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SECOND ANOINTING: THE TEMPLE RITUAL THAT ISN'T DISCUSSED

One of the most important tenets of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the necessity of temple ordinances. LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie explained:

From the days of Adam to the present, whenever the Lord has had a people on earth, temples and temple ordinances have been a crowning feature of their worship. . . . The inspired erection and proper use of temples is one of the great evidences of the divinity of the Lord's work. . . . where these are not, the Church and kingdom and the truth of heaven are not.¹

The LDS Church teaches that only those with proper priesthood authority can administer these essential rites. Joseph Smith, in May of 1842, initiated a small group of men into the new temple ceremony, called the endowment. It would be some months before women were included.

The endowment ceremony, which is performed in special white clothing and a green apron (representing Adam and Eve's fig leaf apron), includes a play reenacting the Fall in the Garden of Eden, secret handshakes, passwords and oaths to always obey the edicts of the LDS Church and to always wear the LDS temple undergarments. These rites are never to be discussed outside of the temple.

Young people, age 18 to 22, generally go through the endowment ritual prior to serving their short term mission,

or prior to their temple marriage. A person must have a temple marriage/sealing in order to progress to godhood. The 2016 *Eternal Family Teaching Manual* explains:

Eternal marriage is essential for exaltation in the highest degree of the celestial kingdom, and it is attained only through being sealed by the proper authority in the temple and then living in accordance with the covenants entered into at that time.²

After members have experienced these rituals for themselves they may return to the temple to do proxy rituals for their deceased loved ones, thus offering the dead a chance to accept the LDS faith in the spirit world. While LDS teens usually perform baptism for the dead, only adults perform the Endowment ceremony and proxy marriages/sealings for those who have died outside the faith. This is the reason the LDS members are so involved in genealogy—collecting the names of their ancestors so that the living members can perform the necessary

rituals for the dead. However, the church does not stop at tracing their own genealogy. According to the LDS Church, it “has created the largest collection of family records in the world, with information on more than 3 billion deceased people.”³ These records are used to perform proxy rites for thousands of dead people with no connection to the LDS Church.



Salt Lake Temple Holy of Holies
The House of the Lord, Signature Books.

¹ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), pp. 780-781.

² *The Eternal Family Teacher Manual*, LDS Church, Lesson 15, 2016. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/the-eternal-family-teacher-manual/lesson-15-eternal-marriage?lang=eng>

³ <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/topic/genealogy>

SECOND ANOINTING

Through the years there have been numerous published exposés of the endowment ritual (see *Evolution of the Mormon Temple Ceremony: 1842-1990*). However, there is another little known ceremony given by invitation only from church leadership called the second anointing.⁴ In fact, teachers are instructed to avoid the topic. In their *Doctrines of the Gospel Teacher Manual* we read:

Caution: Exercise caution while discussing the doctrine of having our calling and election made sure. Avoid speculation. Use only the sources given here and in the student manual. Do *not* attempt in any way to discuss or answer questions about the **second anointing**.⁵

In order to qualify for this ritual one must have proven him/herself worthy with a lifetime of service and already participated in both the endowment and sealing ceremony.

LDS researcher David Buerger pointed out:

The higher ordinance was necessary to confirm the revealed promises of “kingly powers” (i.e., **godhood**) received in the endowment’s initiatory ordinances. **Godhood was therefore the meaning of this higher ordinance, or second anointing** . . .⁶

One does not apply for this privilege, but is invited to the temple, under strict secrecy, to meet with a couple of the top leaders for this special honor. The couple receiving their second anointing go to the temple, and then dress in their temple robes. On December 26, 1866, LDS Apostle Wilford Woodruff described the ritual in his journal:

I met with The Presidency and Twelve at President Youngs Office at about 12 oclok. The subject of the Endowments & **2d Anointings** was presented when President Young said that the order of the 2d anointing was for the persons to be anointed to be cloathed in their Priestly robes the man upon the right hand and wife or wives upon the left hand. The Administrator may be dressed in his usual Clothing or in his Priestly Robes as he may see fit. The meeting Should be opened by Prayer then the Administrator should **Anoint the man A King & Priest unto the Most High God. Then he should Anoint his wife or wives Queens & Priestess unto her husband.**⁷

4 Second Anointing, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_anointing

5 *Doctrines of the Gospel Teacher Manual*, LDS Church, chapter 19, (2000). <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/doctrines-of-the-gospel/chapter-19?lang=eng>

6 David John Buerger, “‘The Fulness of the Priesthood’: The Second Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Spring 1983): p. 21.

7 *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, vol. 6 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1984), p. 307, <https://archive.org/details/WWJFinal>

On January 11, 1846, Brigham Young and his legal wife, Mary Ann Angell, received their second anointing. Part of their ceremony reads:

Brother Brigham Young, I pour this holy, consecrated oil upon your head, and anoint thee a King and a Priest of the Most High God . . . for princes shall bow at thy feet and deliver unto thee their treasures; . . . And **I seal thee up unto Eternal Life**, . . . And thou shalt attain unto [the] **Eternal Godhead** . . . that thou mayest . . . create worlds and redeem them; so shall thy joy be full . . .

Elder Heber Chase Kimble then anointed Mary Ann Young, a Queen & Priestess unto her husband (Brigham Young) in the Church . . . Sister Mary Ann Young, I pour upon thy head this holy, consecrated oil, and seal upon thee all the blessings of the everlasting priesthood, in conjunction with thy husband: and I anoint thee to be a Queen and Priestess unto thy husband, . . . inasmuch as thou dost obey his counsel; . . . And **I seal thee up unto Eternal Life**, thou shalt come forth in the morning of the first resurrection and inherit with him all the honors, glories, and **power of Eternal Lives**, and that thou shalt attain unto the **eternal Godhead**, so thy exaltation shall be perfect, . . .⁸

Early Mormon Apostle Heber C. Kimball recorded the second anointing ceremony in his diary:

February the first 1844. My self and wife Vilate was annointed Preast and Preastest [Priestess] unto our God under the Hands of B[righam]. Young and by the voys [voice] of the Holy Order.

Apriel the first 4 day 1844. I Heber C. Kimball recieved the washing of my feet, and was annointed by my wife Vilate fore my burial, that is my feet, head, Stomach. **Even as Mary did Jesus, that she mite have a claim on Him in the Reserrection.** In the City of Nauvoo.

In 1845 I recieved the washing of my feet by \[which follows is in Vilate’s hand:]\

I Vilate Kimball do hereby certify that on the first day of April 1844 I attended to washing and anointed the head, /Stomach/ and feet of my dear companion Heber C. Kimball, **that I may have claim upon him in the morning of the first Reserrection.** Vilate Kimball.⁹

Kimball’s comparison of his wife’s washing of his feet to Mary washing the feet of Jesus stems from the early LDS teaching that Jesus and Mary were sealed

8 “Book of Anointings,” as quoted in *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship*, by David John Buerger, (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1994), pp. 88-90.

9 Stanley B. Kimball, ed., *On the Potter’s Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), pp. 56-57.

in marriage. Speaking in 1855, Apostle Orson Hyde declared that “Jesus Christ was married” and that “Mary, Martha and others were his wives.”¹⁰

The second anointing rite has been slightly modified over the years. Mr. Buerger gave the following outline of the modern second anointing ceremony:

In practice today the **second anointing** is actually the first of two parts comprising the fullness of the priesthood ceremony. . . . In the Salt Lake temple, second anointings are usually administered on Sunday afternoons. . . . The first part of the ceremony—being anointed and ordained a king and priest or queen and priestess—is administered in a Holy of Holies or special sealing room and is performed by or under the direction of the president of the church. There are usually but not always two witnesses. Only the husband and wife need to dress in temple robes. The husband leads in a prayer circle, offering signs and praying at an altar. He is then anointed with oil on his head, after which he is ordained a king and a priest unto God to rule and reign in the House of Israel forever . . . He is also blessed with the following (as the officiator determines): the power to bind and loose, curse and bless, the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the Holy Spirit of Promise; **to attain godhood; to be sealed to eternal life** (if not done previously); to have the power to open the heavens; and other blessings.

Next the wife is anointed . . . to be an heir to all the blessings sealed upon her husband . . . to receive **the blessings of godhood; . . . to have the power of eternal lives (of posterity without end); . . .**

At the conclusion of this ordinance, the washing of the husband’s feet by his wife is explained to the couple. It is a private ordinance, without witnesses. Its significance is related to the **resurrection of the dead**, as Heber Kimball noted. The couple is told to attend to the ordinance at a date of their choosing in the privacy of their home. At the determined time the husband dedicates the home and the room in which they perform the ordinance, which then **follows the pattern of Mary’s anointing Jesus in Matthew 12**. The ordinance symbolically prepares the husband for burial, and in this way the wife lays claim upon him in the resurrection . . . **Kimball’s journal entry derives from a speculative belief taught by early Mormons that Jesus married Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus.**¹¹

The emphasis on the wife’s assertion that “I may have claim upon him in the morning of the first Resurrection” seems to relate to the teaching in the temple that the woman is called from the grave to exaltation by her husband. The first time members go through the

endowment ceremony they are given a new name, like Paul or Mary or some other scriptural name, and the wife is instructed to not tell her name to anyone other than her husband. Writing in 1846, one former Mormon woman described receiving her new temple name:

In one place [during the temple ritual] I was presented with a **new name**, which I was not to reveal to any living creature, **save the man to whom I should be sealed for eternity**. By this name I am to be called in eternity as after the resurrection.¹²

Preaching in 1857, Apostle Erastus Snow declared:

Do you uphold your husband before God as your lord? . . . Can you get into the celestial kingdom without him? . . . **No woman will get into the celestial kingdom, except her husband receives her . . .**¹³

Apostle Charles Penrose, writing in 1897, explained:

In the resurrection, they stand side by side and hold dominion together. Every man who overcomes all things and is thereby entitled to inherit all things, **receives power to bring up his wife** to join him in the possession and enjoyment thereof.

In the case of a man marrying a wife in the everlasting covenant who dies while he continues in the flesh and marries another by the same divine law, **each wife** will come forth in her order and enter **with him** into his glory.¹⁴

Apostle Penrose’s statement about the wives resurrecting in their order demonstrates the LDS belief that they will be living polygamy in the Celestial Kingdom. This would apply to current LDS President Russell M. Nelson and LDS Apostle Dallin Oaks, both of whom have remarried after the death of the first wife. This would also apply to all LDS men who have been sealed in marriage to multiple women.

While the LDS leaders claim that their rituals date to Old Testament times, their temple endowment, second anointing and other rites are very different from those of the Jewish temple. The temple in the Old Testament, with its High Priest and animal sacrifices, was a foreshadowing of Christ’s role as both our final High Priest and last blood offering for sin (Hebrews, chapters 5-9). When Christ died on the cross the veil of the temple was torn in half (Luke 23:45) thus signifying that the Old Testament temple ritual had been replaced by the atonement of Christ. Not only does the Bible say

10 Orson Hyde, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, p. 210. For further references see Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), p. 227.

11 Buerger, *Mysteries of Godliness*, pp. 66-67.

12 As quoted in *Mysteries of Godliness*, p. 94.

13 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 5, p. 291.

14 Charles W. Penrose, “*Mormon*” *Doctrine Plain and Simple*, (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), p. 66.

marriage ends at death (see Matthew 22:30; Romans 7:2), there is nothing to indicate that the husband will call the wife from the grave (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

ATTAINING GODHOOD

Originally, the second anointing was to be a guarantee of godhood. Mr. Buerger observed:

Because of the strict confidentiality surrounding second anointings, it is unclear precisely what long-term effect they had on recipients nor, for that matter, the degree to which the **conferral of godhood** was held to be conditional or unconditional. Most early nineteenth-century statements imply that the ordinance was **unconditional**.¹⁵

Today, some church leaders seem to be minimizing the importance of the second anointing and refer to it as a “special blessing” but not necessary for exaltation/godhood.¹⁶ In 2002 the official LDS magazine *Ensign* emphasized the necessity of the endowment (as opposed to the second anointing) for “eternal exaltation.”¹⁷ The article went on to state: “Obedience to the sacred covenants made in temples qualifies us for eternal life . . .” According to Mormonism, a person’s endowment and temple marriage starts one on the road to godhood (*D&C* 132:20—“Then shall they be gods”). In a seeming effort to down-play the literalness of attaining Godhood some Mormons emphasize that the word “gods” in the revelation is not capitalized, however editions prior to 1900 have it capitalized. Also an official statement of the LDS First Presidency used the capitalized form, and declared that man’s ultimate goal was to evolve “into a **God**” (*Ensign*, February 2002, p. 30).

In 2002 Tom Phillips, a Stake President, and his wife were invited to the Preston, England, LDS temple to receive their second anointing. He later left the LDS Church and wrote up his experience:

In April 2002 Elder Harold G. Hillam of the First Quorum of Seventy, as President of the Europe West Area, called me into his office. He said he was extending to me and my wife (she was not present), on behalf of President Hinckley, an invitation to receive a “special blessing” in the Preston England Temple. He asked whether I had heard of the “second endowment” to which I replied no. I later told him that I had heard of it, but was so stunned by his invitation my mind went blank regarding the matter.

15 Buerger, *Mysteries of Godliness*, pp. 112-113.

16 See *Mysteries of Godliness*, p. 165.

17 Russell M. Nelson, “Prepare for Blessings of the Temple,” *Ensign* (March 2002): p. 18.

He told me very few people receive this blessing and it must be kept secret. He said if the general membership knew about it there would be problems. More would want to receive the ordinance than the apostles have time to accommodate and members would wonder why so and so had received it but they had not. I must not even tell my children. He said I should just tell them that their mother and I were going away for the day or weekend. He recommended I read all that Elder Bruce R. McConkie had written on the subject of making your calling and election sure.

Elder Hillam promised me it would be a “life changing” experience. He said the ordinance was performed in Joseph Smith’s time but had been discontinued during President David O. McKay’s time. This resulted in only 2 of the then apostles, Harold B. Lee and Spencer W. Kimball, having had this ordinance on the death of President Joseph Fielding Smith. It was therefore re-introduced and is still practiced today.¹⁸

Among the promises bestowed on him that day were “The Holy Spirit of Promise . . . Blessed to live as long as life is desirable. Blessed to attain unto the Godhood. Power to be a member of a Godhead bestowed. Sealed up to eternal life.”¹⁹

The doctrine that men could eventually achieve Godhood, ruling their own planets, just as our Heavenly Father did, was first introduced by Joseph Smith in the 1840’s. He stated: “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.”²⁰ The teaching that a man may achieve literal Godhood and rule over his own planet is still taught in current LDS manuals. For instance, their 2010 publication *Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual* includes this quote from past president Spencer W. Kimball:

Each one of you has it within the realm of his possibility to develop a kingdom over which you will preside as its king and god. You will need to develop yourself and grow in ability and power and worthiness, to **govern such a world** with all of its people. You are sent to this earth not merely to have a good time or to satisfy urges or passions or desires. . . . You are sent to this world with a very serious purpose. You are sent to school, . . . to begin as a human infant and grow to unbelievable proportions in wisdom, judgment, knowledge, and power.²¹

18 Tom Phillips, Mormonthink.com.

(<http://www.mormonthink.com/personalstories/tomphillips.htm>)

19 Ibid.

20 *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith*, (LDS Church, 2007), pp. 221-222; *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, (Deseret Book), pp. 345-346.

21 *Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual*, (LDS Church, 2010), p. 29.

Joseph Smith also taught that our God had a father, who had a father, who had a father, etc., thus creating a whole pantheon of Gods:

If Abraham reasoned thus—If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father?²²

While Mormons say they worship only one God, they believe there are countless Gods in the Universe, ruling other worlds. However, the Bible clearly teaches that there is only one God. Isaiah 44:8 says: “*Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any.*” ■

HANS AND BIRGITTA MATTSSON’S EXPERIENCE RECEIVING THE SECOND ANOINTING

In 2013, *Salt Lake City Messenger* No. 121, we shared some of Hans and Birgitta Mattsson’s journey out of Mormonism. In the early 2000’s Hans was an Area Authority Seventy in Sweden for the LDS Church. In this new appendix to their book, *Truth Seeking: The story of High-Ranking Mormon Leader Hans Mattsson Seeking Sincere Answers . . .*, they discuss their experience with the little known LDS temple ceremony called the second anointing. Following is the Appendix to their book.

APPENDIX TO “TRUTH SEEKING”

In his first year as an area seventy, Mattsson was called to the Mormon temple in Frankfurt, Germany. They were not allowed to tell or talk to anyone about this invitation. Hans knew that there were further temple ceremonies. Despite all his years of leadership he had not taken part of this ritual. But he had diffuse expectation of what they meant and no insight into how the ritual was performed. It was only “whispered” about this, and the people involved were expected to deny all knowledge of the secrets. This selected inner circle was very limited and got access only through an invitation.

One Sunday afternoon, Mattssons and three other couples found themselves at the Temple gate. The Apostle, Elder Ballard and a few other church leaders welcomed them.

Elder Ballard briefly explained that the ceremony they were now to participate in is known as the second anointing or to have their calling and election ensured.

“You are now worthy to receive a higher level of knowledge and to obtain a deeper degree of certainty. The experience you are now facing will change your life fundamentally,” he said.

The ceremony contained two separate parts. The first part consisted of elder Ballard washing the men’s feet. The foot-washing made the participants clean and innocent from the sins of the world. The model appears in the New Testament, where Jesus washes the feet of the apostles just before the crucifixion. Elder Ballard also anointed the participants with oil as the ancient kings of the Old Testament were anointed. In connection with this anointing ceremony, a blessing was pronounced with promises to Hans and the other men. These promises included the power to bless or curse, to live as long a life as is desirable, that the window of heaven should be opened, that is to say that nothing would stand in the way of the coveted and also the certainty of becoming a God himself. It was a fact. Now we had a sure promise.

The women were anointed to be queens and priestesses for their husbands. During the second part of the ceremony, each pair was referred to a separate room. There was a bowl with water and a towel. The wife now washed the man’s feet and dried them. She then placed her hands on her husband’s head and pronounced a blessing on him as the spirit dictated.

After this, the participants converged again in the celestial room. Elder Ballard summarized the day and invited questions because the occasion would never return. No one should know that they had received the second anointing. Uninitiated members should not even know that this occurs.

“If anyone asks, deny any knowledge whatsoever!” That message was clear.

The temple ceremony Hans had experienced as so difficult and frightening in his youth was in contrast to what he now experienced. Hans thought it was as though he was in a new dimension. He had been approved before God.

The promises and covenants that God has made with Abraham once, had God now concluded with him. He felt humble and selected at the same time. The feeling of inadequacy disappeared. God had after all chosen him, he had not exalted himself.

Birgitta’s heart flowed. Everything was wonderful, and what a spiritual experience. Now when they had the second anointing they and their descendants were guaranteed an eternal life together.

For Birgitta, the first part of the ritual was about Hans.

“The church really puts the women so high! The women are clean without foot-washing” she thought.

²² *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, edited by Joseph Fielding Smith, p. 373

The blessings and promises had been pronounced over his head, but as his wife she was complicit (involved). She is a prerequisite for Hans achieving this.

During the second part of the ceremony Birgitta had been the active. She was intensely present at every moment in solitude with Hans. She was his queen, his priestess, the mother of his descendants now and forever. It was no longer just a picture or a promise of the future. It was for real here and now. She was his escort and great love. They were each other's life and meaning and eternal destination.

Birgitta was at ease when she washed Hans' feet in solitude. She realized that this foot-washing must have a completely different meaning than the foot-washing elder Ballard just performed. The Apostle had represented Christ himself.

"Who do I represent?" She recalled how Mary Magdalena anointed the feet of Jesus.

"It must be her I represent. She works in service and love. She is preparing for funeral and resurrection.

"The physical touch strengthened the proximity and affinity. But Birgitta became more uncomfortable in her next mission, to lay her hands on Hans head and utter a blessing on him. The laying of hands was not what Mormon woman normally exerts.

"What should I say? How should I say? Do I speak by myself or by inspiration?"

"She wanted all her soul to lift him as a husband, family man, leader, and priesthood holder. Words came across her lips. Hans was deeply touched by her words and thus disappeared the uncomfortable feelings.

Hans and Birgitta left the temple with an even firmer determination. They now carried a great secret experience together. Their future was secured. Their loyalty would consist of all the tests. They had now achieved all that can be achieved on this earth. All old disappointments and failures were of no importance. They had been sealed and approved for eternal life with the Holy Spirit of Promise.

(epilogue)

Thoughts wander back to Frankfurt. The memories goes to that special Sunday afternoon when we received our calling as a couple and the election ensured. Then, the mind had been filled with wonderment, determination and loyalty.

"Birgitta," I ask, "What are you thinking these days about the second anointing?"

"Maybe it was good for us when it happened, our life was so stressed and this gave added strength."

She thinks, silence prevails and I'm waiting.

"Even though I no longer believe, the emotions it

created between us remains, customized and enhanced."

I look at her and I see how she suddenly pinch together the mouth in a grimace.

"But as a person I feel diminished. As women we are so pure and without sin, we need no washing said. Then I thought that it was due to the fact that women held so high. Now I see that it is the other way around. We are not even of legal age explained to stand for our own actions. As a Child."

I consider her answer, and analyze the experiences and memories. The image of the outer ritual remains unchanged. But the meaning seems different. I marvel that I so fully believed in this. Why did I accept the secrecy? A single secret and selected inner circle (circuit) that others should not know about, especially my fellow believers.²³ ■

23 Hans Mattsson, *Truth Seeking*, Appendix, 2019. To read another person's experience of the second anointing, see Thomas Phillips account. <https://www.exmormon.org/mormon/mormon508.htm>

2018 LDS CHURCH STATISTICS

The *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 6, 2019, reported the following 2018 statistics for the LDS Church:

Membership — 16,313,735
 Converts in 2018 — 234,332
 New children of record — 102,102
 Congregations — 30,536
 Full-time missionaries — 65,137
 Service missionaries — 37,963
 Operating temples — 161

According to the article, independent church demographer Matt Martinich concluded this was the "lowest net increase in church membership since 1978." He also calculated that as many as 140,868 members had resigned in 2018.¹

According to Jana Riess, the LDS Church had a 2.03% growth rate in 2013 but this has fallen every year since then. It now stands at 1.21% growth for 2018.² ■

1 Peggy Fletcher Stack, "LDS Church tops 16.3 million members, but number reflects lowest net increase in 40 years," *Salt Lake Tribune* (April 6, 2019), <https://www.sltrib.com/religion/2019/04/06/lds-church-tops-million/>

2 Jana Riess, "Mormon growth continues to slow, church report shows," *Religion News Service* (April 6, 2019), <https://religionnews.com/2019/04/06/mormon-growth-continues-to-slow-church-report-shows/>

DID EARLY CHRISTIANS PERFORM BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD?

Circular Arguments, Plagiarism, and Dubious Extrapolation: The Patristic Evidence for Baptism for the Dead and its Misuse by LDS Apologists and General Authorities.

Ronald V. Huggins, Th.D.

There is evidence that some form of baptism *of or for* the dead was practiced by three early Christian heresies: the Marcionites, the Cerinthians, and the Montanists. But the mishandling of the evidence by Mormon apologists and General Authorities has resulted in a great deal of confusion concerning the matter. In the present article I shall discuss and evaluate both the Patristic evidence (i.e., the evidence of the Early Church) relating to baptism for the dead, and the Mormon mishandling of it.

Apologists are motivated by a desire to defend a point of view. That's what makes them apologists. They want to, in a sense, weaponize the evidence they are working with in the way that best supports the case they are making. As Austin Farrer wrote of C. S. Lewis:

There are frontiersmen and frontiersmen, of course. There is what one might call the Munich school, who will always sell the pass in the belief that their position can be more happily defended from foothills to the rear. Such people are not commonly seen as apologists . . . They are too busy learning from their enemies to do much in defence [*sic*] of their friends. The typical apologist is a man whose every dyke is his last ditch. He will carry the war into the enemy's country; he will yield not an inch of his own.¹

And all that's fair enough, so far as it goes. But there's a line between favorably reading evidence and distorting or twisting it to make it say something it doesn't want to. In my experience the apologetic impulse toward crossing that line is a very ecumenical one: Evangelical, liberal Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Hindu, Moslem, Buddhist, even Atheist apologists, are all too often guilty of this particular species of transgression. Really, it gives apologetics a bad name.

For some reason the literature of the early Church has proved a particularly fertile field of harvest for evidence-distorting apologists. Part of the explanation for this, no doubt, lies in a desire to have writers of that early period—writers much closer in time to the founding of Christianity—agree with them, or at least disagree with



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those they want to refute. The level of distortion increases where apologists, before reading a single line or page of early Church writings, already feel sure their practice of Christianity today mirrors exactly what Jesus intended it to be from the beginning. Many churches hold this perspective to some degree, but none so categorically as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons).

I believe that as a prerequisite for using the writings of the early Church in a credible way apologetically one must first learn how to read them *disinterestedly*, that is to say, one must be able to read them *on their own terms*, allowing them to develop their *own* theological language to express their *own* thoughts in their *own* way. Otherwise it becomes too easy for apologists to merely exploit, plunder, or mine the ancient texts for what they want to get out of them. Such persons can never really come to know the ancient writers in this way. And, as a result, they frequently distort and misrepresent them, sometimes without even knowing it.

Even though, as I said, apologists of all stripes have been guilty of this, it is a simple fact that Mormon apologists are more likely to be guilty of it because they actually believe, as part of their “dogma,” if you will, that Mormonism *is now* precisely what early Christianity *was* in its original founding. This presupposition provides what they mistakenly believe will be a helpful grid for reading the writings of the early Church. Traditionally

¹ Austin Farrer, “The Christian Apologist,” in *Light on C. S. Lewis* (ed. Jocelyn Gibb; London: Geoffrey Bles, 1965), 23-24.

Mormons have imagined that to whatever degree any early text *differs from* current LDS teaching, to that very same degree it was corrupted in a process of falling away from the truth they call the Great Apostasy. Conversely, they imagined that to whatever degree something *agrees with* current LDS teaching, to that same degree they imagine it retains a glimmer or remnant of original pre-apostasy Christianity. In other words, if one wants to know if a certain ancient Christian teaching is corrupted or not, all one has to do is see if it lines up with current LDS teaching. If it does not, then it can be safely regarded as corrupt. As incredible as it may sound, this grid of judgement was actually authoritatively proposed in the LDS “First Presidency Statement on the King James Version of the Bible” (1992), where it is applied to evaluating places where modern translations differ from the King James: “The most reliable way to measure the accuracy of any biblical passage is not by comparing different texts [i.e., in different Bible translations], but by comparison with the Book of Mormon and modern-day revelations.” In reality, of course, the Book of Mormon and modern-day LDS revelations are going to agree with the King James Version where it differs from other modern versions, simply because both are cribbed from or based on the King James Bible. The same grid is also glowingly articulated by Mormon scholars and apologists Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, though somewhat more cautiously:

Latter-day Saints, though, are in an enviable position here. Given our belief in an apostasy, we fully expect there to be differences, even vast differences, between the beliefs of the Fathers and Mormon doctrine. Any similarities that exist, however, are potentially understandable as survivals from before that apostasy. When any similarities, even partial ones, exist between Latter-day Saints beliefs and the teachings of the Fathers *but are absent between contemporary mainstream Christendom and the Fathers*, they can be viewed as deeply important.²

But what may appear to Mormons as a helpful grid, that allegedly puts them in “an enviable position,” actually fits them with blinders that keep them from being able to see what actually lies before them in the ancient texts.

² Daniel C. Peterson & Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Aspen Books, 1992), 76 (italics original).

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All this brings us uncomfortably near to a story told by Moslem historians about how Caliph Umar allegedly commanded the burning of the books in the Alexandrian library on the grounds that “[I]f what was in them agrees with the Book of God [the Qur’an], they are not required: if it disagrees, they are not desired.”³

At the end of the day, if a methodology produces results that appear too good to be true, it is likely a flawed and dubious one withal. In this case we discover the methodology’s refutation in the fact that it can as easily be turned on its head to be used to prove Mormonism always wrong no matter what (i.e., by saying that wherever the early Church evidence agrees in any way with Mormonism, to that extent it had gone apostate, etc.). And there is also the fact that other groups, Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, can use, and in fact have used, the same methodology, each with equally satisfactory results in defending their own versions of early Christianity.

MISHANDLING OF THE EVIDENCE RELATING TO THE BAPTISM OF THE DEAD

In the present article we will focus our investigation on the Mormon apologetic appeal to patristic evidence in support of its controversial doctrine of baptism for the dead. There are a number of passages Mormons resort to when trying to argue that the practice of baptism for the dead, referred to obliquely by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:29, was actually a divinely instituted practice which the ancient Church had fallen off performing as it slipped into black apostasy, but which God reestablished when he restored the Church to its original primitivity through the prophet Joseph Smith.

MARCION AND CERINTHUS AMONG THE MORMON PLAGIARIZERS

We mentioned at the beginning that there was some evidence that the Marcionites, the Cerinthians, and the Montanists might have practiced a baptism *of or for* the dead. Very often, as we shall see, Mormons get confused between the first two groups, the Marcionites and the Cerinthians, so that they commonly mention one when actually speaking of evidence relating to the other. It is this error in fact that has been perpetuated due to plagiarism. But before getting into that let us first deal briefly with the evidence relating to the Marcionites, which though sparse, is some of the most straightforward.

One of the earliest and best attested examples of a practice of baptism *for* the dead relates, as we said, to

³ Quoted in Rodney Stark, *God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 64 (bracket’s Stark’s).

the followers of the mid-second century heretic Marcion. Their practice is referred to by the late 2nd/early 3rd century North African writer Tertullian,⁴ and actually described by the 4th century Greek theologian John Chrysostom. “[W]hen any [Marcionite] Catechumen departs among them,” Chrysostom writes, “having concealed the living man under the couch of the dead, they approach the corpse and talk with him, and ask him if he wishes to receive baptism; then when he makes no answer, he that is concealed underneath saith in his stead that of course he should wish to be baptized; and so they baptize him instead of the departed.”⁵ When challenged about the practice, Chrysostom went on to say, the Marcionites quoted 1 Corinthians 15:29.

In addition to Tertullian and Chrysostom, Mormons also regularly cite a passage from the 4th century writer Epiphanius of Salamis claiming that it too refers to the Marcionite practice of baptism for the dead. But this is an error. In the passage cited below Epiphanius was actually discussing the practices of a group called the Cerinthians not the Marcionites.⁶ In due course we shall evaluate what Epiphanius had actually said about that other group. But for now, we need to pause and trace the source and origin of the Mormons’ mistake. Those making the mistake obviously hadn’t read Epiphanius. They simply copied the mistake out of other Mormon books, but usually without crediting their actual sources, thus becoming guilty of plagiarism. The following paragraph, for example, appears virtually verbatim in the writings of LDS authors George F. Richards,⁷ Mark E. Petersen,⁸ Albert Zobell,⁹ and LeGrand Richards,¹⁰ with only the last mentioned actually crediting any source beyond Epiphanius:

4 Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5:10.

5 Chrysostom, *Homily* 40.1 (NPNF¹ 12:244).

6 See e.g., John A. Tvedtnes: “Two of the early church fathers, Epiphanius (AD 315–403) in *Panarion* 1.28.6 and Tertullian (AD 145–220) in *Against Marcion* 5.10, note that the Marcionites, an early Christian group, baptized others in the name of the dead.” John A. Tvedtnes, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity* (eds. Donald W. Parry & Stephen D. Ricks; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1999), 56.

7 George F. Richards, “Genealogy and Temple Work,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 13.3 (July 1922): 98.

8 Mark E. Petersen, “Early Christian Historians Tell of Baptism for the Dead,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 24 (April 1933): 63, and “Your Family Tree—A Sign of the Time,” in *Handbook of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City, UT: Zion Printing and Publishing, 1944), 511.

9 Albert L. Zobell, JR. “If the Dead Rise Not: The Story of 100 Years of Baptism for the Dead,” *Improvement Era* 43.9 (Sept. 1940): 530.

10 LeGrand Richards, *Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1950), 180.

Epiphanius, a writer of the fourth century, in speaking of the Marcionites, a sect of Christians to whom¹¹ he was opposed, says: “In this country—I mean Asia—and even Galatia,¹² their school flourished eminently; and a traditional fact concerning them has reached us, that when any of them had died without baptism, they used to baptize others in their name, lest in the resurrection they should suffer punishment as unbaptized.”

And it should be said that the above passage is only an excerpt of a larger block of text Mormons have copied out of one another’s books for well over a century. Had the above authors read the passage in its original context they would have seen it was a mistake.

Such “research” required no real knowledge of the subject being discussed, no familiarity with Epiphanius or the Marcionites. It only required the ability to mindlessly copy out somebody else’s work. It was only the original author of the frequently plagiarized passage who had to do any real research in non-Mormon sources. But which of the above authors (if any) actually first introduced and perhaps even composed the widely plagiarized passage? As we said, only LeGrand Richards tells us his source, and he says he got it from an article by Mark E. Petersen in the April 1933 issue of the *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*.¹³ But it was not ultimately Petersen who composed and introduced the passage, nor was he the one who originally confused the Marcionites with the Cerinthians. That honor on both counts most likely goes to Brigham Henry [B. H.] Roberts (1857-1933), who included the oft-copied passage in several of his books.¹⁴

How Roberts likely came to confuse the Cerinthians with the Marcionites can be seen by comparing the passage as he wrote it with his probable source, namely J. Jacobi’s entry on baptism for the dead in Kitto’s *Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*.¹⁵

11 Mark E. Petersen has “which” here rather than “whom”.

12 Albert L. Zobell, Jr. and LeGrand Richards misspell “Galatia” here as “Galatea”.

13 L. Richards, *Marvelous Work*, 180.

14 E.g., B[righam] H[enry] Roberts, *The Gospel: An Exposition of Its First Principles and Man’s Relationship to Deity* (rev. and enlg. ed.; Salt Lake City, UT: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1893), 289; *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History* (Salt Lake City, UT: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1893), 430; *New Witness for God* [Vol 1] (Salt Lake City, UT: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1895), 383.

15 Roberts’s source in this case is strongly suggested in his clear and acknowledged dependence on this entry in the same context. The same passage from Kitto is also found in Moroni Snow “Redemption and Regeneration,” *Latter-day Saints Millennial Star* 42.24 (June 14, 1880) 370. There the source *is* noted, although Snow mistakenly has “Meronites” instead of “Marcionites.”

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B. H. Roberts

Epiphanius, a writer of the fourth century, in speaking of the **Marcionites**, a sect of Christians to whom he was opposed, says:

‘In this country—I mean Asia—and even in Galatia, their school flourished eminently... [rest of quote identical in form to Jacobi / Kitto’s]¹⁶

Jacobi in Kitto

A similar account is given by Epiphanius (*Haeres*, xxviii. 7) of the Gnostic sect of **Cerinthus**, who were much opposed to the Marcionites:

‘In this country,—I mean, Asia,—and even in Galatia, their school flourished eminently...¹⁷

Where Jacobi had said that Epiphanius had written about the followers of Cerinthus, *who in their turn* were “much opposed” to the Marcionites, Roberts, by skip of eye or thought, seemed to imagine it was Epiphanius *himself* who was opposed to the Marcionites. It is a reasonable assumption, since Epiphanius was “much opposed” to the Marcionites, but it is not what the passage was about. The very fact of the confusion suggests Jacobi/Kitto as Roberts’s ultimate source for the quotation, since there is no mention in the original context of the passage in Epiphanius’s work of the Marcionites. In addition this passage from Epiphanius is often referenced as being found not at xxviii 7, as Jacobi and Roberts both have it, but as xxviii 6 which is actually the correct reference.¹⁸

There is an irony in the fact that it was B. H. Roberts who became the victim of widespread Mormon plagiarism in this instance since it was also he who delivered a very stern warning specifically directed at Mormon leaders engaging in plagiarism in his *Seventy’s Course on Theology*:

I desire to say one more thing, and to say it as emphatically as it is possible for it to be said. Let every speech, lecture, or discourse by a Seventy be an honest one. Let it be his own, good, bad, or indifferent. A poor speech that is one’s own is more to one’s credit than a good one stolen,

16 Roberts, *The Gospel*, 289.

17 J. Jacobi, “Baptism for the Dead,” *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature* (2 vols; ed. John Kitto; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1845), 1:289.

18 See, for example, Daniel Whitby, *Additional Annotations to the New Testament with Seven Discourses* (London: W. Bowyer for A. & J. Churchill, 1710), 92, and *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis Book I (Sects. 1-46)* (Nag Hammadi & Manichaean Studies 63; 2nd ed; trans. Frank Williams; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 120.

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and repeated as his. Plagiarism . . . is always dishonest and not in harmony with the Spirit of truth, which is the Spirit of the gospel.¹⁹

One interesting feature of all the copied versions of the Roberts passage, is the variant numbers included as the alleged reference in Epiphanius where the passage supposedly appears.

One would be hard pressed finding one’s way from the reference given in any one of the plagiarized sources to the actual passage in Epiphanius. This is because the reference numbers given usually make no sense. Once one sees a few of the plagiarized versions together, however, it becomes clear what is going on. Jacobi gave as reference 28:7, which Roberts accurately repeats. Of the four mentioned who copied the Roberts passage, only one, LeGrand Richards, managed to retain the full reference (28:7). Petersen and Zobell inadvertently dropped the 2 from 28, referencing the quote instead to “8.7”. The most mysterious change of reference, however, appears in George F. Richards, who directs the reader to “Heresies, p. 383.”²⁰ Are we to suppose that G. F. Richards had in mind the page number of some obscure edition of Epiphanius, or was he giving the page number of Jacobi’s article in Kitto? As to the former, since G. F. Richards felt satisfied simply copying his material out of someone else’s book, it seems unlikely he would have then troubled himself hunting down an edition of Epiphanius and finding the page number where the quote occurred. The fact that he repeats Roberts’s mistake also militates against this. As for the Kitto reference, we know what page that was on, and it wasn’t 383. What seems most likely to have happened was that Richards has given us the page number of his true source, namely B. H. Roberts’ *New Witness for God* [Vol. 1], where the passage in question appears on page 383.²¹

Until now we have been dealing with Mormons who copied the Roberts passage verbatim. But there were also those who repeated Roberts’s mistake closely enough to still be committing plagiarism but without copying the whole of it word for word. For example, John A. Tvedtnes, a professor at BYU who wrote a number of articles, reviews, and papers on baptism for the dead in early Christianity, repeats Roberts’s mistake about Epiphanius and the Marcionites, but he does so without copying verbatim.

19 B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy’s Course in Theology: First–Fifth Year* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News 1907-12), 1st year, 166-67.

20 George F. Richards, “Genealogy and Temple Work,” 98.

21 Roberts, *New Witness for God* 1, 383. In the same context where Richards cites another passage as coming from “Heresies, p. 290” we actually find the words on page 290 of Roberts’s *The Gospel*.

Thus in one of his more recent efforts Tvedtnes declares: “Two of the early church fathers, Epiphanius (AD 315–403) in *Panarion* 1.28.6 and Tertullian (AD 145–220) in *Against Marcion* 5.10, note that the Marcionites, an early Christian group, baptized others in the name of the dead.”²² Here at last, Tvedtnes gives the correct reference to the passage in Epiphanius, the place where one could actually *look it up* in, say, Frank Williams’s familiar English edition of the *Panarion* published by E. J. Brill.²³ In his earlier writings, Tvedtnes did not give the correct reference but simply copied the wrong reference (*Panarion* 8.7) out of another Mormon’s book, and, typical of those who went before him, did so without properly crediting his source.

In giving this incorrect reference, Tvedtnes inadvertently revealed that he didn’t get the passage from Epiphanius, nor even from B. H. Roberts, but rather from one of Roberts’s many plagiarizers. This detail alone causes us to doubt that Tvedtnes ever read the passage in context in Epiphanius—since there was no way to get from the erroneous reference to the passage itself—but was content to take his place in line as a copiest of the copiest of the copiest of Epiphanius. As we saw, J. Jacobi repeated the passage but gave the reference not as 28.6 but as 28.7 (see discussion above). B. H. Roberts, in his turn, copied Jacobi’s form of the passage, including his 28.7 reference. Then Mark E. Petersen and Albert Zobell copied Roberts, or one another, or some other Roberts plagiarizer, but in the process muddled the reference, inadvertently dropping the 2 from Roberts’s 28.7, reducing it to 8.7. Finally Tvedtnes, in his earlier works, copied the passage

from Petersen or Zobell or some other Roberts plagiarizer, again repeating the muddled 8.7 reference.²⁴

POSTHUMOUS BAPTISM FOR MARCIONITE CATECHUMENS

Even granting that Epiphanius was not speaking of the Marcionites, we still have the statements from Tertullian and Chrysostom saying they practiced a form of baptism for the dead, and in the case of the latter the practice is described as a baptism by proxy. When a catechumen—someone already engaged in a course of preparation for baptism—dies, someone gets under the bed to request baptism on behalf of the dead person, and then is afterward baptized in the dead person’s stead.

Chrysostom’s description as likely as not provides the explanation of the practice’s origin. Where baptism is counted essential for salvation, the death of someone in process of preparing for it must have seemed particularly tragic. Could not some way be found to justify baptizing the dead catechumen? Wasn’t he or she faithful and, as it were, almost there! Under such unhappy circumstances we can easily imagine 1 Corinthians 15:29 being seized upon as suggesting a positive way forward.

If this explanation is correct it nullifies the Mormons’ appeal to Marcionite baptism for the dead as a way of justifying their own more elaborate practice. In addition, in order for it to be of any use to Mormon apologists the practice would need to be viewed as a *remainder* of authentic, original Christian practice, not as a later *innovation* by Marcionites. Such was the attempt of Tvedtnes when he wrote: “Some dismiss this evidence on the grounds that the Marcionites were heretics, Latter-day Saints, believing that the great apostasy was already well under way by Marcion’s time and that no Christian group then possessed the full truth, see the practice as a remnant of an earlier rite dating from the time of the apostles.”²⁵ And yet even laying aside the fact that Marcionites were heretics, where is there any proof to support Tvedtnes’s assertion of the practice’s primitivity? We recall that Chrysostom himself says that when the Marcionites were challenged about the teaching they appealed to 1 Corinthians 15:29. He mentions no claim on their part that they were adhering to a traditional practice, although, to be sure, they may or may not have made such a claim.

22 John A. Tvedtnes, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity* (eds. Donald W. Parry & Stephen D. Ricks; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1999), 56. See also Questions 26 for SHIELDS 42 Questions List (http://www.shields-research.org/42_Questions/ques26_Tvedtnes.htm). Although his plagiarism was much more direct in his “Proxy Baptism,” *Ensign Magazine* (Feb 1977): 86:

But historical records are clear on the matter. Baptism for the dead was performed by the dominant church until forbidden by the sixth canon of the Council of Carthage in A.D. 397. Some of the smaller sects, however, continued the practice. Of the Marcionites of the fourth century, Epiphanius wrote:

“In this country—I mean Asia—and even in Galatia, their school flourished eminently and a traditional fact concerning them has reached us, that when any of them had died without baptism, they used to baptize others in their name, lest in the resurrection they should suffer punishment as unbaptized.”

23 See for example John A. Tvedtnes, “Proxy Baptism,” *Ensign* (Feb 1977): 86, and “Baptism for the Dead: The Coptic Rationale,” *Special Papers of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology* 2 (September 1989) (paper originally given 5 June 1981). The online edition made available at FAIR’s website: <http://www.fairmormon.org/archive/publications/baptism-for-the-dead-the-coptic-rationale>.

24 See for example John A. Tvedtnes, “Proxy Baptism,” *Ensign* (Feb 1977): 86, and “Baptism for the Dead: The Coptic Rationale,” *Special Papers of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology* 2 (September 1989) (paper originally given 5 June 1981). The online edition made available at FAIR’s website: <http://www.fairmormon.org/archive/publications/baptism-for-the-dead-the-coptic-rationale>.

25 Tvedtnes, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity,” 56.

But however that may be the Marcionite practice really does reflect a situation later than the New Testament period. In the New Testament there was no concept of an extended period of preparation prior to baptism. You simply heard, believed, and were baptized. We see this, for example, in the fact that those responding to Peter's Pentecost sermon were baptized the same day (Acts 2:38-41).²⁶ The same is true in the case of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30-33:

He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then *immediately* he and all his family were baptized.

It was only later that baptism came to be delayed to make way for an extended period of preparatory instruction. The Marcionite practice therefore makes more sense as a response to contingencies arising from the later situation.

Yet for the sake of argument let us suppose for a moment that the Marcionites *were* following some sort of traditional, long-established practice. If they were, whose practice was it? Was it Christ's practice? The Apostles'? One of the ironies of the Marcionite practice is that Paul's appeal in 1 Corinthians 15:29 to the practice of baptism for the dead is part of his defense of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead—"If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?" But the Marcionites not only practiced baptism for the dead, they also denied the resurrection.²⁷ The question then becomes: did those who practiced baptism for the dead at Corinth also deny the resurrection? In the context of 1 Corinthians we notice that Paul refers to baptism for the dead *indirectly* rather than as something he himself would want to endorse: "why are *they* then baptized for the dead?" Who are *they*? As we read through 1 Corinthians we discover a number of things going on at Corinth that Paul most definitely did *not* endorse. A man there was having sex with his father's wife (5:1), and some at Corinth were boasting about it, apparently considering it a healthy exercise in Christian freedom (5:2). At the communion table there was social and economic separatism as well as too much wine, some people getting drunk, others going away hungry (11:20-21). Believers were suing one another in court before the secular authority (6:1). Paul even has to remind the

Corinthians that they ought not go to prostitutes (6:14), and that if in the course of prophetic speech someone says "Jesus be cursed" he is not speaking by the Spirit of God (12:3). Finally, in defending the centrality of the resurrection, Paul reveals that there are actually people in the Corinthian church who denied the resurrection: "if it is preached," he wrote, "that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can *some of you* say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (15:12).

Something had gone dreadfully wrong at Corinth, and it appears to have featured an unhealthy reading of the saying "everything is permissible" (1 Cor 6:11, 10:23). Many recent translations often place those words in quotation marks, implying that Paul was treating it as coming from some other written or spoken context, as, for example, something he or Apollos or somebody else might have written, or said, but that had been interpreted entirely wrong, or perhaps something that the Corinthians had said in their letter to Paul (see 7:1), or that Paul had heard from Corinthian visitors to Ephesus from Chloe's household (see 1:11). In either case some of the particulars as to how something had gone morally wrong over the statement are clear enough. But how all that might relate to the rejection of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead by some at Corinth is uncertain. Perhaps they were arguing something along the lines, for example, of later libertine Gnostics, who held that since it is the soul rather than the body that is raised, it doesn't matter what one does with one's body, such that all the traditional morals become *passé*. In view of this possibility it is interesting that when Paul addresses the problem of sexual immorality in the letter the issue of the body stands at the center of his argument:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? . . . Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body . . . You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (6:15-20).

Notice that Paul does not simply say, "honor God," but, "honor God with your body," making it clear that it is possible to dishonor God by what one does with/to one's body. He also makes it clear that one can sin against one's own body. Such argumentation would answer very well a teaching that said it didn't matter what one did with one's body because it is the soul rather than the body that survives death.

Was it possible, then, that the Marcionite teaching about baptism for the dead might have had some genetic connection with the practice of baptism for the dead

²⁶ See also the baptisms of the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:38), and of Cornelius, along with his relatives and friends (Acts 10:47).

²⁷ See, e.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.27.3; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 5.10; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 3.42.3.5

at Corinth? Yes, it is possible. But that alone scarcely implies it was something Christ or the apostles taught and approved of. The best case that can be made would trace Marcionite baptism for the dead back to the Corinthian faction Paul was writing against, not to Paul himself.

There is indeed another case where Marcion held to a teaching that went back to New Testament era. It is referred to in 1 John 2:7: “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.” Marcion was “such a one,” as is seen, for example, in the remark of the 3rd century writer, Hippolytus who writes: “Marcion repudiates altogether our Saviour’s Birth, thinking it out of the question that a creature of destructive Strife [i.e., of the ruler or creator of this world] should become the Logos fighting on the side of Love, that is of the Good.”²⁸ But this merely shows, as in the previous case, that just because a teaching is old, doesn’t mean it is good, nor that it ever enjoyed apostolic endorsement.

BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD AND MORMONISM AS “CHRISTIAN”?

Ancient references to baptism of/for the dead have also played into another apologetic strategy used by Mormons in recent years as part of their attempt to assert Mormonism’s right to be considered Christian. This strategy consists of taking individual Mormon teachings and practices separately one by one and then scouring early Church history in hopes of finding some similar teaching and practice associated with someone, somewhere, who was traditionally described at one time or another as Christian. It is then asserted that if whoever it was, could be in any way considered “Christian,” so too should the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is what Peterson and Ricks were doing when they wrote:²⁹

The argument that Latter-day Saints cannot be Christians because they practice baptism for the dead presumes that it has been definitely established that 1 Corinthians 15:29 has nothing to do with an early Christian practice of baptism for the dead. The argument ignores the fact that such second-century groups as the Montanists and Marcionites—who are invariably referred to as Christians—practiced a similar rite.

28 Hippolytus, *Philosophumena* 30 (p. 383) (ET: Hippolytus, *Philosophumena or Refutation of All Heresies* [2 vols.; trans. F. Legge; London: SPCK/New York: Macmillan, 1921], 2:89-90). See also Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 10-11.

29 Daniel C. Peterson & Stephen D. Ricks, “Comparing LDS Beliefs with First-Century Christianity,” *Ensign* (Mar 1988): 8. See also Peterson & Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 109.

It is simply false to say that Marcionites are “invariably referred to as Christians.” Typical of the Early Church’s view of Marcion and his followers is the following story of an encounter between Marcion and Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John the Evangelist:

And Polycarp himself, when Marcion once met him and said, “Knowest thou us?” replied, “I know the first born of Satan.” Such caution did the apostles and their disciples exercise that they might not even converse with any of those who perverted the truth.³⁰

In contrast, Mormon writer Alexander B. Morrison readily admits that the Marcionites were regarded as heretics, but he does so in the context of making the outrageous assertion that it was for the practice of baptism for the dead that Marcion was “accused of heresy, and condemned by ‘orthodox’ Christians.”³¹ But, again, that simply isn’t true either.³² Marcion was condemned for rejecting the God of the Old Testament and much of the New Testament. He was condemned as well for repudiating a number of central Christian teachings including the resurrection of the dead.

Christians might feel comfortable using the term “Christian” to describe Marcion, so long as the term is an adjective modifying the noun “heresy.” Marcion was the founder of a “Christian” heresy in the sense that he cobbled together his system largely from Christian sources in a Christian context. Hence it would be wrong to say he founded, for example, a “Buddhist” heresy. His was a Christian heresy. In the same way most Christians would be happy to speak of Mormonism as Christian in the same sense, i.e., as a Christian, as opposed to say, a Buddhist, or Jewish, or Moslem heresy. To be sure Mormons are perfectly within their rights to call themselves Christians if they want to: ’Tis a free country. But as soon as they begin insisting that other people call them Christians they run into problems of the sort that always arise where ancient cherished words are co-opted and given new and foreign meanings.

30 Eusebius, *Church History* 4.14.7 (ET: *NPNF*² 1.187)

31 Alexander B. Morrison, *Turning from Truth: A New Look at the Great Apostasy* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005), 151.

32 See the sections on Marcionites and Montanists in Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine Gunsalus Gonzalez, *Heretics for Armchair Theologians* (illust. Ron Hill; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 45-61, 63-76.



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BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD AMONG THE CERINTHIANS

A while ago we were discussing a rather widespread Mormon misunderstanding concerning who the 4th century writer Epiphanius had accused of practicing baptism for the dead. As the reader will recall, they were saying it was the Marcionites, when in reality it was another heretical group known as the Cerinthians. Here is what Epiphanius said about them:

For their school reached its height in this country, I mean Asia, and in Galatia as well. And in these countries I also heard of a tradition which said that when some of their people died too soon, without baptism, others would be baptized for them in their names, so that they would not be punished for rising unbaptized at the resurrection and become the subjects of the authority that made the world.³³

Cerinthus's heresy differed at points from that of Marcion. For example, Cerinthus is not thought to have denied the resurrection outright, as Marcion did, but rather is credited with saying that Jesus would not rise until the general resurrection.³⁴ By the fourth century, when Epiphanius was writing, some Cerinthians were denying the resurrection, while others continued in the teachings of their founder.³⁵

When Mormon apologists seek to exploit the teaching of early heretics in support of their own, they often place the words *heretic* or *heretical* in quotation marks as a way of casting doubt over the designation. They often further underscore this with some reference to the teacher or the group being condemned by the "orthodox," again in quotation marks. The idea is to minimize the significance of the negative characterization: How is a church that called itself "orthodox," but which *we* know through latter-day revelation was already caught in the deep slide of apostasy, really fit to decide who is and who isn't a heretic? In the case of Cerinthus, however, the Mormons are in a bit more difficult situation in terms of being able to deploy this particular strategy of dismissal.³⁶ This is because Cerinthus lived at an early enough time for a comment of actual apostolic appraisal to have survived about him. This was passed down by the apostle John's

33 Epiphanius, *Panarion* 1.28.6.4-5 (ET: *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis* Book I [Sects. 1-46] [Nag Hammadi & Manichaean Studies 63; 2nd ed; trans. Frank Williams; Leiden: Brill, 2009], 120).

34 Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 3.42.6.1.

35 Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 3.42.6.6.

36 One of the most striking features of Mormon apologetics is how many of its strategies have been crafted to be used in dismissing evidence, as opposed to weighing it.

eminent disciple Polycarp of Smyrna, who recounts how the apostle went to bathe one day in the baths at Ephesus, but, upon seeing Cerinthus within, quickly left, exclaiming: "Let's get out of here lest the place fall in: Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is inside!"³⁷ Now to be sure this does not imply a particular comment upon the validity of any single teaching or practice of Cerinthus, much less any evaluation of his, or his followers, practice of baptism for the dead. But it does show quite clearly that he was poorly regarded by at least one of the original twelve apostles, a fact that in itself ought to give pause to anyone later trying to establish their own doctrine as validly Christian on the grounds that Cerinthus had endorsed it.

Having said that, we still need to ask what Cerinthian baptism for the dead actually consisted of? Clearly it was, again, a form of proxy baptism. Cerinthians were being baptized "when some of their people died too soon, without baptism." Epiphanius does not say what "too soon" means. It may be the Cerinthians had a practice of catechumen baptism similar to that of the Marcionites. His reference to the practice being done on behalf of "their people" might suggest this. Or it might suggest something more generally applied to unbaptized Cerinthian believers who had died. The words "their people" would seem to restrict the application of the rite to Cerinthians in any case.³⁸

BAPTISM FOR DEAD AMONG THE MONTANISTS

We mentioned above that Peterson and Ricks had suggested that the "anti-Mormon claim that those who baptize for the dead cannot be Christian . . . ignores the fact that such groups as the Montanists—whom we have already seen to be universally recognized as Christians—practiced a similar rite."³⁹ The claim that the Montanists were "universally recognized as Christians," is incorrect, as it was in the case of the Marcionites. What Peterson and Ricks have done is look in a handful of recent dictionaries

37 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.4, quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.14.6 (ET: Paul M. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007), 129).

38 Although one can easily imagine some Mormon apologist interpreting "their people" creatively to mean, not fellow Cerinthians but ancestral kin, as a way of being able to claim the passage as evidence for their own elaborate practice of baptizing their own non-Mormon relatives. So far as I am aware no Mormon apologist has made this claim as yet. However, since trading on ambiguity is a major feature of Mormon apologetics, we would not be surprised to find this interpretation to be adopted somewhere by some Mormon apologist or other in the future, if only because I have mentioned its possibility as an interpretation here.

39 Peterson & Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 109.

and encyclopedias where the adjective Christian was used to describe these two movements.⁴⁰ Naturally such a superficial approach to research is inadequate for arriving at a true sense of how both ancient and modern Christians have viewed these two movements. As it happens the teachings of Marcion have almost always been deemed heretical, but there are those in the modern Church who are more willing to entertain the possibility that Montanus and his followers were Christians, and to see a parallel to Montanism in the modern prophetic or charismatic movements, where, although a lot of good things happen, some people have been a bit too quick to declare the time of the end, make prophesies that don't pan out, or fake miracles, tongues, or other spiritual gifts. Unhealthy? Certainly! Ill advised? Indubitably! But heretical? Well, maybe, maybe not. In addition the fact that the great theologian Tertullian ultimately became a Montanist has also been a mitigating factor in hesitancy to write the whole movement off as heretical. By way of contrast to modern Christian feelings, the ancient Church was largely agreed on the heretical character of Montanism.⁴¹

But however that may be, evidence that can be cited for a Montanist baptism for the dead is slender and late, consisting primarily of a single reference from the late 4th century writer Filaster (Filastrus/Philastrus), who claimed without elaboration concerning the Montanists, that "They baptize the dead" (*Hi mortuos baptizant*).⁴² Yet even granting the brevity of Filaster's statement, notice that we are not talking, apparently, of proxy baptism, i.e., the baptizing a live person in a dead one's stead, i.e., a baptism *for* the dead. Rather we are talking about baptism *of* the dead, i.e., the baptism of a corpse. Hugh Wimber Nibley, that late great Father Patriarch of Mormon apologetics, recognized the lack of direct parallel here, yet still attempted to make the passage relevant for the Mormon cause by representing it as a corrupted form of the earlier, and allegedly more pristine, practice of the Marcionites. Thus for Nibley the Marcionite practice represented "a half-way point between baptism for the dead and the *later rite* of baptism of the dead . . . in their

need to find some official condemnation of baptism for the dead, churchmen have had to resort to citing those instances which deal with condemnation of its opposite, namely baptism of the dead" (my italics). Therefore, whenever the early Church spoke of baptism *of* the dead, Nibley wants to regard it as "a deliberate confusion."⁴³ As to Filaster's description of the Montanist practice, Nibley deftly dismisses it as one of "a number of false and exaggerated charges against the Cataphrygians [Montanists] in the fourth century." Nibley was very sure of himself in what he says here (as he was in all things), but there is really no reason to claim that the Montanists were being slandered by Filaster when he said that they baptized the dead. Nor can Nibley establish that things developed in the way he described. The weakness of his argument is rendered conspicuous by his need to resort there to a stock *ad hominem* attack on the supposedly sinister intents and motives of the early Christian church.

THE CONDEMNATION OF POST-MORTEM BAPTISM AT THE SYNOD OF HIPPO (393)

John A. Tvedtnes is very typical of Mormon scholars and apologists when he remarks:

That baptism for the dead was indeed practiced in some orthodox Christian circles is indicated by the decisions of two late fourth-century councils. The fourth canon (fifth in some lists) of the Synod of Hippo, held in 393, declares, "The Eucharist shall not be given to dead bodies . . . nor baptism conferred upon them." The ruling was confirmed four years later in the sixth canon of the Third Council of Carthage.⁴⁴

Tvedtnes is mostly right, except for one thing. The canon he quotes reads: "The Eucharist shall not be given *to* dead bodies, nor baptism conferred *upon* them."⁴⁵ The error is calling what was condemned baptism *for* the dead, which he does at the beginning of the passage. As in the case of Filaster's remark about the Montanists, so here too, we are dealing with a baptism *of* not *for* the dead. The point is brought out rather sharply by the fact that apparently the Eucharist was being placed into the mouths of corpses as well.

40 Ibid., p. 52.

41 As is clear from a perusal of the ancient evidence collected in Ronald E. Heine's *The Montanist Oracles and Testimonia* (Patristic Monograph Series 14; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989).

42 Filaster, *Book of Heresies* 49. For English and Latin versions of the extended passage see Heine, *Montanist Oracles*, 138-139. The case of the sometimes appealed to Epitaph of Domnos is obscure, and in any case Tabbernee is certainly correct in saying that in it "[t]here is no hint that someone else was baptized on his [Domnos's] behalf." William Tabbernee, *Montanist Inscriptions and Testimonia: Epigraphic Sources Illustrating the History of Montanism* (North American Patristic Society Patristic Monograph Series 16; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 417-18.

43 Hugh Nibley, "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times" in *Mormonism and Early Christianity (Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 4; eds. Todd M. Compton & Stephen D. Ricks; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book/ Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1987), 129-30.*

44 Tvedtnes, "Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity," 57.

45 Karl Joseph von Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*. Vol. 2 (trans. Henry Nutcombe Oxenham; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1876), 397 (italics mine).

This claim that the Synod of Hippo/Council of Carthage had condemned baptism *for* the dead is an oft repeated one in Mormon apologetics, again largely because B. H. Roberts said it⁴⁶ and many others simply copied what he said either verbatim or nearly so.⁴⁷ In this case as well Roberts was apparently relying on Jacobi's article in Kitto. And once again he misread his source:

Jacobi
In the <i>Concil. Carthagin.</i> A.D. 397, can. 6, and <i>Codex Eccles. Afric.</i> can. 18, it is forbidden to administer baptism and the holy communion to the dead.
Roberts
The council of Carthage, held A. D., 397, in its sixth canon, forbids the administration of baptism and holy communion for the dead.

It is curious that Roberts leaves out any reference to what Jacobi says soon after: "Here baptism *by proxy* is not alluded to, and we must therefore assume that the Councils had no ground for its prohibition, the custom having, as it seems, not then existed in those parts."⁴⁸ Interestingly when the Mormon Moroni Snow appealed to this same passage from Kitto in his 1880 sermon, "Redemption and Regeneration," he managed to notice that the article spoke of baptism *of not for* the dead, and so he too remarked upon the fact that "baptism by proxy is not alluded to."⁴⁹

The context in which baptism *of* the dead as condemned in these late 4th century ecclesiastical gatherings might arise is not hard to imagine. Indeed it dovetails nicely with the fact that some people had been putting off their baptisms until they were about to die. The rationale for that practice being that one was supposed to avoid all sin after baptism. Already more than a half-century earlier the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, had waited to be baptized until he was on

46 Roberts, *The Gospel*, 290; *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History*, 430; *New Witness for God 1*, 384.

47 E.g., G. F. Richards, "Genealogy and Temple Work," 98; L. Richards, *Marvelous Work*, 180; Zobell, "If the Dead Rise Not," 530; Peterson, "Your Family Tree," 511; Matthias F. Cowley, in *Cowley and Whitney on Doctrine* (comp. Forace Green; Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1963), 127.

48 Jacobi, "Baptism for the Dead," in *Kitto* 1:289 (italics original).

49 Moroni Snow "Redemption and Regeneration," *Latter-day Saints Millennial Star* 42.24 (June 14, 1880): 370.

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his deathbed.⁵⁰ It doesn't take a strong imagination to see how a practice of baptism of the dead, could come along to supplement baptism of the dying in cases where the dying had waited just a bit too long.

AN EXERCISE IN REACHING

Given the paucity of early evidence in which someone, somewhere, was said to have practiced baptism *of* or *for* the dead, it is hardly surprising to find more intrepid Mormon apologists searching further afield for potentially useful evidence for defending their practice of proxy baptism. And in the process they have managed to turn up a few tidbits that are interesting, even though not ultimately very helpful to their case. Here our focus continues on John A. Tvedtnes and the late Hugh Nibley who seem to be the two who have worked hardest at this.

It should be noted before we proceed further that in almost every case we have looked at so far those who are said to practice baptism *for* or *of* the dead were being described by others and not by themselves. Happily, we do have a passage from an early Gnostic teacher named Theodotus who does venture an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29 on his own: "And when the Apostle said, 'Else what shall they do who are baptised for the dead?' . . . For, he says, the angels of whom we are portions were baptised for us. But we are dead, who are deadened by this existence, but the males are alive who did not participate in this existence."⁵¹ In other words baptism for the dead refers to angels being baptised for us. Such a passage is understandably of limited use to Mormon apologists and they have not featured it. Of some interest however is the passage appealed to by Tvedtnes from the Gnostic *Pistis Sophia* 3.128 where Mary asks Jesus what to do if a pious relative of an unrepentant, definitely outer-darkness bound person dies, and Jesus responds by recommending that "the one *mystery* of the ineffable which forgives sins at all times," should be performed, promising a positive outcome. Tvedtnes adds words and excludes them in order to make the passage sound more Mormon. He does this first of all, by equating what the text called *mysterries* with *ordinances*, and *one mystery of*

50 As historian Michael Grant has written: "Surprise has often been expressed . . . that Constantine, who had displayed his adherence to Christianity so much earlier, postponed his baptism until what was virtually his death-bed. Some members of the Church deplored the lateness of the decision. But in fact late, last minute baptism — like adult baptism in general — was not an infrequent phenomenon, because it was strongly felt that after baptism one ought not to commit a sin, and the only way to ensure this was to become baptized when one was not going to live very much longer" (*Constantine the Great: The Man & His Times* [New York: Scribner's, 1994], 212).

51 *Excerpts from Theodotus* 22 (ET: Robert Pierce Casey).

the ineffable with *baptism*. While both substitutions may be reasonable surmises, they are by no means obvious from the immediate context, and Tvedtnes made no attempt to provide evidence indicating that his surmise in each case was correct. Then secondly, he uses ellipsis points to pass over mention that the passage appears to involve a process of post mortal progress that involves reincarnation. The latter can be seen plain enough by simply reproducing Mary's question to Jesus with the words Tvedtnes excludes printed in bold:

“My Lord, if a good man has fulfilled all the mysteries [ordinances], and he has a relative, in a word, he has a man and that man is an impious one who has committed all the sins which are worthy of the outer darkness; and he has not repented; or he has completed his number of cycles in the changes of the body, and that man has done nothing profitable and has come forth from the body; and we have known of him certainly that he has sinned and is worthy of the outer darkness; what should we do to him so that we save him from the punishments of the dragon of the outer darkness, so that he is returned to a righteous body which will find the mysteries of the Kingdom of the Light, and become good and go to the height, and inherit the Kingdom of the Light?”⁵²

And yet despite Tvedtnes's Mormonizing touches, there is no question that the passage is dealing with some sort of liturgical rite aimed at delivering souls from outer darkness.

In addition to the above, Tvedtnes also references in footnotes (but does not describe) several interesting practices by contemporary Middle Eastern Mandaean, another heretical group, including one in which, when a baby dies during their lengthy baptism ritual, an image of the child is made out of dough and the rest of the ceremony is performed to completion, thus rendering it valid, even though the child has died,⁵³ as well as an

52 Cf. Tvedtnes, “Baptism for the Dead in the Early Church,” 70, and *Pistis Sophia* 3.128 (ET: Violet McDermot; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 322 & 324.

53 See E. S. Drower, *The Mandaean of Iraq & Iran: Their Cults, Customs, Magic, Legends, and Folklore* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), 46.

actual example of the practice of baptism for the dead.⁵⁴ But of course contemporary examples are of limited value when trying to establish the precise character of ancient practice.

At points however both Nibley and Tvedtnes become too creative in their attempts at molding the evidence in the direction they feel it needs to go. Let me demonstrate this with one example from each.

In the case of Tvedtnes, one of the most interesting claims he puts forward is that the Egyptian Coptic Church practiced and continues to practice baptism for the dead. He even dedicated a paper to the topic entitled “Baptism for the Dead: The Coptic Rationale.”⁵⁵ One of the interesting things about that paper is that in the course of his argument he gives no actual evidence. He does mention the decision of Hippo and Carthage and then says that “The monophysitic church of Egypt was not represented at these minor councils and hence did not feel bound to discontinue the practice.” Tvedtnes is

54 The extent to which Tvedtnes's example departs from the simplicity of the ancient baptismal liturgies is seen in the following excerpt in *The Mandaean of Iraq & Iran* by Drower (pages 215-16):

Then, without speaking, the proxy descends into the water, and repeats voicelessly, ‘I, N. son of N. (the name of the dead person) am baptized with the baptism of [216] Bahram the Great, son of the mighty [ones]. My baptism shall protect me and cause me to ascend to the summit.’ He submerges thrice, and on emerging puts on a completely new *rasta*. As in the case of the dead person, a piece of gold (*athro*) and a piece of silver (*kesva*) must be sewn to the right and left side respectively of the stole. The proxy then comes and sits before the *toriana* facing the North Star (House of Abathur), while the *ganzibra*, who wears a *klila* (myrtle wreath) on the little finger of his right hand, goes, together with the priests and *shganda*, to perform another *rishama* at the *yardna*.

They return and stand in a row facing the north, the *ganzibra* to the extreme right and the *shganda* at the extreme left, and repeat the ‘*Sharwali* ‘tres’, &c., touching each part of the *rasta*.

They then repeat:

‘My Lord be praised! The Right heal ye! In the name of the Great Primal Strange Life, from sublime worlds of light, who is above all works; health and purity (or victory), strength and soundness, speaking and hearing, joy of heart and a forgiver of sins may there be for my soul, mine, N. of N. (the name of the reciter), who have prayed this prayer of *rahmia*, and a forgiver of sins may there be for N. son of N. (the name of the dead person) of this *masiqta* (ascension) and *dukhrana* (mention, remembrance), and a forgiver of sins may there be for our fathers, and teachers, and brothers and sisters, both those who have left the body and those still in the body, and a forgiver of sins may there be for me.’

55 Published in *Special Papers of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology* 2 (Sept 1989), The online version made available at FAIR's website: <http://www.fairmormon.org/archive/publications/baptism-for-the-dead-the-coptic-rationale>. I follow the unpaginated online version.

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right in regarding these councils as merely regional rather than ecumenical, but beyond that he speaks of them anachronistically in using the adjective monophysitic to describe the Church in Egypt. That term has no relevance in the present case, it only really comes into play after the mid-fifth century Council of Chalcedon. More deeply problematic is Tvedtnes's claim that the Egyptian Church *continued* to practice baptism for the dead due to it not being under the jurisdiction of Hippo and Carthage. The difficulty there is that he provides no evidence that the Egyptian church ever *started* practicing baptism for the dead in the first place. Nor could he have done so, since there is none. Naturally one cannot *continue* to baptize for the dead unless one has *started* doing it in the first place. Despite this Tvedtnes includes a footnote in which he claims that "there is abundant textual evidence for this practice among early Christians in Egypt."⁵⁶ Actually there isn't.

When it comes time to support his claim of an *ongoing* practice of baptism for the dead in Egypt, Tvedtnes writes: "I have, to date, found no documentation for its existence in the modern Coptic Church. Nevertheless, some of my Coptic friends have assured me that it is still practiced in the case of family members who die unbaptized." Tvedtnes goes on to point to one printed source which is supposed to provide evidence of the continuation of the practice in the modern Coptic Church: "the Coptic story of the girl who was baptized after her death," (Tvedtnes's words). The story is found in S. H. Leeder's *Modern Sons of the Pharaohs: A Study of the Manners and Customs of the Copts of Egypt* (1918).

When we go to that work, however, and turn to the page indicated by Tvedtnes, we discover that it provides evidence neither of baptism for the dead's continuing existence in the modern Coptic Church, nor of its having ever been practiced. Rather it describes a story attributed to the fourth century that dealt with a miraculous divine action relating to a girl who died without baptism:

There is a Coptic story of the fourth century (which might have come from a village to-day) illustrating not only the importance attached to baptism, but also the infinite hope these Eastern people have in the mercy of God. A certain man living remote from the world had a little daughter, who died before she could be baptized. Her father distributed among the poor the portion that came to her; and he never ceased to make entreaty to God on behalf of his daughter because she had departed without being baptized. As he prayed one day, he heard a voice, which said, "Have no sorrow; I have baptized thy daughter"; but he lacked faith. And the voice spake again,

saying, "Uncover her grave, and thou wilt find she is no longer there." And he did so, and he found her not, for she had departed, and had been laid with the believers.⁵⁷

Not only does this story fail to provide evidence for a practice of baptism for the dead, it indicates the opposite, namely that one was not in place. When his little daughter died without baptism, all the father could do was pray and hope in God. Had such a practice been in place, there would have been no reason for the anxious prayer, nor the miraculous sign in answer to it, nor even for the story itself.

In advance of its appearance, Tvedtnes promised concerning his article "Baptism for the Dead in the Early Church" published in 1999 that it would "put to rest any doubts about the widespread belief in baptism for the dead among early Christians."⁵⁸ This ambitious claim naturally leads the reader familiar with this earlier paper on baptism for the dead in the Coptic Church to wonder whether Tvedtnes would do anything in the new article to improve his case on that point. Given the fact that Tvedtnes's earlier assertion about the Coptic Church's ongoing practice of baptism for the dead was based on nothing better than hearsay—"my Coptic friends have assured me"—would he now in his more definitive study firm up his evidential base, or at least delete his unwarranted claim? As it happened he did neither. Indeed he again appealed to hearsay and to the story in Leeder's book, this time more inaccurately than before: "To date, I have found only one modern story of an Egyptian girl who was baptized by proxy after her death." The key distorting addition is the word "proxy."

Ironically, in his "final-word" article, Tvedtnes further raises the possibility that the Syrian Orthodox Church practices baptism for the dead as well, but again on the basis of nothing better than hearsay: "A Syriac Orthodox priest recently told me that his church still recognizes baptism for the dead, but I have not yet received the promised documentation to support that claim."⁵⁹

Naturally since Tvedtnes's claims came to be posted on the Internet, it was only a matter of time before someone from the Coptic Church would respond. In the Question and Answer section of the website for the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, one of the questions takes note of the Mormon claim

⁵⁷ S. H. Leeder, *Modern Sons of the Pharaohs: A Study of the Manners and Customs of the Copts of Egypt* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918), 101.

⁵⁸ John A. Tvedtnes, "The Dead Shall Hear the Voice," *FARMS Review of Books* 10.2 (1998): 197, n. 11. Available online at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute: <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol10/iss2/14/>.

⁵⁹ Tvedtnes, "Baptism in the Early Church," 74, n. 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 1.

and then asks: “I know our church does not practice baptism for the dead now, but did it ever?” To which an extended answer is given beginning with the statement: “Baptism for the dead is a false practice never observed by the Church.”⁶⁰

We turn then to Hugh Nibley. It is hard to read very far in Nibley before getting the feeling (legitimately or not) that he is trying to make it hard for his readers to check out his claims from his sources. He does this, as I have noted elsewhere, by “featuring obscure editions in other languages instead of the widely available, and often more up-to-date and authoritative, English ones.”⁶¹ This is true in the present case, in addition to which he confounds things further by not referring to his source by its usual name.

In the course of his 1946 sequence of articles on “Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times,” quoted here from his collected works, Nibley quotes a work he calls “Discourses to the Apostles” in which the Lord tells his disciples that they will be called “Servants [*diakonoi*] because they [the dead] will receive the baptism of life and the forgiveness of your⁶² sins *from my hand through you*, . . . and so have part in the heavenly kingdom.”⁶³ By placing the word “the dead” in brackets Nibley is indicating that in the larger context it was *the dead* that were clearly in the author’s mind. But how do we discover whether or not that is the case?⁶⁴ Nibley provides a footnote that directs us to pages 133-35 of a German volume by Carl Schmidt entitled *Gespräche Jesu mit seiner Jüngern nach der Auferstehung* (1919). The actual passage quoted is on page 135 and we see that Schmidt, unlike Nibley, uses the familiar title in the top left heading of the pages cited: *Epistula apostolorum*, known in English as the *Epistle of the Apostles*. Both the Latin and English forms are the familiar names by which scholars refer to this well-known work. Nibley uses neither, but inappropriately gives as the name of the work a title derived from the title of Schmidt’s book. This makes it unnecessary for him to cite the chapter and verse he is quoting from the *Epistle of the Apostles*. It would have been nice had Nibley helped his readers evaluate

his claim by informing them that at the time he wrote the passage he quotes, could have easily been consulted in section 42 of the English edition of the *Epistle of the Apostles*⁶⁵ in Montague Rhodes James’s popular *The Apocryphal New Testament*.⁶⁶ Had he done that, however, it would have become clear to every English reader who cared to check the reference that his insertion of “the dead” into the phrase “they shall receive the baptism of life and the remission of their sins at my hands through you,”⁶⁷ was entirely illegitimate. The occasion of the statement in the larger context is Jesus’s meeting with his disciples after his resurrection and teaching them about their upcoming task of world evangelism. The baptism being referred to, therefore, is the baptism they will be performing on living people as they go out and preach the Gospel. It has nothing to do with baptism for the dead.

CONCLUSION:

Early orthodox Christianity never had a practice of baptism for the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:29 notwithstanding. Very possibly in that context Paul was alluding to the practice of a faction in the Corinthian Church that had departed substantially from early apostolic teaching in other crucial areas as well (they may have, for example, also been denying the resurrection). Two additional heretical groups, the Marcionites and the Cerinthians, did practice forms of proxy baptism—the former for catechumens who had died during preparation for baptism, and the latter for fellow Cerinthian believers who had “died too soon,” whatever that means. In addition to these examples of baptism *for* the dead, there is also evidence of a practice of baptism *of* the dead, i.e., a baptism of corpses. The Montanists were accused of this by one 4th century author, although when Tertullian, writing as a Montanist at the beginning of the 3rd century, refers to the practice in *Against Marcion* 5.10 he does not affirm it, nor does he even seem to know what Paul was speaking about in 1 Corinthians 15:29. In addition, the Synod of Hippo (393) forbid the practice of baptizing dead bodies as well as the placing of the Eucharist in their mouths. This practice, baptism *of not for* the dead, although frequently appealed to by Mormon apologists, really does not relate to their own practice at all. This leaves them only the Marcionite and Cerinthian practices to appeal to for explicit support, although in each of these cases we are probably dealing with a rite whose inner logic is entirely foreign to the one underpinning the current Mormon practice.

60 See, <http://suscopts.org/q&a/index.php?qid=1110&catid=45>.

61 Ronald V. Huggins, “Hugh Nibley’s Footnotes,” *Salt Lake City Messenger* 110 (May 2008): 11.

62 It should be “their sins” (Schmidt: “ihrer Sünden”). See also, M. R. James below. Apparently, Nibley simply made a mistake here since the mistranslation does not appear to forward his argument.

63 Nibley, “Baptism for the Dead,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 123.

64 Also note that where Nibley has “forgiveness for your sins,” it ought to be, and Nibley probably actually intended, “forgiveness for their sins.”

65 Sec. 33.1 in Schmidt’s translation of the Coptic Version.

66 Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), 500.

67 Quoted here from the edition of James.

Thus the case Mormon apologists put forward for a baptism for the dead endorsed by Jesus and the apostles is not impressive. But then, given the methodology endorsed by the First Presidency and Peterson and Ricks at the beginning of this article, it doesn't have to be, so long as the only ones they hope to persuade are Mormons. Still, it is interesting that even being given to such dubious methodology, the language of legitimately using evidence and making valid arguments still persists, as in the case of Tvedtnes's prediction that his 1999 article on the subject would "put to rest any doubts about the widespread belief in baptism for the dead among early Christians."⁶⁸ And while it is possible that in making that declaration Tvedtnes was only engaging in rhetorical bluster, a more disturbing possibility exists. Did he actually believe what he said, and should we regard his overconfidence as a consequence of following the flawed methodology? And does he not imply this himself when he says: "Latter-day Saints, believing that the great apostasy was already well under way by Marcion's time and that no Christian group

then possessed the full truth, see the practice as a remnant of an earlier rite dating from the time of the apostles?"⁶⁹

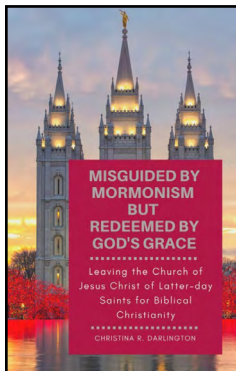
What we would have in that case is a methodology that actually fosters an insensitivity toward the weight of evidence, and which in turn breeds overconfidence, a vicious cycle that calls to mind what Karl Mannheim said in another connection about those who "become so intensely interest-bound to a situation that they are simply no longer able to see certain facts which undermine their domination," or, in this case, their sense of being "in the right."⁷⁰ Such a situation makes it extremely difficult for Mormons to dialogue with and/or be taken seriously by outsiders who expect the early evidence to be handled in a credible and respectful manner. Since this has not been the case, the best outsiders can perhaps do in a sense is to regard such authors as *objects* of study rather than partners in scholarly interaction. ■

69 Tvedtnes, "Baptism for the Dead In Early Christianity," 56.

70 Quoted in Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 120.

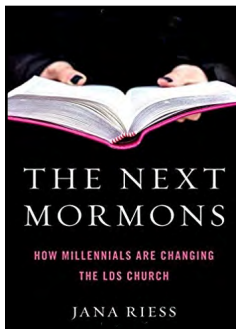
68 Tvedtnes, "Dead Shall Hear the Voice," 197, n. 11.

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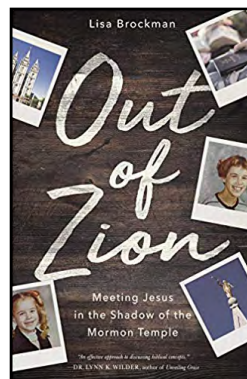
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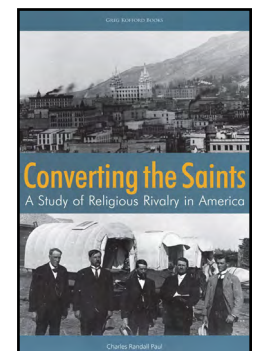
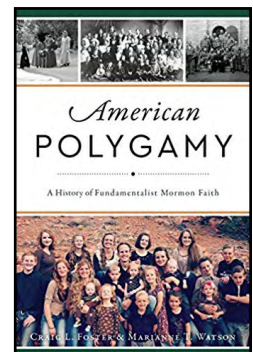


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IS BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD A CHRISTIAN PRACTICE?

Christy Darlington, Witnesses for Jesus, Inc.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:29: “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?”

MORMON POSITION:

Latter-day Saints (Mormons) believe that water baptism by immersion “is the first saving ordinance of the gospel. . . . All who seek eternal life must follow the example of the Savior by being baptized and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost” (*True to the Faith*, 2004, p. 21). Baptism, according to Mormonism, is the prerequisite to receiving the “gift of the Holy Ghost” and is a necessary step in the process of being exalted to the highest level of heaven. Believing that non-Mormon dead relatives will have an opportunity to receive the Mormon “restored gospel” in “spirit prison,” Latter-day Saints take it upon themselves to help “save” them by engaging in proxy baptism on behalf of their dead ancestors. Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie explains:

. . . though held captive in the spirit prison, these prisoners of hope looked forward with desire and expectation to their redemption . . . a redemption that would be complete only after baptism for the dead had been performed for them in this mortal sphere where there is water.—(*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 601)

Appealing to 1 Corinthians 15:29 and Hebrews 11:40 for Biblical support, Joseph Smith claimed that “the greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us [Mormons] is to seek after our dead . . . every spirit in the eternal world can be ferreted out and saved. . . . And so you can see how far you can be a savior . . . This doctrine was the burden of the scriptures. Those Saints who neglect it in behalf of their deceased relatives, do it at the peril of their own salvation” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 1976, by Joseph Fielding Smith, pp. 356-357, 193).

BIBLICAL RESPONSE:

Contrary to the claims of Mormonism, physical baptism is not a pre-requisite for salvation. At Luke 23:43, we read that Jesus assured the thief on the cross (who had not been baptized), that he would be “with” Him in paradise that day, simply because he believed. The apostle Paul made a distinction between the “gospel” and “baptism” when he proclaimed to the Corinthian

believers: “I thank God that I baptized none of you. . . . For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Corinthians 1:14, 17). Not only does Paul reject the notion that “baptism” was part of the “gospel,” but he repeatedly affirmed salvation by “faith” apart from works (see Romans 4:5, 11:6). Furthermore, we see that baptism is not a requirement to receive the Holy Ghost. At Acts 10:44-47, we read of an incident where believers received the gift of the “Holy Ghost” before they were baptized.

Just as Biblical Scripture presents water baptism as a sign (not seal) of salvation, there is no indication in Scripture that early Christians engaged in the practice of “baptism for the dead.” The only place the practice is mentioned is in 1 Corinthians 15:29. It is important to note that in this passage, Paul excluded himself and the Christian believers he was speaking to by his use of the terms “they” and “them” in reference to the practice. It is likely that Paul had in mind heretical groups such as the Cerinthians and Marcionites who practiced a form of baptism for the dead. It appears that Paul was pointing to groups such as these as examples of those whose practice would be futile if Christ had not indeed raised from the dead. If such practice is indeed essential for salvation, we ask why the lack of emphasis in the Bible and Book of Mormon? With genealogical research being a necessary activity for “baptism for the dead,” we ask why the Bible warns against this practice when it states:

But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.—Titus 3:9

Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.—1 Timothy 1:4

Thus we conclude that contrary to the Mormon notion that we all can be “saviors” by “redeeming our dead” ancestors through baptism, the Bible proclaims:

None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him.—Psalm 49:7

(<https://www.4mormon.org/is-baptism-for-the-dead-a-christian-practice/>)

(See Christy Darlington’s new book on previous page.)

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS AND EMAILS

May 2019: LDS woman: I read your article and was rather impressed by your understanding of your book, but I am concerned that you provided a bit of false information about the Church's doctrine. Mormons, or Latter-Day Saints, are Christians, and we believe in one God, which is our Heavenly Father. We do not worship Joseph Smith or anything like that. . . .

Sandra: *After sending her two pages of quotes from Joseph Smith and other LDS prophets where they clearly taught that Heavenly Father is just one of many deities, she responded as follows:*

So I like to call this the law of eternal progression. Like it said in the articles [that I sent her], God—by which I mean our Heavenly Father, not Jesus Christ—was once a mortal, among others, who came to earth and had trials and experiences. We can assume—just assume, though, we have no doctrine about this and it does not affect us personally—we can assume that there was another God who was the Heavenly Father of our Heavenly Father—our Heavenly Grandfather. As Latter-Day Saints, we believe that if we accept Christ's Atonement and obey God's commandments, we can be exalted and become literal gods and goddesses. Mind, not everyone will receive this level of exaltation, but it is possible.

What you may be confused about—and it's okay, a lot of people get hung up on this—is that they think that we are saying that we mortals can become equal to our Heavenly Father, Elohim. This is not true. Just like we can progress throughout eternity, so will God. The scriptures say that He is “unchanging.” That can be misleading, because obviously someone who is alive cannot remain exactly the same. It actually means that He does not change direction. He continues to help His children as they progress through life. Part of His plan for helping us includes giving us more revelation and scriptures.

Sandra: *I still don't understand why you originally said the LDS Church believes in one God, since clearly they believe in countless gods. I understand Mormons don't pray to other gods, but when a Christian says there is only one God they mean there are no others anywhere ever, not even in another universe. You clearly knew when I first asked about Mormons believing in many gods what I was meaning so why play a word game with me. Why not just send me this last statement first? Instead of the denial?*

When Isaiah reports God as saying 'Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there

a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any,' [Isa. 44:8] we take that as an absolute statement. If God doesn't know of any other Gods, then there are no other gods anywhere in any other universe.

She responded: I'm sorry if I created any confusion. We only know of other gods in theory, but whether or not there are other gods equal to our Heavenly Father, they have no bearing on our salvation or relationship with him.

May 2019: I love how you guys break the 10 Commandments specially they'll shall not bear false witness against a neighbor.

And I love this that you guys do not believe in the Bible and I know you guys don't read it, didn't Jesus say those without sin cast the first stone. If you love me keep my Commandments. Did Jesus say love one another and guess what you guys are not doing what Jesus is teaching so you guys are hypocrites in the eyes of the Lord

And also Jesus said by your fruits I won't know thee. If you don't know you talking about the fruits of the spirit. Sweetheart you have no idea what you're talking about you have no clue who Jesus is, you talk to talk but you don't walk the walk.

May 2019: My husband and I recently left the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, seven months now. I had been a member my whole life and my husband a convert since he was twelve. We were faithful members. I served as a Relief Society President, a Primary President, Seminary Teacher, Stake Young Women's President and my husband High Counsel, Bishopric, Young Men's President ect. I am an LDS writer, with three published novels through Covenant Communications. Basically, our entire world was LDS.

I came across a side note to teachers in my seminary manual that bothered me. It said that Joseph Smith translated a portion of the Book of Mormon with a stone he found. I started doing research, which led to more research. A week and a half later I knew the church wasn't true! I told my husband and he said he had to do his own research. He came to me a week later and had even more disturbing information.

I'm sure you get many emails like this, so I won't get any more into our story. Basically, at this point I'm almost three fourths of the way through [*Mormonism*] *Shadow and Reality*. One of the worst things, or at least the statement that bothers me the most is in the *History of the Church*. It's a quote you have on your website by Joseph Smith. (*History of The Church*, vol. 6, pp. 408-409) “I have more to boast than ever man had . . .” He then proceeds to compare himself to Christ, saying he

(Joseph) ran a church better than Jesus! Wow! There is no possible way that Joseph Smith “saw” the Savior of the world and thought himself better. If the Primary Account of the First Vision wasn’t convincing enough, this is a blow. My question: Is that quote taken from Joseph’s journals, writings etc.? I realize that *The History of the Church*, though claimed to be written completely by Joseph Smith, has been finished by historians. I want to know the origin of that particular quote, since it is so telling of Joseph’s character.

Sandra: *I sent her the link to the original source, from the Joseph Smith Papers Project:*

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-26-may-1844-as-compiled-by-leo-hawkins/8#full-transcript>

May 2019: Yeah, Utah Lighthouse Ministry, your cult is false. You guys are not born again and your paid liar pastor is not saving you. Your spirit-god is false. You don’t believe in the resurrection. You believe in a fake doctrine called the rapture. You guys are a fake church and you guys are not saved. The church of God that was restored by a prophet is still the truth and your little web site, U[T]LM.org is ca-ca, just like your paid liar pastors are ca-ca.

May 2019: It’s really sad that you guys cannot leave the Church of Jesus Christ of latter day Saints alone. If Sandra is not God she acts like she’s God, you guys are brainwashed by her. But after just life you have to answer to God why you are trying to dry [destroy?] his church good luck with that. I really feel sorry for you guys, . . . I hope one day you’ll find Jesus and truly know who he is, because you have no clue who he is, very sad. . . . Keep up the good work the more you Bash the LDS church the more I know it’s the true church keep up the good work people.

May 2019: Sandra, you may not remember it, but more than 20 years ago I called you from São Paulo, Brazil to ask you questions. I had just learned about B[righam] Y[oung]’s teachings about blacks from your ministry. I have been a biblical Christian [after leaving Mormonism] for 20 years now and I believe the Holy Spirit has called me to also speak up and warn others of the fallacy of Mormonism. I don’t feel adequate to do it and will never be able to do as much as UTLM has done, but would be so appreciative of prayers for guidance. . . . Thank you for all the work you and Jerald have done to show us the way out! Love in Christ!

You can listen to her story on youtube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nnf_NaBY_j0&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0sRRBRy-CFFtGf23OhDX3oJAcQd8wnFM23Z4oFC0phydWjGTRkRqW8KPhU

May 2019: Your cult is false. You will come forth at the second resurrection as eunuchs. You will not have gender, because you do not choose to go to the Celestial Kingdom. You guys are a joke, a sick joke.

July 2019: To Sandra, all my life we were taught to steer clear of the Tanner’s. Nothing but trouble would come from it. 25+ years later as our eyes are opened to the church and we can see that you were right all along. I pray that this vindication sustains you and that more will have their eyes and hearts opened to the truth. . . . Thanks to you and Jerald for all your years of tireless sacrifice and courage to stand for the truth.

July 2019: Your website is such garbage. We know that Jesus instructed the apostles on the temple. You are profane still, and not saved. You shall all perish and come forth in the 2nd resurrection of the unjust as genderless eunuchs. Matthew 19:12.

(Enjoy the Te[l]jestial/Terrestrial Kingdom)

July 2019: How pleased I was when I saw a documentary [on Oxygen] today regarding Mark Hoffman that included comments by you. I was very impressed with your comments and demeanor and am proud that I took the time to read such documents compiled by you and Jerald including *MORMONISM—SHADOW OR REALITY?*, *The Case Against Mormonism*, and *Major Problems of Mormonism*. You have had a significant impact on my thinking concerning religion and Mormonism in particular. Thank you immensely.

See <https://www.oxygen.com/a-lie-to-die-for/season-1/explosive-lies>

August 2019: I just finished Sandra Tanner’s Mormon Stories interview. I think it’s the best one I’ve heard yet! [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W64Ntsea6uw>] She’s very logical, knowledgeable, and she has a lot of entertaining stories! My takeaway thoughts: 1. I can’t see how anyone who listens to that interview can stay believing. 2. It shows how hard the church tried AND STILL continues to hide information!! To the extent that they tried to bankrupt the Tanners out of spite for exposing FACTS. It’s immoral and just plain wrong. Here are two other short videos of hers that are great:

<https://youtu.be/153jwQIVkB4>
<https://youtu.be/3OhLHz2aDRk>

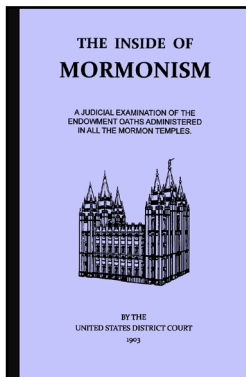
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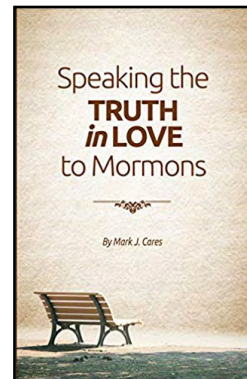
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