpretive*.²⁴² It is characterized by uses of the Bible that implicitly claim to be interpretive, but actually amount to a *de facto* creation of a completely new text. A biblical word or phrase is lifted from its context, and re-used in a different context with a new meaning, with no mooring or connection to its original context. Strictly speaking, then, the fifth category of “re-authoring” is not an interpretive practice, even if it parades as one. It only *appears* to be interpretive. However, it describes one of the uses of the Bible by the LDSC, and thus warrants an investigation.

²⁴² I am using this concept of “re-authoring” as it is used by Moritz (see Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 133). For Moritz, a re-authoring *purports* to be interpretive, even if it is not.

CHAPTER 3

LITERALITY AND THE LDS CHURCH

The LDS^C frequently champions a literal interpretation of the Bible. Before I explore numerous examples of these interpretations, however, we need to gain clarity on the topic of literality. I will first investigate the contrast between literal and figurative interpretation. Secondly, I will focus on a specific methodological practice, advocated by some observers in the mainstream academy, that indicates, essentially, a “canonical” hermeneutic. Given its connection to literality, this methodology has the potential to shed light on, as well as act as a foil for, the literal interpretation of the Bible by the LDS^C. Thirdly, I will detail the difficulties of defining literality, LDS or otherwise. I believe that LDS authors have overlooked this difficulty when they assert that literal interpretation is their predominant interpretive approach. Finally, I will describe my understanding of what is occurring when the LDS^C “literally” interprets the biblical text. As will become apparent, what they maintain is literal interpretation, I suggest is *literalistic*.

3.1. Considerations, questions, and concepts of literality

Our first examination is the conceptual comparison of literal and figurative aspects of interpretive practice. This will be the first step of an exploration into various nuances of the term “literal,” and will help us gain clarity on this complex topic. Specifically, we need a grid through which we can better explore the literal interpretations by the LDS^C.

3.1.1. Literal vs. figurative

How do we understand the similarities, as well as differences, between literal and figurative interpretations? An important issue is the extent to which a text connotes a one-to-one correspondence between the reality described and the locutions used to describe that reality. Aristotle labeled as mimesis the process of how things are represented by words. The correspondence between the

locution and its referent, or how things are represented in words, is seen more acutely in literal interpretation, in contrast to a figurative interpretation. A literal claim is advanced if there is a direct correspondence between the text and the empirical world. This comports even in fictional writing—a literal door means a physical door, even in the implied world of fiction. This literal claim, as long as direct correspondence is maintained, holds either in the *fictional* empirical world, or the *physical* empirical world. James Barr comments: “To understand the text literally is to suppose that the referents are just as is stated in the text, the language of the text being understood in a direct sense.”¹ LDS author Richard Cummings recognizes this concept, since literality is “a distinct mind-set which presumes facticity in scriptural accounts, interprets scripture at face value, and by extension, tends to favor one-to-one equivalence over ambiguous multivalence.”² Barr also introduces a term to emphasize the convergence of the text with its referent: “*Physicality* affords a simple, commonsense, one-to-one correspondence between the entities referred to and the words of the text.”³ Kevin Vanhoozer concurs: “...the literal sense has been identified with ‘the sense of the letter,’ which in turn has been identified with the objects to which individual words refer.”⁴ When there is a one-to-one correspondence, then, between the words and the entities represented by those words, a literal sense is advanced.

However, there are additional considerations. Because of the various nuances of literality, we must “resist reducing the literal sense to its most primitive level, namely, the empirical objects named by individual words.”⁵ A simplistic view of mimesis is the claim that every biblical word says what it means.⁶ If ostensibly the language is about something else—the meaning is figurative/metaphorical. For example, the colloquial phrase “hit the road” does not illustrate a one-to-one correspondence between the language used and the reality the language refers to (e.g., physically pounding the street with hammer in hand). Rather, it deploys a figure of speech—a metaphorical catalyst for the reader (or hearer) to advance quickly. If, then, a speaker says, “let’s hit the road,” an audience is expected to understand this figurative meaning of rapid

¹ James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1973) 171.

² Richard J. Cummings, ‘Quintessential Mormonism: Literal-Mindedness as a Way of Life,’ *Dialogue* 15.4 (Wint 1982) 93-102, citing 93.

³ James Barr, in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 305, emphasis added.

⁴ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 304.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See Brian Cummings, ‘The Problem of Protestant Culture: Biblical Literalism and Literary Biblicism,’ *Reformation* 17.1 (2012) 177-198, citing 182, cf. 195.

advance. Biblically, for example, the “cross” has both literal and figurative senses. It refers to the physical, wooden cross of the crucifixion of Jesus,⁷ yet also connotes a figurative sense that centers on the climax of God’s redemptive work.⁸ A direct, one-to-one correspondence, then, presupposes an understanding of the standard meaning of the locution. However, words often have more than just a “standard meaning.” In other words, “a statement is literal if the primary or conventional meanings of the terms are intended, and metaphorical when associative meanings cause a semantic interplay between the terms that creates a dynamic new understanding of the subject.”⁹ Words are flexible, and often have different connotations, as illustrated by their literal or figurative senses.

There exists an all-too common assumption that “literal” is the opposite of “figurative.” Hans Frei makes the important point that, although the Reformers set the literal sense in opposition to allegory, they were not opposed to figural interpretation: “Far from being in conflict with the literal sense of biblical stories, figuration or typology was a natural extension of literal interpretation. It was literalism at the level of the whole biblical story and thus of the depiction of the whole of historical reality.”¹⁰ Concomitantly, G. B. Caird recognizes a confusion between “literal” and “real,” as well as an assumption in many dictionaries that literal simply means “not figurative or metaphorical.”¹¹ In fact, “literal and figurative language can refer to real entities, and both can refer to fictional entities. There is no logical correlation between literal and ‘true,’ or between metaphorical and ‘false.’”¹² In spite of this, as we will see, LDS thinkers seem to equate “literal” with “real” or “true.” They appear to assume that if a biblical text is not taken “literally,” the reader would be interpreting incorrectly. In response, it is important to insist that questions of truth and interpretation are not equivalent. The former is a function of epistemology and the latter of hermeneutics, and consequently, it would be simplistic to equate the two, as seems to be the case with some LDS thinkers.

⁷ E.g., “When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross” (Acts 13:29, NIV).

⁸ “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor 1:18, NIV).

⁹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 388–389.

¹⁰ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) 2; cf. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 119.

¹¹ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1980) 133.

¹² Craig L. Blomberg and Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010) 228 n32. Also, “the ‘truth’ of an utterance does not depend on its literal nature” (Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 389).

Authorial intention is also an important component regarding literality, as it is with a figurative or metaphorical sense. According to Wright, the *literal* sense is the sense originally intended—whether the statement is, in actuality, literal or figurative.¹³ Ultimately, of course, the “sense originally intended” refers to the intention of the *implied* author, that is, the authorial intention embedded in the text. Specifically, for Wright, the literal sense of a parable of Jesus “involves recognizing it *as* a parable, not an anecdote about something which actually happened.”¹⁴ A literal interpretation, then, “can include figurative senses, if they are intended [as such].”¹⁵ In light of many LDS^C interpretations explored below, LDS thinkers appear to overlook the fact that “the biblical text, literally interpreted, may itself point to a figural sense.”¹⁶ Indeed, for Wright, “the ‘literal’ sense actually means ‘the sense of the letter’; and if the ‘letter’—the actual words used by the original authors or editors—is metaphorical, so be it.”¹⁷

To summarize: a literal claim is illustrated if there is a direct correspondence between the text and the empirical world—if there is a one-to-one relationship between the locution of speech and the empirical reality that the language is applied to. On the other hand, if, evidently, an audience is expected to understand that a phrase or word does not exhibit a one-to-one correspondence between the language used and the reality the language refers to (e.g., “hit the road” referring to something other than a physical road), the sense is figurative/metaphorical. Furthermore, “literal” is not opposed to figurative, nor should it be automatically equated with what is “real” or “true.” Finally, a literal interpretation can include a figurative sense, if the implied author intended it in this way.

3.1.2. *An exploration into “canonical” interpretation as a foil for the interpretive practice of the LDS^C*

A “canonical” hermeneutic demonstrates a connection to literality. This theological hermeneutic emphasizes not only a communal aspect to interpretation, but, more importantly for our purposes, represents a grid through which the Bible can be *literally* interpreted. Brevard Childs viewed the

¹³ Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 135.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, emphasis by author.

¹⁵ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 117.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 73.

literal sense of a text as that which was present in its canonical context.¹⁸ He argued that the literal sense of the Bible is seen *not* in its literary context, but in its canonical context.¹⁹ According to Vanhoozer, “Childs believes that the literal sense will have religious value only in the context of the canon.”²⁰ For Francis Watson, a “relation to the centre” is an aspect of the literal sense.²¹ The death and resurrection of Jesus is the “centre” of a “canonical context,” which “serves not only to extend the scope of a written communication but also to impose certain restrictions on the communicative intention embodied in it.”²² In other words, “all communicative actions embodied in holy scripture are subject to the criteria established by the speech-act that lies at the centre of Christian scripture, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.”²³ Therefore, a literal interpretation of every biblical text would account for this “centre.” Watson continues: “Christian scripture is not a random assortment of texts,” but “it has a particular shape, characterized above all by the enclosure of a normative centre by the two distinct canonical collections, and that this must affect the literal interpretation of individual scriptural texts of both Testaments.”²⁴ Therefore, a “canonical” hermeneutic illustrates a type of grid through which Scripture can be literally interpreted.

However, is it appropriate for such a hermeneutic to take precedence in the interpretive process? And if so, is it feasible to use this kind of mainstream scholarship (Childs, Watson, etc.), in defense of the LDS^C? If an over-arching theological/canonical hermeneutic posits literality in their interpretation, is the LDS^C justified in their own literal approach? The exploration of specific literal interpretations by the LDS^C will allow me to answer these questions. But first, I need to outline the difficulties of the exact parameters of a literal interpretation, as well as my understanding of the “literalistic” interpretations of the LDS^C.

¹⁸ See Kevin Vanhoozer, ‘Hermeneutics, Text, and Biblical Theology,’ in Willem VanGemeren (ed.), *NIDOTTE* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 1:14-50, citing 37 n93; cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

¹⁹ See Brevard Childs, ‘The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem,’ in H. Donner et al. (eds), *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977) 80-93.

²⁰ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 309; cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 719; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible, Theology, and Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 229; Robert Wall, “The Canonical View,” in Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 120-141, citing 120; Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 113-119.

²¹ Francis B. Watson, *Text and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 123.

²² *Ibid.*, 119.

²³ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

3.1.3. *The challenges of determining the exact parameters of a “literal” interpretation*

The meaning of “literal,” LDS or otherwise, is debated. We briefly explored this with a comparison between literal and figurative interpretations. According to David Graham, the literal sense of a text “is itself not an unproblematic notion.”²⁵ Wright writes of “residual problems” as to the exact contours of “what the literal sense might be.”²⁶ Anthony Thiselton comments that “literal” is, in fact, “a slippery term that people use in many different ways.”²⁷ Vanhoozer admits that the “literal sense” is “by no means straightforward.”²⁸ Furthermore, there is a misleading assumption that “literal” always signifies “plain.” Simply put, a “(p)lain sense [is] not the same as literal. For literal might indeed be anything but plain, if the passage was itself complex and convoluted.”²⁹ We have already seen that a literal claim is advanced if there is a one-to-one correspondence between the locutions and the empirical reality referred to in the locutions. Nonetheless, there are further suggestions regarding the exact identification of a “literal” interpretation.

Kathryn Greene-McCreight postulates that the “literal sense” might indicate “the verbal sense,” i.e., “the givenness of the words.”³⁰ For Graham, a literal interpretation occurs when “one works out the meaning of the text while taking its verbal signs according to their proper usage.”³¹ Watson summarizes: “The notion that texts have a single, literal, *verbal meaning* ascribes a certain stability and solidity to the phenomenon of the text.”³² Watson also posits a reading where the “referential claim implied by the text” is “inseparable from its literal sense.”³³ This echoes my discussion of a one-to-one correspondence between locutions and their referents. Problems arise, however, with a narrow definition of “literal” as “the verbal sense.” For one, nothing significant or clarificatory is added to the discussion when one simply takes the phrases of

²⁵ David Graham, ‘Defending Biblical Literalism: Augustine on the Literal Sense,’ *Pro Ecclesia* 25.2 (Spr 2016) 173-199, citing 173.

²⁶ Wright, *People of God*, 19, emphasis by author. One residual problem resulted from Bible believers insisting on “the *literal or historical sense* of scripture as the arbiter of the meaning of the text,” in order to “keep allegorical interpretation at bay” (ibid.).

²⁷ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 4.

²⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 303.

²⁹ Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 79.

³⁰ Kathryn Greene-McCreight, ‘Literal Sense,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 455-456, citing 455; cf. Watson, *Text and Truth*, 110-115.

³¹ Graham, ‘Defending Biblical Literalism,’ 187.

³² Watson, *Text and Truth*, 107, emphasis added.

³³ Francis Watson, ‘Toward a Literal Reading of the Gospels,’ in Richard Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 195-218, citing 211.

“verbal sense” or “taking verbal signs according to their proper usage” as a substitute for the word “literal.” Furthermore, words form meaning with “an author’s particular use of language in a specific context.”³⁴ Meaning “is construed not at the level of the individual terms but at the level of the whole utterance or speech act.”³⁵ Words have histories and are flexible.³⁶ The “given sense” of a word does not remain static, and even the idea of “meaning” is complex, precisely because of the “givenness of the words.”³⁷ McLean writes that words do not always “say” what they mean, for they transmit meaning beyond the literal.³⁸

Greene-McCreight also postulates that the literal sense might mean, “the historical sense” i.e., “what really happened.”³⁹ Graham writes of “literal interpretation in terms of the referentiality of the text, in which the interpreter discerns how the text narrates past events.”⁴⁰ For instance, the Antiochene interpreters insisted that God’s revelation “was in history,” and therefore, “this history was the referent of the biblical text when interpreted literally.”⁴¹ According to Barr, there can “be no doubt about the importance of the historical dimension.”⁴² Although not necessarily advocating this approach, Vanhoozer writes that literality as historical reference “means identifying the events and persons to which it refers.”⁴³ Problems arise, however, with a narrow perspective on “literal” meaning as the historical referent. For example, Hans Frei maintained that in centuries past, literal interpretation was equated with a text’s historical reference, yet today such a restrictive reading of Scripture is

³⁴ See Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 173; cf. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (1961; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 203, 210; Wright, *People of God*, 116. Also: “the meanings of words depend finally on the concrete circumstances into which they were spoken” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (ed.), (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) xxxii).

³⁵ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 388. For example, Osborne comments on the isolated word “bear” when referencing a man, and its possible meanings at the level of a “whole utterance”: “does the man look like a bear, or is he as strong as a bear, or is he a ‘bear’ of a grader?” (ibid.).

³⁶ Neill and Wright, *Interpretation*, 86.

³⁷ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 203; cf., Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 21-22; Lester J. Hicks, ‘Review of *Scripture as Communication*,’ *JETS* 50.4 (December 2007) 816-818, citing 817.

³⁸ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 229. LDS author Madsen notes this complexity in that “theological vocabulary is notoriously vague” (Truman G. Madsen, in Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’ 37).

³⁹ Greene-McCreight, ‘Literal Sense,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 455.

⁴⁰ Graham, ‘Defending Biblical Literalism,’ 174.

⁴¹ See Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 115.

⁴² James Barr, ‘The Literal, the Allegorical, and Modern Biblical Scholarship,’ *JSTOT* 44 (1989) 3-17, citing 9.

⁴³ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 307.

difficult to sustain.⁴⁴ Neil MacDonald comments: “Frei is absolutely right in his claim that literal sense is not to be equated with historical reference.”⁴⁵ Barr points out that the historical dimension may mean different things: the intention of the writer “at the time of writing or editing,” “the earliest known form of the text,” or even a determination of “what really happened.”⁴⁶ Graham writes that literal interpretation “is not less an inquiry into the text’s reference to actual things or historical events, [but] it must transcend profane, reductionist literalisms in which the letter’s referent is understood exclusively within a mundane historical framework.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, equating literality with a historical referent is an inadequate recognition of the way that language works, for a historical referent is only one function of language. A “literal interpretation,” then, “is more than a univocally descriptive and exact presentation of historical factuality.”⁴⁸

Greene-McCreight postulates that the literal sense might mean “the authorial meaning,” i.e., “what the author really meant.”⁴⁹ We have already noted authorial intention in our discussion contrasting literal and figurative interpretations. The literal sense could connote what “the first writers intended,” i.e., “the whole expressed mind...of the human writer.”⁵⁰ The interpreter, then, seeks “to put himself in the writer’s linguistic, cultural, historical, and religious shoes.”⁵¹ I mentioned earlier that Critical Realism requires the biblical interpreter to view the text as external and independent. The ontological realism of texts results in “a *prima facie* claim on the reader, namely, to be construed in accord with its intended sense.”⁵² This “intended sense” is authorial, and is tethered to the text itself. Watson offers a defense of “authorial intention”:

To construe a series of marks as a series of words is already (in normal circumstances) to assume that these words are combined with the intention of communicating an intelligible meaning; and if the words objectively embody an intention to communicate, then that intention

⁴⁴ See Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, *passim*.

⁴⁵ Neil B. MacDonald, ‘Illocutionary Stance in Hans Frei’s The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative,’ in Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, Karl Möller (eds), *After Pentecost: Language & Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 2:312-328, citing 319.

⁴⁶ Barr, ‘The Literal,’ 9.

⁴⁷ Graham, ‘Defending Biblical Literalism,’ 190.

⁴⁸ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 307-308.

⁴⁹ Greene-McCreight, ‘Literal Sense,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 455.

⁵⁰ Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 74.

⁵¹ See Packer, in Carson and Woodbridge (eds), *Scripture and Truth*, 345.

⁵² Meyer, *Critical Realism*, xi, 17.

can only be that of the author...To disregard authorial intention would be to refuse to strive for intelligibility and to allow the text to fall into relative or complete opacity and thus to lose the communicative function without which it is nothing.⁵³

A problem emerges, however, if literal meaning is limited to what was understood by the author's "original audience," with the result that "the literal meaning of the text is perfectly stable and univocal, and its meaning in the past is its only meaning."⁵⁴ In addition, as we have discussed, how do we equate literality with authorial intention, if the "intention" was metaphorical? While authorial intention needs to be included in the discussion regarding "literal sense," it should not be reductionistically used to encompass the sole component of a literal interpretation. It is important to note that this discussion on literality with respect to authorial intention is epistemologically and hermeneutically distinct from the discussion on literality with respect to referentiality. In this investigation of the exact parameters of a "literal" interpretation, this distinction highlights the complexity of the discussion, and belies the simplistic declarations of LDS authors and their insistence on literal interpretation.

A further aspect of the literal sense focuses on the theological content in the biblical texts. Childs writes that a problem arose with "a severe tension between a flat, formalistic reading of the text's verbal sense" that was, in fact, "deaf to its theological content."⁵⁵ Since authors of Scripture proclaimed faith convictions, Schneiders writes, "the literal meaning of the text was understood to include primarily theological material in kerygmatic form."⁵⁶ Thus, "theological concerns were an integral part of the literal sense of the text."⁵⁷ This not only echoes the canonical hermeneutic I outlined above, but is also

⁵³ Watson, *Text and Truth*, 112-113.

⁵⁴ See Sandra Marie Schneiders, 'Faith, Hermeneutics, and the Literal Sense of Scripture,' *Theological Studies* 39.4 (Dec 1978) 719-736, citing 721. For the "intentionalist fallacy," see J. W. Montgomery, *God's Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology & Public Policy, Inc., 1974) 29-31; Philip B. Payne, 'Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author's Intention,' *JETS* 20.3 (Sept 1977) 243-252. For other problems concerning an exclusive focus on "authorial intention," see Thorsten Moritz, 'Project Hermeneutics,' Warehouse Theology website, <http://www.warehousetheology.com/hermeneutics/>; accessed Feb 2015. Moritz describes three North American theological institutions where a prevailing preference for the "literal meaning" existed, along with an unequivocal equivalence of this "literal meaning" with authorial intention. This preference was claimed to be the hermeneutical core of theological training.

⁵⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 724-725. The converse was also problematic, when "a theological and figurative rendering of the biblical text...ran roughshod over the language of the text to its lasting detriment" (ibid.).

⁵⁶ Schneiders, 'Faith, Hermeneutics,' 723.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

similar to Moberly, who sought to “take with full seriousness the integrity of the biblical text on its own terms: that is, to find the ‘spiritual meaning’ precisely in the ‘literal sense.’”⁵⁸ He wrote, “what the words of the biblical text say and mean,” i.e., the literal sense, should be contrasted with an “understanding at a deeper level that of which they speak”—i.e., the “spiritual” sense.⁵⁹ He saw the literal sense as a combination of the “letter” and the “spirit” of the biblical text, even defending a “holding together of ‘spirit’ and ‘letter.’”⁶⁰ The “letter” of biblical texts was to be respected when later insights, the “spirit,” rightly explained the significance of the text, with the result that, “the text is read literally when this spiritual sense is taken into account.”⁶¹ Concomitantly, Graham speaks of the literal sense being conveyed through the text’s theological content:

Scripture refers to a mysterious, transhistorical reality which exceeds its own textual, historical form. Human words cannot contain the Word, nor can a historical scientific framework adequately account for the text’s theological reference. The whole of Scripture, therefore, functions as an improper sign, its letter always pointing beyond itself.⁶²

However, while we can appreciate the theological focus on the content of Scripture evinced here, summarizing the literal sense as the combination of “spirit” and “letter” is a narrow and potentially individualistic reading of the ancient text.

Before summarizing this discussion on literality, we note that Greene-McCreight speaks for many when she considers how the role of the reader as well as of the community have become “of greater interest than any concept of fixity in the literal sense of the text as once understood.”⁶³ In addition, Stephen Fowl argues for a “multivoiced literal sense,” and writes that as far back as Thomas Aquinas many authors recognized that “literal” did not

⁵⁸ Moberly, *Bible, Theology and Faith*, 232.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* Thiselton considers Moberly’s views an “excellent discussion of the complexity of a ‘literal’ meaning” (see Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 4 n7).

⁶² Graham, ‘Defending Biblical Literalism,’ 197. For Graham, the term “improper” has the sense of figural, or allegorical (see *ibid.*, 183).

⁶³ Greene-McCreight, ‘Literal Sense,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 455–456.

incontrovertibly signify “only one meaning.”⁶⁴ Again, these observations emphasize the complexity of the topic under discussion.

To summarize what we have seen, the “literal sense” can encompass verbal meaning, the historical referent, authorial intention, and/or the theological/spiritual component. Literality cannot be limited, however, to any one of these categories. For my purposes, I reiterate my earlier conclusion: a literal claim is advanced if there is a one-to-one correspondence between the locutions and the reality that the locutions refer to. Other aspects can now be added. The verbal meaning of individual words remains important, since words are the “raw materials” of language. However, it must be emphasized that entire locutions make up a communicative act, and therefore, meaning comes from phrases, not isolated words.⁶⁵ Furthermore, while the historical referent cannot be *equated* with a literal sense, it is *aspect* of communicative action and, therefore, of a literal interpretation.⁶⁶ It is possible to maintain the importance of the historical referents of locutions, and at the same time, not deny that such locutions could carry figurative or metaphorical language. In addition, with Vanhoozer, the “literal sense” is “not a matter of locutions alone; every utterance has an illocutionary force as well.”⁶⁷ The impact intended by the author is a crucial component in a literal meaning. For Watson, the literal sense includes an illocutionary and perlocutionary force that is tied to the author’s intention: “...the literal sense is the sense intended by the author...What is intended in communicative action is that determinate meaning should be the vehicle of illocutionary and perlocutionary force.”⁶⁸ Since texts are “communicative actions,” they “seek to convey a meaning in order to evoke a particular response.”⁶⁹ Therefore, “(t)o grasp the verbal meaning and the illocutionary and perlocutionary force of a text is to understand the authorial intention embodied in it.”⁷⁰

In light of these additional insights, I can now give a fuller explanation. A literal interpretation is illustrated with a one-to-one correspondence between the locutions and the empirical reality that such locutions refer to. However, if,

⁶⁴ Stephen E. Fowl, ‘The Importance of a Multivoiced Literal Sense of Scripture: The Example of Thomas Aquinas,’ in A. K. M. Adam et al., (eds), *Reading Scripture with the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) 35.

⁶⁵ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 310.

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, 312.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Watson, *Text and Truth*, 115.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

ostensibly, the locutions do not describe an empirical reality, then the sense is figurative. A literal interpretation can include a figurative sense, if the implied author intended it as such. In addition, there is determinate meaning tied to the illocutionary intent of the implied author. The goal of the careful interpreter will be this determinate meaning.⁷¹ Epistemologically, taking into consideration these aspects of literality will militate against indeterminacy in the interpretive process.

3.1.4. *Literalistic interpretation by the LDS^C*

As a final introductory matter before viewing specific LDS^C interpretations, I propose that the literal interpretations by the LDS^C are better characterized as *literalistic*. I believe the LDS^C is insufficiently critical of their perspective on literality. Their interpretations presuppose a self-evident understanding of the empirical referentiality of the text with a direct correspondence between the text and external realities of the text. As I will detail with numerous relevant examples, their literalistic interpretations assume a one-to-one correspondence between the locution and the reality described—yet without consideration of authorial intent.

A *literalistic* sense, in contradistinction to a literal sense, occurs when the illocutionary aspect of the text is ignored—when an interpreter fails to appreciate the author’s intention in giving the utterance a certain force. Often, it is a wooden, thin interpretation that fails to go beyond the lexical meanings of words and expressions, and is a “word-for-word” translation that yields verbally exact versions.⁷² A literalistic interpretation occurs when an interpreter detects a one-to-one correspondence, yet from the perspective of the author, it was never intended. For example, as Vanhoozer argues, no one literally interprets Jesus’ words of “I am the door” (John 10:9)—in the sense of imagining Jesus being composed of wood and a doorknob.⁷³

In the first chapter, I maintained that Critical Realism requires the biblical interpreter to view the text as external and independent, with a conceptuality embodied in the text that is “other” than the interpreter. In addition, we have seen an “intended sense” of the text that must be a

⁷¹ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 302. In light of this determinate meaning, the interpreter will judge as “inadequate or incorrect” other interpretations of the same communicative act (*ibid.*).

⁷² See *ibid.*, 311.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 117.

controlling factor in interpretation. I can now add the concept of literality. The intended sense may be literal (a one-to-one correspondence between the locutions and the empirical reality represented by them) or figurative. In both, the interpreter must recognize the illocutionary impact of authorial intention. By considering these aspects, the determinate meaning can be gleaned from the text. In the following section, along with detailing LDS^C *literalistic* interpretations, I will argue, among other things, that a one-to-one correspondence between the words used and the reality described by the words is not the intent of the author, but of the LDS interpreter.

3.2. LDS authors and “literal” interpretation

The predominant interpretive practice by the LDS^C appears to be literal. Parley Pratt was an early LDS apologist who set the tone for later writers by attacking those who “spiritualize” the Bible, “rather than read in the plain, literal sense.”⁷⁴ In his book *Voice of Warning*, he compared dozens of biblical passages and concluded that the LDS^C believed in the “Doctrines of Christ” (i.e., the literal meaning), while other churches believed in the “Doctrines of Men” (i.e., the spiritualized meaning).⁷⁵ Pratt also bemoaned the illegitimate hermeneutical posturing of other churches:

...having lost the Spirit of Inspiration, they began to institute their own opinions, traditions, and commandments; giving constructions and private interpretations to the written word, instead of believing the things written. And the moment they departed from [Scripture’s] literal meaning, one man’s opinion, or interpretation, was just as good as another’s.⁷⁶

Brigham Young, the second LDS president, reprimanded the Christian world “for failing to believe [the Bible] in its literal sense.”⁷⁷ Literal interpretation is “firmly rooted in LDS history.”⁷⁸ Indeed, the early LDS^C “out-Bibled the

⁷⁴ See Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 18, 321; cf. *Evening and Morning Star (EMS)* 1.2:11, 14 (July 1832); *EMS* 2.19:145 (April 1834); *EMS* 2.20:153 (May 1834) (<http://www.centerplace.org/history/ems/vol1.htm>; accessed Mar 2016).

⁷⁵ Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning* (11th edn; Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1881) Kindle Edition, ch. 7, ‘A Contrast between the Doctrine of Christ and the Doctrines of the Nineteenth Century.’

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. 1, ‘On Prophecy Already Fulfilled.’

⁷⁷ Brigham Young, in Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 95. This appears to be an example where an LDS thinker equates “literal” with “real” or “true.”

⁷⁸ Barber, ‘Literalist Constraint,’ 25; cf. Sterling M. McMurrin, ‘Some Distinguishing Characteristics of Mormon Philosophy,’ *Sunstone* 16.4 (March 1993) 35-46; David P. Wright,

biblicists” as a result of “their marked literalism in scriptural interpretation.”⁷⁹ Contemporary LDS author Richard Hopkins contends that when interpreting the Bible, literal interpretation “is always preferred.”⁸⁰ For Richard Cummings, “literalism...lies at the core of the Mormon belief system.”⁸¹ The LDS^C keep “symbolic, figurative, or allegorical interpretation to a minimum,” instead maintaining that “Scripture [is] literally true.”⁸² Other LDS authors call this an “entrenched literalism,”⁸³ and assert that their biblical interpretation is “strikingly literalistic.”⁸⁴

This literal interpretation, however, is a selective literalism. Early leaders of the LDS^C “selected their texts carefully” in order to emphasize doctrines that convinced those outside of their church.⁸⁵ Such doctrines included apostasy, the restoration, the millennium, and the special role of Israel. Echoing the teaching of continuing revelation, “Joseph Smith’s expanding theological understanding at any given time dictated which biblical materials he took literally and which less literally, (or) not literally at all.”⁸⁶ As the LDS^C movement grew, there was a careful selection of texts to take seriously, and a careful selection of texts to neglect.⁸⁷

As we have seen, some observers, LDS or otherwise, contend that the “plain meaning” of the biblical text is in consonance with a “literal”

‘Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth,’ *Sunstone* 16.3 (Sept 1992) 28-38.

⁷⁹ Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993) 58.

⁸⁰ Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, 34.

⁸¹ Cummings, ‘Quintessential Mormonism,’ 92.

⁸² Robinson, *How Wide*, 55. Here we note the erroneous concept that literal is in opposition to figurative. The manner in which Robinson would interpret a passage where the authorial intention is figurative is unclear. See also Matthew R. Connelly and BYU Studies Staff, ‘Sizing up the Divide,’ *BYU Studies* 38.3 (1999) 163-190, citing 167; Irving, ‘Mormons and the Bible,’ 476; Bitton and Alexander, *A to Z of Mormonism*, 18.

⁸³ Shepherd and Shepherd, *Kingdom Transformed*, 5; cf. Armand L. Mauss, ‘Refuge and Retrenchment: the Mormon Quest for Identity,’ in Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, Lawrence Alfred Young (eds), *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001) 24-42, citing 34; White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, 58.

⁸⁴ Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 30. This use of “literalistic” by Arrington and Bitton is to be distinguished from my delineation of the term above. Another term used by LDS authors to characterize literal interpretation is proof-texting (see Julie M. Smith, ‘Mormon Hermeneutics: A Modest Proposal,’ Faith promoting Rumor website, <https://faithpromotingrumor.wordpress.com/2007/03/07/mormon-hermeneutics-a-modest-proposal/>; accessed Mar 2015).

⁸⁵ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 10, 49; cf. Irving, ‘Mormons and the Bible,’ 483-487; Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 30; Craig J. Hazen, in Beckwith et al., *New Mormon Challenge*, 36.

⁸⁶ Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 759.

⁸⁷ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 220.

interpretation.⁸⁸ This, in fact, holds acute prominence in LDS^C thinking. The deciphering of the “plain meaning” is “a leading principle in LDS exegesis.”⁸⁹ Early LDS leader Sidney Rigdon presented “plain scripture facts” and was “contemptuous of ‘spiritualizing’ prophecies.”⁹⁰ The BoM prophet Nephi declared that his “soul delighteth in plainness” (2 Nephi 25:4). Nephi was referring to the “plainness” of the interpretation of the book of Isaiah, as well as to his own prophecy.⁹¹ The reading of the Bible for the early Mormon church was to be “straightforward,” for they “prided themselves on the self-evident biblical premises of their faith.”⁹² Similar to many Bible believers in the 19th century, early Mormons “looked to a common-sense reading of the KJV for their spiritual understanding.”⁹³ On account of the “religious confusion engendered by priestcraft,” many restorationists, including the early leaders of the LDS^C, insisted that Bible believers “should shun the priests and become their own ministers. Any person with a Bible and the ability to read could learn the plain self-evident truths of Christianity.”⁹⁴ These LDS thinkers, then, assume that a literal interpretation is equated with the “plain,” or “straightforward” meaning. This “straightforward” reading, however, seamlessly assumes a one-to-one correspondence between the biblical locutions and the empirical realities that the locutions refer to, even when it appears that no such correspondence can be tied to authorial intention.

3.2.1. *James 1:5 and the straightforward, literal call to seek wisdom*

We have seen the use of James 1:5 as an example of diminution and elevation of the Bible: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jas 1:5). According to

⁸⁸ For example, some posit that the “literal meaning is the ‘plain and ordinary’ meaning” (see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 116). The Reformers emphasized the “plain sense of Scripture”—although it was “over against the complexities of medieval exegesis” (Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 79). Wright mentions an obvious difficulty with this: “The word ‘plain’ inevitably introduces a subjective element, inviting the riposte, ‘Plain to whom?’” (ibid.).

⁸⁹ Davies and Madsen, ‘Scriptures,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1280.

⁹⁰ See Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 30.

⁹¹ See also 2 Nephi 31:3; D&C 1:24. A positive aspect of the BoM during the early years of the LDS^C was its supposed “plainness” and “straightforwardness.” For its “rural audience,” this was a “mark of its genuineness” (O’Dea, *The Mormons*, 30).

⁹² Fluhman, *A Peculiar People*, 66.

⁹³ Givens and Barlow (eds), *Oxford Handbook on Mormonism*, 130. Indeed, Joseph Smith “sought, in short, to restore the Bible’s perspicuity and to place its interpretation within the reach of common sense” (Smith, ‘Hermeneutical Crisis,’ 87).

⁹⁴ Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, 50.

Cummings, “Joseph Smith took literally the words of James 1:5.”⁹⁵ Smith was in need of clarification because of competing Bible interpretations. However, there appears to be a one-to-one correspondence imposed on the text that was not intended by the author: “wisdom” for Smith became nothing more than assistance with personal decision-making. Other interpreters, however, note a dissimilar intention by the author. Contextually, what was needed was not a personalized quest for direction, but rather wisdom “in order to achieve the programme set out in [Jas] 1:2-4.”⁹⁶ This “programme” was the “maturing toward moral perfection” through afflictions.⁹⁷ There is a connection between the “perception” of v. 2 concerning “trials of many kinds,” and the need for wisdom and prayer in v. 5, in order to gain the proper perspective. Wisdom was “the lack most critical to remedy,” and was “practical rather than theoretical, enabling not only true perception, but also proper action in the world.”⁹⁸ Wisdom, then, was for comprehension and correct perception related to the trials and “life’s testings” of v. 2.⁹⁹ If these mainstream thinkers are correct in their interpretation of James 1:5, then Joseph Smith literalistically interpreted the text. The illocutionary aspect of the text was ignored—Smith failed to appreciate the author’s intention concerning wisdom in the midst of trials. Although Smith legitimately focused on the verbal meaning of “wisdom,” he neglected the illocutionary force of authorial intention.

3.2.2. *Joseph Smith and the “true meaning” of Genesis 1:1*

In the King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith interpreted the first verse of the Bible and gave its “true meaning.”¹⁰⁰ Commenting on what “sort of a being” God was in the beginning, Smith preached, “Open your ears and hear all ye ends

⁹⁵ Cummings, ‘Quintessential Mormonism,’ 94.

⁹⁶ See Luke Leuk Cheung, *The Genre, Composition and Hermeneutics of the Epistle of James* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2003) 63.

⁹⁷ Martin Dibelius, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, Hermeneia, trans. Michael A. Williams. Revised by Heinrich Greeven (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 77.

⁹⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, AB 37a (New York: Doubleday, 1995) 179.

⁹⁹ See *ibid.*, 182-184. Todd Penner sees the particle $\delta\epsilon$ as connecting 1:5-8 with 1:2-4 (Todd C. Penner, *The Epistle of James and Eschatology* (JSNTSup 121) (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) 145-146 n3). Sophie Laws, however, writes that the “sequence of vv. 4-5 is not an obvious one” (Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980) 54). Nonetheless, Laws notes the word “lacking” in both verses 4 and 5 exhibits a “loose train of thought.” Wisdom becomes a “unifying bond” that can complete the “desire for completeness” in v. 4: “mature and complete, not lacking anything.” Additionally, the wisdom mentioned in 3:13, 17 is seen as the “sum of the virtues,” so that the attainment of wisdom would be “conducive to the desired wholeness” (Laws, *Epistle of James*, 54-55).

¹⁰⁰ Smith, ‘King Follett,’ BYU website. Again, the King Follett Discourse was an important sermon delivered near the end of his life. It would eventually gain “quasi-official” status in the LDS^C (see Stephen Robinson in Beckwith et al., *New Mormon Challenge*, 421 n9).

of the earth; for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible.”¹⁰¹ He continued: “God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did, and I will show it from the Bible.” Later in the discourse, he expressed that “I suppose I am not allowed to go into an investigation of anything that is not contained in the Bible.”¹⁰² Summarizing this sermon, LDS author Richard Bushman adduced that Smith spoke “as if he was giving the obvious meaning of the Bible.”¹⁰³

Smith claimed that in Genesis 1:1 the Hebrew word *bereshit* (בְּרֵאשִׁית) was actually composed of three words: “*baith*—in, by, through, and everything else. *Rosh*—the head. *Sheit*—grammatical termination.” He then explained that originally “*baith*” was not present, but was added by “a Jew without any authority.” Turning to *Rosh*, he expressed that Genesis 1:1 originally read “The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods.”¹⁰⁴ Smith concluded, “that is the true meaning of the words.”¹⁰⁵ He attempted to remain in the interpretive realm with this “plain” reading, and even included text-critical issues and manuscript histories. His hermeneutical intuition demonstrated that meaning was locatable in the smallest linguistic unit.

Smith’s straightforward (read: literal) interpretation, however, does not receive support outside of LDS^C circles. In contrast to *Rosh* as the subject of the sentence, Charles Hummel remarks: “God is not only the subject of the first sentence, he is central to the entire narrative. It mentions him thirty-four times.”¹⁰⁶ In fact, the Hebrew word *Rosh* is not found in any Hebrew manuscripts. Paul Kissling writes that the Bible simply doesn’t explain or

¹⁰¹ Smith, ‘King Follett,’ BYU website.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 534.

¹⁰⁴ I.e., רֵאשִׁית אֱלֹהִים “The head one (of the Gods) brought forth the Gods.”

¹⁰⁵ Smith, ‘King Follett,’ BYU website. The standard LDS defense is that Smith used Hebrew “as an artist, inside of his frame of reference, in accordance with his taste” (Louis Zucker, ‘Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,’ *Dialogue* 3 (Summer 1968) 53). Yet, another LDS author admits to Smith’s “apparent garbling of the Hebrew” (Kevin L. Barney, ‘Joseph Smith’s Emendation of Hebrew Genesis 1:1,’ *Dialogue* 30.4 (Winter 1997) 103-135, citing 106). Barney does defend, however, Smith’s idea of a scribal error (“a Jew without any authority”) with the apparent dittography of the Hebrew letter *bet* (ב). Supposedly the scribe noticed the *bet* of the second word *bara* (בָּרָא) and added *bet* to *reshit* (רֵאשִׁית), which again, according to Joseph Smith, was really *Rosh*—“the head.” Barney adds that the lack of vowels for an ancient scribe would have contributed to this error. However, Barney admits that this error “would have been highly unlikely at the beginning of the text” (Barney, ‘Joseph Smith’s Emendation,’ 110-111). In response, this is not only highly unlikely, but seemingly impossible, given the seriousness with which scribes worked in the ancient world, as well as being the very first words a scribe would copy.

¹⁰⁶ Charles E. Hummel, ‘Interpreting Genesis One,’ *Journal of American Scientific Affiliation* 38.3 (1986) 175-185, citing 179.

defend the existence of God. He was there “in the beginning” and “(n)othing precedes him and everything in the cosmos finds its origin in him.”¹⁰⁷ Although Kissling admits to “disagreement on the translation of the verse,” the “traditional translation” of “in the beginning” is “the only one which does justice to the original intention of the author and the wider ‘canonical context.’”¹⁰⁸

However, LDS scholar Kevin Barney responds: “Revelation often results after wrestling with ideas.”¹⁰⁹ He states: “Joseph’s struggle with the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1 seems to have yielded six concepts,” two of which are “a plurality of gods,” and “a head God.”¹¹⁰ To support the former, Barney simply declares there is an “essentially accepted idea in scholarship today,” that “the ancient Hebrews of the patriarchal age believed in a plurality of Gods.”¹¹¹ As regards the latter, Barney states, “(o)ne can argue that the existence of a pantheon implies the presence of a supreme God who rules the pantheon.”¹¹² While only tangential to our discussion of literality, Barney’s views deserve comment. He shows that epistemologically the transcendent is treated as if it is immanent. There is an implicit assumption: if something is true of a human institution (a group with a leader), then it must be true of a transcendent God (a pantheon with a supreme God). This is unfounded, for if Barney’s perspective holds, a “transcendent” God would be subject to the same limitations as human beings. This is an epistemological shortcut whereby the divine is understood as if God were merely human.¹¹³

Non-LDS scholar Ronald Huggins disagrees with Barney on the translation of Genesis 1:1.¹¹⁴ He mentions two earlier translations by Joseph Smith: “...in the beginning I created the heaven, and the earth upon which thou standest” (Moses 2:1, PGP); “...they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth” (Abraham 4:1,

¹⁰⁷ Paul Kissling, *The College Press NIV Commentary, Genesis* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 2004) 1:82.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Kevin L. Barney, ‘Examining Six Key Concepts in Joseph Smith’s Understanding of Genesis 1:1,’ *BYU Studies* 39.3 (2000) 107-124, citing 107.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 114. He also presents a contrived argument that includes “Ugaritic parallels” and the meaning of *hypsistos* (“highest”) in the Greek to demonstrate that “God Most High” in Gen 14:18-20 is related etymologically to “the Hebrew expression” of “the head one of the Gods” (*ibid.*).

¹¹³ At the same time, this is fairly widespread in Christian circles, and therefore not unique to the LDS. Additional epistemological reflection on this issue will be given below.

¹¹⁴ Ronald V. Huggins, ‘Joseph Smith and the First Verse of the Bible,’ *JETS* 46.1 (March 2003) 29-52.

PGP). These translations differ significantly from the interpretation under consideration. Huggins also mentions a sermon by Smith given on June 16, 1844—months *after* the King Follett Discourse—when he did, in fact, include *bereshit*: “In the begin[ning] the heads of the Gods organized the heaven & the Earth.”¹¹⁵ Huggins then points out the problems in the King Follett Discourse that treats *elohim* as a direct object (contra the works just cited of the Book of Moses, Abraham and the June 16 sermon).¹¹⁶

I noted above that Smith’s hermeneutical intuition was to locate meaning in the smallest linguistic unit. However, the legitimacy of his approach is a matter of some debate. The “true meaning” of biblical passages is rarely, if ever, found by *exclusive* focus on word studies and contextual linguistic investigation. Hermeneutically, an exaggerated focus on etymology has dangers, since it may take the reader outside of the text itself, in search for the history of the word.¹¹⁷ In actuality, the LDS^C infrequently focuses on the minutiae of the biblical texts. Rather, it seems that Smith and the Mormon church desire flexibility and interpretive freedom, as is witnessed in the divergent translations by Smith of the verse under question. This freedom is one ramification of the diminution of the Bible, and is the opposite of a reduction of meaning to the smallest linguistic piece. Smith appears to exhibit a thin veneer of scholarly work, as evidenced with such words as “I am going to prove it to you by the Bible”; “I will show it from the Bible”; “I suppose I am not allowed to go into an investigation of anything that is not contained in the Bible.”¹¹⁸ In point of fact, however, he closes down the interpretive practice. On one hand, Smith reduces interpretation to detailed linguistic investigation, yet on the other hand, he seeks to maintain freedom and flexibility and does not consider the implied intention of biblical texts. Given the different translations of Genesis 1:1, two of which are included in LDS^C “Standard Works” (cited above), the “literal” and “straightforward” interpretation of Genesis 1:1 by Joseph Smith in the King Follett Discourse does not hold up to scrutiny. Rather, although purportedly “straightforward,” it is, in reality, an indication of the freedom and flexibility inherent in literalistic interpretations by the LDS^C.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 30, 33, 40.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 45.

¹¹⁷ The views of Wright echo this caution, although he doesn’t foreclose all etymological investigation: “Historical exegesis is not simply a matter of laying out the lexicographical meanings of words and sentences. It involves exploring the resonances those words and sentences would have had in their contexts” (Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, xvii).

¹¹⁸ Smith, ‘King Follett,’ BYU website.

3.2.3. The “literal” interpretation of Scripture and deification of the LDS believer

The LDS^C teaches that “men and women have the potential of evolving literally into gods themselves.”¹¹⁹ Paulsen writes, “(b)iblically, Peter, John, and Paul all spoke of the idea that man can become God (2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 8:16–17),” with the phrases “participating in the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4) and becoming “heirs” of God and “co-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:16–17) literally describing deification.¹²⁰ Benjamin Huff cites 1 John 3:2 and states, “Mormons take very seriously the New Testament promises” that “when (Christ) shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).”¹²¹ The phrase “we shall be like him,” is taken to mean, literally, that we will become god-like.¹²² Millet cites the call to be perfect in Matthew 5:48 as support for the doctrine of deification.¹²³ Millet also uses a straightforward reading of 1 Corinthians 2:16 and gaining “the mind of Christ” for a similar defense.¹²⁴ Robinson notes that the LDS^C “[take] seriously and literally the...language about becoming children

¹¹⁹ Cummings, ‘Quintessential Mormonism,’ 95.

¹²⁰ Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’ 80. Although Paulsen neglects to cite a passage from John (in spite of referencing him), he does mention John 14–17 in another writing (see David Paulsen, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 527). Paulsen believes that in contrast to the Orthodox church in the East, Western theologians have given marginal attention to the doctrine of deification, although he notes some exceptions: Carl Mosser, ‘The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55.1 (2002) 36–57; Robert V. Rakestraw, ‘Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis,’ *JETS* 40.2 (June 1997) 257–269 (see Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’ 84).

¹²¹ Huff, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 484; cf. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History* (n.p., Deseret Book Company, 1979) 725; Carmack (ed.), *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, 17.

¹²² However, for John Painter, the point of the passage was not the ontological deification of the believer, but “the question of why the author thought that to see him is to be like him” (John Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, SP 18 (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2002) 221). For Georg Strecker, although “Christians will undergo a change in being made sharers in the heavenly δόξα,” there is “no mystical deification...expressed” either in the Gospel of John or in this letter (Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2, and 3 John*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) 89–90). I. Howard Marshall equates this verse with glorification (2 Cor 3:18) and not deification (I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 172–173).

¹²³ Robert Millet, in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 257. To the LDS church, this “admonition of Jesus,” frequently quoted in sermons and writings, “would be strange indeed were it impossible to fulfill” (White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, 74; cf. LDS^C, ‘Be Ye Therefore Perfect,’ in *Messages for Exaltation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1967) 236–242).

¹²⁴ Millet, in McLaughlan and Ericson (eds), *Discourses in Mormon Theology*, 275. However, Furnish notes that contextually Paul must have meant “the mind of the crucified Christ” (Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 45, emphasis by author). Previously, Paul focused on the cross of Christ as foolishness. This was a backdrop to his discussion on the emptiness and vacuity of worldly wisdom. In addition, far from any idea of deification, this “mind of Christ” was “to guide [Paul’s readers] in dealing with the particularities of their own situation, as God’s church in Corinth” (ibid., 46).

of God (Rom 8:16).”¹²⁵ According to Blake Ostler, there are four biblical texts, taken at “face value,” that support deification: 2 Peter 1:2-4, John 10 (citing Psalm 82), John 17, and 1 John 3.¹²⁶ An interpretive focus on the “plain” meaning of these biblical texts leads to the LDS^C conclusion that humankind can become god-like.

However, do these interpretations all unequivocally assert “humankind becoming godlike”? A number of challenges arise with these interpretations. There appears to be insufficient attention given to the question of a *literal* transcendence. Normally, the discussion of the “literal,” by definition, precludes discussion about God and the “transcendent.” The LDS^C reduces transcendence to a “literal level.”¹²⁷ At minimum, the application of literal language to transcendent realities appears to exhibit an unexamined epistemological assumption. Furthermore, although supposedly *literal*, these examples on deification appear to be literalistic interpretations, i.e., “wooden, thin” interpretations that fail to go beyond the standard meanings of words and expressions.¹²⁸ A “word-for-word” interpretation seamlessly connects “perfect” (Matt 5:48) with deification. A literalistic reading of “becoming children of God” becomes evidence for humankind becoming god-like. The locution of being “like him,” is taken as a one-to-one correspondence regarding deity, and being “like him” becomes a “verbally exact version”¹²⁹ of god-likeness. This is unwarranted. Additionally, “participation in the divine nature” assumes that the empirical realities of both “participation” and “divine nature” correspond to a human perspective: Regardless of the authorial intent in the passage, the plain

¹²⁵ Robinson, *How Wide*, 80; cf. Michael D. K. Ing, ‘Ritual as a Process of Deification,’ in Daniel L. Belnap (ed.), *By Our Rites of Worship* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013) 349–367.

¹²⁶ Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods*, vol 3 (Part 1 and 2) (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2008) Kindle Edition, ch. 12, ‘The Scriptural Basis for the Doctrine of Deification.’ Furthermore, in his King Follett discourse, Joseph Smith challenged his hearers to strive for their eventual godhood (Smith, ‘King Follett,’ BYU website). Modern LDS^C scriptural support for deification is found in D&C 132, the revelation on plural marriage. Also, Terryl Givens chides the Protestant tradition for neglecting and even rejecting the “patristic teaching on theosis”—“only to see it raised in such venues as *Christianity Today*” (Terryl Givens, ‘Mormons at the Forefront,’ *First Things* 264 (June–July 2016) 19–21, citing 20). For the John 17 passage, far from a deification focus, the “sound of a single theme tolls across the opening and closing sections of the prayer: making God known” (Francis Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, SP 4 (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1998) 476). To support this assertion, Moloney mentions John 17:3, 6, 8, 10–11, 21, 23, 25, 26.

¹²⁷ This is not the exclusive terrain of the LDS^C. Many Christian traditions ignore the epistemological gap between the transcendent and immanent, by attempting, for example, to “literalize” the doctrine of the Trinity, or by speaking “literally” of the resurrection appearances of Jesus—as if his body was no different than a typical, human body.

¹²⁸ Again, see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 311.

¹²⁹ See *ibid.*

meaning of “participation” is effortlessly connected to a human ability to not only “take part in”/“participate,” but also possess divine nature. These interpretations appear to ignore the illocutionary impact of authorial intention. Instead of an investigation into the conceptuality embodied in these texts, and an attempt to find the intended sense, these literalistic interpretations appear to override any contextual meaning.

3.2.4. *The “literal” interpretation of Scripture and divine corporeality*

As regards divine corporeality, David Paulsen advocates literal interpretation in an effort to remove “biblical passages from the shackles of merely figurative interpretation.”¹³⁰ Although this quote has only a tangential connection to the topic at hand, it does merit comment, for there appears to be a bias against “figurative” here. Why would a figurative interpretation be a “shackle”? This is especially noteworthy, since, as we have seen, it is undeniable that authorial intention can be figurative. Other LDS authors admit this—for, as I will note, Richard Hopkins sees figurative interpretation in the book of Psalms with God having “wings.” At the very least, Paulsen’s view underscores the fact that the LDSC is not really interested in authorial intention. Paulsen appears to assume, irrespective of the contextual intention by the author, that “literal” is in opposition to “figurative.”

Nonetheless, Paulsen believes there is “considerable biblical evidence” for divine corporeality (e.g., Gen 1:27, 5:1, 9:6, 32:30, Exod 24:10, 31:18, 33:11, Luke 24:39, John 14:9, 2 Cor 4:4, Phil 3:21, 1 John 3:2 and Rev 22:4).¹³¹ For Stephen Davis, biblical texts that appear to depict an embodied God should be interpreted “in a straightforward, literal sense.”¹³² A “very human God” walked with Abraham.¹³³ Since Moses and others looked upon God (Exod 24:9, cf. Isa

¹³⁰ Paulsen, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 516.

¹³¹ Ibid., 519. Paulsen also asserts that the early Christians believed in divine embodiment. See David L. Paulsen, ‘Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,’ *Harvard Theological Review* 83.2 (1990) 105-116; Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen, ‘Augustine and the Corporeality of God,’ *Harvard Theological Review* 95.1 (Jan 2002) 97-118. However, Stephen Robinson does not believe that divine embodiment can be proven or disproven by the Bible, but instead comes from modern revelation (Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 7, ‘The Doctrinal Exclusion: Trinity and the Nature of God’; Robinson, *How Wide*, 91). An example of such modern revelation is D&C 130:22, which states the Father has a “body of flesh and bone as tangible as a man’s and the Son likewise.”

¹³² See Stephen T. Davis, in Baker (ed.) *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 216; see also two non-LDS scholars, Paul Owen and Clark Pinnock, open to divine corporeality, in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 124, 229, respectively.

¹³³ Faulconer, ‘Rethinking Theology,’ 191. This “human God” in Genesis 18 is presumably embodied. In addition, for a non-LDS defense of the view that God’s “physical body” is described in the book of Genesis, see Mark S. Smith, ‘The Three Bodies of God in the

6; Exod 33), Ostler sees this as proof of divine corporeality.¹³⁴ Further evidence is that the “Israelites see God’s feet; Moses sees his back; he is ‘seen face to face’ by his people, and so on.”¹³⁵ Dwight Monson claims that there “are more than thirty references to specific body parts of God,” e.g., face (Gen 32:30, Exod 33:11), mouth (Num 12:5-8) and finger (Deut 9:10), and there are references “to functions associated with a body such as sitting (Psalm 46:8), walking (Gen. 3:8, 5:24) and standing (Acts 7:56).”¹³⁶ Finally, an official LDS proclamation in 1995 from the Prophet Gordon Hinkley noted that all human beings, male and female, are “spirit sons or daughters” of “heavenly parents.”¹³⁷ Although not explicitly stated, it is understood that such offspring come from embodied parents.

The body of the incarnate Christ is also used as evidence. Since Christ is the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), is in the “form of God” (Phil 2:6), is the “express image of the (Father)” (Heb 1:3), and had a “glorified body of flesh and bones” after his resurrection, “(i)nescapable logic requires the conclusion that God the Father has a glorified body of flesh and bones.”¹³⁸ God is spirit, according to LDS^C thinkers, yet is not *limited* to being spirit: “God’s being a spirit doesn’t necessarily preclude him from also having a body.”¹³⁹ God is “a

Hebrew Bible,’ *JBL* 134.3 (Fall 2015) 471-488. Smith sees, for example, that planting a garden (Gen 3:8), is a “physical, human activity” (ibid., 475). He also notes that God’s physical body is described in Genesis 18 and 32 (ibid.).

¹³⁴ Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, ch. 5, ‘Monotheism and Divine Agency in John: A Christology of Indwelling Unity’; cf. ibid., ch. 8, ‘The Godhead in Mormon Thought,’ for his defense that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit each “possesses a unique material body.”

¹³⁵ Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 90.

¹³⁶ Dwight E. Monson, *Shared Beliefs, Honest Differences* (Springville, UT: Horizon Publishers, 2010) 23. It is unclear why Monson quotes Psalm 46:8 as evidence of God “sitting” (although see Ps 80:1; 99:1; 102:12, etc.), or why he cites Acts 7:56 which describes the act of standing by *Jesus*. The question of the (resurrected) body of Jesus is not under debate. The views of non-LDS author John Skinner’s could potentially align with LDS^C thought here: “God is expressly said to have a ‘form’ which can be seen” e.g., Num 12:8, Ps 17:15. He continues: “the OT writers constantly attribute to Him bodily parts; and that they ever advanced to the conception of God as formless spirit would be difficult to prove” (John Skinner, *Genesis*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1910) 32).

¹³⁷ ‘The Family: A Proclamation to the World,’ LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation?lang=eng>; accessed Mar 2016.

¹³⁸ See Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, 60; cf. Kent M. Van De Graaff, ‘Physical Body,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1080. However, regarding mainstream views of Hebrews 1:3, Attridge writes that the passage cannot refer to physical realities, “since the context, especially vs 2b, clearly refers to the pre-existent Son” (Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989) 44). Koester relates how the Son was the “impress” of the Father’s “substance.” Therefore, there was “congruence between God and the Son in terms of their ‘substance’ or being” (Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001) 189; cf. David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “to the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 89).

¹³⁹ Harrell, *This is My Doctrine*, 132.

glorified person with a tangible body.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, only those unduly influenced by Greek philosophy, with its spirit/body dualism, viewing “spirit and matter [as] mutually exclusive, opposing categories” will fail to see how God could be both spirit and embodied.¹⁴¹ It is important to note that the very idea of an embodied God supposedly holds difficulties for non-LDS Bible readers, while the LDS^C claims to remain free from such difficulties.

The notion of an embodied Father, however, is the result of *literalistic* interpretation. The figurative meanings of God’s face, mouth and finger are given a one-to-one correspondence to a physical, human body. Authorial intention in these passages is not a concern for the LDS authors. Another challenge with divine embodiment includes the epistemological problem of a physical body limiting God in time and space. The issue of transcendence again emerges, with the inherent epistemological challenges of an eternal, transcendent, yet embodied God.

One LDS author aware of this challenge of transcendence/immanence is James Faulconer. He refers to the story of Moses and Israel to endorse the idea that “transcendence is to be found in immanence,” and “(b)iblical religion suggests that we look for transcendence not by looking beyond this world, but by looking within this world.”¹⁴² Faulconer writes that “the transcendence in question is not merely that of something radically outside of this world.”¹⁴³ He continues, “(t)he usual assumption is that the transcendence that we find in religion is otherworldly transcendence. However, for the most part, that is an assumption, and often not a well-founded one.”¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere, Faulconer cites the LDS^C belief in divine corporeality to maintain that they operate under a different understanding of divine transcendence.¹⁴⁵ Faulconer, then, essentially

¹⁴⁰ See LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 143.

¹⁴¹ See Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 7, ‘The Doctrinal Exclusion: Trinity and the Nature of God.’ In addition, according to Bruce McConkie, if God was only a spirit, he is “a spirit nothingness that fills the immensity of space” (McConkie, *New Witness*, 23). McConkie also asks how “a three-in-one spirit essence that is everywhere and nowhere in particular present,” can “either see or hear or eat or smell, all of which things the true God does?” (ibid., 525). Also, because of a “Cartesian dualism,” which was influenced by “the Platonic tradition...Christianity gave priority to things spiritual over things physical” (see Benjamin E. Park, ‘Salvation through a Tabernacle: Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and Early Mormon Theologies of Embodiment,’ *Dialogue* 43.2 (Sum 2010) 1-44, citing 4).

¹⁴² James E. Faulconer, ‘Philosophy and Transcendence: Religion and the Possibility of Justice,’ in James E. Faulconer (ed.), *Transcendence in Philosophy and Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) 70-86, citing 82.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 5. This is stated in order to defend the notion of justice in this world.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹⁴⁵ James E. Faulconer, ‘Divine Embodiment and Transcendence: Propaedeutic Thoughts and Questions,’ *Element* 1.1 (Spring 2005), Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology website, http://www.smpmt.org/docs/faulconer_element1-1.html; accessed Apr 2015.

collapses the transcendent into the immanent. He summarizes quickly and easily—equating the transcendent with the immanent—in spite of the enormous ontological disparities between them. Notwithstanding the difficulty of speaking of the transcendent becoming immanent, Faulconer simply describes it as a reality. Additionally, Faulconer asserts that others have questionable assumptions, implying that he does not.

An important perspective concerning transcendence/immanence, as well as literal/metaphorical, is that of Nicholas Wolterstorff. For one, he recognizes a fundamental distinction between the locutionary and illocutionary content of the biblical texts, with emphasis on the importance of the latter.¹⁴⁶ Biblical narrative is not simply declarative, for “stories were being told to make a point.”¹⁴⁷ For example, Wolterstorff stresses the majesty of God as the illocutionary intent of Psalm 93: “The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved” (Ps 93:1, NIV). The main point of the psalm is the illocutionary content—God and his majesty. Yet, this illocutionary intent apparently contradicts the locutionary content of the “world/earth is firmly established”—for we know that “the earth cannot be moved” is not true, since the earth is rotating and constantly in motion. However, we can “discard the psalmist’s particular way of making the point as of purely human significance.”¹⁴⁸ Wolterstorff summarizes that some noematic content is left behind (e.g., “earth unmoved”) because of the illocutionary intent—God as majestic and everlasting.¹⁴⁹ To relate this to our discussion, we can “leave behind” the noematic content of a “very human God” who walked with Abraham (Gen 18:16), because of the illocutionary emphasis on God’s presence—in solidarity with Abraham and in judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah. We can “leave behind” the noematic content of “being like Christ” (1 John 3:2) to stress the illocutionary content of the passage—the ontological reality of Christ himself—for to “see him” we will be “like him.”¹⁵⁰

Faulconer admits the issue is difficult, and introduces his readers to Heidegger’s “Basic Problems” for “a philosophical discussion of transcendence in historical context” (ibid.).

¹⁴⁶ See Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 20.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 214.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 210.

¹⁴⁹ See ibid., 211.

¹⁵⁰ In addition, the transcendence of God appears to be the illocutionary intent of Gen 1:1. He created everything “in the beginning.” While not all of the complexities of creation are answered in Gen 1:1, the illocutionary intent conveys a transcendent, creator God. Smith’s translation of the “head (one of the Gods) brought forth the gods” neglects this illocutionary intent.

For Wolterstorff, language about God’s “body” (e.g., ears, eyes) is an example of metaphorical/figurative speech, although descriptions of God’s emotions are to be taken as literal.¹⁵¹ The main intent in biblical interpretation is to “move from our interpretation of the human discourse to our interpretation of the divine discourse mediated by that human discourse.”¹⁵² The “divine discourse” of God’s speech often results in an illocutionary force, rather than exhibiting a literal character. Additionally, in spite of frequent references to God’s “mouth” (Num 12:8; Deut 32:1; Isa 55:11; Lam 3:38; etc.), these passages exhibit anthropomorphism. God does not physically communicate like human beings, with sounds emanating from vocal chords, since God is spirit and has no body.¹⁵³ To summarize Wolterstorff’s perspective, language about God’s body, if taken in a literalistic manner, ignores the illocutionary intent of passages that communicate a “divine discourse.” The passages describing God’s “mouth” or citing the “voice of God” are intended metaphorically to emphasize that God communicates with his creation—that there is a “divine discourse.” Wolterstorff, therefore, is an important voice to be considered.

Vanhoozer advances similar notions. The *literal* sense of “the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous” (Ps 34:15) is figurative. This is because of the intention of the author to highlight God’s “oversight” of his people. “The author intends that the reader recognize his expression as a metaphor.”¹⁵⁴ Far from describing divine embodiment, “the communicative act of metaphorical assertion” in this passage conveys the meaning of divine care and providence.¹⁵⁵

Three final comments on divine embodiment are needed. Firstly, I note that in these examples of divine corporeality, an established metaphorical figure of speech is literalized. The figurative meaning of “the eyes of the Lord” and the divine care intended with the phrase is literalized to denote physical, human-like eyes. Secondly, human beings, by definition, are not transcendent. They are restricted to talking about the divine by analogy. They are incapable, by virtue of *not being transcendent*, of speaking literally about the transcendent. However, the LDS^C uncritically assumes the capability of speaking about a

¹⁵¹ Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 211.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁵³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘On God Speaking,’ *The Reformed Journal* (July–August, 1969) 7–15, citing 8; cf. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1999) 3:409.

¹⁵⁴ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 312.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

transcendent God in literal terms. This is epistemologically questionable. Thirdly, Joseph Smith spoke of *comprehension* of the divine precisely because of an embodied God. Since God was a person with a tangible body, Smith believed that God “was comprehensible, not something beyond the logical grasp or understanding of human beings.”¹⁵⁶ However, it is overly simplistic to equate the possession of a physical body with epistemological certainty. Again, the integration of transcendence with an embodied God is epistemologically and theologically disputable. While I could insist that enormous epistemological obstacles are engendered by the doctrine of an embodied God, the LDS^C simply views the issue from another angle. If God is embodied, the epistemological obstacle is breached, and comprehension of the divine is possible. For the LDS^C, embodiment equals comprehensibility. This is an assumption difficult to maintain in today’s academic climate.

3.2.5. *The “literal” interpretation of Scripture and the imaging of God by the LDS believer*

The LDS^C doctrine of the image of God follows naturally from their teaching on divine corporeality, for “(b)y definition, an image is the representation of physical qualities.”¹⁵⁷ Since God has a body, male and female humans will literally and physically “image” him (or her). LDS “take quite literally” that male and female were made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27).¹⁵⁸ Cummings confidently states that “(s)urely in the entire Judeo-Christian tradition there has been no more literal interpretation than that of the basic doctrine set forth in Genesis 1:27 that ‘God created man in his own image.’”¹⁵⁹ Physicality is assumed with the terms in Genesis 1—(מִצְלַם) *tselem* for “image;” and (תְּמוּנָה) *demut* for “likeness,” with human beings as “duplicates who ‘look like’ God and the gods.”¹⁶⁰ Ostler’s argument centers on Genesis 5:3 and its contextual proximity to Genesis 1:26-27. If Adam’s son, Seth, was “in [Adam’s] own likeness (תְּמוּנָה),” and “in [Adam’s] own image (מִצְלַם)” (Gen 5:3), then this physicality would apply

¹⁵⁶ See White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, 162.

¹⁵⁷ Robinson, *How Wide*, 80.

¹⁵⁸ Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 186; cf. *Old Testament Seminary Teacher Manual*, LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-seminary-teacher-manual?lang=eng>; accessed Jun 2014.

¹⁵⁹ Cummings, ‘Quintessential Mormonism,’ 94. Of course, as Vanhoozer comments, “One’s view of God...will influence which biblical statements about God one considers literal and which statements one takes as figurative” (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?’ in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *Theological Interpretation of the Bible: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 13-26, citing 19).

¹⁶⁰ Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, ch. 8, ‘The Godhead in Mormon Thought.’

to Genesis 1.¹⁶¹ Philip Davies believes that, unlike the LDS^C perspective, other Christians read Genesis 1 as an “over-interpretation, inspired by the presence of a theological agenda, which in many cases appears reluctant to allow that God has a shape that is the same as a human one and wishes to allegorize the ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ in some way.”¹⁶² This is echoed by Richard Hopkins who sees non-LDS readers as “unwilling to accept” the literal meaning of Genesis 1:26-27.¹⁶³

Non-LDS author Gordon Wenham does admit that a “physical image is the most frequent meaning of *צלם*.” However, challenges emerge with the equivalency of the image with physical representation, since “the OT’s stress on the incorporeality and invisibility of God makes this view somewhat problematic (cf. Deut 4:15-16).”¹⁶⁴ Thiselton relates the image of God to humankind’s reasoning capacity, ability to relate to others, and dominion over creation.¹⁶⁵ G. C. Berkouwer laments that the biblical witness “never gives us any kind of systematic theory about man as the image of God,” although the terms used, *tselem* and *demut*, “obviously...refer to a relation between man and his Creator; a ‘likeness’ between man and God, with no explanation given as to exactly what this likeness consists of or implies.”¹⁶⁶ John Frame cautions his readers: “We should not try to identify the image with something *in* us, maybe intellect, emotions, or will. The Bible doesn’t say that there is an image of God *in* man; rather, it says that man *is* the image of God...Everything in us—intellect, emotions, will, even body—reflects God in some way.”¹⁶⁷ However, Frame speaks of how the image relates to dominion, to ethics, and more importantly for our purposes, to a physicality element:

¹⁶¹ Ibid., cf. Falconer, ‘Divine Embodiment and Transcendence,’ Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology website. Ostler may gain further support from mainstream author Charles Lee Feinberg: “The Greek and Latin Fathers distinguished between *tselem* and *demuth*, the first referring to the physical and the latter to the ethical part of the divine image” (Charles Lee Feinberg, ‘The Image of God,’ *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (1972) 235-246, citing 237). For a non-LDS defense of the physicality of the image of God, see Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 69-70.

¹⁶² See Davies in Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, ch. 12, ‘The Scriptural Basis for the Doctrine of Deification.’

¹⁶³ Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, 55.

¹⁶⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 (Dallas: Word, 1998) 30. However, the OT stress on the incorporeality and invisibility of God, as such, does not automatically mandate the meaning of “image” from an earlier passage in the OT. Wenham seems to uncritically assume this. Similarly, Wenham uncritically assumes that language concerning the transcendent qualities of “incorporeality and invisibility of God” can be used seamlessly, without epistemological hindrances, with language about a “physical (i.e., literal) image.”

¹⁶⁵ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 223.

¹⁶⁶ G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 67, 69.

¹⁶⁷ John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006) 88.

...the image of God is physical, bodily. The human eye is an image of God's power to see...God doesn't have literal eyes, but our eyes reflect his power of sight. Similarly, Scripture speaks of God's "arm" and "hand," indicating his power to act, and showing that our arms and hand are also images of him...God doesn't have a body, but our bodies certainly reflect his power.¹⁶⁸

Neither divine corporeality nor a literal, physical imaging of God in the believer is advocated by Frame. According to Francis Watson, the discussion of the image should not be isolated to the Genesis passage, but should include the New Testament: "It is impossible to explain how humankind is created in the image of God without explaining how the image of God is Christ," for "...we learn from Jesus what it is to be human."¹⁶⁹ Watson continues: "the notion of a visual likeness between God and humans...is not simply to be rejected. It is to be understood as a prophetic anticipation of the incarnation. The incarnate, human Jesus is the image of God."¹⁷⁰

These possible meanings of the image of God put forward by non-LDS authors are not compatible with the LDS^C notion of physicality. For authors such as Frame and Watson, there are different nuances of meaning regarding the physicality of the image, although it is not the direct, one-to-one correspondence that the LDS authors assume—i.e., God's literal, physical body, including (presumably) height, weight, eye color, etc., as physically replicated in humankind. Specifically, the physicality of the image emphasizes our bodies as representing God's power and authority (Frame), or as being represented in the bodily incarnation of Jesus (Watson).

One final comment concerning the image is necessary. To those who point out that God is described in the Psalms as having "wings" (e.g., Psa 17:8; 57:1; 91:4), LDS author Richard Hopkins responds that in such a context, the meaning is figurative. This is determined by using "simple rules of hermeneutics."¹⁷¹ This is a surprising assertion from Hopkins, given his perspective already referenced, that hermeneutical reflection will not automatically ensure accuracy in interpretation.¹⁷² For our purposes, it would be

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 88–89.

¹⁶⁹ Watson, *Text and Truth*, 282–283. See 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; cf. Heb 1:3, Col 3:9–11.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 291. Of course, this "canonical" interpretation may yield questionable hermeneutical conclusions—especially if the illocutionary intent of the Genesis passage is ignored.

¹⁷¹ Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, 56.

¹⁷² Ibid., 33.

helpful to know the “simple rules” that Hopkins utilizes in order to determine a figurative meaning. Yet, this is not explained. It is disconcerting when an LDS author uses phrases like this, thus allowing for implicit, self-evident hermeneutical principles, while at the same time, disallowing hermeneutical reflection.¹⁷³

3.2.6. *The “literal” interpretation of Scripture and “the Spirit”*

I have discussed the “spirit of prophecy” as an important component of personal revelation. Several straightforward interpretations of NT passages corroborate this perspective. LDS authors Draper and Rhodes summarize 1 Corinthians 2:6-13: “For Paul, the Spirit is the key that opens up proper understanding and makes it possible to judge the truthfulness or falseness of all things.”¹⁷⁴ Delbert Stapley affirmed that “the Holy Ghost is required to interpret correctly the teachings of holy men. Therefore, those who do not possess the Spirit of God cannot comprehend the things of God (1 Cor. 2:11).” Stapley also referenced 2 Peter 1:20-21, and concluded that just as the ancient prophets were moved by the Spirit, so also modern interpreters need the Spirit for biblical interpretation.¹⁷⁵ Similarly, for Robert Matthews, the scriptures were written by holy men moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet 1:20-21, D&C 68:3-4), and therefore, “inspiration from the same Holy Ghost is required in order for anyone else to perceive the true meaning and intention of a scripture.”¹⁷⁶ Also citing the text of 2 Peter 1:20-21, and defending its plain meaning, LDS authors state that “to understand the scriptures, we must study them with the Spirit.”¹⁷⁷ In like manner, Dallin Oaks cites the “ministration of the spirit” of 2 Corinthians 3:8 so that Bible readers will avoid “trusting in [their] own interpretations of written texts.”¹⁷⁸ Because there are “too many ambiguous sections of scripture to let the Bible speak for itself,” LDS authors cite 2 Peter

¹⁷³ Again, for Hopkins, “common sense, spiritual insight, and respect for the plain language” of the text produces a “satisfactory hermeneutic” (ibid., 34).

¹⁷⁴ Draper and Rhodes, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, “The True Wisdom of God (2:6-8).”

¹⁷⁵ Delbert L. Stapley, ‘The Holy Ghost,’ *Conference Report* (October 1966), BYU website, <http://scriptures.byu.edu/gettalk.php?ID=1520>; accessed Mar 2016; cf. Millet, *Truth*, ch. 2, ‘How We Know.’

¹⁷⁶ Robert J. Matthews, in Black (ed.), *Expressions of Faith*, 121; cf. Joseph Smith—History 1:73-74, PGP.

¹⁷⁷ LDS, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 239.

¹⁷⁸ Oaks, ‘Scripture Reading,’ LDS website. See 2 Cor 3:8: “How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?”

1:21 so their readers will be “in tune with the Spirit enough to understand what the scripture intends.”¹⁷⁹

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 2:9-12, non-LDS scholar Victor Paul Furnish notes that God’s wisdom has been revealed to all believers through the agency of the Spirit.¹⁸⁰ Furnish also sustains the “Spirit’s role as mediating the knowledge of God” in 1 Corinthians 2:10-15.¹⁸¹ Some of the LDS^C conclusions referenced above appear to be reasonable interpretations that take into account not only the illocutionary force of the biblical passage, but also its referentiality. However, there is no hermeneutical or epistemological framework in place that will help LDS members differentiate between their own interpretation of the Bible, and one performed “by the Spirit.”¹⁸² It seems that interpretive rigor is abandoned in favor of interpretation “by the Spirit.” Since the Bible cannot “speak for itself,” one must be “in tune with the Spirit.”¹⁸³ This is a concept derived from a literalistic interpretation of 2 Peter 1:21.

3.2.7. Further examples of literalistic interpretations by the LDS^C

The LDS^C literalistically interprets additional passages. The notion of a “burning bosom” comes from a passage in Luke: “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). This “burning bosom” is crucial for proper interpretation,¹⁸⁴ and is, in fact, the confirmation that a textual interpretation is correct.¹⁸⁵ Thus, according to these LDS authors, a “burning bosom” occurs throughout the process—*before* interpretation, in order to interpret, and *after*

¹⁷⁹ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Only True Church.’

¹⁸⁰ Furnish, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 40.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 45; cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 252-276; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 90-103.

¹⁸² In addition, it is unclear if the LDS^C provides any hermeneutical categories that assists interpreters in determining the ambiguity of these many “sections of scripture.”

¹⁸³ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Only True Church.’ Also, it is unclear how LDS interpreters are able to decipher whether they are “in tune with the Spirit enough.”

¹⁸⁴ Robinson, *How Wide*, 52.

¹⁸⁵ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 291; cf. Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 23. Besides a burning bosom, there are other confirmations of a correct interpretation of the Bible (or confirmations for other life issues): a nagging thought, a vague feeling, a prompting, a dream, a strong impression, a peaceful feeling, or even “a booming voice or vision” (Mould, *Small Voice*, ix, 390-391; cf. Smith, ‘LDS Hermeneutics,’ Times and Seasons website). This is also described as “whisperings of the Spirit” (Faulconer, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 469); a “strong and clear” perception (Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 154); a “stupor of thought” (Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 34); “a knowledge of what needs to be done or said” or “an insight” (Faulconer, ‘Advice for a Mormon Intellectual,’ Patheos website); a “still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things (D&C 85:6; cf. 1 Kings 19:11-12)” (LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 121).

interpretation, in order to confirm. This criterion for interpretive veracity is also found in LDS^C modern scriptures: “...if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right” (D&C 9:8).¹⁸⁶

However, in contradistinction to this individualistic and experiential “burning bosom,” Francois Bovon writes that the Lucan passage emphasizes the opening of the eyes (v. 31; cf. v. 16); the intelligence (vv. 31 and 35; cf. v. 45); and the heart (v. 32; cf. v. 25). The result of this “opening” activity is that “the Scriptures are explained by the Risen One (v. 32c).”¹⁸⁷ Joel Green points out that “burning” was used in a figurative sense, “connoting the divine presence (e.g., Exod 3:2; Deut 4:11; 9:15).”¹⁸⁸ Non-LDS authors, then, see the passage as more than just a confirmation of a personal experience before and after biblical interpretation. It also appears that the LDS^C perspective is immune to criticism, precisely because of its individualistic focus. Outside critique faces insurmountable obstacles in evaluating a “burning bosom.” We note here a literalistic interpretation, with the notion of a “burning bosom” connoting a one-to-one correspondence between the phrase and the physical hearts of interpreters.

I have previously referenced the perspective on prophetic authority and revelation. This also derives from a “plain” reading of the Bible: “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, But he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Several sources take this passage at face value in order to establish modern-day LDS^C prophetic authority.¹⁸⁹ The passage of 2 Peter 1:19-21 is cited to defend biblical interpretation “by the Prophet,” just as it was used to argue for biblical interpretation “by the Spirit.” The interpretation of Scripture is not a private, individual endeavor, but is “best interpreted as it was given—when holy men of God (apostles and prophets) are moved by the Holy Ghost. Far from prohibiting prophetic interpretation of the texts, this Scripture [of 2 Peter 1:19-21] mandates it.”¹⁹⁰ The Prophet will “authoritatively

¹⁸⁶ See Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 81; LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 106; Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Revelation.’

¹⁸⁷ Francois Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:28-24:53*, Hermeneia, trans. James Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012) 375.

¹⁸⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 850 n38.

¹⁸⁹ See Keller, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 39; LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 13; LDS^C, *Primary* 5, 2:7; cf. 2 Nephi 27:11; D&C 128:18.

¹⁹⁰ Robinson, *How Wide*, 205 n10. This negative view of personal revelation/interpretation by Robinson is surprising, given what I have extensively discussed. He downplays its validity and legitimacy. Again, see the section in the previous chapter, *prophetic interpretation vis-à-vis personal interpretation*, for this apparent discrepancy.

interpret” the Bible, and this is “the real intent of 2 Peter 1:19-21.”¹⁹¹ Millet writes that 2 Peter shows the “final word on prophetic interpretation rests with prophets.”¹⁹² Another biblical text that corroborates prophetic interpretation is Ephesians 4:11-16.¹⁹³ For the LDS^C, this passage states that the Prophet can “give authoritative interpretations of scriptures that shall be binding on the Church.”¹⁹⁴ A “straightforward” reading of “Acts 6-12” demonstrates “the Lord directing Peter, the President of the Church, to take the gospel to the Gentiles.”¹⁹⁵ The LDS^C maintains that God continues to give direction—including interpretation of the Bible—through the LDS^C Prophet, in consonance with the “plain” meaning of these passages. This perspective on prophetic authority illustrates a literalistic interpretation. It does not account for the illocutionary force of the passages under consideration, nor for the text’s historical referentiality. Instead, it accentuates the Mormon prophet’s ecclesiological authority.

Modern-day prophetic authority and interpretation is also related to the biblical practice of plural marriage (polygamy). This practice operated in the early decades of the LDS^C movement. A defense of plural marriage was based on “the lives of noble and faithful men and women in the Old Testament,” that included “Abraham, Jacob, and Moses” (see Gen 16:1-11; 29:28; 30:4, 9, 26; Exod 2:21; Num 12:1).¹⁹⁶ Joseph Smith “knew the Bible backward and forward,” and therefore, recognized the importance that plural marriage had for “Old Testament figures as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and King David.”¹⁹⁷ Robinson writes that the OT “explicitly sanctions polygamy.”¹⁹⁸ The practice of plural

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Robert L. Millet, *A Different Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 51.

¹⁹³ See especially Ephesians 4:11-12: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets...For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

¹⁹⁴ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Introduction’; cf. *ibid.*, ‘Only True Church.’

¹⁹⁵ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 141. It is unclear why this manual includes Acts 6-7 in this supposition, as Peter is not mentioned in these chapters.

¹⁹⁶ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Plural Marriage.’ Importantly, for these LDS authors, “there is no indication that God disapproved of their actions in any way” (*ibid.*); cf. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 91 n21; Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 279; Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 493.

¹⁹⁷ Alex Beam, *American Crucifixion* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014) 83-84. Even a well-known critic of the LDS church admitted that Smith had a thorough knowledge of the Bible, and studied it as an “earnest and perceptive reader” (see Wesley P. Walters, *The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon*, Th.M thesis (St. Louis: Covenant Theological Seminary, 1981) 1).

¹⁹⁸ Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 8, ‘The Doctrinal Exclusion: Lesser Arguments.’ For Robinson, the biblical support is found in Genesis 16:4, 25:6 and 30:4, 9. Robinson also writes that the NT “does not forbid” plural marriage (*ibid.*). Joseph Smith practiced plural marriage, and he was “doing the works of Abraham” (Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 281; cf. D&C 132). Since Abraham was promised a posterity “as plentiful as the dust of the earth, the stars in the sky, and

marriage was rescinded in 1890, however, by the LDS prophet Wilford Woodruff. As Woodruff announced the end of the practice, he disclosed that the “Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the programme. It is not in the mind of God.”¹⁹⁹ Woodruff claimed this authority based on his literalistic interpretation of 2 Peter 1:20-21 and Amos 3:7. Thus, we note the striking phenomena of literalistic readings of the Bible, pre-1890, to advocate for plural marriage, alongside the post-1890 institutional and doctrinal change—on account of a prophetic pronouncement. Overall, the LDS^C maintains that no misunderstanding will occur as God communicates to the Prophet. This is applicable to new revelation or, for our purposes, to Bible interpretation.²⁰⁰

The proposed literal interpretation of Amos 3:7 (“Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, But he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets”), receives a measure of support from mainstream scholars. Shalom Paul writes that this verse reflects a notion “rooted in biblical concept of prophecy. The prophet stands in the presence of God (Jer 15:1, 19), is privy to the divine council (Isa 6; Jer 23:18, 22), and as the spokesman for the Deity is apprised in advance as to the plans of his God.”²⁰¹ He continues: “the institution of prophecy is founded on the basic premise that God makes his will known to chosen individuals, as is already clearly stated in Gen 18:17.”²⁰² Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman concur, admitting the possibility that “the idiom

the sands of the seashore (Gen. 13:16; 16:10; 17:6; 18:18; 22:17),” so also Smith sought an extended family through plural marriage (see Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997) 10-11).

¹⁹⁹ LDS^C, ‘Excerpts from Three Addresses by President Wilford Woodruff Regarding the Manifesto,’ Official Declaration 1, *Doctrine and Covenants*, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament?lang=eng>; cf. Bowman, *Mormon People*, 142-151. The LDS^C prefers to call the practice “plural marriage” in contradistinction to “polygamy.”

²⁰⁰ A similar occurrence of prophet authority is seen in the revelation of 1978 to President Spencer Kimball on the acceptance of black males into the “priesthood.” Before 1978, LDS black male members did not have the same privileges as white male members (see Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe*, 8-9). The “priesthood” is a vital doctrine in LDS thinking. For this change in priesthood, see LDS^C, Official Declaration 2, *Doctrine and Covenants*; cf. Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith (eds), *Black and Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2004); Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst (eds), *The Mormon Church & Blacks* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2015); Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Priesthood, Revelation on’; Bowman, *Mormon People*, 212-215. The potential for a forthright declaration—i.e., the LDS^C admitting errors with their former policy of prohibiting the priesthood from black males, is discussed in Marcus H. Martins, ‘Review of “All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage,”’ *Sociology of Religion* 65.4 (Wint 2004) 423-424. According to an early LDS publication, “reason and analogy” showed that God caused some people to be cursed with black skin (W. W. Phelps, ‘Letter No. 5,’ in *Messenger and Advocate* 1.6:82 (March 1835), <http://www.centerplace.org/history/ma/vol1.htm>; accessed Mar 2016). Current LDS^C thinking does not agree with this strong view.

²⁰¹ Shalom M. Paul, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991) 113.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

here means that the Lord will not execute a decree without first telling a prophet and having him announce it.”²⁰³ However, Andersen and Freedman do not accept the all-encompassing formula concerning God’s communication to prophets: “Obviously God does most things without first telling a prophet.”²⁰⁴ They note that the context speaks of a “specific course of action in response to an unusual situation, one requiring forethought and planning.”²⁰⁵

Concerning the passage of 2 Peter 1:19-21, Peter Davids mentions the most perplexing question of the passage: whether it “refer[s] to the prophet’s own interpretation or to the contemporary reader’s own interpretation.”²⁰⁶ The most probable answer is the “prophet’s own interpretation of his visions.”²⁰⁷ Charles Bigg agrees, and points out that Peter was not describing modern-day, “right [i.e., correct] interpreters of Scripture,” but he was “thinking solely of the Hebrew Prophets.”²⁰⁸ For Daniel J. Harrington, “genuine prophets served as instruments of the Holy Spirit, and so their prophecies had a divine origin (‘spoke from God’) rather than only a human origin.”²⁰⁹ Therefore, far from granting an all-encompassing, modern-day prophetic authority, the passage is a “reflection on the OT as Holy Scripture, its divine origin, and its proper interpretation.”²¹⁰

One wonders about the legitimacy of President Woodruff’s statement concerning plural marriage, and included in the LDS^C scripture of D&C: “The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray...It is not in the mind of God.”²¹¹ This statement appears to equate the “mind of God” seamlessly with that of the LDS president. The President is claimed to be a spokesperson for God who, without impediment or obfuscation, transmits the commands of God. We have seen the questionable epistemological judgment of being “one with God.” The LDS^C would buttress this idea with their interpretation of Amos 3:7. However, this passage does not justify epistemological oneness between God and the Prophet,

²⁰³ Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos*, AB 24a (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 398.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 399.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 210.

²⁰⁷ See, e.g., *ibid.*, 211; cf. Duane F. Watson, *The Second Letter of Peter*, NIB 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) 343.

²⁰⁸ Charles Bigg, *Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1901) 270.

²⁰⁹ Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, SP 15 (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 2003) 258.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 259.

²¹¹ LDS^C, Official Declaration 1, *Doctrine and Covenants*.

nor the unfettered ability to communicate directives from God. An inordinate amount of weight is placed upon locutionary expressions by LDS prophets. Therefore, the historical event in 1890 concerning plural marriage, with its example of a prophetic announcement, illustrates one of our stated objectives—to demonstrate the most significant sociological factors that account for apparent inconsistencies in the interpretive methods deployed in LDS^C uses of the Bible. In sum, the literalistic interpretations of Amos 3:7 and 2 Peter 1:19-21 appear to ignore the illocutionary intent of the passages, and advocate an overly optimistic direct correspondence between the concept of biblical prophetic authority and modern-day LDS prophets.

3.2.8. *The canon and “literal” interpretation*

We have seen theological arguments against the canon as examples of diminution of the Bible.²¹² The LDS^C perspective on canonicity is also determined by interpretive methods—by taking a number of passages at face value. An “incomplete biblical canon” is advanced, given the (presumably) lost Pauline letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, as well as the (lost?) “epistle from Laodicea” (Col 4:16), along with numerous references to other books mentioned but not included in the Bible, e.g., “Book of kings of Judah and Israel” (2 Chron 16:11; 25:26; 27:7; 32:32); “Book of the Wars of the Lord” (Num 21:14); “Book of Jasher” (Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18).²¹³ In 1877, LDS Apostle William McLellin spoke of ten lost books of the NT, including, the letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, the “Epistle of the common salvation” mentioned in Jude 3, and the “Commandments to the Thessalonians” of 1 Thessalonians 4:2.²¹⁴

The LDS^C acknowledges that other Christian traditions quote Revelation 22:18-19 and its words against “adding to” the Bible as an argument for a closed canon. Millet, in turn, responds by quoting Deuteronomy 4:2: “Ye

²¹² Further theological arguments are as follows. Even the *possibility* of canonization is questioned, since “the notion of a finite, strictly defined biblical canon is itself an extrabiblical conclusion” (Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’ 48), and “there is no biblical statement closing the canon” (Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 5, ‘The Canonical or Biblical Exclusion’). Since the Bible itself does not explicitly “close the canon,” apparently the Bible must be taken at face value—and not be “closed.” This echoes the assertion that the Bible does not prohibit continuing revelation. Here again we note an argument from silence. While this demonstrates *theological* considerations, it does have bearing on hermeneutical notions, by highlighting an LDS^C focus on the content (or lack thereof) of the biblical text.

²¹³ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Canon of Scripture.’

²¹⁴ See Larson and Passey (eds), *William E. McLellin Papers*, 312. For example: “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of *the common salvation*, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3, emphasis added); “For ye know what *commandments* we gave you by the Lord Jesus” (1 Thess 4:2, emphasis added).

shall not add unto the word which I command you.” According to Millet, if this passage of Deuteronomy is taken at “face value,” i.e., literally, then “61 books in the Old and New Testaments should be jettisoned.”²¹⁵ However, Robinson points out that in the passage of Deuteronomy “obviously Moses was referring here to the specific revelation then being recorded,” so likewise, John was referring to the book of Revelation in Revelation 22:18-19.²¹⁶ It is important for our purposes to point out the seriousness with which these LDS authors read these passages—both Deuteronomy 4:2 and Revelation 22:18-19—appearing to interpret them according to their intended sense.

Concerning 1 Corinthians 5:9 and Paul’s comment of “I have written you in my letter”, most commentators simply believe that the letter referenced by Paul is lost.²¹⁷ There is little doubt that some correspondence from the apostles has, indeed, been lost,²¹⁸ and 1 Corinthians 5:9 holds no importance for the issue of canonicity, in spite of the assertions of LDS authors. Regarding Colossians 4:16 and “the letter from Laodicea,” Edward Lohse admits “(t)here is no trace of the Epistle to the Laodiceans.”²¹⁹ David Pao writes that “(m)ost are convinced... that this letter remains lost.”²²⁰ T.K. Abbott agrees that it could be a “lost Epistle,” although he remarks: “the Epistle referred to was one to which some importance was attached by St. Paul himself, so that he himself directs that it be read publicly in two distinct Churches.”²²¹ Therefore, contra Lohse,²²² he believes it to be the “Epistle to the Ephesians, which we know to have been written about the same time as the Epistle to the Colossians, and conveyed by the same messenger...(and)... regarded as a circular letter.”²²³ This would call into question the citation of Colossians 4:16 to argue for an incomplete canon.

In matters of the canon, there appears to be two levels in our discussion: 1) the establishment and final form of the biblical canon; and 2) the

²¹⁵ Millet, in Millet and Johnson (eds), *Bridging the Divide*, 119; cf. Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Canon of Scripture.’

²¹⁶ Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 5, ‘The Canonical or Biblical Exclusion.’

²¹⁷ See William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation*, AB 32 (New York: Doubleday, 1976) 120. Some, however, surmise that it “is imbedded in II Cor 6:14-7:1” (ibid., 190).

²¹⁸ See Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950) 105.

²¹⁹ Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, Hermeneia, trans. William R. Poehlmann and Robert J. Karris (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) 175 n48.

²²⁰ David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) 321.

²²¹ T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1977) 305, 306.

²²² “...no stock can be put in considering Eph as that letter to the Laodiceans” (Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 175 n48).

²²³ Abbott, *Epistles*, 306.

interpretation of the biblical text. Since the former is not usually seen as hermeneutical, it may not necessarily concern our study. In other words, I should only be discussing data as it relates to actual examples of LDS interpretation—irrespective of the establishment of the text/canon. However, the LDS position on the canon does, nonetheless, yield insights into their hermeneutical perspective.²²⁴

Previously, we explored the over-arching theological hermeneutic of “canonical exegesis.”²²⁵ We saw how some non-LDS thinkers advocate a “canonical reading.” This results in “a theological decision about what the proper parameters for interpretation are: the final-form presentation and the arrangement and sequencing that it exhibits.”²²⁶ Again, Brevard Childs is known for an emphasis on the biblical texts in their final form, in an effort to “do justice to the final, received form of the two testaments.”²²⁷ This concept represents “a commitment to a theological conception of the Bible’s final (or ‘canonical’) shape and to those Bible practices performed by a community of faithful readers.”²²⁸ A positive result of Child’s approach was that it provided an alternative to the historical-critical method.²²⁹ Since the Enlightenment, there has been a constant search for the “original sources,” yet Childs called for a return to the text itself, as the “final product” of the canonization process.²³⁰ While still insisting on the illocutionary force of the biblical text, Wolterstorff echoes Child’s perspective:

One can both interpret each book by itself, honoring its integrity by trying to discern its particular message, while also interpreting all the books together for God’s discourse. Indeed, doing the latter *presupposes* that one has done the former. Scripture is the polyphony of human discourse through the totality of which God’s discourse comes to us.²³¹

²²⁴ Other thinkers also ponder the effect that the process of canonization plays on interpretive issues: “What role do events (i.e., the process of canonization) occurring after the original composition play in interpretation?” (Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 21; cf. Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 18).

²²⁵ Another definition: “interpretation of individual components of the canon in the context of the canon as a whole” (F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988) 291).

²²⁶ Christopher Seitz, ‘Canonical Approach,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 100-102, citing 101.

²²⁷ Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 719; cf. Brevard Childs, *The Church’s Guide for Reading Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 219-236; Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

²²⁸ Wall, in Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 120.

²²⁹ Külli Tõniste, *The Ending of the Canon* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016) 5.

²³⁰ See *ibid.*, 6.

²³¹ Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, ‘Authorial Discourse Interpretation,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 78-80, citing 80, emphasis by author.

Thus, a consideration of individual biblical texts in relation to the wider canonical context would seem necessary for its interpretation. However, to a certain degree, canonical issues are *not* important for hermeneutical considerations. That is, whether or not a text is “canonical,” it still has to be interpreted. Therefore, on the one hand, this discussion of the canon should not detain us, as we are more interested in what the LDS^C actually does with the biblical text—irrespective of considerations of the text’s canonicity. On the other hand, conclusions about the canon are the result of alleged “literal” biblical interpretations by the LDS^C. Thus, the brief investigation into their canonical views is warranted. As I noted, their views on an incomplete Bible are determined by interpretive methods—by taking a number of passages at face value (e.g., Deut 4:2; Josh 10:13; 2 Chron 16:11; 1 Cor 5:9; Col 4:16, etc.). Nonetheless, their literalistic interpretations do not consider the illocutionary intent of the author. For example, Paul certainly did not intend to convey any notions of canonicity when he mentioned a previous letter he had written (1 Cor 5:9).

However, if proponents of a canonical hermeneutic can claim to be interpreting “literally”—and at the same time display characteristics of an overarching theological perspective—can the LDS^C claim justification for their approach? In actuality, both LDS^C and canonical interpretations illustrate a neglect of the illocutionary intent of the author of individual biblical texts. The former does so, apparently, on account of institutional motivations. The latter appears to be more concerned with the influence of the larger canon of Scripture on individual texts, as well as a preoccupation with how the Christian community throughout history has come to understand the text.²³² The priority and importance of authorial intention, then, appears to be neglected in both “canonical exegesis” and LDS^C hermeneutics.

3.2.9. LDS^C *literality as a claimed non-interpretive virtue*

We note an unusual perspective regarding literality and the LDS^C. Joseph Smith claimed that they “believed what the Bible foretold” while the “sects of

²³² A number of conservative scholars disagree with a “canonical exegesis” (see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993) 50). Similarly, this approach results in an interpretation “severed from the original writer’s intention in all of its historical particularity” (Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981) 81).

the day only held to interpretations” of the book.²³³ Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young posited that other churches “interpret” the Bible, while the “Mormons alone take it just as it stands.”²³⁴ When asked by an opponent about his belief in the Bible, Brigham Young replied,

I believe it just as it is. I do not believe in putting any man’s interpretation upon it, whatever, unless it should be directed by the Lord Himself in some way. I do not believe we need interpreters and expounders of the Scriptures, to wrest them from their literal, plain, simple meaning.²³⁵

These strong statements have significant hermeneutical ramifications. We note LDS thinkers appearing to equate “literal” with “real” or “true.” Also, there seems to be a self-evident notion here that interpretation is not even needed. In other words, meaning is both obvious and undisputed. Both Smith and Young simplistically separate literal interpretation by the LDS^C from those that “interpret.” Their statements highlight the lack of awareness regarding their own hermeneutical activity. Smith and Young imply that *literality is non-interpretive*. For both of them, *believing* the Bible, or reading it “just as it was” (i.e., literally), was contrasted to others who “interpret” the Bible.²³⁶ Both Smith and Young placed interpretations *in opposition to* reading the Bible. This is perplexing, and is difficult to reconcile with accepted hermeneutical wisdom. To place interpretation as the direct opposite of a literal reading leads to numerous unresolved questions.

3.2.10. LDS authors and literality

Philip Barlow recognizes the challenge of defining “the proper meaning of literalism,” although he maintains that Joseph Smith exhibited a “selectively applied literalism” throughout the entirety of his life and ministry.²³⁷ LDS author Ian Barber also acknowledges the potential problems of literalism and

²³³ See Irving, ‘Mormons and the Bible,’ 477; cf. McConkie, *New Witness*, 518.

²³⁴ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 95. For other LDS^C perspectives on literality, see Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 15; Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986) 285.

²³⁵ Brigham Young, ‘Effects and Privileges of the Gospel, etc.,’ in JD 1:237, <http://jod.mrm.org/1/233>, accessed Mar 2015, emphasis in original.

²³⁶ See *ibid.*; cf. Irving, ‘Mormons and the Bible,’ 477; McConkie, *New Witness*, 518; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 95. We also note that if other churches “interpret” and the Mormons “take Scripture as it is,” they are using interpretive language—yet are excusing themselves from the need to interpret. This idiosyncratic use of interpretive language would be questioned within hermeneutical scholarship.

²³⁷ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 35, 71.

reacts against the “Mormon obsession of literalist interpretation” to advocate for the “complex LDS scriptural tradition” to be “a fresh Christian doctrine of dynamic development and transformation.” For Barber, the literalist tendency “has become a largely inward and unproductive commitment of Mormon intellectual and theological resources.” Thus, they “must look beyond evidentiary debate and an inflexible literalist framework.”²³⁸ James Faulconer writes against those who “assume that meaning, biblical or otherwise, is essentially referential/representative” and advocates an *incarnational* reading of scripture, in order to go beyond a strict literalism. Faulconer argues that “we can understand scripture as an incarnation or enactment of history rather than a representation of it,” and “the scriptures are literal history, but their history is incarnational rather than representational.” He continues against the aspect of historical referentiality: “such a theory of history is problematic, for to the degree that a historian can be successful there is, ironically, no real history, only the repetition of something that is always the same.”²³⁹ In response, it is unclear how these views illuminate the complex issue of literality. There is a general omission by LDS authors to provide practical reflections on the meaning and outcomes of literality. Barber simplistically calls for a looking “beyond” literality. Faulconer introduces another term in need of definition: “incarnational” reading. He is not explaining the interpretive process, but appears to be avoiding its complexities by introducing an ambiguous term.

3.3. The hermeneutical effect of literalistic interpretation by the LDS^C

We have seen a consistent emphasis by LDS authors concerning a simple, plain, literal hermeneutic. This illustrates the positive manner in which the LDS^C, at times, values the Bible. However, the LDS^C appears to be unable or at least unwilling to articulate the hermeneutical parameters that would guide literal interpretations. My stated argument is that despite implicit and explicit claims by the LDS^C to the contrary, the church’s use of the Bible, as illustrated in the five interpretive categories, goes beyond accepted norms and parameters of mainstream scholarship. They would undoubtedly assume alignment with

²³⁸ See Barber, ‘Literalist Constraint,’ 20, 25.

²³⁹ James E. Faulconer, ‘Scripture as Incarnation,’ emphasis by author, in Paul Y. Hoskisson (ed.), *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 2001) 17–62, BYU website, <http://rsc.byu.edu/archived/historicity-and-latter-day-saint-scriptures/2-scripture-incarnation>; accessed Mar 2016.

accepted norms of hermeneutical principles with their explicit claims of correct interpretation (e.g., finding “the true meaning”).

However, a number of LDS^C interpretations are actually literalistic, by assuming a straightforward understanding of the verbal sense of biblical locutions. In addition, their literalistic reading ignores the illocutionary force of the text. They presuppose not only a self-evident understanding of the empirical referentiality of the text, but also a direct correspondence between the text and external realities of the text. This is an overly optimistic, one-to-one correspondence between the text and the empirical realities projected by the text. One problem with this direct correspondence is the apparent impossibility of the definition of the historical referent itself.²⁴⁰ Indeed, in order to reconstruct the exact identity of the historical referent, it might be necessary to explore outside of the text—the very thing a “literal” interpretation ostensibly opposes. At the very least, an investigation into the historical referent would be highly speculative, with very few parameters.²⁴¹ We saw in the first chapter that some methodologies claim to see a text “straightforwardly” with instant access to its locutionary meaning and the accompanying ability to make judgments about its meaning. The LDS^C not only fails to acknowledge the challenges of a “literal” interpretation, but appears to advocate a simplistic equation of literality with the “verbal sense of the words,” with literalistic interpretations as a result. While the historical referentiality piece does, in fact, retain some importance in the interpretive process, it should not be at the expense of the illocutionary intent of the author.

²⁴⁰ See, for example, Peter D. Miscall, ‘Biblical Narrative and Categories of the Fantastic,’ George Aichele and Tina Pippin (eds), *Semeia* 60 (1992) 39-52, citing 40-41; cf. Iain R. Torrance, in Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 16-17.

²⁴¹ See the discussion in Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 492.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETATION BY ALLEGORIZATIONS

A second interpretive practice that can be seen in LDS^C sources is allegorical. In contrast to their literal interpretations, the LDS^C does not explicitly acknowledge this allegorical approach. As a preliminary exercise, I will introduce basic aspects of allegory. I will also make the important distinction between *allegory* and *allegorization*, especially how both relate to the historical referent. This distinction will become important for understanding allegorical interpretation by the LDS^C. The concept of the historical referent will be explored with particular emphasis on the parables of Jesus. Finally, I will describe my understanding of what is occurring when the LDS^C allegorically approach the biblical text. I will argue that their “allegorical” interpretations, are, in fact, *allegorizations*.

4.1. The complexity of allegory in the mainstream academy

4.1.1. *The identification of allegory*

Allegory is “an extended metaphor in which actions, objects...and/or persons in a narrative correspond to or suggest meanings outside the narrative.”¹ According to Grondin, the interpretation of an allegory results in the discovery of “something more profound behind” the literal sense.² A deeper meaning is found in an allegory when a textual character, place or event represents real-world issues and occurrences. An allegory addresses “insiders,” who can “work out the code,” and who are “in the know.”³ Given that allegory “presupposes shared understanding”⁴

¹ See W. Randolph Tate, *Handbook for Biblical Interpretation* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012) 11-12. I take metaphor to refer to a general category where one object is identified and/or contrasted with another object (see *ibid.*, 256). A metaphor could also be described as “a comparison between two dissimilar things that creates unexpected associations in one’s mental image of the things compared” (Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 142 n9). While a metaphor can be, in fact, a “mini-story” (see Wright, *People of God*, 135), I am using allegory as a more detailed, “extended” metaphor. In other words, an “allegory paints a series of pictures in metaphorical form” (Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 293). In this way, allegory is more than a simple metaphor, as it exhibits details and more narrational characteristics.

² Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 24. For Gerald Bray, an allegorical reading occurs when the literal sense conceals a hidden meaning (Gerald Bray, ‘Allegory,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 34-36, citing 34).

³ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 38.

between the implied author and the implied reader, real-world issues are vividly imaged by these textual characters, places or events.

4.1.2. *The distinction between allegory and allegorization as regards the historical referent*

It is necessary to highlight a distinction between biblical allegory and “allegorization.” For the former, a deeper meaning is found when a character, place or event represents *ancient* real-world issues, occurrences or perspectives. Furthermore, the deeper meaning in a biblical allegory, with its *ancient* historical referent, was the intention of the author. Two examples include Paul’s words in Galatians 4:21-31 concerning Hagar and Sarah representing two covenants, and the parables of Jesus concerning Israel’s history (to be covered below). However, a deeper meaning in an allegorization is found when a character, place or event is connected with *modern* real-world issues, occurrences or perspectives. This deeper meaning, with its modern historical referent, is entirely the invention of the interpreter. When this occurs, there is, effectively, a “re-doing” of the text’s referentiality. Interpreters find hidden, deeper meanings where there are none (from the perspective of the author). The result of this type of interpretation is the disclosing of “deep secrets and arcane significances that were never there to begin with and never entered the mind of the author.”⁵ A non-LDS allegorization is God sending the Gospel to the church, who is the bride for his son, Jesus, as a representation of Abraham sending his servant to find a bride for his son (Gen 24).⁶ Another example is seen in Philo, who viewed the escape of the soul from the limitations of the body as a representation of the biblical event of the Exodus.⁷

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, ‘The Truth of Scripture and the Problem of Historical Relativity,’ in Carson and Woodbridge (eds), *Scripture and Truth*, 169-194, citing 188.

⁶ See Wright, *Scripture and the Authority*, 69. There are many non-LDS examples. For some medieval exegetes, Leah and Rachel, the wives of Jacob, represented the layperson and monk, respectively (see Barr, ‘The Literal,’ 4). For others, the twelve foundation stones of Revelation 21:19-20 are the twelve tribes or the twelve apostles (see Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 284). Or, “early Christian poets made much use of the erotic language of the Song of Solomon to allegorize the relationship between Christ as Bridegroom and the contemplative or mystically inclined poet as metonymically his bride” (David Lyle Jeffrey, ‘Western Literature, the Bible and,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 841-844, citing 841). For examples of allegorization with Origen, see J. W. Rogerson, ‘Interpretation, History of,’ in D. N. Freedman et al., (eds), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 424-433, citing 426. For the possibility of allegorizations occurring with the “reading of later doctrines back into the text,” see C. H. H. Scobie, ‘History of Biblical Theology,’ in Alexander and Rosner (eds), *New Dictionary*, 11-20, citing 12; cf. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 194.

⁷ See Paul R. Trebilco, ‘Diaspora Judaism,’ in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (eds), in *DNLT* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 287-300, citing 296. These examples, strictly speaking, do not necessarily highlight *modern* issues or occurrences, in spite of my definition of allegorization. However, they illustrate deeper meanings that reflect issues or perspectives that are

Again, allegorization is the practice of a modern interpreter imposing a deeper meaning on the text, by assuming that the historical referent represents a modern real-world issue.

4.1.3. *The historical referent and the parables of Jesus*

To illustrate the impact of the historical referent in allegory, I will briefly discuss the parables of Jesus. According to Wright, “at least some of Jesus’ parables,” are to be read as allegory.⁸ They have “an intended figurative meaning”⁹ that presupposes a shared understanding between the implied author and the implied reader. The use of the parables by Jesus was subversive. This, at the very least, implicitly acknowledges a historical referent. In other words, his parables were designed “to break open his contemporaries’ worldview.”¹⁰ Specifically, by representing “different elements in the ‘real’ world,” and evoking “a larger world of story, myth and symbol” the parables of Jesus told “the story of Israel herself.”¹¹ That is, the parables were “Israel’s-story-in-miniature,” with “Jesus’ telling of the Israel-story in order to undermine the present way of understanding the nation’s identity.”¹² One specific example is the parable of sower.¹³ Another example is the following:

In the parable of the wicked tenants, Israel is the vineyard, her rulers the vineyard-keepers; the prophets are the messengers, Jesus is the son; Israel’s god, the creator, is himself the owner and father. But this ‘allegorical’ meaning allows fully for much wider implications. Jesus is claiming to be developing a story already used by Isaiah (5:1–7).¹⁴

Wright demonstrates how powerfully these parables would have impacted the worldview of his hearers, as well as subvert their religious outlook. Jesus was telling the story of Israel in allegorical form—with deeper meanings reflected in the real-world (ancient) issues of his hearers. They would have “heard,” then, what he was attempting to communicate—precisely because of their shared understanding. A true allegory assumes this shared understanding between authors

later than the text. For my purposes, the emphasis on the *modern* is due to contemporary LDS^C allegorizations of the ancient text.

⁸ Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 66.

⁹ Mark Gaipa and Robert Scholes, ‘On the Very Idea of a Literal Meaning,’ in *Literary Theory After Davidson*, 169–70, in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 312.

¹⁰ Wright, *People of God*, 433.

¹¹ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 177.

¹² *Ibid.*, 179.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

and interpreters. In the following examples, I will argue that the LDS^C interpretations are ostensibly allegorical, although in actuality, are allegorizations. Only with the insider information afforded by “systemic parameters” could an interpreter understand the deeper, hidden meanings. The ancient historical referent in the biblical passages to be studied (i.e., the shared understanding between the ancient interpreters and authors), is not considered. Rather, the LDS^C deploys allegorization to promote modern real-world issues.

4.2. Examples of allegorization by the LDS^C

4.2.1. *The Book of Mormon and allegorizations of Ezekiel 37 and Isaiah 29*

Ezekiel 37:16-17 refers to two “sticks”: “take thee one stick...then take another stick...And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand” (Ezek 37:16, 17). From the LDS^C perspective, these two “sticks” represent the Bible and the BoM.¹⁵ It is claimed that the Bible and the BoM “work together to witness of Jesus Christ” when they are joined together.¹⁶ Joseph Smith desired to publish the Bible and the BoM under one cover, in fulfillment of this passage,¹⁷ although he was unable to do so before his death. However, in the year 1981, the Mormon church was able to publish the Bible together with the BoM (along with the D&C and the PGP). To celebrate this event, Elder Boyd Packer proclaimed that the two sticks were “indeed one in our hands,” and that “Ezekiel’s prophecy now stands fulfilled.”¹⁸

However, what is the historical referent of the two “sticks” of Ezekiel 37? Contextually, the prophet Ezekiel prophesied that Israel was no longer to be divided into two kingdoms, but was to become one nation. The two sticks, then, refer to exiled Israel being reunited with those of Israel still in the land (Ezek 37:21-22).¹⁹ This contextual reading highlights an *ancient* historical referent. Interestingly, one LDS source admits to this singular interpretation of the

¹⁵ See Shippis, *Mormonism*, 29; Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 50; Pratt, *Voice of Warning*, ch. 4, ‘The Book of Mormon, etc.’; McConkie, *New Witness*, 453-456; D&C 27:5.

¹⁶ LDS^C, *OT Seminary Teacher’s Manual*, LDS website.

¹⁷ See EMS 2.14:109 (July 1833), <http://www.centerplace.org/history/ems/vol1.htm>; accessed Nov 2016.

¹⁸ Boyd K. Packer, ‘Scriptures,’ *Ensign* 2.11 (Nov 1982) 53, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1982/11/scriptures?lang=eng>, accessed Mar 2015; cf. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 194. What Packer claims as prophecy, I label as allegorization.

¹⁹ See Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, Hermeneia, trans. James D. Martin (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 275; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, AB 22a (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 755, 758.

reunification between the northern and southern kingdoms.²⁰ However, most LDS thinkers believe the passage has a secondary, “deeper” meaning—implicitly acknowledging an allegorization that highlights the modern union of the Bible with the BoM.

In order to defend their hermeneutical conclusions, i.e., positing a modern historical referent in the passage of Ezekiel alongside an ancient historical referent, LDS author David Wright points out the dual interpretation of other biblical passages. According to Wright, the so-called “Immanuel Prophecy” in Isaiah 7:14 originally referred to events in the eighth century B.C.E., although Matthew applied the passage to Jesus at his birth.²¹ The voice calling out to prepare the way in Isaiah 40:3 is viewed as part of the “exodus-from-Babylon motif developed by Second Isaiah,” that is “secondarily applied to John the Baptist (Matt. 3:3).”²² In consequence, the LDS^C concludes that the meaning in Ezekiel 37 is the unification of Israel, *as well as* the joining together of the Bible and the BoM.

A number of allegorizations also appear in LDS^C interpretations of Isaiah 29. For example, the BoM is allegedly mentioned in v. 4: “And thou shalt be brought down, *and* shalt speak out of the ground” (Isa 29:4a). As a young man, Joseph Smith had received a revelation and was told that the BoM was buried in the ground. He needed to dig it “out of the ground” so that it could “speak.”²³ The end result of this process, including its translation, was viewed as a “direct fulfillment of Isa 29:4.”²⁴ Early LDS leader W.W. Phelps commented:

If the present generation had had faith...[in the BoM]...every honest man would have searched the scriptures daily to see if the glorious news it contained, was so...With but little discernment, they might have discovered that Isaiah had his eyes on the last days, when he spoke of what should happen at a future period.²⁵

²⁰ Early LDS authority Heber Snell, who received a Ph.D. in biblical studies from the University of Chicago in 1941, insisted on only one meaning for the passage. He argued, “the text plainly prophesied of the reuniting of Israel.” Instead of using Ezekiel 37 to defend the legitimacy of the “stick” of the BoM, Snell argued that other evidence should be used (see Richard Sherlock, ‘Faith and History: The Snell Controversy,’ *Dialogue* 12.1 (Spring 1979) 27-41, citing 32-33).

²¹ Wright, ‘Joseph Smith’s Interpretation of Isaiah,’ 204. See Oaks, ‘Scripture Reading,’ LDS website, for another defense of the “multiple meanings” of Scripture.

²² Wright, ‘Joseph Smith’s Interpretation of Isaiah,’ 204.

²³ See Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 64-66; McConkie, *New Witness*, 435-450; Wright, ‘Joseph Smith’s Interpretation of Isaiah,’ 196; Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 752.

²⁴ Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 50.

²⁵ W.W. Phelps, ‘Letter No. 8,’ in *Messenger and Advocate*, 1.9:129 (June 1835), <http://www.centerplace.org/history/ma/vol1.htm>; accessed Nov 2016.

Isaiah 29:11 is also cited: “And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a *book that is sealed*, Which men deliver to one that is learned, Saying, Read this, I pray thee: And he saith, *I cannot; for it is sealed*” (KJV, emphasis added). An event early in the LDS^C movement illustrates this verse as an allegorization. Martin Harris was one of the early scribes for the translation of the BoM (that was claimed to be originally written in “Reformed Egyptian” on metal plates). Harris had doubts concerning Joseph Smith’s ability to translate, so he carried part of the translated manuscript to Charles Anthon, a well-known classical scholar in New York. After a brief discussion, Anthon asked to see the plates from which the manuscript was translated. Harris declined this request, since the plates were “sealed.” To this Anthon replied, “I cannot read a sealed book.” This was taken as an exact echo of the words of Isaiah 29:11: “And he saith, *‘I cannot; for it is sealed.’*” Thus, according to Richard Bushman, “Harris and Anthon had inadvertently fulfilled a prophecy in Isaiah.”²⁶

Other phrases from Isaiah 29 exhibit allegorization. In v. 4, the words “brought down” are interpreted as a reference to the defeat in warfare of the Nephites centuries later on the American continent: “And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground...” (Isa 29:4a).²⁷ Since Joseph Smith did not receive a thorough education, a phrase taken from the KJV of Isaiah 29:12 purportedly describes this lack of an academic background: “And the book is delivered to him that is *not learned*, Saying, Read this, I pray thee: And he saith, I am *not learned*” (Isa 29:12, emphasis added).²⁸ According to Philip Barlow, then, with these interpretations of Isaiah 29, Smith “did more” than just feel “keenly the relevance of scripture,” as did many 19th century contemporaries. Rather, he “placed himself *inside* the biblical story.”²⁹ This placing of himself inside the biblical story is an implicit acknowledgement of allegorization—the imposition of a modern historical referent.

²⁶ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 65–66; cf. McConkie, *New Witness*, 449; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 20. Again, what Bushman labels as prophecy, I label as allegorization.

²⁷ See Duane S. Crowther, *The Prophecies of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963) 175. The Nephites are one of the people groups in the BoM. This is advanced, in spite of the second phrase (“and shall speak out of the ground”), referring to the BoM, as mentioned above.

²⁸ See Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 44.

²⁹ Barlow, “Before Mormonism,” 752; cf. Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 52. These LDS^C conclusions on Isaiah 29 are a significant departure from traditional interpretations of the text. In actuality, the chapter is a “woe” that addresses “Ariel.” This name has different meanings, although in the context, it refers to Jerusalem. Motyer states: “Zion is veiled behind Ariel—though its identity is no secret” (J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 20 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1999) 213; cf. Gene M. Tucker, *The Book of Isaiah 1–39*, NIB 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001) 242; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, WBC 24 (rev. edn; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005) 450).

In sum, these interpretations of Ezekiel 37 and Isaiah 29 are allegorizations. They are not examples of legitimate biblical allegories, like the parables of Jesus, which reference ancient historical referents. These passages are quoted in order to emphasize modern historical referents, such as the joining together of the BoM with the Bible, the BoM speaking out of the ground, or Smith being unlearned.

4.2.2. *The LDS^C as the new Israel*

The LDS^C views itself as “the house of Israel and a covenant people.”³⁰ The initial clause of Article of Faith #10 reads: “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes.”³¹ They see themselves as “physically a rediscovered, restored, and reinterpreted ‘Israel.’”³² Some LDS members insist on a literal descent from Israel. For example, “the Saints are literally adopted into Israel and are thereupon brought into the covenant by virtue of their membership in the tribes of Israel.”³³ Additionally, young LDS members receive a “patriarchal blessing” that allows them to identify with “a genealogical line back to one of the tribes of Israel.”³⁴ However, others in the LDS^C concede the “new Israel” to be figurative.³⁵ Nonetheless, an official manual encourages LDS members to “know that they are of the house of Israel.”³⁶

Jeremiah 23:3 speaks of the gathering of Israel: “I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them.” This gathering supposedly occurred within the organization of the LDS^C:

The power and authority to direct the work of gathering the house of Israel was given to Joseph Smith by the prophet Moses, who appeared in 1836 in the Kirtland Temple (see D&C 110:11). Since that time, each prophet has held the keys for the gathering of the house of Israel, and this

³⁰ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 167; cf. Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 66; Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 242; Frank J. Johnson and Rabbi William J. Leffler, *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 2000) 148.

³¹ We note here the language of literality. As Cummings notes, “Although the other articles imply literal belief, this is the only one of the thirteen which explicitly includes the term *literal*” (Cummings, ‘Quintessential Mormonism,’ 95, emphasis by author). Not only does a Mormon convert “experience a spiritual transformation, but he or she also undergoes a miraculous physical change whereby his or her blood is literally transmuted from gentile blood to the blood of Israel” (Cummings, ‘Quintessential Mormonism,’ 96; cf. Joseph Fielding Smith (ed.), *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 150).

³² Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 44; cf. Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd, ‘The Doctrinal and Commitment Functions of Patriarchal Blessings in early Mormon Development, 1834-45,’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80.3 (Sept 2012) 718-749, citing 733.

³³ Shippo, *Mormonism*, 75.

³⁴ Ludlow, ‘Bible,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 105; cf. Abanes, *One Nation*, 109; Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 205-207.

³⁵ See Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 169-170.

³⁶ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 167.

gathering has been an important part of the Church's work.³⁷

Other biblical references are cited to sustain their perspective on being the “new Israel.” A foundational event, after the death of Joseph Smith, was the trek from Nauvoo, Illinois to Salt Lake City, Utah. In this journey west, the Mormons replicated the Exodus.³⁸ In fact, they were “sociologically reenacting the Exodus.”³⁹ Indeed, the “great company” that “walk[ed] by the rivers of waters”—phrases from Jeremiah 31:8, 9—referenced this trek to Salt Lake City.⁴⁰ Brigham Young, who led the trip westward, was seen as a modern Moses,⁴¹ and the arrival in the Rocky Mountains in Utah was seen as a fulfillment of Isaiah 2:2 that speaks of “the top of the mountains.”⁴² To summarize, the deeper meanings imposed on several biblical texts to sustain this “new Israel” perspective assumes insider information that is predicated upon modern historical referents.

Nonetheless, the notion of the re-gathering of Israel, or of remnant language, is not particularly novel to the LDS^C. It is, in fact, not far removed from mainstream thinkers. For example, Gerhard Lohfink argues that the NT contends neither for the reformation of Israel, nor for the formation of the church, but for the restoration and re-gathering of Israel.⁴³ Wright also posits, “Jesus’ mighty works...had the effect of gathering the community of ‘all Israel’, in accordance with ancient prophecy,”⁴⁴ and that Jesus intended for “those who responded to him to see themselves as the true, restored Israel.”⁴⁵ Jesus “thought of his followers as the true people of Israel.”⁴⁶ Biblical examples of a re-gathering include Jesus and his desire to gather the people of Jerusalem like a hen gathers her chicks

³⁷ LDS^C, *Gospel Principles*, 248.

³⁸ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 81-83; Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 96; Bowman, *Mormon People*, xix.

³⁹ Givens, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 107. They were re-enacting “much of the Gospels and Acts besides” (ibid.).

⁴⁰ McConkie, *New Witness*, 547. Nauvoo was located on the eastern side of the Mississippi River. Thus, the Mississippi was one of the “rivers of waters” from the passage of Jeremiah.

⁴¹ Brigham Young “became the Moses of the new world, at the head of a monumental exodus” (Cummings, ‘Quintessential Mormonism,’ 101).

⁴² Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 83; cf. LDS^C, *La Verdad Restaurada* (Argentina: La Iglesia de Jesucristo de los Santos de los Últimos Días, 2012) 126. However, McConkie sees the Isaiah reference of “top of the mountains” as a “specific reference to Salt Lake temple and other temples” as well as a “general reference to the temple yet to be built in the New Jerusalem in Jackson County, Missouri” (McConkie, *New Witness*, 539).

⁴³ See Gerhard Lohfink, *Die Sammlung Israels: Eine Untersuchung zur lukanischen Ekklesiologie* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1975); cf. Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, trans. J. P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress; New York: Paulist Press, 1984); Michael E. Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel's Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2006) 13-24, 197-273.

⁴⁴ Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 193.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 316.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 321.

(Matt 23:37), and John the Baptist inviting his listeners to bypass the temple, and “redo” the Exodus through baptism in the Jordan (Matt 3:5-12).⁴⁷

However, the LDS^C allegorizations of the “new Israel” and the Exodus represent problematic notions. While authors such as Lohfink and Wright note the re-gathering motif with *ancient* historical referents in the NT⁴⁸, the LDS^C sees it with *modern* historical referents of 19th century events in the United States. Lohfink and Wright maintain a strong focus on ancient referentiality. The NT texts referred to a re-gathering of Israel as the people of God in the 1st century. The LDS^C goes beyond the mainstream view, by importing deeper meanings that only reflect modern-day realities.

4.2.3. *The LDS^C as the NT church*

Many characteristics of the New Testament church are imported into the modern LDS^C organization. The NT church is viewed as a “model and prototype” for the modern Mormon church.⁴⁹ Although many 19th century Christians believed that miracles had ceased, the early LDS^C movement concluded that they were living in “sacred time,” and were witnesses of another age of miracles.⁵⁰ Joseph Smith even “included the resumption of New Testament charismata as one of the Church’s thirteen basic Articles of Faith.”⁵¹ In addition, the actual organization of the early LDS^C was alleged to be consistent with the NT pattern,⁵² with the earnest claim that the LDS “organization matched every feature of the NT church.”⁵³ Specifically, “the ecclesiastical structure” of the NT church had been replicated with “a church headed by a prophet and twelve apostles.”⁵⁴ In McConkie’s words, “How is it that the churches of Christendom do not have apostles, prophets, high priests, seventies, and all of the other New Testament offices and callings?”⁵⁵ Joseph Smith saw himself as Peter, a church founder, as well as Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.⁵⁶ He was also proclaimed as “Prophet, Priest and King” on April 11,

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 160-161, 257.

⁴⁸ Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, 75-80; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 193, 316, 321.

⁴⁹ Hutchinson, ‘LDS Approaches,’ 114.

⁵⁰ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 127; cf. D&C 46:17-26.

⁵¹ Paulsen, ‘Are Christians Mormon?’ 41; “We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues, and so forth” (AoF #7).

⁵² Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 11.

⁵³ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 95.

⁵⁴ Siebach, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 464.

⁵⁵ McConkie, *New Witness*, 409.

⁵⁶ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 74-75. The use of the word “Gentiles” refers to non-Mormons.

1844.⁵⁷ He confidently testified to the restoration of “the ancient New Testament faith—the principles, practices, and doctrine originally taught by Jesus Christ and his apostles in the first century (Articles of Faith 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 13).”⁵⁸ Therefore, the LDS^C has claimed to be in consonance with the NT church. In order to support this claim, however, insider information has to be introduced into the text. They effectively import their modern perspective into the text, attempting to argue that they match every feature of the NT church.

4.2.4. *The narrativial self-understanding of the LDS^C*

By claiming to be the new Israel as well as the reduplication of the NT church, the LDS^C assumes that the story of the Bible is continued in their church. Various descriptions further highlight this narrativial self-understanding. The LDS community is described as a “replication”⁵⁹ or “recapitulation”⁶⁰ of the story of the Bible, as well as “a restoration and recuperation not just of New Testament Christianity but also of Old Testament priesthoods and principles.”⁶¹ For Joseph Smith, “the whole biblical narrative had come to life again, as endings were put on stories that had their beginnings in the scriptural text.”⁶² The early LDS members believed their lives were evidence of a work from God.⁶³ As we have referenced, Smith “put himself inside the Bible story, reading episodes in his own life as direct fulfillments of biblical prophecy.”⁶⁴ Grant Underwood writes in reference to the early LDS^C: “they were the fulfillment of much of what they read about in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.”⁶⁵

This narrativial self-understanding is witnessed in other sources. LDS^C teaching is “less a set of doctrines than a collection of stories.”⁶⁶ In fact, “Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, wrote stories,”⁶⁷ so that their doctrine is not

⁵⁷ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 523.

⁵⁸ See Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, Epilogue, ‘The New Testament and the Restoration.’

⁵⁹ Shipps, *Mormonism*, 39.

⁶⁰ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 75, 103.

⁶¹ Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 294.

⁶² Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 752; cf. Abanes, *One Nation*, 84; Bowman, *Mormon People*, xvii-xviii.

⁶³ For the narrativial connection between Scripture and the United States of America, according to LDS^C sources, see Wright, ‘Joseph Smith’s Interpretation of Isaiah,’ 192-193; Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 34; Smith, ‘Hermeneutical Crisis,’ 97; Pratt, *Voice of Warning*, ch. 4, ‘The Book of Mormon, etc.’; McConkie, *New Witness*, 423; Hughes, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 37; Moses 7:21, 23, 62-65; D&C 57:1-3; HC 6:318-319.

⁶⁴ Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 741; cf. Flake, ‘Translating Time,’ 508-509. Thus, the early Mormons “would act out Biblical narratives in their own lives” (Underwood, *Millenarian World*, 59).

⁶⁵ Underwood, *Millenarian World*, 58, emphasis by author.

⁶⁶ Oman, ‘Living Oracles,’ 2.

⁶⁷ Flake, ‘Translating Time,’ 497.

so much propositionally driven, but narratively driven.⁶⁸ They “are deeply invested in historical narratives.”⁶⁹ The “core religious beliefs” of the LDS^C are “expressed in narrative terms.”⁷⁰ Benjamin Huff believes their theological discourse is “a kind of hermeneutic theology based on narrative.”⁷¹ In fact, “(a)ll of Mormonism, even its most unfamiliar tenets, rests in some element on the biblical narrative.”⁷² Kathleen Flake even downplays the theological acumen of her fellow Mormons: “Mormons are not theologians or even particularly doctrinaire; they are primarily narrativists. They inhabit the world of the book. They read themselves into the salvation history it tells and orient themselves to the horizon created by its promises.”⁷³ Douglas Davies suggests that “(t)he tradition of seeing the truth in and through stories about persons continues to lie at the heart of Mormon self-understanding.”⁷⁴ The narrativ impulse is manifested in their views concerning the continuation of the narrative of the Bible. However, ancient historical referents are not considered. Rather, the import of these LDS^C conclusions emphasize the modern LDS^C church.

4.3. The hermeneutical effect of LDS^C allegorization

These examples of allegorization are tendentious. Whereas in mainstream scholarship even *allegory* has come under significant scrutiny and suspicion ever since the late 19th century,⁷⁵ LDS^C thinking appears to be oblivious to the inherent

⁶⁸ Flake warns that “reducing Smith’s event-driven narratives to propositional statements is alien to the religious system he created” (Flake, ‘Translating Time,’ 500).

⁶⁹ Wilcox and Young (eds), *Standing Apart*, 11.

⁷⁰ Steven L. Olsen, ‘The Theology of Memory: Mormon Historical Consciousness,’ *FARMS Review* 19.2 (2007) 25-37, citing 27.

⁷¹ Benjamin Huff, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 482.

⁷² Flake, ‘Four Books,’ 28. Flake continues: “Academics would explain this in terms of intertextuality, noting that the meanings of Mormonism, even its unique scriptures, are achieved within the larger context of the Christian canon” (ibid.).

⁷³ Ibid., 31. Relatedly, the LDS church is well known for their genealogical work, for they “take seriously their individual and family history” (Edwin S. Gaustad, ‘History and Theology: The Mormon Connection,’ *Sunstone* 5.6 (Nov-Dec 1980) 44-50, citing 48). The LDS church also keeps the largest genealogical record in the world (Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 167). See also the genealogical site provided by the LDS church for members and non-members alike, with 10 million hits per day, at ‘Family Search,’ <https://familysearch.org/>; accessed Aug 2014.

⁷⁴ Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 184.

⁷⁵ This was due, in part, because of the views of Adolf Jülicher, who viewed the parables of Jesus as straightforward and in no need of allegorical interpretation, in spite of contrary views. See Ulrich Mell, ‘Die neutestamentliche Gleichnisforschung 100 Jahre nach Adolf Jülicher’ *Theologische Rundschau* 76.1 (Feb 2011) 37-81; cf. Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (2nd edn; 2 vols; Tübingen: Mohr, 1910); K. R. Snodgrass, ‘Parable,’ in Green and McKnight (eds), *DJG*, 591-601, citing 591. Jülicher went in the exact opposite direction of an allegorical hermeneutic. Since Jülicher, it is generally understood that even if he went too far in the opposite direction, unfettered allegorical interpretation should not be considered hermeneutically responsible (see Loretta Dornisch, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics,’ in John Dominic Crossan (ed.), *Semeia* 4 (1975) 27-148, citing 88-92; Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 329).

difficulties of such readings. Grondin has concluded that allegorical interpretation fell into discredit even in antiquity. This was due to its inherent subjectivity, as well as a randomness that “open[ed] the door to interpretive arbitrariness.”⁷⁶ Perhaps not altogether surprisingly, LDS^C scholarship shows little, if any interest in these developments.

Supported in part by Ezekiel 37, Isaiah 29, and Jeremiah 31, the LDS^C views itself in congruence with and as a recapitulation of the biblical narrative. This is a rereading of the past with allegorization. While, positively, they show an interest in the locutionary face value of the biblical text, negatively, there appears to be an invalidation of the historical moorings of the biblical text as the church assumes that ancient Scripture refers to their modern-day movement. There does not exist a specific referent in these texts that justifies the distinct uses of the texts. For example, questionable hidden meanings are advanced, such as Isaiah 2:2 referring to the Rocky Mountains in Utah, or Isaiah 29 referring to a book buried millennia later in New York. LDS author Anthony Hutchinson quotes Mark Leone, who admits to “the collapsing of the present into the past by an ever-renewed and ever-changing rereading of the past in light of the present and a constant packing of the past with anachronistic meaning and value from the present.”⁷⁷ This implicit acknowledgement of allegorization makes it difficult to conclude that LDS^C interpretation is hermeneutically sound.

Another hermeneutical effect of these allegorizations is the implicit claim that locutionary content can be taken at face value. We saw specifically in the use of Ezekiel 37 and Isaiah 29 that these texts were not one of the passages that were corrupt or incorrectly translated. Therefore, it seems that when a text aligns with “systemic parameters,” the LDS^C takes it at face value. When it doesn’t suit them, they correct it, or at least claim corruption or incorrect translation. In addition, there is a disparity between their literal interpretations and their allegorizations. Numerous examples were given above on the “entrenched literalism”⁷⁸ of their biblical interpretations. Yet, with LDS^C allegorizations, a hidden meaning is found behind numerous biblical passages. This does not coincide with a “straightforward,” “plain,” and “literal” meaning.⁷⁹ One of our stated objectives

⁷⁶ Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 24, 28.

⁷⁷ See Hutchinson, ‘LDS Approaches,’ 114.

⁷⁸ Shepherd and Shepherd, *Kingdom Transformed*, 5; cf. Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 30; White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, 58.

⁷⁹ One example is the phrase “rivers of water” from Jeremiah 31:8, 9. Again, this refers to the Mississippi River in the central United States (McConkie, *New Witness*, 547). However, no mainstream scholar would agree with this speculative interpretation, nor would most interpreters

was to discover the most significant sociological factors that account for the apparent inconsistencies in the interpretive methods deployed in LDS^C uses of the Bible. We have noted a significant sociological factor concerning Bible believers in the 19th century context—they “looked to a common-sense reading of the KJV for their spiritual understanding.”⁸⁰ Thus, the early LDS^C championed a “literal,” “plain,” “common-sense” reading of the Bible. At the same time, however, as a significant sociological factor, they sought contemporary relevance with their allegorizations.

Given the idea of a “new Israel,” one could postulate a typology—that Smith is fitting into a pattern. Just as God acted in certain ways in the past, Smith, and by extension the current LDS prophet, were (and are) used by God.⁸¹ Others might postulate similarities with replacement theology,⁸² or with the concept of promise and fulfillment in salvation history.⁸³ Although there are similarities with these interpretive categories relating the OT with the NT, it seems more reasonable to label the aforementioned uses of the Bible by the LDS^C as allegorizations, especially in view of the modern aspect of the historical referent, as well as the insider information needed for these interpretations.

However, what of the views of LDS author David Wright above—on the “secondary meanings” of selected biblical passages (Isa 7:14; 40:3)?⁸⁴ Does the mainstream academy offer suggestions for dealing with “secondary” meanings? It is possible that LDS thinkers could espouse a type of *sensus plenior* approach.⁸⁵ In other words, the LDS^C may posit that God had something more to communicate

conclude that the Mississippi River was the result of a “literal,” or “plain” interpretation of Jeremiah 31.

⁸⁰ Givens and Barlow (eds), *Oxford Handbook on Mormonism*, 130.

⁸¹ A typological understanding, however, displays repeated patterns of events, concepts or people, and describes how God has acted in the past—throughout the two Testaments, and not as regards modern-day events (see especially Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982)).

⁸² “...the church so fulfills the promises to Israel that the promises to ethnic Israel are rendered obsolete” (Scot McKnight, ‘Israel,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 344-346, citing 345).

⁸³ While “the church and Israel are two related but still individually distinguishable entities,” there still exists a “continuity of salvation history” (W. S. Campbell, ‘Church as Israel, People of God,’ in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (eds), *DLNT* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 204-219, citing 211-212; cf. I. Howard Marshall, ‘Acts,’ in G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (eds), *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 513-606, citing 523-524).

⁸⁴ Wright, ‘Joseph Smith’s Interpretation of Isaiah,’ 204.

⁸⁵ For the initial discussion of this concept, see Raymond E. Brown, ‘The History and Development of the Theory of a Sensus Plenior,’ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 15 (1953) 141-162, citing 143; Raymond E. Brown, ‘The Sensus Plenior in the Last Ten Years,’ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963) 262-285, citing 268-269.

than what the human author of Scripture intended.⁸⁶ Specifically, “the *sensus plenior* of a biblical text is not a fully conscious product of its human author(s) but, rather, expresses the intentions of its divine author.”⁸⁷ In addition, a *sensus plenior* reading “recognizes that the inspired meaning of a text in the canon is that which God intended or may divinely reveal through the authority of the church. This fuller sense of the text may extend beyond that which is perceived as the author’s intention.”⁸⁸

Those that advocate a *sensus plenior* approach focus on the contemporary significance of biblical passages. This is similar to our subject under consideration—LDS^C allegorizations as a self-identification with the biblical narrative. The “literal” or “plain” meaning of the text recedes into the background in favor of what the event means today. Therefore, a version of *sensus plenior* might be an appropriate way to label LDS^C methodological activity here. However, the hermeneutical legitimacy of *sensus plenior* is a matter of debate.⁸⁹ Simply put, “(p)roblematic for the *sensus plenior* view as applied to contemporary ‘fuller meaning’ is the lack of any adequate controls for what might be part of this new, fuller sense.”⁹⁰ It is difficult to tell the difference between *sensus plenior* and “the projection on to the text of a theological idea or belief acquired by some other means.”⁹¹ Since the “meaning is not contained in the text itself,” it may be more appropriate to “speak of a fuller understanding on the part of the exegete rather than of a fuller sense of the text.”⁹² Any random interpretation, LDS^C or otherwise, could be claimed as the “fuller understanding” of the *interpreter*.⁹³

⁸⁶ For this perspective of *sensus plenior*, see Kit Barker, ‘Speech Act Theory, Dual Authorship, and Canonical Hermeneutics: Making Sense of *Sensus Plenior*,’ *JTI* 3.2 (Fall 2009) 227-239, especially 228-230.

⁸⁷ Corrine L. Patton and Stephen L. Cook, ‘Introduction: Jane Morse and the Fuller Sense (Theoretical Framework for a *Sensus Plenior*)’ in Stephen L. Cook, Corrine L. Patton and James W. Watts (eds), *The Whirlwind: Essays on Job, Hermeneutics and Theology in Memory of Jane Morse* (JSOTSup 336) (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) 13-39, citing 37.

⁸⁸ Dennis L. Stamps, ‘The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament as a Rhetorical Device: A Methodological Proposal,’ in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 9-37, citing 22.

⁸⁹ In fact, “one of the most heated debates in hermeneutics has been the issue of whether Scripture has a fuller sense than that intended by the human author” (Julius Muthengi, ‘A Critical Analysis of *Sensus Plenior*,’ *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 3.2 (1984) 63-73, citing 63-64).

⁹⁰ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 115.

⁹¹ Wright, *People of God*, 58-59.

⁹² Muthengi, ‘A Critical Analysis,’ 69.

⁹³ Additionally, Roman Catholic proponents of *sensus plenior* argue from church tradition. It is claimed that textual meaning was “designated as divine intention.” However, in reality, the meaning was a “subjective interpretation” (Payne, ‘Fallacy of Equating Meaning,’ 251). Even conservative authors question the legitimacy of *sensus plenior*: “If New Testament authors can use their Scripture (the Old Testament) in ways that were never intended by the original writers and never understandable by the original audiences, there is very little stopping the contemporary

These conclusions argue against the use of *sensus plenior*, and can be applied to the views of LDS author David Wright. The “secondary meanings” of Wright are, in actuality, LDS^C allegorizations that advance modern meanings of an ancient text. The “fuller meaning” of the allegorization of Ezekiel 37, for example, is the purported uniting of the Bible and the BoM. LDS author W. W. Phelps specifically mentioned the modern referent (quoted above in reference to Isaiah 29): “Isaiah had his eyes on the last days, when he spoke of what should happen at a future period.”⁹⁴ According to Phelps, Isaiah 29 refers to the “last days.” This is debatable. There are problems inherent in a *sensus plenior* hermeneutic, then, with a projection of modern meanings onto an ancient text. Likewise, there are problems with LDS^C claims of secondary or fuller meaning that focus only on contemporary significance.

A pertinent issue for the LDS^C centers on how 19th century believers viewed the 1st century church. The “early Christians” in the 1st century held to a “profound conviction that [they] were living in the age when God was fulfilling the OT promises, and filling out the larger meaning or significance of various portions of the OT that did not specifically speak prophetically about the future.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, the coming of Jesus became the hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the OT: “...precisely because of what the early Christians believed about Israel’s story having come to fulfillment in Jesus, they developed a multilayered, nuanced, and theologically grounded reading of the Old Testament.”⁹⁶ These types of conclusions, then, also resonated with 19th century LDS^C thinkers. There was a profound conviction that they were living in a period when the larger meaning of both Old and New Testaments were coming true. They considered themselves to be living in “sacred time,” and as witnesses to another age of miracles.⁹⁷ However, although the 19th century LDS^C claims of a restored biblical narrative resonate within their church, this insider information does not hold up to historical, theological or epistemological scrutiny.

Finally, an important concept to be introduced here (and more fully developed in chapter eight) centers on the implied audience of a text. As McLean

interpreter from looking at any portion of both the Old and New Testaments and applying it with unconstrained creativity” (Blomberg and Markley, *Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, 192).

⁹⁴ W. W. Phelps, ‘Letter No. 8,’ *Messenger and Advocate*.

⁹⁵ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 124.

⁹⁶ Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 53.

⁹⁷ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 127; cf. D&C 46:17–26. Even today, LDS members continue to have “a sense that the age they are living in is of particular cosmic relevance, to be understood as the last dispensation”⁹⁷ (Bowman, ‘History Thrown into Divinity,’ 82).

writes, the ancient biblical text had numerous facets of ancient beliefs, whether of sacrifice, patriarchy, dualism, etc., that encompassed the “virtual unsaid of every text.”⁹⁸ Modern readers do not always recognize these implicit characteristics of the text. In fact, when we approach the text with our own realities that are “unsaid,” we may inadvertently ignore the ancient “unsaid” aspects of the text. This occurs in numerous LDS^C allegorizations. Biblical texts are used as references to their church. Yet, to “enter the story of the Bible,” an identification with the implied audience of the biblical texts is the only possible avenue. A major characteristic of these allegorizations is, typically, the *neglect* of the implied audience. Rarely, if ever, do the ancient texts under consideration offer any indication of being open to modern referentialities. Instead, the hermeneutical filter of “systemic parameters” is used to perceive current LDS^C realities inside the ancient text itself. The question must be asked: does the text come first, or, does the institution decide the meaning through its filter—and then use the text for their own purposes? The answer appears to be the latter. It is an example of hermeneutical neglect that notions of implied audience are not entertained by LDS authors.

I have argued that these interpretations, while appearing to be allegorical, are, in fact, allegorizations. In other words, only with the insider information afforded by the “systemic parameters” of the LDS^C system would an interpreter understand the deeper, hidden meanings of these passages. These deeper meanings reflect *modern* issues and perspectives, and neglect *ancient* historical referents—thus failing to exhibit sound hermeneutical methodology. The LDS^C allegorizations outlined are designed to advance institutional needs. These institutional needs will continue to appear in our investigation, even more so as we now turn to another hermeneutical category, that of a sociological approach to interpretation.

⁹⁸ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 191.

CHAPTER 5

A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

Having seen literalistic interpretations and allegorizations, I now want to focus on a sociological approach to the biblical text. This will highlight the perceived institutional needs of the LDS^C. After a brief study of the parameters of a sociological approach, followed by an investigation into specific sociological interpretations of the LDS^C, I will present a case study of Acts 3:21. A phrase from this passage, “the times of restitution,” is interpreted not only as a validation of the LDS^C institution, but more specifically as a reference to the LDS^C Restoration.¹ As we will see, this reflects a sociological approach to the Bible by the LDS^C.

5.1. The sociological realities of the biblical texts

Recent decades have seen the emergence of sociological approaches to biblical interpretation. This perspective focuses on the social realities and motivations that underlie the context of the biblical texts.² It is helpful epistemologically, since knowledge “is social in nature and oriented within a community [that shares] convictions and assumptions.”³ Just as the ancient church evinced a social and communal reality, so also the modern church as “a social institution... exists in an actual and concrete world.”⁴ Given that “human beings are essentially social,” the meanings of texts, ancient or modern, are “rooted in people’s enculturation, socialization, interrelationships, and interactions.”⁵ A

¹ As an additional example of the overlap between my five categories, this interpretation could also be considered an allegorization. Nonetheless, I have labeled it as a sociological approach, with the reasons given below.

² Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986) 19; cf. Gerd Thiessen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

³ Howard Clark Kee, *Knowing the Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 6.

⁴ Derek Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament: A Sociological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 15.

⁵ Bruce J. Malina, ‘Rhetorical Criticism and Social-Scientific Criticism: Why Won’t Romanticism Leave Us Alone?’ in Jerome H. Neyrey and Eric C. Stewart (eds), *The Social*

sociological approach asks “a different set of questions” to highlight aspects of the text that traditional methods of historical interpretation often neglect.⁶ Furthermore, “since biblical interpretation involves *readers* as well as texts—the reading of Scripture by reading communities in time and over time,” this approach may draw attention to significant features of biblical dynamics that might otherwise go unnoticed.⁷ While this approach to biblical interpretation primarily focuses on the *ancient* social reality that the biblical texts reflect, the approach can, nonetheless, be appropriated for the sociological interpretation of the *modern* church, as we will see.

Francis Watson proposed “two sociological models” to shed light on Paul’s discussions of Gentile Christianity in the context of Judaism.⁸ The first model was “the transformation of a reform-movement into a sect.” Watson labeled Gentile Christianity as the “new reform-movement” and Judaism as the “parent community.” This model posits that the transformation into “a sect” is often the result of opposition, with “a closely-knit group” setting up “rigid and clearly-defined barriers between itself and the parent community.”⁹ Watson was following the insights of Ernst Troeltsch. For Troeltsch, in order to “gain a conclusive insight into the sociological character of Christianity,” the study of “development of the sects” was essential.¹⁰ While on the one hand, the “Church-type” is “overwhelmingly conservative” and “dominates the masses,” the “sects, on the other hand, are comparatively small groups; they aspire after personal inward perfection” and are “forced to organize themselves into small groups.”¹¹ To reiterate, the first sociological model was “the transformation of a reform-movement into a sect.”¹² Watson’s second model has more direct bearing on biblical interpretation by the LDS^C, for “(i)f a sectarian group is to establish and maintain separation from the religious body from which it originated, it will require *an ideology legitimating its state of separation*—i.e., a theoretical justification for its separate existence, which is shared by all the

World of the New Testament: Insights and Models (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008) 5-21, citing 6.

⁶ Stephen C. Barton, ‘Social-Scientific Criticism’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 753-755, citing 753. As detailed in the title of his article, Barton uses the term “social-scientific criticism.” I am using “sociological interpretation” in a synonymous way.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 753-754, emphasis by author.

⁸ Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

¹⁰ Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Harper & Bros, 1960) 1:330.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1:331.

¹² Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 19.

group's members and which helps to give it its cohesion."¹³ What follows, then, are sociological approaches to interpretation by the LDS^C that attempt to legitimize a separation from the "parent community"—the Christian church that was unduly influenced by the Great Apostasy.

5.1.1. *Continuing revelation and sociological interpretation*

We observed in chapter two numerous theological arguments by the LDS^C to sustain the doctrine of continuing revelation. The Bible specifically describes and upholds this doctrine, according to the LDS^C. After Peter confessed that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," he was told that "flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt 16:16, 17). This type of revelation is similar to what the LDS^C church claims to experience today.¹⁴ Continuing revelation is also explicated earlier in Matthew: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt 13:12). According to Dallin Oaks, this verse "capsulizes the Latter-day Saint belief in the importance of continuing revelation as we read and interpret the scriptures."¹⁵ Paul also received the gospel "by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12). He likewise was the recipient of "visions and revelations from the Lord" (2 Cor 12:1). Thus, believers today can also receive revelation.¹⁶ The LDS^C cites a passage from the book of Numbers to encourage their members, since Moses desired for all of God's people to be prophets: "...through divine revelation every child of Christ may, and should, become a prophet or a prophetess to his or her own divinely appointed stewardship."¹⁷

The highlighting of later biblical events that supplant earlier ones also sustains the doctrine of continuing revelation. For instance, the earlier command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac "as a burnt offering" (Gen 22:2), was superseded by a later injunction: "Do not lay a hand on the boy" (Gen

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19-20, emphasis by author. Among the responses to Watson's views, however, see W. S. Campbell, 'Did Paul Advocate Separation from the Synagogue? A Reaction to Francis Watson: *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach*,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42.4 (1990) 457-467. Campbell critiques Watson's view that Paul was primarily influenced by his social reality, when in reality, Paul's theology not only "provided the basis" for his mission, but was the "cause" and "consequence" of his social reality (*ibid.*, 461-462).

¹⁴ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 18; cf. Riddle, 'Revelation,' in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1225-1228; Millet, *Different Jesus?*, 52 n29.

¹⁵ Oaks, 'Scripture Reading,' LDS website.

¹⁶ McConkie, *New Witness*, 489.

¹⁷ Riddle, 'Revelation,' in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1227; see Numbers 11:29: "And Moses said unto him, 'Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, *and* that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!'" (KJV).

22:12). The law of Moses was discarded “by later revelation.”¹⁸ Indeed, the law of Moses was a “schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal 3:24, KJV), for Jesus introduced a “new logic of justice and salvation.”¹⁹ Surprisingly, even what Jesus taught will be repudiated, as explained by Paul in 1 Cor 13, for “we have reason to expect that these concepts [of Jesus] too will fail and be superseded by a fuller understanding: ‘For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears’ (1 Cor. 13:9-10).”²⁰ Similar to the early Christians who “took Jewish religious traditions” and “reconfigured them,” the LDS^C, like other religious groups, develops concepts “in new directions.”²¹ They further assert a repeatable pattern from the first century: “The early Christians simply believed that although God had spoken once upon Sinai and had given them scriptures, he now spoke to them again and had given new revelations that superseded the old ones.”²² The reconfigured revelations update what had previously been revealed. This purported “update” established a separation from the religious group that preceded it. Previously we noted how the presupposition of continuing revelation placed the LDS^C in a “unique position,” since they do not “limit divine revelation to the past,” but believe that God “will yet reveal many great and important things.”²³ Therefore, the perspective on continuing revelation, coming from a sociological approach, legitimizes the institutional existence of the LDS^C, and serves as a catalyst to separate themselves from the parent church that fell into apostasy.

5.1.2. *The “dispensation of the fulness of times” as a sociological interpretation*

An important LDS^C perspective concerns the existence of differing time periods, referred to as “dispensations,” that have existed throughout the history of the church.²⁴ This word comes from the KJV: “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Eph 1:10).²⁵ According to Philip Barlow, this phrase has “a very specific

¹⁸ Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 3, ‘The Exclusion by Name-Calling.’ Concerning the Law of Moses, see Galatians 3:24-29; Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:8.

¹⁹ Huff, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 486; cf. Talmage, *Great Apostasy*, 5.

²⁰ See Huff, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 486.

²¹ See Douglas J. Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 35. “Mormonism developed many pre-existing ideas into a new pattern” (ibid.).

²² Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 3, ‘The Exclusion by Name-Calling.’

²³ LDS^C, ‘Divine Revelation in Modern Times,’ LDS Newsroom.

²⁴ See Wilcox and Young (eds), *Standing Apart*, 3.

²⁵ “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might

Restorationist meaning,” as well as indicating a “proof-text” for LDS doctrine.²⁶ Joseph Smith “brought the restored dispensation of the fulness of time anticipated by Paul in Eph 1:9, 10.”²⁷ The LDS^C believe that the “modern dispensation of the fulness of times enjoys the unique position of gathering in aspects of previous dispensations so that in a way it is like every other dispensation, but no previous dispensation is exactly like it.”²⁸ Neal Maxwell further explains:

Paul...wrote of the “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Rom. 11:25; Eph 1:10), a particular time of times, which would “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth” (Eph 1:10; see also Rom. 11:25). Everything would be restored, including the fulness which was with Adam in the beginning (see D&C 128:21; Abr. 1:3).²⁹

On account of Paul’s words of “gathering together in one all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10), the LDS^C emphasizes the advantageous position of the present dispensation. Again, the final age embraces “all the others, tying together with cords of infinity the perfection of all previous sacred times.”³⁰ LDS authors speak vividly of the advantage of this modern dispensation: “In our day, all the streams and rivers of the past flow into the grand ocean of revealed truth that is the dispensation of the fulness of times.”³¹ Because of a God who acts with “extraordinary immediacy,” the LDS^C has “a sense that the age they are living in is of particular cosmic relevance, to be understood as the last dispensation.”³² Thus, Joseph Smith “insisted that his role was to usher in a new dispensation, a

gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph 1:9-10).

²⁶ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 193. In addition, the term “latter-day” in the title of the LDS church designates “the present age as the final dispensation” (Bitton (ed.), *Dictionary of Mormonism*, 115).

²⁷ See Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 50.

²⁸ Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, ch. 12, ‘First Timothy.’ Also, the verses of Mal 4:5-6 “serve as a charter for the new dispensation of Mormonism: they herald the Restoration,” for Elijah and Joseph Smith were both “prophets who bring the divine message to humanity” (Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 144-145; cf. *ibid.*, 96; D&C 128:17).

²⁹ Maxwell, ‘From the Beginning,’ LDS website. However, the same word translated “dispensation” in Eph 1:10 (οἰκονομίαν) is also used in Eph 3:2: “dispensation of the grace of God” (KJV). The contextual meaning of the word appears to indicate God’s plan for salvation (see Ernest Best, *Ephesians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 24).

³⁰ Hughes, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 36; cf. Smith, in George Albert Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:437.

³¹ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Fullness of Times, Dispensation of the.’ Because of this emphasis on its privileged position, it is no accident that the early LDS^C matched Americans’ “self-perceived originality, vitality, optimism, and divinely sanctioned position on the center stage of God’s unfolding drama on earth” (Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 14).

³² Bowman, ‘History Thrown into Divinity,’ 82.

full restoration of Christianity in its pristine purity...a reinauguration, not merely a reformation.”³³ The particular sociological approach by the LDS^C to Ephesians 1:10 allows them to emphasize the advantageous position of the modern LDS^C, and gives justification for, as well as fuels the separation of, the “new reform-movement” (LDS^C) from the “parent community” (the early church overcome by the Great Apostasy).

5.1.3. *Additional examples of sociological approaches by the LDS^C*

The doctrine of premortal existence has been labeled as the most distinctive of all LDS^C doctrines.³⁴ Several biblical phrases are used to support this doctrine. The concept of being chosen “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4), is claimed to support “the teaching of preexistence.”³⁵ John’s words of “we love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19), teach that God loved us “deep in the primeval past when [God] found himself in the midst of numerous spirit intelligences.”³⁶ The question to Job of “(w)here were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4) is “proof of [the] pre-existence of humans,” since it implies that Job was existing “*somewhere* at the earth’s creation.”³⁷ The prospect of gaining a mortal body, “caused God’s spirit children to shout with joy (Job 38:7).”³⁸ Other relevant verses include Jeremiah 1:5: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee”; Acts 17:29: “we are the offspring of God”; Romans 8:16: “we are the children of God”; and John 9:2: “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” A short phrase from Jude 6, “first estate,” also purportedly describes premortal existence. In sum, biblical phrases are cited to promote and explicate LDS^C belief in premortal existence.³⁹ Therefore, as “the most distinctive of all the LDS doctrines,”⁴⁰ the

³³ Terryl Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth* (upd. edn; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 61.

³⁴ Roger Terry, ‘The Source of God’s Authority: One Argument For an Unambiguous Doctrine of Preexistence,’ *Dialogue* 49.3 (Fall 2016) 109-144, citing 110.

³⁵ Faulconer, *NT Made Harder*, Lesson 39.

³⁶ Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 238.

³⁷ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 71; emphasis by author.

³⁸ Camille S. Williams, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 279. The phrase “spirit children” is another way to describe premortal human beings.

³⁹ However, Terryl Givens writes that “the biblical allusions to preexistence” are “at best cryptic and scattered” (Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 147-148; cf. Blake T. Ostler, ‘The Idea of Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought,’ *Dialogue*, 15.1 (Spr 1982) 59-78; Roger R. Keller, ‘The Latter-Day Saint (Mormon) Theology of Being: A Response to Social Fragmentation,’ *Encounter* 56.2 (Spr 1995) 189-198). Nonetheless, Givens and others speak confidently of the doctrine of “premortality existence” in the Bible.

⁴⁰ Terry, “Source of God’s Authority,” 110.

promotion of the doctrine of premortal existence is a validation of a separate institution, and a fomenting of internal cohesion.

LDS^C sources also illuminate the meaning of the debated phrase “baptism for the dead” (1 Cor 15:29). The phrase describes proxy baptism—i.e., living LDS members performing baptisms “on behalf of the dead.”⁴¹ LDS authors declare that this “ordinance...is solidly based on scripture,”⁴² although they admit that the doctrine “grows out of but one sentence in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 15:29, and even that reference is in passing.”⁴³ To illustrate the overlap with my five proposed categories, LDS authors advocate a literal interpretation of the phrase. They claim other traditions have “alternate explanations [that] force an interpretation on the Greek phrase (βαπτίζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν)...differently than its clear meaning. The phrase reads literally ‘those baptized on behalf of the dead.’”⁴⁴ According to the LDS^C, this rite of proxy baptism was “fairly widespread in early Christianity,”⁴⁵ although it has “not [been] practiced by major Christian groups since the fourth century AD.”⁴⁶ Since “many people have died” in the past without receiving the ordinance of baptism, LDS members are baptized in Mormon temples in their place.⁴⁷ Joseph Smith posed a poignant question in the 19th century: “How are all the millions who lived and died between Jesus [and himself] to be saved?” The answer was through the doctrine of “baptism for the dead.”⁴⁸ Even a phrase from Revelation 20:12 is used to support LDS proxy baptism, since it mentions “books being opened” at the end of the eschaton. These books are explained as the proxy baptism records kept by the LDS^C.⁴⁹ An isolated phrase in Zechariah is also quoted: “As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein *is* no water” (Zech 9:11). It is unclear how the words “prisoners” and “water” constitute an explanation of baptism for the

⁴¹ LDS^C, *Gospel Principles*, 91, 239; cf. LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 184.

⁴² Draper and Rhodes, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ‘Excursus on the Ancient Practice of Vicarious Baptism of the Dead.’ It is “clearly named in the Bible” (LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 185).

⁴³ Draper and Rhodes, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ‘Excursus on the Ancient Practice of Vicarious Baptism of the Dead.’

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 35. Since Paul “does not explicitly condemn” proxy baptism, this suggests “it was among the accepted Christian practices...it does not make sense for Paul to use a practice that he would consider heretical in order to support sound doctrine” (Draper and Rhodes, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ‘Excursus on the Ancient Practice of Vicarious Baptism of the Dead’).

⁴⁶ Givens and Barlow (eds), *Oxford Handbook on Mormonism*, 125.

⁴⁷ LDS^C, *Gospel Principles*, 265.

⁴⁸ See Bloom, *American Religion*, 121; cf. D&C 124:28-29; 127:5-12; 128:1-21.

⁴⁹ See Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 96.

dead. Nonetheless, the LDS^C believe this to be an OT example of the doctrine.⁵⁰ Thus, the sociological approach to the biblical phrase “baptism for the dead” justifies the separation of the LDS^C from “major Christian groups”⁵¹ that no longer practice the rite.

The LDS authors cited above do not mention an important interpretive issue in 1 Corinthians. The presence of “slogans” in the letter is widely recognized by mainstream scholarship. For instance, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food” (1 Cor 6:13) was “a saying current among some of the Corinthian Christians” and was an “Epicurean (possibly Gnostic) justification for prandial excess.”⁵² In fact, because of the “factionalism” prevalent in the house churches of Corinth, along with their apparent use of slogans, Paul responded with “deliberative rhetoric,” i.e., a “deliberative appeal to advantage.”⁵³ Other possibilities for Corinthian slogans include 1:17;⁵⁴ 6:12;⁵⁵ 7:1;⁵⁶ and 8:1.⁵⁷ Jerome Murphy-O’Connor even suggests our debated phrase βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν was designed to mock Paul because of his suffering as an apostle (that is described in 1 Cor 15:31-32).⁵⁸ For our purposes, it is important to note that the LDS^C neglects to interact with an important interpretive issue in this passage—the possibility of a Corinthian slogan in the description of “baptism for the dead.” Instead, the phrase is used to further an institutional rite.

⁵⁰ See Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, ch. 4, ‘First Corinthians.’ Whether this passage exhibits some type of typological foreshadowing is, at least, theoretically possible, although unlikely. For our purposes, it is sufficient to point out the sociological function of the verse as concerns the LDS^C doctrine of “baptism for the dead.”

⁵¹ Givens and Barlow (eds), *Oxford Handbook on Mormonism*, 125.

⁵² Orr and Walther, *1 Corinthians*, 199, 202.

⁵³ Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) 1. See especially *ibid.*, 33-39.

⁵⁴ “cleverness in speech” (NASB); “wisdom and eloquence” (NIV). Paul was not sent to preach ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου (1 Cor 1:17). This short phrase was possibly a description of “skillful speech...which Paul may be taking up as a Corinthian slogan” (Bradley Byron Blue, ‘Apollōs,’ in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (eds), *DPL* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 37-39, citing 38).

⁵⁵ “Everything is permissible for me” (see Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, ‘Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor. 6:12-20,’ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978) 391-96).

⁵⁶ “It is good for a man not to marry” (1 Cor 7:1). Paul “strongly qualifies this slogan” in the following verses (see Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 175).

⁵⁷ “We all have knowledge.” The saying “has an aphoristic quality, which may suggest a slogan” (Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 366). Two other possible slogans appear in 1 Cor 10:23 and 14:34-35 (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1150).

⁵⁸ See Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Baptized for the Dead” (1 Cor., XV, 29) A Corinthian Slogan? *Revue biblique* 88 (1981) 532-543. In spite of the title of his article, however, Murphy-O’Connor does not believe the passage reflects a Corinthian slogan.

The biblical names of Aaron and Melchizedek sustain a system that organizes men into one of two priesthoods—an Aaronic priesthood and a Melchizedek priesthood.⁵⁹ According to Bushman, one of the gifts and abilities of Joseph Smith “was to sense the power in biblical passages that others had long overlooked.”⁶⁰ The result was the restoration of the priesthood to the central position it once had in the ancient Hebrew religion.⁶¹ The “priesthood” is extremely important in the LDS system,⁶² and every worthy male above 12 years old is a “member of one of the quorums of either the Aaronic or the Melchizedek priesthood.”⁶³ Three brief verses on Melchizedek in Genesis 14 are among those that Joseph Smith “embellished most elaborately” for this doctrine.⁶⁴ In addition, Acts 6 is cited, as the work designated for the seven elected men “fell within the realm of those temporal matters normally handled by the Aaronic Priesthood, thus leaving the apostles free to handle the more difficult matters of their Melchizedek ministry.”⁶⁵ The lack of any reference in Acts 6 to an Aaronic or Melchizedek Priesthood does not preclude LDS authors from quoting the passage as an example of the responsibilities of the two priesthoods.⁶⁶ The sociological approach to these passages undergirds the important organizational pattern of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods, and creates cohesion as a supposedly lost biblical reality is restored—the priesthood that once held a central position in the ancient Hebrew religion.

⁵⁹ Early in the translation process of the Book of Mormon, Smith and his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, were ordained into the Aaronic Priesthood by John the Baptist who then promised a later ordination into a higher priesthood—the Melchizedek (see LDS^c, *Joseph Smith: History, Extracts from the History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982) 1:69; cf. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2010) 27-32). Currently, women in the LDS church are not allowed to belong to either priesthood.

⁶⁰ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 159.

⁶¹ Ibid. It is unclear how the reading of the names of Aaron or Melchizedek to designate a modern organizational model could hermeneutically illustrate the sensing of power in biblical passages.

⁶² “If a man does not have the priesthood, even though he may be sincere, the Lord does not recognize the ordinances that he performs (Matthew 7:21-23; Articles of Faith 1:5)” (LDS^c, *Gospel Principles*, 67); “(w)ithout the priesthood, even routine forms of church participation are beyond reach, such as distribution of the sacrament” (Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 96; cf. Flake, ‘Four Books,’ 29).

⁶³ Shippo, *Mormonism*, 134; cf. Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, 148-152; Richard G. Ellsworth and Melvin J. Luthy, ‘Priesthood,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1133-1138.

⁶⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 160.

⁶⁵ See LDS^c, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 141.

⁶⁶ However, even LDS authors note a discrepancy between the “modern Mormon conception of priesthood” and “scriptural” clues (see Terry, ‘Authority and Priesthood in the LDS Church,’ 2). In fact, “...in LDS usage, priesthood is a word that has been wrenched from its historical and linguistic roots and given a meaning not present in any other context, even in ancient LDS scripture” (ibid., 13).

A sociological approach also gives credence to the LDS^C doctrine of the Great Apostasy. For the LDS^C, “apostasy” is an “important New Testament theme” and its importance continues today.⁶⁷ In fact, an impending apostasy is “taught in the New Testament.”⁶⁸ However, the LDS^C do not view Scripture as describing the totality of the Great Apostasy. Passages simply refer to an incipient apostasy that would come upon the church with the death of the apostles. The account in the book of Revelation of an angel bringing the “everlasting gospel” to earth is frequently quoted. The verse states: “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev 14:6). The angel is Moroni, who brought the “fulness of the Gospel” to Joseph Smith by telling him of the buried plates, from which he eventually translated the BoM.⁶⁹ A reference to the Great Apostasy is claimed in this verse, for it “is illogical to assume that the gospel was to be brought to earth by a heavenly messenger if that gospel was still extant upon the earth.”⁷⁰ In other words, “the gospel must have been taken from the earth.”⁷¹ Therefore, through a sociological approach to the interpretation of NT passages that speak of an impending apostasy, the LDS^C legitimizes their institutional existence and separates from the “parent community”—the Christian church that was unduly influenced by this apostasy.

⁶⁷ See Faulconer, *NT Made Harder*, ‘Lesson 41.’ Joseph Fielding Smith believed that the OT also spoke of the Great Apostasy, when Isaiah spoke of a “deep sleep” coming over prophets and rulers (Isa 29:10) and Amos spoke of a famine of “hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11) (Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, 26).

⁶⁸ Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 4, ‘The Historical or Traditional Exclusion.’ For the *warnings* concerning apostasy, according to Robinson, see 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5; Acts 20:29-31; 1 Timothy 4:1-3, 2 Timothy 3:1-7 and Jude 17-18. According to Robinson, the passages of 2 Thessalonians 2:7-11, 1 Timothy 1:15 and 3 John 9-10 “witness rebellion already” (ibid.). See also Kent P. Jackson, ‘New Testament Prophecies of Apostasy,’ in Frank F. Judd Jr. and Gaye Strathearn (eds), *Sperry Symposium Classics: The New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006) 394-406.

⁶⁹ See Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 770; Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, 61-62; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 27; cf. McConkie, *New Witness*, 139; Shipps, *Mormonism*, 30. The angel Moroni is placed on top of LDS temples today with a trumpet to announce a message to the world. This is a reminder of Revelation 14. Additional support for the angel on top of LDS temples is from Matthew 24:31 where angels with trumpets gather the righteous for the coming of the Lord (LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 258).

⁷⁰ Talmage, *Great Apostasy*, 31.

⁷¹ Ibid.; cf. McConkie, *New Witness*, 628.

5.2. The hermeneutical effect of sociological interpretation by the LDS^C

The dynamics of sociological interpretation have been studied for decades, and in the process have illuminated the complex process of biblical interpretation. Ever since the early period of discussion on sociological interpretation in mainstream scholarship (Troeltsch), and more recently (Watson), the social effect of culture has been highlighted, as well as the associated commitment to perceived institutional needs as significant drivers in biblical interpretation. Francis Watson writes,

Speech-acts require an institutional context if they are to achieve their intended effect; to make a promise or to issue a command presupposes a complex set of prior conditions and relationships. If speech-acts are embodied in written texts, their intended illocutionary and perlocutionary force as communicative actions requires institutional continuities extended through the space and time that they traverse.⁷²

Numerous biblical passages are interpreted by the LDS^C as communicative actions with an intended illocutionary force—justification for the separation of the “new reform-movement” from the “parent community.” The sociological interpretation of the “dispensation of the fulness of times” emphasizes its modern-day relevance.⁷³ Yet, these sociological interpretations seem to reveal that the individual biblical book’s right to self-determination is obliterated because of modern-day priorities. That is, by reducing the sum of biblical documents to a single repository of locutions, such locutions seem to be adjusted—and their referentiality ignored. Specifically, the reading of a passage (Eph 1:10), especially the two phrases “dispensation of the fullness of times” and “gathering together in one all things in Christ,” validates a belief operative in the contemporary LDS^C, irrespective of any contextual meaning of the ancient passage itself. The intended sense of the two phrases is not considered.

Specifically, the phrase εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, from which the KJV translates “dispensation of the fulness of times,” does not elucidate differing time periods in church history. The word οἰκονομίαν “refers

⁷² Watson, *Text and Truth*, 117. Watson illustrates this cogently: “A Canaanite text expressing a longing for communion with Baal could no longer achieve its communicative intention, however attractive and moving it might be as a poem” (ibid., 118).

⁷³ Again, many of these sociological interpretations could be labeled as allegorizations, since they exhibit modern historical referents.

to God’s plan of salvation realized in Christ.”⁷⁴ Therefore, it should not be translated “dispensation” (KJV). The word “refers to the *plan of salvation* which God is bringing to reality through Christ.”⁷⁵ It signals that “God’s purposes and law...[were] fulfilled.”⁷⁶ Concerning the “ambiguous Greek verb”

ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι, translated in the KJV as “gather together in one,” Markus Barth asserts that its meaning “is to be derived exclusively from the context of Eph 1:10,” and therefore, translates it as “to make [Christ] the head.”⁷⁷ Precisely because the “headship” of Christ is repeatedly emphasized in Ephesians, and is the focus of 1:10 itself, “it is likely that the readers would have read this term in light of those statements (e.g. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23).”⁷⁸ The original, intended sense of Eph 1:10 is a focus on Christ—not on a Mormon Restoration over 1,800 years later: “(t)he completion of God’s purpose is anticipated and the unifying of the cosmos and restoration of its harmony is seen as achieved in Christ (1.10).”⁷⁹

Concerning the “baptism for the dead,” the LDS^C is inclined to see implicit references to the doctrine even in unlikely places. What Paul was describing in the letter to the Corinthians, or what Zechariah was communicating to his readers, appears not to interest LDS authors—only that these passages purportedly allude to a later LDS^C doctrine. There is an interpretive implication here—the Bible was written, in part, to elucidate later doctrine. The investigation into sociological interpretation assists us in articulating this reality. The citation of a phrase from 1 Cor 15:29, as well as the other biblical passages we have discussed, suggests the possibility that biblical texts are seen mainly as confirmation and explanation of a later doctrine. In sum, we have learned that sociological approaches by the LDS^C foment cohesion of a “new reform-movement” that has separated from the “parent community.” I now turn to a case study of Acts 3:19-21, in order to observe how this interpretive method is utilized by LDS authors as they interpret a sermon by Peter in the book of Acts. Along with this sociological approach of the LDS^C, I will investigate mainstream conclusions.

⁷⁴ Best, *Ephesians*, 24 (see also note 29, p. 117 above).

⁷⁵ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 698, emphasis in original.

⁷⁶ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3*, AB 34 (New York: Doubleday, 1967) 88.

⁷⁷ Barth, *Ephesians*, 91; cf. the views of Arnold: “bring everything under the headship of” (Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 89.

⁷⁸ Barth, *Ephesians*, 91.

⁷⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln and A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 96.

5.3. Case Study: a sociological approach by the LDS^C to Acts

3:19-21

According to Acts 3:1-10, Peter and John healed a beggar, crippled from birth. Peter then spoke to the astonished onlookers (Acts 3:11-26). He called his listeners to repent, so that “times of refreshing” would come, and mentioned soon thereafter “times of restoration.” The precise identification of the “times of refreshing” and the “times of restoration” is a matter of some debate.

19 μετανοήσατε ὄν και ἐπιστρέψατε εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι ὑμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας, 20 ὅπως ἂν ἔλθωσιν καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου και ἀποστείλῃ τὸν προκεχειρισμένον ὑμῖν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, 21 ὃν δεῖ οὐρανὸν μὲν δέξασθαι ἄχρι χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων ὧν ἐλάλησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων ἀπ’ αἰῶνος αὐτοῦ προφητῶν (Acts 3:19-21)

Repent and turn, therefore, for the blotting out of your sins, in order that times of refreshing may come from the face of the Lord, that he may send to you the appointed Christ—who is) Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the times of restoration of all things which God spoke of through the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient times (Acts 3:19-21, *my translation*).

5.3.1. LDS authors and Acts 3:19-21

LDS^C sources interpret the “times of restoration” (“times of restitution” in the KJV), as the appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in 1820. This appearance “was the commencement of ‘the times of restitution’ of which Peter spoke.”⁸⁰ Other LDS authors comment: “God had foreseen the Apostasy and prepared for the gospel to be restored. The Apostle Peter spoke of this [in] Acts 3:20-21.”⁸¹ Other American restorationists “borrowed” the language of Acts 3:21 to speak of the “restoration of all things,” but according to Barlow, “Joseph Smith intended the phrase quite literally.”⁸² Concomitantly, “the times of restitution of all things” describe “the restoration of the gospel through the

⁸⁰ McConkie, *New Witness*, 627; cf. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (2nd edn; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966) 635; Elder John Morgan, ‘Restitution of All Things, etc.’ in JD 20:279, <http://jod.mrm.org/20/277>, accessed Mar 2015; Bruce R. McConkie, ‘The Times of Refreshing,’ *Conference Report* (October 1967), <http://scriptures.byu.edu/gettalk.php?ID=1570>; accessed Mar 2016.

⁸¹ LDS^C, *Gospel Principles*, 92-93.

⁸² Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, xxxvi; cf. Irving, ‘Mormons and the Bible,’ 481.

Prophet Joseph Smith and the fulfillment of all the signs of the times.”⁸³ From the LDS^C perspective, “the times of restitution of all things” is a “prominent theme of both ancient and latter-day scripture.”⁸⁴ This theme is also linked with the previously mentioned “dispensation of the fulness of times”:

All previous dispensations were open-ended and will flow into this final dispensation like rivers into the seas. This dispensation is known as the time of ‘restitution of all things,’ when the covenants, promises, knowledge, doctrines, priesthood, and divine governing powers that were had by ancient prophets and seers will be established and organized again upon the earth.⁸⁵

In 1855, Parley Pratt lamented that previous reforms were in vain, “until the full time should arrive—‘the times of restitution of all things.’”⁸⁶ A century later, Duane Crowther wrote that the “restitution of all things” had “now begun,” and was “commenced in 1830 with the restoration of the Church through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith.”⁸⁷ Finally, LDS authors elaborate on the Mormon understanding of “Restoration”:

The most common use of the term refers to the series of events and divine revelations whereby the fulness of gospel principles, ordinances, priesthood authority, and the true Church of Jesus Christ were restored to the earth. These events, beginning with Joseph Smith’s First Vision in 1820, the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon, and the organization of the Church in 1830, are all part of what Latter-day Saints refer to as the Restoration—the fulfillment of Peter’s prophecy of “the times of restitution” that will precede the second coming of Christ (Acts 3:21).⁸⁸

To summarize, LDS authors claim that Peter, after the healing of the beggar outside of the temple, spoke of the Mormon restoration nearly two millennia later.

⁸³ David J. Ridges, *The New Testament Made Easier Part 2: Acts Through Revelation* (2nd edn; Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, Inc., 2010) 9.

⁸⁴ Robert J. Matthews, ‘The Restoration of All Things: What the Doctrine and Covenants Say,’ in Craig K. Manscill (ed.), *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Doctrine and Covenants* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004) 68–91, citing 68.

⁸⁵ Ibid., cf. Richard T. Hughes, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 28, 31.

⁸⁶ Parley Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (5th edn; Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1891) 18–19.

⁸⁷ Crowther, *Prophecies of Joseph Smith*, 196.

⁸⁸ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Restoration.’

5.3.2. *Mainstream voices and Acts 3:19-21*

A challenging aspect of the passage is, indeed, the exact timing of the “times of restoration.” In fact, “(t)here is no consensus as regards the precise reference of this phrase.”⁸⁹ The three verses cited above constitute a “difficult passage.”⁹⁰ In addition, the connection between καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως “times of refreshing” and χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως “times of restoration” is disputed. They may be synonymous, or sequential.⁹¹ Luke Timothy Johnson states that “times of refreshment” and their connection to the “sending of the Messiah” and “the restoration of all things” is “deeply problematic and perhaps irresolvable.”⁹² An additional challenge is the sending of the Christ (v. 20) that appears to precede Christ’s remaining in heaven (v. 21). The word πάντων adds to the dilemma, although it is a possible clue to the extent and timing of the “restoration.” Furthermore, Peter claimed that “all the prophets from Samuel on...foretold these days” (Acts 3:24). The import of “these days” (τὰς ἡμέρας ταύτας) becomes an added difficulty.

It is important to keep the preceding context in mind: Acts 2:17 established the initiation of the eschaton.⁹³ The “last days” had commenced, and this holds significant impact for our passage in Acts 3. Parallel phrases between Acts 2:38 and 3:19 are also important, for in both Peter calls for repentance and mentions forgiveness of sins.⁹⁴ Acts 2:38 describes the reception of the “gift of the Holy Spirit.” This appears to be echoed with the “times of refreshing” in Acts 3:19. Specifically, it seems, καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως refers to the “spiritual refreshment that comes from the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁵ It was the result of

⁸⁹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Expanded Digital Edition*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) Ac 3:21.

⁹⁰ David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 132.

⁹¹ See, e.g., C. Allison, Jr., ‘Eschatology,’ in Green and McKnight (eds), *DJG*, 206-209, citing 208. Both of these phrases are without parallel in the NT (Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, EBC 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 297).

⁹² Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP 5 (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992) 74.

⁹³ Peter added the phrase “in the last days” to the passage from Joel. This is a significant assertion concerning the initiation of the eschaton (see Paul A. Himes, ‘Peter and the Prophetic Word: The Theology of Prophecy Traced through Peter’s Sermons and Epistles,’ *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 21.2 (2011) 227-243, citing 242; cf. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) 138, where the “fulfillment of other latter-day OT prophecies...was also an indication that the last times had begun (Acts 3:18; 22-26; 4:25-28)”).

⁹⁴ See Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) 108.

⁹⁵ William S. Kurz, *Acts of the Apostles: Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013) 74; cf. Graham H. Twelftree, *People of the Spirit: Exploring Luke’s View of the*

repentance by Peter’s hearers.⁹⁶ As additional evidence, David Pao sees the “times of refreshment” as directly parallel to the coming of the Spirit referenced in Acts 2, because of Symmachus’ translation of Isaiah 32:15, where he used the same word ἀνάψυξις (“refreshing”), seen in Acts 3:20. Although the LXX reads πνεῦμα ἀφ’ ὑψηλοῦ (“Spirit from on high”) in Isaiah 32:15,⁹⁷ Symmachus apparently changed this to speak of the coming times of ἀνάψυξις (“refreshing”). Thus, given the programmatic nature of Isaiah for the book of Acts, as well as the relationship between Acts 3:20 and Symmachus’ translation of Isaiah 32:15 being even clearer in the Western text of Acts, Pao asserts that this “refreshing” in Acts 3 is synonymous with the coming of the Spirit in Acts 2.⁹⁸ To reiterate, Peter’s hearers, upon repenting, would receive the Spirit, or in other words, “times of refreshing.”

Many authors conclude that the “times of refreshing” are synonymous with the “times of restoration.” Joseph Fitzmyer writes that the “times of restoration” “must be another way of saying” the “times of refreshing.” The phrases “mutually explain each other” with “καίροι indicating the beginning of the period, and χρόνων the duration of it.”⁹⁹ Jacob Jervell comments on the ensuing context: “In V 22 wird nun deutlich, was „Erquickungszeit“ heisst; es geht um die Wiederherstellung aller Dinge.”¹⁰⁰ Others see the “times of refreshing” and “times of restoration” as “form[ing] a hendiadys reflecting the sovereign activity of God.”¹⁰¹ For Micheal Parsons, the two phrases are connected, based on a similarity to a rhetorical device in the writings of Cicero. By the use of *expolitio*, or “refining,” a rhetor could “dwell on a topic by expressing an idea once and then by ‘repeating it once again or oftener in other, equivalent terms.’”¹⁰² Going forward, I will assume that these two phrases are synonymous. However, their precise temporal reference remains under dispute.

Church (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009) 179; Marshall, ‘Acts,’ in Beale and Carson (eds), *Commentary on the New Testament Use*, 546-547.

⁹⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 84.

⁹⁷ ἕως ἂν ἐπέλθῃ ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς πνεῦμα ἀφ’ ὑψηλοῦ. καὶ ἔσται ἔρημος ὁ Χερμελ, καὶ ὁ Χερμελ εἰς δρυμὸν λογισθήσεται (A. Rahlfs and R. Hanhart (eds), *Septuaginta* (Rev edn); Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006) Is 32:15).

⁹⁸ Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*, 132-133.

⁹⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, AB 31 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) 288.

¹⁰⁰ Jacob Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998) 168.

¹⁰¹ Stanley D. Toussaint and Jay A. Quine, ‘No, Not Yet: The Contingency of God’s Promised Kingdom,’ *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 164.654 (Apr-Jun 2007) 131-147, citing 143.

¹⁰² Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.42.54-55, in Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 61.

There are two possibilities: a first-century reference, or a future event that describes the coming of the Messiah.

5.3.3. *Restoration as a future reality*

Many maintain that the “times of refreshment/restoration” refer to the Parousia of Christ.¹⁰³ These authors link the “times of refreshing” with what immediately follows—καὶ ἀποστείλῃ τὸν προκεχειρισμένον ὑμῖν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν “that he may send to you the appointed Christ—(who is) Jesus.”¹⁰⁴ This “sending of the appointed Christ” would refer to the Parousia. Hans Conzelmann writes: “Die Parallelität der beiden Vershälften zeigt, daß die καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως nicht Atempausen in der eschatologischen Drangsal sind...sondern die endgültige Heilszeit (wie die χρόνων ἀποκατάστασεως). ἀναψύξεως ist das subjektive Pendant zu ἀποκατάστασις.” He concludes concerning v. 21: “Sie visiert einen längeren Zeitraum zwischen Auferstehung und Parusie an.”¹⁰⁵ For F. F. Bruce, these phrases are apposite and mutually confirming, with the passage implying that “Jesus is absent for a limited time, until the fulfillment of prophetic scripture.”¹⁰⁶ George Stevens summarizes:

The reference [to refreshment] is hardly to the resurrection, but to the *Parousia*. To the hope of this event, always viewed as imminent, all the expressions: “times of refreshing,” “times of restitution” and “these days” (vv. 19–24) undoubtedly refer. So Olshansen, Meyer, Alford, Hackett, Gloag, Lechler and most recent critics.¹⁰⁷

The citation of Deut 18:15 in Acts 3:22¹⁰⁸ is important for this interpretation.

¹⁰³ See John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992) 134; Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976) 2:38. For a fuller discussion, see I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 93; G.K. Beale, ‘Eschatology,’ in Martin and Davids (eds), *DLNT*, 330–345, citing 333.

¹⁰⁴ See Toussaint and Quine, ‘No, Not Yet,’ 143.

¹⁰⁵ Hans Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1963) 34–35; cf. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 29; G. H.-Link, ‘Reconciliation, Restoration, Propitiation, Atonement,’ in Colin Brown (ed.), *NIDNTT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 3:148.

¹⁰⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (3rd rev. and enl. edn; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 144.

¹⁰⁷ George B. Stevens, in Philip Schaff (ed.), *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889) 11:59 n1. See also D. Ernst Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968) 168: “Der Text...trägt der Parusie verzögerung Rechnung: sie geht auf Gottes Willen zurück.”

¹⁰⁸ “For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you’” (Acts 3:22).

For Austin Busch, the “prophet like Moses” whom God will raise up (3:22) is the Christ of the eschaton.¹⁰⁹ This prophet is better understood “as a figure associated with the eschatological consummation and the universal judgment.”¹¹⁰ This “not only makes good sense in the context of Peter’s sermon,” but is “thoroughly conventional in ancient Jewish literature,” and therefore, is “surprising that commentators rarely understand Acts 3:22-23’s prophet like Moses as a reference to Christ’s coming judgment of the world, instead preferring to interpret his raising up with historical reference to Jesus’ first coming.”¹¹¹ In sum, for Busch, “(c)ontext demands equation of the prophet like Moses whom God will raise up (3:22-23) with the Christ whose second coming Acts 3:20-21 prophesied: his Parousia will initiate a final judgment.”¹¹² Although Dennis Johnson, like many observers, admits to an already-not yet dynamic in the passage, he nonetheless concurs: “the fullness of the messianic restoration has not arrived. The seasons of refreshing and the times of restoration of all things still await the sending of Jesus, the appointed Messiah, from heaven.”¹¹³ Others repeat the future aspect of the restoration, for Jesus “will come at some future point to act as judge of the living and the dead and to inaugurate the ‘universal restoration’ (Acts 3:20-21; 10:42).”¹¹⁴ Therefore, many mainstream thinkers argue that the “times of refreshment/restoration” refer to a future reality. I do not believe, however, that this is the correct temporal reference for the debated phrase.

5.3.4. *Restoration as a present reality begun in 1st Century*

A crucial contextual issue is that “all the prophets from Samuel on...foretold *these days*” (Acts 3:24, emphasis added). Regarding the implied audience, it is important to note the relevance of the close contextual connection between

¹⁰⁹ Austin Busch, ‘Presence Deferred: The Name of Jesus and Self-Referential Eschatological Prophecy in Acts 3,’ *Biblical Interpretation* 17.5 (2009) 521-553, citing 541 n45.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 546.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 544; cf. Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AB 31 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967) 29.

¹¹³ Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1997) 65; cf. Pervo, *Acts*, 108, who states that v. 20 refers to the second coming of Jesus.

¹¹⁴ I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) 58; cf. Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994) 39, 42; Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary 3:1-14:28* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) 2:1109, n674; I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004) 203; C.K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 1:206; Goppelt, *Typos*, 123.

“these days” and the “times of refreshment/restoration.” If the “times of refreshment/restoration” were in the future, this would, in fact, appear to ignore the implied audience. It would also render Peter’s mention of “these days” superfluous. For the implied audience, Christ’s *first* coming was the impetus behind the call to repentance. Peter’s listeners were called to listen to Jesus (and by extension, his apostles).¹¹⁵ Notwithstanding Busch’s views, the “prophet like Moses” that Peter references should be construed as referring to Christ’s *first* coming—who with his death and resurrection initiated the restoration.¹¹⁶ In addition, what is the implied *vantage point*? The passage does not refer to the future from the perspective of Jesus, but from the future of the ancient prophets. From that perspective, the *time of the Messiah* was in the future. The future of the past, then, seems to be the “now” of the implied audience. The prophets had foretold of the days in the future—and Luke, through Peter’s sermon, emphasizes the first century as the time of fulfillment. The text under consideration, then, connects the “times of refreshment/restoration,” with the time period of Peter and his listeners (“these days”).

Furthermore, Peter’s call to repentance was expected to result in an immediate “refreshment/restoration,” just as Acts 2 assumed the immediate coming of the Spirit upon repentance. Again, from Peter’s vantage point, the “last days” had begun (Acts 2:17). Precisely on account of God’s raising of Jesus, Peter and John healed the beggar,¹¹⁷ and the “underlying theological message” was that “(t)his is a time of life, of restoration, of resurrection.”¹¹⁸ There was no need to wait for refreshment or restoration, for if one repented, “then ‘times of refreshment’ could come from the very presence of the Lord himself, a kind of advance anticipation of the full and final ‘refreshment’ that we can expect when God completes the work at last.”¹¹⁹ Our passage, then, advocates a first century

¹¹⁵ See Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971) 209; cf. Soards, *Speeches in Acts*, 43.

¹¹⁶ In other places in the NT, Deuteronomy 18 is understood as referring to Christ’s first advent (see John 6:14; Acts 7:37; cf. Matt 11:3; 21:11; Luke 7:16; 24:19).

¹¹⁷ “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see” (Acts 3:16, NIV).

¹¹⁸ See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003) 454, emphasis added.

¹¹⁹ N.T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone: Part One: Chapters 1-12* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) 58. Upon repentance, salvation would come: “kehrt um, damit ihr Vergebung empfangt und damit die Heilszeit kommt” (Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Das Neue Testament Deutsch* (Göttingen: Dandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968) 2:66. Similarly, in the book of Acts, “Jesus and his followers participate[d] in divine necessity...[and] they [were] living out God’s plan” (Mark Reasoner, “The Theme of Acts: Institutional History or Divine Necessity in History?” *JBL* 118.4 (Winter, 1999) 635-659, citing 642).

reality of restoration. The “reference to ‘these days’ in v. 24 as the time of the fulfillment of God’s promises confirms that the ‘times’...are not a future event but the present reality of God’s restoration of Israel through Jesus, the Messiah.”¹²⁰ David Peterson adds that “the restoration of all things has begun and will continue until it is consummated at Christ’s return...[Luke] proclaims the realization of end-time blessings in the present through the preaching of the gospel.”¹²¹ The message to the implied audience of the 1st century was full of hope with the inauguration of the “times of refreshment/restoration.”

What can be concluded regarding the “times of restoration of *all things*” (χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων)? Is Peter claiming that God will restore “all” people regarding personal salvation, or that God will restore “all” the cosmos, or “all” Israel? The meaning of “all things” has bearing on the timing of the restoration. The church father Origen interpreted Acts 3:21 as a universalistic theory of “the restoration of all created things.”¹²² Yet, in contradistinction to Origen, πάντων should be taken as neuter and not as masculine.¹²³ The word πάντων could refer to the cosmos, and to the “universal renewal of the earth.”¹²⁴ Yet others surmise that it refers to “all” Israel. According to Ben Witherington, the restoration of “all Israel” is especially strong “in view of the use of the cognate term in [Acts] 1:6.” The passage in Acts 1 speaks “not of some sort of generic universal restoration of ‘everything’ or all persons.” Rather, it speaks specifically of Israel.¹²⁵ Jaroslav Pelikan concurs with the “universal restoration” and its link to Acts 1:6, for it “seems to refer to restoration of the kingdom to Israel.”¹²⁶ J. T. Carroll maintains that since “the holy prophets” spoke of this “restoration,” it logically refers to Israel’s restoration.¹²⁷ However, according to Graham Twelftree, although “all

¹²⁰ Schnabel, *Acts: Expanded Digital Edition*, Ac 3:20; cf. Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 74; Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 171-173.

¹²¹ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 182-183.

¹²² See Link, in Brown (ed.), ‘Reconciliation,’ 3:148; cf. B. J. Dodd, ‘Universalism,’ in Martin and Davids (eds), *DLNT*, 1188-1189, citing 1188.

¹²³ The translation of the “restoration of *all persons*” that views πάντων as masculine is not likely (see Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 187 n92); cf. Keener, *Acts*, 2:1110-1111; H. Buis, ‘Eternal Punishment,’ in Moisés Silva and Merrill Chapin Tenney (eds), *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible, M-P* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 4:1096-1098, citing 1098. For the word as neuter, see J. M. Gundry-Volf, ‘Paul and Universalism,’ in Hawthorne et al., *DPL*, 956-960, citing 956; Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (eds), *TDNT*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 1:391.

¹²⁴ See Link, in Brown (ed.), “Reconciliation,” 3:148.

¹²⁵ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 187; cf. Rom 11:26.

¹²⁶ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Acts*, Brazos (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005) 68.

¹²⁷ See the views of Carroll, in Busch, ‘Presence Deferred,’ 542 n45.

things” may *include* Israel, it “more likely refers to the whole of creation being returned to its former glory.”¹²⁸ It probably is, indeed, more inclusive, since Luke “anticipates the restoration of all things (Acts 3:19-21) and the inclusive participation of all peoples in the more comprehensive epoch of salvation, which includes Israel’s restoration, but also the inclusion of Gentiles.”¹²⁹ The most important aspect, for our purposes, is that the “times of refreshment/restoration” had indeed begun—in the first century—and the “restoration of *all things*,” had commenced, and would include not only the whole of creation, but also the Gentiles with Israel. Before concluding, it is important to point out that, although the times of restoration had *already* commenced in the 1st century, at some future point a *final* restoration will occur, with

...God summing up all things in Christ (Eph 1:10), reconciling all things to himself (Col 1:20), making new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1), etc...[yet]... (w)hat has happened now is that the final restoration has already happened to Jesus himself: what God is going to do to the whole of creation, he has done for Jesus in raising him from the dead.¹³⁰

5.3.5. *The hermeneutical effect of Acts 3:19-21*

As an example of a sociological approach to interpretation, the LDS^C claims that Peter referred to the Mormon restoration in Acts 3:19-21. However, it is not possible that Peter was speaking proleptically of the coming of Joseph Smith.¹³¹ Our passage refers to the dual reality of 1st century refreshment and restoration brought on by the Holy Spirit in response to human repentance, precisely because the process of final restoration had already been inaugurated in the life and ministry of Jesus. This interpretation does not permit any LDS^C nuance of meaning. In this example, the LDS^C does not allow for the ontological realism of the biblical passage, and the resultant LDS^C interpretation does not occur in accordance with its intended sense.

The LDS^C is not taking seriously the implied realities of the biblical text. They are supplanting the implied audience with themselves in their

¹²⁸ Twelftree, *People of the Spirit*, 179.

¹²⁹ Fuller, *Restoration of Israel*, 269. In spite of Pelikan’s views above, he also sees the possibility of “broadening the hope to include *all* Jews and *all* Gentiles, even all of the cosmos” (Pelikan, *Acts*, 68); cf. the “worldwide, ethnically inclusive community” mentioned by Walton (Steve Walton, ‘Acts,’ in Vanhoozer (ed.), *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, 79).

¹³⁰ Wright, *Acts for Everyone*, 58.

¹³¹ It is possible that Smith was referring to the LDS^C restoration by analogy. However, the modern attempt of the LDS^C to clarify the contextual meaning of “times of restoration” is of concern here.

interpretation of Acts 3:19-21. This occurs as a result of a sociological approach, that is fueled by a commitment to a perceived institutional need. Consideration of the implied audience is an interpretive matter. By replacing the implied audience with themselves, the LDS^C is leaving the interpretive realm—in spite of their insistence on their specific interpretation of Acts 3:19-21. One of their institutional needs is separation from the church affected by the Great Apostasy. The interpretation of Peter’s speech in Acts 3 as a reference to the Mormon restoration solidifies group cohesion. The “new reform-movement” utilizes the biblical phrase of “the restitution of all things” to justify its separation from the “parent community.” We continue to attempt an answer to the question of the validity, applicability and legitimacy of biblical interpretations by the LDS^C. Thus far, many interpretations can be questioned on hermeneutical grounds. Additional conclusions will be given after discussing the two remaining uses of the Bible by the LDS^C, emendatory and re-authoring, while final conclusions will be detailed in chapter eight.

CHAPTER 6

EMENDATORY PRACTICES

Thus far, we have explored three interpretive practices under the broad categories of literal, allegorical and sociological interpretation. The fourth category, emendatory, is present in two ways in LDS^C sources. First, modern LDS authors *clarify* the King James Version. This is inherently interpretive, could be labeled “non-invasive,” and is conceivably helpful in understanding the biblical text. Second, modern LDS^C scriptures *restore* passages from the Bible. Such restoration is needed because of the purportedly corrupted biblical text. This practice could be labeled “invasive,” because of the changes made to the ancient text, as modern LDS^C scriptures use the building blocks of biblical locutions for the purpose of restoration.¹ For our purposes, we will need to explore the extent to which this restorative practice remains in the interpretive realm. In fact, is it appropriate to discuss any type of emendation in a *hermeneutical* investigation? This question must be asked given that the normal usage of the term “emendation” assumes text-critical improvements. Going forward, however, I propose that these modern LDS^C scriptures do, in fact, *initially* interpret the biblical text. From this perspective, the emendatory practice is hermeneutical, for they are correcting, clarifying and emending the ancient text—in an effort to restore it to its supposed original state. However, as we shall see, the level of hermeneutical reflection that informs LDS^C emendatory practice is rudimentary.

For millennia, those who have considered themselves to be God’s people have approached the biblical text in a variety of ways. Paraphrastic targumim and midrashic explanations are two examples. LDS^C emendation resembles these approaches. Similar to the targumim, LDS^C emendation manifests as translation or commentary, and can be characterized “as simple glosses or

¹ To some extent, modern LDS^C scriptures also *clarify* and *explain* the Bible. This is similar to the clarification of the KJV by LDS authors.

additional words and phrases added to the text for explanation.”² The targumim also evinced a tendency “to update the text, answer questions raised by the text, [and] even correct the text.”³ There is also correlation between LDS^C emendation and the Midrashim, which endeavored to find “meanings that went beyond the obvious and got at the true thrust of a text.”⁴ Concomitantly, “(i)n searching the sacred text the rabbis attempted to update scriptural teaching to make it relevant to new circumstances and issues.”⁵ I will note a limited correspondence between LDS^C emendatory practice and these ancient approaches.

6.1. Emendatory clarification of the KJV by LDS authors

The LDS^C uses the phrase “uniformity of the gospel” to describe the consistent presentation of the gospel throughout history. In other words, they believe that the gospel has been proclaimed in an identical manner for centuries. For instance, Joseph Fielding Smith wrote that “(t)he Gospel is much older than the law of Moses; it existed before the foundation of the world. Its principles are eternal.”⁶ Since the LDS^C was “convinced of the truth and plainness of the Bible,” they “expected salvation to be uniform.”⁷ They concluded that both the Old and New Testaments presented the same message.⁸ Indeed, the OT was said to contain the gospel of apostolic times.⁹ It was the “same gospel and plan of salvation that was received by Old Testament patriarchs and taught and testified of by prophets in all dispensations.”¹⁰ Adam was said to have been baptized.¹¹ In addition, since God was “no respecter of persons,” it was assumed that God had given the same “gospel scheme of salvation” to all who were

² Christian M. M. Brady, ‘Targum,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 780-781, citing 780.

³ Craig A. Evans, ‘Jewish Exegesis,’ in *ibid.*, 380-384, citing 380.

⁴ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 325.

⁵ C. A. Evans, ‘Midrash,’ in Green and McKnight (eds), *DfG*, 544-547, citing 544.

⁶ Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, 15; cf. Robert L. Millet, ‘Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: Impact on Mormon Theology,’ *Religious Studies and Theology* 7.1 (Jan 1987) 43-53, citing 49.

⁷ Irving, ‘Mormons and the Bible,’ 476.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Courtney J. Lassetter, ‘Dispensations of the Gospel,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 389; cf. Grant Underwood, ‘The ‘Same’ Organization That Existed in the Primitive Church,’ in LDS^C, *Go Ye into All the World*, 167-186; F. Melvin Hammond, in D. Kelly Ogden et al., (eds), *The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009) Kindle Edition, ch. 1, ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament.’

¹⁰ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘New and Everlasting Covenant.’ This has also been called a “Christianization of the Old Testament” (Smith, ‘Hermeneutical Crisis,’ 99).

¹¹ See Räsänen, ‘Creative Interpreter,’ 74, 75. Also, on account of Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible (JST), the “gospel of Jesus Christ was taught to Adam” (see Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 323; Gen 4:4-9, JST; Gen 6:67-71, JST; cf. Book of Moses 5:4-9 in the PGP).

willing to listen.¹² The LDS^C “worked hard to establish the concept of the unchangeability of the gospel.”¹³ In these examples, LDS authors are attempting to clarify the general content of both OT and NT scriptures concerning the message of salvation.

A specific interpretive clarification is witnessed with a phrase from Galatians: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, *preached before the gospel unto Abraham*, saying, ‘In thee shall all nations be blessed’” (Gal 3:8, emphasis added). This phrase from the KJV is clarified when it is assumed that Abraham knew this gospel mentioned by Paul.¹⁴ We observe here a specific hermeneutical posture—an explanatory reading of Galatians 3:8, along the lines of a midrashic explanation, or a targumic commentary.

The concept of “uniformity of the gospel” also helped answer a difficult question in the early years of the LDS^C movement. A serious concern of the 19th century, in light of thousands of indigenous people in the Americas, was the possibility of salvation for all earnest seekers, past and present. The explanatory power of the “uniformity of the Gospel” appeared to answer this conundrum—giving all seekers a chance to be saved. Joseph Smith struggled as he read John 5:29, wondering how God could divide people into stark categories of saved and damned.¹⁵ Yet Smith, as well as numerous LDS thinkers, concluded that the “uniformity of the gospel” from the past to the present allowed for the salvation of the indigenous people of the Americas.¹⁶ This clarificatory practice of the LDS^C resembles rabbinic midrash, as midrash was an “updat[ing] [of] scriptural teaching to make it relevant to new circumstances and issues.”¹⁷

According to the LDS^C, the concept of the “uniformity of the Gospel” was also endorsed by early church fathers, for “(i)t was post-apostolic Christianity that fully articulated the view that the gospel was literally on the

¹² Irving, ‘Mormons and the Bible,’ 473. The phrase that God is “no respecter of persons” comes from the KJV of Acts 10:34, and will be covered in more detail in the following chapter.

¹³ Irving, ‘Mormons and the Bible,’ 474.

¹⁴ See McConkie, *New Witness*, 136; Other passages used as biblical evidence for the “uniformity of the Gospel” include Genesis 9:16; 17:7; Isaiah 55:3; Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 37:26; Galatians 1:6-9, 11; 2:2, 5, 7, 14 and Hebrews 8:13; 12:24 (ibid.).

¹⁵ See Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 196; “...those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:29, NIV).

¹⁶ See Millet, in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 268; Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 743-744; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 6; Beckwith et al., *New Mormon Challenge*, 44, 322-323; Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 176, 184, 189.

¹⁷ Evans, ‘Midrash,’ in Green and McKnight (eds), *DfG*, 544.

earth from the time of the Fall.”¹⁸ Therefore, both Eusebius and Augustine supposedly believed in the “uniformity of the gospel.”¹⁹ Eusebius said: “So that it is clearly necessary to consider that religion, which has lately been preached to all nations through the teaching of Christ, the first and most ancient of all religions, and the one discovered by those divinely favored men in the age of Abraham.”²⁰ Augustine wrote that the Christian religion “existed among the ancients, and was not absent from the beginning of the human race.”²¹ To substantiate their emendatory practice, therefore, LDS^C sources quote examples from history. Interestingly, however, Harrell implies that interpretive matters give a different story. While “Mormonism has traditionally taught that the gospel...has always been essentially the same, the scriptural record as it has been passed down gives us a different picture.”²² This admission implies that LDS authors arrive at their conclusions only under the guise of interpretation.

This LDS^C matter of “uniformity of the gospel” has been proclaimed since the beginning of their movement. However, the clarifications presented here are not the result of text-critical considerations. They are conjectural emendations designed to explain and clarify. When the LDS^C cite the passage of God preaching “the gospel unto Abraham” (Gal 3:8), they intend to invoke the doctrine of the “uniformity of the gospel.” However, regardless of the contextual meaning that Paul intended to convey to the church of Galatia, the LDS^C asserts modern significance that clarifies the ancient biblical text. Because of this, although it is a “non-invasive” interpretive practice that purports to clarify, it is not hermeneutically helpful, as it does not consider the contextual meaning of the biblical locutions contained therein. Rather, it simply imports a modern, LDS^C perspective.

¹⁸ Harrell, *This is My Doctrine*, 294. Here, as elsewhere, there is little, if any, interaction by LDS authors on the discrepancy between their views on the Great Apostasy and their use of early church fathers to substantiate LDS^C perspectives. See, for example, Stephen Robinson, who states that the LDS^C “reject the authority of traditional Christianity after the death of the New Testament Apostles” (Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 4, ‘The Historical or Traditional Exclusion’). Yet, later in the same book, when Robinson discusses deification, he quotes no less than five church fathers (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Augustine, Athanasius), all of which purportedly agree with his views. He even states, “all five believed in the doctrine of deification” (ibid., chap. 6, ‘The Doctrinal Exclusion’). Yet, never once does Robinson discuss his justification for the citation of these fathers, given that they were part of the Great Apostasy. Their authority should have been rejected.

¹⁹ See Harrell, *This is My Doctrine*, 294.

²⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Church History of Eusebius* 1.4 (NPNF² 1:88).

²¹ Augustine, *Retractions*, 1:13.3, in Harrell, *This is My Doctrine*, 294.

²² Harrell, *This is My Doctrine*, 293.

6.2. Restoration of the Bible by modern LDS^C scriptures

From the standpoint of the LDS^C, modern scriptures are imperative for biblical interpretation. For example, “(m)odern revelation and restored scripture offer indispensable interpretations of the Bible.”²³ Modern scripture is “a lens for reading ancient revelation.”²⁴ LDS^C members “read the Bible through the lens of Restoration scriptures.”²⁵ The “real key” to understanding the message of Christ in the NT is through “expanding that knowledge by adding what inspired men have known of him in the Old Testament, the Pearl of Great Price, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants.”²⁶ These books herald the arrival of the “fullness of the scriptures” as well as shedding “great light on the New Testament” and “illuminat[ing] its doctrines and teachings.”²⁷ Restored scripture and modern revelation “reestablished the lost key of knowledge.”²⁸ For the First Presidency, the “most reliable way to measure the accuracy of any biblical passage is not by comparing different texts, but by comparison with the Book of Mormon and modern-day revelation.”²⁹ LDS author Mauro Properzi believes that “the LDS hermeneutical background is uniquely shaped”³⁰ by their modern scriptures.

Partially owing to their relativizing, even oscillating view of the Bible, the LDS^C is convinced of the superior clarity of modern scripture: “Many of the clearest explanations of doctrines arise from modern revelations or restored scripture.”³¹ LDS authors use the analogy of being lost and in need of the most recent map to locate oneself, and compare the advantage that modern scripture has over the Bible. They ask: “Which map would you rather have?... Which of these is most accurate? Which block of scripture would you rather study

²³ Thomas, ‘Scripture,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1284; The three LDS scriptures, BoM, D&C and the PGP all “interpret the Bible” (ibid., 1283; cf. also Joseph Smith—History 1:11–20, PGP).

²⁴ Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, Epilogue, ‘The New Testament and the Restoration.’

²⁵ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 5, ‘The Scriptures.’ To this should be added, however, another ramification of continuing revelation: “Recent years have seen an increasing number of LDS intellectuals (who) suggest that Smith’s later teachings should be interpreted through the lens of the earlier writings included in the Standard Works” (Carl Mosser, in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 25).

²⁶ Carmack (ed.), *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, 10.

²⁷ Ibid., 20.

²⁸ Thomas, ‘Scripture,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1284; cf. Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 372–373. See Luke 11:52: “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key to knowledge.”

²⁹ See Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Bible’; cf. Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism*, 40; Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, Epilogue, ‘The New Testament and the Restoration.’

³⁰ Properzi, *Mormonism and the Emotions*, 119.

³¹ Thomas, ‘Scripture,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1283; cf. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 83; Black (ed.), *Expressions of Faith*, 125.

from?”³² The answer, of course, is their modern scriptural collection. The following sections describe significant examples of restorations of the Bible by the three LDS^C modern scriptures, the BoM, the D&C, and the PGP. I will also explore the emendatory practice of the JST (Joseph Smith Translation). I will note the similarity between these LDS^C emendations and the targumim and the Midrashim, and will also point out the rudimentary level of hermeneutical reflection evinced in their interpretations.

6.2.1. *The Book of Mormon (BoM) and the restoration of the Bible*

According to the LDS^C, the Book of Mormon contains the “fullness of the gospel.”³³ This “fullness” implies a deficiency in ancient revelation, and the need for restoration. To a limited extent, the BoM also clarifies biblical content. Doctrines are “clearer” in the BoM than in the Bible.³⁴ For Kent Jackson, the BoM contains theology that “far excels in clarity and direction than the doctrines preserved in the New Testament.”³⁵ The BoM prophets Lehi and Jacob “excel Paul in teaching the atonement” and “Nephi makes a better exposition of the scattering and gathering of Israel than do Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel combined.”³⁶ The BoM is viewed as the “key” to “unlock the true meaning of the Old and New Testaments.”³⁷ The “Book of Mormon clarifies many of the writings of Old Testament prophets,” and even “explains the Bible.”³⁸ Since the “words of Isaiah are not plain,” the BoM translates its message in “plain” language.³⁹ Faulconer states that the BoM “sheds light” on Bible passages.⁴⁰

³² LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 51.

³³ Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 49; D&C 19:26; 42:12.

³⁴ McConkie, *New Witness*, 467. Specifically, McConkie expressed “without question, that in ninety-five of...one hundred cases, the Book of Mormon teaching is clearer, plainer, more expansive and better than the biblical word” (ibid).

³⁵ Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints,’ 73. Particular areas where the BoM is purportedly clearer include the nature of Jesus and his atoning sacrifice, the purpose of humankind, the fall of Adam, and the concept of revelation (ibid., 74; cf. Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, Epilogue, ‘The New Testament and the Restoration’).

³⁶ Bruce McConkie, ‘What Think Ye of the Book of Mormon?’ *Ensign* (Nov 1983), <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1983/11/what-think-ye-of-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>; accessed Apr 2016.

³⁷ Fielding McConkie, ‘The “How” of Scriptural Study,’ 63.

³⁸ Thomas, ‘Scripture,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1283; cf. Smith, ‘Hermeneutical Crisis,’ 97; Wright, ‘Joseph Smith’s Interpretation of Isaiah,’ 206; Stark, *Rise of Mormonism*, 116.

³⁹ Smith, ‘Hermeneutical Crisis,’ 98.

⁴⁰ E.g., Mosiah 27:24-26 sheds light on John 3 and the story of Jesus and Nicodemus (Faulconer, *NT Made Harder*, ‘Lesson 5’).

Paradoxically, the vital importance of the Book of Mormon was the fact that it *appeared*, as opposed to its subject matter. Grant Hardy wrote that the “actual contents” of the BoM “could often seem of secondary importance when compared to the sheer fact of its existence.”⁴¹ Terryl Givens even speaks of the “unblushing indifference to the book’s *content*.”⁴² This indifference would seem to call into question not only the legitimacy of its existence, but also the ardent endorsements of its clarity and explanatory power just referenced. Yet such issues do not concern these LDS authors. An emphasis remains—the appearance of the BoM that signified the God of the Bible was again communicating with the people of God. Such communication helped clarify and restore ancient revelation.

To cite a repeated LDS^C refrain, the BoM is “the most correct book on earth.”⁴³ Jeffrey Holland claims that “in an effort to give the world back its Bible and a correct view of Deity with it, what we have in the Book of Mormon is a uniform view of God.”⁴⁴ With this in mind, the following examples from the BoM will illustrate LDS^C emendatory practice. For example, the BoM text of Alma 13:7 explains the enigmatic phrase “without father or mother” of Hebrews 7:3. This refers not to Melchizedek, but to “the high priesthood.”⁴⁵ In addition, 3 Nephi 18:7 is a “corrective lens” as it counters the doctrine of transubstantiation and advocates the Lord’s Supper as a simple remembrance of Jesus.⁴⁶ The identification of the “other sheep” of John 10:16 is an example of a “problematical passage in the Bible.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the BoM identifies the “other sheep” as the Nephites that were visited by Jesus on the American continent after his resurrection (3 Nephi 15:21). This visitation is reputed to have taken place in the year 34 C.E. and is described in 3 Nephi 11: “And it came to pass...they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe...Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:7-8, 10). Concerning the passage of Revelation 17:5-6,

⁴¹ Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 268.

⁴² Givens, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 110, emphasis by author.

⁴³ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Book of Mormon.’

⁴⁴ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, in *ibid.* For early converts to Mormonism, it was not the peculiar Mormon doctrines in the BoM that attracted them, but conversely, “it was the congruence of Book of Mormon teachings with the New Testament” (Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 186).

⁴⁵ Dennis Largey, in Carmack (ed.), *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, 140.

⁴⁶ See also 3 Nephi 20:3; cf. Dennis Largey, in Carmack (ed.), *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, 140; Paul B. Pixton, ‘Sacrament,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1243-1244; Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 33.

⁴⁷ Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 33; cf. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 419.

LDS authors state that “the Lord has given inspired commentary on this passage of Revelation. Nephi saw a similar vision and recorded what he saw (1 Nephi 14:9–12).”⁴⁸ Two examples of clarificatory expansion include Ether 13:3–11 with the KJV of Revelation 21:1–17, and Moroni 7:42–46 with the KJV of 1 Corinthians 13.⁴⁹ Specifically, Moroni 7:44 states “...if he have not charity, he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity,” while Moroni 7:46 states “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail.” These are examples similar to a paraphrastic Targum, or a midrashic explanation. Because of the antiquity of these targumic and midrashic approaches, it is possible that the LDS^C could claim justification for their emendatory practice.

The clarificatory expansion of a biblical text is, in fact, the biblical pattern, according to LDS^C thinking. Heikki Räisänen, a historical-critical scholar with significant empathy for the LDS^C, writes that just as there is a “retelling” of the stories of Samuel and Kings in the books of Chronicles, so also the BoM displays a parallel phenomenon. The Apostle Paul expands on the OT scriptures, according to Räisänen. Furthermore, just as Matthew spiritualizes Luke in the Sermon on the Mount, or as Jesus speaks in a manner quite different in John when compared with the Synoptic Gospels, so also the BoM expands on ancient scripture.⁵⁰ Krister Stendahl holds similar views, and is “one of the few non-Mormon academics to look closely at LDS Scripture.”⁵¹ Stendahl concludes that

...the Book of Mormon belongs to and shows many of the signs of the Targums and the pseudepigraphic recasting of biblical material. The targumic tendencies are those of clarifying and actualizing translations, usually by expansion and more specific application to the need and situation of the community. The pseudepigraphic, both apocalyptic and didactic, tend to fill out the gaps in our knowledge about sacred events, truths, and predictions. ...It is obvious to me that the Book of Mormon stands within both of these traditions if considered as a phenomenon of religious texts.⁵²

⁴⁸ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 261.

⁴⁹ See Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 757; cf. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 29.

⁵⁰ See Räisänen, ‘Creative Interpreter,’ 66–67.

⁵¹ Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 138.

⁵² Krister Stendahl, ‘The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi,’ in Truman G. Madsen (ed.), *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels* (Provo: Utah: Brigham Young University, 1978) 139–154, citing 152.

Stendahl also writes, “the laws of creative interpretation by which we analyze materials from the first and second Christian centuries operate on and are significantly elucidated by works like the Book of Mormon and by other writings of revelatory character.”⁵³ He insists that “such authentic writing should not be confused with spurious gospel forgeries.”⁵⁴ Stendahl views 3 Nephi in the BoM, “as a nineteenth-century expansion and application of ancient material.”⁵⁵

It is unclear why Stendahl narrowly defines the “pseudepigraphic” as writings that “recast” biblical material, and “fill out the gaps in our knowledge.” He neglects to mention the primary characteristic of the Pseudepigrapha—its purported connection to a prophet or apostle.⁵⁶ However, Stendahl could respond with specific examples of the “the pseudepigraphic recasting of biblical material.” For instance, the pseudepigraphical *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* expounds “important examples of developments in angelology, demonology, the priestly and regal functions of the Messiah and ethics.”⁵⁷ The pseudepigraphical book *Jubilees* explains that angels were “actively involved in the revelation to Moses on Sinai, an event without explicit OT support but that also seems to find its way into Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; and Heb. 2:2.”⁵⁸ *Jubilees* then, expands on the enigmatic biblical idea of the angels’ involvement in the giving of the Law.⁵⁹ It also “rewrites the stories of Genesis and Exodus and is of great value for its witness to the development of a theology of Torah.”⁶⁰ While the Pseudepigrapha does, indeed, recast the biblical material, this does not necessarily give justification for a similar practice evinced in the BoM.

⁵³ See Krister Stendahl, *Meanings, The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 99.

⁵⁴ Ibid. However, non-LDS scholar W.D. Davies calls for these strong views of Stendahl to be scrutinized, and claims Stendahl’s views are, in reality, “more provocative than convincing” (Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 48 n9).

⁵⁵ See Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 138. Also, LDS author Daniel Peterson writes of Stendahl and his “strikingly affirmative remarks” concerning the LDS^C doctrine of “baptism for the dead” (Daniel Peterson, ‘Defending the Faith: A Lutheran Bishop’s Perspective on Mormon Baptism for the Dead,’ Deseret News website, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/76553203/A-Lutheran-bishops-perspective-on-Mormon-baptism-for-the-dead.html>; accessed Nov 2017).

⁵⁶ See Peter Enns, ‘Pseudepigrapha,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 652-653, citing 652.

⁵⁷ David A. deSilva, ‘Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,’ in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (eds), *DNTB* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 58-64, citing 62-63.

⁵⁸ Enns, ‘Pseudepigrapha,’ 653.

⁵⁹ In the first chapter of *Jubilees*, it states: “And He said to the angel of the presence: ‘Write for Moses from the beginning of creation till My sanctuary has been built among them for all eternity’” (Robert Henry Charles (ed.), *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913) 2:13).

⁶⁰ deSilva, ‘Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,’ in Evans and Porter (eds), *DNTB*, 63.

Additional reflections on the views of Räsänen and Stendahl will be given in the conclusion of the chapter.

LDS authors point out that many critics claim the BoM “plagiarizes” the Bible.⁶¹ One response to this criticism is that the BoM is an expansion and clarification—with similar vocabulary and concepts used.⁶² For Alan Goff, the intertextuality between the BoM and the Bible is proof of the legitimacy of both.⁶³ In light of the similarity between the Bible and the BoM, “Mormons believe that God simply delivered the same basic message twice.”⁶⁴ The message was clarified in the later version. Furthermore, LDS thinkers assert that Joseph Smith operated under “the editorial conventions” of his day, and that what we consider plagiarism today was all-too frequent (and accepted) in his day.⁶⁵ Since the “culture of Smith’s day was immersed in biblical literacy,” it is natural for the BoM to reflect the diction that came from Joseph Smith that, in turn, reflected his knowledge of the Bible.⁶⁶ In sum, similar to the ancient targumim, the BoM clarified and expanded ancient Scripture.

6.2.2. *The “Doctrine and Covenants” (D&C) and the restoration of the Bible*

The D&C is “a collection of divine revelations and inspired declarations,” is of “modern origin,” and is not “a translation of an ancient document.”⁶⁷ The collection describes “ordinances and performances that pertain to salvation,” and are worth more than “the riches of the whole earth.”⁶⁸ They contain

⁶¹ See the responses of LDS authors to these critics in Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 135-138, and Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 27-28.

⁶² E.g., the “Book of Mormon quotes extensively and directly from the King James Version: Exodus 20:2-4, 3-17; Isaiah 2-14; 48:1-49:26; 52:7-15; 53:1-12; 54:1-17; Micah 4:12-13; 5:8-11; Malachi 3, 4; and Matthew 5-7. In some cases, the wording has been altered slightly” (Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr., *Equal Rites* (New York: Columbia, 2004) 101).

⁶³ Alan Goff, ‘How Should We Then Read? Reading Mormon Scripture After the Fall,’ *FARMS Review* 21.1 (2009) 137-178, citing 146.

⁶⁴ Mark P. Leone, *The Roots of Mormonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979) 12; cf. Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 55.

⁶⁵ Philip L. Barlow, ‘Joseph Smith’s Revision of the Bible: Fraudulent, Pathologic, or Prophetic?’ *Harvard Theological Review* 83.1 (Jan 1990) 45-64, citing 62; cf. Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 758 n16, for the view that the incredible speed with which the BoM was produced (“most of it was dictated in 60-90 days”), precludes any possibility of Smith using or borrowing from the King James Version.

⁶⁶ Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 294.

⁶⁷ ‘Doctrine and Covenants,’ LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament?lang=eng>; accessed Mar 2016; cf. Roy W. Doxey, ‘Doctrine and Covenants: Overview,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 405-407, citing 405.

⁶⁸ See the introduction to *Doctrine and Covenants* (as well as the introduction to D&C 70). See also Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints,’ 75; Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 9, 10. The D&C was published in 1835 (although previously published in 1833 under the title “Book of Commandments”).

teachings central to the LDS faith.⁶⁹ The LDS^C believes the collection is less obscure, more current, and less marred in transmission than the Bible.⁷⁰ As a consequence, the D&C clarify and restore the content of the Bible. For example, in view of the conundrum of Adam and Eve “not dying” on the day they ate of the fruit, in spite of God’s warning in Gen 2:17, the collection explains they “spiritually died” (see D&C 29:41). The D&C also give an “explication on several obscure points in the book of Revelation.”⁷¹ The identification and location of the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21:2 is given as Independence, Missouri.⁷² The meanings of the white stone and the new name in Revelation 2:18 are explained.⁷³ In response to the challenging passage in Matthew 12:31-32 concerning “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost,” D&C 132:27 states that it is murder of innocent blood.⁷⁴ For LDS authors, in view of the question of the survival of the Apostle John in John 21, “it is fortunate that latter-day revelation offers clarification on this matter.”⁷⁵ D&C 7:1-4 explains that John “shalt tarry” upon the earth until the Lord comes in his glory. The verse of 1 Peter 3:19, that possibly describes the descent of Jesus into hell, is clarified in D&C 138, where the gospel is preached among the dead, and all are given the opportunity to repent and receive the gospel.⁷⁶ Joseph Smith, along with early LDS leader Sidney Rigdon, received a vision about the correct interpretation of John 5:28-29, one that espoused universalism. This vision was later recorded as D&C 76:15-24.⁷⁷ Therefore, the modern book of *Doctrine and Covenants* claims to illuminate and explain numerous biblical texts.

⁶⁹ See Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 293.

⁷⁰ Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 752 n11.

⁷¹ Thomas, ‘Scripture,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1283. See, for example, the exact identification of the “sea of glass” and the “four beasts” of Revelation 4:6 in D&C 77:1-4; for the “four angels” in Revelation 7:1 see D&C 77:8; the “144,000” of Revelation 7:4 in D&C 77:11, etc.

⁷² “...in this land, which is the land of Missouri...this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion...the place which is now called Independence is the center place” (D&C 57:1-3; cf. D&C 90:37, 101:17; cf. Arbaugh, *Revelation*, 72-73).

⁷³ See D&C 130:10-11; cf. Faulconer, *NT Made Harder*, ‘Lesson 45.’

⁷⁴ See also Joseph Fielding McConkie, ‘Holy Ghost,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 650; cf. LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 37; D&C 76:31-36.

⁷⁵ Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, ch. 1, ‘The Gospels’; cf. Luke 9:27.

⁷⁶ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 236; cf. Scott C. Esplin, ‘Wondering at His Words: Peter’s Influence on the Knowledge of Salvation for the Dead,’ in Frank F. Judd Jr., Eric D. Huntsman, and Shon D. Hopkin (eds), *The Ministry of Peter, the Chief Apostle* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2014) 296-312; David J. Ridges, *The New Testament Made Easier: Matthew, Mark, Luke & John* (2nd edn; Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, Inc., 2007) 386.

⁷⁷ The passage from John is as follows: “...the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice...they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29); cf. Bowman, *Mormon People*, 33.

6.2.3. *The Pearl of Great Price (PGP) and the restoration of the Bible*

The PGP “clarifies doctrines and teachings that were lost from the Bible and gives added information concerning the Creation of the earth.”⁷⁸ This “added information” amounts to restoration.⁷⁹ The PGP also mentions “mysterious” biblical passages that apparently were in need of clarification. Early in his ministry, along with a colleague, Smith received a visit from John the Baptist, and they subsequently understood the “true meaning” of the “more mysterious passages.”⁸⁰ According to LDS authors, the PGP elucidates numerous biblical ideas: “the premortal Council in Heaven, the nature of God, the reality of Satan, the Creation and the Fall, the rise of the kingdom of Satan, the revelation of the gospel to Adam, the ministry and translation of Enoch and his city, the early life of the family of Noah [and] Abraham and the covenant Jehovah made with him.”⁸¹ One specific example is the clarification of Psalm 82. In the Book of Abraham, the “gods” of Psalm 82 are identified as the “intelligences that were organized before the world was.”⁸² Another example is found in the “revised form” of Matthew 23:39 and Matthew 24, that illustrates “some points reworded and...some verses expanded, by Joseph Smith.”⁸³

The Book of Moses contains several examples of emendatory practices. It originally consisted of revelations given to Joseph Smith as he was “revising the Bible under inspiration.”⁸⁴ In order to resolve “apparently contradictory accounts of the Creation in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, the Book of Moses explained that there were, in fact, two creations. The first was spiritual, the second physical.”⁸⁵ In addition, Moses 5:1-5 is “a lengthy expansion dealing with

⁷⁸ LDS^c, *Gospel Principles*, 48.

⁷⁹ The PGP is composed of five sections. Two of the sections deal with the topic of creation: the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham. The other three sections are “Joseph Smith—Matthew,” an extract from the JST (Joseph Smith’s translation work on the Bible), as well as “Joseph Smith—History,” which contains excerpts from LDS history, and the 13 Articles of Faith. See ‘Pearl of Great Price,’ LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/introduction?lang=eng>; accessed Mar 2016; cf. Paulsen, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 538; Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 12-25.

⁸⁰ Joseph Smith—History 1:74, PGP. See also Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 76. In this event, the “Scriptures were laid open” as never before (Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 26; Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 24).

⁸¹ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Pearl of Great Price.’

⁸² Daniel Peterson in Beckwith et al., *New Mormon Challenge*, 311. This is another reference to premortal existence. See Abraham 3:22-23, PGP.

⁸³ Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 50.

⁸⁴ Kenneth W. Baldrige, ‘Pearl of Great Price,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1070-1072, citing 1071.

⁸⁵ Quinn, *Magic World View*, 169; cf. Hutchinson, ‘Mormon Midrash,’ 37, 69; Robert A. Rees, ‘The Midrashic Imagination and the Book of Mormon,’ *Dialogue* 44.3 (Fall 2011) 44-66, citing 52.

the cultic and family life of Adam and Eve after their expulsion from the garden.”⁸⁶ The passage helps answer questions such as how Cain and Abel found wives. In addition, the fifth chapter of Moses “provides a plausible dramatic background for the seemingly inexplicable rejection of Cain’s sacrifice and his subsequent murder of Abel.”⁸⁷ Similar to midrashic writings, the *Pearl of Great Price* updated, clarified, and restored the biblical text.

6.2.4. *The Joseph Smith Translation (JST)*

Through the revision of the Bible, now known as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), “the Lord has expanded...[the] understanding of some passages in the Bible.”⁸⁸ Although the JST is not the official Bible of the LDS, it “offers many interesting insights and is an invaluable aid to biblical interpretation and understanding.”⁸⁹ The purpose of the JST is “to provide knowledge not found in other Bibles.”⁹⁰ It is also to provide “*a plainer translation* of the Bible.”⁹¹ It can “correct false doctrine.”⁹² The JST was formed because “(t)he Lord inspired the Prophet Joseph to restore truths to the Bible text that had been lost or changed since the original words were written.”⁹³ In 1830, by revising the Bible, Smith was “straightening out contradictions, correcting errors, and adding lost portions.”⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Hutchinson, ‘Mormon Midrash,’ 59.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Specifically, see Moses 5:18, 21-31, PGP.

⁸⁸ LDS^c, *Gospel Principles*, 46.

⁸⁹ ‘Joseph Smith Translation,’ LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/bd/joseph-smith-translation>; accessed Mar 2016; cf. Millet, ‘Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible,’ 43-53. The JST is a “revision or translation of the King James Version of the Bible begun by the Prophet Joseph Smith in June 1830” (ibid.). For the full text of the JST (also called the ‘Inspired Version’) see <http://www.centerplace.org/hs/iv/iv-gen.htm>; accessed Mar 2016. The amount of attention, however, given to the JST by the Utah-based LDS church is closely “interlinked” with its complex relationship with the Independence, Missouri-based Community of Christ (formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and organized under Joseph Smith’s oldest son) who have always held the copyright and ownership of the JST (see Properzi, *Mormonism and the Emotions*, 113). The Community of Christ refers to the translation as the “Inspired Version” while Utah-based LDS^c labels it the “Joseph Smith Translation” (see Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 65-66).

⁹⁰ Robert J. Matthews, ‘Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST),’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 763-769, citing 767.

⁹¹ Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 391, emphasis by author.

⁹² Julie M. Smith, ‘She hath Wrought a Good Work: The Anointing of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel,’ *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 5 (2013) 31-46, citing 44.

⁹³ LDS^c, *Gospel Principles*, 46; Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 12. However, for a dissenting view, Greaves sees the JST as “not a restoration of original material, but a commentary on the KJV” (Greaves, ‘Education of a Bible Scholar,’ 65). In addition, LDS author Russell Nelson viewed many the changes in the JST as clarifications, and not “textual restorations” (see Russell M. Nelson, *Accomplishing the Impossible: What God Does, What We Can Do* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015) 18-19, 46).

⁹⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 13.

For example, the LDS^C considers that marriage is a crucial aspect of salvation.⁹⁵ However, the apparent singleness of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:7-8 presented a problem. McConkie proposed that while “uninspired men” were translating 1 Corinthians 7, they “changed Paul’s words” to make it “appear as though even Paul himself was unmarried.”⁹⁶ Therefore, Joseph Smith corrected this passage to reflect the supposed original wording that elevated the state of marriage. The KJV states in 1 Corinthians 7:38: “So then he that giveth *her* in marriage doeth well.” However, the JST changes it to, “(s)o then he that giveth *himself* in marriage doeth well.”⁹⁷ Referring to this passage in 1 Corinthians 7, an official LDS manual praises the changes made by Smith.⁹⁸

Further instructive examples include the following. The apparent discrepancy of the number of angels at the tomb of Jesus was harmonized in the JST (Mark 16:3, 4; John 20:12), as was the supposed contradiction with the number of demoniacs healed (Matt 8:28, 29; Mark 5:2).⁹⁹ The enigmatic idea of God “repenting” was corrected: “And it repented Noah, and his heart was pained that the Lord had made man on the earth” (Gen 8:13, JST).¹⁰⁰ The “interpretive” piece in these examples seems to be straightforward—the Prophet recognized a problem with the biblical text, and reconstructed it via prophetic authority. The issue, however, is how this recognition took place. It appears that, at times, translation adjustments are made to prevent unwelcome interpretation—and introduce straightforward interpretation or “plainness.” As an additional example, Smith considered a verse in Acts 13 as theologically biased. The KJV of Acts 13:48 reads: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to

⁹⁵ Marriage is eternal and “essential for exaltation” (LDS^C, *Gospel Principles*, 219; cf. D&C 132, and the article on ‘Marriage’ at the website of the LDS church, <https://www.lds.org/topics/marriage?lang=eng>; accessed Mar 2016).

⁹⁶ McConkie, *New Witness*, 404-405.

⁹⁷ Emphasis added. See also the corrections of 1 Corinthians 7:33-4 in the JST <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/jst/jst-1-cor/7?lang=eng>; accessed Mar 2016; cf. <http://www.centerplace.org/hs/iv/iv-1co.htm>; accessed Mar 2016; Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 355-358.

⁹⁸ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 179. The same manual also mentions the “blessing it is to have prophetic help to understand difficult passages of scripture” (ibid.).

⁹⁹ See ‘Inspired Version,’ <http://www.centerplace.org/hs/iv/iv-mar.htm>; accessed Mar 2016. To agree with the two angels in John 20:12, “two angels in white sitting” (KJV), the JST was changed in Mark 16:3: “two angels sitting thereon” (JST); although the supposedly erroneous KJV of Mark 16:5 states: “a young man sitting on the right side” (v 3 of Mark 16 in the JST is equivalent to v 5 of Mark 16 in the KJV). Similarly, to agree with one man healed in Mark 5:23, “a man with an unclean spirit” (KJV), the JST was changed in Matt 8:29: “a man possessed of devils” (JST). See the (supposedly erroneous) KJV of Matt 8:28: “two possessed with devils.”

¹⁰⁰ The KJV has this passage as Genesis 6:6. See also the JST of Genesis 8:15.

eternal life believed.” However, given Smith’s rejection of a rigid Calvinism that he felt endorsed an unmoving God “without body, parts or passions,” he updated Acts 13:48 to read, “and as many as *believed* were *ordained* unto eternal life.”¹⁰¹

A different explanatory attempt by Smith centered on word meanings. In Hebrews 6:1, the KJV translators rendered τῆς ἀρχῆς as “the principles”: “Therefore leaving the principles (τῆς ἀρχῆς) of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection” (KJV). Because of a lack of understanding of the underlying Greek,¹⁰² Smith responded: “If a man leaves the principles of the doctrine of Christ, how can he be saved in the principles? This is a contradiction. I don’t believe it. I will render it as it should be—‘Therefore *not* leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection.’”¹⁰³ If Smith had investigated the preceding context—only three verses earlier—he would have noticed τῆς ἀρχῆς in Hebrews 5:12. There the words τῆς ἀρχῆς carry the meaning of “elementary teaching.”¹⁰⁴ Thus, the writer of Hebrews was, in truth, calling for a leaving behind of the *elementary truths* of the faith—so as to progress toward a more mature faith. The contextual content of this “elementary teaching” about Christ “could include a number of elements, such as Christ’s role as high priest after the order of Melchizedek, a discussion that surrounds the paraenesis in 5:11-6:20.”¹⁰⁵ However, Smith sought to clarify and restore the text by adding the word “not.”¹⁰⁶

There are additional passages from the JST that illustrate corrections and clarifications. On the identification of the mysterious “naked youth” mentioned in Mark 14:51-52, the JST establishes the young man as a disciple.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Acts 13:48, JST, emphasis added; see Räisänen, ‘Creative Interpreter,’ 73.

¹⁰² Διὸ ἀφέντες τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγον ἐπὶ τὴν τελειότητα φερώμεθα.

¹⁰³ Smith, in George Albert Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:57, 58, emphasis added. See also Heb 6:1, JST, <http://www.centerplace.org/hs/iv/iv-heb.htm#v6.1>; accessed Mar 2016.

¹⁰⁴ “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God” (Hebrews 5:12, KJV). See D. Müller, L. Coenen, and H. Bietenhard, ‘Beginning, Origin, Rule, Originator’ in Brown (ed.), *NIDNTT*, 1:166. For other authors, the phrase τῆς ἀρχῆς denotes “elementary principles” in Hebrews 5:12 and “elementary Christian teaching” in Hebrews 6:1 (see Arndt et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 138).

¹⁰⁵ Lincoln Hurst, in Matthew C. Easter, *Faith and the Faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 188-189.

¹⁰⁶ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 59; Robert M. Bowman, Jr., ‘The Book of Hebrews and the Joseph Smith Translation,’ <http://mit.irr.org/book-of-hebrews-and-joseph-smith-translation>; accessed Nov 2016.

¹⁰⁷ “And there followed him a certain young man, a disciple, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him; and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked, and saved himself out of their hands” (Mark 14:57, JST). LDS authors further clarify: “It is likely that it was Mark himself” (LDS^c, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 70).

In Matthew 7:1 of the JST, we are told to “judge not *unrighteously*,”¹⁰⁸ in order to avoid the appearance of unfair judgment. LDS authors contend the Greek of John 1:21¹⁰⁹ is “rather cumbersome”; therefore, the JST “makes it clear.”¹¹⁰ During the 19th century, apparently on account of an “American sensitivity about the demonic reputation of snakes,” the JST was changed to “be ye therefore wise *servants*, and as harmless as doves” (Matt 10:14, JST, emphasis added).¹¹¹ In order to avoid an unwelcome interpretation (becoming like snakes)—and to introduce straightforward interpretation or “plainness”—the text was revised to better cohere with what appears to be a more mature spirituality. In John 1:31, 33, John the Baptist does not appear to know Jesus by sight—in spite of their filial relation. Thus, the JST “makes it clear that the Baptist did know Jesus when he saw him (JST, John 1:29–33).”¹¹² In the parable of the lost sheep, the JST suggests that Jesus wouldn’t irresponsibly leave 99 sheep “in the wilderness,” so he went “*into* the wilderness”—presumably leaving the 99 in a safe place.¹¹³ Dallin Oaks echoes what we have noted previously concerning interpretation by the Spirit, and emphasizes that “the scriptures can be comprehended only by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.”¹¹⁴ He cites the JST of 1 Corinthians 2:11 and the subtle change from the KJV: “The things of God knoweth no man, except *he has the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor 2:11, JST); “...the things of God knoweth no man, but *the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor 2:11, KJV).¹¹⁵ In sum, because of the JST, “many plain and precious things were revealed which throw great light upon many subjects.”¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ Emphasis added. “Judge not unrighteously, that ye be not judged; but judge righteous judgment” (Matt 7:2, JST). Note the difference with the KJV: “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt 7:1, KJV).

¹⁰⁹ καὶ ἠρώτησαν αὐτόν· τί οὖν; σὺ Ἥλιος εἶ; καὶ λέγει· οὐκ εἰμί· ὁ προφήτης εἶ σύ; καὶ ἀπεκρίθη· οὐ.

¹¹⁰ Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, ch. 1, ‘The Gospels.’ For LDS readers, the cumbersome Greek translation is evident in the back-and-forth dialogue of the KJV: “And they asked him, ‘What then? Art thou Elias?’ And he saith, ‘I am not.’ ‘Art thou that prophet?’ And he answered, ‘No’” (John 1:21, KJV). This is in contrast to the JST: “And he confessed, and denied not that he was Elias; but confessed, saying; ‘I am not the Christ’” (John 1:21, JST).

¹¹¹ See Hutchinson, ‘LDS Approaches,’ 109–110. Again, in various passages, the JST has numbered the verses differently. The KJV states “be ye therefore wise as *serpents*, and harmless as doves” (Matt 10:16, emphasis added).

¹¹² See Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, ch. 1, ‘The Gospels.’

¹¹³ Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 352.

¹¹⁴ Oaks, ‘Scripture Reading,’ LDS website.

¹¹⁵ See <http://www.centerplace.org/hs/iv/iv-1co.htm#v2.1>; accessed Mar 2016; cf. Joseph Fielding McConkie, ‘Holy Ghost,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 650; McConkie, *New Witness*, 266. For other changes in the JST, see Smith, ‘Hermeneutical Crisis,’ 86–108 and Barlow, ‘Revision of the Bible,’ 45–64.

¹¹⁶ Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, 116–117.

6.3. The hermeneutical effect of LDS^C emendatory practice

LDS author Anthony Hutchinson writes that, just as there was a re-working of texts in biblical history, so also “much of Restoration Scripture could be so categorized” as midrashic.¹¹⁷ Hutchinson continues: “...one could argue that much of the New Testament consists of midrashic readings of the Old Testament.”¹¹⁸ In addition, throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition, clarification and restoration were deployed in the targumim and the Midrashim. Could this give justification for the emendatory practice of the LDS^C?

We have noted the foundational event of the FV in 1820, where Joseph Smith sought wisdom from God because of the mutually contradictory interpretations of the Bible. Because of these readings, “it was impossible to resolve religious questions by an appeal to the existing Bible.”¹¹⁹ In his handling of the Bible, then, Smith made “interpretive additions,”¹²⁰ theological as well as “common sense” changes, harmonizations, and additions with no biblical parallel.¹²¹ Obviously, interpretation occurs when scriptural passages are determined to be mutually contradictory, or when additions and harmonizations are purportedly needed. However, the reference to contradictory passages may be an exercise in safeguarding doctrinal parameters. Therefore, the interpretation of the ancient text is abandoned because of its inability to be resolved on its own. The novelty of the modern is leveraged to trump the ancient.

The implied realities of the biblical text are not taken seriously with LDS^C emendatory practice. Instead of accounting for “the textually embodied intentionality of the author”¹²² arrived at through implied realities, the LDS^C is supplanting the implied audience with themselves—and revising, correcting or clarifying—because of perceived institutional needs.

Conceivably, however, a possible avenue that could hermeneutically justify LDS^C emendatory practice are the views of non-LDS scholars Räsänen

¹¹⁷ Hutchinson, ‘Mormon Midrash,’ 52.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 48. Surprisingly, Hutchinson calls for a recasting of modern scripture, “including the creation of a body of midrashic readings” of LDS scripture (ibid., 62).

¹¹⁹ Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible’; cf. Joseph Smith—History 1:12, PGP.

¹²⁰ Barlow, ‘Revision of the Bible,’ 55.

¹²¹ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 55-56. Interestingly, Joseph Smith also revised the BoM two times after its initial appearance in 1830 (Gutjahr, *Book of Mormon*, 148). The rationale given was that a “living prophet made it a living book, capable of change” (ibid., 63). The *Doctrine and Covenants* were also revised twice—in 1835 and in 1844 (ibid., 62, 218-219 n3).

¹²² Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 149.

and Stendahl. Yet, for modern LDS^C scriptures to claim the ability to update Scripture, one would expect to see better evidence than simple changes applied to the text. What we are actually seeing is an adjustment of the ancient text to conform to the perceived institutional needs of the current body of believers. Stendahl asserts the “revelatory character”¹²³ of the BoM. Nevertheless, this stance is difficult to accept for those outside of the “systemic parameters” of the church—or for those not as sympathetic to the LDS^C as is Stendahl. Although the BoM, for example, *purports* to explain and clarify ancient Scripture, Stendahl, along with Räisänen, are overly optimistic about its explanatory power.

I claimed earlier that the level of hermeneutical reflection that informs LDS^C emendatory practice is rudimentary. In other words, there is a simple adjustment of biblical locutions, and there is no concern for illocutionary or perlocutionary matters. At a rudimentary level, LDS^C emendatory practice is hermeneutical, to the extent that they are dealing with locutions. Yet, it is not consciously hermeneutical in the fuller sense of considering the levels of speech-act theory, or the narrational dynamics of the text, or whether they are violating the intended sense of the text. Simply put, these restorations and clarifications are doctrinal in nature. They are using the building blocks of biblical locutions to conform to modern-day LDS^C perspectives.

In chapter one, I mentioned the acceptance of the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price* as additional scriptures alongside the Bible. We have now seen that all three books attempt to clarify and/or restore the Bible. In conclusion, however, the commitment of the LDS^C to its perceived institutional needs, and the apparent utilization of “systemic parameters” to emend the ancient text by locutionary clarification or restoration, ends up displacing hermeneutical accountability.

¹²³ Stendahl, *Meanings, The Bible*, 99.

CHAPTER 7

RE-AUTHORING: LOCUTIONARY REASSIGNMENT

It is the contention of this chapter that much hermeneutical activity by the LDS^C amounts to what could be called a “re-authoring” of the biblical text. A “re-authoring” occurs when a phrase or word is lifted from its original context, and re-used with a new meaning.¹ It should be distinguished from interpretation, since it is the creation of a completely new text based on the locutionary components of a prior text. Ostensibly, the use of the text is presented as interpretation, although in actuality, this is not the case. An important consideration follows: although LDS^C re-authoring appears under the guise of interpretation, it is utilized for the purpose of exhibiting an “air” or “mantle” of authority. In other words, with the examples explored below, the implied author of a re-authoring hermeneutic aims for legitimacy by citing biblical locutions, so that implied readers will recognize the provenance of the locutions. In what follows, we will witness three outcomes of LDS^C re-authoring, i.e., locutionary reassignment: 1) Elevation of Joseph Smith as the founder; 2) Advancement of distinct doctrines; 3) Promotion of the institution.² These outcomes are the result of a re-authoring of biblical *words*, and biblical *phrases*.

7.1. Re-authoring practices

7.1.1. *Re-authored phrases by the LDS^C*

How does a “re-authoring” in the hands of LDS authors operate? We start with a frequently cited text in LDS^C circles: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). Since God revealed himself in the past, and

¹ Again, I am using “re-authoring” as it is used by Moritz (see Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 133).

² At the end of the chapter, I will present a case study of Isaiah 28:7-11. The LDS^C cites this passage to champion their views on continuing revelation. Therefore, it is a re-authoring that attempts to advance a distinct doctrine.

often did so by means of the prophets, they conclude: “Knowing as we do that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, that he spoke to [the prophets], however poorly they preserved it, witnesses that he can speak to us.”³ David Seely comments on God’s prerogative to *send* prophets “at his discretion,” since he is “the same yesterday, today, and forever.”⁴ The doctrine of salvation was proclaimed not only *during* the life and ministry of Jesus, but also *before* and *after*, for the Spirit “is the same yesterday, today and forever.”⁵ What the author of Hebrews intended to communicate concerning Jesus Christ is not considered in these examples of locutionary reassignment.⁶ One prominent outcome of this re-authoring is a promotion of the institution, as seen in prophetic priority.

Joseph Smith was aware of separating biblical locutions and re-using them in a new context. In one instance, he alluded to Philippians 2:12: “I saw the Father work out His kingdom with fear and trembling and I am doing the same, too.”⁷ However, in the book to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul was calling his readers to work out their *salvation* “with fear and trembling”⁸—yet Smith re-authored the phrase for a new meaning. Whether he was aware of Paul’s motivation in writing this exhortation to the Philippians is impossible to say. What is clear, however, is that for Smith, this kind of re-authoring opened the door to an elevation of his status in the community.

A particularly instructive example is the re-authoring of the Isaianic “Here am I, send me.” In the distant past, the Father was in need of a

³ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 5, ‘The Scriptures.’

⁴ David R. Seely, ‘Prophecy in Biblical Times,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1162-1163, citing 1163; cf. 2 Nephi 29:9.

⁵ See Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Grace.’

⁶ On the other hand, mainstream scholars are in general agreement concerning the contextual meaning. The verse in question provides a transition between previous human leaders who have departed (v. 7), and the fact that “strange teachings may be afoot” (v. 9). The message is that Christ “is ever the same” and a “sure foundation” (Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 392, 393). In fact, the link with v. 9 (“Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings”) carries much of the interpretive impact of the passage, for the intent would be that “rather than follow diverse and strange teachings, we should remember that Jesus Christ is consistent as the one who is ‘the same’” (Easter, *Faith and the Faithfulness*, 189; cf. Fred B. Craddock, *Hebrews-Revelation*, NIB 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998) 164-165).

⁷ Smith, ‘King Follett,’ BYU website; cf. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 102.

⁸ The intention of Paul, according to Marvin Vincent, was to encourage his readers to “carry out [their] own salvation with conscientious caution and self-distrust.” Vincent remarks that the contextual meaning of φόβος is “godly fear”, and that this grows out of a recognition of weakness, or of a “filial dread of offending God” (Marvin R. Vincent, *The Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961) 64, 65; cf. Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, BECNT (2nd edn; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) 131). Henry Alford also believes the “expression indicates a state of anxiety and self-distrust.” The thought is much the same as Hebrews 2:3: “...how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?” (Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament*, 3:170).

Redeemer to send to earth. There were two volunteers, Jesus and Satan, both of whom responded with “Here am I, send me.”⁹ The Book of Moses in the PGP recounts the scene:

And I, the Lord God, spake unto Moses, saying: “That Satan, whom thou hast commanded in the name of mine Only Begotten, is the same which was from the beginning, and he came before me, saying— ‘Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor’” (Moses 4:1).

God did not choose Satan, however, as the Redeemer. The phrase of “Here am I, send me” comes from Isaiah 6:8. The contextual meaning of the phrase deals with “the decision of the prophet to deliver Yahweh’s message to His people.”¹⁰ Far from a formulaic, resolitional verbiage to be repeated in one’s life, the phrase is a “personal account by the prophet of a momentous event in *his* life, the defining vision.”¹¹ The message for Isaiah, “could hardly be more incompatible with his prophetic sensibility...[He] is now told to tell his neighbors, who so far have been deaf to his pleas, not to see or hear.”¹² Yet, the LDS^C does not consider the Isaianic context, but instead re-authors the phrase and ignores the original context of the biblical locutions.

This heavenly “volunteering” scene is also described in the Book of Abraham, for Jesus “answered like unto the Son of Man” and ultimately was chosen. When Satan was refused, he “was angry, and kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him” (Abraham 3:28, PGP). In this passage, we note two other examples of re-authoring. The “Son of Man” reference comes from Daniel 7:13 (“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven...”), yet it is used here as a reference to Jesus and his desire to volunteer. The “first estate” reference is from Jude 6. It is a phrase separated from its context and used to refer to Satan’s apparent withdrawal (voluntarily?) from heaven. These examples of re-authoring by locutionary reassignment advance the legitimacy of modern LDS^C scripture. Since the Book of Abraham uses biblical language, it appears with a

⁹ See *Times and Seasons* 3:10 (15 March 1842), <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-march-1842/2>; accessed Mar 2016. *Times and Seasons* was an early LDS newspaper. See also Abraham 3:27; Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 122-123; LDS^C, *Gospel Principles*, 13.

¹⁰ George Buchanan Gray, *The Book of Isaiah*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962) 1:101.

¹¹ Tucker, *Book of Isaiah* 1-39, 102, emphasis added.

¹² Patricia K. Tull, *Isaiah* 1-39, SHBC (Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2010) 145.

“mantle of authority.”

An additional example from the book of Isaiah is the complex relationship between the BoM prophet Nephi and his “interpretation” of the book of Isaiah. According to LDS author Grant Hardy, Nephi does not deny “the validity of the original, historic meaning of Isaiah,” although he “virtually ignores the original setting in favor of reinterpreting the words so that they apply to his own predictions of the distant future.”¹³ It appears that Hardy believes that Nephi is updating the book of Isaiah. Although this may seem to be another example of emendation, it is, more accurately, a re-authoring. Hardy’s mention of “reinterpreting” is important. I quote 2 Nephi 26:16:

For those who shall be destroyed shall speak unto them out of the ground, and their speech shall be low out of the dust, and their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit; for the Lord God will give unto him power, that he may whisper concerning them, even as it were out of the ground; and their speech shall whisper out of the dust.

In this passage, numerous phrases from Isaiah 29 are repeated—“speak unto them out of the ground,” “familiar spirit,” “speech shall whisper out of the dust,” etc.¹⁴ However, there is no consideration of any Isaianic meaning. Rather, Nephi is prophesying the destruction of his own people on the continent of the Americas. The term used by Hardy of “reinterpreting” should be considered synonymous with re-authoring. Both create new meanings from locutions that are lifted from their original contexts. In one sense, Hardy should be applauded for correctly describing Nephi’s use of the Isaianic speech-act (“he virtually ignores the original setting”). However, in doing so, he casually refers to Nephi’s reinterpretation of the speech-act. The term “re-interpretation” is, in actuality, an oxymoron. There is no interpretation occurring, but rather the reassignment of locutions (i.e., re-authoring). To sustain the authority of the LDS^C institution, and the legitimacy of their modern scriptures, Hardy argues for the hermeneutical viability of a locutionary reassignment by Nephi, a BoM prophet.

Returning to the book of Jude, the re-authoring of “first estate” from Jude 6 (KJV) is designed to teach that humankind had a spiritual premortal

¹³ Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 61.

¹⁴ “And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust” (Isa 29:4, KJV).

existence. However, Jude 6 states that *angels* did not keep their “first estate” (ἴδιον οἰκητήριον, NASB: “proper abode”; NIV: “own home”; KJV: “first estate”). In spite of this, Millet writes that humans came to earth to take a physical body, to gain experiences that were not possible “in the premortal life, our ‘first estate.’”¹⁵ The earthly life is referred to as a “second estate.”¹⁶ The phrase, “first estate,” then, entirely independent of what Jude intended to communicate, is re-authored to advance the doctrine of premortal existence.¹⁷ Mainstream scholars, on the other hand, are agreed that Jude 6 does not speak of human premortal existence. Contrary to the translation of the phrase ἴδιον οἰκητήριον as “first estate,” Daniel Harrington views it as “domain” or “proper dwelling place.”¹⁸ It refers to where the angels “were assigned by God in the heavenly court.” The passage echoes Gen 6:1-4, where the angels left their “proper place” and introduced “sinful behavior to people on earth.” Instead of a human premortal existence, then, Jude 6 mentions “rebellious angels [who] failed to keep to their own heavenly domain [and] were consigned to be chained in the underworld.”¹⁹ Given the importance of this teaching for the LDS Church, this locutionary reassignment serves the dual purpose of advancing an important doctrine as well as promoting the institution.

That God is “no respecter of persons” is another phrase that is commonly re-authored for doctrinal purposes. The phrase originates in the KJV of Acts 10:34, where Peter describes God’s acceptance of Gentiles.²⁰ We have seen this concept with the aforementioned “uniformity of the gospel,” since God “has given and will continue to give the gospel scheme of salvation to all those willing to be instructed.”²¹ The phrase is also used in reference to those who have died: “Jesus explained that he is God of both the living and the dead, and...both living and dead must be saved by the same gospel principles. The

¹⁵ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 6, ‘God and Man.’

¹⁶ LDS Church, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 280; cf. Hutchinson, ‘Mormon Midrash,’ 51. See especially Abraham 3:26: “...they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever.”

¹⁷ As we saw in chapter five, it could also be categorized as a sociological interpretation, as it legitimizes a separation from the parent community that no longer maintains human premortal existence.

¹⁸ Harrington, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, 196.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 204; cf. Watson, *Second Letter of Peter*, 488.

²⁰ “The impartiality Peter is speaking about refers specifically to God’s justice or fairness in judging human beings in regard to what they have done” (Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 356).

²¹ Irving, ‘Mormons and the Bible,’ 473; cf. Faulconer, *NT Made Harder*, ‘Lesson 30.’

Lord is no respecter of persons.”²² It is used as a counter example to those who showed “preferential treatment of the rich” in James 2:1-13. Since God is “no respecter of persons,” neither should LDS members show preferential treatment.²³ LDS authors use this KJV phrase in creative ways to buttress their doctrines, yet these uses have no connection to the contextual meaning of Acts 10:34.

7.1.2. *Re-authored words by the LDS^C*

LDS thinkers re-author biblical *words* to bolster their claims. For instance, “seventy” is used to buttress their bureaucracy-heavy organization.²⁴ According to D. Michael Quinn, although Joseph Smith claimed to have received visions and revelations authorizing the use of the word “seventy,” it is more probable that “biblical precedents influenced Smith’s thinking on this matter.”²⁵ Indeed, Richard Bushman writes that the word “seventy” is taken from “several obscure biblical references.”²⁶ Exodus 24:1 mentions Moses taking “seventy of the elders of Israel,” while Luke 10:1 reports that Jesus “appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place.” In the modern church, the “seventy” are leaders who are called by the twelve apostles of the LDS^C to preach the gospel.²⁷ The biblical word “seventy” is taken from different contexts and then re-authored to promote a modern, organizational pattern in the LDS^C.

A complicated example of advancing a distinct LDS^C doctrine by ostensibly drawing on biblical texts is found in the use of 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 12. From these passages, the LDS^C arrive at their perspective on the “three levels in heaven.” For example, although these three levels are not explicitly detailed in the Bible, they are purportedly *alluded to* in these chapters.²⁸ This is, in reality, an example of re-authoring, although it is more nuanced, and involves a number of steps. First, it is noted that the words “celestial” and “terrestrial” refer to bodies in the KJV of 1 Corinthians 15:40.

²² See LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 236.

²³ Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, ch. 17, ‘James.’

²⁴ See ‘How the Church is Organized,’ LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/topics/church-organization/how-the-church-is-organized?lang=eng>; accessed Nov 2016.

²⁵ Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 67.

²⁶ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 255; cf. Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Seventy.’

²⁷ See D&C 107:25: “The Seventy are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world”; cf. Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 199.

²⁸ See Robinson, *How Wide*, 153; cf. Keller, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 54 n127; Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, ch. 4, ‘First Corinthians.’

These words are re-authored to describe two of the three levels of heaven. Then, LDS thinkers add the level of “telestial.” This word comes from a revelation that Joseph Smith received.²⁹ As a result, the three levels of heaven are denominated “celestial,” “terrestrial,” and “telestial.” Additionally, the threefold mention in the same chapter of the glory of the sun, the moon, and the stars (1 Cor 15:41), is speculated to be a “threefold distinction that seems to have impressed itself upon Joseph Smith,” who then took this threefold concept back “into the duality of verse 40” (that, again, refers only to “celestial” and “terrestrial”).³⁰ LDS thinkers also use 2 Corinthians 12:2 to corroborate the doctrine, which states that Paul was caught up to the third heaven.³¹ The LDS^C re-authors individual words (“bodies,” “third heaven,” “sun,” “moon,” “stars,” etc.), to form the distinctive doctrine of “three levels in heaven.” This doctrine, in turn, holds significant value for the institution.³²

The biblical word “sealing” is also re-authored. The word appears in various biblical contexts (e.g., 1 Kgs 21:8; John 3:33; Rom 4:11; 1 Cor 9:2; Eph 1:13, KJV). An LDS^C sealing is “(a)n ordinance performed in the temple eternally uniting a husband and wife, or children and their parents.”³³ To be sealed in the temple is a “necessary saving ordinance,”³⁴ where the Lord “seals [believers] up unto eternal life.”³⁵ In Mormon parlance, to “seal” a blessing or relationship “signifies making a promised result legitimate and permanent, both in this life and in the life to come.”³⁶ The word “sealed” is used in other contexts as well. The BoM refers to itself more than 20 times as a sealed book.³⁷ The LDS faithful look forward to a “sealed” portion of the BoM to be opened in the

²⁹ Writing of Smith, Brodie explains, “painstaking study of the Bible served...to stimulate some of his best revelations.” A result of this study was the discovery of the purported doctrine of three levels of heaven (Brodie, *No Man Knows*, 117; cf. Quinn, *Magic World View*, 172-173).

³⁰ See Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 66; cf. D&C 76:70-109; D&C 131. Davies then surmises an additional interpretation, this one allegorical, with 1 Corinthians 15:23, 24 and an apparent “threefold order of resurrection.” First, there was “Christ,” then “they that are Christ’s,” and finally, “cometh the end” (Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 66). This speculative “threefold order of resurrection” purportedly validates the LDS^C doctrine of three levels of heaven.

³¹ See LDS^C, *Gospel Principles*, 275; Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 7, ‘The Doctrinal Exclusion: Trinity and the Nature of God.’

³² See e.g., Melvin J. Ballard, *Three Degrees of Glory* (Ogden, UT: Neuteboom Printing Co., 1922) 6-10.

³³ ‘Sealing,’ LDS website, <https://www.lds.org/topics/sealing?lang=eng>; accessed Mar 2015; cf. Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 69.

³⁴ See LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 240; cf. Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 154.

³⁵ Jacob Baker in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 265.

³⁶ Shepherd and Shepherd, ‘Doctrinal and Commitment Functions,’ 723 n5.

³⁷ Quinn, *Magic World View*, 153. E.g., 2 Nephi 27:7-8, 10-11, 15, 17, 21-22, Ether 4:5, 5:1, Moroni 10:2, etc. It is also paralleled with the “sealed book” in Rev 5:1 (ibid.).

future.³⁸ In fact, LDSC^C scriptures refer to writings that are sealed until God deems humankind ready to receive them.³⁹

Promotion of the institution occurs with the biblical word “keys.” We noted in the previous chapter that modern scripture “reestablished the lost key of knowledge.”⁴⁰ This refers to Luke 11:52: “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key to knowledge.” Keys are also used to validate the LDSC^C authority structure: “The keys of the priesthood refer to the right to exercise power in the name of Jesus Christ or to preside over a priesthood function, quorum, or organizational division of the Church.”⁴¹ The book of *Doctrine and Covenants* contains similar references. Keys are utilized by the institution for translation (D&C 6:28); for ministry (D&C 7:7); for “turning the hearts of the fathers to the children” (D&C 27:9); for the “mysteries of the kingdom” (D&C 64:5); for the “Presidency of the High Priesthood” (D&C 81:2)—reserved for Joseph Smith and his successors; for blessing (D&C 124:92); for the “key of the knowledge of God” (D&C 84:19); and even as “keys of the kingdom and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; for the fullness of times” (D&C 27:5-13).⁴²

Additionally, Joseph Smith used this word to defend his prophetic ministry. For example, he used the physical instruments of “seerstones,” also known as “keys,” to translate the BoM.⁴³ The LDS defend this activity by observing that just as the *biblical* Joseph used a cup in divination (Gen 44:5), so also the modern Joseph used seerstones to practice divination.⁴⁴ These stones

³⁸ See Rees, ‘Midrashic Imagination,’ 60.

³⁹ “...until the fullness of time, and the law and the testimony shall be sealed” (Luke 3:8, JST); “a book...sealed with seven seals” (Rev 5:1, JST; cf. Mould, *Small Voice*, 409 n44). An emendation also occurs with “sealing”: “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven” (Matt 16:19). The meaning of “bind” is explained as sealing (see LDSC^C, *Gospel Principles*, 235).

⁴⁰ Thomas, ‘Scripture,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1284; cf. Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 372-373.

⁴¹ Alan K. Parrish, ‘Keys of the Priesthood,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 780-781, citing 780; cf. LDSC^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 136; Wilcox and Young (eds), *Standing Apart*, 3.

⁴² Parrish, ‘Keys,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 781; cf. Davies, *Introduction to Mormonism*, 41-42.

⁴³ To translate the BoM, Joseph Smith sat with the seerstones in a hat, and bending over with his face looking into the hat, dictated to various scribes (see Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 35, 71-72; Shippis, *Mormonism*, 14; Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 2-3; Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints,’ 77). Also, “...there were two stones in silver bows...and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted ‘seers’ in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book” (Joseph Smith—History 1:35; cf. Shippis, *Mormonism*, 14). For pictures of Smith’s seerstones, see Quinn, *Magic World View*, figures 9 and 10. Prior to his career as the LDS prophet, Joseph Smith used a seerstone to look for lost objects (Shippis, *Mormonism*, 10).

⁴⁴ See Smith, ‘Hermeneutical Crisis,’ 94. LDS authors highlight other biblical examples of physical objects used by God to accomplish his work: blood on a doorpost (Exod 12:7); the

enabled him to “see things invisible to the naked eye.”⁴⁵ The seerstones eventually were called the “Urim and Thummim,” ostensibly providing “an explicitly biblical framework for their use,”⁴⁶ and illustrating another example of re-authoring. The Urim and Thummin were used to read and understand the Bible.⁴⁷ While many others in Smith’s time claimed the “keys” to biblical interpretation, the seerstones were “uniquely tangible,”⁴⁸ and allegedly enabled him to arrive at the correct interpretation. Significantly, however, Smith’s understanding underwent a subtle transformation. As he matured, these physical instruments of revelation became unnecessary, and the terminology of “keys” was transferred to the Melchizedek priesthood. He began to refer to this Priesthood as the “key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.”⁴⁹ He also added, “I have a key by which I understand the scriptures.”⁵⁰ During his life and ministry, Smith “did not believe he was reading anything new into the book, but instead was simply drawing the true meaning out of the Bible.”⁵¹ Thus, an important pattern emerged in the foundational years of the LDS^C—the Prophet claimed the “key” to biblical interpretation—first through seerstones and then through the Melchizedek priesthood. A reader unfamiliar with LDS^C thinking will likely conclude these uses of “Urim

staff of Moses (Exod 4:3; 7:20; Num 20:11); a snake on a pole (Num 21:8); the coat of Elijah (2 Kings 2:8, 14); the corpse coming to life when touched by Elisha’s bones (2 Kings 13:21); mud on blind eyes (Matt 9:6); and Paul’s handkerchief (Acts 19:12) (see Quinn, *Magic World View*, 2-4; cf. Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 2016)). For the connection between magic and the Christian faith, Alan Taylor, ‘Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith’s Treasure Seeking,’ *Dialogue*, 19.4 (Winter 1986) 18-28, citing 19, where Taylor states that magic and Christianity have “usually been inseparable and natural allies.” He also argues that “Joseph Smith Jr.’s transition from treasure-seeker to Mormon prophet was natural, easy, and incremental and that it resulted from the dynamic interaction of two simultaneous struggles: first, of seekers grappling with supernatural beings after midnight in the hillsides, and, second, of seekers grappling with hostile rationalists in the village streets during the day” (ibid., 21). In addition, the Smith family was apparently “typical of many early Americans who practiced various forms of Christian folk magic” (Quinn, *Magic World View*, 27).

⁴⁵ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 48; cf. Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 11.

⁴⁶ Fluhman, *A Peculiar People*, 42; cf. Millet et al., *LDS Beliefs*, ‘Urim and Thummim’; Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 22-24 (cf. Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65).

⁴⁷ See Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 25-26.

⁴⁸ Smith, ‘Hermeneutical Crisis,’ 94; cf. Shippo, *Mormonism*, 14.

⁴⁹ D&C 84:19; cf. D&C 35:18, 20. Again, these keys enabled him to “understand the Bible” (Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 28; cf. Smith, ‘Hermeneutical Crisis,’ 95). Brigham Young proclaimed that after the death of his predecessor “Smith holds the keys of this last dispensation, and is now engaged behind the veil in the great work of the last days” (Brigham Young, ‘Intelligence, etc.,’ *JD* 7:289, <http://jod.mrm.org/7/282>, accessed Mar 2015).

⁵⁰ Smith, in Faulconer, *NT Made Harder*, ‘Lesson 9.’

⁵¹ Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, Epilogue, ‘The New Testament and the Restoration.’

and Thummim,” “keys” and “Melchizedek” are special pleading, yet for the LDS^C, this is not the case.

In order to understand the LDS^C worldview here, it is important to emphasize a distinction that we have previously discussed. Re-authoring effectively entails the creation of a new text out of the locutionary components of a prior text. It is a severing of any connection between the ancient text and its contextual meaning. Yet, reader recognition of these locutions is crucial. In other words, in order to reinforce and shore up the institution and its doctrines, or to elevate the authority of Smith, it is vital that readers recognize the provenance of the locutions. From their perspective, therefore, when biblical phrases/words are used to describe modern LDS^C realities, irrespective of being contextually faithful or not, their institution and doctrines are validated. Therefore, in one sense, the Mormon church is very much concerned with the ancient text, for it repeatedly quotes its locutions for contemporary validation. However, in spite of this, the ancient text is relativized because of modern institutional needs. The presuppositional matters of asymmetry of the Bible as well as continuing revelation again come to the forefront, as does our notion of perceived institutional needs driving biblical interpretation.

7.1.3. Possible LDS^C responses to the concept of re-authoring

According to Philip Barlow, Joseph Smith used the Bible like a poet, subject to refinement and improvement. It was not a book that was “static, final, untouchable, [or] once-for-all.”⁵² Barlow even concedes that Smith’s objective was rarely to interpret the Bible. Rather, he used the Bible to express new revelation or proclaim restored truth.⁵³ This is puzzling, for if LDS^C claims some validation from the ancient text, there must be some interpretive component to it. Yet, Barlow here minimizes the impact that the Bible may have, while at the same time uncritically assuming that re-authoring of biblical locutions is legitimate. For Smith, the “Bible was a gate, not a fence.”⁵⁴ Smith admitted a year before his death: “There are many things in the Bible which do

⁵² Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 46-47, 79.

⁵³ See *ibid.*, xxxii-xxxiii. These views by Barlow are in direct contradiction to the words just cited, that Smith was “drawing the true meaning out of the Bible” (Holzapfel and Wayment, *Making Sense*, Epilogue, ‘The New Testament and the Restoration’).

⁵⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 274. Translating and interpreting the Bible held a “trove of possibilities” (*ibid.*, 560).

not, as they now stand, accord with the revelations of the Holy Ghost to me.”⁵⁵ Smith, then, initiated an interpretive model that was “profoundly adaptive of historic Christianity’s theological traditions.”⁵⁶ Taking into account these views, we again note the elevation of Smith as the founder of the LDSC. We also note a re-authoring hermeneutic that is implicitly acknowledged, as Smith “adapted” Christian, biblical traditions. He pronounced new revelation and restored truth by using biblical locutions. On one hand, the LDS authors are correct—Smith used the Bible (read: “re-authored by locutionary reassignment”) to establish a claim to authority. On the other hand, the hermeneutical legitimacy of this re-authoring is debatable.

However, a re-authoring hermeneutic might be theologically legitimized based on biblical examples of an apparently similar interpretive practice. There are passages from the NT where selected texts from the OT appear to be re-authored. For example, Paul seems to re-author the phrase “the righteous will live by his faith” from Habakkuk 2:4 (see Rom 1:17 and Gal 3:11). In the original context of Habakkuk, the phrase is God’s answer to the prophet’s complaint about the judgment of Israel through the wicked Chaldeans.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Paul uses it soteriologically in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. Thus, we note an apparent change in meaning, as an OT phrase appears to be re-authored, and used to defend a later doctrine. Could this legitimize LDSC hermeneutical practice?

One possible answer is given by Steve Moyise. The use of the subjective genitive by Paul in Romans 1:17 is to focus “on Christ’s own faithfulness,” and not on the individual’s faith in Christ. This connects with “the revelation of God’s righteousness” in the Habakkuk passage.⁵⁸ Moyise continues by quoting the preceding context in Habakkuk: “the revelation awaits an appointed time” (Hab 2:3). Although Paul does, in fact,

⁵⁵ Quoted in Robert J. Matthews, ‘The Role of the Joseph Smith Translation in the Restoration,’ in Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews (eds), *Plain and Precious Truths Restored* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995) 37-54, citing 40; cf. Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 428-429.

⁵⁶ Flake, ‘Four Books,’ 29.

⁵⁷ See Douglas Moo, ‘The Problem of Sensus Plenior,’ in D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (eds), *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1986) 179-211, citing 208.

⁵⁸ Steve Moyise, ‘Quotations,’ in Stanley E. Porter and Christopher D. Stanley (eds), *As it is Written: Studying Paul’s Use of Scripture* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008) (Symposium Series 50) 15-28, citing 20-21; cf. Richard B. Hays, “The Righteous One” as Eschatological Deliverer: A Case Study in Paul’s Apocalyptic Hermeneutics,’ in Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards (eds), *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (JSNTSup 24; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988) 191-215.

...go beyond what the prophet understood...Habakkuk is told that there is a vision to be made plain now and a vision for the future. In other words, Habakkuk envisages a fuller revelation in the end time, and Paul sees himself as providing it. Paul goes beyond what Habakkuk wrote, but it falls within Habakkuk's 'speech-act,' which envisages an interpreter such as Paul speaking from the standpoint of its fulfillment.⁵⁹

The fulfillment is not a re-authoring, but a continuation of the foundational concept of "the righteousness of God," first seen by Habakkuk, then reiterated by Paul. Francis Watson also quotes the important Pauline phrase in Romans 1:17 "it is written," to validate Paul's use of Habakkuk: "That the righteousness of which the prophet speaks is 'of God' is already implied in the claim to normativity entailed by 'it is written.'" Therefore, this "righteousness is asserted by the normative prophetic text—from which indeed Paul's claim derives... Paul's gloss remains faithful to the text it interprets: the revelation of God's righteousness in the gospel corresponds exactly to the identification of true righteousness in the prophetic text."⁶⁰ Paul's use of "the righteous will live by his faith" is not a locutionary reassignment, then, but a plausible rendering of a concept from Habakkuk.

Another example of a potential re-authoring is found in Acts 1. Peter spoke of the urgent necessity for a replacement for Judas, because "Scripture had to be fulfilled" (Acts 1:16). After a Lucan parenthetical thought (vv. 18-19),⁶¹ Peter quoted two psalms: "May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it," and, "May another take his place of leadership" (Acts 1:20). The first quotation comes from Psalm 69:25: "May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents;" and the second from Psalm 109:8: "May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership." There are several questionable hermeneutical maneuvers here. For one, the OT context of the psalms appears to be neglected. As Barrett notes: "It cannot be said that any attention is given to the context [of the Psalms], still less to the original meaning and reference."⁶² Similar conclusions are reached by others: "Der ursprüngliche Sinn der beiden als Schriftbeweis angeführten Psalmstellen ist

⁵⁹ Moyise, 'Quotations,' 21; cf. Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004) 48.

⁶⁰ Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 48-49.

⁶¹ See Soards, *Speeches in Acts*, 28.

⁶² Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:100.

völlig anders als der hier aus ihnen herausgelesene.”⁶³ According to Tzvi Novick, the Psalms cited by Peter are “slightly adapted from their canonical form to suit his purposes.”⁶⁴ Specifically, Psalm 69:25 opposes the very thing Peter is advocating, for the short phrase of “May his place be deserted” assumes that Judas’ “place” as an apostle would not require a replacement.⁶⁵ In an apparent attempt to resolve this discrepancy, then, Peter adds the verse from Psalm 109: “May another take his place...”⁶⁶ Yet, there is an important difference between the use of the two psalms, for the “first Psalm text is concerned with the fate of Judas, a past event, whereas the next citation calls for the forthcoming (or future) replacement of Judas among the twelve.”⁶⁷

An additional problem concerns the field of Judas. Luke describes this in the aforementioned parenthetical remark: “With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood” (Acts 1:18-19, NIV). Thus, right after Luke’s remark of the purchased field, Peter quotes Psalm 69:25 with its mention of a “deserted place.” Therefore, one would assume the *field* of Judas would “be deserted,” with “no one to dwell in it” (Acts 1:20). However, Peter seems to assume that the Psalm refers “to Judas’s *office*, and in particular, to its vacancy after his demise.”⁶⁸ Since Peter obviously wanted to emphasize Judas’ office with his quotation of Psalm 69, did Luke’s parenthetical remark of a field obscure Peter’s intention? For our purposes, it seems that Peter re-authored the passage to emphasize that it was not the “field” of Judas that was to be deserted, but Judas’ office as apostle.

There are further hermeneutical questions that imply a re-authoring. Peter changes “their place” of Psalm 69:25 to “his place” (Acts 1:20), as well as a change from “dwell in their tents” of Psalm 69:25 to “dwell in it” (Acts 1:20).

⁶³ Hermann Strathmann and Gustav Stählin, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes; Die Apostelgeschichte*, in Friedrich (ed.), *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*, 2:26.

⁶⁴ Tzvi Novick, ‘Succeeding Judas: Exegesis in Acts 1:15-26,’ *JBL* 129.4 (2010) 795-799, citing 795. Fitzmyer comments that these “differences” are “simply a Lucan modification” (Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 225). Munck states that the first psalm was “very freely quoted” (Munck, *Acts of the Apostles*, 10). Jervell states the Psalm is slightly modified (“etwas abgeändert”) (Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 126).

⁶⁵ See Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 161; cf. Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 36.

⁶⁶ “All interpreters agree that Ps 109:8 is offered to justify the selection of a replacement for Judas” (Novick, ‘Succeeding Judas,’ 796).

⁶⁷ Soards, *Speeches in Acts*, 28.

⁶⁸ Novick, ‘Succeeding Judas,’ 796, emphasis by author.

This makes “it more applicable to Judas.”⁶⁹ A further problem highlights the betrayal of the Messiah by one of his followers, since “this was not part of early Jewish messianic expectation.”⁷⁰ Thus, Peter seems to have searched for an OT text to support this supposition. Concomitantly, neither Psalm speaks of someone who rejects the *Messiah*, as Judas rejected Jesus. In fact, the content of both psalms concerned the enemies of the righteous, with curses of the tortured pious against the tormenters.⁷¹ Finally, the grammar includes a “change of mood from optative to imperative,” with the optative of Psalm 109 (λάβοι)⁷² modified to the imperative of Acts 1:20 (λαβέτω).⁷³ Before attempting some measure of resolution, I will consider how non-LDS authors respond to Peter’s questionable hermeneutics.

To the issue of the “deserted field” referring to the office of Judas, Mikeal Parsons postulates that one is a symbol for the other: as the field is deserted, so is the apostleship of Judas.⁷⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson concurs, since the field was vacant, “so is his place in the apostolic circle.” The “disposition of possessions” (whether field or office) occurs at each stage of the story, with a final mention in v. 25, where Judas left his “place” (*topos*) in the ministry precisely by “going to his own place” (1:25).⁷⁵ Thus, there is an analogy between “field” and Judas’ apostolic office. Munck states: “As the Scriptures had foretold, he would not be able to live on his land, and another was to replace him in the group.”⁷⁶ This use of analogy by Peter may strain credibility. Richard Pervo states: “Not only are ‘events’ conformed (or concocted) to the biblical models that they fulfill; the text of Scripture itself can be adjusted to highlight this fulfillment.”⁷⁷ Jervell sees the passage as a Lucan invention, where he takes hold of early Jewish Christian traditions:

⁶⁹ Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 31:225. Specifically, “let there be no one to dwell *in their tents*” from Ps. 69:25 is changed to “let there be no one to dwell *in it*” in Acts 1:20, emphasis added.

⁷⁰ Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 122.

⁷¹ “Ursprünglich sind es zwei Gebetsflüche des gequälten Frommen gegen seine Peiniger” (Conzelmann, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 24-25).

⁷² In the LXX, it is Ps 108:8. See Rahlfs and Hanhart (eds), *Septuaginta*, Ps 108:8: γενηθήτωσαν αἱ ἡμέραι αὐτοῦ ὀλίγαι, καὶ τὴν ἐπίσκοπὴν αὐτοῦ λάβοι ἕτερος.

⁷³ This change “may be assimilation to the mood of the previous citation” (Marshall, ‘Acts,’ in Beale and Carson (eds), *Commentary on the New Testament Use*, 530).

⁷⁴ Parsons, *Acts*, 33.

⁷⁵ Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 40.

⁷⁶ Munck, *Acts of the Apostles*, 11.

⁷⁷ Pervo, *Acts*, 53-54.

Die Ausgestaltung der Szene ist zweifelsohne lukanisch, besonders die Form der Petrusrede mit der Anwendung der Septuaginta und das Gemeindegebet. Die Traditionen in diesem Stück sind offenbar sehr alt und entstammen ursprünglich der judenchristlichen Gemeinde in Jerusalem. Denn auch das ist für Lukas typisch, dass er sehr alte und judenchristliche Traditionen aufgreift.⁷⁸

Other authors continue with an analogical defense. Craig Keener writes, “it is not surprising that Peter quotes two verses [69:25; 109:8] both applicable generally to the wicked who persecute the righteous...If these verses are applied to the oppressors of the righteous generally, then ‘how much more’ (*qal vaomer*, a ‘light to heavy’ argument) ought they to apply to Judas, betrayer of the righteous one.”⁷⁹ Similarly, Darrell Bock believes Peter used a *principle* from the book of Psalms and applied it to Judas: “Peter takes the principle expressed in the psalm as a summary of how God acts and applies it to an event where God has judged.” In this sense, Peter is certainly “within the psalm’s meaning and spirit.”⁸⁰ This principle would center on the judgment of God, seen firstly in the cited psalms against the enemies of the righteous and secondly in Acts 1 with Judas as the betrayer of Jesus.

This may constitute an example of typology. I. Howard Marshall points out that Psalm 69 “was interpreted by early Christians as typifying Jesus in his suffering and death (John 2:17; 15:25; Rom. 15:3) and also as applying to those who rejected him (Rom. 11:9–10).” Thus, since Peter saw that Psalm 69 witnessed to a connection between Jesus and those who rejected him, “the psalm could naturally be applied here in 1:20 to Judas.”⁸¹ In similar fashion, Craig Blomberg believes the passage is to be “interpreted as the typological fulfillment of prophecy, this time with reference to two psalms believed to be by David, who is describing his archenemies (Acts 1:20, citing Ps. 69:25; 109:8).”⁸²

Another perspective sees Peter’s interpretive practice as centering on the hermeneutical key of the “Christ event.” This event had the significant

⁷⁸ Jervell, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 129.

⁷⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary. Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012) 1:765; cf. Schnabel, *Acts: Expanded Digital Edition*, Ac 1:20.

⁸⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 87.

⁸¹ Marshall, ‘Acts,’ in Beale and Carson (eds), *Commentary on the New Testament Use*, 530; cf. Bruce W. Winter and Andrew D. Clarke (eds), *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 1:95–96.

⁸² Craig L. Blomberg, ‘Matthew,’ in Beale and Carson (eds), *Commentary on the New Testament Use*, 1:110, citing 97; cf. Bruce K. Waltke, ‘Psalms,’ in VanGemeren (ed.), *NIDOTTE*, 4:1100–1115, citing 1112.

consequences of uniting the Testaments: “Der Glaube an diese Einheit rechtfertigt es, das ganze Alte Testament im Licht des Christuserignisses zu deuten, d. h. aber vielen alttestamentlichen Stellen praktisch einen ganz neuen Sinn zu geben.”⁸³ Therefore, according to this perspective, Peter used the book of Psalms as christological proof, as did Paul:

In diesen Abänderungen und Umdeutungen des alttestamentlichen Textes begegnen wir der überraschenden Freiheit, mit der die ersten Christen die Heilige Schrift auslegten und vor allem für den christologischen Schriftbeweis verwendeten; auch die Briefe des Paulus bieten zahlreiche derartige Beispiele. (Rom 4.3f, 2 Cor 3.1, 3, 16, Gal 3.16)...Alle Linien des Alten Testamentes haben ihren Fluchtpunkt in Christus und seiner Gemeinde.⁸⁴

However, it is hermeneutically difficult to surmise the existence of a “christological hermeneutic.” Instead of an interpretive matter, the issue is changed to an inspirational matter—whether the Apostles possessed the authority to interpret the Hebrew Scriptures through a “christological” grid, or through a “typological fulfillment of prophecy.” Yet, the focus must remain hermeneutical. For example, the above quotation, “christologischen Schriftbeweis,” (“Christological proof of scripture”) settles the matter by appealing to apostolic authority using this theological grid. Peter, therefore, was justified on theological grounds. However, this has the appearance of special pleading. Since the purview of my study is hermeneutical, I will not enter into this theological debate.⁸⁵

The answer to the conundrum of Acts 1:20 might partially come from two pieces of conceptual analysis. Firstly, we note the influence of Greek rhetorical strategy. It is not often discussed that Peter was influenced by Greek culture with its focus on rhetoric. Therefore, it is possible that Peter was using the quoted Psalm for persuasion. While there were obviously Jewish interpretive influences for Peter, Stamps notes that “the exploration of the Hellenistic context” has not been as fully investigated.⁸⁶ We know that a prominent aspect of Hellenistic culture was rhetoric, and this was a “means of persuasion.”⁸⁷ Thus, just as Aristotle quoted respected authors to give weight to

⁸³ Gerhard Friedrich (ed.), *Das Neue Testament Deutsch*, 26.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ My hermeneutical investigation is not the place for theological issues such as inspiration. I will continue to question Peter on hermeneutical grounds.

⁸⁶ Stamps, ‘Use of the Old Testament,’ in Porter (ed.), *Hearing the Old Testament*, 24.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

his discourses, so also first-century Jewish Christians quoted the OT. The citing of “authoritative text and tradition” was “very high in Greco-Roman culture.”⁸⁸ It is possible that a quotation from the authoritative Psalms became Peter’s rhetorical strategy, and this would carry significant interpretive impact. Therefore, one answer to the dilemma is that Peter was influenced by the Hellenistic strategy of persuasion and quoted Psalms 69 and 109 toward this purpose.

The second piece of conceptual analysis that might provide assistance centers on a reconstituted or “re-gathered” Israel. Michael Fuller advances a strong argument concerning the replacement of Judas in his book, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel’s Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations*.⁸⁹ Fuller recounts that the number twelve is foundational. He cites Jervell’s argument that the number of Apostles is “intrinsically linked to Israel, who by Luke’s definition, is a nation of twelve tribes.” The evidence for this connection between the Apostles and Israel is Luke 22:30, where the apostles are judges of twelve tribes.⁹⁰ Therefore, “Luke’s emphasis on the Twelve is, in effect, a concern for Israel’s restoration...The rupture in the Twelve is therefore a serious dilemma for Israel...the loss of Judas, one of the re-gathered Twelve, results in another phase of exile that must be rectified.”⁹¹ Fuller continues: “...the re-election of the Twelve is used by Luke to underscore the motif and even the climactic moment of Israel’s re-gathering that occurs immediately before the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.”⁹² Given the programmatic nature of Acts 2, it was necessary for the events of Acts 1 to transpire—specifically, for the number of apostles to be twelve. Since the pouring out of the Spirit had primary importance for Israel’s restoration, the Twelve had to be reconstituted before this could occur.⁹³ Instead of a re-authoring hermeneutic, then, Luke was emphasizing the biblical importance of a re-gathered Israel being led by the Twelve. This conclusion, while plausible, is not entirely satisfactory. Peter’s use of the two Psalms in Acts 1 remains a conundrum.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 27-30.

⁸⁹ Michael E. Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel’s Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2006). We have already noted the “re-gathering” motif in chapter four, p. 103, with the allegorization of the LDS^C as the new Israel.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 259 n247; “...so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:30).

⁹¹ Fuller, *Restoration of Israel*, 259.

⁹² Ibid., 260 n250.

⁹³ Ibid., 260-261.

Therefore, if the Bible itself contains passages that appear to be re-authored, is it possible that LDS interpreters are justified with their instances of re-authoring? LDS authors seem to think so. Charles Harrell discusses similar examples from the NT where OT passages are altered to fit a different context, with the conclusion that “LDS scripture and authoritative commentary seem to follow this same tradition of reinterpretation and reformulation to accommodate new times and changing paradigms.”⁹⁴ For Anthony Hutchinson, “the reworking of doctrines and texts in Joseph Smith tends to ally him more with the ancient prophets of Israel and authors of the Bible than it separates him from them.”⁹⁵ Thus, just as the ancient prophets re-authored passages, so also modern LDS prophets. However, the LDS^C is guilty here of failing to focus on hermeneutical issues. There is little effort in the LDS community to distinguish between issues of provenance, inspiration and authority on the one hand, and issues of the interpretation of the available text, on the other hand. In a re-authoring hermeneutic, the emphasis is rarely on the text itself—other than a citation of biblical locutions outside of their contextual meaning for the purpose of suggesting an “air” of authority.

7.2. The hermeneutical effect of LDS^C re-authoring

A disparity exists as LDS interpreters, at times, ignore the original context of a passage, while at other times perceive a “plain” and “straightforward” interpretation. When a “re-authoring” of the biblical text takes place, the LDS^C show an unrestrained freedom in isolating words irrespective of their contextual meanings. It appears that they simply use ancient Scripture as a repository of potential words and phrases, from which to assemble various doctrines. Barlow even indicates that “(b)iblical language provides vocabulary building blocks”⁹⁶ to develop modern doctrine. The examples given highlight the absence of a methodological investigation into the contextual meaning of the individual words in question, as well as an interpretive disruption of the text that isolates words and phrases. It is entirely possible that the Scriptures are simply probed and scrutinized for words or phrases to use for already-existing doctrines. LDS^C re-authoring is not only characterized by a supplanting of the

⁹⁴ Harrell, *This is My Doctrine*, 11.

⁹⁵ Hutchinson, ‘Mormon Midrash,’ 70.

⁹⁶ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, xxxiii.

textually implied audience with themselves, but with the advancement of the institution with its distinctive doctrines.

Given the numerous challenges mentioned in our five categories, one conclusion is that the LDS^C is not executing well hermeneutically. On account of higher doctrinal and institutional priorities, responsible hermeneutical execution is lacking. The maintenance of the system itself becomes the impetus behind their biblical interpretation. Their hermeneutics demonstrates a prioritization not to the biblical text, but to their institution. Further conclusions will be given in chapter eight after our investigation into philosophical hermeneutics. For now, however, I will present one final example of re-authoring. A phrase from Isaiah 28, “line upon line, precept upon precept,” is the most important, if not the most frequently cited, re-authored biblical phrase. The investigation of Isaiah 28:10 will show the extent to which biblical locutions are re-authored to further institutional needs.

7.3. Case Study: The re-authoring of Isaiah 28:10 to champion continuing revelation

Having explored a number of examples to demonstrate the breadth of the phenomenon of LDS^C re-authoring, I now wish to delve more deeply into Isaiah 28:10. Numerous LDS authors re-author this passage to defend their doctrine of continuing revelation. The verse in question is “precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept; Line upon line, line upon line; Here a little, *and* there a little” (Isa 28:10, KJV, emphasis in original). From this verse, the LDS^C conclude that truth is apprehended “line upon line and precept upon precept.”⁹⁷ In fact, “(r)evelation may break forth anywhere and anytime. The hard-hearted pay no heed and despise the words of God. The receptive are instructed line upon line.”⁹⁸ There is a “commitment to ongoing revelation” and “truth is revealed line upon line.”⁹⁹ For Grant Underwood, the “line-upon-line manner” is how “truth has been revealed.”¹⁰⁰ An official LDS^C publication maintains that “(g)ospel light does not burst upon men in full noonday splendor,

⁹⁷ See Millet, in Millet and Johnson, *Bridging the Divide*, 145. Millet also states: “We get our truth line upon line” (Millet, *Truth*, ch. 3, “What is our Doctrine?”).

⁹⁸ Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 101; cf. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 51.

⁹⁹ See Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, ch. 1, ‘Distinctive Facets of the Mormon Concepts of God and the Gods.’

¹⁰⁰ Grant Underwood, ‘More Than an Index: The First Reference Guide to the Doctrine and Covenants as a Window into Early Mormonism,’ *BYU Studies* 41.2 (2002) 116-147, citing 119.

but...arises in their hearts gradually, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.”¹⁰¹ The Book of Mormon agrees: “Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little” (2 Nephi 28:29-30).¹⁰² Edward Brandt proposes that “(t)he degree of gospel light that provides true perspective to gospel understanding and use comes line upon line, here a little and there a little, according to one’s heed and diligence in willingly choosing to seek and follow that portion of gospel light that he has already received. (See Isaiah 28:10).”¹⁰³ Even the writing of the JST occurred since “a prophet learns line upon line” and “enlightenment comes ‘line upon line’...and grows ‘brighter and brighter’...The whole of any principle of the gospel cannot be grasped by man in a single moment.”¹⁰⁴ In sum, for the LDS^C, the phrase “line upon line” from Isaiah 28:10 elucidates a gradual, never-ending stream of communication from God.

The passage of Isaiah 28:7-11 reads as follows:

7 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way; The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, They are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; They err in vision, they stumble *in* judgment.

8 For all tables are full of vomit *and* filthiness,
So that there is no place clean.

9 Whom shall he teach knowledge?
And whom shall he make to understand doctrine?
Them that are weaned from the milk,
And drawn from the breasts.

10 For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept;
Line upon line, line upon line;
Here a little, *and* there a little:

11 For with stammering lips and another tongue
Will he speak to this people (Isa 28:7-11, KJV, emphasis in original).

A number of problems arise with the LDS^C use of the verse. First and foremost is the issue of whether the passage speaks of gradual, never-ending communication from God to his people. Additional issues include the mention of priests and prophets stumbling physically and spiritually on account of

¹⁰¹ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 61; cf. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 648. The changing of the order of the words “precept” and “line” is seen in nearly every LDS source.

¹⁰² A similar idea is found in D&C 98:12: “For he will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept”; cf. D&C 128:21.

¹⁰³ Edward J. Brandt, in Carmack (ed.), *New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, 61.

¹⁰⁴ Matthews, *Plainer Translation*, 86, 215.

“strong drink” (v. 7), and the graphic description of foul and rank tables full of filthy vomit (v. 8). The identification of the one “teaching knowledge” (v. 9) is also important, as well as those “he” is teaching (v. 9). Another consideration is the apparent mention of infants—those “weaned from the milk” (v. 9). Finally, the precise meaning of “line upon line” is the crucial interpretive issue. Verse 10 contains a debated Hebrew phrase: $\text{קִרְוֹ קִרְוֹ קִרְוֹ קִרְוֹ קִרְוֹ קִרְוֹ קִרְוֹ קִרְוֹ}$. What could this repeated refrain of *tsav latsav, tsav latsav, qav laqav, qav laqav* mean?¹⁰⁵ For our purposes, were the King James translators justified in rendering this phrase “precept upon precept” and “line upon line”?

Isaiah 28-33 describes a series of woe oracles against the people of God.¹⁰⁶ The oracles are a response to the foolishness of trusting in pagan nations instead of God. The alliances with the pagan nations of Assyria and Egypt signaled a “course of action which could only be proposed by a cynical, faithless leadership drunk on its own power and privilege.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, the thrust of chapter 28 is an “announcement of judgment” because of “the actions and attitudes of its prophets, priests and other leaders.”¹⁰⁸

In v. 7, the religious leaders are depicted as staggering and wandering because of wine and strong drink. The “repetitive language (stagger-wine, wander-beer, stagger-beer, swallowed up-wine, wander-beer, stagger-reel) seems to imitate the stumblings and gigglings of the drunk.”¹⁰⁹ Instead of obediently performing their duties in the temple, their actions are degenerate and debauched.

Es wird eine Orgie geschildert, an der Priester und Propheten (v. 7b) teilnehmen. Demnach ist wahrscheinlich an eine Opfermahlzeit im Tempel zu denken, was sich auch gut damit verträgt, daß die Priester

¹⁰⁵ According to Cook, these words are “cryptic expressions” (Isa 28:10, 13) (J.A. Cook, ‘Hebrew Language,’ in Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville (eds), *DOTP* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012) 307-318, citing 307).

¹⁰⁶ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 199; the verses of 28:1, 29:1, 29:15, 30:1, 31:1 and 33:1 “all begin with a woe marker” (ibid., 204-205).

¹⁰⁷ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 504. See Isaiah 1:23; 7:13; 9:14-16; 19:11-15; 29:15-16 and 30:1. Indeed, “the whole context of chs. 28-31 has to do with leaders who are either too stupid or too depraved to distinguish between wise and foolish counsel” (ibid., 511 n33).

¹⁰⁸ Tucker, *Book of Isaiah 1-39*, 235.

¹⁰⁹ Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 510. My translation of Isaiah 28:7: “And these reel from wine and stagger because of strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel because of strong drink; they are confused by the wine and stagger by the strong drink. They reel in visions, and stumble in decisions.”

und Propheten offenbar divinatorische Aufgaben auszuführen haben (v. 7c).¹¹⁰

Isaiah accuses these leaders of “drunken revelry” and this “is part of the stock-in-trade of prophetic diatribe.”¹¹¹ On account of this vivid description of staggering and stumbling leaders, the passage displays a “sense of horror,” as “the rot has reached even the religious leadership.”¹¹²

The graphic depiction of filthy vomit (v. 8) adds to this sense of horror. The drunken priests have left behind rank reminders of their debauchery. What follows then, in vv. 9-10, is a contentious verbal exchange that “seems to be a genuine confrontation between Isaiah and drunken officials, prophets and priests.”¹¹³ It is fairly clear in v. 9 that the opponents of Isaiah are talking. The religious leaders mockingly challenge and question the teaching of the Prophet Isaiah: “Who does he think he is teaching—ignorant children?” (v. 9), as it were. The question of “To whom is he teaching?,” implies the answer by the leaders—“Not us.”¹¹⁴ They “complain that Isaiah’s message is simplistic and infantile, more suited to young, newly weaned children.”¹¹⁵ They snidely express their “indignation and contempt at the Prophet’s undertaking to instruct them as if they were children.”¹¹⁶ Then, they respond with our debated phrase (v. 10). As we will see, it is difficult to determine conclusively the exact meaning of the debated phrase. However, one aspect of the passage seems clear: the drunken religious leaders are mocking the Prophet Isaiah with a repetitive *tsav latsav, tsav latsav, qav laqav, qav laqav*.

Some understand (לצו) *tsav* as “command,” hence, the KJV version of “precept upon precept.” It is the traditional rendering, and is advanced as the “most straightforward”—since this is the meaning of the word in Hosea 5:11.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Jesper Høgenhaven, *Gott Und Volk Bei Jesaja: Eine Untersuchung Zur Biblischen Theologie* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988) 202.

¹¹¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, AB 19 (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 388. Such diatribe “seems to go back, like so much else, to Amos (2:8; 6:4-7)” (ibid.). See also Isa 5:12 for drinking and festivals as well as Isa 22:13 for drinking and sacrifices.

¹¹² Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 510.

¹¹³ Childs, *Isaiah*, 206.

¹¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998) 223.

¹¹⁵ J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) 351.

¹¹⁶ Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 450.

¹¹⁷ “Ephraim is oppressed and crushed in judgment because he was determined to go after a (human) command (*tsav*)” (Hos 5:11, my translation). See Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 512; Høgenhaven, *Gott Und Volk Bei Jesaja*, 203; Alexander, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 452; Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 428; Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress Press,

The Isaiah Targum seems to repeat this idea, translating Isaiah 28:10 as: “They were commanded to perform the law, and what they were commanded to do they did not wish to do.”¹¹⁸ The (לך) *qav*, then, in v. 10, would mean “line,” or “measuring line,” as it does in v. 17 of the same chapter.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the drunken priests’ mocking response would have been, as it were, “Command after command, line after line (of commands)—does he ever talk about anything else?!” While this remains a possible meaning of v. 10, I do not believe it to be the most probable. The meanings of (צ) *tsav* and (לך) *qav* proposed here appear to be too conjectural, gleaned from contexts too far removed from the *immediate* context of v. 10.¹²⁰ This is especially the case with the use of the term in Hosea as determining the meaning of (צ) *tsav* in the book of Isaiah. Therefore, it does not appear that the King James translators were justified in rendering this phrase “precept upon precept” and “line upon line.” The main thrust however, remains—drunken religious leaders mocking the Prophet.

What are the other possibilities for the meaning of the debated phrase? Some take it as a rudimentary recitation of the alphabet. It is surmised that the religious leaders “feel that they themselves are being taken to task just as if they are being corrected by their first teacher in school...[who] drills the alphabet... [and has] just gotten to tsade and qoph.”¹²¹ The voice of a teacher “repeating the letters over and over again to the boys who are writing them could sound ridiculous to someone who overheard them by chance, particularly if he heard only the sounds.”¹²² The phrase may be a parody on teaching the alphabet, and the sarcastic reply of the leaders (v. 10) implied that the Prophet is “a boring repeater of elemental, obvious claims, sounding the a-b-c’s of Yahwism over and over, when the prophets and priests are sophisticated and have moved well

2002) 17; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 19 to 39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 2:275-276; Moisés Chávez, *Diccionario de Hebreo Bíblico* (El Paso, Tx: Editorial Mundo Hispano, 1992) 571; Wilhelm Gesenius and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003) 704.

¹¹⁸ Bruce D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes*, The Aramaic Bible (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987) 11:55.

¹¹⁹ “And I will make justice as a measuring line (*qav*)...” (Isa 28:17a, my translation). For Oswalt, this word denotes a “measuring line, which along with a plumb line was used to determine whether a building could be repaired or must be destroyed (2 K. 21:13; Isa. 28:17; 34:11)” (Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 512; cf. James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997) #7742).

¹²⁰ See also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 389; Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-39: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974) 245.

¹²¹ Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 16; Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, EBC 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) 184.

¹²² Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-39*, 246.

beyond such elemental data.”¹²³ The problem with this interpretation, however, is that the letters tsade and qoph are found towards the end of the Hebrew alphabet.¹²⁴ This would be a strange place to begin a recitation of the alphabet.

Interestingly, some take the phrase to refer to the language of the Assyrians. This interpretation sees Yahweh as speaking Akkadian in v. 10, since v. 11 mentions the speaking with “a foreign tongue.” The advantage of this view is that v. 13, that contains the very same debated phrase, appears to quote the words of Yahweh. However, while v. 13 does, in fact, appear to cite Yahweh, it seems here the tables are turned on the rebellious leaders, and their own words (of v. 10) are used against them.¹²⁵ Thus, v. 10 is again, the words of the leaders, and not of Yahweh. Furthermore, while it is possible that Isaiah may have known some Akkadian, it is improbable that he had the “exact knowledge about details of that language as this interpretation would presume.”¹²⁶ In addition, translations produced on this assumption do not suit the context well, and it is highly unlikely that the Assyrians gave orders to the inhabitants of Palestine in Akkadian.¹²⁷

Some see the phrase as childishly repeating the words “excrement/filthiness” and “vomit” from v. 8: “For all tables are full of vomit *and* filthiness.” The KJV translates the phrase as “vomit *and* filthiness,”¹²⁸ with (אִיִּץ) as “vomit” and (צִמְצִמ) as “filthiness.” These two words begin, respectively, with the same letter as our debated words in v. 10: (צִ) and (יִץ). Thus, the mocking has deteriorated to a juvenile level. The drunken leaders only repeat the first sounds of (אִיִּץ) and (אִיִּץ) from v. 8, excrement and vomit, with the result that our phrase in v. 10 would be “babyisms”: (צִ) and (יִץ).¹²⁹ J.A. Emerton suggests, “these expressions may be baby talk for shit and vomit.”¹³⁰ According to

¹²³ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 223-224.

¹²⁴ See Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 351; Christopher B. Hays, ‘The Covenant with Mut: A New Interpretation of Isaiah 28:1-22,’ *Vetus Testamentum* 60.2 (2010) 212-240, citing 235.

¹²⁵ It is also possible that the phrase was spoken by the Assyrians, with both vv. 10 and 13 as “an imitation of sentences often heard in the mouths of the Assyrians” while they were driving the people of Israel into exile (Adrianus van Selms, ‘Isaiah 28:9-13: An Attempt to Give a New Interpretation,’ *ZAW* 85 (1973) 332-339, citing 333-334). It could also be a metaphor for the invasion: “Wir haben den Ausdruck oben als Metapher für eine assyrische Invasion gedeutet; durch den Einmarsch der Feinde redet Jahwe zu „diesem Volk“” (Høgenhaven, *Gott Und Volk Bei Jesaja*, 203).

¹²⁶ Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 17.

¹²⁷ Hays, ‘Covenant with Mut,’ 234-235.

¹²⁸ Other translations, however, have “filthy vomit” (e.g., NASB, ESV).

¹²⁹ See Hays, ‘Covenant with Mut,’ 233. Or, our phrase is “some sort of baby talk” (Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 351).

¹³⁰ J.A. Emerton, in Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 351.

Roberts, the translation of v. 8, “Tables full of vomit... excrement until there is no more room,” becomes in v. 10: “Doo-doo to doo-doo, doo-doo to doo-doo, Yuk-yuk to yuk-yuk, Yuk-yuk to yuk-yuk, A little here, a little there.”¹³¹ Hays gives a similar translation for v. 10: “...it is ‘poo-poo, poo-poo, bleh-bleh, bleh-bleh’, a little here, a little there.”¹³² The (וַיִּצְ) *tsav* of v. 10 would mean “doo-doo” or “poo-poo” because of the (הֲאֵצ) *tsoab* of v. 8. The leaders in their drunken state have descended to such a low level that they repeat juvenile vulgarities for the (surely) surprised Prophet. The resultant uproarious laughter among the intoxicated leaders can easily be imagined. The religious leaders, by repeating such foul words, would be “obviously picking up on Isaiah’s earlier graphic portrayal of their drunkenness, and their response suggests that Isaiah, like a naughty child, is hung up on infantile bathroom language.”¹³³ One difficulty with this interpretation, however, is that Yahweh speaks the same phrase in 13.¹³⁴ Furthermore, not only is the order of the words different in v. 8, but it is also unclear in context whether (הֲאֵצ) means “filth” or “excrement”—or if it was an adjectival description of (אִקִּי) “vomit” (so, “filthy vomit”).¹³⁵ The latter seems more probable—a vivid description of vomit. Regardless, one aspect remains certain: the drunken religious leaders are repetitively mocking the Prophet Isaiah in v. 10—and it is possible that they spewed this juvenile slang.

The Septuagint does not help with the conundrum, since it carries a different idea entirely: θλιψιν ἐπὶ θλιψιν προσδέχου, ἐλπίδα ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι, ἔτι μικρὸν ἔτι μικρὸν.¹³⁶ Apparently, the LXX translators did not see *tsav* (וַיִּצְ) but

¹³¹ Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 348.

¹³² Hays, ‘Covenant with Mut,’ 214.

¹³³ Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 351.

¹³⁴ Thus, v. 13 would read: “So the word of the Lord will be for them ‘poo-poo, poo-poo, bleh-bleh, bleh-bleh’, a little here, a little there. So that they will go and stagger backward, They will be broken and snared and captured.” See also Hays, ‘Covenant with Mut,’ 214.

¹³⁵ Possible literal translation of Isaiah 28:8: “For all the tables are full of vomit and excrement without a (single clean) place” (כִּי כָּל־שֻׁלְחָנוֹת מְלֵאוּ קִיא צֹאָה בְּלִי מְקוֹם). However, it is improbable that it means “excrement,” given that Isaiah uses a different word (אֲרָץ) for “excrement” in 36:12: (לְאָכַל אֶת־חֲרָאֵיהֶם וְלִשְׁתּוֹת אֶת־שִׁינֵיהֶם עִמָּכֶם): “...to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine with you”. The complete verse: “And Rabshakeh said, ‘Did my master send me to your master and to you to speak these words, not to those men sitting on the wall—to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine with you’” (Isa 36:12, my translation). Thus, we note an alternative translation of Isa 28:8: “For all the tables are full of filthy vomit without a [single clean] place.”

¹³⁶ Rahlfs and Hanhart (eds), *Septuaginta*, Is 28:10.

rather *sar* (רצ): “trouble, distress, or enemy.”¹³⁷ The word θλιψιν would be appropriate for this meaning. The LXX translators also apparently took (קו) for *qivvab* (קוה): “wait for” or “hope.”¹³⁸ Therefore, a possible rendering of the LXX is that Isaiah is frustrating the priests—since he is vacillating between judgment and salvation, being a prophet of doom yet also of salvation. In other words, he would be considered unreliable.¹³⁹

Finally, the phrase may convey a sense of gibberish and non-sensical language. In v. 9, the derisive challenge by the religious leaders would be: “Who does he think we are to require his instruction? Are we merely children? All we ever hear from the prophet is the same tired old gibberish!”¹⁴⁰ Then they, in turn, repeat the “gibberish” back to Isaiah in v. 10. They “mimic the language of the prophet, as if it were the unintelligible babbling of infants,”¹⁴¹ and they attempt “to discredit Isaiah’s proclamation.”¹⁴² It is striking to note “the mockery of the despisers [that] comes to clear expression, as they utter their drunken stammering, seeking to imitate and caricature the message of Isaiah.”¹⁴³ This interpretation, or some close variant, seems to be the most probable—gibberish spoken by the drunken religious leaders in v. 10 as a continuation of the mocking questions in v. 9.

The meaning of the final words of v. 10: שָׁם זְעִיר וְשָׁם זְעִיר “a little here, a little there” is not debated. However, what “little” (זעיר) actually refers to is unclear. Watts believes it “most likely” refers to “the children of v 9b.”¹⁴⁴ Similarly, it is seen as a comment by the teacher, so: “Little one, here! Little

¹³⁷ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, #7639; cf. #7640; cf. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) 862.

¹³⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 389; cf. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 428; Brown et al., *Brown-Driver-Briggs*, 875; William Lee Holladay and Ludwig Köhler, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 315.

¹³⁹ Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 16, 23.

¹⁴⁰ Childs, *Isaiah*, 207; cf. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, #7744; Holladay and Köhler, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 245.

¹⁴¹ Tucker, *Book of Isaiah 1-39*, 237; cf. Grogan, *Isaiah*, 179; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, ‘1 Corinthians,’ in Beale and Carson (eds), *Commentary on the New Testament Use*, 695-752, citing 740-741.

¹⁴² Even possibly replicating a speech defect that Isaiah had (see Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 23).

¹⁴³ Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 275. Another possible concept is that Isaiah was actually mocking the drunken leaders. They were like infants who couldn’t receive the prophetic message. So Isaiah throws back into their faces a “meaningless chant”: *tsav latsav, tsav latsav, qav laqav qav laqav*. The leaders were like “infants in their intellectual capacity” (Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah: Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 74; cf. Alexander, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, 452). However, contextually, it seems that v. 10 comes from the lips of the religious leaders.

¹⁴⁴ Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 430.

one, ‘over’ there!” The teacher would be calling on one child, then another.¹⁴⁵ Some think that it refers to “another little drink”—they are still calling for more.¹⁴⁶ It could even pick up the theme of vomit (or excrement) from v. 8—a little here and a little there, i.e., “everywhere!”¹⁴⁷ Or it may be a fitting end to the mocking gibberish of the leaders—intimating the ubiquity of the prophetic gibberish.

Our passage pictures inebriated, staggering, vomiting religious leaders (vv. 7-8), followed by juvenile, sarcastic, mocking gibberish (vv. 9-10). It is possible that their provocation has escalated to spewing vulgarities at the solitary Prophet (v. 10). Incredibly, those responsible for the interpretation of the word of God can only mutter and stammer.¹⁴⁸ Verse 11 brings an abrupt change—the childish dialogue has come to an end, as the Creator has come upon the scene. He “will speak to this people” in a foreign tongue—and just as Isaiah has written of the gibberish of the religious leaders in v. 10, Yahweh himself will send the Assyrian army that will speak what sounds like gibberish to the leaders: “So the word of the Lord to them will be, *tsav latsav, tsav latsav, qav laqav, qav laqav...*” (v. 13). The irony of the passage is stunning. The announcement of judgment will not be brought by the Prophet—but by foreigners. The penetrating message appears, in effect: “You religious leaders (who) speak words without sense will be judged by words ‘without sense,’ i.e., ‘with foreign lips’ (v. 11).”¹⁴⁹ The same gibberish will be turned back upon their own heads. The babble that they used to mock the Prophet will be echoed in the strange language of the foreign invaders, who will be the instrument of judgment by Yahweh. Yahweh will confront the rebellious religious leaders with the cacophony of rapid-fire foreign words spoken by a pagan, godless invading army.

Our central concern with the passage pertains to the difficult Hebrew phrase, since the LDS authors quote it extensively. Yet, the precise identification of the words *tsav* and *qav* is not as important as the obvious thrust of the passage. We have seen that the passage is concerned with the issue of teaching knowledge (v. 9) as well as the incompetency of the religious

¹⁴⁵ Procksch in Wildberger, *Isaiah 28-39*, 16.

¹⁴⁶ See Driver in Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 428.

¹⁴⁷ See Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 351.

¹⁴⁸ See Tucker, *Book of Isaiah 1-39*, 237.

¹⁴⁹ Childs, *Isaiah*, 202.

leaders.¹⁵⁰ Thus, the whole of the passage deals with *understanding* and *knowledge*. This picks up central themes throughout chapters 28-33—not only understanding and seeing, but also “comprehensibility and accessibility of the divine word and revelation” and “reception of the Lord’s word.”¹⁵¹ Yet the message arrives through irony and sarcasm—even gibberish. In sum, the thrust of the passage is a lack of understanding on the part of drunken religious leaders who mock the prophet Isaiah with offensive gibberish, and the announcement of judgment from Yahweh.

The LDS^C citation of the debated phrase from Isaiah 28:10 for their doctrine of continuing revelation—learning spiritual truths “line upon line”—is ironic at best, and excessive at worst. They have taken a suspect translation from the KJV (“precept upon precept, line upon line”) and re-authored it to become a central doctrine. The thrust of the passage—gibberish by drunken leaders, and a lack of understanding—has been turned on its head by the LDS^C to speak of incremental reception, and the consequent understanding, of revelation. The intended sense of the passage is completely ignored—and a contemporary meaning entirely foreign to the ancient text is postulated.

LDS scholar Kevin Barney admits that the LDS^C take the passage out of context.¹⁵² He views the debated phrase as “heavily influenced” by the verse in the BoM: “For behold, thus saith the Lord God: ‘I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel...’” (2 Nephi 28:30). For Barney, the phrase “line upon line” is an incremental “increase in knowledge, understanding and revelation,” and the LDS^C is “taught by degrees instead of all at once.” Barney continues: “...of course [this] meshes well with our belief in ongoing, continuing revelation and in the need for a modern prophet.” He then admits “that [the LDS^C] understanding, as valid as it may be on its own terms, is not a contextual reading of Isaiah. I would view our conception of the phrase as deriving from Nephi. In turn, I would view Nephi’s take as a *peshet*...” He then proceeds through the Isaianic passage as I have done, suggesting that “the repetitive line is either baby talk (‘goo goo gah gah’)” or, more likely, a “portion of a child’s spelling lesson.” He summarizes his interpretation:

¹⁵⁰ Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 430.

¹⁵¹ Mischall, *Isaiah*, 74.

¹⁵² Kevin Barney, ‘Line upon Line,’ By Common Consent website, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2006/03/11/line-upon-line/>; accessed Mar 2015.

Therefore, in what I view as the best available contextual reading of this passage of Isaiah, the emphasis is less on the incremental increase in knowledge (although it is certainly true that children learn incrementally) and more on the simplicity and basic nature of the prophet's warnings. The leaders of Israel viewed themselves as sophisticated men of the world and did not appreciate what they saw as Isaiah's condescending approach to them, so they mocked him by sarcastically imitating his message to them. Isaiah in turn ironically repeats their sarcastic version of his message, for it is a lesson they will have to learn one way or the other: the easy way in Hebrew from Isaiah, or the hard way in Assyrian from their captors and new masters.¹⁵³

In spite of claiming to give “the best available contextual reading of this passage of Isaiah,” Barney quickly passes over the meaning of the passage. The emphasis is “more on the simplicity and basic nature of the prophet's warnings.” While he correctly summarizes contextual features, such as the sarcasm and the mocking attitude of the leaders, Barney doesn't take seriously the intended sense of Isaiah 28:10. He is well aware of the numerous LDS authors that cite the passage to champion the doctrine of continuing revelation.

7.3.1. The hermeneutical effect of the LDS^C re-authoring of Isaiah 28:10

The citation of “line upon line” suggests a major focus on the text. They are taking at face value the content of the KJV translation of Isaiah. Yet, they deny any static notion of the meaning of the text itself—instead only focusing on what they believe “line upon line” means. A *selective* straightforward reading and interpretation of the Bible suits the LDS^C ecclesiologically and sociologically, for it allows them to position themselves as the unique receptors of ongoing communication from God. We have seen this hermeneutical procedure with the specific methodological hermeneutic of *selective* literalism. They lift the locution “line upon line” from its context, and wholly unconcerned with the textual viability of their reading, re-author the phrase to defend their doctrine of continuing revelation. In the end, the LDS^C does not appear to be concerned with the original, intended sense of the passage. Modern significance overrides ancient meaning. Clearly, institutional needs are allowed to take precedence over contextual meaning. “Line upon line” becomes a repeated refrain that advances a modern LDS^C doctrine.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

We have investigated five uses of the Bible by the LDS^C. In the process, we attempted to approach their core hermeneutic on its own terms, endeavoring to give the LDS^C a fair hearing. Following the insights garnered from the framework of Critical Realism, external data was collected, and with our epistemic relativity, several judgments were offered. We noted the difficulty inherent in the investigation of an entire religious system. We proposed that LDS^C approaches to the Bible are varied and diverse. Yet, we introduced the possibility of a single, stable hermeneutical framework. In one sense, “systemic parameters” is a single framework that drives their interpretation. Yet, in another sense, LDS^C hermeneutics is quite eclectic, as reflected in our five categories. Given the difficulty encountered so far, as well as the complexity inherent in their hermeneutics, it is imperative to consider other hermeneutical voices. The field of hermeneutics has advanced significantly over the past century, and we need to give these voices a fair hearing before we draw our final conclusions. Given that it is difficult to align the interpretive tendencies of the LDS^C with mainstream hermeneutics, one wonders if philosophical hermeneutics offers a better possibility of justification.

CHAPTER 8

LDS^C INTERPRETIVE PRACTICE IN LIGHT OF PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

Having examined numerous representative examples of the hermeneutical activities of the LDS^C, I am now in a position to bring philosophical hermeneutics more fully into the discussion.¹ The purpose of this exercise is to investigate the extent to which LDS^C hermeneutics is justifiable, at least on the philosophical level, if not on the exegetical level. This philosophical evaluative phase will take advantage of the insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer, not only because of his stature and his understanding of the issues at hand, but also because, in my estimation, his perspectives give the LDS^C the best opportunity for validation.² Thus far in my exploration, I have discussed the dangers of oversimplification in the investigation of a religious system, the complexity of the LDS^C, and the lack of a published LDS^C hermeneutic (ch. 1). A review of two foundational presuppositions noted the asymmetry concerning the Bible as well as “continuing revelation” (ch. 2). After this conceptual scaffolding, I noted the *interpretive* practices of the LDS^C as seen in literalistic interpretations, allegorizations, sociological approaches and the emendatory practices of clarification and restoration, as well as the *non-interpretive* method of re-authoring (chs 3-7). In light of these LDS^C uses of the Bible, the content of this chapter will answer the question: what potential do the concepts of philosophical hermeneutics have either in favor of the LDS^C or for our evaluation of their hermeneutics?

¹ Whereas “philosophical hermeneutics” narrowly refers to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s account of the interpretative process, it can also be applied to many other thinkers as well (see Joel Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) ix; cf. Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 2). For another perspective on philosophical hermeneutics, see Craig G. Bartholomew, *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015) 281-334.

² Of course, the LDS^C does not necessarily seek this validation from a mainstream perspective.

8.1. General Philosophical Matters

8.1.1. *Inescapability of interpretation*

As self-aware individuals, we never experience the world in uninterpreted ways.³ Existence itself presupposes a state of constant interpretation as we discern and evaluate the dialogues and events surrounding us.⁴ Indeed, Gadamer's "foundational insight" was this "universality of hermeneutics."⁵ It is important in any discussion of hermeneutical practice, LDS or otherwise, to acknowledge this foundation. In fact, "all human behavior is based on making sense of things."⁶ Yet, as Westphal notes, interpretation often happens without a reflected hermeneutical theory in place.⁷ The hermeneutical activity by the LDS^C is no exception. We have seen, for example, "(t)he majority of Mormons remain in a hermeneutical Eden, innocent of a conscious philosophy of interpretation."⁸ There is significant hesitation in the LDS^C to articulate a hermeneutic, or to assume hermeneutical accountability. We have also noted that LDS authors go as far as claiming that at least some of the church's published uses of the scriptures are not, in fact, interpretive—for example, the right of the Prophet Joseph Smith to use the Bible as a poet;⁹ to make "additions";¹⁰ or the claim that other churches "interpret," while the LDS^C reads the Bible in its "literal, plain, simple meaning."¹¹ This, of course, runs counter to the widespread notion accepted in hermeneutical scholarship of the inescapability of interpretation—or that presuppositionless exegesis is not possible. We now turn to two of the main architects of this considerable consensus in the scholarship community.

8.1.2. *Martin Heidegger: Being and understanding*

To better understand Gadamer's insights, it is necessary to refer to the influence of Martin Heidegger. A main thrust of Heidegger's perspective is that

³ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 71.

⁴ Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969) 9; cf. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 226.

⁵ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 66; cf. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 19.

⁶ Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 19.

⁷ See Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 149; cf. Wright, *People of God*, 104.

⁸ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 248; cf. James Siebach, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 467.

⁹ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 46-47, 79.

¹⁰ Barlow, 'Revision of the Bible,' 55.

¹¹ Brigham Young, 'Effects and Privileges of the Gospel, etc.,' in JD 1:237, <http://jod.mrm.org/1/233>, accessed Mar 2015.

hermeneutics should be approached from an ontological orientation.¹² Instead of automatically assuming that interpretation begins (and ends) with the deciphering of the text, the significance of the *interpreter's* “being-ness” should be recognized. Heidegger’s famous concept of *Da-sein* demonstrated that “being” for every individual implied the embedment in a particular place and time.¹³ There is a social locatedness of every interpreter, and this always influences understanding.¹⁴ It is only through *Da-sein* that *Verstehen* of the text occurs authentically. For Heidegger, understanding was an existential endeavor—it was “mastery” and a “way of existing.”¹⁵ This ontological reality is “subjectivity in place”—for “to be” is to be *somewhere*. Consequently, the notion of interpretive postures driving exegesis is inescapable.

8.1.3. H.-G. Gadamer: *Being and fusion of horizons*

Gadamer developed this ontological focus in a number of ways. He considered that everything (including the interpreter) is conditioned by its place in history.¹⁶ He viewed the interpretative experience in terms of a life-philosophy, with life as “the stage.”¹⁷ He agreed with Heidegger’s existential structure of *Verstehen*. In his words: “Jetzt aber wird aufgrund der existenzialen Zukünftigkeit des menschlichen Daseins die Struktur des historischen Verstehens erst in ihrer ganzen ontologischen Fundierung sichtbar.”¹⁸ As readers, we are “embedded” in our context.¹⁹ We are even “thrown” into our context: *Geworfenheit*.²⁰ Yet, while

¹² See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) 10-11; cf. Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 136; Georges de Schrijver, ‘Hermeneutics and Tradition,’ *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19 (1982) 32-47, citing 33-34.

¹³ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 103. According to McLean, the hyphen in *Da-sein* is important given that humans constitute a particular, uniquely lived experience in their own time. Thus, the word combination would imply “here/there” and “to be” (ibid.) See also the views of Heidegger with *Da-sein* as “being-there” in Anthony C. Thiselton, “Hermeneutics,” in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 283-287, citing 285.

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 144-149; cf. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 1, ‘What is Hermeneutics?’; Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 69; Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 319.

¹⁵ See Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 93-96. Also, according to Heidegger, “being” is intricately related to language (see Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1971) 63, 85; cf. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 3, ‘Phenomenology and Existential Hermeneutics: Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger’; Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 129).

¹⁶ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 366, 452; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 207.

¹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 2, ‘The Ontology of the Work of Art and Its Hermeneutic Significance’; cf. Edward Tingley, ‘Gadamer & the Light of the Word,’ *First Things* 139 (January 2004) 38-45, citing 38.

¹⁸ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 265.

¹⁹ See Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 132, cf. ibid., 35, 72, 141; Charles E. Scott, ‘Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*,’ *Anglican Theological Review* 59 (1977) 63-78, citing 67; Wright, *People of God*, 138; Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 69; Bartholomew, ‘Three Horizons,’ 122; Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 103-105; Neill and Wright, *Interpretation*, 170.

embedded, readers need to recognize the context of the text, so as to avoid reading into the text their own contextual assumptions. If we do not recognize our ontologically solidified, modern filters, we may be unduly predisposed to highlight (or ignore) certain aspects of the context of the text.²¹ For both Heidegger and Gadamer, the very situatedness of the interpreter, far from being a limiting, negative reality, was actually a positive feature that became the foundation for the possibility of understanding.²² Interpretation “fuses” ancient and modern horizons. However, this fusion, *Horizontverschmelzung*, is not a mere amalgamation of the two horizons,²³ but recognition of their differences.

Gadamer consistently pointed out difficulties in using a “method” from the natural sciences and applying it to the “sociohistorical world.”²⁴ His aim was to avoid “imposing *a priori* a preconstructed conceptual grid of closed assumptions” upon the text.²⁵ Such utilization of a “method” reflects a Western epistemology where only scientific, repeatable investigation is valid.²⁶ Thus, an ontological orientation to the interpretative process prevents a “located” interpreter from mechanically utilizing a supposedly unassailable methodology to flawlessly decipher the ancient text—because his/her embeddedness would unduly distort the use of a method. We emphasize here the descriptive nature of Gadamer’s hermeneutical reflections, for he avoids giving a step-by-step

²⁰ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 104, 106, 108; cf. Brice R. Wachterhauser (ed.), *Hermeneutics and Modern Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986) 7. Also, we note “the historicity of all interpretation” (Douglas McGaughey, ‘Through Myth to Imagination,’ *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 26.1 (1988) 51-76, citing 53), and that this historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) “conditions all understanding” (Thiselton, ‘Hermeneutics,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 283).

²¹ See Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 129; cf. G. R. Osborne, ‘Hermeneutics/ Interpreting Paul’ in Hawthorne et al., *DPL*, 388-396, citing 388; Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 187.

²² See Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 20.

²³ Gadamer in McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 192. Gadamer emphasized that the two horizons never reach a total correspondence. See also Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 261; Joseph Grünfeld, ‘Gadamer’s Hermeneutics,’ *Science et Esprit* 41.2 (May-Sep 1989) 231-236, citing 234; Roy B. Zuck, ‘The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics,’ *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (April-June 1984) 120-130, citing 127; Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 123; Klein et al., *Biblical Interpretation*, 83, 124, 125; Bartholomew, ‘Three Horizons,’ 125; Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 78; de Schrijver, ‘Hermeneutics,’ 44.

²⁴ “Die Erfahrung der gesellschaftlichgeschichtlichen Welt läßt sich nicht mit dem induktiven Verfahren der Naturwissenschaften zur Wissenschaft erheben” (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 10; cf. Luis Enrique de Santiago Guervós, *Hans-Georg Gadamer y la Hermenéutica en el Siglo XX* (n. p., 2012) Kindle Edition, ch. 7, ‘Gadamer y la Herencia de Heidegger’).

²⁵ See Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 409; Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 4, ‘Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics.’

²⁶ Stephen Fowl, ‘Effective History and the Cultivation of Wise Interpreters,’ *JTI* 7.2 (Fall 2013) 153-161, citing 155; cf. Detweiler and Robbins, ‘Twentieth-Century Hermeneutics,’ in Prickett (ed.), *Reading the Text*, 240. The use of method also reflects “the generalizing bias of rationalism” (Thiselton, ‘Hermeneutics,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 283; cf. Tatar, *Interpretation*, 15).

methodology to fuel and sustain the interpretive process. Rather, he is attempting to elucidate the complex process that is the understanding event.²⁷

8.1.4. LDS^C hermeneutics: *Ontology and interpretation*

The epistemological shift brought about by Heidegger and Gadamer is of paradigmatic proportions. For purposes of our study, we ask if any aspects thereof could be deployed in defense of LDS^C hermeneutics. The LDS^C maintains “a hermeneutic of relations, practices, and events” in contradistinction to “a hermeneutic of texts,”²⁸ and “any Mormon hermeneutic is bound to be pragmatic, presentist, and performative.”²⁹ We noted in chapter one that an LDS^C self-understanding has often been described as “concerned more with praxis than dogmatic theology.”³⁰ Mormonism is a forward-thinking, avant-garde movement intensely interested in a pragmatic orientation to life and spirituality.

However, the LDS authors quoted above emphasize what a Mormon interpreter *does*, as opposed to an interpreter’s “being-ness.” A verse from the BoM states the following:

And I did read many things unto them which were written in the books of Moses; but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah; for *I did liken all scriptures unto us*, that it might be for our profit and learning (1 Nephi 19:23, emphasis added).

Many LDS^C books, both scholarly and popular, admonish the faithful to “liken the scriptures” to themselves.³¹ Indeed, “Scripture requires our response in interpretation and meditation: the appropriation of scripture—in Mormon terminology, likening it to ourselves (1 Nephi 19:23)—more so than its rational exegesis.”³² In another writing, Faulconer states that LDS members “are doing textual exegesis and thinking about what the results of that exegesis mean for our

²⁷ See Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 69. Warnke, however, points out that although his aim is descriptive, Gadamer “sometimes uses prescriptive language” (Georgia Warnke (ed.), *Inheriting Gadamer: New Directions in Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) 12).

²⁸ Faulconer, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 476. Faulconer earlier states that “religion is primarily a matter of practice rather than propositional belief” (ibid., 475).

²⁹ The Literary Critic, ‘Metaphysical Elders,’ *Thoughts on Mormonism Blog*, 26 June 2003, http://elders.blogspot.com/2003_06_22_elders_archive.html; accessed Mar 2016.

³⁰ Jacob Baker, in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, xiii.

³¹ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 266; cf. Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints,’ 80; Monte S. Nyman and Lisa Bolin Hawkins, ‘Book of Mormon,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 139-143, citing 143.

³² Faulconer, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 475.

own lives.”³³ These statements illustrate the distance between the LDS^C worldview and the insights of Heidegger and Gadamer. The “locatedness” of every interpreter receives an overemphasis in LDS^C thinking. An LDS^C interpretation gives priority to the modern horizon, as opposed to the pursuit of a fusion between the horizon of the text and their own. Faulconer’s statement corroborates this, for they perform textual exegesis for what it means for their lives. What the LDS interpreter *does* becomes paramount. Furthermore, a consequence of the “appropriation of scripture”³⁴ is a promotion of the LDS^C community. Thus, the LDS^C is only interested in ontological matters as long as it pertains to their communal identity. A well balanced, Gadamerian ontological focus will take into account more than just the actions of the interpreter.

The lack of a published hermeneutical framework by the LDS^C aligns with Gadamer’s suspicion towards the role of methodology in the interpretive process. However, the interpretive examples I have noted throughout this investigation, whether Prophetic interpretation of scripture, restoration by modern LDS^C scriptures, or even “systemic parameters,” witness to pragmatic and methodological instincts on the part of the LDS^C. This is in opposition to Gadamer’s suspicion toward the role of methodology. While lacking an explicit hermeneutical methodology, the LDS^C, nonetheless, demonstrates numerous hermeneutical practices. At the very least, these practices confirm the “inescapability of interpretation,” although at the expense of compatibility with Gadamer.

8.1.5. Presuppositions; pre-understanding; self-deception and awareness

The impossibility of presuppositionless exegesis is a widely held notion.³⁵ Previously, the Enlightenment had a “prejudice against prejudice” which tried to eliminate the existence of presuppositions in the understanding process.³⁶ There was a goal of the “presuppositionless recreation of an author’s intention.”³⁷ Yet, the “locatedness” of every interpreter includes his or her own presuppositions.

³³ Faulconer, *NT Made Harder*, ‘Jewish History between the Old and New Testaments.’

³⁴ Faulconer, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 475.

³⁵ See Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 34; cf. Merold Westphal, in Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 73; Rudolf Bultmann, ‘Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?’ in *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (Cleveland, OH: The Word Publishing Co., 1965) 289-96.

³⁶ See Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 275: “Es gibt nämlich sehr wohl auch ein Vorurteil der Aufklärung, das ihr Wesen trägt und bestimmt: Dies grundlegende Vorurteil der Aufklärung ist das Vorurteil gegen die Vorurteile überhaupt und damit die Entmachtung der Überlieferung.”

³⁷ See Christopher E. Arthur, ‘Gadamer and Hirsch: The Canonical Work and the Interpreter’s Intention,’ *Cultural Hermeneutics* 4.2 (1976-1977) 183-197, citing 183.

True understanding is “never without presuppositions,” since we are located in a specific place and time.³⁸ Furthermore, as we have shown, a presupposition can be “a particular starting point from which understanding advances.”³⁹

Gadamer differentiates between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices. He laments the use of *Vorurteil* as a “limiting prejudice” (*beschränkendes Vorurteil*),⁴⁰ and famously called for a rehabilitation of the concept of *Vorurteil*: “Es bedarf einer grundsätzlichen Rehabilitierung des Begriffes des Vorurteils und einer Anerkennung dessen, daß es legitime Vorurteile gibt, wenn man der endlich-geschichtlichen Seinsweise des Menschen gerecht werden will.”⁴¹ How do we distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate presuppositions? An infallible criterion is not permissible, since this would “certify objectivity” and give validity to an all-encompassing methodology.⁴² Gadamer offers the beginning of a solution with the concept of temporal distance. He states, “(i)t is only temporal distance that can solve the question of critique in hermeneutics, namely how to distinguish the true prejudices, by which we understand, from the false ones, by which we misunderstand.”⁴³

Conceptual analysis of what constitutes “legitimate prejudices” will also assist us. Also called “pre-understandings,” they play an essential role in the interpretative process.⁴⁴ A “fruitful starting point” for understanding is in the realm of “pre-understanding.”⁴⁵ Indeed,

A thought that is to be conveyed to the reader by words often presupposes other conceptions without which it is not conceivable; if a reader is not already in possession of these conceptions, therefore, the

³⁸ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 3, ‘Phenomenology and Existential Hermeneutics, etc.’ Indeed, presuppositional matters are pervasive, since all communication exhibits “presuppositions that never get expressed” (Gadamer, in Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 38; cf. Catherine L. Kelsey, *Schleiermacher’s Preaching, Dogmatics, and Biblical Criticism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2007) 94).

³⁹ Linge, in Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, xxx; Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 20.

⁴⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 4, ‘Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience’; cf. Lawrence Kennedy Schmidt, *The Epistemology of Hans-Georg Gadamer: An Analysis of the Legitimization of Vorurteile* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985) 34, 61.

⁴¹ Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 281. Dunn calls his readers to notice Gadamer’s “striking defense” of prejudice (Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 121 n82). Selby writes that “pre-judgments” have a positive role (Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 166); Malcolm even calls for “...the faithful prejudice of Christian interpretation” (Matthew R. Malcolm, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics and Kerygmatic Responsibility,’ in Porter and Malcolm (eds), *Future of Biblical Interpretation*, 71-84, citing 84).

⁴² Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 112.

⁴³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 4, ‘Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience’; The phrase “only temporal distance,” was later softened by Gadamer to read “Often temporal distance” (see Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 113).

⁴⁴ See Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 85; Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 15.

⁴⁵ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 12.

words cannot effect the same result in him as in another reader who is thoroughly knowledgeable about these conceptions.⁴⁶

Before true understanding emerges, every interpreter will have some type of pre-understanding of the subject at hand. Reflecting the inescapability of interpretation, we see that “understanding is always interpretive. Understanding is always inextricably informed by the perspective we bring to bear in the act of understanding.”⁴⁷ Indeed, there is no such thing as presuppositionless thought.⁴⁸ Interpretation “begins with fore-conceptions that are replaced by more suitable ones.”⁴⁹ We are not blank slates but rather complex individuals who have had past experiences that help us navigate and interpret every new experience.

These pre-understandings are always brought to new experiences, whether we are conscious of them or not.⁵⁰ Perhaps it is the “almost boundless human capacity for self-deception,”⁵¹ that explains why pre-understandings often go unnoticed. The interpreter needs to be vigilant to avoid being seduced by self-interest.⁵² Porter and Robinson cite Gadamer’s argument that “any inquiry or investigation believed to be without prejudice or bias is in denial of its own conditioned ways of understanding.”⁵³ With an echo from our ontological analysis, we must “turn to an understanding of ourselves.”⁵⁴

Recognizing our blind spots and avoiding self-deception can be exceedingly difficult, especially “without outside assistance.”⁵⁵ Philosophy and theology can help us detect our own presuppositions and pre-understandings.⁵⁶ One benefit of philosophical hermeneutics is illustrated in “its constant insistence that we remember we belong to history and thus to a finite

⁴⁶ J.M. Chladenius, in Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 53.

⁴⁷ Francis J. Mootz III and George H. Taylor (eds), *Gadamer and Ricoeur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics* (London: Continuum, 2011) 1.

⁴⁸ Westphal, in Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 72.

⁴⁹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 4, ‘Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience’; cf. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 113-114; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 208; Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 14.

⁵⁰ In many ways “we are hidden from ourselves” (see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 4, ‘Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics’).

⁵¹ Wright, *People of God*, 135.

⁵² Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 5; cf. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 182. For the dangers of “corporate self-interest” see Stanley C. Porter, Stanley E. Porter and Matthew Malcolm, *Horizons in Hermeneutics: A Festschrift in Honor of Anthony C. Thiselton* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013) 271.

⁵³ See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 4, ‘Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics’; cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 3, ‘Historical Preparation.’

⁵⁴ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 2, ‘Hermeneutics and New Foundations: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey.’

⁵⁵ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 123.

⁵⁶ Bartholomew, ‘Three Horizons,’ 125, 127.

perspective.”⁵⁷ A distinct yet related concept is a consideration of the “other.” Not only is it necessary to be aware of one’s own presuppositions, it is imperative to consider the “other.” Gadamer emphasized that “the general characteristic of *Bildung*” is to keep “oneself open to what is other” and “to distance oneself from oneself and from one’s private purposes.”⁵⁸ In the end, awareness of ourselves, including our pre-understandings, as well as “genuine hermeneutical engagement” with “the other” may begin to erode the “spell of idolatrous self-deception,”⁵⁹ and will aid us in the complexity of the interpretative process.

8.1.6. LDS^C hermeneutics: Presuppositions

Somewhat surprisingly, many LDS authors write of presuppositional matters. This is surprising, for one, because of their insistence on the “plain” meaning of the biblical text. Faulconer acknowledges that “at play in every interpretation are our prejudices,” and through them we “make our interpretations,” even though “[they] may, unbeknownst to us, influence our understanding.”⁶⁰ In fact, readers “cannot help but apply our modern biases to the texts we read because we are creatures of history as much as were the writers who produced the scriptures.”⁶¹ For Hutchinson, revelation does not occur in a vacuum.⁶² In addition, “one’s own theological biases and presuppositions also color the way scriptures are read, which can sometimes lead to scriptural proof-texting.”⁶³ Ostler concedes that “one’s reflection on scripture is most often guided by one’s prior theological commitments that often more or less place horizons on what one is able to see.”⁶⁴ Concomitantly, LDS authors grant that it is naïve to deny personal involvement

⁵⁷ Westphal, in Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 168.

⁵⁸ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 1, ‘Transcending the Aesthetic Dimension.’

⁵⁹ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 85.

⁶⁰ James E. Faulconer, ‘Recovering Truth: A Review of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*,’ *The Mormon Review* 2.2 (September 27, 2010) 3. See also his brief discussion of Gadamer, Ricoeur and pre-understanding in Faulconer, ‘Scripture as Incarnation,’ BYU website.

⁶¹ Goff, ‘How Should We Then Read?’, 140.

⁶² See Hutchinson, ‘LDS Approaches,’ 107, where he discusses four groups of LDS scholars, each exhibiting different tendencies in their hermeneutical orientations. Not all members of these four groups, however, would concur with Hutchinson’s view concerning revelation.

⁶³ See Harrell, *This is My Doctrine*, 8.

⁶⁴ Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, ch. 12, ‘The Scriptural Basis for the Doctrine of Deification.’

in interpretation.⁶⁵ Finally, church members need to “diminish their pretensions, pride and self-deception.”⁶⁶

Nonetheless, in general, LDS authors point out the illegitimate prejudices of non-LDS traditions. We have already seen Bruce McConkie describe “the theological bias of the translators” in the formation of the Bible, which “caused them to change the meaning or paraphrase texts that were either unclear or embarrassing to them.”⁶⁷ LDS authors accuse others of being tied to a “theological agenda”⁶⁸ or operating with “assumptions” that are not “well-founded.”⁶⁹ Matthew Bowman writes of the “ability” of his fellow Mormon thinkers, especially Joseph Smith, to “shatter the binding presuppositions of Western culture and produce ideas of great insight and power.”⁷⁰ Implicit in Bowman’s view is that other Christian traditions were unable to overcome these “binding presuppositions.” In matters of God’s nature, Ostler calls into question a “key assumption” that holds to the “view that there is necessarily a metaphysically unique being or ‘God’ that is the explanation of everything else that exists.” This assumption comes from Greek philosophy and has “often controlled the reading of the biblical texts.”⁷¹ Ostler adds that evangelicals have “assumptions” that are “derived from ontological categories that are absent from and contrary to the biblical culture and texts.”⁷² Thus, he believes that the meaning of “God” in other Christian traditions distorts a reading of the Bible, while he implicitly advances the idea that the LDS^C perspective is free from

⁶⁵ See Jeffrey R. Holland, ‘Daddy, Donna, and Nephi,’ *Ensign* (Sept 1976), <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1976/09/daddy-donna-and-nephi?lang=eng>; accessed Jan 2015; cf. Oaks, ‘Scripture Reading,’ LDS website; Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987) 3:202; Barber, ‘Literalist Constraint,’ 21.

⁶⁶ Arrington and Bitton, *Mormon Experience*, 330.

⁶⁷ McConkie, *New Witness*, 403; McConkie also writes that one should read the Book of Mormon “with open mind; a mind unshackled by the prejudices of men” (*ibid.*, 465).

⁶⁸ Davies in Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, ch. 12, ‘The Scriptural Basis for the Doctrine of Deification.’

⁶⁹ Faulconer, ‘Philosophy and Transcendence,’ 73.

⁷⁰ Bowman, ‘History Thrown into Divinity,’ 89.

⁷¹ Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought, Preface*; ch. 1, ‘Distinctive Facets of the Mormon Concepts of God and the Gods.’ Concerning divine corporeality in ch. 3 (p. 77), we also noted Robinson’s views that other churches are “unduly influenced by Greek philosophy” (Robinson, *Mormons*, ch. 7, ‘The Doctrinal Exclusion: Trinity and the Nature of God’). For further LDS^C views on this topic, see Eric D. Huntsman, ‘The Wisdom of Men’: Greek Philosophy, Corinthian Behavior, and the Teachings of Paul,’ in Ray L. Huntington, Frank F. Judd Jr., and David M. Whitchurch (eds), *Shedding Light on the New Testament: Acts–Revelation* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009) 67–97. For a dissenting response, see Francis Beckwith, ‘Mormon Theism, the Traditional Christian Concept of God, and Greek Philosophy: a Critical Analysis,’ *JETS* 44.4 (Dec 2001) 671–695, especially 685–694.

⁷² Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, ch. 1, ‘Distinctive Facets of the Mormon Concepts of God and the Gods.’

prejudice.⁷³ Specifically, he suspects “that the most powerful resistance to the doctrine of robust deification arises not from the scriptural argument but from the metaphysical assumptions that are brought to the biblical texts which control how they are read.”⁷⁴ James Talmage writes that the study of history, “except in the case of inspired historians,” is colored by the prejudice of writers and is “likely to be marred in a thousand ways.”⁷⁵ For Benjamin Huff, early Christians assumed a “Platonic view of embodiment” that caused them to deny that “God the Father is corporeal.”⁷⁶ Similarly, for Huff, “Platonic and Aristotelian reasoning about God led to the traditional understanding of the Trinity in terms of one metaphysical substance.”⁷⁷ Early LDS leaders rejected the “central ‘Christian’ premise” that “Baconian rationalism was the only proper lens through which the Bible should be viewed.”⁷⁸ In 1871, George Cannon, an early Mormon leader, spoke of the distorting assumption in other religious traditions that consisted of “the soul-destroying and damnable heresy that God cannot or will not speak to man again from the heavens.”⁷⁹

These strong perspectives by LDS authors have significant hermeneutical impact. These authors declare that other traditions exhibit illegitimate prejudices, and they implicitly claim to be free of such negative distortions. There is little evidence of LDS authors acknowledging their own presuppositions, or how the topic of presuppositions influences their perspectives.⁸⁰ Although LDS scholar James Faulconer does correctly describe several Gadamerian insights in his review of *Truth and Method*,⁸¹ he does not explicitly relate Gadamerian insights to LDS^C thinking, especially the insights on presuppositional matters. Faulconer merely uses Gadamer to combat what he considers to be the prevailing methodological posture of scientism.⁸² One might have expected him to utilize

⁷³ Ostler’s focus on evangelical problems is fairly typical of LDS authors.

⁷⁴ Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, ch. 12, ‘The Scriptural Basis for the Doctrine of Deification.’

⁷⁵ Talmage, *Great Apostasy*, 35.

⁷⁶ Benjamin Huff, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 480.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Richard T. Hughes, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 23.

⁷⁹ George Q. Cannon, ‘Persecution, etc.’ in JD 14:169, <http://jod.mrm.org/14/163>; accessed Mar 2015.

⁸⁰ I noted two pervasive LDS^C presuppositions in chapter two: asymmetry concerning the Bible and continuing revelation. In the numerous sources that I have surveyed for this investigation, LDS authors do not adequately acknowledge the effect of these presuppositions.

⁸¹ Again, see James E. Faulconer, ‘Recovering Truth: A Review of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*,’ *The Mormon Review* 2.2 (September 27, 2010) 1-7.

⁸² A similar lack of interaction between philosophical hermeneutics and LDS^C hermeneutical perspectives can be seen in James E. Faulconer and Mark A. Wrathall (eds), *Appropriating Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). However, in another writing, commenting on an ontological orientation, Faulconer does interact with Heidegger: “To

Gadamer for constructing a positive case for LDS^C hermeneutics, but, surprisingly, he does not appear to be interested in that. One wonders if this is an indication of a wider LDS^C posture of disinterest in hermeneutical matters. To reiterate, the LDS^C often focuses on the illegitimate presuppositions of others. In the process, they appear to disregard Gadamer's admonition "to distance oneself from oneself and from one's private purposes."⁸³ The LDS^C ignores the reality of their own "locatedness" and assumptions, as well as the voice of the "other."

8.1.7. *Community and Tradition*

All interpreters evaluate experiences within the context of their own traditions. The concept of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, "effective history," elucidates how traditions form interpreters.⁸⁴ Every interpreter is standing within history, which has come to be known as *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* ("historically effected consciousness").⁸⁵ We are "always situated within traditions."⁸⁶ For Thiselton, these traditions, or communities, are key to understanding.⁸⁷ The tradition of an interpreter should "be raised to consciousness in order to 'monitor' the way it deals with texts or [other] traditions."⁸⁸ Gadamer's perspective calls for a "heightening of reflection."⁸⁹ Our own tradition is not just a filter that we use to

use Heideggerian language, it is to say that beliefs have their importance only as they are part of a way of being" (Faulconer, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 475-476). Later, Faulconer even writes that Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur "are not among the philosophers to whom most Mormons are likely to refer," though "that seems to be changing" (Ibid., 477). Brian Birch acknowledges the influence of "philosophical hermeneutics" on his thinking (Birch in Baker (ed.), *Mormonism at the Crossroads*, 51). Also, LDS scholar David Bohn references Gadamer to warn LDS history writers of the impossibility of mechanically reporting history as simple facts. He writes of the necessary inclusion of presuppositional matters in such writing (see David Bohn, 'Unfounded Claims and Impossible Expectations: A Critique of New Mormon History,' in George D. Smith (ed.), *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992) 227-256; cf. David Bohn, 'The Larger Issue,' *Sunstone* 16.8 Issue 94 (Feb 1994) 45-63; Louis Midgley, 'The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter with Secular Modernity,' in John M. Lundquist, Stephen D. Ricks (eds), *By Faith and By Study: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books and FARMS, 1990) 2:502-551). Hutchinson holds similar views in 'LDS Approaches,' 119 n9; 118 n8. However, these few references do not sufficiently counter the general lack of interaction with presuppositional matters in the writings of LDS authors.

⁸³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 1, 'Transcending the Aesthetic Dimension.'

⁸⁴ See Fowl, 'Effective History,' 156; cf. Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 38-39; Mark Knight, 'Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory,' *JNT* 33.2 (Dec 2010) 137-146, citing 137.

⁸⁵ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 121; cf. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 181.

⁸⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 4, 'Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience.'

⁸⁷ See Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 18, 135; cf. Warnke (ed.), *Inheriting Gadamer*, 4; Craig Hovey and Cyrus P. Olsen (eds), *The Hermeneutics of Tradition* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014) xi, *passim*.

⁸⁸ Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 113-114.

⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, 114-115.

see the world, but it is, in fact, who or what we are.⁹⁰ This understanding in community is in contrast to the individually centered orientation of Descartes.⁹¹ For Gadamer, the possibility of *Verstehen* is a move from private isolation “into a community or tradition of understanding.”⁹² The situatedness in community and its corresponding tools will help “determine the proper boundaries of interpretation.”⁹³ Authentic interpretation even “presupposes participation...in community.”⁹⁴ Scripture itself displays a communal focus, as “the New Testament leaves no doubt about the major role of community in interpretation.”⁹⁵

However, while some emphasize these positive facets of communal interpretation, others highlight the negative aspect of being in a confining location, for the interpreter in a specific community can only perceive and evaluate from that particular perspective.⁹⁶ Some lament that every interpretive community does what is right in their own eyes.⁹⁷ The reflection and monitoring concerning one’s tradition can never be completely carried out, since we are inescapably situated in a tradition, and “any methodological distancing we might undertake will itself always be situated and tradition laden.”⁹⁸ Thus, a careful interpreter will need to be aware of any “ideological prejudices” that come from being a part of a tradition/community.⁹⁹

⁹⁰ See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 4, ‘Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics.’

⁹¹ See Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, xvii; in fact, “the very possibility of expressing *cogito ergo sum* depends upon the existence of, and participation in, a community of language users” (Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 37).

⁹² See Adams et al., *Oxford Handbook of Theology*, 512.

⁹³ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 68; cf. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 91, 97; Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 37, 39-40; Also, a community can serve as a “major checkpoint to help us prevent uncontrolled speculation” (see D.A. Carson, ‘Recent Developments in Doctrine of Scripture,’ in Carson and Woodbridge (eds), *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, 5-48, citing 18).

⁹⁴ See Richard Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 49 n42; cf. Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 46.

⁹⁵ Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 130. Among the many specific NT examples of community, we note the church as the household of God and as a holy nation (1 Pet 2:4-9) (see Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 124). We also observe the vine and the branches (John 15), the sheep and flock (John 10), the remnant (Rom 9:27), and God’s field, building, and temple (1 Cor 3:9-17). Additionally, the book of Hebrews describes the pilgrim people of God (see Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 482, 497).

⁹⁶ See Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 71.

⁹⁷ See Vanhoozer, ‘Theological Interpretation,’ in Vanhoozer (ed.), *Theological Interpretation of the Bible: A Book-by-Book Survey*, 15.

⁹⁸ Mootz and Taylor (eds), *Gadamer and Ricoeur*, 47.

⁹⁹ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 308. In addition, Jürgen Habermas criticized Gadamer for his overly optimistic views on tradition (see Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen and Jerry A. Stark (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988) 169; cf. Robert J. Dostal (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 27). For Habermas, tradition was a “possible carrier of ideology” (see McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 213). For another perspective on potential problems with “community-driven interpretation” see Nathan D. Shannon, ‘His Community, His Interpretation: A Review of

In the world of mainstream theology, the widely accepted notion of “theological interpretation” will assist us in capturing some of the complexities of communal interpretation. Although “theological interpretation” (TI) is “not a carefully defined ‘method,’”¹⁰⁰ it is described as “a theoretical framework.”¹⁰¹ It rejects the notion of the historical-critical paradigm as the only sanctioned means of biblical interpretation.¹⁰² TI is “identified especially by its self-consciously ecclesial location.”¹⁰³ Francis Watson notes the “fundamental hermeneutical significance of the reading community as the location from which the text derives its being.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, from the perspective of TI: “ecclesiology proves to be a crucial issue regarding theological interpretation of Scripture.”¹⁰⁵ Yet, Vanhoozer cautions, “(t)he principal thrust of theological interpretation is to direct the interpreter’s attention to the subject matter of Scripture—God, the acts of God in history, the gospel—rather than to a particular theological tradition.”¹⁰⁶ TI, then, “is concerned with encountering the God who stands behind and is mediated in Scripture.”¹⁰⁷

In order to resolve “the modern schism between biblical studies and theology,”¹⁰⁸ advocates of TI maintain that both exegesis and theology “must proceed in dialogue with one another.”¹⁰⁹ Green questions the modern tendency to read Scripture dispassionately as an ancient text far removed from our lives.¹¹⁰ It may be comforting to read the letter of James in accordance with, for example, “the protocols of historical criticism”¹¹¹—yet at the same time ignore its contemporary impact. Thus, “...the principal problem is not our lack of information about folks in the first century. The issue is theological. What

Merold Westphal’s “Whose Community? Which Interpretation?” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 72.2 (Fall 2010) 415-425, citing 421.

¹⁰⁰ Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 2.

¹⁰¹ Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 1.

¹⁰² Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, ‘On the Theological Interpretation of Scripture: the Indirect Identity Thesis, Reformed Orthodoxy, and Trinitarian Considerations,’ *The Westminster Theological Journal* 77.2 (Fall 2015) 337-353, citing 338.

¹⁰³ Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 2; cf. Joel B. Green, ‘The (Re-)turn to Theology,’ *JTI* 1.1 (Spring 2007) 1-3, citing 2.

¹⁰⁴ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 3.

¹⁰⁵ See Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 32.

¹⁰⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 19-26, citing 24; cf. R. W. L. Moberly, ‘What is Theological Interpretation of Scripture?’ *JTI* 3.2 (Fall 2009) 161-178, especially 164-168.

¹⁰⁷ Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 4. This, of course, could be another response to the LDS^C idea mentioned in chapter two of the Bible pointing beyond itself to God.

¹⁰⁸ Vanhoozer, ‘Theological Interpretation,’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 222.

¹¹⁰ Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 22.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

separates us from the biblical text read as Scripture is not so much its antiquity as its unhandy, inconvenient claim on our lives.”¹¹² A biblical text, then, “is not to be regarded primarily as a ‘historical source’ that enables us to add to the store of our knowledge of the past.”¹¹³ It is to be read as a document that addresses our lives. Thus, the tradition/framework of “theological interpretation” highlights not only a communal focus, but also the contemporary effect of Scripture on readers.

8.I.8. LDS^C hermeneutics: Community and Tradition

The Utah-based LDS community is well known for its unity and communal identity. The entire LDS^C “cosmology and philosophical anthropology” is “social or relational.”¹¹⁴ There is a “strong communal sentiment...reinforced by doctrines contained in [Joseph Smith’s]...revelations and by deliberate church policy.”¹¹⁵ There is a “strong emphasis on communal solidarity.”¹¹⁶ LDS author Grant Underwood even recognizes “a communal quality to interpretation.”¹¹⁷ As a recapitulation of the biblical narrative, we have noted that the LDS^C itself plays a major role in interpretation. Their communal focus, as well as their emphasis on Scripture impacting their lives,¹¹⁸ suggests at least some overlap with the current hermeneutical theory of TI.

However, if the LDS^C is accused of muffling the voices of other interpreters, or of concerning itself only with the distorting presuppositions of others, does not TI exhibit some of the same tendencies? The framework of TI may also over-emphasize the modern horizon, something the LDS^C is accused of. The proponents of TI would respond with their solemn commitment to remain in consonant fellowship with the Christian community throughout the centuries.¹¹⁹ Yet, such a debate boils down to questions of *theological* legitimacy, especially the legitimacy of Christian interpretive traditions through the centuries. This is, however, outside of my purview. What matters for our

¹¹² Ibid; cf. Jacob Shatzer, ‘Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Evangelicals: an Apology for the Fundamentals,’ *Pro Ecclesia* 22.1 (Wint 2013) 88-102, especially 90-91.

¹¹³ Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 2.

¹¹⁴ Davies, *Mormon Culture*, 156.

¹¹⁵ Dean L. May, in Eliason, *Mormons & Mormonism*, 53.

¹¹⁶ Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward (eds), *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism* (Denver: University of Denver, 2001) 12.

¹¹⁷ Underwood, ‘More Than an Index,’ 118.

¹¹⁸ Again, see their accentuation on “likening the scriptures” to themselves (1 Nephi 19:23; cf. LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 266; Jackson, ‘Latter-day Saints,’ 80; Monte S. Nyman and Lisa Bolin Hawkins, ‘Book of Mormon,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 139-143, citing 143).

¹¹⁹ Even while reading the ancient text now, TI views “(t)he present Christian community (as) the primitive community and the eschatological community” (James McClendon, in Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 16).

purposes, is a dual recognition that, 1) both the LDS^C and the exponents of TI claim an important role in the interpretive process for the modern community even while disagreeing on the legitimacy of prior generations, and 2) whereas TI claims to be firmly rooted in the ancient text,¹²⁰ the concomitant mooring in the text by the LDS^C is at best, much more selective. Be that as it may, it is noteworthy how both LDS^C and TI consider the modern community to play a hermeneutically crucial role.

In spite of some parallels between TI and the LDS^C, the hermeneutical filter of “systemic parameters” becomes an unwieldy hegemony of privileged discourse. Institutional outlooks actuate biblical interpretation. In addition, the sociological interpretations of the LDS^C result in their separation from the parent community. The role of the “other”—i.e., a voice from outside of the community—is diminished. Separation was deemed necessary, and, in effect, the voice of the parent community was muffled. Furthermore, since the LDS^C is the presumed continuation of the biblical narrative, this holds implications for other Christian communities who claim the Bible as their own. Since the perceived institutional needs of the LDS^C drive much of their use of the Bible, this warrants scrutiny.

Given what we have seen about the epistemological oneness between the Prophet and God (the equation of the “mind of God” seamlessly with the LDS president), another concern is with the apparent “‘monological self-certainty’ of an isolated interpreter.”¹²¹ Concomitantly, on account of the primacy of personal and prophetic interpretation, and notwithstanding *claims* of communal solidarity, little room is left for the LDS^C community in interpretation. In addition, the “historically effected consciousness” (*Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) of the LDS interpreter would be negatively influenced by the doctrine of the Great Apostasy. In sum, the LDS^C speaks consistently of communal solidarity, and may even justify their hermeneutical actions and attitudes by citing similar features of TI. However, in the end, the lack of dialogue and openness with other traditions, even other Christian communities in the past, as well as their focus on individualistic interpretation, demonstrates more of a privatizing of biblical interpretation—in harmony only with their own worldview and perspective.

¹²⁰ Vanhoozer, ‘Theological Interpretation’ in Vanhoozer et al., *DTIB*, 24; Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 22; Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 15, 32.

¹²¹ See McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 223.

8.1.9. Gadamer and application as part of interpretation

Gadamer's concept of application is not a delayed step that *follows* interpretation, for he "regularly insists that application is an essential part of interpretation and not a subsequent and different activity."¹²² He perceived "application to be an essential ingredient in the process of understanding."¹²³ True understanding implies personal involvement—"We always take ourselves along when we understand."¹²⁴ Understanding happens in the context of experience, *Erlebnis*. Gadamer discusses this notion of experience as not only an immediacy of, but also the lasting result of, understanding.¹²⁵ Every interpreter can be likened to a performer in the symphony who is not mechanically reproducing the musical score, but who understands the score by performing it. True understanding entails not only reproduction but production as well, i.e., the performance/application by the interpreter. Thus, reading with understanding requires reproduction, performance, and application.¹²⁶ Perspectives within Critical Realism are similar to these ideas, for CR is not only "intensely empirical," but also "acknowledges the primacy of performance."¹²⁷ When application is included as a part of interpretation, meaning becomes concrete, and specific weight is given to abstract language.

In today's academic climate, we hesitate to concern ourselves exclusively with the ancient context of biblical texts, thereby sidelining the role of the modern, situated interpreter. An exclusive concern on the ancient context reflects an outdated historicism that simplistically objectifies textual meaning, and is not an adequate interpretive tool. We recognize the need to venture beyond the "ancient meaning." This is the case especially since biblical studies over the past century have "almost exclusively concerned itself with the

¹²² Mootz and Taylor (eds), *Gadamer and Ricoeur*, 48.

¹²³ See Stroup, *Narrative Theology*, 207.

¹²⁴ Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 116, cf. 61.

¹²⁵ See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 1, 'Transcending the Aesthetic Dimension.' E.g., "Wir meinen damit den Bedeutungsgehalt, den eine Erfahrung für den, der das Erlebnis hatte, als einen bleibenden besitzt" (Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 72). Also, "Das Erlebnis hat eine betonte Unmittelbarkeit" (ibid.).

¹²⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 2, 'The Ontology of the Work of Art and Its Hermeneutic Significance'; cf. Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 62, 78, 98, 110; Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 119-120; Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 79; McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 196; Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 26, 95, 117, 233, 250; Nathan, 'Truth and Prejudice,' 297; Furthermore, "...we are not passive describers but engaged performers" (Santiago Zabala, 'The Anarchy of Hermeneutics: Interpretation as a Vital Practice,' in Warnke (ed.), *Inheriting Gadamer*, 67-77, citing 76). Besides "application," the process could also be referred to as "contextualization" (Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 117) or even "perlocutionary notion of transformation" (Moritz, 'Scripture and Theological Exegesis,' 136).

¹²⁷ Meyer, *Critical Realism*, x.

‘founding-sense event’ of texts.”¹²⁸ Applying the text will allow a move beyond this “founding-sense event” to a “present-sense event.” When this occurs, “the interpretive act becomes complete.”¹²⁹

8.I.10. LDS hermeneutics: Application as part of interpretation

In matters of application, the aforementioned pragmatic focus of the LDS^C comes to the forefront. According to Alan Goff, the scriptures were written specifically for application purposes.¹³⁰ The “real value of scripture” is changed lives.¹³¹ Obedience is “the first law of heaven” and is “a Mormon mantra.”¹³² Lowell Bennion, an early LDS leader, maintained that correct interpretation results in application to one’s personal life.¹³³ The church has a tradition of “avoiding theological quagmires” and of “being a practical” religion, because “people are more important than dogmas.”¹³⁴ Although education and the intellectual life have their merits, “when contrasted with spiritual endowments, they are of slight and passing worth.”¹³⁵ What the LDS should strive for is “a Ph.D. in faith and righteousness.”¹³⁶ Ian Barber describes this concept as “LDS doctrine represent[ing] a process rather than a single event.”¹³⁷ According to Faulconer, “religion is primarily a matter of practice rather than propositional belief.” These beliefs are still “relevant and important,” although “only in terms of the practices of which they are part.”¹³⁸

“Bearing a testimony” on the truthfulness of church doctrine is a specific manifestation of their emphasis on application. The verbalization of the faith illustrates their personal involvement in the understanding process. For example, “(t)hrough revelation we can obtain a testimony of Jesus Christ and receive direction from God.”¹³⁹ Joseph Smith modeled this “testimony-bearing” behavior

¹²⁸ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 2.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Goff, ‘How Should We Then Read?’ 139.

¹³¹ Brant A. Gardner, ‘I Do Not Think That Word Means What You Think It Means,’ *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013) 49-55, citing 50.

¹³² Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 308.

¹³³ See Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 222.

¹³⁴ David H. Bailey, ‘Mormons and the Omnis: The Dangers of Theological Speculation,’ *Dialogue* 37.3 (Fall 2004) 29-48, citing 38.

¹³⁵ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 2, ‘How We Know.’

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Barber, ‘Literalist Constraint,’ 24; cf. Thomas G. Alexander, ‘The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology,’ *Sunstone* 5.4 (July 1980) 24-33; Smith, ‘Mormon Hermeneutics,’ Faith promoting Rumor website.

¹³⁸ Faulconer, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 475; cf. James Faulconer, ‘Are Mormons Christians?’ Patheos website, <http://www.patheos.com/Mormon/Are-Mormons-Christians-James-Faulconer-08-30-2012.html>; accessed Mar 2016.

¹³⁹ LDS^C, *NT Seminary Teacher*, 72.

in his King Follett Discourse, when he spoke boldly of God being a “self-existent being” and then implied that humankind was the same. He followed this with “I know that my testimony is true.”¹⁴⁰ Millet admits that, although the plates from which the BoM were translated are not accessible today, LDS members should still “have a testimony” on the truthfulness of the BoM.¹⁴¹

In matters of application, however, a fundamental aspect for the understanding of LDS^C hermeneutics is a privileging of the “present-sense event” at the expense of the “founding-sense event.”¹⁴² Given their focus on “likening the scriptures,” the overriding concern is to move directly from the scriptures to their own context/horizon. The ancient horizon of the scriptures is neglected. The LDS^C quest for application displaces textual interpretation. As we have seen, interpretation should be characterized by a merging of the ancient and modern horizons. The pragmatic focus of the LDS^C exaggerates the importance of application as regards the biblical text.

Nonetheless, for some decades, there has been an emphasis in biblical scholarship on recognizing the “intense involvement of the reader in the process of interpreting Scripture.”¹⁴³ Most mainstream Christian traditions posit a crucial role for analogy in the pursuit of application, and this is seen in the common tendency to compare the community or oneself to Bible characters. For example, an analogy is found in a biblical reference, and then applied to one’s life—the tribulations of Paul, Abraham, or Noah are used as inspiration to persevere, and the patience of Job is used as an exemplary example. In this manner, a transfer from ancient realities to modern contexts is attempted. Ironically, despite varying commitments to the sacredness of the text, these traditions often end up locating the transfer from ancient to modern in homiletics, not hermeneutics. We saw in chapter one that “the overwhelming majority” of LDS^C publications “is homiletic and is meant to inspire and motivate its audience rather than provide them with careful conceptual analysis.”¹⁴⁴ One wonders how the approach to application compares with such “analogizing” that merely inspires. In some Christian circles, analogizing often supplants interpretation. Therefore,

¹⁴⁰ Smith, ‘King Follett,’ BYU website; cf. Ostling and Ostling, *Mormon America*, 400. We noted earlier in chapter two the testimony meetings that occur on the first Sunday of the month for LDS members, when they ‘bear a testimony’: ‘I *know* Christ lives’; ‘I *know* Joseph Smith was a prophet of God’; ‘I *know* the church is true’” (Givens, *People of Paradox*, 26, emphasis by author).

¹⁴¹ Millet, *Truth*, ch. 2, ‘How We Know.’

¹⁴² Again, these terms come from McLean. See McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 2.

¹⁴³ Silva, in Kaiser and Silva (eds), *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 289.

¹⁴⁴ Oman, ‘Living Oracles,’ 2.

the LDS^C is not the only tradition that has tendencies to neglect the ancient horizon.

One wonders if LDS authors sufficiently reflect on the significance of the doctrines and beliefs that Faulconer deemed “relevant and important.”¹⁴⁵ For, on the one hand, they speak of “Mormonism’s freedom from the obsession in traditional theology for system building and logical completeness.”¹⁴⁶ Yet, on the other hand, authors such as Faulconer, Webb, Millet, and others, inescapably find themselves expressing “orthodox” claims, with a view to informing the kind of orthopraxis that the church mandates. This holds, despite Faulconer’s claim that they are “more interested in orthopraxy than orthodoxy.”¹⁴⁷ He is, in fact, more interested in “orthodoxy” than his words imply. Such interest is, however, in spite of the LDS^C focus on application concerns.

From what we have seen, application for the LDS^C is not a separate step that follows the act of interpretation. If anything, application is wrapped into the process of “interpretation.” We recognize this serious intent in applying the text. Their use of the Bible here is potentially compatible with Gadamerian insights. It is possible that mainstream authors who agree with Gadamer’s combination of application and interpretation could afford the LDS^C the benefit of the doubt here. However, as we have seen, the LDS^C shows little interest in utilizing the insights of Gadamer.¹⁴⁸ It is surprising that LDS scholars have not made more of what is offered to them by Gadamer.

To summarize, the LDS^C advances directly to the “likening” of the Scriptures to themselves, and tends to neglect the interpretation of the biblical text in reference with its ancient horizon. By doing so, they overgeneralize the complexity of the hermeneutical process. This raises the question whether it is possible to honor the deep concern for contemporary contextualization while at the same time respecting the textual horizons of the scriptures.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, the application hermeneutics of the LDS^C does not appear to be compatible with the accepted parameters of hermeneutical scholarship, perhaps by design. It has been the contention of this study, therefore, that because of this lack of engagement with various hermeneutical insights, the LDS^C perspective warrants scrutiny from the perspective of Critical Realism.

¹⁴⁵ Faulconer, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 475.

¹⁴⁶ Webb, *Mormon Christianity*, 213.

¹⁴⁷ Faulconer, ‘Are Mormons Christians?’ Patheos website.

¹⁴⁸ See the section 8.1.6. *LDS^C hermeneutics: Presuppositions*.

¹⁴⁹ These questions will surface again in the discussion below of the question of locations of meaning. See below in section 8.2. “Location of Meaning.”

8.I.II. *Critical Realism (CR)*

Throughout our investigation, Critical Realism has been a helpful guide since we are subjectivity-located interpreters, influenced by traditions and often with unnoticed presuppositions.¹⁵⁰ The “locatedness” of modern interpreters does not annul the possibility of the correct interpretation of ancient texts, and “this limitation is not a fate to be outwitted and escaped, but [it reflects] the simple fact that we are human and not divine.”¹⁵¹ As we saw, the grid, or lens, through which reality is viewed is not necessarily unfavorable, as the ability to be subjective affords us the opportunity to be relevant.¹⁵² Here we note that Gadamerian concepts of ontology, application and performance merge well with a Critical Realist perspective on the existence of an empirical world, combined with its sense of the “critical” subjectivity of interpreters located in that world.

Thus far in this chapter, we have investigated the perspectives in philosophical hermeneutics on the inescapability of interpretation, awareness in the interpretation process, ontological matters, presuppositions in the interpretive process, a communal emphasis, and application notions. We have compared these to LDS^C distinctives, and have observed *some* overlap between philosophical hermeneutics and the LDS^C, producing an initial, seeming correspondence between LDS^C hermeneutics and the larger arena of mainstream scholarship. However, there are significant differences as well. Insufficient attention is paid by LDS interpreters to the influence of traditions, horizons, worldviews, and self-understandings. This occurs because of the overriding presence of LDS^C assumptions and perspectives that impede the fusion between ancient and modern horizons. Examples of such LDS^C assumptions and perspectives include continuing revelation, pragmatism, and perceived institutional needs. Having covered pertinent areas of general hermeneutics as they relate to LDS^C hermeneutics, we now turn to two specific matters, “location of meaning” and methodological possibilities.

¹⁵⁰ See the earlier discussion on CR in section 1.4. *Utilization of Critical Realism*.

¹⁵¹ Mootz and Taylor (eds), *Gadamer and Ricoeur*, 48-49.

¹⁵² Wright, *People of God*, 36; cf. Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 147, 149; Meyer, *Critical Realism*, xiii.

8.2. Location of meaning

8.2.1. *Philosophical hermeneutics: “Method vs. art”*

Gadamer saw the necessity of going *beyond* method to see the text as art.¹⁵³ Other authors assert that interpretation is more art than science. Schleiermacher, for instance, believed that interpretation required the skill of a loving craftsman. He argued that interpretation could not be reduced to a certain fixed technique to be “followed mechanically to achieve objective results.”¹⁵⁴ Gadamer spoke of the transformation that art often brings to the person experiencing it, in much the same way that texts can impact an interpreter.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, art is “something that occurs to us as an event of being,”¹⁵⁶ and not only affects the person but “tears the person experiencing it out of the context of his life.”¹⁵⁷ This resonates with Critical Realism’s view of the apprehension of meaning through our own perspectives and experiences.¹⁵⁸ An artistic approach allows interpretation to develop slowly through experience and concentrated reflection, as opposed to a programmed, “scientific” methodology. The LDS^C would likely concur with these insights, as we intimated above in our discussion concerning ontology and interpretation.

8.2.2. *LDS^C hermeneutics: “Method vs. art”*

In LDS^C thinking, reason and logical thinking tend to be rejected in favor of experiential knowledge. Their view of access to knowledge may reflect an artistic epistemology. This holds the potential for overlap between their hermeneutics and Gadamerian thinking. In reality, however, many of the hermeneutical examples we have seen exhibit more a methodological maneuvering than an artistic interpretation. For instance, we noted literalistic interpretations; allegorizations; perceived institutional needs; clarification and restoration through emendation; the elevation of Joseph Smith through re-authoring, and even “systemic parameters.” These tendencies work against attempts to defend on intellectual grounds any artistic approach to interpretation by the LDS^C.

¹⁵³ See Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 82, cf. 87; cf. Martin O’Kane, ‘*Wirkungsgeschichte* and Visual Exegesis,’ *JSTNT* 33.2 (2010) 147-159, citing 148.

¹⁵⁴ See McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 44; cf. Grondin, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 157 n11.

¹⁵⁵ See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 2, ‘The Ontology of the Work of Art and Its Hermeneutic Significance.’

¹⁵⁶ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 4, ‘Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics.’

¹⁵⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 1, ‘Transcending the Aesthetic Dimension.’

¹⁵⁸ See Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 18; cf. Wright, *People of God*, 35; Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 147.

8.2.3. *Art, imagination and the implied*

The utilization of the imagination reflects an artistic nuance in the complexity of the interpretative process. In the course of writing a text, authors create an implied version of themselves.¹⁵⁹ As a careful reader studies the text, the implied author (IA) becomes a reconstructed inference from the text.¹⁶⁰ An IA is discernable from the text,¹⁶¹ and is an “ideal, literary, created version” of the empirical author.¹⁶² In fact, the IA is “that singular consciousness which the reader constructs from the words of the text; a consciousness which knows the story backward and forward...the static, overarching view of a text that a reader might develop from multiple readings.”¹⁶³ To perceive the IA, the utilization of the imagination is required—even “a significant role for the informed imagination.”¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, a problem emerges: how can the IA be a reconstructed *inference* from the text, if it is discernable *in* the text? A *reconstructed* inference from the text implies the leaving behind of the text.

The LDSC could respond with a charge of inconsistency: the reconstructed inference concerning the IA appears to necessitate an abandonment of the text. Additionally, some Christian traditions effectively leave the text in an effort to recreate the *empirical* author.¹⁶⁵ To answer, we note that all biblical interpreters with a high regard for the biblical text, LDS or otherwise, should respect the wishes of the empirical author. Even though we only have access to the implied author, there can be no better tribute to the empirical author than the quality of reconstruction of the implied author. Thus, no part of the interpretation of the text would depend on the exact identity of

¹⁵⁹ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 70. Authors are not necessarily aware of this creation. Booth is emphasizing the existence of two authors. The empirical author is responsible for creating the implied author. This implied author is only a version of the empirical author.

¹⁶⁰ Westphal, in Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 169-170; cf. Seymour Benjamin Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980) 148; Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 5.

¹⁶¹ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 42; cf. Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 5.

¹⁶² Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, 74-75.

¹⁶³ Vernon K. Robbins, ‘The Social Location of the Implied Author of Luke-Acts’ in Jerome H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 305-331, citing 311.

¹⁶⁴ Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 128.

¹⁶⁵ Many Evangelical traditions, for example, inexplicably believe that if a biblical book does not identify its author, the search for its empirical author (outside the text) is part and parcel of the *interpretation* of that biblical book.

the empirical author (unless the text makes the identification).¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the interpreter needs to *prioritize* “the implied,”¹⁶⁷ precisely on account of the “presence” of the IA in the text. Knowledge of the empirical author inevitably involves elements of speculation. The same is true, to a limited extent, with the reconstruction of the implied author. However, the reconstruction of the IA is more focused on the text, since it is “that singular consciousness which the reader constructs from the words of the text.”¹⁶⁸

The implied reader (IR) is the textually constructed reader “presupposed” by the text.¹⁶⁹ The IR is the one “actual readers must encounter as they encounter the text. The discourse is thus addressed to a readership which it creates itself.”¹⁷⁰ The IR “incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader’s actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process.”¹⁷¹ The IR is being actively influenced by the IA—who insists through the content of the text that the reader take a certain point of view.¹⁷² A serious consideration of the text will influence the reader. A conscientious, imaginative reader will be open to persuasion “rather than be critically distanced.”¹⁷³ As readers are affected by the text, they are inevitably involved in the production of meaning. Careful readers become “a part of the narrative as they unfold its meaning.”¹⁷⁴ The IR “responds to the narratological movement” of the text and helps determine the meaning of the text by actualizing it in concrete form.¹⁷⁵ The meaning of the text, then, is found in the dialectic and conversation between the IA and the IR that is embodied in the text. When we, as ideal readers, utilize our informed

¹⁶⁶ See Moritz, ‘Project Hermeneutics,’ Warehouse Theology website; cf. Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 81; Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 125. This does not eliminate all investigation into the empirical author, for such empirical realities can help illuminate the reality and worldview of the implied author (see *ibid.*, 133).

¹⁶⁷ Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 133.

¹⁶⁸ Robbins, ‘Social Location of the Implied Author,’ 311.

¹⁶⁹ See Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 40; cf. Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 15; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 149-150.

¹⁷⁰ S. S. Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose and Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) 116.

¹⁷¹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) xii.

¹⁷² Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 23.

¹⁷³ Francis Young, ‘The Pastoral Epistles and the Ethics of Reading,’ *JST* 45 (1992) 105-120, citing 111.

¹⁷⁴ See Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 11, ‘Literary Hermeneutics: Alan Culpepper and Stephen Moore.’

¹⁷⁵ Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 16; cf. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 11, ‘Literary Hermeneutics, etc.’

imagination to discover the implied author's performative aims, our modern stories intertwine with the ancient stories.

8.2.4. LDS^C hermeneutics: Role of implied author and reader

At the outset, these concepts such as involvement “in the production of meaning,” or becoming “a part of the narrative,” resonate with LDS^C thinking. Upon closer look, however, the resonance fades. For example, a justifiably held view by many in the hermeneutical community is that the IR is a function of the text itself, and that the IR becomes a part of the narrative only to the degree that the interpretation remains tethered to the text. Yet, within much of LDS^C hermeneutics, this anchoring to the text is fragile and tenuous. In the matter of the empirical author, the LDS^C aligns with mainstream hermeneutical perspectives that question the all-out search for the exact identity of the empirical author of every biblical text. The LDS^C has very little motive to reconstruct the identity of the empirical author, given their stance on modern revelation interpreting, and holding precedence over, ancient literature. Therefore, the empirical author, as well as the IA, is largely excluded. Since the IA is discovered through an investigation of the text itself, this has little appeal for the LDS^C interpreter—especially if such an “academic” exercise would prevent them from pursuing their “hermeneutics of practice.” Is LDS^C hermeneutics capable of embracing the possibility of an informed imagination? Given their desire for a “likening the scriptures” to themselves—it appears to be so. However, instead of an interpreter allowing an informed imagination to aid in the reconstruction of implied realities of the text, LDS^C interpretations tend to supplant the implied audience with their own community. We have witnessed this in numerous instances. At the outset of this chapter, I proposed that insights of philosophical hermeneutics could help explain what we have seen in this investigation. The sustained focus on the text, evinced in the concepts of the IA and the IR, is not a concern for the LDS^C.

8.2.5. Hermeneutical geography

Traditionally, the interpretive process tends to be discussed with reference to three hermeneutical (“geographical”) locations: “authorial intent, dynamics of

text itself, [and] its effect upon the readers.”¹⁷⁶ This discussion centers on what is *in the text* (the conceptuality embodied in the text by the implied author that is accessed by the informed imagination of the reader), what is *in front of the text* (the interpreter as the co-producer of meaning), what is *behind the text* (the world that the text refers to either explicitly or implicitly).¹⁷⁷ An additional location is *below the text* (the ancient environment that helped shape the text).¹⁷⁸ By attending to these varied locations in the geographical landscape of hermeneutics, the interpreter is better able to avoid one-sided, simplistic interpretations, and is alerted to particular vistas on the circuitous journey of the interpretive process. An interpretation has a greater likelihood of plausibility when it accounts for as many geographical components as possible. This is a highly significant notion for our evaluative investigation: I will be more predisposed to any interpretation, LDS or otherwise, that can more comprehensively utilize these locations of hermeneutical geography.

8.2.6. *The reader (in front of the text)*

As I have mentioned in the discussion of the implied reader, there is a current preoccupation with the “reemployment of the reader,” for the reader is no longer irrelevant.¹⁷⁹ Umberto Eco speaks of “model readers,” that guard against “too easily colonizing or objectifying the text.”¹⁸⁰ Therefore, *in front of the text* activities play a significant part in the production of meaning. Careful analysis can help illuminate the possible or desired effect of a text on its readers, both implied and real.¹⁸¹ Textual communication occurs as “(r)eaders play a part in the realization of meaning” since the text only possesses potentiality until the reader actualizes it.¹⁸² Part of this actualization is the entering of the empirical reader into the

¹⁷⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, ‘The Hermeneutical Dynamics of Reading Luke as Interpretation, Reflection, and Formation,’ in Anthony C. Thiselton, Craig G. Bartholomew and Joel B. Green (eds), *Reading Luke: Interpretation, Reflection, Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) 3-46, citing 25; cf., Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 14, 27; Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 135.

¹⁷⁷ Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 123.

¹⁷⁸ This location was added by Moritz (see Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 123). Many authors only focus on the first three geographical locations. For example, see Porter and Stovell (eds), in *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 12. See also Tate’s integrated approach that he calls “a journey into three worlds” (W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (3rd edn; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 1).

¹⁷⁹ James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 32-33.

¹⁸⁰ See Green, *Practicing Theological Interpretation*, 20.

¹⁸¹ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 1, ‘What is Hermeneutics?’

¹⁸² See Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 97, 98, 306.

implied world of the text—experiencing the text as it was intended.¹⁸³ Such a comprehensive experience typifies “fully hooked readers.”¹⁸⁴

However, some postmodern strategies over-emphasize *in front of the text* components, by shifting the interpretive weight too far in the direction of the reader.¹⁸⁵ Others excessively underscore *in front of the text* activity when readers control the text.¹⁸⁶ The text, at times, is reduced to a lifeless object, like a “cadaver handed over for autopsy.”¹⁸⁷ Wright calls this naïve realism, where there is no event, no author, and not even a text: the reader interprets, and the whole process deconstructs into the feelings and thoughts of the reader.¹⁸⁸

At the same time, there are positive aspects to an *in front of the text* focus, since the subjectivity of the empirical interpreter is to be welcomed “as an aspect of human creationality.”¹⁸⁹ If the perception of truth were not a subjective process, it would be impossible to demonstrate the relevance of truth.¹⁹⁰ The actual participation of the interpreter is crucial, and the interpreter cannot remain as a distant observer, “as if [the reader were] outside of the hermeneutical event.”¹⁹¹

8.2.7. LDS^C hermeneutics: *The reader (in front of the text)*

Undoubtedly, LDS authors would agree with many of these concepts of relevance, participation and experience of the text. James McLachlan, an LDS author, writes: “...the message always comes through the filter of human

¹⁸³ Some speak of the “projected world of the text” and not necessarily the “implied” world (see Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 50-51; Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 138).

¹⁸⁴ Wayne C. Booth, ‘Resurrection of the Implied Author: Why Bother?,’ in James Phalen and Peter J. Rabinowitz (eds), *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) 86.

¹⁸⁵ See Thorsten Moritz, ‘Mark,’ in Vanhoozer (ed.), *Theological Interpretation of the New Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, 39-49, citing 41. In fact, in some postmodern communities, whether of post-colonialism, feminism, LGBTQ studies, etc., one can note a “relentless hermeneutical empowerment of the community” (see Moritz, ‘Project Hermeneutics,’ Warehouse Theology website).

¹⁸⁶ As can be observed in Deconstructionism (Derrida), or with dominating interpretive communities (Fish) (see Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, 16; cf., Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism*, 30).

¹⁸⁷ See these notions of Paul Ricoeur in Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 81. Note also the danger of the use of the historical-critical method placing “the interpreter above Scripture” (see Richard Gaffin, in *ibid.*, 181).

¹⁸⁸ Wright, *People of God*, 59.

¹⁸⁹ Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 149.

¹⁹⁰ See Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 152.

¹⁹¹ Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 4, ‘Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics’; cf. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 316. Note also the idea of “...live encounters [in] a given reading experience” (Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 169).

understanding.”¹⁹² However, the conclusions detailed earlier hold here as well—individualistic interpretation of “likening the Scriptures to themselves” engenders a strong possibility of masking the ontological realism of the biblical text. The conceptuality embodied in the text is obscured with the confined subjectivity of the individual LDS interpreter. In addition, as a reader *in front of the text*, the use of hermeneutical language as it concerns the Prophet and biblical interpretation makes it appear as if they are dealing with interpretive matters. However, the LDS^C Prophet is simply using locutions to affirm his particular perspective. Often, he is announcing entirely new declarations that have no referentiality to the biblical text. The prophetic voice is not interpretive, but exhibits a re-authoring of the biblical text. I have noted this with examples such as the “Melchizedek priesthood,” or the use of “line by line” of Isa 28:10. I have referenced a number of times the mainstream conclusion that texts have “a *prima facie* claim on the reader, namely, to be construed in accord with its intended sense.”¹⁹³ When the prophet, *in front of the text*, makes a theological declaration supposedly based on a biblical text, but in reality not moored to the text, one wonders to what extent LDS^C hermeneutics respects the rights of texts.

8.2.8. *Empirical author: Below the text*

While the investment of energy into authorial intention has its benefits, it is only to the extent that it helps to reconstruct the intention of the author. The final arbiter of meaning must remain with the implied author—because of the correspondence between the IA and the text. Gadamer’s insistence on the concept of the ancient horizon of the text is validated with an emphasis on the IA as the arbiter of meaning. It remains important to include investigation into the biblical author’s context (i.e., the ancient horizon), for, although they are no longer accessible, they are not irrelevant. Form, source and redaction criticism have greatly benefited biblical scholarship in its search for an accurate depiction of the original context of the text.¹⁹⁴ In addition, linguistic and historical exegesis are important aspects in the interpretative process as they attempt to reconstruct the environment that surrounded the writing of the text. Since Scripture is

¹⁹² McLachlan, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 209. Barber mentions problems in denying human agency in the process of interpretation (Barber, ‘Literalist Constraint,’ 21-22).

¹⁹³ See Meyer, *Critical Realism*, xi, 17.

¹⁹⁴ See Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 281-282.

culturally “located”¹⁹⁵ and “conditioned,”¹⁹⁶ it should be self-evident that “the more we know of the period and its culture, in all its manifestations, the better equipped we are to penetrate to the sense of the biblical text.”¹⁹⁷ Hence, as we have seen, an interpreter will need to consider the original “locatedness” of the biblical texts. After all, Gadamer insisted rightly on the concept of the ancient horizon of texts.¹⁹⁸ In sum, *below the text* realities should not be ignored, even more so as we recognize our modern tendency toward self-interest and our own “embeddedness.” The most promising criterion concerning a focus on the empirical author is the extent to which the implied author and reader are clarified by such attention.

8.2.9. LDS^C hermeneutics: *Below the text*

Regarding the hermeneutical activity of the LDS^C, *below the text* matters are regularly discussed only as they highlight modern, *in front of the text* conclusions. This is due, in part, to their focus on continuing revelation. It is the same with *behind the text* matters. We have explored two speculative perspectives *behind the text* that appear to aim at the validation of *in front of the text* doctrines. The two “sticks” of Ezekiel 37:15-17 refer to the Bible and the BoM as one.¹⁹⁹ The LDS^C promotes the *behind the text* idea that Ezekiel was describing a future book that would be discovered in the Americas. We have also seen the interpretation of Isaiah 29:4 that refers to the BoM coming out of the ground and “speaking.”²⁰⁰ The LDS^C argues that Isaiah spoke of a voice from the ground that was not “heard” for thousands of years. Thus, by focusing on the supposed *behind the text* motivations of both Ezekiel and Isaiah, the LDS^C hopes to validate their current perspectives. Instead of thoroughly investigating the ancient environment that helped shape the text in order to reconstruct the intention of the IA, they focus on their own *in front of the text* perspectives. In these cases, there is no interest in the implied author’s message—and, consequently, there is no investment in studying the ancient environment of the text. Notwithstanding claims to the contrary, these modern, *in front of the text* attempts to locate the BoM in Ezekiel

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 259.

¹⁹⁶ Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 128-129; cf. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 62.

¹⁹⁷ Hughes, in Carson and Woodbridge (eds), *Scripture and Truth*, 175.

¹⁹⁸ See Gadamer’s views in McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 192.

¹⁹⁹ See McConkie, *New Witness*, 456, 631; Davies, ‘Mormon Canon,’ 50.

²⁰⁰ See Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 64-66; McConkie, *New Witness*, 435-450; Barlow, ‘Before Mormonism,’ 752.

37 and Isaiah 29 add a *behind the text* perspective to which the original biblical authors (and readers) were oblivious.

Given the orientation toward direct revelation from the heavens, often their focus is not even on the text or the ancient environment surrounding it—but on the claim of the original revelation that led to its writing. The text, then, does not take precedence for the LDS^C. We have noted Stephen Robinson’s view that “written Scripture is mediated revelation, derivative revelation,” and that “direct revelation to a prophet or an apostle is immediate and primary, and this is the word of God in the purest sense.”²⁰¹ A challenge emerges here, not acknowledged by LDS authors, with the locatedness, presuppositions, traditions and possible self-interest of the receptor of the “direct” revelation. Therefore, on closer inspection, *below the text* activity becomes what could be labeled *imposing on the text*. This imposition on the text occurs with a direct revelation that is given priority in LDS^C thinking. As a consequence, ancient *below the text* matters do not appear to concern LDS interpreters.

8.2.10. *Philosophical and LDS^C hermeneutics: The text itself*

Gadamer insisted that “all correct interpretation” would focus on the text.²⁰² If the content of the text is ignored, it is more likely that it will be abused by the “located” interpreter.²⁰³ There are a number of ways to implement an *in the text* focus. For instance, a reader can utilize literary approaches that give the necessary attention to plot, character, narrative structure, allusions, figures of speech, etc.²⁰⁴ A reader could note the distinction between “open” and “closed” texts.²⁰⁵ Or, a reader can demonstrate respect for the text as “other,” as well as explore the intention of the implied author.

While the LDS church does, in fact, look to the biblical text, it does so inconsistently. We noted the randomness in chapter three with their selective

²⁰¹ Robinson, *How Wide*, 57. Of course, for interpretation purposes, the provenance of the text shouldn’t matter—whether it was mediated or not. What matters should be the actual content of the text itself. We see, again, an area where LDS^C hermeneutics focuses on components in the interpretative process that fall outside of accepted parameters.

²⁰² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ch. 4, ‘Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience.’

²⁰³ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 114.

²⁰⁴ Spencer, in Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 49, 169; cf. Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 11, ‘Literary Hermeneutics, etc.’; Grant Osborne, ‘Literary Theory and Biblical Interpretation,’ in David G. Firth and Jamie A. Grant (eds), *Words and the Word* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008) 17-50.

²⁰⁵ See this perspective of Umberto Eco in Moritz, ‘Project Hermeneutics,’ Warehouse Theology website; cf. Anthony C. Thiselton, ‘The Future of Biblical Interpretation and Responsible Plurality in Hermeneutics,’ in Porter and Malcolm (eds), *Future of Biblical Interpretation*, 11-27, citing 13-15).

literalism. We also saw the use of isolated phrases and words that highlight the promotion of the institution through re-authoring. Overall, the five uses of the Bible demonstrate a neglect of an *in the text* focus. Instead, attention is centered on the modern institution. Additionally, as Davies and Madsen put it, “(a)bove the authority of the written record stands the authority of the living prophet.”²⁰⁶ An *in the text* focus is overshadowed by the modern LDS^C prophet. In fact, given the LDS lack of engagement with hermeneutical realities such as self-awareness, locatedness, and self-interest as it relates to the living Prophet, LDS^C interpretation yields several questionable hermeneutical implications. For instance, since the living voice of the prophet needs to be interpreted, it is certainly possible that this voice leads to *less* understanding than textual interpretation. The displacement of the text by the living voice does not solve the problem of interpretation. The LDS^C might respond that the living voice is an empirical reality to which they have access. However, in biblical interpretation, the living voice still needs to reconstruct the implied world of the ancient text. Yet, this voice does not appear interested in doing this. Thus, the preoccupation of the LDS^C with *in front of the text* realities, i.e., the interpreter, ends up subverting the empirical realities of *behind the text*, *below the text*, and especially the world projected *in the text*.

Earlier, we queried whether it is possible to honor the deep concern for contemporary contextualization while at the same time respecting the textual horizons of the scriptures. By attending to as many hermeneutical locations of the text as possible, the interpreter significantly increases the likelihood of not only 1) honoring this deep concern for contemporary contextualization and the textual horizons of the scriptures, but also 2) plausible interpretation of what is *behind the text*, as well as the meaning of the story *in the text*, and the transformative power of the text in the life of the interpreter *in front of the text*.²⁰⁷ To the extent that we attend to the various hermeneutical locations, we can more successfully avoid a distorted, myopic self-interest. However, the LDS^C does not appear interested in these geographical locations.

²⁰⁶ Davies and Madsen, ‘Scriptures,’ in Ludlow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1278.

²⁰⁷ See Porter and Stovell (eds), *Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ‘Interpreting Together: Synthesizing Five Views of Biblical Hermeneutics.’

8.3. Methodological Possibilities

8.3.1. *Philosophical hermeneutics: Method*

Our investigation of philosophical questions and issues such as ontology and presuppositions, and the exploration of location of meaning issues within hermeneutical geography, has alerted us to some very useful methodological tools. In fact, *some* type of methodology needs to be in place to combat the tendencies toward self-deception and self-interest.²⁰⁸ We noted in the first chapter the need for methodological *parameters* to investigate another religious system. An “appropriate method is not ruled out,” for it is not “Truth *or* Method.”²⁰⁹ Wright mentions the need for “proper tools.”²¹⁰ Others describe a “theory of rules;”²¹¹ a “framework of interpretation;”²¹² the need for an eclectic model;²¹³ a “general body of methodological principles;”²¹⁴ or a systematic and careful methodology.²¹⁵ Even 19th century Mormon apologist Parley Pratt advocated for the use of a definite, infallible rule of interpretation.²¹⁶ Two commonly-used methodological approaches will give us another lens from which to evaluate LDS^C hermeneutics: speech-act theory and a storied (narrative) hermeneutic.

8.3.2. *Speech-Act theory*

Speech-Act theory (SAT) can assist the interpreter in holistically grasping the multi-layered nature of communicative acts. Typically, only the locutionary

²⁰⁸ However, we acknowledge that any method will unavoidably reflect pre-understandings, as well as cultural and temporal embeddedness (see Porter, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics,’ in Porter and Malcolm (eds), *Future of Biblical Interpretation*, 29-50, citing 49).

²⁰⁹ Selby, *Comical Doctrine*, 146; cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, ‘On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection,’ *Continuum* 8.1-2 (Spr-Sum 1970) 77-95, citing 84.

²¹⁰ Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 120; cf. Wright, *People of God*, 96.

²¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, in Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory*, 43.

²¹² Shipps, *Mormonism*, xi.

²¹³ See Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 31.

²¹⁴ So say adherents of the tradition of Schleiermacher and Dilthey (see Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory*, 46).

²¹⁵ See Klein et al., *Biblical Interpretation*, 86. Also, it is argued that “everyone relies on some type of method to learn anything” (Craig Van Gelder, ‘Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics,’ *Journal of Religious Leadership* 3.1 & 2 (Spring 2004 & Fall 2004) 43-73, citing 44). See also, e.g., Jerry Sumney, ‘Studying Paul’s Opponents: Advances and Challenges,’ in Stanley E. Porter (ed.), *Paul and His Opponents* (Koninklijke Brill NV: Leiden, The Netherlands, 2005) 7-58, citing 44, 48, 58, for the need to approach Galatians, Colossians and 1 and 2 Corinthians with a certain methodology in mind before attempting to identify Paul’s opponents in such writings. According to Sumney, the reason for the competing and contradictory hypotheses concerning Paul’s opponents is that many authors have not paid sufficient attention to the methods used to identify them.

²¹⁶ Pratt, *Voice of Warning*, ch. 1, ‘On Prophecy Already Fulfilled.’

content of human communication is acknowledged,²¹⁷ at the expense of the illocutionary (the impact upon the reader) and the perlocutionary (the intended response by the reader).²¹⁸ Yet, SAT “demonstrates the inadequacy of an approach towards language...[that only looks at] the surface text to determine what the discourse means, and does.”²¹⁹ SAT, “with its distinction between locution, illocution and perlocution, overcomes any literalistic fixation on the surface text.”²²⁰ Grant Osborne posits that “(a)ll three aspects are interdependent and cannot truly exist apart from the others.²²¹ When we communicate, we do more than make assertions: “(w)e offer comfort; we ask questions; we make requests; we make promises; we express disapproval by means of sarcasm or irony.”²²² McLean postulates that all biblical texts “possess an additional illocutionary dimension...and (by extension) a perlocutionary dimension.”²²³ Many specific NT examples of “confessions” (e.g., Rom 10:8-9; 1 Cor 12:1-3) are “self-involving” speech-acts that exhibit a perlocutionary force.²²⁴

The tools of SAT allow us to recognize “the transformative forces at work in communication.”²²⁵ Indeed, the very intention of much communication is to foster and stimulate growth and transformation. Yet, the perlocutionary impact on the reader “tends to be left out of the hermeneutical discussion. It is inexplicably relegated to homiletics.”²²⁶ Given the illocutionary intent left in the

²¹⁷ For some, the meaning of Scripture is limited to mere propositions or statements of fact (see Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 34). Yet, Scripture not only describes people, events or doctrines, but also has an “intention to do things” (ibid.). It is all too often easy to ignore that “verbal utterances not only say things; they also do things” (ibid., 32; cf. Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 143).

²¹⁸ See Moritz, ‘Project Hermeneutics,’ Warehouse Theology website; cf. Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 121. See also how authorial intention is emphasized with speech-act theory (called “speech-act philosophy”) in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 10, 26; Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, ch. 10, ‘Theological Hermeneutics, etc.’

²¹⁹ Karl Möller, ‘Words of (In-)evitable Certitude?’, in Bartholomew et al., *After Pentecost*, 2:352-386, citing 370.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 57.

²²² Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 36.

²²³ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 218. Indeed, we note the conclusions in the pioneering work of philosopher J. L. Austin that “all statements are performative in some sense” whether biblical or not. See Scott A. Blue, ‘Meaning, Intention, and Application: Speech Act Theory in the Hermeneutics of Francis Watson and Kevin J. Vanhoozer,’ *Trinity Journal*, 23NS (2002) 161-184, citing 163.

²²⁴ Richard S. Briggs, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001) 294-298; cf. Richard Briggs, in Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 9.

²²⁵ Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 122; Richard S. Briggs, ‘Speech-Act Theory,’ in Firth and Grant (eds), *Words and the Word*, 75-110, citing 106; cf. “the performative nature of language” (Briggs, *Words in Action*, 3).

²²⁶ Moritz, ‘Project Hermeneutics,’ Warehouse Theology website; cf. Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 122. Or, similarly, SAT is relevant only to the extent that it illumines liturgical considerations (see Briggs, *Words in Action*, 294).

text by the author, “a perlocutionary intention sits at the edges of meaning,” and is even an “extension of meaning.”²²⁷ Therefore, a careful interpreter will be critically reflective on these components present in the biblical texts.²²⁸ For example, if the only reaction of the original readers of Jeremiah 4:7 is “How interesting!” when it refers to a lion destroying the nations (including theirs), “they would have failed to appreciate” the illocutionary intent/warning of the author, and would not have understood the perlocutionary intent of the passage.²²⁹ With its focus on the entirety of the act of speech, SAT is uniquely suited to help us reconstruct the intention of the implied author. Thus, the meaning of the text is not only found in the locutionary content, but also concerns the perlocutionary action that is the result of the illocutionary intention.²³⁰

We have seen that Critical Realism recognizes the existence of external data being accessible only through located individuals who are influenced by their presuppositions and traditions. Knowledge can never be simply “objective,” for “it is the ever-changing matrix that connects mental consciousness to external realities.”²³¹ Thus, by focusing on the perlocutionary action of the communicative act of the biblical text, the subjectivity recognized in Critical Realism is affirmed.²³² When the careful interpreter recognizes the illocutionary intent in the text communicated by the implied author, the transformative and personal perlocutionary result becomes a legitimate part of the meaning of the text.²³³

8.3.3. LDS^C hermeneutics: Speech-Act theory

SAT could be helpful for the LDS^C because of their pragmatic focus. However, it calls into question many of their uses of the Bible. For example, SAT emphasizes the importance of *authorial* intention that elicits a response from the reader. This

²²⁷ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 113.

²²⁸ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 219.

²²⁹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ‘The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture’s Diverse Literary Forms’ in Carson and Woodbridge (eds), *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, 49-104, citing 86.

²³⁰ See Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 47-48. However, others see SAT as having only limited methodological potential (see Stephen Fowl in Porter, ‘Biblical Hermeneutics,’ in Porter and Malcolm (eds), *Future of Biblical Interpretation*, 29-50, citing 41). Even the well-known proponent of SAT, Richard Briggs, acknowledges that SAT “is not a comprehensive solution to hermeneutical problems” (see Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 292). Treier concedes that “applying speech-act philosophy across the board, as a comprehensive theory, becomes too general to do much good” (Treier, *Theological Interpretation*, 145). Nonetheless, SAT gives us an additional viewpoint from which we can evaluate the uses of the Bible by the LDS^C.

²³¹ Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 150.

²³² See *ibid.*

²³³ See Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 134.

concept of authorial intention (of the IA) stands opposed to the creation by Joseph Smith of new speech-acts out of locutions of the biblical texts. Relatedly, SAT maintains balance with its focus on the triad of the author, the text and the reader, which is lacking in the hermeneutical practice of the LDS^C. The illocutionary impact on the implied reader is superseded by the contemporary conditions/assumptions of the LDS reader. Furthermore, the perlocutionary response of the implied reader is arrived at subjectively and then generally applied by the LDS interpreter (through the process of “likening the Scripture” to themselves), without any anchor to the illocutionary intention of the author. In many instances, the LDS^C mines the text solely for its locutionary value, with no intention to look for the illocutionary, let alone, perlocutionary aspects. LDS^C re-authoring, for example, neglects the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of these biblical texts. By separating biblical words and phrases from their immediate contexts, the illocutionary impact intended by the author is disregarded. From the perspective of SAT, this disregard casts doubt on the uses of the Bible by the LDS^C, since their current hermeneutical parameters do not allow for the informed creativity needed to enter the projected world of the text.

8.3.4. *Storied (narrative) hermeneutic*

Another element in interpretation is the narrational dimension of engaging a text. This draws attention to the storied background that every individual possesses. We use narrational foundations to navigate the complex environments we find ourselves in daily. We interpret stories, words and events in light of “all sorts of other stories that we habitually carry about with us.”²³⁴ We have a unifying web of stories that allow us to make sense of the events, texts and interactions surrounding us.²³⁵ We possess “deep-level perceptions of reality” that consist of our own stories and through which we view all events and texts we encounter.²³⁶ When we read the biblical text, then, there is a transformation as the careful interpreter is drawn into the story projected by the text.²³⁷ The narrative of Scripture allows careful readers to insert their own personal narratives into the grand narrative of God’s dealings with the world.²³⁸ Wright reminds his readers,

²³⁴ Wright, *People of God*, 66.

²³⁵ See Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 126.

²³⁶ See Wright, *People of God*, 123.

²³⁷ Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 138.

²³⁸ See Thiselton, *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 518. One would expect LDS scholars to welcome Thiselton’s contribution, given their claim of fulfilling the biblical narrative, although Thiselton’s views do raise methodological and epistemological questions. His language appears

“interpretation is storied and relational.”²³⁹ Even propositional knowledge does not exist in a vacuum, but is infused with foundational narratives. Indeed, all communication is narrational, given that the process assumes the reality of often-unnoticed interlocking stories.²⁴⁰ Subjective interpreters, according to Critical Realism, can assume that there is an objective reality. In a narrational hermeneutic, we see our subjectivity allowing our storied background to engage with the biblical narrative for a transformative, “story-changing” result.²⁴¹ In fact, Critical Realism “succeeds better than alternative approaches in accounting for the storied nature of our universe, [as it] presents us with the best opportunity to renew our understanding of history, literature and theology.”²⁴²

8.3.5. *LDS^C narrational hermeneutics*

LDS interpreters would assuredly welcome a narrational focus related to biblical interpretation, since, again, they view their own community as the continuation of the biblical narrative, not only as the restoration of the New Testament, but also of the Old Testament. Because of these perspectives, it is at least theoretically possible that they have found fresh points of entry into the ancient texts. This possibility gains traction precisely because they claim to “liken the Scripture to themselves.” Also, the transformative nature of narrative should find consonance with the LDS^C focus on a hermeneutics of praxis. In short, a narrational focus would seem to add some legitimacy to LDS^C interpretation.

However, given the complex and varied assumptions needed to sustain the focus on the community embodying the biblical narrative, it appears that their hermeneutical practice does not actually fulfill that promise. This community concept illustrates one of the significant sociological factors that account for the apparent inconsistencies in their interpretive methods. The hermeneutical issue is not that they see themselves as being in continuity with the biblical narrative, something that is true of most Christian traditions. Rather, the problem is that the LDS^C goes beyond this by “discovering” themselves in the biblical narrative.

close to that of the LDS and the problematic language of “inhabiting (or discovering oneself in) the world of the text.”

²³⁹ See Moritz, ‘Critical but Real,’ 185.

²⁴⁰ See Moritz, ‘Project Hermeneutics,’ Warehouse Theology website.

²⁴¹ Moritz, ‘Critical Realism,’ 149. However, Critical Realism insists that the authorial intentionality of the IA, as an external reality, must be the controlling factor in interpretation. Determinate meaning exists, “even if it is not objectively accessible” (*ibid.*); cf. Wright, *People of God*, 32; Moritz, ‘Scripture and Theological Exegesis,’ 136-137. Also, the use of an informed imagination in *narrational* engagement is another example of art in the interpretative process.

²⁴² Moritz, ‘Critical but Real,’ 174.

Their understanding of being narrational consists of simply finding themselves in the text. In other words, they import referentiality—the text, in reality, refers to them. *They* claim to be the embodiment of the narrational biblical movement, when in contrast, one should be arguing that narrational hermeneutics allows the text to stand within its own narrational context, being interpreted and respected only within this context.

8.4. Conclusion: Interpretive praxis of the LDS^C in light of philosophical hermeneutics

In this dissertation, my intention has been to present LDS^C hermeneutics as a worthwhile object of study. Even to the extent that it is impossible to articulate “one, satisfactory” LDS^C hermeneutic, I have proposed tentative, yet synchronic and heuristic depictions. Throughout this process, I have utilized Critical Realism as a framework to direct us, one that does justice to the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity. I acknowledge that we are subjective interpreters who assume there is an objective reality. Our pre-understandings are transformed by the objective reality of the biblical text, and we are transformed as we “perform” the text. We have also been assisted by the insights of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

After surveying the LDS^C asymmetrical viewpoint regarding the Bible, we noted the importance of continuing revelation, manifested specifically in personal and prophetic revelation and interpretation. A number of literalistic interpretations emerged. At the other end of the spectrum, allegorizations performed by the LDS^C demonstrated that perceived institutional needs drive their biblical interpretations. Their sociological interpretations attempt to justify the separation of the LDS^C (“the new-reform movement”) from the Christian church affected by the Great Apostasy (“the parent community”). Locutionary clarification and restoration is evident in their emendatory practices. Three outcomes of re-authoring, or locutionary reassignment, emerged: 1) Elevation of Joseph Smith, 2) Advancement of distinct doctrines and 3), Promotion of the institution.

We noted overlap in our five heuristic categories, and have acknowledged that numerous LDS^C texts can rightly be cited in more than one of these categories. We also noted that it is impossible to comprehensively systematize any tradition’s hermeneutics, given the artistic aspect of interpretation.

Nonetheless, a focus on general hermeneutical advances, especially those elucidated by Gadamer, such as the inescapability of interpretation, the concepts of ontology, presuppositions, community and application, assisted us in the examination of the five uses of the Bible by the LDS^C. Additionally, our investigation benefited from the perspectives garnered from the “geographical” locations of meaning, as well as the methodological possibilities of speech-act theory and narrational hermeneutics. Based on the evaluation of the four *interpretive* categories—literal, allegorical, sociological and emendatory, along with *non-interpretive* category of “re-authoring”—I have investigated the hermeneutical plausibility of the uses of the Bible by the LDS^C.

I began this chapter with the question: what potential do the concepts of philosophical hermeneutics have either in favor of the LDS^C or for our evaluation of their hermeneutics? We acknowledged a number of ways that their hermeneutical practices, at least initially, align themselves with accepted hermeneutical concerns. Examples of such resonance include a respect given to the ancient text evinced in a desire to restore it, an ontological focus on the interpreter, the need to consider the community in the interpretive process, and the important role of narrative, with narrational realities from Scripture reflected in the interpreter’s life. However, our final conclusions regarding the uses of the Bible by the LDS^C cannot overlook significant aspects of their hermeneutics that are hermeneutically implausible by the standards of the mainstream academy.

First, interpretive language is used as a substitute for actual interpretation, most notably in the assertions by Joseph Smith and Brigham Young that they *believed* the Bible, reading it “just as it was” (i.e., literally), in contradistinction to other traditions that held to “interpretations” of the Bible. There is also a consistent claim to avoid the practice of hermeneutics. However, in spite of the lack of acknowledgement of LDS authors on the need to “practice” hermeneutics,²⁴³ they are nonetheless active in interpretation. As much as this observation seems obvious, it needs to be restated, because the LDS^C operates under the assumption of being able to avoid discussions on the process of understanding biblical texts. Our consideration of accepted conclusions in philosophical hermeneutics is helpful to adequately account for the complexities of biblical interpretation—and for keeping accountable any reading of the Bible,

²⁴³ Again, LDS author James Siebach considers it problematic “to assume that systemic philosophical thought—even the application of hermeneutical categories—ought to be employed in order to clarify the content of revelation” (Siebach, in Paulsen and Musser (eds), *Mormonism in Dialogue*, 467).

LDS or otherwise. However, precisely because of the lack of hermeneutical reflection inherent in the LDS^C perspective, it is reasonable to conclude that their use of the Bible largely falls outside of the boundaries of accepted mainstream conclusions.

Besides a purported claim to be free of “hermeneutics,” our second conclusion regards the individualistic emphasis in LDS^C personal and prophetic interpretation. This subjective, methodological posture masks the ontological realism of the biblical texts, obscuring the conceptuality embodied in the text. In spite of the insistence on a “literal” interpretation, for example, the illocutionary intent of the implied author is neglected. The JST translation also illustrates this subjectivity, as words are added, changed or deleted according to the limited perspective of Joseph Smith.

Thirdly, interpretive freedom and flexibility is a hallmark of claimed LDS^C privilege. For example, on the one hand, thorough attention is given to the minutiae of word meanings in Genesis 1:1 or Hebrews 6:1, yet on the other hand, ancient texts exhibit allegorization to validate modern perspectives. In addition, we saw that passages are sociologically interpreted to justify a separate existence of the new reform movement, verses are updated to avoid unwelcome interpretation, and phrases and words are re-authored in order to elevate their founder. Because of such interpretive freedom and flexibility, responsible hermeneutical execution is lacking.

Our fourth and final conclusion centers on the “systemic parameters” of the LDS^C. The church’s hermeneutic claims positional priority over the biblical text. The use of the Bible appears to be a mining of the ancient text not for the interpretation of authorial meaning; nor for a listening to the text as “other”; nor for a validation of the ontological realism of the ancient text; but for the support of a hermeneutic that is centered on the LDS^C itself. They are quite willing to deploy hermeneutical language and biblical words. Yet they reduce the sum of biblical documents to a single repository of locutions, and such locutions are adjusted—with their referentiality often ignored, sometimes quite willfully. What remains in view, however, is the LDS^C.

The hermeneutical plausibility of many of the uses of the biblical text by the LDS^C needs to be questioned. The LDS^C goes beyond many accepted notions and parameters of mainstream scholarship. The *de facto* disallowance of hermeneutics is ultimately unsustainable. Rather than acknowledging subjectivity as an inevitable and potentially fruitful factor in the interpretation of “the other,”

it has been used by the LDS^C as a way of turning “the other” into a mirror. Ultimately, the real object of interpretation appears to be the LDS^C, and not the biblical text. To that extent, LDS^C hermeneutics reveals more about institutional parameters and motivations than it does about any interpretive commitment to the ancient biblical text.

Appendix #1

Five categories of uses of the Bible by the LDS^C

<i>Interpretive</i>				<i>Non-interpretive</i>
Literalistic (Chap 3)	Allegorization (Chap 4)	Sociological Approach (Chap 5)	Emendatory practices (Chap 6)	Re-authoring: Locutionary Reassignment (Chap 7)
<p>1. “If any of you lack wisdom” (James 1:5)</p> <p>2. “The head one of the Gods brought forth the Gods” (Gen 1:1)</p> <p>3. <i>Deification</i>: “participating in the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4); “heirs” of God (Rom 8:16-17); “we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2); “perfect” (Matt 5:48); “gods” (John 10/Ps 82, John 17)</p> <p>4. <i>Divine corporeality</i>: Gen 1:27, 5:1, 9:6, 18:1f; 32:30, Exod 24:9-10, 31:18, 33:11, Luke 24:39, John 14:9, 2 Cor 4:4, Phil 3:21, 1 John 3:2, Rev 22:4; cf. Isa 6; Exod 33); Jesus as “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15);</p>	<p>1. <i>Two sticks (BoM and Bible)</i>: Ezek 37</p> <p>2. <i>Sealed book speaking from ground (BoM)</i>: Isa 29</p> <p>3. <i>LDS as “Israel”</i>: Jer 23:3; 31:8, 9</p> <p>4. <i>LDS as NT church</i></p> <p>5. <i>LDS^C church as continuation of biblical narrative</i></p> <p>6. <i>LDS^C hermeneutical filter</i>: “Systemic Parameters”</p>	<p>1. <i>Continuing revelation</i>: Matt 16:16, 17; Gal 1:12; 2 Cor 12:1; cf. Gen 22; Gal 3:24; 1 Cor 13:9-10</p> <p>2. “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Eph 1:10)</p> <p>3. <i>Premortal existence</i>: chosen “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4; cf. 1 John 4:19; Job 38:4, 7; Jer 1:5; Acts 17:29; Rom 8:16; John 9:2)</p> <p>4. “baptism of the dead” (1 Cor 15:29; Zech 9:11)</p> <p>5. <i>Aaronic/</i></p>	<p>1. “uniformity of the gospel” (Gal 3:8)</p> <p>2. “...without father or mother” (Heb 7:3 explained in Alma 13)</p> <p>3. “other sheep” (John 10 in 3 Nephi 15:21)</p> <p>4. <i>Book of Mormon expansions</i> (Moroni 7:44-46; 1 Cor 13).</p> <p>5. <i>Adam and Eve died “spiritually”</i>: Gen 2:17; D&C 29:41</p> <p>6. <i>New Jerusalem in Missouri</i>: Rev 21:2 in D&C 57:1-3</p> <p>7. <i>Universalism</i>: John 5:28-29</p> <p>8. <i>The “gods” of Ps 82</i>: Book of Abraham 3:22-23</p>	<p>1. “same yesterday... forever” (Heb 13:8)</p> <p>2. “Father working out kingdom in fear/trembling” (Phil 2:12)</p> <p>3. “Here am I” (Isa 6:8)</p> <p>4. “Son of Man” (Dan 7:13)</p> <p>5. “first estate” (Jude 6)</p> <p>6. “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34)</p> <p>7. <i>Nephi reinterpreting</i>: 2 Nephi 26:16; Isa 29</p> <p>8. “seventy” (Exod 24:1; Luke 10:1)</p> <p>9. “levels”—three in heaven (1 Cor 15:40-42; 2 Cor 12:2)</p> <p>10. “sealing” (Matt 16:19; Eph 1:13,</p>

<p>in the “form of God” (Phil 2:6); the “express image of the (Father)” (Heb 1:3)</p> <p>5. <i>Imaging of God:</i> Gen 1:26-27; 5:3</p> <p>6. <i>Interpretation with/by Spirit:</i> I Cor 2:10-11; 2 Cor 3:8; 2 Peter 1:20-21</p> <p>7. <i>Burning bosom:</i> Luke 24:32</p> <p>8. <i>Guidance to Prophets:</i> “the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7; 2 Pet 1:20-21)</p> <p>9. <i>Prophetic Interpretation:</i> 2 Pet 1:19-21; Eph 4:11-16; Acts 6-12</p> <p>10. <i>Apostles:</i> Eph 4:11</p> <p>11. <i>Polygamy:</i> Gen 16:1-11; 29:28; 30:4, 9, 26; Exod 2:21; Num 12:1</p> <p>12. <i>“Other” books:</i> “Book of the Wars of the Lord” (Num 21:14; cf. I Cor 5:9, Col 4:16, 2 Chron 16:11; 25:26; 27:7; 32:32; Josh 10:13; 2 Sam 1:18, etc.)</p> <p>13. <i>Canon:</i> Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19</p>		<p><i>Melchizedek priesthood:</i> Gen 14:18-20; Acts 6:1-6</p> <p>6. <i>Coming apostasy becomes Great Apostasy:</i> Acts 20:29-31; 2 Thess 2:1-5, 7-11; I Tim 1:15; 4:1-3, 2 Tim 3:1-7; 3 John 9-10; Jude 17-18; cf. Isa 29:10; Amos 8:11</p> <p>7. <i>Angel bringing Gospel:</i> “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth...” (Rev 14:6; KJV)</p> <p>8. “times of restoration” (Acts 3:20)</p>	<p>9. <i>Creation Accounts:</i> Gen 1, 2 in Book of Moses, PGP</p> <p>10. <i>Singleness changed to eternal marriage:</i> JST of I Cor 7:7-8</p> <p>11. <i>Discrepancies with number of angels:</i> Mark 16:3, 4; John 20:12</p> <p>12. <i>Number of demoniacs healed:</i> Matt 8:28, 29; Mark 5:2</p> <p>13. <i>Noah repented, not God:</i> Gen 6:6 (Gen 8:13, JST).</p> <p>14. <i>“Calvinist” reading changed:</i> Acts 13:48</p> <p>15. <i>Misunderstanding of biblical word:</i> “elementary principles”: (Heb 6:1)</p> <p>16. Matt 10:14: “be ye therefore wise <i>servants</i>, and as harmless as doves” (JST)</p> <p>17. <i>LDS^C hermeneutical filter:</i> “Systemic Parameters”</p>	<p>4:30, 2 Cor 1:22)</p> <p>11. “keys” (Luke 11:52)</p> <p>12. “Urim and Thummim” (Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; Deut 33:8; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65)</p> <p>13. <i>Seerstone like divination cup:</i> Gen 44:5</p> <p>14. “precept upon precept, line upon line” (Isa 28:10).</p> <p>15. <i>LDS^C hermeneutical filter:</i> “Systemic Parameters”</p>
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