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The Fractured Reality of LDS Biblical Studies
- Author** D. Jill Kirby
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- Abstract** This work characterizes the state of LDS biblical studies as fractured because of the tension between historical critical analysis and modern revelatory texts and readings. This splintering extends into other areas such as employment inside or outside the LDS Church’s religious education facilities, the need to engage the challenges of confessional hermeneutics, integrating new scholarly findings into confessional interests, and negotiating a transition from older works such as James E. Talmage’s *Jesus the Christ* to more recent scholarship. In navigating these challenges, LDS exegetes can learn from a similar shift in Roman Catholic biblical scholarship. The events of the Modernist Crisis serve as a cautionary tale illustrating the need for patience and humility when bringing historical-critical approaches into conversation with LDS conventions. However, LDS commentators must push past this milestone to integrate critical scholarship with older work in the LDS tradition. In so doing, they may wish to follow the lead of Catholic biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson, who affirms the rich value of patristic and medieval readings and those of historical-critical methods. In adopting this “both/and” approach, LDS exegetes participate in mending the fractured relationship between the ancient and modern elements of the LDS canon.
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# “Beloved, . . . It Doth Not Yet Appear What We Shall Be”: The Fractured Reality of LDS Biblical Studies

*D. Jill Kirby*

ACCORDING TO THE NON-MORMON HISTORIAN JAN SHIPPS, “the mystery of Mormonism cannot be solved until we solve the mystery of Joseph Smith.”<sup>1</sup> Stated more casually, this is called the “prophet puzzle,” and it is sometimes suggested that Latter-day Saints will understand themselves only to the degree that they understand Joseph Smith. The classic definition of the role played by Joseph Smith was contributed by LDS leader B. H. Roberts in the late nineteenth century: “What was Joseph Smith’s mission? It was the mission of Joseph Smith, under God’s direction, to establish the Church of Christ and the Kingdom of God upon the earth; and to the accomplishment of this work he devoted the whole energy of his life and was faithful until the end.”<sup>2</sup> What Roberts meant by this is that Smith restored organizations, roles, priesthoods, sacraments, and so forth that had been previously present among God’s people in all ages. Smith was particularly clear that Jesus had established this church in his own period. To the extent that information about this part of the Christian past is preserved, it is to be found particularly in the New Testament.

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1. Jan Shippo, “The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith,” *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 19.

2. *Journal of Discourses*, 25:130.

Recently, however, Professor Philip L. Barlow has made a potent suggestion—that Roberts’s formulation of Smith’s work is too confining. Barlow suggests that “the trajectory of Smith’s enterprise exceeded his aspiration to restore the primitive Christian church and to combine this entity with the restored, literal, kingdom of Israel.”<sup>3</sup> According to Barlow, Smith eventually discerned that “virtually every realm of human conception and endeavor that impinged on major relationships was fissured and wanted mending.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, reality itself was fractured and required repair. Smith understood that God, working through an activist prophet, must make “the world of human (and divine-human) systems and relationships cohere again.”<sup>5</sup>

### Mending a fractured canon

One key element of the divine-human system that Smith felt needed mending was the matter of scripture. With respect to the Bible itself, four broad “mending” activities must be noted. First, since the Bible in its present state was inadequate as a source of public authority, Smith made a fresh “translation,” usually understood as a targum rather than as a traditional translation, but nevertheless called the “Joseph Smith Translation” or JST.<sup>6</sup> Second, Smith made interpretive comments and historical claims and filled narrative gaps in biblical passages. In so doing, he also “restored biblical methods, namely the prophetic process itself.”<sup>7</sup> This is

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3. Philip L. Barlow, “To Mend a Fractured Reality: Joseph Smith’s Project,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38/3 (2012): 33.

4. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 35–36.

5. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 32. Smith’s vision of eternal families, linked to each other by indissoluble priesthood power and by revelation to one of the twelve ancient Israelite tribes, is perhaps the most visible example of rectification. Other examples might include the denial of a distinction between the physical and spiritual realms or between the spiritual and temporal and the desire for an unbroken, Adamic language (*ibid.*, 43).

6. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 41. A targum is an interpretation. Barlow correctly characterizes Smith’s targum as “the Bible as it was supposed to be” rather than a restoration of the previously existing autograph.

7. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 11.

particularly important because the claim to prophetic gifts is one of the foundational assertions of the LDS community. Third, Smith used various passages as proof texts in support of LDS doctrines, ecclesiology, and community organization. Fourth, Smith used the language of the Authorized Version with great freedom in composing his own revelations, often to express ideas only loosely related to the original context.<sup>8</sup> Finally, in addition to his work with the Bible, Smith produced a lengthy manuscript, the Book of Mormon. This book “challenged and diluted biblical authority” as it was understood in the Protestant world because it implied the inadequacy of the Bible. However, it also complemented the Bible because it demonstrated the presence and relevance of biblical revelation for nineteenth-century life, and in its own words was intended to shore up the Bible’s authority.<sup>9</sup> Most striking, however, in creating the Book of Mormon Smith “dissolved the distinction between the [biblical] testaments while adding a third.” The “pre-Christian narratives of the Book of Mormon were thoroughly Christianized and spoke of the future Christ as clearly as if he had already come.”<sup>10</sup> Recently, modern LDS leaders have added a subtitle to the Book of Mormon that identifies it as “another testament of Jesus Christ,” thus overtly recognizing Smith’s attempts to repair fractured biblical authority by drawing together sacred texts of scattered historical provenance around a broadly christological narrative. Although Smith used logic and reason as well as revelation in his work with the Bible, the disciplines of modern biblical studies, which were just making themselves felt in the United States, had no role in his activities.<sup>11</sup>

### Reception in the twenty-first century

How has all this played out? At this point I leave the description of Smith’s nineteenth-century work to reflect on its reception in the twenty-first

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8. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 21–26.

9. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 41.

10. Barlow, “Fractured Reality,” 42.

11. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 38.

century. It will come as no surprise that modern biblical studies, which can excel at taking things apart, is in tension with many of those aspects of the LDS canon and tradition that reflect Smith's mending activities. At the moment, the most apparent strain is probably the presence of postexilic biblical language from both testaments in the Book of Mormon. However, in this venue I wish to focus on the New Testament and the work of professional LDS exegetes. When I use the term *exegete* and its synonyms in this article, I am including all those specializations that contribute to the interpretation of scripture.

The LDS community is neither the only, nor the first, faith community for which modern biblical studies are challenging. Just why does this discipline have such a formidable reputation for causing tension and turmoil in faith communities? One response might be that modern work with the Bible is not a singular, monolithic approach. Instead, scholars use a variety of methods to probe biblical texts. For example, the textbook I use for my 200-level course in the Gospels introduces college sophomores to narrative-critical approaches, rhetorical and sociological criticism, canonical interpretation, structuralism, liberationist and feminist readings, and reader-response as well as the historical-critical approaches.<sup>12</sup> This abundance of methods, which yields an intellectually and spiritually rich variety of readings, certainly makes talking about "the" meaning of a text nearly impossible.

A second reason that modern biblical studies can be disruptive in some faith communities concerns what is called "critical" reading. Critical readings ask about the meaning of a text unconstrained by authorities such as churches, religious or historical traditions, or even current academic or popular opinions. When critical reading is applied to a text in the specific period in which it was created, it is called the historical-critical reading.<sup>13</sup> The historical-critical reading of a text

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12. Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 67–89.

13. This definition is complicated by texts that were composed in less traditional ways. For example, texts that are the product of an initial writer followed by one or more editors may well have readings according to the stages of its editing. This is called composition history.

attempts to discern readings that might have made sense to its earliest audiences.<sup>14</sup> Since the Bible was created in a world far different from our own, its language, figures of speech, cultural references, and so forth are not intuitive.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, the historical-critical method is a bridge by which readers can cross between disparate historical eras, but because it does not recognize existing authorities, it is a link that does not always lead where one might expect.

In the process of a historical-critical reading, biblical scholars routinely note small details and sometimes odd things about an ancient text such as anomalous spellings or grammar, variant readings between manuscripts, words or ideas that come from disparate eras, discontinuities in the narrative, shifts in theological interests, and so forth. From these details, including the anomalies, they may draw limited conclusions about such things as by whom texts were composed or edited, when the texts were composed, the theological or social interests of authors or editors, the earliest audiences, and so forth. Eventually, this sort of analysis—along with related disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology—may lead to a historical reconstruction of the period under study. The historical-critical approach is therefore challenging to faith communities when the readings and associated historical reconstructions do not cohere well with the traditions of the community. For Latter-day Saints, the readings of heightened interest are those of the kingdom of Israel and early Christianity, both of which figured prominently in Smith's discourse. Those instances in which these readings and reconstructions do not conform to LDS tradition have the potential to threaten Smith's efforts by degrading community trust in the restoration of the prophetic process. To illustrate why this is so, I must

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14. When historical-critical approaches are applied to later interpretations of the text, such readings are called reception history.

15. For example, without an explanation of first-century ideas about light and the human eye, it is very difficult to make sense of this saying from the Sermon on the Mount: "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matthew 6:22 KJV). The importance of the Sermon on the Mount should go without saying, but for the record it is the premier New Testament discourse on discipleship.

explain something of the fractured interaction between LDS exegetes themselves, as well as between these biblical scholars and their faith community.

### LDS biblical scholarship: Fractured

To be sure, new and interesting things are afoot in LDS biblical scholarship. The Maxwell Institute itself is among the most significant—indeed, it is the only space within the LDS community that specializes in academic study of the Bible and the popularization of this work, particularly through the excellent podcasts done by Blair Hodges. I am sure that I speak for LDS students of the Bible when I say that we are very grateful for the work of the Maxwell Institute and particularly the role of *Studies in the Bible and Antiquities* in fostering academic study of the Bible by LDS scholars.

A second innovation in LDS biblical scholarship is the presence of professional LDS exegetes who are employed in religion, history, and classics departments in United States colleges and institutions. In this group who have slipped the gentle constraints of employment in the LDS community's religious education system, I count only those who are professors with PhDs in New Testament or early Christianity. Right now, we number six. We are engaged in all aspects of biblical studies in both public and private institutions, including those with an active religious tradition. We routinely speak in scholarly fora and publish in academic presses, under the full weight of academic peer review. Students in our institutions may elect to major or minor in religion, and some of us will also teach graduate-level classes.

A second group of LDS biblical scholars work within the church's religious education community, which is composed of the BYU system (in Utah, Idaho, and Hawaii) and the Church Educational System (CES). In this latter group are teachers who staff the undergraduate-level institutes of religion at many college campuses. This far larger group is distinctly different from the six who work outside the world of LDS religious education. A growing number of those associated with the BYU

system have begun to regularly present papers and publish in rigorous peer-reviewed journals, a very welcome trend for both faculty and students. Those who teach within the institutes of religion, however, are less likely to have either the same credentials or the same opportunities for scholarship.

There is no real need for these two groups to meet, although they sometimes do, and many form wonderful friendships. Most share common experiences such as life at BYU as an undergraduate, missionary work, and forms of church service that are common throughout the world. As one might expect, however, the differences in expectations and audiences drive some significant methodological dissimilarities between these two groups.

Those who work outside the community teach and publish in accordance with the standard practices of modern biblical studies, with all that implies about methods, assumptions, evidence, and conclusions. Those inside the community may not have as much interest in these issues. Because a key part of their audience consists of senior church leaders, orthodoxy is very important to them. Again with some very notable exceptions, biblical studies as an academic discipline can be, and often is, ignored unless it provides evidence to support orthodoxy. The peer-review process is also governed by this dynamic. For those who work outside the community, church members and leaders are a secondary audience, and the canons of academic discourse in biblical studies govern their work.<sup>16</sup>

Very important for the future, however, is the difference in vigor and number between these two groups of LDS scholars. The bench is getting deeper every year, and most of those graduating will not join the religious education system. Within the next decade or so, the number

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16. This may be different for those who work in secular venues and those who work in institutions governed by association with religious traditions. For example, because I work with Catholics I work under the aegis of Catholic biblical studies, which accepts the historical-critical approach while rejecting the problematic philosophical and theological presuppositions such as those enumerated by Ernst Troeltsch, "Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology," in *Religion in History*, ed. Ernst Troeltsch, trans. James Luther Adams and Walter E. Bense (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 11–32.

of LDS scholars with New Testament/Early Christianity credentials and experience that work outside the church's educational system will meet or exceed those so employed. Social networking software will link them to each other, overcoming the disadvantages of physical separation. Because of audience and professional advancement criteria, those outside will be more active in terms of quality and quantity of research and more visible to their non-LDS peers. At that point, the face of LDS biblical scholarship will no longer be BYU, just as LDS church history is no longer centered at BYU. This will be good for LDS biblical studies, but I am not sure how the wider LDS community will perceive it.

These then, are some of the more basic distinctions among LDS professors teaching biblical studies. A second splintering occurs when these groups work within the LDS tradition, particularly when they attempt to integrate it with modern biblical scholarship. Three scenarios will illustrate something of the challenges this presents.

#### *Confessional reading and writing*

A first challenge concerns how to handle those instances in which the "plain meaning" of a New Testament text does not cohere with the received tradition or some other authoritative reading, an issue recently raised publicly by Craig Blomberg of the Denver Theological Seminary. This sort of a situation could arise for a variety of reasons. Consider, for example, the celestial combat scene of Revelation 12:7–10. This pericope is preceded by the ascent of the man-child, which is usually interpreted as the ascension of Christ to the divine throne. John then reports that there was "war in heaven" between the military entourages of Michael and the Dragon, and that the Dragon lost, as a result of which he and his cohorts were cast down to the earth to torment those followers of the man-child who remained on the earth. Joseph Smith, however, used this combat as a protological proof text. In LDS salvation history, the creation of the world and life as a human person is preceded by a period known as the premortal existence. In this era humans were spirit persons with agency. According to Smith, Satan and Christ were both present, and both attempted to sway humans in order to create a following. In

the end, Satan was defeated and cast down to the earth. Thus, although both readings end in the same theological point—with the victory of God in Christ, the defeat of Satan, and the expulsion of the devil and his followers from God’s presence—the temporal setting is distinct. Most modern biblical scholars would follow the plain reading of Revelation and indicate that in John’s view Satan’s defeat and expulsion followed from the resurrection of Christ. The LDS tradition, however, assigns it to an unremembered period in the distant human past.

Given that the preferred reading in the LDS tradition does not follow the plain reading and is unlikely to be among the historical-critical possibilities, how should an LDS exegete handle the distinction? Must she report the reading from the LDS perspective only, thereby suppressing other options that may well appear more likely from the literary evidence? Is she free to report both? If she does report both, must she then prefer Smith’s proof text even if the first-century evidence against it is overwhelming? If so, how can this radical hermeneutic of confessional priority be justified? Under such a hermeneutic, no interpretation is reliable until it has been pronounced so by the right person. How, then, is it possible for an LDS commentator to read anything? And if she tries to hold both readings together in ways that those outside the community find unconvincing, how can this hermeneutic be justified? How then can an LDS commentator interact with anyone?<sup>17</sup> The number of instances in which this sort of a situation might arise is not large, but neither is it insignificant because of the centrality of some of the involved narratives to the perception of Smith as a prophet who restored what had once been.

Related to this is the matter of how LDS biblical scholars might handle those occasions where highly desirable ancient evidence of important modern practices or ideas is weak or completely missing. The LDS tradition has an apologetic option to attribute missing substantiation to

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17. Craig Blomberg, “Unveiling Revelation and a Landmark Commentary Series,” in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life’s Work of Robert L. Millet*, ed. J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2016), 222.

deliberate excision of this evidence by an organization identified as “the great and abominable church” (1 Nephi 13:28). The process or event by which this happened is called the great apostasy. Although it is an important theological concept, it has never been precisely defined or limited in a fashion appropriate to historiographical analysis and use.<sup>18</sup> Thus, it sometimes becomes a *deus ex machina*, by means of which otherwise unresolved historical problems are rendered harmless to orthodoxy. Holding that desired but missing evidence was expunged by the “great and abominable church” shuts down further conversation among LDS readers about the significance of the lack of such evidence. Scholars outside the LDS world would rightly find this sort of apologetics unacceptable.

These questions might also be extended to publishing with LDS venues. Some years ago BYU professor Lincoln Blumell made some arguments about text-critical issues that are significant to the LDS community and were published in *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*.<sup>19</sup> His conclusions were aligned with the LDS tradition. My point is not to engage his work but to ask whether Blumell’s article would have been published by an LDS press if it contradicted the LDS tradition in some significant way. If LDS presses, some of which are regarded as scholarly,

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18. Some welcome exploration of this topic is available in Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young, ed., *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

19. Lincoln Blumell, “A Text Critical Comparison of the King James New Testament with Certain Modern Translations,” *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 3 (2011): 67–126. Blumell examines twenty-two passages that are found in the Authorized Version but omitted or bracketed in modern translations such as the NRSV and the NAB. He concludes that nineteen are unlikely to be original, but that this results in no significant theological difficulties. However, he does stand by the originality of Luke 22:43–44, which shares significant subject matter with Doctrine and Covenants 19:18. Joseph A. Fitzmyer omits Luke 22:43–44 in *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 1443–44. On the other hand, François Bovan writes that “Luke did not create the episode nor was he ignorant of it. As I have said, the block 22:15–46 comes from Luke’s special material and contained vv. 43–44. It may be that he was reluctant to include them.” Bovan, *Luke 3, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 198. It is therefore possible for scholars to disagree in good faith on this passage.

refuse to publish biblical work that is not aligned with the LDS tradition, will this affect their status in the scholarly community? And if they do publish work that does not cohere with the community's dogma or theology, how will that change their relationship with the wider LDS public?

*Integration of new scholarly findings: Asherah and Heavenly Mother*

A second concern regarding the challenges of integrating modern scholarship with the LDS tradition arises from the ways in which LDS exegetes handle scholarly conclusions that tend to support unique LDS ideas. As an example, consider how the discovery of the divine feminine in Israelite religion has been handled in the LDS world. One of the ways in which Smith sought to mend human relationships was by revealing the existence of a divine consort called Heavenly Mother. She is usually envisioned as a mother figure in a modern family, with the traditional feminine roles of childbearing, childcare, and so forth. Thus, in addition to a triune godhead, LDS thought also has a celestial family with divine parents, although only the divine male is worshipped. Ancient evidence for these unique ideas is sought as confirmation that Smith's prophetic utterances are indeed restorations of something that existed earlier. So when evidence, such as the ostraca at Kuntilet Ajrud reading "Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah" and "Yahweh of Teman and his Asherah," was found, the potential for a divine consort in ancient Israel was established, and some LDS writers began to make explicit connections. As Asherah is associated with trees, grapevines, and poles, I lately seem to be finding her, and hence Heavenly Mother, lurking behind some surprising arboreal references, although she is often visible only to LDS eyes.<sup>20</sup>

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20. See Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 18, for Peterson's argument that the tree of life in 1 Nephi 11:21–23 was recognized by Nephi as an asherah identified with Mary the mother of Jesus. Kevin Barney, "How to Worship Heavenly Mother (Without Getting Excommunicated)," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 41/4 (2008): 121–43, assumes that Asherah can be identified with Heavenly Mother. For a critique of both Barney and Peterson, see Cheryl L. Bruno, "Asherah Alert," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 42/2 (2009):

The challenge this presents is that what is known of the complex Israelite religious traditions of the time is further complicated by these references to Asherah, who is also variously identified as the consort of both Baal and El, as well as of YHWH, and who might also be recognized as Hathor/Qudshu. An extended study of these issues, if publicized in LDS circles, would lead to a less orthodox picture of Israelite religion than is currently favored. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge no one has established any significant link between what little is known of Asherah and what little is known of Heavenly Mother other than their shared gender, nor has the import of the most distinctive difference between them been discussed: one was worshipped, including by the royal family, and the other most emphatically is not.<sup>21</sup> If the Lion Lady, who rides a great cat without the benefit of clothing, cannot be easily meshed with Heavenly Mother, there must necessarily be some adjustment of expectations that were unfortunately raised by premature speculation in popular LDS sources. With respect to the reception of historical-critical results that might confirm high-value or unique LDS insights, there is no question that a slow, methodical development of the involved ideas in peer-reviewed venues is the responsible approach.

#### *Transitioning to modern approaches: Jesus the Christ*

A final facet of this same question is associated with one of the most popular LDS devotional works, *Jesus the Christ*, which was published in 1915 by James E. Talmage, a geology professor at the University of Utah. By way of genre, it is properly grouped with the Victorian lives of Jesus that were created in England in the last half of the nineteenth century. In fact, Talmage's main sources were Alfred Edersheim, Frederick Farrar,

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ix–xiii, and for Barney's rebuttal, see the same issue pp. xiii–xviii. Recently, Barney has returned to the topic by suggesting that the trees of life in Revelation 22 are an oblique reference to Heavenly Mother in Kevin Barney, "A Book or a Tree? A Textual Variant in Revelation 22:19," in *Apocalypse: Reading Revelation 21–22*, ed. Julie M. Smith (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016), 14. Outside the world of formal publications, LDS blogs also feature posts on this topic.

21. John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 99–120.

and Cunningham Geikie. Like the authors it cited, *Jesus the Christ* “combines orthodox theology, serious, if conservative scholarship, Oriental romance, and a graphic popular style” that allows readers to imagine the life and death of the Man from Galilee.<sup>22</sup> Within the LDS community it performed, and still performs, an important role in personal meditation and spirituality, although most would not use that phrase to describe their interest. And of course, its author, who was commissioned to write *Jesus the Christ* by church leaders, himself eventually became an apostle. It is perhaps second only to the teachings of Joseph Smith as an authoritative exposition of the Gospels and is listed on required reading lists throughout the church’s religious education system.

The challenge presented by *Jesus the Christ* for LDS students of the Bible goes back to the related issues of its genre and its age. The Victorian lives of Christ were something of a reaction to the German-Protestant scholarship of the First Quest.<sup>23</sup> In their time, the great instances of the British Victorian lives genre were masterful works that combined the best of moderate nineteenth-century British scholarship with excellent storytelling to produce a narrative that was simultaneously scholarly, orthodox, and immensely appealing to lay audiences. However, by 1900 that synthesis was no longer possible: the best scholarship was no longer simple, nor were the historical conclusions easily co-opted into a traditional picture of Jesus.<sup>24</sup> This means that when *Jesus the Christ* was published, it was already outdated from the perspective of historical Jesus scholarship, a situation that has only worsened in the last one hundred years. In addition, Talmage never really alerted his readers to

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22. Daniel L. Pals, *The Victorian “Lives” of Jesus* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1982), 93.

23. The First Quest was a nineteenth-century rationalistic movement that attempted to explain Jesus as a powerful ethical teacher who proclaimed God’s love and the brotherhood of man but was fully human. Except for Ernest Renan, an excommunicated French Catholic, the authors of the significant “lives of Jesus” in this period were all German Protestants. For a summary of this period, as well as the New Quest and the Third Quest, see Mark Allan Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 10–33.

24. Pals, *Victorian “Lives” of Jesus*, 187.

the limitations of the historical discipline in which he worked, possibly because it was not entirely clear to him. So, for the last one hundred years most LDS readers have read Talmage's *Jesus the Christ* under the assumption that they were reading a valuable scholarly work and learning "what really happened" with respect to the life of Jesus. This, then, is the question: What is an LDS exegete to do when further research leaves highly favored or authoritative authors and insights no longer tenable? Even the best scholarship will inevitably change, either by refinement or replacement. Thus, LDS work that combines modern scholarship with the LDS tradition will be unstable, and the ensuing unpredictability is something with which LDS audiences are unfamiliar.

So the world of LDS biblical studies is fractured, which may have some consequences in the future. LDS laypersons who confine their study of the Bible to works from venues associated with the faith community probably see a domesticated presentation of the issues so raised if they see the matter addressed at all. Those who engage with biblical studies outside the community's religious education system will surely have a better sense of the tension between the LDS tradition and well-established scholarship. This situation has a certain resonance with recent tension in the discovery and presentation of difficult issues in early church history. Just as many LDS laypersons found themselves surprised to learn that LDS history was more complicated than is often presented, so too there is an inflated sense of the coherence between the LDS tradition and the evidence of early Christianity in New Testament and related literature. I think it possible that the "bubble" so created will shortly be discovered and exposed more widely by those who have also publicized the discrepancies in the early history of the community. What effect this will have remains to be seen, and indeed it could be negligible as the LDS community tends to be more apathetic and uncurious about scripture outside of apologetic concerns than they are about church history.<sup>25</sup>

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25. This claim deserves its own paper. For a sense of the direction such an argument might take, consider the satisfaction with the Authorized Version (KJV) when far more comprehensible versions are available, the continued use of very old scholarship, such

## Learning from Catholic biblical studies

As I said when I began to explore the divisive effect of modern biblical studies on faith communities, we are neither the only nor the first to experience this—indeed, among the largest communities in the United States, we are probably the last and therefore in a good position to learn from others. So I intend to shift to a more personal narrative that winds through my identity as an LDS biblical scholar and as a member of the wider Catholic intellectual community.

In addition to taking graduate work with the Catholics, I also teach in a Catholic liberal arts college where I share the freedom of Catholic professors. The foundation of Catholic biblical studies is the historical-critical approach, so this is my pedagogical baseline. In my position I am also free to use the entire suite of modern approaches, and I have no concerns about freely and openly teaching biblical readings that do not reflect later theological concerns and conclusions. Although one sometimes hears that modern biblical scholarship destroys faith, I must be clear that this has not been my experience. My classes support a genuine encounter with the best of biblical scholarship in an explicitly spiritual atmosphere. I have often seen students blossom with the stirring of mature faith as they encounter and appropriate the Bible through meticulous academic study and the Spirit. It is hard to imagine the circumstances under which I might give up my present position because it is immensely rewarding on both intellectual and spiritual levels.

Early in my employment at Edgewood College, I was invited to present a paper at an annual conference called the Aquinas Forum. My assignment was to critique the way Pope Benedict XVI had used scripture in a recent encyclical. I was rather surprised by this, as I was unaccustomed to being called upon to critique church leaders. To be sure, I was not invited to mock or ridicule, but it was a very significant sign of one of the differences between the world of my faith community and that of my work as scholar. I absolutely love the academic freedom

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as *Jesus the Christ*, in study guides and lesson manuals when newer and more adequate references are available, and the lack of interest in the work of excellent scholars in other religious communities.

I experience among my Catholic colleagues, and I welcome the responsibility to use it wisely, for the good purposes of that community.

To make a short story even shorter, I opined to my chair that I was sure the pope knew his Bible and his Jesus and had written an “A” paper. He gravely informed me that although this was possible, an entirely passive response was not the Catholic way. The college president, the assembled deans, the faculty, and whoever wandered in from the larger Catholic community would expect to learn just why I thought the pope deserved an “A.” Be specific, cite examples, and so forth. I finally intuited that, among other things, this was the department’s way of telling me I was on the team, invited to sit at the Big Table and join a conversation among Christians that has been going on for almost two millennia. I have to say that it was an exciting moment.

Therefore, what I intend to bring to the table are two gifts that I think Catholics can give to the emerging world of LDS exegesis. One is a cautionary tale, the story of the Modernist Crisis, and the other concerns some early thoughts about how LDS exegetes might integrate modern biblical scholarship with their tradition. I am aware that some might be inclined to reject these ideas without engagement simply because they are not “native.” To those so inclined, I would point out that it makes good sense to study the successes of others and that the thirteenth article of faith also has something important to say on the subject of the testing and reception of new ideas.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Modernist Crisis*

At one point in my graduate school experience I had the opportunity to take a class in the history and methods of theology from Fr. John Galvin. I must confess I have forgotten much of it, except for the turn-of-the-century events of the Modernist Crisis. The significance of this story for the LDS community is that it was the first sustained encounter of Catholics with modern biblical studies. Space constraints make it impossible to do justice to the nuances of the story, so I have been

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26. The thirteenth article of faith reads in part “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.”

ruthlessly selective in my presentation, although I hope it remains reasonably balanced. A more fulsome narrative may be accessed through the documentation.

Up until the last half of the nineteenth century, Catholics had escaped the turmoil in the Protestant world by mostly ignoring what was then called higher criticism. However, as Peter Enns has pointed out elsewhere, educational strategies that rely on withholding information or polishing evidence carry a certain risk.<sup>27</sup> Louis Duchesne, a professor of church history at the Catholic Institute of Paris, mused about the confusion of students who were taught modern approaches in secular subjects but learned religion from within the medieval worldview mandated in nineteenth-century Catholicism:

Upon reflection, I must say that to the degree that [modern students] run up against our conventional exegesis, the more the masses of ordinary Catholics are slipping away from us. Soon only those will be faithful who know nothing about the matter. Shall I “have compassion on the multitude?” The “multitude” now stand outside our boundaries. If we want them to come back, we cannot impose upon them critical and exegetical fantasies drawn from a culture entirely different from their own. We have let go of Ptolemy, so let us also let go of those interpretations the maintenance of which brings dishonor to the Bible and to our consciences as serious and educated men.<sup>28</sup>

Duchesne realized that when intelligent, young Catholics were presented with biblical readings that seemed unreliable, unfruitful in their lives, or inconsistent with their intellectual practices, they would simply slip away from engagement with the Bible and eventually from religious participation. Indeed, the most famous Catholic apostate of the nineteenth century was Ernest Renan (1832–92). His intellectually impoverished experience in Catholic seminary was completely overwhelmed

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27. Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (New York: Harper One, 2014), 15.

28. Quoted in Marvin R. O’Connell, *Critics on Trial: An Introduction to the Catholic Modernist Crisis* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 92–93.

by his engagement with German Protestant work with the Bible.<sup>29</sup> This loss, that is, the disengagement of the educated and thoughtful Catholic community, is part of what would eventually provoke the reforming movement labeled by its enemies as Modernism.<sup>30</sup>

For our purposes today, the protagonist in our story is Father Alfred Loisy, a brilliant, dedicated priest who wished to serve his community as a professor of biblical studies specializing in the New Testament.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, his community was in a bit of disarray. The Vatican was under tremendous international pressure from unstable or democratizing European countries. Leo XIII sensed a need for reform, which he decided to meet with a return to the social and intellectual models of the High Middle Ages. History and exegesis were therefore the handmaidens of theology—that is, the role of the historian and biblicist was confined to amassing evidence to support the conclusions predetermined by theology and dogma. Students in biblical studies classes did not learn to read the Bible; they were taught only those scriptures that supported important theological and christological proof texts. Outside the required doctrinal mastery, the Bible was a closed and mysterious book, and although they were expected to be the spiritual leaders in their parishes and families, these men were woefully unprepared to engage the currents of modernity that were driving their professional, personal, and spiritual lives.

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29. C. J. T. Talar, ed., *Prelude to the Modernist Crisis: The Firmin Articles of Alfred Loisy*, trans. Christine E. Thirlway (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), viii.

30. The term *Modernism* is problematic, as what is meant varies depending upon the speaker. For a more extended definition of the term, see Darrell Jadock, ed., *Catholicism Contending with Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2–3. The most basic understanding is a group of people in a variety of disciplines who saw the need for modernization of the Catholic community. Since many saw this need but lacked confidence that any change was possible, to be a modernist such a person would also have to have some level of optimism that a reconciliation could be achieved.

31. This characterization of Loisy is contested. Loisy's brilliance was undeniable, but questions remain regarding his faith and particularly his fitness as a priest. My choice follows the work of Alec Vidler, *A Variety of Catholic Modernists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 50–55. Although Vidler was an admirer of Loisy and his apologist, his arguments are detailed and reasonably convincing.

Loisy was dissatisfied with this situation, not least because he had been introduced to the work of German Protestant scholars by Renan. He wanted the best of both worlds—that is, a synthesis of traditional faith and superior scholarship that would modernize the Catholic intellectual world.<sup>32</sup> In this, he had three role models: Ernest Renan, Fulcrum Vigouroux, and Louis Duchesne. I have already mentioned Renan as a Catholic apostate; he both caught Loisy’s attention and disappointed him by his assertion that no theologian could be a successful historian because prior faith commitments precluded critical engagement with evidence. Loisy was determined to prove otherwise. Duchesne likewise disappointed Loisy. Although Duchesne was a famous historian, indeed, a member of the French Academy, and he knew the inadequacies of Catholic scholarship, he declined to risk his status in an attempt to improve the situation. He confined his research to safe subjects and withheld conclusions that were contrary to accepted Catholic viewpoints.<sup>33</sup>

Fulcrum Vigouroux (1837–1915), however, challenged Loisy in a different manner. Vigouroux was the professor of biblical studies at the Sulpician seminary in Paris and during the last decade or so of the nineteenth century the most famous Catholic interpreter of the Bible in France.<sup>34</sup> Loisy notes with disappointment that his lectures were largely concerned with demonstrating the errors of higher criticism in its “criminal revolt against tradition.”<sup>35</sup> Vigouroux, who appears to have been frightened of higher criticism,<sup>36</sup> defended Mosaic authorship, considered the days of creation to be geological epochs, and affirmed that all 6,666 species of animals had plenty of room to fit on Noah’s ark—having calculated it all out. Vigouroux did accept the complicated

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32. Harvey Hill, *The Politics of Modernism: Alfred Loisy and the Scientific Study of Religion* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 25.

33. This comparison summarizes a presentation in Hill, *Politics of Modernism*, 25–31.

34. Vidler, *Catholic Modernists*, 96.

35. Alfred Firmin Loisy, *My Duel with the Vatican: The Autobiography of a Catholic Modernist* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1968), 88.

36. Vidler, *Catholic Modernists*, 96.

nature of the flood narrative, but he attributed J to a description of what was going on in the Eternal mind and P to a “revelation of these thoughts to Noah, and their practical application.”<sup>37</sup> Loisy considered these arguments “childish” and concluded that “to swallow it one must have made up his mind beforehand to accept any reasons, however puerile, to buttress a foregone conclusion.”<sup>38</sup> In later life Loisy concluded that the combination of Vigouroux’s excellent description of critical results in conjunction with his poorly conceived apologetics against these results had “simply paraded before many minds the weakness of the Catholic position.”<sup>39</sup>

What can LDS observers learn from the Catholics? In the late nineteenth century the world of Catholic exegesis was fractured. Indeed, Catholics lacked sound scholarship in either theology or biblical studies. This necessarily gave students the impression that religion was of no value in the modern world and limited the responses when challenges arose from those who did take religion seriously.<sup>40</sup> Second, if one does engage biblical scholarship, the quality of one’s interaction is important. Vigouroux feared and fought modern methods, attempting to serve his community by crafting apologetic arguments that, in the end, reassured those who knew no better and alienated those who did. Lastly, seeking to “save the little ones”—that is, protecting students by withholding ambiguous, challenging, or contrary information—is shortsighted. What is embargoed will escape, and when it does it will spread more widely and be far harder to resolve—a caution that has only grown in relevance with the Information Age.<sup>41</sup>

What happened to Loisy? He did attempt to create a synthesis of traditional Catholic dogma and modern history. In 1902 he responded to the German Protestant Alfred von Harnack with a devastating counterreading

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37. Loisy, *Duel with the Vatican*, 89.

38. Loisy, *Duel with the Vatican*, 89.

39. Loisy, *Duel with the Vatican*, 88.

40. O’Connell, *Critics on Trial*, 12–13, 22–29, 92–94.

41. Meriol Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians: Renewal and Tradition in the Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 80.

of the Gospels in a book called *The Gospel and the Church*.<sup>42</sup> Although his conclusions were broadly in line with Catholic tradition, the delicate balance he attempted between history and theology was judged unsatisfactory in this and later works. Initially he submitted, but in 1908 he made only partial submission and was declared *vitandus*, a sign of the fear he engendered in the Catholic leadership.<sup>43</sup> For the rest of his life he taught in a secular setting, eventually holding Ernest Renan's former chair. He died excommunicate on June 1, 1940, and was buried near his hometown.

We have already seen that the responses of Renan, Vigouroux, and Duchesne were flawed. How about Loisy himself? His choices are better illustrated through comparison with a second French commentator, Marie-Joseph Lagrange, founder of the *École biblique* and its associated journal, the *Revue biblique*.<sup>44</sup> Loisy and Lagrange represent different poles in their responses.<sup>45</sup> Roughly the same age, both realized the inadequacy of Catholic engagement with biblical studies. Both were determined to counter the scholarship of Ernest Renan.<sup>46</sup>

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42. O'Connell, *Critics on Trial*, 245–46, writes that “within a few pages of prose hard and brilliant as a diamond Harnack's emotional and overly simple argument lay in tatters.” According to Loisy, when Harnack reduced Christianity to a single idea he shifted from the complexities of historical analysis to the fideism of a theologian who takes from his sources only what suits his worldview. Loisy “could have said nothing worse” since Harnack had claimed to deal with history.

43. Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians*, 64–66. Loisy offered to give up all teaching and publishing of his views, but he would not renounce his conclusions. To be declared *vitandus* is a rare and most severe form of excommunication that can be imposed only by the Holy See. The faithful are to shun such a person, except in the case of immediate family, subjects, and servants.

44. Lagrange was a member of the Order of Preachers, that is, a Dominican. In general, Dominicans remember this period with considerable antipathy for Loisy, whom they think failed in loyalty to the church when compared to Lagrange's painful submission.

45. This sort of a comparison is not original. It is, however, more usually done between Loisy and Duchesne. Personally, I think that Lagrange is the better, although less well known, choice for comparison.

46. Robert D. Priest, *The Gospel according to Renan: Reading, Writing, and Religion in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 202–3.

Both were dedicated to the community and both “dislodged theology and morality from priority of place . . . to help clarify what the biblical texts really had to say to the Church.”<sup>47</sup> Neither felt that higher criticism necessarily led to a loss of faith.<sup>48</sup> With respect to their exegetical results, both were initially part of the “Catholic center,” although Loisy was to the left of center and Lagrange to the right.<sup>49</sup>

What divides Loisy and Lagrange is less a matter of scholarship than of values. Loisy could submit partially, as a matter of discipline, but felt his integrity precluded revoking his historical conclusions. Lagrange submitted fully and then returned to teaching and writing with renewed caution and circumspection. This illustrates what Van Harvey calls a contrast between the new and old moralities. The old morality, strong in Lagrange, privileges community in ways that do not always sit well in the scholarly world. The new morality, which guided Loisy, privileges integrity in ways that do not always rest comfortably in religious communities with simple ideas about truth.<sup>50</sup> Both men sought a balance between faith and scholarship, but when this became impossible, Loisy followed Renan while Lagrange remained in the faith. My heart lies with Loisy while my head favors Lagrange, for Lagrange’s humility kept alive the beginnings of a sound legacy in biblical studies until it could bear fruit in Vatican II.<sup>51</sup>

Modernism was condemned in *Pascendi dominici gregis* on September 8, 1907. The rhetoric of this document was extremely harsh, but

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47. Nadia M. Lahutsky, “Paris and Jerusalem: Alfred Loisy and Pere Lagrange on the Gospel of Mark,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52/3 (1990): 446.

48. Priest, *Gospel according to Renan*, 203, 207.

49. Lahutsky, “Paris and Jerusalem,” 445.

50. Van A. Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 103.

51. Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians*, 90. Vatican II (1962–65) was the twenty-first ecumenical council, intended to bring the Catholic Church up to date. For the present purpose the conciliar document *Dei Verbum* affirmed the inspiration of scripture and recognized the role of the Bible’s human authors. Thus, Catholics were directed to study scripture according to the ancient literary forms in order to discern their meaning. For more information, see John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

even worse was the response it mandated. An oath against the ideas of Modernism was required; seminary faculties were purged; more rigorous censorship was instituted; and councils of vigilance were ordered to be formed in each diocese.<sup>52</sup> These spies reported to Rome, and it is not hard to imagine that more than a few extraneous scores were settled.<sup>53</sup> Most damaging, however, were the efforts of the Holy Office, which used these reports to conduct secret examinations, issue secret condemnations, and require oaths of silence on pain of excommunication.

The cost of *Pascendi* to the Catholic community has never really been chronicled. Although Catholic leaders tended to blame “rebel minds,” that is not the entire story. To the historian, heresy may also indicate a failure of leadership to adequately respond to new questions with anything other than a repetition of the old answers.<sup>54</sup> Thus, when Loisy rather politely knocked on the door of the Vatican with his copy of *The Gospel and the Church*, there was no option for a limited response.<sup>55</sup> In the end, ultramontanians used *Pascendi* for fifty years “as a rod with which to beat down any sort of opposition—including the efforts of Benedict XV to end the post-Modernist reign of terror” that *Pascendi* initiated.<sup>56</sup>

This description of a faith community shattered by its leadership brings up two more points: First, it would be terrible to live through a *Pascendi*-type era. It would be better if LDS biblical scholars had some sort of a consensus on how to handle the interaction of biblical scholarship and the LDS tradition. It would be best if the community were

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52. For more information, search on “La Sapiniere,” which was formed under cover of the Sodalitium Pianum, run by Mgr. Umberto Benigni. Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians*, 79.

53. O’Connell, *Critics on Trial*, 345–48.

54. Trevor, *Prophets and Guardians*, 77.

55. John Ratté, *Three Modernists: Alfred Loisy, George Tyrrell, William L. Sullivan* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 21.

56. Ratté, *Three Modernists*, 25. Ultramontanism, literally “beyond the mountains,” a reference to the Vatican’s south-of-the-Alps location, was a nineteenth-century tendency to exalt the authority of the pope. This may be illustrated by the fact that proponents were adamant that the pope had no obligation “to reconcile himself and come to terms with, progress, liberalism and modern civilization.” *Syllabus of Errors*, no. 80; <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm>.

led into a modern engagement with scripture as were the Catholics after Vatican leaders realized the need for more rigorous engagement with the Bible. Second, it is impossible for scholars to initiate change in the way scripture is appropriated in a faith community unless they have a champion, or at least a dialogue partner, in the ranks of the most senior leaders. Failing that, Lagrange's example of patience, discretion, humility, and good humor over time is the only remedy.

To bring this story around to the present, Catholic exegetes did persevere along the example set by Lagrange. In 1943 Pius XII issued *Divino afflante spiritu*, which called on Catholic scholars to discern the literal (original) meaning of scripture. To do so, they were to attend to historical and cultural context, philology, archaeology, textual criticism, and ancient history, thus addressing many of the concerns of historical-critical exegesis.<sup>57</sup> In 1964 *Dei verbum* became the fourth dogmatic constitution of Vatican II; it affirmed previous encyclicals and went on to direct complete engagement with modern biblical studies. In 1993 the Pontifical Biblical Commission issued "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," in which it described and evaluated various interpretive methods beyond the historical-critical, probed hermeneutical questions, and considered the role of the Bible in the church.<sup>58</sup> The most recent and comprehensive instruction on Catholic biblical studies is the 2010 apostolic exhortation from Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum domini*. In this last document, Benedict XVI raised a number of complicating factors, learned or more fully appreciated since the close of Vatican II. For our purposes, it is sufficient to say that the Catholic community regularized the historical-critical approach, declared it essential, and noted that it was not sufficient for a variety of reasons. In fact, Catholic scholars have led in affirming that the revitalization of their community through full engagement with the biblical text has not been as positive as hoped. Indeed, perhaps the

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57. See <http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/index.html>. This encyclical had a variety of objectives; for the present purposes it put an end to a sort of "mystical" approach to scripture that had sprung up since the Modernist crisis.

58. Marc Zvi Brettler, Peter Enns, and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 82–85.

most significant shortcoming of modern biblical studies is that it “is increasingly an academic activity that is removed from the existential concerns of communities of faith.”<sup>59</sup>

### *Modern LDS biblical scholarship*

Rather than repeat this historical process, LDS biblical scholarship might do well to skip to the bottom line: the historical-critical method is necessary because it provides contextual access to a suite of meanings associated with the Bible’s inspired creation and earliest audiences. However, for biblical interpretation to be meaningful for modern LDS laypersons, more is required, including but not limited to other methodologies. Unique challenges, particularly those posed by the combination of modern revelation and modern biblical studies, must be addressed. Ultimately, LDS biblical scholarship must embrace the spiritual and the scholarly *in tandem*: Just as the Bible cannot be read without study, so too it cannot be adequately read without faith. Precisely how to do this, however, is still very much debated.

Fortunately, we are not the only community trying to figure out how to integrate modern biblical studies with our wider tradition. As you might have guessed, our closest “cousins” are the Catholics, who likewise have a tradition of continuing revelation as well as a deposit of premodern, authoritative commentary on scripture. In the opinion of Catholic Professor Luke Timothy Johnson, modern biblical studies is deeply rooted in an either/or worldview, which he attributes to strong German Protestant scholarship working under an assumption of *sola scriptura* in the early development of the historical-critical approach. The focus on differentiation that arises from an either/or approach is nowhere more apparent than in the historical reconstruction of Christian origins. In this endeavor, a great deal of effort is expended in attending to how early Christianity can be distinguished from the Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures in which it originated. The difficulty here is the implication that all that preceded that moment was but a

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59. Luke Timothy Johnson and William S. Kurz, *The Future of Catholic Biblical Scholarship: A Constructive Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 26.

prelude to God's real activity and all that followed it a postlude, or perhaps even decay and corruption. This is, as Johnson notes, a theological commitment typically associated with some Protestant world-views, rather than genuinely historical-critical scholarship.<sup>60</sup> By way of contrast, well-formed histories certainly do describe new developments, but they also affirm the elements that preceded and shaped the moment of origin, as well as components that grew from that moment.<sup>61</sup> Thus, Catholic exegesis of the New Testament should not limit itself to the historical-critical.

According to Johnson, historical-critical approaches need to be amended with "what is distinctively Catholic about Catholic biblical interpretation (scholarship)"—that is, "its instinct for the both/and, and its conviction that critical scholarship is not merely a matter of separating and opposing, but also of testing and reconnecting."<sup>62</sup> Johnson illustrates how one might begin to go about "testing and reconnecting" by proposing that, at a minimum, dissertations should include a more significant history of interpretation. Ideally, this engagement will work backwards beyond the nineteenth century and move forward into reception history to entertain consideration of the ways in which New Testament texts were appropriated by readers. Such an approach eventually connects the modern Catholic tradition with its New Testament roots and supports the church by affirming the value of the rich spiritual heritage of patristic and medieval theologians and biblicalists as legitimate actualizations of the founding texts.

For LDS commentators, the issue will be how to best integrate the wider LDS tradition with modern biblical scholarship. There is a good deal of resonance between Johnson's description of Catholic biblical scholarship as a both/and enterprise renewing historical-critical approaches to study of the Bible and Barlow's characterization of Joseph Smith's mission as one of mending fractured relationships by strengthening and enlarging the canon. What is wanted is a version of Catholicism's

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60. Johnson and Kurz, *Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 20.

61. Johnson and Kurz, *Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 22.

62. Johnson and Kurz, *Catholic Biblical Scholarship*, 15, 19.

both/and approach that integrates the expanded LDS canon and associated modern prophetic commentary with the readings and reconstructions arising from modern biblical studies.

How might this play out in practice? In this very early discussion, my primary focus is on combining the historical-critical approach with the LDS tradition. First, a both/and approach will not attempt to select one reading over another as “*the* interpretation.” It is especially important that historical-critical readings retain their association with the first century and that readings from the LDS tradition continue to be construed as reception history but with normative force for the community. This is a distinctly different approach from that used in the Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary. So far, all the volumes in that series have employed an either/or approach, sifting through modern biblical scholarship in order to use conclusions that cohere with the LDS tradition and rejecting those that do not. The readings in these volumes cohere with the LDS tradition because of this selection process.

It is also vital that contributions from the LDS tradition be historicized. The purpose of this step is to identify, with as much precision as possible, the intentions, questions, and the historical and cultural issues that limit and direct the contents of the LDS tradition. Once both readings are situated in their appropriate historical context, biblical scholars will be in a position to consider how to bring them together in ways that respect both differences and similarities.

I suggest that the ultimate step in combining the LDS tradition with modern biblical scholarship is a theological meditation. The purpose of this reflection is to discern, unify, and enlarge upon the identified transcendent truths in both readings. In the broadest perspective, those truths that are held in common represent continuity between first-century Christianity and the LDS tradition, while differences call attention to the work of the Holy Spirit in preparing and guiding the community. Barlow indicates how one might understand both similarities and differences as restorative mending. He suggests two other implications of the word *restore* beyond *returning* to what once was: First, Smith

mended by *repairing* what was broken, and second, he mended by *revealing* new aspects of God's plans in order to more perfectly organize God's people. The appeal of these last two activities is that they "do not reference things as they had been, but things as they should be."<sup>63</sup> At this early point, I think that an adequate theological meditation will therefore be canonical, ranging as needed across biblical texts and LDS sources once they have been historicized. While the details of this sort of a methodology have not been worked out even in a preliminary form, and they will surely be far more complicated than the picture presented here, this approach represents a viable way forward.

Finally, I appreciate the opportunity I had to participate in this roundtable. I learned a great deal in making my preparations for it, and even more as I have reflected in the weeks since. Much is new in LDS biblical studies, particularly as it moves out from its original Utah matrix and begins to adapt and grow in other environments. The challenges are only just beginning to appear. We are an exegetical community forming within a faith community that does not yet understand, let alone appreciate, what we might eventually bring to the table. Barlow's insight regarding Smith's vision of a world filled with strong, nourishing relationships is a powerful one, though, and in my opinion is capable of guiding at least the first few years of modern LDS biblical scholarship. We can also look to our partners in other faith communities for lessons from their experiences as they opened themselves to critical appreciation of the Bible and grew into it. If there is any one lesson LDS exegetes might hear at this point, it is that of the Catholics: we will not escape engagement with the historical-critical, but we must avoid the trap of an either/or approach. Our spiritual heritage does not require us to choose, for it includes, according to Article of Faith 9, all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and all that he will yet reveal.

**D. Jill Kirby** is assistant professor of religious studies at Edgewood College in Madison, Wisconsin.

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63. Barlow, "Fractured Reality," 33–34.