

Article

Latter-Day Saint Liturgy: The Administration of the Body and Blood of Jesus

James E. Faulconer

Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, USA;
James_faulconer@byu.edu

Abstract: Latter-day Saint (“Mormon”) liturgy opens its participants to a world undefined by a stark border between the transcendent and immanent, with an emphasis on embodiment and relationality. The formal rites of the temple, and in particular that part of the rite called “the endowment”, act as a frame that erases the immanent–transcendent border. Within that frame, the more informal liturgy of the weekly administration of the blood and body of Christ, known as “the sacrament”, transforms otherwise mundane acts of living into acts of worship that sanctify life as a whole. I take a phenomenological approach, hoping that doing so will deepen interpretations that a more textually based approach might miss. Drawing on the works of Robert Orsi, Edward S. Casey, Paul Moyaert, and Nicola King, I argue that the Latter-day Saint sacrament is not merely a ritualized sign of Christ’s sacrifice. Instead, through the sacrament, Christ perdures with its participants in an act of communal memorialization by which church members incarnate the coming of the divine community of love and fellow suffering. Participants inhabit a hermeneutically transformed world as covenant children born again into the family of God.

Keywords: Mormon; Latter-day Saint; liturgy; rites; sacrament; endowment; temple; memory



Citation: Faulconer, James E. 2021.

Latter-Day Saint Liturgy: The Administration of the Body and Blood of Jesus. *Religions* 12: 431.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060431>

Academic Editor: Christina M. Gschwandtner

Received: 30 March 2021

Accepted: 6 June 2021

Published: 10 June 2021

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2021 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

In 1839, in contrast to most other early nineteenth-century American religious leaders, Joseph Smith, the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints¹ said, “Being born again comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances” (Smith 1839), in other words, through sacred rites. For Smith, sacred liturgy rather than merely spiritual conviction was essential to spiritual rebirth. As a result, what is often taken as one more example of the evangelical Protestant sects that began in the Burned Over district of New York in the early nineteenth century turns out to be something other than one might think at first glance. There are many places in which we can see how Latter-day Saints differ from others who might be thought so similar as to be variations of the same: things such as elements of their dogmatic theology (or the lack thereof), and their communitarianism and nineteenth-century polygamy. Perhaps one of the least noted of the differences, however, is Latter-day Saint liturgy.

A comparison of Latter-day Saint liturgy with that of other denominations is significant enough to merit further discussion, but such a comparative discussion exceeds the scope of this paper. Instead, in order to explore what Smith perhaps had in mind when he made his claim about being born again requiring sacred rites, I reflect on the meaning of Latter-day Saint liturgy, the temple to some degree, but more particularly that of the administration of Jesus’s body and blood in their weekly Sunday meetings. I argue that, among their other functions, both liturgies’ overarching intention is to overcome the bifurcation of ritual experience into immanence (the realm of beings) and transcendence (that which is prior to being). In Latter-day Saint belief, even God, who of course appears only in exceptional instances and in exceptional ways, is nevertheless a being who appears; God is no more prior to being than any other agent (The Church 2021c). My claim is that ritual elision of the division between the transcendent and the immanent results in a focus on relationality and embodiment.

For Latter-day Saints, there are two foci for worship. The first is the local chapel at which the congregation's weekly services and such things as youth activities are held. Weekly services include a worship service on Sunday with preaching by members chosen from the congregation and the rite of administering the flesh and blood of Christ (usually called "the sacrament", the only rite referred to as a sacrament by Latter-day Saints, all others being referred to as ordinances).² In addition, there are Sunday School classes for children, youth, and adults, and additional classes for women and men. Participation in weekly meetings is strongly encouraged. Regular participation in the sacrament and other meetings is a requirement for participation in the second focus of worship, the temple.

In contrast to participation in the sacrament liturgy, there is no set timetable for participation in the temple liturgy. Members of the church are simply encouraged to take part "regularly" (The Church 2021e). However, the absence of a periodic requirement for participation does not suggest relative unimportance. After Joseph Smith's martyrdom in 1844, the second leader of the church, Brigham Young, said that the endowment provides "all those ordinances ... which are necessary ... [to] gain your eternal exaltation" (Young 1853, p. 31).³ Adherents decide for themselves how often to take part, based on their circumstances. Temple rituals are not conducted on Sundays, and only adults participate in the rites beyond proxy baptism and confirmation on behalf of dead ancestors.

The temple liturgy for adults, called "the endowment", includes ritual washing and clothing, followed by a participatory enactment of "Creation, Adam and Eve in the Garden, the Fall, mortal life, resurrection, and entrance into God's presence" and rites of covenant making, including covenants of marriage as the culmination of the endowment, bringing participants into families as part of the family of God (Faulconer 2015, p. 197). Individuals first take part in the endowment and make its covenants on their own behalf. Thereafter, each time they return to take part in the rite, they do so in the name of a specific dead person, preferably one of their own ancestors.

The cosmological significance of the endowment is clear. Because of the sacred nature of the rite, participants are admonished not to speak of it with the uninitiated. Indeed, they refrain from speaking of the rite outside the temple at all, except in general terms.⁴ Nevertheless, without infringing on Latter-day Saint sensibilities regarding what they take to be sacred, given the participatory character of the endowment, with each person taking part in the ascent from Creation to the presence of God, we can say that the rite is a ritual encounter with God, not just a representation of that ascent, but intended to be an experience of it (Faulconer 2015, p. 197; Stapley 2018, pp. 126–27).

1. Transcendence and Immanence

Though the cosmological significance of the temple liturgy is crucial to its understanding, that significance must not be misunderstood as otherworldly. Because Latter-day Saints believe that God and Jesus Christ are physically embodied persons (though, to be sure, persons with bodies much different than those of mortal humans),⁵ the boundary between the quotidian and the sacred is not metaphysical. In some sense or another, God is within space–time rather than metaphysically other. God is a being. The theology of this belief has not been worked out, and given the non-theological character of Latter-day Saint culture and leadership, it is unlikely to be. However, we can say, at least, that Latter-day Saints believe both that God is within space–time and that God is, in some sense, transcendent of the ordinary world, but not of being itself.⁶ In that context, then, the word *transcendence* has two possible philosophical and theological meanings: (1) that which is before being and so, as in Kant, beyond all categories of pure reason; (2) that which goes beyond consciousness but is neither before being nor beyond thought. We should remember that, as Robert Orsi points out, "Religion is not transcendent, or not in the way the word is commonly meant. ... The idea of religion's transcendence is a modern one" (Orsi 2016, p. 68).⁷ Nevertheless, for the last several hundred years, *transcendence* has usually had one of those two meanings in philosophy and theology.

It seems appropriate, then, to approach Latter-day Saint practice and belief with a method commensurate with the denial of traditional metaphysical transcendence (meaning 1) and the continuing reference to transcendence (meaning 2). Phenomenology is such a method, for it has understood transcendence without reference to traditional metaphysical transcendence from its beginning with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Heidegger, for example, says “Being and the structure of being lie beyond every entity and every possible determination of an entity. *Being is the t r a n s c e n d e n s pure and simple*” (Heidegger 1962, p. 62). That remark about being is preceded by an earlier clarification in which he says, “We call that *towards which* Dasein as such transcends the *world*, and can now define transcendence as Being-in-the-world [in other words, engaged being with others and among things in the material world]” (Heidegger 1962, p. 41; translation revised). We can say that transcendence means at least being beyond oneself, in other words, being-in-relation-to. Heidegger later clarifies, “Transcendence means going beyond. The transcendent (transcending) is what brings this going-beyond to fruition, lingering [*verweilen*] in the going-beyond” (Heidegger 1967, p. 133). For Heidegger, transcendence does not mean moving from one sphere to a higher one. It means the movement beyond oneself, itself, without reference to either literal or metaphorical height. Additionally, on this view, transcendence is an event which one inhabits as the being that one is rather than simple movement to another place, position, or time: I am transcending in that I am. It is being-in-relation to the world at hand both physically and temporally. I argue that Latter-day Saint liturgy enacts a transcendence that remains, lingers,⁸ transcending understood as being with others and God made liturgically visible.

In a related vein, having argued that transcendence is not negativity (Levinas 1969, pp. 40–42), Emmanuel Levinas makes the point that transcendence means exteriority, the absolutely other, “the sole *ideatum* of which there can be only an idea in us; it is infinitely removed from its idea, that is, exterior” (Levinas 1969, p. 49). However, for Levinas, the absolutely other is not God-beyond-being.⁹ It is the person other than myself, exterior to my embodied consciousness, whose presence before me makes ethical demands of me. Levinas can be understood to have rethought Heidegger’s transcendence as not just being-in-the-world, which means being in relation to other entities, but also being-called-on-by-the-other-person.¹⁰ An infinity transcends the individual, but that infinity is the other person who always presents herself as exceeding or surpassing (*dépassant*) my idea of her (Levinas 1969, p. 50). Like God, she is not-appearing even in her appearing.

For Latter-day Saints, the similarity of human persons to God is taken to include the fact that both are embodied, though, of course, it does not follow that God is merely another human person. Understanding God as embodied, rather than as the metaphysical *theos* of the Christian tradition, means that my very existence as a person is a relation to another embodied person. In their very being as embodied persons, humans are in the image and the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). *Embodied* personhood is the measure for being a person, including divine personhood.

The assumption motivating this study is that two points of parallel between Latter-day Saint belief and practice, on the one hand, and phenomenology, on the other, suggest that the latter may give us some insight into the former. One of those points is the reinterpretation of the finite and infinite for both Latter-day Saints and phenomenology. The other is the fact that Latter-day Saint belief and practice is heavily weighted toward embodiment and relationality, to which phenomenological studies have devoted considerable time and print space, much of it in response to the work of thinkers such as Heidegger and Levinas. These two points of parallel, transcendence as phenomenological going-beyond and the insistence on embodiment, mean that the line between the liturgical and the quotidian will not be obvious.

Oddly perhaps, a comparison to Confucianism is helpful in making that point. Referring to Herbert Fingarette’s work on Confucianism, Michael Ing says, “Confucianism blurs the line between the categories of sacred and secular and [Fingarette] explains that *li* [the

cultivation of the body through ritual] is a process of sanctifying even the most mundane aspects of life" (Ing 2013, p. 354). Says Ing:

To understand Mormon ritual in terms of *li* would broaden the category of ritual to include all bodily performances done for the sake of cultivating a divine body. In essence it would expand ritual to include every activity humanly possible when performed in accordance with *li*. . . . [So] not only are baptisms, blessings, and marriages ritual but so are the more mundane acts of ironing the shirt, corralling the children into the minivan for church, and making the physical voyage to the chapel. The weekly congregating with fellow Saints likewise takes on new meaning in this light. The significance in attending is not simply learning new ideas from sermons and Sunday School or partaking of the sacrament (as significant as these things are). In addition, there is an embodied significance in cultivating the social habits of sitting together, in listening to the voice of the speaker, and in raising one's hand to sustain a newly called member [a member of the congregation recently asked to perform some duty]. Singing hymns and reading scripture becomes a means by which participants do more than learn concepts about the gospel. (p. 359)

The rites of the temple can be understood to be something like the most formal of Latter-day Saint *li*, cultivating an understanding of the cosmos through ritual, an understanding that continues to be revealed in the life of the participant outside the temple by sanctifying the human world in which that life occurs. Nevertheless, temple worship, participation in weekly worship, and ironing a shirt to get ready for church are at least on a continuum, if not of a piece, as parts of Latter-day Saint liturgical life. The sanctification wrought by temple worship is not only of those things obviously connected to worship, even if tangentially, such as "corralling the children into the minivan". "Every activity humanly possible" is sanctified, including the more mundane aspects of life, whether associated with worship or not. Speaking of the sacrament in particular, Matthew Bowman says:

The Lord's Supper teaches us to see the world sacramentally. . . . [Rites in general] show us the ways in which the mundane things of the world—bread, or water—might suddenly tilt in particular times and places and refract the lovely and blinding light of God's love in ways unexpected and dazzling. But the Lord's Supper also presents to us a particular way of thinking about what God's grace might do for us, and that is its power to evoke in us holy and typological memory, to bring us into a particular flow of history in such a way that revises our understandings of who we are and to whom we belong. (Bowman 2011, p. 209)

The overcoming of the transcendent/immanent boundary serves to make the day-to-day itself part of divine life, bringing us into history as new beings.

The aim of the participatory enactment of cosmological history in the temple is an example of what Orsi describes as the past acting on us "in such a profound way as to erase our intentions of remaining outside of it. This is the vertigo of abundant history" (Orsi 2016, p. 71). Those who have participated in the cosmological history of the temple then live in a world configured by *that* history at least as much as their personal or communal histories. Thus, the temple rites are what Jean-Yves Lacoste calls a project. The mythic past and future of the temple become "the pre-thematic investment of our present by the past and the future" (Lacoste 1990, p. 27). The future that the temple opens for its participants is one figured by the past and future enacted in the temple rite. Lacoste's remark is apropos: "Re-presented as we re-present the past, the projected future—a future from which, in a sense, memory is made, the future available in the present—is the object of a donation of meaning which is an anticipated donation of reality" (Lacoste 1990, p. 29; see also Schrijvers 2005, p. 317). Lacoste's point is that when we represent the future to ourselves, we give ourselves a future in the present, opening a possibility in the present; the present holds the future in it as the possibility of acting in particular ways. The projected future

gives meaning to the present by anticipating a reality. The temple rite, by ushering its participants from the Garden of Eden through mortal life and into the presence of a God of flesh and bone before whom they can stand face to face gives them a mythic past and future, from which and toward which they can act. They have a new temporality. The temple rite offers its participants a new possible world, one with a mythically sanctified past, a mythic present, and a mythically sanctified future. Ideally, those who take part in the rite live with that possible world in view even outside the temple.

The goal of this erasure of the line between immanence and transcendence gives one a divine project that Latter-day Saints would admit is, at best, imperfectly achieved. That goal is described by Kierkegaard: “[W]hen a person in the infinite transformation discovers the eternal so close to life that there is not the distance of one single claim, of one single evasion, of one single excuse, or one single moment of time from what *he* in this instant, in this second, in this holy moment shall *do*—then he is on the way to becoming a Christian” (Kierkegaard [1947] 2013, pp. 87–90). However imperfectly the believer is able to be an instantiation of that transformation into something new, though, the temple ritual opens the world otherwise. The closeness of the finite and the infinite may be inapparent to others with whom the ideal Latter-day Saint lives and works; like other Christians, she may live “as-not”,¹¹ seeming to act as society at large expects but in actuality living according to the understanding of herself and her community given her by God through her liturgical experience, including the temple rite. Most often, she is like Kierkegaard’s burgher, someone who lives in the world differently than others, but only visible as different in exceptional circumstances (Kierkegaard 1983, pp. 39–40). The Latter-day Saint scholar Jennifer Lane notes, “through the ordinances [rites] we participate in a way of being that we are becoming” (Lane 2006, p. 64), and that expectation of what the believer can become makes this life itself new. However, how that new life differs from life otherwise may not be immediately obvious.

2. A Hermeneutics of Liturgical Practices

The relational project of Latter-day Saint worship—bringing the family of God into actual rather than only potential being—is not only an aspect of temple worship; it overflows the temple rites and influences how Latter-day Saints congregate, perform their weekly worship, and make covenants outside the temple. Indeed, it flows as well into ordinary life, for each aspect of Latter-day Saint daily life has its meaning as it fits into the ascent to and encounter with God as a member of God’s family.

This focus on the relational is perhaps why, in contrast to the solemn rites of the temple, the weekly liturgy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is much less formal. At first glance, the weekly worship of Latter-day Saints looks like that of the Churches of Christ, with whom they share history. However, in spite of the similarities of Latter-day Saint weekly worship to that of the Churches of Christ, the Latter-day Saint sacrament service, the meeting in which the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ is administered, is different because its meaning is best understood against the transfiguring and relational backdrop of highly liturgical temple worship and within the parameters for the weekly service created by the rite of the sacrament. Because of differences in circumstances, not all Latter-day Saints taking part in a sacrament service will have had the opportunity to take part in temple worship. However, though the particulars of temple worship may remain unspoken, its overall meaning and intention is very much part of Latter-day Saint culture. The temple’s emphasis on embodiment and relationality is the liturgical framework within which weekly worship has its meaning. David A. Bednar, a member of the church’s Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, expressed this when he said “As we stand in the waters of baptism, we look to the temple. As we partake of the sacrament, we look to the temple” (Bednar 2009). Even for those in the community who have not taken part in the temple liturgy, the significance it gives to human experience infuses the experience of the community and alters the meaning of what may sometimes appear to be merely casual.

Equally important to the temple liturgy is that of the sacrament. To some degree, the sacrality of the sacrament rite may be a reflection of its universality: whereas temple worship is only available to members of the church who are in good standing, the sacrament is available to every member of the church every Sunday. That availability to all, coupled with its explicit focus on the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, appears to make it important for Latter-day Saints in ways that temple worship is not. We have seen that in the temple endowment, each participant is part of the individual and communal movement from Eden, through the fall, to entry into the Kingdom of God. As we shall see, in the weekly sacrament, the community comes together as the body of Christ to commemorate the physical body of Christ and to memorialize in covenant the embodied relationality that is at the heart of the endowment. The result is a hermeneutic of meaning between the two liturgies, with temple worship setting the cosmological background for what happens in the sacrament, and the rite of the sacrament laying the ground of relational meaning for temple worship. The hermeneutic is also one between formality and informality.

As recent scholarship recognizes, much of ritual space is very ordinary, “set apart by human action that constructs the sacred through belief and practice” (Wright 2016, p. 85). In that light, the informal atmosphere of weekly worship includes things such as noisy chit-chat before and after the meeting, babies crying and toddlers fussing during the administration of the body and blood of Christ, young men with less-than-upright posture and only partially tucked-in shirts passing the sacramental elements to the congregation, and some speakers feeling the need to begin their homilies with an irrelevant joke as if they were unsophisticated toastmasters. The informality of worship may make the liturgy more open to the congregation than it would be otherwise, constituting a practice that largely integrates those rites, formal and informal, with practical life rather than moving the two apart from each other. For good or bad, the informality of sacrament meeting is a sign that Latter-day Saint liturgy is thoroughly relational in some respects, often more like a family gathering around a meal than what some think of as worship. However, regardless of what other explanations there are, that informality must be understood as partly generated by the hermeneutic of formality and informality: formal temple ritual giving a cosmology that puts the family at the heart of worship by bringing people into the family of God and actual families engaged with others as a worship family in a congregation in Sunday services.

3. The Sacrament

The Book of Mormon says that those who take part in the sacrament should do so “always” (3 Nephi 18:3–7), without clarifying what *always* means. Early in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the decision was to celebrate the sacrament weekly (Bray 2012a, pp. 68–69; Perego 2016, p. 7). Though other things occur in the meeting—praying, hymn singing, and preaching—the point of the weekly meeting is to take part in the sacrament. The liturgical arc of sacrament meeting is from the communal business of the ward to the administration of the body and blood of Jesus, to homilies or witness, both of which have as their purpose inviting others to Christ (however much the absence of education or training may sometimes undermine that invitation¹²). The arc is, thus, from the needs of the communal body of Christ, to remembrance of the actual body of Christ, to a call to come to Christ as the spiritual Father of the congregants.

Every worthy male twelve and older is expected to be ordained to the priesthood and to officiate in its rites. Thus, one finds sixteen- to eighteen-year-old boys as priests performing the prayers over the sacramental elements, and boys younger than the priests passing those elements to the congregants. Before sacrament meeting, some of the younger boys prepare the altar. To prepare for the sacrament, ordained young men (“teachers”) put water into individual cups (Latter-day Saints use water rather than wine¹³), and they place whole slices of bread on trays. In many wards, that bread has been baked by one of the women in the congregation who has that as her calling.¹⁴ The young men cover the altar with a white drape that has been washed, pressed, and sometimes embroidered by members of the ward women’s organization, the Relief Society (Wright 2016, p. 87). Then,

they place the trays of water and bread on the altar. Finally, they cover those elements with another white cloth, also prepared by the Relief Society, as a shroud. That cloth will be lifted for the blessing of each element of the sacrament, and the participants will eat the elements as a sign of Christ's resurrection: they take his name on themselves, taking his body and blood into in their living bodies.

When it comes time to celebrate the sacrament, priests at the table uncover the trays of bread and break it into pieces for consumption as the congregation sings a hymn. Then, kneeling, one of them invokes a set prayer. After the bread has been distributed to the congregation, a similar process is repeated for the water by a second priest.

The prayer over the bread is:

O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.

The blessing on the wine—now water—is similar, but slightly abbreviated:

O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine/water to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen.¹⁵

The abbreviation is in the second half of the prayer.

After each element has been blessed, ordained young men circulate it among the members of the congregation. They offer the element to those at the end of each row in the congregation, and the members of the congregation then share that element with each other. Each person holds the tray for the person seated next to them, offering the tokens of Christ's body and blood to their neighbor, who then repeats the same act for the next person in the row. Thus, though male priesthood holders say the prayers and officiate in distributing the elements of the sacrament to the congregation, each participant enacts the lingering of transcendence by not only participating in the rite as an individual, but also by offering the elements of that rite to other worshippers. Like the early Christian kiss of peace or the sign of peace in Catholic mass, and underscored by the relationality of the background temple liturgy, the congregational sharing of the elements of the sacrament embodies the relationality of the sacramental rite itself. As we shall see, that relationality is an essential element of the sacramental prayers.

4. The Liturgy of the Sacrament Prayers

Just as partaking of and sharing the elements of the sacrament is essential to the experience of the sacrament, so too is understanding how those who take part in the rite understand the words of the prayers said in blessing those elements. Notice first that the priest offering the prayer addresses the Father in the first-person plural: "We ask thee." Contextually, this plural may refer to the congregation as a whole, priest and congregants, or it may refer only to the officiating priests since they ask on behalf of those who consume the elements, "they": "We ask thee . . . to bless and sanctify this bread/water to the souls of those who partake/drink of it, that *they* may . . ." (italics added). There is no established answer to the question of how to understand that pronoun reference. However, those listening to each prayer will *hear* it as the priest and the congregation together asking the Father for a blessing on the bread or water. This may be an effect of the fact that the priest is usually one of the teenaged boys in the congregation, someone the congregants think of as a boy (he is usually the child of someone in the congregation) rather than as an authority acting on behalf of themselves and God in this rite.

Another, less contingent explanation for that experience is what we noted, that the prayers are said in the first-person plural. They begin with language similar to that of the Lord's Prayer: "O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee" in the sacrament prayers; "Our Father, who art in heaven" in the Lord's prayer. Plural in both cases, *our* prayer. Congregants hear themselves as a body asking God to bless the bread, with the priest acting as their voice, and it is common practice for congregants either to read the prayers silently as they are said or to repeat them in their heads from memory. Heard in the first-person plural, the sacrament is not simply performed by a priest officiating in this rite. Rather, it is performed as a congregation with the priest officiating in the group prayer. Together with the priests at the altar, the congregants silently pray that the Father will sanctify the bread and water "to the souls" of those who consume them, in other words, to their own souls. The reference to souls here is important since, in Latter-day Saint parlance, the term is a reference to the whole person, body and spirit as one thing.¹⁶

For further evidence of the communal, relational character of the sacrament rite, consider what at first may appear to be merely a curiosity: this ritual is intended for those who are members of the church ([The Church 2021a](#)). Among the members there is to be "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). However, the sacrament is not intended for those who are not church members. At the same time, according to Latter-day Saint scripture (Doctrine and Covenants (hereafter D&C), 46:3–5) and by contemporary rule ([The Church 2021f](#)), the sacred meal is forbidden to no one. Moreover, though little children are not understood to be able to make the covenant implicit in the sacrament nor are they understood to be members of the church, since they are not yet baptized,¹⁷ it has become universal practice for members to encourage their children, including even babes in arms, to partake of the elements.

The explanation for encouraging those too young for baptism to take the sacramental elements has been that it is to teach children to take part, yet it seems to be a mistake to reduce this act of sharing the sacramental elements with children to training. Training is surely part of what is going on. However, like baking the bread for sacramental use, preparing the cloth for the sacrament table, and passing the bread and water from congregant to congregant, sharing the body and blood of Jesus with the innocent may also be an enactment of meaning, a lingering in the understanding that the sacrament is not only about the forgiveness of sin. It is also about memorializing Jesus Christ with our souls, with our bodies *and* our minds.

Except for obvious references to the body and blood of Christ, the language of the sacrament prayers is notably without the language of sin and forgiveness. They are implicit only, while the blessing of the souls of those who partake is explicit. The precondition for baptism given in the Book of Mormon is that a person is ready to be one in suffering with those who suffer and mourn (Mosiah 18:8–10). The covenant made based on that precondition is that one is a witness of the Messiah, who suffered and mourned for all. Taking the sacrament is a public commitment that one meets the precondition of joining with those who suffer and mourn, and it is a public witness of the suffering Messiah. By offering the elements of the sacrament to those who are innocent, something seen by virtually everyone in attendance, the members of the congregation publicly recognize the powerless as representative of all whom the members of the church are pledged to serve, and they share the body of Christ with those powerless. Infants do not take the sacrament for forgiveness of sin or to make or renew covenant with God. Nevertheless, they too partake of his body and blood, most often through the hands of adult congregants. Thus, they too are made part of his body, and they exemplify those who need to be mourned with and comforted.

Orsi's description of the pilgrims at Lourdes is apropos to this part of the sacramental liturgy when members of the congregation share the sacramental emblems with each other and their children:

There is a heightened sense of intimacy among pilgrims at these sites, an awareness of each other's needs and vulnerability and of mutual dependence. The carefully, if subliminally, maintained distances between modern bodies, the spatial surround that buffers each individual's autonomy, are erased, as volunteers and family members offer physical support to pilgrims who cannot walk on their own, feed or wash themselves, or take care of their intimate bodily needs. (Orsi 2016, p. 54)

Of course, a Latter-day Saint sacrament service does not have the offer of physical support that we see at Lourdes, yet the congregation sharing the food of the sacramental elements with each other and offering them to their children reminds them, even if only subliminally, of the preconditions for baptism they agreed to, to suffer with those who suffer and mourn with those who mourn. Partaking with the congregation and the innocent is a physical witness of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the innocent one who bled and died for them.

Orsi's discussion also helps us to see another effect of Latter-day Saint liturgy, temple or sacrament, namely, that its meaning is not dictated by holy writ or ecclesiastical authority (though the words of the rites may be), but by the "excess" of the event (Orsi 2016, p. 57). What the participants do beyond the official prayers and pronouncements—enacting, baking, embroidering, praying, passing, sharing—gives meaning to the rite. The meaning of the sacrament arises from what the participants do in response to the prayers of the priests and the consumed elements of the sacrament. Taken together, the invocation over the elements and the actions of the congregation open a world for those who take part in the rite. That world, of course, is the world of the Kingdom of God, a world made possible by commemorating Eden, Golgotha, the empty tomb, and the future Kingdom in the liturgies of the temple and the sacrament.

5. The Sanctification of Souls: Incarnation and Community

Latter-day Saints reject transubstantiation (at least as understood by the Reformation), yet they also do not take the sacrament to be merely a sign. A Latter-day Saint theologian from the late twentieth century, Truman Madsen, said that to partake of Jesus's flesh and blood that has been sanctified to our souls is for the bread and water the congregants consume to make them something new, to make them more like him: they are to become what they eat (Madsen 1975, p. 287). The elements of the material sacrament are sanctified so that those who partake can be sanctified, body and spirit. They are commemorabilia that the participants in the rite consume to bring about their sanctification as embodied persons. We shall see that, as part of an act of memorializing, the elements become things by means of which the participants join with the Church in remembering the physical existence of the person Jesus Christ, and the reality of his sacrifice and resurrection, making him present in their individual and communal life and thereby opening a future for them.

The metaphysics of this sanctification aside, the liturgical and phenomenological point is that the material bread and water become things that the faithful recognize as something other than ordinary bread and water which, by ingesting them, will be a blessing to them as souls. As David Holland shows, one evidence that something about the elements of the sacrament makes them different is the language used in Latter-day Saint scripture to denote the rite, "the administration of the body and blood of Christ" (Holland 2020, pp. 45–46) (see Moroni 4:1 and 5:1; compare 3 Nephi 18:28). In most discussions of this rite, Latter-day Saints will speak of it as the sacrament, but the Book of Mormon's language is important to the Latter-day Saint understanding of what they do in that ritual. As does Christ in the New Testament (Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20), the Book of Mormon speaks of the elements of the rite as themselves the flesh and blood of Christ rather than merely tokens of that body and blood (3 Nephi 20:8; Moroni 4:1). Of course, a reader might take that straightforwardly to be symbolic language, referring to the thing which functions as a symbol by calling it the thing symbolized, the present symbol standing in for the absent symbolized. The language of the Doctrine and Covenants suggests as much (see

D&C 20:46, 68; 27:2; 46:4; 62:4; and 95:16). However, for understanding religious practice and experience, there are better ways to understand what is happening.

As Orsi says, the contemporary assumption that the relation between the symbol and symbolized is a relation of absence, where the symbol stands in the place of something absent that it represents (as in the thought of C. S. Peirce (1998, pp. 272–73)), makes the religious experience of presence disorienting and inexplicable (Orsi 2016, p. 64). However, those who do not insist on letting that post-seventeenth-century understanding of symbolic language define their experience, whether Latter-day Saint, Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, have a different implicit understanding of symbolic language and ritual. Those with the older view might agree with Karl Jaspers's claim that, for the religious, there exists "a stream of communal life that lies beyond the reach of philosophy" (Jaspers and Bultmann 1958, p. 51). However, to do so, one would have to agree to exclude the phenomenology of religious life from philosophy, an exclusion against which Heidegger had already argued (See Falque 2020). Rewriting Jaspers, we might say: "A stream of communal life gives meaning that is inexplicable unless we understand that meaning as presencing rather than representation".

Holland also points out that the Book of Mormon language "draws our attention to the ordinance [of the sacrament] as something more than mere memorial. It is for remembrance, to be sure, but there is also a presence beyond memory involved" (Holland 2020, p. 45). Holland uses the terms "mere memorial" and something "beyond memory". As we shall see, I disagree with his terminology since I think it does not allow us to distinguish between memorializing and mere recollection. However, with that gentle proviso, a merely terminological disagreement, I take Holland's point to be important. According to him, the Book of Mormon's description of the rite as administering the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ "keeps us in this tense middle space—forces pushing us away from transubstantiation, forces pulling us away from mere symbolism—and we are left with bread and water empowered to carry out the presence of our Redeemer into our lives" (Holland 2020, p. 45). For Holland, the elements are neither—or both—mere symbols and transubstantiation. They are in a liturgical space between those two options.

The sacrament prayers ask that the Father bless the elements on the table, and that he do so in order for the bread and water to become things that can bring about an effect in the *souls* of those who partake. As we have noted already, the soul is not the Cartesian mind or some other spirit entity inhabiting the body. For Latter-day Saints, the soul is the human person as a living whole, as it was in earlier English and German usages and as it remains when speaking of passengers on a ship or airplane: the souls on board. The sacramental petition that the elements be blessed to the souls of those who eat or drink them underscores the earlier claim that the elements of the sacrament are blessed so that those who partake might become that which they eat. The elements are, as it were, "ensouled", body and spirit, so that the participants in the sacrament may be ensouled to become like Christ, like the embodied Father and his embodied Son.

The sacramental prayers call on God to do something for the congregation by making the bread and water instruments of his power to the physical and spiritual nourishment of the incarnate persons who consume them. Before the sacramental prayers, the elements were just ordinary bread and water. With the invocation of the priest, these same elements become that by which the participants are renewed not only in body, but also in their being as a whole, as souls. The elements become that by which they witness that they are a member of Christ's body, a member of the community whose destiny is communal life with the Father. Thus, the witnessing and remembering referred to in the prayers is not something the congregants do by their own power through taking part in the ritual. By making the flesh and blood of Jesus present to the congregants in their memorializing, the prayers *empower* those who partake to remember the Son and to become like the Father in body and spirit. God's intention gives the prayer its power and meaning, not the intention of the congregants. As Bowman says, this "language [of the sacrament prayers] is not simply a tool of description, but rather the way in which God invokes his presence in

the world” (Bowman 2011, p. 208), a presence made known through the bodies of the congregants, by the things they do as witnesses, things suggested by the precondition for baptism: engaged unity with those who suffer.

The rite of the sacrament must be understood alongside the temple ritual. Together, they suggest that the presence of God in the world is seen not only in the rite of ascension in the temple or in the sanctified sacramental elements, but also in sanctified life, a life of obligation to those who suffer that leads to life in the presence of God. On this understanding, for the congregant, each sacrament prayer is a prayer for grace—for the gift of community, witness, and remembrance, and above all, the gift of the Spirit—gifts enacted in the whole person, but in this case, especially in the whole community. The blessing for which the priests and congregation pray is that of being empowered to become who it is that God intends them to be: participants partake of the bread and water in order to partake in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4; compare Pieper 1974, p. 19), a nature that is relational rather than merely individual.

As with the temple ritual and as was the Lord’s Supper for early Christians, the elements of the sacramental rite are given to the church so that it can be and become something made manifest in Jesus’s blood and body—bodily, material sacrifice for others—rather than merely as tokens by which the individual brings Jesus’s sacrifice to recollection (Dix 1945, pp. 29ff., 78ff.). To remember the sacrifice of Jesus and his resurrection is to take part in a community and the life of that community. It is to incarnate the divine community—the body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12:27 and Eph 4:12) or Zion in the language of Joseph Smith’s revelations (for example, D&C 6:6). To remember the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus is to enact the community envisioned by that sacrifice and resurrection, not merely to recall a past event.

6. The Sacrament as Memorialization

Memorializing—remembrance—is central to the sacrament rite, not only as that which puts them into relation with Christ and the Father, but also that which brings them into relation with one another. The priests pray that the elements of the sacrament will make it possible for those who eat and drink to remember the body and blood of the Son and thereby to be witnesses of him, presumably of his existence as a person of flesh and blood as well as witness of his sacrifice. Those who eat and drink are to remember so that they can declare or witness what they remember, and they are to witness that they take the name of the Son on themselves (in the divine family, he is their adoptive Father), that they will remember him. They also witness that they are willing to obey him. However, none of these acts and concomitant commitments is made simply in order to recollect. That the prayer on the water abbreviates three commitments (taking the name of the Son, remembering him, and obeying him) with simply remembering him shows that those commitments are *one* thing rather than three. Remembering means taking the Son’s name and obeying him, as well as recollecting him. This is a rite of remembrance rather than simple recollection, to be sure. What does that mean, though?

Edward Casey (2000, pp. 216–28) and Paul Moyaert (2007, pp. 147–53) have said perhaps the most relevant and important things about this kind of memory, though Orsi’s work is also relevant and helpful. Casey and Moyaert argue that, to quote Casey:

The past is made accessible to me by its sheer ingrediency in the *commemorabilium* itself. . . . *Through* the appropriate *commemorabilia* I overcome the effects of anonymity and spatio-temporal distance and pay homage to people and events I have never known and will never know face-to-face. (Casey 2000, p. 218)

The past is an ingredient of any material object by which we commemorate something. Were it not, the thing in question would be a different object: without the past as an ingredient, no national flag is a national flag. As an object that incorporates the past, the object overcomes the effects of the anonymity of those in the past because the one who commemorates encounters the past in the *object—as a physical thing in the present, shared world*—and not just a notion in their psychological recollection. Thus, the one who joins

with others in commemoration pays homage to those whom they have never met by, as it were, meeting them through the commemorative object—in the case of the sacrament, the bread and water which explicitly commemorate the resurrected Jesus and implicitly commemorate all those who have commemorated him in the past. Casey goes on to argue that the act of physically commemorating “embodies the *commemorandum* rather than adumbrating it as still outstanding, still to be realized” or beyond realization in a remembered past (Casey 2000, p. 220). The point is that the commemorative object is not a sign of something else: the bread and water are an embodiment of the thing they memorialize.

Consider examples of this from Moyaert: When his wife is absent, he touches her pillow, perhaps pulling it against himself and, by doing so, remembers her (Moyaert 2007, pp. 148–49). His wife’s pillow embodies her because it occupies the ethico-metaphysical space that she usually inhabits. Similarly, the photo of his deceased father on his bureau becomes a point for remembrance (my literal translation of *herinneringsteken*, “reminder”). In his father’s absence, it reminds him that he is not allowed to forget. One can even say *it remembers his father for him*, helping him to live as if his father were present (Moyaert 2007, p. 151; Faulconer 2010, pp. 4–6). The physical presence of the thing and physical contact with it makes remembrance possible by reconfiguring space so that what is conventionally thought of as absent is made present, embodied in the presence of another thing. Moyaert’s wife is embodied in her pillow. Jesus Christ is made present, embodied in the bread and water of the sacrament.

It might seem that this way of understanding the remembrance taking place in the Latter-day Saint sacrament makes it an instance of either transubstantiation or real presence. However, those are the wrong categories to use in thinking about Latter-day Saint liturgy. Casey offers us a better term, one that avoids the difficult categories and their metaphysical commitments. His term is *perdurance*. Casey says, “Eternity connotes an intelligible, wholly fulfilled order of being, while time, in contrast, signifies something degenerate, fleeting, and opaque to intelligence . . . Perdurance represents a *via media* between eternity and time” (Casey 2000, p. 228). The Latter-day Saint liturgy’s overcoming of the transcendent-immanent distinction means equally an erasure of the Platonic and Aristotelian eternal *and* an erasure of mere time.¹⁸ Perdurance is the middle road by means of which the past is present to and with us without that event being a matter of mere recollection and without such an event requiring the Aristotelian metaphysics of substance. Most importantly, the presence of that past in the present makes a future possible. It gives us a new world. This is Lacoste’s project and Orsi’s vertigo of history, when we find ourselves drawn into the past that makes itself present in the present, a past that opens the future for us, giving it content and direction.

The sacrament appears different when seen through the lens that Casey and Moyaert use for memory and memorials. Memorial is in many ways the best way to understand it, as we have seen. However, the memorial of the sacrament is unlike other memorials. Someone goes to the cemetery on Memorial Day as a remembrance of their parents. That non-theological ritual is something the person or family does, an act of will even if also a memorial. However, the sacrament is something that the priests pray God to *make possible* for those in the congregation. Remembrance is not first of all what the priest does by the prayer he offers, nor first of all what the congregant does by eating the elements of the sacrament and sharing them with her neighbor. The prayer asks God to bless the bread and the water, and his blessing allows the participants to consume the elements in remembrance or memorialization. This kind of communal remembrance is what God makes possible in the rite rather than what the participants do by their acts, and what God makes possible are acts, not only the act of taking part in it, but especially the acts promised by those who take part: they witness, they remember, they receive the Holy Spirit. All of this is done in the plural rather than the singular: implicitly “we witness”, “we remember”, “we receive”.

Once the metaphysical space of the elements of the sacrament has been reconfigured by being consecrated to the souls of those who consume them, by taking the bread, the

congregants witness that they are *willing* to always remember the Son. By taking the water, they witness that they *do* so (and the tension between what the participants are willing to do and what they actually do remains unresolved by these prayers). Though Shoshana Felman is speaking of the *Shoah* rather than witnessing in general, what she says is apropos:

To testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness's stand, or to take the position of the witness insofar as the narrative account of the witness is at once engaged in an appeal and bound by an oath. To testify is thus not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and to commit the narrative, to others: to take responsibility—in speech [and in the case of the sacrament, in body]—for history or for the truth of an occurrence, for something which, by definition, goes beyond the personal, in having general (nonpersonal) validity and consequences. (Felman 1991, p. 39)

In referring to the elements of the sacrament as a means of bearing witness, the prayers most explicitly assume that what happens is not simply a matter of what happens in the consciousness of the participants. First of all, as Felman points out, to witness is to take a public stand. It is to take responsibility for the truth of the event for which one is a witness, and taking responsibility is never something a person does alone. To be responsible for something is to be responsible to others for it. By eating and drinking the sacramental elements publicly and by sharing those elements with others, those who take the elements bear witness that they take on themselves the responsibility of being called by the name of Jesus Christ and of remembering him. Thus, what they do is remembrance, but this remembrance stretches from the past into the future, as in the temple ritual. It looks to the future (the Parousia) by remembering the past that opens that future (Jesus's Incarnation) in the present.

If *remember* means “never lose conscious awareness of,” then the participants would be committing to do something that is impossible for a human being. Absorbed in the daily tasks of life, it is not possible always to be conscious of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection. But memorializing or remembrance, as opposed to simple recollection, need not always be conscious. In fact, remembrance is largely *unconscious*. Moyaert remembers his father by having his father's picture at hand; he remembers his wife by touching her pillow (Moyaert 2007, pp. 148–49). We remember marriages by wearing wedding rings, a matter of vision but especially of touch. Remembrance means finding ourselves in the material world in a particular way made possible by the things we deal with—by touch, by vision, by smell, and hearing as much as or more than by consciousness. I remember that I am married by the way in which I orient myself in the world as an incarnate being in relation to other incarnate beings and among other physical things. The world I inhabit is a married world and my wedding ring is one of the objects most obviously but very quietly and usually unobtrusively making it such.

Andreas Huyssen speaks of memory as contemporaries most often do:

Today we ... think of memory as a mode of re-presentation and as belonging ever more to the present. After all, the act of remembering is always in and of the present, while its referent is of the past and thus absent. Inevitably, every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence. (Huyssen 2003, p. 3)

However, Huyssen is describing how remembrance has become mere recollection, how, to repeat Orsi's point, symbols have come to be understood only in terms of absence. That is what remembrance would be like if memory were only a mode of re-presentation. It would be nostalgia, at best. Rather than betraying the past, however, the liturgy of the Latter-day Saint sacrament—like the temple liturgy—recuperates that past as a way of opening the future.

With Casey and Moyaert, Nicola King argues that memory is what shapes the present, creating and recreating us as we remember (King 2000, pp. 1–32). To do so is of course also to open the future. Memorializing Christ, the Christian inhabits the world as a Christian; Christians remember Christ by memorializing the world of the Christ event through the possibility opened by the sacramental elements. Sometimes, that is a matter of consciousness. Often, it is not. The sacrament prayers open the possibility that by consuming the bread and water blessed by God, participants will be able to memorialize Christ's death and resurrection, *the* defining event of his life. God offers to their souls that which will nourish them to become like his Son and also to offer themselves to fellow sufferers.

7. Sacrament as Covenant

As we have seen, the rite of the sacrament assumes the covenant made at baptism. We can also understand the rite as praying that the remembrance it performs will bring its participants into covenant relation with God and with one another. As a result, when Latter-day Saints speak of the sacrament, they often do so with the language of covenant. For example, Joseph F. Smith (nephew of the founding prophet, Joseph Smith and at the time he spoke a member of The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles) said: "We meet here . . . and partake of the Holy Sacrament together as brethren in the bonds of the covenant" (Smith 1867). Latter-day Saints use the word *covenant* with a variety of meanings. It can refer to the covenant made with Abraham (as in 3 Nephi 20:25–27), a covenant that has important theological resonances for Latter-day Saints (Butler 2006) as well as Jews and other Christians. The term often refers to marriage. It has a wide variety of other uses as well (Nielson 2012), but one of the most frequent is in reference to baptism.

As mentioned, based on a passage in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 18:6–10), baptism is understood as an act of witness that the believer covenants to serve God and keep his commandments—a covenant with the precondition that one is willing to join a community of those who are:

called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places . . . (Mosiah 18:8–9)

They do not mention that precondition, but the sacrament prayers use the same language of witness and keeping commandments. The precondition is important to understanding what it means for Latter-day Saints to take the sacrament.

The first thing to note about the precondition is its communal nature: to be baptized is to become one of those who are called God's people. This is an explicit and literal connection for Latter-day Saints, who believe that to be a member of the church is to receive a birthright by adoption into one of the tribes of ancient Israel (The Church 2021d). Additionally, the covenant with Israel was with it as a nation more than with the particular individuals in that nation. It was a communal and generational covenant rather than an individual one, though of course individuals are implicated by being members of the community and there can be no community without individuals. However, the communal nature of the covenant shows itself in that the covenant continues from the time of its making in Genesis 17 through those who come afterward and who were not there to make the covenant as individuals. Those in Israel are covenanted as a community more than as individuals.

Similarly, in the sacrament, the Latter-day Saint congregation puts itself forward as a body, both as living bodies and as bodies in relationship with one another, agreeing to bear one another's burdens and be witnesses of God, which the Book of Mormon says are the same thing: "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). That body of those committed to serve one another prays that the Father will bless the bread and water on the sacrament table to those members of the congregation who consume them, in principle to themselves. The prayers repeat

not only the language from the baptismal covenant about witness and obedience, but they also add the language of remembrance. For Latter-day Saints, taking the sacrament is an act in which they renew their covenant as members of a community to be witnesses, to memorialize the Son of God with the church and their individual lives.¹⁹

Witness is required because, as Kierkegaard says, “If the world is not as Christianity originally assumed it to be, then Christianity is essentially abolished” (Kierkegaard [1947] 2013, p. 194). With other Christians, Latter-day Saints believe that the world is “the same”. It is still a world in need of redemption from human selfishness. Given the ways in which the modern individual has been cut loose from the fabric of society and time and made into a solitary, autonomous atomic particle (Siedentop 2014; Marion 2007, pp. 11–66), a Christian might argue that the world is *more* the world than ever. However, if the world continues to be the world in which Jesus died and was resurrected for humanity, then it continues to require what it required at the time of Jesus and Paul, namely, witness of his death and resurrection,²⁰ a witness that happens most of all in serving those who suffer and working to restore the family of God.

8. Conclusions

In spite of some grammatical issues with reference in the prayers,²¹ it is clear that Latter-day Saints understand the phrase “his Spirit” in them to be the Holy Spirit (see, for example, Oaks 2008). On that understanding, the Godhead is explicitly present in the sacrament prayers: The Father will empower the bread and water to make witnessing and remembering possible; the Son is he whom the participants remember, the one whose name they take as their own as members of God’s family; and the Spirit is promised to abide with those who take part (Compare John 15:26–17, 16:13–14). The point of the ritual, however, is for the participant to make covenant with the Father by memorializing the Son in their lives, and the promise of the covenant is that they will receive the Holy Spirit. As the non-nomological origin of and guide to Christian life (as per Rom. 8:1–9) and that which makes witness possible, phenomenologically, the promise to have the Spirit is a promise of the openness and possibility of the future. In the project of building the Kingdom of God, this is a promise that makes it possible for the church and its members to act from out of their investment in the past (both the past of Christ’s death and resurrection and the historical past of the church) toward a future kingdom available in the present as possibility—both the Kingdom to come at the Apocalypse and the immediate kingdom to be built amongst those who suffer and mourn together. The promise of the Spirit is, to quote Lacoste, “a donation of meaning which is an anticipated donation of reality” (Lacoste 1990, p. 29), both now and in the unknown future. Without the Spirit-created hermeneutic tie between the past and present that opens to the future, remembrance would become mere recollection, witness would be impossible because there would be no event of which to witness, and obedience would become mere legalism. The object of the rite of the sacrament, therefore, is that those who partake of it will live Spirit-filled lives together in the family of God. The sign of the participants living those lives is memorializing witness and Spirit-directed obedience.

By ignoring the traditional transcendent/immanent distinction, the temple and sacrament liturgies of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints open a new world for their participants, a world in which human bodies, our own and those of others, are essential to the work of building the Kingdom of God. The precondition for the covenant made in the sacrament rite is that the congregation be one in relational Christian love in order to receive the Spirit of God promised by Jesus (e.g., John 16:7–14). The cosmology of the temple sets the relational background for Christian love and directs it toward life that brings people to God as a family. Congregants’ daily lives are inflected by the relational character of the temple rites. In turn, the temple rites and their mythic cosmology are inflected by the sacrament, with its precondition of Christian love and unity and its covenant that those who eat Christ’s body and drink his blood will be witnesses of his reality, that they will not just recall but memorialize him with their own bodies by living in the community of

humanity that is the rite's precondition, and that they will obey him. In the hermeneutic circularity common in religious life, they are promised that if they witness, remember, and obey, they will have the Holy Spirit, the divine light for knowing how to witness, remember, and obey.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: The Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship generously provided funding for Lavender Earnest, Courtney Fielding, and Richard Robertson as research assistants.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 Since early in its history, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has often been referred to by the nickname "Mormon Church", because, in addition to the Bible, it recognizes the Book of Mormon as scripture. For the entirety of their history, members of the church have themselves used the term, referring to themselves as "Mormons". However, the church has recently asked that the nickname not be used ([The Church 2021b](#)). As a consequence, in this essay, I use its formal name or some variation thereof, or I just refer to "the church", meaning The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For the same reason, I refer to members of the church as "Latter-day Saints" rather than "Mormons".
- 2 The terminology for referring to the ritual and aspects of it has varied since the foundation of the church in 1820. For accounts of the history of the Latter-day Saint sacrament, see ([Bray 2012b](#); [Stapley 2011](#); [Perego 2016](#)).
- 3 Note that Latter-day Saints distinguish between salvation (resurrection to some form of glory) and exaltation (life with the Father), but that theological distinction does not concern us here, so I simply note it and use the more common term *salvation* for both salvation and exaltation in the Latter-day Saint sense.
- 4 For an official description of what Latter-day Saints can discuss concerning the endowment rite, see ([Bednar 2019](#)). It should be noted, although it may surprise no one, that the secrecy of the endowment "transforms a given piece of knowledge into a scarce and precious resource, a valuable commodity, the possession of which in turn bestows status, prestige, or symbolic capital on its owner" ([Urban 1998](#), p. 210). Those in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who have taken part in the endowment ritual have symbolic capital within their congregations.
- 5 For an excellent discussion of God's embodiment in Catholicism, see ([Webb 2012](#)). In particular, see pp. 243–70 for a comparative discussion of the Latter-day Saint position.
- 6 See ([Faulconer 2012](#)) for one of the few theological discussions of this problem.
- 7 For a history of the separation of nature from grace that eventually became the modern version of metaphysical transcendence, see ([Dupré 1993](#)).
- 8 I have in mind the verb *verweilen*, as in the quotation from ([Heidegger 1967](#)).
- 9 The point is arguable, but most interpreters of Levinas have taken the position that Levinas's philosophical works use the word *God* to mean "the other person" rather than "the object of worship".
- 10 Levinas believes that Heidegger has left the ethical demand of the other out of his phenomenology. As Chantal Bax says, for Heidegger, the self is related to a larger sociohistorical unity, whereas for Levinas, the self is outside the communal context, faced with the absolutely other ([Bax 2017](#), p. 383). To what degree that is an accurate critique is beyond the scope of this paper and irrelevant to its argument.
- 11 See 1 Corinthians 7:29–31 for Paul's use of this phrase. See also John 17:14b–18. The twentieth-century Italian thinker, Giorgio Agamben makes much of Paul's "as-not". See ([Agamben 2005](#)) as well as Jean-Yves Lacoste's discussion of nonplace ([Lacoste 2004](#), p. 27). ([Orsi 2016](#)) is a particularly relevant discussion of this phenomenon, the rupture of ordinary time by something else that reconfigures it.
- 12 Latter-day Saints have no paid clergy except at the international level.
- 13 This practice has an historical explanation. In response to the fear that enemies had poisoned the wine for the sacrament, the founding prophet received a revelation: "It mattereth not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink when ye partake of the sacrament" (D&C 27:2). Though few, if any, fear being poisoned today, this event, combined with the early twentieth-century decision to expect compliance with the advice against alcoholic drinks given in Doctrine and Covenants 89, has resulted in the practice of using water for the blood of Christ in the sacrament rite.
- 14 For more on the liturgical participation of women in a church with an all-male priesthood, see ([Wright 2016](#), pp. 84–87).
- 15 These prayers are found in Doctrine and Covenants 20:77, 79. Almost identical prayers are found in the Book of Mormon, in Moroni 4 and 5.
- 16 See D&C 88:15, for the doctrinal basis of this: "The spirit and the body are the soul of man".
- 17 The Book of Mormon identifies infant baptism as "a gross error" and "solemn mockery before God" (Moroni 8:6, 9).
- 18 Lacoste's discussion of time is particularly relevant to understanding this temporality ([Lacoste 1990](#), pp. 13–34).

- ¹⁹ The understanding of taking the sacrament as a renewal of one's baptismal covenant is explicit in the General Handbook, the official rules governing the rites and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Church members meet on the Sabbath day to worship God and partake of the sacrament (see D&C 20:75; 59:9; Moroni 6:5–6). During this ordinance, they partake of the bread and water to remember the Savior's sacrifice of his flesh and blood and to renew their sacred covenants (see Matthew 26:26–28; Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 14:20–25; Luke 22:15–20; 3 Nephi 18; Moroni 6:6). Everyone should be reverent during the blessing and passing of the sacrament ([The Church 2021f](#)).
- ²⁰ See ([Badiou 2003](#)) for a trenchant analysis of Christianity's need for witness.
- ²¹ Grammatically it appears that "his" refers to "thy Son".

References

- Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *The Time That Remains*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Badiou, Alain. 2003. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bax, Chantal. 2017. Otherwise than Being-With: Levinas on Heidegger and Community. *Human Studies* 40: 381–400. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Bednar, David A. 2009. Honorably Hold a Name and Standing. Available online: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2009/04/honorably-hold-a-name-and-standing?lang=eng> (accessed on 18 May 2021).
- Bednar, David A. 2019. Prepare to Obtain Every Needful Thing. Available online: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2019/04/54bednar?lang=eng> (accessed on 15 March 2021).
- Bowman, Matthew. 2011. This is My Body: A Mormon Sacrament. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44: 208–14. Available online: https://www.dialoguejournal.com/themencode-pdf-viewer/?file=https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V44N03_607.pdf (accessed on 21 January 2021).
- Bray, Justin. 2012a. The Lord's Supper in Early Mormonism. In *Ye Shall Have My Word: Exploring the Text of the Doctrine and Covenants*. Edited by Scott C. Esplin, Richard O. Cowan and Rachel Cope. Provo: Religious Studies Center, pp. 64–74.
- Bray, Justin. 2012b. Excessive Formalities in the Mormon Sacrament, 1928–1940. *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 4: 61–75.
- Butler, Shanna. 2006. *Articles of Faith: What Abraham's Covenant Means to You*. Fayette: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Available online: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/new-era/2006/04/articles-of-faith-what-abrahams-covenant-means-to-you?lang=eng> (accessed on 30 January 2021).
- Casey, Edward S. 2000. *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Dix, Gregory. 1945. *The Shape of the Liturgy*. London: Adam and Charles Black.
- Dupré, Louis. 1993. *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Falque, Emmanuel. 2020. For a Phenomenology of Religious Life. Paper presented at Heidegger's Phenomenology of Religious Life, Cambridge, MA, USA, March 14.
- Faulconer, James E. 2010. Remembrance. In *Faith, Philosophy, Scripture*. Provo: Maxwell Institute, pp. 1–17.
- Faulconer, James E. 2012. Transcendence: Transcendence in Mormon Thought. In *Mormonism at the Crossroads of Philosophy and Theology: Essays in Honor of David L. Paulsen*. Edited by Jacob Baker. Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, pp. 235–54.
- Faulconer, James E. 2015. The Mormon Temple and Mormon Ritual. In *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*. Edited by Terry Givens and Philip L. Barlow. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 196–208.
- Felman, Shoshana. 1991. In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah. *Yale French Studies* 79: 39–81. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time [GA 2]*. Translated by Jon Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1967. Vom Wesen des Grundes. In *Wegmarken [Gesamtasugabe 9]*. Frankfurt a.m.: Vittorio Klosterman Verlag, pp. 123–75.
- Holland, David F. 2020. *Moroni: A Brief Theological Introduction*. Provo: Maxwell Institute.
- Huyssen, Andreas. 2003. *Presents Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ing, Michael D. K. 2013. Ritual as a Process of Deification. In *By Our Rites of Worship: Latter-Day Saint Views on Ritual in History, Scripture, and Practice*. Edited by Daniel L. Belnap. Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, pp. 349–67.
- Jaspers, Karl, and Rudolf Bultmann. 1958. Myth and Religion. In *Myth and Christianity: An Inquiry into the Possibility of Religion without Myth*. New York: Noonday Press, pp. 5–103.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 1983. *Fear and Trembling and Repetition*. Translated and Edited by Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. 2013. *Kierkegaard's Writings, XVI: Works of Love*. Translated and Edited by Howard V. Hong, and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press. First published 1947.
- King, Nicola. 2000. *Memory, Narrative, Identity: Remembering the Self*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lacoste, Jean-Yves. 1990. *Note Sur le temps: Essai sur les raisons de la mémoire et de l'espérance*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Lacoste, Jean-Yves. 2004. *Experience and the Absolute: Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Lane, Jennifer. 2006. Embodied Knowledge of God. *Element* 2: 59–69.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1969. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press.
- Madsen, Truman G. 1975. The Meaning of Christ—The Truth, the Way, The Life: An Analysis of B. H. Roberts' Unpublished Masterwork. *BYU Studies* 15: 259–93.

- Marion, Jean-Luc. 2007. *The Erotic Phenomenon*. Translated by Stephen E. Lewis. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Moyaert, Paul. 2007. *Iconen en Beeldverering: Godsdienst als Symbolische Praktijk*. Amsterdam: SUN.
- Nielson, Christy. 2012. Understanding Our Covenants with God. *Ensign*. July. Available online: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2012/07/understanding-our-covenants-with-god?lang=eng> (accessed on 4 February 2021).
- Oaks, Dallin H. 2008. Sacrament Meeting and the Sacrament. Available online: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2008/10/sacrament-meeting-and-the-sacrament?lang=eng> (accessed on 18 January 2021).
- Orsi, Robert A. 2016. *History and Presence*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Peirce, Charles S. 1998. A Syllabus of Certain Topics of Logic. In *The Essential Peirce*. Edited by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, vol. 2, pp. 272–73.
- Perego, Ugo. 2016. The Changing Forms of the Latter-day Saint Sacrament. *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-Day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 22. Available online: <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-changing-forms-of-the-latter-day-saint-sacrament/> (accessed on 23 January 2021).
- Pieper, Josef. 1974. *Faith, Hope, Love*. Translated by Mary Francis McCarthy, Richard Winston, and Clara Winston. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Schrijvers, Joeri. 2005. Jean-Yves Lacoste: A Phenomenology of Liturgy. *Heythrop Journal* 56: 314–33. [CrossRef]
- Siedentop, Larry. 2014. *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- Smith, Joseph F. 1867. Embarrassments on Arising to Speak—The Different Religions—None Perfect Except Revealed from God. *Journal of Discourses* 11: 310.
- Smith, Joseph, Jr. 1839. Discourse, between circa 26 June and circa 4 August 1839—A, as Reported by William Clayton. The Joseph Smith Papers. Available online: <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-between-circa-26-june-and-circa-4-august-1839-a-as-reported-by-william-clayton/14> (accessed on 28 January 2021).
- Stapley, Jonathan A. 2011. Last Rites and the Dynamics of Mormon Liturgy. *BYU Studies Quarterly* 50: 2. Available online: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol50/iss2/5> (accessed on 7 February 2021).
- Stapley, Jonathan. 2018. *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2021a. Guidelines for the Sacrament. Available online: https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/18-priesthood-ordinances-and-blessings?lang=eng#title_number30 (accessed on 21 January 2021).
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2021b. Style Guide—The Name of the Church. Available online: <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/style-guide> (accessed on 30 December 2020).
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2021c. Godhead. Available online: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/godhead?lang=eng> (accessed on 30 January 2021).
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2021d. Patriarchal Blessings. Available online: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/patriarchal-blessings?lang=eng> (accessed on 23 February 2021).
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2021e. Temple and Family History Work in the Ward and Stake. Available online: https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/25-temple-and-family-history-work?lang=eng#title_number1 (accessed on 29 January 2021).
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2021f. The Sacrament. Available online: https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/general-handbook/18-priesthood-ordinances-and-blessings?lang=eng#title_number28 (accessed on 4 February 2021).
- Urban, Hugh B. 1998. The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions. *History of Religions* 37: 209–48. [CrossRef]
- Webb, Stephen H. 2012. Godbodied: The Matter of the Latter-day Saints. In *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wright, Kristine. 2016. We Baked a Lot of Bread. In *Women and Mormonism: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Edited by Kate Holbrook and Matthew Burton Bowman. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press.
- Young, Brigham. 1853. The Necessity of Building Temples—The Endowment. *Journal of Discourses* 2: 29–33.