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**“GOD IS NEAR:” AMERICAN THEOCRACY AND THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY
OF JOSEPH SMITH**

by

ALAN KOENIG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate
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Abstract

“GOD IS NEAR:” AMERICAN THEOCRACY AND THE APOCALYPTIC POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF JOSEPH SMITH

by

ALAN P. KOENIG

Adviser: Professor Corey Robin

The Mormon prophet Joseph Smith established the quintessentially “American religion” according to religious critics like Harold Bloom, perhaps the last major religion to emerge in the Western world. Founded during the rise of Jacksonian Democracy, early Mormonism espoused many populist and egalitarian tenets, yet behind Smith’s theology of an ever more exalted path to individual godhood lay an extraordinary politics demanding a new, theocratic hierarchy. This dissertation will discuss how Smith’s apocalypticism and exceptional politics of continual revelation confronted a pluralistic Protestant society with the superseding aim of creating a uniquely American kingdom. As a political theorist, Smith’s apocalyptic theology challenges liberal pluralism both in its inception (by emerging out of pluralism itself from a seemingly integrated populace), through prizing unremitting revelation over reason in political discourse, and in the isolating peculiarity of its theocratic tenets. The intensity of these theocratic challenges illustrates that liberal theories have misperceived the true, protean nature of American theocracy and how best to engage it.

This dissertation will follow the tradition of scholars like Fawn Brodie, Marvin Hill, and Richard Lyman Bushman in referring to Joseph Smith as “Joseph,” and the primary focus herein will be on his political theology and the resulting religious movement of his time.

For Felix and Oliver:

in hopes of a better tomorrow.

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Introduction

The Devil was closing in on Joseph Smith. Though he would later waiver, Joseph sounded exuberantly defiant preaching before his flock on May 26th, 1844, one month before his assassination: his public faith was proudly unshaken, his apocalyptic vision of ultimate triumph undimmed. Besieged by anti-Mormon forces encircling his Church and apostates plotting within, Joseph delivered a scorching sermon exulting in the apocalyptic clash to come with enemies he had long assigned to Satan.¹ Satan had persecuted his people, the chosen people, throughout history, and the trials born by Joseph were a testament to his role as leader and true prophet of the Elect. That day in May Joseph proclaimed:

The Lord has constituted me so curiously that I glory in persecution . . . I shall always beat them. . . In all these affidavits, indictments, it is all of the devil – all corruption. Come on! ye Prosecutors! ye false swearers! All hell, boil over! Ye burning mountains, roll down your lava! for I will come out on the top at last. I have more to boast of than any man ever had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam . . . I boast that no man ever did such a work as I. . . . How I do love to hear the wolves howl!²

Amid the hyperbole and lupine swagger are elements of fact. Joseph, more than any other American political theologian and actor, established both a new major world religion and an actually existing theocracy, one that would prove the largest and most enduring since the founding of the republic. At the time of his murder he was not only Prophet, Seer, Revelator and President of the Church of Latter Day Saints, but also judge of the municipal court, Mayor of Nauvoo, “General” to over 5,000 troops, candidate for the President of the Unites States, and the secret “King, Priest and Ruler” of the incipient Kingdom of God on Earth.³

Despite incarceration, mob violence, mass expulsions of his followers, and at least two small wars lost against the state of Missouri, Joseph persisted in his theocratic drive for unified religious and secular power -- an unceasing practice of an extraordinary politics -- until his brutal death. He strove to achieve a more virtuous and compliant society under prophetic rule, one prepared for the imminent and total transformation of all the earth into the millennial kingdom of Christ's final resurrection. Founded during the social dislocations and political ruptures of the Jacksonian and Industrial Revolutions, Joseph's Mormon movement was tribal, prophetic, and profoundly patriarchal. To charge against the prevailing tides of greater democracy and Protestant pluralism in America required audacious innovation, bold new ideas of political theology to justify a series of theocratic city-states on the American frontier. How did Joseph accomplish this remarkable feat of political thought and action, what ideas and visions of a new society did he deploy to establish his counter-revolutionary political order and its cities of refuge and reaction? Why examine Joseph as a political theorist?

For this study, Joseph serves as an exemplar of American theocratic theory, a political theology that in its critiques of democracy, promotion of exceptional politics, and advocacy for the supremacy of a religious elite, seeks to supplant liberal pluralism. As I will demonstrate, Joseph deployed anti-democratic arguments and ideas that are strikingly similar to those of the political theorists Carl Schmitt and Joseph de Maistre as he sought to reverse the flow of political history in 19th century America and the world. His mission was to reassert the primacy of an epic age of the Hebraic Prophets and return to a culture and politics based on mystery and sacred order.⁴ Joseph's aspirational world was one of re-enchantment in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, his political ideal a prosperous kingdom where righteous patriarchs ruled over a chosen tribe with secret polygamous practices, and he established its theocratic foundational

polity during the same decade as the Seneca Falls Convention.⁵ Like the French reactionary Joseph de Maistre, he believed that “only sacred institutions based on the supernatural would survive. All others were “only a passing phenomenon.”⁶ And much like Carl Schmitt’s probing queries on the bases of legitimate authority, his tendency in political thought was to contest the constraints of the legally and socially normative in favor of the exceptional. For both Joseph and Schmitt, key problems of modern political theory could be overcome through the power of myth.⁷

In this dissertation, I posit three primary claims in service of my broader argument. First that Joseph’s political theology and theocratic project are paradigmatic of an understudied phenomenon: that in America’s secular system theocrats arise in *reaction* to -- and from within -- pluralism, amid the very sort of liberal accommodations that were originally thought to foster tolerance and prohibit theocracy. American theocracy is a different, more modern creature from its historical precedent in Europe, and political theory should pay more heed to its unique anatomy since much of pluralist theory still retains that first form as its imaginary other; much of American political thought has yet to engage with the actually existing gestalt of modern theocracy and its peculiar relationship to pluralism.

Second, the relationship between American theocracy and liberal pluralism that Joseph’s theocratic theology serves as a paragon of is a synthesis of both elements of liberalism and authoritarianism -- with the ultimate aim of superseding Lockean pluralism in America. I will define this theocratic mode of synthesis in the service of overcoming its host as antagonistic symbiosis. In order for theocracy to accommodate itself to, with the intent of supplanting, the dominant liberal order, Joseph’s theology introduces forms of democratic adaptability (e.g. in its populist appeals) and doctrinal flexibility. These paradoxical aspects make the nature and aims of

theocracy difficult for a liberal state and society to fully grasp and respond to. American political theory often takes the integrity of theocratic theologies for granted, believing that they are composed of deep traditions, comprehensive doctrines.⁸ I will argue that American theocracy is better characterized by its secrecy, fluidity, and doctrinal adaptability, traits that provide a mask to protect from liberal scrutiny and skepticism. This mask is not merely instrumental but integral to modern theocratic theology.

Third, American theocracy relies on the reassertion of ontological privilege in politics. Central to Joseph's exemplary political theology was the restoration of the social and political power of his revelations. This form of ostensibly archaic revelatory politics is disruptive to liberal pluralism not only because its permissible role in public discourse was long ago forbidden throughout Europe and therefore largely forgotten, but also for reasserting ontological claims into political contestations that cannot be respectfully handled within the public sphere. As this dissertation will demonstrate, the return and persistence of Joseph's mode of revelatory politics strikes against basic secular assumptions that undergird the normative order of modern pluralist society, a challenge well described by the exceptional politics advanced by Carl Schmitt.

The Anatomy of an American Theocracy

As a form of modern political theology, Joseph's theocratic drive and the apocalypticism that impelled it are remarkable, for they constituted a profoundly anti-liberal form of religious politics that relied on religious pluralism and religious liberty in order to incubate and spread. Founded on a rejection and intolerance of all other forms of Christianity, Joseph demanded tolerance and the rights of religious liberty from the Jacksonian America he preached his

Mormons would inherit, and he did so while openly situating his movement within the symbolic frame of America's tolerant, liberal civil religion. Joseph would publically laud the constitution and its republican values and deftly deploy the language of national providence and divinely-guaranteed liberties described by Robert Bellah as America's civil religion, while privately plotting the outlines of a theocratic empire.⁹ As the religious scholars Robert T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen observed, the "two dominant threads" in early Mormon theology were a "coercive, sometimes even violent antipluralism, along-side a ringing affirmation of the right of all people to freedom of conscience."¹⁰ In terms of American political theology and its actual theocratic practice, Joseph's thought and ministry are significant for the way they spin against the main drive of the liberal Protestantism that his religion emerged out of -- and should be considered more influential for foreshadowing the forms of American theocracy to follow.

Joseph's innovations in challenging American pluralism, for all their fabulous novelty, drew on modes of crisis already present in an American apocalyptic tradition. Parallel strands in this apocalyptic tradition posit historical moments of spiritual and political crisis that the state alone cannot answer, and the onset of these recurrent crises draw a sharp friend and enemy distinction between the pious and the profane. In his classic exploration of the Puritanical origins of the American jeremiad, Sacvan Bercovitch wrote in *The American Jeremiad* that the rhetorical cycle of apocalyptic lamentation and recommitment in early American sermons "made anxiety its end as well as its means. Crisis was the social norm it sought to inculcate. . . . The future, though divinely assured, was never quite there, and New England Jeremiahs set out to provide the sense of insecurity that would ensure the outcome."¹¹ According to Bercovitch, the jeremiad's impelling assumption is that America's providential mission must yet be fulfilled, and the norm of crisis it inculcates is a recurrent call for spiritual rearmament and political renewal.

Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860*, in a thematically overlapping theory American mythic narrative, portrays the Puritans encounters with the frontier and Native Americans as the genesis of a "myth of regeneration through violence [that] became the structuring metaphor of the American experience."¹² Through violent conflict with frontier "savagery," American society created new histories of a mission to revitalize civilization, a mythic aspiration that expressed their national desires for territorial expansion and autonomy.

Joseph's promises of apocalyptic deliverance were also premised on this very American style of crisis: spiritual refinement was to be achieved on the frontier through persecution from, and in conflict with, Satanic forces (i.e. gentiles) -- an age-old battle that would, notably in his early revelations, culminate in the annihilation of all outside the Mormon covenant.¹³ However initially similar, Joseph's political theology deviates from the civil religious throughlines described by Bercovitch and Slotkin in that its eschatology applies to a far more specific Elect, an emergent nation that breaks off from, and will ultimately triumph over, the American republic, while their jeremiads and regenerative dynamic are broader national tropes of republican renewal rooted in a more conventional Christian culture. The *Book of Mormon* and Joseph's later revelations inspired Mormon settlement efforts for an American Zion, crusading endeavors which, at their most grandiose, resembled imperial projects of Westward expansion.¹⁴

Separatism from mainstream culture in America is also its own tradition, having been a frequent social tactic for embryonic movements contesting conventional Christianity and forming new religions in America. Louis Hartz noted in his *The Liberal Tradition in America* the existence of a deep strain of a "curiously Hebraic kind of separatism" that "saturated the American sense of mission" and existed in tension with Christian universalism. Hartz perceived

this trope as a form of ethno-nationalist withdrawal from Europe, and in its specific notion of chosen-ness, an exemption from the sort of global crusades that had typified Europe. The historian of religion Philip Jenkins has described a more apocalyptic and internally contentious conception of American separatism, asserting that “The doomsday theme has never been far from the center of American religious thought. The nation has always had believers who responded to this threat by a determination to flee the wrath to come, to separate themselves from the City of Destruction, even if that means putting themselves at odds with the law and their communities and families.”¹⁵ Similarly, the scholar of religion R. Laurence Moore observes that new religious identities have emerged in America through a sense of antagonism. “[Many Americans] gained that sense [of what is meant to be an American] by turning aspects of a carefully nurtured sense of separate identity against a vaguely defined concept of mainstream culture . . . New religions, which have often been linked to ethnic identifications, have served as vehicles through which people have nurtured a sense of antagonistic culture.”¹⁶ Joseph would, in a parallel with Hartz’s version of separatism, develop his own theological form of Hebraic separatism as an integral part of a very American mission, one that would also contest the more established theories of Christian universalism with a vision of his own. But similar to Jenkin’s and Moore’s conceptions of separatism, Joseph’s form would be more explicitly apocalyptic, and therefore antagonistic towards mainstream culture in lieu of helping to define it.

As the historian Dan Erickson has emphasized about the evolution of Mormon distinctiveness and separatism, the epic battles in ancient America fought by the children of light and darkness in Mormon myth prefigured conflicts with non-Mormons during the early decades of the Church. “Smith and his early followers believed the Book of Mormon’s description of two main factions – true Christians under a theocratic government, and atheists who waged war

against the righteous – prophesied the reality of their day . . . Written from a Christian prophet’s perspective, dissent and pluralism were always destructive and evil.”¹⁷ Joseph’s prophecy of a Zion for his people would have to be wrested from its current inhabitants in Missouri, and with its militant rhetoric of damnation for non-Mormons, the early millenarian movement was ideologically primed for conflict with “gentiles.” Erickson notes that “Viewed as the refiner’s fire, persecution both fulfilled prophecy and was necessary prior to Christ’s return. This in turn led to a siege mentality. When the Saints’ early mistreatment validated their dualist philosophy, a cycle of apocalyptic belief and rhetoric led to additional persecution which further fed millennial anticipation.”¹⁸ Persecution led to a deepening desire for separation, a place of refuge in which the full doctrine of Mormonism could be safely revealed and its peculiar practices safely performed. Separation, in turn, would provide the distance from legal authority for the Mormon theocracy to usurp the individual rights for religious dissidents otherwise available in Jacksonian America, and intensify the more authoritarian aspects of social power in Joseph’s theocracy. That project, in his lifetime, would achieve its greatest degrees of political and social control under the legal autonomy of the Nauvoo, Illinois city charter and then, after Joseph’s death, in the Deseret Kingdom (the future state of Utah) on America’s western frontier.

These inherent elements of apocalyptic separatism and antagonism illustrate that the emergence Joseph’s theocratic theology from its pluralist seedbed poses a challenge to pluralist theories of a state of relative religious tolerance and comity in America, both on the theoretical level and within certain American historical accounts. Robert Putnam and David Campbell’s *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, for example, portrays America’s history

of religious diversity as remarkably tolerant: “From its founding, America has had religious tolerance coded in its national DNA. In saying this, we must recognize that at the time of the Founding magnanimity towards different religions was contained in various Protestant sects . . . the early years of the republic were informed by John Locke’s conception of religious toleration.”¹⁹ Similarly, Samuel Huntington wrote in *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity* that

The “separation of church and state” is the corollary to the identity of religion and society. . . It was spectacularly successful. In the absence of a state religion, Americans were not only free to believe what they wished but also to create whatever religious communities and organizations they wished. As a result, Americans have been unique among peoples in the diversity of sects, denominations, and religious movements to which they have given birth, almost all embodying some form of Protestantism.²⁰

If such tolerance is truly coded in American DNA as Putnam and Campbell suggest, then how did a home grown anti-pluralist faith emerge from the diversity of tolerant Protestant sects? And for Huntington’s premise that secular separation was the corollary to the very identity of American religion, then why was the theocratic unification of state and religion integral to what Bloom has labeled “The American Religion”?

The conventional shorthand for America’s Lockean arrangement links religious freedom to tolerance as a both a guarantor and key component of liberal politics. As we shall investigate, the whole liberal Protestant historical evolution of political theology from Luther to Locke actually contains more complicated and rigorous qualifications for inclusion into the field of religious tolerance, and has consistently sought to contain the very elements of revelation and apocalypticism that Joseph would employ to break away from the liberal legacy of the Reformation. Perez Zagorin in his *How the Idea of Religious Tolerance Came to the West* traces the influence of religious thinkers like Erasmus, John Locke, John Milton and Thomas More in

arguing that concern for the spiritual welfare of religion itself promoted norms of toleration and allowed diverse Christian faiths to flourish together, yet a Protestant offshoot in a land of unparalleled religious freedom declared all of Christianity an abomination and prophesied the end of the “gentile” world.²¹ The political philosopher Elizabeth Pritchard, among others, cogently argues that Locke’s conception of religious pluralism, and its extension of tolerance and freedom, relies on the public circulation and scrutiny of religious doctrines, a sharp limit to just how private a faith could be in order to gain tolerance, a qualification which is often forgotten in conventional summaries praising America’s vaunted secular success.²² The theocratic characteristics in Joseph’s political theology not only reintroduces us to those neglected qualifications, but exposes the modern limits and deficiencies of religious tolerance, as well as how theocracy can emerge from within a liberal consensus demanding its freedoms.

Theocracy and Theocratic Paradoxes

Whereas the political theorist Lucas Swaine defines theocracy as “a mode of governance prioritizing a religious conception of the good that is strict and comprehensive in its range of teaching,” I will define theocracy as a mode of governance that strictly prioritizes a religious conception of ontological privilege as the ultimate source of sovereign authority.²³ To clarify this definition, I advance two qualifying explanations. First, only a select group within a theocratic polity possesses the ontological privilege to a degree significant enough to make governing decisions. A more egalitarian access to revelation or miracle sufficient for governing decisions would diminish clear lines of authority, a quality that I will elaborate on in chapters one and four. Second, the fluidity and adaptability of Joseph’s theology illustrates the difficulty of synthesizing anything either comprehensive or doctrinaire in a theology being guided by ever shifting

“revelation adopted to the circumstance in which the children of the kingdom are placed.”²⁴ As will be discussed in chapters four and five, the pace of Joseph’s revelations placed doctrines and even fundamental tenets in flux. The liberal attempt to discover an overlapping consensus with such a protean faith is made more difficult by the assumption that it does in fact constitute a comprehensive doctrine. The political theorist Sarah Song touches on the frequent oversight of this aspect when she writes that certain identity groups “do not necessarily share a comprehensive worldview,” an observation that should qualify assertions to the contrary throughout political theory.²⁵

In discussing how fluid Joseph’s political theology was, how secretive and slippery it could appear, a caveat is in order: part of the paradoxical challenge that American theocracy poses to liberalism is the contrast between the deep grounding of its claimed tradition and the true dynamism of its doctrines and tenets. Joseph’s theology epitomized this paradox: one of his first revelations declared that all other faiths were an “abomination,” later in his ministry Joseph would proudly embrace religious liberty and declare that all faiths were welcome to be practiced under his protection in Nauvoo. The early Mormon movement was strongly anti-Masonic in its sacred texts and doctrines, the later movement covertly embraced Masonic membership and ritual. Joseph stridently preached against abolitionism in 1836 and proposed abolishing slavery as part of his presidential platform in 1844.²⁶ Both the *Book of Mormon* and an early Church commandment explicitly prohibited plural marriage, a later secret revelation commanded its practice on pain of death. Joseph initially derided the “priestcraft” of established denominations, promising that his faith offered a more egalitarian access to spiritual gifts and authority – before beginning to “restore” complex orders of priesthood allegedly tied to ancient Israel. Joseph would frequently praise the US constitution as being divinely inspired, and declare his fervent

support of it, while his later proclamation of “The Government of God” (1842) and Theodemocracy (1844) argued that republicanism was doomed, while his Theocratic Council plotted to establish an autonomous kingdom that would shortly supersede the republic. While his revelations were advertised as the word of God, Joseph would frequently edit them, sometimes establishing a form of retroactive continuity with newer doctrines.²⁷

Structure of the Dissertation

In investigating American theocracy’s historical origins and unique theological path through American liberalism, chapter two will begin with European states closing down revelations, a political necessity as the Bible became more democratically accessible, a development that ultimately helped form the rough outlines of Lockean tolerance. From there I will demonstrate how the Mormon antipathy to pluralism in all its forms was remedied by the authority of a prophet promising the ‘true religion,’ a religion that paradoxically required the liberties and freedoms of the American frontier in order to thrive.

Chapter three will examine the paradox that though Joseph perceived pluralism as a spiritual and political catastrophe, American religious and cultural pluralism also equipped him with the diverse cultural sources and materials to forge his own theological heterodoxies and populist religious appeals. Pluralism was both opponent and resource, providing him with the mythic resources to enact his own Exodus. In particular, 18th century occult millenarianism would provide Joseph not only the appropriate eschatological stage for the emergence of “latter-day” saints with a new covenant, but serve as a capstone between for the long-running subcultural effort to unite the occult folk practices common in rural American and Joseph’s family with a restored Christianity. At the conclusion of this chapter, I will return to Locke’s

political theology to see how these imaginative extravagances of Joseph's apocalyptic theocracy appears as a haunted iteration of the liberalism it seeks to overcome, in effect, a Lockean nightmare.

Once I have established the historical roots of Joseph's political theology and its antagonistic symbiosis with Lockean liberalism, chapter four will investigate how it operates within its host by engaging Joseph's political theology with contemporary liberal theorists. Through that theoretical engagement we can better grasp both the protean aspects of its theocratic nature and how it participates in the rights and freedoms at the core of liberalism while cultivating a secrecy and authoritarianism that operates outside of the peripheral vision of the liberal state.

Chapter five will first recount how Thomas Hobbes and John Locke's arguments attempted to divorce disruptive religious concepts like the miracle and sacrifice from politics. The theories of Hobbes and Locke helped to establish modern secular safeguards against theocracy within liberalism, and in reaction, later theorists like Joseph de Maistre and Carl Schmitt aspired to circumvent them in order to reconceive authoritarian political theology. Joseph Smith would actually do so, and in this chapter I will demonstrate how his prophetic authority was a form of Schmittian exceptional politics operating in 19th century America.

Chapter six details how, once Joseph was securely established in his theocratic city-state, he more aggressively promoted the peculiar perogatives of his rapidly evolving theology in order to form his own ethno-nationalist people out of the pluralist array. His antagonistic symbiosis with American pluralism best functioned by fusing theocratic precepts analogous to those found in Schmittian and Maistrean political theology with demands for religious liberty. The peculiar

doctrines that made early Mormonism distinct from its Protestant origins struck against key concepts of liberal political theory, and they overlapped in complex and subtle ways that American pluralist society found difficult to legally regulate. Finally, I will diagnose some of the idiosyncrasies of modern revelatory politics that Maistre and Schmitt did not have to confront in their theories: how faith in revelation, when challenged by public skepticism, must remain secretive to survive, and how, in chapter seven, the constant evocation of the sacred in quotidian politics inevitably turns revelatory politics banal.

Chapter 1: Political Biography

“We have learned through sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called but few are chose.” – Joseph Smith, prophesying from the Liberty Jail, March 20, 1839¹

Born in Vermont in 1805 and raised in a region of upstate New York where religious revivals “by their very excess deadened a normal antipathy towards religious eccentricity,”² Joseph Smith claimed to have received his first vision of angelic prophecy in 1820.³ Subsequent visions throughout the 1820s emboldened him to restore an Old Testament mode of testimony, condemnation, and prophecy to an age of newspapers, daguerreotypes, and telegraphs. He marries the former Emma Hale in 1825 and in September of 1827, he claimed to have extracted golden plates with ancient hieroglyphics from a hill near Palmyra, New York while guided by an angel.⁴ In between his first vision and the translation of the plates, his regional reputation as a practitioner of folk magic led to a career as a “treasure-digger,” a searcher for buried gold or magical artifacts, which ended in his being charged for fraud in Palmyra in 1826. Joseph confessed in court records to using a “seer stone” to search for buried treasure, an adventure he claimed to weary of.⁵

After abandoning money digging, Joseph’s most famous work, the *Book of Mormon* was “translated” by him during 1827-28 from the gold plates, and in 1830 he formally organized his small movement into the “Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints.”⁶ Joseph’s early Mormonism was a religion rife with apocalypticism, in which its adherents are, literally, “Latter Day Saints” steadily working toward the future Kingdom of God in America, and he compared his mission

and intended empire on earth to that of Mohammed, warning that he would spread his new faith through the “the Alcoran or the sword.” He was, through the power of his revelation, a “rough stone rolling” that would smash any country, opponent, or unjust law in his path, and whenever he felt himself politically thwarted, his visions and proclamations invoked apocalyptic license.⁷

The backbone of the early church consisted of the initial “Three Witnesses” to the *Book of Mormon* (Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer), and the former Methodist priest Sidney Rigdon, who all joined with Joseph in Kirtland Ohio after increasing controversy and harassment in New York and a revelation from Joseph that instructed them to “assemble together at the Ohio.”⁸ Missionary efforts spread rapidly throughout the United States, Canada and Great Britain, and while visiting Jackson County, Missouri in July of 1831, Joseph would later reveal that the site was the original Garden of Eden.⁹ The Mormon settlement to be built on it would be “The City of Zion,” a “New Jerusalem” to serve as both a refuge for the Mormons at the millennium, and the foundational site for the future Kingdom God where the Lord would “consecrate the riches of the gentiles, unto my people.”¹⁰ At this stage of his ministry, Joseph appeared to be primarily fixated on congregational and local control, seemingly uninterested in the United States as a political entity or specific prophetic setting; the republic had no unique place among the nations of the world in the first few years of his early apocalyptic schema.¹¹ His first revelations of the fiery demise of the American republic came in December of 1832, during the South Carolina nullification crises, when he foretold a cataclysmic battle between Northern and Southern states that would destroy the Union and engulf the world. When the crisis waned, the prophecy was quietly suppressed for nineteen years, until Joseph’s successor, Brigham Young, reintroduced it to great acclaim among the faithful in 1851 as a vision of the coming Civil War.¹²

Joseph prophesied that his latter-day Saints would soon rise to inherit America after the corrupt and invidious republic had fallen. In the interim, his overarching political strategy focused mainly on two tracks: advocating on behalf of greater religious liberty for him and his persecuted people and the stealthier promotion of a proto-nationalist, and ultimately ethno-religious, separation. This separation from an American society of largely Protestant pluralism was all the more remarkable since the vast majority of his converts came from Protestant denominations. (Joseph himself was raised in a household split between Presbyterianism and Methodism.) The enmity towards these “Gentiles” was expressed in many revelations early in the formation of the Church.¹³ Before Mormon settlers had even set out for the promised land of Missouri, a revelation delivered in February of 1831 from Kirtland, Ohio declared: “For it shall come to pass, that which I spake by the mouths of my prophets shall be fulfilled; for I will consecrate the riches of the Gentiles, unto my people which are of the house of Israel.”¹⁴ In June of 1831, about a month before Joseph arrived in Missouri, another revelation elaborated: “And thus, even as I said, if ye are faithful, ye shall assemble yourselves together to rejoice upon the land of Missouri, which is the land of your inheritance, which is now the land of your enemies.”¹⁵ Arriving with such a millenarian assurance, the Mormon settlers were primed for conflict with their new Missouri neighbors.¹⁶

After establishing Zion in Missouri, the main portions of the Mormon movement were now divided between the border states of Missouri and Ohio, and local persecution grew in response to expanding Mormon populations in both locales -- notably their growing political power through block voting, antagonism over the issue of slavery (the Mormons were opposed), commercial insularity, and the antagonistic rhetoric of repossessing the land of the gentiles for the Mormon faithful.¹⁷ In 1832, Joseph and Rigdon were beaten, tarred and feathered in Ohio,¹⁸

and mobs began to attack the Missouri settlements in early 1833, forcing the majority of Mormons to abandon the state by the end of the year.¹⁹ This expulsion radicalized Joseph's politics, introducing a new focus in his thought and preaching on the limits of secular law to contain religious authority, while new revelations promised divine retribution upon the Gentiles for their apostasy and arrogance:

the Gentiles received the covenant . . . but the Gentiles have not continued in the goodness of God, but have departed from the faith that was once delivered to the Saints, and have broken the covenant in which their fathers were established; and have become high-minded, and have not feared; therefore, but few of them will be gathered with the chosen family. Have not the pride, high-mindedness, and unbelief of the Gentiles, provoked the Holy One of Israel to withdraw His Holy Spirit from them, and send forth His judgments to scourge them for their wickedness?²⁰

The mob attacks in Missouri also convinced Joseph that though his own authority should not be constrained by secular law, an appeal to the federal government was the only means to redress the Mormon losses in land and property, and a revelation soon followed on August 6th of 1833, advising “the Saints to befriend constitutional law.”²¹ Bushman and R. Laurence Moore note that from that point forward the Mormon's public story focused much less on their saga of new scriptures and dramatic revelations that superseded traditional Christianity, and far more on the religious persecution they experienced at the hands of bigoted mobs. Joseph would complain to visitors that “In this boasted land of liberty [the Mormons] were brought into Jeopardy, and threatened with expulsion or death because they wished to worship God according to the revelations of heaven, the constitutions of their country, and the dictates of their own consciences. Oh Liberty, how art thou fallen!”²² The revelation in August 1833 also provided an increasingly theocratic approach to secular law according to the Mormon historian Michael D. Quinn, one that first theologially “established Mormonism as *imperio in imperium* – a religious sovereignty within the civil sovereignty of the United States of America.”²³ Three years after the founding of

his Church, Joseph already conceived of religious liberty as not merely a constitutional protection bounded in the more conventionally liberal sense, but as a theocratic freedom for greater autonomy for him and his Church. Throughout his ministry, Joseph ran into repeated trouble with courts and local authorities, conflicts in which he frequently framed his opponents as agents of Satan and his persecution as further evidence of his prophetic role.²⁴ Guided by Joseph, Mormons would contest the legitimacy of the state most frequently over issues of Mormon counterfeiting and polygamy, but most directly over – notably during the Missouri War and Joseph’s final arrest in June of 1844 – fears that secular law would arrest and unfairly try the Prophet.²⁵

Guided by a prophetic vision, Joseph briefly organized and led a militia force of nearly 200 called “Zion’s Camp” to “redeem” the holy land in Missouri in the spring of 1834, but heavily outnumbered, fractious, and cholera-ridden, the small force headed back to Ohio with shots unfired and much grumbling. The apparent defeat both precipitated an outbreak of open dissent over the failed prophecy of reclaiming Zion and charges against Joseph’s inept leadership. Simultaneously, those loyalists who stood by Joseph formed a tighter nucleus around the Prophet that would become the core of his reorganized Church hierarchy.

Despite the discontent and growing fractures in the Missouri settlements, the local economy prospered in Kirtland for three years during the national land speculation boom, and the Mormon movement continued to grow until the financial crash of 1837, when debt and sour business deals contributed to internal frictions. During the economic boom, Church elders had acted on a revelation from Joseph to establish a Mormon-run bank in Kirtland, but since they were unable to secure verifiable assets, the state of Ohio denied them a charter. Citing gentile prejudice and God’s will, Joseph printed out currency notes regardless, calling his fraudulent

institution an “*Anti-Banking Company*” and he appeared to believe that “his debts, along with those of his followers, could be wiped out by merely printing these notes and using them to pay creditors.”²⁶ Joseph had prophesied that the bank would soon grow to consume all other banks and “survive when all other should be laid to ruins,”²⁷ and its crash during the panic of 1837 resulted in yet another schism, as well as his conviction for illegal banking and an outstanding warrant for bank fraud in Ohio.²⁸

Rigdon and Joseph fled from Ohio to Missouri to avoid creditors, lawsuits, and unanswered warrants, but the struggling colonies in Missouri encountered the same frictions with their neighbors as had the previous settlement ventures. The outside threats and internal murmurings and divisions inspired the formation of the Danites among the loyalists in Missouri, “a secret society, several hundred strong, organized in June of 1838, to drive out dissenters, using violence when necessary.”²⁹ Despite their efforts at secrecy, the Danites’ militant reputation grew nationally during and after the Missouri War of 1838. Mark Twain would report, almost four decades later, that it was open knowledge that these “Destroying Angels” were set apart by the Church to conduct permanent disappearances of obnoxious citizen.”³⁰ Even some of the more sympathetic Mormon scholars, like Bushman, regard the Danites as “an example of religious power run amok.”³¹

Danite veterans would later assist Joseph in the establishment of his theocratic Council of Fifty, a secret cadre working towards building the post-apocalyptic Kingdom of God. The formation of the Danites in the late 1830s presaged a political route the Mormons would increasingly travel in Illinois in the early 1840s; that of “creating [their] own alternative civil and political institutions as the basis of theocracy.”³² According to Fawn Brodie, justifications for the formation of both the Danites and the Council of the Fifty emerged from Joseph’s revelations

to organize and lead the elect in the final days, that “one man empowered from Jehovah has more influence with the children of men than eight hundred million led by the precepts of men.”³³ Though numerous Saints would testify that Joseph attended Danite meetings and that the organization was established on the basis of his revelations, Joseph later denied explicit knowledge of the organization and kept a low profile in founding and managing the Danites. A mysterious British ex-patriate, Dr. Sampson Avard was their public founder and face. Avard would lecture new recruits that “You have been chosen to be our leading men, or captains to rule over this last kingdom of Jesus Christ,”³⁴ and his apocalyptic rhetoric was not anomalous; speaking of the intensifying conflict with their Missouri neighbors, Sidney Rigdon warned on July 4th, 1838: “That mob that comes upon us to disturb us; it shall be between them and us a war of extermination, for we will follow them, till the last drop of their blood was spilled, or else they will have to exterminate us.”³⁵ Marvin Hill finds that many Church elders were very much aware of Danite “extravagances,” and he remarks that “it does not seem likely that in a town made up of Mormons, where Smith’s word was law, that the Danites could have done very much without Smith hearing about it from one of these men.”³⁶ Michael D. Quinn argues that “Avard was a stalking-horse” for Smith and Sidney Rigdon, and the Danite constitution specified that Smith was the commander-in-chief.³⁷

The consolidation of political power in Missouri around Joseph was too much for many of his oldest allies within the Church hierarchy, and the remaining *Book of Mormon* witnesses were excommunicated and warned by loyalists, many of them Danites, to flee the Missouri settlements immediately, “or a more fatal calamity shall befall you.”³⁸ Outside of Joseph’s own family members, those early Church members who were most pivotal in certifying and publicizing the *Book of Mormon* all quit the movement in the schisms of 1837 and 1838. After

their defections, Joseph would become increasingly concerned with enforcing loyalty and curbing apostasy.³⁹

The rapidly growing Mormon population in Daviess County, Missouri, and their penchant for bloc voting, led to skirmishes during local elections followed by the forcible extraction of an affidavit of impartiality from a justice of the peace by Avar and a party of fifty mounted Mormons.⁴⁰ The justice complained of Mormon intimidation to a circuit judge and another warrant was issued for Joseph's arrest for allegedly masterminding the thuggery. Concern over whether the Mormons would abide by criminal complaints resulted in the mobilization of state militia, and a rapid exodus of Mormons from Daviess County, as tit-for-tat vigilantism and plundering erupted on both sides.⁴¹ When a colonel of the Mormon militia beseeched Joseph to stop the looting and march to war, Joseph replied that he was like the rough stone rolling from Daniel's prophecy, and would crush all enemy kingdoms in his path.⁴² A few weeks later with crises worsening, the governor of Missouri, in a rhetorical echo of Rigdon's Fourth of July speech, declared that "the Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State if necessary for the public peace – their outrages are beyond all description." Bushman notes that the citizens of Northern Missouri were already "fixed on expulsion" even before the governor's legal sanction.⁴³

The Mormon War consisted of a series of small militia skirmishes, followed by a massacre of roughly 20 Mormon settlers at Haun's Mill on October 30th, which quickly convinced Joseph to surrender to the superior forces of the state militia. He was charged with treason, arson and murder.⁴⁴ During the trial, Sampson Avar testified as a chief witness for the

prosecution that Joseph had “compared the Mormon church to the little stone spoken of by the Prophet Daniel; and the dissenters first, and the State next, was part of the image that should be destroyed by this little stone.”⁴⁵ Like Avar, the majority of the state’s witnesses were or had been leading Mormons, and their testimony placed Joseph “squarely at the center of a plot to erect an independent government that planned to wage war on the state of Missouri.”⁴⁶ Denying that the Danites were a legitimate part of his Church, Joseph blamed Avar for leading Mormons astray, and would later repudiate them as “frauds and secret abominations.”⁴⁷ Joseph, and those Church leaders that did not turn state’s evidence against him, were confined to jail in Liberty, Missouri for several months during the trial, but after a couple of failed attempts all of them managed to escape in April of 1839 and flee to Nauvoo, Illinois.

While in the jail Joseph had written letters to his followers denying that he was a fallen prophet, and oddly took the time to refute rumors of polygamy that weren’t germane to the trial.⁴⁸ He also resumed his lectures on the importance of religious liberty. “The Constitution of the United States,” he enthused, “is a glorious banner; it is to all those who are privileged with the sweets of liberty, like the cooling shades and refreshing waters of a great rock in a thirsty and weary land.” Joseph wrote that he planned to keep the Constitution, for the Framers (though Gentiles) were divinely inspired, and their work was of such tremendous importance that he placed it between God and the Bible in a ranking of the sacred.⁴⁹ Its best components, particularly regarding religious liberties, were to be enhanced over time, built upon and expanded through new prophecies.⁵⁰ Joseph’s innovation in American political theology was to nestle his exceptional politics within liberal arguments for liberty, rights, and privacy. He would continually laude the constitution and its protections, declaring, “I am an advocate of unadulterated freedom,” while covertly building a theocracy as an extension of that freedom.⁵¹

Once free and settled in Illinois, Joseph was determined to win back some form of reparations from the federal government for the persecutions Mormons had suffered. Joseph left for Washington DC in late October, and on November 29th, accompanied by an Illinois congressman, knocked on the door of the White House. According to his congressman (later Governor of Illinois) John Reynolds:

When we were about to enter the apartment of Mr. Van Buren, the prophet asked me to introduce him as a "Latter-Day Saint." It was so unexpected and so strange to me . . . that I could scarcely believe he would urge such nonsense on this occasion to the President. But he repeated the request, when I asked him if I understood him. I introduced him as a "Latter-Day Saint," which made the President smile.⁵²

Despite this and another meeting two months later, Van Buren could only assure Joseph that though his cause was just he could do nothing for the Mormons. To do so would put him in conflict with the entire state of Missouri.⁵³ Stung, Joseph turned to Congress, lobbying many individual members, including a fruitless interview with Senator John C. Calhoun that turned into an extended epistolary exchange on American political theory and the power of the federal government to redress grievances in states.⁵⁴ Calhoun was unpersuaded by Joseph's attack on states' rights and his expansive view of federal power to overturn state laws that trample religious liberty.⁵⁵ Unable to win over Calhoun or any other substantive support, Joseph temporarily retreated from the federal arena back to Nauvoo, Illinois. (Peter Barnett, Joseph's attorney in Missouri became the Governor of California, while a sympathetic Illinois judge, Steven Douglas, would become the famous Senator and debating partner of Abraham Lincoln.)

Nauvoo, or "beautiful place" in Joseph's understanding of Hebrew, was the last of his holy cities, and the place where his theocratic thought and authority most thoroughly developed. Having no faith in due process from the state of Missouri, and denied any possible federal redress for his grievances, Joseph was now determined to protect his people and his ministry by

“neutralizing any future opposition to Mormon settlements in Illinois.”⁵⁶ Bloc voting and a well-connected new recruit, the roguish John C. Bennett, assisted Joseph in obtaining a unique city charter for Nauvoo from the closely divided state legislature of Illinois, one that granted the Mormons an unusual degree of municipal rights in relation to state law, particularly against out-of-jurisdiction warrants, a key protection for the still fugitive Joseph and Sidney Rigdon. Containing a curious clause for capacious executive legal interpretation, city officers were empowered to “pass ordinances that contradicted state law, as long as those ordinances did not conflict with the state or national constitution.”⁵⁷ Joseph believed that the charter granted him expansive executive power, enough to nullify state and national law when he thought it necessary to protect local autonomy and religious freedom: “I concocted it for the salvation of the church, and on principles so broad, that every honest man might dwell secure under its protective influence.”⁵⁸

The city charter also granted the right to organize a “University of the City of Nauvoo” and a Mormon militia, the Nauvoo Legion, supposedly under the ultimate command of the governor, though Joseph was designated its commanding officer and “Lt. General.” The sheer size of the sectarian militia, which quickly grew to the largest armed force in the state, “made the prophet the focus of intense fear and hatred” among neighbors in Illinois.⁵⁹ Joseph’s willingness to trade the Mormon voting bloc for political favors did nothing to further endear him and his people. Disdaining any ideological or partisan loyalties, he proclaimed “we care not a fig for *Whig* or *Democrat* . . . We shall go for our *friends*, our TRIED FRIENDS, and the cause of *human liberty*, which is the cause of God.”⁶⁰ Vacillating between the parties only managed to annoy both of them.⁶¹

From Nauvoo, a revelation in January 1841 commanded Joseph to write a proclamation “to all the kings of the world . . . to the honorable president-elect [William Harrison], and the high-minded governors of the nation in which you live, and to all the nations of the earth scattered abroad.”⁶² Addressing them both “in the spirit of meekness and by the power of the Holy Ghost,” Joseph was tasked with explaining the will of God to diverse political authorities across the world. This revelation, like earlier ones, assumed an unbounded concept of sovereign authority, but now secure in Nauvoo, it is far bolder in challenging political authorities to listen.⁶³ The following month, Joseph -- who had once prophesied that all other forms of Christianity were an abomination -- enshrined protections for religious liberty in the Nauvoo city ordinances, offering sanctuary to all faiths, and criminalizing the ridiculing of anyone’s religion for up to a \$300 fine and six months imprisonment, as judged by the city’s mayor.⁶⁴ As noted by the historian Patrick Mason, the statute “conveniently provided the first line of defense” against dissenters for Nauvoo’s Mormon leadership.⁶⁵

That July, Joseph wrote in the Mormon newspaper *Times and Seasons* that Mormon political power, as guided by his revelations, had global sovereignty. “It has been the design of Jehovah, from the commencement of the world, and is his purpose now, to regulate the affairs of the world in his own time; to stand as head of the universe and take the reins of government.”⁶⁶ Though busy applying God’s will to political matters of local and global import, Joseph found time to declare bankruptcy in 1842, taking advantage of the brief legal window for a federal bankruptcy law passed by the Whigs that would be repealed the next year.⁶⁷

Not satisfied with the independence granted by the Illinois legislatures, in December of 1843 Joseph petitioned the US Congress to declare Nauvoo an autonomous federal territory so that the empowered mayor (himself) could mobilize his militia and US troops in its defense.⁶⁸

While publically committing to maintaining national law and order, Joseph had been cavalier about state laws regarding monogamous marriage since the mid-1830s, and in 1841 he quietly informs the governing Church body, the Quorum of the Twelve, that plural marriage is a secret commandment ordered by God to fully restore the ancient priesthood and deliver celestial glories in the afterlife.⁶⁹ Joseph weds another wife in April of 1841 and over the next two and half years, marries at least another thirty women, ten of them already wed to other men.⁷⁰ These were often portrayed as Abrahamic tests of his closest disciples, proposals that they share their wives with him in “celestial marriage.”⁷¹

Limits, when they did come, arrived from outside the Mormon community in Nauvoo. In May of 1842, Joseph’s former chief aid and the Church’s First President, John C. Bennett, is excommunicated, partly on allegations of sexual impropriety (his polygamy was apparently freelance, unapproved by Joseph), and he retaliates with a nationally distributed exposé that the Mormon elite are covertly practicing polygamy. Joseph denies this publically but continues to expand the practice among his most trusted apostles in private. That March he secretly organizes a theocratic Council of Fifty, an organization charged with: deciding which secular laws Mormons should honor, initiating the grand enterprise of Western exploration and settlement, and serving as a nucleus for the future government of the Kingdom of God to rule over all temporal and spiritual affairs.⁷² In turn, the Council ordains him a “King, Priest, and Ruler over Israel on Earth.”⁷³ Though these various strategies of expansion were covert, not all of his more grandiose plans were; already in October of 1842, Joseph had publicly proposed in a Mormon newspaper to lead 100,000 Mormon soldiers and scouts into the American West for exploration and settlement.⁷⁴

Joseph sent ambassadors to Washington, DC, England, France, the Republic of Texas, and Russia in March and April of 1844 with private instructions to coordinate Mormon interests in establishing large colonies in Texas California and the Oregon territory. As he had successfully played off Whigs against Democrats in Illinois state politics, so too was he ready to repeat the strategy on the international stage by exploiting international rivalries for the advance of his nascent kingdom.⁷⁵ By January of 1844, confident in the political and military power he had amassed, Joseph declares himself a candidate for President of the United States, and that April he openly advocates for a:

Theodemocracy, where God and the people hold the power to conduct the affairs of men in righteousness. And where liberty, free trade, and sailor's rights, and the protection of life and property shall be maintained inviolate, for the benefit of ALL. To exalt mankind is nobly acting the part of a God; to degrade them, is meanly doing the drudgery of the devil. Unitas, libertas, caritas-esto perpetua! With the highest sentiments of regard for all men, I am an advocate of unadulterated freedom.⁷⁶

Mason asserts that this Mormon conception of freedom did not perceive “their theodemocratic ideas as competing with the principles of American constitutional democracy,” so much as “fulfilling them, in much the same way that Jesus taught that his gospel fulfilled, not destroyed, the Jewish law.”⁷⁷ Joseph’s more precise political expectations in seeking the presidency that election year appear unclear. On one hand, in announcing his candidacy he declared that if he were not elected the nation would be doomed.⁷⁸ On the other hand, he discussed his political possibilities with visitors in a slightly more practical tone, discussing how much leverage was to be gained as a third party spoiler – at least for the election cycle of 1844.⁷⁹

Joseph’s secret polygamist and theocratic practices were further publicized and scathingly condemned by Mormon dissenters who had set up an opposition press in Nauvoo in June of 1844. Their single issue effort, the *Nauvoo Expositor*, decried the “yoke of tyranny” that

Joseph had imposed on the community along with his “complete apostasy” and monarchic pretensions.⁸⁰ The resulting scandal ignited another internal rebellion that Joseph sought to crush through expulsion, censorship, and violence.⁸¹ After he ordered his loyal Nauvoo police force to smash the printing press established by his rivals, the dissidents appealed to the state of Illinois for legal redress, leading to another arrest warrant for the Prophet. Joseph flees for a day, relents, then turns himself over to a state militia and is murdered by a mob while detained in a make-shift jail in Catharge on June 27th. At the time of his murder the 39 year-old Joseph was not only Prophet, Seer, Revelator and President of the Church of Latter Day Saints, but also judge of the municipal court, Mayor of Nauvoo, “General” to over 5,000 troops, candidate for the President of the Unites States, and the secret “King, Priest and Ruler” of a theocratic kingdom on the American frontier that would survive almost five decades after him.⁸²

Chapter 2: American Theocracy and the Crisis of Pluralism

A growing body of academic scholarship has deliberated over how Western pluralism will respond domestically to the theocratic drive in the various forms of radical Islam, but those discussions, particularly within American political thought, have yet to thoroughly examine the complexities of a home-grown form of theocracy.¹ In the first half of the 19th century, out of the most pluralistic Protestant society at that time, a self-described American Mohammed arose out of Protestantism. Castigating all other forms of Christianity as an “abomination”, he threatened that, if interfered with, “we will establish our religion by the sword. We will trample down our enemies and make it one gore of blood from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean. I will be to this generation a second Mohammed, whose motto in treating for peace was ‘the Alcoran [Qu’ran] or the Sword.’ So shall it eventually be with us – ‘Joseph Smith or the Sword!’”²

Pluralism, as it developed in the North Atlantic world is in large part a reaction to the threat of theocracy, a historical arrangement that was the antipodes of Lockeanism. In America, pluralism permitted a wider array of religious diversity to thrive than in Europe. Ironically, however, for the religious freedom granted by liberalizing state governments and the frontier allowed for far greater expression from schismatic revelatory faiths with theocratic tendencies than did the relatively tolerant states like England. In comparison, the sociologist John Hall has written about Western Europe that, “two centuries after the beginning of the Reformation, the book of prophecy was largely closed: both within establishment national religious confessions and in heterodoxical religious movements, the range of permissible revision to religious doctrine became circumscribed in ways that discouraged radical new messiahs from stepping forward.”³ Under the Westphalian system, it was European states themselves that assumed the delineation

of internal pluralist arrangements and decided which disruptive churches and movements fell outside the tolerable and could be subject to repression. Joseph, however, shows that in America theocrats also arise in *reaction* to -- and from within -- liberal pluralism, the very sort of liberal accommodations that, with so little state oversight or interference, are supposed to foster tolerance in the first place. As the political theorist Lucas Swaine acknowledges, intolerant new religions still emerge from a tolerant society: “. . . new theocratic groups continually burgeon forth in democratic societies as new flora in the simple pluralistic array.”⁴

American theocracy is a different, more modern creature from its historical precedent in Europe, and political theorists should take note because much of pluralist theory still retains that first form as its imaginary other. As Andrew March writes, “I suggest a sympathy for theocratic doctrines as *traditions* which rely in large measure on integrity and continuity.”⁵ Yet, traditions in modern theocracy need *not* be time-honored, or reliant on integrity or continuity. The Mormon scholar Richard Bushman has written that Joseph’s Mormonism debuted in the 19th century with an “instant history,” an allegedly ancient tradition that was entirely novel and uniquely American. A good deal of American political thought hasn’t really engaged with the real, peculiar nature of modern theocracy and its curious relationship to pluralism. In showing through the Mormon example how discontinuous, thoroughly modern, and inventively flexible theocratic traditions can be we better understand its real relationship with pluralism.

The relationship between American theocracy and the pluralism that fosters it is a uniquely synthetic one that blends authoritarianism with elements of the very pluralism it rejects, and this antagonistic adaption is undertaken with the ultimate aim of superseding Lockean pluralism. I call this relationship “antagonistic symbiosis.” In order to accommodate itself to the dominant liberal order, Joseph’s theocracy introduces a form of democratic adaptability (e.g. in

its populist appeals) and doctrinal flexibility (as per what Bushman has labelled Mormonism's "instant history") into a secretive priesthood hierarchy. This combination makes Joseph's theocracy appear paradoxical in its blending of modernity and the allegedly ancient, the putatively egalitarian and the hierarchical, the apparently democratic and the deeply theocratic . . . what Joseph would ultimately label his politics of "theodemocracy."

What makes Joseph's project authoritarian, what provides it a consistently anti-liberal grounding, is its theocratic hierarchy with a revelatory prophet at its summit. It is the very rigidity of its core priesthood organization that allows for such ideological flexibility and nimbleness, traits that better equip it to strike against liberalism with demands for tolerance and the liberal language of religious rights. As an authoritarian organizational structure spiritually mobilized by apocalyptic visions, it bears a strong anatomical resemblance to the ideals of the German conservative revolutionaries of Jeffrey Herf's "reactionary modernism," an analogy that will be further developed in the chapters six and seven. In investigating American theocracy's historical origins and unique theological path through American liberalism, this chapter will start with the political necessity of European states closing down revelations as the Bible became more democratically accessible, a development that ultimately helped form the rough outlines of Lockean tolerance. From there we'll see how the Mormon antipathy to pluralism in all its forms was answered by the authority of a prophet promising the "true religion," a religion that paradoxically required the liberties and freedoms of the American frontier in order to thrive.

Chapter three will examine the paradoxical phenomenon that though Joseph perceived pluralism as a spiritual and political catastrophe, American pluralism also equipped him with the diverse cultural sources to forge his own theological heterodoxies and populist religious appeals. Pluralism was both opponent and resource, providing him with the mythic assets to enact his

own Exodus. In particular, 18th century occult millenarianism would afford Joseph not only the appropriate eschatological stage for the emergence of “latter-day” saints with a new covenant, but also serve as a capstone for the long-running subcultural effort to unite the occult folk practices common throughout rural American with a restored Christianity. At the conclusion of this chapter, we’ll return to Locke’s political theology to see how these imaginative extravagances of Joseph’s apocalyptic theocracy appears as a haunted iteration of the liberalism it seeks to overcome, in effect, a Lockean nightmare.

Chapter four will investigate how Joseph’s political theology works against its host by engaging Joseph’s political theology with contemporary liberal theorists. Through that engagement we can better grasp both its theocratic nature and how it operates by asserting its faith and participating in the rights and freedoms at the heart of liberalism, while cultivating a secrecy and authoritarianism that operates outside of the peripheral vision of the liberal state.

A brief caveat: in discussing Joseph’s contestation of pluralism it is important to note at the outset how he blurs the very axis of differentiation in American pluralism within his political theology: political affiliation, ethnicity, religious choice, and even familial boundaries and lines of descent all become melded in his effort to forge a tribal people out of the dislocation and atomization of Jacksonian America. His early critiques of American pluralism applied to all of the various forms of plural identity that he perceived to be in a confusing and fractious flux, and his intended solution was to combine secular authority with religious power over a newly formed people with a unique ethno-religious identity. This political theological strategy was a challenge to the theories of John Locke, who, as will be discussed, sought to circumvent the deeper attachments of religion in his political theology, to make Christianity an exercise of reasonable faith, even allowing liberal subjects to change religion --denominations, really -- as easily as

“fashion”. The Lockean subject is supposed to be a consumer of religion, while, in militating against this perceived spiritual shallowness and the social atomization of the American frontier, Joseph created an American millenarian tribe suffused with a divine mission.

From Luther to Locke: Opening the Gospel, Closing the Book on Revelations

The Protestant emphasis on evangelizing began with Martin Luther and his fervent belief that sharing the real word of God would win over converts. This required an enhanced public space for religious instruction, a church far different in setting and approach to commoners and permissible discourse than that of Catholicism, one that would encourage an openness among fellow Christians to share the gospel and preach it to others, the essence of what Luther referred to as Christian liberty. The Bible was to be translated into vernacular languages to increase knowledge of scripture and broadcast its good news. Given the importance of spreading salvation and winning converts, the Latinate esotericism of the Catholic Church, so essentially elitist, was rejected for open worship services and the printed, public circulation of Protestant doctrine in local languages.

From an early Protestant perspective, the increasingly sophistic and mercenary theological justifications for unscriptural practices, alongside the inherently aristocratic Catholic priesthood, had corrupted and concealed the message of Christ’s salvation, obscuring the basic right of Christians to access the divine behind pharisaic ritual. Luther preached that, “Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things.”⁶ Among true (reformed) Christians, a “priesthood of all believers” could

all partake of their Christian liberty, which meant for Luther that the Word of God was not to be mediated strictly through a priestly class, as the ministry was only “functionally, not ontologically distinct.”⁷

At his most optimistic, Luther seemed to believe that simply hearing the real Gospel would be enough to win over the fallen: “What man is there whose heart, upon hearing these things will not rejoice to its depth, and when receiving such comfort will not grow tender so that he will love Christ as he never could by means of any laws or works?”⁸ Cleansed of its Catholic fripperies and defilements, the true message could be found by anyone who honestly searched the Gospel for answers. For “the entire content of Scripture has been brought to light, though some passages which contain unknown words remain obscure,”⁹ no real mysteries remain to be explained. Therefore, the easily accessible Gospel should be taught to boys and girls, an early form of public education.¹⁰

The almost monomaniacal fixation on scripture alone for salvation led Luther to rail against outbreaks of revelation that distracted from Christ’s already completed message, as well as the enthusiastic followings they attracted. In seeking to contain these outbreaks of fervor, Luther would not be so fortunate with his former disciple Thomas Müntzer. Müntzer had studied under Luther in the winter of 1517-18 but, believing that his mentor was both moving too cautiously in reforming the Christian community and was far too deferential to the tyranny of princely authority, Müntzer began to preach a radical proto-communist political theology premised on the apocalyptic arrival of Christ’s kingdom in 1523.¹¹ Luther first denounced his former disciple in his *Letter to the Princes of Saxony Concerning the Rebellious Spirit*, and sought to lure the millenarian revolutionary to Wittenberg to debate him, were he was confident that “if the conflict was left to words alone, truth -- Luther’s interpretation of the Bible-- would

win out.”¹² At the center of the conflict was whether or not the message of the gospel, as perfectly contained in the New Testament, could be seen as the authoritative word of God, or whether it could be supplemented by further revelation, what Richard Marius refers to as “the greatest single issue of the Reformation.”¹³ That Müntzer’s enthusiastic ministry could win adherents among the peasantry drove Luther into one of his infamous furies, and when the zealous movement erupted into the Peasant War of 1525, Luther viciously denounced them and condoned the slaughter of the peasant army by an alliance of German princes. Müntzer was captured, tortured, and made to renounce his millenarian heresies.¹⁴

Luther’s advocacy of Christian liberty clearly had its heretical limits. Perez Zagorin writes that before the modern development of religious freedom and tolerance, the Catholic Church, Christian governments they were intertwined with, and the Protestant state churches that broke from them, all utilized a “Christian theory of persecution” to warrant the repression of dissenters and heretics. “Religious intolerance and persecution, therefore, were seen not as evils but as necessary and salutary for the preservation of religious truth and orthodoxy and all that was believed to depend on them. What chiefly rendered persecution commendable was a set of doctrines and an underlying rationale that explained and justified it.”¹⁵ Though political expediency and exhaustion following the devastation of religious wars were certainly necessary factors in promoting guarantees of tolerance, Zagorin sees them as insufficient, asserting that the continuing argument for toleration made by the most historically influential political theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “was very largely inspired by religious values and was fundamentally religious in character . . . in advocating a policy of peace and tolerance toward religious differences, their supreme concern was the welfare of religion itself.”¹⁶ Zagorin’s historical account is premised on the supposition that the diverse Protestant sects,

influenced by advocates of toleration, came to share overlapping conceptions of the fundamental right to choose one's faith, and that they steadily learned to tolerate the aggregate results of those choices. Inverting the previous Christian theory of persecution, they came to emphasize Protestant commonalities, overlook narrow heresies, and accept that "true religion" is already tolerant. Or, as Locke put it in his *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ". . . I esteem that Toleration to be the Chief Characteristical Mark of the True Church."¹⁷

In an argument that runs parallel to Zagorin's, Elizabeth Pritchard asserts that Locke, in lieu of simply erecting secular barriers to hive off religion into the private sphere as the conventional understanding often adumbrates, actually attempted to make religion -- especially his vision of a more liberalizing Christianity -- more worldly, more secular. His political theology attempted to achieve the best of Christianity's potential by endowing "humans, as the property of the divine, with an inalienable transcendence that grounds rights, and promotes the conversion of "religion" into persuasions and fashions, suitable for circulation, debate, and judgment in the public sphere."¹⁸ The locus for this circulation of doctrines, the place where they could attempt to persuade, be debated and judged, would be "Locke's religious marketplace."¹⁹

Like Luther, Locke believed that the Word of God must be put into circulation, but given the endless schisms and fragmentation of religious authority since the Reformation, he held no hope for the Lutheran vision of a singular, coherent faith united by the Gospel, but a looser consensus held together by the henotic sorting of the market. Pritchard places a disciplinary market logic at the center of Locke's political theology, wherein "(r)eligious claims are to be placed in circulation, as other competing market goods and political claims are, and are to be submitted to the discipline of public opinion."²⁰ For Locke, a corruption of the gospels, either malign or through accidental religious error, would be culled over time through public airing as

they were exposed to both individual critical reflection and collective judgment. Publicity on doctrinal matters helped to ensure peace, for it was far superior “to have a religious position aired and challenged than to have it fester, mislead, and mobilize resistance in private.”²¹

This movement away from religious esotericism and secrecy is fundamental to the emergence of the modern public sphere, a “shift from norms of secrecy and privilege to appeals to public opinion, the recognition of the right to petition the government, and printing’s imposition of dialogical order on political (and religious) conflict.”²² Locke’s political theology establishes the space for contentious religious debate within Protestant society, provided that the interlocutors share the same sacred values of open-mindedness and toleration. As Pritchard notes, “In other words, consensus about the truly sacred enables religious dissensus. Locke is explicit and perhaps insistent that the consensus on which religious pluralism pivots is itself religious.”²³

Ancient theocracy lacked such consensus, its prioritizing of ecclesiastical law over civil made it coercive, and Locke was convinced that such a particularized and inflexible form was and should be relegated to the past. In his *Letter on Toleration* Locke characterized the:

commonwealth of the Jews . . . was an absolute theocracy . . . Now, if any one shew me where there is a commonwealth at this time, constituted upon that foundation, I will acknowledge that the ecclesiastical laws do there unavoidably become a part of the civil, and that the subjects of that government both may and ought to be kept in strict conformity with that Church by the civil power. But there is absolutely no such thing under the Gospel as a Christian commonwealth.²⁴

Dismissive of the possibility of a Christian commonwealth attempting to mimic the outmoded ecclesiastical form of Hebraic theocracy, Locke was far more concerned about the threat of a different form of theocracy, that of intolerant sects.

Locke's Intolerables

Locke's notion of a rough religious consensus around sacred notions of tolerance requires, not the retreat into a reserved or secretive or strictly private practice, but openness to scrutiny.

Public argument over religious doctrine and individual revelation will weed out error and should keep variances narrow, and therefore more civil. Accordingly, all sects should be inquired into and judged, a level of collective review and market discipline far more intrusive than merely "private" religion. As Locke wrote in *Human Understanding*:

To break in upon the Sanctuary of Vanity and Ignorance, will be, I suppose, some Service to Humane Understanding: Though so few are apt to think they deceive, or are deceived in the Use of Words; or that the Language of the Sect they are of, has any Faults in it, which ought to be examined or corrected . . . I have . . . endeavoured to make it so plain, that neither the inveterateness or the Mischief, nor the prevalency of the Fashion, shall be any Excuse for those, who will not take Care about the meaning of their own Words, and will not suffer the Significancy of their Expressions to be enquired into.²⁵

A sect's willingness to share its doctrines, and perhaps be corrected, is the frequently forgotten price of admission for what Martin E. Marty has called the "compact of mutual tolerance" in American religion, a compact that -- if true to its Lockean derivation -- cannot function if one sect is secretly intolerant of the rest, or, if in its secrecy, other religious sects are unaware of what they're asked to be tolerant of.²⁶ Locke, in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, listed those intolerables to be excluded from the compact, first describing the obviously immoral ones that public opinion could easily weed out:

No Opinions contrary to human Society, or to those moral Rules which are necessary to the preservation of Civil Society, are to be tolerated by the Magistrate. But of these indeed Examples in any Church are rare. For no Sect can easily arrive to such a degree of madness, as that is would think fit to teach, for Doctrines of Religion, such things as manifestly undermine the Foundations of Society, and are therefore condemned by

Judgment of all Mankind: because their own Interest, Peace, Reputation, every Thing, would be thereby endangered.²⁷

Note that for Locke, the embrace of dangerous doctrines that risk reputation and openly defy public opinion, the “Judgement of all Mankind,” was evidence enough of a degree of madness that no sect could easily arrive at. Openly apocalyptic sects of the type that disrupt civil society and threaten the public peace are deemed rare, an odd blind spot for a man who had lived through the English Civil War and Commonwealth and must have witnessed the millenarian militancy of many sects such as the Ranters, the Diggers, Fifth Monarchy Men and Muggletonians.²⁸ Even more dangerous, though, are those sects that traffic in deceit:

Another more secret Evil, but more dangerous to the Commonwealth, is, when men arrogate to themselves, and to those of their own Sect, some peculiar Prerogative, covered over with a specious shew of deceitful words, but in effect opposite to the Civil Right of the Community. . . We cannot find any Sect that teaches expressly and openly, that men are not obliged to keep their Promise; that Princes may be dethroned by those that differ from them in Religion; or that the Dominion of all things belongs only to themselves. For these things, proposed thus nakedly and plainly, would soon draw on them the Eye and Hand of the Magistrate, and awaken all the care of the Commonwealth to a watchfulness against the spreading of so dangerous an Evil. But nevertheless, we find those that say the same things, in other words.²⁹

Locke here is most likely referring to the threat posed by Catholicism, but his criteria for inclusion point out the potential problems secretive sects pose for his ideas of tolerance and pluralism. After arguing so strongly for the necessity of prohibiting magistrates from interrogating diverse sects about the tenets of their faith, under what authority should they now intervene to uncover sacred secrets?³⁰ And if the sleuthing task were to be left to civil society alone before it could levy intolerance on these intolerant and subversive faiths, just how is the public supposed to first discover their true doctrines and intentions without official authority?

Locke's arguments for tolerance and Protestant pluralism would initially find their fullest implementation in America, while European states continued to patrol the boundaries of toleration and heresy, repressing those sects or individuals that threatened the peace. John Hall notes that, after Puritan Revolution in England and its aftermath, and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in France, both states kept a close watch on Protestant schisms, wary of the contagion of apocalyptic enthusiasm.³¹ By the time Tocqueville reached America, he discovered no such state oversight necessary, for "no religious doctrine displays the slightest hostility to democratic and republican institutions."³² Among the "innumerable" sects in America Tocqueville encountered variations of worship "in their own peculiar manner," but that all of them, just like Locke had dreamed, "preach the same moral law in the name of God," and that "(m)oreover, all the sects of the United States are comprised within the great unity of Christianity, and Christian morality is everywhere the same."³³ Tocqueville too was dismissive of personal revelation, but in believing that the historical advance of democracy was clear enough to show where God's will lay, he did not deem it a real danger: "It is not necessary that God himself should speak in order that we may discover the unquestionable signs of his will" but modern men should learn "by attentive observation and sincere reflection, that the gradual and progressive development of social equality is at once the past and the future of their history, this discovery alone would confer upon the change the sacred character of divine decree. To attempt to check democracy would be in that case to resist the will of God."³⁴ As noted by Steven Harper, during Tocqueville's nine-month sojourn in America from 1831 to 1832, in which he could find no major variations among the "innumerable sects" that thrived under democracy, Joseph dictated more than fifty revelations to his increasingly peculiar, theocratic Church.³⁵

Having missed the quickly growing Mormon Church in Ohio and Missouri, Tocqueville was not to know the degree to which “the American Religion” loathed the cacophony of denominations, parties, and voluntary associations that made up the raucous pluralism he so praised. In Joseph’s mind, the proliferation of sects led to confusion and apostasy, a plan hatched by Satan to divide the Church. As the Mormon historian Marvin Hill remarks, “in opposing the voluntary agencies of reform in America, the Saints set themselves against those institutions which Alexis De Tocqueville said were indispensable to a democratic society where individualism had become extreme. In denouncing the means by which a democratic society achieved its democratic ends, the Saints were demonstrating their distaste for democracy itself.”³⁶

“What Is To Be Done?”: The Search for True Spiritual Authority

Joseph’s theocratic drive against pluralism began with his youthful search for true religious authority among many competing denominations. He was to discover that the type of authority he sought was dissipated long before his birth in 1805. Christianity in America was already plural and decentralized at the founding of the republic, for the Revolution had severed the authority of the Church of England from those states where it had been established in colonial times, while in parts of New England the Congregational Standing Order had long established dissident denominations as their state religions. A singular, coherent national faith was already impossible during the writing of the constitution.³⁷ The already tenuous ties between church and state frayed further when Baptists in Vermont successfully disestablished the Standing Order in 1807 on the basis of religious discrimination, and by 1818, only

Massachusetts bothered to maintain an established state religion, a distinction it held until 1833.³⁸

Disconnected from the last vestiges of official state authority, American religion became far more voluntary, an increasingly personal choice influenced by spiritual yearning, aspirational community, and desired status. American Christianity constituted the freest marketplace of faith in the Protestant world, one given to constant innovation, denominational schism, and -- with so many churches making similar salvific assertions -- an increasingly populist competition that continually vitiated claims to any single sect possessing a unique spiritual authority.³⁹ Amid the eruption of radical sects and eccentric revivalists emerging out of the Second Great Awakening came a “widespread disdain for the supposed lessons of history and tradition, and a call for reform using the rhetoric of the Revolution.” Under these centrifugal social pressures there was no definable national center of Church authority left, only many counterestablishments vying for souls and greater glory.⁴⁰

In an era where local religious instruction still comprised the most formal and rigorous educational experience over any other state or social institution in molding the worldviews of the mass public, the intense religious competition was “not merely a clash of intellectual and theological differences, but a social struggle with power and authority.”⁴¹ Overlapping with the rise of Jacksonian democracy, political and religious issues of the Second Great Awakening often merged, and the generalized sense of the arrival of truly radical times led many Americans of diverse denominations to ponder the coming of the Millennium.⁴² The historian Nathan O. Hatch has described the era as a “period of religious ferment, chaos, and originality unmatched in American history,” a time in which the traditional claims to religious authority could not weather “such a relentless beating.”⁴³ For religious dissidents and many revivalists, the ceaseless

challenges to spiritual authority revealed that the theological foundation of predominately Protestant America was so much shifting sand, and the very viability of the young republic seemed threatened by a spiritual anarchy.

Against this unprecedented degree of insecurity, upheaval and social disintegration, Joseph Smith and his apostles saw the pluralism of what they termed the “the Gentile world” as promoting confusion and infidelity. Pluralism, in all its social aspects and competing associations, was “devoted to destruction” in the words of the Mormon apostle Oliver Cowdery, and the Saints believed they could impose safety and salvific certainty through a new gospel declaring *the* one true faith.⁴⁴ That faith would be a testament of such authority and strident finality that all other religions and associations would soon join or be destroyed. No religion, indeed no voluntary portion of civil society, would long stand against Mormonism and its divine mission. According to the Mormon historian Marvin Hill, by “opposing voluntary associations the Saints were repudiating some of the fundamental ways in which the developing democratic society functioned.”⁴⁵ Mormon opposition to religious pluralism was textually supported in *The Book of Mormon* by historical scriptures detailing how divergent faiths led to a civil war among the ancient tribes of America -- the spiritual and prophetic forerunners to the modern Saints. The originally righteous tribe of Nephites is described as being continually beset by internal disintegration and schisms; their existence endangered by heresies and enemies within far more than it was by foreign invasion.⁴⁶ The Mormon dread of the chaos unleashed by ungodly pluralism was matched by its opposite, a certainty that all godly aspects of civil society were soon to be subsumed under a millenarian unity through the Mormon faith, an apocalyptic vision described by the *Book of Mormon* scribe and apostle Martin Harris in 1832 thus:

Within four years there will not be one wicked person left in the United States; . . . the righteous will be gathered to Zion . . . and there will be no President over these United States, after that time.

I do hereby assert and declare that in four years from the date whereof [September] every sectarian and religious denomination in the United States will be broken down, and every Christian shall be gathered unto the Mormonites, and the rest of the human race shall perish.⁴⁷

As Hill has argued, against the many choices of religious pluralism available during the Second Awakening in conjunction with the expansion of Jacksonian democracy, the theocratic tenets of Mormon political theology that decried and prophesied the imminent end of political and religious pluralism demonstrated “their distaste for democracy itself.”⁴⁸ Out of the Mormon quest to restore the true gospel of the primitive church came the imperative that “godly men must rule. When they do not society is imperiled.”⁴⁹

At the center of that imperative, as prophet of God’s new testament and “revelator” of his will, was Joseph Smith. In 1832 Joseph recorded his recollection of the spiritual struggles leading to his first vision when he was fifteen years old.⁵⁰ As the Mormon scholar Terryl Givens writes, “The Mormon emphasis on exceptionalism is traceable to the first recorded spiritual experience of the young Joseph Smith. Long before he ever heard the word Mormon, or had an inkling of what his life or ministry would stand *for*, he learned what he was to be set against.”⁵¹ Experiencing the enthusiasms unleashed by regional revival meetings -- and the frequently riotous violence over religious disputes that followed -- had ignited an inner agony in Joseph. His family, with its long history of religious seeking, was split at the time among Presbyterians and Methodists, and Joseph knew firsthand how the “great excitement” of the era created “great uneasiness” owing to the “confusion and strife among different denomination.”⁵² The Smiths, having been defrauded in Vermont, and struggling with successive crop failures and dubious get-rich-quick schemes in Palmyra, New York, were denied the consolation and guidance of an

authoritative religious voice, remaining bitterly confused and socially detached by the cacophony of faiths sweeping the regions.⁵³ Despite the “great zeal manifested by the respective clergy” of the competing revivals, Joseph noted that the ardor of new converts would quickly fade as they drifted off to different sects and “soon a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued—priest contending against priest, and convert against convert; so that all their good feelings one for another, if they ever had any, were entirely lost in a strife of words and a contest about opinions.”⁵⁴ Joseph wrote that as a young man:

My mind at times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult were so great and incessant . . . In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be aright, which is it, and how shall I know it? . . .

After lengthy prayer and meditation, Joseph ventured out into the woods alone to seek answers. There he encountered two angelic “Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description,” one of whom instructed that among the many Christian denominations available to him, Joseph was to abstain from them all:

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

He again forbade me to join with any of them; and many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time. . . . It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom; else why should the powers of darkness combine against me? Why the opposition and persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy?⁵⁵

Though Joseph’s faith and political theology was born amid the Lockean pluralism of American Protestantism, from his first vision he rejected the normative traditions of Christianity and with it, the original bases for Lockean consensus. His rejection was premised on reintroducing prophesy and miracle as realities suitable for political discourse, a sphere of

contention where Locke's efforts to forge a more reasonable religion had hoped to excise it.⁵⁶ Prophecy and miracle returned to the world because true Christianity was being restored by Joseph and his apostles, and with this restoration came an alternative history for the true Church that wends its way from ancient Israel through ancient tribes in America before culminating in the Golden Plates in upstate New York. The major schisms within historical Christianity (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Western Protestantisms) all deeply identify with a common Biblical tradition that encompasses the apostolic era and the early Church of at least the first four ecumenical councils, traditions Mormonism's instant history circumvented and dismissed. Generations of irenic theologians from Sebastian Castellio to John Locke had attempted to forge some cross-sectarian agreement on creedal fundamentals as the basis of tolerance.⁵⁷ Early Mormonism's extirpation of these common roots of faith, while boldly asserting the titular claim to Christianity, poses a radical discontinuity with the historic confessions and the politics informed by them. By dramatically rejecting the foundations of Western Christianity, Joseph's theology steps outside the "consensus about the truly sacred [that] enable dissensus" that forms such a convivial basis within Locke's political theology.⁵⁸ Joseph would later comment that it was obvious to him that, "if God had a church it would not be split up into factions." The incessant factionalism tolerated by American Christianity raised the very question for the discomfited as to whether God had a Church at all.⁵⁹ Protestant pluralism's cultivation of, even reliance on, such Satanic uncertainty was a sure sign that all other confessions were corrupt abominations.⁶⁰

The testimonials of many Mormon converts follow Joseph's autobiographical themes of uncertainty, spiritual seeking and ultimate revulsion with the pandemonium of contending faiths preaching their divergent methods of salvation.⁶¹ But with government's firm disinclination to

intervene with any manner of official church, the restoration of singular religious authority could no longer be a top down imposition as it had been throughout so much of European Christianity. Paradoxically, while castigating the voluntarism intrinsic to the new spiritual marketplace of American Protestantism, and railing against the democratization of American Christianity, Joseph's young church won over its adherents voluntarily, often through promises of a more democratic access to the sacred.⁶² The *Book of Mormon* attracted many of its early followers through attacks on social injustice, inequality, and the professional clergy, and by promising them the true Christian priesthood to all adult males who joined. Thematically, according to the historian Nathan Hatch, the *Book of Mormon* is primarily a work of "profound social protest, an impassioned manifesto by a hostile outsider against the smug complacency of those in power and the reality of social distinctions based on wealth, class, and education;"⁶³ a new gospel that links the splintering of faiths to social stratification, injustice and repression.

Early in the *Book of Mormon*, the Book of Nephi declares that there is only one true church, and all the other factions found on Earth are actually of a "great and abominable" church founded by Satan.⁶⁴ As the good, light skinned proto-Christian tribe of American Jews, the Nephites, were, at the initial reception of the one true gospel, stridently anti-pluralist, for "dissent and diversity were always atheistic and destructive."⁶⁵ Appearing to borrow heavily from excerpts from the biblical prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi, the *Book of Mormon*, depicts the righteous prophet Mormon, in the dying days of Nephite civilization, prophesizing the apocalyptic judgment of God's wrath upon the wealthy, arrogant and educated.⁶⁶ Mormon's condemnation comes after Satan's triumph, for the Nephites have backslid, and their once just and noble society is infiltrated by apostasy, unequal riches, and a plague-like proliferation of merchants, lawyers and:

many officers . . . the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning . . . And thus there became great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up. . . Now the cause of this iniquity of the people was this – Satan had great power, unto the stirring up of the people to do all manner of iniquity; tempting them to seek power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world.⁶⁷

While presented as a history of ancient America, Marvin Hill writes that *The Book of Mormon*'s "prime purpose was to warn Americans in the 1830s." The ancient peoples of America had once been given the true gospel, but wealth, social division, and sectarianism – the temptations of Satan – had led them to ignore the message of godly prophets and destroy themselves.⁶⁸ Satan's most effective agents in sowing discord, in ancient times and in 19th century America alike, are the competing clergy and their churches, as Mormon laments: "O ye wicked and perverse and stiffnecked people, why have ye built up churches yourselves to get gain?"⁶⁹

A Modern Zion on the Frontier: The Paradoxes and "Contraries" of an American Theocracy

Radical in its critique of social stratification and inequality and novel in its peculiarly American spiritual geography, Joseph's new gospel and faith claims to be ancient in its origins. Writing of public and Mormon perceptions of Joseph's Saints in 1833, Richard Bushman notes, that "(t)hough organized less than three years before, Joseph's new religion felt old. The Saints had an instant history."⁷⁰ 'Instant history' provides a deft term for Joseph's eclectic tradition, his daring fusion of innovation with a claim to an Adamic/Abrahamic lineage already declared by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Thematically quite similar to the diverse American anti-modern 19th century cultural projects analyzed by Jackson Lears in his *No Place of Grace*, Joseph's

Saints, “long(ed) for a regeneration at once physical, moral, and spiritual,” and sought to escape a disenchanted and venal American liberalism in an alternative world of a refounded primitive church. In its tremendous flexibility and dynamism, its rapid alterations of protest and accommodation, the alleged tradition of Joseph’s instant history was also “unstable, [and] ambivalent” in its contestations of the hegemonic culture.⁷¹

Antagonistic encounters, a constant striving for greater enlightenment, and abrupt shifts in perspective and position were for Joseph not only descriptions of his character development, but, according to Mormon scholar Terryl Givens, “his intellectual modus operandi: exploring the limits, challenging conventional categories, and dynamic engagement with the boundaries – all in the interest of productive provocation. Or, as he said more simply, shortly before his death, ‘by proving contraries, truth is made manifest.’”⁷² In their ceaseless acquisition of spiritual and worldly knowledge, Joseph’s Saints are to never rest upon their halos but – as “Faustian strivers”-- constantly pursue ever higher degrees of enlightenment and glory . . . wherever to be found.⁷³ Even though the “larger world was still a corrupt Babylon,” Givens notes that, “Joseph’s open eclecticism (‘we will claim truth as ours wherever we find it’) meant some borrowings were not only allowed, but mandated.”⁷⁴

Propelled by these paradoxical imperatives, early Mormon alterity rapidly vacillated between political moments of absolutist condemnation and salvific exclusivity with campaigns for more members, inclusion, and religious rights. Prophecies of America’s imminent apocalyptic downfall were mingled with Joseph’s 1844 national campaign for the American Presidency; secret Old Testament prophecies for God’s elect were publicized through broadsheets and newspaper interviews; condemnations of factionalism were quickly superseded by agile machine politics and bids for Mormon block votes among Whigs and Republicans; and

the sect's founding antipathy for legal guarantees of pluralist religion and their reactionary privileging of God's harsh commandments over man's dissolute laws would be hybridized with a growing devotion to the Constitution. Initially, Joseph had neglected the relevance of Constitution as an inconsequential part of the soon-to-be destroyed political system of the United States, but after the mob violence and extralegal persecution of the Mormon during the Second Missouri War, he switched tactics and embraced religious rights as the best earthly hope for the safety of his ministry and people.

Imprisoned for treason against the state of Missouri in March of 1839, Joseph wrote that the great appeal of the Constitution was that it “garantees to al parties sects and demomimations and clases of religion equal and coher[ent and] indefeasible right”: “Hence we say that the constitution of the unit[ed] States is a glorious standard it is founded [in] the wisdom of God it is a heavenly banner it is to all those who are privileged with the sweats of its liberty like the cooling shades and refreshing waters of a greate rock in a thirsty and weary land.”⁷⁵ Yet, free in Illinois three years later, Joseph would write in a newspaper article entitled “The Government of God” that all the various forms of the governments of men “have in their turn been raised to dignity and prostrated in the dust. The plans of the greatest politicians and the wisest senators, and most profound statesmen have exploded . . .” and the United States, “which possesses greater resources than any other, is rent from center to circumference, with party strife, political intrigue and sectional interest.”⁷⁶ The theme of factionalism and destruction had re-emerged, with no mention this time of the constitution or rights. After reciting Biblical figures who God had guided or instructed in governing, Joseph once more concluded on an apocalyptic note that “every effort [to promote peace and happiness] has failed; every plan and design fallen to the

ground; it needs the wisdom of God, the intelligence of God, and the power of God to accomplish this.”⁷⁷

In his paradoxical political and cultural blending of mythic tradition and modernity, Joseph’s political theology resembles not only Lears’ American antimodernism, but Jeffrey Herf’s study of German 20th century ‘reactionary modernism’. Analogous to Herf’s subjects and their Weimar-era mix of Spenglerian doom, Nietzschean transcendence, and engineering expertise, Joseph’s utopianism combines a very American sense of optimistic futurology promising the ascent of man to godhood (theosis) with a doom-laden reaction predicated on a retreat to Zion to ride out the destruction of the present republic. These seemingly contrary elements were necessary in order for the Mormon movement to gain, first, adherents as a distinct faith in an open marketplace of religion; and second, political and legal traction, as an institutionalized Church with a unique state-granted charter, building a theocratic city-state in Illinois. The legal and political space for this venture, though, were uniquely American and here we see Lears’ American context where such overlapping spaces did not exist for Herf’s Germany. Joseph’s theocracy thrived off a cultural symbiosis with American liberal pluralism and the open spaces free from a central government concerned with religious disruption freedom as in Europe. In his *Apocalypse: The Empire of Modernity*, John Hall writes of European states after the Reformation that,

Catholic, Protestant and mixed states all increasingly took up the containment of religion by regulating and sometimes administering it, and they did so in way that eventually undermined the most intense apocalyptic doctrines. In the long term, two centuries after the beginning of the Reformation, the book of prophecy was largely closed: both within establishment national religious confession and in heterodoxical religious movements, the range of permissible revisions to religious doctrine became circumscribed in ways that discouraged radical new messiahs from stepping forward.

The experimental space *required* to reintroduce prophecy into Christianity and permit Joseph to step forth as a “radical new messiah” could only emerge out of the religious pluralism he sought to overcome with his theocratic religion. "The American Religion," born of America's vaunted religious liberty, promises a path to godhood once forged by the American Adam (out of an Eden now called Missouri) while being governed by an authoritarian institution with theocratic designs. In contrast, European states, with their official churches and willingness to "regulate" and sometimes "administer" contentious religion, were much more likely to contain messianic disruptions (e.g. the British state put the highly eclectic 19th century prophet Richard Brothers in an asylum),⁷⁸ while in America, the most pluralistic of early modern nations, religious freedom produces the last serious theocratic challenge to the state (two Mormon wars and the Deseret Kingdom), before being ultimately assimilated after the mob murder of its founder and decades of coercive regulation. For this reason (and hewing closer to Lears's anti-modernism than Herf's reactionary one) Joseph's revelatory faith, for all its violence and separatism, tied itself much more closely to America and modern liberalism, and its particular evolution resembles a form of antagonistic symbiosis more than the steadfastly oppositional modernity conceived of by Herf's conservative revolutionaries. During Joseph's life, and that of his successor, Brigham Young, the most effective space to balance the demands of greater autonomy and the proximity necessary to symbiotically tap mainstream energies and potential recruits was the frontier.

On the frontier, Joseph could attempt to reconcile the theological mandates for independence and universalism. At times he was quite clear in his desire to cut the ties of his people from the corruption of American society, as in his statement in August of 1844 that “it was my endeavor to so organize the Church, that the brethren might eventually be independent of

every encumbrance beneath the celestial kingdom, by bonds and covenants of mutual friendship, and mutual love.”⁷⁹ Yet, Joseph also inspired the Mormon obsession with genealogy, the ritual of baptisms for dead non-Mormons, and a phenomenal missionary zeal that counterbalances Mormons’ deep sense of peculiarity and autonomy “with a theology, rituals and research programs that aspire to universal integration.”⁸⁰ Mormonism, though sprung from American soil, is prophesied in the end times be the universal faith for not just America but the world.

Until then, the more pragmatic and prosaic accommodations with modernity meant that life on the frontier could never fully detach itself from the material strivings of the Jacksonian era. In their more independent mode, the early Mormons received from Joseph commandments to pool resources and distribute their goods in communistic endeavors overseen by the Church elders. As the movement grew across New York, Ohio and Missouri, the church organization strained to regulate its communal economy, and the relative prosperity that benefitted from the booming national economy was followed by another revelation loosening the bonds of the United Order.⁸¹

Revolt against the Clergy

Promises of millenarian revolution of behalf of the poor found in Old Testament prophecies were repeated and occasionally elaborated upon in the *Book of Mormon*. Given the socially radical themes of past and present prophecies, the mainline clergy’s smug denial of living prophecy and God’s power to still work miracles in the modern world seemed to Mormon eyes to be part of a monstrous conspiracy.⁸² From their perspective, the mainline American clergy still clung to its position of minor gentry in Jacksonian America as an aristocratic vestige

that shouldn't have survived the Revolution.⁸³ Similar to Luther's revolt against the Catholic priesthood in its bill of particulars, American priests and the churches they served were castigated by Mormons as heretical, obsolete, but still capable of orchestrating phenomenal deceit to maintain power, thereby denying common people access to prophetic power with their false doctrines. Priests were perceived as a rearguard of religious convention by the early Saints, and "the vision of Joseph Smith [was] intensely populist in its rejection of the religion conventions of his day and in its hostility to the orthodox clergy, its distrust of reason as an exclusive guide, and its rage at the oppression of the poor."⁸⁴ That deep antipathy for the clergy, and correspondent desire for a more primitive church of direct communication with God, is present at the start of Joseph's career in a confrontation between a Methodist preacher and the young prophet. After Joseph informed him of the dramatic content of his first vision and:

I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them.

I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects—all united to persecute me.⁸⁵

Here, we see early in Joseph's career how the desire for prophecy, for active revelation opposed to the mainline denomination's cessationism (that miracles and prophecies ceased with the end of the Biblical age), incited not just contempt but a feeling of profound persecution.⁸⁶

As Michael Walzer observes, the populist desire to share in priesthood and the gifts of prophecy is a part of revolutionary movements stretching from Exodus to the English Reformation to the French Revolution. Korah's rebellion against Moses and Aaron was

premised on the notion that “All the congregation are holy, every one of them;” John Milton saw Moses and the prophets rejoicing in heaven, for at long last in glorious Albion “all the Lord’s people are become prophets;” and one of the promises for equality in the French Revolution “was that everyone would share, and share equally, in the required religious or political performances.”⁸⁷ Following the themes of that long revolutionary tradition, the Book of Nephi describes the Lord offering a sealed book to a man of learning whose pinched efforts to decipher it are “thwarted by greed and ambition,” before turning to an unlearned man who joyfully reveals its message of marvelous works and wonders to be bestowed upon the poor and unschooled. Joseph’s revelation was not merely a reminder of an ancient promise, but an announcement of its delivery, the vision and the Golden Plates were themselves supernatural proof of God’s miraculous presence . . . as revealed to the common man who lacked the spiritual contamination of “learning.” Soon a restored church would re-incorporate the ancient order of priesthood for all, “an equality among all men.”⁸⁸ The glories of the refounded primitive church would empower all those who could find no home in the other denominations and provide them a reason for their prior estrangement.

Joseph’s astonishing debut of the Book of Mormon and his early descriptions of his continuing revelations, like the revivals meetings of his youth, ignited new fires of prophecy wherever his testament was welcomed in the American West. Many eye-witnesses, Mormon and Gentile, chronicled “the most wild, frantic and horrible fanaticism” set loose by Mormon missionaries in Ohio and New York in 1831.⁸⁹ Scenes of visionaries rolling on the floor, “exhibiting “all the apish actions imaginable, making the most grimaces both horrid and ridiculous,” aping “the Indian modes of warfare,” and even concuss themselves into unconsciousness and then prophesy what they had seen.⁹⁰ Joseph worried about what he had

unleashed, as the Mormon historian Richard Bushman observes “[b]y licensing his followers to speak through the Holy Ghost, the whole movement risked spinning out of control.”⁹¹

In igniting a populist blaze of prophecy, Joseph encountered a dilemma common to religious dramaturges before him: how to fuse the newly freed passions of such chaotic “spiritual gifts” with the desire to build lasting institutions to contain them. Before he would openly promote theocracy as the penultimate regime on earth, Joseph had to first establish ecclesiastical control and sole prophetic authority amid competing claims of biblical interpretation and revelation. His initial appeal of a radically egalitarian priesthood brought hundreds of new members into the fold in New York and Ohio, and Joseph had to quickly confront the fact that “a church full of prophets was a holy bedlam.”⁹²

As Thomas Hobbes pondered in *Leviathan*, if alleged prophets of God were to once more deliver new revelations, inspiring new scriptures, then who was to determine their legitimacy?⁹³ Probably unknowingly, Joseph was traveling the well-tread theological ground of a Protestant schismatic struggling to reassert authority. Hoping to reconnect Man with God through the Gospels, Martin Luther first sought to raze the ecclesiastical hierarchy that mediated faith; Church society was to be spontaneous, coercion-less and acephalous -- without a directing “head”.⁹⁴ In 1521, Luther had barely broken with the Catholic Church when he encountered reports of the frenzied revelations of radical weavers, the “Zwickau prophets,” who claimed complete knowledge of the Bible, telepathy and, most threatening to Luther, a divine revelation that privileged their numerous heterodoxies and biblical interpretations against those of any competitor.⁹⁵ Luther was shocked, unprepared for this revelatory challenge after having convinced himself that once the corrupt authority of Roman Papism had been defied, scriptural exposition – *solo scriptura* -- and therefore true Christianity, would be obvious to all.⁹⁶ When

his attempt at rational engagement through biblical exegesis and scholastic argument failed to convince the unlettered prophets, Luther was forced to confront the anarchic menace with the power of his own authority: “On April 12 he wrote in exasperation to Spalatin that Satan had shat on himself to produce their “wisdom.” They talked so fast that he could hardly get a word in. He commanded them to do miracles to prove their claims of direct conversation with God. They refused. He said, “My God keeps your god from doing a miracle.” Soon they were gone.”⁹⁷

Joseph appears similarly naïve as to the populist enthusiasms, contending revelations, and challenges to his own authority he was to initially unleash. An early revelation of Joseph’s in the summer of 1828 equated “my people” with a non-institutional “my church,” and as with his previous prophecies, once more rejected all organized religion as “they who do not fear me, neither keep my commandments but build churches unto themselves to get gain.”⁹⁸ Adhering to this early tenet, the first gatherings of the Saints in 1828 were -- like Luther’s acephalous ideal -- as an unorganized body of “my people” without priestly authority or religious ordinances. In 1829 however, Oliver Cowdery (while still allied with Joseph) debuted “A commandment from God unto Oliver [--] how he should build up his church and manner thereof,” a blueprint for a new organization with specific lines of authority, church offices and ordinances. Finally, after rapidly establishing three branches in three separate counties, Joseph published the *Book of Mormon* in March, 1830, and formally established a third reorganization, “the Church of Christ” in April 6, 1830.⁹⁹ Included in the formal launch were recent revelations on church organization, originally called “the Articles and Covenants of the church of Christ,” which functioned as the sort of confessions of the faith found in standard Christian denominations -- as well as a

seemingly anodyne insistence that “[f]or all things must be done in order and by common consent in the church, by the prayer of the faithful.”¹⁰⁰

Despite the changes institutionalized in 1830, the early Mormon Church was still much more egalitarian in its willingness to recognize priestly authority and those with the gift of revelation. As David Whitmer, one of the original three witnesses to the existence of the Book of Mormon would later lament: “Brother Joseph gave many true prophecies [sic] when he was humble before God: but this is no more than many of the other brethren did. Brothers Ziba Peterson, Hiram Page, Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt Orson Pratt, Peter Whitmer, Christian Whitmer, John Whitmer myself and many others had the gift of prophesy.”¹⁰¹ Among those prophets listed, Oliver Cowdery and the Whitmer family were the most prominent and contentious, believing themselves to be independent authorities, capable of receiving revelations and even correcting Joseph.¹⁰²

In September of 1830, Hiram Page one of the “Eight Witnesses” to the book of Mormon - - and an ally of the Whitmers and Cowdery -- used his own magical seer stone to generate a “roll of papers” containing whole new prophecies while Joseph was away. Prominent Church members initially entertained Page’s revelation as gospel until Joseph, clearly cognizant of the danger of competing revelations, confronted him in an emergency conclave and Page abandoned his claims. Mormon historian Michael D. Quinn notes that “a hierarchy of spiritual authority is impossible if there is unrestricted access to receive and announce God’s will,” and Joseph soon dictated a revelation at the next Church conference that proclaimed: “no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this Church excepting my servant Joseph, Jun., for he receiveth them even as Moses.”¹⁰³

This revelation utilized and was added to a developing Articles and Covenants document which described the procedures and leadership structure necessary to restrict errant visions, the bane of other charismatic movements. In official church documents, Joseph's authority was now as literal and all-encompassing as that of Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt.¹⁰⁴ After this second incident, Joseph realized that "charisma was to be focused, not left free to run wild,"¹⁰⁵ and Joseph and Oliver Cowdery would alter the later editions of the Articles (and the succeeding document, the *Doctrines and Covenants*) to provide retroactive continuity for the developing structure of the Mormon hierarchy. Michael Quinn writes that establishment of priestly authority would be specified sixteen years later in Joseph's 1839 account of his visitation by the angel Moroni, but that "[t]hese words had not appeared in Smith's 1832 account or in Cowdery's 1834 detailed description of Moroni's words."¹⁰⁶ And Joseph himself would often explicitly cite the refounded priesthood as the solution to the problems of Christian sectarianism: "Conflicting opinions, the clash of doctrines, the diversity of sentiment [exists]. Let the Melchizedek priesthood be introduced and men be subject to their teaching and their sectarian, narrow contracted notions would flee away.... The anarchy and confusion that prevails among men would disappear." When challenged with contrary opinions, his own revelation, which undergird the priesthood would brook no challenges: "The opinions of men, so far as I am . . . concerned are . . . as the crackling of thorns under the pot, or the whistling of the wind."¹⁰⁷

Joseph's revelations of the renewal of priesthood authority – and its quickly developing hierarchy -- radically diverged from that of Protestant theology. Much like Catholicism, Joseph taught that the "keys" to this authority were specific ordinances of salvation handed down through apostolic succession, but not from Peter but Adam. This power was, according to Terryl Givens, "coexistent with God himself and connected to his sovereignty."¹⁰⁸ This co-sovereignty

with God was an awesome power one that Joseph said was “nothing more or less than to triumph over all our enemies and put them under our feet . . . and the last enemy was death . . . [U]ntil a man can triumph over death, he is not saved. A knowledge of the priesthood alone will do this.”¹⁰⁹ This was the power of the resurrection of the dead as well as the divine ability to bond the faithful to each other through all time and eternity through the ordinances of celestial marriage, an eternal power that had been physically transmitted from an apostolic chain starting with Adam.¹¹⁰ These were to be the bases of Joseph’s American theocracy.

Shortly after arriving in Kirtland, Ohio to check on the progress of the congregation there, Joseph confronted shocking displays of enthusiasm in which the Saints would mimic the antics of Indians, and even more troubling, a mysterious prophetess named “Hubble” who had gathered followers of her own and demanded acknowledgment as a ‘teacher in the Church.’ Providentially, Joseph’s authority was further strengthened by yet another revelation, that only one prophet was “appointed unto you, to receive commandments and revelations from my hand,” and “there is none other appointed unto you to receive commandments and revelations until he be taken, if he abides in me.”¹¹¹ Richard Bushman remarks that, “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 Smith’s Mormonism. The amplification of authority at the center was meant to increase the authority of everyone, as if the injection of power at the core energized the whole.”¹¹² In eliminating rivals and crushing dissent, Joseph remained firmly at that core, and he began to preach that his followers would be exalted first through his leadership and visions, the prophetic gifts open to all men would have to be developed under his guidance. A key component of Mormonism’s success was the unique way in which it placated tensions among members by letting the subordinate orders of priesthood

share in the light of Joseph's revelatory glory. As the historian John L. Brooke describes, "Institutionalizing the anticlericalism of his following, Smith established the ideal of universal priesthood among the believing men of the church, sharing charismatic power and organizational responsibility while retaining prophetic authority."¹¹³ Once that tutelage began, the initiate was cleaved from the rest of humanity to join a sacerdotal elite, for as Grant Underwood describes, ". . . the Mormons have always believed that they were called upon to pass the gathering of the elect. Not the broad electorate of humanity."¹¹⁴ In gathering the elect, not every link to the broader American culture was hewed, however. Joseph claimed that his gospel has ancient roots in prehistoric America, and the cultural resources he knit together to institute this new theocratic order resonate with other Anglo-American prophetic, magical and masonic traditions

Chapter 3: Pluralism as Imaginative Resource: Mining and Refining the Mysticism of the

Radical Reformation

“Even great innovative religious founders have to draw on a preexisting vocabulary available to their society.” -- Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*¹

“What kind of being was God in the beginning, before the world was?’ [Joseph] asks, and replies, “God Himself who sits enthroned in yonder heavens [was] as Man like unto one of yourselves -- that is the great secret!” -- Joseph Smith, “The King Follett” sermon²

In castigating all the other sects and denominations of American Christianity as an “abomination,” an implacable enemy to the one true path to salvation, Joseph warred against religious tolerance and pluralism, a reactionary challenge in which he borrowed from the broader culture he declared so adversarial. Joseph saw the expanding pluralism of Jacksonian America as a spiritual malaise and political disaster, but it also provided the space and myriad cultural sources for him to forge his own theological heterodoxies, populist appeals, and paradoxical demands for the state protections provided by religious liberty from the very state he sought to supplant. Pluralism was both opponent and resource, equipping him with the mythic materials to enact his own Exodus, a triumphal retreat to the wilderness of the frontier in which he gathered his own Israelites in America *and* delineated an oppressive Egypt to flee from. As Gordon Wood has observed:

[Mormonism] was born at a peculiar moment in the history of the United States, and it bears the marks of that birth. Only the culture of early-nineteenth-century evangelical America could have produced it . . . It defied as no other religion did both the orthodox culture and evangelical counterculture. Yet at the same time it drew heavily on both these cultures. It combined within itself different tendencies of thought. From the outset

it was a religion in tension, poised like a steel spring by the contradictory forces pulling within it.³

Joseph's ministry drew from diverse counter-cultural traditions of Anglo-American prophecy, folkmagic, hermeticism and masonry to blend into his own uniquely American cosmology and religious practices. Mysticism, alchemy, and the occult were suppressed, but integral, practices of early modern religious radicals of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, and in a specifically early American popular culture, their resurgence in Mormonism constitutes what W.T. Lhamon, Jr. refers to as a lore cycle.⁴ According to Lhamon,

A lore cycle is important because it provides connection underlying the breaks we experience as historical shifts. Lore is vernacular culture that people practice without any sense of who authored it. Lore is manifest in the anonymous practices of groups. It is a group's common sense, its gestures and styles, its tunes and tendencies . . . Because lore cycles enforce the return of an underlying continuity, they also point to places where emerging groups will break with imposed or engineered social directions.⁵

Joseph's deft use of hermetic lore, to a far deeper degree than his competitors among "young men of restless energy" in the prophecy trade made him distinctive in a career field where "self-conscious outsiders" with apocalyptic visions were also attempting to tap the "acute anger at the orthodox churches for withholding knowledge from ordinary folk."⁶ The enthusiastic years of Joseph's early adulthood "were the most fertile in America's history for the spouting of prophets," and the revivals and endless schisms of the era almost normalized outbursts of enthusiasm and religious eccentricity.⁷ Incorporating the mystic lore of folk magic and hermeticism into his sect not only helped to set Joseph apart, but provided him with another form of populist appeal in a vocation previously dominated by religious elites -- as well as a bridge back to traditions of the Radical Reformation that hinted of a restored Christianity. As the Mormon scholar Terryl Givens writes: "The larger world was still a corrupt Babylon, but Joseph's open eclecticism ("we will claim truth as ours wherever we find it") meant some borrowings were not only allowed, but mandated."⁸ Many of the more heterodox and mystical

tenets Joseph would integrate into Mormonism bear remarkable parallels to those found in the political theology of the Savoyard reactionary Joseph de Maistre. Best known either as the archconservative apologist for “throne and altar” counter-revolution, a traditionalist who initially hoped providence would simply restore the *ancien regime*; or, as an ultramontane, an early modern proponent of papal authority and infallibility, Maistre’s forays into mysticism and heterodoxy are less well examined.⁹ Having lived long enough to see the limits and historical refutations of some of his earlier counter-revolutionary arguments, Maistre’s later theoretical contentions (notably in *Les soirées de Saint Pétersbourg*, 1821, and *Éclaircissement sur les sacrifices*, 1810) in the service of theocratic power became evermore unorthodox and esoteric.¹⁰ For both Josephs, Masonry and hermetic lore contributed a symbolic order to decipher the hidden flow of history and perceive within it the outlines of both a theocratic government capable of universal sovereignty, and a true Christianity restored by incorporating the wisdom of ancient pagan revelation. Analogous to Joseph Smith’s recovery of a lost testament among native Americans fallen into paganism, Maistre, influenced by Friedrich Schlegel, believed that sin has dispersed revelation (like language and the Tower of Babel) throughout a shattered peoples, “and that it is the nature of revelation to be forgotten with time and preserved, in corrupted form, in the myths and institutions of pagan peoples.” Both theocratic theologians believed that this form of “primitive revelation” provided an ontology outside of that accessible in conventional Christian theologies and clerisies, a thoroughly unorthodox access that would reconnect man with God and assist in the reconstruction of his true church.¹¹

In Joseph Smith’s circumstance, the incorporation of esoteric features from a “vernacular culture” would push him above and beyond a cohort that was already overturning the orthodoxy and institutional churches of their day. As Nathan O. Hatch remarks, Joseph’s fellow insurgents

also often emerged from the periphery of American culture, and their parallel projects of reconstruction “mingled diverse, even contradictory sources, erasing distinctions that the political culture . . . had struggled to separate.” These alchemists of popular religion combined “odd mixtures of high and popular culture, of renewed supernaturalism and Enlightenment rationalism, of mystical experiences and biblical literalism, of evangelical and Jeffersonian rhetoric.” Harkening back to the origins of the early Jesus movement, they often inverted traditional modes of religious authority, preaching that “divine insight was reserved for the poor and humble rather than the rich and proud,” a spiritual egalitarianism fitting for the Jacksonian revolution.¹²

Breaking from the past and establishing more democratic modes of worship required both novelty and the promise of a more generous distribution of spiritual gifts. The Presbyterian revivalist Charles Finney, one of the greatest preachers of the Second Great Awakening (and who began his ministry simultaneously with Joseph’s in Western New York) incorporated the arts of innovation and salesman-like persuasion in his evangelizing, popular styles that were previously considered too common, crude, or carnivalesque for the dignity of a respectable man-of-the-cloth.¹³ In the hopes of sustaining the momentum of his revivals, Finney sought to evoke not the “intermittent shower,” but “a continuous downpour” of grace within a carefully marketed message of handbills and pamphlets.¹⁴ Formalization of worship and respectability, the return to the drab liturgies and clerical pretenses of yesterday, were signs of calcification and snobbery, for the new religious firebrands understood the need for a spiritual dynamism as relentless as the other revolutions of the age.¹⁵ Alexander Campbell, who would lose his lead disciple, Sidney Rigdon, to Joseph, was one of several innovators who condemned the “pollution” of contemporary Christianity and deem himself and his mission the one divine channel to wash

away the deceitful accretions of Catholicism and Protestantism and rediscover a primitive church, *the* authentic Christianity, that would resolve the crisis of pluralism and restore unity by ushering the arrival of Christ millennial kingdom.¹⁶ Joseph's religious imagination, then, drew from a tide that propelled him before he swam against it. His theological cohort of radical reconstructionists all drifted in the same counter-stream of crisis and discontinuity, one characterized by "the sharp blows of democratic revolutions in severing taproots of orthodoxy and the disconcerting reality of intense religious pluralism."¹⁷

Joseph's project was unique, however, in his drive to restore not only Christianity, but to do so while revitalizing and (re)combining radical Protestantism with the "magical world view" shared among those with little wealth or formal education -- as well as the esoteric spiritual orders of Masonic elites.¹⁸ For beneath the conventional veneer of late 18th and early 19th century American Protestantism that the Great Awakening sought to upend were hundreds of strains and minor traditions of radical sects and "cunning folk," practitioners of hermeticism, alchemy, witchcraft, divining and treasure-seeking, mystical counterfeits, and the odd community practicing modes of Adamic perfectionism and polygamy.¹⁹ Similar in their anarchic composition and circulatory function, Brooke's historic social movement of radical heretics also thematically overlaps with the revolutionary Atlantic proletariat chronicled by Rediker and Linebaugh.²⁰ Both studies portray the trans-Atlantic movement and hidden influence of historically invisible cultural radicals, lumpen commoners, and primitive rebels arising like a "Hydra of misrule" beneath the surface of early modern globalization. As the historian Gordon Wood noted, part of the uniqueness of Joseph's enduring innovation was to combine this radical folk tradition with the initial surface appearance of Protestant respectability: "In dozens of

different ways Mormonism blended the folk religiosity of common people with the hardened churchly traditions and enlightened gentility of modern times.”²¹

Joseph’s unearthing of the Golden Plates of the *Book of Mormon* managed to resonate with not only folkloric practices of rural seekers that had deep roots among his impoverished family of visionaries in a region rife with the occult, but also with a more formalized hermetic tradition of “the Rosicrucian-Masonic mythology of sacred texts in underground vaults,” which was an integral part of his more subaltern formative religious experiences.²² Early familiarity with this mystic lore cycle flowed through Joseph as an inheritance from both sides of his family: “The Smiths of Topsfield were predisposed to witchcraft beliefs and metallurgical dreams; the Macks of Lyme lived in a religious milieu of visions, healing miracles, and sectarian perfectionism. The marriage in 1796 of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack in Tunbridge, Vermont, brought both streams of familial culture into a single household.”²³ In her dictated manuscripts, Joseph’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith, was quite open about the family’s deep involvement with folk magic, while his father, Joseph Sr. was, by his own account, a “firm believer in witchcraft and other supernatural things” and a practitioner of alchemy.²⁴ Compromising both a deep rural tradition and a source of scorn that divided them from more mainstream Christianity and higher class society, an affidavit from one of the Joseph’s neighbors in Palmyra sniffed that, “all with whom we were acquainted, that have embraced Mormonism from this neighborhood, we are compeled [sic] to say, were very visionary, and most of them destitute of moral character.”²⁵

Arriving in the New World through the migrations of Baptists, perfectionists, Pietists and Quakers, the cultural inheritance of the Radical Reformation filtered through generations of family tradition and remained vivid enough at the start of Joseph’s ministry that, according to the

historian John L. Brooke, “the Mormons themselves were self-conscious of these memories . . . and they centered their religion on a cosmic hierarchy of familial connections stretching backward and forward through eternity.”²⁶ Incorporating folk magic and the more formalized rituals and esotericism of masonry helped to draw many of the early Mormon converts together from a shared sense of a spiritual past outside of a more prosaic Protestantism -- an affiliation that also connected Joseph and the early Church elders with the mythic components to construct their rapidly evolving heterodoxy. Even some of the more unlawful aspects of early Mormon social banditry, such as counterfeiting, had mystical antecedents in subcultural practices of New England and New York sects performing alchemy and hermeticism. The Smiths had old familial links to counterfeiters in 18th century New England, and they had “brushed up against counterfeiters in 1807 and in the 1820s,” well before Joseph’s indictment for the failure of the fraudulent Kirtland Bank in 1837.²⁷ Oliver Cowdery, Joseph’s distant relative, closest early disciple, and an amanuensis for the *Book of Mormon*, had family ties to the hermetically inspired New Israelite sect of New England (which claimed lineage to ancient Jewish tribes, the power of revelation, and practiced treasure seeking), and both sides of their extended families were exposed to Masonic millenarian influences from the 1790s on.²⁸ (Of the three non-Mormon members of Joseph’s theocratic Council of Fifty, two were known counterfeiters and the third was pursued by Joseph for having invented a “liquid fire to destroy an army or navy.”²⁹)

While Joseph’s ministry used techniques and tenets of innovation, dynamicism, spiritual egalitarianism, and ecstatic practice analogous to revivalist figures like Charles Finney, the inclusion of tenets and practices strikingly redolent of hermeticism and folk-magic moved him well-beyond the Protestant theology of his contemporaries towards the exceptional path of American godhood. Indeed, so relentless was the pace of Joseph’s revelations, so quickly where

new tenets and texts added (*The Book of Commandments*, *The Book of Moses*, *The Book of Abraham*, Joseph's revisions to Gospel of Matthew) that his ministry sometimes seemed to outpace the very *Book of Mormon* that founded his movement. During the consecration of a hotel built according to revelation for him to manage, Joseph broke from the dedication to retrieve the last surviving manuscript of the *Book of Mormon*. After flipping through to ensure it was complete, he complained "I have had enough trouble with this thing," and buried it under the cornerstone.³⁰

Breaking from the traditions of Luther and Calvin and revealing truths not contained in the *Book of Mormon*, Joseph taught in his final years that salvation is not delivered by God's grace, but, according to the Mormon scholar Terryl Givens, "[s]anctification is strictly connected to self-conformity with laws that are intrinsically transformative," with God the originator and guide of and through these laws. Sanctification, instead of mere salvation, for man possesses a divine potential coequal with God, an eventual exaltation that retains a formally monarchic hierarchy in its ranking of celestial ascendancy ("Ye . . . shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and power, dominions, all heights and depths" (D&C 132:19), This celestial monarchy includes the power to generate infinite spiritual children as part of an expansive eternal family that rules from their own planetary realms.³¹

While a startling theology for the uninitiated, or more conventional Christian, the Mormon doctrine of human perfection has many shared features with old traditions of European hermeticism, in which ancient theories of resurrection and metallurgy were fused in an exceedingly eclectic theology premised on refining the human spirit to regain the divine powers lost since Adam's Fall.³² Intertwined strands of hermetic theology snake throughout early modern European thought and were influential in the Anabaptist tradition in 16th century Europe,

the revolutionary sects of 17th century England, and the anti-Hapsburg mysticism of the Rosicrucian movement (17th century), the predecessors of modern Masonry.³³ Whereas hermeticism held out the promise of restoring Adamic perfection through deciphering the secrets of divine knowledge and attaining ritualized degrees of spiritual rank, in Joseph's version of human potential, his people were commanded: "You have got to learn to make yourselves Gods" by ascending the degrees and rungs of spiritual transcendence, "till you are able to sit in everlasting burnings and everlasting power and glory as those who have gone before, sit enthroned."³⁴

Curiously, Maistre also aspired "to the utter and essential transformation of humanity, out of itself and onto a higher state" and believed that the human will would continue to gather power through its spiritual evolution until it could contradict the very will of God.³⁵ In Maistre's cosmology, God is still omnipotent, but he predicts a future state where there are no permanent limits on the ever expanding power of a humanity, "attached to the throne of the Supreme Being by a supple chain."³⁶ For both theologians the image of the heavenly throne is a coveted position for future humanity to approach or occupy for celestial glory a step far beyond conventional Christian conceptions of salvation. As an actual social and political practice, Joseph Smith's hidden focus on human perfection and the formation of celestial families were not only licenses to transvalue contemporary law and morality, but to cleave the Mormon people from the corrupt and pluralistically atomized Americans that they emerged out of. "It was my endeavor," Joseph wrote, "to so organize the Church, that the brethren might eventually be independent of every encumbrance beneath the celestial kingdom, by bonds and covenants of mutual friendship and love."³⁷

The re-emergence of this secret knowledge into an expanding Church of saints could not happen in an ordinary time. The Mormon faithful, like the Rosicrucians of 17th century Europe, believed that “the discovery of buried text bearing the wisdom of the ancients would aid in the dawning of the millennium.”³⁸ The outbreak of illumination emerging from encounters with these holy texts, the confounding presence on Earth of ever more potent and illuminated men, and the growing precision of revelations concerning an encroaching divine government could only be signs of the Apocalypse. Hopes of hermetic revival had been key tenets in the development of occult millenarianism in late 18th century America, as evidence by the New Israelite movement in the Vermont of Joseph’s youth, and Brooke finds a “powerful affinity” in the era between the spiritual seeking of Masonic mythology and Christian restorationism.³⁹ Apocalypticism in early Mormon theology serves not only as the appropriate eschatological stage for the emergence of “latter-day” saints with a new dispensation, but as a capstone between for the long-running subcultural effort to unite hermeticism to a restored Christianity. Brooke describes the project of Hermetic Restoration launched at Nauvoo as “in effect an institutional antinomianism, with a fundamentally radical notion of divinization contained and circumscribed by the absolute rule of Mormon ordinance, the “perfect law of Theocracy.” The Mormon faithful were not to be accountable to mere human law but to the higher law of the Kingdom of God.”⁴⁰

Throughout both the sectarian and esoteric strains of the Radical Reformation, a mythology of the elect unlocking secrets through the possession of magical “keys” was linked to visions of restoration. Striving for their own foretelling of a restored Christianity, English puritans believed that they held the “keys” to church authority, and therefore the true apostolic succession established by Jesus Christ; while Masonic myth foretold of three Masons discovering a translating “key” to decipher the Ark of the Covenant. A central theme of Joseph’s

later preaching was that his dispensational authority derived from his possession of “keys” to the Church, or “keys to the Kingdom of God.” This revelatory power, descended from a divine Patriarchy, infused the authority of the ancient priesthood Joseph had reestablished, and the ultimate expression of that authority lay in the “perfect law of Theocracy,” whereby the “kingly power” of the priesthood would “administer . . . endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam.”⁴¹

Much like the explicitly political program of the Fifth Monarchy Men of the English Revolution, the early Mormon devotion to immanetizing the incipient Kingdom of God was premised on the destruction of the current regime and “the establishment of a theocratic world government” under God’s chosen saints.⁴² Three weeks after Joseph was formerly initiated into Masonry in April of 1842, he revealed that the forthcoming government would be called “The Kingdom of God and his Laws, with the Keys and power thereof, and judgment in the hands of his servants, Ahman Christ.” Two years later, in March of 1844, he secretly formed the governing “Council of Fifty,” also known as the “Council of the Gods,” in which some of his most trusted associates (85% of whom were also Freemasons)⁴³ were to begin planning to legislate over all the world. Similar to the Mormon priesthood’s ability to “bind on earth and seal eternally in the heavens”, the Council amalgamated divine power with human will unfettered by secular moral codes or laws written by men.⁴⁴ Instead, the Council would operate as a government in a continuously exceptional state, enacting a higher form of divinely inspired politics as a “Living Constitution.” Shortly after being initiated by Joseph, the Council then, in turn, ordained him as “King on earth,” and sanctioned his run for President of the United States in order to bring “Theodemocracy” to the rest of America. It was time to expand the borders of the Mormon Kingdom beyond Nauvoo, and by early April of 1844 the already grandiose

conception of Missouri as Zion was dramatically expanded to “cover a broader ground . . . the whole of America is Zion itself from north to south.”⁴⁵

A couple of days earlier Sidney Rigdon had first revealed to thousands of Mormons that their divine system of salvation was also a “system of government” that “shall rule over temporal and spiritual affairs,” one which would supersede the laws of the United States and every other secular state:

A man is not an honorable man if he is not above all law, and above government. . . . The law of God is far more righteous than the laws of the land; the laws of God are far above the laws of the land. The kingdom of God does not interfere with the laws of the land, but keeps itself its own laws.⁴⁶

Here we have a distinctly American culmination of the elite freedom proffered by the promise of hermetic practices, an ultimately political vision that the religious critic Harold Bloom holds out as one of the best examples of dangers of American Gnosticism: “It is a knowing, by and of an uncreated self, or self-within-the-self, and the knowledge leads to freedom, a dangerous and doom-eager freedom: from nature, time, history, community, other selves.”⁴⁷ Of course, while Joseph’s religion sought to marginalize its saints from the sinful national community, it didn’t provide freedom from all community, but linked patriarchal power and the formation of celestial families backwards, towards righteous ancestors and those redeemed through “baptism of the dead;” in the present, among a community of saints building God’s Kingdom on Earth; and forwards towards a future of limitless celestial glory. The theologies of Adamic perfection found in forms of folk and Masonic hermeticism encountered throughout his life are strikingly similar to integral features of Joseph’s theology, and from them flow his divine license for an exceptional politics and theocratic ethics. The approaching apocalypse means that profane time has been shattered by a divine schedule, the miraculous has been restored to a redeemed

America, and the return of a “King of Earth” presiding over a political kingdom promises a continual flow of spiritual gifts and new prophecies.

Joseph’s cosmology promises the obedient and righteous Mormon a path to godhood, but that Promethean quest is an ascendancy of many unequal degrees and even secret rituals unknown to those laboring below, while those in the higher ranks are granted extraordinary legal and ethical prerogatives to fit their exalted status. Organized into a loyal priesthood, the basics of that hierarchical structure would survive Joseph’s death to rule a theocratic kingdom in the American West almost to the beginning of the 20th century -- before evolving to guide the development of one of the world’s most recent major religions.⁴⁸ During its formation, religious pluralism equipped Joseph with both an enemy, a pseudo-Christian “abomination” to overcome, and a vast lore of folk magic and high hermeticism to inspire and incorporate, from the social banditry of counterfeiting to the correlations between Adamic perfection and Masonic millennialism.

Though there were some resemblances, none of Joseph’s American contemporaries among Protestant revivalists shared in his astounding compilation of esoteric practices, apocalypticism and reactionary political theology, the unique doctrines that made him an exemplar of “the American Religion” as noted by Harold Bloom. In pondering the distinctions between a more traditionally European Christianity and its American variants, Bloom inquires into how theologians mingled the seemingly immiscible strains “of the American religion, the “positive thinking” aspect of our optimism, and the Gnostic despair of society that is our even more persistent pessimism. What is the link between these strains?”⁴⁹ Knowing now the procedural links between Adamic perfectionism and the apocalyptic arrival of the Kingdom of God in the gnostic tradition that informed Joseph’s theology, we can reframe Bloom’s question to explore

its political corollary: Why is it that this so democratically accessible cosmology (Bloom's optimism) has, in its most exemplary American form -- wherein even godhood itself has allegedly been pluralized and placed within democratic reach -- become intertwined with, indeed, resulted in, theocracy (Bloom's pessimism)?

Joseph as Lockean Nightmare

We can better understand how theocracy works as the institutional corollary of an elite imagination unchained from the constraints of Lockean liberalism by employing Uday Mehta's analysis of Locke's anxieties over imaginative excess. Mehta perceives a deep unease within Lockean liberalism about the instability that unregulated imagination can so easily unleash, and he explores why Locke became obsessed with "curbing the conscience" in order to contain the cognitive sources of political volatility.⁵⁰ A Lockean suspicion of the sort of visionary extravagance long practiced by Joseph would only be further piqued by the prophet's assertions that such politically disruptive passions are permitted within a legal right to privacy. As Mehta writes, "Lockean liberalism is deeply suspicious of that which smacks of being fundamentally different, especially if that difference claims for itself immunity on grounds of privacy."⁵¹ While attempting to break with pluralism, Joseph's theocratic alterity is also iterative of Lockean liberalism in his realization that the imaginative excess that propelled his movement was also destabilizing, and must be itself controlled through new institutions if it was to form an enduring church. Such isomorphic mimicry does nothing to calm Lockean anxieties however. In demanding the liberty to conceive and promote his illiberal dreams, in creating illiberal institutions within the permissive space of religious freedom, and by resuscitating modes of

political theology Locke had hoped to supersede, Joseph appears as a Lockean nightmare within liberalism.

Locke's fixation with patrolling the imaginative limits of individuality emerges out of a concern for guiding the formulation of reason, ensuring that a broader, consensual form of reason is strong enough to maintain social stability.⁵² Reasonableness, as a precondition of politics for Locke, must be promoted by encouraging a "self-discipline [that] requires submission not to one's own reason but rather to the reason of others. The experience of submission to others is thus a precondition of one's own reason, and hence a precondition for self-discipline."⁵³ Against such conformist submission, Joseph's revelations persistently defied conventional reason. In Mehta's terms, his conception of religious liberty countenanced no external limits to his own religious imagination. Complaining that Methodists "have creeds which a man must believe or be kicked out of their church." Joseph countered that, "I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammelled."⁵⁴ While Joseph's own liberty was exalted through the power of prophecy, his most prominent revelation, the *Book of Mormon*, "proposes a new purpose for America: becoming a realm of righteousness rather than an empire of liberty . . . the book's main point [is] that submission to God is necessary for society to survive."⁵⁵ In pursuit of that realm of righteousness for everyone else, Joseph's political theology rears back, away from established arguments of natural law to return to a form of scriptural politics as the basis of an ideal governance, the sort of scriptural politics that Locke had sought to end.⁵⁶

Diverging however from the form of early Protestantism's scriptural politics premised on the Bible as the guide to human affairs, Joseph placed himself as the ultimate, authoritative translator of an expanding library of divine texts.⁵⁷ Even the King James Bible itself would have

to be revised by Joseph to bring it up to more contemporary standards of accuracy.⁵⁸ The introduction of new scriptures, doctrines, and covenants, with the promise of more to come as Joseph received or translated them, constituted a profound rupture with not just with Locke but also Luther's concept of *sola scriptura*.⁵⁹ The New Testament was no longer a closed canon or the single best guide to salvation -- now the revised Mormon bible and the *Book of Mormon* would constitute the authentic source of political anthropology (of ancient American tribes), and these scriptures would help illuminate a vision of theocratic governance. The interpretative mode of scripture inspiring the "authoritative political ideal and discourse" Locke once hoped to neutralize in the works of his opponent, Robert Filmer, was once again loose in the most Lockean of lands.⁶⁰

The central institution within Locke's thought that was supposed to curb such irrational extravagance was education,⁶¹ and Joseph was sensitive to how little he had. His boasts, betraying his shortcomings, frequently indulged in "fantastic claims to learning and position, as a lawyer, a doctor, a linguist, a politician, the positions in respectable society from which his family and the Church were excluded."⁶² By incorporating subaltern forms of folk magic and hermeticism outside of the more conventional Protestantism political theology, Joseph represents -- to the Lockean worldview -- the imagination unlearned and unleashed, and, most dangerously, he arrives equipped with the ability to forge new letters and build new institutions to trespass where he wished.

Those new institutions arose after Joseph encountered the destabilizing "burdens of plurality" within his developing church, and quickly discovered the necessity of having to build regulatory institutions to contain them -- a dynamic that led to increasing degrees of control in response to the contrary imaginations he confronted. As Bushman describes, "revelation meant

freedom to Joseph, freedom to expand his mind through time and space, seeking truth wherever it might be. . . Against the centrifugal force of individual revelation, Joseph continually organized and regulated.”⁶³ What in Lockean terms this resembles is a politically unruly form of elite imagination, with Joseph as its theurge and warden. As Mehta has shown, Lockean liberalism can only perceive this almost Nietzschean will with “utmost suspicion,” for this is the will that continually resists “the general . . . collective . . . or national will” while appearing to possess “an inner certainty that demanded obedience.”⁶⁴

Chapter 4: Liberty for Theocrats: The Challenge of Apocalyptic Theocracies for Liberal

Pluralism

“Both liberty and equality are among the primary goals pursued by human beings through many centuries; but total liberty for the wolves is death to the lambs . . .”

-- Isaiah Berlin¹

“When I am the weaker I ask you for my freedom because that is your principle; but when I am stronger I take away your freedom for that is my principle.”

-- The ultramontane polemicist Louis Veuillot²

Joseph Smith’s apocalyptic political theology challenges liberal pluralism both in its inception -- by emerging out of a pluralistic populace already tolerant of a wide variety of Protestantisms -- and in its theocratic tenets. By engaging Joseph’s apocalyptic political theology with the works of contemporary liberal theorists, we can better grasp the continuing relevance of the strategic cunning to his conservative thinking and how, through the language of religious liberty, he fought to establish a place within a liberal pluralist society he ultimately sought to supersede. The strategy of antagonistic symbiosis, so integral for his American theocracy to thrive, worked by adopting and modifying liberal principles in order to subvert liberal pluralism, capitalizing on where Lockean liberalism has certain limited ideas of what it has to confront from illiberal elements within its polity and how much it can accommodate them.

In proclaiming his revelations the basis for new ontological hierarchies deserving political power, Joseph drew on forms of irrationality that Locke sought to dismiss from the public sphere. Joseph’s political challenge to Locke strikes deeper than merely a clash over interests or ideologies because it emerges at the cognitive level, the level of imagination that

Uday Mehta claims as “the central locus of conflict and disorder for Locke.”³ According to Mehta, Locke saw madness, revelations, and other forms of irrationality as originating from excesses of imagination: “Locke places his stamp on subsequent forms of liberalism both in the noble insight that links imagination with freedom and, unfortunately, in the urge to circle the wagons and close itself off from different imaginations that it cannot comprehend or otherwise tolerate.”⁴ Despite Locke’s arguments for their exclusion, revelatory claims to political authority within liberal polities have continually attempted to disrupt liberal politics, especially when they assume Locke’s language to demand tolerance and religious liberty. So while this discussion of Joseph’s political theology and his millenarian goals resides within its historical context of 19th century theocratic city-states on the American frontier, we will introduce it to modern theory – “subsequent forms of liberalism” -- fully aware that Jacksonian society constituted a far more limited spectrum of pluralism than the range of diversity discussed by 21st century liberal theory. The intent is not to harp on the failures of liberalism to anticipate all enemies so much as it is to anatomize Joseph’s political theology, revealing the ways it emerged to work in between the principles of liberalism in order to subvert it. Joseph’s revelatory mode and the politics it inspired collapsed the distance established by more conventional Christianities in America between the sacred and profane, and in so doing, blurred distinctions that liberal secularism uses to discourage adventures in explicitly religious rule.

Indeed, the very novelty of Joseph’s theocratic religion and the fluidity of its revelatory theology confound efforts of liberal toleration and recognition. A faith so rapidly developing its dogma and doctrines frustrates external determinations of what its core essence truly is. Questions of what is integral to the faith cannot be thoroughly satisfied if it is constant flux, for inclusion within liberal pluralism relies on some degree of integrity and openness in order to first

make distinctions between legitimate faith and fraud. As mentioned previously, mainstream Mormon doctrines, culture, and beliefs have evolved substantially since the murder of Joseph in 1844. This study is primarily about Joseph's original thought and its political implications, not the more moderate politics of its institutional successor. Noting these qualifications, the application of a 19th century political theology to 21st century theories of pluralism is worthwhile. Despite the self-acknowledged heterodoxy and anachronism of Joseph's thought several of the contemporary theorists discussed below acknowledge that new theocratic challenges are common in modern liberal society. As the religious historian Philip Jenkins has described the character of American religious culture, "(e)xtrême and bizarre religious ideas are so commonplace in American history that it is difficult to speak of them as a fringe at all . . . the doomsday theme has never been far from the center of American religious thought."⁵

Contemporary apocalyptic movements premised on revelation over reason and distinctly anti-pluralist beliefs will not follow the specific contours of Joseph's political theology, but the Schmittian exceptional politics at its core is not entirely unique. Analogs can also be found among illiberal new religions -- and should serve as a warning that some theocratic challenges that request liberal accommodations still cannot be answered by the traditional liberal solutions of negotiation, rational discussion, and the privatization of religion.

In his effort to carve out his own empire within American pluralism, Joseph deployed an exceptional politics with tactics that can be broken into three general categories. First, against the broad tolerance for minor heterodoxies within Protestant denominations, Joseph cultivated a deliberate *peculiarity* for his newfound people that could simultaneously appeal for tolerance while cleaving from a common Christianity. While similar liberal arguments have been made to grant toleration and legal accommodations for "marginal" religious groups resisting assimilation

like the Amish and the Hasidim,⁶ Joseph's innovation was to promote peculiar practices and beliefs that inspired persecution for a group emerging out of an already integrated population, not controversial tenets of a faith already formed when its adherents arrived in America. In deviating from the underlying theological consensus and liturgical similarities that helped to promote tolerance, Joseph broke from the commonalities that Michael Walzer identifies as making America so unique: "One reason that toleration works so easily in countries like the United States is that the churches and congregations that individuals form, whatever their theological disagreements, are, mostly, very much like one another."⁷

As his theology further developed, the early Mormon communities Joseph led attempted a complex stratagem of publically appearing tolerant of the broad array of American Christianity, sometimes portraying their beliefs as within those bounds of conventional Christian tradition, while simultaneously defying social taboos and developing ever more grandiose theocratic institutions and national ambitions in what they asserted was the private practice of their faith. Joseph's ministry demanded tolerance for his Saints while preaching the adoption of radical theological and social differences that inspired persecution. As R. Laurence Moore has argued about the ways Joseph courted notoriety for himself and his nascent church,

Mormons were different because they said they were different and because their claims, frequently advanced in the most obnoxious way possible, prompted others to agree and to treat them as such. The notion of Mormon difference, that is, was a deliberate invention over time. . . . Furthermore, as their opponents charged again and again, they fed on persecution. They memorialized it in ways that seemed to invite more of it . . . Joseph Smith employed a rhetoric of deviance to describe himself and to elaborate the institutions of his church.⁸

In response to persecution that could not have been a surprise, Joseph's moves towards ever greater degrees of semi-sovereignty for Mormon communities were premised on requesting and receiving legal exceptions through pluralist accommodation for a repressed minority

religion. Once granted, he initiated ever more dangerous and illiberal political practices within his archipelago of autonomy. This tactic should be noted by liberal theorists in examining contemporary theocracies, for as new movements marshaled out of the diversity of modern America, they've already emerged *out* of pluralism, subverting the principles of tolerance that helped to incubate them as they exit.

Second, as we've seen there is an important in emphasis Joseph's political theology on secrecy, oaths, and in esoteric teachings, wisdom and even revelations that must remain concealed from the larger public. Deceit for Joseph is a strategic tool, a political weapon doctrinally validated. The liberal reliance on negotiation, deliberation, and compromise (to settle conflicts of interests) cannot handle strategic dishonesty well from within its polity, especially when it is intertwined with assertions of religious freedom. Lucas Swaine notes that laws and institutional practices in the United States emerged from Protestant doctrine, and "still retain their partisan trapping,"⁹ and in matters of faith and religion, their blind spots too. The competition among denominations for members within Protestant pluralism in Jacksonian America relied on an openness about (or usually promotion of) church doctrines and biblical exegesis. Secrecy and deceit were then often affiliated with Popish plots and conspiracies, while the Protestant seeker was expected to find a denomination that comported with his faith in a marketplace of competing churches.¹⁰

Finally, there is Joseph's prioritizing of revelation over reason in politics. Much like negotiation, rational discussion (to resolve conflicts of ideas) for liberals is premised on a shared conception of reason. Theocrats like Joseph who cite revelation over reason to buttress their anti-liberal political claims and policies (overt or covert) within a liberal polity do so from an

ontology inaccessible to those outside the faith, and therefore constitute the problem of what Johnathan Quonq (working off of John Rawls) describes as unreasonable citizens.¹¹

In order to gauge the ways in which American theocracy maneuvers outside the peripheral vision of liberal pluralism, or, through a secondary facet of the phenomenon, how liberal pluralism fails to account for, or outright misunderstands, the theocratic threats it must confront from home-grown or immigrant apocalyptic movements, we will first contrast Joseph's political theology with Michael Walzer's work on pluralism and the politics of difference. Here we'll note the theocratic strategy of separation *out of pluralism* as a religious liberty, and how it slips outside liberal efforts of incorporation. Since theocratic challenges do not rise to a specific concern of Walzer's, Lucas Swaine's arguments for how theocrats can be won over to liberal governance by appeals to a liberty of conscience will serve as an example of how an exceptional politics (utilizing the strategies of peculiarity, deceit, and revelation) common to illiberal apocalyptic movements subverts a contemporary pluralist theory that hopes to better adjudicate the many dilemmas posed by theocrats. We'll see how the theocratic hierarchy established by Joseph as an authority on revelation and doctrine affords no space for Swaine's appeals to individual reason. In concluding, the recent works of Jürgen Habermas on the difficulties for liberal regimes in incorporating the voices of those religious citizens unwilling to formulate liberal rationales for their political claims in the public sphere will be juxtaposed with the array of discourses available within Joseph's political theology. Joseph's life and ministry illustrates that revelation can be transcribed by prophets in prosaic language, on subjects that may be surprisingly banal, and the more conventional language of reason, even liberal rationales, are still available to religious citizens for crafting political claims.

* * * *

The challenge raised by Joseph's apocalypticism, particularly its more reactionary Schmittian elements that outright reject pluralist premises, is not addressed by a good deal of pluralist American political theory. The emergence out of assimilation is rarely perceived as a possibility for liberal theorists. For example, Michael Walzer's schema of articulation, negotiation, and incorporation, laid out as a successful sequence of integrative citizenship in his *The Politics of Difference*, assumes that the primary difference within a multicultural society is that of an ethnic immigrant identity that moves at varying rates towards assimilation, aiming for and reaching a final status of reciprocal recognition and toleration by other ethnic groups.¹² Though this model has its origins in the tolerance of religious minorities in liberal states, for Walzer ethnicity in America is now the primary grounds for contestation in a politics of difference. The critical problem Walzer locates in the present is how a pluralist society is "to encompass the actually existing differences within some overarching structure,"¹³ and he perceives the politics of difference starting when "a group of people, previously invisible, repressed, and fearful, insists on its value as a group and on the solidarity of its members, and demands some form of public recognition." So defined, groups then begin a process of negotiation, where "each group must come to acknowledge that its limits are set by the legitimacy of others." The mutual recognition of these limits become the boundaries of group identities peacefully coexisting in a pluralist civic culture, foundational borders for continuing negotiation. Their articulation gives hope -- through negotiation -- for reaching a "shared commitment to tolerance, equality, and mutual aid."¹⁴ Walzer hopes that this establishment of an ethnic solidarity, and its recognition as having value and legitimacy vis-à-vis other ethnic groups, constitutes a break with the old world and its coercive practices of imperial placement, relocation, and incorporation for ethnicities. As a liberating step towards non-repressive modes

of assimilation in pluralist society, “(a)rticulation shatters these ancient patterns, and negotiation replaces them with their liberated, dissociated pieces.”¹⁵

Walzer’s final, ideal step of incorporation, dependent on articulation and negotiation, can only start “after we have made our peace with the newly liberated groups” and adheres to no particular pattern.¹⁶ Concerned that excessive articulation of difference is undercutting the negotiation of difference, Walzer hopes that the latter can be strengthened through a much stronger conception of “American citizenship, for a political community of engaged and active men and women.”¹⁷ An ultimately optimistic theory that puts great faith in the deep cultural pull of incorporation, Walzer is dismissive of the “silliness and nastiness” of autocratic and aristocratic politics in multicultural societies. They are minor problems, and the “response to demagogues and cults, to bizarre doctrines of racial superiority and unlikely tales of conspiracy, is ostracism, avoidance, rejection.”¹⁸ This dismissal finds an echo in his later work, *On Tolerance*, where he asserts that in modern liberal states, intolerant minorities are no threat to their neighbors or internal critics. “These same minorities cannot practice intolerance here (in France, say, or in America), that is, they cannot harass their neighbors or persecute or repress deviant or heretical individuals in their midst.”¹⁹

In contrast, the articulation of group difference and religious identity for Joseph was not a break from the old world, it was a return to it, or more precisely, an adherence to doctrines derived from a uniquely Mormon vision of an old world of theocratic Israeli tribes in ancient America. Unlike Walzer’s diverse ethnicities moving towards greater visibility, liberation, and toleration on American shores, Joseph’s Latter-day Saints emerged from the already visible and free communities of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. As Moore has argued, many Americans have formed their sense of American identity “by turning aspects of a carefully nurtured sense of

separate identity against a vaguely defined concept of mainstream culture.” What makes this so novel, so American, is the language of dissent merging with that of religious liberty in a culture where traditions have become increasingly fluid. “New religions,” writes Moore, “which have often been linked to ethnic identifications, have served as vehicles through which people have nurtured a sense of antagonistic culture.”²⁰ A distinctive part of the new Mormon identity, part of their thymotic struggle for spiritual and social distinction, was the assumption of the yoke of the “repressed and fearful” that Walzer’s success stories strive to shake. They *become* heretics stalked by a religious society they feel compelled to leave -- but whose material goods and power they would soon inherit. The process of group articulation occurred while the very doctrines that made them distinct were still being developed (or revealed); the addition of ever more strange commandments handed down from the Prophet, the greater the “actually existing differences” from the rest of gentile society.

Early Mormonism under Joseph’s leadership was a culture in formation that did not inherit ascriptive identities or discrimination as per a subordinate ethnic minority or “race;” the heterodox beliefs and peculiar practices that inspired opprobrium from much of American society were knowingly adopted.²¹ In this expanding marketplace of religions, there was a novelty to theocracy: the “traditions” relied upon in forming a new ethno-religious people were either highly syncretic or entirely unknown; they were not, at first, clearly bounded so much as additive and expansive. Only Joseph could interpret all of his mysterious golden plates, and there were always new magic items popping out of the secreting earth.²² This novelty to “tradition” is outside of Walzer’s focus, which is why his theory misses Lucas Swaine’s warning that liberals need to address the challenge of theocracy “because new theocratic groups continually burgeon forth in democratic societies as new flora in the simple pluralistic array.”²³

(Ironically, the non-immigrant groups that Walzer covers as having the most difficulty with integration are the Quebecois, Native Americans and Puerto Ricans, are all colonized peoples and the last two of which possess indigenous claims. The Mormons, in comparison, assumed an indigenous inheritance and identity through their theology.²⁴)

Another point of friction lies in what other multicultural theorists would call recognition, for what in Walzer's theory would be situated between the stages of negotiation and incorporation. For political theorists recognition entails groups overcoming social and political marginalization and gaining respect for their contributions to society, if necessary through measures to reduce discrimination or preserve and protect their unique culture.²⁵ Remarking on Charles Taylor's work of how recognition and identity form the bases for an ethics of authenticity necessary for liberal politics, K. Anthony Appiah notes that within a plural society "people have the right to be acknowledged publicly as what they already are. It is because someone is already authentically Jewish or gay that we deny them something in requiring them to hide this fact, to pass for something they are not."²⁶

Given the profoundly covert aspects of early Mormon culture, what degree of "public recognition" would be possible when so many of the distinct doctrines, eschatological goals and beliefs are practiced in secret, some under penalty of death?²⁷ The authentic Mormon self formed by Joseph's political theology is concealed from the gentiles behind a strategic mask, and can only be given its full expression when protected from the faithless in theocratic city-states on the American frontier.²⁸ Passing is what the authentic Mormon does as a minority in a doomed pluralist society, for her true role as successor to the current corrupt regime must be concealed for her own safety and that of her mission. This is a theocratic mode that claims the privilege of privacy in its formation and transmission of doctrine among its members, but as a political

practice cannot be reconciled with liberalism's commitment to a principle of public justification for its governing policies. The value of recognition as a form of public authentication for "what they already are" misses what must be kept secret – and it is also exceedingly difficult to recognize a bounded, consistent social entity, community, or faith when a religious culture changes so quickly as new revelations arrive. The Mormon Church founded in 1830 was doctrinally quite different from the Church in 1844 at the time of Joseph's death, notably in regards to the former's revelatory prohibition of polygamy.

In the last of Walzer's sequences, the critical step for incorporation "is the territorial dispersion of the immigrant 'tribes' -- national and ethnic groups, races, religious communities."²⁹ Joseph's flight from American pluralism towards a Zion prophesied for his refounded people reverses this movement -- it is a process of increasing distinction as his revelations inspired the mustering of a tribe of anti-pluralists who saw the mainline Christianity they emerged from as not just misguided but an "abomination."³⁰ By 1980, the *Harvard Encyclopedia of Ethnic Groups* gave Mormons their own entry.³¹ As we've studied, the adoption of taboo practices, "apparently absurd beliefs," and an emphasis on ancient Hebraic sacrifice incurred social costs that cleaved their adherents from the corpus of relatively tolerant Protestantism. Believers in "extreme" tenets can thus identify and trust one another, a solidarity necessary for defense against a hostile culture.³²

In opposing integration, articulation of group differences for the early Mormons meant an increased antipathy to the pluralism of Jacksonian America as the historian Marvin Hill has written: "The early Mormons wanted a society that would exclude unnecessary choices and would exclude pluralism. Above all, they wanted to diminish influences that pluralism engendered."³³ According to Joseph's theology, the secularizing influence of pluralism must be

shunned to appreciate the re-enchantment of the world, attained through the divine unity promised in a wholly new dispensation, one available to those capable of listening and believing. Those unprepared for the second advent of Christ would be “cut off and destroyed.”³⁴ Yet in response to hostility and conflict from the Gentile world they sought to supplant, Mormons would gain sympathy for the persecution they suffered and ask for toleration and their rights to worship as simply one church among many.³⁵ Anti-Mormons were aware of the quandary that their persecution enhanced Mormon tales of martyrdom and appeals for tolerance, that, “(a) buse seemed to give Mormons what they most needed.”³⁶

As we’ve seen, for Joseph the abomination of a corrupted Christianity so spiritually dead it can no longer hear God, the confusion of pluralism spread by Satan, and the profound evil pervasive in America that the Second Coming would vanquish, all contributed to a profound Schmittian friend/enemy attitude towards pluralist society and the American government.³⁷ Given these tenets, Walzer’s dream of a more participatory American citizenship is simply not on the table. Joseph cultivated a paradoxical stance of praising the American Constitution -- for which he saw himself as a great apologist -- and, near the end of his life in Nauvoo, insisting that he honored and protected all religious practice, while covertly promoting a priesthood government, a contradiction he never reconciled for his followers or the dissidents cast out of his movement.³⁸

Ultimately, Joseph’s movement does, after his death, move much closer to the mainstream of American culture, which at first glance might appear to be one of Walzer’s liberal success stories. However, this came after the Mormon War of 1838 and the martyrdom of Joseph, as well as the federal government’s 1852 War against the Mormon Kingdom in the Utah territory and a campaign of heavy-handed raids and mass incarcerations of Mormon elites in the

1890s . . . before the Church publically renounced its most radical practice of polygamy. Instead of a steady movement of peaceful assimilation and integration as per the liberal ideal, the most controversial of Mormon tenets were only renounced after an intense campaigns of social and state-sponsored coercion.

The more specific type of antagonistic symbiosis that Joseph represents evade traditionally liberal conceptions of distinction and recognition, Walzer's theory, for example, comes closest to addressing this illiberal phenomenon in two arguments. His first is tangentially related, and rest on the observation that the accommodations granted to marginal religious sects like the Amish and Hasidim "is justified in part by the marginality of the Amish, and in part by their embrace of marginality: their deep commitment not to live anywhere except on the margins of American society and not to seek any influence beyond them."³⁹ Joseph's revelations of Mormons inheriting gentile lands in Missouri, of Mormonism triumphing in a post-apocalyptic America, his block voting and party alliances in Illinois, and his run for the presidency, are all indicative of a drive for influence beyond the margins. Walzer's second argument lies in his aforementioned dismissal of any real danger posed by the autocratic and aristocratic politics of "demagogues and cults," which he believes can simply be avoided or ostracized. Since the mechanisms for doing so, and whether it is practical to merely ostracize a rapidly growing expansionistic theocratic movement that is attempting to supplant pluralism, are outside the ambit of his argument, we turn to the theories of accommodation for theocracies proposed by Lucas Swaine for a more in-depth look at how theocratic threats from within pluralism can circumvent efforts of accommodation.

Revelation Over Rationality: Liberalism and Semi-sovereignty for Theocrats?

“Relative to our city [of Nauvoo] charter, courts, right of habeas corpus, etc., I wish you to know and publish that we have all power; and if any man from this time forth says anything to the contrary, cast it into his teeth . . .”

-- Joseph Smith, June 1843⁴⁰

In his *The Liberal Conscience: Politics and Principle in A World of Religious Pluralism*, Lucas Swaine expresses concern for how theocrats are treated in liberal polities and how they can best be reconciled to liberal arguments and governance. His goal is to engender greater respect for theocratic practices and beliefs, and find the right space for them to create a *nomos* of their own, one free of disruptive intrusions from liberal state and society.⁴¹ Swaine asserts that liberal governments that attempt to “simply repel and retaliate against theocrats” are terribly misguided, for “the stance is kindling for combat, fuel for zealot’s inflammatory plans.” Such an innately adversarial stance conforms too easily to the theocrat’s internalized friend/enemy distinction and offers no hope for reconciliation, a terrible error in that it only “looks to the eyes of many as though theocrats must by their nature be at odds with liberal principles.” In reality, the conflict “need not exist, and liberals can make a positive impact to mollify problems.”⁴²

Swaine’s theoretical exercise is useful for illustrating how the cunning of Joseph’s deployment of theocratic revelation alongside liberal arguments for religious liberty can subvert even modern attempts to win over theocrats with liberal rationales and grants of greater autonomy. Swaine defines theocracy as “a mode of governance prioritizing a religious conception of the good that is strict and comprehensive in its range of teachings.”⁴³ The philosophic fulcrum to leverage theocrats into liberalism is the appeal to a liberty of conscience, which he believes can be far better argued by liberals to convince even ambitious theocrats. After elaborating on the principles of a liberty of conscience and how they can overlap with

theocrat's conception of the good, Swaine explores the best ways to grant theocratic communities the sort of autonomy that assuages them to the best practices of liberal governance.

So confident is Swaine in the philosophical appeal of a liberty of conscience, and arguments for liberal institutions that naturally extend from it, that he does not regard "illiberality as a definitive trait of theocracy."⁴⁴ Instead, he focuses on four exigent moral failures of liberalism and how liberals are beholden to rectify these shortcomings and better advance their arguments. First, "liberalism lacks a well-devised schema for treating theocrats within liberal democracies." Second, liberalism provides no "proper and identifiable grounds for governing theocrats."⁴⁵ Third, liberals have not provided readily comprehensible and consistent justifications for the coercion of theocrats when the latter break the law. And finally, Swaine sees a fourth moral failure in liberalism's neglect in offering reasons for interference in theocrats' lives comprehensible enough for them "that theocrats should accept."⁴⁶ Noting that in the end, they must accept them, Swaine is convinced that theocrats "may not yet understand that they are rationally committed to these principles of liberty of conscience or that they should accept and affirm the institutions those principles require, but they can come to understand those facts."⁴⁷

There are three principles of liberty of conscience that Swaine argues will appeal to theocrats if liberals respectfully dialogue with them: 1) *Rejection*: the supposition that in the search for divine truth, one must be free to reject lesser doctrines and conceptions of the good. 2) *Affirmation*: one must be free to accept the good. 3) *Distinction*: one must be free to distinguish between good and bad doctrines.⁴⁸ Since theocrats themselves are committed to discovering and accepting the good, rejecting the bad, and the necessity of discovering the difference, Swaine proposes that these principles will appeal to theocrats when they sequentially accept the premises, hence "the value conflict between theocrats and liberal *is a rationally soluble*

problem.”⁴⁹ Addressing the issue that there is no liberty of conscience for “self-assured theocrats,” Swaine insists that theocrats will still need to procure a reason for why God rejects a free conscience to seek truth.⁵⁰ For Swain, guaranteeing the principles of liberty of conscience permits open ontological inquiry, the very notions that Joseph at first welcomed and then sought to contain under his singular control. Swaine extends the liberty of conscience to claim that there is a “strong reason for theocrats to reject unqualified theocratic governance and to affirm liberal institutions, given their wish strictly to promote and pursue otherworldly ends.”⁵¹

But what form of governance would allow theocratic practices while preserving a liberty of conscience? In attempting to reconcile theocrats to liberalism and liberal governance, Swaine first dismisses a legal accommodation standard that would merely grant specific exemptions to theocratic communities within a regulatory framework as far too narrow and intrusive, for the struggle to constantly gain exemptions from the many points of conflict with legal codes would still involve theocrats in “continual and excessive” legal battles with legislatures, courts and governments attempting oversight of their uncommon practices.⁵² Litigation would embroil theocrats in lawsuits and invite the kind of interference that Swaine deems to be “*infra dignitatem* or even outright proscribed by doctrine.”⁵³ Therefore, “the only legal structure able to handle theocratic communities appropriately that could be adapted to fit with the overarching legal structure of democracies would be one that allowed those communities to gain semi-sovereign status.”⁵⁴ Since theocratic communities do not “normally” wish to outright secede from the polities in which they reside, granting them limited autonomy would provide a far more pragmatic standard.⁵⁵

Permitting theocrats to establish semi-sovereign communities would assuage their fears of liberal government, as it shows that liberals are “prepared to respect their religious practices

and beliefs, giving members . . . the option of greater religious autonomy and the ability to create a *nomos* of their own.” Yet, in acknowledging that when theocrats are granted “free reign over their subjects” severe repression could occur,⁵⁶ the accommodating liberal government will still have to continually monitor these semi-autonomous communities “for outbreaks of physical violence, the rapid acquisition of firearms and other weapons, and further warning signs.” This would require that, when detected beforehand, government defuse “such situations tactfully”.⁵⁷ If full autonomy would permit theocrats to suppress their members’ basic rights and even war against other polities, then the government must be not only ensure that such a secession isn’t attempted, but is must also take a proactive role in ensuring the maintenance of basic rights.

Having outlined his arguments, how do Swaine’s theories of the rhetorical and philosophical appeal of a liberty of conscience, and the liberal accommodation of semi-sovereignty, illustrate the subversive power posed by Joseph’s mode of theocracy? In terms of Joseph’s theology (and many other forms of theocratic soteriology), searching for divine truth is permitted, even encouraged, but true revelation is not open to everyone nor are they free to reject it. It must be obeyed. When V.S. Naipaul conducted interviews with Islamic fundamentalists in Mansoura, Pakistan, he encountered a similar conception of a strongly circumscribed religious freedom in a theocratic state: “‘There is freedom in Islam.’ [an Islamist argued] What they wanted . . . was a state where everyone accepted Islam voluntarily, with all his heart. And I began to understand how freedom and submission could run together.”⁵⁸ For “self-assured” theocrats (and which ones aren’t?), there already is a liberty of conscience -- with only one correct answer.

What Joseph established in an American context, and what Swaine neglects, is who it is within theocratic theology that receives and interprets the will of God, and what the otherworldly

ends are that they alone hear. His egalitarian premise of a right of conscience would subvert the very hierarchies of authoritative interpretation that constitute theocracies. Within Joseph's theology, the prophet could both proclaim his longstanding devotion to a liberty of conscience,⁵⁹ while simultaneously repressing dissenters and plotting the overthrow of the liberal order that claimed to guarantee free speech and conscience. A January 1831 revelation of Joseph's decreed that individual freedom only exists under the authority of Jesus Christ: "Wherefore, hear my voice and follow me, and you shall be a free people, and ye shall have no laws but my laws, when I come, for I am your Lawgiver, and what can stay my hand?"⁶⁰ Given the evident confusion over what Christ wants for his followers on earth, Joseph's renovated priesthood (with himself as high priest) would cut through that chaos with *the* authoritative interpretations. The principle of *distinction* Swaine proposes to determine the difference between good and bad doctrines is ultimately in priestly heads alone to decipher, not in the heart of each individual adherent. Swaine's conception of how religious seekers discover truth and the correct conceptions of the good is rooted in a post-Reformation ontology, one in which the earnest Protestant knows God and the good through individual effort, such as prayerful investigations of *sola scriptura*. The allegedly ancient caste system of different degrees of ontological status that Joseph (re-)established was inspired by pre-Reformation forms of hierarchy, "an authoritarian system of priesthood that he intended to be monolithic . . . Mormons were supposed to view any factionalism in spiritual or temporal matters as contrary to God's will."⁶¹

Not everyone knew of Joseph's priesthood or how it really functioned. For those Americans distant from Mormon communities, Joseph and his apostles could appeal for religious tolerance and protection from unjust persecution, while, according to Norman O. Hatch, for those gentiles closer to them, "what also infuriated their neighbors and makes it difficult to think

of [the Mormons] in any sense as classical republicans, was their denial of the most basic liberty imaginable, freedom of thought.”⁶² Swaine’s very argument for engagement, for winning theocrats over to religious pluralism, is premised on the receptivity of their “comprehensive conception of the good” to liberal appeals, and that “theocratic doctrines are widely or fully comprehensive in the sense that they extend to cover” all recognized values and virtues .⁶³ As we’ve seen, Joseph’s social doctrines could shift very rapidly and promised to continue evolving as his exceptional politics drew from a stream of new revelations, a continuing elaboration of gospel truth with a rapidly evolving cosmology and dogma. Early Mormonism eschewed contemporary Christian theology as static and stale, devoid of the clarifying, enchanting power of revelation, while the collection of beliefs and commandments into the Doctrine and Covenants were not considered comprehensive for all eternity, and might never fully be -- they were absolute for the present, with the promise of ever greater light and knowledge to be revealed. The quick progression of revelatory knowledge, the inherent mutability of Joseph’s political theology confuses liberal attempts to establish what a faith’s comprehensive doctrines truly are, as well as communitarian assertions that religious beliefs and practices are deeply rooted and immutable.

In regarding theocrats as bounded by their comprehensive doctrines, tied to their conceptions of the good, Swaine claims that though they reject liberal basic rights, they “do not make these maneuvers merely to suit some immediate selfish interest; to the contrary, they do so in the larger purpose of trying to save souls, avoiding eternal damnation, or achieving some other otherworldly value, so conceived.”⁶⁴ To the liberal skeptic, unable to access revelation transmitted through a singular prophet, the exceptional politics of Joseph Smith can appear suspiciously convenient. Joseph’s citation for the divine authorization of counterfeiting in

Kirkland, for example, blurs the line between integrity and venality. Aside from Joseph, the presumption that all theocratic ontologies are intrinsically oriented towards “conceptions of the good” neglects those religious movements with wildly divergent conceptions of the “good,” those whose (anti-)theology consciously inverts modern norms premised on what they perceive as mere convention,⁶⁵ or the potential for pious frauds to run a religious racket. Swaine argues that rational commitments almost always undergird illiberal theology, which is why those who “seek unmitigated theocratic governance are indeed misguided” in failing to see why they should strongly affirm liberal institutions.⁶⁶ His faith in the underlying rationality of most theology is so deep that in discussing the theocratic preference for martyrdom over assimilation, he finds it an “implausible” suggestion that “the best religious doctrine should command such an apocalyptic stance toward temporal life.”⁶⁷

Swaine admits that some theocrats possess conceptions of the good that “seem as though they may be fundamentally different and discordant” with those of other citizens, and they clearly do not accept the liberal notion that their epiphanies are ultimately a private matter when it comes to politics, best left outside the public sphere of policy debate.⁶⁸ What he does not dwell on is the appropriate liberal response if those deeply held theocratic beliefs truly are radically different from the norms and conceptions of the good held by liberal society and are not amenable to reason and its appeals to a liberty of conscience. For emergent groups of ambitious theocrats, having rejected liberal values and the conventions of rational argument at their inception, dismissing an enduring *modus vivendi* for community life within a liberal government is part of what makes them distinct. Instead of an episteme amenable to argument, ambitious theocrats rely on an ontology that appears fluid and inaccessible to those outside of its *doxa*.

Swaine, frequently acknowledges the novelty of modern theocracies when he remarks on how theocracies continually emerge as “new flora” *in* pluralist societies,⁶⁹ but he doesn’t account for what it means when this emergence required that theocracies *must* have previously rejected liberal pluralism as part of their sociological and theological (or cosmological) formation. That is, either through immigration or their development out of the pluralist religious array, theocracies in liberal polities must be aware of liberal norms they contest from the outset -- and how pluralist rights have afforded them legal space for certain practices while they simultaneously reject liberal authority to curb those that are illegal. Emergent theocratic religions in modern liberal states therefore must possess *intrinsically* illiberal tenets, doctrines, beliefs and/or ontological modes as part of their self-definition. Aside from indigenous theocracies (already granted a problematic semi-sovereignty⁷⁰), no modern forms were first conquered or forcefully assimilated by the liberal state. Their adoption of peculiar or illegal practices happens in a modern world where the theocrat knows they are already disdained or proscribed.

We can see how Joseph’s mode of antagonistic symbiosis weaves its way between liberal principles and perceptions in Swaine’s analysis that within modern liberal democracies, theocrats divide “naturally” into retiring and ambitious classifications.⁷¹ While the retiring ones, like the Old Oder Amish and Satmar Hasidic settlements, do not participate in civil and political society and simply seek seclusion from everyday affairs, ambitious theocrats are active in public life and participate in politics “with a view to supplanting liberal institutions with stricter laws and regulations drawn from their religious conceptions of the good.” Swaine doesn’t devote much time investigating whether theologies premised on illiberal conceptions of the good really negotiate in good faith with liberal governments or take seriously liberal arguments.

As we've seen with Joseph's penchant for Masonic-style secrecy and his covert establishment of the theocratic Council of the Fifty -- an ambitious theocrat, somehow compelled to supplant the liberal order, might deem it strategically wise and doctrinally approved to publicize his political theology as that of a merely *retiring* theocrat -- as Joseph did to the Illinois legislature in 1840 to win Nauvoo's unique charter. To be more accurate in discerning theocratic typologies, and correct for his claim that they "naturally" divide, the *apocalyptic* theocrat might be added to Swaine's two categories, an even more adversarial version of the ambitious theocrat whose theology is premised on the sort of imminent apocalypse Joseph prophesied and who deploys a style of exceptional politics similar to what Joseph practiced. The apocalyptic theocrat would differ from the ambitious one is that in their exceptional politics, in their willingness to enter into liberal politics in order to subvert, they might appear far more moderate, even retiring. How a liberal government could distinguish the true typology and threat level of a self-proclaimed theocratic community is, barring scandal or violence, left unclear.

Intriguingly, Swaine mentions Joseph Smith as a theocrat who claimed other religions are "misguided," but he still maintains that an affirmation of his principles of liberty of conscience would be "logically consistent and psychologically unproblematic" for theocrats such as Joseph.⁷² Of course, Joseph saw all of contemporary Christianity as not merely misguided, but an "abomination." And as we've seen, the alleged freedom of religion Joseph mandated for Nauvoo Illinois neither protected real dissent nor mitigated the foundational belief in the Mormon eschatological triumph over all other faiths.⁷³

The need to protect dissenters, guarantee the rights of minorities within theocratic communities, and provide a realistic exit option for apostates that desire it were concerns raised by the feminist scholar Susan Moller Okin, and they are loosely addressed by Swaine within his

defense of granting theocrats partial autonomy. The very vague educational standards he proposes, such as ensuring that children in theocratic communities are taught about their “rights of exit,”⁷⁴ on top of his prior proposals for government supervision, illustrate the functional contradictions of his semi-sovereign scheme. The state intrusion and legal entanglements that Swaine dismisses under an accommodation standard as *infra dignitatem* would still be required to ensure theocrats’ compliance with a regime of basic rights . . . they oppose.⁷⁵ Swaine wants to protect theocrats from excessive interference from the state while still ensuring basic rights for all members in a theocratic community -- but as Sarah Song has strongly argued, a guarantee of basic rights for subordinated members within a theocratic community requires a high degree of state oversight (notably in ensuring a right of exit), one sure to seem invasive by the standards set by Swaine.⁷⁶

Whatever their interaction with the state, Swaine promotes the effort to reach beyond those that hold liberal values to engage with even for the most recalcitrant of theocrats: “The point is that it will generally be better to try to convince or persuade theocrats to turn away from their more illiberal inclinations before leaving it to government to employ coercion against them.”⁷⁷ This could be true, but leaves aside the severity of the illiberal inclination in question, which might merit legally-sanctioned coercion instead of discussion.⁷⁸ However noble a goal, Swaine’s hope for his theory relies on the rational appeal of a liberty of conscience that positions a liberal conception of politics and acceptance of reasonable argument over whatever tenets of illiberal theology confront it. A deeper familiarity with the history of early Mormonism and the political theology of Joseph Smith should modify those premises.

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Throughout the formation and trials of his young Church, Joseph formulated explicitly political demands in both the languages of revelation and the secular logic of legal rights and liberties. His rapidly vacillating stances over the primacy of American law, frequently on the same subjects of contention, illustrates that he could offer liberal rationales for political rights, or the supremacy of divine law, or a fusion of the two when they agreed. His frequent use of legal rationality in lawsuits and petitions within a context of antagonistic symbiosis illustrates how the theocratic retention of revelation could be combined in the same radical religious movement with clear expressions of more conventional forms of public reason when strategically necessary. The ways in which Joseph's situationally variable approach to law and public discourse obscures liberal perceptions of the nature of American theocracy and confuses critical liberal categories of public and private, integrity and venality, accommodation and subterfuge, and rational and irrational discourses, can be seen in the recent works of Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas's later works are concerned that John Rawls's controversial "proviso" requiring religious faiths provide liberal rationales for their political voice in the public square excludes those religious citizens who "cannot or are not willing to" formulate liberal rationales for their politics, and that a liberal constitution meant to protect religious forms of life would inflict "asymmetrical" burdens on its religious citizens.⁷⁹ Habermas shares Rawl's primary assumption that it will be ultimately beneficial to both religious citizens and the larger public to bring these moral intuitions and their resulting politics into a more popularly accessible dialogue, and in order to lift the burden of translation, he counters Rawls suggestion with his own proposed proviso that every citizen should be able choose whether to deploy religious language in public – and that if they do they should accept that "the potential truth contents of religious utterance must be translated into a generally accepted language" before they can be admitted into

the world of official discourse.⁸⁰ Habermas hopes to popularize a Karl Jaspers inspired perspective on the “genealogy of reason” that will not only allow and encourage religious citizens to greater access within the public sphere, but also assist Rawlsian liberals in both recognizing and enhancing their own sense of overlapping moral solidarity with religious citizens within the pluralist array.⁸¹ Part of this effort is a grandiose reconciliation between the traditions of Athens and Jerusalem, an awareness that reason has its roots in “the shared origin of philosophy and religion in the revolution of worldviews in the Axial Age.”⁸² The translation proviso ensures that “all legally enforceable and publically sanctioned decisions can be formulated *and justified* in a universally accessible language without having to restrict the polyphonic diversity of voices at its very source.”⁸³

The example of Joseph’s political theology and the early Mormon movement, however, provides notable counterpoints to several of Habermas’s assumptions. As we’ve seen, the majority of Mormon converts were initially situated within the dominant Protestant culture where they could access such rationales in the liberal idiom of the Jacksonian era as well as other mainstream citizens. Through conversion and evolving doctrine they moved into a more deliberate practice of peculiarity and antagonism towards the mainstream culture as they became religiously distinct. Peculiarity is often expressed through cultural idiom in rituals and practices, and in early Mormonism the emphasis on a hierarchy of revelations, certain of which must remain secret, augmented the development of deep cultural truths that were necessarily inaccessible to outsiders: secret truths that set Mormons on an inherently adversarial relationship to American society.⁸⁴ Joseph Smith and his leading apostles understood very early on that the revelation of the inceptive theocratic triumph for their young church required that its immanent eschatology and resulting organization be hidden from the public.⁸⁵

Joseph's antagonistic symbiosis with liberal pluralism further complicates Habermas's schema by problematizing when translation provisos are required and why, as it provides an case of recently enraptured citizens who were unwilling to express deep truths of the faith, yet could still formulate liberal rationales when demanding their religious rights for either legal redress or greater autonomy vis-à-vis the state. In concealing key aspects of its faith within the private sphere, the larger public could not accurately recognize the Mormon faith or its goals. In February of 1831, for example, a revelation recorded in the Book of Commandments announced that God "will consecrate the riches of the Gentiles, unto my [Mormon] people which are of the house of Israel."⁸⁶ Before Joseph had even arrived in Missouri with Mormon settlers to establish a Zion for the end times in July of 1831, he had revealed that June that God commanded the Saints to assemble "upon the land of Missouri, which is the land of your inheritance, which is now the land of your enemies." A subsequent revelation in August proclaimed that lands in Missouri should be obtained for the expansion of Zion either "by purchase or by blood (of Mormon martyrs)".⁸⁷ In Kirtland, Ohio, when the Mormon leadership was desperate for development funds they established the Kirtland Safety Society Bank Company "with the authority of divine revelation but not a state charter." The unlicensed and under-secured "anti"-bank soon collapsed, and a heavily indebted and court fined Joseph fled to Missouri, a posse pursuing him on charges of illegal banking and counterfeiting.⁸⁸

Joseph could declare in October of 1843 that "I am the greatest advocate of the Constitution of the United States there is on the earth," and in March of 1844 secretly task his theocratic Council of Fifty "to decide formally which national or state laws Mormons could disregard."⁸⁹ The many incidences of his legal exceptionalism, going back to at least 1831, and their foundations in apocalypticism were unknown to interlocutors like President Martin Van

Buren, and Senator John C. Calhoun, to whom he appealed for legal redress -- or to the Illinois legislature that granted him the unique degree of civil autonomy he would use to craft his refuge from out of state warrants in Nauvoo.⁹⁰ As the ultimate example of Joseph's ability to speak both languages simultaneously, he protested in January of 1844 that he would not have declared his candidacy for the President of the United States if "I & my friends could have had the privilege of enjoying our religious & civil rights." Three months later he secretly "prophecied the entire overthrow of this nation in a few years," and was crowned king of the Kingdom of God by the theocratic Council of Fifty, a shadow government soon to emerge as the political foundation of Christ's millennial reign.⁹¹

Joseph was not alone among the Mormons in his mixing of sacred and profane rationales and discourses. The Mormon apostle Oliver Cowdery delivers another curious illustration as to the availability of secular, rational discourses among a people made recently receptive to revelation. As witness to -- and scribe for substantial portions of -- *The Book of Mormon*, cofounder of the church, and long serving Assistant President, Cowdery was integral for the early development of the faith. Yet, after clashing with Joseph over polygamy, and further defying church authority by selling some of his land investments during the slow collapse of the Mormon colony in Far West, Missouri, he was charged by the high council with "virtually denying the faith by declaring that he would not be governed by an ecclesiastical authority nor Revelation in his temporal affairs." He responded with a scathing letter contrasting ecclesiastical authority (which he compared to European feudalism), and American constitutional rights based on "the three great principles of English liberty": the rights to personal security, personal liberty, and private property. "This attempt to controll me in my temporal interest," he wrote, "I conceive

to be a disposition to take from me a portion of my Constitutional privileges and inherent rights.”⁹² Writes Bushman of this remarkable shift in discourse:

Cowdery’s letter is a reminder of the complex ideological environment of Mormons in the 1830s. Most of the time they spoke Kingdom of God language . . . At the same time, as American citizens knew the political language of rights and freedom. . . Cowdery showed how easily a disaffected member could slip out of millennial, scriptural discourse into political talk, using republicanism to discredit Church leaders. Democratic discourse transformed obedience, faith, and loyalty into fanaticism and blind submission.⁹³

Cowdery’s slippage back to the language of constitutional rights, a form of public reasoning, to counter a “Kingdom of God” language he helped create, serves as an example of the tremendous mutability of religious traditions formed in early modernity. Habermas’s translation proviso is informed by a communitarianism that insists that religious traditions offer a depth and a solid grounding that is often missing in liberalism. He sees a stream of knowledge and deep moral intuitions flowing down from the Axial age, of “major world religions – as the only surviving element of the now alien cultures of the Ancient Empires”⁹⁴ Joseph’s faith was also premised on being the surviving element of the now alien culture of an ancient empire in America, but as Bushman notes, it debuted in the 19th century with an “instant history.” Instead of reminding Western civilization of the deep moral intuitions and “unexhausted force” of timeless religious traditions that undergird communal life, Joseph’s dynamic theology illustrates that religious traditions can be highly adaptive and rapidly revisable. For Habermas, the modernization of religious consciousness is the response of religious traditions to the “challenges posed by the fact of religious pluralism, the emergence of modern science, and the spread of positive law and secular morality.”⁹⁵ Mormonism did not have to respond to the challenge through an alteration of modern consciousness, it was born within the challenge, a fluid tradition that is composed out of the constituent elements of the challenge itself. In contesting religious pluralism, modern science, and secular law, Joseph demanded pluralist accommodations,

declared an openness to amalgamating all form of knowledge into the faith for “a man is saved no faster than he gains knowledge,”⁹⁶ and filed lawsuits and legal petitions against his opponents while placing revelation over reason, and theocracy over secular law.

Chapter 5: Joseph's Exceptional Politics

Joseph Smith's remarkable political project and theology illustrate how American theocracy arises in reaction to, and from within, liberal pluralism through an adaptive process of antagonistic symbiosis. A deeper examination of the exceptional politics that emerge from his revelatory faith will also reveal how American theocracy recombines its authoritarian politics and theology for a political theology capable of justifying its claims to sovereignty against the liberal state. What are these integral theological elements that American theocracy must re-establish in order to first assert and sustain itself within liberalism? Critics of liberal pluralism like Alasdair MacIntyre, R. John Neuhaus, and Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde have argued that liberal modernity subsists on religiously informed ethical resources that it cannot renew, that the modern state is incapable of sustaining the moral bases of its own legitimation without resorting to illiberal methods.¹ This "Böckenförde dilemma" also points to an intriguing difficulty for would-be theocracies. The theological desiderata that communitarian and conservative theorists so often discern in the liberal public sphere are, for theocratic theorists, the very spiritual bases of their legitimating political theologies. Theocracies delineate themselves in opposition to secular regimes by adhering to some mode of ontological privilege which is publically inaccessible and consistently trumps secular sovereignty. For theocracies within liberal states, these ontological premises and their providential claims must remain esoteric -- they wither under the harsh light of modern skepticism and public scrutiny and have to be protected by theocrats, marshalled in ways that reveal both theocracy's vulnerabilities and how it seeks to mask them. To better understand American theocratic thought and theocracy's struggle to establish its theological presuppositions as sovereign within modern communities, we can invert the Böckenförde dilemma's core critique to see how those supernatural sources of authority and social order must

cautiously circumvent secular law and public scrutiny in order to establish the social bases for theocratic sovereignty. In other words, what distinctly illiberal tenets of transcendental justification are necessary for modern theocracy's claims of sovereignty?

Joseph's example demonstrates that theocratic authority relies on extra-state assertions of divine providence, phenomena that Hobbes and Locke sought to severely constrain within, or outright banish from, modern politics in order to establish peace from religious struggles over the apparatus of state. Since competing assertions of having received revelations and miracles were so politically disruptive in England and Europe, both theorists argued that they should be subjected to skepticism and public scrutiny, while another theocratic holdover, sacrificial rituals, were to be simply rejected for their clerical corruption. In reaction to the secular division within liberal modernity, theorists like Carl Schmitt and Joseph de Maistre sought to recombine the political and theological, which they argued would require a restoration of divine elements such as the miracle and sacrifice into politics in order to establish true authority. The miraculous power of revelation, as Heinrich Meier has cogently argued, is integral to Schmitt's political theology for its provision of divine truths and their corollary sorting of the political world into those faithful friends who accept that truth and enemies who do not.² As an argument for the return of political theology, revelation is supposed to supply the truth claims that inform Schmitt's infamous decisionism, the theological core of his exceptional politics.

Echoing Hobbes's analysis of how the political symbolism of the miracle was used to establish the authority of an elect capable of receiving and interpreting its messages, Schmitt inverted Hobbes's concern over the invidious demands for obedience from revelation, perceiving its potentially transcendent power as a source of heroic strength and motivation. Instead of abandoning revelation as a basis of sovereign authority, Schmittian political theology

“presupposes faith in the truth of revelation. It subordinates everything to revelation and traces everything back to it. Insofar as political theology champions the binding force of revelation, it places itself in the service of obedience.”³ As elucidated by Meier, “political theology stand and falls with faith in revelation” and a demand for faithful obedience to its message is the key determinant of a revelation’s political content.⁴ To contest the validity of the revelation is to be an enemy of the faith in the revelation.⁵

A restoration of faithful obedience among the masses and religious political power were also pivotal aims of Maistre’s political theology. Dismissive of the viability of constitutional republics premised on reason, Maistre declared that religious rituals of sacrifice constitute a social imperative for any enduring political order. Sacrifice, he argued, was an anthropological universal: found in every human culture, it was only through sacrifice that nations and communities could be certain of the vitality of their solidarity.

One especially finds that all nations agree on the marvelous efficacy of the voluntary sacrifice of the innocent who sacrifices himself to the divinity as a propitiatory victim. Men have always attached an infinite price to the submission of the just person who accepts these sufferings.⁶

Dismissive of the resilience of secular institutions, Maistre believed that an institution is either “founded on a religious concept or it is only a passing phenomenon. Institutions are strong and durable to the degree that they are, so to speak, *deified*,”⁷ and the real political order is only visible to God’s “elect.” Therefore, as Armenteros writes, “Maistre argues that neither society nor political constitutions can be products of rational deliberation.” As the source of “all polities,” God, according to Maistre, “when he wants to lay the foundations of a political edifice all at once, and show to the universe a creation of this kind, it is to rare men, it is to veritable

elect that he confides his powers: placed at great distances across the centuries, they rise like obelisks on the road of time, and as the human species grows older, they appear more rarely.”⁸

Over this sacred foundation revealed to rare men, Maistre perceived sacrificial practices as central to the maintenance of social stability for the clear, costly evidence they provided of the popular recognition of that divine sovereignty. In Maistre’s formulation social stability cannot exist without religion, and religion requires ritual, those communal customs that establish religious solidarity. Ritual, ultimately, is sustained by sacrifice “where the symbolic order of religion comes into contact” with quotidian life and re-establishes a sense of providence’s harmonious pattern to fallen humanity.⁹ Sacrifice required a stark categorization within a society, for its ideal victims are innocents, preferably loosely attached to the community, whose gentle attributes would substitute for the guilty.¹⁰ The degrees of obeisance and deference inherent in such social differentiation would function as a correlating mechanism for hierarchies between members of society, a necessary function for political order.¹¹ Thus, through his idiosyncratic version of sacrificial theology, Maistre theoretically unites “the religious nature of politics” and the “political nature of religion.”¹² His reinterpretation of Roman Catholic theology adapted a conception of sacrifice for the reactionary politics of post-Revolutionary Europe where he hoped that sacrificial displays would soon serve as a powerful sign of the restoration of divine authority. In Maistre’s thought, sacrifice possesses a historically dialectical dimension, for as “historical phases of tranquility are followed by shorter, critical periods of punitive but remedial suffering,” the reappearance of these intensely “punitive” periods of violent suffering will prove providential to the world, revealing how sacrifice works cyclically throughout history as an engine of progress, a “vehicle of the eschaton.”¹³ Sacrifice serves as both a sign of the historical

progression of the divine political order by supplying meaning to bloodletting, and when it is restored, as an eschatological proof of the final Kingdom.

Joseph Smith's importance as a political theologian is that he concretizes, codifies, and enacts those theological elements -- which Maistre and Schmitt ultimately left up to providence to establish -- as the doctrinal basis for his theocracy. He demonstrates that miracles can be introduced and sustained by "God's elect" in liberal modernity, and why a revelatory mode of political theology must necessarily be theocratic. Moreover, the ways in which Joseph's theological concepts' ontological foundations and eschatological justifications are incubated in liberal arguments of religious liberty, family law and privacy, and local control, reveal the power of theocratic exceptionalism at work within the frame of American liberalism. Joseph accomplishes this by first shielding the miracle and revelation, and faith in them, from too much public scrutiny. Hidden doctrines and revelations, deemed unfit for the larger public are concealed behind justifications of sacred secrecy and the protections of religious liberty.

The private sphere to which Schmitt believed Hobbes had so regrettably consigned religion -- to the detriment of revelation -- is for Joseph the site of revelation's rebirth. Here, too, within the spheres of family and private faith, Joseph secretly reintroduces practices of sacrifice as proof of obedience and faith to a project of theocratic restoration that bear striking parallels to the political theology of Maistre, practices Hobbes and Locke had hoped to proscribe. As we've seen in the previous chapter, the theocratic imperatives integral to the faith and practice of Joseph's political theology were best defended against state intervention through the assertion of private conscience, by the liberal right of religious freedom. Joseph's exceptional politics were intensely socially disruptive, but they were most successful in being translated into institutional practices when they were anchored in those remnants of feudal control -- particularly familial

relations – still residing within American liberalism as elucidated by Karen Orren, Nancy Cott, and Michael Grossberg. By rooting secret rituals of sacrifice in the privacy of the family sphere among autonomous communities on the frontier, it becomes easier to isolate believers and inculcate obedience. Once believers were firmly enmeshed in an increasingly covert and confidential habitus, their loyalty could be more easily determined and the ranks of theocratic priesthood filled with the most dedicated.

This chapter first examines how Hobbes and Locke attempted to divorce disruptive religious concepts like the miracle and sacrifice from politics. In reaction to these moves Maistre and Schmitt dreamed of reintroducing the miracle and sacrifice in order to recombine politics and theology. Joseph actually accomplishes what Maistre and Schmitt only theorized: by reintroducing a politics based on the miraculous and sacrifice, he establishes a political theology with striking parallels to the radical aspirations of both theorists. His vision for a theocratic kingdom in America did not resemble that of traditional theocracies before the rise of secular states in Europe: Joseph's prophetic authority was a form of Schmittian exceptional politics. The return of God's revelations to Jacksonian America, with a singular prophet as ultimate sovereign of earth, heralded the imminence of the apocalypse and meant that mere human laws and governing norms would be transcended.¹⁴ Revelations are exceptional moments that resist codification, they cannot be circumscribed by laws, general norms, or even prior prophecies in holy scriptures, and Joseph's exceptional politics were fueled by a continual stream of revelation, providing Mormon doctrine with an astonishing fluidity that appeared suspiciously slippery to outsiders and apostates. Despite its protean nature, the specific theoretical components of Joseph's theological anatomy can be more clearly drawn than Schmitt's -- its impelling revelations and resulting doctrines were recorded (and revised), believed, and acted upon, thus

providing a more concretely religious referent for a revelatory theology in historical practice. Our investigation of Joseph's exceptional politics will focus on how he wielded his revelatory authority to establish his theocratic city-states in expectation of the apocalypse, and how, sociologically, he embedded an archipelago of theocracy within the liberal spaces of religious liberty, and familial privacy, as well as the greater legal autonomy found on the frontier and the contested authority between states and the federal government.

Chapter six will detail how, once Joseph was more securely established in his theocratic city-state, he more aggressively promoted the peculiar prerogatives of his American Zion in order to form his own ethno-nationalist people out of American society. His antagonistic symbiosis with American pluralism best functioned by melding theocratic precepts analogous to those found in Schmittian and Maistrean political theology with demands for religious liberty. The peculiar doctrines that made Mormonism different from its Protestant origins struck against key concepts of liberal political theory, and they overlapped in complex and subtle ways that American liberalism found difficult to negotiate with and legally regulate. Finally, chapter seven will diagnose some of the idiosyncrasies of modern revelatory politics that Maistre and Schmitt did not confront in their theories: how faith in revelation, when challenged by public skepticism, must remain idiomatic to survive, and how the constant evocation of the sacred into quotidian politics inevitably turns revelatory politics banal.

The theoretical constraints on the power of the miracle that would become foundational for the secular tradition within liberalism were most influentially first theorized by Hobbes in *Leviathan*. Attempting to establish a reasonable basis for peace, perhaps even a limited tolerance

for private conscience, Hobbes promoted an epistemological skepticism towards all forms of revelation not sanctioned by the state.¹⁵ His specific concern was not with the wondrous or bizarre that, lacking political content, might be chalked up to a “strange deviation of nature,” but the miracles that established, or spoke through, divine authority.¹⁶ Hobbes defined the miracle as “a work of God (besides His operation by the way of Nature, ordained in the Creation) done for the making manifest to His elect the mission of an extraordinary Minister for their salvation.”¹⁷ The miraculous, by its very nature, establishes a divine hierarchy (an elect) on earth, for miracles are “wrought for the procuring of credit to God's Messengers, Ministers, and Prophets, that thereby men may know they are called, sent, and employed by God, and thereby be the better inclined to obey them.”¹⁸ In chapters twenty-six and thirty-seven of *Leviathan*, Hobbes uses the terms miracle and revelation interchangeably in regards to their political import, both of them denoting divine events that were supposed to establish or enhance the authority of a religious elect on earth. In their intended form, they demanded the subordination of all earthly powers to their prophets, the fusion of politics and theology.

Throughout *Leviathan*, Hobbes weaves his arguments of epistemological skepticism in order to dispel disruptive revelatory assertions that can arise from diverse social sources to challenge state authority. His skepticism is deployed as part of an effort to move away from a political theology grounded in revelation towards a philosophy of governance established by reason. In his attack on a singularly revelatory assertion of authority, Hobbes builds a skeptical argument that denies any large scale public agreement on the meaning of divine manifestations, thus revealing the entirely subjective nature of miracles and revelation. Questioning how anyone can be certain of another's putative revelation without having received one himself as verification, Hobbes answers that such discursive assurances are impossible, for

though a man may be induced to believe such Revelation, from the Miracles they see him doe, or from seeing the Extraordinary sanctity of his life, or from seeing the Extraordinary wisdom, or Extraordinary felicity of his Actions, all which are marks of Gods extraordinary favour; yet they are not assured evidence of speciall Revelation. Miracles are Marvellous workes: but that which is marvellous to one, may not be so to another. Sanctity may be feigned; and the visible felicities of this world, are most often the work of God by Naturall, and ordinary causes.¹⁹

No one can know with certainty, through reason alone, the truth of a revelation; one can only reject it through skepticism or subscribe to it through greater or weaker degrees of faith. Correlated with the vast variation in human knowledge and experience, “it followeth that the same thing may be a miracle to one, and not to another.”²⁰ Aside from personal witness, and private judgement as to the veracity of such claims, if one were to hear secondhand of a miracle and require verification, Hobbes recommends consulting the singular “Lawful Church” of the sovereign.²¹ He argues for an integrative and ideally irenic appeal to political community -- ultimately rooted in the state -- for authority in lieu of investing that authority in invidious sects.²² Individuals in doubt should look to this authority, as a form of public conscience, to clarify their concerns. Above the level of the individual, public transparency for religious and civil groups assures the state that treasonous doctrines are not being concocted and disseminated. By publically accounting for their actions they assure the state of their inherent lawfulness and benign intentions, while those who refuse and meet covertly without the state’s knowledge, such as private leagues, cabals and factions are to be proscribed by the Hobbesian state.²³

Having isolated political appeals to the miraculous through his skepticism, Hobbes places the rationality of natural law at the center of his ideal political community: one has to obey natural law, and all laws emanating from the sovereign, but people don’t necessarily have to believe these laws possess divine origin or import to comply. Subjects of the sovereign are “bound I say to obey it [law], but not bound to believe it: for mens believe, and interiour

cogitations, are not subject to the commands, but only to the operation of God, ordinary, or extraordinary.”²⁴ As Schmitt summarizes, Hobbes argues that it is sovereign state power alone that “determines what subjects of the state have to believe to be a miracle . . . but also--and here the irony is especially acute -- the reverse: Miracles cease when the state forbids them.”²⁵

Schmitt associates the miraculous with a powerful, motivating belief, one that “penetrates to the innermost core of men, in order to grasp them in their conscience, their virtues, their deepest longing.”²⁶ Schmitt argues that the modern state, in availing itself of skepticism to constrain the miraculous, and by declaring itself the sole authority on what was legitimately supernatural, has effectively lost its foundation in accessing what is truly divine. Like a drunk unwilling to leave the light of streetlamp to find his keys, the state misses the miracle that emerges outside of state control, and Schmitt regards this instrumental determination of the politically convenient miracle as a profound mistake.²⁷ In divorcing itself from the truly miraculous and centralizing the authority of public reason, Hobbes’s Leviathan cannot compel the necessary degree of obedience from its subjects. The artificial “Mortal God” constructed by the English skeptic lacks access to the transcendent power of true authority that undergird the feudal order, revelations rooted in private faith.²⁸

Hobbes doesn’t outright deny the existence of the miracle, but in mandating its verification by the state, in promoting public skepticism, and by advancing “scientificity” and philosophy over political theology, the miracle is severely contained. So contained that Schmitt claims Hobbes has snuffed out the potential for revelatory authority, even for his stated goal of bolstering loyalty to the state. For Schmitt, Hobbes so overplayed his skepticism that he now stands as one of the most culpable “inaugurators” of the Enlightenment; on who, in a “style almost reminiscent of Voltaire’s,” portrayed the peddling of miracles as “error, delusion, and

open or bidden deceit; the tricks of forgers, actors, ventriloquists, and other swindlers.” Hobbes accomplished this feat of skepticism “in a manner so vivid that in this domain every claim to credence seems to be senseless and no longer a subject appropriate for discussion.”²⁹ Convinced that Hobbes was attempting to unify religion and politics through the mythic grandeur of his artificial construction, Schmitt is convinced that Hobbes’s rigidity on the question of faith and miracles will eventually deconstruct Leviathan.³⁰ In creating conditions whereby paying public “lip service” to the official confessional faith suffices for the state, while acquiescent private conscience (whether to believe or not) is permitted, Hobbes effectively detached the transcendent power of revelation and religion from his political system. Thus lacking the ability to “penetrate the innermost core of men,” the regime was left only with a corrosive skepticism that “contained the seed of death that destroyed the mighty leviathan from within and brought about the end of the mortal god.”³¹

Schmitt contended that a reliance on pervasive skepticism cannot prepare the Hobbesian state for an exception that exceeds a rationalist sovereign order, for “the exception confounds the unity and order of the rationalist scheme.”³² Escaping all attempts to constrain or codify it, the exception, says Schmitt, “can be more important” and “is more interesting than the rule.”³³ Its inherently disruptive ability exposes the limits of the rules and laws it exceeds, revealing the uneasy borders of general norms based on a legal rationality. The dull artifice of the rationally constructed liberal system, starting for Schmitt with Hobbes, pales in comparison to the authentic danger displayed by the eruption of the exceptional moment, and Schmitt clearly appreciated its power to break through the Weberian routinization that underlay the modern order and uncover a deeper mode of existence: “In the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a

mechanism that has become torpid by repetition.”³⁴ Free from rational constraints, real life is only experienced *in extremis*.

Liberal political orders could not readily avail themselves of this “vital intensity,” for “(t)he exception was something incommensurable to John Locke’s doctrine of the constitutional state and the rationalist eighteenth century.”³⁵ This incompatibility was most readily evident when it came to exceptions premised on miracles and revelations. In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke opposed demands to assent to supernatural propositions that contradict our own reason. Whether they come from individuals claiming a direct inspiration from God, or miracles related to us secondhand, we must understand every proposition we are asked to agree with. For at the end of any civil deliberation “reason must be our last judge and guide in everything.”³⁶ Ideally then, all proselytizing must occur within the domain of civil society and be governed by the liberal conception of public reasoning.³⁷ Like Hobbes, Locke sought to anchor public reasoning in theories of natural law, proscribing revelations that are “inconsistent with natural religion and the rules of morality.” Since the presumption of certain prophecies that violate natural law also violate the “light of reason,” one “cannot be supposed to back the contrary [to reason] by revelation; for that would be to destroy the evidence and the use of reason, without which men cannot be able to distinguish divine revelation from diabolical imposture.”³⁸ Locke viewed revelations that defied reason, in their earliest Old Testament examples, as inherently subjective and discursively constrictive, for they were “shut up in a little corner of the world, amongst a people, by that very law, which they received it, excluded from a commerce and communication with the rest of mankind.”³⁹ Throughout his political theology, Locke promoted the circulation and intermingling of Christian doctrines, confident that the aggregate result of this commerce would be a more “reasonable” Christianity.⁴⁰

In his debates with Jonas Proast over the political power of miracles, Locke observed that according to the Acts of the Apostles “even miracles themselves [performed by Christ’s disciples] did not effect, upon all eye-witnesses,” and were therefore so subjective as to be unable to affirm the truth of doctrine or scripture.⁴¹ Proast -- as Carl Schmitt would later also argue -- had linked the compelling power of miracle with the state’s own power to compel through coercion, implying that the diminishment of the former over time necessitated the increase in the latter to maintain doctrinal compliance.⁴² Locke countered that miracles were only “inwardly compelling” therefore not comparable with external phenomena such as state coercion, and the inherent mystery and subjectivity of miracles made them incapable of reliably establishing doctrinal truth or social order.⁴³ At best, from a Lockean perspective, the recourse to supernatural inspiration as a justification in politics is “at a basic level disrespectful of the rational capabilities and sensibility of the other.”⁴⁴

Locke frequently asserted a similar disdain for and concern over the power of religious ritual, characterizing it as a form of compliance riven with fraud, contrivances (“wrong notions and invented rites”) created by priest to “secure their empire” once they had ceased to be virtuous.⁴⁵ Priests had “made it not their business to teach” virtue, but instead demanded that the people be “diligent in their observations and ceremonies, punctual in their feasts and solemnities, and [adhere to] the tricks of religions,” through which the gullible were told the gods were pleased. Sacrificial rituals had “an expiatory” function, that too cheaply “atoned” for the observation of virtue, and “was much more convenient, than a strict and holy life.”⁴⁶ In Locke’s view, such rituals were always Pharisaic and patrolled by scoundrels, for it was Jesus himself who overturned the very need for rituals “*by nailing to his cross the law of ordinances.*”⁴⁷ Even when priestly rituals and authority were to be tolerated, Locke insisted that they be proscribed

from any sort of theocratic pretense. Whatever powers a voluntaristic Church society granted its priest, Locke was adamant that they could not “in any manner be extended to Civil Affairs,” for individual Churches were “absolutely separate and distinct.”⁴⁸

Perhaps unique among major twentieth century political theorists, Schmitt perceived revelation as necessary for politics and according to Meier, “sought to the best of his ability to combine them.”⁴⁹ Schmitt’s dictum “sovereign is he who decides the exception” could very well have been amended “and there is no exception of greater exigency than the revelation” to better emphasize the crucial force of revelation in his political theology. Echoing Hobbes’s analysis of how the political symbolism of the miracle was used to establish the authority of an elect capable of receiving and interpreting its messages, Schmitt inverted Hobbes’s concern over the invidious demands for obedience from revelation, perceiving its potentially transcendent power as a source of henotic strength and motivation. Instead of abandoning revelation as a basis of sovereign authority, Schmittian political theology “presupposes faith in the truth of revelation. It subordinates everything to revelation and traces everything back to it. Insofar as political theology champions the binding force of revelation, it places itself in the service of obedience.”⁵⁰ As elucidated by Meier, “political theology stand and falls with faith in revelation” and a demand for faithful obedience to its message is the key determinant of a revelation’s political content.⁵¹ Lacking that demand, competing claims to revelatory truth within a system of religious pluralism won’t necessarily compel the various faiths or secular philosophies within society to antipathy and conflict. The rancorous polarization that Hobbes feared arrives “as soon as a theology claims to be blessed with the revelation of sovereign authority that demands obedience,” for under such

a broad ultimatum “whoever does not decide for the truth of faith decides against it.”⁵² To contest the validity of the revelation is to be an enemy of the faith in the revelation.⁵³

For Schmitt only the theological is what is politically authoritative, and he proposed in the first edition of *The Concept of the Political* that this lack could be “corrected” within liberalism by its reassertion “whether from the political or the religious [side].”⁵⁴ Liberal democracy’s inability to sustain the basis of its own legitimation engendered a profound and continuing crisis, making it both feasible and “politically imperative to uncover the theological thought forms once used to imagine, build, and defend the European state.”⁵⁵ Genealogical investigation aside, Schmitt never precisely described why the theological conception was still so essential for grounding the sovereign, and though he proclaimed the contemporary need for the miraculous, the theologically inflected exception for which a liberal regime -- with its reliance on secularism -- had no answer for, he never developed a larger theological framework necessary for the reception and interpretation of the miraculous. The exceptional moment was frequently described by Schmitt in eschatological terms and in an apocalyptic tenor, but its particular political telos -- or eschatology -- was never posited to be within orthodox Christianity.⁵⁶ Two of his primary examples of political theology, Maistre and Donoso Cortes, were both deeply heterodox in their Catholic faith, and the religious component of Schmitt’s own political theology is not considered Catholic in any conventionally understood sense.⁵⁷

Philosophers like Peter E. Gordon have observed this peculiar vagueness to the theological dimension of Schmitt’s political theology, arguing that his theological lexicon was “impoverished,” his political existentialism rather abstract, and that he failed to “specify exactly which strands of our tremendously variegated theological tradition are truly of relevance today.” Similarly, Heinrich Meier and Gopal Balakrishnan have convincingly countered the effort to

portray Schmitt's political theology as merely a reactionary extension of his Catholicism by emphasizing the idiosyncratically revelatory and deliberately elusive theological qualities that are distinguished from the merely confessional doctrine he professed.⁵⁸ Böckenförde, "in light of many personal conversations with Schmitt," claims that the "theological portions of his political theology were influenced by religious convictions and interpretations in which he is deeply rooted and which propel him to act. Yet this remains essentially hidden." These mystical motivations were not "communicated on the level of science" but were conveyed "only encryptically." Böckenförde remains mystified by the "the cipher of 'political theology' that is the key to Schmitt," uncertain as to how to disentangle those religious convictions that emerged from a Catholic "ecclesiastical framework" from those that "were of a far more personal kind."⁵⁹

Schmitt never invoked a historical or contemporary revelation as an exemplar for his exceptional politics. Whatever his aspirations, when it came to asserting any distinct grounding for God's sovereignty on earth he offered no answers, for "in the end everything [in his political theology] depends on the question before which [Schmitt] stops himself."⁶⁰ For Schmitt, the insidious advance of Hobbes's "natural scientificity" since the 17th century had evicted God from the world, first into the disenchanting metaphysics of deism and then neutralized into a merely depoliticized, more individualistic concept. "The concepts that were developed over many centuries of theological thought are now becoming uninteresting and are turning into a private affair," he lamented.⁶¹ Schmitt sees the private sphere as where liberalism buries its troublesome theologies, and it is there, in the realm of an individual's religious liberty, that Joseph Smith seeks to resurrect political theology. Unable to articulate a viable theological program, Schmitt's precise political theology remains vague, "encrypted," but Joseph illustrates what a modern revelatory politics looks like on the ground and in an American form. He reveals what a

Schmittian theology would actually look like in practice, and, following Schmitt, why it must follow a stark friend/enemy distinction and theocratic politics.

Like Schmitt, Joseph's political theology placed the battle lines of contemporary politics within the framework of an imminent "eschatological confrontation," a cataclysmic conflict that "appears simultaneously as the promise of faith and as the completion of great politics."⁶² In pursuit of his political goal, the restoration of an epic age of prophets, Joseph's frequent appeals to the apocalypse were not merely instrumental, an only rhetorical resort to catastrophe when times were daunting, they were constant, a license for a broader plane of action for him and the core of his movement, a continual politics of exception. In a hierarchy of revelatory politics, the encroaching apocalypse is the apex of exceptionalism; within modern political theory it is an anachronism, a theological category thrust back into the modern era. Minor revelations involving more prosaic matters of church life and ritual don't necessarily challenge the state, but a revelation of imminent national catastrophe and the rise of a new elect asserts both a supernatural event and a transcendent authority far beyond the capability of the state to manage or even access. The inherent apocalypticism of Joseph's theology characterized both his exceptional political and their reception in Jacksonian America: as his career progressed his prophecies increasingly rejected popular sovereignty, and his revelations of Mormon triumph over their neighbors drove a sharp friend/enemy distinction into communities adjoining Mormon enclaves. Thematically similar to other millenarian movements, Mormon apocalypticism heralded a sacred age of divine manifestations for its adherents, a break with the present in which a theocratic nation would arise from the destruction of the old. However, the rapid debut of new commandments, scriptures, and doctrines lent a peculiar dynamism to Joseph's theology, a doctrinal fluidity that appeared situational to outsiders -- a license to convene laws established

through popular sovereignty that, in order to avoid public scrutiny, assumed ever greater degrees of secrecy.

Secrecy gained more prominence in Joseph's theology and Mormon practice with the quiet introduction of the principle of plural marriage, a volatile new doctrine unveiled to a select few. Running counter to the egalitarian access to scripture proposed by Martin Luther in his concept of Christian liberty, secrecy established different audiences for revelations, degrees of elite hierarchies of faith and loyalty within Mormonism, and became conceptually intertwined with tests of loyalty, sacrifice, and plural marriage. All of these radical tenets and secret practices helped to determine and reinforce loyalty to Joseph as the divine prophet of the imminent apocalypse. From their perspective, Joseph and his latter-day Saints believed secrecy was theologically justified since they were surrounded by unholy enemies, living on the precipice of Christ's final kingdom, and were engaged in a larger cosmological order of politics than mere democracy. Joseph wrote to a newspaper editor in January of 1833:

And now I am prepared to say by the authority of Jesus Christ, that not many years shall pass away before the United States shall present such a scene of *bloodshed* as has not a parallel in the history of our nation; pestilence, hail, famine, and earthquake will sweep the wicked of this generation from off the face of the land, to open and prepare the way for the return of the lost tribes of Israel from the north country. The people of the Lord, those who have complied with the requirements of the new covenant, have already commenced gathering together to Zion, which is in the state of Missouri . . .⁶³

Where the specific "metaphysical core" of Schmitt's political theology and the content of his proposed "truth in revelation" remained undefined, Joseph was utterly "inflexible in his insistence that his encounters with Deity involved literal speech acts between divine persons and himself. The Book of Mormon he produced emphasizes as one of its cardinal teaching the urgency of embracing dialogic revelation as the birthright of righteous seekers in all ages."⁶⁴ His insistent leitmotif on the power of revelation was distinctly different however from evangelical

Protestantism in both its expansion of entirely new revelatory scriptures and a rejection of Protestant pluralism and popular sovereignty. Though revelation could be open to all who joined the faith, Joseph placed himself as its central authority – an early revelation recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants warned the Mormon faithful to “give heed unto all [of Joseph’s] words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth For by doing these things, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.”⁶⁵

As a hermeneutic practice Susan Juster remarks, this concentration of prophetic power into that of a single revelator appears deeply authoritarian in its silencing of contending voices.⁶⁶ Politically, the claims of nonbelievers, when they clashed with revelation, would have to be over-ridden or ignored, for to provide those claims equal weight in political deliberations would mean the “devaluation of direct, ‘dialogic’ revelation. Smith's followers [therefore] objected to the process of transferring sovereignty from God to the people.”⁶⁷ If God spoke only to an elect (through dialogic revelation), then the elect must be sovereign, and to ignore their revelations was profane. Joseph’s revelations, following the privileged path of divine communications warned of by Hobbes, proclaimed the authoritative truth of a sovereign, biblical God, and with the prophet’s revered position as primary recipient of His truth, Joseph was God’s highest authority on earth, an argument that would eventually lead to his claim of sovereignty over all the earth.⁶⁸ In his King Follett Sermon of April 7, 1844, Joseph proclaimed:

If I am so fortunate as to be the man to comprehend God, and explain or convey the principles to your hearts, so that the Spirit seals them upon you, then let every man and woman henceforth sit in silence, put their hands on their mouths, and never lift their hands or voices, or say anything against the man of God or the servants of God again. . . .

I will prove that the world is wrong, by showing what God is. I am going to inquire after God; for I want you all to know Him, and to be familiar with Him; and if I am bringing

you to a knowledge of Him, all persecutions against me ought to cease. You will then know that I am His servant; for I speak as one having authority.⁶⁹

As Meier remarked on Schmittian political theology, to deny the authority of revelation is to be an enemy of faith in revelation, and in Joseph's most militant statements, all critics of his authority were to remain silent.⁷⁰ Citizens outside the faith, when confronted with the Mormons' revelatory politics in Ohio and Missouri in the early 1830s, reacted with outrage to this presumption, particularly when Joseph prophesied to his followers that the land of Missouri would soon transition from "your enemies" to the Mormon people.⁷¹ Strikingly similar to the friend/enemy distinction that Schmitt placed, in its most intensified form, in the eschatological confrontation between Christ and the Antichrist, the Mormon conflict with the "gentiles" was prophesied by Joseph as a quickening of the apocalypse.⁷² Early in the movement, according to Underwood, the Mormons subscribed to a "soteriological dualism, whereby their enemies were damned "to perdition, while the elect live on triumphantly in a transformed world." (Joseph would later modify his cosmology of an interminable hell with hell gradations of salvation in his "Vision of the Three Degrees of Glory")⁷³ Adhering to a sharply polarizing eschatology common to millenarian movements, Mormons perceived a totalizing battle over all the earth where "the lines between good and evil, between saintly and satanic," their friends and their enemies were "clearly drawn," and this shaped their view of the world around them. Neighboring communities would often be portrayed by labels such as "the congregations of the wicked" and deemed to be either in league with Lucifer or his dupes.⁷⁴

In their perception of themselves, the Mormon faithful believed that Joseph's revelations were nothing less than the triumphant return of God's active presence in the world. Spiritual gifts and the return of miracles under the guidance of a true prophet were signs that the true Christian church had been restored to the faithful, as was the persecution from false Christians and satanic

agents that followed -- just as *The Book of Mormon* predicted. Bushman writes that the Saints believed that “great work . . . was to be accomplished through the book. It was not only the herald of restoration; the *Book of Mormon* was the instrument for accomplishing it. The book worked on the premise that a history – a book – can reconstitute a nation. It assumes that by giving a nation an alternative history, alternative values can be made to grow.”⁷⁵

The alternative values advanced in Mormon scripture had no enduring place for Jacksonian democracy. One of the *Book of Mormon*'s dominant themes is that democracy and all other forms of government have disastrously failed, and only under a theocratic government, ruled by God's elect, can society survive and prosper in the present and prepare for the apocalyptic future. “Mormon civil theology,” writes the historian Michael D. Quinn “ultimately dictated that the church depart radically from American political norms . . . in the middle of Andrew Jackson's first term as U.S. president (1829-33) when the national rhetoric praised the common man and democracy, the *Book of Mormon* favored monarchy.”⁷⁶ According to the *Book of Mormon*, ancient tribes in America incurred divine disasters by placing popular sovereignty, with all of its attendant pluralist confusion, above God's. As the political scientist Michael Barkun has observed across millennial movements “disaster harkens the breakdown of old values associated with [religious] conversion.” The old order of the status quo “has failed to both to prevent disaster and to explain it,” indeed, in its corruption and deviance, it has impelled the imminent catastrophe.⁷⁷

As a signal of a break with the secular past, the very arrival of the *Book of Mormon* began what Mormons called “the restoration of all things,” an ecstatic return of ancient rites, rituals, and priestly authority for an interim theocratic kingdom until Christ soon returned to rule man in an Edenic state.⁷⁸ The visions, rituals, and symbols of the imminent apocalypse were esoteric,

transmitted through secret ritual, which helped to “conceal the message from the persecuting majority and reserve it only for the elect.”⁷⁹ The Mormon focus on the apocalypse began as early as 1831, when a revelation told Joseph to prepare his people for the millennium by organizing a new social order, and in those early years the Saints often set the arrival of the apocalypse within a half dozen years: “Awakened one morning at 4 a.m. to see the signs in the heavens, Joseph reported, “I arose and beheld to my great Joy the stars fall from heaven . . . a sure sign that the coming of Christ is close at hand.”⁸⁰ From then on, “wherever he was,” according to Bushman, Joseph constantly watched “the world through a millennial lens,” looking for “calamities signaling the end.”⁸¹

The approaching apocalypse demanded everything from those Christ had chosen. Compared with other 19th century American religious movements, Joseph outdistanced his millenarian competitors and indulged in a more radical range of political action and spiritual authority by wielding his revelatory power to create, at the base of his movement, a refounded Israel.⁸² He transformed a presumptive Protestant schism into a modern American tribe bonded together by peculiar religious practices, polygamy, persecution and above all, their belief and love in Joseph himself. At top, to weather the coming storm, he instituted an intricately overlapping hierarchy that, in its transgressiveness and scope of power, exercised a proto-Nietzschean vision of elite individual freedom and aristocratic political privilege. His transgression of contemporary taboos, combined with his disarming grandiosity and exalted authoritarianism, led to bloody conflicts with outsiders, state and local governments, and many defections – while ultimately enhancing his spiritual and secular authority among his remnant and new recruits. Defiance of convention and laws testified to his greatness, his status as a modern prophet and leader. Throughout his turbulent life there is an incredible and tremendously

improvisational quality to Joseph's prophetic political tactics and religious dramaturgy: deep personal rifts and theological contradictions are barely bridged with last moment revelations; time and again struggles over authority and authenticity are won by the power of his personal charisma and testament; all manner of rival prophets, dubious friends, and outright grifters are drawn deep into his personal and institutional orbit only to be expelled, often violently; mobs and militia come close to ending his life many times, before finally succeeding in Catharge, Illinois in 1844.

In describing the dynamism typical of new millenarian movements, Barkun notes that the charisma of the prophet is particularly vulnerable, "for it is of the essence of charisma that one who has it be seen to *performed*; he must prove himself in the eyes of his followers."⁸³ The prophet must continually reaffirm and complement the symbolic order he has created by readily supplying new omens and portents; the experiences of the faithful must constantly be fitted into an eschatological framework that makes immediate and absolute claims on reality. The world, and its vision of an emerging order, must always be validated by the new word.⁸⁴ Whatever political opportunity or crisis confronted Joseph, revelation always pointed a way forward. The ceaseless pace of prophecy he produced frequently seemed more attuned to the immediate impact on his audience over any enduring coherence or fear of contradiction.⁸⁵ Joseph routinely revised the language of his collected revelations and *The Book of Mormon* with each new edition, and the majority of the Saints, valuing "the process of revelation more than the product," appeared not to be terribly troubled by the inconsistencies.⁸⁶

Remarking on his relentless revelations and penchant for revision, Bushman notes, "At other points in his life, he was to think he had finished, and then a new revelation would drive him on. He perpetually initiated new campaigns and taught new doctrines. His administrative

style was almost excessively dynamic.”⁸⁷ The author Walter Kirn labels Joseph’s mode of “perpetually promising the world” as “Dynamic Overextension,” and when related, as it often was, to Joseph’s continual extension of the millenarian horizon after the apparent failure of some of his short term prophecies, it bears a strong resemblance to what the historian Richard Landes calls “apocalyptic jazz,” in which “cognitive dissonance, or the confusion that arises with apocalyptic disappointment, is often rationalized away with a form of prophetic improvisation.”⁸⁸ Early in their ministry obvious disjunctures in chronologies and discrepancies in doctrine led to efforts by Joseph and Oliver Cowdery to establish some degree of retroactive continuity, but these efforts gave way to the commandments proclaiming Joseph’s prophetic powers unimpeachable, notably after Cowdery was purged.⁸⁹ Like Schmitt’s praise of the exception’s “vital intensity,” with its power to “break through the crust of mechanism that has become torpid by repetition,” Joseph’s relentless prophetic style valorized exceptional moments over general norms.⁹⁰ The prophet’s authority was not to be constrained by worldly law or, as the Church rapidly evolved, even a need to synchronize with previous prophecies or sacred text.⁹¹

When challenged by a “leading man in the Church” during a sermon in Kirtland to keep his prophecies in line with those already laid down in the (now) canonical works of the Bible, *The Book of Mormon*, and *The Doctrine and Covenants*, Joseph summoned Brigham Young to speak in his defense. Young chastised the challenger, arguing that compared with “living oracles,” these works of static scripture “are nothing,” for they “do not convey the word of God direct to us now, as do the words of the Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation.” Joseph seconded his testimony, “Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord, and he has told you the truth.”⁹²

Of his many prophecies in which he proclaimed his paramount revelatory authority, Joseph best explained his highly flexible mode of dynamic overextension, in April of 1842, in his letter to Nancy Rigdon, the nineteen-year-old daughter of his friend and apostle Sidney Rigdon. After his secret marriage proposal to her was rebuffed, Joseph instructed Nancy on why she must overcome her horror and quietly join with him in polygamous marriage. He wrote to her -- in an extant letter:

That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be and often is, right under another. God said thou shalt not kill, -- at another time he said thou shall utterly destroy. *This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted – by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire.* If we seek first the kingdom of God, all good things will be added . . . even things which may be considered abominable to all who do not understand the order of heaven . . . (Emphasis added)⁹³

This divine imperative delivered as a marriage proposal is an explicitly political statement: that which appears to be profoundly situational, even violating previous commandments, is actually premised on “the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted.” The demand to do “things which may be considered abominable” is best justified if “we first seek the kingdom of God,” for “whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is . . .”

The audacity of his transgressive actions and visions demonstrated Joseph’s religious genius to his followers, and, in turn, fueled his political daring. Wanted in two states, married to over thirty wives, and assuming ever greater degrees of religious and secular power, Joseph declared that “I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammelled.”⁹⁴ Bushman writes that, “Revelation meant freedom to Joseph, freedom to expand his mind through time and space, seeking truth wherever it might be.”⁹⁵ From his exalted position, dissent, doctrinal routinization, oversight and excessive rationality were all hindrances

to truth seeking, to spiritual evolution and personal freedom -- exceptional moments were the ones that instructed, that brought forth further revelation. Three years after his death, his successor, Brigham Young, wrote of Joseph's dissemination of the secret revelation on "celestial marriage." The prophet had told Young: "'I command you to go and get another wife.' . . . [and] I said to Joseph,"

Suppose *I* should apostatize, after taking another wife, would not my family be worse off?" Joseph answered – "There are certain bounds set to men, and if a man is faithful and pure to these bounds, God will take him out of the world; if he sees him falter, he will take him to himself. You are past these bounds, Brigham, and you have this consolation. . . . Then I said to Joseph, I was ready to go ahead. He passed certain bounds before certain revelations were given."⁹⁶

What Young describes is a method whereby an apostle's discipline of alleged righteousness, enlivened by the direct reception to God's word, transcends norms -- and in turn is given further revelations. As a spiritual prescription for gaining more power and knowledge, this transcendence of "certain bounds" resembles a Nietzschean exercise of the transvaluation of values.⁹⁷ Inspired by Nietzsche, Schmitt too was fascinated by transgressive dynamics whereby "the exception is more interesting than the rule" for its ability to break through the norm, and Joseph himself was alive to the power he derived from his exceptional practices and continual flirtations with violence.⁹⁸ In a sermon delivered in May 1843, while surrounded by conspiracies and suppressing ever more dangerous secrets, he proclaimed: "Excitement has become almost the essence of my life. When that dies away I feel almost lost. When a man is reined up continually by excitement, he becomes strong and gains power and knowledge."⁹⁹

So empowered, Joseph's political theology, like Schmitt's, frequently appears ambivalent about, or even actively opposed to, tranquility and political stability. For both theorists, the modern conception of peace, with its reliance on a routinized legal order and emphasis on safety,

was a regime of constraints -- and extraordinary individuals and movements only thrive *in extremis*. The perpetual challenge of disorder is more interesting than the solution of order, and implacable enemies, the adoption of a stark friend/enemy distinction, ensures that a pluralistic peace and a normative legal order is unobtainable. In his own ideal of political existentialism, Schmitt wrote that “(t)he ever present possibility of conflict must always be kept in mind. . . . For to the enemy concept belongs the ever present possibility of combat.”¹⁰⁰ Joseph, particularly towards the end of his life, proclaimed that he thrived in his role of prophet and church founder in the face of enmity and oppression:

I, like Paul, have been in perils, and oftener than anyone in this generation. As Paul boasted, I have suffered more than Paul did. I should be like a fish out of water, if I were out of persecutions. Perhaps my brethren think it requires all this to keep me humble. The Lord has constituted me so curiously that I glory in persecution. I am not nearly so humble as if I were not persecuted. If oppression will make a wise man mad, much more a fool. If they want a beardless boy to whip all the world, I will get on the top of a mountain and crow like a rooster: I shall always beat them.¹⁰¹

Caught between the instability of his exceptional politics and the continual conflict his revelations engendered, Joseph sought to stabilize his nascent political order with priesthood institutions composed of loyal, tightly-knit hierarchies. Richard Wolin has critiqued the apparently irreconcilable tendency within Schmitt’s thought between a decision that is “‘born of nothing,’ and thus enacted *ex nihilo*, in flagrant disregard of the legal and moral requirements” on the one hand, and on the other a deep regard and drive for a “philosophy of order” that must commit to maintaining the stability of a political system.¹⁰² Ensnared in a similar dynamic, Joseph struggled to establish the normative grounds necessary for an enduring institution, his Church. He would attempt to minimize the confusion caused by his disruptive prophecies while integrating the resulting new decrees into an increasingly peculiar and expansive theology. The

Church was supposed to be governed by God's laws, and as Schmitt observed about the stability of a legal order, for it "to make sense, a normal situation must exist, and he is sovereign who definitely decides whether this normal situation actually exists."¹⁰³ Since new revelations were being continually disclosed by Joseph, doctrines were in almost continual flux, and even seemingly foundational commandments were subject to revision. According to Bushman, "every attempt to regularize belief was diffused by new revelations."¹⁰⁴ In order to stabilize his Church and provide a foundation for his theocracy, Joseph would need to provide some form of institutional structure for the governance of the faith and increase the solidarity of his Mormons as a distinct people. In order to do so he would have to contest those elements that made them more mobile, communicative, and independent subjects operating within the religious world of Lockean pluralism and turn them insular and secretive. His political theology would have to incorporate unique tenets to make them, as they became known as, a "peculiar people."

Chapter 6: The Peculiar Prerogatives of American Zion

Like Schmitt, Joseph believed that the identity of a people was sacred and one of the most extraordinary accomplishments of his prophetic ministry was to create one. In order to do so his political theology would evolve to reveal new doctrines and practices that bound together the mobile, communicative, and independent subjects of Lockean religious pluralism into a distinct ethno-religious people. He achieved this remarkable feat of social aggregation within a pluralist society by repurposing some of liberalism's essential freedoms into theocratic ties. As a budding patriarch, Joseph's uniquely anachronistic success was to weld his theocratic prerogatives to a tribal structure that was both strikingly new, in situating an elect people and sacred place in America, while seemingly ancient, in its invocation of God's promise of a chosen Jewish people -- a projection requiring a whole new covenant that mirrored the Book of Exodus.

Joseph asserted that a Hebraic lineage ran from Israel through ancient America and to his Mormon flock, promising them a Zion on the frontier of the United States as a refuge from oppression.¹ Exodus had been a liberatory inspiration cited long before by Anglo-American revolutionaries and republicans, but Joseph deviated from the nationalist arc of that tradition by emphasizing a much more literal reading and application of its subject, the "people of Israel," and he readily assumed the desirability of theocracy over the tradition's many republican interpretations.² Michael Walzer has written that "Exodus is a journey forward – not only time and space. It is a moral progress, a transformation. The men and women who reach Canaan are, literally and figuratively, not the same men and women who left Egypt."³ Joseph's young Church, in following his vision, underwent a march of their own with the requisite persecution,

struggle and backsliding, an exodus that transformed them into a Mormon people. The distinctiveness, militancy and tight societal bonds of tribal affiliation tied the Mormons not only to Joseph, but cut down on the social and economic variables of mobility and independence in American frontier society, assimilating migrant nuclear families that had been detached from their larger clan or community out of economic opportunity or necessity. Helping to lead the people, the hierarchical ties among the Mormon elite were further tightened by Abrahamic tests of faith and a web of polygamous and polyandrous marriage with the Prophet himself at the center.

So successful was Joseph in forging his peculiar people out of Lockean pluralist society that even today political scientists hold up Mormon distinctiveness as an example that within American religious pluralism, “Rumors of death of ethno-religious politics have been greatly exaggerated.”⁴ Joseph’s antagonistic symbiosis with American pluralism would score its distinctive successes by combining theocratic precepts analogous to those found in Schmittian and Maistrean political theology with demands for religious liberty, integrating these anti-pluralistic elements into Lockean pluralism in order to eventually supersede it. Of the many peculiar doctrines that made Mormonism different from its Protestant origins, it was the Mormon priesthood, separatism, secrecy, polygamy and the acceptance of sacrifice that most drew them apart. The theocratic formulation of each tenet struck against key concepts of Lockean political theology, and they could be combined in complex and subtle ways that American pluralist society found difficult to legally regulate. This chapter first situates each of these theocratic doctrines against the backdrop of Lockean political theory, and then examines their evolution within Joseph’s political thought. Focusing on their unusual or outright bizarre aspects will illustrate how their integration into Mormon doctrine assisted in forging a unique ethno-religious

identity away from the normative pluralism of the time, an identity intrinsically receptive to theocracy. After discussing the characteristics of each, a deeper examination of polygamy's theoretical challenge to the dominant American familial arrangement of monogamy will be applied. Finally, a brief exploration of how Joseph's conflation of the empyrean with the everyday will conclude with how his continual evocation of the sacred ran the risk of banality.

Structurally, Joseph's introduction of the Mormon priesthood institutionalized a hierarchical access to the divine, its Masonically-influenced ranks with their grades of ontological privilege similar to those theorized by Maistre in his aspirations towards Christian restoration.⁵ In containing disorder and apostasy, Joseph's priesthood could ideally establish a hierarchy both loyal to Joseph and capable of implementing his new doctrines and rituals. Locke, as previously discussed, insisted that ecclesiastic power be kept separated from civil power and he demonstrated considerable suspicion of priests and priestly ritual, seeing them as outmoded constraints on the free flow of religious ideas.⁶ In his conception, a church was ideally a "voluntary Society of Men," who had peacefully united for the "publick worshipping of God."⁷ The more public and accessible church doctrine was, the better the assurance that there was no practice of "secret Evil," whereby "men arrogate to themselves, and those of their own Sect, some peculiar Prerogative, covered over with a specious shew of deceitful words, but in effect opposite to the Civil Right of the Community."⁸ Central to Locke's political theology was the proposition that "reason must be our last judge and guide in everything," and that the precepts of Christian faith should be readily accessible so that, provided the time and ability, seekers could work out their inherent reasonableness free from coercion. As a theological premise, Locke

portrayed Jesus's clash with the Sanhedrin as the triumph of reason and consent over the more coercive religious power of the Hebraic priesthood.⁹

In theorizing both the economy and the interchange of religious convictions, Locke encouraged "the circulation and exchange of goods, ideas, and people."¹⁰ For him, much like Luther, "Jesus heralds the broad circulation" of God's word. It was through the free circulation of ideas that the intrinsic reasonableness of Christianity would predominate in the marketplace of religious ideas, the consensus building process of public discussion and reflection over doctrine making it ever more reasonable as it shed superstitions and an antiquated reliance on miracles alone.¹¹ (As I.T. Ramsay remarks, over time this dynamic within the public sphere had the effect of diluting mystery and what was theologically distinctive about the particulars of the Christian faith.¹²) Circulation would also open up worship geographically, not confining it by ritual to specific religious sites. Jesus's ministry showed that the "magnificent temple, and confinement to certain places, were now no longer necessary for his worship, which by a pure heart might be performed any where."¹³

In Joseph's political theology, secrecy and separation are methods of restoring the social power of the miracle within Locke's increasingly skeptical world. Secrecy inhibits the circulation of religious ideas, helping to create – along with the priesthood -- hierarchies of sacred knowledge within Mormonism. It could also serve as a testing ground to check the degree of social acceptance of new doctrines, it could shelter "infant, half-formulated ideas from persecution by keeping them hidden from public knowledge."¹⁴ Separatism for Joseph was also means of creating a safe space where his miracles could incubate and attach themselves to social power, enhancing the sanctification of his people. From that social power would grow increasing

political power, and both forms were most safely cultivated on the frontier, away from the urban centers where their accumulation would be more rapidly and forcibly contested.

Even far from major cities, Joseph's introduction of Mormon polygamy would still attract the outrage and violence from the Gentile world culminating in his death. Why polygamy, what did it do sociologically for the formation of the Mormon people? How did it strike against theories of the family in Lockean pluralism? In Pritchard analysis, Locke holds a strong ambivalence about the outer limits of religious diversity and its "concomitant promiscuity," an ambivalence which finds him turning to the family to provide the socially stabilizing grounds of affection and unity. "Returning to the family . . . has the added benefit of cultivating the feeling of dependency that is so prized by Locke. Locke's worldly, promiscuous subjects will nonetheless feel strong emotional bonds for their parental nurturers and heavenly father."¹⁵ Although he argues for untethering "religion from the steady reproduction of political and familial patrimony," Locke "reenvisions and redeploys the family as the foundation of his political theology. Thus, Lockean political theology appears paradoxical: subjects "are freed from patriarchal political-religious power only to be quietly imbued with a softer version of this power," a power based more on familial pedagogy.¹⁶ Joseph returns to a more explicit form of patriarchal political-religious power by dramatically restructuring the family through polygamy, enhancing ties to a heavenly father and creating a patriarchal model derived from the Hebrew Bible. Starting with his most trusted disciples in Nauvoo, Joseph prophesied that this return to patriarchal families would spread out to unite the globe. Familial bonds sealed in temple ordinances form a "theological imperative" to weave together "all of humanity into a vast network of interlocking, eternal relationships." (Thus the related effort to baptize the dead,

reaching those who had missed the new and everlasting covenant of plural marriage and bringing them too into the Mormon fold.)¹⁷

As we've considered previously, Locke believed that Christianity had dispensed with sacrificial ritual (indeed almost all religious ritual) and the clear preference in his political theology is for tacit consent expressed through spiritual enlightening words over more coercive displays of political loyalty and fixed group membership.¹⁸ For Joseph Smith and Maistre however, "the road back to God" was "not with enlightening words" but through renewed practices of Christian restoration such as sacrificial ritual.¹⁹ Sacrifice in Joseph Smith's theology served several functions. Explicitly, its return was a covenantal signal that devotion was deep enough for the Church to endure, a tenet Maistre has suggested earlier in a European context. Sacrifice was a recognition of divine sovereignty, an eschatological proof of the political restoration of God's Kingdom on earth. Instrumentally, as the anthropologists Scott Atran and Jeremy Ginges have proposed, adherence to bizarre religious beliefs can increase group solidarity in ways that a larger liberal society cannot. Whereas "fully reasoned social contracts that regulate individual interests to share costs and benefits of cooperation can be more liable to collapse," in contrast, "costly and seemingly arbitrary ritual commitment to apparently absurd beliefs deepens trust, galvanizing group solidarity for common defense and blinding members to exit strategies."²⁰ As discussed in the previous chapter, Joseph Smith declared his intention "to so organize the Church, that the brethren might eventually be independent of every encumbrance beneath the celestial kingdom, by bonds and covenants of mutual friendship and love."²¹ As I shall illustrate, the secretive, separatist, and sacrificial components Joseph ultimately revealed in his theology apply a more authoritarian and punitive cast to those bonds and covenants than just friendship and love alone.

Amidst the doctrinal chaos of his highly dynamic young religion, Joseph proposed that rituals and ranks of priesthood would provide a semblance of institutional order. As Pritchard has observed, political theologies dependent – as Mormonism was – on immanent sacrality “tend to set up hierarchical and competitive structures of differential access to this sacred.”²² Managing access to the sacred is much easier with institutional gatekeepers and varying levels of access. Though he frequently derided “priestcraft” at the start of his ministry, Joseph began to develop complex orders of priestly hierarchy a few years into his ministry to diminish confusion about the status of doctrine and assist the Prophet in governing the Church.²³ He, as Bushman observes, “almost always wound theology around his organizational changes.”²⁴ For Joseph, the most dangerous threat to faith was that both apostates from within the Church, and skeptics from the outside world, fed an unholy perplexity among the faithful -- and he preached that they had the same origin.²⁵ Warning that spiritual gifts could be counterfeited by Satan, Joseph cautioned that “the Devil can speak in tongues,” and only a trained priesthood could accurately determine the providence of the supernatural.²⁶ Priestly hierarchies organized and trained through secret rites would serve to verify and promote the truth of Joseph’s revelations to the wider church, while protecting them from the sort of public scrutiny and skepticism that Hobbes and Locke had promoted to dispel the politically invidious power of revelation. Once more in Joseph’s political theology, religious pluralism, both societal and institutional, was conflated with Satanic confusion.²⁷ Hill writes that loyalty to the priesthood among Mormon emerged as “the paramount virtue,” and as the orders were granted new powers they became vital “instruments of group cohesion.”²⁸ After priestly ranks were firmly established and aspirants to the higher echelons properly vetted, these ascending orders of priesthood would become the basis for

Joseph's evolving political system -- a theocratic kingdom.²⁹ Joseph's confidence in the stability a restored priesthood would provide was initially exceedingly optimistic: "Conflicting opinions, the clash of doctrines, the diversity of sentiment [exists]. Let the Melchizedek priesthood be introduced and men be subject to their teaching and their sectarian, narrow contracted notions would flee away.... The anarchy and confusion that prevails among men would disappear."³⁰

Establishing a reliable priesthood was no easy task, however. To guide the elect, Joseph continually tinkered with an increasingly elaborate and overlapping set of orders, quorums, and governing councils, the eventual cadres of a Mormon hierarchy. The fluctuations in its structure and content can be historically correlated with the unstable dynamics between Joseph's increasingly radical revelations and the expulsions and dissensions that continually wracked the Church. Many of the defectors doubted Joseph's more radical revelations, and the movement was rife with high-ranking disciples who apostatized.³¹ Apostates who "denied the faith" were "cut off," and when they came from the upper echelons of the Church their excommunications were often violent.³² Curbing apostasy by properly preparing the elect meant acclimating the Saints to constant doctrinal innovation, a process which required both a continuing battle against some of the more staid traditions of contemporary Christianity and a willingness to jettison even recently adopted Mormon traditions in favor of newer ones. It was lonely work. Joseph complained that:

There has been a great difficulty in getting anything into the heads of this generation. It has been like splitting hemlock knots with a corn-dodger [a piece of corn bread] for a wedge, and a pumpkin for a beetle [a wooden mallet]. Even the Saints are slow to understand.

I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a

celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen.³³

Outside of the faithful, the widely perceived peculiarity of the new Mormon myths, particularly in their tendency to inspire derision from mainline culture, demonstrates to what degree faith in the modern miracle is necessarily culturally idiomatic, even secretive. In confronting the dangers of public scrutiny and the frequent turmoil caused by apostasy,³⁴ Joseph encountered what Charles Taylor calls the “fragilization of faith” among his followers; the awareness that “people who lead ‘normal’ lives do not share my faith (and perhaps believe something very different),” therefore “my own faith commitment becomes fragile—put into question, dubitable.”³⁵ Strengthening a fragile and rapidly developing faith, maintaining communal belief in the return of the miraculous in the face of widespread hostility and skepticism, required restricting knowledge of key elements of the sacred to Mormon communities alone. The ideal Lockean social practice of broadcasting and openly debating all aspects of doctrine in pursuit of an ever more reasonable Christianity had to be curbed, and the political control to do so could best be maintained in communities that were situated in the relative isolation of the frontier. As evidenced by some of the early movement’s skeptical encounters and adverse reactions in the Eastern cities, the proximity Zion to large urban centers would have led to even more direct conflicts with state and federal authorities – especially as Church doctrines grew more socially and politically transgressive -- in those places where both legal and liberal cultural power was strongest.³⁶

Susan Juster discovered the same withdrawal to the periphery in her study of Anglo-American prophets: in the nineteenth century, a shared aversion to industrialization, cosmopolitan skepticism, and growing state power inspired diverse millenarians to turn “their back on the city,” and embrace a militant pastoralism. Mormonism, for Juster, was “the most

spectacular example” of this prophetic exodus, a pilgrimage away from urban centers to the frontier so that “the vices of the modern world are held at bay” by great patriarchs ruling over pacific kingdoms.³⁷ Zion would therefore lie, as Bushman describes, “on the margins of the civilized world, not at the center;” the New Jerusalem would find its “own space at the edge of American settlement.”³⁸ There the secretive dissemination of Joseph’s more peculiar and grandiose revelations could better rely on the cultivation of a specifically Mormon culture for their limited reception -- with the express understanding that they were not yet available for a broader cultural distribution. Secrecy helped to shield the content of dramatic revelations and the peculiar forms of new rituals, as well as conceal the expanding development of theocratic practices and imperial ambitions.

In April of 1844, Sidney Rigdon delivered a lecture on Church history at the Nauvoo conference describing the need for secrecy at the beginnings of the movement. Rigdon revealed that at his first Mormon conference in Waterloo, New York, fourteen years prior, the nascent Church already required that prophecy be discussed in “secret chambers” to shield it from the corrosive effects of ridicule and outright violence.

We knew the whole world would laugh at us, so we concealed ourselves; and there was much excitement about our meetings, charging us with designs against the government, and with laying plans to get money &c, which never existed in the heads of any one else, and if we talked in public, we should have been ridiculed more than we were, the world being entirely ignorant of the testimony of the prophets . . . So we were obliged to retire to our secret chambers, and commune with God.³⁹

We talked about the people coming as doves to the windows; that all nations should flock unto it; that they should come bending to the standard of Jesus, saying, ‘Our fathers have taught falsehood and things in which there is no profit,’ and of whole nations being born in one day. We talked such big things that men could not hear them, and they not only ridiculed us for what we did say in public, but threatened and inflicted much personal abuse; and had they heard all we said, their violence would have been insupportable.⁴⁰

Rigdon's testimony is intriguing not only for its possible dating of an emerging nationalist sentiment ("of whole nations being born in a day") so early in the Church's history, but also for its assertion that anti-Mormon reaction would have been even more extreme if the full range of Mormon heterodoxy was made public. Now that the Mormons were more secure in Nauvoo in 1844, Rigdon relaxed his guard enough to explain the initial necessity of secret meetings:

The time has now come to tell why we held secret meetings. We were maturing plans fourteen years ago which we can now tell; were we maturing plans to corrupt the world, to destroy the peace of society? Let fourteen years of the experience of the church tell the story. The church would have never been here, if we had not done as we did in secret. The cry of false prophet, and imposter rolled upon us . . . ⁴¹

Aside from Rigdon's personal testimony, a commandment delivered to Martin Harris by Joseph in the summer of 1829 already established that the larger world was not ready for the full scope of revelations and teachings of the Prophet: "And I command you that you preach naught but repentance, and show not these things unto the world until it is wisdom in me. For they cannot bear meat now, but milk they must receive; wherefore, they must not know these things, lest they perish."⁴² Faith in Joseph and his first visions would precede knowledge of all of the new covenants and doctrines that had been received. A year later, in September of 1830, Joseph would link the fullness of faith in his revelations to the imperative of establishing a refuge for his followers from the coming apocalypse.

And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; for mine elect hear my voice and harden not their hearts; Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their

hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked.⁴³

In February of 1831, Joseph conveyed a series of laws similar to the Ten Commandments to govern the Saints in their search for a New Jerusalem (first formalized as the *Book of Commandments*, later the *Doctrine and Covenants*), and followers who disobeyed them were to be expelled. One commandment demanded that “Thou shalt observe to keep the mysteries of the kingdom unto thyself.”⁴⁴ Together, the commandments delivered a year apart describe a mission both of separation and acculturation: “to prepare their hearts” by a “gathering of the elect,” and that the “mysteries of the kingdom” were not to be revealed to the larger world. Separation and secrecy combined were integral practices for creating the cultural -- and legal -- space where a sense of the sacred unique to Mormon culture could flourish, flourish to the point that the doomed gentile world will soon be shocked by the temporal power of the Church and God’s wrath towards those who refused to join. A revelation received in Kirtland on March 7th, 1831 prophesied that in the final battles of the imminent apocalypse the wicked shall avoid Zion “for the inhabitants of Zion are terrible.” The Lord, therefore, commands that the founding and fortification of Zion in Missouri -- “a land of peace, a city of refuge, a place of safety for the saints of the most high God” -- must be done covertly. The Saints’ mission must not be revealed until Zion is mighty enough to frighten away all aggressors:

And now I say unto you, keep these things from going abroad unto the world, until it is expedient in me, that ye may accomplish this work in the eyes of the people, and in the eyes of your enemies, that they may not know your works until ye have accomplished the thing which I have commanded you:

That when they shall know it, that they may consider these things, for when the Lord shall appear he shall be terrible unto them, that fear may seize upon them, and they shall stand afar off and tremble: and all the nations shall be afraid because of the terror of the Lord, and the power of his might; even so: Amen⁴⁵

Echoing Rigdon's testimony over early Mormon fears for safety, Joseph taught that secrecy was required not only during the initially dangerous gathering of the elect to Zion, but to conceal the growing strength of its inhabitants until they are "terrible." At a conference of Church elders in April of 1834, Joseph elaborated on the role Zion would play as both a refuge to withstand the appalling destruction unleashed by the apocalypse, and as a place of sanctification where faith in his revelations would deepen:

It is very difficult for us to communicate to the churches all that God has revealed to us, in consequence of tradition; for we are differently situated from any other people that ever existed upon this earth; consequently those former revelations cannot be suited to our conditions; they were given to other people, who were before us; but in the last days, God was to call a remnant, in which was to be deliverance, as well as in Jerusalem and Zion. Now if God should give no more revelations, where will we find Zion and this remnant? The time is near when desolation is to cover the earth, and then God will have a place of deliverance in his remnant, and in Zion,

Take away the Book of Mormon and the revelations, and where is our religion? We have none; for without Zion, and a place of deliverance, we must fall; because the time is near when the sun will be darkened, and the moon turn to blood, and the stars fall from the heaven, and the earth reel to and fro. Then, if this is the case, and if we are not sanctified and gathered to the places God has appointed, with all our former professions and our great love for the Bible, we must fall; we cannot stand; we cannot be saved; for God will gather out his Saints from the Gentiles, and then comes desolation and destruction, and none can escape except the pure in heart who are gathered.⁴⁶

From Joseph's perspective Zion -- "a place of deliverance" where the Saints can be gathered out "from the Gentiles" -- was essential to the sanctification and very survival of the Mormon people. In contrast, when seen from the position of Hobbes's political theory, the proto-nationalist drive to establish Zion, together with the promulgation of secret Mormon doctrines, would provide incriminating evidence of the very type of insurrectionary civil groups that Hobbes so feared. Secrecy and secession were dramatic examples of why, within Hobbesian theory, the Hobbesian state demanded public transparency to prevent social conflict and civil

wars. Operating outside of public accounting or the state's explicit knowledge was a likely sign of nefarious plots, a group's inherent uncivilly.⁴⁷

At times Joseph seems to have concluded that when secrecy failed, the very practice itself incited more animus towards the Church than it was worth. Even within the Church, secrecy was often controversial. In April of 1833, an Elder had written to Joseph complaining about "secrets within the councils of Zion." Joseph was dismissive, answering back that the concern was "written blindly."⁴⁸ However, when imprisoned after the second Missouri conflict, Joseph changed course, writing to his people from the Liberty jail in December of 1838 that: "We have never dissembled, nor will we for the sake of our lives."⁴⁹ Still captive in March of 1839, he protested in another missive that the Mormons were in fact just a beleaguered Protestant sect, one being horribly persecuted for their traditionalist faith, and that he understood that secrecy antagonized the gentile world. He suggested then that the secret practices associated with Mormonism were actually not his, but emerged from the plots of the apostate Dr. Sampson Avard, and thus were not truly endogenous to their faith:

And again, I would further suggest the impropriety of the organization of bands or companies, by covenant or oaths, by penalties or secrecies; but let the time past of our experience and sufferings by the wickedness of Doctor Avard suffice and let our covenant be that of the Everlasting Covenant, as is contained in the Holy Writ and the things that God hath revealed unto us. Pure friendship always becomes weakened the very moment you undertake to make it stronger by penal oaths and secrecy.⁵⁰

Free in Nauvoo two years later, in December of 1841, Joseph again denied that Mormonism kept any doctrine or revelation secret, stating that "The reason we do not have the

secrets of the Lord revealed unto us, is because we do not keep them but reveal them; we do not keep our own secrets, but reveal our difficulties to the world, even to our enemies, then how would we keep the secrets of the Lord?"⁵¹ But in October of 1843, while compiling ever greater mysteries and secretly marrying more wives, Joseph apparently felt secure enough in Nauvoo to proclaim both his devotion to religious liberty *and* his Church's growing reliance on subterfuge. His resumption of secret doctrines and practices after many disavowals lends credence to Moore's proposition that Joseph engaged in a deliberate strategy of polarization; knowing that secrecy "offended the openness of American democracy," he proceeded as "part of his effort to give his followers a sense of distinct identity. Those who knew the secret . . . were joined together. Those who were excluded from the secret were invited to regard the Mormons as mysteriously different."⁵²

In his sermon of October 15th, 1843 Joseph began with high praise of the American constitution and its guarantees of religious freedom and threw in an odd endorsement of Freemasonry towards the conclusion: "The secret of masonry is to keep a secret. It is good economy to entertain strangers -- to entertain sectarians."⁵³ Though the early Mormon movement originally condemned Freemasonry and secret societies (with the *Book of Mormon* being described by Martin Harris as an "Antimasonick Bible"), Joseph began to formally switch tactics in December of 1841, embracing Masonry and incorporating Masonic rituals into Mormonism.⁵⁴ Shortly after he and some of his leading disciples became Masons and formed their own Grand Lodge in Nauvoo in March of 1842, Joseph instituted another campaign to enforce loyalty and confidentiality within the Church, this time more ceremoniously with new sacred rites containing complex oaths, signs, symbols, and ritual drama of a distinctly Masonic aspect.⁵⁵ Two year later, while organizing his theocratic Council of Fifty Joseph recorded in his diary that he required, at

the preliminary meeting “perfect secrecy” of all the participants. According to both apostates and the official minutes of the council, members’ obligations demanded “secrecy, *under the penalty of death.*”⁵⁶ Quinn notes that the need for secrecy within the theocratic council made it “more completely an extension of Freemasonry than any other dimension of Nauvoo society,” with many of its members bound by overlapping oaths. By his calculations, at least fifteen percent were constrained by secret oaths delivered under four different auspices: “Danite, Masonic, endowment, and Council of Fifty.”⁵⁷

In addition to undergirding his theocratic council with ritualistic practices, Masonry also provided Joseph with unique theological precepts outside of conventional American Christianity. Joseph’s initial rejection of Masonry, followed by his enthusiastic adoption, parallels the political and religious utility in the covert craft that Maistre had also rediscovered decades earlier. Despairing over the lasting repercussions of the Revolution upon an increasingly diminished monarchy across Europe, Maistre’s later works returned to the Masonic millennialism of his youth -- with its dense symbolic repertoire -- for an interpretive schema with which to generate myths that “express an ontological order actually invested with historical efficacy.” He had concluded that Catholic theology alone was insufficient and was looking for alternative modes of mysticism to contest the Revolution. Armenteros writes that Maistre’s application of Masonic semiotics was the “most important among his intellectual acquisitions from Freemasonry Insofar as Freemasonry was a philosophy, it could be broadly defined as a science towards sacred symbols whereby every detail of every being in the world can, if interpreted right, yield information about the divine.” Much like the Masonic content in Joseph Smith’s increasingly theocratic revelations in Nauvoo, Maistre too believed these myths proclaimed that “knowledge

of the divine government of the universe can aid us, as spiritual beings, in governing the world spiritually ourselves.”⁵⁸

Maistre was convinced that the French Revolution was a Satanic mutation evolved from the errors of 18th century philosophy, historically destructive errors that were themselves the teratogens of Protestantism. In reconciling the illuminist philosophies of his youth with key features of his traditionalist Catholicism, he hoped to “shatter the logic of *philosophie*” with what he considered the neglected religious strands of Enlightenment thought.⁵⁹ Returning to Masonic myths provided Maistre with the theoretical approaches to integrate the “hidden *doxa*” and Neoplatonic cosmology of early Christian philosophers like Origen with his dreams of a revived Catholicism, a revitalized religion capable of establishing a universal Christian order.⁶⁰ Departing even further from Catholic theology however, Maistre perceived this revitalized religion as an opportunity for “human moral enrichment, efficacious discipline, and the ascent toward sainthood.” His intended universal religious order would ultimately unite a “perfected humanity.”⁶¹ In his later years, Maistre could only wistfully reflect on his hopes of taking those first steps of merging Masonic rites with the Christian world.⁶² Joseph Smith would actually do it. Joseph’s transmutation of Masonry into an American religious idiom, according to Brookes, was an integral source for his theology of perfectionism. “Masonic myths,” writes Brookes, describe “priestly genealogies running back to Adam . . . [q]uite simply, the Adamic language was the royal road to perfection, the “key to the mysteries.””⁶³ Theologically, both men perceived Masonic myths as providing a tiered path to sainthood and human perfectionism, a path that could, when pioneered by a prophet, be connected with Christianity.

Sociologically, Joseph’s promotion of Masonic rites and secrecy within the Church were most concentrated at his elite theocratic council, but these practices could be also found in other

Mormon institutions where transparency threatened the Prophet. According to Brooke, Joseph's demands for loyalty from the leading women of the Church helped drive his sanctification of the recently formed Female Relief Society of Nauvoo during the spring of 1842. Caught between incompatible organizational imperatives, the Society was founded on a peculiar combination of charity work, communal policing, secrecy, and loyalty tests. Initially organized by a concerned coterie of prominent women of the Church to help provide for the impoverished and needy, Joseph wrote to them shortly after their formation that he hoped they were also "sufficiently skill'd in Masonry to keep a secret."⁶⁴ Why the application of Masonic symbols and codes of secrecy to Church institutions such as the Relief Society? The Society emerged during the transitioning family structure of the mid-19th century, when fathers were increasingly assigned the role as primary wage earners and mothers granted more moral authority in the domestic sphere along with their assumption of greater household duties. The Mormon women behind the Relief Society, according to the historian Merina Smith, were eager to acquire this virtuous authority and extend it and their authoritative roles throughout the Mormon community, much like analogous women's Christian societies and national charity organizations. But they quickly found themselves embroiled in a polygamy scandal that, by conventional American mores, represented a "threat to the moral authority of women and the nuclear family."⁶⁵ Caught between organizing philanthropic efforts similar to those in mainline churches and a socially explosive new religious doctrine, part of their assigned work would have to be conducted covertly. In addition to their public duties, the Relief Society was confidentially tasked by Joseph with keeping secret that "some unprincipled men" were engaged in efforts to "deceive and debauch the innocent . . . a private matter in your Society." He noted that their ability to maintain such a volatile secret would reveal "whether you are good masons."⁶⁶ To aid in their tasks, Joseph

promised them that they would receive “keys to the kingdom,” similar to those bestowed on the male priesthood, secret key words and holy signs – unknown to the devil -- that allowed the initiate to “be able to detect every thing false.”⁶⁷

The ritualized enforcement of silence among the women of the Relief Society was, by Brooke’s account, “interwoven with a multilayered campaign of deception,” and when the rumors of polygamy could not be contained, Joseph and his elders commissioned the Society to take a leading role in rebutting them. Their first effort was a petition organized by the Society and signed by over a thousand women attesting to the prophet’s “virtue integrity honesty”.⁶⁸ Emma, meanwhile, was quietly organizing investigative committees composed of her fellow Society members to determine the truth of these rumors, unaware that some of her closest colleagues and friends – including signatories of the anti-polygamy petition testifying to Joseph’s monogamy -- were already married to Joseph.⁶⁹ Eliza Snow, a close friend of Emma’s who lived with the Smith family and was one of Joseph’s secret wives, would lament years later that the introduction of the plural marriage principle was “a deep intricate puzzle, a tangle of strings.”⁷⁰

That “intricate puzzle” was composed of interconnected doctrinal practices including ritualized secrecy, public deception, and the plural marriage principle conveyed as an Abrahamic test of faith; all pieces of a complex social construction that, when fit together, would form a confidential bond among the Mormon elite and inspire deeper loyalty to Joseph. Extending Eliza Snow’s mixed metaphor, we can analogize how the overlap and tight entanglement of these peculiar doctrines would weave those who passed the loyalty tests into a new holy order tied together through “celestial marriage,” the social basis of a theocratic council that would gather to declare Joseph “King, Priest, and Ruler” of the emergent Kingdom of God on Earth shortly

before his assassination.⁷¹ The string of secrecy that started with concealing the widening practice of plural marriage ended in theocracy.

* * *

Rumors of licentiousness and polygamy haunted the early movement almost from its inception in New York, even though the practice was initially condemned by the *Book of Mormon* on pain of the Lord's curse.⁷² In addition, a commandment recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835 asserted: "Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication and polygamy; we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife; and one woman but one husband; except that in the event of death when either is at liberty to marry again."⁷³ Though the historical record is ambiguous, there is strong evidence that Joseph first engaged in a polygamous marriage in 1835 with a young woman living in the Smith household who subsequently left the Church and remarried.⁷⁴ From the abandonment of this early, almost experimental effort in plural marriage, the historian Merina Smith concludes that while in Ohio and Missouri in the 1830s, "Mormon life then was too unstable and volatile to allow such an innovation."⁷⁵ After establishing greater political power and a large militia in Nauvoo, Joseph's campaign of and for plural marriage would resume in the spring of 1841, when he secretly married again and revealed to select followers a "new and everlasting covenant" that, theologically, was framed as a test of Abrahamic sacrifice. The reward for obedience was an eventual cosmic kingdom of one's own, where rule was established through eternal marriage ties.⁷⁶ Sociologically, acceptance of the astounding doctrine was both an explicit proof of loyalty to Joseph and a signal of assimilation into an elite group who were promised sanctification above

that of other members. After Joseph's martyrdom, the elite practice would rapidly grow more popular, becoming quickly integrated into the rest of Mormon culture as the first generation of polygamous men and women – those secretly married in the early 1840s -- served as the Church leaders for the next fifty years.⁷⁷

Joseph offered many spiritual benefits to those women he first approached with the doctrine.⁷⁸ He informed Mary Lightener, who eventually agreed to become one of his wives, that her acceptance of the principle meant her salvation was assured. Initially, in his polygamous marriages, salvation was tied to Joseph through his singular role as God's prophet without a specific theology of exaltation, but with the arrival of his July 12th, 1843 revelation, Joseph elaborated on the many glories that were far greater than simply ascension to conventional conception of heaven.⁷⁹ The bonds established through plural marriage were to extend beyond mortal life. Plural marriages were made eternal through the practice of "priesthood sealing," whereby couples were bound together forever through the renewed authority of the ancient Christian priesthood.⁸⁰ Once sealed by priestly ordination, the revelation explained, their exalted status would be divinely elevated far above those joined by mere worldly authority:

Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.⁸¹

United in the afterlife through plural marriage on earth, these celestial families would form their own cosmic governments, their glories and realms of heavenly inheritance including "thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights & depths." Practicing plural marriage on earth would both exalt the faithful and serve as preparation for a "heavenly rule" in the afterlife that appears to be almost endlessly expansive in the scope of its power.⁸²

The penalties for denying the doctrine were eternal too. In the fourth line of the revelation commanding obedience to the doctrine (of July 12th, 1843), Joseph announced: “I reveal unto you a New and Everlasting Covenant and if ye abide not that Covenant, then are ye damned.”⁸³ The stark severity of refusal never seemed to make the choice easier. Even in studies from sympathetic historians, the shattering of the monogamous taboo is recorded as a shock for the faithful. Bushman writes that “(t)he reaction was almost invariably negative. One young woman, Lucy Walker, was struck with horror on hearing the doctrine. She was fifteen when the Prophet invited her to in live in his house.”⁸⁴ Fourteen years old when the proposal was made, Walker was warned by Joseph that she must not dither in her decision or “the gate will be closed forever against you.”⁸⁵ She would later testify about the experience that, “I felt at this moment that I was called to place myself upon the altar a living sacrifice – perhaps to brook the world in disgrace and incur the displeasure and contempt of my youthful companions.”⁸⁶ Her reaction was typical; Joseph introduced plural marriage with an explicit emphasis on loyalty and the fear of betrayal, according to the testimonies of many of the women he proposed to, and their recollections of their reactions were frequently framed in terms of enduring trials and making costly sacrifices. Phoebe Woodruff, the first wife of the Church’s Fourth President, Wilford Woodruff, wrote, “I opposed it to the best of my ability until I became sick and wretched,” and Eliza Maria Partridge Lyman, who married to Joseph sometime in 1843, complained that it “was truly a trial for me.”⁸⁷

Zina Huntington was taught the doctrine directly from Joseph and she resisted even after he secretly proposed to her on three separate occasions. She would later record that she refused out of respect for Emma, her belief in traditional monogamy, the radical peculiarity of the doctrine, and out of suspicion of the furtive secrecy it required.⁸⁸ Seven months after she married

another man, she relented to Joseph's fourth request when told that if he failed to establish polygamy within the Church, an angel would deprive Joseph of "his position and his life." Years later Zina Huntington described her decision to enter into polyandry as a sacrifice: "I mad [made] a greater sacrifice than to give my life for I never anticipated a gain to be looked upon as an honerable women by those I dearly loved [but] could I compromise conscience . . . after having been baptized by one having authority and covenanting to be obedient[?]"⁸⁹ After Joseph's martyrdom, Zina would polyandrously marry Brigham Young.⁹⁰

In addition to Huntington, Joseph told at least one other of his wives that an angel had threatened his life if he did not abide by the principle, and he warned that the very existence of the principle, as well as his marriage proposals, must be kept secret for his continuing physical safety: "In revealing [the principle] to you I have placed my life in your hands, therefore do not in an evil hour betray me to my enemies."⁹¹ In instructing Mary Lightener, Joseph demanded to know whether she would accept the principle and his offer or whether she "was going to be a *traitor*." According to Emily Partridge, before his proposal Joseph said, "Emily if you will not *betray* me, I will tell you something for your benefit." Emily's sister, Eliza, was typical in her testimony of the social costs inherent in maintaining such secrets, that plural marriage "was truly a great trial for me but I had the most implicit confidence in him as a Prophet of the Lord . . ."⁹²

Acceptance of the doctrine was a trial for the Mormon men, too. Brigham Young lamented that upon learning of the commandment, he was so distressed that "(a)nd when I saw a funeral, I felt to envy the corpse its situation, and to regret that I was not in the coffin." Apostle John Taylor, one of the Quorum of the Twelve at the time the revelation was delivered and the third President of the Church, confessed that "It made my flesh crawl."⁹³ Orson Pratt, one of the greatest of the early apostles of the faith, endured a near suicidal breakdown when informed that

Joseph had secretly proposed plural marriage to Pratt's wife, Sarah, in his absence.⁹⁴ Brigham Young wrote that Pratt's "mind became so darkened by the influence and statements of his wife, that he came out in rebellion against Joseph refusing to believe his testimony or obey his counsel. He said he would believe his wife in preference to the Prophet." Joseph threatened Pratt that if he chose to follow the testimony of his wife "he would go to hell," and Pratt, after a brief excommunication, soon relented, eventually accepting the doctrine and becoming an enthusiastic polygamist.⁹⁵ (Pratt was the Church official who would finally proclaim the doctrine of plural marriage to the public from the relative safety of the Utah territory in 1852.⁹⁶) In addition to marrying polyandrous wives, Joseph occasionally made polyandrous request to test a couple's loyalty to, and faith in, him. The historian Spencer Kimball, writes of an episode involving his ancestor, Heber Kimball, that:

[Heber] was introduced to the doctrine of plural marriage directly through a startling test -- a sacrifice which shook his very being and challenged his faith to the ultimate. He had already sacrificed homes, possessions, friends, relatives, all worldly rewards, peace, and tranquility for the Restoration. Nothing was left to place on the altar save his life, his children, and his wife. . . . Joseph demanded for himself what to Heber was the unthinkable, his [wife] Vilate. Totally crushed spiritually and emotionally, Heber touched neither food nor water for three days and three nights and continually sought confirmation and comfort from God.⁹⁷

After three days of fasting, "some kind of assurance" becalmed Heber and he accepted the principle and submitted to Joseph's request. Upon telling Joseph of their acquiescence to the new commandment, "(t)he Prophet wept at this act of faith, devotion, and obedience. Joseph had never intended to take Vilate. It was all a test."⁹⁸ (Joseph would shortly thereafter convince Heber to marry an additional wife, though the Prophet cautioned him not to inform Vilate.⁹⁹) The many accounts of Nauvoo Mormons' dismayed willingness to pay "the psychic cost" of

obedience as “evidence of commitment” to the principle supports Daynes’s contention that the initial anguish and eventual acceptance of the doctrine provided dramatic proof of loyalty to Joseph.¹⁰⁰

In addition to the testimonies of his wives and closest disciples, Joseph’s own public and recorded statements would also link the highest degrees of heavenly salvation to the necessity of sacrifices on earth. As early as the winter of 1834-35, in a remarkable parallel to the political theology of Maistre, Joseph would profess the centrality of sacrifice for any enduring religion:

Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation; for, from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God.¹⁰¹

In 1840 Joseph would further elaborate that sacrifice “has ever been connected and forms part of the duties of priesthood. It began with the priesthood and will be continued until [sic] after the coming of Christ from generation to generation.” Anatomically similar to Maistre’s linking of sacrifice with his political theological project of restoration, sacrifice and sacrificial ceremonies were for Joseph an integral part of the full restoration of “the authority power and blessings” of the restored priesthood, or “(e)lse how can the restitution of all things spoken of by all the Holy Prophets be brought to pass(?)”¹⁰² Just how many elements of ancient sacrificial rites were to be restored before Christ’s return, as well as their specific ritualized forms, were left vague by Joseph. Further elaboration of sacred ritual, as with revelation and doctrinal innovation, appeared to be a continuous project¹⁰³

The broad anthropological proposition that a more explicitly ritualized and personally costly form of sacrifice is vital for the maintenance of true religion was in sharp variance with

the critiques of sacrificial ritual made by Locke, and runs counter to the perspective on sacrifice emerging from the mainstream of Protestant theology. In the early apostolic Christian Church, Christ's self-sacrifice was to be the final act of atonement for the redemption of sin, and, in superseding the ancient Hebraic forms of sacrifice, the Christian faith was to be proclaimed through a belief in Christ's ultimate sacrifice through his role as messiah and son of God.¹⁰⁴ Whereas most Christian theologies see Christ's sacrifice as atonement for man's sin, Joseph taught that new rituals of sacrificial atonement were required as a "divinely intended strategy for human progression," a progression that moves beyond mortal life "onward toward endless celestial schooling."¹⁰⁵ In August of 1843, one month after delivering the secret revelation on plural marriage to a select few, Joseph would publically lecture that, "The sacrifice required of Abraham in the offering up of Isaac, shows that if a man would attain to the keys of the kingdom of an endless life; he must sacrifice all things. When God offers a blessing or knowledge to a man, and he refuses to receive it, he will be damned."¹⁰⁶

From 1842 on, both publically and privately, Joseph would frequently evoke the example of Abraham to explain God's provision of specific trials to test the faith of his latter day Saints. The primary referent for renewed rituals of sacrifice in Joseph's private teachings, however, was not to the offering up of Isaac, but to Abraham's polygamy. The revelation on plural marriage, which would eventually be published as number 132 in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, stated that:

This promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham, and the promise was made unto Abraham; and by this law is the continuation of the works of my Father, wherein he glorifieth himself.

Go ye, therefore, and do the works of Abraham; enter ye into my law and ye shall be saved.

But if ye enter not into my law ye cannot receive the promise of my Father, which he made unto Abraham.

God commanded Abraham, and Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham to wife. And why did she do it? Because this was the law; and from Hagar sprang many people. This, therefore, was fulfilling, among other things, the promises.¹⁰⁷

In clearly associating the practice of polygamy with the covenantal promises received by Abraham, Givens notes that for Joseph the confirmation of his prophetic righteousness included similar rewards -- numerous blessings in his role as a biblical patriarch, and a “special status as a conduit of God’s blessings to those multitude.”¹⁰⁸ Givens argues, however, that in an intriguing deviation from Judeo-Christian theology, the logic of Abrahamic sacrifice is supposed to be temporally bounded, a test of “a person’s willingness to *provisionally* suspend a moral imperative (do not practice human sacrifice) in deference to a divine mandate to perform an ethically repugnant act.” The Abrahamic test, as portrayed in the book of Genesis, does not overturn God’s law against murder forever. Joseph’s theology adds an innovative form of sacrifice to the Protestant tradition it emerged from: instead of a temporary suspension of ethical law, the revelation on plural marriage elevated a taboo act “into a supernal principle.”¹⁰⁹ Joseph’s transgression of monogamous marriage was open-ended and eternal. His revelation on the principle states that Abraham was not under “condemnation” for polygamy because the Lord “commanded it,” and in an echo of Joseph’s letter to Nancy Rigdon, in which Joseph explained the highly situational context of God’s superseding commandments, the revelation on plural marriage reiterates that God commanded Abraham to offer his son even though He had previously commanded “Thou shall not kill.” Now, in the instance of plural marriage, any limit on the singularity of the act of sacrifice is gone. In Joseph’s retelling, Abraham’s obedience, regardless of past commandments, was the required sign of his righteousness, though there is a clear slippage in the marriage revelation’s verses between the commands and promises made to Abraham, references to his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, and the offering of Hagar to Abraham made by Sarah. The sacrifice of a son as a temporary test quickly segues into polygamy as new,

eternal, sacrificial practice. Sarah's apparently selfless proposition from the book of Genesis is subsumed, both textually and theologically in Joseph's thought into Abraham's offering of Isaac. A narrative of an offer of polygamy initiated under Sarah's own agency is transformed into one of a sacrifice demanded by God.¹¹⁰

Emma, unlike the biblical Sarah, at first vigorously contested the very legitimacy of the principle and never appears to have been at ease with it.¹¹¹ She was not alone; as successive revelations magnified Joseph's spiritual and earthly powers, high ranking Church members found the internal logic and theological consistency of Joseph's revelations becoming more frayed and implausible, in turn increasing Joseph's demands for secrecy and obedience.¹¹² Emma's sporadic resistance to spiritual wifery led Joseph, in receiving the principle, to beseech God for a specific message to convince her of its (and his) virtue. The divine response for Emma was also couched in the language of an Abrahamic test and demands for sacrifice:

A commandment I give unto mine handmaid, Emma Smith, your wife, whom I have given unto you, that she stay herself and partake not of that which I commanded you to offer unto her; for I did it, saith the Lord, to prove you all, as I did Abraham, and that I might require an offering at your hand, by covenant and sacrifice.¹¹³

Lacking references to what particular offers were made, the syntax is confusing. Joseph was commanded by God to make an unspecified offer to Emma, and she was commanded to – or already did -- “stay herself” and reject that offer, all of which the Lord devised as form of Abrahamic test for them both. The sacrifices demanded by God in this moral drama were made simultaneously to Joseph (“I commanded you to offer unto her”) and Emma, with both parties blind to God's commandment delivered to the other. Abrahamic tests of faith could be far more convoluted and demanding in Joseph's theology than that of conventional Christianity. According to the Mormon scribe and member of the Council of Fifty, William Clayton, Emma

had argued with Joseph near the end of June, 1843 that she too should be allowed to “indulge” in polyandry if Joseph was doing so.¹¹⁴ The revelation Joseph received that July reassured him of God’s favor, foretold that he would “rule over many things,” and also commanded Emma not to marry other men, and if she did not accept Joseph’s other wives, conform to the principle of plural marriage, and obey Joseph, she would be “destroyed”:

For I am the Lord thy God, and ye shall obey my voice; and I give unto my servant Joseph that he shall be made ruler over many things; for he hath been faithful over a few things, and from henceforth I will strengthen him.

And I command mine handmaid, Emma Smith, to abide and cleave unto my servant Joseph, and to none else. But if she will not abide this commandment she shall be destroyed, saith the Lord; for I am the Lord thy God, and will destroy her if she abide not in my law.¹¹⁵

In an example of Joseph’s theocratic prerogatives ostensibly outpacing the normative logic of his recorded revelations, the principle on plural marriage explicitly condemns polyandry, stating that if it is undertaken the woman in the illicit relationship “would be destroyed.”¹¹⁶ Scholars differ on how many polyandrous wives Joseph had before his death, with common estimates running from ten to fourteen.¹¹⁷ Aside from prohibiting polyandry, the revelation requires that a wife grant her consent before her husband can take further polygamous brides, but if she refuses -- as with Emma -- she will be “destroyed” and her husband can then proceed to marry.¹¹⁸ In practice, like Emma, first wives in Nauvoo weren’t always notified before their husbands took additional wives. Joseph’s (self-) sanction of these apparent contradictions between the letter of the revelation and his divergent practices accentuate the ways that his exceptional politics continually struggled to establish new normative grounds, grounds that, even in the eyes of some of his closest followers, he appeared to be already transgressing.¹¹⁹

Though Joseph’s introduction of sacrificial rituals and the development of the Mormon priesthood could not ultimately insure his own safety, both conventions left a lasting institutional

and cultural legacy. Sociologically, scholars such as Brooke, Smith, Hill and Daynes have linked Joseph's intense emphasis on loyalty and enhancing Mormon solidarity with his Nauvoo-era religious innovations.¹²⁰ Hill, for example, notes that "the doctrine of plural marriage provided a means by which sex could be regulated under a new order and put to social purposes," particularly loyalty to the Prophet and the priesthood, a social function also noted by the Mormon historian Kathryn M. Daynes.¹²¹ Applying ideological strain theory developed by the sociologist Robert Wuthnow, Daynes situates Joseph's introduction of polygamy as a response to crises of apostasy, disloyalty among the elders of the Church, and the intensified persecution of the Saints after their second expulsion from Missouri: "The social problems caused by disloyalty among church leaders are directly linked to the social solutions provided by accepting new family forms with their accompanying covenants. . . In some cases, plural marriages created family ties among church leaders, with strong moral responsibilities that attend familial relationships; in all cases, entering plural marriage was a sign of loyalty to Joseph Smith."¹²²

Plural marriage would transform political relations within the Mormon movement from a selection of newly converted Church officeholders with their monogamous families to a uniquely Mormon elite secretly united by the more intimate, almost tribal, bonds of shared ritual sanctification and overlapping polygamous families.¹²³ Just as Joseph saw priesthood as the solution for theological confusion, plural marriage families would reduce the social atomization on the American frontier and enhance solidarity within Mormon Zion. Bushman asserts that Joseph did not polygamously marry for "human companionship," but "to create a network of related wives, children and kinsmen that would endure into the eternities." Noting that the plural marriage revelation provided a "hundred fold into this world, of fathers and mothers, brothers

and sisters, houses and lands, wives and children, and crowns of eternal lives in the eternal worlds,” Bushman believes that “(l)ike Abraham of old, Joseph yearned for familiar plentitude.”¹²⁴ Polygamous familial ties, sealed for all eternity through the power of the Mormon priesthood, would become the restored basis of patriarchal (Abrahamic) rule on earth, and in death family relations would extend infinitely into endless celestial domains, a sort of dynastic, cosmic imperialism.

Givens perceives the same drive for an expanded clan when he observes that Joseph’s preachings on celestial marriage “reveal a kind of voracious appetite to expand his relations, far beyond his immediate family,” but in an intriguing parallel to Joseph’s political maneuverings and reliance on secrecy, he additionally cites that the gathering of a celestial family also relies on cunning and subterfuge. In the King Follett sermon of March 10th, 1844 Joseph preached:

If you have power to seal on earth & in heaven then we should be Crafty, the first thing you do go & seal on earth your sons & daughters unto yourself, & yourself unto your fathers in eternal glory, & go ahead and not go back, but use a little Craftiness & seal all you can . . . I will walk through the gate of heaven and Claim what I seal & those that follow me and my council.¹²⁵

Joseph’s acknowledgement for the need for craftiness to gain rewards in heaven is both a tribute to the cunning required on the Mormon path to individual godhood and, in the earthly realm, just how subversively his polygamous project struck against a “commitment to monogamous marriage on a Christian model” that was “lodged deep in American political theory”¹²⁶

Nancy Cott and Michael Grossberg have written that at least since Montesquieu’s Persian Letters, there has been an Enlightenment association of polygamy with despotism and monogamy with the “government of consent, moderation, and political liberty.” Christian monogamous marriage was considered by theorist and politicians as the social bedrock,

foundational to the political and social stability of a modern Western republic.¹²⁷ The 19th century German-American political theorist Francis Lieber would iterate Montesquieu's concerns in his own trepidation that American liberty could still be susceptible to polygamy, and that the return of the primitive practice "would reintroduce patriarchy and thus despotism into the new republic."¹²⁸ Indeed, Lieber's apprehensions of the resulting despotism and degeneration extended beyond the health of the republic to that of the white race. He perceived monogamous marriage as "one of the primordial elements out of which all law proceeds, or which the law steps in to recognize and to protect. . . . It is one of the pre-existing conditions of our existence as civilized white men . . . Strike it out, and you destroy our very being, and when we say *our* we mean our race – a race which has its great and broad destiny, a solemn aim in the great career of civilization."¹²⁹ Lieber's critique of polygamy was typical of the dominant theoretic assumptions that ensured that the federal government adopted the "Christian model of monogamy as the *sine qua non* of civilization and morality."¹³⁰

So deep ran these tenets of monogamy within American political thought that Mormon polygamy would be seen as a direct challenge to federal authority by a "Polygamic Theocracy," with the Mormon's autonomous "control of marital practice denot[ing] incipient state-building."¹³¹ In opposition to the dominant norm, utopian sects such as the Shakers, Owenites, and Rappites viewed "monogamy and the private family to be impediments to human progress." Joseph held very similar views about the spiritual limits of monogamy, but his theological conceptions of secrecy and sacrifice had the effect of making the private family even more private, and whereas radical groups like the Owenites would attempt to dissolve patriarchal prerogatives into the communal solidarity of socialist marriage, Joseph's theology of spiritual wifery was explicitly instituted to expand patriarchal power on earth and in the celestial

kingdom.¹³² Where scholars like Cott, Grossberg, and Karen Orren see remnants of patriarchal or feudal control in the legal privileges and structure of the family, Joseph advanced those peculiar prerogatives a step further, demanding familial sacrifices for a theocratic king.¹³³ His institution of polygamy was the most dramatic part of his effort to reformulate Mormon society and make it suitable for theocracy.

Chapter 7: “A Constitutional Right to be a False Prophet”

Like comparable religious originators outside the Protestant tradition, Joseph possessed the amazing ability to explain and integrate unusual elements of the world around him through and into myth. Nathan Hatch writes that "Mormons distinguished themselves from other churches by claiming that mundane life was alive with" revelations, miracles, and wonders, through which Joseph provided an "immediate access to the god-head."¹ American land was not the demon-haunted world of Puritanism, a savage place to be conquered and then overwritten with new mythic narratives as described by Richard Slotkin, but a holy land overflowing with the artifacts of ancient Israelis.² The tattered papyri of a traveling Egyptian roadshow became the lost "Book of Abraham;"³ an old skeleton unearthed in Missouri with an arrowhead embedded in it was declared to be the warrior chieftain "Zelf," a "Lamanite" so pure that "the curse of the red skin was taken from him, or, at least in part;"⁴ Hebrew lessons from a Jewish scholar became an "auxiliary to divine illumination."⁵

These audacious prophecies and wondrous discoveries could fire the mythic imagination and intensify life, preparing the receptive listener for an authority based on theocratic order, discipline, and hierarchy. Joseph's conflation of the cosmic with the quotidian, however, also reveals to what extent the continual evocation of the sacred runs the risk of banality. The sacrifices and gritty compromises demanded of his followers often fell short of traditional conceptions of the heroic and into the contemporary realms of the petty and prurient. Terryl Givens and Jan Shipps have analyzed the many ways that early Mormons thoroughly infused their sense of the sacred into the banal -- and ran the resultant risks of sacralizing the banal and

banalizing the sacred.⁶ Givens notes that Joseph would dictate poetic revelations revealing elements of cosmic grandeur never before heard of in the Judeo-Christian tradition, such as “The earth rolls upon her wings, and the sun giveth his light by day, and the moon giveth her light by night and the stars also give their light, as they roll upon their wings in their glory, in the midst of the power of God.” Yet, he would also “invoke the same revelatory power and authority to declare in the voice of God, ‘let my servant Oliver Cowdery have the lot which is set off joining the house, which is to be for the printing office, which is lot number one, and also the lot upon which his father resides.’”⁷

Fawn Brodie perceived a similar conflation of the sacred and banal present in the persona of the Prophet, writing that “Joseph’s character was the commonplace Yankee mixture of piety and avarice,” and she cited a January 1841 revelation ordering the Saints to build a hotel in Nauvoo that contained a jarringly specific rider that it be financed at “not less than fifty dollars a share of stock.” Those Saints charged with its construction that failed to properly appropriate the stock “shall be accursed,” and Brodie notes that the revelation “guilelessly” granted “Joseph a suite of rooms in the hotel for himself and his posterity ‘from generation to generation, for ever and ever.’”⁸ Joseph occasionally seemed aware of this deflationary danger, voicing periodic concern about the vast chasm of decorum between the proper degrees of gravity and gratitude expressed for the exaltations bestowed by God on his chosen people -- and their hopelessly prosaic squabbles. Writing from the Liberty Jail in March of 1839, Joseph warned:

A fanciful and flowery an heated imagination beware of; because the things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity—thou must commune with God. How much more dignified and noble are the thoughts of God, than the vain imaginations of the human heart! None but fools will trifle with the souls of men.

How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversations — too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters of the called and chosen of God, according to the purposes of His will, from before the foundation of the world!⁹

“Too low, too mean, too vulgar” could well typify for many critics the numerous commandments dealing with economic matters that appear trifling to modern sensibilities. According to one researcher, 88 out of 112 revelations announced by Joseph “dealt partly or entirely with matters that were economic in nature.”¹⁰ Susan Juster notes that as religion in nineteenth century America “became more and more a commodity to be packaged and sold like any other form of entertainment, the line between legitimate expressions of faith and cynical manipulation was considerably blurred.” Recounting an apparently apocryphal meeting between P.T. Barnum and Brigham Young, Juster writes that “Barnum made a career of fooling his customers, usually with their tacit consent, by means not far removed from the occult practices of early Mormons.”¹¹ Aspects of this almost Barnumesque knowingness pervaded Joseph’s portrayal of his own role as prophet, a tendency that, in his recorded words makes it difficult to distinguish when he was being disconcertingly playful or outright cynical about his alleged powers.¹² In June of 1843, after foiling an attempt of a Missouri sheriff to extradite him, Joseph preached to a hastily convened assembly in Nauvoo, and at the end of his lecture introduced an allied Illinois politician to his faithful flock. According to accounts from Church newspapers: “[Joseph] turned to him and said with a little smile: ‘These are the greatest dupes, as a body of people, that ever lived, or I am not so big a rogue as I am reported to be.’”¹³

When the Boston Brahmins Josiah Quincy, Jr. and Charles Francis Adams visited Nauvoo in May of 1844 to investigate the Mormon sect, Quincy found Joseph to be charismatic and generous, but warned him that he had consolidated too much power for any one man. Joseph retorted that in any ordinary man’s hands “so much power would, no doubt be dangerous. I am

the only man in the world whom it would be safe to trust with it. Remember, I am a prophet!” Quincy was skeptical and startled by Joseph’s sly tone, writing that, “The last five words were spoken in a rich, comical aside, as if in hearty recognition of the ridiculous sound they might have in the ears of a Gentile.”¹⁴

Not all of his Joseph’s commentary on his prophetic role was so confident and comical. He complained in July of 1843 that: “It has gone abroad that I proclaimed myself no longer a prophet. I said it last Sabbath ironically: I supposed you would all understand.” Since his audience had missed the irony, Joseph found it necessary to explain his rather qualified reasoning, “It was not that I would renounce the idea of being a prophet, but that I had no disposition to proclaim myself such. But I do say that I bear the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy.”¹⁵ That disposition was no longer in evidence in May of 1844 when Joseph confronted charges from apostates that he had fallen: “My enemies say that I have been a true prophet. Why, I had rather be a fallen true prophet than a false prophet. When a man goes about prophesying, and commands men to obey his teachings, he must either be a true or false prophet. False prophets always arise to oppose the true prophets and they will prophesy so very near the truth that they will deceive almost the very chosen ones.”¹⁶ As intriguing as his near embrace of the appellation of “fallen true prophet” is, Joseph’s condemnation of false prophets is more noteworthy for his theory of religious liberty and the exceptional politics commanded by revelation. For just a month prior, in his King Follett sermon of April of 1844, Joseph taught that the American people should “meddle not with any man for his religion; all governments ought to permit every man to enjoy his religion unmolested Every man has a natural, and, in our country, a constitutional right to be a false prophet, as well as a true prophet.”¹⁷ In the final months of Joseph’s life his dedication to the theocratic freedoms provided by religious liberty

was so all-encompassing that the sincerity of belief did not matter, a startling proposition for a prophet that had declared his church the only true one and all others “abominations.” Here, the right to deceive the American public, “almost the very chosen ones,” was portrayed as a fundamental religious liberty, a constitutional right. In this licensing of chicanery, we see a uniquely American example of what Schmittian political theology, specifically in the form of revelatory politics, looks like in political practice: both the Promethean heights of an exceptional politics seeking power beyond all earthly law and how banal such a ceaseless politics must soon become.

Conclusion

Ultimately, “the covenants of loyalty were not enough” to protect Joseph’s life, and his theocratic regime in Nauvoo was crushed shortly after his murder.¹ Its protective charter was quickly revoked by the Illinois legislature, its civil government was legally disincorporated, and the Mormon movement fragmented amidst a leadership fight for a successor to the Prophet. The bulk of the faithful abandoned Nauvoo to follow Brigham Young’s exodus to the Utah territory in early 1846. Yet, in death and apparent defeat, Joseph’s theocratic project and its driving political theology have had their triumphs. First, Joseph’s theology and the government he formed in Nauvoo were the guiding inspiration and initial cadre for Brigham Young’s Deseret Kingdom, a theocracy on the American frontier that lasted almost fifty years.² Even after renouncing polygamy and surrendering theocratic control to federal authority in return for full statehood rights for Utah in the 1890s, the Latter-day Saint (LDS) Church retains a strong ethno-religious identity, a belief in the singular authority of a prophet, and a penchant for secrecy in its sporadic political campaigns. Second, Joseph’s legacy lives on in the forms of antagonistic symbiosis adopted by new religions in America with theocratic tendencies, notably in their doctrinal fluidity and their legal challenges made against the authority of the state while carving out forms of local autonomy and demanding greater religious liberty.³ Third, cognates of the theocratic strategies that Joseph combined in his political theology can be found in an arena he excelled at: religious coalitional politics pushing for more theocratic control over individual rights, on both the local and national levels. Seeking to circumvent secular constraints on religious political activity, religious conservatives in recent decades have attempted to roll back the advance of civil rights through secrecy and arguments for greater religious liberty.

Joseph's early Mormon movement, as a paragon American theocracy, carved out a place within liberal pluralism through coalitional politics and its assertions of the liberal rights of religious liberty, but the American state and culture ultimately disciplined the Mormon theocracy through federal force and cultural coercion. The traditional liberal solutions for managing civil disputes of negotiation, rational discussion, and the privatization of religion were insufficient to quell the Mormon drive for theocratic separation within federal territory. Had he not first fled from Kirtland, escaped from the Liberty Jail, and been martyred in Carthage, Joseph would very likely have been criminally convicted for bank fraud in Ohio, treason in Missouri, or polygamy and the destruction of private property in Illinois. The arc of the Mormon Church's doctrinal evolution since his death demonstrates a great deal of assimilation to the dominant political and cultural norms it once contested. In the Utah territory, gradual accommodations to greater federal oversight were first made after the occupation of Salt Lake City by federal troops in 1852.⁴ The Church officially revoked the "eternal covenant" of polygamy as an actual practice in 1890, after a decades-long legislative and federal prosecutorial campaign that imprisoned many of the Mormon hierarchy.⁵

In response to the federal campaigns, the Church, according to Mason, retreated from the synthesis of politics and theology "that characterized much of their early history, theodemocracy had evolved from an explicit political philosophy to a depoliticized descriptor of Latter-day Saint (LDS) ecclesiastical governance." Mason perceives the "shift in the meaning and application of theodemocracy" as a signal of accommodation, the Church being "forced to reckon with the modern world;" yet it bears repeating that theodemocracy emerged from within the modern world. The arc that Mason traces is similar to the R. Laurence Moore's thesis that a strong, manufactured difference must be asserted by new religious movements within American

liberalism before a “reviled countercultural sect” can assume “the shape of an acceptable American denomination.”⁶ In addition to its revocation of the practice of polygamy, another notable concession to liberal society came in 1978, when LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball revoked the ban on African-American men serving in the priesthood, the last official revelation made by a Church Prophet.⁷ However, there are still unique elements of prophecy and secrecy present in the recent and contemporary politics of the LDS Church that are rooted in Joseph’s political theology.

Joseph’s assertion of the absolute sovereignty of revelation still echoes in the modern Church. In 1980, Ezra Taft Benson, who would become Church President (and Prophet) five years later, reaffirmed the political power of the Mormon Prophet:

Some so-called experts of political science want the prophet to keep still on politics. Some would-be authorities on evolution want the prophet to keep still on evolution. And so the list goes on and on. How we respond to the words of a living prophet when he tells us what we need to know, but would rather not hear, is a test of our faithfulness.⁸

Following closely to some of Joseph’s key formulations on the primacy of prophetic power, Benson iterated that the Mormon faith still held that “the living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works,” and that the temporal authority of the prophet is such that he “is not required to have any particular earthly training or credentials to speak on any subject or act on any matter at any time.” The power of revelation, he reminded his congregants “is not limited by men’s reasoning.”⁹

In addition to the retention of the role of the prophet in guiding the faith, so integral was the secrecy shrouding the revelation on the plural marriage covenant to the survival of Joseph, and its sense of the sacred in a hostile gentile world, that the Church did not publically recognize Joseph’s polygamous marriages until November of 2014. Up until then Joseph had been

“portrayed in church materials as a loyal partner to his loving spouse Emma.”¹⁰ Beyond the curious delay in acknowledging the well-established history of the Mormon founder’s many wives, several scholars have documented the inherent secrecy in Mormon political campaigns since the 1970s. When the Equal Rights Amendment passed Congress and began to circulate among states for ratification, the Mormon Church initially issued no position on it. According to the historian Neil Young, before the official Church delivered a statement in opposition to the amendment, Mormon politicians in four states had helped to ratify the ERA, and a “majority of candidates to the Utah legislature” regardless of party supported the measure. A poll of Mormon voters taken by the *Desert News* in 1974 found that 63.1 percent of them favored passage of the amendment. Young writes that “The day before the Utah legislature’s opening session in 1975, the Mormon Church killed the ERA’s chances in Utah by publishing an anti-amendment editorial in the “Church News” section of its *Deseret News*.”¹¹ The official Church statement was remarkably effective in rapidly swinging Mormon opinion and voters against the ERA, and a funding campaign for an anti-ERA organization was secretly, and centrally, coordinated by Church officials.¹² Mormon dissidents who publically supported ERA were disciplined and a dissident who publically revealed the extent of the Church’s involvement in fighting against the amendment was excommunicated.¹³

Young writes that the success of the anti-ERA campaign “depended upon the effective strategies of coalition politics. In its foray into New Right politics, the Mormon Church could use the ERA battle to show its political allies the significant contribution it could make to a national conservative coalition.”¹⁴ The Mormon Church’s contributions to coalitional politics would again be pivotal in another Religious Right political campaign that the Church engaged with similar strategies, the fight against same-sex marriage.¹⁵ The political scientists Elizabeth

Gordon and William Gillespie note that the tactics the Church used in defeating the ERA by “drawing on centralized authority, tapping into established volunteer and communications networks, effectively channeling money and personnel to where they are most needed, and engaging in stealth politics (obscuring the centralized nature of apparently spontaneous action)” were repeated in the fight against same-sex marriage, particularly in the successful anti-same sex marriage ballot initiative in California, Proposition 8.¹⁶ Church officials successfully organized campaign efforts “at least in part, under the radar screen,” and went to great efforts to obscure “the extent of financial involvement by the Church and by individual Mormons.”¹⁷ (The Church’s covert funding efforts in California’s 2008 Proposition 8 campaign were particularly fascinating for legal scholars for the almost open violation of the federal law prohibiting tax-exempt organization from supporting or opposing political causes or candidates.¹⁸)

“Stealth politics” and the faith in the sovereignty of active revelation are not confined to a singular religion in America. As we have reviewed in the scholarship of Lucas Swaine, theocratic new religions still emerge from a tolerant society, the “new flora in the simple pluralistic array.”¹⁹ New religions in America run a vast spectrum of beliefs and approaches to secular society, but the more aggressive of those of a theocratic orientation have engaged in their own forms of antagonistic symbiosis in contesting the state, modes that bear an elective affinity to those pioneered by Joseph. Applying a positive frame of contestation and constitutional development, Philip Jenkins has written that “By continually pressing the boundaries of tolerance, and doing so in the name of religious liberty, new and emerging denominations have found themselves in the vanguard of constitutional development.”²⁰ A more thorough survey would note not only constitutional development, but new religions have also been in the vanguard of exploring and exploiting gray zones of legality. The novelty of these mixed forms of

contestation and symbiosis can be truly remarkable. In 1973 for example, according to the journalist Lawrence Wright, the Church of Scientology launched a covert operation to preempt legal action against it by infiltrating “five thousand Scientologists . . . in 136 government agencies worldwide.” So vast was this undertaking that “Nothing in American history can compare with the scale of the domestic espionage of [the operation],” dubbed “Snow White.”²¹

Even after discovery and the criminal prosecution of eleven high-ranking church officials, a similar effort was maintained against the IRS to gain tax exempt status. An intensive multi-million dollar campaign of lawsuits was launched against the IRS in conjunction with the hiring private investigators to research the private lives of IRS officials, and the pilfering of IRS files and wiretapping of IRS meetings.²² Despite its clear record of past criminal activity and active harassment of government officials, Scientology reached an accord with the IRS in 1993. The final settlement, after an almost twenty-year campaign of provocation, granted “Scientology financial advantages that were unusual, perhaps unique, among religions in the United States.” For example, “schools using [Scientology’s founder L. Ron Hubbard’s] educational material received tax exemption,” as did “Scientology publishing houses that were solely dedicated to turning out Hubbard’s books, including his commercial fiction.” So expansive was the settlement for granting exemptions to future organizational branches of the institutional church that “the church could make its own decisions about which of its activities were exempt.”²³

Other theocratic new religions in America, such as the Rajneesh movement, have also possessed a doctrinal and ideological fluidity, one premised on the charisma of the movement’s founder, that has proven mystifying to plural society and troublesome for liberal governance.²⁴ Famously, the movement was able to acquire a large degree of autonomy in a small community in Eastern Oregon by buying all the available commercial property, encouraging the current

residents to leave, and electing Rajneeshes to every public office.²⁵ Long after Nauvoo, Zions for other faiths continue to occupy isolated communities and attempt to displace the current residents.

Doctrinal fluidity, strategies of subterfuge, and demands for greater religious liberty are not limited to the antagonistic symbiosis of new religions contesting liberalism from within. The coalitional politics of Religious Right also contain analogous elements according to the historians of American religion like Randall Ballmer. As an example of doctrinal fluidity, Ballmer has written that the focus on opposing abortion as the dominant reason behind the mobilization of the Religious Right “serves as a convenient fiction because it suggests noble and altruistic motives.” However, he finds it “highly disingenuous” because the primary motivation for the formation of the movement was “for the purpose, effectively, of defending racial discrimination at Bob Jones University and other segregated schools.”²⁶

Intriguingly, denials of doctrinal fluidity and protestations of the sincerity of belief are one measure of how far arguments of religious liberty have come to be adopted as a tool of contestation against secular rights -- not just by small theocratic movements, but the larger coalition of American conservatives. Indicative of this arc, in the 1990 Supreme Court case *Employment Division v. Smith* involving a question of religious liberty, Justice Antonin Scalia wrote for the majority opinion that “a person may not defy neutral laws of general applicability” out of even a sincerely held religious belief. “To permit this,” he then argued “would make the professed doctrines of religious belief superior to the law of the land, and in effect to permit every citizen to become a law unto himself.” Scalia feared that if the exemption that the respondents favored were to be granted, that it “would open the prospect of constitutionally required religious exemptions from civic obligations of almost every conceivable kind . . .”²⁷

In response to the *Smith* ruling, the US Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993, the foundation for the majority opinion in *Hobby Lobby v. Burwell* (2014), which would uphold an employer's religious exemption to the contraception mandate for employees as provided by the Affordable Care Act. Justice Samuel Alito, writing for the majority opinion (which included Scalia) in the Hobby Lobby case stated, "It is not for us to say that their religious beliefs are mistaken or insubstantial," as long as the employer insisted that the belief was sincere and that accommodation posed an undue burden to his faith. The majority opinion also ruled that the RFRA holds that corporations are "persons" and as such can hold religious beliefs worthy of protection.²⁸

Even the dissenting opinion in *Hobby Lobby v. Burwell* demonstrated that the minority justices, much like John Locke's arguments in his *Letter on Toleration*, were unwilling to have the magistrates decide the legitimacy of belief. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, writing for the minority, argued that there was an "overriding interest" in "keeping the courts 'out of the business of evaluating' . . . the sincerity with which an asserted religious belief is held." The courts therefore, "must accept as true" any assertion that a respondent's "beliefs are sincere and of a religious nature" while assessing a RFRA claim.²⁹ As Justice Scalia predicted in *Employment Division v. Smith*, however, courts will have to evaluate a flood of claims if the scope of future rulings on the applicability of RFRA claims isn't substantially narrowed.

A year after the Hobby Lobby decision, a federal judge invoked the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) in his decision (*Perez v. Paragon Contractors*) that a member of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS) would not be compelled to cooperate with a Department of Labor investigation into the abuse of child labor laws. The court ruled that it could not question his assertion that "the identity of FLDS Church leaders, the

organization of the FLDS Church, and its internal affairs are sacred matters, designated so by God, and that he has vowed or covenanted not to discuss sacred matters.” His testimony on how officials of the FLDS Church had organized work gangs of children to pick pecans without pay would constitute a “substantial burden” on sincerely held religious beliefs, and was therefore excused.³⁰ In these recent court rulings, we see the potential vanguard of theocratic development: ever greater degrees of religious control over new spheres of private life. By asserting rights of religious liberty, employers can now deploy a very American synthesis of corporate power and religious belief to contest the rights of their employees in the field of labor law.

Joseph’s political theology left behind multiple legacies, in both the anatomy of modern American theocracies and as a foreshadowing of the strategies utilized by the coalitional politics of the Religious Right. This study has sought to demonstrate that whereas communitarians and religious conservatives portray the value of the deep moral intuitions and “unexhausted force” of timeless religious traditions that undergird communal life, Joseph’s political theology exemplifies how theocratic traditions can be highly adaptive and rapidly revisable. Political theorists should take note since much of American political theory still misperceives theocracy as an archaic other, and has yet to engage with the real, peculiar nature of modern theocracy and its curious relationship to pluralism.

Abbreviations Key:

BoM: The Book of Mormon

BoC: Book of Commandments

D&C: Doctrine and Covenants

HotC: History of the Church

PoP: People of Paradox

RSR: Rough Stone Rolling

TOTPOTC: JS: Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith

Introduction

¹ Klaus J. Hansen in Launius and Hallwas, eds. *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited: Nauvoo in Mormon History* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1996) pg. 62; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York, Vintage, 2007) pp. 137, 160, 370; Dan Erickson, *As a Thief In the Night: The Mormon Quest for Millennial Deliverance* (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 1998) pg. 134; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith: Taken from his sermons and writings as they are found in the Documentary history and other publications of the Church and written or published in the days of the prophet's ministry* (Deseret book, 1976) pp. 63, 234, 258, 385, 301.

² Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: the Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Vintage Books, 1945) pg. 374; Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 538; Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith: Taken from his sermons and writings as they are found in the Documentary history and other publications of the Church and written or published in the days of the prophet's ministry*. Deseret book, 1976. v. 6. pp. 408-09. <https://byustudies.byu.edu/history-of-the-church>

³ For the size of the Nauvoo Legion see Gardner in Launius, pg. 57. For the coronation of Joseph by the theocratic Council of Fifty, see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Signature Books, 1994) pg. 128.

⁴ *ibid.* pp. 10-11.

⁵ Palmyra, where Joseph lived when he first discovered the golden plates, is 27 miles from Seneca Falls, New York.

⁶ Joseph de Maistre, *Considerations on France* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Cambridge University Press, 1995) pg. 41. Joseph Smith, "The Government of God," *Times and Seasons*, July 15, 1842, pp. 855-58.

⁷ Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (Verso, London 2000) pg. 47.

⁸ See Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the Public Use of Reason and Secular Citizens," pp. 136, 142; Lucas Swaine, *The Liberal Conscience: Politics and Principle in a World of Religious Pluralism* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2006) pg. 7.

⁹ Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America." *Daedalus* 96 (1967): 1-21.

¹⁰ Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988) pg. 150.

¹¹ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1978) p. 23.

¹² Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1973) pg. 5.

¹³ Erickson, pg. 90, 102; and Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (University of Illinois Press, 1999) ch. 3.

¹⁴ David L. Bigler, *Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West, 1847-1896*, (Logan, Utah; Utah State University Press, 1998) chs. 2, 4, 6 and 10 and Erickson, pg. 140.

¹⁵ Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) pg. 5.

¹⁶ R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (Oxford University Press, 1987) pg. xi.

¹⁷ Erickson, pg. 53.

¹⁸ Erickson, pg. 58. Underwood also notes how a “rhetoric of polarization” inspires a “siege mentality”, pp. 44-45.

¹⁹ Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012) pg. 539.

²⁰ Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005) pg. 85.

²¹ Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Tolerance Came to the West* (Princeton University Press, 2003).

²² Elizabeth Pritchard, *Religion in Public: Locke’s Political Theology* (Stanford University Press, 2013). Chs 1-3.

²³ Swaine, pg. 7.

²⁴ This quote of Joseph’s describes the highly situational context in which revelation can supersede revelation and will be discussed in depth in chapter four. Quinn, pg. 112; Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 441.

²⁵ Sarah Song, *Justice Gender and the Politics of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) pg. 7.

²⁶ Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 327-28, 551-17; Allen in Neilson, Reid L., and Terryl L. Givens, eds. *Joseph Smith, Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries* (Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 74, 80.

²⁷ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 174. The LDS Church provides a summation of Joseph’s thoughts on revision here:
In some instances, when a new revelation changed or updated what had previously been received, the Prophet edited the earlier written revelation to reflect the new understanding. Thus, as his doctrinal knowledge clarified and expanded, so did the recorded revelations. They were characterized by the changing nature of his understanding of the sacred subject matter. The Prophet did not believe that revelations, once recorded, could not be changed by further revelation.

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/2009/07/the-joseph-smith-papers-the-manuscript-revelation-books?lang=eng>

Chapter 1: Political Biography

¹ D&C 121: 39-40; Daynes in Launius, pg. 133.

² Broadie, pg. 15.

³ Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 39-40; Hill, reflecting earlier scholarship and Joseph's different versions of his first vision, cites the year 1823, pg. 20.

⁴ Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 58-61.

⁵ Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 48-52; Edwin Brown Firmage and Rirchard Collin Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Latter-day Saints 1830-1900*, pp. 48-51.

⁶ Bushman, pp. 109-11.

⁷ Broadie, pp. 244, 296.

⁸ Quinn, pg. 616.

⁹ Richard Bushman wrote in an email correspondence: "It is actually hard to pin down in the sources exactly when that specific designation [the Garden of Eden] was made. The sources are all from a time long after his death. It was implied in 1838 when Joseph declared that Adam built an altar in Davies County, Missouri, after his expulsion from the Garden." (4/11/14).

¹⁰ Erickson, pg. 102.

¹¹ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 168.

¹² Broadie, pg. 124, Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 191-192, D&C 87.

¹³ Erickson, pp. 44-58, 100-02.

¹⁴ BoC 44:32; in its later edited form: D&C 42: 39.

¹⁵ BoC 54:43; D&C 52:42. Bushman gives rough gloss on this passage in *RSR*, pg. 169.

¹⁶ Underwood, pp. 8-9, 43-46, 56.

¹⁷ Erickson, pp. 102-103.

¹⁸ Bushman, pp. 178-80.

¹⁹ Bushman, pp. 222-227.

²⁰ *TPJS*, pg. 15.

²¹ D&C 98: 4-6; Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 226.

²² Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 226-27. See also Moore, *Religious Outsiders*, pp. 34-35.

²³ Quinn pp. 80-86.

²⁴ Hansen in Launius, pg. 62; Erickson, pg. 134.

²⁵ See Firmage and Mangrum, chs. 3-5.

²⁶ Abanes, pp. 134-9; Bushman pp. 328-332; Broadie pp. 194-202.

²⁷ Broadie, pg. 195.

²⁸ Abanes, pp. 141-2; Bushman, pg. 331, 340.

²⁹ Bushman, pg. 349.

³⁰ Jenkins, pg. 34. q.v. Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Chicago: F.G. Gilman, 1872)

³¹ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 349.

³² Quinn, pg. 103.

³³ Broadie, pg. 354.

³⁴ Hill, pg. 75.

³⁵ Harper, pg. 293.

³⁶ Hill, pg. 76, see also Bushman, pp. 350-2.

³⁷ Quinn, pg. 99.

³⁸ Bushman, *RSR*, pp 347-9, 350-1, Broadie, pg. 214-9; Erickson, pg. 118; Quinn, pg. 93, 95.

³⁹ Daynes in Launius, pg. 132.

⁴⁰ Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 356-57.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 358-66.

⁴² *ibid.*, pg. 362.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pg. 365; Harper, pg. 293.

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- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 365-7.
- ⁴⁵ Quinn, pg. 95.
- ⁴⁶ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 369.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pg. 372.
- ⁴⁸ Broadie, pg. 246.
- ⁴⁹ Mason, pg. 365.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pg. 366.
- ⁵¹ *ibid.*, pg. 357.
- ⁵² John Reynolds, *My Own Times: Embracing Also the History of My Life* (Chicago: Fergus Printing, 1879), 367.
- ⁵³ Bushman, pp. 392-393.
- ⁵⁴ Bushman, pp. 397, 514.
- ⁵⁵ James B. Allen, "Joseph Smith vs. John C. Calhoun: The States' Rights Dilemma and Early Mormon History," in Neilson and Givens, pp.73-90.
- ⁵⁶ Harper, pg. 296.
- ⁵⁷ Harper, pp. 296-97.
- ⁵⁸ Hill, pg. 106.
- ⁵⁹ Hill, 111; Quin pg. 106.
- ⁶⁰ Bushman, pg. 427.
- ⁶¹ Bushman, pg. 508.
- ⁶² D&C 124: 3.
- ⁶³ Harper, pg. 297.
- ⁶⁴ Quinn pg. 107.
- ⁶⁵ Mason, pg. 368.
- ⁶⁶ Quinn, pg. 111.
- ⁶⁷ Bushman, pg. 433.
- ⁶⁸ Broadie, pg. 356; Quinn pg. 116.
- ⁶⁹ Bushman, pg. 443.
- ⁷⁰ Bushman, pg. 437. Or perhaps, his third wife, as there is some evidence of his marriage to Fanny Alger in 1835. See Bushman, pp. 323-7.
- ⁷¹ Bushman, pg. 644 *fn* 2.
- ⁷² Bushman, pp. 519-521.
- ⁷³ Quinn, pg. 643.
- ⁷⁴ Quinn, pg. 134.
- ⁷⁵ Quinn, pg. 133-34; *TJPS*, pp. 334-335.
- ⁷⁶ Timothy L. Wood, "The Prophet and the Presidency: Mormonism and Politics in Joseph Smith's 1844 Presidential Campaign, pg. 187. *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5, No. 8, April 15 1844, pp. 509-510. <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/8375>
- ⁷⁷ Mason, pg. 365.
- ⁷⁸ Hill, pg. 137.
- ⁷⁹ Quinn, pg. 136.
- ⁸⁰ Mason, pg. 369; Harper pg. 301; Palmer, pp. 6-8.
- ⁸¹ Broadie, pp. 367-77; Wood, pg. 189; Bushman, pp 537-544.
- ⁸² For the size of the Nauvoo Legion see Gardner in Launius, pg. 57. For the coronation of Smith by the Council of Fifty, see Quinn, pg. 128.

Chapter 2: American Theocracy and the Crisis of Pluralism

¹ See, for example, Andrew March, “Theocrats Living under Secular Law: An External Engagement with Islamic Legal Theory,” *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2011, pp. 28-51; Klausen, Jytta, *The Islamic Challenge: Politics and Religion in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press, 2008; Lucas Swaine, *The Liberal Conscience: Politics and Principle in a World of Religious Pluralism*, Columbia University Press, 2006; Robert B. Thigpen and Lyle A. Downing, “Rawls and the challenge of theocracy to freedom,” *Journal of Church and State*, 40 (1998), 757–73.

² Broadie, pg. 230-1.

³ John Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013) pg. 94.

⁴ Swaine, pg. 27.

⁵ March, pp.50-51.

⁶ Luther, *Freedom Of a Christian*, in Dillenberger, ed *Selections From His Writings* (Anchor Library of Religion, 1961) pg. 64.

⁷ Dillenberger, Introduction in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, pp. xxxiii, 66.

⁸ Luther, *Freedom Of a Christian*, in Dillenberger, pg. 66.

⁹ Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, in Dillenberger, pg. 172.

¹⁰ Luther, *An Appeal to the Ruling Class*, in Dillenberger, pg. 475.

¹¹ Richard Marius, *Martin Luther: the Christian between God and death* (Harvard University Press, 2009) pp. 398-9.

¹² Marius, pg. 401.

¹³ *ibid.*, pg. 402.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 424, 430-2.

¹⁵ Zagorin, pg. 16.

¹⁶ Zagorin, 289.

¹⁷ Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, pg. 23.

¹⁸ Pritchard, Elizabeth *Religion in Public: Locke’s Political Theology*, pg. 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 6.

²⁰ *ibid.*, pg. 11

²¹ *ibid.*, pg. 18.

²² *ibid.*, pg. 19.

²³ *ibid.*, pg. 132.

²⁴ Locke, *Letter on Toleration*, pg. 44.

²⁵ Locke, *Human Understanding*, pg. 23; cited in Pritchard, pg. 23.

²⁶ Martin E. Marty, *Religion and the Republic: The American Circumstance* (Boston, Beacon, 1987) pg. 58.

²⁷ Locke, *Letter on Toleration*, pg. 49.

²⁸ For more on these radical sects, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution*, Penguin History, 1984.

²⁹ Locke, *Letter on Toleration*, pp. 49-50.

³⁰ “What if a Church be Idolotrous, is that also to be tolerated by the Magistrate? I answer. What Power can be given to the Magistrate for the suppression of an Idolotrous Church, which may not, in time and place, be made use of to the ruine of an Orthodox one?” Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, pg. 42.

For a more contemporary example, see the reluctance of Justice Samuel Alito’s majority decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* to probe the sincerity of a religious claim: “The companies in the cases before us are closely held corporations, each owned and controlled by members of a single family, and no one has

disputed the sincerity of their religious beliefs. . . Here, in contrast, the plaintiffs do assert that funding the specific contraceptive methods at issue violates their religious beliefs, and HHS does not question their sincerity.” Pp. 35, 44: http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/13pdf/13-354_olp1.pdf

³¹ Hall, pg. 94.

³² Alexis Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Daniel J. Boorstin ed., Vintage Classics, 1990. pg. 302.

³³ Tocqueville, pg. 303.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 7.

³⁵ Stephen Harper, “Dictated by Christ”: Joseph Smith and the Politics of Revelation,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer, 2006), pg. 277.

³⁶ Hill, “Counter-Revolution: The Mormon Reaction to the Coming of American Democracy,” pg. 26.

³⁷ For a comparison with the comparatively more limited range of Protestant theology in Canada, which maintained closer ties to the Anglican Church, see Mark Knoll, *America’s God*, pp. 155-156.

³⁸ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) pp. 164-165.

³⁹ Nathan O. Hatch, pp. 6-11.

⁴⁰ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, pg. 7.

⁴¹ Hatch, pg. 14.

⁴² Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pg. 7.

⁴³ Hatch, pg. 64.

⁴⁴ Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pg. xi.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pg. xii.

⁴⁶ Bushman, pp.85-6.

⁴⁷ Hill, pg. xix.

⁴⁸ Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pp. xi-xii, and Hill, Sunstone, 26

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pg. xiii.

⁵⁰ The first draft was probably recorded in 1832, the second, which would become *The History of the Church*, was started in 1838. Bushman, pg. 39, 389.

⁵¹ Givens, pg. 54.

⁵² *History of the Church (HotC)*, Volume 1, Ch. 1: 8.

⁵³ Hatch, pg. 114. For the economic trials of the Smith family, see Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pp. 1-6, Brooke, pg. 135, and Bushman, chapter 1-2. For the role of family socialization in millenarian subcultures, see Barkun, pg. 94.

⁵⁴ *HotC*,. Ch: 1:6.

⁵⁵ *HotC*, V 1, Ch. 1:9-10, 19-20. Joseph himself was initially “partial to the Methodist sect,” and sided with his father’s religious preferences over his mother’s dalliance with Presbyterianism. Bushman, pg. 37. For the family’s generations long quest of seeking for religious certainty, see Bushman pp. 12-17 and Brodie chapter 1. Part of the divide resulted from a Presbyterian minister implying that Alvin Smith, Joseph’s eldest brother, was doomed to hell for not attending church before his death. Brooke, pg. 150.

⁵⁶ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, pp. 10-15.

⁵⁷ Zagorin, pp. 97-144; Kaplan, pp. 17-21.

⁵⁸ Pritchard, pg. 132.

⁵⁹ Hill, Sunstone, pg. 26.

⁶⁰ Givens, *WtA*, pp. 24-34.

⁶¹ Hill, *Refuge*, pp. 15-16.

⁶² Hatch notes that “If America was becoming a democratic marketplace of equally competing individuals with interest to promotes, it is not difficult to understand the appeal of insurgent religious movements who claimed to take a place at the center of culture by virtue of their popular following,” pg. 62. See also the “common style and demeanor,” of these insurgent movements, pg. 67.

⁶³ Hatch, pg. 116.

⁶⁴ *Book of Mormon*, 1 Nephi, 13:6.

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- ⁶⁵ Hill, *Refuge*, pg. xii
- ⁶⁶ Hatch, pg. 117. Richard Bushman writes: “Whole chapters of Isaiah are inserted into the text.” Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 99.
- ⁶⁷ *BoM*; 3: Nephi 6:11-14.
- ⁶⁸ Hill, *Refuge*, pg. 21.
- ⁶⁹ *BoM*; Mormon 8: 33.
- ⁷⁰ Bushman, pg. 203.
- ⁷¹ Lears, pp. xii, xv.
- ⁷² Givens, pg. 28.
- ⁷³ Givens, pg. 30.
- ⁷⁴ Givens, pg. 59.
- ⁷⁵ Bushman, pg. 377. The evolution of Joseph’s stance can be traced throughout *Rough Stone Rolling*: “The *Book of Mormon* was the seminal text, not the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence.” Bushman, pg. 104; “The United States government in all of its democratic glory was not the model for Zion; the value of the Constitution as the “law of man” was acknowledged only later, after the Missouri persecution.” Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 168; “Instead of sound like scripture, the motto’s first line [of synoptic Mormon teaching] was “The Constitution of our country formed by the fathers of liberty.” Bushman, pg. 349.
- ⁷⁶ “The Government of God,” *Times and Seasons*, Friday, July 15, 1842.
- ⁷⁷ *ibid.*
- ⁷⁸ Juster, *Doomsayers*, pg. 184.
- ⁷⁹ Givens, pg. 57.
- ⁸⁰ Givens, pg. 58.
- ⁸¹ Broadie, pp. 140-42.
- ⁸² Hatch, pg. 119.
- ⁸³ Hatch, pg. 14.
- ⁸⁴ Hatch, pg. 120.
- ⁸⁵ *HotC*, V 1, Ch. 1:22
- ⁸⁶ Bushman, pp. 40-41.
- ⁸⁷ Walzer, pp. 111-113.
- ⁸⁸ Hatch, pg. 120.
- ⁸⁹ Hill, pg. 33.
- ⁹⁰ Bushman pp. 150-151.
- ⁹¹ Bushman, pg. 285.
- ⁹² Givens, pg. 10.
- ⁹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part 3, Ch. 32.
- ⁹⁴ Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2006) pg. 136-38.
- ⁹⁵ Marius, pg. 323.
- ⁹⁶ Marius, pg. 324.
- ⁹⁷ Marius, pg. 335.
- ⁹⁸ Quinn, pg. 5.
- ⁹⁹ Quinn, pp. 6-7.
- ¹⁰⁰ Bushman, pp. 114, 121.
- ¹⁰¹ Quinn, pg. 8.
- ¹⁰² Bushman, pg. 120.
- ¹⁰³ Quinn, pp. 8-9.
- ¹⁰⁴ Givens, pg. xiv.
- ¹⁰⁵ Bushman, pp. 120-121; Hill, pg. 27.
- ¹⁰⁶ Quinn, pp 5-6.

¹⁰⁷ Hill, *Dialogue*, 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Givens, pg. 9.

¹⁰⁹ *HotC*, V. 1, Ch. 5:387-388, 403.

¹¹⁰ Givens, pp. 9-10.

¹¹¹ Quinn, pg. 9; Bushman, pg. 151.

¹¹² Bushman, 175.

¹¹³ Brooke, pg. 192.

¹¹⁴ Underwood, pg. 221.

Chapter 3: Pluralism as Imaginative Resource: Mining and Refining the Mysticism of the Radical Reformation

¹ Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pg. 52.

² Givens, pg. 43.

³ Gordon Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism" (April 1980), in *The Mormon History Association's Tanner Lectures: The First Twenty Years*, ed. Dean L. May and Reid L. Neilson (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 2006), 9-28.

⁴ For the lore of Radical Reformation, see Brooke, pp. xv-29.

⁵ Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed*, pp. xiii-xiv.

⁶ Hatch, pp. 4, 132.

⁷ Broadie, pg. 15.

⁸ Givens, pg. 59.

⁹ For the restoration of the monarchy by providence, see Maistre, *Considerations*, pp. 84-85, 105.

¹⁰ Armenteros dates Maistre's more formal return to the illuminism of his youth, and his increasing hopes for reconciling it to Catholicism, to 1809. Armenteros, pp. 157-8.

¹¹ Armenteros, pp. 201-04.

¹² Hatch, pg. 35

¹³ Hatch, pg. 196.

¹⁴ Howe, pp. 171-172; Hatch pp. 196-198.

¹⁵ Hatch, pg. 195.

¹⁶ Hatch, pp. 167-8.

¹⁷ Hatch, pg. 169.

¹⁸ Hill, pp. 16-17.

¹⁹ See Brooke chs. 1-2.

²⁰ Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, Beacon Press, 2013.

²¹ Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism" *New York History* 61 (1980): 359-86, pg. 364

²² Brooke, pp. 4, 19.

²³ Brooke, pg. 129.

²⁴ On Lucy Mack Smith, see Hill, *Refuge*, pg. 3. For Joseph Smith Sr., see Brooke, pp. 72, 77.

²⁵ Bushman, pg. 147.

²⁶ Brooke, pp. 38-39, pg. 59.

²⁷ Brooke, pg. 270.

²⁸ Brooke, pp. 133-34, 140-141.

²⁹ Quinn, pp. 127-28.

³⁰ Broadie, pg. 276; Brooke pg. 246. For the many ways in which Mormon theology transcended the *Book of Mormon*, see Givens, *WtA*, pp. 8-10, and Bushman, pp. 199-200.

³¹ Givens, pg. 39.

³² Brooke, pp. 9-10.

³³ Brooke, pp. 14-19.

³⁴ Givens, pg. 70.

³⁵ Armenteros, pp. 182, 193.

³⁶ Armenteros, pg. 214.

³⁷ Givens, pg. 57.

³⁸ Brooke, pg. 101.

³⁹ Brooke, pp. 102-104.

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- ⁴⁰ Brooke, pg. 262.
- ⁴¹ Brooke, pp. 34, 158, 256.
- ⁴² Brooke, pg. 266.
- ⁴³ Quinn, pg. 130.
- ⁴⁴ D&C 132: 46-49.
- ⁴⁵ Brooke, pp. 267-8.
- ⁴⁶ Quinn, pg. 123.
- ⁴⁷ Bloom, pg. 49.
- ⁴⁸ With renewed federal oversight, David Bigler dates the lifespan of the “Forgotten Kingdom” from 1847-1896.
- ⁴⁹ Bloom, pg. 55.
- ⁵⁰ Uday Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in Locke’s Political Thought* (Cornell University Press, 1992) pg. 76.
- ⁵¹ *ibid.*, pg. 172.
- ⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 114-18.
- ⁵³ *ibid.*, pg. 138.
- ⁵⁴ Bushman, pg. 285 and Broadie, pg. 366.
- ⁵⁵ Bushman, pp. 105, 107.
- ⁵⁶ Mehta, pp. 47-48, 60.
- ⁵⁷ Givens, *WtA*, pg. 21.
- ⁵⁸ Bushman, pp. 132-33.
- ⁵⁹ Givens, *PoP*, pp. 29-30.
- ⁶⁰ Mehta, pp. 60, 67.
- ⁶¹ Mehta, pp. 124-25.
- ⁶² Bushman, pg. 484.
- ⁶³ Bushman, pg. 285.
- ⁶⁴ Mehta, pg. 171.

Chapter 4: Liberty for Theocrats: The Challenge of Apocalyptic Theocracies for Liberal Pluralism

¹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (New York: Knopf, 1991), pp. 12-13.

² Patrick Buchanan, *Suicide of a Superpower*, pg. 317.

³ Mehta, pg. 21.

⁴ Mehta, pg. 118.

⁵ Jenkins, pg. 5.

⁶ Walzer, *On Tolerance*, pp. 66-70, 80-82.

⁷ Walzer, *On Tolerance*, pg. 66.

⁸ Moore, pp.31-33.

⁹ Swaine, pg. 80.

¹⁰ For the “tyranny” associated with the Catholic Church, see Bloch, pp. 57-63. For the populist marketplace of American Protestantism, see Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, pp. 162-167.

¹¹ Quong, “The Rights of Unreasonable Citizens,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, V 12, N 3, 2004, pp. 314-335.

¹² The choice of Walzer here is not indicative of any particularly egregious flaw in his arguments in comparison with the larger array of pluralist theory, simply to show how well his work on the subject embodies a general tendency in the literature.

¹³ Walzer, *What It Means to be an American*, pg. 8.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 4-6.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pg. 7.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pg. 8.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pg. 10.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pg. 19.

¹⁹ Walzer, *On Tolerance*, pg. 80.

²⁰ Moore, pg. xi.

²¹ Erickson, pp. 53-58.

²² See for example the “Book of Abraham” and the “Kinderhook Plates” in Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 720, 726.

²³ Swaine, pg. 27.

²⁴ The lineage runs not through genetic propinquity, but through the power of the Holy Ghost which would transform the pious and “purge out the old blood & make him actually of the seed of Abraham.” Richard Bushman writes that “Election in Joseph’s mind involved adoption into Abraham’s progeny and gaining the resulting blessings of intelligence.” Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 387.

²⁵ Song, pp. 1, 19-20.

²⁶ Appiah “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction,” in Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, pg 149.

²⁷ Quinn, pp. 128-131.

²⁸ Moore notes that Joseph publicized the fact that Mormonism contained secret doctrines, and that “(r)ather than warding off the persecution of his ideas, Smith’s strategy of secrecy only intensified it and gave total license to the imaginations of those who wrote anti-Mormon propaganda. Smith, therefore, appears to have used secrecy for another reason, as part of his effort to give his followers a sense of distinct identity.”(Moore, pg. 37)

²⁹ Walzer, pg. 9.

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- ³⁰ Cite page on pluralist section.
- ³¹ Givens, *PoP*, pg. 56.
- ³² Scott Atran and Jeremy Ginges, “Religious and Sacred Imperatives in Human Conflict,” *Science* 18 May 2012: Vol. 336, Issue 6083, pp. 855-857.
- ³³ Hill, pg. 14.
- ³⁴ Erickson, pp. 44, 49; Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:323-24.
- ³⁵ Bushman, pp. 227, 377.
- ³⁶ Moore, pg. 39
- ³⁷ Bushman, pg. 167.
- ³⁸ Bushman, pp. 348-354, 377.
- ³⁹ Michael Walzer, *On Toleration*, (Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 66-67.
- ⁴⁰ Broadie, pg. 351.
- ⁴¹ Swaine, pg. 132.
- ⁴² *ibid.*, pg. xv.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, pg. 7.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pg. 8. Yet he also acknowledges that “the theocrat’s disaffection runs deeper [than mere policy disagreements], reaching down to the very sea floor of liberalism and liberal governance itself. For the theocrat’s dissent . . . tends to be based . . . on the very rejection of liberal values.” pg. 13.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pg. 158.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pg. 160.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp. xvii, 161.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pg. xvii.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pg. 23.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pg. 66.
- ⁵¹ *ibid.*, pg. 67.
- ⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 81-87.
- ⁵³ *ibid.*, pg. 85.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pg. 72.
- ⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pg. 91.
- ⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pg. 89.
- ⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pg. 132.
- ⁵⁸ V.S. Naipaul, *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*, Abacus, 1998. Pg. 320.
- ⁵⁹ “It is one of the first principles of my life and one that I have cultivated from my childhood . . . to allow every one the liberty of conscience.” Faulring, pg. 420
- ⁶⁰ Quinn, pg. 80 and BofC, 82; D&C 38: 21-22.
- ⁶¹ Quinn, pg. 86
- ⁶² Hatch, “Mormons and Methodists,” pg.43.
- ⁶³ Swaine, pg. 8.
- ⁶⁴ Swaine, pg. 23.
- ⁶⁵ See, for example, Jesper Aagaard Petersen’s *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology*, Ashgate, 2009. Theologies containing conceptions of the good that are radically divergent from, or even self-consciously oppositional to, more mainstream cultural formulations are more likely to contest the very conventional premises of the good that Swaine assumes are a given.
- ⁶⁶ Swaine, pg. 64.
- ⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pg. 65.
- ⁶⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
- ⁶⁹ *ibid.*, pg. 147.
- ⁷⁰ For concerns over semi-sovereignty, see Swaine, pp. 92-93. For theocratic tribes such as the Pueblo, see pg. 213.

⁷¹ Swaine, pg. 9.

⁷² Swaine, pg. 144.

⁷³ Swaine writes that “The strength of his conviction in the truth of his doctrine and the fact that some putative religious authority has given him a rendering of God’s commands together cannot suffice to give the theocrat adequate reason to believe that God’s doctrine requires unmitigated theocratic governance.” pg. 66. What Swaine seems to be projecting onto the theocrat is a degree of doubt sufficiently strong enough to be swayed by liberal arguments that liberty of conscience must be maintained in order to discover the good. He appears to reject the idea that for a theocrat, a strong enough conviction in theocracy might indeed suffice as a reason to believe that God desires. . . theocracy.

⁷⁴ Swaine, pg. 131.

⁷⁵ Despite his consistent promotion of an education standard for children sufficient to inform them about the principles of a liberty of conscience and their right to exit, earlier in his argument Swaine appears to be wary of how comprehensive that education should be, or who would teach it: “Under a well-formed schema for quasi-sovereignty, the educational baseline that liberal government may justifiably require of theocratic communities would be considerably less comprehensive than that advocated by such liberals as Amy Gutman or Stephen Macedo. Here it is important to be chary, however, since quasi-sovereign communities may by their nature wish fully to prevent their children from having contact with outsiders.” Public schools, therefore, are out of the question. Swaine, pp. 95-96.

⁷⁶ Song, pp. 161-2. For Song, state-mandated education plays a vital role in protecting the rights of exit: “Children should be taught about their basic constitutional and civic rights so they know that liberty of conscience exists in their society and that apostasy is not a legal crime.” In addition, members should be free from abuse and coercion, have decent health care, nutrition, and be provided “genuine alternatives among which to make choices, including real access to a mainstream society to exit to.” As discussed, this is not the society that Smith envisioned.

⁷⁷ Swaine, pg. 161.

⁷⁸ See Swaine’s example of child sacrifice or “free exercise for Aztecs.” pg. 95.

⁷⁹ Habermas, “The Political: The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology,” in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, pg. 25.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, pg. 26.

⁸¹ Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the Public Use of Reason and Secular Citizens,” pg. 143.

⁸² Habermas, “An Awareness of What is Missing,” pg. 17.

⁸³ Habermas, “The Political: The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology,” in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, pg. 25.

⁸⁴ Terryl Givens writes that the revelation that Mormonism was “the only true and living church” in the whole world was a truth that helped set Joseph and his church into an adversarial relationship with the outside world. “What was different about Joseph’s posture was how effectively he imbued an entire people with this same sense of hostile separation from the world.” Joseph’s successor, Brigham Young, would maintain that oppositional posture, remarking that “I am satisfied that it will not do for the Lord to make this people popular. Why? Because all hell would want to be in the church. The people must be kept where the finger of scorn can be pointed at them.”

Givens, *PoP*, pp. 54-56.

⁸⁵ Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pp. xviii, xix, and 30.

⁸⁶ *Book of Commandments 44:32*, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/book-of-commandments-1833>

⁸⁷ *Doctrine & Covenants 52:42*. For Joseph’s arrival in mid-July of 1831, see Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 162. For Zion as a millenarian refuge for Mormons, *ibid.* pp. 164-68. The June 6th prophecy on inheriting Missouri from enemies that they had yet to meet was delivered in Kirtland Ohio; *Doctrine & Covenants 63:31*.

⁸⁸ Brooke, pp. 222 and 225-26; Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 328-32, 334 and 340.

⁸⁹ Allen, James B. “Joseph Smith vs. Kohn C. Calhoun: The States’ Rights Dilemma and Early Mormon History” in Neilson and Givens, ed., pg. 83 and Quinn, pg. 121.

⁹⁰ Quinn, pp. 105-06, 110.

⁹¹ Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 515, 521-24.

⁹² Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 348.

⁹³ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 348.

⁹⁴ Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the Public Use of Reason and Secular Citizens,” pg. 142.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, pg. 136.

⁹⁶ Givens, *PoP*, pg. 25.

Chapter 5: Joseph's Exceptional Politics

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre., *After Virtue*, Notre Dame Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984. Ch. 18; Neuhaus, Richard John, *The Naked Public Square*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986.; Böckenförde, Ernst-Wolfgang, "Carl Schmitt Revisited," *Telos*, 109 (Fall 1996), pp. 84-86.

² Heinrich Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt: Four Chapters on the Distinction between Political Theology and Political Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1998) pg. 67, 27, 66-68.

³ Meier, pg. 20.

⁴ Meier, pg. 66.

⁵ Meier, pg. 66.

⁶ Quoted in Ivan Strenski, *Contesting Sacrifice: Religion, Nationalism, and Social Thought in France* (The University of Chicago Press, 2002. Chicago) pg. 39.

⁷ Maistre, Joseph and LeBrun, Richard A. (ed.), *Considerations on France*, pg. 41.

⁸ Armenteros, pg. 55.

⁹ Bradley, Owen. "Maistre's Theory of Sacrifice," in *Joseph De Maistre's Life, Thought, and Influence: Selected Studies*, Lebrun, Richard; ed. (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001) pg. 68.

¹⁰ Bradley, "Maistre's Theory of Sacrifice," pg. 70. In his *Consideration on France*, Maistre also explored this dynamic, proposing that "the innocent suffer for the benefit of the guilty." Pg. 30.

¹¹ Armenteros, pg. 164.

¹² Strenski, pg. 38.

¹³ Armenteros, pp. 156, 165, 164-71, 178-81. See also Bradley, "Maistre's Theory of Sacrifice," pp. 79-80.

¹⁴ D&C 132: 7:

And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, whom I have appointed on the earth to hold this power (and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred), are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.

¹⁵ Christopher Scott McClure, "Hell and Anxiety in Hobbes's *Leviathan*," *The Review of Politics* 73, No. 1 (2011).

¹⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 37, pg. 470.

¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 37, pg. 473.

¹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 37, pg. 471.

¹⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 26, pp. 331-2.

²⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 37. pg. 471.

²¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 37. pg. 477.

²² Boyd, pg. 71, Hobbes, *Leviathan* Ch. 29, pp. 365-66

²³ Boyd, pp. 72-74.

²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Ch. 26, pg. 332.

²⁵ Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, pp. 54-55.

²⁶ Meier, pg. 76.

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- ²⁷ Schmitt writes that the feudal order was based on the divine: “The state that came into being in the seventeenth century and prevailed on the continent of Europe is in fact a product of men and differs from all earlier kinds of political units.” *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, pg. 34. See also pp. 53-54.
- ²⁸ Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, pp. 56-57.
- ²⁹ Schmitt, *Leviathan*, pg. 54.
- ³⁰ Meier, pg. 108.
- ³¹ Schmitt, *Leviathan*, pp. 56-7.
- ³² Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pg. 14.
- ³³ *ibid.*, pg. 15.
- ³⁴ *ibid.* pp. 15, 44, 65.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
- ³⁶ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. IV, Ch. 18, no. 5; Ch. 18, no. 7; Ch. 19.
- ³⁷ Boyd, pg. 110.
- ³⁸ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, pg. 84.
- ³⁹ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, sec. 240, pg. 59; Pritchard, pg. 75.
- ⁴⁰ Pritchard, pp. 11-18.
- ⁴¹ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, pg. 96. See also pp. 78, 83-84, 95.
- ⁴² *ibid.* pg. 90.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 90, 88-99.
- ⁴⁴ Richard Boyd, *Uncivil Society: The Perils of Pluralism and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Lexington Books, 2004) pg 111.
- ⁴⁵ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, sec. 238, pg. 57.
- ⁴⁶ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, sec. 241.2, pg. 60.
- ⁴⁷ Locke’s commentary on Ephesians, quoted in Pritchard, pg. 74.
- ⁴⁸ Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, pg. 33.
- ⁴⁹ Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt*, pg. 67
- ⁵⁰ Meier, pg. 20.
- ⁵¹ *ibid.*, pg. 66.
- ⁵² *ibid.*, pg. 73.
- ⁵³ *ibid.*, pg. 66.
- ⁵⁴ Meier, pg. 77. Meier notes that assertion was removed in subsequent editions of Schmitt’s text.
- ⁵⁵ Balakrishnan, pg. 48.
- ⁵⁶ See Balakrishnan, pg. 48 and Meier pg. 68. Perhaps this inability to link his eschatology to a more distinct Christianity is an extension of his theory that the truly disruptive nature of the exception defies all efforts to frame it, and conventional Christian theologies were still too rational and predictable. On the other hands, exceptional moments could still ultimately lead to the apocalyptic narrative described in the New Testament. For Schmitt’s postwar thoughts on apocalypticism, see *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum*, Telos Press Publishing (2006).
- ⁵⁷ Schmitt wrote of Maistre and Cortes: “What we immediately recognize in them is a conceptually clear and systematic analogy, and not merely that kind of playing with ideas, whether mystical, natural-philosophical, or even romantic, which, as with everything else, so also with state and society, yields colorful symbols and pictures.” *Political Theology*, pg. 37. For Cortes and Maistre’s religious heterodoxy, see Balakrishnan, pp. 48-50, for more in-depth examination of Maistre specifically, see Armenteros, pp 20-34, and ch. 3-5. For Schmitt’s religious thought, see Balakrishnan, pp. 49-50.

For more on Schmitt’s narrow approach to Christian theology and scant interest in the biblical tradition, see Wolfgang Palaver, "Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism," *Telos* 102 (Winter, 1995), pg. 66.

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- ⁵⁸ Peter E. Gordon, “Political Theology and Political Existentialism,” <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2011/08/26/political-theology-and-political-existentialism/>; Meier, Heinrich, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt*, pp. xii – xviii; Balakrishnan, Gopal, pp.48, 50.
- ⁵⁹ Böckenförde, “Carl Schmitt Revisited,” *Telos*, 109 (Fall 1996), pg. 86.
- ⁶⁰ Meier, pg. 92.
- ⁶¹ Quoted in Meier pg. 95-96; Schmitt *Concept of the Political*, pg. 90.
- ⁶² Meier, pg. 68.
- ⁶³ *The Prophet Joseph Smith*, pg. 17.
- ⁶⁴ For Schmitt, see *Political Theology*, pg., 62, and Meier, *The Lesson*, pp, 68, and 72; for Joseph, see Givens, *PoP*, pg. 14.
- ⁶⁵ D&C 21: 4-6.
- ⁶⁶ Juster, *Doomsayers*, pg. 46.
- ⁶⁷ Harper, Stephen, “Dictated by Christ”: Joseph Smith and the Politics of Revelation, pg. 281.
- ⁶⁸ Quinn, pg. 128.
- ⁶⁹ *HotC* 6:304-5.
- ⁷⁰ Meier, pg. 66.
- ⁷¹ Harper, pp. 287-288, 291; Erickson, pp. 44-58, 100-02.
- ⁷² Meier, pp. 66-71.
- ⁷³ Underwood, pp. 8-9, 43, 56.
- ⁷⁴ Underwood, pp. 44-46.
- ⁷⁵ Bushman, 104; see also Hill, pg. 21
- ⁷⁶ Quinn, pg. 79.
- ⁷⁷ Michael Barkun, Michael, *Disaster and the Millennium* (Yale University Press, 1974) pp. 113,158.
- ⁷⁸ Underwood, pg. 38; Quinn. Pg. 4.
- ⁷⁹ Underwood, pg. 10.
- ⁸⁰ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 166, 152; Hill, pg. 35.
- ⁸¹ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 191.
- ⁸² For a comparison with their “apocalyptic adversaries,” the Millerite movement, see Underwood, ch. 7.
- ⁸³ Barkun, pg. 120.
- ⁸⁴ Barkun, pp. 120-21.
- ⁸⁵ See Bushman, a sympathetic biographer: pg. xxi, 174.
- ⁸⁶ Hill in Launius, pg. 123 and Bushman, pg. 174.
- ⁸⁷ Bushman, pg. 122.
- ⁸⁸ For the postponement of Mormon millenarian timeline, see Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pp. xix – xxii. Gordon Haber, “Secular End Times and Apocalyptic ‘Roosters,’” *Religion Dispatches*, September 13, 2011. <http://religiondispatches.org/secular-end-times-apocalyptic-roosters/>; Landes, Richard A. *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (2011).
- ⁸⁹ For the efforts to establish retroactive continuity in Church doctrines and scriptures, see Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, pp. 18-22. For an early doctrine proclaiming Joseph’s singular authority see D&C 21:1-7. For Cowdery’s expulsion from the Church, see Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 347-351.
- ⁹⁰ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pg. 15.
- ⁹¹ Mason, pg. 367.
- ⁹² Quoted in Ezra Taft Benson, “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” February 26, 1980, <https://www.lds.org/liahona/1981/06/fourteen-fundamentals-in-following-the-prophet?lang=eng>
- ⁹³ Quinn, pg. 112; Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 441. In 1980, five years before he himself ascended to the position of President of the Church, the Apostle Ezra Taft Benson quoted portions of Joseph’s letter to Nancy Rigdon to illustrate the importance of following the Church President in all revelations no matter previous prophecies or scriptures. “Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet,” February 26, 1980, <https://www.lds.org/liahona/1981/06/fourteen-fundamentals-in-following-the-prophet?lang=eng>

Mormon dissenters asserted that Joseph had made similar statements to those in the Nancy Rigdon letter even earlier in career, in Kirtland in 1835, after the high-ranking Church members John Whitmer and Benjamin Winchester complained of Joseph's contact with a woman in the congregation. Winchester wrote that Joseph asserted then that: "He was authorized by God Almighty to establish His Kingdom – and that he was God's prophet and God's agent and that he could do whatever he should choose to do, therefore the Church had NO RIGHT TO CALL INTO QUESTION anything he did, or to censure him for the reason that he was responsible to God Almighty alone." Quoted in Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pg. 60; Brooke, pg. 217.

⁹⁴ Broadie, pg. 366.

⁹⁵ Broadie, pg. 366.

⁹⁶ *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1847-1850*, pg. 158. Edited by William S. Harwell. (Collier's Publishing 1997). Young would trace this theological strategy of transgression and transcendence back to Adam: "Father Adam," he taught, "transgressed the law designedly." Quoted in Givens, *WtA*, pg. 225.

⁹⁷ Kaufman, Walter, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, ch. 3.

⁹⁸ *Political Theology*, pg. 15.

⁹⁹ Broadie, pg. 348.

¹⁰⁰ Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, pg. 32.

¹⁰¹ *HotC*, v. 6, pp. 408-409.

¹⁰² Wolin, Richard. "Carl Schmitt, political existentialism, and the total state." *Theory and Society* 19, no. 4 (1990), pg. 393.

¹⁰³ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, pg. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 293.

Chapter 6: The Peculiar Prerogatives of American Zion

¹ The lineage runs not through genetic propinquity, but through the power of the Holy Ghost which would transform the pious and “purge out the old blood & make him actually of the seed of Abraham.” Richard Bushman writes that “Election in Joseph’s mind involved adoption into Abraham’s progeny and gaining the resulting blessings of intelligence.” Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 387.

² Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, pp. 127-8.

³ Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, pg. 12.

⁴ Campbell, Green, Monson, pg. 40.

⁵ Armenteros, pp. 174, 185.

⁶ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, pg. 60. See also, *Letter on Toleration*, pp. 29, 33-34.

⁷ Locke, *Letter on Toleration*, pg. 28.

⁸ Locke, *Letter on Toleration*, pg. 49.

⁹ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, pp. 12, 19, 38.

¹⁰ Pritchard, pg. 109.

¹¹ Pritchard, pg. 75; Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, pp. 88-96.

¹² Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, pg. 19.

¹³ Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, pg. 68.

¹⁴ Moore, pg. 36.

¹⁵ Pritchard, pg. 116.

¹⁶ Pritchard, pg. 108.

¹⁷ Campbell, Green, Monson, pg. 18.

¹⁸ Pritchard, pp. 52-53.

¹⁹ Armenteros, pg. 182.

²⁰ Scott Atran and Jeremy Ginges, “Religious and Sacred Imperatives in Human Conflict,” *Science* 18 May 2012: Vol. 336, Issue 6083, pp. 855-857.

²¹ Givens, pg. 57.

²² Pritchard, pg. 80.

²³ Bushman, *RSR*, pp 349, 157-160. See also Joseph’s establishment of priestly quorums in 1835: *D&C* 107: 27-30.

²⁴ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 436. See also Quinn, pg. 45.

²⁵ *TJPS*, pp. 43, 96, 103,

²⁶ Brooke, pg. 228.

²⁷ Brooke, pp. 228-229. See also *TPJS*, pg. 227.

²⁸ Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pg. 113.

²⁹ Quinn, chapters 1-4.

³⁰ Quote in Hill, *Dialogue*, 2006, pg. 161. For Joseph, the reverse was also true: for those without the Melchizedek priesthood there would only be chaos and no clear path to salvation: “Respecting the Melchizedek Priesthood, the sectarians never professed to have it; consequently they never could save any one, and would all be damned together.” *TPJS*, pg. 322.

³¹ Harper, pp. 284-5. See also Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 436, Quinn, pg. 45.

³² See Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 170, 350, 352-353, 531-532, 540.

³³ *TJPS*, pg. 331.

³⁴ For examples of the disruptions cause by apostates, see Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 169-170.

³⁵ Taylor, *The Secular Age*, pg. 141.

³⁶ After missionaries returned from Eastern cities To Kirtland, Ohio in September of 1832, a revelation proclaimed:

Wo, I say again, unto that house, or that village or city that rejecteth you, or your words, or your testimony of me; For I, the Almighty, have laid my hands upon the nations, to scourge them for their wickedness. . .

Nevertheless, let the bishop (Newell Whitney) go unto the city of New York, also to the city of Albany, and also to the city of Boston, and warn the people of those cities with the sound of the gospel, with a loud voice, of the desolation and utter abolishment which await them if they do reject these things. For if they do reject these things the hour of their judgment is nigh, and their house shall be left unto them desolate.” D&C 84: 95-96, 114-15.

When visiting New York City the following month, Bushman writes that Joseph “felt like a Jonah or an Amos, a wilderness prophet, warning the proud inhabitants of a decadent city.” (RSR, pp. 189)

³⁷ Juster, pg. 266.

³⁸ Bushman, RSR, pg. 168.

³⁹ Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pg. 30.

⁴⁰ Cannon, George ed., *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star, Volume XXIII*, Liverpool, 1861. See also a similar version quoted in Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pg. xviii.

⁴¹ Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pg. 30.

⁴² D&C 19: 21-22.

⁴³ D&C 29: 7-8.

⁴⁴ Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, pg. 36.

⁴⁵ BoC 48: 59-69; D&C 45: 66-75.

⁴⁶ *TJPS*, pp. 70-71.

⁴⁷ Boyd, pp. 72-74.

⁴⁸ *TJPS*, pg. 22.

⁴⁹ *TJPS*, pg. 124.

⁵⁰ *TPJS*, pg. 146.

⁵¹ *TPJS*, pg. 195.

⁵² Moore, pg. 37.

⁵³ *TJPS*, pp. 326, 329; Faulring, pp. 420, 422.

⁵⁴ Brooke, pp. 246-47. Bushman, RSR, pp. 449-451.

⁵⁵ Brooke, pp. 247-48; Daynes in Launius, pg. 134. During the final two years of his life, Joseph would still insist that the most important Mormon doctrines were taught publically: “I am bold to declare I have taught all the strong doctrines publicly, and always teach stronger doctrines in public than in private.” (June 16th, 1844) *TPJS*, pg. 370.

⁵⁶ Quinn, pg. 128.

⁵⁷ Quinn, pg. 131.

⁵⁸ Armenteros, pp. 24, 176-177.

⁵⁹ On Protestantism and the French Revolution, see Maistre, *Considerations*, pp. 27, 41, 45. For Origen and illumism, see Armenteros, pg. 173.

⁶⁰ Armenteros, pp. 174, 185.

⁶¹ Armenteros, pp. 193, 213.

⁶² Armenteros, pg. 185.

⁶³ Brooke, pg. 196-7.

⁶⁴ Brooke, pg. 247

⁶⁵ Merina Smith, “Nauvoo Secrets and the Rise of a Mormon Salvation Narrative, 1841–1842,” University of Colorado Press, Utah State University Press, pg. 96.

⁶⁶ Brooke, pg. 264.

⁶⁷ Brooke, pg. 247.

⁶⁸ Bushman, pp. 462-83, 46.

⁶⁹ Brooke, pg. 264; Bushman, RSR, pp. 447-48; Broadie pp. 305-06, 321.

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- ⁷⁰ Brooke, pg. 265.
- ⁷¹ Brooke, pg. 265; Quinn, pg. 128.
- ⁷² Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 323; *BoM*, Jacob 2: 27-30; Daynes in Launius, pg. 132.
- ⁷³ D&C [1835] 101:4; Bushman *RSR*, pg. 323.
- ⁷⁴ Bushman, *RSR*, 323-25.
- ⁷⁵ Merina Smith, pg. 60.
- ⁷⁶ Bushman, pg. 437; Doctrine and Covenants 132: 4.
- ⁷⁷ Merina Smith, pg. 76.
- ⁷⁸ For a thorough investigation of the spiritual and emotional logic of Mormon polygamy, notably as practiced in the Utah territory, see Kathleen Flake, "The Emotional and Priestly Logic of Plural Marriage," Leonard J Arrington Mormon History Lecture Series No. 15, October 1, 2009, Utah State University Press.
- ⁷⁹ Merina Smith, pp. 77-78.
- ⁸⁰ Bushman, pg. 443.
- ⁸¹ Doctrine and Covenants 132:20.
- ⁸² Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 445; Doctrine and Covenants 132:19.
- ⁸³ D&C, 132: 4, Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 438, 491.
- ⁸⁴ Bushman, pg. 491.
- ⁸⁵ Bushman, pg. 492.
- ⁸⁶ Broadie, pg. 337.
- ⁸⁷ Hill, pg. 115.
- ⁸⁸ Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward, "Plurality, Patriarchy, and the Priestess: Zina D. H. Young's Nauvoo Marriages," *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring 1994), pg. 90.
- ⁸⁹ Merina Smith, pg. 72.
- ⁹⁰ Bardley and Woodward, pg. 103.
- ⁹¹ Bushman, pg. 438.
- ⁹² Daynes in Launias and Hallwas eds., pg. 138.
- ⁹³ Daynes, in Launius and Hallwas eds., pg. 130.
- ⁹⁴ Broadie, pg. 319; Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 466.
- ⁹⁵ Bushman, pg. 457. Sarah Pratt, for her part, founded the Anti-Polygamy Society in Salt Lake City and died a Mormon apostate.
- ⁹⁶ David J. Whittaker, "The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt and the Public Announcement of Plural Marriage," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Jul., 1987), pp. 293-314.
- ⁹⁷ Stanley Kimball, pg. 93 in *Heber C. Kimball, Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer*.
- ⁹⁸ Kimball, pg. 93; Merina Smith, pp. 73, 80-82.
- ⁹⁹ Smith, Merina, pp. 80-82. Heber Kimball would later insist that the principle was not only defensible but eternal: "The principle of plurality of wives never will be done away although some sisters have had revelations that, when this time passes away and they go through the veil, every woman will have a husband for herself." Quoted in Givens, *WtA*, pg. 287.
- ¹⁰⁰ Daynes in Launius, pp. 134-38.
- ¹⁰¹ HotC 2:176.
- ¹⁰² Joseph spoke on the distinction and duties of the priesthood on October 5, 1840, appearing to leave room for all previous forms of ritualized sacrifice, ordinances and duties being revived as a requirement for the full restoration of God's priesthood in the final days:

And God said unto Noah the end of all flesh is before me, for the earth is filled with violence through them, and behold I will destroy them with the earth," thus we behold the Keys of this priesthood consisted in obtaining the voice of Jehovah that he talked with him in a familiar and friendly manner, that he continued to him the Keys, the Covenants, the power and the glory with

which he blessed Adam at the beginning and the offering of Sacrifice which also shall be continued at the last time, for all the ordinances and duties that ever have been required by the priesthood under the direction and commandments of the Almighty in the last dispensation at the end thereof in any of the dispensations, shall all be had in the last dispensation. Therefore all things had under the Authority of the Priesthood at any former period shall be had again—bringing to pass the restoration spoken of by the mouth of all the Holy Prophets. . . .

And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of Silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord . . .

It will be necessary here to make a few observations on the doctrine, set forth in the above quotation, As it is generally supposed that Sacrifice was entirely done away when the great sacrifice was offered up—and that there will be no necessity for the ordinance of Sacrifice in future, but those who assert this, are certainly not acquainted with the duties, privileges and authority of the priesthood. or with the prophets **The offering of Sacrifice has ever been connected and forms a part of the duties of the priesthood. It began with the priesthood and will be continued untill after the coming of Christ from generation to generation**—We frequently have mention made of the offering of Sacrifice by the servants of the most high in antient days prior to the law of moses, See which ordinances will be continued when 22 the priesthood is restored with all its authority power and blessings. . . .

It is a very prevalent opinion that in the sacrifices of sacrifices which were offered were entirely consumed, this was not the case if you read Leviticus [2] Chap [2-3] verses you will observe that the priests took a part as a memorial and offered it up before the Lord, while the remainder was kept for the benefit maintenance of the priests. So that the offerings and sacrifices are not all consumed upon the Alter, but the blood is sprinkled and the fat and certain other portions are consumed

These sacrifices as well as every ordinance belonging to the priesthood will when the temple of the Lord shall be built and the Sons Levi be purified be fully restored and attended to then all their powers ramifications ramifications and blessings—this the Sons of Levi shall be purified. . . . It is not to be understood that, the law of moses will be established again with all it rights and variety of ceremonies, ceremonies, this had never been spoken off by the prophets but those things which existed prior Mose's day viz Sacrifice will be continued —It may be asked by some what necessity for Sacrifice since the great Sacrifice was offered? In answer to which if Repentance Baptism and faith were necessary to Salvation existed prior to the days of Christ what necessity for them since that time — [emphasis added in bold] Smith, Ehat, Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁰³ Ehat and Cook, the editors of *The Words of Joseph Smith*, remark that “There are also other allusions by Joseph in this discourse to certain elements of priesthood doctrine—teachings as he put it “that have been kept hid from before the foundation of the world from the wise and prudent”—ordinances not previously performed in this dispensation that would be institutionalized in the Church by way of the temple endowment. For example, the Prophet alludes to the reinstatement of the Law of Sacrifice—that part administered by the Melchizedek Priesthood before the Law of Moses.” n15, Smith, Ehat, Cook, pg. 54.

¹⁰⁴ Guy G. Strousma, *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity*, University of Chicago Press, 2009, pp. 73-73; Givens, WtA, pp. 222-24.

¹⁰⁵ Givens, WtA, pg. 225.

¹⁰⁶ *TPJS*, pg. 322.

¹⁰⁷ D&C: 132: 31-34.

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- ¹⁰⁸ Givens, pg. 281.
- ¹⁰⁹ Givens, *WtA*, pg. 287.
- ¹¹⁰ D&C 132: 35-37. Genesis 16:2 has Sarai/Sarah initiating the offer of her handmaiden, Hagar.
- ¹¹¹ Bushman, *RSR*, pp. 490-99.
- ¹¹² The Mormon historian and theologian Terryl Givens remarks on D&C 132 that “Confusion arises from the fact that the revelation ranges over a few interrelated principles, using vocabulary that is fraught with ambiguity and multiple meanings.” Givens, *WtA*, pg. 286. For examples of high ranking members who denied the legitimacy of the plural marriage principle, see Daynes in Launius, pp. 139-141.
- ¹¹³ D&C 132: 51.
- ¹¹⁴ Bushman, pg. 495. In addition to Clayton’s diary entries on Emma’s argument with Joseph, see also the testimony of Joseph H. Jackson in Grant Palmer, “Why William and Jane Law Left the LDS Church in 1844,” pp. 4-6. It is Palmer’s contention that Joseph may have offered a polyandrous relationship to Emma to win her compliance with the principle, and then retracted the offer.
- ¹¹⁵ D&C: 132: 54
- ¹¹⁶ D&C: 132: 41-42 and 61-63.
- ¹¹⁷ Bushman in *RSR* counts ten polyandrous wives (pg. 439) , while Merina Smith cites a scholarly debate ranging from eleven to fourteen (pg.73). Most, perhaps all, of Joseph’s polyandrous wives were married to him before the revelation on plural marriage, though Brigham Young continued the practice after Joseph’s death (see Merina Smith, “Nauvoo Secrets”). If there was a prior revelation sanctifying polyandrous marriage, it has not been canonized.
- ¹¹⁸ D&C 132: 61, 64-65.
- ¹¹⁹ Daynes in Launius, pp. 140-42.
- ¹²⁰ Bushman also notes that “as the years went by, and one stalwart after another deserted him, Joseph came to value loyalty above every other virtue.” *RSR*, pg. 170; Daynes in Launius, pp. 130-42.
- ¹²¹ Hill in Launius, pg. 124.
- ¹²² Daynes in Launius, pp. 131-2.
- ¹²³ Bushman, *RSR*, pg. 444.
- ¹²⁴ Bushman, pg. 440.
- ¹²⁵ Quoted in Givens, *WtA*, pp. 281-82.
- ¹²⁶ Cott, pp. 22-23.
- ¹²⁷ Grossberg, pg. 120, chapter 1.
- ¹²⁸ Grossberg, pg. 120.
- ¹²⁹ Quoted in Cott, pg. 115.
- ¹³⁰ Cott, pg. 26.
- ¹³¹ Cott, pg. 111.
- ¹³² Grossberg, pg. 121; for the more constrained views of eighteenth century Anglo-American prophets, see Juster, pp. 101, 113-14.
- ¹³³ Cott, pp. 14-15; Grossberg, pp. 106, 211-213; Orren pp. 3-4, 72.

Chapter 7: “A Constitutional Right to be a False Prophet”

¹ Hatch, “Mormon and Methodist” pg. 40.

² See Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (1975).

³ Bushman, pp. 285-90.

⁴ Brodie, pg. 149.

⁵ Louis C. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” *Dialogue*, Volume 3, Number 2, (1968). pg. 47.

⁶ Givens, *PoP*, pp. 42, 46-47.

⁷ Givens, *PoP*, pp. 46-47; D&C 88:45 and D&C 104:28 respectively.

⁸ Brodie, pg. 263; D&C 124: 56-83.

⁹ *TJPS*, pg. 137.

¹⁰ Dean D. McBrien, “The Economic Content of Early Mormon Doctrine,” *Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly* 6 (1925): 180. Cited in Givens, *PoP*, pg. 47.

¹¹ Juster, pg. 269.

¹² See Bushman, *RSR*, pp 483-84 for an analysis of, and cultural context for, Joseph’s penchant for frontier-style boasting.

¹³ Quoted in Brodie, pg. 295. See also, *History of the Church*, Vol. V, pg. 472.

¹⁴ Quoted in Bushman, *RSR*, pp, 6-7.

¹⁵ *TPJS*, pg. 315.

¹⁶ *TPJS*, pg. 365.

¹⁷ *HotC* 6, 304.

Conclusion

¹ Daynes in Launius and Hallwas, pg. 141.

² See Bigler, *Forgotten Kingdom: The Mormon Theocracy in the American West, 1847-1896*.

³ For a more general overview of new religions and local control in the 21st century, see José Casanova, "Religion, the new millennium, and globalization." *Sociology of religion* 62, no. 4 (2001): 415-441. Pp. 429, 437-441.

⁴ Bigler, chs. 2-4.

⁵ Cott, pp. 111-20; Grossberg, pp. 120-26.

⁶ Mason, pg. 350.

⁷ Armand L. Mauss, "The Fading of the Pharaoh's Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood's Ban against Blacks." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14.

⁸ Ezra Taft Benson, "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet," Address delivered at Brigham Young University, February 26, 1980. <https://www.lds.org/liahona/1981/06/fourteen-fundamentals-in-following-the-prophet?lang=eng>

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Laurie Goodstein, "It's Official: Mormon Founder Had Up to 40 Wives," *New York Times*, November 10, 2014.

¹¹ Neil J. Young, "'The ERA is a Moral Issue': The Mormon Church, LDS Women, and the Defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment" *American Quarterly*, Volume 59, No. 3, September 2007, pp. 626-27.

¹² Elizabeth Ellen Gordon and William L. Gillespie. "The Culture of Obedience and the Politics of Stealth: Mormon Mobilization Against ERA and Same-Sex Marriage." *Politics and Religion* 5, no. 02 (2012): 343-366. pg. 344.

¹³ Young, pp. 636-39; Gordon and Gillespie, pg. 353.

¹⁴ Young, pg. 629.

¹⁵ Jesse McKinley and Kirk Johnson. "Mormons Tipped Scale in Ban on Gay Marriage." *New York Times* 14 (2008).

¹⁶ Gordon and Gillespie, pg. 343.

¹⁷ *ibid.* pp. 355, 357.

¹⁸ See the opinions of Brian D. Galle, "The LDS Church, Proposition Eight, and the Federal Law of Charities" *Northwestern University Law Review Colloquy, FSU College of Law, Public Law Research Paper No. 327*, December 30 (2008); and David Lourie, "Rethinking donor disclosure after the proposition 8 campaign." *Southern California Law Review*. 83 (2009): 133; and Monica Youn, "Proposition 8 and the Mormon Church: A Case Study in Donor Disclosure," *George Washington Law Review*, Volume 81, No. 6, November 2013.

¹⁹ Swaine, pg. 27.

²⁰ Jenkins, pg. 237.

²¹ Lawrence Wright, *Going clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief*. Vintage, 2013. pp. 122-23.

²² *ibid.*, pp. 226-30.

²³ *ibid.* pg. 232.

²⁴ The sociologist Lewis Carter described the difficulty in even studying the movement thus:

The analytic task is complicated by the changing and inconsistent nature of the Rajneesh movement which makes no claim to consistency of ideology. Further, beliefs, practices and goals are extremely changeable, though a few enduring patterns can be abstracted. The Rajneesh movement appears to be totally "manufactured" in the sense that beliefs, practices, corporate identities, and physical location may be changed quickly to suit necessities and convenience of the moment. Just as Sannyasin are urged to live in the "here and now," their social systems and legal identities are very impermanent. . . Further difficulty is introduced by the fluidity of

Rajneesh practices, with a pronouncement in the name of the Bhagwan having been sufficient to cause abandonment of old practices and acquisition of new ones.

Lewis F. Carter, "The "New Renunciates" of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh: Observations and identification of problems of interpreting new religious movements." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1987): 148-172. pp. 149-52.

²⁵ Carter, pg. 159.

²⁶ Randall Ballmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts Faith and Threatens America*, New York: Basic Books, 2006. pp. 16-17. The historian Rick Perlstein has made a similar observation, tying the early Mormon strategy to that of the modern Religious Right:

Religious traditions suffused with a sense of millennial stakes often have subrosa discourses akin to what the Mormons call "lying for the Lord." Pentecostal missiologist C. Peter Wagner, for example, has written, "We ought to see clearly that the end *does* justify the means.... If the method I am using accomplishes the goal I am aiming at, it is for that reason a good method."

Lying for the Lord has its concomitants on the political right. Jerry Falwell has argued for the elimination of all public schools. Nothing wrong with making that argument. But in 1998, when confronted with a quote, he denied making it, and denied having anything to do with the book in which it appeared. It was from a book of transcriptions of his sermons.

Rick Perlstein, "I Didn't Like Nixon *Until* Watergate': The Conservative Movement Now," *The Huffington Post*, December 5, 2005. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-perlstein/i-didnt-like-nixon-until- b 11735.html>

²⁷ See Supreme Court of the United States, "Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of Oregon v. Smith No. 88-1213, Argued Nov. 6, 1989, Decided April 17, 1990.

<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/494/872/case.html>

²⁸ Supreme Court of the United States, "BURWELL, SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, ET AL. v. HOBBY LOBBY STORES, INC., ET AL." October Term, 2013.

https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/13pdf/13-354_olp1.pdf

²⁹ Ben Adams and Cynthia Barmore, "Questioning Sincerity: The Role of the Courts After *Hobby Lobby*," 67 *Stanford Law Review Online* 59, November 7, 2014.

<https://www.stanfordlawreview.org/online/questioning-sincerity-the-role-of-the-courts-after-hobby-lobby/>

³⁰ Kara Loewentheil, "Code of Silence: RFRA Protects Religious Refusal To Testify," Public Rights, Private Conscience Project, Columbia Law School, September 17, 2014.

<http://blogs.law.columbia.edu/publicrightsprivateconscience/2014/09/17/code-of-silence-rfra-protects-religious-refusal-to-testify/>;

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