

Mormonism and the New Spirituality: LDS Women's Hybrid Spiritualities

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation illuminates overlaps in Mormonism and the New Spirituality in North America, showing their shared history and epistemologies. As example of these connections, it introduces ethnographic data from women who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in order to show (a) how living LDS women adapt and integrate elements from the New Spirituality with Mormon ideas about the nature of reality into hybrid spiritualities; and (b) how they negotiate their blended religious identities both in relation to the current American New Spirituality milieu and the highly centralized, hierarchical, and patriarchal Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The study focuses on religious hybridity with an emphasis on gender and the negotiation of power deriving from patriarchal religious authority, highlighting the dance between institutional power structures and individual authority. It illuminates processes and discourses of religious adaptation and synthesis through which these LDS women creatively and provocatively challenge LDS Church formal power structures.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family: my husband, David, who ongoingly chooses and supports me not just in spite of but in celebration of our differences; my children Tatiana, Astrid, Dominic, Natasha, and Mikhail, who are my heroes and my champions; my grandchildren, Cozette, Tristan, Donovan, Nathaniel, and Vivienne, who are so creative and open to new possibilities; my father Ray, to whom I owe my intellectual curiosity and pursuit of excellence in teaching, but who died before I could complete the project; and my mother Callie, who I now have the privilege of caring for. This project is a tribute to your patience, love, and uncritical, enthusiastic support. I feel deeply privileged to share this life with you all, and I still believe in forever.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Project Overview

The standard narrative about Mormonism in America is that it produces obedient CIA employees and conservative Republicans—not people who study channeled materials, heal with energy, or call down the moon in Pagan rituals. I challenge that stereotype by looking at the construction, negotiation, and maintenance of religious identity at the intersection of Mormonism and the New Spirituality as practiced by varied North American women with Mormon backgrounds. Founded by Joseph Smith, Jr., on April 6, 1830, in Fayette, New York, Mormonism is a religious tradition indigenous to North America. Neither Protestant nor imported from Europe, and strongly hierarchical and patriarchal, it is most often classified as an American restorationist movement. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (often called the Mormon Church or LDS Church) is the largest, wealthiest, and most visible expression of the Mormon tradition.¹ The nickname “Mormon” derives from the Book of Mormon, which the Church promotes as sacred text accompanying the Bible as another witness of Jesus Christ. The book is named after the figure Mormon, who the Church describes as “a fourth-century

¹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the official name of the largest of the organizations deriving from the visions of Mormonism’s founder Joseph Smith. This “Utah-based” church has historically been called the Mormon Church and its members “Mormons” after *The Book of Mormon*, which is named for a prophet who appears in the book. With increased emphasis on Jesus Christ beginning in the late 1980s, the Church began discouraging usage of the term “Mormon” requesting that journalists and scholars use the Church’s full name. Though it has not changed the name of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir or its flagship website, Mormon.org, it ongoingly tries to control the use of Mormon as a marker of identity, primarily to prevent its use by groups who claim “Mormon fundamentalist” identity. To that end, the LDS Church has applied for and obtained trademarks on “Mormon” in several countries. At this time, however, it has not yet been successful in the United States. In this project, I mainly use “LDS Church” to designate this institution.

prophet-historian who compiled and abridged many records of his ancestors into the Book of Mormon.”² However, because of its emergence through and emphasis on personal revelation (i.e. Smith’s vision, at the age of fourteen, of God and Jesus Christ), the LDS Church has generated at least two hundred offshoot groups.³

Having encountered numerous LDS women who engaged in the New Age practices listed above as supplements to their practice of Mormonism, my original research question became whether or not women’s extra-LDS spiritual seeking had been at all related to their experience of three specific aspects of Mormon doctrine and culture: the standardization and simplification of Mormon doctrine by the LDS Church; the Mormon concept of eternal gender; and institutional and cultural attitudes about the Mother in Heaven, who is the celestial role model for mortal women. These questions led me to examine women’s roles and access to power and authority in Mormonism as well as the doctrinal and cultural elements of Mormonism that I thought might be congruent with the New Spirituality, where channeling, energy work, and earth-based spiritualities are culturally located. I found that while increasingly rejecting but still necessarily reconciling and reinterpreting the specter of “the Molly Mormon,” the Mormon cultural euphemism for the “perfect” woman, many LDS women (like women of other religious traditions) are looking outside institutional Mormonism to add depth to their spiritual lives.

² The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Mormon: The People, the Church, the Prophet,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed January 15, 2012, <http://lds.org/topic/mormon/>.

³ Steven L. Shields, “The Latter Day Saint Churches,” in *America’s Alternative Religions*, ed. Timothy Miller, vol. 41, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 49.

The themes of religious identity, legitimacy, and dissent are at the heart of this project. Armed with Mormon doctrines regarding their potential for godhood and esoteric temple practices that distinguish them from mainstream Christians, the women highlighted in this project supplement Mormonism with elements drawn from the New Spirituality, especially through New Age channeling and other forms of divination, energy healing, and earth-based practices through which they access the Divine Feminine—spiritual options that are decidedly not part of the institutional Mormon toolbox but, I will argue, *are* nevertheless congruent with the orthodox Mormon worldview. Furthermore, these women’s insistent pursuit of these particular blended identities not only re-enchants Mormonism—at least where they sit—but also facilitates the “de-exotification” of previously exotic Mormon concepts such as the Mother in Heaven and other esoteric doctrines like her, which have been elided from the institutional Mormon experience.⁴ In addition, for these individuals, this reenchantment effectively revives or reforms a demystified, “protestantized” (what Roger Finke and Rodney Stark would call “secularized”) Mormonism.⁵

⁴ Partridge defines de-exotification as “a belief’s or artifact’s or practice’s loss of exotic status,” which then makes it available to spiritual seekers. Christopher Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West Volume 1: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 197, 91n.

⁵ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, Revised. (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005). For an analysis of the LDS Church’s mid-to-late 20th-century retrenchment in relation to Stark and Bainbridge and Stark and Finke’s secularization thesis, see Armand L. Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994). See also Eric R. Samuelsen, “The Passion Paradox: Signposts on the Road toward Mormon Protestantization,” in *After The Passion Is Gone: American Religious Consequences*, ed. Shawn J. Landres and Michael Berenbaum (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2004), 59. Samuelsen attributes the phrase “protestantization of Mormonism” to Mauss, but I have been unable to document his use of it. Others, however, use it without attribution.

Contextualizing Mormonism and the New Spirituality

These hybrid “New Age Mormon Pagan” spiritualities can only be explored in the context of the current state of religion in the United States.⁶ Scholars of religion have new and important statistics for understanding the role of religion in American public life, including new data gathered on members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 2007, the *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*⁷ was administered by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, and the *American Religious Identification Survey* (ARIS)⁸ was carried out by the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture and the Leonard E. Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life. Both provide vital updates to our picture of American religion. ARIS indicates that not only do fewer Americans currently identify as Christians, but this self-reported decline in American Christianity is attributed to Americans’ increasing rejection of institutional religion and an associated surprisingly large number of Americans who report believing “in a deist or paganistic concept of the Divine as a higher power,” (Ibid., 2-8). Similarly, the *Baylor Religion Survey*, administered in between 2005 and 2007, found that “Americans may

⁶ The conversation about hybridity originated in the context of academic cultural studies on postcolonialism, globalization, ethnicity, and multiple cultural identities.

⁷ Luis Lugo, et al. *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington, DC: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008), 58–59, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>.

⁸ Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, “ARIS 2008: American Religious Identification Survey 2008” (Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society & Culture, 2008), http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf.

agree that God exists. They do not agree about what God is like, what God wants for the world, or how God feels about politics.”⁹

Moreover, as North Americans take advantage of the large variety of available religious options, religious identity in America has become more and more flexible and hybrid. Responding to the statistics, Michael Paulson of the *Boston Globe* observes that “the United States is in the midst of a period of unprecedented religious fluidity, in which 44 percent of American adults have left the denomination of their childhood for another denomination, another faith, or no faith at all.”¹⁰ In part, this is the result of religious diversity and the fact that it is impossible to avoid that diversity and its influence.¹¹ For example, while Mormons still rank high in maintaining affiliation and engagement with the LDS Church, some of their answers to survey questions indicate that grassroots Mormons are moving toward a more pluralistic understanding of their own faith. For instance, according to the Pew Forum survey, forty-three percent of Mormons surveyed say that there is more than

⁹ The Baylor survey (2005 and 2007, released in 2006 and 2008), is less helpful in illuminating the Mormon experience because of its use of mainstream Christian categories and its main focus on Black, Evangelical, and Mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Mormons are categorized as “Other,” along with Buddhist, Christian Science, Hindu, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Muslim, Orthodox (Eastern, Russian, Greek), and [revealingly] Unitarian Universalists (9). Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, “American Piety in the 21st Century: New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the US” (Baylor University, September 2006), 9, <http://www.baylorisr.org/wp-content/uploads/American-Piety-Finall.pdf>. For the published analysis of the Baylor survey, see also Rodney Stark, *What Americans Really Believe: New Findings from the Baylor Surveys of Religion* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Michael Paulson, “US Religious Identity Is Rapidly Changing,” *Boston.com* (Boston, February 26, 2008), digital edition, http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/02/26/us_religious_identity_is_rapidly_changing/.

¹¹ Quoting Peter Berger, Andrea Useem notes that “encountering other people’s religious beliefs—and perhaps being persuaded by them—is ‘an inevitable part of modernity.’” Andrea Useem, “For Many Americans Religious Identity Is No Longer a Given,” *National Catholic Reporter* (Kansas City, February 12, 2007), digital edition, <http://ncronline.org/node/4920>.

one way to interpret Mormon teachings; and a significant number (thirty-nine percent) say that access to eternal life is available through religions other than Mormonism. This is startling development in a church that has historically asserted itself as providing the only access to eternal life.¹²

This dynamism and resulting competitive marketplace is fueled by the access to religious alternatives made possible by the Internet. Online, any seeker can not only discover what occurs to them as new concepts and practices but also discuss and create communities based on them including others across the globe. In addition, religiously hybrid families create distinctive experiences for adults and children that stimulate religious exploration and innovation, which may result in actually taking on new religious identities (what Andrea Useem calls “switching religious identities”¹³) or expanding existing understandings of one’s traditional religious identity. Though *religion* is one primary category in analyses of this phenomenon, observers more often characterize it as *spirituality*.

The New Spirituality

The term *New Spirituality* (which is sometimes capitalized and at other times appears in the lower case) was first used by Linda Woodhead to distinguish the emergence of nontraditional religion in the 19th century “through the simultaneous

¹² Luis Lugo, et al. *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington, DC: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008), 58–59, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf>. As we will see, Mormons believe that most members of the human family will ultimately occupy a heavenly realm. However, “eternal life” will only be available to those who reach the highest level having accepted the LDS version of the gospel. See “Gospel Topics: Eternal Life,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2010, http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?locale=0&sourceId=61810bbce1d98010VgnVCM1000004d82620a____&vgnnextoid=bbd508f54922d010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD.

¹³ Useem, “For Many Americans Religious Identity Is No Longer a Given.”

retention, radicalization, and rejection of key themes in liberal Protestantism.”¹⁴ In what Christopher Partridge calls “the Easternization of Western Liberalism,”¹⁵ this trend was symbolized by movements like Transcendentalism, groups like the Theosophical Society, and events like the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions. This category is currently used by practitioner-adherents and groups, their antagonists, and scholars to cover the Western culture of spiritual seeking that is concerned with mind-body-spirit unity, affirms religious pluralism, and critiques dualisms in part by promoting a pantheistic concept of God (characterized by Woodhead as a “radically immanent,” and “this-worldly monism”¹⁶). Gordon Lynch identifies these four characteristics of the New Spirituality: (1) “the desire for an approach to religion and spirituality that is appropriate for modern, liberal societies,” (2) “the rejection of patriarchal forms of religion and the search for religious forms that are authentic and liberating for women,” (3) “the move to re-sacralize science (particularly quantum physics, and contemporary theories of cosmology),” and (4) “the search for a nature-based spirituality that will motivate us to try to avert the impending ecological catastrophe.”¹⁷ Wade Clark Roof characterizes the New Spirituality as emphasizing “personal choice, faith exploration, and more holistic ways of thinking.”¹⁸

¹⁴ Linda Woodhead, ed., “The World’s Parliament of Religions and the Rise of Alternative Spirituality,” in *Reinventing Christianity: Nineteenth-Century Contexts* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2001), 81–96.

¹⁵ Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West, Vol. 1*, 94.

¹⁶ Woodhead, “Reinventing Christianity,” 82.

¹⁷ Gordon Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-first Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 10.

¹⁸ See Wade Clark Roof, “Toward the Year 2000: Reconstructions of Religious Space,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 527 (May 1, 1993): 155–170, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1048683>. See also CwG Foundation, “Conversations with God

Some scholars of religion and religious practitioners have also begun employing *New Spirituality* in an attempt to distinguish between the contemporary twenty-first-century context and the twentieth-century milieu associated with the New Age Movement of the 1970s and 1980s, even when their subject covers many of the same categories. In part, this is not only an effort to develop more precise and nuanced ways of talking about ideas and practices and the people and groups who engage them, especially since it is appropriate to question the extent to which practitioners-adherents actually employ the “New Age” category to describe their religious or spiritual identity.¹⁹ There is also a degree to which “New Age” as a category may be “tainted” by its association with consumerism and “shallow” practices and ideals—even “debased if not totally discredited.”²⁰ Paul Heelas, whose groundbreaking book *The New Age Movement: Religion, Culture and Society in the Age of Postmodernity* pioneered the academic study of New Age, now considers continued

Foundation -- About,” *About Neal*, 2010, http://cwg.org/index.php?page=about_neale.; and Neale Donald Walsch, “Neale Talks About Purpose,” Archive, *Spirit Library*, January 5, 2007, <http://spiritlibrary.com/neale-donald-walsch/neale-talks-about-purpose>. This usage is evident in Neale Donald Walsch’s School of the New Spirituality. Walsh became a New Age icon with the publication of his first book in a ten-book series, *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue* (1996). The first volume was on the New York Times nonfiction bestseller list for at least 137 weeks and is available in thirty-four languages. According to the Conversations with God Foundation website and other public statements through the School of the New Spirituality, Walsch’s books have “redefined God and shifted spiritual paradigms around the globe” by positing a God whose voice is “soft and kind, warm and loving” as opposed to being stern and judgmental, focused on sin and retribution. On his website, Walsch defines the New Spirituality as “a way of looking at the world, a way of understanding God and Life and Each Other that brings each of us a new perspective of our relationship with all of that.”

¹⁹ Apart from Sutcliffe’s critique of “New Age” identity, he also disputes the idea of New Age as a movement. Instead, he observes “radically elective” alternative spirituality “networks” made up of self-conscious dissenters against “religious institutions and post-Enlightenment rationality alike.” Steven Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2003), 196.

²⁰ Nevill Drury, *Exploring the Labyrinth: Making Sense of the New Spirituality* (London and New York: Continuum, 1999), ix. For a counter-cult critique of this trend, see James A. Herrick, *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004).

use of “New Age” unnecessary, even harmful.²¹ He argues against its use, precisely because the term is often used polemically but also because other neutral categories exist to replace it.²²

Ultimately, the category *New Spirituality* appears capable of representing not only what Americans have come to think of as New Age practices and ideas, such as astrology, channeling, divination, and reincarnation, the belief in and use of which are easily visible and accessible in American popular culture, but also what has become a revitalization (or dilution, from the perspective of fundamentalist-leaning religionists) of established religious traditions in America toward a progressive, more humanistic spirituality.²³ One example of revitalization in North American monotheism is Jewish environmental theology, which in part draws from Jewish Kabbalah.²⁴ Another example is the ways in which many religious communities are reaching beyond theology and dogma (a top-down concern with orthodoxy) to embrace a humanistic doctrine of discipleship and accountability for all humankind

²¹ Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: Religion, Culture and Society in the Age of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996).

²² Heelas, for instance, employs the terms “alternative spirituality” and “expressive spirituality.” Paul Heelas, “Expressive Spirituality and Humanistic Expressivism: Sources of Significance Beyond Church and Chapel,” in *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, ed. Steven J. Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 250.

²³ This is not to say, however, that *New Age* as an academic category has disappeared. As time goes on, it will be interesting to see the extent to which scholars drop it in favor of other categories as they continue their efforts to analyze these aspects of lived religion. See Jon P. Bloch, *New Spirituality, Self, and Belonging: How New Agers and Neo-Pagans Talk About Themselves*, vol. 6, *Religion in the Age of Transformation 1087-2388* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998), 1. Bloch notes that many people who participate in activities associated with “‘alternative’ or countercultural’ spirituality” either aren’t interested in the distinctions made between New Age and Neopagan practices or resist labels others might place on their spiritual beliefs and practices.

²⁴ Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller, *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2007), 338.

(a bottom-up, or what Frederick Herzog calls a “corporate” emphasis on orthopraxy).²⁵ In the Mormon context, the LDS Church’s institutional commitment to building sustainable structures—like the growing grassroots interest in ecology among individual Mormons—can be seen as an expression of both a modern institutional articulation of historical Mormonism’s concept of stewardship as well as an individual spiritual impulse embraced by Mormons who see that stewardship as integral to LDS spirituality. The Church’s commitments to sustainability serve not only to legitimate the ecological impulses and commitments of individual Mormons by connecting them to the historical Mormon tradition (which may extend far beyond the use of solar energy) but also justifies their participation in the larger ecological movement and the New Spirituality.²⁶

I use *New Spirituality* as an inclusive category that can cover the wide range of non-institutional options available to Americans for spiritual self-expression as well as innovative theological trends in mainstream American religion as noted by Roof, Lynch, and others. At times I will use *New Age* or *New Age spirituality* when speaking specifically of the movement that emerged in the West in the 1970s and 1980s and which still contributes to the general spiritual milieu or when discussing the scholarly canon developed around this category. Similarly, I will distinguish between New Age

²⁵ Frederick Herzog, “A New Spirituality: Shaping Doctrine at the Grass Roots,” *Archive, Christian Century*, July 30-August 6, 1986, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=322>.

²⁶ Mormons see themselves as having been given stewardship over all elements of their lives, including their families, church callings, and the natural world. They believe they will be asked to account for how they managed that stewardship when they are judged after death. For an introduction to the Church’s solar building program and its relationship to the Mormon concept of stewardship, see Greg Hill, “Solar Stake Center Harnesses Power of the Sun,” *LDS Church News* (Salt Lake City, May 1, 2010), digital edition, <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/59278/Solar-stake-center-harnesses-power-of-the-sun.html>.

and contemporary Pagan (and broad contemporary Paganism from other specific related categories) when discussing those who adopt nature-based beliefs, and practices or who self-identify as contemporary Pagans.

Approach

To facilitate my analysis of what I heuristically call the “New Age Mormon Pagan” experience, I explicate the Mormon analogies of three popular trends in the current North American spiritual milieu: channeling and other ways of knowing as compared with both personal and institutional revelation in Mormonism; energy work and other alternative methods for healing and personal growth as compared with LDS priesthood blessings, temple ordinances, and LDS beliefs about human ontology and human potential; and, finally, earth-centered practices and the Divine Feminine in contemporary Paganism as compared with the magical worldview embodied in Mormon doctrines about the nature of the earth, the nature of God, and the existence of a Heavenly Mother. As we will see, these categories overlap in the stories told here. Through open-ended interviews of forty-three women, from age thirty to seventy-one, I selected the stories of twelve to represent the intersections of Mormon and New Spirituality identity delineated in this project. Except for three of the twelve, who have public profiles online and in their communities, I have taken care to obscure details of their situations so that they remain anonymous, identifiable by pseudonyms. Each chapter introduces them in detail. I encountered many of these women through social networking (e.g. Facebook, Meetup, and MySpace) and requests for interviews sent to LDS-themed listservs. Some of these listservs relate to a topic I was investigating, such as LDS_Reiki and Mormon-Mystic, both of which are public groups on Yahoo.com.

Other groups in which I solicited participants are more general online assemblies of Mormons who have gathered to discuss Mormon issues, such as OpenMormon, and New Order Mormon (NOM). I also sought participants in private female-only feminist discussion groups. In addition, I conducted general searches online using relevant search terms in order to find LDS women for the study. Finally, through my participation in conferences like various Sunstone Symposia and American Academy of Religion (AAR) nationally and at the regional level, I encountered numerous possible subjects and word-of-mouth contacts.

To some extent, the resulting numerical narrowing is a function of the extent to which women were ongoingly available for discussions. In the interest of space, this project also omits women whose narratives fall outside my main research question. For instance, those women are excluded whose blended identities consist mainly of their experience of being Mormon and psychic. Space did not allow me to include those stories. In addition, in the case of the women who are involved in channeling in Chapter 3, I limited my scope to the women in a particular group (except for one exception, explained there) to show the interplay of those relationships and how these identities evolve in a group setting like that. Likewise, I limited the finished project to women who remain affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and have supplemented institutional Mormonism, as Janet Bennion has observed, by “dipping” into popular spiritual practices.²⁷ This distinction will illuminate some of the range of belief and activity that occurs inside

²⁷ Peggy Fletcher Stack, “LDS ‘Double Dippers’ Hungry; Social Anthropologist Says Some Mormons Need More Than Faith,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002). Bennion, a social anthropologist who studies Mormon-derived fundamentalist polygamist groups, argues that double dippers constitute an “important subset” of faithful Latter-day Saints, who “are motivated by a sense of [spiritual] deprivation.”

of that overarching LDS identity. Because popular culture participates in and provides the stuff for popular religion in the everyday lives of most Americans—and because in the twenty-first century individual as well as institutional religious practice is mediated through popular culture—I also utilize other primary sources beyond these interviews: LDS Church materials in print and digital formats; New Spirituality and Mormon-themed websites, blogs, listservs, and other popular progressive Mormon media.

Another distinction in my approach is that, while many LDS men would have qualified for inclusion, for several reasons I focus on women and for the most part ignore the spiritual lives of men. First, to some extent the feminist critique of male hegemony in institutional religious hierarchies and the assumptions built into the normative male experience has been applied to the study of religion. However, there is still a relative deficit of monographs analyzing the religious experience of women, especially since so much of what is produced in religious studies is historical. This deficit is compounded in the case of women in new religious movements and even more so in Mormon Studies, especially with regard to *living* LDS women.²⁸ In other words, most of the printed scholarly work on Mormon women done in the last ten years has been historical.²⁹ Simultaneous with the North American feminist interest in and recovery of women's historical voices in the last quarter of the

²⁸ Only two prominent books have been written exclusively about women in new religions: Elizabeth Puttick, *Women in New Religions: In Search of Community, Sexuality, and Spiritual Power*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997; and Susan J. Palmer, *Moon Sisters, Krishna Mothers, Rajneesh Lovers: Women's Roles in New Religions* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

²⁹ One important exception is *Pedestals & Podiums* by Martha Sonntag Bradley. Bradley looks at the ways in which LDS women responded to second wave feminism and the Church's campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment. Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005).

twentieth century, a new generation of female Mormon scholars gained access to their own previously obscured history. Historians (many of them women) recovered the lives of early Mormon women, including their experience of polygamy, economic autonomy, and their wide range of spiritual practices (i.e. hands-on blessing, anointing, spiritual healing, palmistry, card divination, and tea leaf reading³⁰)—which, as noted earlier, stand in stark contrast against the roles and practices prescribed for their twentieth- and twenty-first-century counterparts. Therefore, in place of exposés like the 1886 book, *The Women of Mormonism, or the Story of Polygamy as Told by the Victims Themselves*, by Jennie Anderson Froiseth, Mormon women’s letters and journals were available as sources for revisionist histories that completely changed our view of early Mormon women’s lives.³¹

In addition, while women in all patriarchal religions must negotiate attitudes and restrictions related to gender, LDS women face a particularly interesting dilemma because the LDS Church maintains a doctrine of both gender *and* sex as

³⁰ In fact, in early Mormonism the latter three practices apparently were exclusive to LDS women. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, Revised and enlarged ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 294.

³¹ Jennie Anderson, ed., *The Women of Mormonism, or the Story of Polygamy as Told by the Victims Themselves* (Detroit, MI: C. G. G. Paine, 1886). Examples of modern histories include Jessie L Embry, *Master or Slave the Economic Role of Mormon Polygamous Wives*, vol. 15, Southwest Institute for Research on Women 0276-9630 (Tucson, AZ: Southwest Institute for Research on Women, 1982); Lawrence Foster, *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991); Maria S. Ellsworth, ed., *Mormon Odyssey*: *The Story of Ida Hunt Udall, Plural Wife* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Rebecca Bartholomew, *Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995); Donna Toland Smart. Donna T. Smart, *Mormon Midwife: The 1846-1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions*, vol. 2, 2 vols., Life Writings of Frontier Women (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1997); Melissa Lambert Milewski, *Before the Manifesto: The Life Writings of Mary Lois Walker Morris*, vol. 38, Life Writings of Frontier Women (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2007); George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy . . . But We Called It Celestial Marriage*, 2nd ed. (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 2011); Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and Todd M. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997).

eternal characteristics of each individual human being.³² Therefore, with respect to the policies and procedures of the institutional church, all aspects of Mormon life are not only presumably gendered, but the biological fact of sex and its associated gendered ways of being are actually constituted as being doctrinal and therefore essential and unchanging.³³ In another doctrinal differentiation, Mormonism limits priesthood power to men. Therefore, just as women are distinguished as inherently and essentially different ontologically from the normative male (both physically *and* spiritually at the level of the soul, which is gendered), they are also simultaneously positioned as auxiliary to men in Church organization. Thus, regardless of whether or not the women highlighted in this project gladly accept, ambivalently resist, or explicitly reject these institutionally defined distinctions, most of those who still claim a Mormon identity articulate their spiritual practices in gendered ways in relation to the male prerogative to heal, administrate, and speak with (priesthood) authority in the name of God.³⁴

³² The issue of transsexual individuals is addressed in Volume 1 of the Church Handbook of Instructions. However, the Church does not make that volume available to the public and has sued over its publication online. It purportedly covers Church policies regarding the status of transsexuals in the Church.

³³ Ironically, this proclamation was first delivered publicly at the General Relief Society (the Church's international women's organization) meeting held September 23, 1995. According to this document, "ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose." Though at this time the Proclamation is non-canonical, it is the most likely contender for canonization since the death of Gordon B. Hinckley, the church president under whose tenure the Proclamation was created. This has not, however, happened as of now. See The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 1995, <http://lds.org/family/proclamation?lang=eng>.

³⁴ The distinction between those who are authorized to speak for God and those who are not is an important one to make. LDS women constantly have to situate themselves in relation to men, who hold the priesthood: Are their activities encroaching on priesthood authority? If not, how can they distinguish their activities so that they are not seen as encroaching on that authority? This is

Finally, studying LDS women has been controversial in ways that studying LDS men is not, and so their experience demands our sustained attention. Historically, female believers have had to defend their membership in a church that is perceived by outsiders to subjugate them. Their identity has been contested from inside and outside the tradition. Early LDS women had the vote and were institutionally sanctioned healers. They were, however, also polygamist wives, whose commitment to the principle of plural marriage and support of social and political theocracy bewildered and angered outsiders. Polygamy was a vehicle to becoming goddesses in the celestial kingdom, the highest level of heaven.³⁵ While they are no longer asked to express their obedience through participation in polygamous unions, modern LDS women have lost institutional approval for healing and have also had to negotiate the Church's designation of motherhood as their main proscribed role.

In addition, LDS feminists have been subject to church discipline for advocating change in the LDS Church based on revisionist history. The publication of *Women and Authority*, the last major scholarly effort to explore living Mormon women's explicitly feminist spirituality from the inside, resulted in the

especially the case if they are healers: They risk facing charges that they are trying to pretend they have the priesthood and are using it.

³⁵ Eliza R. Snow, poet and plural wife of Joseph Smith, wrote often about her own understanding of the principle of plural marriage. Speaking of "Mother Eve" and obedience to the restored and revealed principle of plurality, Snow writes, "Obedience will the same bright garland weave, / As it has been done for your great Mother, Eve, / For all her daughters on the earth, who will / All my requirements sacredly fulfill. / And what to Eve, though in her mortal life, / She'd been the first, the tenth, or fiftieth wife? / What did *she* care, when in her lowest state / Whether by fools, consider'd small or great? / 'Twas all the same with her—she prov'd her worth— / She's now the Goddess and the Queen of Earth." See Jill Mulvay Derr, "The Significance of 'O My Father' in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996-1997): 100.

excommunication of its editor and at least one of its authors.³⁶ One consequence of this event was a pervasive reluctance among insiders to speak openly and/or publicly about feminism, women's roles, women and authority, and the feminine divine—especially if such speech might be interpreted by the church as feminist opposition to its authority and policies. *The Sisterhood: Inside the Lives of Mormon Women*, by Dorothy Allred Solomon, is a candid, apologetic, mass market look at LDS women from the inside; however, it does pose difficult questions and explores the paradoxes of being a faithful LDS woman from a believing perspective.³⁷ A more recent contribution, *Mormon Women: Portraits and Conversations*, is a detailed study of fourteen believing LDS women on five continents.³⁸ Written by a travel writer, a diverse group of faithful LDS women tell their stories of how they have negotiated the LDS Church's stated ideal roles for Mormon women with their individual circumstances and personal goals and dreams.

As a response to this state of scholarship about women and Mormonism, this dissertation reflects my commitment to looking at religion and spirituality through the lens of lived religion. Attention to lived experience provides access to the complicated negotiations of everyday life; the fluidity of religious boundaries; and unofficial adjudications of authority. An emphasis on lived experience also naturally invites attention to religious practice because both are concerned with the interaction

³⁶ Maxine Hanks, ed., *Women and Authority: Re-Emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

³⁷ Dorothy Allred Solomon, *The Sisterhood: Inside the Lives of Mormon Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

³⁸ James N. Kimball, Kent Miles, and Governor Olene Walker, *Mormon Women: Portraits & Conversations*, ed. Dan F. Thomas and Elbert Peck, trans. Kent Miles (Salt Lake City: Handcart Books, 2009).

between individuals and larger systems.³⁹ Looking at what people *do* enables us to see their interpretations and negotiations of time, space, and the body. Moreover, emphasizing practice can bring us into conversation with the material elements of religion: the physical products that are inseparable from the practices that give them meaning (e.g. LDS temple garments acquired and worn throughout a person’s life in the pre-endowment washing and anointing ceremony; candles lit at particular moments in Pagan rituals; the setup and maintenance of objects on home altars; or the plethora of products essential for pilgrimages, festivals, and dances. Looking at the practical dimension of religion also reveals the extent to which rich and varied material and digital products of religion (e.g. icons and other ritual objects, print images, television, film, virtual space, digital media, advertising, fine art and photography, fashion, architecture, and religious kitsch) are inherently iconoclastic; in various hands, they act to both reinforce as well as counteract the status quo. A wide range of material and digital products are deployed by religious institutions to shore up their authority in response to iconoclastic challenges to their regimes. Likewise, similar images and products may just as easily be appropriated by marginal community members in their challenge of institutional authority.⁴⁰

³⁹ According to Sherry Ortner, “Modern practice theory seeks to explain the relationship(s) that obtain between human action, on the one hand, and some global entity which we may call ‘the system,’ on the other. Questions concerning these relationships may go in either direction—the impact of the system on practice, and the impact of practice on the system.” Sherry B. Ortner, “Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 1984): 148, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/178524>.

⁴⁰ It is at the level of practice that both Mormonism and the New Spirituality meet opposition from conservative religionists precisely because of practices like, for instance, LDS posthumous baptism, New Age crystal healing, and contemporary Pagan Goddess worship.

Active performances of religious narratives (whether individual or communal) inevitably involve material objects. As a whole, such performances have an impact on one's identity, beliefs and attitudes about the body, and understanding of time and space. Daily performances of identity give objects and practices meaning at both the institutional and individual level, in part because any given performance also supports (and is supported by) its accompanying narratives.⁴¹ These communal narrative concerns, whether having to do with the Mormon Plan of Salvation, the Age of Aquarius, or the Sacred Self on the road to perfection, are at the heart of these LDS women's participation in a Pagan coven, channeling group, or a Mormon-themed energy healing listserv like LDS_Reiki.⁴² The women in this study all participate in an ongoing narrative process by which they create hybrid identities and then learn to master rhetorical and practical strategies for blending and performing Mormon, New Age, and contemporary Pagan beliefs and practices. Actions such as these are not the expressions of women simply following their culturally mandated

⁴¹ Richard Schechner argues that everyday life is a series of performances for which one trains over time, "learning appropriate bits of behavior, of finding out how to adjust and perform one's life in relation to social and personal circumstances." See Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 22–23.

⁴² Reiki is a three-level healing system originating in Japan that has been adapted to Western users. A Reiki master has been attuned to Level Three Reiki and is qualified to attune others as well as teach Reiki Levels One and Two. Reiki attunement allows practitioners to manipulate energy using the hands for physical and emotional healing. A Reiki treatment may involve the laying on of hands but may also take place through distance healing. The LDS Reiki listserv has 323 members as of January 31, 2012. Similarly, the Mormon-Mystic Yahoo group has 362 members. Other relevant listservs and/or physical groups that draw on the New Spirituality and include Mormon-Tarot, Reform Mormonism, MormonGoddess, NaturalLDSWomen, MormonVeg, Mormon-Prophecy, and—yes—there is a Yahoo group named Molly_Mormon.

roles; rather, they are “creative strategies by which [they] continually reproduce and reshape their social and cultural environments.”⁴³

As mentioned earlier, it is clear that the women I interviewed supplement, and synthesize elements of Mormonism with elements of the New Spirituality as they respond to, negotiate, and manage their relationship to LDS beliefs and practices related to gender. Though the LDS Church provides women with more than ample leadership opportunities, only men have the priesthood and so, as noted above, men are the only ones with authority to declare doctrine.⁴⁴ The official LDS women’s community, the Relief Society, is wholly dependent on and functions to support the goals of the Church as defined by the male priesthood leadership and to reinforce the roles for women it has identified as doctrinal and eternal. Therefore, it is important to map the ways in which popular culture—especially the new media—ongoingly creates new opportunities for women to expand their roles as defined by institutional religion and create identities of their own choosing. In private listservs and other public forums, participants in this project establish themselves as healers, psychics, witches, herbalists. They debate scripture, church doctrine, and their roles as women—none of which would be acceptable in institutional LDS space.

Even with this apparent dissonance between their church experience and their extra-Mormon activities, I will show that those who supplement or replace

⁴³ Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, Reissued ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76.

⁴⁴ Asked if she thought this project should include men, one believing LDS woman said, “Of course you’re focusing on women! Because they’re the ones who set policy, most LDS men don’t know there’s anything broken! They wouldn’t even get your questions!” In addition, the LDS Church has set up strict rules around the conditions under which married men and women (who are not married to each other) can be alone together. Thus, it would be more difficult to gain access to the stories of faithful LDS men.

Mormonism with options from the New Spirituality are easily able to do so precisely because certain of them are congruent with the comprehensive Mormon worldview. Despite their presence in Mormon doctrine, however, these components of Mormonism are apparently also not available in the places Mormons spend most of their communal religious time: in church meetings and other official church activities. Therefore, I aim to highlight aspects of LDS belief and practice that may be trivialized or even ignored by church officials and/or other Mormons on the ground today but that are integral to these women's choices and actions as they construct a meaningful identity. Acknowledging the LDS Church's mandate to protect doctrinal purity, its apparent aversion to certain types of diversity, and its emphasis on obedience, I do not simply distinguish between individuals and an institution but also investigate the dance between regulation and resistance that takes place where the individual and the institution meet. Because Mormonism is a container for such a wide range of religious and cultural idioms, there are any numbers of ways to be authentically "Mormon"; therefore, scholars must continually challenge stock images of Latter-day Saint women. To that end, I show some of the rhetorical and practical strategies by which the LDS Church (meaning both the institution proper and those in authority both locally and at the highest levels) simultaneously oppose and legitimize women's dissenting or heterodox activities as well as the ways in which these particular women negotiate the meeting of their patriarchal tradition with what Christopher Partridge argues is a decidedly occult or "re-enchanted" current spiritual milieu.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West, Vol. 1*.

In fact, Mormonism is no stranger to this theme. The historiography of religion in America locates Mormonism with Spiritualism, Christian Science, Theosophy, and other groups that developed out of the 19th-century metaphysical tradition. As Catherine Albanese observes, “Joseph Smith . . . conjoined a folk magic of dowsing and treasure-seeking to the high Hermetic tradition of magic that Masonry, Swedenborgianism, and other and related sources had mediated to him.”⁴⁶ Such narratives also usually note the process by which the LDS Church has progressively deemphasized (in some cases, suspended) those early practices (i.e. plural marriage) and doctrines (e.g. God was once a man; God has multiple wives; human beings can ultimately progress to become Gods), to which other Christian religionists historically point to distinguish it from mainstream American Christianity. These shifts have been facilitated by a practice the LDS Church calls “correlation”: a review system based on male authoritative consensus, which oversees—literally—every aspect of LDS interpretive output for the purposes of maintaining doctrinal consistency and purity across all Church curricula.⁴⁷

The process the LDS Church calls “correlation” has been a crucial vehicle for what I call the *disenchantment* of the Mormon tradition by the Church. I consider these progressive changes in Mormonism expressions of demystification driven by several trends: (a) the LDS Church’s desire to rehabilitate their public identity, primarily by emphasizing similarities as opposed to differences, so as to better

⁴⁶ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 144.

⁴⁷ For a history of LDS Church correlation, see Daymon Mickel Smith, *The Last Shall Be First And The First Shall Be Last: Discourse and Mormon History* (CreateSpace, 2010).

facilitate its primary evangelical mandate among conservative North American Christians; (b) the pragmatic nature of its corporate leadership, who have progressively moved away from the mystical theological innovations of their founder, Joseph Smith; (c) growth in a centralized religion that claims exclusive access to restored truth, which church leaders perceived to require the simplification and standardization of all institutional materials; and (d) assist their maintenance of rigid gender roles, which are complicated by the doctrines under discussion here. However, while this pragmatism and simplification may appeal to more pragmatic Latter-day Saints and those who consider every action the Church takes as being directly mandated by God, no official revelations have been announced to supersede the complex theological ideas at the heart of the tradition that get embodied in the experience of individuals and negotiated through twenty-first-century LDS popular culture.

For instance, D. Michael Quinn has traced the historical trajectory of magical thought and practice in Mormonism, including its decline. According to Quinn, *magic* might not be an indigenous Mormon term now, but it once was. Like other Americans of his time, Joseph Smith did, in fact, engage in various forms of divination (primarily divining rods and seer stones); he did believe in and practice astrology; he did inherit and keep artifacts used in ceremonial magic. However, it is significant that, while other Americans were blending folk magic with Christianity, Smith actually used implements of folk magic to create a successful major religion. Quinn's recovery of Mormonism's original magical worldview, including Smith's use of magical implements to translate the Book of Mormon, generated important apologetic and academic reflection on the role of magic in the development of

Mormonism. In general, Smith and other church leaders' use of magic has been acknowledged by apologists but has been dismissed as irrelevant, as Smith progressively gained more knowledge and understanding about the gospel truths he was restoring. However, according to historian Alan Taylor, rather than renounce magic, "Mormon leaders have . . . steadily renamed, consolidated, centralized, and regulated its practice."⁴⁸

Though as a historian Quinn's primary concern is not with today's Mormonism, he does state that by the early twentieth-century, "identifiable magical practices and beliefs" had not only declined but were in fact nonexistent for most Mormons (Ibid., 319.) He points to the two main reasons for that as being the high levels of *secular* education and scientific worldview among Mormons; the Church's increasing obsession with authority and conformity; and the assumption that most converts to the LDS Church come not as seekers but from denominational Christianity. Quinn also makes the curious assertion that "liberal Mormons [and other members who are anti-institutional or otherwise critical of church leaders] are rarely attracted to folk religion and folk magic, despite the latter's anti-institutional emphasis" (Ibid.). This may have been true at the time when Quinn first published his analysis (1987); but this was before the full protestantizing effects of correlation were felt across Mormon America and removed most of Mormonism's magic from plain view, before the New Spirituality developed fully as the predominant spiritual milieu, and before Mormons had the factual history of the development of their Church that Quinn provided as a cultural resource. Thus, I clearly build on the vital

⁴⁸ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 320.

historiographical work Quinn has done while showing that “magic” is alive not only in the literal practice of spellwork among Mormon Pagans but also in the healing and divinatory practices of the women highlighted here. While Mormonism can be seen as a nineteenth-century restorationist movement that has adapted and assimilated socio-culturally and correlated and routinized its programs, it has *not* yet become something wholly other *doctrinally* than it was then: an eclectic synthesis of already existing occult and esoteric ideas. Thus, because institutional space for exploring “the mysteries,” has dramatically declined, church members for whom this correlation and routinization are not satisfying are forced to find or create alternative opportunities for that exploration.⁴⁹ In part, those forums are the data for this project. Some participants in this study do not see themselves as acting outside of orthodox Mormonism at all but merely being in action and putting it into practice—a position that is understandable, even if practitioners are unfamiliar with the revisionist history that has made early esoteric and hermetic Mormonism available to interested seekers. This is the place from which Bennion’s deprived double-dippers step outside Mormonism to supplement their Mormon experience.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The Encyclopedia of Mormonism entry on “the mysteries” states, “In latter-day scripture the word ‘mysteries’ typically has three interrelated meanings. First, the mysteries consist of significant truths about God and his works. Second, faithful, obedient members of the Church will be given this sacred knowledge through revelation. Finally, those who are not made partakers of this special understanding will not attain the same glory as those who are. Understanding the mysteries of God is a gospel privilege for the reverent who serve God faithfully (D&C 76:1-10; cf. 1 Ne. 10:17-19; Moses 1:5).” Clark D. Webb, “Mysteries of God,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Publications, 2001), <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/EoM/id/4391/show/3973>.

⁵⁰ Stack, “LDS ‘Double Dippers’ Hungry.”

Significance

This dissertation is primarily an investigation of particular ways of being “Mormon” in America that intersect with the New Spirituality. However, this project contributes to the development of several other conversations inside of religious studies. Mormon, New Age, and Contemporary Pagan studies are all relatively new religious studies subfields. My goal is to extend current knowledge in all three of these fields, given that I will be illuminating some of the places at which they overlap under the *New Spirituality* umbrella. James R. Lewis proposes that the prospects for New Age studies lie in several key areas: A renewed and sustainable agenda for New Age Studies would include additional localized ethnographies, popular culture analyses, and closer attention to gender, ethnicity, and age cohort as mechanisms of symbolization and demographic transmission.⁵¹ This project contributes to New Age Studies in at least three of those categories. Though my work here is not a full ethnography of a discrete group of people, it will include ethnographic data to illustrate particular examples of the lived New Age Mormon blended experience. In addition, attention to gender and age (or generation) is important to the project.

These prospects exist simultaneously for Mormon and Contemporary Pagan studies. Because it has been so focused on revisionist histories, studies of Mormonism lack a similar sustained attention to its contemporary ethnic diversity, material culture (except for at least one notable exception, Colleen McDannell’s

⁵¹ James R Lewis, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 483.

chapter on Mormon temple garments in her book *Material Christianity*⁵²), and comparison. Except for doctrinal contrasts with traditional Christianity (mostly by apologists and detractors) and historical comparisons with other nineteenth-century “heresies,” little to no comparative work has been done on Mormonism. This is currently changing as more and more comparisons are being made between Mormonism and Islam and Latter-day Saints recognize common social and cultural sympathies.⁵³ However, no major academic study like this project has ever been done. The project also adds to our understanding of religion as ethnicity by looking at the processes by which the individual’s experience of Mormonism as an ethnicity might change through its synthesis of New Age and Neopagan ideas and practices.⁵⁴

Finally, this study poses some new questions about Mormon identity. Beyond the debate over whether Mormons are Christians, when speaking of Mormon identity one must also consider other layers of consciousness, which set Mormons apart from non-Mormons as well as from each other.⁵⁵ With regard to the women in

⁵² Colleen McDannell, “Mormon Garments: Sacred Clothing and the Body,” in *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 198–221.

⁵³ David Haldane, “U.S. Muslims Share Friendship, Similar Values with Mormons,” *Los Angeles Times Articles* (Los Angeles, CA, April 2, 2008), digital edition, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/02/local/me-morlims2>. Given that comparison, it is interesting that sixty-three percent of Mormons report their perception that Mormonism is least similar to Islam than it is to Catholicism, evangelical Protestantism, and Judaism. Mormons see their tradition as being most like the latter two religions. See Gregory Smith, et al., *Mormons in America* (Washington, DC: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, January 12, 2012), http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Christian/Mormon/Mormons%20in%20America.pdf.

⁵⁴ TT, “The Magical Connection Between Mormonism and Early Christianity: Faith-Promoting Rumor,” *Patheos*, April 21, 2010, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithpromotingrumor/2010/04/the-magical-connection-between-mormonism-and-early-christianity/>.

⁵⁵ African American W. E. B. Du Bois famously articulated the African American experience of “double consciousness,” which he used to refer to “the double life every American Negro must

this study, for instance, we want to know what it means to be (a) a woman in a patriarchal church; (b) believing and compliant—or compliant but not believing; and/or (c) a temple-endowed woman who may or may not still hold a temple recommend. As Paul M. Edwards argues, “Much of what is being written in Mormon history answers questions that are no longer being asked. The expanded contribution we can make lies in understanding the nature of the questions to be asked.”⁵⁶ This dissertation asks not what happened in the past but how the past informs how these LDS women create innovative identities while pursuing very Mormon questions.

Contemporary Pagan Studies, the newest of the abovementioned fields, is engaged in the creative act of constituting itself while simultaneously struggling to legitimize its existence as a separate field outside the New Religious Movements and/or New Age categories. As the field develops, scholars are becoming more aware of distinctions within a religious category that is at least as complex as and even less structured and centralized than, for instance, Hinduism. Thus, contributions to Pagan Studies will turn sustained attention to the same diversities that Lewis calls for in New Age Studies. Besides my insights into what some of the participants in this study call “Mormon Pagans,” any new knowledge about what it

live, as a Negro and as an American,” or the experience of subordination and marginalization. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Du Bois on Religion*, ed. Phil Zuckerman (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000), 54. Others, such as Womanists, other women of color, members of the LGBT community, and the disabled have adapted that concept to articulate their own particular experience of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. Here I simply employ the idea of multiple layers of Mormon identity that requires Mormons and LDS women in particular to negotiate their identity in relation to outsiders as well as insiders.

⁵⁶ Paul M. Edwards, “The Irony of Mormon History,” in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 23.

means to claim any kind of synthesized Pagan identity will certainly contribute to this mandate.

Similarly, this project highlights particular aspects of the New Spirituality, the larger descriptive umbrella under which much of North American spirituality occurs. The New Spirituality is inherently worthy of the scholarly gaze because it has become the American religious mainstream. While neither New Age nor contemporary Paganism has developed the same kinds of structures that have been created by the LDS Church, they are both heavy contributors to the current spiritual milieu and thus demand sustained attention. (In fact, Paganism was seventh in the top ten organized religions in the United States in 2001.⁵⁷) As more Americans choose Pagan paths, observers will be able to watch them address legal and cultural challenges to their religious legitimacy, which will contribute to our understanding of twenty-first-century First Amendment conflicts (e.g. the battle over the pentacle as an approved symbol on the gravestones of war dead); and as publishing companies generate materials and parents create structures by which they can pass on their Pagan traditions to a second and third generation, academic work can illuminate the process of religious change in this area. More important, however, is the fact that deeper understanding of what is actually happening in American public life has the capacity to create tolerance and ultimately an increased state of pluralism not just in America but globally—especially in relation to “controversial” expressions of religion.

Finally, it is no longer feasible to withhold attention from or refuse to convey legitimacy on nuanced studies of contemporary Mormonism. At this moment the

⁵⁷ Kosmin and Keysar, “ARIS.”

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the fourth largest religious group in America, and LDS Church growth has generated debate over whether or not Mormonism constitutes the next world religion.⁵⁸ Because of the pursuit of the Republican Party's presidential nomination by two LDS men, Mitt Romney and John Huntsman, and the award winning *The Book of Mormon* musical,⁵⁹ this has been cast as a "Mormon Moment." Neither, however, is it acceptable to acknowledge the voice of the LDS Church as the only authoritative arbitrator of Mormon identity. Despite church rhetoric emphasizing obedience and a shared verbal (and physical) language that leaves the impression of a monolithic identity, the Mormon experience is, in fact, individual and therefore varied. Finally, with Mormon polygamists on the border of Utah and Arizona and in their new compounds in Texas and Canada forcing our pluralistic societies to revisit their commitment to religious tolerance, the LDS Church ongoingly engages in both overt and not widely known legal and emotional battles to distinguish itself as the only legitimate repository of Mormon tradition.

Self-Situating

My interest in Mormonism and the New Spirituality began with my encounter with Wouter Hanegraaff's book *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*.⁶⁰ In Hanegraaff's identification of

⁵⁸ See Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

⁵⁹ *The Book of Mormon*, written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, lyrics by Robert Lopez and Matt Stone, choreography by Casey Nicholaw, opened on Broadway in the Eugene O'Neil Theater March 24, 2011. It won the Tony Award for Best Musical in 2011, and it also won in thirteen other Tony categories. See <http://www.bookofmormonbroadway.com/home.php>.

⁶⁰ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*.

channeling, reincarnation, personal growth and spiritual healing, New Age science, and “neopaganism” as major trends in New Age, I recognized interesting analogies in Mormon doctrine and practice. Though much work has been done on New Age since this important text (especially to critique the New Age category and to clarify the distinctions between it and contemporary Paganism), my own comparative work is still largely informed by the resonance I saw between those categories and their Mormon analogies. Since 2002, I have participated as an insider at Mormon Studies symposia designed to explore the nature of Mormon identity and its relationship to New Age and contemporary Pagan ideas and practices.

I converted to Mormonism in my teens and maintain membership in the LDS Church, though I am not now currently active in my local LDS community. What attracted me to Mormonism were its communalism, concept of God, and the magic of its doctrines: eternal progression;⁶¹ the aliveness of the natural world; the ready availability of personal revelation. In addition, I also maintain a hybrid identity based on my participation in some of the communities described in this project. In 1978, at the age of twenty-one, I shared what I saw as the magic of the temple by participating in ordinances of washing and anointing and receiving a new name that would someday gain me entrance into celestial glory and eventual godhood. I was endowed to become a priestess to the Most High and was sealed (married for time

⁶¹ Mormons have traditionally believed that because human beings are literally the children of (meaning the same species as) God, they can, over long periods of time, evolve or progress into godhood.

and eternity) to a man by the mysterious power of the Mormon priesthood to knit families together forever.⁶²

In order to assimilate as an adult Mormon, I followed many of the LDS women of my late-Boomer generation in keeping gardens, canning that produce, growing herbs, and learning herbal remedies like their pioneer forebears, none of which had been a part of my own family-of-origin experience. Whether making herbal tinctures or selling and consuming, for instance, Sunrider Herbs, the Mormons I've known in virtually every place I have lived inevitably relate their activities to the Word of Wisdom, which Mormons believe is a revelation given to Joseph Smith to govern the health of God's people, and their desire to treat their bodies as temples of their spirits, their future habitation as gods and goddesses. I am also thoroughly steeped in Mormonism's privileging and cultivation of paranormal experience. Church talks and lesson materials are routinely rich with magical stories of dreams, visitations, voices, appearances of angels and other beings, and other mystical experiences that connect church members to the veiled world that exists here on this earth and by which they make sense of their lives.

⁶² Like most LDS women, I obeyed church instruction to ignore the women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s and regarded feminism with suspicion and remained largely untouched by it, despite ongoing negative experiences with priesthood authority. My first temple marriage ended in 1981, after only three years, largely because I discovered my spouse was gay. I experienced the unsympathetic attitudes of my local leadership (who blamed me for his homosexuality) and the subsequent humiliating post-divorce process of appealing to the LDS Church presidency for a cancellation of our temple sealing so that I could marry and be sealed to my current husband. Mormons are trained from birth to reject as potential spouses those to whom they may not be sealed, for whatever reason. While men may be sealed to multiple spouses, all of whom will be their eternal partners in the celestial kingdom, women may only be sealed to one spouse at a time. Without the cancellation of sealing I was virtually unmarriageable, and my eternal potential for exaltation was in jeopardy. Thus, I have experienced first-hand the imbalance of power inherent in LDS Church patriarchal conventions.

In addition, a major relocation to the east coast and subsequent health problems led me to volunteer in a holistic health association in the mid-1990s—associations that introduced me to the world of psychics, tarot cards, goddess spirituality, and other earth-based spiritualities. Seeking holistic solutions for my own physical healing simultaneously required me to reconcile my gendered experience of Mormonism. In 1993, I was fortunate enough to move into the LDS Princeton Second Ward, the largely progressive members of which were Princeton University students, faculty, and other professional members of the community. It was at this point that I was introduced to the feminist writings coming out of the Mormon intellectual community, including Sunstone Educational Foundation’s magazine and symposia, and *Exponent II*, a modern version of *Woman’s Exponent*, the late nineteenth- early twentieth-century LDS women’s independent feminist newspaper. During this time, D. Michael Quinn, Margaret and Paul Toscano, Janice Allred, Maxine Hanks, and Lynn Whitesides were recovering and analyzing the magical origins of Mormonism and the history of early Mormon women’s healing practices, advocating new interpretations of LDS women’s relationship to priesthood power and authority, and highlighting, elaborating, and advocating that the LDS Church and its members should have access to their Mother in Heaven.⁶³

After the actions taken against them by the LDS Church in 1993, researching, writing, and teaching about Mormonism became a minefield littered with the spoiled identities of the excommunicated and disfellowshipped, and much

⁶³ All those listed above, except for Whitesides, were ultimately excommunicated from the LDS Church for their work on these and other topics, which generated at least a decade of fear among Mormon scholars of researching and writing about women’s issues.

has been written in academic, journalistic, and popular literature about the tension in Mormonism between the Mormon commitment to and quest for knowledge and the LDS Church's historically varied responses to intellectual freedom.⁶⁴ In part, this controversy is the natural result of Mormonism's growth, enhanced respectability derived from its assimilation into American social cultural mainstream, and the increasing wealth, power, and notoriety of its members. Daniel Golden of the Wall Street Journal found that, despite the high quality of his work and his reputation as a scholar, Quinn is unable to get a regular university teaching job because of his status as an excommunicated members of the notorious September Six:

Mr. Quinn's struggles reflect the rising influence of religious groups over the teaching of their faiths at secular colleges, despite concerns about academic freedom. U.S. universities have usually hired religious-studies professors regardless of whether they practiced or admired the faiths they researched. But some universities are "bending" to the views of private donors and state legislators by hiring the faithful.⁶⁵

It should be clear, then, that this particular stereotype is more or less correct: Notwithstanding the Pew Forum's results regarding possibilities for interpreting the Church's mission, most Latter-day Saints appear to take very seriously the institutional church's claim to be the only legitimate representative of Jesus Christ and consider criticism of the church or its leaders as apostasy. Dorothy Allred Solomon, who grew up in a fundamentalist Mormon polygamist group but is

⁶⁴ For an academic understanding of LDS Church attitudes about dissent, see Roger D Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds., *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and Philip Lindholm, ed., *Latter-Day Dissent: At the Crossroads of Intellectual Inquiry and Ecclesiastical Authority* (Greg Kofford Books, Inc., 2011). See also Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Touchstone ed. (New York: Touchstone, 1986).

⁶⁵ Daniel Golden, "In Religion Studies, Universities Bend to Views of Faithful," *Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 2006, sec. Higher Learning.

currently a believing and practicing member of the LDS Church, writes about this issue. She speaks directly to women's fear of encroaching on priesthood turf and/or even just writing or speaking publicly about LDS women's issues. With regard to an LDS midwife who anoints and heals laboring women with a vial of healing oil consecrated by her husband, Solomon notes the power of the Mormon sense of calling or foreordination in the face of ingrained ways of being for LDS women.

Layne tells me not to reveal her real name, for she could get in a lot of trouble for her practice of anointing the sick and afflicted when necessary. Something inside me groans at this knowledge. Layne loves the church, loves Jesus, loves Heavenly Father. She loves people. She's about as far from radical as a human being can get—except when it comes to fulfilling her calling.⁶⁶

Over the last fifteen years I have experienced similar fear, both personally and as a scholar. I have also encountered it among most of the women who participated in this project. In the summer of 2007, one LDS woman who does healing with Reiki said, "I'll talk to you, but a part of me wishes you wouldn't do this. You will draw attention to us and then the church will feel compelled to come out against us."

To a large extent, then, mine is a deliberately critical and subversive project. This impulse is immediately evident in my obvious refusal to follow the style guide provided at the Church's newsroom website. The battle over Mormon identity involves an institutional effort to control how scholars and journalists talk about the Church and its members. The guide specifically asks that we not use "LDS Church" when referring to the Church and requests we use either its full name, "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," or the abbreviation "The Church of Jesus

⁶⁶ Solomon, *The Sisterhood*, 186–87.

Christ.”⁶⁷ I reject this abbreviation because it is not used by Church members when describing their affiliation and so occurs to me as an artificial attempt to elide its history. I similarly reject its assertion that “when referring to people or organizations that practice polygamy, the terms ‘Mormons,’ ‘Mormon fundamentalist,’ ‘Mormon dissidents,’ etc. are incorrect.” The Associated Press Stylebook may in fact note that “the term Mormon is not properly applied to the other . . . churches that resulted from the split after [Joseph] Smith's death”; however, I am not a journalist and my concern here is not with facilitating the Church’s hegemony over Mormon identity.

I am committed to self-reflexivity and personal openness and have developed reciprocal relationships with the women I have come to know through this project. Therefore, I take very seriously my commitment to their stories and I have certain critical goals that include speaking about them to others in a way that empowers them; validating their religious and spiritual choices; questioning commonsense assumptions about the natures of Mormonism and the New Spirituality and their possible relationship to each other; and dissuading others from obsolete ways of thinking about these traditions. Ultimately, my goal here is not to argue that all Mormons should be practicing energy healing, believing in reincarnation, following the pagan circle of the year with their families, or reading tarot cards in order to be authentic Mormons. Neither do I argue that most Mormons participate in these beliefs and practices; rather, I advocate an understanding of Mormonism that legitimizes those beliefs and practices in their own context.

⁶⁷ “Style Guide: The Name of the Church,” *Newsroom.lds.org*, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://newsroom.lds.org/style-guide>.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation contains six chapters. Apart from Chapter 1, this introduction, I have included four subsequent chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 2, “Mormonism and New Spirituality: Common Historical and Epistemological Roots,” lays the basis for understanding the intersection of Mormonism and the New Spirituality. It recounts their shared historical origins and compares epistemological commitments. Focusing mainly on early Mormonism and Spiritualism, this analysis makes clear their overlapping ways of knowing that persist into the twenty-first century, despite the evolution of the LDS Church into a less “mystical” and more “protestant” Christian denomination. For instance, the LDS commitment to continuing revelation and inspiration are the main methods by which the LDS Church legitimizes its existence and maintains its authority over its members. Other significant practices by which Mormons know what they know include patriarchal blessings (a priesthood ordinance) and the concept of the *liabona*, a divinatory tool that originates in the Book of Mormon text. All of these tools participate in the individualistic pursuit of what Mormons call “further light and knowledge,” which corresponds to a remarkably similar search for ultimate truth through one’s self-development through tarot readings and other divinatory tools in the New Spirituality. These commonalities help explain the persistent association of Mormonism with New Age and contemporary Paganism and their opposition by (especially) conservative American Christians.

Chapter 3, “Embracing the Light: Ways of Knowing in Mormonism and the New Spirituality,” expands on the epistemological frameworks developed in Chapter 2, in order to compare those Mormon ways of knowing as analogies for the specific

New Age practice of channeling. In particular it looks at how at the individual level these beliefs and practices all overlap in the Mormon imagination as *personal revelation*. The idea of personal revelation, which is thought by Mormons to come through the Holy Ghost, can be expanded to include channeling and other forms of divination and mediumship as authentic practices. At the most basic level of comparison, the Holy Ghost can be seen as the source that gets “channeled” by Mormons in response to their personal needs and questions. However, it is even more interesting to identify and explore the channels through which Mormons gain access to the spirit world. This ability to identify a correct path sets the stage for understanding subsequent chapters and how believing Mormons legitimate their extra-Mormon activities. To that end, this chapter includes a comparison of some channeled materials that project participants find most congruent with Mormon doctrine and current folk beliefs: (a) *A Course in Miracles*,⁶⁸ Abraham-Hicks, and Ramtha’s *The White Book*;⁶⁹ (b) examples of women with Mormon backgrounds who in some way are involved in the channeling phenomenon and explain how they interpret the concept of channeling when integrating it into their system of belief and practice; and (c) a discussion of their attitudes about Mormonism and the LDS Church and their struggle with concerns about legitimacy.

Chapter 4, “Molly Mormons Can Be Reiki Masters Too?: Healing and Wholeness in Mormonism and the New Spirituality,” discusses the relationship of modern Mormonism to science and healing, emphasizing some of the reasons for

⁶⁸ Foundation for Inner Peace, *A Course in Miracles*, 3rd ed. (Mill Valley, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace, 2008).

⁶⁹ Ramtha, *Ramtha: The White Book*, Revised & enlarged. (Yelm, Washington: JZK Publishing, 2005).

why Mormons might seek spiritual and physical healing alternatives outside of Mormonism. To a large extent, a general “crisis” of Mormon identity is one legacy of recently deceased church president Gordon B. Hinckley. During his tenure, Hinckley (who was professionally trained in journalism and public relations) made concerted efforts to rehabilitate Mormon identity by eliding the church’s more controversial doctrines. These public statements have generated ongoing debate among Mormons at all levels of activity about the nature of continuing revelation and what Mormons really *should* believe about the nature of human beings and the Divine.

These ambiguities also affect how Mormons feel about their access to spiritual and physical healing. In particular, this occurs because in Mormonism spiritual, psychological, and physical healing is directly associated with the atonement of Jesus Christ and his priesthood power. This chapter discusses the routinization of this power in priesthood operations such as fathers’ blessings, blessings from local leaders such as the bishop (who is considered to be the father of the ward, or local congregation), and an individual’s once-only patriarchal blessing, all of which are integral aspects of LDS practice as well as constituting part of the framework for Mormon cosmology and cosmogony. The chapter also lays out the increasing association of LDS priesthood with administration of church offices as opposed to healing and revelation. Thus, though men still give healing blessings and church presidents and apostles still claim the titles of prophet, seer, and revelator, male priesthood has in fact become more discrete and managerial as opposed to prophetic and curative. Once empowered to learn to become Gods, Mormons are less likely to expect actual healing at the hands of priesthood-holding brethren and so look into other healing systems to supplement or replace priesthood blessings.

With regard to spiritual, physical, and psychological healing, then, this chapter looks at the women in my study who participate in healing practices such as Reiki, Spiritual Response Therapy (SRT), past life regression therapy, hypnotherapy, shamanic journeying, Rapid Eye Technology (RET), Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), crystals, herbs, oils, and flower remedies. I illuminate the experiences behind and the methods by which they came to choose specific healing modalities. As in the previous and forthcoming chapters, I will detail the issues related to identity and legitimacy, both at the individual and institutional levels. I will identify the degree to which individuals consider themselves to be operating out of a Mormon paradigm and the ways in which they authorize their choices and activities. In part, this relates to how they perceive themselves in relation to the concept of the Molly Mormon, the woman who one participant in the study calls “a woman who submits gracefully to LDS Church patriarchy and strives toward perfection with a pharisaical intensity.” Sharing their stories illuminates the ways in which these practices are strategies for healing and female empowerment, wherever they perceive themselves to be on the spectrum of belief or in relation to (i.e. in concert with or in opposition to) LDS priesthood power and authority. I ultimately argue that, at least for believing Mormons, these healing activities and the beliefs that support them are at least one response to the secularization of Mormonism described above.

Chapter 5, “The Goddess is Alive and Magick is Afoot”: The Mormon Pagan Experience,” outlines Mormon analogies of contemporary Paganism and the existence of what I call Mormon Pagans, LDS women who claim a religious identity under the Neopagan umbrella. As I have done in previous chapters, I will explore the incidence of these analogies along the spectrum of Mormon belief and practice,

mapping the lived experience of LDS women who practice some form of magic, belong to witches' covens, and/or celebrate full moons and other holidays on the earth-based Pagan ritual calendar. Because most traditions under the Pagan umbrella acknowledge more than one deity or worship some form of the masculine and feminine divine principles, these Mormon Pagans are able to maintain LDS scriptural understandings of the uncreated spiritual nature of the earth and all beings on it. More importantly, they are also able to claim and articulate the Mormon concept of a Heavenly Mother.

Chapter 6, the Conclusion, will review the arguments and conclusions laid out in this study and assert their significance and contribution to our understanding of Mormonism and religion in America. Ultimately, the LDS women introduced here blend Mormonism with New Spirituality elements as they navigate their gendered experience in the LDS Church. As they embark on this journey as adults, they encounter their desire for a relationship with their Heavenly Mother and/or they are troubled by her institutional role as it appears to mirror their own. This process inevitably takes them outside of institutional Mormonism because the Church Correlation Program has divested Church curricula of much of their doctrinal depth. Regardless, LDS women create these hybrid identities while maintaining affiliation with the Church because Mormon doctrine easily accommodates their hybridity; therefore, they are able to make them congruent with their desire to maintain their membership in the LDS Church.

Summary

Ultimately, this dissertation proposes a focus on religious hybridity with an emphasis on gender and the negotiation of power deriving from patriarchal religious

authority. These chapters explore how Mormon women incorporate the New Spirituality into their already existing religious identities and create hybrid identities based on multiple sources. It will focus on processes and discourses of religious adaptation and synthesis through which these LDS women creatively and provocatively challenge LDS Church formal power structures.

Chapter 2

MORMONISM AND THE NEW SPIRITUALITY: COMMON HISTORICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ROOTS

Chapter 1 laid the groundwork for our investigation of Mormonism and the New Spirituality by introducing the project, methodology, and its relevance to the field of religious studies. Chapter 2 briefly reflects on their shared historical roots and illuminates their modern epistemological commitments. The encounter of Mormonism with Spiritualism in the decades after Joseph Smith's death especially illustrates their shared commonalities, the comparison of which can be extended into the examination of twenty-first-century Mormonism and the New Spirituality. Looking at these traditions' shared pursuit of truth, light, and knowledge gives us a foundation for understanding the theological and cultural worldview out of which the women in the forthcoming chapters create their blended identities.

At first glance, Mormonism and the New Spirituality may seem to have few apparent commonalities. The LDS Church is a centralized, hierarchical, and patriarchal religious institution with a total membership of just over fourteen million. On the other hand, the New Spirituality is radically decentralized, individualistic, and more open to explicit feminist concerns. While Mormonism in other countries is more likely to be at least somewhat shaped by the varied socio-cultural experiences of its members in their local context, American Mormons have generally been more likely to at least ostensibly endorse the conservative corporate identity promoted by

the Utah-based Church.⁷⁰ Mormon doctrine may change through continuing revelation; therefore, Mormonism is generally more concerned with orthopraxy than orthodoxy. The most basic LDS practices signifying “activity” in the LDS Church include church attendance, payment of tithes and offerings, and the faithful acceptance and performance of church jobs, or “callings.” In contrast, though some metaphysical-based churches are quite popular (e.g. Unity churches⁷¹), the New Spirituality (especially as expressed through New Age concerns) is less likely to involve formal church membership and proscribed requirements for affiliation. Its practitioners and proponents are more likely to attend a weekend workshop or a private session with a specialist for a psychic reading, energy healing, or astrology chart than they are to attend church services.

We can still compare Mormonism and the New Spirituality, however, by examining their shared epistemic values.⁷² Harold Bloom would identify as first among those qualities a distinctly American “corporate Gnosis”: the importance of

⁷⁰ This may be changing. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many Mormons disagree with tactics the Church used in its cross-country support of laws and constitutional amendments that would outlaw same-sex marriage. Some members have actually left the Church because of this institutional activism. In addition, LDS democrats are becoming more vocal and have begun developing strategies for appealing to LDS republicans who are disillusioned by the campaign against same-sex marriage and the immigration debate. See David Montero, “What Are Mormons’ Views on Illegal Immigration?,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, October 6, 2011), digital edition, <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/politics/52681984-90/church-immigration-issue-lds.html.csp>; and Karen Grigsby Bates, “Mormons Divided On Same-Sex Marriage Issue,” *NPR.org*, November 3, 2008, sec. Day to Day, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96405866>.

⁷¹ Charles and Myrtle Fillmore founded the Unity in the late nineteenth century. It was an expression of the New Thought movement. For a brief explication of these connections, see Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 275–329. See also Neal Vahle, *The Unity Movement: Its Evolution and Spiritual Teaching* (Templeton Foundation Press, 2002).

⁷² Employing what Reza Lahroodi calls “collective or group virtue statements,” or epistemic virtues, we can point to “epistemically valuable qualities or characteristics” that overlap in Mormonism and the New Spirituality. Reza Lahroodi, “Collective Epistemic Virtues,” *Social Epistemology* 21, no. 3 (September 2007): 283, <http://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/doi/abs/10.1080/02691720701674122>.

knowing the truth.⁷³ *Gnosis*, a Greek word meaning “knowledge,” is interpreted today as having to do with personal inner insight, intuition, wisdom, and light—all of which are vital commodities in Mormonism and the New Spirituality. These values are a direct expression of the ways in which these two traditions sacralize the self and locate authority in the individual’s personal experience. Their epistemologies are grounded in embodied action, emphasizing the importance of practices that facilitate higher knowledge and understanding—and ultimately transformation. LDS practices like service, prayer and scripture reading refine individuals, making them more Christ-like and ultimately worthy of exaltation. New Agers and contemporary Pagans, for instance, are committed to similar transformation, mainly through personal but also group practices that include tarot readings, channeling sessions and guided meditation, which connect them to spiritual beings with higher knowledge, help facilitate physical, emotional, and environmental healing, alter their level of consciousness and ultimately enable them to access and/or develop their divine selves.

It makes sense that Mormonism and the New Spirituality share certain epistemological commonalities, given that they are connected historically by a common nineteenth-century American east coast metaphysical background, out of which also grew Transcendentalism (1830s and 1840s), Adventism (1840s), Spiritualism (1848), the Theosophical Society (1875), Christian Science (1879), and New Thought (mid- to late-1800s). With freemasonry, Swedenborgianism,

⁷³ Bloom famously argued that, alongside Christian Science, Seventh-day Adventism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Pentecostalism, Mormonism is an indigenous expression of “the American Gnosis.” Harold Bloom, *The American Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Chu Hartley Publishers, 2006), 8, 284.

divination, and folk magic as raw materials, Joseph Smith drank from the nineteenth-century well of the American metaphysical or “alternative” tradition, which had “no code of conduct, central doctrine, single sacred text, organized body, or central leadership.”⁷⁴ Catherine Albanese points to the importance of this environment on Joseph Smith and other religious innovators of the time, seeing Smith as “a dazzling display of the kind of combinativeness that would be the preeminent feature of American metaphysical religion.”⁷⁵

This historical narrative helps explain the resonance between Mormonism, New Age, and contemporary Pagan streams of the New Spirituality. While New Age and contemporary Paganism are modern movements that developed in the twentieth century, in the U.S. and Western Europe, it is important to recognize their historical development out of the modern (nineteenth century) hermetic revival, with which Joseph Smith also experimented as he formulated the foundational elements of Mormon cosmology.⁷⁶ Smith’s early activities included divining for water and the use of peep stones to find lost objects and, as his theology matured, he studied Kabbalah, astrology, and some aspects of ritual magic.⁷⁷ New Age and contemporary Paganism incorporated elements of the modern theosophical tradition and American

⁷⁴ Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 39.

⁷⁵ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 149.

⁷⁶ For an account of the connections between Hermeticism and Mormonism, see John L. Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷⁷ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. Quinn details, for instance, Smith’s use of magic circles (46-47, 70), and “implements of ritual magic,” such as magic daggers (70-72), magic parchments (98, 103-116), and talismans (81-90).

Transcendentalism, both of whose roots are in European occult traditions such as Kabbalah, Christian theosophy, Rosecrucianism, alchemy, and freemasonry. For instance, they both inherited the concepts of ascended masters and the astral plane from Helena Blavatsky's Theosophical Society.⁷⁸ Similarly, the occult tradition was vital to the origins of Mormonism. Just as Joseph Smith's Plan of Salvation contains the obvious hermetic marks of Emanuel Swedenborg's perfected angels and multiple heavens, what Albanese characterizes as the Hermetic and Swedenborgian project of human progression writ large,⁷⁹ Smith also joined the Mormon-founded masonic lodge in the Mormon town of Nauvoo, Illinois and explicitly modeled LDS temple rituals after masonic rites (ibid., 137-38).⁸⁰

In addition, while nineteenth-century Spiritualism is an especially important antecedent to both New Age and contemporary Paganism, it was also an important rival to early Mormonism because of their shared occult and metaphysical foundations and interests. Albanese characterizes both Spiritualism and Mormonism as embodiments of the four characteristics of her definition of metaphysical religion: first, "preoccupation with mind and its powers"; second, commitment to cosmologies based on correspondences (macrocosmic-microcosmic, or "as above, then so below"); third, concern with movement, motion, and progression—of the spheres and of the human being—toward reuniting the micro with the macro,

⁷⁸ Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 59.

⁷⁹ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 144.

⁸⁰ For a nuanced analysis of the Mormon concept of heaven, see Colleen McDannell, and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History*, Second Edition, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 313–322. This text also contains a chapter on Swedenborg, through who emerged the modern view of heaven (181–227).

human beings reunited “to their parent and/or true being”; and fourth, a soteriological reordering or reframing of salvation-as-healing from “the sin of separation,” toward “making wounded people whole” in a “felt and physical” way.⁸¹ A preoccupation with mind and its powers involves privileging cognitive abilities like clairvoyance as a way of knowing (seeing or perceiving things that are beyond the range of normal human senses), including visual, tactile, auditory and other physical signs, as well as the ability to physically transform or manipulate the material world. Similarly, a cosmology of correspondences is usually based on the idea that the microcosm (the human or natural world) is made of the same stuff as the macrocosm and that human beings can, through attaining special knowledge, move toward physical and spiritual wholeness or perfection, healing the breach between the worlds.

Precursors: Nineteenth-century Mormonism and Spiritualism

Many reasons existed for nineteenth-century Americans’ (including Mormons’) interest in Spiritualism. The Civil War as an instrument of mass death, for instance, brought people face to face with widespread and inconsolable loss. Bereaved Americans on both sides of the conflict were desperate to know what had happened to their loved ones. Moreover, doubts about Calvinist notions of salvation and high mortality rates from disease had people look to Spiritualism for proof that their friends and family members were neither suffering, nor were they lost forever.⁸²

⁸¹ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 13–15.

⁸² According to Drew Gilpin Faust, the Civil War made the articulation of the afterlife as “an eternal family reunion” all the more urgent. Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, Reprint (New York: Vintage, 2009), 180. See Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 211. According to Weisberg, the same phenomenon occurred during World War I (264).

The LDS Church's encounter with Spiritualism was its first major negative experience with hermetic competitors. With Smith no longer the driving force in Mormonism after his death in 1848, other more pragmatic personalities like Brigham Young, whose interest in folk magic appears to have fluctuated, began to contend with some Mormons' participation in séances and other spiritualistic activities.⁸³ Both Mormonism and Spiritualism made similar claims to direct connection with the unseen world; thus, they appealed to the same population: those who were looking to communicate with God.⁸⁴ Davis Bitton (a believing Mormon) neatly explicates this common interest from the Mormon perspective:

Was modern revelation speaking to modern needs desired? Mormonism had it. What about personal contact with God and departed spirits? Mormonism allowed for such encounters and, under the necessary controls, even encouraged them in the form of dreams and individual revelations for the guidance of the individual. The longing for contact with departed loved ones...was given rich fulfillment in genealogy and temple work, which was seen and experienced as an activity that actually did something to knit the relationship with one's family. (Ibid., 93-94)

⁸³ According to Quinn, Young believed in many folk beliefs, but he was concerned that institutional support for them might have people choose astrology, for instance, over the Church as a divinatory authority. Thus, Young's private beliefs differed from many of his official positions on folk beliefs. See Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 182–188. Despite Young's pragmatism and his unwillingness to institutionally support astrology, in which many Mormons believed, the magical worldview was embedded in Mormonism by other LDS leaders, whose explications of Joseph Smith's ideas became recognized as Mormon doctrine. For an explication of Orson Pratt's spiritualist influence on Mormon doctrine, see Craig Hazen, *The Village Enlightenment in America: Popular Religion and Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 15–64. Pratt was a contemporary of Joseph Smith, Mormon apostle, and chief apologist and theologian, who "felt called to take the prophetic utterances of Joseph Smith, divine their essences, order them, and then draw them out to their logical conclusions based on his understanding of science and philosophy" (16). According to Hazen, Pratt's view sounded much like spiritualist doctrines, which softened the official Mormon response to spiritualism and other contemporary movements (57).

⁸⁴ Davis Bitton, *The Ritualization of Mormon History, and Other Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 83.

According to historian R. Laurence Moore, early Mormons and Spiritualists shared at least two other important characteristics: they had a “religious imagination that was graphic and literal,” and they were passionate about “collecting witnesses to certify the facts of their faith.”⁸⁵ The founding Mormon story, for instance, includes the testimonies of various witnesses: three who claimed to have been shown the gold plates which contained the Book of Mormon and eight who claimed to have actually handled the plates. These testimonies are printed in the opening section of the Book of Mormon. Similarly, books like *The Truths of Spiritualism: Immortality Proved beyond a Doubt by Living Witnesses*, published in 1876, contains accounts of spirit visitations and the spirits’ answers to questions posed to them by a “seer” in séances all over the country.⁸⁶ It seems natural, then, that early Mormons would be drawn to spiritualism due to the individual and experiential nature of Mormonism. Both spiritualism and Mormonism’s practice of current and ongoing revelation engaged the supernatural on an individual level, providing answers for important life questions through personal messages from the world beyond. Both Mormon and Spiritualist systems affirmed the reality of divine power and the existence of an afterlife, but both also laid claim to scientific congruence.⁸⁷

However large or small the numbers may have been of nineteenth-century Mormons who dabbled in spiritualism, most mainstream Latter-day Saints felt no

⁸⁵ Robert Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crow: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1977), 50.

⁸⁶ E. V. Wilson, *The Truths of Spiritualism: Immortality Proved Beyond A Doubt by Living Witnesses* (Chicago: Hazlitt & Reed, 1979), <http://www.archive.org/stream/truthspiritual00wilsgoog#page/n2/mode/2up>.

⁸⁷ Bitton, *The Ritualization of Mormon History*, 84–85.

need to “defect” because Mormonism offered not only the same mystical elements as spiritualism but also doctrine, ritual, and superior organization. From the Church’s perspective, unity and structure was one of its own most vital contributions. For those who sought a structured religious community, Mormonism provided a well-organized and comprehensive society that spiritualism’s performances could not supply. The distinction made by church leaders themselves pointed to Mormonism’s obvious advantage of and emphasis on unity, or what Apostle George Q. Cannon called “oneness.” Cannon reasoned that “the difference between the two systems is transparent. The Latter-day Saints are united, just as Jesus Christ prayed that His followers might be. It is true that we are not yet one as the Father and the Son are one; but we are approximating thereto. The principle of oneness is in our midst and is continually growing.” Pointing to the lack of organization and uniformity in belief in spiritualism and the Mormon preference for and commitment to harmony and accord, Cannon continued, “There is no form of belief in which they unite . . . all is division, confusion, and chaos. There is nothing to cement them together or make them one.”⁸⁸ Brigham Young expressed a similar opinion when he challenged, “Take all who are called Spiritualists and see if they can produce the order that is in the midst of this people. Here are system, order, organization, law, rule, and facts. Now see if they can produce any one of these features. They cannot. Why? Because their

⁸⁸ Ibid., 92. This carefully cultivated unity is what LDS leaders appear to capitalize on today as one important aspect of Mormon identity while claiming rich diversity among its members.

system is from beneath, while ours is perfect and is from above; one is from God, the other is from the Devil, that is all the difference.”⁸⁹

Put another way, Young did not dispute that such communication could take place; only that Spiritualism (like mesmerism) was Satan’s counterfeit for the truth found in Mormonism: “Was there ever a counterfeit without a true coin? No. Is there communication from God? Yes. From holy angels? Yes; and we have been proclaiming these facts during nearly thirty years. Are there any communications from evil spirits? Yes; and the Devil is making the people believe very strongly in revelations from the spirit world. This is called Spiritualism” (ibid.). Parley P. Pratt echoed Young’s opinion, though he was more circumscribed about the implication of taking a position on Spiritualist power. He saw clearly the dilemma facing the Church with regard to the temptation to denounce Spiritualism as false. On the one hand, affirming the Spiritualist project, or indiscriminate acceptance of “every spiritual manifestation,” could result in Saints being led astray. “Demons, foul or unclean spirits, adulterous or murderous spirits, those who love or make a lie, can communicate with beings in the flesh, as well as those who are more true and virtuous.”⁹⁰ However, the opposite option, to “deny the philosophy or the fact of spiritual communication between the living and those who have died,” would be a denial of “the very fountain from which emanated the great truths or principles which were the foundation of both the ancient and modern Church” (ibid.). Douglas

⁸⁹ John A. Widtsoe, ed., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1925), 73.

⁹⁰ Parley P. Pratt, “Oration by Elder Parley P. Pratt, Spiritual Communication,” in *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1853), 43, <http://gospelink.com/library/document/40058>.

J. Davies characterizes this dilemma as having to do with Mormonism and Spiritualism's different approaches to communication with the spirit world. Calling it a matter of interactive "flow," Davies observes that Spiritualist séances required the services of a "religious virtuoso," out from which flowed the information conveyed by the spirits. However, because each individual Mormon could perform temple rituals (already in practice when the Fox sisters had their originating experience), which defined and shaped their understanding of their relationship to the dead, they needed neither trance medium nor séance to facilitate that connection for them.⁹¹

At the same time, however, Mormon leaders saw the popularity of spiritualism as a sign of the times. In 1869, LDS apostle George Q. Cannon (1827-1901) associated the rise of spiritualism—especially as a divination practice—with Joseph Smith's "restoration of the gospel." "Fifty years ago," he wrote, "there was a great lack of faith in the supernatural; it is not so now."

Men had by science endeavored to explain away all the phenomena ascribed to spiritual influence; nobody, comparatively, believed in the spirit of prophecy, either in a good or bad sense. There were no mediums, no 'séances,' no spirit-rapping and table turnings, no "interior revelations," no divination in its many forms. Now these things are fashionable. How is it that this spirit which has slept for ages is again evoked? "Like causes produce like effects." It is the antagonism brought to bear against the authority of God which calls forth these manifestations; when that is not on the earth, the spirit of divination slumbers. It is only when Prophets and Apostles are among men with a view to bring about the Government of God, when this power as well as this authority are made manifest, the power of the opposite is needed to deceive.⁹²

⁹¹ Douglas James Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 101–102.

⁹² George Q. Cannon, "Divination," in *The Latter-Day Saints Millennial Star*, vol. 31, 26th ed. (Liverpool; London: P. Pratt, 1869), 416.

Writing almost a century later, LDS Church president Joseph Fielding Smith also recognized the synchronicity. “Spiritualism started in the United States about the time that Joseph Smith received his visions from the heavens. What is more natural than that Lucifer should begin revealing himself to men in his cunning way, in order to deceive them and to distract their minds from the truth that God was revealing? [sic] and he has kept up pretty well ever since.”⁹³

These concerns are understandable, given the possibility that the spirits would deny the authority of the LDS Church and call into question the Mormon Restoration. One such case is the Collinson family, who immigrated to America after joining the LDS Church in England. Their original plan had been to move to Salt Lake City, but that changed after Mrs. Collinson died and her spirit responded negatively to a spirit medium’s question of whether or not Mormonism was true.⁹⁴ A much more notorious example is the Godbeite movement, which blended Spiritualism with Mormonism. According to historian Ronald W. Walker, William S. Godbe traveled from Utah to New York, most likely for the express purpose of consulting a medium for advice on the veracity of Brigham Young’s theocratic economic policies and his relationship to the LDS Church. For Godbe and his traveling companion, simply entering the meeting place and greeting the medium “confirmed their doubts about Mormonism” in a very emotional and poignant way.⁹⁵ The voice they said they heard was that of Heber C. Kimball, close and respected

⁹³ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co, 1957), 34.

⁹⁴ Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 22–23.

⁹⁵ Ronald W Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 114–15.

counselor to Brigham Young. Kimball, who had died several months before, advised them to leave the Church.

For our purposes, it is also important to note that Spiritualism was largely attractive to and identified with women. No education or formal training—only the presence or outpouring of the spirits, who chose them—was necessary for one to become a medium or psychic.⁹⁶ Ann Braude details the ways in which Spiritualism was a platform for women’s rights and other social justice issues. What distinguished Spiritualists from others was “their radicalism” (ibid., xxi). In fact, it was attractive to Americans precisely because it represented “rebellion against death and rebellion against authority” (ibid., 2). For most Americans, attendance at a public spiritualist event was the first time they had seen a woman speak in public (ibid., 93). When they spoke, the spirits advocated a “radical vision for the reformation of society” (ibid., 56). As such, Spiritualism was subversive and transformative.

It should be no surprise, then, that early Mormons were interested in spiritualist activities, as Mormonism was itself radical. LDS historian Val Rust reminds us that “Mormons speak freely of angels, visitations, visions, dreams, and revelations . . . take for granted . . . the power and capacity to heal the sick, prophesy, work miracles, discern diverse spirits, speak in tongues, and interpret the words of those who speak in tongues. . . . [They] hold assurance that . . . those who endure will one day become gods, ruling as husbands and wives over their own worlds and civilizations.”⁹⁷ Early Mormons were prepared to accept those ideas, Rust

⁹⁶ Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 84–85.

⁹⁷ Val Dean Rust, *Radical Origins: Early Mormon Converts and Their Colonial Ancestors* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 1-2.

argues, by their forbearers' acceptance of and participation in the ideals of the Radical Reformation, which included restorationism (the aim of "restoring the original gospel of Jesus Christ"); access to personal knowledge of God (that literally anyone could appeal to God and be rewarded with a knowledge of "the simple and everlasting truths of the gospel"); the divine nature of human beings (that "each human being possesses an eternal, everlasting spark of the divine"); and the ongoing availability of spiritual gifts (that the gifts of the Holy Spirit could be manifest in their communities) (ibid., 33-35).

Rust agrees with John L. Brooke's assessment that those who found Mormonism appealing were predisposed by a "radical spiritual orientation" (ibid., 5). In fact, the ancestors of early Mormons had been among the most religiously radical populations of the time. For instance, Mormon progenitors were expelled from Massachusetts Bay Colony and "whipped, mutilated, and hanged for their religious beliefs"; they lived in Rhode Island and New Hampshire, places created as havens for religious radicals and they belonged to radical religious groups like the "Antinomians, Seekers, Anabaptists, Quakers, and the Family of Love" (ibid., x). Rust found alchemy (ibid., 122-23), astrology (ibid., 125-26), and witchcraft (ibid., 134-39) beliefs among early Mormon forebears, some of whom followed Anne Hutchinson (ibid., 88), looked for the philosopher's stone (ibid., 123), and married by the phases of the moon (ibid., 126). Significant numbers of Mormon converts came from the lines of John Proctor, his wife and son, and Rebecca Nurse, targets of the Salem witchcraft tragedy. In fact, Rust even discovered that eleven of his ancestors were among those accused in Salem, four of whom were hanged.

Ultimately, according to Rust, "a significant number of LDS convert ancestors defied

the demands of Puritan leaders that they refrain from spiritualist activities; instead, they insisted that they and others had received special gifts and possessed special powers from the invisible world” (ibid., 130-139). However, while Rust admits that “for Mormons the windows between the visible and invisible world was open, and wonders, including seer-stones, amulets, anointing, divining rods, and buried treasures, were a part of their life experience,” he sees the source of Mormonism’s radical doctrines not in the occult but in Christian experience of “revelations, prophesying, seeing visions, and dreaming dreams” and distinguishes between knowledge gained through esoteric study and that gained through revelation (ibid., 116). Regardless, it seems clear that the Mormon message is connected to a lineage of spiritual seeking that simply will not be quiet.

Finally, Spiritualism was a set of beliefs and practices that allowed participants to maintain their previously established religious affiliations, even if only marginally. However, LDS historian Ronald W. Walker makes it clear that not only Mormon apostates saw the connections between Spiritualism and Mormonism by citing their shared concern with utopian ideas, desire for world reform, belief in life before and after this existence, marriage experiments, and concern with diet and personal health. Walker also compares Mormonism’s practice of patriarchal blessings with spiritualist phrenology, psychometry, and physiognometry; Mormonism’s “extemporaneous ‘speaking by the spirit’” with spiritualist trance speaking; and Mormon priesthood authority with animal magnetism.⁹⁸ Finally, adherents to both traditions considered themselves and their practices rational, progressive, compatible

⁹⁸ Walker, *Wayward Saints*, 112.

with emerging modern science, and even revolutionary. According to Walker, Spiritualism “answered the thirst of people . . . for spiritual phenomena, even as it validated their previous experience in Mormonism” (ibid.). He notes that it was especially resonant for English converts to Mormonism because its “rakish, revolutionary quality” was similar to their experience of how radical Mormonism was in England. “In short,” he summarizes, “it had intellectual appeal, it had phenomena, and it carried the banner of revolution” (ibid.). Though Bitton ultimately dismisses the influence of spiritualism on Mormonism (particularly its power to draw the Saints away from the LDS Church), he also notes that these similarities helped dissident Mormons contextualize their Mormon experience by “allow[ing] them to retain some elements of their Mormon beliefs, or to see Mormonism as a preliminary phase of spiritualism that had now moved . . . to the summit of the mountain.”⁹⁹

Ultimately, the question for Mormons was whether or not the experiences generated by spiritualism were real, or in Mormon terms, “true.” The Church’s response was calculated so as not to call into question the principle of communication “beyond the veil” but to legitimize only particular communication. According to Parley P. Pratt, there were five criteria for legitimate spirit communication, all of which firmly situate such transmission within the LDS Church. Almost any member of the church could fulfill most of these requirements: (1) It was necessary for one to “believe in direct revelation in modern times” and (2) to be repentant; (3) one had to be acting in the name of Jesus Christ; and (4) the communication must occur “in the temples dedicated to God.” In addition, one

⁹⁹ Bitton, *The Ritualization of Mormon History*, 93–94, 87.

other (fifth) requirement was related to gender: Only those who held the priesthood could be expected to receive true communication (“revelation”) from the spirit world (ibid., 91). We will see this issue raised in forthcoming chapters in relation to the quality of information that might be derived from near death experience as well as the debate among Mormons over the existence and role of the Heavenly Mother. The Mormon response to 19th Century spiritualist competition was similar to its current solution to the question of Heavenly Mother. Both she and communication beyond this world can be said to exist, but only those at the top of the church’s male hierarchy have the authority to define and interpret that existence. The privilege of communicating with spirits then, and the privilege of defining Heavenly Mother today, has seemingly been the domain of Mormon men.

Despite many commonalities, this gender discrimination and the policies that support it sets Mormonism apart from both early Spiritualism and today’s New Spirituality and is also relevant to our discussion of why LDS women might feel drawn to supplement and/or combine Mormonism with, for instance, the language and iconography of goddess spirituality. The New Spirituality today, including, as we will see in Chapter 3, practices like channeling, is happening not “outside organized religion,” but “across and beyond it.”¹⁰⁰ This fluidity, combined with the fundamentals of Mormonism found in what Latter-day Saints call the Plan of Salvation, allows contemporary LDS women to participate in many forms of spiritualistic activities without leaving the LDS Church behind.

¹⁰⁰ Lynch, *The New Spirituality*, 7.

The Plan of Salvation

The Plan of Salvation, described by the LDS Church as “the great plan of happiness” (Alma 42:8), “the fulness [sic] of the gospel,” expresses the totality of Mormon cosmology: the creation of the universe, the fall of humankind, the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and “all the laws, ordinances, and doctrines of the gospel.” Prepared by a loving Heavenly Father, it also includes the Mormon concept of “moral agency, the ability to choose and act for ourselves [which] is also essential in Heavenly Father's plan.” Through this plan, Mormons believe they “can be perfected through the Atonement, receive a fulness [sic] of joy, and live forever in the presence of God.” The plan also enables “family relationships [to] last throughout the eternities.”¹⁰¹ Ultimately, the plan of salvation is “the system of doctrine, ideas, and practices that pertain to *all the intelligence* that exists in eternity, ... devised in the heavens for the redemption of mankind from sin, and their restoration to the presence of God.”¹⁰²

Mormons believe that all human beings are involved in this plan through their ongoing participation in three realms of existence: premortal life as literal spirit children of heavenly parents; mortal life, in which spirit and body unite to learn and be tested; and life after death, at which time the spirit reunites with its body in a

¹⁰¹ “Plan of Salvation,” accessed February 12, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/study/topics/plan-of-salvation?lang=eng>.

¹⁰² “Chapter 14: Dispensations of the Gospel,” in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1997), <http://lds.org/manual/teachings-brigham-young/chapter-14?lang=eng>.

process of graded resurrection based on its mortal worthiness.¹⁰³ Referring to a universalist bent in the Mormon doctrine of eternity, Kevin Barney argues, “Hell hath no fury for Mormons.”¹⁰⁴ Only those who have a “perfect knowledge” of the divinity of Jesus Christ and then deny it will be consigned to Outer Darkness, “the temporary abode in the spirit world for those who were disobedient in mortality.”¹⁰⁵ This Mormon version of hell is not necessarily endless, however. Spirits who were disobedient in their mortal lives will be taught the gospel in this “spirit prison” and, upon their repentance, will be assigned eternally to one of three levels of glory, either the celestial, terrestrial, or telestial kingdom. Even those who reject the Savior’s atonement and refuse to repent will ultimately suffer for their own sins and thereafter be fit to occupy a realm of glory.¹⁰⁶ These realms of existence are the framework for learning to become a god through revelation, understanding, and achievement. Essentially, “foreordination” occurs in the preexistence, and most, if not all, of the women say they feel “called” (which means foreordained) to do what they are doing. They authorize their activities by referring to a calling they’ve been given and to personal revelation gained through their experience seeking for what

¹⁰³ It is important to note that since around the year 2006, the use of the term “preexistence” in LDS Church publications has dramatically declined. It is possible that its replacement by the term “premortal existence” has been made to more clearly nail down its meaning. One participant in this study asserts that “preexistence” can too easily imply reincarnation, or multiple mortal probationations.

¹⁰⁴ Kevin Barney, “The Seeker: Hell Hath No Fury for Mormons,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 14, 2011, http://newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/religion_theseeker/2011/04/hell-hath-no-fury-for-mormons.html.

¹⁰⁵ “The Guide to the Scriptures: Hell,” *LDS.org*, 2012, <http://lds.org/scriptures/gs/hell?lang=eng>.

¹⁰⁶ See “Teacher’s Manual Lesson 8: The Three Kingdoms of Glory,” in *Preparing for Exaltation* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), <http://lds.org/manual/preparing-for-exaltation-teachers-manual/lesson-8-the-three-kingdoms-of-glory?lang=eng>.

Mormons call “further light and knowledge,” as is mentioned in the temple ceremony. This thread of truth-seeking woven into Mormon doctrine is what drives them toward individual revelation, which ultimately transforms their worldview.

Revealed through Joseph Smith, the Plan of Salvation is the narrative that expresses the totality of Mormon cosmological, ontological, and eschatological beliefs. The story itself is primarily located in two bodies of sacred scripture unique to Mormonism (Doctrine and Covenants [D&C], composed of revelations received by Joseph Smith, and the Book of Abraham, in the Pearl of Great Price), all of which are considered by Mormons to be revealed truth. In addition, ongoing commentary on the Plan by high-level LDS Church leaders is considered to be inspired interpretation that may change over time through revelation. Mormons accept that a hierarchy of knowledge exists that can be considered critical to one’s eternal salvation. In Smith’s words, the most essential knowledge is “to know for a certainty the Character of God.”¹⁰⁷ For Mormons, understanding the nature of God involves placing him in the context of time and universal laws. Presumably God himself only became God by “absolute obedience to all the eternal laws of the Gospel,”¹⁰⁸ which by definition includes the laws of physics. Therefore, the Plan of Salvation is also the source of the LDS view of and attitudes about *science* as a way of knowing.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Smith, Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph F. Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1938), 345.

¹⁰⁸ Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel Through the Ages*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co, 1946), 115.

Science and the Plan of Salvation

The writings of Joseph Smith and those of all church presidents after him assert the congruence of science and truth with the teachings of the church and stress the importance of obtaining knowledge of all true things. While we have come to see conflict between religion and science as a hallmark of fundamentalist Christianity, from its origins Mormonism asserted that gaps between science and religion are simply due to a lack of knowledge about the nature of reality—gaps that Heavenly Father either has or will fill in, at some future time through revelation to his prophets. Early Mormons were certain that God had restored this primary mechanism for establishing and maintaining eternal truths and ordinances. Brigham Young, for instance, identified the lack of contradictions between the religion and science as one way to distinguish Mormonism from the rest of the “Christian world,”¹⁰⁹ declaring, “It is one of the most difficult things in the world to make men believe that the revealed religion of heaven is pure science. . . . it is hard to get the people to believe that God is a scientific character, that He lives by science or strict law.”¹¹⁰

The Mormon inclination toward blending doctrine and science, combined with the certainty that God would ultimately reveal all truth, led early LDS Church members to see a connection between the Plan of Salvation and science as the

¹⁰⁹ Brigham Young et al., *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 14, Millennium. (West Valley City, UT: Waking Lion Press, 2006), 118. For a modern reference to Young’s ideas as being authoritative for the Church, see F. Kent Neilson, “The Gospel and the Scientific View: How Earth Came to Be,” *Ensign*, September 1980, <http://lds.org/ensign/1980/09/the-gospel-and-the-scientific-view-how-earth-came-to-be?lang=eng>.

¹¹⁰ Brigham Young et al., *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 13, Millennium. (West Valley City, UT: Waking Lion Press, 2006), 308.

pursuit of all ultimate truth and knowledge. The LDS Church's support of secularized (i.e. evolution-based) science studies at Church-sponsored universities and, for instance, its maintenance of a large fossil collection at Brigham Young University, are expressions of its commitment to a scientific worldview. It is not a small thing that the Church also expresses its attitude about the compatibility of science and religion by including men in science in its leadership ranks at the highest levels. For instance, Dr. James E. Talmage (1862-1933), Mormon apostle and geologist, argued in a church address about science that "faith is not blind submission, passive obedience, with no effort at thought or reason. Faith, if worthy of its name, rests upon truth; and truth is the foundation of science. . . . The scientist in his self-denying earnest labors is a true child of God; as he is strengthened spiritually will his work be the better. The scientific spirit is divine."¹¹¹ Similarly, F. Kent Nielsen sums up the modern LDS perspective on science:

As Latter-day Saints we do not throw out the Genesis story—as so many secularists have done—nor do we regard scientists' honest efforts to learn the truth as the work of the Adversary (though the Adversary does, of course, use those views to fulfill his ends). Instead, we would do better to wait patiently with faith in the scriptures until the Lord fulfills his promise to reveal at the beginning of the Millennium, "things which have passed, . . . things of the earth, by which it was made," which, we are assured, will still be part of the "hidden things which no man knew" (D&C 101:32–33). Once the truth is known, all conflicts arising from part truths will vanish. In the meantime, scientists (including many Latter-day Saints) can continue to supply us with helpful knowledge about our present, mortal sphere, or even with ideas about how things might have occurred in the past if the processes under consideration really were uniform over the necessary length of time.

This cosmological assumption about the structure and history of the universe—the meaning of the past, present and the future effectively sacralizing all

¹¹¹ James E. Talmage, "The Methods and Motives of Science," *Improvement Era*, 1900, 256.

time and space—are all comprehended through Joseph Smith’s Plan of Salvation. Thought to be ultimately rational and based on the answers to questions Smith posed to God, in Mormon epistemology there are no real mysteries, only truths that either have yet to be revealed or are not yet completely understood.¹¹² Thus, in the Mormon world, secular events take on eternal, spiritual significance that have only to be fit into the narrative of the Plan. Because God reveals truth and wisdom “line upon line, precept upon precept” (D&C 98:11-12) Mormon doctrine can ultimately be seen as evolutionary and rational.

For instance, as should be obvious in this view of God and human potential, bodies are powerful and necessary for fulfilling the measure of human creation. According to Smith, even God reveals himself not only through biblical text, but also by being temporally present. Without a body, God could not be God, and humans could not become like him – nor could they return to live with him in an eternal family unit. What is the nature of a God who appears to Smith with body, parts and passions? The logical answer was that he had once been a man. Who are humans in relation to that God? Once thought to have been “created” by God, human beings came to be understood as having somehow been organized and then *procreated* by him in a preexistence spirit life.¹¹³ Just as the logical implication of procreation is the existence of a Heavenly Mother, the belief that human beings are all spirit children of

¹¹² Mark P Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 9.

¹¹³ Abraham 3:21-24. For an analysis of the impacts of this kind of literalist approach on Mormon doctrine and theology, see Donald B Lindsey, John Heeren, and Marylee Mason, “The Mormon Concept of Mother in Heaven: A Sociological Account of Its Origins and Development,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 23, no. 4 (December 1, 1984): 396–411.

Heavenly Parents gave rise to the assumption that they therefore have the capacity to advance to godhood.

Questioning God about the mechanics of these ontological principles brought Smith revelations about a heaven with “three degrees of glory”—terrestrial, telestial, and celestial—to which only the most righteous individuals will go (D&C 76:19-119). The Telestial Kingdom, the lowest degree of glory, will house those who rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ but are redeemed by their ultimate acceptance of Christ. Throughout the eternities, they are not allowed access to God the Father or Jesus Christ. The Terrestrial Kingdom is home to those who rejected Christ while in mortality but accept the fullness of the gospel after their death and have “had their work done,” meaning that they are baptized by proxy in LDS temples around the world. These individuals receive “his glory but not his fullness” (D&C 76: 76): they enjoy communion with Christ but have no access to God the Father. Those who are worthy of the Celestial Kingdom “shall have part in the first resurrection” and live throughout the eternities with the Father and the Son (D&C 76: 64). According to Smith, the celestial kingdom is further divided to provide for the process of ongoing exaltation and procreation of the worthiest in that group (D & C 131: 1-4).¹¹⁴ Those who are faithful to all their religious commitments but fail to be “sealed” by priesthood authority in an LDS temple of the Lord will still occupy the lowest degree of the celestial kingdom, where they will be ministering angels to those celestial kingdom occupants who attained a higher level of exaltation.

¹¹⁴ For early Mormons the idea of celestial marriage was synonymous with plural marriage.

Sealing, an ordinance performed only by those men who have been given the “keys” of sealing, takes place in LDS temples worldwide, binding couples together with their children into celestial “forever families.” Thus, those church members who are sealed will ongoingly enjoy relationships with their righteous families and continue to progress throughout the eternities toward eventual godhood. In Smith’s theology, eternal progression, or “exaltation” (which he characterized as the process through which humans become gods), is only accessible through living so as to be worthy of obtaining the highest level of the celestial kingdom. Accordingly, the earthly structure of the church and the family came to be thought of as being patterned after a celestial structure; ‘as it is on earth, so it is in heaven’ became the model for an eternal family unit that replicates God’s heavenly relationships and arrangements (D&C 132: 15-17). B. H. Roberts, a high level church leader and philosopher at the turn of the 20th Century, summarizes Mormonism’s story of creation and redemption as a philosophy of “eternalism”:

[A]n eternal universe, with no beginning and no end: eternal intelligence, working in eternal duration, without beginning or ending, and without ultimates, and hence eternal progression running parallel with eternal lives; and an eternal or ‘everlasting gospel,’ offering eternal opportunities for righteousness; eternal existence of mercy, justice, wisdom, truth and love; all accompanied by eternal relations, associations, unions – eternal youth and eternal glory!¹¹⁵

For Mormons, then, time has no beginning or end. Believing that humans have always existed in some form of intelligence and that they will continue to exist, progressively perfecting themselves for eternity, they don’t have to be biblical

¹¹⁵ David L. Paulsen, “Foreword,” in *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity: The Roberts-Van Der Donckt Discussion, to Which Is Added a Discourse, Jesus Christ: The Revelation of God*, Signature Mormon Classics (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1998), xiv. Roberts was a member of the First Council of the Seventy, those men who, at the highest level, are in charge of LDS missionary work.

literalists with regard to the creation of the earth and its inhabitants.¹¹⁶ Similarly, there is no reason for the women in this study to feel as though they are rebelling against Mormonism by seeking spiritual development in the New Spirituality. Instead, they experience anticipation, delight, and even solace in their seeking process as it relates to their understanding of the Mormon mandate to attain perfection and is a natural transition in their spiritual growth and journey toward salvation. In essence, the pursuit of truth, light and knowledge in Mormonism parallels the New Spirituality and the concept of seeking.

Finally, it should be clear that the Plan of Salvation gives Mormons a deeply-felt sense of meaning and purpose. Ultimately, those who prove worthy are reunited eternally with other worthy family members, who are “perfected through the Atonement, receive a fulness [sic] of joy, and live forever in the presence of God.”¹¹⁷ This perfected state is a function of the truth, light, and knowledge one has attained over time through obedience to God’s laws. This process of growing in intelligence begins in the preexistence and continues through mortality and then into the eternities as one grows into an exalted being.¹¹⁸ At the foundation of this overarching worldview is the assumption that priesthood power—only available to men—is not only administrative authority but is also that elemental power keeping the universe in motion and regulating all natural laws. In other words, priesthood power both constitutes and is constituted by the laws of physics. In his comparison of the

¹¹⁶ See Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*, 8–10.

¹¹⁷ “Plan of Salvation.”

¹¹⁸ Ibid. See also Moses 4 and Abraham 3 in the Pearl of Great Price.

Mormon understanding of “God as Light” with the scientific understanding of light as a form of energy B. Grant Bishop, M.D. argues, “Our Father is not just a being *with* light. He *is* light itself.”¹¹⁹ Because light is both wave and particle, Bishop asks if God can be “both wave and particle, energy and matter, spirit and body, everywhere and somewhere, universal yet personal, all powerful yet intimate, the revelation of justice, and the cradle of mercy?” (ibid., 30). Thus, the Plan of Salvation is a comprehensive narrative that regulates every aspect of LDS life and death; Mormonism is at once an ethnic, cultural, and hegemonic system based on the cultivation of truth, light, and knowledge.¹²⁰

Truth, Light, and Knowledge

In both Mormonism and the New Spirituality, the pursuit and acquisition of light, truth, and knowledge are integral to one’s self-development as a spiritual being. Christopher Partridge considers ‘the self’ “the most significant metanarrative in New Age Thought,” by virtue of its emphasis on individual “intuition, feeling, and imagination” as vehicles for truth. “Not only is the self able to discover truth, but the truth it seeks is within the self [as one’s “Higher Self”]. In a very real sense, the self is

¹¹⁹ B. Grant Bishop, *The LDS Gospel of Light* (B. Grant Bishop, 1998), 1. See also D&C 50:24.

¹²⁰ Mormonism constitutes a hegemonic system, in the sense of hegemony as it is articulated by Raymond Williams and quoted by Sherry Ortner: “It is in just this recognition of the wholeness . . . that the concept of ‘hegemony’ goes beyond the concept of ‘ideology.’ What is decisive is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values. . . . [Hegemony] is in the strongest sense a ‘culture,’ but a culture which also has to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes.” Sherry B. Ortner, “Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties,” in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 393.

understood to be ‘the way, the truth and the life’.”¹²¹ This impulse is evident in some broad commonalities shared by New Agers, such as the belief that humans may receive information from outside the individual consciousness, such as through communication with various types of other-than-human beings (e.g. angels, ascended masters, and power animals); a commitment to both individual and social transformation; and the ability, through various methods of divination, to understand one’s personal situation and uncover deeper meaning. New Age (and the New Spirituality in general) does not promote dogma, nor does it require affiliation with an institution. Olav Hammer notes, for instance, that in New Age “here is no real need to believe in any particular doctrines, nor is one obliged to trust in their antiquity or their scientific basis. The ultimate litmus test is whether you can experience their veracity for yourself.”¹²² For spiritual seekers, Truth is accessible through practices like tarot card readings, shamanic journeying, guided meditation, astrology reports, and channeling.

Knowledge and intelligence are also vitally important to Latter-day Saints, and the methods Mormons use to obtain them are similar. The LDS women in these pages, who all seek beyond the institutional limitations of Mormonism, embrace this kind of knowledge as empowering and, subsequently, essential for their spiritual journey toward exaltation. Church members often quote Doctrine & Covenants 93:36: “The glory of God is intelligence,” which they understand from Joseph

¹²¹ Christopher Partridge, “Truth, Authority, and Epistemological Individualism in New Age Thought,” in *Handbook of New Age*, ed. James R. Lewis and Daren Kemp, vol. 1, Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 237–38.

¹²² Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, Numen Book Series. Studies in the History of Religions v. 90 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 353.

Smith's revelations will survive death and benefit them in the afterlife. The remainder of the verse clarifies that intelligence is synonymous with "light and truth." Historical ways of knowing light and truth in the Latter-day Saint tradition fall under the rubric of revelation, defined by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as "communication from God to His children." According to the Church, "This guidance comes through various channels according to the needs and circumstances of individuals, families, and the Church as a whole." The Church specifies that "when the Lord reveals His will to the Church, He speaks through His prophet. Prophets are the only people who can receive revelation for the Church."¹²³

However, personal revelation is also available to both individual church members and leaders, and revelation is not only highly valued but necessary to a person's development as a Latter-day Saint. "According to our faithfulness," the LDS Church says, "we can receive revelation to help us with our specific personal needs, responsibilities, and questions and to help us strengthen our testimony" (ibid.). Affirmation of these basic tenets of Mormonism is a prerequisite of church membership. During the missionary discussions, personal revelation is stressed as the mechanism for obtaining a testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, the Book of Mormon as translated by Smith is a true record of an ancient people, the LDS Church is the church of God, restored through Smith in 1830, and that the Church is led by a prophet of God today.

¹²³ "Revelation," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2010, http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?locale=0&sourceId=cbb29c57af139010VgnVCM1000004d82620a____&vgnnextoid=bbd508f54922d010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD.

According to the Church, revelation may occur through the channels of visions, dreams, and angelic visitations; patriarchal and other types of blessings; and inspiration, all of which are thought to be contingent on personal worthiness, faithfulness, and obedience. Mormon dogma cultivates the belief that a person's ability to receive these revelatory gifts requires their active and ongoing (i.e. daily) engagement in the spiritual practices of prayer, scripture study, and "keeping the commandments." In addition, church members are encouraged to cultivate states of being that make them open to revelation, such as *reverence* (which may be described as a feeling of peace or an absence of turmoil), *humility* (recognizing one's dependence on God), patient seeking after God's will (which is most often revealed "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little" [ibid.]) and open-mindedness—most often described as *pondering* (a direct reference to Joseph Smith's pre-First Vision experience of "pondering" on scripture).

As church members ongoingly seek the answers to life's questions through personal revelation, "knowing" takes on special significance as distinguished from "belief" in religious concepts. Mormon discourse at all levels centers on *knowing* the "truthfulness" of Mormonism. From the time they are born or baptized as older members, LDS children are trained to express their engagement with the Church in the language of *knowledge* as opposed to *belief*. Scholar and believing Latter-day Saint Terryl Givens describes this distinction:

The most amazing thing about Joseph Smith was the scope of his vision. He didn't see himself as merely restoring a few principles to make course corrections of Christianity. But he had this sense, I think, that everything was possible through revelation; all knowledge could come through revelation....

. . . Joseph Smith was a man characterized by absolute religious certainty. . . . [H]e was absolutely insatiable, and I think that some of the

most important contributions of Joseph Smith were not the ones that he left in print, but the way that he personally exemplified a kind of passion and excitement for knowledge, for revelation, that I think informs and undergirds the church to this day.

I think that's really one of the distinguishing hallmarks of Mormonism—not just that it was founded on these principles of absolute certainty, but Joseph was convinced that every member of the church, every individual and human family had access to that kind of certainty. . . .¹²⁴

In light of this mandate to know, however, the Church ongoingly distinguishes between personal revelation and revelation received for the Church as a whole by referencing the hierarchal, patriarchal order of all things on earth and in heaven: All revelation is relevant to one's sphere of influence. Put another way, an individual may receive personal revelation for one's self and one's immediate family; a bishop may receive revelation for the ward over which he presides; and the prophet, the only individual to hold the keys of all church ordinances, is the only person authorized to receive revelation for the entire Church. Thus, because church members are taught that their prophets will “never lead the Church astray,” personal revelation is officially subordinate to counsel conveyed through institutional church channels, especially as it originates at the highest levels.¹²⁵

Tension between personal and institutional revelation has always existed in the Mormon tradition, and this stress is often experienced by Mormons as having to do with their individual identities. Because Mormonism rejects the concept of

¹²⁴ “The Mormons. Interviews. Terryl Givens,” *PBS: The Mormons*, June 8, 2006, <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/givens.html>.

¹²⁵ For an example of how this concept gets taught to Latter-day Saints, see this lesson on priesthood authority and leadership for women: “Follow the Brethren,” in *The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual for Women*, Part B, vol. B (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2000), 99, http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?hideNav=1&locale=0&sourceId=d689767978c20110VgnVCM100000176f620a____&vgnnextoid=d6371b08f338c010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD.

original sin and the age of eight is considered by Mormons to be the age of accountability, becoming a Latter-day Saint is always seen as a conscious choice, an act of conversion and choice based on gaining a testimony through personal revelation. LDS conversion is less pliable than in some Christianities because of the centralization and standardization of virtually all aspects of Mormonism, including baptism. Whether one is an adult or a child born into an LDS family, tradition in the LDS Church associates conversion with the experience of coming to know that Joseph Smith had a vision, restored the true church of Jesus Christ, and translated the Book of Mormon, about which they should be able to assert as an historical document. This experience gets articulated as a “testimony” that the church is true. As Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reportedly asserted, “Testimony is to know and to feel; conversion is to do and to become.”¹²⁶

The church’s theological explanations for conversion focus on the witness of the Holy Ghost to the truthfulness of the knowledge, with no particular hierarchy in terms of which aspect of testimony should develop first. Some individuals join the LDS Church because of their engagement with the Book of Mormon; still others convert because they come to accept as true Joseph Smith as the restorer of the lineage of prophets and priesthood authority, LDS teachings about human potential, or the concept of forever families. Others come to a more subtle, dawning realization that they know the church is true because it is congruent with their previously-held view of the world. After gaining a testimony, the next step of conversion is for individuals to actually join the church, becoming a part of the

¹²⁶ Allan F. Packer, “Finding Strength in Challenging Times!,” *Ensign*, May 2009, 17, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/2009/05/finding-strength-in-challenging-times?lang=eng>.

covenant relationship with God. They become Saints through a process of reframing social and cultural experiences into a unique Mormon paradigm.¹²⁷ In this process, the LDS Church applies no overt coercion and appears to engage in no negotiation; however, highly structured church discourse plays a major role in “the self-restructuring of contradictory religious subjectivities,”¹²⁸ ultimately reconstituting and homogenizing the language of testimony into a “reified, colonizing discourse.”¹²⁹

The most generous explanation of the motives for Church structures becoming even more centralized, structured, and simplified is by the non-Mormon historian, Jan Shipps, who goes beyond interpreting the structural shift as simply a response to social upheaval and the church’s fear and horror over feminism. Her more nuanced interpretation recognizes the element of increased growth—not only international growth, but specifically domestic growth beyond the borders of the Mormon regional cultural center. Shipps observes that while the church’s growth was descent based and had been raised from infancy to a Mormon cultural identity, dissent was more easily tolerable.¹³⁰ However, in the 1960s, convert baptisms increased such that the church was faced with much the same dilemma as some monastic orders in the Middle Ages: how to reframe the worldly experiences of adult

¹²⁷ Jan Shipps, “Making Saints: In the Early Days and the Latter Days,” in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B Heaton, and Lawrence A Young (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 79–80.

¹²⁸ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 135.

¹²⁹ Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 353.

¹³⁰ Shipps, “Making Saints,” 79–80.

novitiates into a new monastic identity.¹³¹ This project of making saints has exacerbated the tension between competing values: the importance of personal revelation (its individual interpretation through a testimony based on personal experience) and the democratic ideal of personal freedom, against allegiance to the institutional hierarchy.

Given the importance of knowledge and knowing as vital commodities, situating oneself in relation to others as well as competing sources of knowledge is a significant aspect of developing an LDS religious identity. Personal revelation that contradicts official LDS Church policies (which might include anything from confirmation of a member's choice not to attend church meetings, get a tattoo, marry a nonmember, marry a member outside the temple, or have an abortion) is officially characterized as having come from the "wrong" source (i.e. Satan, who can masquerade as a being of light). It might also be understood as having been misinterpreted (failing to pray correctly, read scriptures, or be humble) or as applying only to the individual receiving it and not to any others (a warning not to promote one's revelation regarding personal matters as binding for the Church). We find an example of counsel that Church leaders would not want its recipient promoting as truth for other church members in Belinda's story. In the 1970s, Belinda, an LDS woman now in her mid-fifties who is no longer active in the LDS Church but nevertheless strongly identifies as Mormon, posed the question to her local church leaders about whether she could consider terminating a future pregnancy after having lost a child just after birth because of a congenital disease. "I needed answers and solace when my son was dying," she says, as well as permission to "consider all

¹³¹ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 141–145.

options” if another pregnancy manifested the same problem. In the course of counseling with her local leaders, Belinda’s query was forwarded to Thomas S. Monson (the president of the LDS Church in 2012), who at the time was a counselor in Ezra Taft Benson’s presidency. The elderly Benson was incapacitated and no longer running the Church. “The message came down,” Belinda says, “that ‘you have the countenance to do what you need to do. If anybody has any questions, send them my way and I’ll have a talk with them.’” Though she never had to act on that counsel, another family in Belinda’s ward faced the same problem within a year or two and sought her out. When she shared the counsel she had gotten from Monson with this pregnant friend and her husband, who subsequently used her as an authoritative source for their own decision about how to deal with the pregnancy, Belinda’s bishop was incensed. “It was devastating!” she remembers. “‘What are you doing telling people to terminate a pregnancy?’ they said. ‘That counsel was just for *you!*’”

Similarly because the LDS Church places so much emphasis on following the counsel and inspiration of church leaders, members are taught that is important to identify the Church’s position on what might occur to it as conflicting spiritualities. The LDS Church insists that its precepts and requirements for participation are compatible with and accessible by all cultures and peoples. As Gordon B. Hinckley, the last LDS prophet explained, “Our whole objective is to make bad men good and good men better, to improve people, to give them an understanding of their godly inheritance and of what they may become.”¹³² However, as the Church has grown

¹³² Gwynne Ostling, Richard N. Ostling, and David Van Biema, “Kingdom Come,” *Time*, August 4, 1997, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,986794,00.html>.

internationally, its authorities have spoken to possible conflicts of allegiance, making it clear that an individual's first commitment—or primary identity—should be to one's membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and not to one's state, ethnicity, or local social-cultural heritage. Dallin H. Oaks, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, warns Latter-day Saints that “there is a unique gospel culture, a set of values and expectations and practices common to all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

This gospel way of life comes from the plan of salvation, the commandments of God, and the teachings of the living prophets. It is given expression in the way we raise our families and live our individual lives. The principles stated in the family proclamation are a beautiful expression of our gospel culture. . . . This requires us to make some changes from our family culture, our ethnic culture, or our national culture. We must change all elements of our behavior that are in conflict with gospel commandments, covenants, and culture.¹³³

However, little official guidance has been provided to general church members about, for instance, the New Spirituality as competition to traditional Mormon ways of knowing. Most counsel from the Church has had to do with distinguishing between true and counterfeit revelation and prophecy—with special emphasis on astrology as an imitation way of knowing.

D. Michael Quinn has documented extremely well the LDS Church's historical concern with astrology. Quinn notes that LDS Church leaders have warned against the practice of and belief in astrology more often than they have warned members against other folk beliefs or occult practices. His assertion is that more

¹³³ Currently, some individuals who participate in StayLDS, Mormon Stories, and New Order Mormons (NOM) are reportedly being threatened with church discipline by their local church leaders because these leaders are alarmed at their association with what some Mormons call the “Mormon Middle Way.” See “Who & What Will Define ‘Middle Way Mormons?’,” *New Order Mormon*, May 12, 2011, <http://forum.newordermormon.org/viewtopic.php?p=292513&sid=bb0961d17286f278b03c2b104a614ef6>.

warnings have been necessary because more members have historically believed in and practice astrology than those other options.¹³⁴ Some modern hints come from high-level authorities, but most is presented in church magazines by relatively unknown church employees in essay or question and answer format. A 1979 essay in the *New Era* by Terry J. Moyer is titled, “Questions Astrologers Avoid like Cancer.” Moyer argues that astrology is “an ancient form of magic,” and (like Spiritualism in the nineteenth century) “Satan’s counterfeit for real prophecy.”¹³⁵ In 1991 R. Kim Davis, bishop and associate professor of surgery at the University of Utah noted in the *Ensign* that “some aspects of the New Age movement may seem harmless. But when we compare basic principles of the gospel with New Age philosophies, we see that New Age beliefs can lead us away from our Heavenly Father, allowing us to rationalize behavior and become ensnared in sin.”¹³⁶ The church education curricula bring forward earlier prophetic warnings. In the *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith*, one adult Priesthood and Relief Society manual currently used church-wide, church members receive a warning originating in 1913, to beware of false teachings and false spirits:

When visions, dreams, tongues, prophecy, impressions or any extraordinary gift or inspiration conveys something out of harmony with the accepted revelations of the Church or contrary to the decisions of its constituted authorities, Latter-day Saints may know that it is not of God, no matter how plausible it may appear. . . . Anything at discord with that which comes from

¹³⁴ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 277–291.

¹³⁵ Terry J. Moyer, “Questions Astrologers Avoid Like Cancer,” *New Era*, March 1979, <http://www.lds.org/new-era/1979/03/questions-astrologers-avoid-like-cancer?lang=eng>.

¹³⁶ R. Kim Davis, “I Have a Question: Are the So-called New Age Spiritual Beliefs Opposed to Christ?,” *Ensign*, March 1991, http://www.josephsmith.net/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?hideNav=1&locale=0&sourceId=38b066ce3a47b010VgnVCM1000004d82620a____&vgnnextoid=2354fccf2b7db010VgnVCM1000004d82620aRCRD.

God through the head of the Church is not to be received as authoritative or reliable.”¹³⁷

Summary

Mormonism and the New Spirituality both emerged from the nineteenth-century American metaphysical milieu. As a result, their followers share a fundamental epistemological goal of knowing the truth and putting it into practice in developing their divine selves. Despite their shared interests, however, the LDS Church has a strong theological need to maintain exclusivity as the only “true” church, meaning that it alone contains the saving ordinances and prophetic authority to speak for God. Therefore, from its foundation it has sought to frame outside influences as counterfeit competitors. Given these institutional attitudes, why would an LDS woman participate in activities or cultivate knowledge that might fit into that counterfeit category? What practices in the New Spirituality might resonate with their understanding of Mormonism? And how does the LDS Church and Mormon doctrine facilitate as well as alienate or disenfranchise women who pursue and apply knowledge gained from, for instance, channeling, near death experiences, and past life regressions? As we will see, at some point in their journey all of the LDS women involved in this study took these warnings very seriously. However, to a great extent this seeming incongruence was resolved for them through the prevalence of accepted divinatory practices in Mormonism, beginning with patriarchal blessings and the

¹³⁷ Joseph F. Smith, “Stand by the Truth Lest You Be Deceived,” in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 17. This book is one in a series of manuals based on heavily redacted teachings of various LDS prophets used for adult classes.

frequently invoked concept of a *liabona*, a physical divinatory tool used for guidance described in the Book of Mormon and a metaphor for a Mormon way of being.

Chapter 3

EMBRACING THE LIGHT: SEARCHING FOR FURTHER LIGHT AND KNOWLEDGE IN MORMONISM AND THE NEW SPIRITUALITY

Chapter 2 laid the historical groundwork for understanding the overlaps of Mormonism and the New Spirituality with an emphasis on Spiritualism as a nineteenth-century competitor to early Mormonism after the death of Joseph Smith. In addition, I introduced epistemological commitments shared between Mormonism and the New Spirituality, especially their dedication to seeking and knowing the truth, in order to set up the introduction of the women who claim those epistemologies as their authority for their hybrid spiritualities. Chapter 3 extends that conversation by explicating the overlap of the Mormon practice of patriarchal blessings and the concept of a *liahona*—Mormon forms of divination—with New Spirituality divinatory practices like channeling and past life regression. I also explore the ways in which overlapping LDS and New Spirituality interpretations of *light* facilitate some women's appropriation of channeled materials like *A Course in Miracles*¹³⁸ and the teachings of Ramtha into the Mormon worldview. Because the concept of reincarnation is a virtually ubiquitous teaching among channels, we will see how Mormon doctrine facilitates some Mormons' easy adaptation of reincarnation into a Mormon-specific belief in multiple mortal probations (MMPs), as well as the extent to which supplementing Mormonism with channeling and belief

¹³⁸ Foundation For Inner Peace, *A Course in Miracles*, 3rd ed. (Mill Valley, CA: Foundation for Inner Peace, 2008)

in MMPs empowers their negotiation of LDS patriarchy and the consequences of spiritual seeking on their relationships with others.

In Chapter 3, to illustrate this process of embracing the light and seeking further light and knowledge, I introduce stories of women who accept those channeled materials as revelation in part because of their engagement with the popular films “What the Bleep do We Know?” and “The Secret,” both of which are popular media products that derive from channels. Chapter 3 specifically highlights five of the seven LDS women I interviewed for these topics. That total is smaller than the number of participants I was able to gather for the categories covered in subsequent chapters. I assigned them pseudonyms so that they would remain anonymous. As we will see going forward, this desire to have their identities protected is often a common one. Until they gain confidence around their spiritual choices and assess their impact on their family, friends, and extended LDS community, many women experience fear associated with spiritual seeking outside the LDS Church and deliberately choosing to develop hybrid spiritualities. When I discovered a group of LDS women living near me who are involved in the Ramtha and I Am movements, I determined not to pursue other contributors to this section. Denise, Natalie, Sherry, and Sandra belong to what they call “Book Group.” Denise, Natalie, and Sherry follow the teachings of Ramtha, an entity channeled by JZ Knight. Sherry and Sandra both attend a Phoenix-area I AM movement women’s group.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Book Group has other members, two of whom I interviewed. One of these two women moved to another state, which took her outside the group; because I wanted to observe the group dynamics, I eliminated her from the project. In the case of the second other woman, I chose not to include her story because a personal crisis made her unavailable for ongoing conversations.

Linda, the fifth woman whose story is included in this chapter, is not a member of the group; in fact, she lives in another state and has no relationship whatsoever with any of the group members. However, she appears here because she represents one prominent philosophy that is not congruent with modern Mormonism: belief in reincarnation and the practice of past life regression as a way of seeking and knowing truth. The concept of past lives is virtually ubiquitous in the New Spirituality and is especially prevalent in channeling. The LDS position on mortality is that humans get one life, one chance to pass the test of mortality. Because belief in some form of rebirth is so widespread in the New Spirituality, Linda illustrates how this transgressive integration occurs and how it gets reconciled in the Mormon context inside of the divinatory search for further light and knowledge.

Divination and Mormonism

Divination, the practice of foretelling the future or tapping into unseen powers of discernment, occurs across cultures. In general, divination practices involve eliciting knowledge about one's individual identity and destiny from an external, other-than-human source, through a human intermediary. Examples of modern Western European divination include scrying (the practice of looking into a smooth surface for a vision, such as in the popular image of a crystal ball), the use of crystals as divining pendulums, and the practice of reading tea leaves, runes, and tarot cards.¹⁴⁰ In addition, American engagement with Zen and Tibetan forms of Buddhism has generated the increasing popularity of I Ching and Feng Shui, two

¹⁴⁰ See Judy Hall, *The Illustrated Guide to Divination: A Practical Guide to Predicting the Future* (Toronto: Sterling Publishing Company, 2000), 6-7.

forms of Chinese divination. The popularity of divination is undeniable. Divination tools are not only now widely available in bookstores of all sizes, the Internet makes virtually all forms of divination available to interested consumers for a price and even free. As one bookseller says, Americans' interest in divination is "evidence of a deeper sea change in American spirituality over the last several years": the individual search for knowledge about one's circumstances and relationship with the Divine outside of institutional religion.¹⁴¹

As one of the most widespread New Spirituality practices, divination is an important way of knowing that appeals to the LDS women in this study. All of them use one or more forms of divination in their healing work, especially (a) tarot or other kinds of divination cards, (b) dowsing for answers to questions with a pendulum, and (c) astrology. In addition, they often refer to patriarchal blessings, for instance, one vital method of Mormon divination, as their authorization for pursuing transgressive knowledge and actions. Like astrology (historically a prophetic system based on the position of the planets relative to the sun and other stars) and tarot (a predictive system in the form of a deck of cards that requires the intuitive interpretation of pictorial symbols appearing on cards that are drawn), it is possible to see Mormon patriarchal blessings as forms of predictive divination.

Patriarchal Blessings

The office of *patriarch* and the blessings given by men who are ordained to that calling in the LDS Church derives from a revelation received by Joseph Smith in March of 1835, regarding priesthood structure and the patriarchal order. The

¹⁴¹ Jan Ferris Heenan, "Divination=Divine Sales," *PublishersWeekly.com*, May 21, 2001, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/print/20010521/36461-divination-divine-sales-.html>.

revelation established that this order was handed down “by lineage,” through Adam (D&C 107:41). The first patriarchal blessing occurred when Adam, near death, called his posterity to him to give them a blessing (D&C 107:56).

Similar to the distinctions made between Spiritualism and early Mormonism, the LDS Church explicitly distinguishes patriarchal blessings from astrological charts or “having your fortune told,” despite the fact that the process is similar.¹⁴²

Especially today, when astrology is described as “a philosophy that helps to explain life,” it is easy to see the comparison.¹⁴³ Church materials invoke comparable metaphors to describe patriarchal blessings: “a guide”; “like scripture from Heavenly Father to you”; “Heavenly Father’s blueprint for . . . life”; “a map so you can better prepare”; “a [paragraph] from the book of your possibilities”; “a compass [that] points you in the right direction.” Church members are counseled, “As you read your patriarchal blessing, look for warnings, counsel, and future blessings.”¹⁴⁴ Similar to psychics who contact the spirit world for guidance and astrologers who prepare charts for clients, LDS patriarchs are “moved upon by the Holy Spirit” to make “prophetic utterance[s]: “inspired declaration[s]” of the recipient’s biblical lineage, “spiritual gifts, promises, advice, admonition, and warnings.” Like astrological charts, which Chapter 2 shows have historically had currency with Mormons, patriarchal

¹⁴² Richard P. Lindsay, “Chart Your Course by It,” *New Era*, September 1990, <http://www.lds.org/new-era/1990/09/chart-your-course-by-it?lang=eng>.

¹⁴³ “Understanding Astrology,” *Astrology.com iVillage*, 2012, <http://www.astrology.com/understanding-astrology/2-d-d-279632>. This is not to say that all Mormons will agree with the comparison. Those who would never visit a psychic or astrologer would invoke the lack of priesthood authority as what distinguishes extra-LDS divinatory practices.

¹⁴⁴ “Questions and Answers: Patriarchal Blessings,” *New Era*, May 2007, 14, <http://www.lds.org/new-era/2007/05/qa-questions-and-answers?lang=eng>.

blessings can aid in human evolution if they are (prayerfully) studied. The position of the planets at the time and place of one's birth is fixed, just as is one's lineage (and all that means) in the LDS system. However, neither blessing nor moon chart is set in stone; each is an outline that contains clues, directions, and indications, all of which must be consulted and then acted on to produce positive results. They are all *liahonas* of a sort.

The Liahona

The liahona, a powerful concept in Mormonism, is both a material object for divination and a metaphor for seeking the truth. According to Mormon doctrine, the liahona, which Robert L. Bunker describes as “the only mechanical device . . . ever constructed ‘by the hand of the Lord’ for use by mortal man,” was a gift both prepared and given by God to the main characters in the Book of Mormon, a compass to guide them in their journey through the desert (1 Ne. 16:10).¹⁴⁵ The Liahona, however, was not only a compass for identifying the physical location in which God wished them to go; it was also a divination tool that allowed God to convey instructions to his children. If they were prayerful and faithful, following the changing instructions that appeared on the surface of the ball, the Lord blessed them by keeping them safe and providing for their every need as they made their way through the desert. According to the text, the object was designed with two spindles inside. Though the purpose of the second spindle is unknown, Robert L. Bunker relates it to the engineering principle “voting of redundant strings,” in which one

¹⁴⁵ Robert L. Bunker, “The Design of the Liahona and the Purpose of the Second Spindle,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 2, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=3&num=2&id=59>.

spindle would indicate whether the directional spindle was accurate (i.e. whether or not those who held the object were righteous).¹⁴⁶

Because the liahona is accepted by Mormons as having been a real object, it grounds Mormons in the literal, rational, “scientific” world. Its materiality has also resulted in the development of a rich assortment of material objects by inspired LDS capitalists: necklaces, bracelets, home décor, key chains, lapel pins, tie clips—and ties—zipper pulls, etc., all rendered to signify the Liahona from the Book of Mormon story. These objects inevitably resemble the original rendering of the object by the artist Arnold Friberg in his painting depicting its discovery.¹⁴⁷ One can purchase what Mormons assume is a life-sized replica of the object. However, Mormons do not mistakes these replicas for the real thing, nor do they expect them to be efficacious, to actually perform as communications devices as one would when purchasing a crystal ball, Ouija board, tarot deck, or (for that matter) GPS system.¹⁴⁸ Instead, these liahonas are merely indexical representations pointing to the original ball. Similarly, given the importance of the material liahona to Mormon culture, one might think that as an object it is important to contemporary Mormons. Natalie (whose story appears below) wryly remarks on its notable unavailability for actual use: “It means nothing to me because I don’t have one.” However, because the ball is thought to have been an actual physical object, it grounds Mormons in a historical

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 7–8.

¹⁴⁷ Arnold Friberg, *302 The Liahona, in Home and Family: Gospel Art Picture Kit*, accessed February 21, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/hf/art/display/1,16842,4218-1-3-89,00.html>.

¹⁴⁸ For a humorous speculation on whether or not the Liahona was “a time-travelling GPS unit, see Blue Sky GIS, “Maps in Comics: Liahona GPS,” *Blue Sky GIS*, February 22, 2012, <http://blueskygis.blogspot.com/2012/02/liahona-gps.html>.

narrative based on divination. As such, it gains credibility by virtue of its appearance to the Three Witnesses described in Chapter 2. The liahona, the urim and thummim (described in the Jewish Encyclopedia as a breastplate that functioned as “a kind of divine oracle” for a high priest¹⁴⁹), Joseph Smith’s seer stone, and the gold plates, are all associated with the Book of Mormon, and all of these objects are authorized and legitimized by their presence in the text as well as the scriptural promise, through a revelation to Joseph Smith, that the Three Witnesses would be shown them if they exercised faith (D&C 17:1).

While the original liahona was an object, for most Mormons it is also just as surely an approach to living the restored Mormon gospel or a way of *being*. One of the main messages of the Book of Mormon is that human beings must cultivate the spirit. Thus, *liabona* has become a compelling metaphor for seeking, discerning, and following the guidance given by the Lord. It so captures the Mormon imagination that the international version of the adult church magazine is named *Liabona*. In addition, various other Mormon cultural products take the name of liahona, most of which explicitly have to do with finding—or helping others find—themselves and their way to who they really are: an after-school program for at-risk children in Hawaii (<http://www.liahonayouth.org/>); a twenty-two acre Youth Activity Centre in Queens Ground, North of Feltwell, Norfolk, UK (<http://www.campliahona.co.uk/>); a “Self-Reliance Foundation” that provides “educational opportunities for Latino Mormons (<http://www.liahonaselfreliance.org/>); and “an online community of

¹⁴⁹ “Urim and Thummim,” *JewishEncyclopedia.com*, 1906, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14609-urim-and-thummim>.

Latter-day Saint families with special needs children and adults”

(<http://www.theliahonaproject.net/>).

Interestingly, the liahona as an approach to or metaphor for seeking truth is tempered in Mormon culture by another Book of Mormon symbol: the Iron Rod, which represents the LDS Church and its leaders as the sole repository for the word of God, to which one should resolutely hold throughout one’s mortal journey. Since their recognition in 1967, by believing Mormon Richard D. Poll, most Mormons have become familiar with the distinctions between “Liahona Mormons and “Iron Rod Mormons.” According to Poll, these categories have to do with questioning. Unlike “Iron Rod Saints,” Liahona Saints are “preoccupied with questions and skeptical of answers.”¹⁵⁰ However, asking questions can lead Mormons to interrogate the authority of the Church or its methods for asserting that authority. Thus, despite continuing to value the story of the original liahona, twenty-first-century Iron Rod Mormons have come to be suspicious of the less-accurate compass as a guide. Therefore, they commonly criticize Liahona Mormons for being unwilling to follow the straight and narrow path back to God, which they interpret as obediently submitting to Church authority in all things. Alternately, to many Liahona Mormons, “holding to the iron rod” has come to represent not truth-seeking but religious rigidity, blind obedience, and an easy but stagnant spirituality.

LDS seekers today, then, are more likely to identify as Liahona Mormons precisely because they ask “uncorrelated”—meaning unconventional, probing, or

¹⁵⁰ Richard D. Poll, “What the Church Means to People Like Me,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 4 (March 1, 1967): 108, <http://content.lib.utah.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/dialogue&CISOPTR=2869&CISO SHOW=2813>.

unmediated— questions and look beyond authorized LDS sources for their answers. They seek after the will of the Lord; the light of Christ; the absolute knowing of truth as confirmed by their own experience of the spirit, and they do seek for questions as well as answers. Being a liahona, for instance, allows contributors of the LDSAnarchy blog to find support for their ideas in the Mormon tradition, such as the popular quote from Joseph Smith, “I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves.”¹⁵¹ As liahonas, they have a ready-made context for incorporating ways of knowing prevalent in the New Spirituality such as channeling and past-life regression—*other* liahonas—into their already existing epistemologies.

Channeling in the New Spirituality

Channeling (sometimes called psychic mediumship or trance channeling) is one of the most interesting categories for comparing ways of knowing in Mormonism and the New Spirituality. Channeling, the modern analogy of mediumistic spiritualism, is one of the most important aspects of the New Age movement. Its goal is the acquisition of truth.¹⁵² As a predominately New Age practice, channeling is a form of “interdimensional communication”¹⁵³ that involves obtaining knowledge and wisdom from non-physical entities—what Jon Klimo

¹⁵¹ “Joseph Smith, Leading with Love, A Servant of All: Witnesses,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2010, <http://josephsmith.net/josephsmith/v/index.jsp?vgnextoid=dd2f001cfb340010VgnVCM1000001f5e340aRCRD&vgnnextfmt=tab2#>. For Smith’s assertion, see “The Organization of the Church,” *Millennial Star*, Nov. 15, 1851, 339.

¹⁵² Michael F. Brown, *The Channeling Zone: American Spirituality in an Anxious Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 75; and J. Gordon Melton, “New Thought and the New Age,” in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. J. Gordon Melton and James R Lewis, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 21.

¹⁵³ Suzanne Riordan, “Channeling: A New Revelation?,” in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. J. Gordon Melton and James R Lewis, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 105.

characterizes as “an extended notion of telepathy that involves *disembodied* beings as information sources communicating to *embodied* beings.”¹⁵⁴ (In Mormonism one might also receive communication from a resurrected being, which we might say is *re-embodied*.) The spectrum of channeled sources can include external authorities like deceased historical figures (e.g. Abraham Lincoln and John Lennon), angels (e.g. the Archangel Michael), disembodied human spirits (e.g. from highly evolved guardians and guides to deceased family members and other more mundane spirits), other types of energetic and/or invisible entities in the astral plane (e.g. fairies, elves, plants and animals), and extraterrestrials (usually those from realms existing on a higher vibrational level than earth), all of whom communicate through a living person. In other words, a channeled source can be “almost anything to which some kind of intelligence might be attributed.”¹⁵⁵

Groups of entities are also believed to collectively channel information through a human conduit. One example of this phenomenon is the “Michael Teachings,” which are unrelated to the Archangel Michael. According to their website, “Michael is a group soul, a collective consciousness of 1050 essences who finished all their lifetimes on Earth, cycled off the physical plane, and recombined into an Entity who now resides and teaches from the mid-causal plane. Basically, they (Michael usually refers to themselves as "we" rather than "I") are spirit-guides and mentors to us here on Earth, channeling their wisdom and energy to us for our spiritual advancement and learning. Through this, Michael (like the Heavenly Father

¹⁵⁴ Jon Klimo, *Channeling: Investigations on Receiving Information from Paranormal Sources*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1998), 10.

¹⁵⁵ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 23.

and others in the Council of the Gods in Mormonism) also learns and evolves. The journey they have taken is the same one we are on, they are just in another plane of existence now.”¹⁵⁶ Significantly, one might also channel one’s Higher Self or other levels of personal consciousness (what Ralph Waldo Emerson called the *oversoul*,¹⁵⁷ and what today proponents call the *transpersonal*, or *superconscious*.¹⁵⁸ In this case, one is channeling to cultivate personal intuition and creativity, or what well known channel Kevin Ryerson calls “direct knowing.”¹⁵⁹

Some question exists over how broadly to define channeling and how to apply the label across cultures and time periods. Though today it is associated with New Age, both scholars and proponents argue that the practice as defined above has occurred inside of many cultures, throughout time. Suzanne Riordan (1992) states that channeling “was the craft of the oracle, the seer, the shaman, and the prophet—those who have served as intermediaries between the material realm and the realms of the spirit.”¹⁶⁰ Klimo argues that “channeling, like mysticism, is a phenomenon that has been part of human experience as far back as human records go. It appears to be an essential element in the origins of virtually all of the great spiritual paths. It is not

¹⁵⁶ “Michael Teachings FAQ,” *Michael Teachings*, accessed February 4, 2012, <http://www.michaelteachings.com/mfaq.html>.

¹⁵⁷ See Klimo, *Channeling*, 197.

¹⁵⁸ In his landmark study of New Age, Paul Heelas considers significant the fact that this “external” source of knowledge is “detraditionalized” as internal awakening to one’s own authority as a channel. Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: Religion, Culture and Society in the Age of Postmodernity* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996), 23.

¹⁵⁹ Kevin Ryerson, “Forward,” in *Channeling: The Intuitive Connection*, by William H. Kautz and Melanie Branon (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987), vii.

¹⁶⁰ Suzanne Riordan, “Channeling: A New Revelation?,” in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. J. Gordon Melton and James R Lewis, SUNY Series in Religious Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 105–106.

just a curiosity of current interest based on a resurgence of inner voices, visions, trance séances, and automatic writing. Rather, the phenomenon is an important aspect of human consciousness, a crucial experience for human beings in all cultures and times, even though we do not yet understand its origins or mechanisms.”¹⁶¹ In its most basic form, it is often compared with the Greek and Egyptian oracles, indigenous shamanisms, as well as with prophecy and revelation in the biblical tradition, including Mormonism.¹⁶² Some scholars agree and are even willing to include prophecy and revelation from God or Gods in the *channeling* category (e.g. Melton, 1991; Klimo, 1998; Hammer, 2001 [56]; Riordan, 1992; Lucas, 1992 [197]), leaving the door open for comparison with various religious traditions. Some distinctions can be made, such as between modern channeling and nineteenth-century spiritualism. Hanegraaff, for instance, argues that New Age channeling does not include contact from recently deceased individuals (p. 24), which is historically common in Mormon life stories.¹⁶³ Channeling involves anywhere from partial to total eclipse of consciousness and change of personality as the entity speaks through

¹⁶¹ Klimo, *Channeling*, 7. Wouter Hanegraaff, however, explicitly disagrees with Klimo, whose ideas have been very influential. For Hanegraaff, channeling is a container concept that doesn't distinguish between cross-cultural or religious methods for obtaining revealed knowledge or acknowledge the lack of information we actually have about ancient revelatory practices. He calls the connections Klimo draws “association by similarity.” See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 26.

¹⁶² In a critical effort to debunk the film “What the [Bleep] Do We Know,” Alexandra Bruce compares channeling as a practice to Muhammad's reception of the Holy Koran from the Angel Gabriel and the messages from the angel Moroni, upon which Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (186). Alexandra Bruce, *Beyond the Bleep: The Definitive Unauthorized Guide to What the Bleep Do We Know!?* (New York: The Disinformation Company, 2005), 186.

¹⁶³ Klimo acknowledges the distinction, but nevertheless includes spiritualistic mediumship in his channeling category. Klimo also refers to Joseph Smith's “channeling” of information from the Angel Moroni. See Klimo, *Channeling*, 121.

its human channel. A channel receives audible messages (clairaudient reception of an entity's voice speaking through the channel) or silent messages (clairvoyant reception of ideas and images in the channel's mind). Channels convey received messages vocally, in writing (i.e. automatic writing), in music, and through art.

A Course in Miracles

Even though many channels take a back seat to the entities and/or products they generate, because a channel becomes the embodied representative of the entity being channeled through this process channels become an important aspect of the messages they disseminate. For instance, the text for *A Course in Miracles* was channeled by Helen Schucman during a seven year period between 1965 and 1972. At the time she began channeling the *Course*, Schucman was a doctor of psychology at Columbia University who did not even consider herself a spiritual person.¹⁶⁴ According to Schucman, who dictated the text she received to her colleague Dr. William Thetford, she heard an inner voice, which identified itself as Jesus: "This is a course in miracles, please take notes."¹⁶⁵ The result is the text of the conceptual ideas revealed through Schucman, on which the course is based, a student workbook, and a teaching manual. ACIM, the course itself, is organized into 365 daily lessons, which one is encouraged to study in order.

Having been involved in both Mormonism and ACIM, psychologist Thomas L. Davies categorizes the Qur'an, the Book of Mormon, and ACIM as revealed

¹⁶⁴ "ACIM: How It Came into Being," *A Course in Miracles*, accessed March 13, 2012, <http://acim.org/AboutACIM/how.html>.

¹⁶⁵ "ACIM: About the Scribes," *A Course in Miracles*, accessed March 22, 2012, http://acim.org/Scribing/about_scribes.html. For a full description of the voice and her hearing of it, see "ACIM: The Voice," *A Course in Miracles*, accessed March 22, 2012., http://acim.org/Scribing/the_voice.html.

works. In a comparison of ACIM and the Mormon worldview, Davies notes significantly that "many women within the Church have an authority problem which they otherwise might not have if they had equal access to leadership positions."¹⁶⁶ He also sees most of these women as wanting to maintain their church memberships and work within the structure authorized by the Lord and his Church. Presumably this means that they are more likely to want to officiate in the LDS priesthood rather than seeking a source of authority outside the LDS Church. The fact remains, however, that if reluctance to submit to institutional authority is a characteristic of many ACIM participants, it surely also applies to LDS women who study the course. In this sense it is likely that Mormons who gravitate to ACIM find its emphasis on personal revelation resonates with their already existing Mormon worldview. Similarly, another significant point is the status of the Book of Mormon as an authoritative extra-biblical text. One Beliefnet.com discussion question asks whether or not Mormons "believe Jesus will continue to inspire the writing of more spiritual books" (in particular, ACIM). A conversant responds with this explanation:

I'm not familiar with *A Course in Miracles* but Mormons do believe that any number of books similar to the Book of Mormon will come forth in the last days. Mormons don't just believe that Christ came to the Americas after his resurrection. They believe that he visited other groups around the world and that their records will someday supplement the Book of Mormon. . . . Mormons are open to inspiration, revelation and additional scripture, but they balance this openness with a sense of discernment.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Thomas L. Davies, *Mormons and A Course in Miracles: An Introduction*, 11, http://www.tldavies.net/webfm_send/9. According to the author's website, this paper was written at some point in the "late 80s and early 90s."

¹⁶⁷ BillThinks4Him, "Do Mormons Believe Jesus Continues to Inspire the Writing of More Spiritual Books?" Discussion, *Beliefnet Forums, Latter Day Saints Community*, January 1, 2009, http://community.beliefnet.com/go/thread/view/44071/13328789/Do_Mormons_believe_Jesus_continues_to_inspire_the_writing_of_more_spiritual_books.

The discernment he describes often involves adjudicating an entity's persona—and the persona of its channel—as well as what may occur to some as their fantastical ideas. But this is not an unfamiliar issue to Mormons who face it. Like early Mormon converts steeped in the magical nineteenth-century world view encountering the magical idea of golden plates, retrieved from a mountain and “translated” by Joseph Smith using a seer stone, the twenty-first-century LDS encounter with channeled materials involves an encounter with a channel. From the beginning, Church members have faced challenges to Joseph Smith's claims and dismissed charges against his character. Defending the eccentricities of both Smith and the religion he founded actually has the effect of normalizing ideas and their associated personalities that likely occur as unconventional to others. While *A Course in Miracles* is more popularly associated with author, lecturer and spiritual teacher Marianne Williamson rather than Helen Schucman, the actual channel of the Course, this is not to say that channels do not attain a measure of fame as a result of the message they promulgate.¹⁶⁸ In fact, it is likely that channels today are more likely to assert their relationships to the sources of their channeled messages because of how generic those messages tend to be and how prevalent those ideas have become in popular culture.

Channeling in Popular Culture Products

Historically, books and audio recordings have been the main manner of conveying channeled ideas. In the early twenty-first century, however, two films

¹⁶⁸ ACIM is actually a fairly comprehensive phenomenon. Unlike some other entities, who ongoingly reveal messages through their channels, the revelation of the Course curriculum to Schucman seems to have been the main purpose of the relationship.

dramatically increased the audience for particular messages. The film and subsequent companion book “The Secret,” which made millions of dollars for author Rhonda Byrne, promoted the idea that “you are a magnet attracting to you all things, via the signal you are emitting through your thoughts and feelings.”¹⁶⁹ Though the producers designed the film to promote a message of monetary prosperity as opposed to spirituality, the film clearly carries a spiritual message. This “ancient secret” is actually one version of the “Law of Attraction”: the “original source material” for the film, channeled as “The Teachings of Abraham” through Esther and Jerry Hicks.¹⁷⁰ The idea that through expanding our consciousness we can become creators of our lives is a familiar theme to anyone familiar with the movements and groups growing out of nineteenth-century New Thought Christianity, which argued that God was the source of all bounty and Christians could “tap into the flow.”¹⁷¹ However, the pivotal

¹⁶⁹ “Summary of Secret Teachings,” *Official Web Site of The Secret and The Power*, 2007, <http://thesecret.tv/teachings-summary.html>. See also Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret* (New York; Hillsboro, OR: Atria Books/Beyond Words, 2006). According to the product fact sheet, as of February 29, 2012, the book had been published in forty-seven languages and has sold over twenty-one million copies. The film is available in thirty-two languages.

¹⁷⁰ See “About Abraham Law of Attraction,” *Abraham-Hicks*, 1997, http://www.abraham-hicks.com/lawofattractionsources/about_abraham.php. Abraham self-describes as a universal “group consciousness from the non-physical dimension. Interestingly, Abraham rejects the *channeling* label. “You could leave the channeling out of it,” they say. “Call it inspiration; that’s all it is. You don’t call the basketball player a channeler, but he is; he’s an extension of Source Energy. You don’t call the surgeon a channeler, but he is. You don’t call the musician, the magnificent master musician, you don’t call him a channeler, but he is. He’s channeling the broader essence of who he is into the specifics of what he is about.”

¹⁷¹ For information about Unity churches, one modern expression of the New Thought movement, especially the Unity version of the law of attraction, see “What We Believe,” *Unity*, 2009, <http://content.unity.org/aboutunity/whatWeBelieve/index.html>. Religious Science, another movement developed from within New Thought by Ernest Holmes and Emma Curtis Hopkins, is also popular today. This movement’s intellectual progenitor was Phineas Parkhurst Quimby. Andrew Carnegie explained his economic abundance in the influential book, *Gospel of Wealth* (1901), as did Norman Vincent Peale in his book *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952). These ideas continue to be recognizable in notorious/popular Protestant theologians like Joel Osteen, David Platt, Jan Crouch, Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Benny Hinn, Frederick K.C. Price, and T. D. Jakes, who preach a gospel of abundance.

moment in the history of spiritual cinema, which opened the way for the success of “The Secret” was the unexpectedly wild popularity of “What the Bleep Do We Know?” (WTB).¹⁷² As explained in the film’s synopsis, “What the Bleep!?” is difficult to describe. In between the story line, the film interviews scientists and mystics on “the Great Questions framed by both science and religion” and the blurred lines between the two by virtue of their seeking answers to the same questions. The film seeks to illuminate “the interconnectedness of all things” as it is revealed in a popular spiritualized version of quantum physics.¹⁷³

“What the Bleep!?” is a film based on the teachings of Ramtha (the Ram of Hindu mythology), one of the most popular channeled entities today. Ramtha’s channel, J. Z. Knight, collaborates with Ramtha in running Ramtha’s School of Enlightenment: The Original School of Consciousness & Energy, in Yelm, Washington. The school’s materials clarify that Knight is a “pure” channel, meaning that her experience of channeling is like a near death experience: She does not enter a trance; rather, her spirit goes to another dimension when Ramtha speaks through her. Ramtha identifies himself as a 35,000-year-old male “Lemurian,” a member of a highly evolved ancient civilization conquered by Atlanteans. Ramtha’s founding myth revolves around his having been the first human being to achieve enlightenment within one lifetime, ascending while living—becoming an ascended master—as opposed to dying and being resurrected. Not only does Ramtha appear in the film;

¹⁷² William Arntz, Mark Vicente, and Matthew Hoffman, “What the Bleep Do We Know!” ed. Betsy Chasse and Mark Vicente (2004).

¹⁷³ “What the Bleep Do We Know!? & What the Bleep!? – Down the Rabbit Hole,” *What the Bleep: Synopsis*, 2004, <http://whatthebleep.com/synopsis/>.

what isn't apparent initially (unless one recognizes the institutions and individuals listed in the credits or already knows the etymology of the film) is that the film was produced by students of Ramtha's school and several of the consultants appearing in the film were also associated with it, either as teachers or authors whose books supported the curriculum. Therefore, the goal of the film is to present and promote the view of reality taught by Ramtha, that human beings are actually the God that they seek. This is the teaching that draws some Mormon women to Ramtha's school.

LDS Women Embrace Channeling: Ramtha and the I AM Activity

Denise, Natalie, Sherry, and Sherry are women with LDS backgrounds who were drawn to Ramtha's teachings, which they discovered by watching and studying WTB. They qualify as Liahona Mormons because they privilege their own knowing over counsel given by the LDS Church. They all live close to each other in a secondary Mormon market on the edge of Phoenix, Arizona, most of them in the same—or nearby—LDS ward. I came to know them in 2006, through an LDS feminist friend, who had begun meeting with their all-female spirituality study group. (You must meet them, Doe," she said. "They're just the kind of women you want to write about!") The number of women in the group was difficult to pin down because of the fluidity of the group and its schedule and content. On my first visit, six of us sat around Natalie's dining room table to discuss the What The Bleep study guide. However, most of the meeting consisted of my introduction to the group and

discussion of our common interests and experiences as LDS women.¹⁷⁴ The women who have commented on their numbers all indicate that whoever is meant to be in the group will find it. They believe very strongly in the power of individual choice (free will, which in Mormon vernacular is called *agency* or *free agency*—what Denise calls “the only absolute truth; the only eternal law”), whether conscious or unconscious; that everything that happens in a person’s life—“positive” and “negative”—is the result of some individual choice as an act of creation. Similarly, they also accept the adage that “When the student is ready, the teacher [—or book group—] will come.” This belief, which Book Group members all say they have seen operating in their lives, is remarkably congruent with Mormon beliefs about individual agency and accountability such that choice will ultimately determine one’s eventual location in the heavenly hierarchy.

Why did Ramtha’s channeled message resonate with these women? First, with some qualifications, they are seekers: “Someone who is likely to see some truth in all alternatives, while regarding the movement from one doctrine or practice to the next as a genuine advancement in spiritual understanding and enlightenment.”¹⁷⁵ The Doctrine and Covenants establishes a tradition of knowledge gathering from whatever source it occurs: “And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one

¹⁷⁴ Book Group is very dynamic and has changed a great deal since I was introduced to it. The first time I attended, the group had been discussing the study guide from WTB. Though I attended subsequent meetings, this was the last meeting I would attend focused on What the Bleep. The group had begun to plan a humanitarian and spiritual trip to Turkey, which became its focus until 2006, when the trip took place. After that, the emphasis shifted to Ireland, where many of the same women gathered to inaugurate the creation of a peace center. Thus, those women unable to go on the trip eventually dropped out of Book Group meetings, as the conversation centered on Turkey and not on the WTB Study Guide.

¹⁷⁵ Colin Campbell, “Cult,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*, ed. William H. Swatos, Jr. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1998), 123.

another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). LDS children are also raised to recite the Thirteen Articles of Faith, one of which says, “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”¹⁷⁶ In addition, in Mormon approach to divination there is a mandate to identify problems and then seek their solutions. Therefore, these women experienced pivotal moments that had them seek out answers to vital questions.

In addition, however, it is also important to consider that Ramtha’s teachings sounded familiar to them. *Ramtha: The White Book*, which lays out the school’s basic cosmology, reveals striking similarities with Mormon teachings about the nature of God and human ontology: Ramtha’s main message is “You are God.”¹⁷⁷ The idea that humans are the same species as God—Gods in the making—also lies at the foundation of Mormonism. Just before his death in 1844, Joseph Smith asserted that “God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heaven, is a man like one of you. . . . God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did.” Moreover, said Smith, becoming Gods should be our ultimate goal:

Here, then, is eternal life--to know the only wise and true God. And you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves--to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done--by going from a small degree to another, from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you are able to sit in glory as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Smith, “The Articles of Faith,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,106-1-2-1,FF.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Ramtha, *Ramtha*, 69.

¹⁷⁸ Joseph Smith, “Mormon Literature Sampler: The King Follett Discourse,” *Brigham Young University*, accessed January 2, 2012, <http://mldb.byu.edu/follett.htm>.

Smith's stunning revelation about the nature of God was undoubtedly one of the primary sources of the persecution aimed at early Mormons.¹⁷⁹ In part, it represented pagan polytheism: "The head God called together the Gods, and they sat in grand council. The grand councilors sat in yonder heavens and contemplated the creation of the worlds that were created at that time."¹⁸⁰ In addition, Smith's reading of the Hebrew Bible revealed that as powerful as God might be, he was not an omnipotent creator; rather, he was an *organizer*. He neither created the earth or the souls of humankind.

The word create came from the word *baurau*; it does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize, the same as a man would organize materials to build a ship. Hence we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos--chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element are principles that can never be destroyed; they may be organized and reorganized but not destroyed. . . . God never did have power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself. Intelligence exists upon a self-existent principle; it is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it. Moreover, all the spirits that God ever *sent* into the world are susceptible to enlargement." (*King Follett Discourse*)

This was the first time Smith taught these ideas in public. In 1833, Smith received a revelation that later was canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, making clear to all who followed him the eternal nature of humankind: "*Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be*" (italics in original). In addition, the idea that one achieved godhood by "learning salvation" and participating in temple rituals suggested an emphasis on works:

¹⁷⁹ Terry Givens, *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America*, vol. 3, The American Religious Experience (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), 90.

¹⁸⁰ Smith, "Mormon Literature Sampler: The King Follett Discourse."

When you climb a ladder, you must begin at the bottom and go on until you learn the last principle; it will be a great while before you have learned the last. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it is a great thing to learn salvation beyond the grave.

. . . God found himself in the midst of spirits and glory, and because he was greater, he saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have the privilege of advancing like himself--that they might have one glory upon another and all the knowledge, power, and glory necessary to save the world of spirits. (*King Follett Discourse*)

Like the Heavenly Father of Mormon belief, the Ramtha introduced in

Ramtha: The White Book was a man who became a God through acquiring knowledge and putting it into practice.¹⁸¹ Not a traditional “Christ” figure, Ramtha nevertheless sounds familiar to these women because he is a member of “an unseen brotherhood “who love mankind, greatly” (ibid., 1). Much like Christ is the first-born spirit child of Heavenly Father, member of the council of the gods, and a spirit brother to all other human beings, Ramtha and his “brothers” watch over and hear the prayers and meditations of human beings. Having once lived human lives and learned what they needed to know, they developed mastery over and transcended the human condition “to realize a grander state of being (ibid.). Similar to the council of Gods in Mormon tradition, Ramtha participates with the brotherhood in monitoring the prayers and “movements” of earth-bound humans. “By harnessing the power of [his] mind,” he was able to realize “an existence of unlimited freedom, unlimited joy, unlimited life” (ibid., 21).

Ramtha calls the product of this harnessing process *ascension*, which is different from the traditional Christian concept of resurrection because ascension is not preceded by death. In Mormonism, this experience is known as *translation*, or

¹⁸¹ Ramtha, *Ramtha*.

being *translated*: being “taken up by the spirit or buried by the hand of God” (Alma 45:19); “sanctified, never to taste death” (3 Ne. 28:1–9, 36–40); changed in twinkling of an eye (D&C 43:32). The example of translation best known to Mormons is the story of the prophet Enoch, who makes a brief appearance in the book of Genesis in the Bible but gets fleshed out more fully in the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, accepted by Mormons as revealed scripture (Moses 7:69). Enoch built “the City of Holiness, even Zion” (Moses 7:19), in which dwelt God’s people. The righteous Enoch was so favored that he saw God and spoke with him “face-to-face” (Moses 7:4). The entire city was translated because the people therein “were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). Their translation meant that “they would feel no pain and would not die (3 Ne. 28).”

Mormon folklore is similarly rich with stories of church members’ experiences with the Three Nephites, Book of Mormon characters to whom the Lord granted “the same blessing granted to John the Beloved—that they might stay on the earth to bring souls to Christ until the Lord comes again.”¹⁸² The LDS Church continues to teach about the Three Nephites as they occur in LDS scripture, though the adult Gospel Doctrine (Sunday school) manual specifically prohibits class discussion of Three Nephites appearance stories and warns that “members of the Church should be careful about accepting or retelling these stories.” The Three Nephites have a Wikipedia entry and, despite their decline in LDS consciousness,

¹⁸² Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Three Nephite Disciples,” *The Guide to the Scriptures*, accessed March 4, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/gs/three-nephite-disciples?lang=eng>.

appear in everything from official lesson books to independent films and other popular Mormon cultural products, even into the twenty-first century.¹⁸³

As noted earlier, Ramtha also teaches a form of theosis that is familiar to Mormons. The essence of human experience is that of “the intelligence and life force”—the connectedness of all beings both on this planet and in “untold universes which you have not yet the eyes to see.”¹⁸⁴ He has appeared in this time period to remind people of their heritage as “divine and immortal entities who have always been loved and supported by the essence called God” (ibid.). Similar to the God of Mormonism, Ramtha offers a precious gift to the world: knowledge of that divine heritage, which will solve the world’s problems by the way it transforms human ways of being. The Mormon analogy is remarkably similar: Joseph Smith restored the knowledge that—far from being born sinners—we are all children of God who have always existed, and this knowledge has the power to change lives.

There is also a resonance between the Ramtha worldview and LDS teachings about light and knowledge. For instance, as mentioned in Chapter 2, B. Grant Bishop confirms the view of innovation outlined above in his book *The LDS Gospel of Light*.¹⁸⁵

The love of God is always shining throughout the universe and we tap into it by opening our eyes and our hearts to see and feel what has always been. The

¹⁸³ “Lesson 42: This Is My Gospel,” *Book of Mormon: Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2003), 187, <http://www.lds.org/manual/book-of-mormon-gospel-doctrine-teachers-manual/lesson-42-this-is-my-gospel?lang=eng>. For examples of appearances of these three figures recorded by faithful Mormons, see D. L. Ashliman, “The Three Nephites,” *University of Pittsburgh*, 2006, <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/nephites.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Ramtha, *Ramtha*, 1.

¹⁸⁵ Bishop, *The LDS Gospel of Light*, 173.

light of Christ, which is the light of truth, is in and through all things and the power thereof. Before scientists discovered them, X-rays and gamma rays, hydrogen nuclear-reactions, microwaves, quarks, and DNA, were already there. The spirit of Christ just helped those who were most attuned to discover the “Truth.” (Ibid., 173)

Analyzing Mormon belief and practice through the lens of quantum physics, Bishop (apparently a member of the LDS Church in good standing) develops what I would call a theology of quantum Mormonism that relies on the same technical language as WTB and other Ramtha products to connect Mormonism to science. He takes what science has revealed about the nature of light and energy and argues that Mormons can understand their ontological relationship to God by understanding the nature of light. Light, Bishop observes, is a form of energy that is both visible and nonvisible. It is waves of varying lengths, and it can also be particles. Both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, Smith’s successor, taught followers about the uncreatedness of matter and the interconnectedness of the universe through God’s divine nature (Journal of Discourses 3:27). Following their ideas, Bishop speculates, “Since all energy and matter are variations of the same thing, is it possible that *spirit matter* is the energy phase of reality, and *physical matter* is the physical or element phase of reality?” (ibid., 27). Mormons are promised that partaking of God’s light provides access to the mysteries of God (D&C 76:7-8), not least of which is to understand his nature. According to Bishop, variations in God’s ontology can then be explained by variations in his light, all of which are expressions of his love: life, intelligence, law, judgment, truth, knowledge, understanding, spirit, and the word (ibid., 6). “Perhaps the only difference between the different types of *spiritual light* is their wave lengths” (ibid., 15, italics in original).

Bishop reminds his readers that “we came to earth to learn how to be gods,” a project only accomplished by gaining knowledge in every possible area of life (ibid., 172). Eternal progression requires knowledge about God. Like all of us, “God’s own intelligence was at one time organized with energy, the wave form of light, or what we would call spirit. He was again organized with matter, physical flesh, the particle form of reality. Having been resurrected into celestial glory, he became perfected pure light. Being in both forms of light he could have full power over all the elements in the universe, while retaining his refined body of flesh and bone (ibid., 30). Bishop speculates that God’s spirit is “the interconnected, timeless part of light, and his glorified physical body of flesh and bones the other half of reality—the particle form, in time and place.” Exaltation, gaining entry into a life in the Celestial Kingdom, would mean that both forms of reality are fully accessible to those exalted (ibid., 28). Ultimately, he says, “Comprehending God is comprehending light” (ibid., 1).

This basic way of viewing the self and the world is at the heart of much of the famous Mormon orientation toward achievement, as expressed through the inscription that welcomes students and visitors to Brigham Young University: “The Glory of God is Intelligence.” Precisely because famous artists, musicians, and scientists are the literal spirit children of heavenly parents, they have created and innovated by receiving divine inspiration. Just as Ramtha teaches that inventions and increased scientific knowledge have been brought (and will be ongoingly conveyed in the future) by him and other members of the Brotherhood, the LDS Church teaches that modern scientific and technological innovations throughout time have been created through inspiration. For instance, Joseph Fielding Smith (1876-1972), who

was LDS Church president from 1970 to 1972, argued that every discovery and invention is produced through the Spirit, even when created by unbelievers. “He uses such minds as are pliable and can be turned in certain directions to accomplish his work, whether they believe in him or not.” With regard to the relationship of innovation to Latter-day Saints, Smith expresses Mormonism’s postmillennialist attitude. “We are ready for these discoveries, these inventions,” he says, “and they all have a bearing upon the restoration of the gospel and preparation for the time which is yet future, but which is shortly to come, when Christ shall reign on the earth, and for a thousand years peace shall be established.”¹⁸⁶ By privileging achievement and creativity, this worldview produces a people who are enculturated to *seek*.

Denise

In general, the women who integrate Ramtha’s and other channeled teachings with Mormon doctrine do so because they are seekers, implying their strong concern with personal experience and choice. As we will see, they seek answers to questions about their inherent and eternal nature as well as solutions to problems, such as how to negotiate power and authority in a strongly patriarchal religion. Ironically, despite the fact that Mormonism cultivates and validates personal experience, all of these women discover that, at some point in their journey, seeking outside of the LDS Church impacts their personal relationships with family, friends, and their church community.

Wanting a deeper understanding of LDS teachings about the nature of God, who she is, where she came from, and how she always existed is what led Denise to

¹⁸⁶ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, Volume 1*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1954), 179–181.

Ramtha. Primarily because of how ardently she sought answers to her ontological questions, Denise has always had the experience of being spiritually different from virtually all others around her. Born into a cattle ranching family in southeastern Idaho in 1954, Denise says, “I came in as a fighter.” Her parents were only intermittently active in the LDS Church, but she attended fairly frequently with her grandfather, who served more than once as bishop in his local ward and held other stake callings. Like most other children born into the LDS Church, Denise was baptized at the age of eight. At the age of fourteen, she began going to church by herself. Aiming for the end seat in the very back row, she would slip in after services had started and would slip out while the closing song was sung. She remembers that everybody sat together as family, and she was embarrassed not to have one. She attended church, despite the fact that there was no one to make her go, because of the spiritual connection she felt there, “because of the truths that were taught there.”

Denise remembers being very connected spiritually, in part because of how adults responded to her. She often gave talks in sacrament meeting, after which adults commented on how inspiring they had been. Denise’s deep spiritual orientation likely had her parents to give her a lot of autonomy as a teenager. When she was fourteen, her father told her she no longer needed to ask for permission to “go and do things,” as long as she kept him updated. She laughs and says her own sense of responsibility was highly developed; “He just trusted me because of who I was.” Her mother later admitted to Denise that she thought Denise had been sent to their family to save it through her spiritual connectedness. She says that as an adult this difference has been alienating. As a result, she has been on a long journey seeking likeminded others: “I’m searching for other people who think like me.” This

is why Book Group was so important to her. “The journey for me is that I don’t have to fit in with other people. I’m very much a loner and don’t have any friends in my ward. They don’t relate to me.” In fact,” she says, “they’re afraid of me.” In part, other Mormons fear her because she embodies the Liahona identity.

Ironically, however, and despite her obvious seeking, Denise denies being a seeker, because in her view she does not fit the definition. Specifically, she does not experience herself as having gone from one spiritual path to another seeking spirituality and enlightenment. “I am very connected to my Divine Self,” she says, “to my Holy, Holy Spirit, to my God within me! I *am* spirituality and enlightenment!” She certainly does not fit into the early (1965) definition of a seeker posed by John Lofland and Rodney Stark, who used the term to explain religious conversion. According to Lofland and Stark, seeking was imperative to conversion, for “without the ideological congruence provided by self-identification as seekers, conversion was less likely to occur.”¹⁸⁷ Though she expresses “openness to a variety of religious views (frequently esoteric),” she has neither found herself “floundering among religious alternatives,” nor has she failed “to embrace the specific ideology and fellowship of some set of believers.”¹⁸⁸ Neither does Wade Clark Roof’s more recent

¹⁸⁷ John Lofland and Rodney Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective,” *American Sociological Review* 30, no. 6 (December 1, 1965): 870, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2090965>. In addition, Stark and Bainbridge observe that “Chronic religious seekership is most common around high-tension religious groups” (228) and that “seekership is an intermediate stage that begins when commitment to one religious affiliation collapses and ends when a new commitment is established” (224). The fact that Mormonism still maintains a relatively high level of tension with American culture at large (though certainly not as high as experienced by early Mormons) may also help explain the act of seeking observed in this project. However, I argue that the combination of a cultural history of seeking and the mandate for personal revelation is more likely the place to look to explain (especially) the blending of New Age Mormon Pagans. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, Toronto Studies in Religion vol. 2 (New York: P. Lang, 1987).

¹⁸⁸ Lofland and Stark, “Becoming a World-Saver,” 870.

characterization of those seekers who are “most deeply involved in their own personal quests” as individuals who apparently reject institutional religious identification resonate with Denise’s situation. She is *not* more likely to identify herself as spiritual and not religious.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, she easily fits into the historical tradition of religious seeking engaged in by Mormons and their ancestors as noted in Chapter 2.

This historical tradition is based on revelation. As a believing Latter-day Saint woman, Denise supports my argument that she can accept the process of channeling because its process resonates with the practice of revelation in Mormonism. In fact, because Mormon doctrine not only accommodates but also underpins her seeking concerns, she has no experience of conversion to channeling or any other New Spirituality belief or practice. Though she has “tried on” other channeled materials and rejected them (Denise reports having looked into *A Course in Miracles* and several times attended the Phoenix-area I Am women’s study group with other members of Book Group), she nevertheless accepts channeling as a valid phenomenon because of what Mormonism has taught her about knowledge, light, and truth.

The only teachings outside of Mormonism Denise has embraced have come from Ramtha, who she encountered having been invited by others to a screening of WTB. Rather, she has spent her whole life seeking “further light and knowledge,”

¹⁸⁹ Wade Clark Roof, Bruce Greer, and Mary Johnson, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 79–80. See also Margit Warburg, “Seeking the Seekers in the Sociology of Religion,” *Social Compass* 48, no. 1 (March 1, 2001): 48, 91, 94–95, <http://scp.sagepub.com/content/48/1/91.abstract>. Warburg categorized as seekers those Baha’i who actually reported having had contact with at least two other religious groups besides their religion of birth.

revealed answers to questions about the truths she first knew through Mormonism.

Mormon scripture contains promises regarding the receipt of such knowledge:

If there be bounds set to the heavens or to the seas, or to the dry land, or to the sun, moon, or stars—

All the times of their revolutions, all the appointed days, months, and years, . . . and all their glories, laws, and set times, shall be revealed in the days of the dispensation of the fulness [sic] of times.

. . . . How long can rolling waters remain impure? What power shall stay the heavens? As well might man stretch forth his puny arm to stop the Missouri river in its decreed course, or to turn it up stream, as to hinder the Almighty from pouring down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints (D&C 121:30-31).

In 1991, Howard W. Hunter, who was then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (and next in line to become the prophet), explained the connection between knowledge and light:

We believe there is a spiritual influence that emanates from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space. (See D&C 88:12.) All men share an inheritance of divine light. God operates among his children in all nations, and those who seek God are entitled to further light and knowledge, regardless of their race, nationality, or cultural traditions.¹⁹⁰

Thus, when Denise saw WTB, she immediately knew she was receiving further light and knowledge. “What they spoke about was also my knowingness, my truth. It so strongly resonated with me and I knew that I wanted to hear more of what was so familiar to me!”

We can even see the LDS Church as participating in Denise’s certainty about the truth she has encountered through Ramtha. LDS emphasis on cultivating an individual experience of the Holy Ghost, who reveals all truth, puts that experience

¹⁹⁰ Howard W. Hunter, “The Gospel—A Global Faith” (presented at the October 1991 General Conference, Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1991), <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/1991/10/the-gospel-a-global-faith?lang=eng>.

to some extent beyond reproach. At least this is Denise's belief about it. "You can't dispute somebody's testimony!" she insists. This attitude is especially significant in relation to gender. Many outsiders perceive LDS women as "not having voices" because of their lack of ecclesiastical authority, which bars them from holding most positions in the LDS Church. There is some truth to that perception. While not all LDS women are quiet and unassuming, it does mean that LDS women and men have been socialized to affect particular mannerisms, ways of being and speaking (or not speaking) that have women find it difficult to have their voices heard. Over several decades I have heard innumerable stories from LDS women about how they automatically slip into well-practiced gender conventions in the presence of male church leadership, even against their will. Despite LDS theological conventions governing the relationship of women's voices to authority (they can never declare doctrine and so culturally are less valued), Denise is so filled with certainty of the rightness of her spiritual identity that she lacks the rhetorical reticence of most LDS women. Speaking of women she knows who are "afraid to speak their truth," she believes that their fear comes from not really understanding what Mormonism teaches about their true identity, which Ramtha confirms. Because we are our own Gods, "there is no Heavenly Father checking us off saying you must do this and this in this lifetime or Satan saying I'm going to tempt you with this and this. That's a man-made fear thing. [So many] people who live on our planet are those who are fearful of authority. The longer we hide, the longer we will [suffer]." Invoking the famous LDS children's song, which is often sung in adult meetings as well, Denise insists, "I am a Child of God. A Child of *me*"—a point of view she got from the Mormon Plan of Salvation.

We should not interpret this to mean that Denise’s perspective strictly follows current LDS Church teachings. She reinterprets the Mormon Plan of Salvation even while her viewpoint is still congruent with it. Instead of being a savior figure who atones for her sins, Christ becomes a savior through his role as Teacher. Because Denise no longer sees mistakes as sins, she no longer experiences herself as someone in need of redemption. Rather, she is God, which means all she needs (i.e. what she is missing, the presence of which will exalt her) is to be shown the way through knowledge and practice—a key aspect of the original (Mormon) Plan.

These attitudes are an anathema to many Mormons, and so Denise has had to face the impact her evolution through seeking has had on her marriage and other relationships. From the beginning, her husband expressed concern and anger over her fascination with Ramtha and generally considered her ongoing participation in Ramtha’s school an act of apostasy. However, her response to that charge carries an indignation that also surfaces when she encounters authoritative challenges from male church leaders. Several years ago, when her husband implied he was considering a divorce, her reply captures her certainty of the righteousness of her quest. “I told him I had done everything I was supposed to do *and* helped him build a lucrative business. ‘If you want to divorce me, go ahead. But I have done nothing wrong and I will take half of everything you have.’” Similarly, in 2010, Denise challenged her stake president over a Relief Society lesson she had taught outlining the basic elements of Joseph Smith’s King Follett’s Sermon detailed earlier in this chapter. Focusing specifically on Smith’s teachings about the uncreated nature of human spirits that occurred in the lesson, she asked, “Why does the Church teach that we are children of God, when Joseph Smith clearly taught that he didn’t create

us?” To his answer, “The Church interprets that teaching differently,” she responded smartly, “Well, I have a bigger testimony than you”—by which she means that her testimony is more advanced and therefore more “true” than that of the Church and its leaders, who have the authority to declare doctrine.

Denise is right; to some extent she is immune to criticism. At her age, she has fulfilled Mormon cultural expectations for women: She successfully raised “righteous children” who served missions for the Church and were worthy of temple marriages; she remains active in the LDS Church, attending and even holding callings in her local ward; and, perhaps most important of all, she still believes deeply in the principles of Mormonism and the basic authority of the LDS Church. Ironically, she says her patriarchal blessing counsels her “to not be critical of [her] church leaders” and she feels she has been successful because speaking her truth should not be equated with criticism. She says that for her the counsel means she should “allow others to just be, without my judgment upon them.” As she encounters leaders with whom she disagrees, or lessons being taught that “doesn’t feel right” to her, she simply makes a choice. “I either stay, listen, and observe, or I get up and leave the meeting. My personal knowing is to live by *my own intuition*, the knowledge that comes from my Soul that is my Spiritual and Intellectual Self.”

Denise is actually invoking the historical concept of free agency in Mormonism, another casualty of the LDS Church’s shift to a more pronounced culture of obedience. Denise rejects the new LDS interpretation of agency as no longer being the freedom to choose based on personal revelation but, rather, as merely the opportunity to choose to obey the Church’s mandates. “Each day, I am grateful for the only eternal law of heaven that I love,” she says, “the law of

agency—and of course it is *free* agency!” Reflecting the mandate of the New Spirituality, Denise sums up her commitments: “What is most important for me is to know for myself, to receive information from within me and not be wanting another individual to tell me what to do through their own eyes of experience. My patriarchal blessing was given to me as a guide to interpret as I ask the questions at any moment I ponder it. I Am [sic] my spiritual journey, not me having a spiritual journey by doing something someone else advises or counsels me to do. I Am Spirit, I Am Intelligence and I Am My Beautiful Body! All Are One, Me!”

Natalie

Knowledge gathering through experience is a common theme among the women of this study, and Natalie is no exception. Natalie’s story is strikingly similar to Denise’s, though she has let go of the LDS Church’s notion of authority. Born in Kanab, Utah, in 1958, her “core question” also related to being taught that she was a “child of God.” “My question was always ‘When do I grow up and *be* God?’”¹⁹¹ Natalie shares Denise’s memory of being taught as a child about Joseph Smith’s experience of questioning that led to a vision of God. The image of personal revelation modeled by Smith had a deep impact on her. “In that story I got the idea that we could all have our own revelation and vision, our own experience.” As a *liahona* questioner like Denise, Natalie is a seeker. However, unlike Denise, Natalie self-consciously claims that title. Also like Denise, she projects a strong sense of security in her own authority, a strength born of necessity due to her experience of difference. Though in part Denise’s sense of alienation is a consequence of

¹⁹¹ Natalie, “Spiritual Seeking,” June 11, 2011. Emphasis in original email correspondence.

challenging Mormon gender ideals by being outspoken about her spiritual knowing, Natalie outright rejects Mormon gender ideals and feels she has moved beyond them. As a child, she says she “was well programmed and wanted to please my parents [by] following the Mormon pattern.” However, as an adult who was active in the LDS Church, she felt isolated from other women in her ward. In part this separation was the impact of being thrice married and divorced, having “[three] children from [three] different fathers in different places”—children she raised and supported on her own. She didn’t fit in because of the LDS emphasis on being—and staying—married. At the time when Natalie was marrying and divorcing, divorce was highly stigmatized in LDS culture, and today *multiple* marriages are still likely to be seen by Mormons as a sign of either selfishness or poor judgment. Moreover, in the space between husbands Natalie became an adult “single”: a notoriously problematic category in Mormon culture because in the Plan of Salvation a single person (male or female) cannot be exalted. Predictably, she also felt isolated because other women saw her as a threat to their marriages. At the same time, however, the LDS Church validated her dissolution of her first two marriages because she was granted two temple sealing cancellations. These highly unusual annulments, reportedly granted only in the case of adultery, abandonment, or abuse, made possible her rare third temple sealing to husband number three.

Another source of Natalie’s sense of alienation was her decision to get a degree in finance. Twenty-eight years old, twice divorced with three babies, she started a career that, in 1986, was largely a man’s world. “My biggest fear was taking care of myself financially. I got a scholarship at Weber State, I went into business. I was determined to walk into a world of men with logical thinking. I was twenty-

seven going on twenty-eight. It took four and a half years to put myself through school. I stopped being a victim and started being responsible for myself and my children.” Natalie remembers being supported during this time in a very significant way by her patriarchal blessing, which told her she was “a spiritual being” who was “loved deeply”; “courageous in facing challenges”; and “had the capacity to accomplish what [she] desired.” It also told her, "Continue in your schooling as it will broaden your mind." She says, “In times of chaos in my life I did just that; that one concept was a wonderful guide for me.”

Taking charge of her personal and professional life empowered Natalie to act on her spiritual inquisitiveness. Having moved up to Utah to attend school after her second divorce, Natalie met a man who became her companion in extending her knowledge beyond the conversations about the meaning of doctrine taking place in church lessons and meetings. “He had been a temple librarian and church historian in Salt Lake City,” she said, “which meant he had access to old church documents concerning church history and early Mormon esoteric practices, including information about early temple endowment practices.” Because of his connections, Natalie was privileged to accompany him on special tours in the famous Manti temple, a common favorite among her generation of Mormons because of its history and style. When her friend’s marriage necessitated a change in their relationship, Natalie spent about five years studying on her own. Having remarried again, she was in the middle of her third divorce when she discovered common ground with Judy and Jill. “My life was in transition, and I felt free to explore new ideas and I had wonderful friends to do it with. I was finding out who I was without a relationship; my children were basically gone.”

Natalie met Judy and Jill, other women who helped organize Book Club, at the charter school her children attended. Judy and Jill had been taking courses in Holographic Repatterning, and the next year (2001) Natalie did the same. The main idea of this healing modality is to discover the pattern holding particular problems in one's life and "repattern" it toward wholeness using sound, color, and other sensory input. Between 2001 and 2005, Natalie studied and/or paid for sessions in Reiki, Rapid Eye Therapy (RET), tarot, (see email for the rest of the list), "That's how Book Group got started," she said. "We just started hanging out doing stuff together." Natalie was attending church for half of this five year period, trying to reconcile what she was learning with her church experience. However, her commitment to the institutional LDS Church faded as she acquired the knowledge she sought from other sources. Like Denise, Natalie felt everything she had learned and done to that point had all led up to discovering Ramtha's teachings.

Just before her third divorce, Natalie was asked (called) to work in one of the Arizona temples. As a working mother with teenaged children, it was an unusual calling: director of women's endowments. "For a year and a half I was in charge of every girl who came into the temple. I got to have the kind of experience that most [temple workers] never get when they're older." Natalie strongly feels the calling came to her as a result of trying to relate what she was learning to her Mormon worldview. Specifically, she was seeking an answer to the question "Is this all there is to Mormonism? Is this all we can know about truth? Is there something more?" She didn't have a problem with some of the things other women report in relation to the temple, but she knew from her extra-Mormon explorations that the temple experience was severely limited.

As a seeker, Natalie's relatively privileged access to the temple during these years enabled her to make temple ordinances her primary study theme. She saw the temple's limitations because, unlike the average Mormon, she had memorized every word of the endowment ceremony by performing her specific job as a temple worker. That allowed her to contemplate the meanings at the heart of the words and opened her mind to new questions. "When I was working there I was questioning everything," she said." At the same time, she knew how to be "politically correct" in framing her questions so as to protect herself against negative impact. "I was put in every position because I was the leader everywhere I went. I was ambitious; I applied everything I knew; I knew how to do everything." For instance, she learned every astronomical aspect of the temple precisely because she had to make it all make sense. She "had to figure it out."

In keeping with the Liahona Mormon identity, which by definition is preoccupied with questions and suspicious of or even just unsatisfied with institutional answers, Natalie's seeking was focused on questions she had discovered in the seeking process. Her overarching question was about the meaning of a phrase used at the conclusion of the endowment ceremony regarding power and priesthood. She approached the oldest workers and then the temple president. "I would go and ask, 'What does power in the priesthood mean? What's the difference between power *of* the priesthood and power *in* the priesthood?'" But they had no answers for her. "*Nothing*," she says. "Their only response was to ask where I had come up with these questions!" Natalie was deeply frustrated that the other temple workers occurred to her as being "just robots," and she even saw the temple president as relating to the temple not as a mystical experience but in a limited way as an

administrative task. Nevertheless, she finally had the breakthrough she had sought for so long. “The irony is that when I got ‘Power in the priesthood be upon me’ (and I perceive priesthood as that power given to me), I realized the whole point, the whole culminating climax of going to the temple, is that *you empower yourself*. That really set me free. When I got that, I was—oh my God—*thank you!* My focus on what the temple was about gave me the questions that told me I was beyond it!”¹⁹² Natalie worked in the temple for a year and a half before realizing, “No one there knew even what I knew. Not only did they not have answers, but I knew *more* than what they knew.” As a result of this experience in the temple, Natalie began to see the Church as a system like any other, making rules that were “supposed to be from God, obviously (or not so obviously) interpreted by the guys running the show.” However, like any child who matures and sees her parents’ fallibility, she realized she had been “going to the religious Parent (or proxy) and asking if [she] was worthy, listening to all their guidance, giving them money, [her] time, energy, the whole mix.”

Though she remains a member of the LDS Church, Natalie has left its restrictions on behavior and questioning behind, while simultaneously embracing its deepest ontological impulses. On a prominent wall in Natalie’s home hung a calligraphic rendition of Shakespeare’s famous query: “To Be, or Not to Be, that is the question.” After over two years spent contemplating that thought, asking herself deeply what she wanted to be, she always answered with confidence that she wants

¹⁹² Natalie’s insight is shared by Antonio A. Feliz, a former LDS temple sealer, who now teaches “Mexica/Toltec Wisdom.” He believes “it is logical to interpret ‘power in the priesthood’ as creative”; i.e.: that which is created by the agreement of two or more on whom the blessings of the ancients are sealed” (47). Feliz’s overarching goal is to understand the overlaps he sees in the Mormon and Toltec traditions relating to sex and gender. He combs LDS Church archives for evidence of Joseph Smith’s original motives for sealing men to men, multiple women to men, and multiple men to women. Antonio A. Feliz, *Elijah’s Power* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Concord Press, International, 2007), 47.

to be God. For Natalie, the road to godhood led not to deeper involvement in the LDS Church, which by vacillating on its commitment to that teaching has relinquished its cultural capital, but to Ramtha's school. "The first thing [Ramtha] says is 'Behold God. Every one of you is God. You've forgotten who you are. *You are God.*'" However, Natalie has not simply exchanged the God of Mormonism for Ramtha as God, or the LDS Church for Ramtha's School; she is not interested in replacing the LDS Church with another proxy parent. Rather, she says, Ramtha "presents himself as a teacher, not as a God to worship."

Natalie believes this is why Ramtha resonates with other LDS women, who—like children—are never the ones fully in charge at church and must always look to male leaders for counsel, permission to act, and for affirmation of their worthiness through temple recommend interviews. Ramtha validates their desire for knowledge beyond what is accessible through the LDS Church and provides training that leads to the experience of godhood without exclusions or prohibitions based on gender. In addition, Ramtha empowers them to trust themselves, which takes the place of submitting to external parental Church authority. She says, "It's no wonder that after being introduced to Ramtha, the first ringing bell of resonance for me was saying his core messages is "Behold God," and "The Power is in You. He answered my question of what do you do when a child of God grows up. Mama God plus Papa God make Baby God. But when do we grow up and *be* God? *He was my answer,* and I'd been asking that forever!"

Natalie's questioning does not imply lack of belief in the basics of Mormonism. For Natalie, Mormonism has some aspects of the truth in that it posits a hierarchical system in which humans have the potential to become gods. However,

the family framework occurs as “simplistic” to her now. “To be told over and over again that *I am God*, I always was and will be, and redefining what God is puts all responsibility in my court as well as the power to create anything I may think of.” Speaking of the plaque on her wall, Natalie says she has replaced Shakespeare’s quote with this new phrase: “To *become* or *not* to become; *that* is the question—realizing that I have always ’been God’ [and asking] what do I choose next to Become and experience, knowing I will always be becoming the next thought.

Like Denise, Natalie’s seeking has generated some conflict in her relationships. Natalie is not married and she does not appear to be concerned about looking for a marriage partner. However, she has had to negotiate relationships with the LDS Church, her strongly LDS mother, and her three adult children. It would be an understatement to say that Natalie’s relationship to the LDS Church has changed. Using the technology she learned at Ramtha’s school, she says she has created a reality in which the consciousness of her neighbors and local leaders would be directed elsewhere, enabling her to operate “under the radar,” so to speak. Thus, even when she stopped attending church meetings, she never received either positive or negative attention from the Church.

This is not to say, however, that she resents or actively works against the Church. She still considers it a part of who she is and where she’s going. “I don’t regret one minute,” she says. “It’s still in me.” Thus, she neither rejects it nor makes it “wrong.” Rather, she explains in a pragmatic tone, “I don’t believe in a God that’s limited, so why would I believe in a religion that’s limited?”

Going to church is like going back to third grade. Third grade was fabulous, but I don’t want to sit there in third grade because I want more. I’ve outgrown that. The other thing is, every prophet—Joseph Smith, Elijah, *all*

those who asked their own questions—got their own answers and they never went back to the established church. *Nobody*. Isn't that interesting? We admire prophets—and they always leave the establishment!

Natalie's personal relationships are less simple precisely because they are personal. However, she approaches them in much the same way. To her believing mother's sorrow, Natalie is no longer active in the LDS Church. Like other Mormons who believe strongly in the Plan of Salvation, Natalie's mother is steeped in LDS teachings about eternity. In this story she will no longer spend eternity with her daughter, because she no longer accepts the Church's claim to authority from God. From Natalie's perspective, she no longer attends church because she "values [her] spiritual time." For Natalie, the LDS church is "a way to keep you busy"; thus, active engagement in it would rob her of valuable time practicing becoming God and gaining further light and knowledge. Now she gets her answers through out of body experiences, during which she experiences an absence of time. This environment mirrors her Mormon understanding of eternity, where there is no time and everything is "present before the Lord" (D&C 38:2; Moses 1:6; D&C 130:4-7). As a consequence, Natalie now sees her patriarchal blessing more like a reading she would get from any "psychic or intuitive"—a "probable timeline' as it was seen at the time," given by "a very kind and loving man." Now, however, she is totally committed to taking full responsibility for creating and choosing according to her own knowing, which is based on personal experience. "If in ignorance, someone chooses to give their power away in asking someone else what they should do, be it a patriarch, psychic, tarot card reader, astrologer etc., it is their path to learning as then it gives them reason to blame someone or something else. Hopefully eventually they

would come to realize their misunderstanding and take responsibility and then use their power to choose righteously.”

Trying to explain her new beliefs to her mother, Natalie lovingly disputes the Church’s authority. “Our church is *a* way, [but] not the only way, [and] certainly not the better way.” To Natalie, the Church’s version of the Plan is limiting and judgmental, based on exclusion instead of inclusion. Using the Church’s activism against gay marriage as an example, she says, “I’ve come to a place where I’m responsible for what I believe and think and what I’m being and what I’m living. Believing is *living* it. So I’m thinking very carefully about every aspect of the God I believe in and how *I* want to be. And it’s not the same God I was taught [about], because this God excludes people. I don’t exclude people. This God judges people. I don’t believe [in] that.” When her mother responded, “We don’t really believe in that either,” Natalie reminded her that exclusiveness and judgment against others permeates LDS scriptures and history. “There are some wonderful gems . . . things I still do believe,” she said, “but I hope I change my mind about everything.” In response to her mother’s query for clarification, Natalie replies, “Because then I’ll be God. When I change my mind about everything, then I’ll be God.”

Natalie has also had to deal with concern and criticism from her adult children, who also are no longer active in the LDS Church but have mixed feelings about her early retirement as an investment banker and her move from Arizona to Washington State, where Ramtha’s school is located. The move was not just about being near Ramtha but about creating a completely new life in which she lives off her own relatively isolated land. The palpable tension between Natalie and her daughter, which I have witnessed, appears one-sided. Natalie’s daughter is happy that her

mother is thriving, but because they enjoyed such a close relationship before Natalie's move she appears to be more than just a little ambivalent about Natalie's move. While Natalie appreciates her daughter's sense of loss, because of Ramtha's teachings about the nature of reality she feels no sense of obligation to be physically present for her children. Because Natalie's children are neither involved in Ramtha's school or his teachings, I get the sense that her daughter may resent not just her mother's move but also her commitment to Ramtha's teachings.

Natalie's daughter's angst may derive somewhat from the fact that Natalie's focus is on herself and not her children, which defies LDS gender prescriptions. Though she was an unconventional mother, and her children are not active in the LDS Church, they were still raised in a cultural environment that generated in them certain expectations about what their mother would do after retirement. Most retired LDS women in their neighborhood perform the normative gender role of focusing on their children and grandchildren, except during their missionary service for the LDS Church. Thus, in contrast with Denise, who fulfills these expectations and remains active in her LDS ward while seeking further light and knowledge outside the Church, Natalie confirms Wade Clark Roof's characterization of seekers as those who are "most deeply involved in their own personal quests."¹⁹³ Like Roof's seekers, she considers herself spiritual but not religious. While she maintains membership in the LDS Church and appreciates its contribution to her spiritual worldview, she is not active in its programs. She has clearly "converted" to Ramtha's teachings, but Ramtha merely confirms and expands on Mormon ideas about human potential

¹⁹³ Roof, Greer, and Johnson, *A Generation of Seekers*, 78–79.

while legitimizing her rejection of LDS gender conventions—what she calls “the expanded version of being eternal or Christ-like.” Ultimately, she says, “My journey is about *me*. It’s not about Ramtha. He could be gone tomorrow. My journey continues.”

Sherry

Like Denise and Natalie, Sherry is a Liahona Mormon and a seeker. In fact, of the three women, she most strongly identifies with Collin Campbell’s definition. Unlike Denise and Natalie, however, Sherry is a convert to Mormonism. As a convert, her experience of Mormonism has been different by virtue of having chosen it as part of her spiritual quest. Another thing that distinguishes Sherry from Denise and Natalie is her age (sixty five). Born in in Portland Oregon in 1946, she met her missionary-boyfriend in Tustin, California, where she lived with her parents. They met in high school and married when she was nineteen, after he returned from his LDS mission. Sherry declares that her conversion to the LDS Church at the age of sixteen established her as a voracious spiritual seeker. She says she is “always open to truth wherever it may present itself,” and feels she “can’t limit that light by being selective.” Rather, she asks “for the right thing to show up . . . and then trust[s] the process.”

Raised Lutheran, she didn’t know anything about Mormon philosophy, so her boyfriend taught her the basics during the two years before leaving on his mission. Mormonism wasn’t just “attractive” to her, she says; she was “really smitten” by it; “seduced.” To her, the most exciting doctrine was the multilayered heaven and a celestial kingdom containing multiple degrees of glory. “I’d always believed there was heaven and hell,” she said. “If you’re not quite good enough,

you're going to hell. That always really bothered me." After her baptism, she became "a total Mormon zealot": she "couldn't get enough, couldn't read enough, couldn't learn enough." She identifies this experience as a recurring pattern in her life: "getting hooked on a belief system, studying all about it, reading all I can, and then another one comes along, and then boom, I'm right on to that one too." When asked if at the time she understood the implications of the three levels in the celestial kingdom, Sherry replies, "I didn't know anything about polygamy when I joined the church. My understanding was very limited. But because I was in love with the boy and I could feel the light of the gospel to a small varying degree, I just grabbed onto it, like picking a horse on the merry go round. I was ready to take the ride; it didn't matter which horse I got on. So I went on the ride and just kind of learned as I went along."

Sherry describes her engagement with Mormonism as a "lengthy addiction." Her convert passion was indomitable. That fervor did not endear her to her fellow Young Women at church, where she was not very popular with the other girls because she was "a very young zealot who hung on every word. I just couldn't get enough!" she explained. "I'd go to the Laurel class, and the girls would be chit-chatting in the back, and I'd say 'Shush! She knows good stuff! Listen to what your teacher is trying to tell you!'

Moreover, because Sherry is what Stark and Bainbridge would call a "chronic" seeker, and in keeping with Campbell's definition noted earlier, her seeking failed to stop with Mormonism.¹⁹⁴ "I wanted to know so many things about

¹⁹⁴ Stark and Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*. According to Stark and Bainbridge, "Chronic religious seekership is most common around high-tension religious groups" (228). They see

God and other aspects of the unseen,” she says, “so I took myself on a search by reading books about the light. See, I’m like the Thirteenth Article of Faith: I hope all things, I believe all things. Anything that is good, virtuous, or lifts me up, I’m taking it down, I’m going for it. And I use my own feeling world as my barometer. If it feels good to me on an intellectual or spiritual level, I’m on it!”

Because Sherry was fascinated with the Mormon view of the afterlife, she began with resources about near death experiences, including materials by Dannon Brinkley, Raymond Moody, LDS convert Betty Eddie, and “about twenty other books on the subject [of NDEs].” Then, because of what she learned at church about LDS prophets’ speculations about the possibility of other inhabited worlds, she turned to the study of UFOs and read until she couldn’t find anything new. After those explorations, she took up the study of “ancient teachings like the Egyptian mysteries, temple ordinances up and down the Nile; the life of Buddha; the origins of man; [and] pre-Genesis human histories.” Like Denise and Natalie, for whom spiritual seeking was a means to an end, Sherry says she wasn’t trying to solve problems other than her “intense desire to know.” She says, “I guess I have been looking to know the face of God all these years and I finally know her . . . in the mirror . . . It’s me!! I get to manipulate energy and play God in this world to create [my life]. How fun is *that?*”

This obvious enthusiasm and willingness to entertain any empowering, “light-filled” idea ultimately brought Sherry to Ramtha’s teachings, who she encountered through her first husband, the young man who had first introduced her

seekership as “an intermediate stage that begins when commitment to one religious affiliation collapses and ends when a new commitment is established” (224).

to the LDS Church. They married in the LDS temple and “had a few good years,” including the birth of three children. (She says, “While it was good it was really good.”) When he started “exploring other belief systems” and found Ramtha, he was unable to ignore the impact of Mormonism’s highly structured worldview on his life. He left the LDS Church and the marriage in the same year, when Sherry was thirty-four years old. He ultimately moved to Yelm, Washington—to be close to Ramtha’s school—and was a member of Ramtha’s Red Guard for several years.¹⁹⁵ Sherry recognizes his suffering as an impact of subjecting himself to the authority of “the tribe”:

He realized that he had gone on a mission, married me, had kids, gone to the temple, all because everyone said “You have to do it. This is the way it’s done.” He woke up one day and said, “You know, I’ve never lived my life for me. I’ve been following the program; I’ve been letting ‘the bishops of the tribe’ dictate what my life should be. So one day he said, “I’ve had enough. I’m going to live my life for me.” So he completely dropped out of the church, all at once, and that pretty much was the beginning of our divorce right there.

This crisis had Sherry cling even tighter to the safe surety of the LDS Church. She describes herself as a Molly Mormon at the time of her divorce and subsequent remarriage within the same year. She remembers that she passionately continued “doing the Mormon thing,” which for her included considering Ramtha a counterfeit to revelation and, thus, a seemingly obvious threat to her testimony.

Today she doesn’t blame Ramtha or the school for destroying her marriage (“he just wanted to live his own truth”), but she remembers being deeply worried about the spiritual safety of her children. He had sent the children a copy of *The*

¹⁹⁵ According to Sherry, “the guys that work for JZ and keep order in the arena are called Red Guards.”

White Book, which they hid between their mattresses. She thought they were being influenced by Satan.

But I found it, the good little bed maker that I am, and I'd get in their book and write in the margins, "This is a lie! You are being deceived!" and then I would close it and put it back under the sheets. So they knew I was reading their book along with them, but no one ever confronted me about it. And so finally [one son] said, "I want you to come up and take it. We're going to pay for your plane ticket." So I went.

After I went to the first workshop, *my whole belief system was taken apart*. All the parts were on the table, and I was left to put it back together one piece at a time, and I've never been the same. That first retreat completely undid me and I've been working on myself ever since.

Like Denise and Natalie, Sherry stands out for her willingness to continue seeking spiritually, despite the ways in which seeking complicates her relationships. Sherry joined the LDS Church against the wishes of her parents, who wanted her to wait until she was eighteen. The passion with which she took on a Mormon life is mirrored in her intense and enduring appetite for Ramtha's teachings, both of which she justifies by appealing to her personal experience of truth. "I joined [the LDS Church] on a feeling level, not a knowledge level. I thought, "This is a great church. And I looked at the Book of Mormon one day, and it glowed; and I said, 'It must be true.' Did I read it? No. *And it's all true.*" What she means by this is that the book is true "as a record, as history...a divine book, dug out of a mountain, on gold plates, and transcribed."

Sherry also believes "Ramtha is true," despite the impact of that belief on her current marriage. Now, just as after the demise of her first marriage she was concerned with her children's eternal salvation, her current husband has interpreted Ramtha as a threat to their eternal marriage. Returning from the lengthy beginning

retreat, her husband demanded a divorce. He told her if she ever went to the school again, he would leave her. Nevertheless, she went again.

I was too afraid to tell him, so I left a note on the butcher block saying “Gone to Yelm; be back in two weeks.” And I called him when I got up there and he said just don’t bother coming back. And I said, “Is that really what you want? Do you want to end our whole marriage because I’m so enchanted with learning something new that fills my cup and lights my fire? I’m *high* on this stuff, and you want me out of your life because it doesn’t fit into your plan?” And he said, “Well...just come home when you’re done.”

In two weeks she returned home, but the more she tried to discuss Ramtha with him, the more he pulled away from her, afraid of her divided loyalties and potential apostasy. He finally issued the ultimatum: Choose between Ramtha and their marriage, or he would file for divorce. So they planned for a divorce. Finally, she insisted she did not want a divorce and challenged him to set aside his fears and trust her. In return, she promised to never stop attending church so he could be sure that nothing essential had changed about her allegiance to him or the Church.

Again, like Denise, Sherry appeals to her own testimony, based on personal revelation, to justify her commitments. She uses Mormon teachings about the lost chapters of the Book of Mormon to legitimize her seeker activities, which are now driven underground. Transcriptions of a section of the text were lost by Martin Harris, which resulted in the information contained therein being taken back and sealed by God. Mormons believe the Lord will reveal that hidden knowledge at some future date when the Saints are ready to receive it. Sherry believes these sealed chapters contain Ramtha’s truth: “the God that’s in you, your I Am presence, which does all things for you—and how to access it. I think it gives instructions on how to [get answers] for ourselves more than Mormons are able to do now; going *within* to

find God instead of to the bishop.” Instead of the Church’s current emphasis on “doing, doing, doing,” she believes the knowledge lost to Mormons is about “*being*.”

It’s about walking on water instead of reading about it. So I feel like there’s a whole lot more that Mormons are going to get, but I can’t wait around for that. I’m chasing it down. And I feel so happy with the things that I’m learning! I’m just on *fire* with God-stuff! So the Mormon Church can be whatever it wants to be. My little opinion won’t change that. But in my world, [Ramtha’s school] is my church; it’s where I’ll stay.

One of Sherry’s main spiritual practices is reading, which she does daily.

When she is in that space, she believes in her power to create reality: “All things are possible to she who believes.” Ramtha says that words create, but Sherry reports that “feelings are even more powerful as creators.” Visualizing the outcome she wants and adding the feelings of gratitude and joy the outcome will generate “puts the wheels in motion and guarantees its fruition. Every great teacher has said that, [so] it must be true.”

Sherry is also involved with another group who studies the I Am Activity materials, which were channeled by ascended master Saint Germaine through Guy Ballard (1878-1939) and his wife Edna (1886-1971) between the early 1930s and mid-1950s. This theosophical group focuses on a hierarchy known in theosophical culture as the Great White Brotherhood. The I Am Movement shares with Mormon and Ramtha teachings their preoccupation with light, in this case in the form of a divine flame: God and other divine beings occur in the form of light; and the Mighty I Am Presence is that light as it occurs in each individual.¹⁹⁶ Sherry found the local I Am group right after moving from Utah to Arizona. After three or four months of

¹⁹⁶ J. Gordon Melton, *Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America*, vol. 7, 2nd ed., Religious Information Systems Series (New York: Routledge, 1992), 62.

church inactivity because of the exhausting moving process, she finally gave God an ultimatum:

One day I said, I am so lonely; I'm going to have to go to church! You know? I was hungry for a social life! So I was standing in my living room on a Monday and I just raised my fist in the air and I shook it at God and said, "You'd better hook me up with some like-minded females here! I'm dying on the vine! I have to have someone who resonates with me, and that isn't probably what I'm going to find at church, but there's got to be somebody around here, so you hook me up NOW!" That was a huge demand, a command coming right out of my mouth.

A week later, she and her husband were invited to a neighborhood party, at which she met Esther, the group's leader. They felt an immediate connection and rapport. Sherry says, "It was like two magnets!" She asked Esther what church she attended, what was her religion, but her response was, "I don't really belong to any churches. I'm a student of the truth." Accepting Esther's invitation to attend the study group, Sherry says she was there that Monday and has only missed it when she is out of town. She affectionately calls the group the "Green Book Club," because the covers of their study materials are the color green. Like Ramtha's materials, which she also loves, she says, "It just sings to me!" Despite the fact that (for some unexplored reason) Sherry's husband doesn't see the I Am group as a threat, Green Book Club doesn't compete with Ramtha's teachings, which she still loves.

I can read Ramtha's teachings, and that rise in vibration when you're feeling dumpy and sad . . . you just start soak in those words and it's like taking a bath! You soak it up, and it raises your frequency and you're no longer in the dumps. Anytime I read the Green Books or the Ram, man, I get *high*! Literally! You *need* a rise in vibration when you're feeling dumpy and sad or nothing. And of course you get addicted to that. It's like spiritual cocaine! You want it as much as you can get it! Not a day goes by when I don't read at least a paragraph out of Green Book or the Ram's books. That's my drug of choice.

Like Denise and Natalie, Sherry continues seeking outside Mormonism because the space does not exist within the LDS Church to explore the mysteries that captivate her imagination. Mormonism contains those mysteries—the LDS Church introduced them to her—but over the years the Church has progressively muted discussion about them in institutional space. Thus, for her, their immediacy is lost in Church meetings. Describing her sadness over what she sees as the current degenerating spiritual state of the Church, she refers to its “homogenization” of the gospel and the fact that it will no longer teach the mysteries. “There’s not enough substance,” she says. Using Ramtha’s language of quantum physics, Sherry characterizes it as a decline in frequency. “The church is staying on the lowest level because so many people are joining. It’s a lower frequency. They keep it there because they want big numbers. Once you’re in, it’s your own responsibility to grow and discover the mysteries of godliness.” Ramtha, on the other hand, opened her eyes to what she says were the “greater degrees of the truth [she] learned in Mormonism.” In fact, Sherry echoes Natalie’s and Denise’s assertion that Ramtha’s teachings are especially attractive to Mormons, many of whom she says enroll at Ramtha’s school.

It’s very attractive to the Mormon mindset. It does empower *you* as a God. And we hear in the Mormon Church that we are gods in embryo. But you know it can be much more than that. We could be Gods of preschool or 8th grade, you know, we could carry it to other levels and we have the ability, the power, but you’ve got to get to know him. If you don’t know how to put something together, if you don’t have the instructions, then you’ve just got a bunch of pieces that don’t fit. So you learn where the parts go and how to make it work for you, which you don’t really get in Mormonism. You get do this this this and this, but they don’t tell you how to *be*; they don’t tell you how to go inside and truly create.

Sherry has met several obvious challenges in the course of her liahona life, including the dissonance between the promise of Mormonism and what it has become through the LDS Church's changing agendas, her divorce, and her current husband's prohibition of her participation in Ramtha's school. Despite her belief that the LDS Church is not living up to its potential, and the fact that she has to significantly mute her enthusiasm for seeking at church and at home, she is willing to do that because of the passionate relationship she enjoys with her husband and her love for the Church. She refuses to focus on the negative aspects of the Church because she believes that negativity affects her own frequency. Thus, like Denise, Sherry is completely committed to ongoing activity in the LDS Church. Though she rejects the LDS belief that the Utah institution is the "only true Church" she says she doesn't plan on joining any other churches. "I'll be a Mormon for the rest of my life. And that pleases my husband." She says that her patriarchal blessing warns her that "the disappointments that will enter [her] life . . . will all be learning events," and instructs her that if she uses her gift of *discernment* to make sense of it all, it will be for her good. She says, "That certainly has been true in this big school called 'life,' with an equal measure of blessings, as well. I am getting my money's worth here in this adventure. I am sixty-five, and feel that finally I understand the whole program of Life."

Sandra

Though she is not involved in the Ramtha School, seventy-one year old Sandra, the oldest Book Group participant in this project, joined Sherry in the I Am group about five years ago and is open to Ramtha's teachings. Sandra is another Mormon convert, having joined the LDS Church in 1955, at the age of fifteen, in

southern California. She had a family connection to Mormonism, as her grandmother had joined the Church in Sweden and was a faithful, believing American Mormon. Like all of the previous women introduced here, Sandra also identifies herself as a seeker, one who looked deeply to understand Mormon doctrine. However, as we will see, the impact from her negative experience as a woman in the LDS Church was the driving force behind her seeking outside the LDS Church to resolve this issue and restore her physical and emotional health. Ultimately, Sandra's seeking began as an intellectual project that became a spiritual quest to reconcile her gendered experience of Mormonism.

Sandra believes she was born with a spiritual instinct that got activated early in her life. She remembers accompanying neighbors to their various churches and, as a four-year-old, thinking, "Jesus loves me! I just believed that. I believed what I sang in the songs we sang." When she was about seven, she remembers "learning that Jesus died on the cross, the whole gory story," which was so upsetting her mother refused to let her return. Her yearly attendance at the Burbank, California YMCA camp from the age of nine is what influenced her search for a church family. "Y camp was just a spiritual place," she recalls. "We were out in the mountains; we'd sing spiritual songs; and our chapel was outside. I remember singing 'How Great Thou Art' while I was sitting outside and experiencing all those things. I could hear the birds singing, the breeze rushing by, and I felt spiritually connected and wanted a place where I could worship all year long. People were from different religions and I decided that I wanted a church to go to."

Sandra began attending the LDS Church when she was twelve. Her grandmother ongoingly reminded her that Mormons were "her people" and that she

should join that community. Finally, when she was twelve, she persuaded her mother to take her and her brothers to church. Her first visit happened to occur on the first Sunday of the month, traditionally reserved for “fast and testimony” meeting, during which anyone in attendance may approach the podium, bear their testimony of the gospel, and share personal faith promoting experiences. Sandra remembers that “Two young girls my age bore their testimonies, and I just wanted what they had. I wanted to go to church there and I wanted those girls to be my friends. And they did become my friends.”¹⁹⁷

Sandra shares a lot in common with Denise, Natalie, and Sherry. However, while they challenge and/or reject gender norms but do not appear to suffer cognitive dissonance over it, soft spoken Sandra’s relationship with the channeled I Am materials grew out of the physical and emotional disorders she developed over decades as she struggled—and largely failed—to reconcile LDS Church’s attitudes about gender. Though her conversion to Mormonism and her experience as a sociology student at Brigham Young University was largely positive, all of this shifted with her gendered experience of the temple, when she (in Mormon parlance) “took out her endowment” in preparation for being sealed to her husband. Like many if not most Mormons, Sandra’s patriarchal blessing had promised she would marry and have children. She reflects on the anxiety of one of her BYU roommates whose blessing had *not* made those promises, and remembers counting on and looking

¹⁹⁷ To her disappointment, Sandra’s mother and brothers were not interested in the LDS Church. She was scared to tell her mother that she had scheduled her baptism. For some time, a member who lived near her had taken her to church. However, by her baptism day they had moved away. She remembers finally approaching her mother two hours before the ceremony. Sandra’s mother was willing to take her but waited outside, refusing to attend the baptism.

forward to a temple marriage. Up to that point, Sandra says, the Church had never made her feel bad about herself or make her “feel lacking in some way.”

This changed, however, during her encounter with Mormonism’s most sacred rituals. During the endowment ceremony, church members have a number of identity-changing experiences that challenged Sandra’s relationship to what had been her experience of benign LDS Church patriarchy. Participants in these ceremonies receive “new names” that will serve as one key for entry into the celestial kingdom; witness performances of the organization of the earth, Adam and Eve’s arrival in the Garden of Eden and their subsequent fortunate fall by eating of the fruit of The Tree of Good and Evil; make covenants with God, as Mormons believe Adam and Eve did; and share their search for further light and knowledge promised by the Father, learning and performing all of the tokens and keys that, ultimately, will allow them to enter the presence of the Lord when they leave this life and receive their final reward.

Sandra’s problems with the LDS Church began with this ceremony. One’s first experience in the temple is being separated from the opposite sex—not only to enter the dressings rooms where one dons the white clothing designed to facilitate the ceremony; men and women are also seated separately during the endowment ceremony itself, with men on the right side and women on the left. Moreover, women are apparently subordinated to men at various points in the actual endowment ceremony. While in the temple endowment film Adam covenants directly with God, Eve apparently only looks and speaks directly to Adam, covenanting to hearken unto him as opposed to obviously entering into a direct relationship with God. Similarly, later in the ceremony a prayer circle is formed,

made up of an equal number of men and women. Though women participate in the prayer, their faces are veiled. Finally, when a woman is endowed in preparation for her sealing to a man for time and all eternity, at the culmination of the endowment she approaches the veil symbolizing the end of mortality and entry into the spirit world. She is met at and taken through the veil between the worlds by her future husband instead of a generic temple worker. He acts as a stand-in for the Lord, asking her for the signs and tokens given in the endowment for passage into the Lord's presence. Ultimately, he ushers her into the celestial room of the temple, which symbolizes the celestial kingdom—the only place in which God resides.¹⁹⁸

This initiatory experience was problematic for Sandra for several reasons. As a convert with non-member parents, Sandra's parents were not allowed in the temple and so were not present at either the endowment or marriage ceremony. In addition, she was disturbed by the apparent gender inequalities enacted in the ceremonies. For her, the most striking problem was that one of the first questions asked by her new husband at the veil was to speak her "new name," without which she could not enter the celestial room. Mormons are taught that sealed couples will repeat this performance when they have been judged worthy for exaltation. Men will thus call their wives' new names to make real their sealing and eternal progression together as gods. Participants are warned never to reveal their new name (and other signs and tokens) to anyone in any place other than at the temple veil, and men are prohibited from sharing their new names with their wives. (Perhaps it would be more correct

¹⁹⁸ For information about these and other aspects of LDS temple rituals, see David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994); and Allen H. Barber, *Celestial Symbols: Symbolism in Doctrine, Religious Traditions and Temple Architecture* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers and Distributors, Inc., 1989).

from the LDS point of view that it is “unnecessary” for a woman to know her husband’s name.)

The implications of the endowment created a recurring nightmare for Sandra. “The problem was that [my husband] would know my name and I would not know him.” For her, this meant that she might not know *him* if he failed to call her name.¹⁹⁹ “I had years of nightmares,” she remembered, “where I was in Provo [Utah] and was looking for [him], looking in the phonebook, but I could never find his name. I never connected.” In addition, returning to the temple caused Sandra emotional and physical pain because of the implied mandate to achieve perfection in order to realize an eternal marriage:

Temple ceremonies would cause me to have so much grief. I told myself I’d always be the best wife and he’d always want me. But I wasn’t always, and sometimes that would cause me to have that dream. I was trying to be perfect and couldn’t do it.

I thought it was wrong that men were put in between women and God. And I thought if I studied the gospel enough and understood everything, I would come to understand why it was the way it was and it would be fine. I didn’t want it to hurt my testimony. I wanted to still believe the church was true. So I began to study. In about 1980 I took an Institute class (5 years) I had a prof who was from Harvard. He had studied Greek, and all the questions I’d had about women were issues he’d dealt with. He knew all the translations about women were wrong, that men are not placed between women and God. Deliberate mistranslations. When I found *that* out, I was *really* mad. If I knew those things weren’t translated correctly, the General Authorities [of the LDS Church] had to know too. *And they just left them that way.*

Though her husband supported her completely, like Denise, Natalie, and Sherry, Sandra’s intellectual seeking led to problems in her other relationships. By the time Sandra had these insights about the implications of translation, she “was really

¹⁹⁹ Sandra is one of many LDS woman I have heard report on the fear that their husbands would fail to call their names, usually because they had failed to be the perfect “Molly Mormon” wife. Anecdotally it appears that this was a common fear for young women of my generation.

mad and wanted out” of the Church. However, she was also older, with several adult children, who she had raised to be observant Mormons. Echoing a sentiment I heard from many women, Sandra observes how difficult it is to question the Church after having supported it in indoctrinating her children not to question. “We’re so entwined in the Church,” she remembers. “It takes a lot to get out once family is involved.” Like many Mormons who encounter loved one’s negative reaction to Church teachings or policies, her children were alarmed and even angry. Fearing her effect on *their* children, they even considered whether or not to continue allowing Sandra access to her grandchildren. “I was trying to figure it all out. I found Sunstone and began going in 1986 or 1987. I discovered that others were finding ways to stay [in the Church]. I also found and began attending Provo Canyon Women’s Retreat and the New Hampshire Exponent Retreat.”²⁰⁰

Part of the problem was that intellectual seeking had become a dangerous activity. As she began engaging in those “intellectual” communities, Sandra became aware of what she considered to be unrighteous use of priesthood power in the excommunications of several prominent Mormon feminist men and women, the September Six, some of whom she knew personally. The excommunications were especially powerful because of the rhetoric church leaders used to distinguish between loyal saints and those it saw as dissident apostates. In 1993, Boyd K. Packer (who reportedly had instigated the excommunications) gave an infamous talk in which he identified what he saw as being the three greatest threats to the Lord’s

²⁰⁰ For information about the Women’s Exponent Retreat see <http://www.exponentii.org/retreat/exponent-ii-retreat-2011>. For information about Provo Canyon Retreat, now the Rosewood Retreat, see http://dir.groups.yahoo.com/group/rosewood_retreat/

Church: Homosexuals, feminists, and “so-called intellectuals.”²⁰¹ Sandra says she felt she’d “been thrown out of the church as well. . . . Packer’s talk about enemies of the church . . . I thought ‘well, I’m two of those. I’m questioning and wondering.’ If I was an enemy to the church, why would I go if my church didn’t have a place for people who were wondering?”

Besides being dangerous, Sandra’s intellectual and spiritual curiosity made church meetings difficult to sit through. Like Denise, Natalie, and Sherry, the other problem Sandra faced was an increasingly bland church experience due to doctrinal simplification and instruction not to allow theological speculation during lessons. “I got so I was so miserable . . . I felt that there was no place for spiritual growth in the church.”

Everything was repetitious; lessons were the same. The worst thing was the combined lesson manuals [for priesthood and Relief Society]. There was nothing about women in the lessons. It blew my mind. I was so disappointed. . . . I knew that the General Relief Society president had been preparing lessons for women, and then [the general authorities] insisted we would all study prophets. There were no women’s voices in the lessons. I needed women’s experience and history validated . . . I needed to be someplace other than the church.

As a result of this disenchantment, Sandra continued attending church sporadically, but (like Sherry) she “prayed for groups of women” to appear, and Sherry, Book

²⁰¹ In his talk to the All-Church Coordinating Council on May 18, 1993, LDS apostle Boyd K. Packer distinguished three main threats to the Church: “There are three areas where members of the Church, influenced by social and political unrest, are being caught up and led away,” he began. “I chose these three,” he explained, “because they have made major invasions into the membership of the Church. In each, the temptation is for us to turn about and face the wrong way, and it is hard to resist, for doing it seems so reasonable and right. . . . The dangers I speak of come from the gay-lesbian movement, the feminist movement (both of which are relatively new), and the ever-present challenge from the so-called scholars or intellectuals. Our local leaders must deal with all three of them with ever-increasing frequency. In each case, the members who are hurting have the conviction that the Church somehow is doing something wrong to members or that the Church is not doing enough for them.” See Boyd K. Packer, “All-Church Coordinating Council Meeting,” *Brigham Young University*, May 18, 1993, <http://emp.byui.edu/HUFFR/All%20Church%20Coordinating%20Council-Boyd%20K.%20Packer.htm>.

Group, and the women's I Am group were the answers to her prayer. It wasn't exactly what she thought she was looking for, she says, but since her health had become so bad she kept going "because they talked about a way of experiencing life and happiness by changing your own thinking." At Green Book Club she says she learned "the most important concept I've ever learned: that the person you see as your enemy is truly your best friend." At first she applied the idea to a sister-in-law with whom she had a rocky relationship, asking how the woman could be her friend and teacher. "She was helping me to see if my reactions were Christ-like. When she talked against me, I would get unhappy with her. Instead I turned it around and saw how I could let her be who she was without me judging her in every way."

Ultimately, like Sherry, who focuses only on the positive so as to attract only positive, Sandra decided to apply that insight to the church, and it helped enhance her relationship to Mormonism. "I thought [my anger] was justified because I was so hurt," she says. "I put my whole heart and soul into [the Church] and cared deeply about it; but it didn't care about me, didn't support women in return. I found it to be an institution that supported men." Nevertheless, based on her study of the I Am materials at Green Book Club, like Sherry she was determined to "let the Church be what it was, accept what was good about it, and see how I could be more like Christ in dealing with the Church." As a result, she found that she was no longer angry with the Church. Sandra effectively remembered what she had known through Mormonism since her conversion: Through all the layers of educational standardization and the Church's accompanying emphasis on obedience to centralized authority, she remembered, "*I am the power and authority over me. I have the ability to connect directly with God any time I wanted. I am a God. A*

Goddess. *Everybody* is, because we're all part of God. We're all connected to each other spiritually on this earth—and to the flowers and elements. And that positive energy is *God in action!*"

I wanted to be about having positive, loving energy. That's why we're here: to enjoy life and live without fear and judgment. I knew if I lived with positive energy, and did not fear, I'd be free. I wouldn't have to worry about my children, or anything else. I knew everything would eventually take care of itself. I wanted to live from a place of gratitude and peace. And that's what would come back to me, even at church.

Sandra does not attend "their [Green Book] church," and she says she does not believe everything they teach, though she doesn't provide details. Regardless, she says she can apply all the things she learns from the channeled I Am materials, even in the temple ceremony. Like Denise, Natalie, and Sherry, she says, "It allows me to remain Mormon, because at church I walk in the door and experience that men are more important than women. I know it through the Relief Society lessons. I have to weekly go outside of the church to get what I get and remember that women are important, women's experiences are important. Without it, I can't be there."

During this process, Sandra was called in to see her stake president, who wanted to know why she and her husband did not have temple recommends. She lovingly explained her dilemma to this man, whom she had known for many years, requesting that he do a temple session expressly to listen for what women hear. When they met again, he reported that he had gone through not one but two sessions. "I was really impressed he'd done this for me," she said. "He told me, 'I heard in the temple what you hear, and I believe like you do, that Jesus Christ taught differently. Can you go to the temple and take in what you know about your relationship with Christ and reinterpret the words in the way you know them to be

true?’ She thought about that request for two years, joining him in regular meetings to discuss the issues:

I finally told him I was just going to go to church and love the people. And then one day it occurred to me maybe I could go to the *temple* just for love. Before hand, I drove my car in front of the temple in a no parking zone facing in to the temple, and I prayed. “I’m going in the morning and I want it to be a loving experience for me. I want to see it differently.” When those [bothersome] parts came along, I would tell myself what *Jesus Christ* would say. I would say, “Both men and women hearken unto God. And in a Christ-like marriage, both would harken to each other and to God.” In my own head I say those words.²⁰²

Today Sandra attends church but is not a true believer because she feels the Church has failed to live up to its potential, and that failure has harmed women. Speaking of her patriarchal blessing, she recalls its promise of the gifts of “kindness, charity, forgiveness, and the power of discernment. It also stated that she would be blessed with leadership qualities, that she would “do good and grow” while directing and leading others. The last time she read it, however, she noticed that following those blessings is the promise that her ability to excel in those leadership skills would “bring honor to those who preside over [her].” She interprets that to mean that, at least in the worldview of the man who blessed her, “I have clearly only been blessed with those things to honor *men!*” Nevertheless, she continues to claim those gifts and their legacy. When she was forty-two, she asked to be released from her calling as stake primary president. “I did not honor those who presided over me,” she says. “I

²⁰² Sandra is referring to a section of the temple endowment ceremony in which Adam and Eve covenant with God. Eve covenants to “hearken unto” her husband as he follows the will of the Lord, and Adam covenants to follow that will. In Mormonism, *priesthood* is the channel. (See Bishop, *The LDS Gospel of Light*, 158–59.) Therefore, because only men hold the priesthood, the LDS Church ongoingly struggles with how to characterize the relationship of women to men and authority and agency. Over the years, the terms obey, preside, hearken unto, etc., have been used. Though it appears true that most LDS women are unlikely to openly question the implications inherent in those terms, the Internet has become a forum for their interrogation by LDS women and men.

asked to be released!” In addition to her pervasive nightmares about eternity, she had a crisis of faith over the pace of Church membership. “The Church was using me up! I had a constant stomach ache; I never had time to be with my own children. And I thought that’s how I had to live my life, that all members of the church had to live like that, but suddenly I realized I was getting off the church treadmill—was also getting off the patriarchal blessing treadmill, doing the things that were prescribed” just because they appeared in the document. Now she claims her accomplishments as a leader, helping “other women navigate their lives when they’re having trouble with the Church.” Similarly, she claims the gift of discernment she was promised, saying, “I think that [promise] is huge! I discern my own truth!”

Reconciling Reincarnation: Mormonism, Multiple Probations, and Near Death Experience

As easy as it is for Natalie, Denise, Sherry, and Sandra to integrate and/or reconcile Ramtha’s teachings and other channeled materials into Mormon belief and practice, not all philosophies associated with channeling are congruent with the LDS Church’s doctrines. This dilemma would seem to pose a problem for claiming they have encountered eternal truth. The most glaring example is the concept of reincarnation, or rebirth, for channeled messages virtually always incorporate some understanding of rebirth or multiple mortal lives. It is clear that Mormonism posits at least three incarnations, or probations, but only one of them—life on earth—is an experience of mortality. Reincarnation, or what many Mormons call the doctrine of *multiple mortal probations* (MMPs), is officially designated as heresy by the LDS

Church.²⁰³ However, because of its teachings about premortal existence and eternal progression, the door is open to individual speculation about the role rebirth might play in the Plan of Salvation.

Despite the Church's official stand on reincarnation, Denise, Natalie, Sherry, and Sandra are all part of the eleven percent of Mormons who say they believe in reincarnation.²⁰⁴ A few LDS scholars and theologians have examined the early LDS Church's attitudes about MMPs and have come to the conclusion that reincarnation may be compatible with Mormonism after all. This assertion is largely authorized by referring to the teachings of Joseph Smith (some of them privately disseminated during his lifetime) and other prominent early church leaders, who maintained and tried to teach that concept after his death. In the King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith made a statement that some Mormons interpret as pointing to multiple mortal probations:

Here, then, is eternal life--to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, *from exaltation to exaltation*, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.²⁰⁵

However, Smith is also frequently quoted as denouncing the specific concept of "transmigration of soul or spirit" as being "of the Devil." In his exhaustive historical

²⁰³ Spencer J. Palmer, "I Have a Question: Reincarnation," *Ensign*, August 1989, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1989/08/i-have-a-question?lang=eng>.

²⁰⁴ Gregory Smith, "Mormons in America," 16-17.

²⁰⁵ "History of the Church, Volume VI," *BYU Book of Abraham Project*, 1844 1843, http://www.boap.org/LDS/History/History_of_the_Church/Vol_VI (emphasis mine).

narrative about Mormonism and magic, D. Michael Quinn reveals that two of Smith's plural wives reported his teaching them about the principle.²⁰⁶

Brigham Young is responsible for the decline of reincarnation in the Mormon tradition before it was widely disseminated to the general church membership. However, in 1853, Young seemed to imply some form of rebirth by stating, "When the elements in an organized form do not fulfill the measure of their creation, they are thrown back again, like . . . old pottery ware, to be ground up, and made over again."²⁰⁷ One contributor to an Internet discussion about multiple mortal probations points to the related issue of movement or progression between the three degrees of glory:

I think the principles of "inter kingdom progression" and "multiple probations," both of which can be found in writings of early church leaders, are today discounted and denied because no one understands them and there haven't been subsequent revelations about it. I think there is also fear that people will become lazy and complacent if they think they get second chances and can progress after this life. But for me personally, eternal progression (for everyone) and multiple mortal probations, are the only ways the great plan of happiness makes sense.²⁰⁸

Nevertheless, today the LDS Church rejects reincarnation as knowledge or truth, to the ire of those Mormons who have come to believe in it through a process of prayer and reason. Despite the contradictions and ambivalence, many modern Mormons believe in reincarnation. It appears anecdotally that many, if not most,

²⁰⁶ According to archived journals, Eliza R. Snow and Prescendia Huntington Buell both affirmed that they believed in the principle of reincarnation because Joseph had told them it was true. See Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 302.

²⁰⁷ Brigham Young, "True and False Riches, by Brigham Young (Journal of Discourses, Vol. 1, Pp. 264-276)," *Journal of Discourses*, August 14, 1853, <http://jod.mrm.org/1/264>.

²⁰⁸ Black Moclips, "No Progression Between Kingdoms!," Response, *Mormon Dialogue & Discussion Board*, January 5, 2009, <http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/40553-no-progression-between-kingdoms/>.

members of support discussion groups who gather online and in person to discuss less orthodox ways of being LDS believe in reincarnation.²⁰⁹ Moreover, all of the women I interviewed for this chapter believe in some form of reincarnation or multiple mortal probations—beyond the traditional Mormon interpretation of the Plan of Salvation, which includes preexistence, mortal life, and afterlife. In part, this belief has been generated by their participation in past life regressions and their interest in the related study of near death experience (NDE).

Mormonism and the Study of Near Death Experiences

Near death experiences are another way of knowing that has currency with both Latter-day Saints and proponents of the New Spirituality. In the LDS context, the NDE has been compared with Mormon visionary experiences, including Joseph Smith's First Vision;²¹⁰ related to similar episodes in the Book of Mormon,²¹¹ and speculated as possibly being the basis for a new religious movement combining Mormon ideas with mainline Christian and New Age elements.²¹² Douglas Groothuis traced the development of the NDE phenomenon, arguing that we can understand its popularity as "an American religious tendency: individualistic and immediate." Groothuis asserts that the popularity of NDEs "conforms to recurring New Age

²⁰⁹ See, for example, NewOrderMormon.org, MormonStories.org, StayLDS.org, FeministMormonHousewives.org, and LDSLiberationFront.net.

²¹⁰ Robert Fillerup, "Early Mormon Visions and Near Death Experiences," *Mormon History and Doctrine*, August 22, 1990, <http://www.code-co.com/rcf/mhistdoc/nde.htm>.

²¹¹ Kevin Christensen, "'Nigh Unto Death': NDE Research and the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 1–20, <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/jbms/?vol=2&num=1&id=16>.

²¹² Massimo Introvigne, p. 118 "Embraced by the Church? Betty Eadie, Near-Death Experiences, and Mormonism." *Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 99-119.

aspirations and predilections” by it promising “a new evolutionary development in human consciousness.”²¹³

For our purposes, the most important observation comes from Raymond Moody, the researcher who coined the term *near death experience* to describe the phenomenon and is the father of its study. Moody observed that Mormonism is the Western religion with the most sympathetic view of NDEs, precisely because of its doctrinal peculiarities.²¹⁴ In part, this congruence derives from the significance of the category *light* in both NDEs and Mormon doctrine. Titles of books about NDE experience indicate this general orientation: *Lessons from the Light*, *Messages from the Light*, *By the Light*, *Beyond the Light*, *Into the Light*, *Transformed by the Light*, *The Truth in the Light*—and so on. As explained in Chapter 2, light is not just a concept to Latter-day Saints. Rather, light denotes not only a synonym for knowledge and truth but is also an ontological state: One’s degree of perfection (i.e. the state of knowing and acting on truth) is related to the amount of light one is given.

Therefore, given their understanding of the vitality of existence “beyond the veil” and their interest in the cultivation of “further light and knowledge,” Latter-day Saints have also been great contributors to research on the positive near death experience. In fact, those Latter-day Saints who have had NDEs and write about their experiences inevitably speak about their experience in terms of knowledge—especially the extent to which the ontological state of the “next life” facilitates learning. Lawrence E. Tooley, for instance, devotes an entire chapter to describing

²¹³ Douglas Groothuis, “To Heaven and Back?,” *Christianity Today*, April 23, 1995, 41.

²¹⁴ Raymond A. Moody, *Life After Life & Reflections On Life After Life*, Guideposts. (Carmel, CA; New York: Guideposts, 1988), 88–89.

“learning centers” in which spirits studied whatever interested them. His spirit guide, a friend who had died while they were both in college, informed Tooley that in the spirit world “everyone has a burning thirst for knowledge,” and its pursuit is among their greatest joys.²¹⁵ In that environment, people are able to absorb knowledge tactilely, visually, and telepathically. Experience is essential to real knowledge, because of the opportunity to become as God is, to know what God knows: “The one thing we’ve learned is that knowledge increases our intelligence. The greater our field of knowledge and experience, the more intelligent we become” (ibid., 76).

One of the most well-known NDE in both LDS and New Age circles is *Embraced by the Light* (1992), by Betty J. Eadie, an LDS convert.²¹⁶ *Embraced by the Light* documents Eadie’s near death experience in 1973, while in the hospital recovering from a hysterectomy. Her descent into death was preceded by a feeling of darkness and dread, deriving from persistent childhood claustrophobia and fear of God’s anger and judgment. As she lay reflecting on the state of her soul, she realized she was chilled and weak but was unable to reach for the call button to alert the nurse. Sinking further into darkness but still aware, she felt her spirit detach from her body and surge forward out of the building. Eadie reports being met by three comforting and reassuring spirit beings, who she recognized as “guardian or ministering angels,” beings who informed her that she had died prematurely.²¹⁷ Concerned for her family, she was almost instantaneously transported to her home. Observing her husband and

²¹⁵ Lawrence E. Tooley, *I Saw Heaven: A Remarkable Visit to the Spirit World* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers & Distributors, 1997), 75.

²¹⁶ Betty J. Eadie and Curtis Taylor, *Embraced by the Light*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bantam, 1994).

²¹⁷ Betty J. Eadie, “Embraced by the Light: A Brief Retelling,” *The Official Betty J. Eadie Website*, 1992, <http://www.embracedbythelight.com/leftside/embraced/brief.htm>.

children, she began to understand that they would be all right without her. Once her understanding about her family was complete, she found herself back at the hospital again with her monk-like friends. Eadie then felt herself “drawn up and into a great, whirling, black mass,” seemingly traveling “at speeds faster than light.” Filled with tranquility, comfort, and healing, she deliberately continued her progression toward a brilliant light, inside of which she met a man she recognized as Jesus Christ, someone she had known before and who had always loved her.²¹⁸ Eadie experienced the light surrounding him as a force that radiated knowledge about the creation of the earth and all beings on it; the nature of God, humans, and agency; and the existence of a premortal world separated from preexistence of human beings before being born into a body on Earth.

Eadie’s story is important to this project in part because of its iconic place in New Age thought as a New York Times bestseller but also because of how it bridges Mormon and New Age thinking and illustrates how Mormons mediate knowledge. According to trade magazine *Publishers Weekly*, the book *Embraced by the Light* “set new sales records” for books in the near-death experience category.²¹⁹ It was number one on the New York Times bestseller list for 34 consecutive weeks and was on the list for more than two years. Based on a survey of discussions about Eadie’s experience, Mormons were excited about Eadie’s connection to the LDS Church and the ways in which her NDE supported Mormonism’s claims about Christ and the

²¹⁸ Eadie and Taylor, *Embraced by the Light*, 42.

²¹⁹ Daisy Maryles, “Yet Another Awakening,” *Publishers Weekly* 243, no. 32 (August 5, 1996): 279.

afterlife—until they encountered the ways in which her account challenges Mormon conventions about reality.

Eadie’s book is also interesting because of how it challenges LDS gender ideologies that refuse to institutionally validate women as prophets and the fact that it has also generated scathing critique because of how Eadie’s story both supports and deviates from Mormon doctrine. The most strident critique of Eadie’s book—and the experience it details—has been Orson Scott Card, an LDS Hugo and Nebula award winning science fiction author, whose books have routinely included Mormonism—and magic—as creative tropes.²²⁰ Ironically, Card’s observation about the book’s popularity at the time is similar to the one I am promoting here: Mormons have been increasingly suffering from spiritual boredom. Ironically, Card admits, “The very fact that *Embraced by the Light* has spread like wildfire through the Church, being quoted from in sacrament meeting and Relief Society and buzzed about wherever Mormons gather, may be a symptom of how hungry the Saints are for vivid spiritual experiences.”²²¹ However, he blames Eadie’s LDS readers for their

²²⁰ Card is noted for having won both the Hugo and Nebula awards for two of his books, *Ender’s Game* (1971), and *Speaker for the Dead* (1986), its sequel. He has also repeatedly written about magic. Of particular relevance to this project is his “Alvin Maker” fantasy series, set in an alternate 19th and early 20th century America in which the “plain magics of plain people” have “colored the entire history of the colonies.” The series protagonist is Alvin Miller, a seventh son of a seventh son, whose character can be read as a retelling of the life of Joseph Smith. Even in Card’s version of Mormon sci-fi, “makers” (those with the most powerful gift, the ability to control—*make*—the physical world) appear to be male. Orson Scott Card, “Books By Orson Scott Card: Seventh Son,” *Hatrack River: The Official Web Site of Orson Scott Card*, 1987, <http://www.hatrack.com/osc/books/seventh.shtml>.

²²¹ Orson Scott Card, “A New Age Testament: A Mormon Reader Looks at *Embraced by the Light*,” *Vigor: Advice & Commentary on Mormon Life*, August 1994, <http://www.nauvoo.com/vigor/issues/06.html>.

boredom, accusing them of not cultivating the Spirit and being unwilling to do the hard work requisite for a meaningful spiritual life.²²²

In addition, Card has a gender complaint, noting three main reasons for so vocally opposing Eadie. First, her story constitutes “doctrinal discourse,” and, as such, she is usurping the role of LDS prophets. “The Lord’s house is a house of order,” Card reminds readers. Credible private revelations have their place in the LDS worldview, but Eadie lacks the “legitimate responsibility” or “stewardship” authority to proclaim doctrine. Though Card does not state it specifically, the fact is unavoidable that in Mormonism women are not eligible for that prophetic calling. Therefore, by virtue of her being *female*, Card can easily dismiss Eadie as a false prophet teaching “false doctrine.” Even if the experience was real, according to Card it has no importance for anyone but herself. One mark of true personal revelation is that the recipient holds it sacred and keeps it to themselves. To do otherwise is to compete with the Lord’s true anointed.

Second, in some instances she clearly teaches established LDS doctrine and folk doctrine but fails to identify Mormonism as the source of those doctrines. She

²²² Card’s entire statement reads as follows: “The very fact that *Embraced by the Light* has spread like wildfire through the Church, being quoted from in sacrament meeting and Relief Society and buzzed about wherever Mormons gather, may be a symptom of how hungry the Saints are for vivid spiritual experiences; sadly, this implies that they live without much contact with the Spirit of God. They yearn for spirituality, but like the Nephites who listened to Nehor and Korihor [Satan-like figures from the Book of Mormon], they want to receive it without reshaping their lives. They have lost the vigor of true testimony, and therefore, just as many Mormon would-be intellectuals are seduced by the dogmas of worldly disciplines, so also are these Mormon would-be charismatics seduced by the optimistic, enthusiastic, affirmative tone of Eadie’s book. It *should* be true, because it makes us feel so good” (ibid.).

“gives the Church [and its prophets] no credit.”²²³ In addition, however, Card argues that she also teaches ideas that directly contradict established LDS doctrine. Card identifies as one such deception Christ’s purported response to Eadie’s question “why there were so many churches in the world”²²⁴: “Each of us, I was told, is at a different level of spiritual development and understanding. Each person is therefore prepared for a different level of spiritual knowledge. All religions upon the earth are necessary because there are people who need what they teach. . . . Each church fulfills spiritual needs that perhaps others cannot fill. No one church can fulfill everybody’s needs at every level.”²²⁵ The LDS Church, of course, teaches that it is the

²²³ Card complains, “What we do know is that there is no mention of the Church whatsoever in this book. Gold Leaf Press, the publisher, gave LDS booksellers an insert with an adhesive strip that would allow booksellers to affix them to copies of *Embraced by the Light* being sold to LDS readers. This single page tells of her conversion to the gospel and gives special insights to LDS readers. But the fact remains that she is a member of the Church whose vision is overwhelmingly a collection of LDS doctrines and folk doctrines that have circulated widely in the Church. All the important ideas have roots in the LDS community, and at all the points where it departs from genuine LDS traditions, it follows pop psychology or trendy new-age religious ideas. Yet she felt no obligation whatsoever to tell her nonmember readers that this gospel can be found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” Orson Scott Card, “A New Age Testament: A Mormon Reader Looks at *Embraced by the Light*,” *Vigor: Advice & Commentary on Mormon Life*, August 1994, <http://www.nauvoo.com/vigor/issues/06.html>.

²²⁴ Eadie and Taylor, *Embraced by the Light*, 45.

²²⁵ Card says, “I will confess to being most annoyed when Eadie put into her vision one of the most pernicious and anti-Christian of the current pop religious fads. She says, as Christ did, that we must love God first, but then, in direct contradiction to Christ’s own words, she says ‘Then we must love ourselves. I know that without feelings of self-love that the love we feel for others is counterfeit.’ (60). If we had no other evidence, this alone would be clear proof that at least some parts of her supposed vision not only did not come from Christ but are directly opposed to his will. That is, unless Christ didn’t mean it when he said, over and over, that after our love for God must come our love for our fellow humans. It has become trendy in the Church to accept the false doctrine of the world that misconstrues the grammar of ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ to imply that Christ was therefore inserting between God and our neighbor a commandment to look out for Number One; but, fortunately, none of the prophets has ever felt it appropriate to put this bit of anti-Christian nonsense in the form of scripture. Its roots are not in revelation, but in pop psychology—the same pop psychology that urges us to get rid of guilt, not by repentance, but by loving ourselves as we are, sins and all. And that same pop psychology and trendy New Age religion is the source of all the ideas in Eadie’s book that do not come from Mormon doctrine—or common misconceptions about Mormon doctrine.” Card, “A New Age Testament: A Mormon Reader Looks at *Embraced by the Light*.”

“true” church of Jesus Christ, the only church with the Savior at its head. As a result, Card argues that “Latter-day Saints are not free to accept both the teachings of LDS prophets and those of Betty J. Eadie as having equal authority, for the simple reason that they can't both be true” (ibid.).

Finally, Card objects to the fact that Eadie has made so much money from her “false doctrine.” Though he admits to benefitting financially from his own written work, he reminds readers that he always identifies himself as LDS and never claims to speak for God. In what Card apparently sees as a sort of spiritual plagiarism, Eadie claims divine origin of her experience, fails to cite her source, and makes money:

Eadie has clearly set herself up as an alternate prophet, and has, just as clearly, separated her work and teachings from the Mormon Church—even as she exploits Mormon doctrine to make money and to persuade the world that she is a prophet. She has become a rival to the Church, and to follow her is to leave The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Finally, instead of keeping her revelation to herself, she “broadcast” it for “her own aggrandizement.” (Ibid.)

Despite Card’s negative review of Eadie’s particular NDE report, which does *not* promote reincarnation, acceptance of the general validity of NDEs by Mormons has led some of them to believe in multiple mortal probations. In fact, virtually all of the women interviewed for this chapter recalled reading *Embraced by the Light* and all found it compelling. In many cases, an interest in NDEs and belief in channeling led to the related practice of past life regression.

Linda: Mormons and Past Life Regression

According to Wouter Hanegraaff, past life regression has developed as a therapeutic method for both “healing *and* spiritual growth.”²²⁶ Recovering memories from past lives not only helps individuals understand and solve problems but also expands their understanding of personal identity: Proponents believe that humans are not only a product of their current life experiences but that experiences in one’s past life help explain one’s often perplexing choices, responses, and ultimately facilitate the resolution of recurring negative behavioral patterns. Moreover, some past life regression is comparable to channeling because it involves clairvoyance on the part of the therapist or healer. The most famous such individual was medical intuitive Edgar Cayce, who, while asleep, was able to access information about people’s past lives that helped him to identify the best prescription for their healing.²²⁷ Cayce has been compared to Joseph Smith because of the similarities of their religious experiences.

Linda, the next participant in this project, went from a profound interest in NDEs to a thriving practice doing past life regressions for predominantly LDS clients in Utah and areas of the Southwest. I also identify Linda as a seeker and a Liahona Mormon. Like the other women in this chapter, her seeking has been shaped by an experience of difference. Reconciling that difference through both intellectual and spiritual studies has raised questions that take her beyond the LDS

²²⁶ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 272.

²²⁷ K. Paul Johnson, *Edgar Cayce in Context: The Readings, Truth and Fiction* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 1.

Church for their answers. However, she also clearly believes deeply in the LDS Church and Mormonism as a religious tradition, and she more obviously acknowledges and acquiesces to the Church's authority more often than the other women in this chapter. Like Denise and Sherry, Linda sees Mormonism as a container that can hold all universal truth. As a result, she devotes a lot of her spiritual search to reconciling the extra-Mormon truth she encounters with Church teachings. Her own experience of the Holy Ghost is her arbiter of truth.

Echoing the other women's stories, Linda reports having had an early series of experiences that led her to develop a *liahona* personality—all of which effectively set her apart from others around her. She remembers having what she calls “the gift of clairaudience” until about the age of five. Though the amount of data she received was not extensive, she says “the gift was very thoroughly given. It wasn't like out of the mist, not very soft, but *loud*. Something definitely outside of me was happening in a very Mormon way.” The messages she received mainly had to do with God's love. “Because of that, where love was everything and I had a sense of responsibility to bear that love, I was always looking for people's expression of feeling that love—because I knew there was nothing exclusive about it. It's like rain: You know it's raining on everyone, but you're the only one who can see it.” Only she could see it because, over time, the meaning of the divine love experienced in Joseph Smith's First Vision was increasingly dampened by the Church's concern with distinguishing the Mormon self from outsiders through displays of worthiness, perfection, exclusivity, and righteous judgment. Even as a child, Linda's access to the spirit world gave her a different perspective on these concerns that she knew she had to cultivate.

Like the other women whose stories appear above, Linda's sense of and desire to maintain access to this divine love throughout her life fueled her spiritual seeking. Like Sherry, Linda's concern eventually led to an interest in NDEs. "People reported feeling this intense love," she said. When she read the book *Life After Life*,²²⁸ by Raymond Moody, the father of NDE research, she realized that "people in Christ's presence felt no judgment, only love. That wasn't the God I heard about at church—and yet by following those [behavioral] requirements I got these gifts. I knew God wanted us to do hard things but at the same time had deep, profound love for us." Like Denise, Natalie, Sherry, and Sandra, Linda's search for truth was also deeply informed by the Thirteenth Article of Faith. She had had "lots of experiences that confirmed that spiritual gifts were connected to this church." However, she also had confidence that "whatever I learned about the nature of humankind would be okay in a church context." This was her attitude when Moody spoke at Brigham Young University in November of 1977.²²⁹ Linda remembers the general student response was that "he [Moody] doesn't really have the truth—he's not Mormon."

But the fact that he'd been invited [to BYU] told me that the gathering of truth is of value to us, even if it's not about Mormonism. I think the fact that other people I cared about didn't think [his presentation] was a big deal really surprised me. I felt alone *again*. So I started reading all the books I could get my hands on about NDEs—probably a dozen books, including Betty Eadie's book, *Embraced by the Light*. It was delightful because she was a Mormon, but there was nothing exclusively Mormon about it. I eventually started reading

²²⁸ Raymond A Moody, *Life After Life & Reflections On Life After Life*, Guideposts. (Carmel, CA; New York: Guideposts, 1988).

²²⁹ "Near-Death Experience / Raymond Moody," Microfilm reel, carton 12, reel 26 (Harold B. Lee Library; Brigham Young University; Provo, Utah, November 1, 1977), L. Tom Perry Special Collections; University Archives; 1130, <http://findingaid.lib.byu.edu/viewItem/UA%201300/carton%2012/reel%2026/>.

Moody's book about connecting with departed loved ones . . . ways of contacting the dead. And I started having experiences of the dead contacting me. [Like the clairaudience,] *it was shocking enough that I believed it was real!*"

One experience of her contact with the dead involved one of her piano students, who had committed suicide. She got messages for her family, including specific impressions: the girl with her father on horses in the mountains; wearing a shell necklace she had been given by her mother; the word "misty"). A strong supporter of Linda's gift, her husband suggested she call the girl's family. "We feel like she's been around lately," they responded. "Her dad was riding in the hills and felt her with him." They also confirmed all of the data Linda obtained. *Misty* had been their family password. "I felt like thunder was rolling under me but wasn't going to touch me," Linda remembers. The experience confirmed her understanding that "spiritual gifts are available to those who pursue them," and she was certain that without pursuing this particular gift, she "wouldn't have recognized it."

At the time, however, because she was aware of the Church's position and accepted it as the arbiter of truth, Linda drew the line at entertaining a belief in reincarnation. Upon reading about Moody's experiments with using hypnotic regression to uncover previous lives, she felt he was at a dead end. "I thought, 'Oh no! Now he's gone off the deep end! This is just too weird,' and I put the book away." It seemed to her that "pursuing practices outside of Mormonism leads you to think you're a law unto yourself," so she determined to make sure she was in tune with the Holy Ghost and continued to read. Her position changed, however, when she read Michael Newton's book, *A Journey of Souls*²³⁰: "I was never the same again

²³⁰ Michael Newton, *Journey of Souls: Case Studies of Life Between Lives* (Saint Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1994).

after that,” she says. “It was confirmed to me from all these experiences that there was truth to be had outside of Mormondom and that it could be gathered and studied; that was the work that fascinated me, and God was okay with that! Brigham Young said that all truth will eventually be embraced by Mormonism. [Church apostle] Hugh B. Brown (1883-1975) said we don’t have a corner on truth!” Thus, like Denise, Natalie, Sherry, and Sandra, decades of seeking after spiritual experiences and being a liahona punctuate Linda’s journey toward an interpretation of Mormonism that accommodates her belief in multiple mortal probations.

Like the other women in this chapter, Linda’s seeking has complicated her relationships. However, rather than managing family conflict, one of Linda’s main concerns is deflecting negative attention from LDS Church leaders. Because she is the most orthodox Mormon of all the women in this chapter, she has not faced rejection from her children, some of whom are adults. She and her husband instilled in their children an appreciation for the Liahona Mormon way of being and the spiritual quest it represents. Unlike Denise and Sherry, because she and her husband are extremely close and he has watched her cultivate closeness to the Spirit, he ultimately trusts her instincts and gifts. In fact, as Linda gravitated to other divinatory tools like tarot, her husband joined her. He even joins her in some of her practices. While from her perspective this is clearly a positive, it does, then, generate their need to manage their reputations in the Utah community where they live.

Like the other women in this chapter, Linda must also manage her seeking in relationship to LDS attitudes about and policies regulating gender, which has cost her full self-expression. As a priesthood holder who ongoingly holds high level local leadership positions, her husband’s high visibility in the LDS community necessitates

their ongoing attention to how Linda presents her insights to others and pursues her largely volunteer past life regression practice. For instance, though she admits her belief in multiple mortal probations privately, she publicly describes her practice as a method of dealing with the negative effects people experience as a result of gaps in the veil separating humans from their memory of their pre-earth existence. Mormons who reject reincarnation in any form usually explain the déjà vu experiences that are associated with it by asserting that as spirit children each of us was assigned to mortal individuals as a guardian angel or ministering angel, a phrase used by Betty Eadie, as noted above. In this scenario, memories of past lives are actually our memories of sharing these mortals' experiences as we closely attended them. Eadie actually promotes this position. In *Embraced by the Light*, she reveals that she “learned that we do not have repeated lives on this earth; when we seem to ‘remember’ a past life, we are actually recalling memories contained in the cells.”²³¹

However, what Linda believes is only one part of the problem. Like Betty Eadie, the knowledge she has gained about the true nature of the afterlife also puts her in danger of appearing to declare prophecy. Therefore, like Denise and Sandra, Linda has made it a point to counsel often with her local Church leaders to explain her positions on controversial issues and reassure them that she does not consider herself a prophet and so is not competing with the LDS priesthood. Unlike Sandra, whose main concern has been with healing the effects of subordination gender, Linda does not report feeling disenfranchised by the Church's commitment to patriarchy. She argues that she is merely developing gifts of the Spirit with which she has been blessed.

²³¹ Eadie and Taylor, *Embraced by the Light*, 93.

Analysis

In Chapter 3, I showed some of the ways in which patriarchal blessings and the *liahona*—Mormon concepts of divination—are congruent with channeling in the New Spirituality. I also explained how the *liahona* serves as a metaphor for spiritual seeking that in Mormon culture has long been recognized as a particular identity: *Liabona Mormon*. I introduced Denise, Natalie, Sherry, Sandra, and Linda, women with either life-long or lengthy LDS backgrounds, as examples of how this overlap of Mormonism and the New Spirituality occurs in their lived experience.

What stands out most about these women is that they are seekers, for whom ultimate reality is grounded in their individual spiritual experience. As a religious tradition, Mormonism arose at a time in U.S. history when one's individual experience of the spirit had already become one of the most important common denominators in the evangelical revivals spreading through New England. In the American context, beginning with the colonial Puritan requirement that each community member be able to publicly share an account of their inward conversion story, experience assumed a privileged place. When in 1820, Joseph Smith formulated his question for God ("Which church should I join?"), his religious instinct was to retire to the woods to pray rather than make a decision based on ecclesiastical authority. Similarly, though he consulted the Bible text for guidance (James 1:5), it is significant that the text only pointed him toward individual prayer. Smith then privileged the resulting visionary experience, stating, "I have actually seen a vision; and who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? For I had seen a vision; I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew

that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation” (*History of the Church*, Vol. 1, 2:25). Just like Smith and those who followed him, the women in this chapter assert their experiences as *knowledge* in an effort to remove them from critique.

For the women introduced here, seeking arose in response to an experience of difference or a sense of alienation and then was fueled by their encounter at various ages (whether as generational Mormons or as converts) with the Mormon mandate to become like God. Denise, Natalie, Sandra, and Linda all had early childhood experiences that set them apart. For instance, Denise knew from the age of two that she saw the world differently from adults and other children around her. Similarly, Linda experienced clairaudient communications from “beyond the veil” at about the same age. Others, like Natalie (born and raised LDS) and Sandra (a convert to Mormonism), were spiritually precocious children but also had adult experiences that alienated them from the LDS Church and other LDS women. Likewise, always intellectually and spiritually curious, Sherry’s initial conversion to Mormonism set her on the path of a lifetime of spiritual seeking.

However, as the LDS Church simplified and standardized its doctrine for an increasingly international membership in the 1980s and 1990s, while also fighting what it saw as the feminist and intellectual menaces, they all found their search for further light and knowledge inside the LDS Church much more difficult. As a result, they experienced the paradox of no longer being able to be authentically “Mormon” at church, or (like Sandra) to question and reject the Church’s motives for gender inequality. Spiritually bored, or even just anxious to be more fully self-expressed spiritually, they search for answers to questions that Mormonism has always posed

but has ceased to be able to answer in its modern LDS incarnation. For example, though one of the most popular institutional and individual LDS discourses invokes the attractive Mormon idea that “families can be together forever” as a pithy survivor of doctrinal simplification—precisely because it is a catchy phrase that can distinguish Mormonism from rival Christianities while being repeated endlessly without meaning anything beyond what it says. In fact, Mormons have for the most part lost the language for inquiring into what that means, because the LDS Church actively discourages and even closes down speculative discussion about it (and virtually all other doctrinal topics) in its Sunday meetings and other institutional environments. The female Liahona Mormons highlighted here operate out of burning questions about how it works and what it means to progress to godhood—traditionally presented as the sole state in which “forever families” are actually available, though this idea is much more theologically complicated than the parroted phrase reveals. Denise illustrates the situation perfectly when she describes her response to her first screening of the film “What the Bleep Do We Know?”: “I wanted to hear more of what was so familiar to me!”

To find answers to the deeper meanings of Mormon doctrine, these women explore outside of Mormonism in the New Spirituality, primarily in channeled materials, near death experiences, and past life regressions. I have focused mainly on the Ramtha School of Enlightenment, showing the congruence between Ramtha’s and Mormon teachings about human ontology, and less so on Sandra’s participation in the I Am (Saint Germaine) study group that meets weekly in Phoenix, AZ. Though Linda is not involved in either of these groups, she is included in this chapter because of her belief in multiple mortal probations (MMPs), an LDS

interpretation of reincarnation, which is closely related to the practice of channeling. Her experience of receiving communication from the dead validates her belief in MMPs and empowers her to give presentations that promote the practice of past life regression as a way of understanding the experience of pre-earth existence in the Mormon context.

Like MMPs, the beliefs and practices of all of the women in this chapter invite some degree of criticism because of LDS attitudes about gender, and their activities inevitably produce discord in their relationships with friends, loved ones, and/or ecclesiastical leaders. As seekers, none of these women are shy about looking outside the LDS Church for further light and knowledge, even though to some extent they all transgress LDS expectations about how women should behave, which alarms their loved ones and Church leaders to varying degrees. Loved ones and ecclesiastical leaders have challenged them, especially when their spiritual experimentation involves speaking out, publicly asking speculative doctrinal questions, privileging the prophetic (i.e. channeled) discourses of non-LDS sources, or especially activities that look like they themselves are prophesying or declaring doctrine. In response, Denise, Sherry, Sandra, and Linda comfortably invoke Mormon doctrine about being a *liabona* and/or their patriarchal blessings to explain and justify transgressing the LDS ideal, even if their only visible transgression is that they have stopped going to church. Denise, Sherry, and to an even larger extent Natalie also put into practice what they have learned from Ramtha's school about creating their reality to mitigate negative reactions against their spiritual experimentation. Natalie, for instance, "created a reality" in which no one in the LDS Church would notice her absence from church meetings or the fact that she has no

church calling, and she has yet to receive a phone call or visit from curious or concerned Mormons.

Apart from institutional concerns, family relationships are complicated in a different way. Denise, Sherry, and Sandra, for example, have had to deal with alienation from family members. Denise and Sherry's husbands have both threatened to divorce them more than once because of their involvement in Ramtha's School. Sandra's husband is supportive and they are very close, but her adult children fear her influence on their children and worry about the state of their "forever family." Because of her children's expectations, Sandra feels that leaving the Church—or even just staying at home on Sundays—is not an option. Thus, she has embraced channeled resources as a way to "survive" being Mormon. Denise has also been rejected and verbally attacked by some of her adult children, making her marriage even more difficult. Sherry says she does not experience her willingness to surrender her participation in Ramtha's school for her husband as a sacrifice, nor does she see herself as his victim; however, it is clear that she has almost completely given up the ability to express her love for Ramtha and his teachings in her own home. She reports that spending just two private hours with me for an update on her situation filled her husband with anger and anxiety, questioning why this topic had resurfaced—yet again—in their lives. Thus, as with most Latter-day Saints marriages in which one spouse develops heterodox beliefs (or stops believing in the Mormon system), for Sherry and her husband this negotiation is an ongoing matter.

Ultimately, at least in this group, those who are married appear less likely to completely stop attending church meetings or to throw caution completely to the wind. In part, this is an issue of age and stage of life, as well as the LDS culture of

their locations (originally Arizona and Utah). Being excommunicated for apostasy or divorced for no longer believing or attending church (a common reason for LDS divorces) erases the sealing and breaks eternal family connections while it simultaneously disadvantages aging women who have no personal income. The fact that Natalie has no husband to accuse her of apostasy and threaten divorce empowers her to take the most drastic step and embark on a dramatically different path: selling her home, leaving her job and adult children, and building a self-sufficient farmstead relatively near Ramtha's school. From her astral travels and quantum spirituality perspective, distance means nothing. "I know they don't understand that," she says, "but I haven't really *gone* anywhere!"

Given that all of these women experience an absence of full spiritual self-expression in their relationships, building new community has become very important to them. Though everyone in this chapter but Natalie still engages in the LDS community, they all have developed communities outside the Mormon ward family with whom they can be authentic. When I first met them, Book Group was that community for Denise, Natalie, Sherry, and Sandra. Denise, Natalie and Sherry also have important relationships with Ramtha's school. Though Sherry no longer attends the school because of her husband, she still maintains a privileged associating with JZ Knight because of her sons' relationship with the channel. We should not suppose that Ramtha's school is an easy substitute for the high level of commitment required by the LDS Church to maintain good standing in the community. In fact, to be an "eligible student," Ramtha requires ongoing coursework and practice of the spiritual disciplines taught in mandatory retreats and retreat follow-ups (both on the

ground and streaming media online), all of which can be expensive and physically and/or emotionally taxing.

Other outside groups have developed to provide support for Latter-day Saints' faith journeys as they negotiate their future in the institutional Church. Sunstone Education Foundation, which has long been a community home for questioning, dissident, and excommunicated Mormons (including fundamentalist Mormons excommunicated by the LDS Church for practicing polygamy), has also been an important source of support for some of the women in this chapter. For many years, Sandra and Linda in particular have both been active in Sunstone's annual Mormon Studies symposium in Salt Lake City, even presenting papers and leading discussions about spiritual seeking, gender discrimination in the LDS Church, and other topics vital to LDS women. Similarly, Sandra has become involved with the Mormon Stories Foundation, an organization that helps Mormons navigate their loss of faith. Mormon Stories has created online communities on Facebook as well as sponsored regional gatherings across the country, each of which attracts hundreds of attendees. Though MoSto boasts a younger and more tech-savvy constituency than Sunstone, it also includes Mormons of all ages—like Sandra.

I find extremely interesting the extent to which technology like the Internet has played a role in community building in this group. Denise, Natalie, Sherry, Sandra, and Linda are certainly computer literate, and they all use the Internet for a variety of its community building tools. For instance, Sandra, the oldest participant in this project (71), is very active in a large feminist Mormon listserv. She is also involved in the Bloggernacle (a clever combination of the terms “blogging” and “tabernacle” (as in Mormon Tabernacle Choir) to describe the Mormon

bloggersphere), and she ongoingly contributes provocative posts on prominent LDS-focused blogs like Exponent II and Feminist Mormon Housewives. Others, like Natalie and Sherry, appear to use the Internet mainly as a tool for sending email and streaming Ramtha events rather than for starting women's circles or keeping up with the larger LDS world. However, it is well known that the LDS Church's Strengthening the Members Committee is charged with surveying the Internet and public symposia and reporting for further investigation and possible discipline the names of Mormons who openly criticize Church leaders or advocate for unorthodox interpretations of Mormon doctrine.²³² In addition, "righteous" LDS individuals frequently copy others' personal statements from public *and* private social networking sites and present them to LDS leaders in order to keep the religion pure.²³³ Such actions can endanger their church status and therefore their marriages and other family relationships.

However justified they may feel about being Liahona Mormons, with regard to Church membership Denise, Natalie, Sherry, Sandra, and Linda are ultimately subject to the LDS Church's authority. In the course of seeking they have all discovered that LDS Church structure and its general intellectual and spiritual environment has effectively disempowered them, and they have looked to the New Spirituality to reinterpret what it means to be female, Mormon, and a seeker. But regardless of the fact that Denise, Natalie, Sherry, and Linda feel empowered by

²³² For one fairly recent example of this phenomenon, see "Signature Books News & Events: Grant Palmer Faces Church Discipline for Writing History," Archive, *Signature Books*, December 12, 2004, <http://web.archive.org/web/20050306102953/www.signaturebooks.com/news.htm>.

²³³ This most recently happened publicly on the private Facebook group for Feminist Mormon Housewives community.

Mormon doctrine and the legitimacy of own experience to confront, ignore, avoid, council with, and/or reassure their local church leaders about their activities and beliefs, in the end, the power to grant or revoke their temple recommends and/or instigate church discipline against them belongs to men in the LDS Church. As we will see in the situations of LDS women who become energy healers, this concern is especially acute because of the way energy healing competes with or mimics priesthood authority in the LDS Church.

Chapter 4

"MOLLY MORMONS CAN BE REIKI MASTERS TOO?": HEALING AND WHOLENESS IN MORMONISM AND THE NEW SPIRITUALITY

One overarching goal of this project has been to identify LDS doctrines, beliefs, and practices that overlap with similar elements in the New Spirituality. In the last chapter I argued that patriarchal blessings, given through men designated by the LDS Church to fulfill the calling of patriarch, are one important Mormon way of knowing that overlaps with channeling and other means of divination in the New Spirituality. In addition, it is important to illuminate what conditions have made that overlap significant enough to be identifiable in both institutional discourse and grassroots LDS practices. With that goal in mind, Chapter 4 explains the ways in which Mormon doctrine, folk theology, and the historical Mormon experience overlap with New Spirituality ideas about healing. I will show that the LDS practice of priesthood blessings, the Mormon tradition of herbalism, the command to create a “Zion society,” and Mormons’ general beliefs about healing and wholeness through the atonement of Jesus Christ are all congruent with the New Spirituality commitment to individual accountability for the wellbeing (“wellness”) of the individual and the earth. These analogies allow LDS women to use them more or less interchangeably to develop healing practices outside of the institutional LDS Church and to deflect criticism related to how their activities imitate LDS priesthood—challenging the assumption that a believing, compliant, perfection- and knowledge-seeking (“Molly Mormon”) LDS woman could also be a Reiki master.

For this chapter, I chose to highlight five particular women out of the twenty-one women I interviewed. I chose these five from all those I interviewed

because, though they are all active in the LDS Church, they represent different stages of belief in Mormonism and/or interpretations of the LDS Church's authoritative role in their lives. Martha, Jackie, and Darlene are three anonymous LDS women from various parts of the country, all of whom practice multiple energy healing modalities. Martha is the most conservative, in that she is most concerned with checking her healing practices against LDS scripture and church discourse. Darlene has a strong testimony of the LDS Church but is more moderate because she is critical of the Church and has more heterodox interpretations of Mormon doctrine. Martha and Darlene were each referred to me by different people who knew them when I sent out an email blast to a large Mormon feminist listserv advertising my need to contact LDS energy workers. Jackie is at the other end of that spectrum, having largely reinterpreted the meanings of Mormon doctrine and authority and being only marginally active in the LDS Church to support her husband, who still faithfully attends. Jackie is actually a part of the Book Group introduced in Chapter 3, which is how I came to meet her, though it was two years before I came to know and interview her.²³⁴ All three women live in different areas of the country. Because I wanted to show that this is not merely a local phenomenon, I eliminated several local (Arizona) energy workers I had interviewed. The interviews began with the question of their background in Mormonism. After that, Martha, Darlene, and Jackie shaped the trajectory of our conversations. Afterward, I asked clarifying questions based on the themes and experiences they considered important.

²³⁴ Though Jackie dropped out of Book Group when its attention turned to planning their trip to Turkey, as explained in Chapter 3, she returned to the group the next year and accompanied them to Ireland. It was during this time that I first interviewed her.

After an explication of the shared concern with health and wellbeing in Mormonism and the New Spirituality, the chapter presents an analytical narrative of their redacted interviews. Echoing the emphasis on light in Chapters 2 and 3, I will show how these women relate the New Spirituality concept of *energy* to Mormon understandings of personal aliveness and the light of Christ as these understandings are conveyed to them by LDS Church leaders in both institutional and revisionist histories. One of the main consequences of doing healing work is that LDS women often feel compelled to contrast it to the priesthood ordinances performed by LDS men and defend their activities. Despite the fact that the LDS Church refuses to extend priesthood ordination to women, we will see how LDS women still find ways to develop their healing abilities inside of the New Spirituality.

In addition to Martha, Darlene, and Jackie, I also introduce Carolyn Cooper and Carol Tuttle, both of whom are very successful professional LDS healers. My data on them comes solely from materials they have made available on the Internet. I include Cooper because of the role she has accepted to instruct other LDS Church members on how to legitimize their energy practices to Church leaders and other Mormons. Her public persona is decidedly conservative, obviously a result of her desire to publicly affirm the Church as the authoritative arbiter of all truth. To some extent Tuttle occupies a more moderate place on the spectrum. This could be a matter of personality, or perhaps the fact that she has been a public personality significantly longer than Cooper and is less hesitant to assert the validity of her own truth, regardless of how it might contradict Church convention. Regardless, Tuttle is also important because she was the first Mormon to publish a book about healing from sexual abuse, which she reports as being a crucial component of her personal

narrative as a professional LDS energy healer. Like the other women highlighted in this chapter, Tuttle's materials reflect a deep concern with holism, the gateway through which they all encountered energy healing.²³⁵

Health and Healing in Mormonism and the New Spirituality

Two main streams of "holistic health" are important to this project: Energy healing and the American folk medicine tradition of herbalism. Another stream of holistic health is shamanism. Despite how compelling this subject is in relation to Mormonism, I chose to limit this project to energy healing and herbal medicine. Energy healing is the main subject of this chapter, though I will also explain the Mormon cultural connection to herbalism and Mormon participation in the modern supplements industry. The American folk medicine tradition includes the combination of Anglo-European, African, Mexican American, and indigenous herbs and ritual practices for healing (e.g. the laying on of hands, prayer, singing, and shamanistic relationships with other-than-human beings²³⁶). It also involves a strong interest in protection, employing the use of amulets and talismans as wards against physical and spiritual harm. In the context of the New Spirituality, all of these concepts and practices are legitimate today because they can be traced back to ancient origins.²³⁷

²³⁵ "Systems of Traditional Herbal Medicine," *Traditional Medicinals*, 2012, http://www.traditionalmedicinals.com/systems_of_thm.

²³⁶ This concept comes from A. Irving Hallowell's work on the indigenous Ojibwa society. Hallowell discovered that the Ojibwa recognize a category of other-than-human beings to whom/which they must orient themselves. See A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in Dennis Tedlock, *Teachings from the American Earth: Indian Religion and Philosophy* (Liveright, 1992), Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View, p. 143.

²³⁷ Christopher Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West Volume 2: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 5. D. Michael

A concern with health and healing is central to the Mormon and New Spirituality worldviews. Their attitudes about and approaches to healing are grounded in remarkably similar beliefs about what it means to have and be responsible for a physical body. First, both contexts share a central premise that each person is responsible for their own spiritual and physical wellbeing.²³⁸ This emphasis on the individual's personal accountability echoes the democratization of ways of knowing we saw in Mormonism and the New Spirituality in Chapters 2 and 3. As evidence of a "massive subjective turn" in Western culture, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead observe that the decline of religious forms that locate ultimate authority outside the individual (what they see as evidence of secularization) correlates with the simultaneous growth of forms of "the sacred" that are concerned with the subjective life and personal authority (what they define as sacralization).²³⁹ Heelas and Woodhead point to modern concern with self-healing as evidence of this subjectivist turn.

Quinn details the use of these resources in the Mormon context. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, Chapter 3: Ritual Magic, Astrology, Amulets, and Talismans, pp. 66–97.

²³⁸ J. Gordon Melton, Jerome Clark, and Aidan A. Kelly, *New Age Almanac* (Detroit, MI: Visible Ink Press, 1991), 169. See also Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West, Vol. 2*. Partridge observes that "wellbeing is almost always a holistic term, implying more than simply *being well* or feeling good. Wellbeing is consistently suggestive of more than physical health, recognizing the integration of mind, body, and spirit" (p. 17).

²³⁹ Paul Heelas et al., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 9–10. Heelas and Woodhead consider these two forms of religion incompatible. However, Mormonism holds these two commitments to authority in tension. There has always been tension between personal and institutional authority in Mormonism. This project shows the extent to which this tension has become a struggle for individual Mormons in an increasingly standardized, obedience-focused church. However, Mormonism participates in this subjectivist trend not as a newcomer but because it has *always* sacralized all aspects of life. One could almost say that the "subjectivist turn" in the New Spirituality has caught up with the Mormon inclination.

Healing in the New Spirituality

The most obvious popular expression of this trend is the wide array of therapies under the holistic health movement, a philosophical sister to the New Age Movement, which blossomed in the 1970s. The thread connecting these diverse treatments is their use to produce and promote an experience of physical, emotional, psychological, and/ or spiritual healing, all of which are available to anyone who seeks them.²⁴⁰ In addition, the discourse of wellbeing has spilled out from its counterculture origins to overtake virtually all Western commodities markets. Cosmetics, food, music, book publishing, and fashion companies all simultaneously draw on, promote, and validate the subjectivist culture of holistic wellbeing.

Besides critiquing the American medical establishment for its mechanistic emphasis on treating isolated symptoms with drugs and invasive surgeries, holistic healing is conceived of as restoring optimal physical, mental, and spiritual conditions. To that end, holistic health strives to identify the underlying causes of a body's imbalance or disease and reestablish—or even exceed—the systemic wellbeing of the whole person.²⁴¹ Thus, participants in the New Spirituality are concerned with healing as *integration* (becoming emotionally, physically, and spiritually whole as individuals, as a society, and as a planet²⁴²); *happiness* (i.e. freedom from addictions,

²⁴⁰ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 42.

²⁴¹ As we will see, this impulse toward progressive mind-body-spirit development is easily recognized by LDS women who believe in eternal progression toward exaltation. For a detailed history of holistic healing in America, see Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine*, (W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

²⁴² While in the New Spirituality healing is most often undertaken with self-exploration and personal transformation as its goal, the assumption is that personal healing will also heal society and even the earth itself. Peter Clark observes that “New Age individuals and communities constantly experiment to discover the most effective ways of realizing self- and world-transformation.” Peter

delusions, and past experiences and/or negative events); *fulfillment* (i.e. self-actualization, full self-expression, transcending ordinary human ways of being); *self-transformation* (becoming a new “creature,” awakening ever-higher levels of consciousness so as to communicate with and get help from their higher selves and create wellbeing); and *balance* (of one’s natural healthy state).²⁴³ This kind of healing is accessible through a proliferation of options, including herbalism, chiropractic, naturopathic medicine, acupuncture, shamanism, and Reiki (and other modalities of energy work).

Healing in Mormonism

In Mormonism, this subjectivist commitment is also immediately evident. For both Mormons and proponents of the New Spirituality, the body is the focus of spiritual and physical healing.²⁴⁴ In the New Spirituality, healing begins with the embodied self, which experiences both illness and its remedies; ongoing transformation and progression²⁴⁵; and communion with the divine (what Wade Clark Roof calls “the divine energy that is within all of us”²⁴⁶). Courtney Bender observes that, in the New Spirituality, the “new metaphysicals” believe that each

Clarke, *New Religious Movement in Global Perspective; a Study of Religious Change in the Modern World* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2006), 26.

²⁴³ See Heelas et al., *The Spiritual Revolution*, Chapters 1–2. Similarly, Hanegraaff argues that “health [not disease] is the natural state of the world and of human beings.” Therefore, illness is the result of “working against . . . nature.” Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 46–47.

²⁴⁴ Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West*, Vol. 2, 4.

²⁴⁵ Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 106. See also Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 45–46.

²⁴⁶ Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 96.

individual has both a temporary physical body and a “lasting” energetic body. “The energetic body has a concrete existence, and while it is more flexible than one might suspect, it nonetheless continues through time and retains its own kinds of knowledge, and . . . has its own sort of bodily memory.”²⁴⁷

In Mormonism, this principle is grounded in the LDS belief that bodies are vital to eventual human exaltation and that communion with the divine means developing attunement with the Holy Ghost until one ultimately *becomes* divine. Bodies not only have spiritual significance as the home for the spirit; Mormons also believe that resurrection involves the reuniting of the spirit with the body in a whole, perfected, eternal state. For those who chose to follow God in the pre-earth life, the Plan of Salvation involves these transitions from a premortal disembodied state to mortality precisely in order to obtain a body that one might be schooled and tested in that state.²⁴⁸ After this probationary state, Mormons believe that virtually all individuals are resurrected to a home in one of three heavenly spheres of existence. In Mormon soteriology, this virtually universal event reunites the individual spirit with its perfected body, which is then eligible (for those worthy of the highest degree of glory) for exaltation. Only those who commit the unpardonable sin, denying the Holy Ghost, will not be resurrected into some heavenly realm. As in the New Spirituality, LDS Church general authorities ongoingly affirm the individual’s

²⁴⁷ Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 92.

²⁴⁸ In the Plan of Salvation, those spirits who rejected Christ’s plan of free agency were cast out of heaven and are denied the opportunity for embodiment. Though some Mormon theology asserts degrees of worthiness are carried into mortality, the fact remains that having a body indicates that one has kept one’s “first estate” and assented to the plan as it was outlined before the War in Heaven.

responsibility for their individual physical and spiritual health and wellbeing.

Mormons are reminded that each person is a child of God, literal sisters and brothers to Christ, having the “light of Christ” as their spiritual heritage. Similarly, Mormons and New Agers in particular believe that that the physical body is *made* to heal itself.²⁴⁹

Like many other Christians, Latter-day Saints have a robust healing tradition through which they work out these ideas about bodies and their potential. LDS beliefs and practices relating to wellbeing have two main sources: Mormon pioneer folk customs based on the use of herbs and other natural resources as healing medicines (D & C 42:43-44); and the Word of Wisdom, a health code reportedly revealed to Joseph Smith by God and canonized in Doctrine and Covenants Chapter 89. The Word of Wisdom contains two main sections that lay out the code’s prohibitions and prescriptions, and a third section contains the promises of following the code. First, wine and other strong drinks, and “hot drinks” (interpreted by the LDS Church to be coffee and tea), are prohibited. Tobacco is also prohibited, except when used as “an herb for bruises and all sick cattle, to be used with judgment and skill” (D&C 89:8). Then herbs, fruit, and grain and meat—both used “sparingly” and “only in times of winter, or of cold, or famine”—are “ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man” (D&C 89:10-13). The promises associated with living in accordance with the Word of Wisdom are significant.

18 And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;

²⁴⁹ Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 104.

19 And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures;

20 And shall run and not be weary, and shall walk and not faint.

21 And I, the Lord, give unto them a promise, that the destroying angel shall pass by them, as the children of Israel, and not slay them (D&C 89:18-21).

In addition, Mormons are expected to engage in monthly fasting, which involves going without food and drink for a twenty-four hour period and donating what those meals would have cost as a fast offering: first, for needy local church members and then, if extra funds remain, for those Mormons in need internationally.²⁵⁰ Newspaper headlines often tout their higher level of health due to following the Word of Wisdom and fasting. A UCLA twenty-five year study showed that Mormons live significantly longer. Other studies have indicated that Mormons have had dramatically lower rates of cancer, diabetes, heart and cardiovascular disease (e.g. stroke) than other Americans.²⁵¹

LDS Church priesthood ordinances are just as vital as the Word of Wisdom to the pursuit of health and wholeness. Defined by the Church as “sacred, formal act[s],” ordinances include “baptism, confirmation, ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood (for men), the temple endowment, and the marriage sealing.” As an extension of the restoration of the eternal priesthood to Joseph Smith “by the laying

²⁵⁰ For specific Utah health statistics, see “Welcome to IBIS-PH; Utah’s Public Health Data Resource,” *Utah Department of Health*, August 3, 2011, <http://ibis.health.utah.gov/>. Fasting often accompanies prayer and precedes priesthood blessings, as Mormons believe that these practices can help individuals and families overcome sins and/or weaknesses. It is not uncommon for an entire ward or stake to collectively fast for weather, health, or other community goals. See “Study Topics: Fasting and Fast Offerings,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/study/topics/fasting-and-fast-offerings?lang=eng>.

²⁵¹ See Joseph L. Lyon and Steven Nelson, “Mormon Health,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12, no. 3 (1979): 84–96; and Ray M. Merrill, “Life Expectancy Among LDS and Non-LDS in Utah,” *Demographic Research* 10, no. 3 (March 12, 2004): 61–82, <http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol10/3/10-3.pdf>.

on of hands,²⁵² LDS men who have been ordained to the priesthood perform these vital priesthood ordinances. A priesthood blessing is defined by the Church as “a blessing given by a Melchizedek Priesthood holder, by the laying on of hands and by inspiration, to one who is sick or otherwise in need of special counsel, comfort, or healing. If the blessing is for the sick, consecrated oil is used (James 5:14-15).”²⁵³ Certain words must be used to designate the blessing as being given by one with authority. Thus, a blessing is a combination of structured memorized words, like other priesthood ordinances, and direct inspiration through the priesthood holder. Mormons consider the priesthood to be the same power and authority Jesus used to heal and restore the dead. In fact, educational materials used to instruct men in priesthood operations teach men that “Heavenly Father requires that the ordinances of the gospel be performed by men who hold the proper priesthood authority. Only when an ordinance is performed by this authority will our Father in Heaven approve it.”²⁵⁴

While the Church does not consider them essential for human salvation, it also categorizes “naming and blessing children, consecrating oil, and administering to the sick and afflicted” as ordinances that provide “comfort and guidance.”²⁵⁵ The

²⁵² For the canonized version of how “John the Baptist conferred the Aaronic Priesthood upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery by the laying on of hands,” see Joseph Smith—History 1:68-69.

²⁵³ “Study Topics: Priesthood Blessing,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/study/topics/priesthood-blessing?lang=eng>.

²⁵⁴ “Lesson 4: The Purpose of Priesthood Ordinances,” in *Duties and Blessings of the Priesthood: Basic Manual for Priesthood Holders, Part B* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 27, <http://www.lds.org/manual/duties-and-blessings-of-the-priesthood-basic-manual-for-priesthood-holders-part-b/lesson-4-the-purpose-of-priesthood-ordinances?lang=eng>.

²⁵⁵ “Study Topics: Ordinances,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/study/topics/ordinances?lang=eng>.

most basic level of service for men in the LDS Church is the commission to give these healing blessings to family members and others over whom they have stewardship.²⁵⁶ These blessings for healing and comfort usually take place before surgery and other medical procedures as a prophylactic against anxiety and negative outcomes; and/or during an acute or long-term physical or psychiatric illness. Outside the family, this responsibility usually takes place through the home teaching program. Virtually all males over the age of twelve are ordained to the Aaronic (lower) priesthood. They advance through several class levels until they are ready and worthy to be ordained to the Melchizedek (higher) Priesthood, usually at the age of eighteen or nineteen, before going on a proselytizing mission for the Church. Being a home teacher is a “sacred calling” that involves visiting one’s assigned families at least once a month “to teach and strengthen them.”²⁵⁷

Priesthood blessings are only one element of the larger Mormon concern with wellbeing. In Mormonism, their purpose is usually personal comfort and healing rather than for larger change, while in the New Spirituality healing the self is meant to heal society. That said, LDS priesthood blessings are indeed thought to have a larger effect—in part by the service given by the priesthood holder. Historically, LDS Church rhetoric is replete with references to healing as a service that restores both

²⁵⁶ Men with the priesthood have the responsibility of “watch[ing] over the members of the Church” Men may use the priesthood to bless non-Mormons as long as the person being blessed understands and accepts the principles on which the blessing is based. “Study Topics: Home Teaching,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/study/topics/home-teaching?lang=eng>.

²⁵⁷ Boys who hold the Aaronic Priesthood must be advanced from the rank of deacon to that of either teacher or priest before being able to participate in home teaching. Ibid.

the recipient and the donor practitioner.²⁵⁸ Besides priesthood blessings, however, Mormons have also been large consumers and producers of nutritional supplements.

The Word of Wisdom and Nutritional Supplements

The most publicly obvious overlap of the Mormon and New Spirituality concern with wellness is in the booming—and lucrative—supplement industry. According to a *Time* magazine article published in 2006, the production of dietary supplements by more than one hundred companies (many of them owned by Mormons) generates several times more revenue than Utah’s ski industry.²⁵⁹ A more recent report from the Economic Development Corporation of Utah puts the number of Utah companies at over one hundred fifty.²⁶⁰ In addition to the naturalistic and political explanations for why Utah is home to so many supplement companies, the *Time* article points to the religious environment that supports this phenomenon. In part, the entrepreneurial LDS missionary experience of door-to-door proselytizing and a history of self-sufficiency have helped make Utah the capital of multilevel marketing (MLM).²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Most New Agers and some contemporary Pagans require payment for healing services in the form of private sessions, workshops, or other teachings. LDS men do not charge for priesthood blessings, but the entire economy of Mormonism benefits them in their gendered caretaker roles.

²⁵⁹ By Jeffrey Ressler and Salt Lake City, “Industries: State of Reliefs,” *Time*, October 1, 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1541294,00.html>.

²⁶⁰ See Economic Development Corporation of Utah, “Utah Nutritional Products Industry Profile” (EDCUtah, 2009), http://www.edcutah.org/files/Utah_Nutritional_Products_Industry_Profile_09.pdf.

²⁶¹ In 2009, the *New York Times* commented on the presence of young LDS men in door-to-door marketing of security systems, noting that their success in this field is due to their experience as missionaries. In this article, one returned missionary characterizes his sales work as “missionary work turned into a business.” Those who work for Pinnacle Security, which was founded by a BYU student in 2001, are “used to knocking on doors, and . . . used to rejection.” See Kirk Johnson, “Door to Door as Missionaries, Then as Salesmen,” *The New York Times*, June 12, 2009, sec. US, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/12/us/12coldcalls.html>. However, affinity fraud is also rampant in Utah and in other secondary LDS markets. The LDS Church recently hosted a conference aimed at

Mormon investment in this industry is due in part to the legacy of Joseph Smith's suspicion of doctors, which he passed on to early Mormon believers. An important part of the early Mormon narrative includes the gruesome details of Smith's multiple leg surgeries for a bone infection at the age of six,²⁶² and the impact of the loss of his brother, Alvin, which was due to a dose of calomel administered by a doctor.²⁶³ It is clear that Smith, and later his successor Brigham Young, advocated botanicals for the use of church members;²⁶⁴ Mormons involved in the supplement industry as consumers or producers often quote D&C 42:43, which states: "And whosoever among you are sick, and have not faith to be healed, but believe, shall be nourished with all tenderness, with herbs and mild food." Most reports on these companies mention the tradition of herbal medicine use by Smith and Young and the overarching context of the Word of Wisdom.²⁶⁵

educating its members about this kind of fraud. Heather Whittle Wrigley, "Affinity Fraud Called a Destructive Crime at Conference," *Church News and Events*, February 20, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/church/news/affinity-fraud-called-a-destructive-crime-at-conference?lang=eng>. For details on one case, see James Sterngold, "Mormons Become Victims in \$50 Million Scam to Sell Gold Bullion," *Bloomberg*, September 1, 2009, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=an7Pm3hkmauw>.

²⁶² See William D., M.D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith, Jr., and the Dissociated Mind* (American Psychiatric Publishing, 1998).

²⁶³ See John Heinerman, *Joseph Smith and Herbal Medicine*, 2nd ed. (Cedar Fort, 2009), pp. 3–9.

²⁶⁴ Both Smith and Young apparently followed the "Thompsonian method of herbal cure," developed by Samuel Thompson in the early 1800s. Historian Leonard Arrington noted that Young eventually reconciled himself to "doctors and their cures" and actually sent both men and women out on medical missions to become doctors. Given church members' concern for following the actions of their prophets, this action is the likely reason for the decline in herbal medicine church-wide. Today, church leaders come from the ranks of medicine, law, and business—not naturopathy. See Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (University of Illinois Press, 1986), 310–312.

²⁶⁵ For instance, see "The Sunrider Corporation: Company History," *Funding Universe*, March 14, 2012, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/The-Sunrider-Corporation-company-History.html>.

The industry is said to have gotten its start in Utah in 1935, with the colorful and controversial doctor of herbal medicine John Christopher. Christopher became committed to herbal medicine when a serious accident and subsequent multiple illnesses led him to consult the Word of Wisdom. Following what Mormons consider to be a program for natural living reportedly healed him, and he embarked on his natural healing career with the publication of his booklet “Just what is the Word of Wisdom?” This project may have had little public influence were it not for the support of John A. Widtsoe, a prominent Salt Lake City doctor, who had also written about the Word of Wisdom and was a member of the LDS Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Christopher founded the School of Natural Healing in 1953.²⁶⁶ Prominent Mormon Senator Orin Hatch has not only spearheaded the natural products industry’s protection from regulatory oversight; he has also invested in at least one company (Pharmics) and benefits from industry contributions to his campaigns.²⁶⁷ One corporation, Nutraceutical International Corporation, has historical ties to LDS presidential candidate Mitt Romney.²⁶⁸

Healing the Earth in Mormonism & the New Spirituality

As noted earlier, in addition to its investment in healing the body, another major characteristic of the New Spirituality is its commitment to healing the earth as

²⁶⁶ For a history of the legacy of Dr. Christopher, see David Christopher, *An Herbal Legacy of Courage* (Springville, UT: Christopher Publications, 1993).

²⁶⁷ Ressler and City, “Industries.”

²⁶⁸ See “Nutraceutical International Corporation -- Company History,” accessed March 14, 2012, <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/Nutraceutical-International-Corporation-company-History.html>.

concomitant with healing the self.²⁶⁹ The self cannot be healed unless society is healed, and vice versa. Wouter Hanegraaff observes that in New Age “the meaning of illness . . . lies in a disturbance of the natural balance between the elements of the human organism,” and “the human body is usually regarded as modeled on the wider universe” (ibid.). In the New Spirituality, this impulse has to do with saving the world—as a physical place and as society—from the deleterious effects of modernity.

The New Age idea that healing the earth means “restoring it to its natural purity”²⁷⁰ is also echoed in Mormonism. As explained earlier, Mormons have a particular relationship to the natural world. Unlike most Christians, whose interpretation of the “end times” includes the destruction of the world, Mormons specifically look forward to a post-millennial time when the earth will be restored to its pre-Edenic state of perfection and become the abode of the most righteous. The tenth Article of Faith states in part that “the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Pearl of Great Price, Articles of Faith: 10).²⁷¹ Bruce R. McConkie’s infamous book, *Mormon Doctrine*, states that “at the Second Coming of our Lord, [the earth] will be renewed, regenerated, refreshed, transfigured, become again a new earth, a paradisiacal earth.”²⁷² Church president Joseph Fielding Smith stated that a post-millennial earth “will die and be resurrected and glorified for those

²⁶⁹ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 45.

²⁷⁰ Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, 81–84.

²⁷¹ The entire Tenth Article of Faith states, “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.”

²⁷² Bruce R McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 795–96.

righteous who will inhabit the celestial kingdom.”²⁷³ Why? Because this is why the earth was formed in the first place. Its perfection will allow it to fulfill “the measure of its creation” (D&C 88:19; 25). Invoking a New Age crystal, Mormon scripture dictates that the earth will “become a Urim and Thummim,”—a *liabona*—or “a sea of glass” (D&C 130:9). In this “sanctified and immortal state,” the earth will become a divinatory tool, a crystal ball of sorts, allowing celestial inhabitants to view happenings in all lower kingdoms.²⁷⁴ Moreover, Mormon scripture suggests that humans helped create the very earth they inhabit. Speaking of Jesus Christ, Abraham 3:24 states: “And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and *he said unto those who were with him*: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell” (Abraham 3:22-24).

Echoing the New Age commitment to transform society, Mormonism has always included a communitarian, utopian impulse. Social transformation in Mormonism has historically had to do with restoring “Zion,” creating a “Zion society.” Though the LDS Church looks very different today, Mormons are still invested in that utopian dream. Today, however, they may tithe stocks and real estate instead of animals and crops. Neither do they live the United Order, the practice requiring that early Mormons give all of their “increase” to the Church to “build up the kingdom.” In return for their consecration of worldly goods, participants had their physical needs cared for by the Church to some extent.

²⁷³ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, Volume 3*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie, vol. 3, *Doctrines of Salvation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1954), 282.

²⁷⁴ Mormons also have a scriptural basis for believing that the earth is alive with spirit. See Moses 7:48-49, in the Pearl of Great Price.

Despite the suspension of the United Order in the late 1870s, LDS eschatology still includes the ultimate restoration of “Zion,” which literally includes the City of Enoch and every other “Zion society” that has existed in each dispensation—“a land of peace, a city of refuge” (D&C 59:20). Like Roman Catholics and other institutionally based Christians, Mormons are looking to create a new world; however, Mormonism does not fit into their dualistic view of reality in which God is outside of nature and radically dissimilar to human beings. As Paul Heelas notes in his comparison of the New Age and Roman Catholic utopian impulse, “Until saved, the self of the conservative Christian is fallen; the Self of the New Ager is intrinsically good. Theistically envisaged, the Christian God is infinitely more than *anything* we can hope to be (at least in this life), rather than being what, in essence, we *already* are.”²⁷⁵ Thus, Mormonism more reflects New Age than traditional theistic attitudes about human potential. Human beings are God’s children and so are his literal partners in world transformation, characterized in Mormonism as “bringing to pass the eternal life of man.”²⁷⁶ As we will see, for Mormons this involves cultivating individual wholeness.

Wholeness as the Mormon Analogy of Wellness in the New Spirituality

One must look beyond the institutionally sanctioned ordinance of priesthood blessings to understand the overlap of Mormonism with the commitment to wellness in the New Spirituality. For Mormons, integration, happiness, fulfillment, self-transformation, and balance find their analogy in the concept of *wholeness*. In official

²⁷⁵ Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, 37, italics in original.

²⁷⁶ According to Mormon scripture, this is God’s *raison d’être*. See Pearl of Great Price, Book of Moses 1:39.

LDS discourse, *wholeness* has been described as “our great purpose of mortality”²⁷⁷; “being in balance”²⁷⁸; “perfection”²⁷⁹; “the peace of Christ”²⁸⁰; integrity²⁸¹; “that unity in our very being that balances the demanding and inevitable diversity of life”²⁸²; the healing of separation and incompleteness; and, ultimately, a manifestation of the atonement of Jesus Christ. In fact, the atonement is the larger framework through which Latter-day Saints today understand healing and wholeness—what Arthur Henry King calls “The *only* wholeness.”²⁸³

The Atonement as the Mormon Doctrine of Healing

Ironically, LDS identification of Christ’s atonement as “A Doctrine of Human Development,”²⁸⁴ the only true source of healing, enables Mormon women’s engagement with alternative healing methods and facilitates their reinterpretation of those methods and ideas into an LDS framework. This occurs primarily because of the apparent context in which the atonement came to be understood and employed

²⁷⁷ Edwin Brown Firmage, “The Peace of Christ,” *Ensign*, October 1985, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1985/10/the-peace-of-christ?lang=eng>.

²⁷⁸ Jan Underwood Pinborough, “Keeping Mentally Well,” *Ensign*, September 1990, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1990/09/keeping-mentally-well?lang=eng>.

²⁷⁹ A. Dean Byrd, “Anticipating the Need to Forgive,” *Ensign*, September 2011, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/2011/09/anticipating-the-need-to-forgive?lang=eng>.

²⁸⁰ Firmage, “The Peace of Christ.”

²⁸¹ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Happy Landing,” *New Era*, March 1995, <http://www.lds.org/new-era/1995/03/happy-landing?lang=eng>.

²⁸² Patricia T. Holland, “One Thing Needful?: Becoming Women of Greater Faith in Christ,” *Ensign*, October 1987, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1987/10/one-thing-needful-becoming-women-of-greater-faith-in-christ?lang=eng>.

²⁸³ Arthur Henry King, “Atonement: The Only Wholeness,” *Ensign*, April 1975, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1975/04/atonement-the-only-wholeness?lang=eng>, italics mine.

²⁸⁴ Bruce C. Hafen and Marie K. Hafen, *The Belonging Heart: The Atonement and Relationships with God and Family* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1994).

as a healing rubric by the LDS Church and individual church members: increased public awareness of and discussion about child sexual abuse in the late 1980s and early 1990s.²⁸⁵ Though the idea that the atonement applies to emotional and mental healing as well as to the sins of the repentant was not new to the 1990s, this appears to have been the historical moment in which it found purchase as a response to the healing challenges of sexual abuse, awareness of which had increased dramatically.²⁸⁶ This context is one lens by which we can frame the entry of some LDS women into the realm of energy healing.

While wellness can only be realized through self-healing in both Mormonism and the New Spirituality, this democratization also applies to explanations for the *failure* to heal. As Paul Heelas notices with regard to “Self-as-healer,” New Age participants consider themselves responsible for both their illness and for their

²⁸⁵ For the history of this phenomenon, see Rebecca M. Bolen, *Child Sexual Abuse: Its Scope and Our Failure* (New York: Springer, 2001). Mental health care professionals have struggled to develop therapies and structures for healing the effects of abuse, with mixed success. Energy work has emerged as a major adjunct to or replacement for traditional therapies and medication that enables abuse survivors to participate in their healing in more hands-on ways. It is also more within their control as they are the consumers and do not have to work through their health insurance coverage. This can also be a disadvantage because these therapies are largely uncovered by health insurance providers. At the same time, the therapies are generally dramatically cheaper than traditional mental health treatments.

²⁸⁶ It appears that the essay titled “Being Parents, Being Children” was the first published LDS mention of child abuse in the context of “our society violently rejecting family values through child abuse, divorce, wife beating, and flagrant sexual sin.” The first reference to the needs of victims as opposed to perpetrators (in the LDS context, “sinners” who need repentance), occurs in 1988. Allen E. Bergin, “Questions and Answers: Healing from Child Abuse,” *Liabona*, 1988, <http://lds.org/liabona/1988/10/questions-and-answers/questions-and-answers>. Virtually all earlier references to healing and the atonement had to do with repentance and healing the emotional and spiritual agony of sin. As an example, see Edwin W. Aldous, “A Reflection on the Atonement’s Healing Power,” *Ensign*, 1987, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1987/04/a-reflection-on-the-atonements-healing-power?lang=eng&query=atonement+healing>.

restoration to a state of wellness. They often attribute healing failures to blocks or spiritual imbalance and/or disconnection in either the healer or the one who is ill.²⁸⁷

In the Mormon context, the LDS Church has always rejected the notion of original sin, stating that “men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.”²⁸⁸ However, Mormons do accept the idea of The Fall and therefore believe that they inhabit fallen bodies and a fallen world. Thus, because bodies are also subject to illness and abuse, it becomes possible to see the natural human condition as an inherited absence of wholeness that may only be healed through the atonement.²⁸⁹ In the context of child sexual abuse, for instance, the Mormon commitment to the concept of *agency* or free will helps Mormons explain why God must allow things such as these to happen to children.²⁹⁰ Echoing the

²⁸⁷ Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, 209.

²⁸⁸ Joseph Smith, “The Articles of Faith,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,106-1-2-1,FF.html>.

²⁸⁹ In 1924, one influential church leader made this connection explicit when he said, “To a degree, children are born heirs to the good or evil natures of their parents; the effects of heredity are admitted. Good and evil tendencies, blessings and curses, are transmitted from generation to generation. . . . The children of Adam are natural heirs to the ills of mortality; but through Christ’s atonement they are all redeemed from the curse of this fallen state.” (The Articles of Faith, 12th edition, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1924, pages 87–88.) This nuance to Mormon doctrine might be seen to contradict Wouter Hanegraaff’s observation that in New Age “health is the natural state of the world and of living beings” (*New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 46). However, it is important to remember that the Plan of Salvation instills Mormons with a sense that because they are the same species as God, they are immanently perfectible. In addition, for Mormons the atonement makes mortality the vehicle for “joy, understanding, and even the presence of God.” See Hafen and Hafen, *The Belonging Heart*, 79.

²⁹⁰ As Allen E. Bergin stated in 1988, in response to the question of whether abused individuals would continue to struggle with the impact of abuse in the next life, “The Lord does not cause evils such as child abuse, but in order to preserve his children’s agency and accountability, the Lord allows his children to suffer the consequences of the misuse of agency—whether those consequences stem from their own actions or the actions of others.” Allen E. Bergin, “Questions and Answers: Healing from Child Abuse.” Questions and Answers,” *Ensign*, Oct 1988. Question: “We are taught that, for the righteous, the Spirit World is a place of rest. But what about emotional wounds, such as those caused by child abuse, that some people carry with them all their lives? Will they continue to struggle to overcome them after death?” Answered by Allen E. Bergin, professor of psychology at Brigham Young University and counselor in the presidency of the BYU Eleventh Stake.

popular spiritual belief that knowing one's true identity has the capacity to heal, Richard G. Scott, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, encouraged Latter-day Saints to remember their true identity: "Recognize that you are a beloved child of your Heavenly Father. He loves you perfectly and can help you as no earthly parent, spouse, or devoted friend can. His Son gave his life so that by faith in him and obedience to his teachings you can be made whole. He is the consummate healer."²⁹¹

Finally, Mormonism shares with the New Age the idea that illness and other adversity is a challenge that an individual must face with a positive outlook.²⁹² The ability to do so is interpreted as a measure of one's personal spiritual growth.²⁹³ Optimism is both a tool and the outcome of progressive self-development. In the New Spirituality, it is a measure of one's healing and growth. In that context, the most popular mechanism for evoking and maintaining an optimistic attitude is the use of affirmations, or "positive sentences which are believed to have a strong influence on the subconscious."²⁹⁴ For Mormons, this attitude is pursued through prayer, obedience, and avoidance of conflict in institutional settings; it is a measure of one's humility, closeness to the spirit, and evidence of evolutionary progression toward being like God.²⁹⁵ In fact, Mormons believe that while they are not held

²⁹¹ Richard G. Scott, "To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse," *Liahona*, 2008, <http://www.lds.org/liahona/2008/05/to-heal-the-shattering-consequences-of-abuse?lang=eng>. See also Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 110–113.

²⁹² See Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 34. Both Mormons and New Agers have been criticized for their desire to downplay the negative and accentuate the positive. Both communities are often accused of naïve avoidance of reality.

²⁹³ Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 100.

²⁹⁴ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 56.

²⁹⁵ Joanna Brooks, who writes and speaks about Mormonism in American public life, reflected on the extent to which Mitt Romney is hurt by this avoidance of conflict in his campaign.

accountable for the bad things that happen to them through no fault of their own, they *are* held accountable for their reactions to them. This attitude is reflected in the following statement by a woman who was sexually abused as a child, printed in the LDS adult magazine *Ensign* in 1997:

I am a survivor of childhood physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. I no longer view myself as a victim. The change has come from inside me—my attitude. I do not need to destroy myself with anger and hate. I don't need to entertain thoughts of revenge. My Savior knows what happened. He knows the truth. He can make the judgments and the punishments. He will be just. I will leave it in his hands. I will not be judged for what happened to me, but I will be judged by how I let it affect my life. I am responsible for my actions and what I do with my knowledge. I am not to blame for what happened to me as a child. I cannot change the past. But I can change the future. I have chosen to heal myself and pass on to my children what I have learned. The ripples in my pond will spread through future generations.²⁹⁶

Ultimately, this approach to adversity shapes the choices LDS women make in their search for healing. Because they are accountable for how they deal with illness and misfortune, they are likely to be careful consumers, looking for tools that are congruent with their LDS worldview. The Law of Attraction, introduced earlier, is one such popular New Spirituality tool.

The Law of Attraction in Mormonism and the New Spirituality

It should be clear that this shared approach to adversity includes some of the ideas about wellness or wholeness promoted in the “Law of Attraction,” which is at

Brooks says, “I’m not the first to observe his stiffness in terms of interactions with the public. Given that Mormon congregations don’t openly dispute with their leaders, they are not used to, perhaps, candid feedback. So that lack of an ability to do a give-and-take with the press or the public is something we’ve already seen impact Mitt Romney’s candidacy. And I think it may have been something he picked up in Mormon leadership culture.” See “‘Ask Mormon Girl’ Discusses Mitt Romney’s Candidacy: NPR,” accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/2011/12/02/143063003/ask-mormon-girl-discusses-mitt-romneys-candidacy>.

²⁹⁶ Anonymous, “The Journey to Healing,” *Ensign*, September 1997, <http://lds.org/ensign/1997/09/the-journey-to-healing?lang=eng&query=healing+positive>.

the heart of twenty-first-century New Spirituality. This “law” has to do with “how all things, wanted and unwanted, are brought to you.”²⁹⁷ The ripples referred to in the quote above can be seen as a Mormon expression of that concept. An even better institutional example is this statement by past Church president Spencer W. Kimball, in which his version of the Law of Attraction—what he calls “abundance”—has to do with service: loving and being loved, which creates a state of fullness and abundance); and right living, or “keeping the commandments,” including chastity and fidelity, integrity, and feelings of goodwill.²⁹⁸

As noted earlier, the concept of the Law of Attraction is promoted in the film “The Secret,” which is derived from information channeled by the entity Abraham through Esther Hicks. It was also notably present in the nineteenth-century Theosophical and New Thought movements.²⁹⁹ According to the law, human beings create their reality by attracting what they have thought about, even if it is negative and what an individual “creates” is harmful. This often-critiqued New Age theory of accountability is the logical conclusion to the idea that illness is caused by imbalance, which is ultimately an issue of choice: People have chosen to have all

²⁹⁷ Esther Hicks and Jerry Hicks, *The Law of Attraction: The Basics of the Teachings of Abraham* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2006), pt. front flap. Many of the ideas in the Law of Attraction occur in biblical covenantal discourse about reaping what one sows. However, because it is now so strongly associated with the New Spirituality, it is interesting that Mormons are claiming and reinterpreting it (the Law of Attraction in its New Spirituality incarnation) through a Mormon lens. It is at least one more piece of evidence that Mormons find the New Spirituality compelling.

²⁹⁸ Spencer W. Kimball, “First Presidency Message: The Abundant Life,” *Liabona*, June 1979, <http://www.lds.org/liabona/1979/06/the-abundant-life?lang=eng>.

²⁹⁹ It is likely that Rhonda Byrne, author of *The Secret*, also drew from the book *The Secret of the Ages*, a New Thought classic published by Robert Collier in 1926. Collier’s trope for the ideas in the book is “The World’s Greatest Discovery.” Robert Collier, *The Secret of the Ages* (New York: R. Collier, 1926). In 1896, W. J. Colville argued that the law of karma, which was central to the theosophical worldview, operated identical to what was called the ‘Law of Attraction’. See W. J. Colville, *A History Of Theosophy*, 1896 Reprint (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2006), 31.

of their experiences, even violent and otherwise destructive ones. This idea follows naturally from the New Age belief that we—not God—have created the universe and that our mortal task is to remember the “pure spiritual beings” that we are.³⁰⁰

In Mormonism, this concept occurs as an extension of the belief in human agency: that at every level of development an individual must choose, rather than be compelled to obedience. Just as in the pre-earth life spirits had to choose between Lucifer’s plan (based on compulsion) and that plan proposed by Jesus (based on freedom of choice), a common LDS folk belief is that each person had to know the challenges they would face and pain they would suffer and actually *choose* them. Mormons point to Jesus Christ as the most important example of this phenomenon: He who serves as their foremost example knew from before the beginning of time exactly what he was agreeing to suffer as savior of the world: He had to willingly accept those experiences. Mormons are also strongly committed to the concept of *foreordination*, which the LDS Church distinguishes as being based on “a result of righteousness in the premortal existence” that is predicated on “the righteous exercise of agency.” Foreordination means that “in the premortal spirit world, God appointed certain spirits to fulfill specific missions during their mortal lives.” Jesus, for instance, was “foreordained to carry out the atonement” and LDS prophets were foreordained to their callings and responsibilities. This doctrine “applies to all members of the Church.”³⁰¹ Thus, it can help explain the extent to which the women in this chapter act on their sense of being called or chosen to be healers.

³⁰⁰ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 230.

³⁰¹ “Study Topics: Foreordination,” *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed March 14, 2012, <http://lds.org/study/topics/foreordination?lang=eng&query=foreordination>.

Mormon Women as Healers

Unlike the New Spirituality, in which women figure prominently as healing practitioners, only LDS men are authorized as having the authority to heal by the power of the priesthood. There is, however, a rich history of women's healing revealed by recent revisionist histories. Though most Mormons today do not know their own history with regard to women's authorization to heal by the laying on of hands between 1840 and 1930, we will see that this is quickly changing with its easy availability on the Internet and its discussion through social networking. Recovered knowledge like this has had a significant impact on women who are committed to healing.

It was accepted Church practice for early Mormon women to be active healers, primarily because it was authorized through Joseph Smith. Speaking to the women's Relief Society in 1842, Smith even used the language of *ordination* to settle the matter:

No matter who believeth, these signs, such as healing the sick, casting our devils, etc., should follow all that believe, whether male or female. [Can you] not see by this sweeping promise, that wherein [you] are ordained, if it is the privilege of those set apart to administer in that authority, which is conferred on [you]; and if [you] should have faith to heal the sick, let all hold their tongues, and let everything roll on.³⁰²

In other words, women who had faith, as well as those who were actually ordained to do so were allowed—even *expected*—to exercise healing power by administering

³⁰² This teaching (some call it a revelation) is published in *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. This particular statement is taken from notes made of his address to the Relief Society. The original note reads as follows: "No matter who believeth, these signs, such as healing the sick, casting our devils, etc., should follow all that believe, whether male or female. He asked the Society if they could not see by this sweeping promise, that wherein they are ordained, if it is the privilege of those set apart to administer in that authority, which is conferred on them; and if the sisters should have faith to heal the sick, let all hold their tongues, and let everything roll on." Smith, Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 224.

blessings and anointings. Some were given patriarchal blessings saying they should heal by the laying on of hands.³⁰³ According to Jonathan A. Stapley and Kristine Wright, before having that power progressively limited after the death of Joseph Smith, men and women practiced healing together, and until June, 1921, both sexes even served as healers in Mormon temples (ibid., 8-10). “Each of the temples offered subtly different activities, and Latter-day Saints participated in a set of rituals governing life and death not described in the canon: anointing sealings, baptism for health, temple healing, washing and anointing the sick or pregnant, therapeutic application of consecrated oil, and deathbed rituals” (ibid., 65).

As late as 1955, Joseph Fielding Smith quoted his father (past Church president Joseph F. Smith) on women and men healing together. Though president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and not yet president of the Church, it seemed clear that Joseph Fielding was sympathetic to his memories of women’s (even his own mother’s) healing practices. Published in a Church magazine (the Improvement Era) and repeatedly included in books still in print today, Smith’s memory of his father saying that women healing was “no uncommon thing” became “the last general instruction on female participation in healing rituals” and “collaborative healing” (ibid., 83).

Today, however, LDS women are thoroughly socialized to avoid any practice that resembles the performance of priesthood ordinances, such as the healing by the

³⁰³ Jonathan A. Stapley and Kristine Wright, “Female Ritual Healing in Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. Winter (2011): 4-6, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1754069.

laying on of hands.³⁰⁴ As a result, prayer is now their only institutionally authorized avenue for healing. Betina Lindsey notes that “[u]nbelief is not the reason Mormon women no longer practice the gift of healing, because to do so would challenge the male-focused LDS authority structure. Rather, there exists much faith but no legitimate avenue to exercise it.”³⁰⁵ Regardless, many LDS women find justification in developing healing powers—some because they feel called to heal, and others because they feel they were born with—or foreordained to—the gift of healing. Despite the potential (and sometimes actual) conflict, many LDS women have found energy healing compatible with these proscriptions against acting in the name of the priesthood.

Energy Healing and Spirituality

It is impossible to overstate the importance of *energy* to the New Spirituality. Catherine Albanese succinctly quips: “New Spirituality in America [*means*] energy spirituality.”³⁰⁶ Thus, what is variously classified as alternative, complimentary, or integrative healing in America most often has to do with *energy*.³⁰⁷ Adrian Ivakhiv

³⁰⁴ The exception to this rule occurs inside the temple. Men and women both are washed and anointed to become kings and priests, queens and priestesses in sex-separate ceremonies. Up until recently (2005), female officiators actually anointed women with oil in preparation for the endowment ceremony. Now officiators only touch the forehead with water and oil.

³⁰⁵ Betina Lindsay, “Woman as Healer in the Modern Church,” in *The Wilderness of Faith: Essays on Contemporary Mormon Thought*, ed. John Sillito (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 99, <http://signaturebookslibrary.org/?p=10863>.

³⁰⁶ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 514.

³⁰⁷ Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, 26. Bender states, “The repositioning of energetic healing within alternative medicine has taken place at the same time that alternative medicine has become increasingly enveloped within mainstream medical practice. Alternative medicine is at present far from countercultural, and its critiques of mainstream medicine have softened in the last decades as alternative practices become more integrated within it. Indeed, the resurgence of many modalities is due in part to the interest of federal and state scientific and medical agencies in understanding these practices as integral, rather than alternative, to regular medicine. In large measure, alternative practitioners have welcomed, if not actively sought, this form of legitimacy,” (26-27).

calls the notion of energies “a kind of conceptual glue that binds alternative and non-western physio-medical theories, ideas inherited from late nineteenth and early twentieth century spiritualism and metaphysical religion, the post 1960s vocabulary of humanistic and consciousness psychology, and an imagined future in which advanced technology is reconciled with earthy cosmic ecology.”³⁰⁸ As the New Spirituality does in general, energy (or energetic) healing in the U.S. draws on non-Western concepts such as *chi*, *prana*, and *chakras*; and practices like acupuncture, acupressure, and yoga.

Of all those sources, the concept of chakras has had the most impact on healing in the New Spirituality. Chakras were ultimately associated with the human auric field, which ultimately led to an understanding of the body as “a vehicle of consciousness” and its spiritual evolution into “the enlightened body-self.”³⁰⁹ Albanese observes, “What is so surprising about the language of the chakras . . . is how quickly and easily it spun away from its Asian roots.”

Indeed, it became a free-floating, general discourse on energy—used by the end of the twentieth century, for example, interchangeably with talk of Chinese acupuncture points and energy meridians. Far more than the discourse of yoga, which stayed contained in sets of body-discipline and meditation practices continually fed by infusions from Asia, the chakras became an independent enterprise. (Ibid., 452–464)

Energy “work” may involve a practitioner receiving (perhaps even as channeled messages) information about—and resolutions to—both physical and energetic imbalances; tapping into divine energy to balance, stabilize, or harmonize

³⁰⁸ Adrian Ivakhiv, “Power Trips: Making Sacred Space through New Age Pilgrimage,” in *Handbook of New Age*, vol. 1, ed. James R. Lewis and Daren Kemp, Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 277. Though Ivakhiv speaks specifically of New Age, his insights are broadly applicable to the New Spirituality.

³⁰⁹ Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 456.

unbalanced energy³¹⁰; and/or plugging and replenishing energy “leaks” by working with the chakras or other characterizations of the body’s energetic centers.³¹¹ Practices include Tai Ch’i and Ch’i Kung (also translated as Qigong), both of which are healing meditative exercises originating in China; other forms of meditation; pranayama, Indian breathwork derived from yoga (*prana* means energy in Sanskrit); and Reiki, which means “Universal Energy or Life Force.”³¹² Reiki, which was imported to the U.S. through Hawaii in the mid- to late-1930s, is a Japanese spiritual healing method that deploys this healing energy through the laying on of hands.³¹³ A gateway into integrative medicine, Reiki is attractive to those seeking healing precisely because it emphasizes the individual’s responsibility for self-treatment.³¹⁴

Mormons and Energy Healing

In Chapters 2 and 3, I began to show how in Mormonism this universal energy is characterized as “the light of Christ”: a “universally diffused essence”;³¹⁵

³¹⁰ Bender observes that “disease and sickness are therefore the result of lives out of balance: healing is a process of continual alignment of body, soul, spirit, and emotion with this underlying force.” Bender, *The New Metaphysicals*, 26.

³¹¹ Shalila Sharamon and Bodo J. Baginsky, *The Chakra Handbook*, trans. Peter Hubner, Shangri-La (Wilmot, WI: Lotus Light Publications, 1999), 13–14.

³¹² Reiki “connects to the body’s innate power of healing to promote self-healing.” Leslie Nield-Anderson and Ann Ameling, “The Empowering Nature of Reiki as a Complementary Therapy,” *Journal of Holistic Nursing Practices* 14, no. 3 (February 24, 2000): 22, <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=b3263583-fbea-4d90-8aeb-920dd0c17fe2@sessionmgr11&vid=2&hid=8>.

³¹³ For the popularized narratives of Reiki origins, see the books Diane Stein, *Essential Reiki: a Complete Guide to an Ancient Healing Art* (Random House Digital, Inc., 1995); Frank Arjava Petter and Christine M. Grimm, *Reiki: The Legacy of Dr. Usui* (Lotus Press, 1999); and Mikao Usui and Christine M. Grimm, *The Original Reiki Handbook of Dr. Mikao Usui* (Lotus Press, 1999).

³¹⁴ Robert Schiller, “Reiki: A Starting Point for Integrative Medicine,” *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* 9, no. 2 (April 2003): 21, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12652880>.

³¹⁵ Boyd K. Packer, “The Light of Christ,” *Ensign*, April 2005, accessed March 14, 2012, <http://lds.org/ensign/2005/04/the-light-of-christ?lang=eng&query=universal+light+christ>.

“the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things” (D&C 88:13); “something inside all of us.”³¹⁶ Though LDS Church members have assimilated to the North American norm as consumers of medical care, they still have a way of approaching health and wellbeing that is congruent with New Spirituality beliefs about energetic healing. During the Church’s April 2010 General Conference, Dallin H. Oaks, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, reminded Mormon men of the authorized framework for healing. First, he states that Mormons apply scientific methods to restore and preserve health, including nutrition, exercise, and visits to “healing practitioners.”³¹⁷ To ground his assertions in the LDS tradition, he recalled a story about Brigham Young, who was notorious for sending people home without the healing blessings they requested if they had not “used any remedies.”

Oaks’ reference to this story serves two main purposes in setting boundaries for LDS attitudes about healing: First, priesthood blessings should be seen as only *one* appropriate intervention in the set of healing modalities. Second, the story ultimately teaches Mormons that they are all responsible for their own healing. In addition, Oaks reminds his male listeners of an even more significant teaching from that story, which will be important in our analysis of women who engage in energy healing practices: Brigham Young’s apparent description of an *energetic* basis for healing, which would sound familiar to any practitioner of integrative healing:

³¹⁶ Joseph F. Smith, Anthon H. Lund, and Charles W. Penrose, “Editors’ Table: Receiving the Holy Ghost,” in *Improvement Era, 1916* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1916), 460, <http://gospelink.com/library/document/59582?highlight=1>.

³¹⁷ This talk was delivered only to men, at the April 2010 general priesthood meeting and then printed in the *Ensign* magazine for LDS adults. Dallin H. Oaks, “Healing the Sick,” *Ensign*, April 3, 2010, <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2010/04/healing-the-sick?lang=eng>.

When I lay hands on the sick, I expect the healing power and influence of God to pass through me to the patient, and the disease to give way. . . . When we are prepared, when we are holy vessels before the Lord, a stream of power from the Almighty can pass through the tabernacle of the administrator to the system of the patient, and the sick are made whole. (Ibid.)

One of the main attractions of Reiki and other similar forms of healing is that it does not *have* to involve the laying on of hands. In addition, in the New Spirituality, distance healing is possible because of the interconnectedness of all things.³¹⁸ While the laying on of hands in an LDS priesthood blessing is a physical act that requires the priesthood holder be present with the person requesting healing or comfort, Mormonism also has a tradition of nonlocal healing. In Mormonism, as in other Christianities, this nonlocal healing can occur through something as simple as personal or group prayer. All of the women I interviewed spoke of “sending energy” to those who need healing.

In addition, Mormons also have two group practices that draw on this belief about the nature of the universe: fasting, as noted above, and the temple prayer circle, which takes place in the endowment ceremony. Referring to the symbol of the circle as “an ancient and universal symbol of perfection,” the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* describes the prayer circle as consisting of “an equal number of men and women dressed in temple clothing.” They form a circle around an altar “to participate unitedly in prayer.”³¹⁹ On the altar is a box filled with the names of individuals submitted by Latter-day Saints. When visiting a temple, one may write the names of those for whom some kind of healing is needed on small slips of paper and

³¹⁸ Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 96.

³¹⁹ Daniel H. Ludlow, *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1120–1121.

place them into designated boxes. One may also call one's local temple or even the main number of the Church Office Building to request a name be added to the prayer roll. Membership in the LDS Church is not required to make prayer roll requests. This resembles healing done in some Neopagan contexts. As Sarah Pike observes, for example, those who send healing requests to the Circle Sanctuary in Wisconsin will have a ribbon representing their request placed on an altar. Healing energy is produced both by simply having one's request on the altar and by the ritual that takes place in the sanctuary once a month.³²⁰

Located in Utah, both Carolyn Cooper and Carol Tuttle have this kind of global influence as their goal. Both have lucrative careers teaching a variety of energy healing methods they have developed themselves. They both conduct healing sessions with individuals and groups in person and online. Though they have adapted their separate practices to suit non-LDS consumers, their original activities took place inside of and were heavily influenced by their LDS communities.

Carolyn Cooper, LDS Energy Healer

Carolyn Cooper is a believing Mormon who has developed SimplyHealed™, her own “unique” healing method that combines Mormon concerns with the principles of energy work. According to Cooper, SimplyHealed™ “is an easy, non-invasive way of clearing away negative emotions.” It accelerates “healing wounds of the past and present and allow clients to claim more joy and peace.” Using a combination of “professional training and natural intuition,” which she says is available to everyone, her practices “restore harmony, align energy systems, and

³²⁰ Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 96.

more fully balance the body.” As a result, her clients experience “increased confidence, greater connectedness in relationships, improved finances, freedom from self-sabotage, joy-filled days and peaceful nights.”³²¹

The “Meet Carolyn” section of her website explains the genesis of her interest in energy work. Growing up in the 1960s and 70s, Cooper was deeply influenced by her father, who taught her that “our bodies all have a perfect blueprint for health and . . . our thoughts have a direct influence on the health of our bodies.” Family mealtimes included stories about the patients he had helped as a chiropractor. In her website introduction, Cooper admits that “his amazement at the body’s capacity to heal and his pure joy at being able to help facilitate that healing was what really sparked my interest in natural healing at a young age.” She was inspired by the “high vibration” of the audio tapes her father played, which “taught about positive mental attitude and how that affects everything in your life.” Going even farther back into her family history, Cooper reveals that her grandparents owned “a vitamin store” and her grandfather worked for Dale Carnegie. She even admits having spent her adolescence taping “positive affirmations” to her wall. She acknowledges that, unlike many energy healers, she is not a “wounded healer,” nor does she have a “tale of woe” that prepared her to do healing work. Rather, in keeping with her adolescent occupation with affirmations, a New Age spiritual staple, she began doing energy work to shift her energy for the purpose of managing emotions. This choice has had a huge impact on her life: “Letting go of the emotions that triggered . . . limiting

³²¹ Carolyn Cooper, “Carolyn Cooper Bio,” *Carolyn Cooper*, 2011, <http://carolyncooper.com/bio/>.

beliefs has made a world of difference!”³²² However, Cooper makes it clear that what she does is not talk therapy. In following that convention, she echoes the teachings of Church leaders: Though the LDS Church has developed social services to provide counseling to church members, Mormons have been counseled to be wary of group therapy (especially mixed-sex groups), counseling methods that would have them question the LDS gospel, and support groups that might convince them to embrace any level of moral relativism.³²³ Therefore, Cooper points to the advantage of energy healing over talk therapy:

When working with energy, you don’t have to relive every detail of a past trauma in order to release it from your system. Your inner wisdom already knows all the details; we just need to find the emotion(s) held with that memory. Through certain techniques, those emotions (anger, fear, betrayal, etc.) are released from the body AND the energy field. This doesn’t erase the memory of the incident, but releases the emotional potency of it, so it is no longer a barrier in your life. Energy Therapy gets to the root of the problem on an energetic and emotional level effectively and efficiently.³²⁴

Important currents from Mormonism are visible in Cooper’s public concerns with DNA healing, free agency, and her desire to distance her work from psychic

³²² Carolyn Cooper, “Meet Carolyn Q&A,” *Carolyn Cooper*, 2011, <http://carolyncooper.com/meet-carolyn-qa/>.

³²³ In May 1975, Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles advised BYU students to avoid “group therapy . . . promoted under a number of titles: sensitivity training, self-actualization, training groups or T-groups, simulation, transactional analysis, encounter groups, marathon counseling sessions. Some even function under such titles as value clarification, one or two under the title of character education, and so on.” Packer’s main concern is that “they recognize no ultimate source for truth. All values are those established by the individuals or by the group. There is no reference to God. They encourage a free and full expression, something of a confession, before the group of every intimate and personal feeling and experience. They encourage an openness, a touching, and a closeness among the members of the group, and they attempt to resolve problems simply by finding a comfortable interaction. Above all, they avoid any feeling of guilt.” For Packer, this poses “major emotional and spiritual dangers,” and he cautions members of the Church to “leave them alone.” Boyd K. Packer, “Self-Reliance,” *Ensign*, August 1975, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1975/08/self-reliance?lang=eng>.

³²⁴ Carolyn Cooper, “Carolyn Cooper FAQs,” *Carolyn Cooper*, 2011, <http://carolyncooper.com/faqs/>.

reading. Cooper's website reveals that her emphasis is on locating "flaws in the ancestral-emotional DNA and repair wounds of the past, some of which have been contained in the lineage for many generations."³²⁵ Though Mormons reject the notion of original sin as noted above, this concern with generational damage is related to Exodus 34:7, which states that without repentance, God will "[visit] the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:7). Though this phrase does not occur often in institutional LDS Church discourse, it has captured the imagination of North American church members as an explanation and a warning for those who fail to keep the commandments as outlined by the Church. The idea that we carry our ancestors' physical as well as emotional DNA helps explain the generational effects of depression, poor health, spousal and child sexual abuse, and even financial problems. "If we have an ancestor who went through trauma, or had a particular negative belief pattern and we inherited that emotional tendency," Cooper argues, "then when we are presented with certain life situations it seems to be magnified for us."³²⁶

I suggest that LDS energy workers gravitate to generational DNA healing as a practice because it echoes the purpose of the LDS practice of proxy temple work, through which Mormons believe they are providing the saving ordinances for their ancestors' exaltation—correcting (healing) what is missing: the LDS gospel. In this work, Mormons see themselves as "saviors on Mount Zion," doing "saving work for

³²⁵ Cooper, "Carolyn Cooper Bio."

³²⁶ Cooper, "Carolyn Cooper FAQs."

them that they cannot do for themselves.”³²⁷ More specifically, temple work for the dead explicitly transforms the negative effects of “the iniquity of the fathers” into the positive outcome of “[turning] the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers” (D&C 110:15). Even the dead, however, have the choice of accepting baptism, confirmation, endowment, and sealing work done on their behalf. Echoing this parallel commitment, Cooper first asks permission of her clients’ energy. Permission granted, she gathers information she needs through “spirit-to-spirit communication” and “integrates” the healing. Speaking of the concern for agency, Cooper reassures her clients:

Your body’s intuitive wisdom will process and benefit from what it knows is for your highest good, whether or not your conscious mind thinks it’s “a little out there.” And remember, your higher self will automatically “veto” anything that it deems is not in your best interest. The integrity of the SimplyHealed™ method never allows anything to be integrated without first checking if it’s in your best interest. Of course, you can consciously block any of it from being accepted, if you are happy and comfortable living in a lower vibration.

. . . . There is absolutely no manipulation involved, since it is an energetic gift offered to them, and their subconscious can choose which parts (if any) of it they want to accept or not. It is like saying a prayer for someone and sending it out to them—it is always up to them what they will do with it. Because most people’s inner wisdom is always drawn to a higher level, it’s rare that someone will not give energetic permission to be worked on. And if they give permission that means their subconscious understands it.³²⁸

Cooper’s participation in the 2011 LDS Holistic Living Conference provides a window into how LDS women who do energy work reconcile their healing practices with Mormonism. Her session “Energy Healing from a Gospel

³²⁷ “Chapter 1: The Purpose of Temple and Family History Work,” in *Temple and Family History Course Materials* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed March 13, 2012), 2, <http://classic.lds.org/pa/familyhistory/pdf/Member%27s%20Guide%20May%2009--Chapter%201.pdf>.

³²⁸ Cooper, “Carolyn Cooper FAQs.”

Perspective” was designed to share ideas for responding to questions and challenges from church leaders and other members with other LDS energy workers. The session was designed to highlight how energy healing “fits in with the gospel” and to authorize Cooper as someone who “has seen a pressing need to extract and use only the purest, most gospel-aligned practices in her work.”³²⁹ Cooper admits she has “always felt very supported by [her] priesthood leaders,” never had “too much opposition,” perhaps, she speculates, because of the high vibrational level of her own personal energy. With these comments Cooper means to validate both energy work and its congruence with Mormon cosmology. She begins by situating energy healing in relation to science, claiming that science has begun to confirm the claims of energy healers. One of her sources is Dr. Mehmet Oz, a surgeon who figures prominently on Oprah Winfrey’s television show and website as a proponent of energy medicine and related components of the new spirituality.³³⁰ Cooper quotes Oz’s assertion that “energy and the use of energy in healing will be the biggest frontier in medicine over the next decade.”³³¹

To legitimize energy work in the context of Mormonism, Cooper quotes deceased LDS Church general authorities Bruce R. McConkie and David O. McKay, whose commentary she interprets as support for the validity of her practices. (“He

³²⁹ “Cooper, Carolyn: Energy Healing From a Gospel Perspective,” *LDS Holistic Living*, 2011, <http://ldsholisticliving.com/store/cooper-carolyn-energy-healing-gospel-perspective>.

³³⁰ Dr. Oz also appears to be a popular resource on other network news and health shows and has his own television show. See, for example, Mehmet Oz, “Prescription: The New Age, The End of Ouch?,” *TIME.com*, March 11, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/0,28757,2053382,00.html>.

³³¹ Anderson Cooper, “Power of Prayer,” Transcript, *Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees* (CNN, November 13, 2007), <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0711/13/acd.02.html>.

said that years before any of these scientists came up with that!) McConkie, she insists, speaks not only to energy as both a natural and spiritual phenomenon but also to the related existence of the Book of Life, the Mormon analogy to the Theosophical cum New Age concept of the Akashic Records³³²:

In a real though figurative sense, the book of life is the record of the acts of men as such record is written in their own bodies. It is the record engraven on the very bones, sinews, and flesh of the mortal body. That is, every thought, word and deed has an effect on the human body; all these leave their marks, marks which can be read by Him who is Eternal as easily as the words in a book can be read.

. . . . When the book of life is opened in the Day of Judgment (Rev. 20:12-15), men's bodies will show what law they have lived. The Great Judge will then read the record of the book of their lives; the account of their obedience or disobedience will be written in their bodies.³³³

Cooper uses the concept of vibration to relate these Mormon ideas to energy. “Everything in the universe has a vibration, correct? Yes.” Those vibrations at the lower end of the spectrum, which produce a negative reaction in the human spirit, resonate “slow and heavy.” The higher vibrational levels resonate with “peace, joy, happiness, contentment, gratitude.” Humans naturally recognize that resonance: “It feels like home.” However, Cooper rejects the role of “healer.” Instead, she insists that *God* is the healer. Rather, she characterizes herself as “the cleaning lady,” who senses and releases the “emotional abscess,” the “lower vibrations” that have

³³² One believer characterizes the Akashic Records as “the Book of God's Remembrance, [which] contain accounts of everything we have ever thought, said, or done.” Numa Jay Pillion, *The Immortal Truth: The Akashic Records Read by Saints and Mystics* (Wheatmark, Inc., 2009), back cover. According to one LDS observer, alarmed at the New Age influence on Mormons, the Akashic Records are “the counterfeit of the Book of Life.” Bella, “Mormonism and the New Age: Astral Projection an Occult Teaching,” *Mormonism and the New Age*, April 26, 2009, <http://mormonismandthenewage.blogspot.com/2009/04/astral-projection-occult-teaching.html>. I have heard individual Mormons compare the LDS genealogy project to the Akashic Records. Some even speculate that the Akashic Records were Joseph Smith's source for the Book of Mormon.

³³³ McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 97.

gotten “stuck.” Comparing the process to a snake bite, Cooper’s goal is to help people “release the venom from their system.” This involves “forgiving, letting go,” which raises one’s vibration, makes one “more receptive to the spirit.” The ultimate goal of the work she does is to “clear generational DNA from our system so we don’t also have the patterns, tendencies, fears, that have been in our lineage. . . . so we don’t carry the sins of the fathers through the generations.” Finally, Cooper confirms her explanation of “vibrations” by implying its equivalence to LDS Church President David O. McKay’s concept of “radiation” and the impact that has in the world:

About vibrations, David O. McKay said “There is one responsibility which no man can evade [and] that responsibility is personal influence. A silent, subtle radiation. This radiation is tremendous. Every person who lives in this world wields an influence, whether for good or for evil. It is not what he says alone; it is not alone what he does. It is what he is. Every man has an atmosphere which is affecting every other. [He] cannot escape for one moment from this radiation of his character. This constantly weakening and strengthening of others.”³³⁴

The most interesting aspect of Cooper’s presentation, however, is her suggestions for responding to those Mormons who openly oppose women who do energy work. First, she explains that “it is just a tool, and it’s done by the power of the atonement That’s the only way anything is healed in this world, because the atonement makes it possible.” Referring to the New Age interest in indigenous shamanisms, Cooper chuckles that “there may be a shaman or a guru somewhere in Peru doing some ancient rituals and [they are] actually healing people.” However,

³³⁴ This statement read by Cooper actually appears to be a paraphrasing of a quote originally taken from William George Jordan. William George Jordan, *The Majesty of Calmness; Individual Problems and Possibilities* (University of California Libraries, 1900), 10. For the David O. McKay version, see David O. McKay, “Addresses on Education: The Mission of Brigham Young University,” *David O. McKay School of Education*, April 27, 1948, <http://education.byu.edu/mckay/48apr27.html>.

Cooper's opinion is that they fail to see the source of their success: "[T]he bottom line is [that] it's healing people because of Christ's atonement; even if they don't know who Christ is And *we* [Mormons] know that. *We* know that's where all healing comes from."³³⁵

In a significant move, however, Cooper's main tactic for authorizing herself as a female energy healer is to reduce the importance of her work by comparing it negatively to the LDS priesthood, which effectively minimizes her own power. First, the "cleaning lady" analogy reminds her broader audience (i.e. anyone who might be hear her presentation) that she understands her "place" in the universe as "helpmeet," to men who hold the priesthood and to God who is the true healer. Not much later, she applies a similar image, that of a mother "kissing a child's boo-boo . . . which makes them feel better." This is not priesthood, she insists; this is "mother's intuition those gifts that God gave to me" (ibid.).

Finally, Cooper diminishes the efficacy of her healing activities as compared with the priesthood. Despite having spoken enthusiastically and authoritatively about vibrational resonance and her ability to clear generations of pathological emotions and negative experiences that inhibit an individual's eternal progression, she says that a priesthood blessing "trumps anything I can do." This stance is ironic, given her next assertion that energy work does not compete with prayer (including, presumably, priesthood blessings); it is simply a tool given us by God because we lack the faith to be healed:

Why don't you just pray for your kids when they're sick? Why don't you pray your sore tooth away? Prayer can do anything. If you have the faith for a

³³⁵ "Cooper, Carolyn: Energy Healing From a Gospel Perspective."

prayer, you could have cleared up your abscessed tooth and you could have simply healed your sick child. But we need some tools.

It's just an extra little tool that Heavenly Father gave us because he knew "they're going to need a little help, especially in the last days, a little bit of help with some of those emotional things that come up." So yes, if you have the faith to just do it by prayer, certainly! *You don't need energy healing. It's just an extra tool.* (Ibid.).

This statement is evidence of the tension LDS women experience between following the further light and knowledge they have been given with authority vested in male lay leadership. Ultimately, Cooper advises women, "If you live your life in such a way that you're doing everything you can to be a devoted member of the church," bishops and other church leaders will get the spiritual insights they are entitled to and it will not matter that they know nothing about energy work. Again, despite the powerful nature of the healing work she does, she warns LDS women against offending or making their church leaders feel uncomfortable: "There's a time and a place!" she insists. "Ask Heavenly Father, 'Show me ways to use my gifts without stepping on toes . . . without making other people feel uncomfortable.' Sometimes you have to be the trailblazer a little bit in certain places, and it's ok for you to hold back" (ibid.).

Finally, by warning Church members against New Age counterfeits for Mormon-compatible beliefs and practices (the same reasoning as used in the early church against spiritualism), Cooper implies the overlap. For instance, she criticizes the concept of "spirit guides" that is so important in the New Spirituality, while simultaneously validating the existence of angels: Personal ancestors who have been assigned by God to each individual: "Why would God give us stranger-angels when we have so many ancestors in our lineage that get us, that understand us, that are on

our team, that are cheering for us?” Similarly, she rejects the belief in past lives, held by many of her non-LDS clients. Instead, she refers again to the “generational work” she does to free individuals from pre-earth life blocks and cautions listeners to beware of psychics and channeling. But the problem is not that as a Mormon she does not believe in angels. Rather, she believes in the LDS kind: “[A]ngels of light [who] respect healthy boundaries” and “respect free agency.” These angels “would never go in a physical body like that. Only spirits from the other side would do that. And with ill intent” (ibid.). Again, she locates ultimate authority in the LDS Church when she says, “I know people who have traveled far and wide to get a shaman’s blessing . . . or go to India or go to Peru. . . . When you have the priesthood from God, the *true priesthood*, why do you have to go halfway around the world to go to some guru to learn something?” (ibid.).

Carol Tuttle, LDS Energy Healer

Carol Tuttle, who is arguably the most famous LDS energy healer, is more pluralistic and outspoken than Cooper. By that I mean she does not appear to publicly disparage non-LDS energy workers. She also never appears to privilege LDS teachings over her own experience. Tuttle’s career as a healer began in 1989, when she was desperate for relief from severe depression as a consequence of having endured “severe sexual abuse” as a child. Having tried and discarded prescription medication for depression, she trained in Reiki, Emotional Freedom Technique, Tapping, and “Energy Medicine.”³³⁶ In a podcast, Tuttle discusses her entry into the world of energy healing through participation in a 12-Step program “designed to

³³⁶ Carol Tuttle, “What Are The 7 Chakras,” *Chakra Healing*, 2012, <http://www.chakrahealing.com/products/chakra7>.

help women who were depressed because they were “dealing with the ‘unspeakable issues of life,’ meaning depression, suicide, child sexual abuse and things that weren’t talked about outside of a therapist’s office.”³³⁷

Characterizing herself as “a leader in the areas of Energy Psychology, Emotional Freedom Technique and Energy Medicine,” Tuttle’s goal is to “[wake] up people’s souls to living so they realize their greatness.” To this end, she employs her “gift for identifying blocks and patterns that are keeping a person stuck,” while also using “her evolving intuitive gifts and clearing techniques to reconnect people with their spirit truth and life purpose.”³³⁸ Like Cooper, Tuttle has also developed her own healing programs, such as an accessible chakra healing system; however, unlike Cooper (whose only acknowledgement of special training is to note that she is a “gifted . . . Certified Professional Coach, and teacher³³⁹), Tuttle provides her professional qualifications as a “certified Master Rapid Eye Therapist,³⁴⁰ a Reiki

³³⁷ Carol Tuttle, “Living My Type 3 Truth,” mp3, *BlogTalkRadio* (BlogTalk Radio, January 4, 2010), 3, <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/caroltuttle/2010/01/05/living-your-truth-with-carol-tuttle>.

³³⁸ “About Carol Tuttle,” *Carol Tuttle: Master Energy Therapist, Author, Spiritual Teacher*, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.caroltuttle.com/about.asp>.

³³⁹ Cooper, “Carolyn Cooper Bio.”

³⁴⁰ RET is a healing modality developed by Janae Johnson, has an LDS background. Tuttle describes RET as a technique that uses “a fast eye blinking process” to discharge “energy confined at the cellular level by emotional or physical trauma.” Carol Tuttle, “About Energy Therapy,” *Carol Tuttle: Master Energy Therapist, Author, Spiritual Teacher*, accessed March 13, 2012, <http://www.caroltuttle.com/aboutenergy.asp>.

Master Teacher, certified Energy Medicine³⁴¹ and Emotional Freedom Technique Therapist.”³⁴²

Tuttle has been effective marketing her brand in part because of her LDS affiliation but also because for the most part she has resisted using that affiliation in her marketing. Located in Draper, Utah, a small town (about 40,000) just southeast of Salt Lake City, her work has influenced virtually all of the women I interviewed who are involved in energy work and other forms of healing. Without prompting, they inevitably mentioned her name. This is likely because her first book, *Path to Wholeness: A Guide to Spiritual Healing & Empowerment for Survivors of Child Sexual & Spiritual Abuse*, published in Utah and directed at LDS women, contained ideas about energetic healing that were based on LDS Church principles.³⁴³

Similarly, though (like Cooper) Tuttle does not now openly publicize her LDS affiliation, it is easily discerned from one of her most popular books, *Remembering Wholeness: A Personal Handbook for Thriving in the 21st Century*.³⁴⁴ In this text, Tuttle draws from LDS Church publications like the *Ensign* and scriptures like The Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price, as well as from popular New Spirituality authors like Neale Donald Walsch and Marianne Williamson (both of whom are

³⁴¹ Tuttle says she recommends Donna Eden’s Energy Medicine books and educational CDs. See Donna Eden and David Feinstein, *Energy Medicine: Balancing Your Body’s Energies for Optimal Health, Joy, and Vitality*, 2nd ed. (New York: Tarcher, 2008).

³⁴² Tuttle describes EFT as “a unique version of acupuncture” performed without the use of needles. Instead, one uses tapping techniques to “stimulate well established energy meridian points on [the] body.” Tuttle, “About Energy Therapy.”

³⁴³ Carol Tuttle, *The Path to Wholeness: A Guide to Spiritual Healing & Empowerment for Survivors of Child Sexual & Spiritual Abuse* (Covenant Communications Inc., 1993).

³⁴⁴ Carol Tuttle, *Remembering Wholeness: A Personal Handbook for Thriving in the 21st Century*, 2nd ed. (Elton-Wolf Publishing, 2003).

mentioned in Chapter 3). In addition, at the beginning of the book she acknowledges both her “Father and Mother in Heaven,” who she thanks for creating her. Alluding to the pre-existence and the Mormon folk belief that as spirits we knew and made promises to each other before being born as mortal beings, she thanks those who promised to show up in her life and help her: “You remembered, and you did it” (ibid., Acknowledgments). This is also why she finds RET so effective: Somewhat like a *liahona*, it helps clients “remember who they are and why they are here” (ibid., 6-7). Thus, while Tuttle’s earliest goal was “to help people recover from traumatizing childhood events” (Ibid. 1), her current intention is “to assist people to awaken their god-self and the amazing powers of creation that lie within them. . . . [t]o help someone to literally biologically become like Christ, with all the capacities of God” (ibid., 2).

This rhetorical way of talking about the world and human capacity is familiar to both Mormons and participants in the New Spirituality. However, in order to integrate their shared ideas about healing into Mormon consciousness, Tuttle has to counter and reframe one prevalent Mormon explanation for the source of illness and other adversity: sabotage by Satan. “We too often blame God or Satan for our challenging circumstances,” she argues. She tells her audience it is wrong to see those circumstances as “trials” or “tests” of their faith, or as evidence that “Satan tempting us or trying to control us.” According to Tuttle, this idea contradicts their higher level of knowledge about how God behaves. “Why would he try me and test me if he knew me? Loved me, and essentially knew the outcome [had perfect knowledge of] of my life?” (ibid., 36)

Tuttle also teaches the Law of Attraction using the Mormon framework of agency outlined earlier. “We live in a universe with constant laws and truths by which God even functions,” she says” (ibid., 23). According to Tuttle, the Law of Attraction, which encompasses Mormon ideas about agency, is one of those laws. “I believe everyone that is abused, raped, murdered, or has suffered in some other fashion was given a choice at the spirit level, and they chose suffering, and great will be their growth and reward” (ibid., 26).

It is my personal belief that in our spirit life before our birth, many individuals agreed to come to families with the purpose of interrupting the generational sins and dysfunctions of their family line. Many made sacred agreements and received instruction to prepare them to come forth in the due time of the Lord to labor in his vineyard for the salvation of the souls of men. (Ibid., 200)

Tuttle’s book is about *wholeness* which, in the Mormon context, is only possible through the atonement. Thus, like Cooper, Tuttle employs the image of redemption to validate energy healing. For Tuttle, clearing generational patterns and refusing to pass them down makes one “a transition person”—someone who suffers innocently “that others might not suffer,” . . . “a ‘Savior on Mount Zion’—helping to bring salvation to a lineage” (ibid., 200). This Mormon idea easily resonates with related ideas in the New Spirituality about personal accountability and interconnectedness. Tuttle’s interpretation of this event contains Mormon ideas funneled through New Spirituality language:

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ took upon himself all the sins of mankind and released any power this energy had to keep us stuck in our suffering state. In this single event, Christ took upon himself all of the negative, heavy energy that had been and ever would be created by mankind, and recycled it back into light energy.

. . . Christ’s atonement has already healed us. (Ibid., 297-98)

In early 2010, Tuttle recorded a podcast that promised to share things about her Mormon experience she had never before shared publicly. Being Mormon, she says in this podcast, “has added a dimension of this experience that I could have never predicted how some things would play out; but now in hindsight I can perfectly see how living my . . . truth, and being female, and being a pioneer in the personal development field . . . then [resulted in] being a pioneer in the . . . Mormon culture, [which] has really pushed some buttons!” Regardless, Tuttle repeatedly invokes her experience with personal prayer and resulting revelation that over time has led her to healing modalities and inspired her as an author. She has also sought to rehabilitate the figure of the clairvoyant in Mormon culture. “When I wrote *Remembering Wholeness*,” she says, “I knew I was way ahead of the consciousness, especially in my church culture. No one even uses the word ‘psychic’ here, and one of the chapters [in *Remembering Wholeness*] is ‘Everyone is Psychic!’” According to Tuttle, “everyone is psychic because everyone has spiritual gifts and capacities” (ibid., 123). For Tuttle, the concept of *intuition* is the closest mirror of what it means to be psychic; it is synonymous with *inspiration*, which Mormons understand to come from God.

Like the other women in this study, those who appear in this section grapple with the shadow of the Molly Mormon: the LDS woman whose behaviors perfectly match the LDS Church’s institutional ideals. Raised in California by liberal Mormon convert parents, Tuttle knew she was different from other LDS women around her when she started writing about “metaphysical things” that deeply inspired her by expanding her personal awareness. The metaphysical ideas she so much wanted to share with others were not so controversial as her topic (sexual abuse) and her

natural assertiveness and certainty. “I was basically given the opportunity to write this amazing book that’s blessed many lives,” she says. “And I knew it was unconventional and therefore would be deemed controversial. And I said ‘Okay. . . . I’m doing something that’s not been done; and I’m doing it as a female member of my religious affiliation; and I’m speaking in a different voice, in a different style; and I’m coming out in a different *behavior* than is really common in Utah.” Tuttle acknowledges her outspokenness and what it has cost her, saying, “I’m a serious anomaly here, there’s no question about that!” Her experience of Utah Mormons is that people expect women to be soft-spoken, quiet, and reluctant to offend anyone. Instead, she became “the woman who writes about healing from sexual abuse; the woman [who is] now the energy therapist; and now who’s writing a book about metaphysics and how that relates to Christian principle[s]. *Women don’t do that in Utah!*”³⁴⁵

These cultural expectations about female ways of being, which Tuttle encountered in Utah at the time she was writing her first book (1993), are undoubtedly accurate for the time and place in which she operated. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that those cultural conventions persist more stubbornly in Utah than in other less conservative LDS communities (e.g. Boston or San Diego). To some extent, location, generation—and even the degree of involvement in the New Spirituality—appear to have something to do with those conventions at the local level. The New Spirituality is inherently empowering to women because it teaches them to develop their own knowing and trust their own voice, which then

³⁴⁵ Tuttle, “Living My Type 3 Truth.”

emerges in new ways of being—even inside of a strong commitment to the LDS Church. Thus, involvement in the New Spirituality, at any age, changes their way of being. That issue is also complicated by the way LDS lay ministry works.³⁴⁶ However, Tuttle is important in part precisely because she modeled that new way of being for LDS women in Utah and elsewhere, a way of asserting one’s own authority in the face of questions posed by leaders and other Church members about spiritual seeking for health and wellbeing—and then tutored countless other LDS women in that attitude and how to do what she was doing. Thus, regardless of the expectations of others, Tuttle appears much less concerned than Cooper with offending or making church leaders or members uncomfortable. She repeatedly asserts the authority of personal experience as the only justification needed for following one’s path.

You don’t have to justify, defend, or explain yourself in what rings true for you! You just need to be able to say it. If you’re justifying, defending, or explaining yourself, you don’t believe you have that right. And you need the justification, the defense, somehow to be defending your choice. You’re still needing approval from an outside source to say “It’s OK for you to choose what’s right for me, because I don’t have a clue!” That’s really a vulnerable place to live your life. You were meant to know! You were meant to be so aligned with your God-given truth, your compass of your intuition, and your knowing, and your spiritual divine mind, to know “I know what’s right for me!” And that’s an unfolding expanding part of us and it’s something that we get to practice over and over and over.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ This inconsistency has always been a problem with the lay ministry in Mormonism and is frequently a discussion topic among LDS feminists. Depending on all of the circumstances (e.g. whether she is abrasive or hostile), in one place, with a particular bishop, a woman might be given a temple recommend even though she is openly feminist and admits she doesn’t believe some of the most important tenets of Mormonism (e.g. Sandra, whose story appears in Chapter 3); while in another place (or even the *same* place), with another bishop, she will have her recommend revoked and/or be threatened with church discipline.

³⁴⁷ Tuttle, “Living My Type 3 Truth.”

LDS Women as Energy Workers

This individualistic perspective is echoed by the women I have included in this project. Just as Denise and the other women in Chapter 3 shared the commitment to spiritual seeking, Cooper, Tuttle, Martha, Jackie, Gloria, and Darlene share the characteristic of having sought healing from various forms of illness, abuse or other traumatic experience for themselves and/or their children. Having satisfied those goals, they have trained in various healing disciplines so that they can be the conduit through which others might be healed. Energy work has been paradigm changing for them all. Being led astray by “false prophets,” “false spirits,” or “causes which are counterfeit” is a common motif in Mormon scriptures and LDS Church rhetoric about living close to the spirit and being obedient to Church teachings.³⁴⁸ To some extent they all had to deal with fear of being led astray by what several of them called “New Age energy stuff.” Thus, integrating it into their existing Mormon worldview has been a gradual process. They are all active in the LDS Church, and they all legitimize their healing modalities by referring to LDS scriptures that urge readers to seek gifts of the spirit, including that of healing.

Martha

Born in 1963, in Montana, Martha was forty-seven years old when I interviewed her in 2011. She was “born under the covenant,” meaning that her parents had been sealed in an LDS temple (in their case, in Idaho Falls) before she was born. Her ancestors joined the Church even before the Book of Mormon was printed, so her family has long been invested in Mormonism. She is the fourth of

³⁴⁸ Victor L. Brown, “Is There Not a Cause?,” *Ensign*, November 1974, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1974/11/is-there-not-a-cause?lang=eng>.

five children. All of her siblings are active in the church, and all were married in the temple. Martha is married but has never had children. In response to my original search criteria, Martha wanted to make sure I understood that she has not replaced LDS beliefs with New Age ones; that she had merely assimilated into her Mormon belief and practice “ones that support [LDS] beliefs, or,” as she sees it, “filling in a few of the ‘mysteries of God’.”

Most Mormons believe that in the preexistence they were foreordained to accomplish some task in morality, and Martha is no exception. She is a physical therapist who in high school felt called to do that work. Though she originally had no plan to become a PT, she says, “It just sucked me in like a calling. I definitely was called into it.” She had actually planned to become a physical education teacher, but “Heavenly Father said, ‘No, honey, this is where you’re going’; and I was like ‘Okay! [Being a physical therapist] was a calling to me.’” Martha reports always wanting to be healthy, to eat healthy and exercise; and she always participated in sports. “I felt my body was something I needed to take care of and respect. Being LDS had some impact on that, because we’re taught that our bodies are temples and gifts from God, and that we’re here to have mortal experience, and learn to control and discipline our bodies.” She laughs, “We can’t give in to every possible mortal appetite—unless you want to be a thousand pounds and really unhealthy!”

Ironically, Martha’s reluctant entry into New Spirituality healing came about because she was intuitively able to feel energy. “You feel flows and the ebb of the cerebral spinal fluid, and I always felt that was energy,” she says. However, she thought there was also something else going on. Her first exposure to energy work

was through taking a CranioSacral course in 1997.³⁴⁹ “To me it wasn’t like just a fluid thing. I pretty much thought I was working with *something*, but I didn’t know what. That was the first time I did something that wasn’t considered in-the-box physical therapy stuff, though in this day and age most PTs have been exposed to it. I just got the sense in that training that ‘there’s more here.’”³⁵⁰ As a result, she says, “Energy work has crept into my physical therapy practice.” In 1998, Martha opened her own practice. Though she “did not really do anything energy-wise,” she knew she had a gift that impacted her ability to treat clients. “It was innate in me that I could feel things in people’s bodies and get things done with manual techniques that I couldn’t really explain but if I tuned into it, I could accomplish. So people were being sent to me [by the spirit] with different problems that I didn’t know I could help, so I thought I would do my best.”

Like virtually all of the women I interviewed for this chapter, Martha quoted D&C section 46, on spiritual gifts. In part, this section urges Mormons to “seek ye earnestly the best gifts,” so that they can know the truth (D&C 46: 8). The list given there includes the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding how things work (“the diversities of operations”); the faith to heal and be healed; the ability to work miracles; the gift of prophecy; the discerning of spirits; speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues; and, finally, the ability to discern whether or not a manifested gift is of God (D&C 46).

³⁴⁹ For information about CranioSacral Therapy, see John E. Upledger and Jon Vredevoogd, *Craniosacral Therapy* (Seattle, WA: Eastland Press, 1983).

³⁵⁰ CranioSacral Therapy did not have the specificity she was looking for, so she chose not to continue that training. She says she probably would have found it more satisfying had she taken more than just the level one course, but she “just wasn’t attracted to taking more courses in [that method].”

Martha feels like she was led to this gift by faith. “My gift was healing,” Martha says. “I could feel things I didn’t understand, and I could modulate it, but I didn’t know how to explain it.” She was encountering clients who suffered from lymphatic problems but she had no idea how to help them. One desperate woman urged her to get training, saying “somebody really needs to get trained in this; it’s really important.” Martha’s reply was, “Maybe it is, but it’s not where I’m going.” Nevertheless, within a day of that meeting, a post card advertising lymphatic training appeared on her desk. “I thought, oh what the heck, it’s a four day course! So I go to the course and I’m sitting there, and at the morning break I had already seen and felt enough that I knew I needed to sign up for the certification.” There were all kinds of roadblocks with regard to time, but she got on the waiting list for the course and those that followed. Referring to a sense of being called and led, “It was faith,” she says. “It was what I knew I had to do.” As a result of the work she was doing, she says, “So many things were occurring, spiritually and emotionally.” What occurred to her is that lymph could be related to “living water” in the scriptures. “It was more than just a way to make a living. I didn’t *think* about how to make a living or how much to charge or how much I’d make...I just knew I had to get the training. So that’s what I did. And I’ve never regretted it.”

As an adjunct to lymphatic training, Martha then studied Heart Centered Therapy, what she calls “sort of a counseling, sort of a hypnosis, sort of an eclectic energy thing.”³⁵¹ Characterizing it as “the emotional-spiritual component of the

³⁵¹ For more information about Heart Centered Therapy, see “Discover Heart Centered Therapy: Chikly Health Institute,” *Chikly Institute*, 2009, <http://www.chiklyinstitute.org/hct/discover.htm>. According to the website, HCT involves learning a “dialoguing technique that is guided by the wisdom of the heart.” The program is offered to both

lymphatic work,” HCT is “an intense experience.” She practiced it on herself, as well as on some clients, though “not real frequently, because not everybody is ready for that.” According to Martha, the facilitator’s first task is to decide their intent for the session, whether it is for themselves or another person.

Like, “I’d like to address the pain in my shoulder.” And then you need the [client] to tell you the name of their spiritual connection, whether it’s Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit—whatever they come up with. I actually use all those three. I have patients that come up with all different things. We use whatever they come up with. It’s not about me it’s about them.

You need your spiritual connector to come in and help support you through this process. Then you connect in with whatever this issue is. Somewhere it’s in your body and you need to locate that connection. Before you connect in with the issue, you connect with spiritual power to support and facilitate this process of learning, and understanding, and forgiveness. Then as you bring in your spiritual connection, you give the issue...you define it by how it feels in your body. You give it a color, shape, size, density, etc. You want at least three descriptive terms so it becomes very real. Then you work through it.

However, what resonates most with Martha is the way another LDS woman has adapted this healing modality to the LDS context capitalizing on the Mormon concern with kinship and eternal families. The program is based on the concept of SEVIRUS (or SE-viruses), “which can be passed down from ancestors into us.”³⁵² “It worked with what I’d believed my whole life, connecting to descendants.” Invoking scriptures from the Bible and the LDS book of scripture, the Doctrine and Covenants, Martha describes the process: “Say you have an issue [like] compulsive overeating. Trace it back with the Connector through your history, and genetically

professional and lay persons and is particularly effective for “deep healing without reliving the trauma.” The Chikly Health Institute, which teaches the course, also teaches courses in lymph drainage therapy.

³⁵² I have been unable to find any information about this program.

through your ancestors.” Without a way to heal the generational damage, she says, invoking the scripture that authorizes LDS posthumous baptisms and missionary work, “the sins of the parents will be on the heads of the children until the 3rd and 4th generation” (Exodus 20:5). Martha explains that Heart Centered Therapy “increases your ability to love, [which] resonates with turning the hearts of the children to the fathers” (D&C 2:2).

I’m like *wow!* This is so amazing; this really connects in with the gospel! When I go to some of these courses, some of this stuff can get a little creepy; it can get a little far out there. So I always try to keep the gospel in my mind and always ask if it is supported by the gospel or if it would be in contradiction to gospel principles. So I always hold the gospel as my standard. So as I’m listening to this, and she’s talking about these SEVIRISES, that can be passed down through generations, and I thought, “Wow! How cool is that connection when you start looking at [the scriptures]!”

Echoing the LDS belief that by their deliberate actions all things may be made whole (e.g. families sealed for eternity, as she implies above), Martha has “expounded on some of the things [she’s] learned” and is excited by the possibility of actually going “back to the beginning” to heal all things. “You can actually bring in these ancestors into your energetic or spiritual being and have a conversation with them,” she says. “We have the hearts of the fathers...and we’re able to find healing that way.” For Martha, this also involves easing the boundaries between the spirit and mortal realms. She says she has done a number of sessions in which she has “brought in” her ancestors and released certain tendencies and behaviors.”

According to Martha, the question people ask is, “When I know what I know, why do I keep doing what I do?” Her explanation is that “It’s hardwired through the ‘sins of the fathers.’” The idea is to “invite them [ancestors] to come,” and “invite them to let it go.”

During the session, you can actually bring in these ancestors into your energetic or spiritual being and have a discussion with them! And ask them “how did you feel, why did you do that?” Not necessarily “why,” but “Are you willing to let that go now? You made the best decision at the time, but now you’re able to see that there’s another decision or another pathway. Are we ready to let this go so that *we* don’t hold this anger, this animosity, this pain, this emotion, whatever it is?”³⁵³

It’s called Heart Centered Therapy. Isn’t it interesting that we have a modality called HCT where the hearts of the children are turned to the fathers...and we’re able to find healing that way?

However, it wasn’t until Martha lost her practice that she started looking for healing for herself and encountered what were for her new aspects of the New Spirituality. After having to close her practice and lay off her employees because she no longer had the physical health to support it, she became angry and cynical. Medical physicians who saw her, she says, treated her with contempt and dismissed her as not having a legitimate illness. She was angry with God, to whom she attributed both her healing gifts and the inability to use them. “They said, “This is not organic; this is somatization!” Well, even if it *had* been psychological, it *still* would have been a legitimate problem I needed help for! Doctors offered me nothing. *Nothing!*” Martha was angry because she had lost her business, which she’d been directed to do by fasting and prayer, so she went in fasting and prayer for the solutions. “How do I deal with this anger? I’m praying to Heavenly Father saying,

³⁵³ According to Martha, not everyone wants to let those things go. “So you go back through and you have conversations with these ancestors and find out and say, ‘Let’s let this go.’ And if the person doesn’t want to let it go, that’s their free choice. You don’t force them. You invite them to come and invite them to be a part of this community. You invite them to let it go, and not everybody does. They may choose to step out of the circle or whatever you’re using as your conduit to invite all of the entities in; so not all of them do choose to let it go or embrace this new direction of freedom. So there’s always this freedom of choice to do what’s right for them. But you, too, are free to make the choice that’s right for you. And then you’re able to release it. And if they don’t want to, that’s their business. But you can free up generations. You don’t have to pass it along to your next generation.”

‘I’ve got this anger, and I don’t know how to deal with it, and how are you going to help me? I’m pretty much yelling at him!’”

Martha says her answer came through a client’s husband, who repeatedly requested that she attend a “healing group—like energy healing.” At first she was reluctant to go. “Um, well, thanks for inviting me, and there’s *no way* I’m going to that!” But eventually she gave in because she became desperate for help. “They were doing all these weird things on me! Somebody’s doing EFT and telling me to ‘tap,’ and [the client’s husband] comes in and does some kind of energy work.” Martha went home and slept well, and the effects of the treatments were so profound that she began attending the meetings of both the energy group and an associated meditation group.³⁵⁴

Like the women in Chapter 3, Martha had to confront the issue of reincarnation. While meditation captivated Martha’s attention, many group members used it to explore the meanings of past lives, which she rejected. She did, however, have the context of preexistence from which to form a forward-looking position.

For the sake of argument, let’s assume that we all believe in reincarnation. I do believe we existed before this life and will exist after we leave this earth, and we don’t come back again to this earth in the same type of mortal body. But let’s assume we all believe this way. What’s the point of going back to your past life during this meditation? I don’t understand. One of the guys (this guy was spiritual, not LDS, but spiritual—I could feel his spirit when I walked in the room) said, “Yogananda said [the goal] wasn’t to entertain [ourselves] with dwelling in past lives in meditation but to focus on the issues or growth that needs to occur now.” Okay!

³⁵⁴ Meditation as a Buddhist practice with its associated cosmologies is not “New Age.” However, meditation in the North American non-immigrant context has often been stripped of Buddhist cosmology. As such, meditation is closely related to New Age and is an integral part of the New Spirituality.

Her major breakthrough, she says, came when she was able to integrate her meditation practice with her LDS prayer practice to truly heal her anger. Despite the fact that doing the practices she learned (“the pranayama, the kundalini”) put her in a deep and tranquil meditative state, she was unable to maintain that level of peace outside her meditation. So she prayed to know what to do. “And then I just sit there,” she says. “I ask that one question and I just sit there. And answers start coming to me. I start realizing that anger doesn’t get you anywhere, honey. . . . And I start realizing just how much energy it sucks out of me to feel this way and be this way.” As she continues to ask similar questions about her wellbeing over the course of several meditations, she realized that she could “take one or two questions into a meditation and focus on them for forty to sixty minutes and *listen!* That was the key. Meditation, when you come right down to it, is *listening.*”

Martha gained more confidence as she continued to reconcile meditation and energy work with Mormonism. Comparing the LDS concept of *pondering* explained earlier with what she experienced in meditation, she asserts that Mormons often conflate the two but they are actually dramatically different.

Pondering is your own thoughts. Meditation is focusing on what the Lord has to say. Meditation is *emptying your own self out*, emptying your worries, emptying the world out, and allowing the spirit and the Lord’s voice to fill you up and to receive. Whereas pondering [has] you *fill yourself up*. You can use scripture; you can use the Relief Society manual; you can use whatever you want, but you’re not making space to listen to the Lord. You’re basically filling [yourself] up so much with your own voice and what you remember, you’re forgetting to allow the lord to come in and communicate with you personally—so that he can reveal the mysteries that you need to know.

For Martha to be able to release her anger, she had to be able to “listen to the Lord’s voice.” Despite the LDS commitment to prayer as an access to everything from “the still, small voice” of the spirit to elaborate visions, Martha found the tool for her

own healing outside the Mormon tradition in the New Spirituality and integrated it back into her ongoing belief in the Mormon religious framework. As she did so, she found other Mormon concepts that validated her experience.

Reverence became the next thread Martha found for connecting LDS ways of being with what she had learned in the energy and meditation groups. In Mormonism, *reverence* is defined as “profound respect and love” directed at God. It “includes honoring Him, expressing gratitude to Him, and obeying His commandments.” Behaviors that fall into the category of reverence include “prayer, scripture study, fasting . . . payment of tithes and offerings; . . . having wholesome thoughts, wearing modest clothing, and using clean, wholesome language.”³⁵⁵ In other words, reverence is not just a quiet state of being; it is developed inside of multiple practices, such as conventions of dress and ways of speaking. In the LDS Church, reverence is a never-ending pursuit, a goal taught to the smallest children and the oldest adult. Even LDS meetinghouses are designed to teach Church members reverence by maintaining different spaces inside of which are required different behaviors.

In Martha’s story it is easy to see how meditation resonates with the goal of reverence in LDS culture. Reflecting on the meditative process, Martha says that instead of using meditation to get in touch with past lives, she was able to use it to “get into a state of reverence.” It was a different experience, she says. She started meditating and using it as a “prayer state.” “Things started coming to me,” she says. “When you start emptying yourself out and filling up with the spirit, there’s a whole

³⁵⁵ “Study Topics: Reverence,” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, accessed March 13, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/study/topics/reverence?lang=eng>.

different reverence, and whole different feeling and you receive things!” It was not long before she wanted to share it with others in her LDS community. Sitting in church, she often reflected that “if people here knew how to meditate, they would *get* reverence.”

Over a year later, after experiencing the difference her blended spirituality made for her, Martha began questioning why these kinds of techniques are not taught in church.

I’m sitting in church thinking, “Why doesn’t anybody teach this!” You hear conference talks, and they say you should ponder the scriptures; you should really study them and delve into them; but nobody tells you how to *get* there. You know what I’m saying? You read the Book of Mormon [the Book of Enos, which tells you to] wax boldly in mighty prayer. He prays a day a night and day! That’s like 36 hours! Are you kidding? My knees would be dead! How do we *do* that?

And when you start asking and you’re really truly sincere, “I really truly want to know this!”—I got led to this group to learn about *becoming* that grounded and that centered and pulling [my] awareness *out* of the world. I’m still *in* the world because I’m here physically; but I’m [actually] *out* of the world. I’m not *of* the world; I’m *interior*; and I’m connected into this spiritual connection; and I’m able to ask the question and then *listen* for an answer—however long it takes. In [LDS general] conference, they say we should [do that]....but nobody tells us how to do it!

Waxing bold in mighty prayer! I want to *do* that! I want to know *how to do that!* And I got led into this group.

However, like most other devout Mormons, Martha was unwilling to take any action without first consulting God. Contemplating her question, Martha reports being told by the spirit that the women in Relief Society needed to learn to meditate; however, she had not had a calling for some time because of her poor health. “Somebody should be teaching this in relief society! It needs to be brought to the people!”

Shortly after having this insight, she was actually called by the bishop of her ward to teach Relief Society—confirmation that she was on the right track. Following

Mormon concerns and conventions, Martha prayerfully prepared her lessons and felt prompted to begin her first two lessons with meditation. She prayerfully requested knowledge of what to do and how to do it. “The answer from God was, ‘I want you to teach them to do what you’re doing. I want you to teach them to wax boldly in mighty prayer.’”

At first, she thought perhaps she had projected her own desires back into the answer. She was also concerned that if she taught meditation in Relief Society, she would likely not be allowed to teach again. Martha talked over her plans with one Relief Society counselor, who was very hesitant about approving her approach to the lesson. However, on the day of the lesson she proceeded, having received the same affirmation of her plans. The lesson, she explained, was about talents and gifts. It posed the questions “What lessons would you have me working on to develop your kingdom today, or to develop my household? Where [should] my focus lie?”

Ultimately, Martha combined the HCT method with guided meditation in which she posed these and other open-ended questions and left time between questions for the women in Relief Society to listen for their own personal answers. She said, “I really tried and was fairly successful at connecting into Heavenly Father in my heart, to be open to whatever questions were suggested to me [by him].” Consequently, she felt she was rewarded by revelation as insight. “I did ask questions that I had not thought about ahead of time that were not in the lesson manual but came into my awareness.”

Like the women in Chapter 3, Martha supports my argument that the simplification of Mormon doctrine by the LDS Church has led members to seek elsewhere for tools to put that doctrine into practice. When asked how she answers

her own question as to why meditation is not taught in the LDS Church, Martha repeats what others have said: The Church is made up of so many people, in so many different places, who operate spiritually at vastly different levels. “Brand new converts, people who have been members their whole life; people like my mother who lives the gospel very diligently but sometimes misses the spirit. Know what I’m saying?” The Church actually gives her tacit permission to explore other spiritual options precisely because they cannot be held responsible for providing spiritual depth.

While meditation is ubiquitous in the New Spirituality,³⁵⁶ Martha’s solution is also a very Mormon one: She has a personal responsibility to seek revelation specific to her as an individual. While other Mormons may recoil “in fear of opening themselves up to Satan,” Martha is secure in her meditation practices precisely because she has received confirmation of their “rightness” from God. She is, however, ongoingly committed to testing everything she encounters against what she understands to be the gospel standard. Though she thinks that most LDS women as a group could find “greater health and wellbeing” in energy practices, she admits that as individuals most Mormons are ready for the kinds of things she does.

It is also obvious that Martha’s use of energy medicine and meditation techniques is mediated by her participation in the insurance system as a physical therapist. Though she has been trained in several energy healing programs and uses them occasionally with patients, using lymphatic techniques in her practice “get greater result with less amount of time—and if you’re billing insurance that’s a darn

³⁵⁶ Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 10.

big deal!” Nevertheless, she continues to learn new modalities, such as herbalism, Functional Manual Therapy (a holistic physical therapy modality), “muscle testing,” and pendulum work to identify energy resonance, though because of her medical training she rebels against imprecise language. “Muscle testing,” she says, “is an *energetic* technique—you’re *not* testing *muscles*.” As a physical therapist, she is trained in the complicated medical process of muscle testing for strength. “I know what muscle testing is, and that’s not it!” That does not mean Martha does not use what practitioners call “muscle testing.” However, like other energy healing methods she has learned, she has ended up adapting that practice for her own use.

When I do use it with patients, I call it Energy Resonance Testing [her version of “muscle testing”]. Sometimes people bring me something and say “Do you think this is good for me?” We’re testing “does this product resonate with your system or not?” If it resonates, then it’s going to come out healing; it donates energy to your system. If it *doesn’t* resonate with your system, it’s a waste of your time and money to use this product or technique or whatever it is. If you’re using the pendulum, the pendulum is picking up the resonance.

One striking thing about Martha is her ability to relate everything she does back to Mormonism. This is especially true with regard to Ho’oponopono, a Hawaiian healing method promoted by Joe Vitale. Vitale is one of the major teachers of “The Secret,” mentioned in Chapter 3. The relationship of Ho’oponopono to the Law of Attraction and “The Secret” is made clear with one proponent’s assertion that “taking 100% of the responsibility is *The Easiest Way*. Think about it. If we have created a situation, we can change it!”³⁵⁷ At once we recognize the belief that we

³⁵⁷ Mabel Katz, “Ho’oponopono (ho-o-pono-pono), an Ancient Hawaiian Art for Problem Solving,” *Ho’oponopono is Beyond the Secret*, 2008, accessed April 21, 2012, <http://hooponoponoisbeyondthesecret.com/>.

create our reality and are responsible for it. It is no surprise that this message resonates with Martha, given the Mormon commitment to that idea.

Beyond that, however, Ho'oponopono has a connection with the Book of Mormon, which increases its authority and value in Martha's eyes. When talking about the effectiveness of this healing modality, Martha references LDS Church history in Hawaii and the other Polynesian islands. In Mormon doctrine, Book of Mormon peoples "left the North and South American continents and traveled off in the sea and were never heard from again." In Martha's opinion, "That doesn't mean they died in the sea. I really think they went to these islands." She sees the Ho'oponopono technique as coming from those people. The method contains four key phrases: I'm sorry; I love you; please forgive me; and thank you.

You've got repentance, love, forgiveness, and gratitude that are shown in these statements. When you take them back to the scriptures and compare them to the standard of the gospel of Jesus Christ, you start to see these are core essential foundational principles and they come through this [Hawaiian] technique of healing. The things you can accomplish doing that, as well! What you do is envision somebody [in whom] you need to release something or address an issue with, and you say "I'm sorry; I love you, and thank you." I've played around with those statements with different beings in my life—different ancestors—and one thing I've felt or seen . . . is when I put those phrases in different orders, it becomes a different meaning. It's really quite profound. And so sometimes I put them in one order for a while and then I flip-flop them around, and you can get a really different perspective and feeling of healing and relief as you're doing that.

When asked how she views energy, Martha replies, "As I continue to grow as both spiritual and mortal being, I guess I would have to say that *energy* is what we all were before we were born. It's what makes us up as spiritual beings. We're spiritual beings having a mortal experience. To me, *energy* is our word in the English language that sort of translates into this spiritual being that we are."

Darlene

Like Martha, Darlene is a committed, active member of the LDS Church. She “expanded into the realm of New Spirituality many years ago” and also “works professionally in the energy healing arena, having formerly practiced as a marriage and family relationship therapist.” Her interest in energy work has an origin in personal experience of abuse: Her second husband molested her thirteen-year-old daughter. “Dealing with all of that opened the door,” she says, for her to investigate, consume, and ultimately practice energy healing. For the most part, her clients are active LDS women. Having worked for LDS Family Services, she understands their challenges. She calls her services “life coaching,” which has as its goal helping them transform their guilt around what it means to be an LDS woman in a perfection-centered, male-centered religion. Darlene says her “soul purpose” is to help women “remember who they are” so that they can experience joy. She does both individual counseling in her office and by phone, and she also facilitates several group programs by teleconference. In her coaching practices, she primarily uses guided meditation and a variety of energy-based healing modalities: EFT, Thought Field Therapy (TFT), which uses stimulation of acupuncture points to disperse the traumas, painful emotional experiences and other mental negativity that blocks emotional healing³⁵⁸), and Soul Detective healing,³⁵⁹ which uses acupuncture and “chakra techniques,” muscle testing, and “shamanistic-like” principles to heal the

³⁵⁸ Steve B. Reed, “TFT: Discovering Thought Field Therapy,” *Dallas Counseling & Psychotherapy*, 2006, <http://www.remap.net/discovering-thought-field-therapy.html>.

³⁵⁹ For information about Soul Detective approach, see Barbara Stone, *Invisible Roots: How Healing Past Life Trauma Can Liberate Your Present* (Santa Rosa, CA: Energy Psychology Press, 2008).

“invisible root” of an issue. Also like Martha, Darlene says she eases her LDS clients into energy healing by synthesizing and therefore harmonizing them with Mormon beliefs.

Born in “a western state” and adopted at birth in the mid-1950s, Darlene is a convert to the LDS Church. She says she and her siblings were “raised to be independent thinkers and take care of and think for [them]selves.” Her introduction to Mormonism came at the age of ten, when her family moved to Utah. Though she had some good friends who were LDS, she was the victim of date rape by two LDS boys in high school and so may seem an unlikely candidate for conversion. However, she had several good friends who were Mormon and so was able to maintain an open mind with regard to Mormonism. Back in her home state for college, Darlene had what she today still considers a powerful and authentic evangelical Christian conversion. She still felt, though, as if she was at a crossroads and “had to settle the ‘Mormon question.’”

In part, the issue was how she could reconcile the goodness she saw in some Mormons with “the appalling darkness, smallness, and meanness” she experienced in others. Her other concern was their claim of being “the true church.” It became what she describes as “a burning, driving, driven obsession.” Inside of that obsession, she claimed the promise of knowing if their assertion of exclusivity was true. So she read the Book of Mormon and knelt in prayer, and the Lord answered. “I felt the witness all through my body,” she says. “It came [as] a package. Joseph really did do what he claimed to do.” Urged by some LDS friends to read the Book of Mormon and put its promise to the test, she says she received a witness that it was

real scripture (“I felt it run through me like Reiki attunement!”) and joined the Church in her sophomore year. Darlene feels strongly about her conversion:

God led me to the Church, just like I have been led all along, step by step—throughout everything in my life. Throughout my marriages; into energy healing; into what I do now, which is so different it’s not even psychotherapy anymore. I can say with great comfort and assurance that I have been led and continue to be led. [For thirty years] . . . it’s been God, Father and Mother, and the Savior, who shepherded this journey . . . expanded my spiritual worldview, expanded my view of what I do professionally and how I do it. . . . I’m still a member, I still am active, I have a temple recommend, and I participate actively in the lifestyle of the church.

However, like other women I interviewed, Darlene supports my argument that many Latter-day Saints are spiritually bored. She readily expresses her frustration with what she calls the current “in-the-box, politically correct, conventional, mainstream . . . watered-down version of what Joseph [Smith] originally taught,” which in her view “[simplified] the living spirit out of the Church!” Thus, she too supports my argument that the streamlining of Mormon doctrine and practice by the LDS Church has inspired these LDS women to seek outside the Church for ways to be more authentically Mormon. Especially with regard to heterodox beliefs, Delores says she can bear testimony to the fact that God led her “out of the Mormon box” and that (like Martha) her “soul calling” is to help others transcend the box. “People in the Mormon box think the box is all there is. Well, I can tell you there’s more than the Mormon box. There *is*! And I can say that God led me *out* of the Mormon box! I can bear my *testimony* of that, if need be.” This testimony, a powerful motivator in the Mormon world, enables her to more effectively navigate and negotiate her public and private spiritual realities.

Her testimony also helps her reconcile apparently heterodox ideas. With regard to the issue of past lives, for instance, which all of the women I encountered

have had to wrestle with, she eloquently says, “If the soul is eternal and the stakes are so high, and the potential is literally to become like God—if this is true, and eternity is really forever, then it makes sense that it might take more than one passage through this mortal experience to figure it out.”

. . . [I]o learn all the lessons, to master in the physical dimension, with the stuff of creation, with the physical elements we’re endowed with through our own body (meaning our physical body and also our mind and emotions) if that is the point—to literally become like our heavenly parents, to live as they live, to do as they do—then it seems reasonable to me that we might need more time here.

Darlene’s husband plays a significant role in this process. Their calling in this lifetime, she says, is to “teach by example and precept this principle of true, sacred partnership, starting with us as women stepping up to our full identity as women, remembering our identity and claiming our place in our families, in our communities, in our churches, in the world, in our authentic femininity and presence.” In part, this imbalance (what others might identify as “generational iniquity”) is what she hopes to help heal with the energy work she does.

We clear the generational patterns and the original wound back to the original source, however far [back] that is—including past lives, including curses and hexes and energetic cores, and previous life experience on other planets—and we do it all by bringing it into the light and healing it.

In fact, Darlene believes that she and her husband have had relationships in multiple mortal lifetimes. They have been married more than once, had children together, played other roles in each other’s lives. This life, however, is pivotal, she says, for they have been called, foreordained as a couple, to a pivotal role in the ongoing restoration of all truth.

This knowledge puts Darlene and her husband at the forefront of what she considers an ongoing Mormon restoration. Latter-day Saints often state their belief

that while not all has been revealed, the restoration of all truth will eventually occur. However, in Darlene's view the Restoration is not merely incomplete; it has stalled at the institutional level. Darlene repeatedly references the late nineteenth-century suspension of the practice of polygamy as the moment when, in the Church's conciliatory assimilation into mainstream American cultural life, it "took the path to actually dumb down the Church and dumb down the teachings." In other words, she cites the actual regression of Joseph Smith's restoration of truth as the main problem with which the LDS Church is grappling. To be clear, *Darlene does not call for the restoration of plural marriage*. Referring to Carl Jung's concept, she identifies the lingering consequences of the early Mormon practice of polygamy as the LDS Church's "shadow side." In general, she says, "The shadow . . . is the unfinished parts of us we don't want to acknowledge, that we split off, that we try to cut off, that comes from the unfinished business in our past, whether that be in our own mind or those generational patterns that we inherit." In the LDS Church, this shadow gets expressed in its disgust of homosexuality and the way in which women are "simultaneously marginalized and practically deified, but not treated like real people." "The restoration of all things in the last days," she says, is "so much bigger" than just "taking the gospel to all the nations of the earth" and making available all of the "original principles" and temple ordinances; ultimately "it is the bringing together and finishing of the grand picture of the Father's plan," in which all humans are playing their individual roles. In her opinion, that will eventually include the restoration of institutional approval for an understanding of multiple mortal probations.

According to Darlene, however, the most pressing issue is restoring the status of women to its original level, which she sees reflected in the relationship of the Heavenly Mother and Father. She does not think the Restoration will be complete “until women are once again restored to full and equal partnership in the institution of the Church.” The consequences, she says, are dramatic, because the Church is “losing women like crazy.” Darlene sees the decline in young women transitioning into Relief Society as adults as a product of the “huge disconnect” between the messages they get about gender roles in the Young Women’s Program and those they get in their families of origin. Their experience at home does not contain such “limited—and limiting”—gender role definitions. “Then they see this traditional, male dominant, hierarchical top-down militaristic organization in the institution of the church.”

A very high percentage of young women do not make the transition from the Young Women’s program into the Relief Society [and] remain active.

. . . . They are losing a lot of the best and brightest young women, because the answers they get are not satisfying to them; don’t make sense to them; don’t resonate as truth within their hearts and within their spirits. And they are strong enough to say, “This doesn’t work,” and to start taking their own path. So if the church wants to stop losing them, they have to come to terms with it. And it’s a big behemoth, a big obelisk. It moves very, very slowly. And with a leadership primarily over seventy, it will take time; it will be a slow process—unless there is a direct input from heaven and they’re open enough to receive it, and I’m still optimistic enough to think that if that were to be the case, that they would be willing to be [directed].

Darlene confirms my hypothesis that she gets corroboration for her experiences and ideas in revisionist histories. She says that ward members in various places she has lived have shared historical references with her that further confirm the rightness of her path. Most significantly, she is riveted by stories that confirm women’s historical involvement in LDS priesthood ordinances as outlined earlier.

Because both men and women are apparently endowed with priesthood power during the robing ceremony part of the LDS temple endowment, she does not believe women need to be ordained to the priesthood.³⁶⁰ However, there must still be what she calls “a double restoration”: Women’s authority needs to be first restored to LDS consciousness and then actually *recognized*. By that she means the Church must do more than just symbolically acknowledge women “putting on the power of god” but must then restore women’s priesthood to “institutional functioning.” According to Darlene, the Relief Society should be restored to equal and parallel power and influence to the male priesthood quorums. “This would involve women sitting around the council room with members of Quorum of the Twelve,” she says, “not merely as guests but as full and participating *members* of that council [who are] there by virtue of the spiritual authority they have been endowed with.”

Darlene further confirms my suspicion that social networking aid LDS women seeking to legitimize their extra-Mormon activities. She also credits the Internet with supporting the trend in individual thinking that, for instance, leads women (and men) to her door. “Much as they’d like to,” she says, “the Church cannot shut down the blogs; cannot shut down people talking amongst themselves.” Referring again to historical work like Quinn’s, she asserts that “[e]ducated, bright, intelligent women and men are talking about these things, opening the box on practices that the church was [once] okay with but now is not—such as women giving blessings—and they can’t shut it down.” In her opinion, this grassroots

³⁶⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of early Mormon attitudes pertaining to Joseph Smith’s intention to “make of this Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch’s day—as in Paul’s day” (365) and the changes made by the LDS Church over time to erase Smith’s original purpose, see D. Michael Quinn, “Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood Since 1843,” in *Women and Authority: Re-Emerging Mormon Feminism*, ed. Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 365..

movement is “a really good thing,” because it brings “into the light” (and actually even elevates) this relatively obscure knowledge. “The church, the institution, the brethren . . . will have to come to terms with it.”

Darlene believes strongly that the work she does has a role to play in that reconciliation. Naturally, she also has to ongoingly deal with the virtually universal fear of attracting negative attention from the LDS Church. This situation is compounded by the generalized fear church members have, including each of these women, of being led astray.

When it comes to spiritual health or emotional problems, or family problems, there is a lot of fear that is they go to somebody who’s not approved by the Church or endorsed by the Church or a part of the Church in some way, they’re going to be led astray, or that they’re going to be told to do something against their values. There’s this fear of reaching out for help outside the box.

Therefore, like the other women I interviewed for this chapter, she is concerned with maintaining both her professional and her spiritual reputation in relation to the LDS Church. She is also committed to being prayerful about who and how to teach so that she teaches at each individual’s spiritual level and location in “the Mormon box.” She says she has “no temptation to teach higher principles” in her Gospel Doctrine class.³⁶¹

All I can say is that Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother and the Lord know what I’m doing. I know they’ve been leading me and guiding me, and I know they will continue to do so. I have been told in the last week to keep going on this path.” They have work for me to do. Inherent in that is that they know what I’m doing and where I am and that what I do involves this bigger, expanded spiritual dimension.

³⁶¹ It is extremely significant that Darlene is a Gospel Doctrine (adult education) teacher. That is a prominent assignment, which indicates that she is trusted in her ward.

Ultimately, Darlene doesn't "listen to a lot of what Church leaders have to say." Those sources, she says, are "biased, clouded, looking through a lens darkly [1 Corinthians, 13:12]; [their personal] perception." Instead, she relies on her direct relationship with God. In this way, she compares herself to Eve in the Garden of Eden, who "saw a deeper view, stepped up to the plate, and exercised her spiritual gifts and went forward—claiming without permission."

Jackie

Jackie was born in 1953, to deeply devout LDS parents in American Fork, Utah. "We were 'hundred-percenters,'" she says, by which she means that they "put the church ahead of all other concerns." Her brothers got awards for attending church every week without fail, and her parents were proud of that. "Even when we were on vacation, we'd stop and go to church. So we were never on vacation. It was just crazy. It was a very big priority in our lives all the way down the line. Even if we lived far away from a temple, they would go down at least once a month to a Utah temple." She had four older brothers, of whom her parents were very proud. "They all went on missions; all were married in the temple." She, on the other hand, was always "the one at [LDS] Girls Camp who wouldn't stand up and bear her testimony 'cause I felt like I just didn't get it." She "went through the program" and tried to feel what others felt, "but it never quite took." As a college student at BYU, however, she found herself deeply interested in spiritual things and did more personal study than her religion classes required.

Jackie's lack of a testimony of the LDS Church was problematic over time. When she married a returned missionary, she assumed that he would take over the concern for their family's spiritual welfare, especially since he had just spent two

years “teaching and preaching.” She was surprised to discover that he was not as devout as she had assumed. He did not want the spiritual steward job any more than she. “He was raised in a much more relaxed atmosphere,” she says.

They’d go out to dinner on Sunday, and it was really no big deal. I felt ostracized by his family, because I was the straight one. When we moved to Las Vegas [near his large LDS family], I was teased for being too straight. I was introduced as ‘Goody Two Shoes’ to his cousins. And I was the one who was expected to keep up on the spiritual stuff in the family. So if there was anything going on, I needed to be the one who did it. If we were going to have personal prayers together—*anything*—I was the one who had to bring it up. That was my job.

Jackie was frustrated by her husband’s easygoing approach to Mormon life. While she lacked a testimony of the Church, she believed in Mormon doctrine; and she wanted to go to the celestial kingdom, “And there was a point in our lives when I said, well if he’s not going there, I don’t want to go there either, because I want to be with him. So if he’s not going to make it to that level . . . oh well!”

Jackie discovered energy healing in 1995, while trying to find solutions to some medical and marital problems. She thought the relationship stress had caused her physical illness, which originally manifested as severe food allergies. Several women in her southern California ward were having similar problems, which local doctors found impossible to successfully treat. One night they got together and pledged themselves to a mutual quest for healing. “We decided to go different routes of healing, to look for different practitioners. And I went to a doctor down in La Jolla, who was giving injections for allergies [and] was under investigation by the FDA. That did nothing for me. And one of [the women] went to this chiropractor; one of them went to a naturopath; and we just kept in touch with each other.”

Ultimately, they all began seeing the chiropractor, who worked with “a whole bunch

of Mormons, of course, with the ‘Mormon network.’ I was just *fascinated*. I *decided* to pursue more of that.” Jackie and her family moved to Arizona, where “right away, more doors were opened,” and she learned more about energy work.

In Arizona, she began having what she thought might be memories of child sexual abuse, and at that point, she says, “everything started to make sense.” She also faced a new health crisis: hemorrhaging, which necessitated blood transfusions and other medical interventions. “It was a powerful journey, really, experiencing all of that; a process of digging up old memories, and the old emotions that were tied to those, and clearing them.” Jackie reports having had another visionary experience during that time, having to do with a battle between “the forces of darkness and the forces of light.” She commanded the dark forces to leave. “I felt the hand of the Savior’s on my head,” she says. Not all of the people from whom she has sought healing have been LDS. However, she feels she has “just been led by my Savior, or those who have been assigned by him to do different things to help me heal.”

Jackie tried priesthood blessings for her health problems and says “they did—and didn’t—work.” Her experience with priesthood blessings gave her a different perspective on their efficacy. When she had been married for only a month or so, she and her husband ended up working in a secluded place. “For some reason we were alone without a car, and [he] got really, really sick. Here I am, and I don’t know what to do. So I just blessed him, and it went away.” Because Jackie does not see the institution LDS system as always being inspired, she is able to reframe its policies. “So I always looked at priesthood blessings like ‘Yeah, you [the men] do it, but if you’re not around, then I’ll do it.’ So I kind of had that perspective,” she says. Moreover, because Jackie was the marriage partner responsible for the spiritual

wellbeing of the family, she knew she had to be the one to “have the revelation or the vision” to change her life and solve the problems the family faced. She knew that personal visions were a possibility because Joseph Smith had had them.

“Mormonism taught me that visions were out there. Even after I started questioning things, I still didn’t doubt that Joseph had a vision.” In fact, Jackie had had visions before, at pivotal times when she “needed a miracle.” She clearly separates the LDS Church from the revelatory experiences of its founder. “I do believe the church is in the business of religion,” she says, “and religion does serve a general populous very well in many ways. It provides an intention to live a better life, which is really powerful. If you can’t find it on your own, organized religion gives you a really good framework to do that.” However, she relies on her own visions and not those of Church authorities to guide her through mortality.

Jackie is deeply committed to the revelatory process. She says she had a vision about moving from California to Arizona. Her husband had mentioned moving his business and planned to commute, but Jackie’s experience changed that. “I had a vision! It just hit me like a lightning bolt: ‘I have *got* to get out of here!’ I came home and said, ‘We’re moving to Arizona.’ It was time to get out of town and start a new life, basically.” She says moving made it easier to “reevaluate” their relationship to the Church, because before becoming acclimated to their new ward, their family life was not so deeply tied into the organization and social structure of the church. “My husband was not a high profile, well-known person in the stake. We didn’t know anybody; we didn’t have kids [at home] anymore, so there wasn’t that socialization with the kids. It was just easier to do our thing. There wasn’t any requirement to look a certain way.” Moving gave Jackie the space “to become

different.” She tried to continue doing callings, volunteer assignments, in her ward, but her health issues made that commitment difficult. “It was just time in my life to live a different way. I got really involved trying to find solutions to my health problems—and *that* led me deeper into energy work.”

Under the chiropractor’s care in California, Jackie learned how to check energy, administer flower essences, aromatherapy, magnetic therapy, and “hands-on healing.” As far as she was concerned, nothing she did was incompatible with what she had been taught at church, primarily because “it *felt* right.” To explain that feeling, Jackie recalls the historical Mormon experience of persecution and the tactic of self-reliance the LDS Church has ongoingly pursued as a result. “For me it was a self-reliance issue,” she says. She felt driven to be able to provide for her family “in case of chaos or mass destruction.” She wanted to be able to do as much as possible to make them comfortable. “You need to be prepared if they crash and burn. You want to be able to heal them. If there’s not a doctor around, you want to be able to do that. I felt like you could be *inspired* to know how to do that.” She remembers a story that looms large in Mormon mythology about an early Mormon pioneer boy who was wounded at the Haun’s Mill Massacre. His hip joint had been shot away, and his mother recalled calling to God for inspiration to help him. She reported being directed by a voice to clean the wound with ashes and lye and pack it with a slippery elm poultice. “So I knew there were other ways of healing and I could be inspired. I knew I needed to do what I could to investigate so I could be prepared to take care of my family. You learn how to do things yourself so that in the case of catastrophe. We’re always waiting for the next catastrophe.”

Along with self-reliance, Jackie has always felt that her spiritual path has been sanctioned by God. “I feel like I have been impressed and guided all the way through—and that’s consistent with what we’ve been taught.” Once, when she substituted in an LDS Institute class (the LDS version of the Catholic Newman Center), the assigned lesson confirmed this attitude. “The lesson was all about faith: knowing what *you* needed to do and having the faith to leave it in the hands of God. When I taught that lesson I thought, ‘I can walk off the ledge. What’s the worst that can happen? I can live in chaos, or I can walk off the ledge and see what happens.’ And that came to me through studying teachings of the [LDS] prophets. It was very inspiring, all about taking [your] path to do what [you] felt was necessary.”

This pragmatism extends to Jackie’s explanation for why the LDS Church has so simplified its religious education. Echoing Martha and Darlene, she says, “You’ve got [fourteen] million people now who are Mormons. You’ve got to play to the lowest common of denominator. Not everybody is ready for the kind of information that maybe the prophet has knowledge of. It’s not in the primary manual because it has to be generic for ten million people. So what’s it going to look like? What would that responsibility be?” She strongly believes that she has been given to know that the Church is merely doing what institutional religion does: Look after its own interests so that the institution thrives. Thus, she has compassion for its leaders, who she sees as having few choices that don’t involve the risk of big losses in membership.

After first looking into energy healing modalities in California, Jackie brought that interest with her to Arizona, where she met other women who were on similar paths. A search for a counselor for her daughter led to an LDS woman who did

energy work. She was introduced to Resonance Repatterning, “where you use different modalities to align your frequency with your intention to keep you spiraling up in your frequency,” and Landmark Education, “which has been great, because it just brought a new way of looking at what was going on. Do you want to live in the past or start a new thing?”³⁶²

Like all of the other women in this project, Jackie has had to reconcile her encounter with the popularized concepts of reincarnation in the energy healing community. However, her response is dramatically different from Carolyn Cooper’s. Reflecting the discussion of multiple mortal probations (MMPs) in Chapter 3, she too believes that one explanation for “memories of other things, other places” may be that we were guardian angels who were close to the individuals whose lives we remember and “those memories are still with us.” However, she leans toward believing that she actually lived those lives. “That doesn’t mean that I wasn’t a guardian angel or a committee member for somebody else,” she says, “but when those memories are so strong, maybe I was the *main* soul participating at that time. I believe we have several lifetimes of experience to gain the wisdom to be exalted.” She considers that eternal progression. It doesn’t make sense to her that we are limited to only one mortal lifetime. “Why would your progression only be on a spirit level after this life, and not in a physical dimension? I think that we just gather experience lifetime upon lifetime and then we choose lessons that we want to learn in a lifetime and kind of write out the plan. And we can follow that plan—or not. We

³⁶² Landmark Education derives from the est training, developed by Werner Erhardt in the 1970s. For information about the original EST training, see Adelaide Bry, *EST: Sixty Hours That Transform Your Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1976).

still have agency to change the plan, but we have a pretty good idea what we want to do.”

Jackie came to this belief after an experience she had while practicing Resonance Repatterning with another energy worker. “She’s usually pretty clear on those people who have died. They like to hang out with her. She can recognize them a little better than I can. She asked, ‘Who do you know who smokes?’ And the only person’s name who came into my head was my father in law, who had passed several months before.” Jackie came into the family long after her father-in-law quit smoking, so she didn’t know him when he smoked. When her friend confirmed the spirit’s identity as her father-in-law, Jackie chose to be the proxy through whom he could communicate. “It was as if he was standing right here. I could feel him so clearly, and the words that came out of my mouth were like his words.”

At the beginning of the session, her father-in-law seemed to feel very sad and alone. Jackie could feel the sadness and regret over what he had been unable to do during mortality. Soon, however, another figure appeared: his wife, who had died from Alzheimer’s several years before him. What struck Jackie was that her mother-in-law did not appear to her as female. “It was interesting when she appeared, I knew her and so I knew it was her. He was definitely male, but she didn’t appear to me as female.” In addition, she did not get the sense that they were “together” as husband and wife, as the highest goal for Mormons is an eternal family, but that her mother-in-law was just a dear friend to him. His sadness was related to his inability to forgive her for things in his life for which he blamed her.

He was very upset. She had become pregnant, and they had had to get married. He just didn’t get over that; he felt like it was her fault. He also grew up in a very poor family. His father was an alcoholic. They were the family

that everyone gave Christmas baskets to, hand-me-downs. And they fought a lot. There were nine boys, and they fought and scrapped their way through. It was a tough life, and he never forgave the people in that town, whatever his perceptions were about their judgments of him.

This experience was powerful for Jackie because she was able to participate in her father-in-law's healing. Her sister-in-law, his daughter, had wanted to know if her mother and father were together, and Jackie was able to provide an alternative interpretation to what Mormons believe about the afterlife. "It was clear that she had made this commitment to provide this service for him to see if he could actually accomplish what he wanted to and be there with him in this life. It didn't feel like our [Mormon] perceptions of the life after this, where you have a man and a woman and they live happily ever after. She said 'I did what I told you I'd do,' and he came to a place of agreement with that." Jackie became aware of another group of spirits nearby, some of whom she recognized as his brothers. Others, she thought, were friends.

They were laughing, having a great time. There was just so much joy in that group! They were chiding him, "So what? You didn't get what you want. Try again! So you didn't do what you had to do! No big deal! It's just so good to see you! Come laugh with us!" So he was in that group, and Grandma was in that group with him. There was no judgment; just a group of souls experiencing such joy.

She got the impression that there was a plan before they came down, that they were souls that were committed to each other's progress. "Maybe we all are on the other side," Jackie says, "but [Grandma] represented a role that they had agreed she would play in this life to help him learn what he wanted to learn, experience what he wanted to experience."

Jackie's years of doing proxy work for others in LDS temples opened her up to these kinds of experiences. She reports that the temple is where she was first

introduced to “listening to those on the other side.” Growing up in the church and going to the temple as an adult, she viewed it as “a time of meditation and reflection, a time to listen.” Echoing the experience of most Mormons who do temple work, she began to feel the spirits of those whose work she was doing. “It gave me an invitation to notice what that was like.” The LDS clients she sees are especially receptive to their ancestors visiting to participate in their healing. Mormonism has taught them that going through the veil will make all knowledge available to them. Therefore, similar to Bender’s New Metaphysicals, who believe their energetic bodies Mormons think their ancestors have access to and can convey important information about their wellbeing. Hearing that ancestors are nearby, “LDS clients brighten up and *open* up and are then willing to consider unorthodox ideas.”

Jackie’s belief in reincarnation is heavily informed by that experience. Echoing the Mormon belief in pre-earth life choice and agency, she believes that in each life we create a plan for what we want to accomplish. If, for instance, one wants to really “get” forgiveness or some other eternal principle, one will create a life that has forgiveness as its lessons. Only by working out one’s exaltation through multiple lifetimes is one able to fully develop the capacity as a god the ability to create that kind of world and opportunity for others. “And he did plan that, and he got his friends to help him, to be in this life with him, to present those opportunities to him. I think we do *do* that. We’re [always] progressing, and that’s the only thing I can come back to.” Most Mormons listening to her story would assume one or both marriage partners had somehow failed in their efforts to be righteous enough to merit a “celestial marriage.” However, Jackie insists that “it wasn’t like that at all.

There was absolutely nothing wrong in that scenario. Any judgment or reference to that wasn't even part of the picture.”

Jackie's experience with her dead father- and mother-in-law has also had a significant impact on her work with LDS clients. She says it is a great gift to be able to share with them her experience of “one man's transition.” She tells the story because so many of them are concerned about the status of their eternal family. The idea that “families can be together forever” can be very comforting; it can also be the source of fear and anxiety. “From the LDS perspective,” she says, “they had to be together forever for them to be happy. After he got that she had just played a part for him in this life, he was okay. And there was no sense that either of them had done anything wrong.”

When asked what most worries her LDS clients, Jackie replies that many divorced LDS women are afraid there will be no husband to meet and “bring them through the veil” that separates this life from the next. Others, especially those who left their husbands, are worried that their ex-spouses will still have a claim on them, despite the fact that they divorced them in this life, because not all those sealed (married) in the temple are granted cancelations of their sealing by the LDS Church after a civil divorce. Others who are married but wish they could leave their marriages are miserable because they believe being “sealed for all eternity” eliminates that option for them. “Guilt often comes up in sessions,” Jackie says. “They're doing energy work to begin with because of some constraint. They are so concerned about getting to the celestial kingdom only through the bonds of an eternal marriage, and that restricts them.”

Nevertheless, because she is acutely aware of the boundaries of LDS clients she is uncomfortable about challenging those beliefs. When she does pendulum work for them, for example, she feels constrained about keeping her responses to them within their belief system. If she's dowsing and receives the answer for a woman, "You really need to leave your husband," she does not "feel comfortable saying that because they're committed to an eternal marriage." Similarly, she often receives responses for individuals that contradict the Word of Wisdom. "Yes, your coffee is good for you,' or 'you need some tea,' or 'you need to have a glass of wine before bed'." She does not want to be responsible for "pushing them outside their comfort zone, leading them astray." If they find their way on their own, that is another thing, she says, "That's agency. I want them to have freedom to choose, that's what I've been taught." In part this reticence has to do with her belief in free agency. On the other hand, she still experiences a kind of covert guilt over breaking the rules on revelation set by the LDS Church.

It's okay to get personal revelation for *you*. And if you're a woman, you have no authority to get revelation for others unless you're in a calling in the church. But when you're doing energy healing, you're getting revelation for others. There's the conflict. So if you were the Relief Society president, you would have no guilt. But if you're just a person setting up a practice to do energy work, that is truly outside the box. But if you're a card carrying [temple recommend carrying] Mormon, you still have the stamp of approval. I don't want people to assume that's who I am, but they do.

It is not surprising that Jackie's interpretation of salvation has also changed. Like Cooper and Tuttle, Jackie sees the atonement as the vehicle for all healing. However, she no longer believes in Satan ("I think we made him up!") and Jesus as savior "represents a way for us to achieve what we want on this earth. . . . A great

example of how to live your life and use the tools that are available to walk on water, heal the sick, live our lives.”

Ultimately, if the earth is going to be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory, which I would hope, I think it’s going to take that kind of power and that kind of light, and *many of us* having that. It’s not about sin. It’s about lower frequencies: those who don’t have hope or have not a desire to move forward; those who get here and then fall into a belief system where they don’t progress, even after this life—or they’re kind of stuck. And those of us who can, [Jesus] included, work with them and give them an understanding of how they can move forward. *That* will be the achievement of the renewal of the earth. I’m all about that. He may be our master teacher, and I think there are other master teachers, but I think we can participate in that. I believe that some of us were chosen to come and do just that.

Analysis

This chapter explored the similarities between New Spirituality and LDS beliefs about health and wellbeing, which in Mormonism are expressed as the pursuit of *wholeness*. In both contexts, wellbeing and wholeness have to do with personal transformation as well as transformation of the earth. The New Spirituality promotes wellbeing through cultivating happiness, self-expression, integration, and balance, especially through holistic health practices. Mormons approach wholeness, which they believe is only available through the atonement of Jesus Christ, through their practice of priesthood blessings, “following” the Word of Wisdom and other commandments they believe the Lord has decreed, and striving to create a “Zion society.” Because they are also deeply concerned with developing their spiritual gifts, they are committed to cultivating personal revelation as described in Chapter 3, and concerned with being led astray by Satan, whose sole purpose is to seduce them with counterfeits to LDS gospel truths. Consistent with the Law of Attraction in the New Spirituality as introduced in Chapter 3 and explicated further here, Mormon doctrine makes individuals accountable for their own health and wellbeing as well as their

response to physical, mental, and emotional adversity. One might think that their weekly meetings would provide an opportunity for sharing their successes and failures. However, LDS culture highly values a positive outlook. Moreover, weekly LDS Church meetings are heavily structured and regulated, as illustrated by the example of the Sunday school lesson about the Three Nephites described in Chapter 3. Thus, over time Mormons have been largely socialized (a) not to discuss topics outside the structure of standardized lessons; and (b) not to mention negative outcomes that cast doubt on the LDS system. Similarly, priesthood blessings today appear more likely to be given for comfort rather than actual curative outcomes. As a result, anecdotal evidence indicates that LDS women are increasingly looking to energy work for therapeutic healing and venues outside the LDS Church for solving problems related to health and wellbeing.

This chapter also introduced Martha, Jackie, and Darlene as examples of LDS women who fit into this category. They all blend New Spirituality energy healing with LDS understandings of healing and wholeness. They each practice more than one form of energy work, including Reiki, Rapid Eye Therapy (RET), Spiritual Response Therapy (SRT), Heart Centered Therapy (HCT), Resonance Repatterning, meditative techniques that have energetic effects, and more. The line is blurred between their personal consumption of energy work and their pursuit of professional training. To some extent they were all consumers seeking to solve intractable physical and/or emotional problems before becoming practitioners. Because of the difference it made in their personal lives, they then became providers of energy work to serve others.

As LDS energy workers, they all share the above concerns to some extent. For instance, they all report being blessed with spiritual gifts (i.e. faith, discernment, and healing), the development of which have led them outside LDS conventions. For Darlene and Jackie, their personal experience and insight informs their view of ultimate truth, while for Martha her experience is measured against Church teachings. Martha's concern with being led astray is the most acute of the three women because she not only believes "the Church is true" but also supports its policies. As a result, she appears to be most comfortable with those practices she can relate directly back to Mormonism, such as scriptures about spiritual gifts like faith, discernment, and healing. Thus, we might characterize her as an Iron Rod Mormon exploring the Liahona Mormon milieu. Martha's main goal for helping women is to teach them techniques for being better Latter-day Saints. Darlene shares that objective because she believes in Joseph Smith's restoration of the gospel. However, her main goal is to help women navigate and negotiate the Church's dysfunctional aspects. Remarkably, she is also the Gospel Doctrine teacher in her ward: the most important local calling a woman can hold because it is the only one that involves teaching both women *and* men. Ironically, her ideas occur as being the most extreme because she believes that women have priesthood power and that the Church is off track, possibly in apostasy, because it will not acknowledge and promote that fact. Her willingness to call the Church to repentance in this way may be a function of her status as a convert as well as her personal experiences of what she calls the "shadow" of Mormon culture, which she finds confirmed by revisionist histories about the progressive loss of status women have suffered at the hands of LDS Church leaders.

Despite being raised in an extremely strict LDS family, of all three women Jackie is least engaged in the LDS Church. Even as a child she simply never developed a testimony of the LDS Church, though she has always believed in “the gospel.” Jackie is also concerned with not being led astray, but not in the same way as Martha and Darlene. She is at the opposite end of the spectrum from Martha, primarily because for the most part she has replaced traditional Mormon methods for cultivating her healing gift and avoiding deception (e.g. prayer, fasting, and scripture reading) with energy work and divinatory methods like pendulum work, the technique used in her favored healing modality, Spiritual Response Therapy (SRT). Instead of measuring the knowledge she gains through energy work by the standard of the Church, discernment for Jackie has to do with relying on a combination of spiritual gifts she has been given and tools she has learned to use; she dowses for everything from which foods her body needs to how she can best fulfill her aging parents’ needs. Nevertheless, Jackie still frames her daily energy-based divination practices in the context of the historical Mormon pursuit of inspired self-reliance.

As examples of cultivating this kind of discernment, Martha, Darlene, and Jackie (like the women whose stories appear in Chapter 3) have all had to confront and reconcile the issues of reincarnation and the lack of substance in church meetings and programs. Though Martha is deeply committed to energy work to heal generational sin and other dysfunction that could easily accommodate belief in multiple mortal probations, Martha predictably rejects that teaching because it is not acknowledged as a true principle by the LDS Church. However, it would not surprise me if her attitude changes as she continues to encounter and study new healing treatments. In keeping with their confidence in their own experience over Church

policy, however, Darlene and Jackie have embraced and integrated MMPs into their individual understandings of generational healing and eternal progression.

Similarly, all three of these women report being deeply affected by the routinization of LDS Church culture mentioned above and in previous chapters, which shapes the conversations that are tolerated in church meetings and therefore inhibits discussions that deviate from the very shallow and heavily directed lesson manuals. The lack of depth in LDS teachings today has contributed to their pursuit of training outside the LDS Church to explore and develop their healing gifts. Their collective response to the deficiencies in Church programs is generally pragmatic, though Darlene is less patient than Martha, for whom Church policies seemingly occur as unquestioningly revealed by God. Both Martha and Darlene see themselves as participating in the ongoing restoration of the gospel by bringing their skills and what they have learned about cultivating wholeness back into LDS culture, especially to benefit LDS women. Jackie's attitude is also matter-of-fact in that she sees all of the Church's choices as business decisions. In her view, the Church merely does what all institutions do: protect its interests at any cost. However, she no longer feels subject to those interests because she has become so thoroughly self-reliant through energy work. Though she readily states that her healing practice is completely congruent with Mormon doctrine, she only marginally relates it to the LDS Church or the Restoration.

It is also impossible to overemphasize the gender factor in these women's personal experience and choices. Their stories illustrate the extent to which accepting the role of healer requires that they wrestle with what it means to be an LDS woman who is denied the authority to heal by the LDS Church. I have shown the various

ways in which they get around and sometimes even ignore that institutional convention, their strategies for legitimizing their disregard, and their reasons for doing so. Even Jackie, who is less active and less believing, obviously still feels compelled to very carefully negotiate her healing practices with the locally agreed upon norms for LDS women. We might even be tempted to contrast Carolyn Cooper's apparent submission to those norms with Jackie, who clearly no longer believes in many of the stories that form the framework of the institutional LDS Church today yet still acknowledges and respects their power. However, our access to Cooper is limited to her public persona. Her public expression of LDS female ways of being is valuable because it illuminates the fear that obviously accompanies her claiming the role of healer. Even though she refuses that title or downplays its significance relative to LDS priesthood, it is clear that she *does* facilitate healing.

With regard to healing, LDS women are clearly at a disadvantage due to their inability to openly bless others using the priesthood. Women must request a blessing, and a male priesthood holder must agree to give it. Mormons emphasize achieving and ongoingly maintaining "worthiness" to give a blessing and being worthy to receive the blessings it promises. Moreover, that agreement is always contingent on the individual priesthood holder's interpretation of what constitutes a proper reason for giving a blessing, as well as his personal sense of worthiness and state of mind. Thus, it is not a forgone conclusion that a man will perform a requested blessing.³⁶³

³⁶³ Recently I observed a conversation between three LDS women, one of whom was upset because her bishop refused to give her a blessing as the father of the ward. She was new to the ward and, because she had been very sick with cancer, she had only infrequently attended church. He suggested blessing her was her husband's responsibility. However, she reportedly requested the blessing because husband was unwilling to accept her illness, which had caused tension in her marriage. One woman offered to pray for her bishop and other church leaders; and the other replied that *her* husband would be willing to give her a blessing. This story is strictly anecdotal and it is likely

In the April 2011 LDS General Conference, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, reminded men that by not giving blessings they are “[settling] far below [their] priesthood privileges.”³⁶⁴ Anecdotal evidence suggests that LDS men are giving fewer blessings, and the blessings they give are more for comfort than for dramatic healing. They may have reservations about giving blessings having recently been reminded not to give too many.³⁶⁵ Now they are more often reminded that not all are meant to be healed than they are encouraged to raise the dead; some who fail to recover are “appointed unto death,” meaning that they have fulfilled the measure of their creation and it is time for them to move to the next stage of their eternal existence.³⁶⁶ Their goal in giving blessings is not the *end* of death, for this life is merely one stage in an eternal journey leading to possible exaltation.³⁶⁷

Beyond what I have shown here, anecdotal evidence also suggests that LDS women appear to increasingly be claiming identities as energy workers, as healers. As I searched out women to interview for this chapter, I was astonished to discover that

that her bishop ultimately would have given her the blessing. However, I have had it confirmed by one of my own local ward leaders that LDS men have, in fact, become increasingly reluctant to give blessings because they either feel unworthy or have lost faith in their ability to be effective.

³⁶⁴ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Your Potential, Your Privilege,” *Ensign*, May 2011, 58, <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2011/04/your-potential-your-privilege?lang=eng>.

³⁶⁵ The element of faith is important in the efficacy of priesthood blessing. In 2010, Dallin H. Oaks reminded men not to allow people to rely solely on blessings for healing; that requests for multiple blessings indicate a lack of faith. See Oaks, “Healing the Sick,” 47.

³⁶⁶ This should not, however, be mistaken for predestination. See William E. Berrett, *Teachings of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1956), 135–6.

³⁶⁷ In answer to the question of why all efforts to heal are not successful, one general authority reminded readers that death is a crucial aspect of the Plan of Salvation. “If the power to heal in every case was given to men, out of sympathy for the suffering they would continually exercise it, and there would be, as a consequence, no sickness and no death. By this means the divine plan would be frustrated, and this earth would be no place of probation or sphere of trial.” See “The Ordinance for the Sick,” *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star*, October 15, 1877, 675.

energy work among LDS women appears to be so widespread. This becomes obvious not only in Internet searches for evidence on professional websites, blogs, and social networking. In addition, as I have presented at academic conferences and answered questions about this project in conversation with Mormons and academics locally and around the country, I have met very few individuals who don't know an LDS woman who practices some form of energy work. Despite the fact that LDS priesthood blessings involve reciprocity and many (perhaps even most) women who pursue them find them advantageous, LDS women who are healers are clearly filling a need. Implicit in these stories is their critique of the extent to which modern Mormons have gotten away from their true roots. The Church and its "faithless" members—not the energy worker—have been "led astray" by their reliance on modern medicine. Similarly, LDS women appear to also be resisting the Church's ostensible limitation of their spiritual gifts to motherhood and homemaking, even if that resistance does not appear to be overt.

Finally, while I have argued that Mormon attitudes about healing are congruent with those in the New Spirituality—especially in its New Age incarnations—in ways that "easily" facilitate LDS women's healing practices, I do not mean to suggest that Martha, Darlene, and Jackie experience no tension about transgressing institutional norms. That tension clearly informs how they approach their spiritual work and their institutional religious commitments. They occasionally encounter alarm from other Latter-day Saints who are grounded in mainstream medicine and are unfamiliar with energy work. More often, though, because of the Church's historically strong negative reaction against any statement or practice that challenges its restriction of the priesthood to men, or appears to duplicate priesthood

functions, women like Martha, Darlene, and Jackie have had to develop ways of speaking that distinguish what they do from healing practices designated as proprietary to the priesthood by the LDS Church.

This anxiety is not only gender related but also occurs relative to heterodox ideas. In the case of reincarnation, for instance, it is likely true that Carolyn Cooper does reject the concept of reincarnation. Regardless, she still acknowledges the LDS belief in a pre-earth life, which may have the unintended effect of progressively easing other women into accepting the concept of multiple mortal probations—especially if they read the revisionist histories that highlight early Mormon leaders’ affirmation of the practice. Moreover, however publicly submissive Cooper is when she talks about how she understands her ability to facilitate healing, I have shown that women may publicly state one thing to maintain their credibility in Mormon circles while still having serious *private* concerns about the trajectory of the LDS Church—and the contortions they must make to claim the legitimacy of their practices—that they would never share outside a very small circle of friends. Even Jackie, for instance, shares the other women’s deep commitment to “doing no harm” to their LDS clients. She gently—and selectively—introduces her clients to the solutions she has discerned through energy work that would directly contradict LDS teachings (e.g. the Word of Wisdom). Nevertheless, I have shown that one presumably unintended consequence of the LDS Church’s apparent attempt to control doctrinal “purity” and its bare-bones approach to that doctrine has given license to and even accelerated these women’s transgressive activities.

LDS women who practice energy healing are engaged in a power struggle. Paul Heelas argues that “the greater importance accorded to inner spirituality, the

more clearly healing is New Age.”³⁶⁸ In other words, the more healing depends on “external power, authority [and] responsibility,” the less “New Age” it is. While Mormon healing at the institutional level would seem to fit that description (i.e. priesthood blessings are *not* New Age), Mormonism nevertheless does place primary responsibility for healing on the agency of individuals. However responsible LDS women might be for their own wellbeing (i.e. following the Word of Wisdom, cultivating positive states of being, etc.), they also have been socialized to see hands-on healing as a privilege of male priesthood. With only early Mormon models as their guides and open hostility against the very idea of women’s ordination, they are unable to support each other in learning and practicing how to give each other officially sanctioned healing blessings.

Regardless, based on evidence from Mormon Studies conferences, blogs, social networking sites, listservs like the Yahoo group LDS_Reiki, and women like Martha, Darlene, and Jackie, more and more LDS women are encountering the recovered histories of early Mormon women, whose routine healing activities were sanctioned by the LDS Church. As a result, they are either ignoring or reinterpreting LDS policy statements about what women can and cannot do; how they can and cannot serve. Social networking is especially important to them because they are not able to share authentically in their wards. Online, they choose between discussing their ideas anonymously on public and private blogs and discussion forums; founding and/or joining public and private groups; and/or creating professional websites through which they promote their professional practices.

³⁶⁸ Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, 81.

Ultimately, the significance of energy work for LDS women is that it breaks down the walls that structure the LDS Church. To some extent, it even replaces faith because it forces them to confront the ways in which the LDS worldview does not work for them. In a male-dominated church, women are recognizing that a different kind of power and authority are available to them and they are claiming it. Learning how to become gods is no longer something they can do at church, says Jackie. “I want to move mountains, but where can I do that? Not by reading the Book of Mormon.” However, it is also important to note that the women in this chapter are still LDS, and their presence in the Church cannot help but change through their encounter with energy work. In Chapter 5, we will see how this change occurs as Mormon Pagans publicly and vocally claim and worship the Heavenly Mother.

Chapter 5

“THE GODDESS IS ALIVE, AND MAGICK IS AFOOT”: THE “MORMON PAGAN” EXPERIENCE

Chapter 5 looks at the intersection of Mormonism and Contemporary Paganism and introduces three women who identify as both Mormon and Pagan.³⁶⁹ It shows the ways in which women who call themselves Mormon Pagans integrate Mormon and Pagan beliefs and practices. As with the account of LDS women who do energy work in the previous chapter, I argue here that Mormonism contains obvious analogies of fundamental Pagan ideas that then make Paganism accessible to LDS women in characteristically Mormon ways.

Though I feature others, the strongest theological characteristic of Mormonism that makes integration with Paganism a viable spiritual option for LDS women is the belief in a “Mother in Heaven” or “Heavenly Mother.” I show how the figure of a Heavenly Mother operates in Mormonism, the extent to which these particular women’s spiritual choices are informed by this model for female potential, and the challenges LDS women face when reinterpreting her. In addition, I explain the practice of “correlation” in the LDS Church: its sweeping standardization and simplification of the entire LDS program, and its particular impact on the women who seek the Heavenly Mother. By disputing her significance to Latter-day Saints and attempting to erase her influence in LDS culture by “correlating” her out of its

³⁶⁹ Academics and practitioners adopted the term Neopagan or Neo-Pagan to distinguish modern from ancient pagan religion and indigenous non-Christian traditions. More recently, the category Contemporary Paganism was introduced in academic literatures to replace this older descriptor. The American Academy of Religion group that studies this subject uses the term Contemporary Paganism. I will use these terms interchangeably to describe modern Pagans.

institutional discourses, the Church has unintentionally contributed to a new wave of LDS feminists, many of whom are bent on promoting ecclesiastical parity and claiming Heavenly Mother for worship through blended Mormon Pagan spiritualities.

Chapter 5 also shows how and why this particular hybrid identity poses certain challenges. As we saw in Chapter 4, LDS women's healing practices must be reconciled with the LDS Church's prohibition against women holding (and therefore exercising) priesthood authority to heal. Those who supplement Mormonism with Pagan or earth-based spiritual practices face a similar dilemma: Because ritual performance and women as priestess-officiators are vital to Pagan practice, LDS women who are found to be participating in woman-focused Pagan rituals face possible ecclesiastical action. One reason for this anxiety is that women's regular ritual performance in the LDS Church is extremely limited and circumscribed by Church interpretation. Weekly ward meetings are dominated by men and men's ritual performances as they bless and pass the sacrament and officiate in all of their administrative callings.

Nevertheless, LDS women do act ritually in the temple endowment. Virtually every woman in this project insisted that through these ritual actions (which at some points mirror those of men) they are not only clearly equal to men but, they believe, they are actually *endowed* with priesthood power. Making the distinction between being endowed with priesthood power and being ordained to an office of the priesthood is a tactic that they believe prevents them from being in apostasy. No one has done the sociological work that would reveal how widespread this belief is among LDS women. However, like the question of whether or not women are truly

valued in the LDS Church, a partial answer is evident in the fact that the Church has to repeatedly comment on the question. Similarly, when faced with the clear historical evidence, the Church has resorted to claiming the authoritative right to interpret the historical record differently so it can repeatedly deny that women hold the priesthood in any way. It is outside the temple, these women say, that their church experience fails to reflect that level of equality.

Even inside the temple these positive elements of the temple ceremony are often ruined for women by moments in the narrative performance when God appears to be unapproachable by them except through their husbands. In the prayer circle described earlier, for instance, women veil their faces and men do not—though the reason for this practice is never explained in or outside the temple. As Paul and Margaret Toscano observe, “Because we are not taught to read, reinterpret, and revitalize our religious symbols, we are in danger of losing them.”

We do not wish to lose the richness of any of our symbols, particularly the face veil. And yet, neither do we wish to see it used to justify the subordination of women. We frankly doubt that our complex interpretation of the veil will become generally accepted in the church. It is more likely that the veil will continue to be perceived and presented as a negative image for women and as justification for their continued disenfranchisement.³⁷⁰

Of all those explicated here, this particular hybrid Mormon identity is the most tricky to navigate. While veneration of the Goddess in all her forms is pivotal to many, if not most, Pagan groups, the worship of Heavenly Mother through prayer or other ritual practice has been prohibited by the LDS Church. As noted earlier, the Church is less concerned with what members believe than with their actions. While the women in Chapter 2 can assure their church leaders that they are not “using the

³⁷⁰ Margaret Toscano and Paul Toscano, *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 270–273.

priesthood,” those whose stories appear in this chapter have a more difficult task because they combine their worship of Heavenly Mother with ritual. Nevertheless, we will see the ways in which LDS women at various stages of engagement with the institutional LDS Church have integrated their Mormon identities with self-identification as Pagans.

I interviewed seventeen women for this chapter, either on the phone, in person, or by email chat, or social networking. I encountered them through MySpace and Facebook ads; through presenting at academic conferences; and through ex-Mormon and feminist groups online. As was the case in the previous chapters, I also found women in this category through word of mouth. They live in Ohio, California, Utah, Arizona, Alaska, and West Virginia. Their ages range from thirty to mid-fifties. Of those seventeen, three are no longer members of the LDS Church or are members of record but do not identify with the LDS Church. Some of them describe this state of identity as being “Mormon, but not LDS.” As noted earlier, though it would be interesting to show the entire range of religious affiliation, I chose to focus this project on women who still identify as Mormon so as to more deeply illuminate their spiritual choices. While I was surprised by some of the things I learned during the interviews, all of the women who participated told stories that supported my original assumptions about Heavenly Mother, Church correlation, the role of social networking in their spiritual expressions, etc. While their stories differed somewhat in their actual content and emphasis, they all brought up concerns about the temple, women’s relationship to priesthood, the stories told by other Mormons to explain away Heavenly Mother’s absence in their ecclesiastical experience, and what it means to do ritual outside of a Church-approved context.

Dryad, Ayla, and Elena are all LDS women of record.³⁷¹ I selected these three women to highlight with more depth for several reasons. First, they were open and accessible and were looking to tell their stories in great depth, whereas some others were more guarded. One of the other fourteen women stopped returning my calls when I sought clarification on some points; I lost track of another. I discovered that another woman I had “met” online in the Mormon Mystic Yahoo Group lives in Arizona, so I was able to have significant access to her. However, because she travels a lot, we were unable to complete our work together to the depth that would satisfy my goals for the project. In the end, she requested that I send my clarification questions by email, but she ultimately was unable to return her answers before I finished the project. This is a real missing piece for me in this chapter, because—like Ayla—she is a recent convert to Mormonism from Paganism and her story is quite different from Ayla’s while reflecting the same concerns.

Second, because of their stage in life (early to late-thirties) and the fact that they worked in their homes, Elena, Dryad, and Ayla were able to devote time to extended discussions of their spiritual lives with me in ways that some of the other career women could not. These three reliably and enthusiastically made themselves available even after the initial interviews so that I could ongoingly witness their spiritual and emotional process. In addition, Dryad, Ayla, and Elena were especially able to articulate their experiences in very compelling ways. Their memories of

³⁷¹ Dryad is not her real name but her magical name. She chose it because of the deep bond she feels she has with trees. Similarly, Elena uses this name to protect her identity online. Ayla has long been open about her spiritual life online and so I use her name because she is such a public figure it would be virtually impossible to make her anonymous. In fact, because so much of her life story is online in public forums, I was able to rely solely on those sources. While in previous chapters I assigned pseudonyms for those who contributed to them through contact with me, I felt the need to let them keep the magical names Elena and Dryad have chosen for themselves.

events and emotions tied to them made their stories particularly rich, and the depth and breadth of their stories best articulate the connections I have sought to make in this project.

Third, these women tell three different yet related stories about gender and family issues in the LDS Church. One of them converted to Mormonism after identifying as a Pagan for most of her life and since her conversion appears to have adopted the stereotypical conservative Mormon overlay—with a Pagan twist. The other two women share the experience of being misfits in their conservative LDS families. The fact that they all have lived in California (Dryad recently moved to Arizona) gives us access to the extent to which these female California Mormons share a similar political, cultural, and social experience of Mormonism.³⁷² They do not know each other personally—though just recently Ayla became acquainted with Dryad through social networking. Finally, they represent different stages of experimentation with and integration of Paganism and Mormonism.

Introduction to Contemporary Paganism

Contemporary Paganism has been defined as (1) “a reconstruction of ancient Nature religions and the combining of the mystical, environmental, and spiritual disciplines of many cultures”; (2) “a polytheistic nature religion,” which emerged in mid-twentieth-century England; (3) synonymous with Witchcraft; and (4) a religious

³⁷² This is an emic category, usually employed derisively by Mormons against those who, for instance, roll their garments up when wearing them becomes inconvenient or for otherwise having a more lax or liberal approach to the gospel. Armand Mauss’s study showed that, at least in 1971, “in general the Coastal City saints show noticeably higher levels of secularization, and lower levels of traditional religious commitment, than do the Salt Lake City saints (at least as these tendencies are operationally defined here). We shall see also that in certain ways the beliefs of the Coastal City saints more closely resemble those of “mainstream” Protestants and Catholics than do the beliefs of the Salt Lake City saints.” Armand L. Mauss, “Saints, Cities, and Secularism: Religious Attitudes and Behavior of Modern Urban Mormons,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 7, no. 2 (1971): 11.

complex that primarily gets disseminated through the written word.³⁷³ Like the earlier Theosophical Society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn—and Mormonism—the development of contemporary Paganism was influenced by freemasonry and the 19th century occult revival.³⁷⁴ The term *pagan* has had multiple meanings over time. However, I adhere to Ronald Hutton’s position on those historical meanings: They are less relevant to this project because what matters here is that the term has come to be associated with nature, “the Goddess,” and polytheistic opposition to Christianity.³⁷⁵

Biblical scholar Mark S. Smith argues that polytheism is a modern (largely Western) theoretical concept that is not indigenous to ancient pagans and thus has no meaning apart from monotheism.³⁷⁶ As a category, *polytheism* developed out of the modern European need to define themselves against non-Western, non-Christian cultures. In this same way, modern contemporary Pagans seize the term in defiance of old stereotypes and in an effort to rehabilitate them. However, because North American Pagans for the most part are still steeped in American Christian culture,

³⁷³ (1) Stephen J. Hunt, *Alternative Religions: A Sociological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 149; (2) Tanya M. Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 77; (3) James R. Lewis, *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 2; and (4) Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 17.

³⁷⁴ Joanne Pearson, “Introduction,” in *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age*, ed. Joanne Pearson, Religion Today: Tradition, Modernity and Change, vol. 5 (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2002), 16.

³⁷⁵ A valuable historical account of the term’s various meanings and an analysis of what is at stake in using these terms is found in Michael Strmiska, *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* (ABC-CLIO, 2005), 4–22. See also Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2001), 4.

³⁷⁶ Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11.

they must deliberately create a polytheism drawing on pantheons from their own ancient Western pagan past (e.g. ancient Greek, Nordic, and Celtic), and also from the living traditions of others (e.g. India, Native American, and African). Thus, in keeping with American religious innovation, Pagans by necessity mine divinities from other cultures, severing them from their communities and their cultural and historical contexts, even deliberately combining them to create new gods and goddesses as needed.

Today, *pagan* with a lower case *p* can refer to indigenous traditions and those who historically resisted conversion to evangelical monotheistic traditions.³⁷⁷ *Pagan* with a capital *P* refers to an umbrella category under which thrive an astounding number of religious choices, most of which are largely derived from pre-Christian traditions but some of which are self-conscious modern creations. It covers several major subgroups, such as Druidry (Celtic paganism originating in Britain), Asatru (Nordic paganism, also called Heathenism), Greek, Italian, and Egyptian Reconstructionism, and Wicca (a religious system based on practice of magic or witchcraft).³⁷⁸ In an effort to make contemporary Paganisms comprehensible to outsiders, Helen A. Berger and Douglas Ezzy explain that “‘Paganism’ includes a group of earth-based religions in a similar way that ‘Christianity’ refers to a variety of churches and traditions.”³⁷⁹ Though the practice of witchcraft is integral to many

³⁷⁷ Strmiska, *Modern Paganism in World Cultures*, 11.

³⁷⁸ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 84.; Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, annotated ed. (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 5; and Pearson, ed., *Belief Beyond Boundaries*, 2, 39.

³⁷⁹ Helen A. Berger, *Teenage Witches: Magical Youth and the Search for the Self* (Rutgers University Press, 2007), 24.

forms of Paganism, it is very difficult to make sweeping statements about who is what. While witches may identify as Pagans, not all Pagans are witches. Similarly, though most Wiccans practice some form of witchcraft enacted in spellwork and ritual, not all witches are Wiccans.³⁸⁰ Magic, characteristically defined as “the ability to make changes in physical reality by nonphysical means,” is an important element in Wicca and many other Pagan groups, and ritual is its vehicle.³⁸¹ In chapter 2, we saw that magic was also important to Joseph Smith’s understanding of the world as he built the foundations for the Mormon tradition. While Mormons do not call temple rituals like marriage sealing and posthumous baptism “magic,” it certainly fits the definition above.

Looking at the catalogues of publishers of books and other materials for Pagans, one would think that Wicca dominates the Pagan category because of the large number of books about Wicca. However, most of those books are aimed at solitary practitioners who are looking to become witches or start covens. Because the initiatory requirements and attendant secrecy of traditional Wicca actually undermine general anti-hierarchical Pagan ideals, Joanne Pearson argues that the other Paganisms far outnumber initiated Wiccans.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ These subgroups only scratch the surface of Contemporary Paganism. The book *Which Witch is Which?* is a humorous introduction to Pagan diversity. The fact that such a book exists points to the difficulty of making sweeping statements about what constitutes “Paganism.” See Patricia J. Telesco, *Which Witch Is Which?: A Concise Guide to Wiccan and Neo-Pagan Paths and Traditions* (New Page Books, 2004).

³⁸¹ James R. Lewis, *Witchcraft Today: An Encyclopedia of Wiccan and Neopagan Traditions* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 183.

³⁸² Joanne Pearson, *Wicca and the Christian Heritage: Ritual, Sex and Magic* (Abingdon, Oxon [England], and New York: Routledge, 2007), 4.

Gerald Gardiner is credited with founding the Wiccan religion, and his original “Gardnerian” formulation of witchcraft was secretive and initiation-based. Gardnerian Witchcraft was brought to the U.S. by Raymond Buckland, and those who received it adapted it to their own needs. Reflecting the nature of American culture, witchcraft became less secretive and more eclectic over time. Because Gardner’s Wicca has been held largely responsible for pioneering the contemporary Pagan renaissance, it is easy to make the mistake of subsuming other Paganisms under the Wiccan umbrella rather than the other way around.

James R. Lewis provides concise insight into the variations within the Wiccan and other Pagan traditions employing an image of concentric circles containing the various derivations of Gardnerian Wicca, including aforementioned eclectic Gardnerians; Gardnerian offshoots that have no concern with Gardnerian rules and regulations regarding the running of their covens; non-Gardnerian witches; and following with other Pagan and magical groups, such as reconstructionists and eclectic witches. Lewis actually includes magical groups derived from Mormonism in one of his outermost circles. Though he doesn’t say why, exactly (or name groups he is referring to), it is likely because of the shared Wiccan and Mormon commitment to the relationship of the Lady and the Lord, the Divine Couple, the Heavenly Mother and Heavenly Father.³⁸³

Joanne Pearson details the complications associated with Wicca as a category and Pagan identity in general. “On the one hand,” she says, “Wiccans use the term ‘Wicca’ to denote a mystery religion involving a process of initiation and rigorous

³⁸³ Lewis, *Witchcraft Today*, xxxvi–xxxix.

training within a cosmos polarized between male and female forces, all of which is an inheritance from the magical secret societies from which Wicca is descended.” On the other hand, it is also a term “(re)invented” by founder Gerald Gardner to distinguish his religion from other forms of indigenous witchcraft. The encounter of Wicca and feminism in America has been instrumental in the development of “feminist spirituality and Goddess movements.” According to Pearson, women who identify as feminist witches are more likely to use the term “witchcraft” because it emphasizes practices that empower them against patriarchal oppression.³⁸⁴

Like other categories under the New Spirituality umbrella, it should be clear that contemporary Paganism in all its many forms is extremely varied and individualistic. As such, they share many of the same beliefs and practices with New Age, such as reincarnation, holistic healing, use of various tools for divination, and pursuit of personal and social transformation.³⁸⁵ Similarly, members of both groups generally reject any externally imposed prescriptions for uniformity in belief and practice.³⁸⁶ Many Pagans call their traditions “earth-based” or “nature based.” By this they mean not only that they consider nature sacred. In addition, they celebrate nature in their rituals and gatherings. The Goddess (often as either Gaia, the “Great Goddess,” her tripartite—Triple Goddess—form of Mother, Maiden and Crone, and/or their expression in the stages of women’s lives) takes center stage in their observances. This commitment is reflected in their festival cycle based on the

³⁸⁴ Pearson, *Wicca and the Christian Heritage*, 4.

³⁸⁵ Despite their commonalities, significant differences exist between New Age and Contemporary Paganisms. For a thorough discussion of New Age and Neopaganism, see Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*.

³⁸⁶ Strmiska, *Modern Paganism in World Cultures*, 47.

changing seasons and (depending on the group) the phases of the moon. Many Pagans map these celebrations onto the human life cycle symbolized by the “Wheel of the Year.”³⁸⁷ Pagans perform their religious activities in groups such as covens (usually associated with witchcraft); women’s circles “a place that Witches describe as ‘between the world of humans and the realms of the Gods’”³⁸⁸); “hearths” (Heathen teaching groups); Internet listservs; and/or book study groups.

In addition, as noted above, a large and uncounted number of practitioners are “solitaries.”³⁸⁹ Solitary Pagans practice more or less alone. However, there exists an enormous array of instructional and other materials from which they may draw their practices. Publishing houses of all sizes provide print and digital support for beginning and advanced Pagans. These publications replace the traditional “sacred text” with instruction from famous mentors and become primary texts for solitary practitioners.³⁹⁰ This is not to say that Pagans consider books containing instructions “sacred texts.” As the Patheos website makes clear, “Paganism by definition has no written sacred scripture. Its ‘sacred text’ and source of authority is the natural world and the personal experience of each individual practitioner.” In addition, the

³⁸⁷ For a description of how this works with goddesses in Greek mythology, see Eve Sweetser, “Metaphor, Mythology, and Everyday Language,” in *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 24 (1995), 587.

³⁸⁸ Nikki Bado-Fralick, “Mapping the Wiccan Ritual Landscape: Circles of Transformation,” in *Folklore Forum* 33:1-2 (2002), p. 45.
<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/2022/2424/33%281-2%29%2045-65.pdf?sequence=1>

³⁸⁹ Pointing to the explosion of Pagan publishing, Margot Adler argues that while the Internet has facilitated an increase in the numbers of solitary Pagans, “There have always been solitary Pagans. You don’t need the Internet for that.” For an analysis of Pagans and the Internet, see Douglas E. Cowan, *Cyberbenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet* (Psychology Press, 2005).

³⁹⁰ “Pagan Scriptures,” *Patheos*, 2011,
<http://www.patheos.com/Library/Pagan/Origins/Scriptures.html>.

formation of numerous independent Internet schools has made access to “year and a day” and degree-based initiatory programs accessible to both adult and adolescent students worldwide.³⁹¹

One of the oldest and largest publishers of New Age and Pagan titles is Llewellyn Worldwide, Ltd., located in Woodbury, Minnesota. While Llewellyn is not a scholarly press, its publications nevertheless operate simultaneously as a dual provider of primary theological texts for New Age and contemporary Pagan practitioners as well as books that contain rich cultural data for academic authors and researchers responding to the growing prominence of these groups since the 1980s.³⁹² Llewellyn is recognized in the Pagan community for publishing many of the standard educational texts, such as Scott Cunningham’s book *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* and Raymond Buckland’s book *Buckland’s Complete Book of Witchcraft*. Some Pagans also accuse the company of diluting Paganism by publishing poorly researched books and flooding the market with a preponderance of “fluffy” books that lack depth.³⁹³ Regardless, publishers like Llewellyn are vital for facilitating religious education for Contemporary Pagans, especially in their ability to provide examples of rituals and instructions for their performance.

³⁹¹ Though there are now numerous Pagan schools online and on the ground, some of the most well-known include Witch School, now located in Salem, Massachusetts after having moved there after facing religious persecution in their previous location; Dianic Wicca University Online, founded by Z Budapest, the mother of feminist Wicca; Goddess School; and the Grey School of Wizardry, for adults and children.

³⁹² Llewellyn Publishing began as the Portland School of Astrology. Founded in 1901 by Llewellyn George, its original purpose was to provide materials to practitioners of the occult.

³⁹³ It is difficult to find documentation of this critique other than in private conversations and individuals’ Internet sites. For one example see <http://nonfluffypagans.livejournal.com/788324.html>

Ritual is the basis for most Pagan practice. Whether solitary or communal, Paganism broadly involves the recognition of male and female deities and the observance of cyclical time based on “the Wheel of the Year,” though different groups will claim allegiance to those deities who reflect their concerns. Wicca, for instance, has always been aligned with the gods and goddesses who reflect its British roots, and Egyptian Reconstructionists are committed to Egyptian deities like Isis. The main Pagan holy days on the Wheel are the four solar festivals, including “winter and summer solstices and the spring and autumn equinoxes,”³⁹⁴ though their celebration is also variable and based on group focus and commitments. In addition, some Pagan branches (e.g. Wicca) place more emphasis on structured ritual and so include these “cross-quarter” days (*Sabbats*) on their ritual calendars: Imbolc (January 31-February 1); Beltane April 30-May 1); Lammas (July 31-August 1); and Samhain (October 31-November 1) (*ibid.*). On the other hand, other Pagan groups (e.g. Asatru) develop calendars that reflect their specific needs, minimizing seasonal emphasis and concentrate instead on culturally specific holidays (*ibid.*, 5-6). Some Pagans also attend large festivals for the purpose of celebrating and building their communities.³⁹⁵

In Paganism, however, there are many ways to approach magic and ritual. For some Pagans ritual is more relaxed, involving spur of the moment spellwork (e.g. making a pot of soup for the intention of healing someone, or sweeping the floor to

³⁹⁴ Pearson, ed., *Belief Beyond Boundaries*, 4-5.

³⁹⁵ Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, xi. One study which remains to be done would compare Mormon festivals with those organized by Pagans. Though there are many differences, similarities do exist in how the two groups create and extend their communities.

cleanse and balance a home, which reflects the idea that all one's daily tasks can be expressions of magic. This way of interpreting magic and ritual resonates with many LDS women investigating Paganism, in part because the LDS Church has promoted domesticity as their eternal calling. However, the women in this chapter are inspired by more than that. With Mormonism ever more increasingly focused on service to others, Paganism provides an opportunity for depleted LDS women to step back, and focus on, and care for the self.

Mormonism and Contemporary Paganism

Pagans have more in common with Mormons than one might think, though there are obvious caveats. None of these comparisons should be considered equivalencies. Rather, I highlight them because of the possibilities for hybrid spiritualities they make available for LDS women. For instance, as distinct groups, Pagans are more likely to be liberal and Mormons are more likely to be conservative than other Americans. Both groups, however, are more highly educated, middle class, and politically active than other Americans; more likely to be Caucasian; and more likely to be female, though the gap is not as wide in Mormonism as it is in Paganism.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁶ Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, 2. For a report on Mormon demographics based on the ARIS data from 2008, see Rick Phillips et al., "Mormons in the United States 1990-2008: Socio-demographic Trends and Regional Differences," (Harford, CT: Trinity College, 2008), <http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/12/Mormons2008.pdf>. This report shows that Mormons in Utah have a 90% voter registration rate and that they are "more than twice as likely to be Republicans (59%) than non-Mormon Americans (27%)." Similarly, each woman who participated in this study is Caucasian. Davy observes that women in Paganism outnumber men 2/1. The Trinity College ARIS study indicates that the LDS gender gap is widening in Utah, where Mormons make up fifty-seven percent of the state population. According to the survey, LDS women outnumber LDS males in Utah three to two.

Contemporary Pagan identity is at least as contested as Mormon identity. Some of these areas of contestation overlap with each other. Pagans routinely debate about virtually everything related to their religious identity.³⁹⁷ Thus, they often appear at war over what constitutes any particular pagan identity and how it is practiced. Furthermore, Pagans are known for their “extreme antiauthoritarianism, which sometimes borders on anarchism.”³⁹⁸ This seems to be in extreme contrast to the LDS Church, which is not only undisputedly hierarchical, centralized, and increasingly focused on obedience to Church authority, but is also often accused of being highly authoritarian. That said, this project shows that Mormons as individuals can be almost as antiauthoritarian as the average Pagan when defending their spiritual choices and experiences. This is certainly evident in the context of those who call themselves Mormon fundamentalists and stubbornly claim Mormon identity. More importantly, a new wave of feminism has emerged *within* the Church, and Mormons at all levels of belief and activity daily debate what it means to be LDS. In other words, as various types of Pagans ongoingly take on the process of negotiating what it means to be Pagan online and in print, Mormons are doing the same. This implied recalcitrance may also be a consequence of the LDS—and, for the most part, most Pagan groups’—deep opposition to the establishment of a paid

³⁹⁷ Online forums devoted to discussing and comparing the various traditions that fall under the Contemporary Pagan (or the now less frequently used Neopagan) heading seem to point to the idea that modern pagans are likely to disagree on almost everything related to Pagan identity. Even their almost universal agreement on a polytheistic worldview generates lively debates on its meaning. For an example, see this online discussion comparing Wicca and Paganism. Hierophant, “Wicca Vs. Paganism,” *Religious Forums* (July 29, 2004, accessed Dec. 19, 2011), <http://www.religiousforums.com/forum/showthread.php?t=1318>. For more recent discussions about Pagan identity, see <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/pantheon/2011/05/link-round-up-is-the-pagan-labelcommunity-useful/>.

³⁹⁸ Lewis, *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, 3.

ministry. Reliance on lay leaders means that, depending on the circumstances, all members may be eligible to act in leadership positions in either ward or coven.³⁹⁹

Because of their heterodox beliefs and practices, Mormons and Pagans share an historical experience of being misrepresented, discriminated against, and even persecuted by opponents. Thus, both groups strongly identify with and sometimes seem actively committed to maintaining victim identities. Barbara Jane Cavy argues in the Pagan context that embracing “the victim status . . . allows them to claim the moral high ground in relating to Christians.”⁴⁰⁰ Pagans who identify as witches react not only against biblical injunctions against witchcraft and the command to “not suffer a witch to live” (KJV, Exodus 22:18). They also refer to the Burning Times—what Sarah Pike calls “the Neopagan version of the Holocaust”⁴⁰¹—meaning that period between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries during which time Europeans

³⁹⁹ This is not to say that women have access to the same callings as men; because they are not ordained to the priesthood, clearly they do not. However, one of the first things the Church does for a young person entering adulthood—male and female—is to call them to a lay position with the goal of socializing and grooming them to take on ever more responsible callings. Though not every man will serve as a bishop of a ward, implicit in every young man’s experience is that he has that potential. Similarly, not every woman will serve as a Relief Society president; however, her worldview includes that potential. We could take this further by looking at callings at the highest level. There, however, we face the exception to the lay commitment. Many of those who serve as general authorities of the Church are paid a stipend for their service. In addition, the Corporation of the President hires thousands of worthy LDS men and women to run the workings of the international Church. For a humorous anthropological view of LDS Church employment, see Daymon M Smith, *The Book of Mammon: A Book About A Book About The Corporation That Owns The Mormons* (CreateSpace, 2010).

⁴⁰⁰ Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, 185.

⁴⁰¹ Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, 124. Helen A. Berger also asserts that, “The cry ‘Never Again the Burning Times’ is equivalent to the slogan ‘We Will Never Forget,’ which is associated with commemorating the Holocaust.” Helen A. Berger, *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 71.

and Americans hunted down and murdered suspected witches in the name of religion.⁴⁰²

One goal of the “Burning Times” narrative is to situate modern witches as carriers of a much older tradition that Christians have tried to eliminate through violence and fear.⁴⁰³ Therefore, “Never Again the Burning Times!” is the rallying cry of many Pagans when they encounter discrimination or feel threatened by political forces driven by religious conservatism that would strip them of religious or social legitimacy.⁴⁰⁴ This narrative of victimhood also informs their commitment to educational activism against negative stereotypes perpetuated by other (usually monotheistic) religionists (ibid., 48). However, Pagans have had to deal with the historical problems posed by the original Burning Times narrative, which asserts that as many as nine million witches (most of which were female midwives, herbalists, and healers) were killed by religious courts during the witch craze period. Evidence shows, however, that only a fraction of that number actually died and that many other elements of the narrative are empirically unreliable or unverifiable.⁴⁰⁵

Though it is not important to all groups across the extremely varied Pagan spectrum, the “Matriarchal Myth,” or the myth of the “Mother Times,” is another

⁴⁰² I have heard some Pagans widen the span of years for the Burning Times from the early 1200s to the 1830s. For an explanation of the Burning Times as one element of Christian conquest and conversion, see Carol Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 48–49.

⁴⁰³ See Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*, pp. 119–128. See also Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism*, pp. 47–49.

⁴⁰⁴ See Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism*, 58.

⁴⁰⁵ Diane Purkiss, “The Witch in History,” in Joanne Pearson, *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002), 314.

foundational narrative for many contemporary Pagans that works together with the Burning Times story to create and support a particular kind of Pagan identity. The myth was extremely influential in the development of Wicca in the 1950s, because it was directly related to the Burning Times story about what proponents saw as the historical practice of witchcraft.⁴⁰⁶ Today it has lost some currency among Wiccans, but not without controversy. It has, however, been essential to goddess feminism and the development of women-only spirituality.

The women's spirituality movement was a synthesis of the feminist movement and critique against patriarchy involving women from different traditions who felt disenfranchised by their religions. In the course of looking for empowering spiritual forms for women, the movement encountered contemporary Paganism and especially Goddess worship. In addition, other women who were already attracted to Paganism developed a synthesis of feminism and witchcraft that both critiqued and corrected women's historical experience of marginalization and subordination—which is precisely why the matriarchal myth was appealing.⁴⁰⁷ The myth proposes to explain historical male dominance and attendant female subordination (known as the condition of “patriarchy”) by positing a universal prehistoric matriarchal period in which “the Goddess” was worshipped, and women—because of their capacity to give birth like her—ruled their communities and were otherwise highly valued.

⁴⁰⁶ Cynthia Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, 1861-1900* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2011), 7–8.

⁴⁰⁷ It is also important to note that not all Pagans, including Wiccans, are feminists. Helen Berger and Douglas Ezzy's recent research on teenage witches details the waxing and waning of feminist agendas among individual witches. Some spiritual seekers become committed feminists through their encounter with Paganism. Conversely, some feminists lose interest in feminism through their encounter with Paganism because of its emphasis on the Goddess and the God. Berger, *Teenage Witches*, 177–78.

However, matriarchal societies and their goddesses were overthrown from without by violent and patriarchal nomadic tribes, and from within by the development of agriculture.⁴⁰⁸ According to the matriarchal myth, this prehistoric woman-centric Goddess worshiping religion was gradually eclipsed by replacing the Great Goddess with male divine figures; appropriating their sacred places for male gods; recasting goddesses as consorts (which both explained and perpetuated women's subservience in the new social structure); and by developing creation myths that demonized goddesses and justified the subordination of women by making them responsible for evil in the world.⁴⁰⁹ This defeat ushered in a period of patriarchal reign and widespread subordination of women by men that continues today.

For those spiritual feminists who accept and adopt the myth, one of its attractions is its reliance on essential biological differences between the (violent) male and the (peaceful) female. While men are painted as inherently violent and inferior, women are characterized as superior to men because of their inherent greater intuitiveness, spirituality, concern with relationships, and connection to the Earth and to the Goddess—all because of their biological capacity to give birth. This story is powerful for many women, because it elevates femaleness—especially those characteristics patriarchal religions have felt compelled to attempt to regulate: As the story goes, ancient women and the Great Mother Goddess they worshiped were powerful because they were life-givers. Therefore, the myth gives women a

⁴⁰⁸ For a clear description of this myth and how it operates, see Cynthia Eller, *Living In The Lap of the Goddess: The Feminist Spirituality Movement in America* (Beacon Press, 1995), pp. 150–184.

⁴⁰⁹ For an example of how this myth has been expressed in academic scholarship, see Marianne Ferguson, *Women and Religion* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994).

framework through which to imagine that their position was not necessarily always subordinate and precarious, and that there is hope for a future that such a myth implies is possible. It also makes available the possibility that restoring the Goddess to her rightful place in religion will help create a true partnership society, transform our relationship to the earth, and heal our patriarchal wounds. However, this myth too has had to be reinterpreted as critics have dismantled many of its historical assertions.⁴¹⁰

Like Paganism, Mormon culture is also heavily informed by a historical persecution narrative. LDS gatherings of all kinds are replete with references to and reverence for nineteenth-century Mormon pioneers, who for the sake of their faith lost their homes and all their possessions, died of privations, or were killed fleeing from murderous mobs.⁴¹¹ The broad Mormon cultural memory is strongly grounded in the nineteenth-century experience of fighting the federal government over the practice of plural marriage and Brigham Young's creation of a theocratic government in Utah. When the state seized Church properties and incarcerated its prophet and other leaders, the institution was forced to adapt and assimilate to survive. A search for the word "persecution" at lds.org generates approximately 1,600 results, only 157 of those from scripture references. Mormons not only recount stories of their ancestors' maltreatment; they also relate their own personal experiences as victims of

⁴¹⁰ For a forceful, feminist critique of the matriarchal myth, see Cynthia Eller, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women A Future* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001).

⁴¹¹ This narrative thread is also present in the negative backlash against the LDS Church's political activism in California and other states. Church leaders frame this debate as an issue of religious freedom and characterize the backlash not as the natural consequences of being politically active but as "persecution" of the Lord's people who are only committed to doing His will in a wicked world.

slanderous lies about Mormonism (e.g. accusations of kidnappings, forced polygamous marriages, and abuse of women and children in LDS temples) and persecution they have endured “for righteousness sake.” They bear their testimonies that persecution has made them stronger.⁴¹² As LDS Church President Harold B. Lee asserted, “Blessed are they who are persecuted”:

Remember that warning when you are hissed and scoffed because you refuse to compromise your standards of abstinence, honesty and morality in order to win the applause of the crowd. If you stand firmly for the right despite the jeers of the crowd or even physical violence, you shall be crowned with the blessedness of eternal joy. Who knows but that again in our day some of the saints or even apostles, as in former days, may be required to give their lives in defense of the truth? If that time should come, God grant they would not fail!⁴¹³

Mormonism also has similar problems with history and historicity. Like modern Paganism, the LDS Church is relatively new to the Western religious landscape and so its history is relatively open to inspection against scientific scrutiny. While the LDS Church does make certain documents relating to its operations and history available to researchers, access to these resources has been more controlled at some times than others. In addition, though Mormons have always faced incredulity

⁴¹² Reference to the Mormon persecution narrative is a cultural habit that I have witnessed personally in every Church setting and at gatherings and in private conversations outside of the institutional environment. It is especially embedded in the experience of generational Mormons, whose family histories contain those stories. I have heard the women in this project either recount or reference those stories when describing what it means to them to be Mormon. It also becomes quickly evident in the discourse around the 2012 U.S. presidential campaigns. Mentioning Mormonism in the press can cause even doubting Mormons to react defensively when they feel their religion is under fire or misunderstood. The most common charge against criticism is that the critic is “anti-Mormon,” after which usually follows an historical story of persecution and comment on the erosion of religious freedom. Even converts like me learn the persecution narrative and adopt it as our own through the numerous hymns devoted to the topic and Church discourse centered on that narrative. It would be interesting to do research on how new converts encounter these stories.

⁴¹³ Harold B. Lee, “Striving for Perfection,” in *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 195–205, accessed March 16, 2012, <http://lds.org/manual/teachings-harold-b-lee/chapter-21?lang=eng>.

over the Church's origin story (Joseph Smith's visions of God and his discovery of golden plates and their translation into proprietary Mormon scripture), the LDS Church has faced several more modern challenges. For instance, technological innovations such as DNA analysis have the potential to challenge the basis of its scriptural authority and therefore its ability to control interpretations of some of its doctrinal stands. Anecdotal evidence shows that a significant number of Mormons have left the LDS Church over two issues in particular: DNA analysis has shown no evidence of Israelite DNA in Native Americans (the foundation of the Book of Mormon story); and when the papyrus from which Joseph Smith said he had translated the "Book of Abraham" in the *Pearl of Great Price* was found and actually translated by Egyptologists, it was found to be a funerary text that failed to match the narrative in Smith's translation.⁴¹⁴

This is not to say that Mormons and Pagans share the same persecution narratives. However, their persecution narratives *do* overlap when Mormons are conflated with Pagans in the minds of many conservative Christians.⁴¹⁵ As potential

⁴¹⁴ The LDS Church describes The Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price as "a translation from some Egyptian papyri that came into the hands of Joseph Smith in 1835, containing writings of the patriarch Abraham." "Pearl of Great Price: Introduction," *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/introduction?lang=eng>. The papyri were kept in Smith's family until after the death of his widow, Emma, when they were sold and found a home in the Chicago Museum. The papyri were thought lost in the Chicago Fire in 1871, but subsequently ended up in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City. The museum ultimately gave them back to the LDS Church in 1967. See John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Foundation for Ancient Research &, 2000), 3. For more LDS apologetic responses to these issues, see Cooper Johnson, "DNA and the Book of Mormon," *FAIR: Defending Mormonism*, 2001, <http://www.fairlds.org/authors/johnson-cooper/dna-and-the-book-of-mormon.>; and Michael D. Rhodes, "I Have a Question: Book of Abraham," *Ensign*, July 1988, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://lds.org/ensign/1988/07/i-have-a-question?lang=eng>.

⁴¹⁵ See, for instance, this website headline referring to Glenn Beck, a famous Mormon convert: Brannon S. Howse, "Glenn Beck Rally Set Stage for 'Christians' to Accept Paganism, and Mormons Say Beck Achieved 200 Year Goal of Getting Evangelicals to Declare That Mormons Are Christians," *Worldview Times*, August 30, 2010, <http://www.worldviewweekend.com/worldview-times/article.php?articleid=6470.>; and the book by Hershey F Scott, *Mormonism Unscriptural, Pagan and*

martyrs for their beliefs and practices, the Mormon and Pagan encounters with the world mirror each other in ways that make the Pagan experience feel familiar to LDS women looking to claim ground in the Pagan tent. Whereas many evangelical Christians argue that Mormonism is a form of paganism rather than a Christian religion because of Mormon doctrines of continuing revelation from a God who is subject to natural laws, belief in eternal progression, and the ways in which the Mormon Jesus deviates from that of “traditional Christianity,” contemporary Pagans also face persecution from religious Others, especially Christians, many of whom are convinced that Pagans worship Satan and therefore are doing the Devil’s bidding.⁴¹⁶ In critiques of Mormonism, this “satanic” association is compounded by Mormonism’s claim about the ontological relationship of Satan to God, Jesus, and God’s other offspring. As the Plan of Salvation dictates, because Satan is literally God’s recalcitrant spirit child, he is therefore the spiritual brother of Jesus and all other human beings.⁴¹⁷

Similarly, just as Pagans resent their dramatically different groups being collapsed into one category, Mormons resent similar dedifferentiation that occurs

Immoral (Book on Demand, 1901).

⁴¹⁶ In fact, Pagans do not believe in Satan and so do not worship him. For a nuanced analysis of this issue and the place of Aleister Crowley and the “left-hand path” in modern Paganism, see Nevill Drury, *Stealing Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), chap. Aleister Crowley and the Left-Hand Path, 78–125.

⁴¹⁷ In 1998, in a talk titled “Building Bridges” [with the non-Mormon world], one LDS apostle warned LDS Church members against referring to Jesus as “our Elder Brother” because of the derision it generates from other Christians: “[S]ome non-LDS Christians are uncomfortable with what they perceive as a secondary role for Christ in our theology. They feel that we view Jesus as a spiritual peer. . . . It is true that Jesus was our Elder Brother in the premortal life, but we believe that in this life it is crucial that we become ‘born again’ as His sons and daughters in the gospel covenant.” See M. Russell Ballard, “Building Bridges of Understanding,” *Ensign*, June 1998, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://lds.org/ensign/1998/06/building-bridges-of-understanding?lang=eng>.

when journalists conflate the large Utah-based LDS Church with “Mormon fundamentalist” polygamist groups. Like Pagans, “Mormons” are not all the same and do not all share the same beliefs and practices. Just as Druids are not synonymous with Wiccans, Latter-day Saint offshoot groups are not considered to be equivalent to the Utah Church and are not interchangeable with it. Yet Mormons occur to others as “pagan” precisely because of that association. Thus, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” routinely promotes and protects its brand by distinguishing it from all other versions of Mormonism with great urgency and fervor—even going so far as to attempt to secure a trademark of the term *Mormon* so as to prevent other groups from using it⁴¹⁸ and to excommunicate those who join rival groups.⁴¹⁹

Neither does this mean that the LDS Church and various Pagan groups are on even ground with regard to social, cultural, and political power. Assimilated Mormons are no longer driven from their homes; rather, they are overrepresented in government and purportedly have a distinctive Mormon-informed leadership style that helps them be successful in business.⁴²⁰ The occasional discrimination faced by Mormons usually occurs in religious settings, such as the husband and wife who were rejected as Scout leaders by a conservative Christian church in 2010, only because

⁴¹⁸ For a review of the history of this legal effort, see <http://tarr.uspto.gov/servlet/tarr?regser=serial&entry=78161091>

⁴¹⁹ It appears to now be LDS Church policy not to automatically excommunicate its members who join other religions (unless they have committed a sin that requires excommunication). However, joining one of these rival groups—especially one known for practicing polygamy—will result in excommunication.

⁴²⁰ See Jeff Benedict, *The Mormon Way of Doing Business: How Eight Western Boys Reached the Top of Corporate America* (New York: Business Plus, 2008).

they were LDS,⁴²¹ or (more famously) in national politics at the highest level.⁴²² Numerous polls taken since Mitt Romney unsuccessfully ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 2007-2008, indicate that remarkably large percentages of Americans would not vote for a Mormon presidential candidate.⁴²³ Another poll reported that in America only Muslims are less popular than Mormons. Some of this aversion is a consequence of the LDS Church's participation in the passage of California Proposition 8, which revoked the right of gays and lesbians to marry in 2008. There were calls for a boycott of LDS businesses; chapels were defaced, at least three prominent Mormons gave up their jobs or were fired⁴²⁴; and Prop 8 opponents loudly protested around LDS temples.⁴²⁵ Proposition 8 continues to be

⁴²¹ Tim Funk, "Scout Controversy Hinges on Mormon Status as Christians," *DeseretNews.com* (Salt Lake City, October 22, 2010), Digital edition, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700075599/Scout-controversy-hinges-on-Mormon-status-as-Christians.html>.

⁴²² Mormons are also occasionally involved in employment lawsuits. For an analysis of this phenomenon, which shows that Mormons are now more likely to be the defendant rather than the plaintiff, see Jeff Breinholt, "The Surprising Truth About Mormon Employment," *Mormon Matters*, September 12, 2009, <http://mormonmatters.org/2009/09/12/the-surprising-truth-about-mormon-employment-discrimination/>.

⁴²³ "New Vanderbilt Scientific Poll Reveals Intense Bias Against Mormons; Romney Must Demystify His Religion to Gain Support," *Vanderbilt University* (Nashville, TN, December 4, 2007), digital edition, <http://news.vanderbilt.edu/2007/12/new-vanderbilt-scientific-poll-reveals-intense-bias-against-mormons-romney-must-demystify-his-religion-to-gain-support/>.

⁴²⁴ Peter Vidmar most recently stepped down from his job as the 2012 Olympic chief after he was found to have given \$2,000 in support of Prop 8. See Rosemary Winters, "LDS Olympics Chief Steps Down After Prop 8 Flap," *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, August 1, 2011), sec. LGBT FYI, <http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/blogslgbt/51779563-61/vidmar-olympic-athletes-gay.html.csp>. Shortly after the presidential election in 2008, Scott Eckern resigned from his job as the artistic director for the California Musical Theater, and Rich Raddon also resigned as director of the Los Angeles Film Festival. See Adam Hetrick, "Eckern Resigns as Artistic Director of California Musical Theatre," *Playbill*, November 12, 2008, <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/123270-Eckern-Resigns-as-Artistic-Director-of-California-Musical-Theatre-;> and Rachel Abramowitz, "L.A. Film Festival Head Resigns over Prop. 8 Donation," *L.A. Times Blogs* (Los Angeles, CA, November 25, 2008), Afternoon edition, sec. L.A. Now, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2008/11/la-film-festiva.html>.

⁴²⁵ See "Mormons Face Flak for Backing Prop. 8," *SFGate*, accessed March 10, 2012,

referenced by non-Mormon as well as even LDS church members as evidence of the Church's arrogance and authoritarianism.

In contrast, while the nineteenth-century Mormon challenge to the U.S. Constitution over polygamy was unsuccessful, contemporary Paganism has become the latest religion whose goal is to “keep our constitutional system honest.”⁴²⁶ Being “in the broom closet” is a euphemism that refers to the fact that many Pagans are very circumspective about “coming out” to others with their Pagan identity because of their fear of the possible consequences.⁴²⁷ In one example, Pagans have faced discrimination in prisons, where they have not always had access to the support of chaplains, time and space for performing religious rituals, and/or the reading and other materials necessary for Pagan religious practice.⁴²⁸

Like Mormons, Pagans also face significant political discrimination. Though Mitt Romney may face opposition of conservative Christians, particularly in the South, Harry Reid's position as Senate Minority Leader indicates that Mormonism is

http://articles.sfgate.com/2008-10-27/bay-area/17137948_1_mormons-salt-lake-city-based-church-ballot-measure.; <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/13/at-mormon-temple-thousands-protest-prop-8/>; “Prop. 8 Protesters Target Mormon Temple in Westwood,” *Latimes.com*, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-protest7-2008nov07,0,3827549.story>.

⁴²⁶ Stephen J. Stein, *Communities of Dissent: A History of Alternative Religions in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003), 140. Stein argues that “alternative religions in the United States have helped to keep our constitutional system honest” because they offer Americans an increasingly larger set of religious options. They serve as “a possible check on the impulse to narrow the range of free exercise and a reminder of the potential breadth of the principle.”

⁴²⁷ For examples of the fears many Pagans experience, see Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach, and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: a National Survey of Witches and Neo-pagans in the United States* (University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 172–173.

⁴²⁸ For analyses of the *Dettmer v. Landon* U.S. federal court case that held that Wicca is a religion, see *Dettmer V. Landon*, 617 F. Supp. 592 (Dist. Court, ED Virginia 1985). For an analysis of the *Cutter v. Wilkinson* SCOTUS decision making it unconstitutional for federally funded prisons to institute barriers to the free exercise of religion, see Marty Lederman, “Cutter V. Wilkinson,” *SCOTUSblog*, May 31, 2005, <http://www.scotusblog.com/2005/05/cutter-v-wilkinson/>.

clearly no barrier to high political office. Famous witch and activist Starhawk argues, however, that “[n]o Pagan who openly acknowledged her faith could run for public office, beyond the local level, and expect to win.”⁴²⁹ As an illustration of this problem, one need only look to Delaware’s Republican Senate candidate Christine O’Donnell’s dilemma in 2010, when she let slip she had “dabbled in witchcraft in high school.”⁴³⁰ The video she subsequently released to neutralize public incredulity and derision has since been “songified,” identified as an important meme and “notable quote,” and spoofed on Saturday Night Live. As one NPR blogger observed, “It should go without saying that if in your first TV ad as a candidate for the U.S. Senate you feel compelled to announce: ‘I am not a witch,’ you’re in deep trouble.”⁴³¹

In more notorious challenges, Pagans have faced significant discrimination in the military and in the civil courts. For instance, they have met opposition to their performance of Pagan ceremonies on military bases and their attempts to establish a

⁴²⁹ Starhawk, “On Faith Panelists Blog: Discrimination Against Pagans,” *Washington Post* (Washington, DC, March 18, 2007), digital edition, sec. On Faith, http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/starhawk/2007/03/discrimination_against_pagans.html.

⁴³⁰ Kevin Bohn, “O’Donnell: ‘I Am Not a Witch,’” *CNN.com Blogs*, October 4, 2010, <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/10/04/odonnell-to-air-first-campaign-ad-she-says-i-am-not-a-witch/>.

⁴³¹ *Songify This - I'M NOT A WITCH - Sung by Christine O'Donnell*, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44mqiBrB0zI&feature=youtube_gdata_player; “I Am Not a Witch | Know Your Meme,” *Know Your Meme*, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/i-am-not-a-witch>; “‘I Am Not A Witch’ And 9 Other, Er, Notable Quotes From 2010,” *Business Insider*, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://www.businessinsider.com/i-am-not-a-witch-and-9-other-er-notable-quotes-from-2010-2010-12>; “SNL’ Spoofs ‘I-am-not-a-witch’ Ad from Christine O’Donnell,” *Usatoday.com*, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/entertainment/post/2010/10/snl-spoofs-christine-odonnell-ad/1>; “Christine O’Donnell TV AD: ‘I’m Not A Witch’: NPR,” *NPR.org*, accessed March 16, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2010/10/05/130346290/christine-odonnell-tv-ad-i-m-not-a-witch>.

Pagan chaplaincy.⁴³² Moreover, in contrast to the rapid approval enjoyed by other religious petitioners, getting Veteran’s Administration approval to display a pentacle (a five-pointed star) on the gravestones of loved ones who have died in military service “took about 10 years and a lawsuit.”⁴³³ Disturbingly, some Pagans have lost their jobs and even custody of their children because of their religious commitments.⁴³⁴

Mormons and Pagans are even engaged in similar (though certainly not analogous) projects. The LDS Church understands itself as the full *restoration* of the original religion given to the first humans rather than as a “slightly idiosyncratic” branch of the Christian family.⁴³⁵ Contemporary Pagans are also engaged in the *reconstruction* of ancient, original religious pasts—though “original” for the most part is conceptualized as pre-Christian.⁴³⁶ While Paganism is explicitly polytheistic, Mormons often face accusations that they are polytheists because they believe that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are three separate beings and that human beings can become gods. It is also significant that Pagans and Mormons

⁴³² See Mark Silk, “Something Wiccan This Way Comes,” *Religion in the News* 2, Summer (1999), <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINVol2No2/wicca.htm>.

⁴³³ Neela Banerjee, “Use of Wiccan Symbol on Veterans’ Headstones Is Approved,” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2007, sec. Washington, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/24/washington/24wiccan.html>.

⁴³⁴ For one example, see Dean Praetorius, “Wiccan TSA Agent Fired,” *Huffington Post*, March 28, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/28/wiccan-tsa-agent-fired_n_841510.html. For an explanation of this issue, see Dana D. Eilers, *Pagans and the Law: Understand Your Rights* (Career Press, 2003), Chapter 4, Pagans and Child Custody.

⁴³⁵ See Shipps, *Mormonism*, 148.

⁴³⁶ Lewis, *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, 3–4.

share a history of religious persecution and the perception of being misinterpreted—and misjudged—by scholars and other religious and secular observers.

Finally, to some extent Pagans and Mormons also share similar philosophies about the nature of the universe. As “people of the land,” Pagans are thoroughly grounded in and focused on this world as opposed to being motivated by “otherworldly” concerns. At the same time, Barbara Jane Davy observes that this is not the whole story:

Pagans sometimes speak of an ‘otherworld’ as though it is a distinct place from the natural world, in a way that makes it seem like the natural world is transcended to access something supernatural that is not immanent in nature. This “otherworld” or “otherland” is understood as a place where people go when they meditate or dream, and sometimes as the land of the dead.⁴³⁷

Mormonism is similarly oriented. Douglas J. Davies argues that Brigham Young’s influence on Mormonism was to cement in place a “strong this-worldly orientation” visible in LDS Church organization. However, this proclivity is also mediated through the otherworldly inclinations expressed in the temple endowment, which is essentially a performance of the Plan of Salvation story. The endowment is itself a combination of these two impulses, as it takes participants through the stages of pre-earth, mortal, and eternal life in a performance of ceaseless progression.⁴³⁸ Moreover, the description above of the “otherworld” in Paganism could easily be recited with some nuances by a Latter-day Saint speaking about the Mormon concept of the spirit world, which in Mormon culture is often the subject of dreams and visions. Described as being “on the earth” but separated by a veil in another

⁴³⁷ Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, 6, 25.

⁴³⁸ Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism*, 160–161.

dimension, it is home for those “loved ones who have passed on [but] are not far from us.”⁴³⁹

The ecology of Pagan theism is usually characterized as explicitly polytheistic (“acknowledging the existence of many goddesses and gods”⁴⁴⁰) or *bitheistic* (“revering divinity in the forms of a Goddess and a God”⁴⁴¹); *pantheistic* (belief that “deity [is] underlying and manifest in the world”); and *animistic* (belief that the divine is immanent in the natural world, that “the whole of ‘nature’ [the totality of all that which is] is alive, ensouled”⁴⁴²). Most Pagans develop and cultivate relationships with at least one God and Goddess, usually as a divine couple—though Pagans disagree on virtually all of what that means and also have very different ways of expressing those commitments in practice. As shown earlier, Mormons have a pantheistic and animistic context in that they are taught in scripture and through the temple endowment that the natural world was imbued with spirit before being organized physically. Similarly, Mormonism is based on the idea that Gods have bodies and are able to show up in time and space. Thus, the Pagan idea that “if divinity is present in nature, nature does not need to be transcended for divinity to appear”⁴⁴³ is also congruent with Mormon cosmology. In Mormonism, God is not separate from

⁴³⁹ “Chapter 41: The Postmortal Spirit World, in *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), accessed March 10, 2012, <http://lds.org/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-41-the-postmortal-spirit-world?lang=eng>.

⁴⁴⁰ Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, 5. However, as Graham Harvey humorously notes, “there are apparently Pagan mono-, duo-, heno-, poly-, and a-theists.” Graham Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism: Religions of the Earth from Druids and Witches to Heathens and Ecofeminists*, 2nd ed. (NYU Press, 2011), 163.

⁴⁴¹ Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, 5.

⁴⁴² Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism*, 129, 87.

⁴⁴³ Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, 5, 26.

nature but actually subject to its laws. The LDS Church also recognizes the divine feminine and—sometimes explicitly and at other times implicitly—teaches that men and women may both become gods and goddesses, kings and queens, who will create and populate their own worlds; but these ideas are not fully developed in modern LDS theology. As a result, Mormons have been reluctant to affirm Heavenly Mother *as* a Goddess, *as* divine, because to do so would suggest that she has authority to act as God acts.⁴⁴⁴

Mormon soteriology may seem thoroughly opposed to Pagan ethics. Though Mormons interpret Adam and Eve’s transgression in Eden as fortuitous choice, they still believe in sin and in the human ontological need for redemption. In contrast, River and Joyce Higginbotham identify two main concepts they identify as being essential to virtually all Pagans: The interconnectedness of all things (a science-based *monism*⁴⁴⁵), and what they call “blessedness”: the idea that human beings and nature are neither broken nor do they need saving.⁴⁴⁶ Thus, the general Pagan pantheistic view reflects a very forgiving attitude about human ontology, and many Pagans are attracted to the religion because it is seen to “challenge the mainstream” through numerous countercultural practices like ritual nudity, [and] ritual sex.⁴⁴⁷ One of the

⁴⁴⁴ This point was discussed deeply in a Daughters of Mormon podcast. See Sybil, “Daughters of Mormonism: Episode 12: Finding the Divine Feminine, Part I,” *Daughters of Mormonism*, June 1, 2011, <http://daughtersofmormonism.blogspot.com/2011/06/episode-12-finding-divine-feminine-part.html>; and Sybil, “Daughters of Mormonism: Episode 13: Finding the Divine Feminine, Part II,” *Daughters of Mormonism*, June 1, 2011, <http://daughtersofmormonism.blogspot.com/2011/06/episode-13-finding-divine-feminine-part.html>.

⁴⁴⁵ See Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, p 26.

⁴⁴⁶ River Higginbotham and Joyce Higginbotham, *Paganism: An Introduction to Earth-Centered Religions* (Llewellyn Publications, 2002), 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, 191.

movement's major agendas has been to replace puritanical sexual prohibitions with sexual openness, sometimes even in ritual, as a way of rejecting the Christian emphasis on human sinfulness and need for salvation.⁴⁴⁸ At its heart, this reversal of religious norms has been an open critique of Christian monotheism's self-ascribed status as the highest expression of religious order and meaning as compared against all other religions.⁴⁴⁹

There is still room for comparison, however, in Mormonism's almost universalistic approach to salvation. Moreover, though the LDS Church mandates "personal purity" before and absolute fidelity after marriage, many Mormon Pagans relate sexual openness, as in Pagan polyamory (the practice of maintaining ethical "non-monogamous relationships based on honesty and affection"⁴⁵⁰) to the early Mormon practice of plural marriage.⁴⁵¹ In fact, having polygamy in one's historical memory seems to sooth the entry into polyamorous experimentation.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁸ Pearson, ed., *Belief Beyond Boundaries*, 157.

⁴⁴⁹ See Ronald Hutton, "The Roots of Modern Paganism," in *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age*, ed. Joanne Pearson, Religion Today: Tradition, Modernity and Change (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2002), 304.

⁴⁵⁰ Raven Kaldera, *Pagan Polyamory: Becoming a Tribe of Hearts* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2005).

⁴⁵¹ In a blog post titled "Mormons, Pagans and 'Post-Modern Polygamy,'" John L. Crow discusses the potential of recent legal cases concerning Mormon polygamist groups in Canada to impact on polyamorous Pagans: "[I]here is a tendency today to think that polygamy is primarily a Mormon issue. . . . [However,] polygamy, polyamory and multiple-partner marriage are clearly issues that concern American paganism too." John L. Crow, "Mormons, Pagans and 'Post-Modern Polygamy,'" *John L. Crow*, July 28, 2011, <http://www.johnlcrow.com/2011/07/mormons-pagans-and-%E2%80%98post-modern-polygamy%E2%80%99/>.

⁴⁵² Kaldera, *Pagan Polyamory*, 178. According to Janet Bennion, "[O]n average, six mainstream Mormon families convert and become baptized into the Allred Mormon polygynous group each month—a fact that sheds light on the growing social and ideological tensions within current Mormonism." I have met LDS women who identify as Pagan and who also have been polygamists. They consider polyamory as just one more option for acting out their Mormon Pagan identity. See also Janet Bennion, *Women of Principle: Female Networking in Contemporary Mormon Polygyny* (New York:

Two aspects of this Mormonism and Paganism overlap are particularly important because they are the foundation of LDS women's journey into Paganism. First, both Mormons and Pagans are committed to and "trust their experience above all else."⁴⁵³ Second, like Paganism, commitment to the divine in female form is fundamental to Mormon doctrine about human capacity and the nature of the Divine. It is important, then, to see how the Mother in Heaven operates in Mormonism and how she provides access to blended Mormon Pagan identities.

Heavenly Mother in the Mormon Tradition

As a principle that has been available to Mormons from the Church's early days, examining the Heavenly Mother can give us access to one of the most heterodox elements of LDS doctrine and theology that overlaps contemporary Paganism in the New Spirituality. The development of the Mormon concept of a Mother in Heaven was a part of Joseph Smith's rational theological process.⁴⁵⁴ The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* confirms, "Today the belief in a living Mother in Heaven is implicit in Latter-day Saint thought. Though the scriptures contain only hints, statements from presidents of the church over the years indicate that human beings have a Heavenly Mother as well as a Heavenly Father."⁴⁵⁵ Given Smith's teachings

Oxford University Press, USA, 1998), 5.

⁴⁵³ Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies*, 15.

⁴⁵⁴ Latter-day Saints believe in Heavenly Parents with exalted bodies, parts and passions. God is an immortal, glorified and perfected being with a "body of flesh and bones as tangible as a man's"; thus, the existence of his female counterpart is inferred by and canonized in scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C 130:22). According to LDS general authority Bernard Brockbank, "The belief that God has no body, parts, and passions is not a doctrine of Jesus Christ or a doctrine of the holy scriptures but is a doctrine of men, and to worship such a God is in vain." See Bernard P. Brockbank, "The Living Christ," *Ensign*, May 1977, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1977/05/the-living-christ?lang=eng>.

⁴⁵⁵ Elaine Anderson Cannon, "Mother in Heaven," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel

about exaltation, she simultaneously reinforces the idea of sex in heaven and the complication of multiple wives.

The exalted and necessary partner to an anthropomorphic God, Heavenly Mother by definition “possesses the attributes of godhood.”⁴⁵⁶ In a manual “published for use of the Melchizedek Priesthood by the General Priesthood Committee” in 1915, high level LDS Church leader John A. Widtsoe even argued the logic of the “eternity of sex” and its nature as an “eternal principle.” Together the Heavenly Parents create and parent spirit children who are subsequently embodied as mortal humans. As Widtsoe argued, one of the rewards of intelligent development [eternal progression] is “that we may be to other spiritual beings what our God has been to us.” Thus, the historical goal of Latter-day Saints has been to learn to become like their exalted parents to the extent that they are themselves able to become gods and creators of their own worlds.

The Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price both stress the plurality of gods, not only in the godhead but also in the heavens, emphasizing the universality of this type of organizational activity in multiple universes overseen by multiple gods (Abraham 4:12). Notwithstanding their belief in a plurality of gods, the god worshipped by Mormons is the God of this world; therefore, the creation story Mormons tell is that of their relationship to *that* particular God and *this* specific earth. Humankind is of the same “species” as God, created in “their” image.⁴⁵⁷ Smith’s

H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 961.

⁴⁵⁶ John Andreas Widtsoe, *Rational Theology as Taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Printed by the Deseret news, 1915), 66, 146, 148. See also Ida Smith, “The Lord as a Role Model for Men and Women,” *Ensign*, August 1980, 66.

⁴⁵⁷ Brigham Young, quoted in Brigham Henry Roberts, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity: The*
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successor, Brigham Young, elaborated this genesis as a three-step process: First, spirits are “begotten,” or generated, out of eternal intelligences, “which are eternal, uncreated, self-existent beings. . . of the nature of him who begets them”; next, spirits are begotten as human beings in “earthly tabernacles,” the body being a necessary element of the soul; and finally, the body and spirit are reunited in the resurrection, and those who have proved themselves worthy obtain “eternal lives, eternal existence, eternal exaltation” (ibid., 260).

Positing a Heavenly Mother served several purposes in nineteenth-century LDS Church. For one thing, she was the vehicle whereby women approached spiritual equality with men. Scriptural proclamations from Joseph Smith that promised to all those worthy “thrones, kingdoms, principalities, powers, and dominions”—without regard to sex—compelled Church leaders to elaborate on the status of women as regards to their potential for deification. For instance, Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith (who subsequently became president of the church) asserted that women have the capacity to become “priestesses and queens in the kingdom of God,” and that “they will be given authority.”⁴⁵⁸ Using the same metaphor for deification, James E. Talmage described the redemption of women in this way: “Then shall woman reign by Divine right, a queen in the resplendent realm of her glorified state, even as exalted man shall stand.”⁴⁵⁹ In 1966, LDS General Authority

Roberts-Van Der Donckt Discussion, to Which Is Added a Discourse, Jesus Christ: The Revelation of God, Signature Mormon Classics, Reprint (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1903), 263.

⁴⁵⁸ H. Burke Peterson, “Unrighteous Dominion,” in *Ensign*, July 1989, accessed April 23, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1989/07/unrighteous-dominion?lang=eng>.

⁴⁵⁹ Joseph Fielding Smith and James E. Talmage, quoted in Marie Cornwall, “Mormon Women and the Temple,” in *Sisters in Spirit: Mormon Women in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Lavina Fielding Anderson (Chicago: University of Illinois Press,

Bruce R. McConkie unequivocally confirmed that man “cannot attain a fullness of joy here or of eternal reward hereafter alone. Woman stands at his side a joint-inheritor with him in the fullness of all things. Exaltation and eternal increase is her lot as well as his.”⁴⁶⁰ All of these assumptions were provoked by the revelation on celestial marriage given to Joseph Smith, who argued for the potential exaltation of both women and men through the elevation of family life and procreation into heaven. Those who entered into this new covenant of marriage were eligible for deification. “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” (D & C, 132:20).

Though they do not all agree on her importance to eternal salvation, most Latter-day Saints agree on the existence of the Heavenly Mother. Therefore, she continues to be somewhat useful in the twenty-first century because she still functions as an index or role model for living LDS women. In my M.A. thesis, *Bodies Parts and Passions: Erasing the Divine Feminine in the Mormon Tradition*, I described the LDS Church’s late twentieth-century effort to diminish the concept of a Heavenly Mother to the level of doctrinal insignificance as an example of iconoclasm.⁴⁶¹ What I identified at that time as her “erasure” was, of course, a particular moment in time to some extent fueled by the church’s alarm at her possible association with goddess

1992), 98- 99.

⁴⁶⁰ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 844.

⁴⁶¹ See Doe Nan Daughtrey, “Bodies, Parts, and Passions: Erasing the Divine Feminine in the Mormon Tradition” (master’s thesis, ASU, 2000), <http://library.lib.asu.edu/record=b4547350>.

spirituality, and its concern over lingering charges from other Christians that Mormonism is polytheistic and therefore idolatrous. By definition, Heavenly Mother makes this connection explicit and unavoidable. The Church waves away these concerns by asserting its commitment to one God and eliding her significance.

However, affirming her existence raises another problematic issue:

Notwithstanding her position as co-creative partner to the God of Abraham, the Church extends its position that only men can hold the priesthood and officiate in the name of God to mean that only the *male* god can be worshipped. Moreover, their understanding that a patriarchal structure is reflected throughout all possible universes implies that in no universe would a Goddess be worshipped. This solution has obvious implications for Heavenly Mother's status—and for her mortal daughters. Despite cultural agreement concerning the legitimacy of a Mother in Heaven and their partnership as Deity, the LDS hierarchy dutifully guards the Father's place as the one god among all the gods to be worshipped in this world and predictably relegates the Feminine Divine to institutionally sponsored silence and obscurity. Though the church's contemporary concern with idolatry among Mormons largely refers to the danger of worldly pursuits rather than the worship of other gods, when the subject of Heavenly Mother comes up, church members recall that she may have all the *attributes* of godhood, but she is “not *God*.”

The other motive for iconoclasm, a desire to gain control over people's access to politically sensitive artistic or intellectual elements, and to manipulate and manage individual and public responses to those elements, is fundamental to the LDS Church's position on Heavenly Mother. It is easy to imagine that the hierarchy's major fears are related to how difficult it might be to control the meaning made from

a sensorial and powerful Heavenly Mother. The issue for Mormons is not whether she exists, but whether or not she is to be worshipped. One of the problems is that active devotion to a female deity would likely impact LDS women's willingness to remain in their proscribed church and social roles. It does seem obvious that "seeking the feminine principle in the Godhead empowers women."⁴⁶² Thus, it appears that one of the church's late twenty- and twenty-first-century objectives was the generation of female identity based on a celestial example that includes a Female Divine role model, but specifically precludes empowering women through worship of the Divine Feminine. In this way, iconoclasm of Heavenly Mother acts as a power resource for men (especially as they assign themselves the role of cultural mediator) as well to deprive female subordinates of access to the divine feminine.⁴⁶³ This mediation primarily takes place through Church Correlation.

LDS Church Correlation

As I have indicated in previous chapters, the LDS Church's most comprehensive tool for constructing and controlling these kinds of concepts is its Correlation Program. According to the Church, "Church correlation was initiated and continues to operate today by revelation from the Lord to His prophets," and its main purposes are 1) "Maintaining the purity of doctrine"; 2) "Emphasizing the

⁴⁶² Brinkman states that the invisibility of Mother in Heaven "facilitates a rigid feminine personality and by extension, spirituality. Because LDS women experience God's power through men, their access to the relational component of the divine is diminished and they are more able to reconcile their [subordinate] positions in the church." Kandi Brinkman, "Religious Affiliation, Spirituality and Gender Identity" (doctoral dissertation, University of Utah, 2000), 116.

⁴⁶³ See Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 257-8. Unlike Indian gods such as Shiva, the Heavenly Mother of Mormon theology has only one body to go to or be associated with, so that euphemistically locking her up in a museum effectively eliminates all options to worship her as divine.

importance of the family and the home”; “Placing all the work of the Church under priesthood direction”; “Establishing proper relationships among the organizations of the Church”; “Achieving unity and order in the Church”; and “Ensuring simplicity of Church programs and materials.”⁴⁶⁴ Officially institutionalized in the 1960s as a response to social change and the church’s increased international growth, the program incorporates changes in doctrine and practice into what appears to most members to be a seamless history and theology. The advent of the Correlation Department was in part an expression of the church’s developing desire to place greater emphasis on its relationship to Christ so as to counter the common Christian assertion that Mormons are not Christians; it also had to do with controlling and standardizing the representative images to which members and non-members alike were exposed. It is presented to church members as having been initiated, and operated “by revelation from the Lord to His prophets.”

Prior to correlation, the church had been a place where members at every level of participation were fairly free to develop their own personal theology through speculative public discourse, but this openness was abandoned for an increasingly repressive program of correlation. As a result, every aspect of religious activity and discourse became simplified, subject to approval, and disseminated from the top down by a committee of men. Over a period of time, the program reduced doctrine to its most essential elements and brought every aspect of church operations under

⁴⁶⁴ “Continuing Revelation to Latter-day Prophets,” in *Doctrine and Covenants and Church History Gospel Doctrine Teacher’s Manual* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 243, http://www.lds.org/ldsorg/v/index.jsp?hideNav=1&locale=0&sourceId=4b509207f7c20110VgnVCM100000176f620a____&vgnnextoid=198bf4b13819d110VgnVCM1000003a94610aRCRD.

priesthood control. This committee is responsible for insuring that all church publications and institutional presentations such as conference talks and Sunday school lessons reflect and express the church's official positions and interpretations.

Today this general retrenchment facilitates what non-Mormon historian Jan Shipps calls "Making Saints" by reframing social and cultural experiences into a unique Mormon paradigm.⁴⁶⁵ Unlike the medieval monastic program of creating selves that relied on the application of pain, the LDS Church applies no overt coercion and appears to engage in no negotiation; however, correlated church discourse plays a major role in "the self-restructuring of contradictory religious subjectivities" of the kind produced by Heavenly Mother.⁴⁶⁶ Institutional discourse reconstitutes and homogenizes the language of LDS testimony into a "reified, colonizing discourse."⁴⁶⁷ In this case, the colonized are Mormon women due to the fact that correlation led to the women's organization's complete loss of financial and instructional autonomy, and a shift in emphasis away from the church's more mystical theological elements, in particular, Heavenly Mother.

Shipps has given the most generous explanation for the church's motives in regards to this aspect of church correlation. She goes beyond interpreting the structural shift as simply a response to social upheaval and the church's fear and horror over feminism. Her more nuanced interpretation recognizes the element of

⁴⁶⁵ Jan Shipps, "Making Saints," in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 64-83.

⁴⁶⁶ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 135.

⁴⁶⁷ Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 353.

increased growth—not only international growth but, specifically, domestic growth beyond the borders of the Mormon regional culture center. Shipps observes that when the church’s growth was descent-based and had been raised from infancy to a Mormon cultural identity, dissent was more easily tolerable.⁴⁶⁸ However, in the 1960s, convert baptisms increased such that the church was faced with much the same dilemma as some monastic orders in the Middle Ages: how to reframe the worldly experiences of adult novitiates into a new religious identity.⁴⁶⁹ Put another way, because Mormonism is a comprehensive religious and cultural system that may be radically different from a convert’s previous experience, the Church’s problem has been how to teach individuals who have not been raised as Mormons to not only embrace the gospel, but also to *think* like a Mormon—to be culturally, or *socially* Mormon—or how to make converts “indigenous.” It also has had the effect of exacerbating the tension, which we have been examining in these chapters, between competing values: the importance of personal revelation (its individual interpretation through a testimony based on personal *experience*) and the democratic ideal of personal freedom, against allegiance to the institutional hierarchy.⁴⁷⁰

As Douglas J. Davies reflects, this “process of indigenization is long and arduous, taxing authorities in their judgment of the degree of change that should be

⁴⁶⁸ Shipps, “Making Saints,” 79–80.

⁴⁶⁹ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 141–145.

⁴⁷⁰ See Lawrence A. Young, “Confronting Turbulent Environments: Issues in the Organizational Growth and Globalization of Mormonism,” in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B Heaton, and Lawrence A Young (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 45–47.

permitted, and in accepting pre-existing attitudes.”⁴⁷¹ The fervent devotion with which correlation is imposed to regulate interpretation and presentation of both public and private religious experience raises the issue of censorship in a church that is based on theology that authorizes the subjective religious experience arising out of an individual’s personal creative search for truth. For *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, LDS historian Frank O. May, Jr. described Church Correlation as “the process of identifying the role of each part of the church, placing each in its proper relationship to the others, and ensuring that each functions properly.”⁴⁷² In practice, however, this “unifying process” actually drastically reduces materials and interpretations of doctrine available for use in church sponsored settings.⁴⁷³ Shipps affirms that as Correlation has fulfilled its job of systematizing church doctrine, it has functioned “as a censoring body, empowered with the ability to withhold consent to publish in official channels historical, philosophical, and theological works written by members of the church.” Armand Mauss concurs, describing how the church discourages discussion of varied doctrinal viewpoints. “To the extent that correlation implies operationally a cut-and-dried approach to church teaching and leadership, it reinforces, however unintentionally, the classic fundamentalist tendency toward

⁴⁷¹ Davies, 260.

⁴⁷² Frank O. May, Jr., “Correlation of the Church, Administration,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 323, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/EoM/id/4391/show/5634>.

⁴⁷³ Some people do ignore this request, but anecdotal evidence suggests that they are very often released from their callings and cease to have access to their platform for influencing their peers. Similarly, those church members attending Sunday school classes who attempt to introduce deep or “speculative” doctrine (or otherwise complicate the discussion) are pointedly ignored or, if they are persistent, interrupted. This has happened to me.

unquestioning obedience, rote learning, and indoctrination in preference to understanding and informed commitment.”⁴⁷⁴

At the same time, Church correlation has a problem with history. Iconoclasm through correlation effects a change—in this case, an erasure of Heavenly Mother—which is concealed by a Mormon history whose very nature obscures such change.⁴⁷⁵ Until very recently, Church history has long been the site of a battle between the hierarchical desire to produce a faith-promoting history and one that might be more factual but “less useful.” This is what Mark P. Leone calls the historical puzzle of Mormonism.⁴⁷⁶ Even infrequent use of continuing revelation as a tool to facilitate changing programs or doctrinal trajectories produces consequences for such revisions and elisions. In the Information Age, no organization can ongoingly hide their efforts to reinterpret or obscure history. Individuals and groups of Mormons stand at the ready to attempt to hold accountable the men who claim to speak for

⁴⁷⁴ Shippis, “Making Saints,” 80; Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 165.

⁴⁷⁵ Along with Heavenly Mother, other “weird” doctrines have been quietly eliminated from Sunday school lessons and other church educational materials. We see this expressed in its major goal of distancing itself from polygamy. In the 1990s, for instance, Sunday school lessons became so repetitive, and joint Relief Society and Priesthood manuals about prophets of the Church became laughable because vital historical points about church leaders were obviously missing, especially when polygamists appeared mysteriously monogamous. For an example of this erasure, see Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ed. *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998). This 1998-1999 adult educational manual contained no apparent references to any of his plural wives. Plural marriage is not even mentioned in the book, despite the fact that Young was responsible for taking the practice public and cementing its relationship to the concept of eternal marriage.

⁴⁷⁶ Mark Leone’s discussion of Mormon history as an individual and group exercise that promotes and produces “memorylessness” has obvious relevance to the “forgetting” that has occurred with Heavenly Mother (212). Leone understands one main function of history to be to “mask factors that operate best unseen,” noting that “in Mormonism there is an elaboration of the masking process in which the history that each person believes to be true is the history that each manufactures” (211). Leone argues that “[t]o assume that the past could tell about the present except in a superficial way would give the previous times a self-sufficient reality or independence that they are not supposed to have if one believes that the world is one, unified, and continually guided reality. Contrasts between today and other times would make something different, and nothing is supposed to be different.” Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism*, 208–209.

God when they contradict his earlier revelations. Because Heavenly Mother's history must not appear contradictory or changeable, her current status as sacred and unknowable is disseminated as truth and only through revisionist histories have Mormons become aware of the difference. Therefore, the Mormon engagement with its history must also be seen in relation to the Church's development of media resources and the phenomena of blogging and social networking.

The Church grasps the power of the image, whether spoken, sung, written, or visual. The Church has grown because of its emphasis on missionary work and its embrace of electronic and print media through which it stresses that Mormons are no different than other mainstream Americans. It is ironic that the media, which are now the Church's most useful evangelical and educational tools, were perceived in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to be most dangerous to its goals precisely because they could be used as a forum for public dissent.⁴⁷⁷ The Church branded public dissent through print and electronic media as acts of apostasy, which, at times, it aggressively punished through its ecclesiastical court system. In these cases scholars who publicly engaged in speculative theology or were critical of church positions, even implicitly, were asked to publicly, and in writing, censor themselves by retracting their positions, removing them from websites, etc., all of which gave the impression of censorship and implied that the Church's goal is for its membership to be so thoroughly committed to its larger project of taking the gospel

⁴⁷⁷ The word "public" is the key. While church members are free to privately hold whatever beliefs they choose, *action* on those beliefs (such as continuing to *press* for discussion about Heavenly Mother or challenging or criticizing the church's position on her) constitutes an active public opposition to the church itself, and by association, to the Lord. See Don Lattin, "Musings of the Main Mormon," in *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sunday April 13, 1997, accessed April 23, 2012, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/1997/04/13/SC36289.DTL>.

to the world that it self-censors out of loyalty (or fear) so that media attention only reflects positively on the church and its mission.⁴⁷⁸ The result was a well-publicized, sanitized, “censored” history.

However, this is another site of religious change in Mormonism. Like other religious bodies, it has had to “accept, reject, reconfigure, and/or innovate” in relation to a dizzying array of media options.⁴⁷⁹ It has largely embraced them all. When the LDS Church developed a method for correlating and therefore controlling the Internet as a method of facilitating positive discourse about the Church, it saw the potential for its members countering the negative images about Mormonism through individual websites and blogs. Church leaders then specifically requested that members embrace these new media for fulfilling its primary mission of spreading the gospel and perfecting the Saints. LDS apostle Russell M. Ballard instructed Mormons that to blog about the Church requires that they both “*understand the basic principles of the gospel*” and that they present a “*clear and correct*” witness of gospel truths.⁴⁸⁰ His guidelines sidestep the obvious dilemma of what actually constitute the basic principles of Mormonism and what analysis establishes their “correct” interpretation. Regardless, as we will see later in this chapter, this shift

⁴⁷⁸ Through conference talks, articles in church periodicals and correlated letters from church headquarters disseminated and read from LDS pulpits throughout the world, such opposition is explicitly equated with apostasy. LDS apostle James E. Faust, who quotes from the church’s handbook of instructions, defines apostasy, the equivalent of heresy, as an individual “repeatedly acting in clear, open and deliberate *public* opposition to the church or its leaders,” and “teaching as church doctrine information that is not church doctrine after being corrected by their bishop or higher authorities.” James E. Faust, “Keeping Covenants and Honoring the Priesthood,” *Ensign*, November 1993, accessed April 20, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1993/11/keeping-covenants-and-honoring-the-priesthood?lang=eng>, emphasis mine.

⁴⁷⁹ Heidi A. Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 112.

⁴⁸⁰ M. Russell Ballard, “Sharing the Gospel Using the Internet,” *Ensign*, July 2008, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/2008/07/sharing-the-gospel-using-the-internet?lang=eng>.

in attitude about social media has culminated in the Church's institutional "I'm A Mormon" campaign, which essentially turns the LDS Church's definition and image over to its members and highlights those who are most diverse. Furthermore, the Church has developed the create.lds.org and tech.lds.org websites, which allow Latter-day Saints to participate with the Church in contributing (a) music, photos, plays, prose, and other creative projects; and (b) building applications for Church use of new media.

While the benefits of correlation to the LDS Church are undeniable, its benefits obscure its other consequences that directly affect women. Correlation limits the stories that get "told," in whatever form, from the institutional down to the local level, in all social settings, and at all age levels. Moreover, because correlation has been implemented gradually since the 1960s, many (perhaps most) Church members did not notice its imposition and encroachment. As a result, correlation enables the church to suppress group definition—perhaps even consciousness—of Heavenly Mother as a proactive deity while it regulates women's access to empowering messages about *themselves* as potential goddesses. Thus, iconoclasm of Heavenly Mother is one aspect of a church-wide focus on almost exclusively male role models in story, song, and public ritual. Until just recently, even instructional lessons designed exclusively for women contain stories in which virtually all of the anecdotal images are male.⁴⁸¹ Correlation has attempted to eliminate anything the Church

⁴⁸¹ Perhaps because of the reported crisis of attrition, the Church has finally responded to women's call for empowering materials, and a new history of the women's Relief Society has just been published as a manual for use in both Relief Society and Priesthood classes. It remains to be seen whether or not men will be interested enough in the women's perspective to actually use the manual in their own quorums. See "Diversity and Strength of Mormon Women Highlighted in New Relief Society Book," *Newsroom.lds.org*, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/diversity-strength-mormon-women-new-relief-society-book>.

determines is controversial, speculative, or “extraneous” from its official story so that when, for instance, Heavenly Mother inevitably but infrequently gets discussed in settings such as early childhood Primary lessons, her identity is carefully framed as supportive and subservient.⁴⁸²

It should be clear now that the power to control all images (whether they are written, verbal, auditory or visual) is retained by LDS men through institutionalized correlation. Therefore, the efforts by LDS women to reclaim and develop practices around Heavenly Mother can be seen in part as a response to correlation. As its victim, she can be seen as only one of several erasures that have deeply affected the women highlighted in this project. One of the program’s goals seems to be that of making sure that women do not overstep their bounds by assuming the authority of men. For example, organizational tasks and administrative assignments once performed by women have been defined as being priesthood functions. As Chapter 4 showed, anointing and blessing the sick were similarly redefined.⁴⁸³

Nevertheless, “speculative theology” continues to develop at the individual level fueled by official Church histories, feminist and other recovered histories, critical materials posted on the Internet, and prayerful appeals that generate individual revelatory experiences. Speculation about “deep doctrine” then gets

⁴⁸² For instance, the Primary 2 lesson manual introduces Heavenly Mother, but she is framed as peripheral and the text does not bother to capitalize her name. The teacher is instructed to “explain that we all lived in heaven with Heavenly Father before we came to this earth. We are his children. That is why we call him Heavenly Father. We also lived with our heavenly mother and all the rest of Heavenly Father’s children.” “Primary 2: Choose the Right A, Lesson 3: I Am a Child of God,” accessed March 10, 2012, <http://lds.org/manual/primary-2/lesson-3?lang=eng>. See also Noel A. Carmack, “Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture, 1900-1999,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (2000): 45

⁴⁸³ See Marie Cornwall, “The Institutional Role of Mormon Women,” in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

disseminated amongst friends and acquaintances locally and in a wide range of Internet discussion groups.⁴⁸⁴ In 1994, Armand Mauss observed that “centralization, correlation and injunctions to ‘follow the Brethren,’” have had the effect of stultifying local creativity (and I would add, intellect and aliveness) and created a generation that waits for leaders in Salt Lake to make decisions that affect everyone at the grassroots level.⁴⁸⁵ This local abdication of both authority and power ostensibly keeps church members safe from the consequences of uncorrelated decision making, but every woman in this chapter who grew up in this system noted the difficulty they had making adult decisions—in part a casualty, as we will see, of growing up in a “motherless house.”

One common LDS answer to the question “Why has Heavenly Mother gone missing?” is that church leaders are reluctant to share ecclesiastical power with women. However, observing other religious traditions reveals that belief in a female deity doesn’t necessarily translate into clerical power or social equality for women; and yet the visibility of those deities and their availability for veneration provides positive role models and a variety of images for imagining the identity of deity as well as one’s own identity. However, it is also possible to think about erasure in Mormonism in other ways. For instance, she has not disappeared because the church does not believe in her; she is gone because she is “so sacred.” While its original source is obscure, the idea of Heavenly Mother as “sacred” is a characterization that

⁴⁸⁴ For an explanation of how Mormons continue to perpetuate early Mormon speculative theology despite correlation, see W. Paul Reeve and Michael Scott Van Wagenen, *Between Pulpit and Pen: The Supernatural World in Mormon History and Folklore* (Utah State University Press, 2011).

⁴⁸⁵ Mauss observes, “After an entire generation of centralization, correlation, and injunctions to ‘follow the Brethren,’ Mormons and their leaders at the grassroots have become accustomed to waiting for directions ‘from Salt Lake.’” Mauss, *Angel and the Beehive*, 206.

has spread through the American LDS community to get repeated again and again with the force of authority. There is no paper trail for the genealogy of the idea. However, because of the LDS Church's reticence to define doctrine as more than a few basic statements of belief, the perpetuation of her sacrality does not require dissemination of a revelatory statement.

Looking at the way in which the word "sacred" is used in LDS discourse provides a clue to how the Mother in Heaven acquired this status. Echoing the essentialist Goddess feminist position on the ontology of women, LDS apostle Richard G. Scott refers to "the sanctity of womanhood" and the gift of women's "exalting roles as wives and mothers." He also presents these stereotypical notions of feminine attributes as being sacred and eternal: "Each of us absolutely must help each daughter of God we can to realize what sacred characteristics Father in Heaven has given her."⁴⁸⁶ LDS general authority Vaughn J. Featherstone makes women's connection with Heavenly Mother explicit:

Women are endowed with special traits and attributes that come trailing down through eternity from a divine mother. Young women have special God-given feelings about charity, love, and obedience. Coarseness and vulgarity are contrary to their natures. They have a modifying, softening influence on young men. Young women were not foreordained to do what priesthood holders do. Theirs is a sacred, God-given role, and the traits they received from heavenly mother are equally as important as those given to the young men.⁴⁸⁷

It can also help to situate "Heavenly Mother as sacred" in relation to church discourse in general. Topics considered political, moral, or simply spiritually

⁴⁸⁶ "There is one title that the First Presidency and the Twelve seldom use, considering it too sacred—that of Apostle. It is in that role that I come to you my beloved priesthood brethren." Richard G. Scott, "The Sanctity of Womanhood," *Ensign*, May 2000).

⁴⁸⁷ Vaughn J. Featherstone, "A Champion of Youth," *Ensign*, November 1987, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1987/11/a-champion-of-youth?lang=eng>.

“necessary” are a part of communal discourse.⁴⁸⁸ On the other hand, those issues designated as sacred and private are withdrawn from the communal domain and interiorized. It appears that only two major doctrinal elements are considered too sacred to discuss publicly: the temple, and Heavenly Mother. However, in addition to being a public, communal experience accessible to all saints within this public church space, the temple is a topic open for permanent and continual discussion in Sunday school lessons, church educational materials, and Sacrament Meeting and conference talks. No manuals have been written about how to have a better relationship with Heavenly Mother. A large percentage of church discourse centers on the temple and all “worthy” saints have access to it. On the other hand, Heavenly Mother is so sacred as to be “secret.” While LDS temple ceremonies are commonly thought to epitomize this sacred/secret aspect of Mormonism, and other doctrines have fallen into periods during which their emphasis was either downplayed or positions on them altered, the agreement between Mormons that human beings have a Heavenly Mother is actually the only LDS doctrine to enjoy widespread acceptance in the community while falling into the sacred *and* secret category. Explicit in this sacralization is a “forgetting” that is critical to the erasure of controversial doctrines. However, in spite of—or likely the consequence of Church efforts to avoid this fusion—a new wave of LDS feminists are making Heavenly Mother the basis for their blended Mormon Pagan spiritualities.

⁴⁸⁸ The church will intervene directly with lobbyists, financial support, and physical presence in what it perceives to be “moral” issues while insisting that its position on “political” issues is not to interfere with the individual Mormon conscience. In particular the church enters the political arena over issues such as homosexual marriage, the status of women, and abortion, though its position on abortion is less strict than that of the Catholic Church.

Mormon-Pagan Synthesis

The synthesis of Mormonism and Paganism is not new. Since the development of the Internet, “Mormons” (e.g. Mormons, former Mormons, and new Mormon converts) have gathered online to make and debate connections between the two groups. The earliest public discussion I have found occurred in 1992, in an early Prodigy discussion group. As their original question had to do with Mormonism and New Age, one man compared Joseph Smith’s use of the urim and thummim divination tool (which purportedly accompanied the Book of Mormon gold plates and by which those plates were “translated”) to New Age crystal gazing and said that he saw evidence that “disenchanted Mormons are leaving the Church and entering the New Age Movement.”⁴⁸⁹

It was not long, however, before the conversation turned to Paganism. As another discussant, a Wiccan, mused, “Several . . . local Wiccan priests and priestesses are ex-Mormons, and I know several ex-Mormon Druids” (ibid.). Another participant protested that “Mormonism is not living up to all that it promises and some of us are getting really tired of waiting for it to happen.” One response to his complaint placed the blame on centralization, correlation, and the culture of obedience: Why is the Spirit of God gone from our meetings? Why does the church frown on us if we propose to meet in small groups to study and/or pray among ourselves? Why does the Church place so many of its eggs in the basket labeled ‘Strict Obedience,’ and so few in the one labeled “Individual Spiritual Growth and Attainment?” (ibid.). On the question of whether Mormons are Pagans,

⁴⁸⁹ “New Age Mormons,” *Proclus at Tripod.com*, February 26, 1992, <http://proclus.tripod.com/radical/mutants/newage.html>.

one LDS man declares, “Yes we are Henotheistic.⁴⁹⁰ Yes we believe in an eternal uncreated Universe. Yes we believe [in] the spiritual nature of all matter and living things. Yes we believe in the possibility of godhood for humans. If that is your definition of Pagan, I would proclaim from the rooftops that I am pagan!!”

Yet another discussant compares the Wiccan fivefold ritual kiss as described in the book, *The Spiral Dance*, with washing and anointing in the LDS temple.⁴⁹¹ Whereas in the fivefold kiss the Wiccan priestess kisses (and thereby anoints) the feet, knees, pubis, breasts, and lips, in LDS temples men are anointed and blessed by male temple workers, and women are anointed by women. Originally, the ceremony involved anointing through actual touching of similar crucial body parts (e.g. head, ears, eyes, back, arms, legs, and loins), though no actual touching of genitals was involved. Since 2005, however, the “washing” has become largely symbolic. Both ceremonies take place after the initiate is given a secret “new name”—in the Wiccan context, a magical name—though in the temple names are assigned, not chosen.

In 2008, a discussion took place on the Beliefnet website reflecting on the similarities and differences that exist between Mormonism and Wicca. One discussant predictably offered that “[t]he unofficial teaching that God has a consort Goddess as his wife is astonishingly pagan and a primary belief in Wicca.”⁴⁹² Also in 2008, I posed the question of what elements of Mormonism aided their pursuit of a

⁴⁹⁰ The simple definition of henotheism is the belief in many gods but the worship of only one.

⁴⁹¹ “New Age Mormons.”

⁴⁹² Aint_seen_noth, “Wicca and Mormons,” Response, *Beliefnet Forums: Wicca*, February 23, 2008, http://community.beliefnet.com/go/thread/view/43861/13305819/Wicca_and_Mormons; Anonymous post, December 29, 2008.

Pagan identity to former Mormons on a large private Pagan listserv group based in Utah. They provided a predictable list: The idea that humans and Deity share the same ontology; the availability of personal revelation; continuing revelation that opens up the possibility of receiving new light and knowledge; and the existence of a Heavenly Mother. Several of them also noted that these ideas have faded from view. As one group member opined, “the things I hold dear from the Mormon way are all but forgotten or renounced by the modern Church. It is, today, a mere magickal shadow of what it used to be.” More recently, in August, 2010, Star Foster, a Pagan contributor to the blog *Patheos*, listed Paganism and Mormonism’s shared “occult roots” as one of a list of “Thirteen Things I Like About Mormons.”

Both the LDS and modern Paganism have drawn on Masonic influences. The levels of initiation, the rituals, the names, the symbols, the secrecy and the emphasis on personal spiritual growth are things we very much have in common. Though Pagans and Mormons may seem to be at opposite ends of the religious spectrum, I think we’d actually find ourselves very much at home in each other’s rituals.⁴⁹³

Said again, for Mormons and non-Mormons to assert that Mormonism is Pagan (or a brand of Paganism) is not new. What is new, however, is the wide accessibility of the Internet in America and the development of blogging, which enables almost any individual Mormon—and Pagan—with computer access to either anonymously or publicly assert their feelings on virtually any subject. Even more important, however, has been the development of social network forums like Yahoo Groups and Facebook, and video teleconferencing technologies like Skype. Similar to revisionist histories, which LDS women in this project use to validate their extra-

⁴⁹³ Star Foster, “Pantheon: 13 Things I Like About Mormons,” *Patheos*, August 19, 2010, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/pantheon/2010/08/13-things-i-like-about-mormons/>.

Mormon spiritual practices, debates about Mormon Pagan identity both shape and are shaped by the ability to communicate with large groups of people over large distances given by these technologies. The importance of this development has been crucial in the stories of three Mormon Pagan women.

Mormon Pagan Women

As noted earlier, I chose Dryad, Ayla, and Elena as examples of the Mormon Pagan fusion I have been describing. They are all mothers in their thirties. Two of them live in northern California and the other lives in Arizona. I began the interviews by asking them to share their background in Mormonism and then allowed them to introduce the ideas that were important to them. Having done that, I asked clarifying questions based on the themes and experiences they shared. What follows is an analytical narrative of their redacted interviews.

Dryad

Dryad, who calls herself a *Morgan* (a name she and her friends have developed to identify themselves as Mormon Pagans⁴⁹⁴), was living in northern California when we were introduced online. At thirty years of age, Dryad is married and has a two-year-old son. She and her husband met while they were serving as linguists in the military. He joined the LDS Church before their marriage but has since become completely inactive. Dryad was born in upstate New York in 1981. She says she grew up poor, and her family moved around a lot as her father followed

⁴⁹⁴ Dryad believes her friend Jenni is responsible for developing this title. Jenni's story about "her integrated belief system of paganism and Mormonism" is available in the Daughters of Mormonism podcast titled "Not in Conflict." Sybil, "Daughters of Mormonism: Episode 15: 'Not in Conflict' — Jenni's Story," *Daughters of Mormonism*, June 15, 2011, <http://daughtersofmormonism.blogspot.com/2011/06/episode-15-not-in-conflict-jennis-story.html>.

the early computer tech jobs he had trained to do in lieu of a college degree. Her father was raised Roman Catholic, but he joined the LDS Church at the age of seventeen, after meeting and falling in love with her LDS mother. Dryad calls her parents “über conservative.”⁴⁹⁵

Dryad admits that her response to this extreme conservatism was to be “really straight-laced and judgmental and narrow-minded and really awful and obsessed with marriage and family—just the normal things young women [in the Church] grow up obsessed with.” Besides her parents’ version of Mormon traditionalism, one of the biggest influences on Dryad was her mother’s experimentation with energy healing. When her mom started looking into energy healing, Dryad felt she had permission to “look into alternative things more.” She reports having always been particularly interested in nature:

Growing up, my sister and I would look for fairy corners. Places in the woods where we thought, “Yeah! Faeries could *totally* live there!” Enclosed leafy sorts of things . . . little hideaways in the woods . . . I used to go in the back yard and burn candles. Even in my most conservative years in the Church, I would go into the woods and burn a candle while I prayed and meditated. I can’t believe I didn’t even notice! I was all shocked. “What? Am I part Pagan?” And one of my friends pointed out, “You didn’t see *that* coming?” So my mom’s stuff gave me permission to look into things.

It is clear that Dryad is very close to her parents and shares with them most of what she is thinking and doing. Given her own personally imposed authoritarianism and perfectionism, her parents played the essential role of easing her guilt over any mistakes she felt she had made. She would also call them for

⁴⁹⁵ Of her father, she says she thinks joining the Church “saved his life.” As a result, she believes he “holds really tightly to it, in a very literal sense,” as “an act of gratitude and faithfulness.” Her father is still “very conservative, very traditional,” but her mother has changed significantly after spending most of their married life “following him in whatever he believed.”

confirmation of actions she planned to take to make sure she was holding fast to the “iron rod” of the gospel. She was deeply frightened of the spiritual consequences of breaking rules laid out by the LDS Church and what her weaknesses or lapses in judgment meant about her.⁴⁹⁶

While Dryad was pregnant with her son, a friend gave her a copy of “Mothering” magazine. She knew she wanted a “natural” birth (she wanted to be “tough”), but she never expected to want to give birth outside of a hospital. The magazine intrigued her so much that she went to the Mothering.com website and found bountiful resources on natural parenting, attachment parenting, etc. On the website she also found the *Crunchy Mormon Forum*, “a community of Mormons who strive to live simply and close to nature.”⁴⁹⁷ Eventually, participants created a “coven” area, which was private so as not to make others in the group feel uncomfortable. Participating in this forum, she discovered her need for the Mother in Heaven.

As mentioned earlier, LDS women can face a crisis when trying to imagine their eternity in relation to a silent, shadowy figure they know nothing about. However, like many LDS women, Dryad had always dismissed others who expressed

⁴⁹⁶ For example, the first time Dryad watched an R-rated movie, she stayed up most of the night. Predictably tired the next day (a Sunday), she skipped church. In addition to warning church members away from R-rated movies, the LDS Church teaches that failure to attend church leads to a loss of the spirit and, ultimately, to apostasy. However, when she called her mother in a panic over her transgression, her mother reassured her that it is all right to sometimes take time to rest and renew one’s reserves. This guidance eased her fear and gave her permission to seek the solitude she sometimes craved away from church. Dryad has predictably experienced this same kind of anxiety over her first tentative forays into earth-based spirituality. “I’d have to call home in a panic because I felt so guilty about something and my mom would have to make me feel okay about it because I couldn’t find peace on my own.”

⁴⁹⁷ “The Crunchy Mormon Forum,” *Facebook*, July 2007, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Crunchy-Mormon-Forum/140219102685453>.

anger or distress over not knowing more about Heavenly Mother. Echoing LDS Church discourse about Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, who while being separate personages are the same in purpose, Dryad explained her earlier attitude about Heavenly Mother: “If you know Heavenly Father,” she said, “You know Heavenly Mother. If they’re the same in purpose they’re pretty much one in mind and heart. To know Him is to know Her.” However, when Dryad began following the blog of another LDS feminist who expressed a deep sense of loss over not having access to the Mother in Heaven, the woman’s perspective had a dramatic impact on her view of this issue. Before this experience, Dryad says she would never have called herself a feminist. It was a paradigm shift. “She mentioned what people like me say [to dismiss their questions and distress] and she said, ‘Well, I’m heading for an eternity of . . . *what?* What’s my *job?* What’s my *future?* I have nothing to look at, no example. I don’t know what Heavenly Mother *does* all day. What is her *role*, what is her *purpose?*” Dryad says it was the first time she realized that “[LDS] women have . . .” (and she pauses for a very long moment) “*nothing*. You’re supposed to ‘liken the scriptures unto yourself,’” but they’re written for men, by men, about men. You have to twist everything around so it works for you. I’d never thought about how likening the scriptures to myself required me to change all the pronouns! Now I want to know about Heavenly Mother!”

Fueled by this mission, Dryad and several of her *Crunchy Mormon Forum* friends started the Facebook group *In Mother’s Lap*. The group’s original impulse was “to seek Heavenly Mother in Church-approved ways” because they were all “active, conservative members at that time.” She says they wanted to keep the group small so that they could maintain anonymity and safety. Some of them even knew and had

a history with each other offline. “It’s a secret group because we didn’t want anyone to know what we were doing; because we were afraid we were going to get in trouble or somebody would get upset about it. We were also concerned of what our families would think.” However, she says, they since have all “become quite uncorrelated,” and almost all of them have “drifted into ‘Pagan ways.’”

Their next uncorrelated step was to found the *public* blog, “Mother Wheel: LDS Families Celebrating the Seasons.” Their home page cautions visitors that they do not welcome either debate or criticism; neither are they a teaching group. Instead, their instructions are to “[s]eek out what feels right for you, trust the Spirit to guide you and have faith in our heavenly parents who are the givers of all pure knowledge.”⁴⁹⁸ According to the blog, these families (“led by faithful and passionate mothers”) aim to teach their children “to appreciate nature” as “evidence of a God in heaven who is all-knowing, all-powerful and supremely creative and loving”; “honor the elements”; and “embrace the good and true principles of traditional nature based, pagan religion where the harvest, solstices and full moon were celebrated as the promise of health and sustenance.” This includes, of course, the restoration of the Heavenly Mother. Quoting the Thirteenth Article of Faith, the blog states, “We recognize the pagan belief in a Goddess who was revealed through Joseph Smith to be our Heavenly Mother, wife to God the Father and equal partner in creation and sustaining their spirit children. We find these things ‘virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy’ [and] we seek after these things” (ibid.).

⁴⁹⁸ “Mother Wheel: LDS Families Celebrating the Seasons,” *Mother Wheel*, accessed March 16, 2012, <http://motherwheel.blogspot.com/>.

Ayla

Eight families are associated with Mother Wheel. Two of them were practicing Pagans before joining the LDS Church. Ayla, who lives in northern California with her husband and three sons, is one of these. Now in her early thirties, Ayla has always been openly Pagan. Even before her conversion, her M.A. thesis, titled *Heavenly Mothers and Plain Goddesses: A Look at Magick, the Divine Feminine and Homebirth in the Mormon and Amish Communities of North America*, indicates that she had a high level of interest in the Mormon worldview. As the author of the regular column, “Peaceful Mom,” Ayla was even a regular contributor to “Sage Woman,” a magazine dedicated to the “celebrating the Goddess in every woman,” from 2006-2009.⁴⁹⁹ She joined the LDS Church in 2008, after having gotten a testimony of Mormonism and successfully blending it with Paganism as evidenced on her blog.

Ayla’s blog “Mother Lover Goddess” chronicles her early experience of motherhood, polyamory, homeschooling (she has three children and is now pregnant with another), unassisted homebirth, feminism, raw food—and conversion to Mormonism. Though most of those commitments stay constant, she now describes herself as “a monogamous help-meet to my husband, a Mormon, and a traditional foodist.” Mother Lover Goddess is still available online, but contains several disclaimers. Ayla welcomes readers but cautions them: “Please feel free to read this blog and its content, but please keep in mind that I am no longer the younger woman who wrote these words. This is a museum of the old me.”

⁴⁹⁹ In 2007, Ayla earned a master’s degree in Women’s Spirituality from New College of California, in San Francisco. Her committee chair was Dianne E. Jenet, and her committee included Vicki Noble, author of the Motherpeace Tarot deck. See “SageWoman Magazine Home,” *Sage Woman*, 2012, <http://www.sagewoman.com/>.

The blog is a fascinating snapshot of one woman's dedication to blending Paganism with her adopted Mormonism. For instance, in a post from Wednesday, August 01, 2007, Ayla writes about "Mormon Pagan Lammas or the "first harvest" on the Pagan sabbat ritual calendar. Beginning with the modern Pagan explanation of the holiday, which has to do with the "decline of summer" and "the demise of the Celtic sun God Lugh," she writes about her family's harvest of zucchini, wild plums, and blackberries. She tells the story of the harvest meal of rice her family shared with another family, including the detail that "Demeter is the grain Goddess of this season, Greek Goddess of the bountiful harvest." Finally, she integrates Mormon history into her narrative by invoking the stories of the harvests of hard working Mormon pioneers and quotes from Book of Mormon on the law of the harvest, which she interweaves with the Pagan story.

Ayla's relationship to Mormonism has always been complicated. Shortly before her baptism, she asked the Feminist Mormon Housewife community if she should join the LDS Church, if there was a place for her in Mormonism. Though she claimed a testimony of the Church's truthfulness, she cited the following issues that gave her pause: "I pray to Heavenly Mother and feel I have a deep relationship with her. I believe women should have (and do have) the priesthood. I'm a feminist, a politically and socially active Liberal. Liberal with a capitol L. I'm a columnist for a Goddess oriented magazine (SageWoman)" Her tongue and cheek question was, "Should I join the Church, should I stay away, or maybe I could jump straight to excommunication?" Ayla joined the LDS Church the week before the letter from church headquarters commanding every Mormon to give of their time and money to support California Proposition 8 was read over every LDS pulpit in the state. In

protest, she walked out of the building. However, in April, 2008, she recalls having asked herself this question:

Should I live a spiritual life outside the LDS church, perhaps as a [Unitarian Universalist], believing and acting as I please with no impact or ability to make the changes (women in the priesthood, the restoration of Heavenly Mother, etc.) that I believe need to be changed to bring about the fullness of the gospel. Or do I enter the fellowship of one of the world's largest churches and lobby for gentle change from within?⁵⁰⁰

Along with this shift in course, she also has muted her Pagan identity to some extent (or is less critical of the LDS Church) and adopted an essentialist approach to LDS womanhood that resonates very well with the LDS Church's doctrine on the "eternal role of women" as previously outlined. "Mother Lover Goddess" now points visitors to her new blog, "A Wise and Glorious Purpose." Here she extolls the virtues of clean and healthy living; homebirth, crafting, and an apparent anti-feminist biblical informed view of womanhood. This is not to say that Ayla is no longer Pagan. She is active on Mother Wheel and routinely writes posts about her family's Wheel of the Year celebrations. Ayla's list of pagan characteristics sees the Mormon include "the 'God' and 'Goddess' in the revealed knowledge of Our Heavenly Parents"; the Mormon version of universal salvation ("no fire and brimstone Hell, no salvation through grace"); "the magic and ceremony of the LDS Temples"; the Book of Mormon reference to the sentience of the earth noted above (in her words, "the Prophet Enoch communing with the Earth Mother in Moses 7: 48-49"); and the Mormon belief in Heavenly Parents as "beings of flesh and bone

⁵⁰⁰ "Mother Lover Goddess: To LDS or to Not LDS, This Is the Question.," *Mother Lover Goddess*, April 7, 2008, <http://motherlovergoddess.blogspot.com/2008/04/to-lds-or-to-not-lds-this-is-question.html>.

just as the ancient pagans believed.”⁵⁰¹ In her *Mother Wheel* biography she says that she and her family attends church regularly and “follow its teachings.” They also “celebrate the Wheel of the Year, the old holidays, of Paganism to keep that connection with our Earth that is so important and can be so easily lost in our modern world.”

Ayla appears to have settled on an integration of Mormonism and Paganism that is authentic for her. While as the author of “Mother Lover Goddess” Ayla occurs as being more Pagan than Mormon (or at least at war with or unsettled about her Mormon identity because of her then liberal political attitudes), “Wise and Glorious Purpose” reconciles that dissonance. “I still retain a deep connection to paganism,” she says. “I don't consider myself ‘not pagan.’ I simply consider Mormonism, at its heart, to be very pagan.”

Dryad is moving in the opposite direction. However, it is important to note that she is also in a completely different stage of Mormon-Pagan development than Ayla. Unlike Ayla, who has had an open public identity as a Pagan, Dryad is a Mormon who is becoming more Pagan. This movement from ultraconservative Mormon to what she characterizes as more liberal ideas has her be concerned with anonymity. This enables her, for instance, to share deeply about her husband’s loss of faith. Though this development was “traumatic,” she admits that it gave her permission to ask questions. “I always had a strong desire to learn about paganism, but my conservative upbringing always stopped me. I was terrified that I’d stray from the straight and narrow, join in pagan sex orgies, and completely lose my testimony

⁵⁰¹ Mama Ayla, “Mother Wheel: LDS Families Celebrating the Seasons: Ayla,” *Mother Wheel*, December 23, 2010, <http://motherwheel.blogspot.com/2010/12/ayla.html>.

and my soul.” However, she says, “Having a husband who doesn’t care about religion allowed me to search for myself for answers.”

Some of those answers came in their discovery of second wave Mormon feminist materials like Carol Lynn Pearson’s book and accompanying video of her one-woman play, “Mother Wove the Morning” (1992). The play recounts the stories of women throughout history to “show that the human family has always longed for its Mother in Heaven, has often exiled her, and is now inviting her to come home.”⁵⁰² Pearson’s chapter “Healing the Motherless House (also the title of Pearson’s poem “Motherless House”) in the 1992 book, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, edited by Maxine Hanks, has become the mantra of LDS women who yearn for the LDS Church to allow them to openly worship the Heavenly Mother:

The Mormon Church could have been a leader in giving to the modern world the concept of God as Mother: for 150 years we have been sitting on this doctrine. Many other churches have moved ahead, making strides in this direction. Currently the reintegration of the feminine divine into our religious experience is happening almost universally. I am sorry to say that Mormons are now almost of the last wagon. However, within the LDS church there are thousands of women and men who are hungry and ready for this step.⁵⁰³

Almost twenty years later, the poem “Motherless House” appears in its entirety in the book *The Sisterhood: Inside the Lives of Mormon Women*.⁵⁰⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 1, *Sisterhood* is written by Dorothy Allred Solomon, a believing LDS woman. It is significant, then, that in 2008 when this book was written, Pearson’s

⁵⁰² Carol Lynn Pearson, *Mother Wove the Morning: A One-Woman Play* (Mother Wove the Morning, 1992).

⁵⁰³ Hanks, *Women and Authority*, 241-42.

⁵⁰⁴ Solomon, *The Sisterhood*.

poem is still powerful enough to open its final chapter. It is still able to capture the imagination of another generation of LDS women. Dryad reports that when she started looking into Carol Lynn Pearson, she and her “enabler” coven mate thought, “Holy Cow! There’s all this stuff we can do! She’s still an active member of the Church!” Dryad felt her discovery of open yearning for Heavenly Mother in mainstream LDS culture gave them “permission to go whole hog on everything!”

Though Dryad has not read *Sisterhood*, the book echoes her anxieties about the absence of Heavenly Mother in the twenty-first century. Reminding us of Pearson’s assertion that we live in a motherless house, Solomon replies, “Well . . . not exactly Motherless. We just don’t know Her. It’s as though She’s gone on an extended journey, or She’s sick or tired or She’s done something wrong and has been sequestered in another room. We know She’s there, but we don’t get to meet her” (ibid., 194). Remembering times when her own children were negatively affected by her absence and were “desperate to reconnect,” she asserts, “Sometimes I think we should have been insistent with Our Heavenly Mother.” Solomon asserts that in her absence, LDS women reinvent her in their own image through each other and through creative products like Pearson’s. Men have their own “divine corollary,” Solomon observes, and LDS women need one too. “It’s not that we don’t love Father in Heaven—oh, we do. But He spends a lot of His time and directions on the men. Heaven knows they need it. But so do we. And we don’t get to go to Mother for the inside scoop on how to be a woman” (ibid., 195).

During this time of spiritual discovery and experimentation, as Dryad was learning more about the eight sabbats of the Pagan wheel of the year, she was also reading several other books that altered her view of herself and her situation as an

LDS woman. On the one hand, she was discovering the recovered LDS Church histories about early Mormon women healers. On the other, she was searching out materials written by non-LDS women, such as the book *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, by Sue Monk Kidd.⁵⁰⁵ Dryad reveals that *Dissident Daughter* gave her “permission to not only grieve and get super furious and get so depressed about so much.” But it also “broke a chain that was holding me back from looking into Paganism more. Because I thought it would be frowned on by the church so it must be wrong. That [book] got rid of that feeling.”

Having formed close friendships with several *In Mother's Lap* and *Mother Wheel* group members in various parts of the country, Dryad decided she wanted to “formalize” those relationships. One close friend in both groups, who was “still a pretty conservative Mormon,” was “just celebrating the seasons in a Pagan way.” Thinking there was nothing wrong with that, Dryad would go to her to clarify and legitimize her own ideas. “I’d say, ‘Do you think it’d be okay to do this? And we’d find justifications in scriptures and Church history.’” Because she and two of the other group members were meeting regularly for hours-long online chats about these books and other materials, Dryad suggested that they form a group—“like a moon circle.” She had been “thinking a lot about magical stuff,” and, for the first time, “really connecting the idea of magic not with evil or calling on demons. . . . I suddenly started realizing that it was the same! Everything was the same! It was just a different language!” Therefore, she did not resist when the other women insisted on

⁵⁰⁵ This book is creative nonfiction about a religious woman whose feminist awakening changed her life by making her aware of both sexism and the wide variety of spiritual options available to women today. Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

calling their group a coven: “Let’s call it what it is: It’s a coven!” After identifying and inviting a fourth member, they exchanged packages. “It was the perfect setup,” she says. The coven “box-swap” was the first thing they organized. They all sent each other care packages containing candles in each individual’s chosen representative color. “So when we do long distance rituals, when one of us needs extra support,” she explains, “the other ones can light that sister’s candle and keep her in all day and pray for her—because we’re a Mormon coven. We’re all Mormons. So we pray for each other.” She neatly sums up her position: “That’s where I am. I have a coven. We’re all Mormon. We’re all feminist. We all go to church.”

When asked about the impact of social networking on her ability to pursue this particular hybrid spiritual identity, Dryad says she would not have been able to do any of it without social networking. “Social networking is how I found friends who felt the same way; and it’s also how I research things, and look things up, and find books, and find people. And also I never would have started on this path without mothering.com.” She thinks she might have continued doing “the natural hippie stuff,” but for it to go farther “it would have taken years and years.”

The human connection would have been the most elusive. Even Dryad’s coven mate, who lives a few hours north of her former home, would have remained unknown to her had she not had access to social networking. Even had they lived in the same town, she says that the geographic structure of Mormon wards and stakes make it possible that “we never would have crossed paths.” She is certain that “there’s really no way that could have happened without the internet. I wouldn’t know her at all. I wouldn’t know you at all! I wouldn’t know anyone in my coven. And I’d probably still be plodding along, afraid to do anything different at church...

even though, deep down I'd be craving something more, like I have my whole life. . . . This isn't new, there were signs all along. I just never had the courage to do it, and then people over the internet were the ones that helped guide me and drag me along and push me sometimes when I needed it."

Dryad has also started her own blog, on which she processes her experience of discovering the Pagan elements of Mormonism, working through and reconciling the cultural elements of Mormonism that no longer worked for her, and embracing her budding feminism.⁵⁰⁶ Though at first she felt isolated in Arizona, she found a 12-member coven nearby whose members celebrate the full moons and sabbats. Out of that group is developing a small working coven of four women with whom she is about to commit to regular (i.e. weekly) magical studies and spell work.

Ultimately, Dryad has no desire to leave the LDS Church. "I believe in the gospel," she says. "Something deep inside me [she pauses] just *knows*; and I can't walk away." One tactic she uses is to separate the "truth of the gospel" from what she sees as the influence of a corrupt cultural patriarchy. "If so many policies and things in this church are related to the cultural practice of patriarchy," she says, "then I don't have to take that as revelation from God. It's just imperfect men doing the best they can but screwing up a lot because of their culture." She is also convinced that her "mission in life" is to "help other women who feel damaged by it." She says she needs to be available to women who "wake up" to help them deal with the "cognitive dissonance [that] is so devastating."

⁵⁰⁶ Dryad, "Spiral Grove," Blog, *Spiral Grove*, accessed March 16, 2012, <http://spiralgrove.blogspot.com/>.

As aspects of Dryad's dismay about and rejection of LDS cultural patriarchy, Dryad's main complaints include her lack of access to institutional female healing and the suppression of the Heavenly Mother. She is currently experimenting with praying exclusively to Heavenly Mother, despite the admonition of Gordon B. Hinckley, who in 1991, as noted earlier, announced to a general Relief Society audience that prayer directed at Heavenly Mother is inappropriate. When they discovered that knowledge, the coven then had to decide how to "get around that." Their answer was that Hinckley was not speaking as a prophet; in fact, he had not actually been the Church president when he made that statement. "He said praying to her was inappropriate because Jesus never said to in the New Testament! And when was *that* written?" Invoking cultural patriarchy again, Dryad challenges, "Let's go back to who wrote the New Testament and when it was written and how many times it was translated! Let's go ahead and go *there* for a while!"

Mormon Pagan Ritual

This attitude toward the validity of LDS Church leaders' pronouncements is important in other areas of Dryad's supplementation of Mormonism with Paganism. As noted earlier, ritual is the prayer language of contemporary Pagans, and temple ritual is essential to Later-day Saints; thus, Dryad and the other members of her coven feel that any authentic Mormon Pagan synthesis must include their performance of rituals based on that synthesis. From their perspective, what is particularly missing from Mormonism is ritual that celebrates women as unmistakably as priesthood ordination and ongoing application celebrates men. As Dryad puts it, "we all had a craving for more ritual in our lives." In part, that has to do with the absence they felt of transitions that celebrate the female life. "Men in the

church go through the different levels of the priesthood and then specific callings,” she says, which usually correspond to age markers in their lives. Those stages occur developmentally inside of the Young Men’s program of the Church. The LDS Church has struggled, however, with how to make the Young Women’s program relevant to girls. The celebration of boys is directly related to priesthood and not simply life passages or stages. This may be the reason for why the Church has simply not been either willing or able to develop significant ecclesiastical markers for celebrating women’s development in absence of priesthood ordination and so lacks any truly significant rituals for marking the stages of a woman’s life.

Dryad’s coven has taken on the challenge of developing such a comprehensive program for their own use and, perhaps, to ultimately share with others. This objective constitutes what Leslie A. Northup calls “creative, provocative, innovative ritualizing.”⁵⁰⁷ Because of the concerns mentioned earlier that Mormons have about ritual, they began with simple unambiguous practices like “looking at the moon and meditating,” and incorporating family “feasts” into full moon observances. Then they decided to look for “transitions” to ritualize. They found the Pagan Triple Goddess concept mentioned earlier extremely compelling. As a result, their earliest composition was a menstruation ritual based on a self-blessing from the book *Drawing Down the Moon*, by Margot Adler, which resembles the blessing and anointing that occurs in LDS temples.⁵⁰⁸ Also like the temple

⁵⁰⁷ Leslie A. Northup, *Ritualizing Women: Patterns of Spirituality*, (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1997), 20.

⁵⁰⁸ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today*, Revised & Expanded. (Penguin (Non-Classics), 1997), 468–470. The self-blessing from Adler’s book appears as a resource on the Mother Wheel site.

endowment, their menstruation ritual has women imagine themselves as Eve or as her daughters.

Even more interesting, however, is the fact that the ritual rewrites the LDS sacrament prayer to celebrate the blood that flows from women as a legacy of Eve's perceptive choices (D&C 20:79):⁵⁰⁹

O Goddess, the Eternal Mother,
I ask you as heiress of your daughter Eve,
To bless and sanctify this blood to my soul as I release it
That I may bleed in remembrance of the blood of thy daughter
And witness unto thee, O Goddess, the Eternal Mother,
That I am willing to take upon me the legacy of your daughter
And always remember her
And honor her choices, with which she has blessed me
That I may always have that spirit to be with me.
Amen.

Dryad says she feels less comfortable with that part of the ritual, not necessarily because she sees it as heretical but because she feels the prayer has a particular ritual purpose (blessing the sacrament) that is unrelated to the menstruation ritual. Nevertheless, this rescripting of the male-centric prayer is significant as an example of how these LDS women fuse Mormonism with Paganism by inscribing the Goddess onto already existing Mormon ritual conventions. Northup sees as one characteristic of women's ritualizing a non-reliance on traditional texts. However, these women's adaptation of LDS ritual texts suggests their desire to continue to claim the LDS tradition and LDS identity for themselves while manipulating LDS symbols, performing status reversals, and thereby performing change (ibid., 48).

⁵⁰⁹ Mormons believe that the LDS prayer for blessing bread and water for the sacrament was revealed to Joseph Smith. To read the text of the sacrament prayer, see <http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/20.77,79?lang=eng#76>.

After successfully writing the menstruation ritual, Dryad and her coven mates divided womanhood into eight phases that relate to the moon: (1) Prenatal state (associated with the dark or “new” moon); (2) child (waxing crescent); (3) maiden (first quarter); (4) priestess (waxing gibbous); (5) woman (full moon); (6) mother or creatrix (waning gibbous); (7) midwife (third quarter); and (8) wise woman or crone (waning crescent). What is especially significant about these categories for LDS women is their ability to include all women, even those who are not mothers. In the “woman” stage, “you find yourself as a woman. You find your purpose, your driving reason for existence—whether that be motherhood or not, it doesn’t matter because it’s about *you*.” Similarly, the motherhood stage “could be having biological children or creating something that requires sacrifice, blood sweat, and tears, that requires all the effort and energy that you have. So it makes [this life stage] accessible to women who are infertile or just single. It makes ‘motherhood’ accessible.” Women in Mormonism, she says, are already disadvantaged simply by being female. Making *mother* equivalent to *creatrix* includes those “women who are totally left out of the Church. Not only are they women, but they’re not married. Or they don’t have children. So they can’t join in 90% of the talks and lessons given because it’s about family, all the time! Which is fine, but it leaves out an awful lot of people!” For instance, one of the coven members is single. “She’s not an unmarried maiden,” Dryad insists; “she’s *thirty years old!* She’s a priestess at *least*, and she’s hitting womanhood! She was actually a temple worker for two years, so . . . *priestess!*”

Another advantage to this structure, Dryad says, is that “it’s not a straight line. It’s a circle. It’s a spiral, even.” It also helps her relate to past lives. “The whole [idea of] multiple mortal probations can come in there, because once you’re done

being the wise woman, you just take that knowledge somewhere deep in your psyche and become an unborn child again. Some people are unusually insightful or clairvoyant, and who's to say that isn't because they learned something about human behavior before this life that is helping them now see more than the normal person would?"

Dryad and the other women in the coven have also created a ritual around their wearing of the sacred LDS temple garment, reenchanting what many modern Mormons had wiped clean of power and rendered symbolic. These ritualized activities support Meredith B. McGuire's assertion that "if transformations of gender roles and identities are occurring, they are accomplished through embodied practices."⁵¹⁰ Reflecting on temple garments, Dryad says, "It's an everyday thing. It's just underwear, and it should be more special than that." The ritual is designed to be performed every day or only when one feels the need. The garment is marked with four symbols. The mark over the left breast, Dryad explains, represents Heavenly Mother because it looks like a "chalice mark," a Pagan symbol for the Goddess. The right breast mark represents Heavenly Father. The navel mark is representative of Christ, because it reminds them of balance. Finally, the knee mark represents the Holy Spirit, which they (and many other LDS feminists) speculate is female.⁵¹¹ The coven also associated each mark with a characteristic: Heavenly Mother with wisdom

⁵¹⁰ Meredith B McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2008), 182.

⁵¹¹ Dryad speculates that a female Holy Ghost could have been "the sister of Jesus with a totally different role in life; maybe she has already had a physical body [in a previous life] and she put it off [in this life] for this calling." In part, this theological speculation got Janice Allred excommunicated after the publication of her book, *God the Mother and Other Theological Essays*. Because the LDS Church defines the Godhead as arising out of priesthood, in the eyes of the institution the Holy Ghost could not be other than male.

or Sophia; Father in Heaven with honor; Christ with balance; and Spirit with Faith. The ritual consists of touching each mark and repeating those associations. “Honor in my Father; Wisdom in my Mother; balance in my Brother; Faith with my Sister.” She likes to use water from her altar when she performs the ritual. “I like there to be a little dampness; it reminds me what I’m wearing.” She even sees a connection between the garment ritual and the eight-stage ritual structure they are creating. “Garments? Priestess! It just really resonates with me! These garments are the clothing of the priestess; because once you go through the temple, you are anointed to become queens and priestesses!”

Finally, Dryad says that Mother Wheel is about “reaching out to other Mormon Pagans” who are also looking to integrate Pagan celebrations with being Mormon. “Every [Pagan] festival has the Mormon side of it,” she says; “And that was the purpose of the blog: to blend both sides.” Despite her obvious commitment to the Mormon tradition as well as the institutional LDS Church, she confesses that she is “not good at blending ‘Mormon’ into it.” In fact, she laughs as she insists, “I’m kind of mostly *Pagan* at the moment.”

The issue of Heavenly Mother is at the forefront of her discontent. Dryad’s sister “parroted one of the things you hear” about Heavenly Mother’s obscurity, saying, “Well, she has a different job now. Maybe she’s preparing spirits up there.” Dryad’s response was “The whole ‘don’t talk about Heavenly Mother because He’s protecting her’ [thing is] *such* crap!” So when you leave home and [you have] younger siblings, she doesn’t want to hear from you anymore? Suddenly you only can talk to your dad? It doesn’t make sense!” She says she used to say the same kinds of things when people asked about the “Mormon Goddess.” She says she was “trying to

sweep it under the carpet” because she was “kind of embarrassed about it.” She didn’t want to “turn people off from the gospel because we had this weird belief in a Goddess.” Today Dryad has complete contempt for these excuses. “Oh, yeah, we just don’t talk about her because we like to be respectful! Blah, blah, blah! That’s *crap!* She’s a *Goddess!* She can take some shit! *She’s a Goddess!*”

Like most of the other women in this study, Dryad is much happier now because her spiritual experimentation has resulted in new interpretations of the atonement and what it means to seek perfection. Praying to Heavenly Mother “specifically to feel loved and accepted” eliminated the fear she talked about when we first began our conversations. As she explained to another coven mate, “You don’t have to be afraid of messing up, because They get you. They understand everything about you that makes you *you*, and makes you do what you do—they get that completely. That’s why they’re Gods.” She realizes that her “fear of messing up” or doing something outside the boundaries” has faded away.

It’s not about disappointing my [Heavenly] Parents. It’s not about me being worthless, and that I have to climb back up to the tower of virtue and purity somehow to be acceptable again—because I’m acceptable *no matter what*. I have to keep progressing and keep going through this work because that’s what’s going to bring me joy. That’s why I like the scripture, “Adam fell that men might be, and men are that they might have joy.” Well, how about Eve ate the fruit so woman might be, and woman is that she might have joy?

For Dryad, repentance has to do with raising one’s inner vibration through developing perfect love. “Hurting people is going to slow your progression significantly,” so “you don’t hurt people anymore.” As she was relating these ideas, she realized her fear was gone. “I just suddenly felt like that was a huge sign to me that I was loved and accepted,” she said. “They took my fear away. I had been begging and begging and begging for something, anything. I worried that someone

at church might say that I had lost the Spirit and wasn't paying attention. Because if I have the Spirit then, of course, I should be afraid of things. There are still things that make me kind of uncomfortable. But I'm not afraid of it. I'm not having anxiety attacks anymore about trying new things in my spiritual path. No more fear.

In her "Blessed Yule" blog post, Dryad summed up her year:

I've made local connections with wonderful people in this desert land that I never thought I could love. I have embraced my own power, and I have largely cast off the fear of my blended path. I am making it work, and I am feeling guidance in unexpected places that lead me nearer to Christ. An empty spot in me has started to fill with warm and wonderful things.

My new perspectives on the gospel have led me through some doubt-ridden and twisty paths, but I am finally starting to heal my testimony, to grow a fantastic new one that has room for all the joy and none of the guilt. I am eager to serve my brothers and sisters, and I am finding the patience to deal with flaws I find in the structure of the church. My perspective on repentance has changed from one of fear of disappointing my Parents to one of pragmatic progression. I know my Parents love me and accept me the way I am, and they already know my every weakness. If I walk too close to the edge and fall, They will catch me and guide me to a better way as They look on in love and encouragement. My search for passion and authenticity is no longer a forbidden road that causes anxiety.

As the moon wanes into the end of the year, I will be purifying my heart, and inviting Christ to reside there more permanently as I symbolically cleanse the anger and resentment from the past year from my soul. The new moon on Christmas Eve will be a time of new beginning, of self-love, of power, and courage.

Elena

Elena, who contacted me in 2008, through a MySpace profile I created to advertise my project, has gone through a similar process in her integration of Mormonism and Paganism. Born in 1975, in Salt Lake City, she is now a thirty-six years old mother of three, who lives in a conservative town in northern California. Just as Dryad reports that her background evoked in her ultraconservative attitudes, Elena reports that the legacy of her father's "interesting religious past" was resolute

religious tolerance.⁵¹² Like Dryad, and Darlene from Chapter 2, Elena’s husband is a convert to the LDS Church, and they have been sealed in the LDS temple. She says he “is amazingly accepting of my current quest” and attributes that in part to the fact that his mother has a strong belief in God, which she supplements with “Native American traditions and astrology—Christianity layered with other philosophies.” Elena and her husband were participating in Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), a “medievalist society.” SCA attracts many Pagans who are drawn by its reconstruction of the past (what James R. Lewis calls “‘golden-age’ type pastimes”). Similarly, for those with an interest in such hobbies, SCA becomes the gateway to Paganism.⁵¹³

This was certainly the case for Elena. In 2006, she attended a Samhain ritual with an SCA friend. She says, “I kept waiting for that sick feeling that said I shouldn’t be there, but it never came.” In addition, her chosen career (massage therapy) also provided a bridge to alternative spiritual forms. “I was a massage therapist before I became a mom,” she says. “I loved it! Working with people’s energy I came to [realize] that there were things I couldn’t see. . . . When I worked on some people I felt I could run a marathon; with some people it felt like I’d *run* a

⁵¹² According to Elena, her father was born Irish Catholic, but he left the Church when his brother was excommunicated after punching a nun and breaking her jaw. He became Presbyterian, but in college he became Shinto Buddhist and then Mormon, when he met her mother. She says growing up she had friends who were Lutheran, Baptist, Jewish, etc. “They were really ok with me trying things out. Recently I told them I was participating in my friend’s handfasting. As long as it’s an exploration mission they’re all right with that.”

⁵¹³ James R. Lewis, who writes on new religious movements, characterizes SCA as working “on a romanticized version of the historical past.” Lewis, *Magical Religion and Modern Witchcraft*, 89, 5n. See also Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America* (Penguin, 2006), 405. Adler mentions SCA in the context of Paganism and SCA as “action-oriented” movements.

marathon. . . . Massage therapy was the door, the tiny crack I crawled through first. There's something out there. I want the experience everyone around me is having."

Elena was seeking the experience of healing for a wound she has been trying to soothe through her experiments with Paganism: her incomplete relationship with her mortal mother and the absence of her Heavenly Mother. "My mom wasn't a nurturing, loving person," she explains. "She was competent. Nobody died. She made sure we had food and stuff, but we didn't really connect." Elena reports always being made to feel she was "the odd one" in her family. "I was always the outsider: more emotional, more intuitive, always overreacting." Seeing one of her friends in an intimate moment with her daughter opened Elena's eyes "to what a familial relationship should be. Made me realize I really needed that, I really *wanted* that. She realized, "I can't make my mom be the mom I want, so I need Heavenly Mother. I need her to be a part of my life, and I'm not going to wait around for the church to do something about it."

Like many, perhaps most, LDS girls, Elena had only always wanted to be a mother. Yet, she experienced fertility problems that surpassed her ability to reconcile her strong biological urge to have children and the LDS Church's almost exclusive preoccupation with and promotion of women's role as mothers. She describes her difficulty carrying a fetus to term and its impact on her spiritual life:

Before having my son, God and I kind of had a falling out. I always wanted to be a mom. [My friends] had a joke that they had a biological clock, and I had a biological air raid siren! All I ever wanted was to be a mommy. I wanted children; I wanted a family, beyond anything. All I ever wanted to be was all under[neath] the consideration of how I would be there for and raise my family. And so after being married 6 months we had our first miscarriage.

After numerous pregnancies, none of which exceeded twelve weeks, she and her husband began fertility treatments. “It was an emotional horrifying nightmare that had me contemplate suicide at certain points,” she admits. “I was in therapy for a year, and on medication, so I was pretty bashed and battered.” Most upsetting was “watching people I knew who didn’t really want to have kids, shouldn’t have kids, *have kids.*” At one point, thirteen women in her ward were pregnant or were holding babies. She stopped going to church and stopped praying.

[I told God] “I’ve done everything you’ve ever asked me to do. I’m on the enrichment committee, I’m going to the temple, I’m doing service, I’m a visiting teacher, and you’re giving babies to these people I know are never going to [care for] them. I was so upset, so hurt. It was torturous for me to be at church most of the time. I’d just sit there and watch these women’s bellies get bigger or holding their babies and it was what I couldn’t have. So I got mad. [She laughs] So we stopped talking for a while.

When she was finally able to carry a pregnancy to term and her son was born, Elena’s attention was drawn to the Heavenly Mother in Mormonism because of how precious her relationship was to her child and because of unresolved issues with her mother. Comparing Heavenly Mother to herself as a mother, she thinks it “weird” to think that her son would ever grow up and leave home for college or some other endeavor and only call home to talk to her husband. Instead, she says, he would be asking, “Where’s Mom?”

I think we’re one of the few Christian faiths that even *acknowledge* the Divine Female; but she’s never mentioned, she’s never acknowledged. And I remember hearing [that] Heavenly Father ‘can’t stand to hear people talk bad about his wife’. He wants to keep her safe. I think for a lot of my life I could buy that, but I’m done buying it now. I just want to stand up in church and yell, “What about *Mom*???”

In addition to her yearning for Heavenly Mother, she has been working out her relationship to the patriarchal and (in her experience) perfection-focused LDS

Church. “In church, every time you turn around somebody’s telling you what’s wrong with you, calling you to repentance. . . . I just wanted God to love me because of me.” Speaking of Heavenly Mother, Elena says, “I think she’d been calling me for a long time and I’ve just now decided to answer her. I have felt so alone in these yearnings for so long and fought them for longer.” Repeating Dryad’s concern, Elena believes it is time to claim her own identity as a divine child but finds it difficult because of an absence of a role model. She does not begrudge LDS men the plethora of guidance for what will be their “job role as a divine male.” From her perspective, she simply yearns for the same access to information. “As women,” she says, “we have *no* idea what it is that we’re going to be asked to do, what our role is, or what that means for us in the eternities. I’ve been missing Her so much in my life and needing that balance.” Moreover, despite her belief that the Church will someday be forced to restore Heavenly Mother to her rightful place in the Godhead, she is not willing to wait. Comparing that restoration to other controversial Church decisions, such as the 1978 revelation that extended the priesthood to all worthy males, she says, “I figure it took a long time for the Church to let African American men hold the priesthood and for them to figure out the whole polygamy thing. I’ll let them catch up to me. I’m not going to wait for them to figure this one out. I’m not going to sit around waiting for Her; I’m going to go find Her, and they can catch up with *me!*”

Elena’s first intentional movement toward a personal Pagan identity was her involvement in an eclectic “coven” with two other women: “a shamanistic Wiccan, a Buddhist woman with Wiccan tendencies, and . . . a Mormon with Wiccan tendencies.” Each member “subscribes to” her own Gods and Goddesses. For

Elena, that meant “Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother” In addition, she says she acknowledges Jesus in her personal prayers. In this group Elena feels loved and supported: “It’s amazing to find others with which I can explore this side of my life. It’s an *amazing thing!*” At that point, however, she was not invoking the Heavenly Mother or otherwise combining Mormonism with her Pagan activities. For several months they had been spending time with each other “bonding” and discussing Wiccan spirituality, when Elena discovered the *Wicked Sister in Zion* blog written by a woman in Arizona.⁵¹⁴ It was the first time she had seen an LDS woman blending Mormonism and Paganism. Even more significant was the fact that the blog’s author was a new convert and had previously identified as Pagan. “That just kind of kicked the door open, where I’d only been peeking,” she says. Finding “that there were others like me—this made me feel a little more brave.”

This realization so empowered her that she wrote her first ritual for her coven, a four-stage “cleansing ritual with sage and water and fresh floral wreaths,” which Elena had made from her garden—a bonding ceremony “to let them know how much I cared for them, to “celebrate who we really are”:

So much in this world tears at us, especially our Self. I wanted to give us a chance to see each other through each other’s eyes rather than through our own. Like when you look at yourself all you see in your imperfections, the scars, whatever. But when our friends see us, they see us as these beautiful, amazing people. So I just wanted something that would help us celebrate our strengths instead of focusing so much on our weaknesses. So it started with a poem that I wrote and then it grew into this thing where we really claimed each other as sisters.

⁵¹⁴ The “Wicked Sister in Zion” blog no longer exists. I have been unable to discover how this woman, a new Pagan convert to Mormonism in 2008, has chosen to define herself in 2011. When doing this research I saved copies of her pages and so have an archive of this now-deleted account. She and other women like her used the blog to work out the connections she saw between Paganism and Mormonism and most often legitimized her earth-based choices through quoting Mormon scriptures and LDS general authorities.

Sitting around after the ceremony eating and talking, they determined to do ritual more often. “That night is what kicked everything into high gear,” Elena says, “because the next week we did a full moon ritual together and *that* was wonderful.” They have been “getting books, reading, doing tons of research on the internet, and talking.” Like Dryad, even though these women are geographically close and they see each other often, they are always texting each other, sending emails of things we find.” Of the ritual logistics, she says, “Every month somebody else does the ritual. We take turns holding it and providing snacks. We have a meal together.” The night before our conversation they had worked with runes.⁵¹⁵ Their next goal was to further illustrate their bond through monthly “tattoos.” (“Pagans love tattoos!”) They have chosen a symbol for themselves, which they will apply on each other with henna, with the idea of adding to it monthly to represent “things we think we need to work on or want in our lives for the next month—adding it to the main symbol that represents the three of us.”

When we first spoke in May of 2008, Elena reported that doing Pagan ritual made her nervous. Her very first private ritual had been to consecrate the Book of Shadows for the group, which she created as a meditation and a prayer. However, they called it “a book of illuminations” because they “didn’t like the implication of darkness.” She covered her bed with a white blanket, sprinkled it with flower petals from her garden, lit incense, and sat and prayed, talking both “to Him” and “to

⁵¹⁵ Runes are very popular among New Agers and Pagans, apparently especially those who are interested in Norse mythology. According to Ralph Warren Victor Elliott, among North Germanic peoples, runes historically “served for the casting of lots, divination, and other rites.” Runes were used to “invoke higher powers to affect and influence the lives of men.” See Ralph Warren Victor Elliott, *Runes: An Introduction* (Manchester University Press ND, 1980), 2.

Her.” She then took the petals and put them in olive oil to create “blessing oil” for the book. When it came to actually performing the blessing, she felt anxious:

I thought, “I don’t know if I can do that!” But then I thought, “Wait a minute! We consecrate oil in my religion! I bless my food every stinking day! Why can’t I bless a book for a good purpose? We bless our car when we’re going on a car trip, we dedicate our homes! What’s the difference between that and what we’re doing?” And the little voice in my head says, “Nothing!” I have these momentary crises where there’s part of the old thinking in my brain pops up and goes “Ahhhggg!” I think I can’t, and then it’s like “Yes I can!” I don’t know where that voice comes from, but I’m glad [it’s there] because my husband says if you really believe something, you need to have it challenged or you’ll never know how strong it is.

That these sorts of ceremonies occur in Mormonism eased her way into performing them in Pagan contexts. She has since become very active in a Wiccan Meetup group and frequently officiates in public and private rituals. In 2010, she even performed the handfasting (Pagan wedding) of a close friend. When Elena does ritual, she sees herself as a Priestess of Heavenly Mother. However, she sees no conflict between the LDS priesthood and what she does. (“Do apples compare to oranges?”) Interestingly, she responds to this question by referring to balance and the ways in which she and her husband divide responsibilities in their home. “I do the laundry; I take care of the kids. I’m the boo-boo kisser. That’s where my natural gifts are. My husband is an electrician. He’s really gifted. He wouldn’t want to do my job, massage therapy, or be secretary of the PTA.” She says she does not think that her activities threaten either the LDS Church or men who hold the priesthood. She doesn’t find what they do threatening to her; instead, she sees it as complementary. “There’s balance in the universe. Even trees are male and female. It’s not a competition. It’s the yin and the yang. There has to be both. I do it differently, but I

wouldn't say that what I do is better or what they do is worse. I think it's pretty much the same because all the priesthood is, is the authority to act in His name.⁵¹⁶

Regardless, Elena is clearly aware that she is pushing the boundaries set by Church authorities when she includes Heavenly Mother in her prayers and ceremonies. She used to think that because she was doing these things she was no longer worthy to attend the temple. People with whom she was close exacerbated that feeling by asking, "Does your bishop know about this?" Then she took herself through the temple recommend questions and realized "I'm not breaking any rules!" Moreover, she says she "felt so ridiculous! She's my mother! I should be able to talk to my mom when I want to! If you have problems, don't know how to fix your car, that's when you go to your dad. But there are some things you're more comfortable talking to your mother about. There are some things you feel more comfortable talking to your father about. Why should that be any different? I should have *open* conversations."

Elena considers Heavenly Mother as the mother of her spirit and imagines her and Heavenly Father as having "kind faces." She acknowledges their divinity, but insists that "all of us have that same divinity in us." This line of thought appears designed to close the gap between Elena and the Divine by showing that she is one of them. Referring to LDS beliefs about the premortal Council in Heaven, Elena ticks off the main players: "Mom, Dad, Jesus," who she refers to as "the older

⁵¹⁶ However, in conversation with men in an LDS ward in Provo, Utah, Elena asserted that she considers the priesthood to be "a consolation prize." She says, "I am partner in creation with divine creation to create new life. We are connected to Heavenly Father in a way you will never fathom or understand. We are bonded to our children before they're ever born. The priesthood gives you a way to connect with Him and stewardship for your children and your responsibility, but for women it's innate. For you it's a consolation prize."

brother.” Speaking of Christ, she argues, “He wasn’t different from any of us He wasn’t more loved. He was special, but any one of us could have been [chosen] . . . he wasn’t any better than any of us.” She also invokes Christ’s humanity, expressing the widespread Mormon folk belief that he was married to Mary Magdalene. Similar to other women in this project, Elena has reinterpreted the role of Jesus in her life. “Christ is no longer my personal savior,” she says. “He’s not the road, the signposts on the side of the road rather than the road itself.”

Like many Pagans, Elena subscribes to a *bitheistic* position on Heavenly Mother’s ontology. She sees goddesses like “Hecate and Demeter and Diana and Persephone and Ceridwen” all as different names that describe the same person. “The name she has been called is different [but] they’re aspects of her.” When in a ceremony with her coven sisters someone prayed to the Goddess Kore, she invoked her as the blessed Eternal Mother. “That’s my reference point for her,” she says. “That’s how I see them: My eternal mother and eternal father. So when they say ‘the Lord and the Lady, that’s what I’m thinking of. Elena’s point of view also echoes the LDS and New Spirituality emphasis on light and energy. The soul, “the eternal part of you,” she says, may be *energy*. “If [Heavenly Mother] is a perfected human being, then she would be a combination of a perfected human body and *that energy*—having those two merged.”

Of human beings’ relationship to Heavenly Mother, Elena says, “We are bioelectric machines. We are energy. It’s hard to deny that there’s energy in human begins, and she’s the source of that. So she *is* energy, but she’s also a person. I’m energy, you’re energy, and we’re all humming pieces of matter. I’m energy; I’m also a person. Our lives may be smaller than hers, but it’s the same life.” By this Elena does

not mean to say that she believes she and Heavenly Mother are the same person.

Rather, she believes as she shares the same experience of the same kind of life.

In 2011, Elena reports that she is less “Mormon” today than she was in 2008, when we were first introduced, by which she means that she is less active in the LDS Church and no longer has concern about its authority over her spiritual life.

However, as a person she says she is happier now than she has ever been. “If this is what this is, then this is good,” she says. “I’m okay with this.” Contrary to what most Mormons believe about people who “stray” by becoming less active, Elena asserts that her marriage is stronger, and that this is the best year she can remember having with her children. Late in 2008, after her sister died, Elena and her husband adopted her niece. Her husband has a steady job, and when they needed to replace some major appliances, he was suddenly assigned the overtime he needed to pay for them all in cash, with some left over for savings. With irony, she says, “If this is the Lord cursing me for my lack of [obedience], then I’m all right with it.” Her parents, however, have not reacted positively to her declining activity; regardless, she still claims her right to choose based on her own spiritual witness:

My father sat in the living room and told me that my family and my children would never have people who would love them like people do in the church. And he was right. He was *absolutely right*. Because *my* children will have people who love them for *who* they are and *what* they are and not what they purport to believe; who will honor and cherish them and support them and love them unconditionally rather than as some ‘big brother’ organization who is watching to monitor their every movement and reporting back to parents or bishopric figures as they see fit.

Elena is one of the many LDS women looking outside Mormonism for what is missing through the correlation of Mormon doctrine, especially the Mother in Heaven. It has been a process of eliminating fear over transgressing prohibitions

about her activities. Once she began searching, the world of the Goddess opened up for her. At the same time, however, she still acknowledges her debt to Mormon doctrine and her experiences that led her to this point. Looking for “goddess music,” Elena speaks of coming across a YouTube video: “this beautiful music [sung] to the names of different goddesses.” She reports getting chills from head to toe.

Listening to this music was so beautiful; I remember getting feelings like that when I was in the temple and when I had these amazing spiritual experiences in the other side of my life to me that was like you now...this is where I'm supposed to be. This is finally a feeling of being at peace and feeling balanced and feeling whole—which is something I haven't felt in a long time. I don't know if I've ever felt as centered. It feels so weird and 'New Agey' to say that, but it's hard to describe it any other way.

Analysis

In this chapter I briefly introduced contemporary Paganism and explained its overlaps with Mormonism. I argued that these overlaps are the most visible options for Mormon Pagan blending, precisely because magic is already an integral part of the historical Mormonism and continues to be visible in temple worship and embedded in Mormon doctrine and theology. As John W. Morehead asserts in his paper about “eclectic Mormon women from 2006, Mormonism seems to some extent to be a special case when he argues that “the LDS worldview seems to provide a conceptual matrix in which the subculture of Eclectic Mormon Women might find a ‘natural,’ or more accurately, ‘magical’ fit.”⁵¹⁷

I have focused especially on the concept of a Heavenly Mother in the Mormon tradition and the institutional correlation program that has had the

⁵¹⁷ John W. Morehead, “Daughters of the Moon: Eclectic Mormon Women and Their Search for a Place in the Light of the Sun,” unpublished paper in my possession. Morehead's paper analyzes papers that have been published in *Sunstone* and other Mormon journals and magazines.

historical effect of almost erasing her from institutional LDS discourse. In part this eliding is due to her association with Pagan goddesses and LDS women who want to be ordained to the LDS priesthood. In the 1970s and '80s, Church leaders used the Heavenly Mother to define women's roles as "maternal," "modest," "queenly," "elegant," and "restrained."⁵¹⁸ The "maternal" metaphor clearly has power for the LDS women introduced here, even though for them it is not a metaphor but the truth about the nature of their female Deity as it relates to the nature of human women. Even though Dryad reports not wanting to have more than two children, the maternal image is meaningful to her. Similarly, though Elena could only have one biological child, she and Ayla embrace the heightened emphasis on the maternal role of women as it gets expressed in the feminist spirituality of Goddess worship. However, the maternal role is not all there is to human women and so this image is becoming less and less palatable, just as are the excuses for why Heavenly Mother is "hidden." Moreover, as an organization that has gender identity embedded in the eternal plan for humanity and yet claims to embrace all people, the LDS Church struggles to come to terms with how to deal with its gay, lesbian, and transgendered members. A Heavenly Mother who expressed those characteristics is unlikely to resonate with butch and other lesbian Mormon women who continue to claim Mormonism as their religion.

⁵¹⁸ In 1978, LDS Church president Spencer W. Kimball said, "When we sing that doctrinal hymn and anthem of affection, 'O My Father,' we get a sense of the ultimate in maternal modesty, of the restrained, queenly elegance of our Heavenly Mother, and knowing how profoundly our mortal mothers have shaped us here, do we suppose her influence on us as individuals to be less if we live so as to return there?" Spencer W. Kimball, "The True Way of Life and Salvation," *Ensign*, May 1987, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1978/05/the-true-way-of-life-and-salvation?lang=eng>.

One other major development in the LDS Church has enabled the expression and dissemination of hybrid Mormon Pagan and other blended identities: The Church's "I'm a Mormon!" public relations campaign. As has been reported in newspapers and magazines all over America, this most recent attempt to rehabilitate its identity as an authoritarian and misogynistic religious institution and its members as lock-step conservatives who look, talk, act, and think alike, was designed to highlight Mormon diversity. The Church solicited profiles from Latter-day Saints en masse, providing workshops during Sunday meetings and at other times to instruct members of all ages in the skills of social networking. Individuals were meant to introduce themselves and answer one or two questions about Mormonism, and (based on anecdotal evidence) their profiles were apparently vetted by individuals "called" by the Church to do this job. The Church then redesigned its Mormon.org website to prominently feature the most racially and culturally diverse profiles, including LDS women who ride motorcycles and work at demanding careers, as well as rock stars, homosexuals, and feminists who love Heavenly Mother.⁵¹⁹

This campaign clearly qualifies as a transmedia project, defined as "storytelling across multiple forms of media, with each element making distinctive contributions to a user's understanding of the story universe, including where user

⁵¹⁹ One example is this African American woman, Sharon, who likely could have fit into this project. Sharon, "Hi, I'm Sharon: I'm Committed to Lifelong Learning and Actualization. I'm a Mormon," *Mormon.org*, 2011, <http://mormon.org/me/7M2Z/>; Mamiko, "Hi I'm Mamiko. I Am a Harley Davidson Motorcycle Rider! And I'm a Mormon," *Mormon.org*, 2011, <http://mormon.org/me/36S8/>; Brandon Flowers, "Hi I'm Brandon: I'm a Mormon," *Mormon.org*, 2011, <http://mormon.org/me/5233/>; David, "Hi I'm David: I'm Gay. I'm a Mormon. I'm so Much More. I Believe in Christ!" *Mormon.org*, 2011, <http://mormon.org/me/1TJC/>; Tuulikki, "Hi I'm Tuulikki: I'm a Finnish Feminist Socialist Environmentalist Vegetarian Philosopher and Mother. I'm a Mormon," *Mormon.org*, 2011, <http://mormon.org/me/46QT/>; Tom, "Hi, I'm Tom: I'm a Spouse, a Father, a Feminist, a Computer Programmer, an Amateur Scholar of Ancient Greek, and I'm a Mormon," *Mormon.org*, 2011, <http://mormon.org/me/1DX3/>.

actions affect the experience of content across multiple platforms.”⁵²⁰ Transmedia is a barely emerging trope for exploring religion, and the “I’m a Mormon” campaign has already been simply analyzed in that context.⁵²¹ This kind of analysis can help us make sense of what happens when the LDS Church loses control of its message—“I’m a Mormon”—upon opening that definition up to individuals who define themselves by creating their own digital profiles.

Jenne, a frequent participant on feminist Mormon blogs and a member of Mother Wheel, designed her profile around the question of what Mormons believe about the nature of God. Her profile begins, “Hi, I’m Jenne. I’m a women’s rights activist, a feminist, a stay-at-home mother and a student of midwifery. I’m a Mormon.” Jenne explains that she is a convert to the LDS Church. She was raised in Unitarian Universalism, and she took seriously its teaching about the personal responsibility of each person to “search for truth and meaning.” Thus, she was open to Mormonism when she encountered it when she was mourning her father’s sudden death. Even though Jenne’s answers to the questions “What do Mormons believe about the nature of God?” and “Why don’t women hold the priesthood in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?” are subsumed under the hyperlink inviting readers to “show more of my answers,” her attitudes about Heavenly Mother and the all-male priesthood are clear.

⁵²⁰ “All Media: What Do We Mean By . . .?” accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding/allmedia/definitions.aspx>.

⁵²¹ Rachel Wagner et al., “Finding Meaning in the Space Between: Religion and Transmedia, an Interactive Panel” (Religion and Popular Culture session presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA, November 19, 2011), http://www.aarweb.org/Meetings/Annual_Meeting/Current_Meeting/Program_Book/default.asp?ANum=A19-320&DayTime=&Keyword=&Submit=Submit.

Most Mormons first learn about Heavenly Mother in one of the LDS hymns which reads, “In the heav’ns are parents single? No, the thought makes reason stare! Truth is reason, truth eternal, tells me I’ve a mother there.” This concept made so much sense to me, and, I expect, to *others who are coming from a pagan, earth-based religious background or who are familiar with the history of goddess worship throughout the centuries of the world*. It’s wonderful to me that neither gender is pushed aside for the other, but male and female reign together as divine beings. In knowing about the existence of a Heavenly Mother and a Heavenly Father, I have a better understanding of who I am as a daughter of God.

Though not much is taught about Heavenly Mother, I envision a womanly goddess who is capable, strong, intelligent and all-knowing, creative, hardworking and infinitely loving: the perfect woman and mother and equal to power and ability to God the Father. The vision I have of Heavenly Father is gentle, loving, compassionate, all-knowing, patient and sensitive: the perfect man and father. In both, I find the parents I need to feel loved, comforted, guided and supported. I am able to learn how to be a better parent and partner to my husband because of the example I envision my heavenly parents set for me.⁵²²

About the priesthood, Jenne is even more frank:

One of the reasons why women do not hold the priesthood in the Mormon Church is because, as President Hinckley said in an interview with an Australian reporter is that “there is no agitation for that.” He seems to imply that if the members of the church were interested in women being ordained to the priesthood that a number of them ought to approach the leaders of the church expressing their interest. One faithful Mormon created a website where Mormons and non-Mormons can express their interest in women of the Mormon Church receiving the priesthood. The URL for that site is www.agitatingfaithfully.org. If the leaders take the communication seriously, they have the opportunity to show the world that the Mormon Church continues to receive revelation and that the church can change its practices as it better learns the mind and will of God.

Jenni, another member of the Mother Wheel blog writes about integrating the fertility-related Pagan festivals and the Hieros Gamos, “Sacred Marriage,” or “The

⁵²² “Hi, I’m Jenne: I’m a Women’s Rights Activist, a Feminist, a Stay at Home Mother and Student of Midwifery. I’m a Mormon,” *Mormon.org*, 2011, <http://mormon.org/me/1Q8H/>.

Great Rite,” into her relationship with her husband as a temple-married Mormon.⁵²³

Underneath a picture of the two of them at the temple on their wedding day, Jenni writes about sex as a sacred ritual:

Another translation of hieros gamos is "temple marriage." That certainly caught my eye from an LDS perspective since we teach that a temple marriage (or temple sealing) is the only kind that will last past death and for all eternity. Indeed, this hieros gamos is supremely important and sacred.

Take that in conjunction with the belief that we all have the potential to become gods/goddesses (some say we have a "godseed" in us), then when we practice hieros gamos we are indeed participating in the joining of deities.

In 2006, Claudia Bushman asserted that Jan Shipp's earlier characterization of late twentieth-century "enthusiasm for a Mother in Heaven among some Mormon women as a thwarted effort to develop a feminist theology" is a past that their daughters are free of.⁵²⁴ In reality, this is not the case. Rather, a new wave of Mormon feminism is afoot, and it is a re-enchanted one in that one of its aims appears to be the return of Heavenly Mother and a more magical worldview to LDS culture. Blogs like Daughters of Mormonism, Mormon Matters,⁵²⁵ Empowering LDS Women, Zelophehad's Daughters; and on forums like New Order Mormon; and publications like Sunstone, BYU Studies, and the Exponent, Heavenly Mother is being debated, redefined, and claimed outside of the authority structure of the institution. At the same time, the LDS Church enables this project by refusing to

⁵²³ Jenni, "Mother Wheel: LDS Families Celebrating the Seasons: Some Thoughts on the Three Fertility Festivals," *Mother Wheel*, May 2, 2011, <http://motherwheel.blogspot.com/2011/05/some-thoughts-on-three-fertility.html>.

⁵²⁴ Claudia L. Bushman, *Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-day Saints in Modern America* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 185.

⁵²⁵ Wotherspoon Dan, *Mormon Matters: Heavenly Mother in Today's Mormonism*, Audio mp3, accessed March 16, 2012, <http://mormonmatters.org/2011/05/17/32-heavenly-mother-in-todays-mormonism/>.

incorporate her into its structure of authority. It may appear insignificant that a handful of blogs are discussing Heavenly Mother and blended Mormon Pagan identities. If it were a handful of people sitting in a living room, this might be the case. However, fifteen blogs associated with large social networking sites have a far reaching effect on LDS women who are no longer afraid to define themselves on their own terms.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION: RE-ENCHANTMENT AS LDS REFORMATION?

Project Review

This dissertation has explored the intersections and overlaps of Mormonism and the New Spirituality, focusing specifically on congruence in their ways of knowing, their commitments to and attitudes about wholeness and wellbeing, and Mormon parallels to Pagan earth-based beliefs and practices. Though at first glance these relationships may be obscured by fifty years of LDS Church correlation, New Spirituality analogies are embedded in Mormon doctrine and have been ongoingly negotiated both at the institutional and individual grassroots levels. I have not only shown that there is resonance between the two. I have also shown some of the ways in which the contemporary LDS women highlighted here actually adapt and integrate elements from the New Spirituality with Mormon ideas about the nature of reality into hybrid spiritualities, and how they negotiate their blended religious identities both in relation to the current New Spirituality milieu and the highly centralized, hierarchical, and patriarchal Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

My original research goal was to discover why LDS women like those I interviewed have been seeking outside of Mormonism in the New Spirituality for spiritual resources. What I found is that, rather than embracing something completely different, their seeking involved going to the New Spirituality to accomplish a variety of Mormon-related goals. I have shown that their spiritual hybridity is a product of combining (“local”) LDS cultural forms from the Mormon religious tradition with other congruent forms in the (“global”) New Spirituality to

create individual blended identities.⁵²⁶ They seek answers to questions such as (a) how to become gods, (b) solutions to problems such as how to heal from physical illness and the effects of childhood violence, (c) gender subordination, and (d) how to relate to a male God when the female one is available but has been designated by the LDS Church as being unavailable for personal association. As the women's identities ongoingly evolve through their encounter with and embrace of what Mormons call "further light and knowledge" on these subjects, they move freely along a spectrum conforming more or less to LDS ideals. Because of the congruence between Mormonism and the New Spirituality, I have shown that their hybridity is not something wholly new but is still recognizably "Mormon," regardless of their place on that continuum.

Based on my research and individual interviews with the women, this project contributes to our understanding of contemporary Mormonism in several ways. Specifically, I have shown that their spiritual seeking begins with the epistemological commitments shared by Mormonism and the New Spirituality: first, a mutual commitment to knowing the truth, and, second, the mandate in Mormonism to seek out truth in the pursuit of eternal progression toward exaltation and, in the New Spirituality, in an ongoing holistic process toward perfecting the Self. These women's lived experience has also allowed me to show the impact the Correlation Program of the LDS Church has had on how the women enact that commitment and mandate. Scholars have long noted the consequences of Church correlation—from standardizing, simplifying, and routinizing its curricula to its ostensibly unintended

⁵²⁶ Keri E. Iyall Smith and Patricia Leavy, eds., *Hybrid Identities: Theoretical and Empirical Examinations*, vol. 12, Studies in Critical Social Sciences (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 3–5.

destruction of women's autonomy through unifying all church organizations and programs under the administrative and authoritative umbrella of "the priesthood." However, through these narratives I have actually shown the impact of the effects of the Correlation Program on living LDS women. Church Correlation has excised communal discussions of the deeper Mormon doctrines from Gospel Doctrine and Relief Society classes. As a result, these women not only feel spiritually starved, they are also spiritually bored. I recently overheard one LDS women not involved in this study admit that she was running as fast as she could from what she called a "stagnant, correlated Mormonism."

In March 2008, in response to what I was learning about the LDS women in my study and elsewhere, I participated in a panel discussion with historian Richard Bushman and others on the legacy of LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley, who had recently died.⁵²⁷ At the time, Bushman was the Howard W. Hunter Visiting Professor of Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate University. During the question and answer section, he responded to my observations about the decline of the most compelling and expansive Mormon doctrines that occurred under Hinckley's leadership. Hinckley, who by training was a publicist and until his call into the Church hierarchy had always worked in LDS Church public relations, determined that church members and media should focus on Mormons' commonalities with others rather than their doctrinal and social differences. In that conversation, Bushman admitted that as scholars like me insist on raising these deemphasized

⁵²⁷ Richard L. Bushman et al., "The Legacy of President Gordon B. Hinckley" (presented at the Sunstone West Symposium, Claremont Graduate Universities, 2008), http://www.sunstonemagazine.com/docs/sw08_final_web.pdf.

doctrinal topics to the level of public discourse, we will be the main vehicle for their survival.

Thus, this project is significant because it participates in a Mormon Studies conversation with the explicit agenda in mind of subverting the elision of doctrinal options for Latter-day Saints so as to support their assertions of authentic Mormon identities that include those options.⁵²⁸ The stories recounted here detail the ways in which, by embracing the New Spirituality, these women have compensated for what is missing for them in modern correlated Mormonism and by doing so have evolved in directions shaped at least to some extent by the spiritual options they explore and then embrace. In addition, their various negotiations confirm that, if they wish to remain Church members, their search for light and knowledge may indeed be mediated by the institutional LDS Church since its expectations about obedience to prophets and apostles, and deference to its correlated curricula are central to LDS practice. However, the LDS women who create hybrid spiritual identities articulate, respond to, and deal differently with varying levels of dissonance between Joseph Smith's restoration and its modern incarnation of corporate authoritative checks and balances. I have shown that even when they consider the Church their spiritual standard, their ultimate locus of authority is the personal revelation valued so highly in the Mormon paradigm—by which they authorize their seeking. Notwithstanding the fact that Martha, in Chapter 4, still retains LDS Church authority as her epistemological guidepost, for instance, she still embodies a critique of the Church and subverts its hierarchy by recognizing what is missing and acting to fill that void.

⁵²⁸ If the LDS Church can claim a Christian identity in the face of detractors who insist it is *not* Christian, then LDS women who combine Mormonism with New Spirituality have the right to claim Mormon identity.

By illuminating issues related to the Correlation Program and its relationship to Mormons seeking for further light and knowledge, I have also shown what these women make explicit: As they create these blended identities for the purposes stated above, they must grapple with LDS attitudes and policies regarding gender and the relationship to power and authority of gender in the LDS Church. Whether integrating into their spiritual identities channeling and past life regression as forms of extra-Mormon revelation, energy work as an adjunct to or replacement of LDS priesthood blessings, or earth-based Pagan ideas and practices to re-enchant their religious lives, they are always (a) in tension with the nature of their relationship to the exclusively male LDS priesthood authority and its functions, and (b) forced to navigate the LDS Church's doctrine of both sex *and* gender as immutable and eternal.

Also with regard to issues of gender and power, I have shown that the Mormon concept of a Heavenly Mother is a central concern in gender negotiations. It is impossible to overstate the extent to which the issue of Heavenly Mother brings gender-related concerns into sharper focus. Church Correlation has divested the modern LDS version of Mormonism of its depth and magic, which, among other things, Heavenly Mother represents. Though the women in this study do not all approach the issue in the same way or come to the same conclusions about how to relate to her, Heavenly Mother ultimately is an overarching category that represents women's larger question of who they are and what their value is to God inside of a male-focused religion. Even if not all of these women are advocating women's priesthood ordination, pressuring church leaders to acknowledge Heavenly Mother

as essential to their eternal identity by elevating her in public discourse and doctrine still creates points of conflict.

Besides the questions that arise for the Church when the Heavenly Mother is articulated as a divine being complete with all of the attributes of a Goddess (e.g., with a female divinity at the heart of Mormonism, why women would not hold the priesthood?), the fact that many LDS women are sidestepping the issue of ordination and claiming the right to include her in their prayers and create rituals that elevate her without any reference to Church authority is truly transgressive in the LDS context. One example of how this is occurring now comes from Jena, a participant in the Mother Wheel community, who in 2011 soulfully confronted a visiting high level general authority of the LDS Church about Heavenly Mother. He had given his audience five minutes in which to think of “inspired questions” he could answer. Feeling compelled to “be the voice for thousands of women,” she reported being overcome by “the fire of the Spirit and the weight of a woman’s need.”

It enveloped me and seeped into me. It fused with my being for 30 electrifying seconds. I have felt such a sensation once before—this thick feeling of being engulfed in water but never drowning, only being pressed in upon by something omnipresent and holistic—as I entered a Celestial Room for the first time. I stood before him, wearing an unseen mantle lent to me by the spirit of every woman who ever lived, and choked out the words, “Please...I've talked to so many women about this, and we're very concerned. We want to know about our Mother. Please take that back to them. Let them know. Please, take it back to them.”⁵²⁹

Jena supports my argument that claiming Heavenly Mother as an actual divine being—apart from her role as an essentialist, invisible reminder of plural marriage (both historically and celestially)—has dramatically empowered and changed how

⁵²⁹ Jena Daughter of Eve, “Like Unto Eve: As a Woman on Fire,” *Like Unto Eve*, November 13, 2011, <http://likeuntoeve.blogspot.com/2011/11/as-woman-on-fire.html>.

these women see themselves and their mortal and eternal possibilities. For many of them this involves actively worshiping the Heavenly Mother while simultaneously and ongoingly exploring what it means to be a potential Goddess without a visible role model. Whether it is their goal or not—though for some it explicitly is—I have shown that their activities have the effect of reenchanting Mormonism where they stand.

However, this empowerment and enchantment has consequences, and I have shown the characteristics of the women's individual encounters with these doctrines and the controversies they provoke: how they develop various tactics for dealing with the impact of their seeking on church and family relationships as they determine the degree to which they will comply with LDS gender conventions regarding authority. Though some keep their beliefs, feelings, and activities to themselves, others maintain close relationships with their Church leaders because they report being invested in LDS Church authority. Moreover, while some of these women are more demure in describing their spiritual boredom and their certainty that their knowledge is authoritative, others are much less concerned about the implications of criticizing what they see as mistakes the Church is making. For example, Denise, in Chapter 3, calls for appointments with her local church leaders fairly frequently. She is certain that any action the Church might take against her (i.e., for apostasy) would not actually affect her eternal salvation. When she asserts to her stake president, "My testimony is bigger than yours," she makes it clear that she is the *knower*, the authority on her own spiritual witness: she does not need him to *know* for her or to mediate her relationship with God. Sandra and Linda, introduced in the same chapter, also meet regularly with Church leaders to discuss their concerns about

gender and authority, but they are less bold and more concerned with resolving any conflict that might arise.

Preventing deterioration in those institutional relationships is important to them because their goal is to remain members of the Church in good standing. Nonetheless, however they negotiate the issue of gender and prophetic authority, to some extent they all—either explicitly or implicitly—reinterpret or reject the Church’s exclusive authority to dictate truth. With regard to intimate relationships, I have shown that having supportive relationships makes a difference in how these women form blended identities. LDS husbands who are aware of the negative impact of LDS patriarchy on their wives and/or respect or even share their desire to seek a relationship with Heavenly Mother—or LDS husbands who are themselves disengaged or less invested in the corporate LDS system—increase the women’s sense of freedom to openly pursue hybrid spiritualities and be fully authentic and self-expressed.

Finally, I have illuminated how through their promotion of LDS ideals, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints participates in its members’ spiritual quests that may lead them away from correlated doctrine. When the LDS Church released this statement explaining “The Religious Experience of Mormonism” in June 2008, it outlined the importance of individual knowledge-based (and even *interpretive*) action:

Knowledge results from beliefs that are acted upon. Accordingly, Latter-day Saints test their beliefs in the crucible of experience. And experience confirms the truthfulness of those beliefs. LDS apostle Elder David A. Bednar described the interaction between faith and knowledge: “Assurance, action, and evidence influence each other in an ongoing process. This helix is like a coil, and as it spirals upward it expands and widens. These three elements of faith — assurance, action, and evidence — are not separate and

discrete; rather, they are interrelated and continuous and cycle upward. . . . As we again turn and face forward toward an uncertain future, assurance leads to action and produces evidence, which further increases assurance.” Thus, *knowing* informs and motivates *becoming*, and *becoming* requires *doing*.⁵³⁰

Indicating the centrality of personal experience in the lives of these women and the LDS Church, this statement is meant to reinforce the ideology that “*knowing*” the [LDS] Church is true “informs and motivates *becoming*” more faithful in following institutional mandates regarding lines of prophetic authority (in which “doing” equals “following the prophet”).

However, the statement can actually be invoked to explain and justify transgressing the LDS ideal. Following Laura Bush’s insights into women’s experience of autobiographical writing, extra-Mormon “doing” in the context of spiritual experimentation may occur to women (and/or their loved ones and ecclesiastical leaders) as transgressive acts, which Bush defines as “boundary crossings”—or even, perhaps, as sins.⁵³¹ We may similarly frame them as acts of dissent, for they ultimately involve a refusal to completely conform. This nuance can be understood by examining the relationship between sin and transgression in the Mormon tradition.

New Spirituality as Transgressive Dissent

The distinctions Mormonism draws between sin and transgression illuminates the concept of spiritual seeking as a transgressive crossing of boundaries.

⁵³⁰ “The Religious Experience of Mormonism,” *Newsroom.lds.org* (Salt Lake City, 2008), <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/the-religious-experience-of-mormonism>, italics in original.

⁵³¹ Bush characterizes the autobiographies she analyzes as “faithful” in that their authors remain connected in some way to their Mormon heritage as well as to the conventions of Mormon life writing. Laura Bush, *Faithful Transgressions In The American West: Six Twentieth-Century Mormon Women’s Autobiographical Acts* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2004), 16.

Though the two concepts are closely related, *transgression* in Mormonism is not the same thing as *sin*. One LDS general authority made this distinction in 1981: “Any violation of the law that is willful and knowing we shall call “sin.” But any violation that results either from ignorance or lack of accountability we shall call “transgression.”⁵³²

Most Mormons refer to the Genesis creation story to explain the difference. Mormonism interprets Adam and Eve’s transgression as a “fortunate fall” precisely because they chose to fulfill the *higher* commandment—to multiply and replenish the earth (i.e. to bring the human race into being, which was God’s overarching plan)—which they could not do without eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. According to the LDS Church, God placed them in a position where they would have to exercise agency and choose. “Faced with this dilemma,” the premier LDS Church magazine for adults instructs, “Adam and Eve chose death—both physical and spiritual—which opened the door for themselves and their posterity to gain knowledge and experience and to participate in the Father’s plan of happiness leading to eternal life.”⁵³³ Quoted on this topic in 2006, a more authoritative source is LDS President Joseph Fielding Smith (1876–1972), who insisted that what Adam and Eve did was not a sin: “This was a transgression of the law, but not a sin ... for it was something that Adam and Eve had to do!” (Ibid.) Like Eve, because of the Mormon doctrine of agency, seeking after further light and knowledge is a choice

⁵³² Gerald N. Lund, “Salvation: By Grace or by Works?,” *Ensign*, 1981, <http://lds.org/ensign/1981/04/salvation-by-grace-or-by-works?lang=eng>.

⁵³³ “The Fulness of the Gospel: The Fall of Adam and Eve,” *Ensign*, 2006, <http://lds.org/ensign/2006/06/the-fulness-of-the-gospel-the-fall-of-adam-and-eve?lang=eng>.

these women *could* refuse; however, I have shown that for the women introduced here seeking occurs as an eternal, Church-mandated project—even if it leads further away from Church mandated ideals about gender and “official” doctrine.

This is not to say that characterizing spiritual experimentation as transgressive means that these women are ignorant of what their acceptance of New Spirituality resources implies: that “inspired” speeches, male monopoly over healing authority, and minimalist doctrine are spiritually insufficient. However, they resist or reject the label of *apostate* precisely because they have “test[ed] their beliefs in the crucible of experience.”⁵³⁴ Neither do they apologize or feel guilty for supplementing, synthesizing, or replacing aspects of Mormonism with channeling and belief in past lives, energy healing, and earth-based practices. Like Bush’s authors, they expect to be challenged in some way by the institution or by other Mormons, including, possibly, their spouses, children, and friends. If their objective is to remain active in the Church and “temple worthy,” they subsequently develop tactics to establish their legitimacy as faithful Latter-day Saints. I have shown some of the ways in which they accomplish that goal.

According to Bush, the issue of authority is “paramount to Mormon women writers.”⁵³⁵ Bush’s “transgressive” LDS women wrote about their experiences of plural marriage (Mary Ann Hafen and Annie Clark Tanner), race (Wynetta Willis Martin), gender and sexuality (Juanita Brooks, Terry Tempest Williams, and Phyllis Barber), and other taboo subjects. Regardless of time period, to speak as women

⁵³⁴ “The Religious Experience of Mormonism.”

⁵³⁵ Bush, *Faithful Transgressions*, 11.

about subjects that draw a critical eye to their religion has always been a transgressive act. This is also true for women who practice channeling or consume messages channeled through non-Mormon sources, practice energy healing, and/or ritually worship the Goddess as Heavenly Mother. All of these activities can be seen to generate ritualized ways of being that legitimize their noncompliance with LDS Church policies and ideals.⁵³⁶

With regard to transgression, Michel Foucault argued that limits and their transgression dance together in constant movement and change each other at their points of intersection. “Transgression, then,” says Foucault, “is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust.”⁵³⁷ This insight can be applied to the dance between the LDS Church and women who transgress the Molly Mormon ideal it denies it has erected. The Church and the women in this study are changing each other as they navigate and renegotiate the boundaries of Church membership and identity. For instance, in September, 2011, Dryad authored a blog post titled “Die, Molly! Die!”

I am not a Molly Mormon. I do not sew; I love to cook, but it's organic, not bulk crap food from the food storage centers; I do not drink Tang; I go barefoot as much as possible; I have friends who identify as gay and lesbian; I believe in evolution sometimes; I am a feminist; I hug trees; I do “weird” Pagan rituals that involve lighting candles and thinking about (GASP) Goddess; I plan on working at least part time, and it might even be outside

⁵³⁶ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1992), 206.

⁵³⁷ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 35.

the home, and it won't necessarily be because I have to; I talk to my Heavenly Mother just as much as I talk to my Father; I question things, and I use my intellect on purpose; and now I have the cutest ever pierced nose.

Tonight I'll be burning Molly in effigy, and saying a ritual goodbye to: unnecessary guilt, self-loathing, perfectionism, judging people based on appearance and expecting them to conform when they join the church (Acts 15, anyone?), and the layers and layers of fear deeply instilled in my soul by well-meaning teachers and parents.

So yeah. Go ahead and die, Molly. Rest in peace.⁵³⁸

This message, which Dryad says she meant as “a sort of declaration—to myself, and to other church members,” represents just one moment, one movement in which the Church (if it is watching) is forced to face itself inside the (spiral) dance.

Like Eve: LDS Women Looking for Further Light and Knowledge

LDS women's interest in the New Spirituality most certainly derives from the extent to which these activities are more mainstream in American culture. At the same time, however, we can also see the turning of that interest outward from the LDS Church as a result of decline in real revelation in the institutional church. In 1987, Richard Crapo noted that prophetic revelation presented as such had dramatically declined since Joseph Smith's canonized foundational revelations. In fact, there has been general absence of doctrinal pronouncements apart from ongoing reassertions of Joseph Smith's restoration of original Christianity (including priesthood authority and hierarchy), his production of the Book of Mormon as an historical text, and the LDS Church as the repository of the fullness of

⁵³⁸ Dryad, “Spiral Grove: Die, Molly! Die!” Spiral Grove, September 13, 2011, <http://spiralgrove.blogspot.com/2011/09/die-molly-die.html>.

Christianity.⁵³⁹ Thus, we are left with the contradictions between the expansive worldview conveyed by Joseph Smith and a simplified, protestantized (read: sanitized) institutional LDS Church. Mormonism purports to contain and/or embrace all truth—defined as knowledge of things past, present, and future (D&C 93:24)—and adherents believe that through the LDS Church the faithful have access to that truth through the programs of its rationalized bureaucracy.

Significance

This project enhances our understanding of religion in America in a number of ways. First, it amends the available academic work on modern Mormonism and LDS women. The most recent trends in academic scholarship on Mormonism have been toward dense historical analyses of important figures in Mormon history⁵⁴⁰; constitutional and racial conflict⁵⁴¹; detailed explications of particular aspects of

⁵³⁹ For an analysis of revelation in late twentieth-century Mormonism, see Richley H. Crapo, “Grass-Roots Deviance from Official Doctrine: A Study of Latter-Day Saint (Mormon) Folk-Beliefs,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 465–485, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1387098>. The last revelation presented to the body of the Church and accepted by membership as binding was obtained in 1978, when the LDS priesthood was extended to men of African descent, and temples became accessible to men and women who fall into that category. See “Official Declaration 2,” in the Doctrine and Covenants, at <http://lds.org/scriptures/dc-testament/od/2?lang=eng>. A more recent document, titled “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” has developed the patina of canonization because of the extent to which the LDS Church has promoted it. However, when one of the most conservative and vocal Apostles, Boyd K. Packer, referred to it as “revelation” in LDS General Conference, October 2010, the Church edited his talk for the published version, replacing his term “revelation” with the less authoritative word “guide.” Boyd K. Packer, “Cleansing the Inner Vessel,” *Ensign*, 2010, <http://lds.org/ensign/2010/11/cleansing-the-inner-vessel?lang=eng>. See also The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Family Proclamation.”

⁵⁴⁰ Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁵⁴¹ Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America*, Studies in Legal History (Chapel Hill, NC; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith, eds., *Black and Mormon: Taking Stock of Mormon Progress on the Developing Role of Blacks* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

Mormon doctrine, history, missionary efforts, cultural conventions, and portrayals of Mormons and Mormonism in popular culture⁵⁴²; the history of international Mormon missionary efforts⁵⁴³; and general textbooks that attempt to capture and explain the general Latter-day Saint experience in America for students of religion and other interested observers.⁵⁴⁴ Surprisingly, only two major academic books on gender and the LDS Church have been published since 2006.⁵⁴⁵

Beyond the above contributions to the general study of religion in America, I have extended Quinn's important historical work on the magical worldview in Mormonism, in which he observed in 1987, that LDS interest in magic had died—at both the institutional and individual levels. However, Quinn's work was a historical project and not an investigation of modern Mormonism; twenty-first-century magic was not his topic. I have built on Quinn's essential contributions to what we know about Joseph Smith's commitment to magic and its subsequent decline while lengthening the view he provided about the state of magic in modern LDS culture. Beyond the Mormon context, however, as an extension of Quinn's work the stories

⁵⁴² Douglas J. Davies, *Joseph Smith, Jesus, and Satanic Opposition: Atonement, Evil and the Mormon Vision* (Surrey, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2010); Reid Neilson, *Exhibiting Mormonism: The Latter-day Saints and the 1893 Chicago World's Fair* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011); Terry L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007); Mark T. Decker and Michael Austin, eds., *Peculiar Portrayals: Mormons on the Page, Stage and Screen* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2010); and Janet Bennion, *Polygamy in Primetime: Media, Gender, and Politics in Mormon Fundamentalism* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis, 2012).

⁵⁴³Hokulani K. Aikau, *Chosen People, a Promised Land: Mormonism and Race in Hawai'i* (Minneapolis, MN: University Of Minnesota Press, 2012).

⁵⁴⁴ Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012); and Lee Trepanier and Lynita K. Newswander, *LDS in the USA: Mormonism and the Making of American Culture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

⁵⁴⁵ Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums.*; Susanna Morrill, *White Roses on the Floor of Heaven: Nature and Flower Imagery in Latter-Day Saints Women's Literature, 1880-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

related in this dissertation enhance our understanding of how religious change occurs in concert with larger cultural trends like the current fascination with magic in popular culture. Moreover, given the evidence that American religion and/or spirituality are being actively re-enchanted, this project participates in and extends our understanding of that process, especially as it involves women.⁵⁴⁶ As such, this study adds a new dimension to our discussion of what American religion really is: its diversity and fluidity—not only in regard to Mormonism but also in relation to American religious choices in general.

Second, this project disputes popular stereotypes of Mormonism and Latter-day Saints who, according to statistics quoted earlier, are more likely to be conservative Republicans and easily managed because of their indoctrination into a religious system that elevates obedience as its highest principle. The question of obedience has been especially relevant during this presidential election year when two Mormons, John Huntsman and Mitt Romney, were candidates for the U.S. presidency. As the apparent nominee and more devout Mormon, Romney has ongoingly faced questions about whether his first allegiance as president would be to his prophet or to his country. However, these stereotypes about obedient Mormons fail to account for the ways in which conservative Mormons actually enact their spirituality. Moreover, this dissertation also illuminates a spectrum of belief, practice,

⁵⁴⁶ Christopher Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West Volume 1: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2005). Partridge characterizes re-enchancement as occurring through simultaneous processes of “de-exotification” and contextualization that continually reshape the lived experience of religion and spirituality in the West (53). Occulture, Partridge’s term for this current spiritual milieu, “the spiritual bricoleur’s Internet” (85), is the larger shared “language” spoken by spiritual seekers in the West. It is “a reservoir of popular ideas, beliefs, practices, and symbols” (84) that get expressed and then consumed in the encounter of popular culture and the spiritual milieu.

and attitudes toward corporate authority and therefore extends our understanding of how an institutional church simultaneously attempts to prohibit but is also complicit in its member's potentially transgressive activities.

We can see the same “obedient Mormon” stereotype operating in assumptions many people have of LDS women: that LDS women who report believing strongly in the LDS Church are unlikely to believe in reincarnation or to call down the moon in a Pagan ritual because the LDS Church has defined reincarnation as a false teaching, and women's rituals challenge LDS Church power structures. However, I have illuminated these beliefs and practices, showing that one may be either more *or* less of a believing LDS woman while simultaneously asserting a strong Mormon identity. Thus, this dissertation is important to our understanding of women in patriarchal traditions because it shows (a) some of the strategies by which women claim the status of the believing—even orthodox—religionist while simultaneously transgressing some of their religion's gender ideals; (b) how they integrate sources from outside their traditions and actually alter their understanding of who they are; and c) how women negotiate their religiosity and mediate their personal relationships as well as their relationship to a hierarchical, centralized, and patriarchal religion.

Third, this dissertation extends Roger Finke and Rodney Stark's analysis of religious change as a process of secularization.⁵⁴⁷ Finke and Stark characterize *secularization* not as a one-way process of religious decline (or disenchantment) but as one aspect of a cyclical process of religious transformation. They see religious change

⁵⁴⁷ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, Revised ed. (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

on a continuum based on the “degree of tension between religious organizations and their sociocultural environments” (ibid. 43). Finke and Stark argue that new religions almost always begin as sects organized by those who are looking for a more immediate religious experience with promises of great rewards in the next life. For these deferred rewards, they are willing to pay high costs in this life—in the case of Mormonism, ten percent of their money and their time (ibid., 250), a sensible health code, and ostensible submission to centralized, hierarchical, and patriarchal authority. According to Finke and Stark, however, in order to increase their numbers a sect gradually makes doctrinal and cultural choices that lower the tension between the group and the wider society so as to minimize their deviance from the mainstream. The result is a “secularized” (i.e. “assimilated”) church. In the next stage of the cycle, dissatisfaction grows, and some members of the group ultimately leave the church in favor of creating a higher tension movement. The result, say Finke and Stark, is “an endless cycle of sect formation, transformation, schism, and rebirth.” In other words, “*Secularization is a self-limiting process that leads not to irreligion, but to revival*” (ibid., 43-46, italics in original).

This cycle is obvious in the nineteenth-century Mormon context, in which the LDS Church struggled with legitimacy and government persecution over the practice of plural marriage and political theocracy. We can see it operating in the more than two hundred groups who have claimed themselves heir to the legacy of Joseph Smith, and especially in the polygamist challenges to the LDS Church that claim Smith’s—and therefore God’s—authority. This process is exacerbated by the doctrinal variable of personal revelation, which increases the potential for an individual to form another breakaway group. The late nineteenth-century suspension

of plural marriage “secularized” the LDS Church by making it subject to the U.S. government and to a great extent secularized its doctrine by necessitating its redefinition of “celestial marriage.” As the Church assimilated and tension between it and the wider American culture declined, its numbers increased. Another major practical capitulation, the 1978 revelation extending the priesthood to all worthy males, opened African and South American countries more fully to proselytization. However, that growth combined with changing women’s roles in American society generated the impulse in Church leaders to simplify doctrine and more closely police the boundaries of faithful Mormon identity—what Mormon Stories founder John Dehlin called “the Boyd K. Packer siege mentality.”⁵⁴⁸ The women in this study are the revivalists in Finke and Stark’s theory. However, they do not have to leave the LDS Church to pursue a more authentic Mormonism. They merely have to incorporate the New Spirituality into their practice of Mormonism.

Finally, this dissertation is significant because it contributes detailed information on how both institutions and individuals use the new media to investigate, discriminate between, and then embrace what may be unfamiliar religious

⁵⁴⁸ John Dehlin, *Terry! Givens: An Approach to Thoughtful, Honest and Faithful Mormonism*, Mormon Stories Podcast, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://mormonstories.org/?p=2018>. The Mormon Stories website states: “Mormon Stories is an Internet blog and podcast (i.e. radio/tv show) originally created in 2005 by John Dehlin. Inspired by Terry Gross/Fresh Air and Charlie Rose, Mormon Stories seeks to interview interesting people about Mormon-related current events, issues, media and culture.” Subsequently, Dehlin “established the Open Stories Foundation to serve as an organizational base for the Mormon Stories podcast and its community of listeners.” The foundation has hosted regional conferences across the U.S. with the goal of providing “safe spaces where community members can express themselves authentically regardless of activity level in the Mormon Church or belief in any particular ideology.” “About Mormon Stories Podcast,” *Mormon Stories*, 2012, <http://mormonstories.org/about/>. As explained earlier, Boyd K. Packer, who is next in line to be president of the LDS Church, was reportedly behind the excommunications that sent discussions of Mother in Heaven, women’s ordination, and other speculative topics underground. The likelihood that Packer’s power has waned is evident in the fact that LDS women appear to no longer be afraid of him.

forms. I have shown how LDS women use the new media to create community. Especially in the case of Mormon Pagans, this embrace of new technology is significant given that contemporary Pagans are more likely to practice alone than in a group. Most attempts to create Pagan community through listservs and other online forums will likely fail.⁵⁴⁹ Mormon Pagan women's shared Mormon identity makes a difference in their long distance success. Not because Mormonism is superior but because their commitment to it creates an already existing context for community that is then employed to support their Pagan identities. Moreover, this study provides an example of how extensively employing new media has unintended consequences for institutions like the LDS Church, when their public relations efforts focus on publicizing their heterogeneity and hybridity.⁵⁵⁰ In the Mormon context, the LDS Church has virtually wholeheartedly embraced the new media by fitting it into the Plan of Salvation narrative, in which technological advances like the Internet and social networking are God's gifts given for the purpose of furthering the goals of his church. Seeing that the LDS Church embraces and then teaches its members of all ages to use social media through a correlated training program for the express purpose of rebranding its corporate image contributes to (a) academic discourse on the new media, (b) religious branding, (c) construction of religious identity, and has other potential for studies of popular culture.

⁵⁴⁹ Cowan, *Cyberhenge*, 199.

⁵⁵⁰ Manuel A. Vasquez and Marie F. Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 228, <http://site.ebrary.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/lib/asulib/docDetail.action?docID=10075356>.

Recommendations for Future Study

This dissertation has been a qualitative introduction to the topics discussed above, and therefore expansion of topics introduced in each chapter may provide opportunities for various research methodologies. Other imperatives exist for expanding academic studies of religion and Mormonism in America. First, our fields could benefit from an actual quantitative research analysis of Mormons who are adapting, integrating, or supplementing Mormonism with the New Spirituality and/or other religious forms. In January 2012, The Pew Forum released a general study on Mormons in America, which reveals important information about the extent to which religion matters to American Mormons.⁵⁵¹ The most startling result is the data about LDS engagement with Eastern religions. The study states, “As is the case with members of other religious groups in the U.S., significant minorities of Mormons express belief in certain tenets of Eastern religions” (ibid., 16). Specifically, the study shows that more than one-quarter of Mormons (twenty-seven percent) “say they believe in yoga as a spiritual practice,” which exceeds the national average among the general public (twenty-three percent) who affirm that belief. Furthermore, as noted earlier, one-in-ten Mormons (eleven percent) say they believe in reincarnation—which the Pew Forum explicitly defined as the belief “that people will be reborn in this world again and again” (ibid., 46). This is much lower than the twenty-four percent of non-Mormon Americans who say they believe in

⁵⁵¹ Gregory Smith, et al., *Mormons in America* (Washington, DC: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, January 12, 2012), http://www.pewforum.org/uploadedFiles/Topics/Religious_Affiliation/Christian/Mormon/Mormons%20in%20America.pdf. The study tells us that religion is very important to 82% of Mormons and that 77% of Mormons worship at least once weekly (36). We find that LDS women are especially committed: 87% of LDS women surveyed said that religion is important in their lives (35); and 73% of LDS women report high commitment to the LDS Church (37).

reincarnation, but is still significant given the LDS Church's attempt to strictly demarcate doctrine, in part through defining reincarnation as a heresy. Though the Pew survey confirms the importance of topic to this dissertation, more questions need to be asked about how Mormons engage feminist spirituality and other categories inside of the New Spirituality, such as whether or not they see the New Spirituality, New Age and Paganism as similar to Mormonism.⁵⁵²

Moreover, I recommend sustained attention on religious hybridity and its relation to religious dissent and disaffiliation. I have shown what this hybridity looks like and how it works among these particular LDS women, highlighting the congruencies and the impact of Church Correlation that enable that process in the their contexts.⁵⁵³ I have also suggested that what we see in our encounter with the women introduced here is their personal re-enchantment of Mormonism through their creation of individual hybrid spiritualities. Though my data set is obviously small and I can't say for sure, my sense is that the stories introduced here are a harbinger of a larger movement to re-enchant or even reform the Mormon tradition in America.

This phenomenon is certainly one aspect of a larger popular movement to embrace what Richard Bushman called a "big-tent" approach to or view of Mormonism. Despite the fact that many of those big tent Mormons who call themselves "New Order Mormons," "Open Mormons," "Reform Mormons," and

⁵⁵² Though Mormons were asked to rate how similar Mormonism is to other faiths, New Age, New Spirituality, Paganism, or any other "new" or non-Western religion were not included in the answer options.

⁵⁵³ This process is not exclusive to Mormonism; women in other American religions are just as obviously engaged in these same sorts of practices, drawing on their own religions' overlaps with the New Spirituality.

so on, do not care about re-enchantment, the fact remains that many do so precisely because part of that identity for them includes some version of a New Spirituality hybridity. Based on a perusal of these online forums and attendance at their gatherings, many of these women believe in reincarnation, do energy work, and pursue Heavenly Mother as a relational being and object of worship.⁵⁵⁴ In addition, however, this trend clearly encompasses more Mormons than are pursuing reenchantment of Mormon tradition. A quantitative study would help us delineate (a) to what extent a woman's age and related cultural trends influence entry into the New Spirituality, choice of ideas and practices they embrace, and their possible disaffiliation from Mormonism; (b) the extent to which these individuals and groups are part of a broader trend among Mormons at the popular level towards reenchantment; (c) whether those who fit my reenchantment thesis relate their activities to an actual reformation of the Mormon tradition; and (d) what are the other currents in LDS spiritual seeking—both in and outside the New Spirituality.

Other issues that could be addressed inside of a qualitative study include the question of which category (channeling, energy healing, or Paganism—or perhaps even other categories under the New Spirituality umbrella) is the least or most likely to lead to women no longer identifying as LDS or even Mormon. Though any of these women might disaffiliate, based on my observations I suspect that the Mormon Pagan women in Chapter 5 are most likely to leave the LDS Church or stop identifying as LDS (though they might still consider themselves “Mormon”)

⁵⁵⁴ Similarly, when I participate in panel discussions that highlight Mormon Psychics and Mormonism and New Age and the room fills with a predominantly female audience, my suggestions are supported by this anecdotal evidence.

than are those in the other chapters. I offer this preliminary suggestion because of the fact that worshipping the Heavenly Mother and developing spellwork and other women-based ritual practices around her worship are the most transgressive activities I have observed and have the most potential for negatively transforming how they relate to the LDS Church. All of these questions ultimately point to the need for a longitudinal study, which would follow a group of LDS women over time to actually observe these changes and their consequences to relationships and ways of being.

Finally, men with backgrounds in Mormonism also participate in the New Spirituality. They do energy work, participate in channeling groups, and identify as Pagans. They are also feminists. Their stories are an important aspect of the larger story I have introduced here, and so ethnographic research is needed to identify their beliefs and motivations for seeking as well as the extent to which they gravitate toward particular spiritual categories. Not only women are negatively impacted by rigid gender roles implemented or prescribed by the LDS Church. Ethnographic and quantitative research would reveal the extent to which embracing elements of the New Spirituality liberates men from oppressive patriarchal thinking and facilitates non-institutional practices that transform their personal, family, church, and social relationships. General authorities of the LDS Church begin as local lay leaders and then work their way up in the hierarchy. Though the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles is overwhelmingly white, North American, and Mormon-born, the Church's tone has already changed as a result of its election into the quorum of Dieter F. Uchtdorf, a German-born convert. As a non-American and a convert, he brings new insight to Church deliberations at the highest levels. As counselor in the First Presidency, he has even more influence than older and more conservative

apostles. A study about LDS men whose spiritual lives are supplemented by the New Spirituality would (a) illuminate the extent to which such supplementation alters leadership styles at the local levels as they implement Church policies as well as (b) their influence on the structure of the Church.

Summary: Re-enchantment as LDS Reformation?

In conclusion, this project has shown that Mormonism (stereotyped as monolithic and oppressive) is pliable in particular ways that enables LDS women to easily blend it with the New Spirituality. Unless they desire to, Mormons do not have to leave the LDS Church to become “New Age Mormon Pagans.” LDS scholar Terryl Givens’ considers what he calls the “unprecedented” LDS numerical loss as highly preventable.⁵⁵⁵ He calls for institutional reform—not only of the ways the LDS Church approaches its history but also a reversal of its retreat from its more distinctive doctrines.⁵⁵⁶ If we accept that our attention to lived religion consists of looking not only at religious institutions and elite leaders and teachings but also its members, we have to acknowledge that Mormonism intensifies that focus and

⁵⁵⁵ John Dehlin, *Terryl Givens: An Approach to Thoughtful, Honest and Faithful Mormonism*, mp3, Mormon Stories Podcast, MormonStories.org, September 28, 2011, episode 293, accessed January 9, 2012, <http://mormonstories.org/?p=2018>.

⁵⁵⁶ See Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Joseph Smith Papers: Home,” *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/>. This situation appears to be changing dramatically since the excommunications in September of 1993 and their aftereffects. A new era appears to be dawning for Church history as well as the LDS intellectual community. See also Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Don’t Sanitize History, Mormons Say,” *The Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, July 21, 2007), Digital archive edition, http://www.sltrib.com/ci_6429006. In 2007, the Church did a survey that revealed that “Mormons want their history “inspiring, but not sanitized.” After at least two decades of anxiety over its history, it is especially meaningful that the Church has organized the Joseph Smith Papers project at Brigham Young University. Similarly, the development of blogging and other web-based platforms for interactive intellectual collaboration has made it impossible for the Church to contain theological criticism. The centralized hierarchy appears to have grown used to disagreement when framed as faithful speculation—as long as bloggers situate themselves as believing and respectful.

impact because of its lay ministry, which does include women in leadership positions. When in their capacity as lay teachers for the LDS Church these women take their transgressive beliefs and activities to other LDS women, especially in the context of Relief Society lessons, they are to some extent individual embodiments of Terry Givens' call for reformation.

Based on my participation in various LDS communities and my academic research, it is clear that Mormons are discussing these issues. After my presentation on Mormon Pagans at the 2011 Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, for instance, the prominent LDS blogger Bored in Vernal questioned my assertion that these women's stories are valid expressions of modern Mormonism. In essence, she asked if I did not think they are just trying to "bring back some of the magical ideas from Joseph Smith's time." My answer, like Darlene's in Chapter 4, was, "Yes." Mormons who are interested in "the mysteries" are likely to maintain rhetorical conventions at church but will find other outlets for engaging in speculative theology: they do their own private research, which they may or may not share with others; participate in Internet listservs (e.g. lds_reiki, lds_reincarnation, and Mormon_mystic); and/or gather in small, like-minded local groups.

However, LDS Church leaders have cautioned against "seeking after the mysteries." One warning against this kind of seeking comes from Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who advises that while "[m]any important truths have yet to be revealed," church members should be cautious about seeking them out. "Preoccupation with the so-called 'mysteries' should be avoided,"

he says.⁵⁵⁷ Contradicting this basic Mormon impulse and seeking to have Latter-day Saints leave deep analysis to Church leaders, Nelson cautions believers to “Beware also of private interpretation. Look to the living prophets and official policies for interpretation” (ibid.). The problem this creates for church members is that the Church rarely declares official doctrine beyond the simple basics of Joseph’s vision and the Church’s prophetic authority. Combine this with the extent to which the Church has reduced Mormon doctrine to its lowest common denominator so it can be easily taught to new converts in developing countries, and one result is a sense of separation between LDS identities: one that gets enacted at church and the other that is reserved for specialized groups outside the Church. Nelson warned Mormons about cultivating this kind of alternative identity (ibid.). However, he cannot avoid simultaneously authorizing that very thing when he reminds listeners that “Inner peace comes only as we maintain the integrity of truth in all aspects of our lives” (ibid.). In confirmation, another lds.org newsroom statement asserts that “Latter-day Saints embrace the acquisition of knowledge as a spiritual mandate,” and that “all human striving blends seamlessly into eternity.”⁵⁵⁸ As a result of this most basic Mormon impulse, the women in this study seek out other venues for making meaning out of their eternal yearnings and revelatory experiences as they blend the New Spirituality with their Mormon heritage.

⁵⁵⁷ Russell M. Nelson, “Living by Scriptural Guidance,” *Ensign*, November 2000, lds.org/ensign/2000/11/living-by-scriptural-guidance.

⁵⁵⁸ “A Mormon Worldview,” *LDS Newsroom* (Salt Lake City, January 8, 2008), digital edition, <http://newsroom.lds.org/article/a-mormon-worldview>.

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APPENDIX A
IRB DOCUMENT



Research Compliance Office
Office for Research & Sponsored Projects Administration
P.O. Box 873503
Tempe, AZ 85287-3503

Phone
(480) 965-6788
Facsimile
(480) 965-7772

To: Linell Cady

From: Mark Roosa, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Date: 06/07/2007

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 06/07/2007

IRB Protocol #: 0705001902

Study Title: Popular Spiritual Practices of Women with LDS (Mormon) Backgrounds

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.