

# Considering Our Canon

## Scripture's Relationship to Ritual and Community Life In Christ

By Khaden Pettingill

I have a question about scripture canonization. I am unsure how to vote for the upcoming conference(s). I haven't formulated a complete answer; there are many proposals to consider. I'm leaning towards [Proposal 12](#) to "Table the Proposals"<sup>1</sup> until we better understand what a canon means to the communal life of believers. I may be biased in my skeptical prudence; experience has turned me into a cautious conservative. Those of you who know me well know that I had to learn some weighty life lessons a few years ago in a rather debilitating manner. One of those lessons was that plunging hastily into projects and spreading yourself thin for mere "progress's sake," to the point where the forest becomes lost to the trees, can cause one to fall hard. Life has a way of cutting the prideful, who are too stiffnecked to observe what's right under their noses, off at the knees<sup>2</sup>. [How we proceed must be as noble as the cause we seek](#), lest we become our own adversaries- tyrannizing ourselves and one another to the echo of an ideal. A noble ideal so easily lost in the clamor of [contention, jarring, and strife](#) that emerges when [zeal oversteps the pass](#).

Considering these proposals has caused me to question this *noble cause* we seek, asking myself: What exactly is a canon? This investigative criticism of canon will question the "how" we are proceeding, pausing to ask *how* we do the things we do- to see if there is something overlooked that lies underneath the fervor and busyness of this great restoration work that can better inform us of our present condition. What I have written below might be a little philosophically dense; I apologize. I am a contemplative guy who hones his writing not for

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<sup>1</sup> Who gets to set table for a Covenant?

*God alone makes the covenant. We accept it by abiding the conditions. The only thing we can do on our own is attempt to make vows to God. We can make vows, but Christ discouraged us from doing that in Matthew chapter 5. This was in the Sermon on the Mount...*

*...The fact of the matter is, that you can make a vow to God, but you cannot create a covenant with God. God can make a covenant which you can fulfill by your performance. God can offer you something, but it's up to you to accept it. You accept it by what you do. It's not enough to say, "Yea Lord, I'll go out and do as I'm bidden." Instead you must actually do it. Because it is only through doing that the covenant is kept by you. It is only through doing the covenant is able to be empowered sufficiently to give you the blessing which a law has been established to allow you to lay ahold. You can't get there without God offering you the covenant and you accepting God's invitation. ([Talk 4. Covenants page 12](#))*

<sup>2</sup> In my case, it was a literal cutting-off at the knees through a weight-lifting squatting incident. I had a bilateral patellar tendon rupture. My knees were utterly useless and unable to bend to any degree for months. I had to wear full-leg braces for several months. Sitting required that I had a stool nearby to prop my legs up on. If I had to do anything that would typically require one to squat or take a knee, I had to do a controlled fall, relying entirely on my upper body and core, and slither on the ground like a snake. It took me over a year to relearn how to walk normally without a cane, and it took over two years to regain "functional" strength and mobility.

persuasive and expressive ends but as a tool for thinking through complex topics. I lack the skill and style to convey these ideas and questions more simply and concisely, but if you could lend me a patient ear and walk a mile through the weeds of my understanding, perhaps you will have insight and experience to share with me about these matters.

I have to frame this inquiry by providing context from outside of Mormonism. We must step back to better observe our condition. For that, we go east, across the Atlantic, to our Christian European Liturgical roots of Orthodoxy. We travel far and ancient to contrast our faith with theirs and consider whether we have become more Protestant than Mormon in our religion<sup>3</sup>—to observe the development of the modern American Evangelical culture the Restoration has found itself growing in and to question which inherited influences may be a frustration to that noble cause we seek.

## Worship: Sacramental or Propositional?

Orthodox Christians, and to a great degree Latin-Mass Catholics, have a *sacramental*<sup>4</sup>, or Liturgical, form of worship. Their religious gatherings are far different from our more *propositional-focused* meetings<sup>5</sup>. The liturgical form of worship consists of a long ritual drama leading up to the offering of the Eucharist, where scriptures are sung, prayed, and gestured. It is a ritual-embodied form of participation in the narrative and patterns of the gospel. These are the same patterns scriptures convey in print through words and ideas (propositions)- but instead of seeking to absorb the truth through propositional means (sitting and listening), they are enacted through ritual participation. They don't have "sermons" or group scripture discussions

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<sup>3</sup> *It has become somewhat of a commonplace to observe that modern Mormonism tends to reduce itself to another Protestant sect, another Christian heresy, while the religion of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley and Orson Pratt and other leading early Mormons was a far more radical swerve away from Protestant tradition.* - Professor Harlod Bloom, quoted in *Perserving the Restoration* pg 392

<sup>4</sup> Sacramental Christianity is the process of *participation* in the patterns of the cosmic or heavenly order, mediated through a living community of persons via rituals that transform how we relate to God and one another. The Seven Sacraments of the Orthodox Church are baptism, chrismation, eucharist, healing, marriage, reconciliation, and ordination. Each of these sacraments, or ordinances, is ritualistic in that each seeks to conform the initiate/believer to the image or pattern of a higher heavenly narrative. There are elements of ceremonial recognition in each of these sacraments that bestow or reaffirm an identity, thus transforming and informing how the community relates to and loves one another in a non-propositional and embodied manner.

Sacramental Christianity is also a way to see the world. Secularism breaks the world into a dualistic dichotomy: the material and immaterial, spiritual and physical, objective and subjective. Sacraments join the two worlds back together so that they participate with each other- heaven meets earth.

<sup>5</sup> Propositional, or "*text-based*" approach to Christianity. *This is the idea that- as a religion- Christianity has its source in the text of the Bible, and the Bible is the way religion has come down the centuries to modern man like a time capsule. In order to be a Christian (in this view), you must read and understand this text and then put them into practice, which anyone can do if he or she has access to the text...[It functions] essentially as a process of reenactment or agreement with a set of ideas mediated through a text.* -Porcu, [Journey to Reality: Sacramental Life in a Secular Age](#) page 12.

around their sacrament meetings as we do. Although they engage in those forms of communication and teaching, it is done outside their “sacred space.” The way we gather for sacrament would not be viewed as worship by someone in a liturgical (sacramental) tradition. They would view our meetings as a mere “bible study.” From their framework, worship is more about how the initiate participates than what the believer thinks as he nods in intellectual agreement to a lecture.

It’s often said by Orthodox writers/thinkers, somewhat pejoratively, that protestant church services are a cross between a political party and a social club<sup>6</sup>. I can not defend against that sharp criticism because it accurately cuts to the point.

It is a political party in the sense that one person is sharing his beliefs and interpretation of scriptures in the form of propositions, which members of the congregation show support through their continued attendance and attention; and it’s a social club in that by paying your dues you are provided a community and network. The focus in modern protestant religious gatherings, which we as Mormons are deeply influenced by, are the words spoken. Whether through a single bishop/pastor figure or the back-and-forth dialogue among equals in the more intimate home-church settings. Propositions: words, ideas, and thoughts!

In contrast, the focus of a liturgical gathering is communal participation in the ritual drama—embodied, embedded, and enacted!

The difference between the two is that modern protestants seek to know God through words, perhaps more philosophical and intellectual in the suit-and-tie corporate churches, while more emotional and expressive via spontaneous utterances<sup>7</sup> in casual charismatic congregations. In contrast, a liturgical tradition seeks to know through ritual participation (sacramental) by conforming to the embodied and communal patterns that exist beyond the mere ideas that float in and between our heads.

Now, maybe both groups will come to know the same God through different mediums. One more ritual, the other more ideological. Or Maybe not. Maybe **how** you worship more accurately determines **what** you worship. Protestants may argue that knowing through rituals, with all its relics and icons, is a form of idolatry. That could be the case if you worship **the** ritual instead of worshipping **through** the ritual. The same argument could be made against the Bible-thumping Sola-Scriptura types who idolize their scriptures, equating knowledge of God to the collection of scriptural facts and theological ideas(or feelings) one can hold in one’s mind. They fail to see **through** the scriptures by only seeing **the** scriptures.

- *People who engage in ritual forms of knowing are superstitious and irrational, right? Sacramental rituals had their utility in an illiterate pre-modern society, but we are*

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<sup>6</sup> Zachary Porcu, [Journey to Reality: Sacramental Life in a Secular Age](#), Chapter 7: The Life of the Church

<sup>7</sup> Lori Branch, [Rituals of Spontaneity: Sentiment and Secularism from Free Prayer to Woodsworth](#)

*enlightened now and can all read*<sup>8</sup>. Each can access God alone through God's word; I can individually know God. Why do we need to formally and communally reenact something? God meets us where we are at. Would reliance on the ordinances provided by the religious order be trusting in the arm of flesh and allowing a priest, a man, to get in between Jesus and me?

- *People who equate knowledge to their ability to recall facts and command grammar are idealistic, ivory-tower intellectuals who live in their heads, right? Protestantism is just a religious form of a fractured, untethered progressive liberalism. It makes everyone individualist<sup>9</sup> and narcissistic<sup>10</sup> in their so-called "spiritual but not religious" journey of self-discovery.*

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<sup>8</sup> Although I frequently criticize the "propositional straightjacket" the Enlightenment has constrained our thinking to, I am incredibly grateful for the civilizing effects Modernity has bequeathed us through democratic liberalism, science, and, most significantly, the invention of the Gutenberg Press. Steven Pinker, in his book, [\*The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined\*](#), pages 175-177, presents the historical data and makes a strong argument that mass literacy is one of the significant catalyst that has made humanity as a whole less violent; not through the propositional information books transmit and readers consume, but how, over time the frequent practice of reading conditioned readers to become more empathic through the "perspective-taking" that occurs when you continually read the experiential depths of another's suffering.

Of course, mass-literacy and modernization has had many nuance effects, vastly positive but some negative, on our cultural cognition. Joseph Henrich, in his book, [\*The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous\*](#), goes into further depth into what we have lost as a culture through Modernity and how weird we are compared to other cultures across time. How we think about our lives and relate to the world is not the norm, nor godly. We have both gained and lost so much throughout the centuries of Apostasies. I believe the Restoration work will reclaim all the good we've lost while reconciling, separating, or sanctifying the messy.

<sup>9</sup>How many of us on this path are traversing it in solitude, outside of community? How many of us ground our sense of Christian fellowship through online mediums? Is the flexible self-curation afforded by digital platforms conditioning us to treat our spiritual development as a consumerist enterprise? Online-group hopping? Fellowship-hopping? Have we lost touch with one of the greatest virtues attributed to Latter-Day Saints by non-member observers in our radical leap off the Good Ole Ship into the chaotic waters of the internet?

*Terry L. Givens, a professor of literature and religion at the University of Richmond and an expert on the LDS faith, says Mormon theology and ecclesiology forge unusually strong social bonds within local churches (or "wards"). Mormons don't believe in ward hopping. They are assigned their ward based on where they live and have no right of appeal. This compels them to work together to build a unified community of believers, not to wander in search of one. Givens calls this "Zion-building, not Zion-hunting a reference to the Mormon belief that adherents must lay the foundations for Zion, the community that Jesus Christ will establish at His return.*

*American Christians have a bad habit of treating church like a consumer experience. If a congregation doesn't meet our felt needs, we are quick to find another one that we believe will. I'm as guilty of this as anybody else. But Rachel Balducci can testify to the benefits, spiritual and otherwise, of grounding oneself in a committed community. ([Benidict Option, Chapter 6: The Idea of the Christian Village](#), pg 132)*

<sup>10</sup> John Vervaeke, [Luther' Interpretation of Paul: A Cultrual Seebed for Narcissism](#)

These are arguments made on both sides of the protestant-orthodoxy divide against the other-different attitudes I have had at different times in my life.

Maybe, **how** you know something is just as important as **what** is being known<sup>11</sup>. **How** you know something will mold the way you think, perceive, and determine what you value about that thing. If you know God through words, you will come to cherish the books about Him, and your experience of God will be spoken phrases in your head and written words that glow on the paper.<sup>12</sup> If you know God through the liturgy, your experience of God will be more ineffable, beyond words, as you conform to the unspoken pattern of the cosmic narrative the rituals are initiating you into.<sup>13</sup> If you know God through loving one another, you will encounter the personage of God in all His humanity<sup>14</sup>- your fellow man who is made in the image of God will become precious to you.

Now that we have discussed the differences in worship between Orthodox and Protestants, we will turn to the role scripture plays in their communal worship.

## Canon or Apocrypha

Orthodox Christians value and relate to canonized scripture differently than we, Modern Mormons, do. Scripture serves a different purpose to them because they worship differently. Are we worshipping correctly? Have we ever paused to consider such a thing? Is how we worship determining what we value and, therefore, setting the stage for evaluating our sacred text?

There is no single universal canon of scripture for ALL Orthodox Christians. Different branches of Orthodoxy have different canons based on ethnic/cultural heritage.<sup>15</sup> That is important to

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<sup>11</sup> [Marshall McLuhan \*The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects\*](#)

<sup>12</sup> [...ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth...](#)

*Comprehension of the Doctrine of Christ is not based on command of a vocabulary or mastery of an argument....he may acquire a vocabulary with which to discuss the subject, but he will not have the light to comprehend it. ([Glossary: Light](#))*

<sup>13</sup> *But great and marvelous are the works of the Lord, and the mysteries of his kingdom which he shewed unto us, which surpasseth all understanding, in glory, and in might, and in dominion, which he commanded us we should not write while we were yet in the spirit, and are not lawful for men to utter, **neither is man capable to make them known**, for they are only to be seen and understood by the power of the holy ghost...([T&C 69:29](#))*

<sup>14</sup> ***charity is Christ's pure love**, and it endures forever. Those who are found to possess it on the last day, it will go well with them. So, my dear people, **pray earnestly to the Father so you can be filled with this love** that He's freely given to all who are true followers of His Son Jesus Christ, **so you can become the sons and daughters of God, so when He appears, we'll be like Him and we'll see and comprehend Him....** ([Moroni 7:9](#))*

<sup>15</sup> Upon writing this, I did not have the time to track down the exact reference, but it was explained to me in the [Lord of Spirit Podcast](#) which I spent much of my summer work days listening to last year. I was



them and perfectly reconcilable because various groups of people have other things from God that are more relevant to them.

*The Lord gives to every nation, from their own people, using their own language, teachers delivering His message that He decides is relevant for them. Therefore we should trust that the Lord is wise enough to guide everyone to the truth appropriate for them. I know the Lord's commandments to me, and I've found joy obeying." [-Alma 15:13](#)*

But just because one group has a different canon does not mean you can not read and appreciate what other people value as scripture. Eastern Orthodoxy has another class of text called the "Apocrypha," which means hidden. Hidden does not mean secret or lost; it more accurately means "books to be read at home."<sup>16</sup> Orthodox members are encouraged to study those books, and [we were likewise encouraged to do so in the Answer and Covenant. \(Careful study. enlighten by the Spirit\)](#)

So, if the Apocrypha is for personal study, what makes the canon distinct and elevated in authority? The Canon is what is *read at church*<sup>17</sup>. It's the words of the liturgy. It governs the communal life of the Church<sup>18</sup>. It guides the rhythm of believers' way of life, which is deeply intertwined with their fellow Christians through the participatory, *sacramental* way of knowing.

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gripped by how well they expounded scripture and I saw many parallels in their thinking to the Restoration as they sought to reach back to time of Adam. I felt I could learn much about my own Mormon faith through a dialogical reflection with them.

How a Christian canon was determined in the early churches was based on the prior sacred text of a people in a given region. Much of those texts were the inheritance from the Israelite religion/ethnicity, but Judaism was NOT one single sec; it had many diverse sub-groups with different Old Testament era texts, and therefore different canons for different regions. Things homogenized in the west through the central power of Catholic Church but in the east it remained more flexible and organic among the various branches. Canon throughout Orthodoxy is not just their much larger "bibles" (they use the LXX) but also Holy Canon and Canon of Hymns which contain a variety of writings from church fathers and saints- all having a different degree of authority, usage, or acceptance throughout the Eastern Orthodox world.

<sup>16</sup> *Many Christians today divide ancient Jewish and Christian literature into two categories: what is in the Bible and what is not. The Christian East, however, has traditionally described a third category considered beneficial for Christians to read in the home: "apocrypha." These texts, from the centuries before and after the Incarnation of Jesus Christ-beyond even the larger canons of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Old Testaments-reveal to us the religious world and theological framework of the apostles and early Church Fathers. ([Stephen De Young, Apocrypha: An Introduction to Extra-Biblical Literature](#))*

<sup>17</sup> Lord of Spirits Podcast episode, "[How \(and How Not\) to Read the Bible](#)" goes into to further depth the relationship between the canon bible and the Liturgy

<sup>18</sup> ***Do you have faith in these things and receive the scriptures approved by the Lord as a standard to govern you in your daily walk in life, to accept the obligations established by the Book of Mormon as a covenant, and to use the scriptures to correct yourselves and to guide your words, thoughts, and deeds?***

*Do you agree to assist all others — who covenant to likewise accept this standard to govern their lives ([T&C 158:3-4](#))*

The Greek Orthodox church has a different canon than the Ethiopian Orthodox church. They have a different cultural inheritance. Other regions of the world will require a distinct expression of the Christian faith. If you are bilingual, you know well that many aspects of language do not translate between cultures. You have to be culturally embedded in their way of life, not just as an academic observer, but as a participant in their culture, to comprehend their language's meaning and significance. To be a good translator, you have to simultaneously be immersed in both worlds- knowing the depths, customs, and nuance relationship between a people's language and way of life- if you are to convey a writing's spirit or essence.

The Greeks' liturgy includes elements and language from Homer's Iliad and Odyssey<sup>19</sup>. Ethiopians' canon includes the Book of Enoch. Does this reveal anything about their ancient identity? What is our cultural inheritance as Mormons, and what is relevant to our identity in Christ?

The Liturgical form of worship allows for these distinctions between canon and Apocrypha, and even writings of church fathers and saints, as sacred and valued texts. Why? Their religion, at least from their frame of reference, has sacred space/time and profane space/time.<sup>20</sup> The sacred space/time is distinguished through the architecture and ceremony of their house of worship, and their communal fasts and feasts distinguish sacred/profane time and a rhythm of life<sup>21</sup>. Having distinct sacred/profane spaces allows for a value hierarchy of text that gets sorted

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<sup>19</sup> This was this discussed in this podcast: ["The Great Tales"](#) either in this episode or one of the two that follow. This podcast analyzes and discusses the epics, the myths, and the fairy tales of our cultural heritage, showing how many aspects of the legends of old testify, or find their fulfillment, in Christ.

<sup>20</sup> Profane space does not mean morally impure- it just means ritually impure. Being ritually impure does not make you a "bad" person. It just means certain ceremonially things have to occur to qualify you to inhabit sacred space. Its okay to be ritually impure through out life because we live in a fallen world, and life is messy. Its not okay to be morally impure.

Lord of Spirits Podcast Episdoe ["Purifications of the Law"](#) expounds upon the distinction between ritual purity and moral purity. I share a resource if you want a perspective in understanding this distinction

<sup>21</sup> Fasting and feasting are not just a solitary ascetic practice that brings the individual closer to God. They are a means that communally bind a community to the same rhythm of life. In the ancient world when a king or emperor would conquer or obtain a new territory/city, a herold would enter in before the arrival of a new ruler to declare their gospel or evangelion (ie, the evangelion of Cesar). Obviously they would propagandize their new rule as "good news". Within this gospel was the pronouncement of a new political and religious order which would often contain **a new civil year in which the calendar and its communal holidays would be centered around this new ruler, making the very passage of time and rhythm of the seasons relevant to him- binding the lives of his subjects to his order in an almost deified way.** The gospel of this new ruler was the light, or the [good-spell narrative. by which those under him perceived and lived.](#)

What narrative or rhythm of life do we participate in? What do we celebrate as a community? What brings our families and fellowships together? What is it we break bread over? Would mourning together, comforting one another, hungering and thirsting communally-being *with, remembering, and accompanying* one another-through the same seasons and rhythms of life make us one in the same Gospel narrative, binding our way of life to Christ?

into what is relevant for the occasion and place. Is there room for such distinctions in “the Remnant Movement”? Will there be such distinctions in Zion? What purpose does our canon serve to us as a community of believers?

## The Fundamentalist Impulse: Propositional Tyranny<sup>22</sup>

Fundamentalists, people who take a hyper-literal interpretation of scripture, struggle with this sacred/profane space distinction. Most fundamentalists throughout our American/ Protestant history have distanced themselves from the ritual ways of knowing associated with the Catholic Church in favor of the propositional knowledge of scripture. It’s a very reactionary swing to Sola-Scriptura that has too often thrown out ALL the holy water with the corrupt priests.

However, without ritual, nothing is sacred. Everything inevitably falls into a flat, dreary, profane wasteland of our interpretations. Yet, we are ritual beings, and if we don’t participate in ceremonies from a higher authority, we will create our own sacred spaces and fill them with all sorts of “sacred cows” or conspiratorial narratives.<sup>23</sup> Fundamentalists will take minute aspects of the gospel and turn them into dogma. They make mountains out of molehills, making things like swearing, abstaining from coffee, paying tithing, etc., the ultimate qualifier for exaltation. They do this because they yearn for holiness and righteousness but can’t find it in their messy world. All they have is moral, ideological codes extracted from the literal reading of the scriptures. They impose such codes as creeds, which develop into strange doctrines, beliefs, practices, and inappropriate relationships<sup>24</sup>. I’m sure we have done similar things in our literal

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<sup>22</sup> This is a phrase I believe was coined by cognitive scientist John Verveake to describe the mental health and meaning of the crisis of our day. Culture has come to value “propositional knowledge” over all other forms of knowledge, such as ritual or communal knowledge- forms of deep knowledge that bestow meaning in life. I would recommend his book [“Awakening From the Meaning Crisis”](#) if you want to dive into that subject.

To give clarification and to avoid conflating the various usage of word “knowledge”, here are the different ways I have come to understand, and differentiate, the english word knowledge:

- Propositional Knowledge: facts “knowing that”, ideas and concepts you hold in your head. ie. “ I know (really really believe) the church is true!”
- Procedural Knowledge: skills “knowing how” ie. knowledge of riding a bike
- Perspectival Knowledge: lens “knowing what it is like” ie, you can remember what it is like to be a child with your toys
- Participatory Knowledge: identity “knowing by being (coupled) in relation to” ie, I know what it is like to be a husband because I am a husband to my incredible wife. All the other forms of knowledge are built on the foundation of our participatory knowledge, which is relational, transformational, and sacrificial at its core. Sacramental, communal, and ritual knowledge is designed to get us more in touch with this participatory knowledge.

<sup>23</sup> [“Symbolism happens”](#) -Johnathan Pageau

<sup>24</sup> John Vervake, [Religion vs Credo](#)



fixation of scriptures and many of the wonderful revelations we have received from God, only seeing **the** words of the message but failing to see the reality **through** the message.<sup>25</sup>

What a ritual does is it orient us, in space, time, and status, to God. From that orientation, we awaken to what is relevant or irrelevant- to what is an actual mountain or a mere molehill. The ritual embodies all those abstract heavenly concepts described in scripture into a highly salient and immersive enactment. If the ritual is True and your participation *contrite*<sup>26</sup>, it puts you into contact with Reality beyond your small intellect. It initiates you into and reaffirms your position in the Family of God. It affords the perception of a higher world saturated with meaning, holiness, and significance. From that vantage point, from that foundation of Christ, you can

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<sup>25</sup> [Recall the words The Lord open the Restoration with through Joseph Smith:](#)

*"...all their **creeds** were an abomination in his sight, that those **professors** were all corrupt, that, They draw near to me **with their lips**, but **their hearts are far from me**; they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, **having a form of godliness**, but they **deny the power thereof**." ([JSH 2:5](#))*

What if the Restoration is **not** a further extension of the Reformation but a return to something far more ancient? To correct the Aposostasy, we must work our way back through time, trace the millennia-long path, and amend what we have broken in our long march through history. **Before** we can deal with the problems created by the Catholic and Orthodox Church, we have to repent of the unbelief that emerged out of Protestantism and the Enlightenment. That unbelief is the obsession with **creedal** (ideological) dominance. America's buzzing religious culture of 1820, still in the infancy of enjoying its flowering freedom of speech and religious expression afforded by liberal democracy, had a form of godliness (they have words, a zealous fixation on words) but lacked the power thereof. (Perspective/Participatory knowledge) Ask yourself, [through what is the power of godliness manifest?](#) Do *professors* offer anything more than just ideas, reason, sophistry, and tenets? What is it precisely that is in need of Restoration?

When looking at a revelation, it is wise to trace the path toward that revelation instead of merely enjoying the fruit of another's labor. When we understand the process and the framing of such questions that parted the veil, we can better understand the purpose and reason for heaven's response. Consider the tumultuous world of propositional tyranny Joseph Smith is caught up just before he asks God such great and sincere questions:

*But so great was the confusion and strife amongst the different denominations that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. My mind at different times was greatly excited; the **cry and tumult** were so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists, and used all their **powers of either reason or sophistry** to prove their errors, or at least to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally **zealous** in endeavoring to establish their **own tenets and disprove all others**.*

*In the midst of this **war of words** and **tumult of opinions**, I often said to myself, What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right? Or are they all wrong together? And if any one of them be right, which is it? And how shall I know it? ([JSH 2:3](#))*

<sup>26</sup> *"The intention and inner meaning are everything. But the outward act confirms the inner change which takes place. Action is married to belief and intent. Both are necessary. When it is done in faith, sincerity, complying with the steps the Lord has prescribed, He promises to visit the obedient "with fire and with the Holy Ghost." - [Denver's commentary on 3rd Nephi 5:11](#)*

read scriptures<sup>27</sup>, love one another<sup>28</sup>, and perceive this profane lower world in the heavenly Light.

However, without communal rituals, scriptures are elevated to the most important aspect and means of knowing in religious life. While scriptures are durable, they will always fall prey to the fundamentalist impulse to reduce the message to mere intellectual and propositional dogma. Canonized scriptures must be coupled with community and Ritual.

Because we have so much fundamentalist, puritan, and protestant baggage from our ancestors, I think we mistakenly put way too much weight in wanting to add more scripture and more propositions. Perhaps we could weigh such matters properly by living more sacramental. If we could communally learn how to conform our lives to the pattern of heaven instead of merely reading about it, then it would be made self-evident which texts and writings from our cultural inheritance and inspired prophets could be brought into the canonized way of life.

## Conclusion

What are the implications of adding more scriptures? What is the purpose of canonized scriptures in our community? Are these proposed writings relevant to the way of Life God would have us live? I read and appreciate a lot of apocryphal records and have found much truth in them, but despite them being true, I would not want to be accountable for those records as a [standard to govern our life.](#)

1. Many of those great records come from people with whom I share no cultural heritage.
2. The truth those records seek to describe is far better conveyed, concise, and clear in our current canon.

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<sup>27</sup> Ritual knowledge of baptism and the perspective it affords:

*Immediately upon our coming up out of the water after we had been baptized, we experienced great and glorious blessings from our Heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery than the holy ghost fell upon him and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy; when standing up I prophesied concerning the rise of this Church, and many other things connected with the Church and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the holy ghost and rejoiced in the God of our salvation.*

*Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of. ([JSH 14:3](#))*

<sup>28</sup> Ritual knowledge of sacrament and the perspective it affords:

*You pray each time you partake of the sacrament to always have my spirit to be with you. And what is my spirit? It is to love one another as I have loved you. Do my works and you will know my doctrine, for you will uncover hidden mysteries by obedience to these things that can be uncovered in no other way....to know your Lord is to love one another. ([T&C 157:51](#))*

If something is not canon, does that mean we cannot read, discuss, and enjoy it? Of course not, but it's not pure enough (hyper-condensed, concise, and salient in meaning) to be part of sacred space. So it belongs in profane space to be read and enjoyed in the home.

I believe the current canon is sufficient for our general body of believers to realize Zion. God offered the scriptures and set His table for our dining. However, suppose you can show me how the proposed text is relevant to the purposes we must collectively fulfill from God and where it can't already be better conveyed in the currently canonized scripture. In that case, I am willing to be persuaded. Although I am more conservative about more being added to the canon of scripture, it does not mean I am not at all open to further revelation. I am exploring and desire to know more fully what the purpose "canon" holds to the communal life in Christ we hope to one day realize in Zion. Maybe that knowledge will only come about to the degree we are faithful.

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# Our Heritage, Our Rituals

By Khaden Pettingill

*The following is my answer and response to a question received from part one of this paper (originally a post on an online forum): "Considering Our Canon." I address that question and explore this topic in greater depth.*

## Response Question:

I don't understand the desire to canonize more scripture. I agree with what you presented here about the scriptures. I've had the position that the scriptures are to be a companion to your spiritual life; they are not to be the only place where spirituality exists. I was wondering what rituals our heritage engages in. There's the temple. I'm not sure how different that is from what you're describing. There are also reenactments of the Christmas story with Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus. Would that be a profane ritual? And how would we in this movement participate in Godly rituals? Who would compose the ritual? I was wondering who composed the Orthodox rituals as I read. I like the idea of ritual learning. At the same time, I think of Jonathan Pageau's claim that you can't escape ritual. It happens whether you intend to do so or not.

## Reply:

Liturgical fathers who are "saints" compose or organize the Orthodox rituals. They update grammar as language evolves and cultures rise and fall over the centuries. Orthodox Christians will claim their rituals are the same ones the Apostles practiced and taught. I don't believe that is true. Things changed over two millennia, and I highly doubt their ritual way of life out-last the 200-year Post-Resurrection Nephite religion, or else they would have realized "Zion." (who knows, maybe scattered Orthodox communities throughout lost history did realize something Zion-like) However, I believe there are still echoes in their liturgy that reach back to the time of Christ, and I believe that we Mormons who are losing touch with that ritual way of knowing could actually benefit from observing. They welcome guests to their parishes, and unlike Latter-Day Saints, their rituals are not behind a temple-recommend paywall.

## Rituals in the Covenant of Christ

As Modern Mormons seeking to follow Christ, we do have access to rituals and have adopted a cultural inheritance—a very rich, deep, and much more ancient one bequeathed to us from the

Nephite civilization, with which we have the privilege (and attendant responsibilities) of being numbered among<sup>29</sup>.

Yes, we have the temple, but right now, it's more of an "ideal" than something we can claim to be part of. That project was thwarted in the 19th century, and we haven't yet recovered from that loss. But if that prophesied temple is ever realized, rituals will be performed in its sacred space, and a whole cultural and communal way of life will spring forth from that center<sup>30</sup>.

The reenactment of the Christmas story you bring up, in my opinion, is not so much profane as it is "exoteric".

The sacrament, however, is esoteric<sup>31</sup>: for those initiated through repentance and baptism. ([3rd Nephi 8:7 RE](#))

The initiation ritual is baptism and the Doctrine of Christ, as explained in [3rd Nephi 5](#).

I believe the whole Sermon at the Temple in [3rd Nephi](#) was given, or sung<sup>32</sup>, as an ordinance initiate would walk through in a three-part ascent<sup>33</sup>. It was recorded as a liturgical contemplative text for initiates to help them remember their cosmic course of knowing Christ.

So, the Doctrine and Law of Christ and the Sacrament contain "ritual knowledge." There was something afforded by that ritual knowledge that was powerful enough to enable the Nephites to be partakers of the [heavenly gift](#) for 200 years.<sup>34</sup> Have our efforts to conform to those ordinances afforded us to likewise share in that heavenly gift?

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<sup>29</sup> *I will number you among the remnant of Jacob, no longer outcasts, and you will inherit the promises of Israel. You shall be my people and I will be your God, and the sword will not devour you. And unto those who will receive will more be given, until they know the mysteries of God in full. (T&C 157:48)*

<sup>30</sup> Hierocentric Civilization, see [Hugh Nibley, Temple and Cosmos](#), pg 15-25

<sup>31</sup> I think for an ordinance or teaching actually to be "esoteric" requires a complete psychological shift in one's being, identity, and relationships- which is mediated by that potent initiation ritual and one's own broken heart and contrite spirit. This *state of being* affords one the ability to participate in the *mysteries*. (see footnote 36) I do not believe the esoteric knowledge that saves a man and teaches him to become like a god can be understood from what is consumed on the internet or read in a book.

<sup>32</sup> *"It is my view that Christ's Sermon on the Mount was actually a hymn. It was announced as a form of "new law" or higher path. Those to whom He addressed it would have readily recognized the propriety of it being sung...I was then asked if I had heard Christ sing. I replied, "We all have, but only a few can now remember it." - Denver 3/26/2010 post*

<sup>33</sup>This is premise of the Dave Butler's book, [In The language of Adam](#), Chapters 1-4

<sup>34</sup>Hugh Nibley has some interesting observation about the temple, *heirophantic time*, and the Zion-like Nephite Civilization on page 13 of [Temple and Cosmos](#). *Meaning of the the Temple*.



Another ritual given to us now that isn't contingent on "sacred space" but can still conform us to the proper rhythm of time is the Sabbath. It has the power to orient and transform the individual and the life of a community more fully to the flow and rhythm of that 7-day cycle of creation.<sup>35</sup>

Marriage is a sacrament that can afford immense participation in God's mysteries<sup>36</sup> because it was ordained in Eden and reflects [God's image](#).

After Alma shares the "[Zenos Prayer](#)" with the outcast Zoromites, Amuleck expounds on that prayer, teaching them to pray it **aloud**- morning, mid-day, and evening. This interpretation of Alma and Amuleck's prayer form often gets reduced in understanding to mean just casually thinking about God or praying over meals, but could there be more ritual weight to how this lost Brass-Plate prophet prayed?<sup>37</sup>

The Laminates converted through Ammon seem to repeatedly go through a death/rebirth experience very similar to Alma the Younger's where they all make a prayer for "mercy," similar to the Orthodox Jesus Prayer.<sup>38</sup> If it happens once, that is a story. Twice, cool coincidence.

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<sup>35</sup>Slaves work mindlessly 7 days a week with no incentive other than to avoid the displeasure of the tyrant's whip. Even if you work for yourself, no day of rest makes you a slave. Work does not make you free. God makes you free. Observing the Sabbath is how we honor that freedom.

<sup>36</sup> Mysteries of God often get understood as a puzzle that someone can analytically solve if you can articulate their meaning put together all the scripture clues in the cosmic patterns. This is a contemporary and "propositional" way of thinking about mysteries, popularized through the *crime-solving mysteries genre of books and movies*. Mysteries mean something more profound in the ancient context. Nibley, in "*Temple and Cosmos*" pages 27-28, explains *mysterios (Teleioma)* in the more original context to mean ordinances, which agrees with the updated [Glossary definition for the Mysteries of God](#).

[Marriage is a sacrament](#); Your spouse is a mystery. You don't know your spouse by analytically studying her. You know her through your participation in the marriage. Through honoring the marriage, which reflects the image of God, you come to know God. It's a mysterious/participatory knowledge that can only be learned(experienced non-propositionally). It cannot be taught. (transmitted via propositions)

What the did mystery of marriage afford the young man in the Tenth Parable: *The Missing Virtue*?

<sup>37</sup> *Pray to Him for mercy, because He is powerful to save. Humble yourselves and continue praying to Him. **Pray out loud to Him** when you're in your fields, over all your flocks. **Pray out loud to Him** in your houses, over all your household — **morning, midday, and evening. Pray aloud to Him** against the power of your enemies. **Pray aloud to Him** against Satan, who's an enemy of all righteousness. **Pray aloud to Him** over the crops of your fields, that they thrive for you. **Pray aloud** over the flocks of your fields, so they can increase. But this isn't everything. You must pour out your souls in your private rooms and secret places and in your secluded retreats. And when you don't pray aloud to the Lord, let your hearts be full, drawn out in silent prayer to Him continually for your well-being as well as the well-being of those who are around you. ([Alma 16:35](#))*

<sup>38</sup>"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner"

Similar prayer occurring in connection to this "fainting/death ritual":

[Alma 18:3](#)

[Alma 12:17](#)

[Alma 12:25](#)

Three or more times, now a pattern has been established, is there a ritual, a participatory ordinance, occurring here?<sup>39</sup> Is this Orthodox Jesus Prayer and the Mercy Prayers in Alma both the echos of a much more ancient religion?

## Our Inheritance is Far More Ancient than Orthodoxy

The Book of Mormon, the Covenant of Christ, was written for a religion and culture far more ancient and heavenly than our own Judeo-Christian culture. While that book is the keystone of our faith, it is not the keystone of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, or Protestantism.

The keystone of their religion is the Bible. The Bible is not only a valuable religious book, it is the cornerstone of Western Civilization. Even if you are not religious, being biblically literate will profoundly deepen your appreciation of our cultural inheritance with all her art, literature, and history. Likewise, being embedded in Western Culture can open your understanding of the Bible. I am proud of my Western European heritage; we owe so much gratitude to its values, for it has made Mormonism, the Restoration, possible. It is not harmful to be educated in the bible and Western Civilization. [It is good to be educated if we also follow God's counsel.](#)<sup>40</sup>

But the Judeo-Christian keystone has been tampered with throughout history and at the very dawn of our Judeo-Christian heritage with the Deuteronomist reforms<sup>41</sup> between 750-586 BC. Those ancient Jews, who were more politically motivated than God-fearing, changed the religion and fabricated many documents, which would later become the canon of the Orthodox and Catholic churches and eventually the English King James Bible.

God sent many prophets to try and steer the corrupt Jews straight, but those men were all slain, becoming the frequently referenced martyred fathers of the Nephite religion. Lehi's family had to leave Jerusalem in 600 BC with the brass plates to America to preserve that ancient religion before it would be completely lost through the Babylonian conquest. While Judaism, and eventually Christianity, would grow lofty and twisted in from its early corruption, God planted the

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<sup>39</sup> This death and rebirth ritual found in Alma was brought to my awareness by Dave Bulter, in his book "[In the Language of Adam](#)" chapter 9, pages 190-195

<sup>40</sup> Perhaps a classical education instead of a public school education. I have only just discovered the classics in my adult years, and its been deeply edifying. Its has cultivated my awe, wonder, understanding, and respect for the Gospel of Christ. We hope to offer our future children a more classical-based education. Education, in the Classical Latin sense, means to [educere](#) or bring out and cultivate the best in someone. In the Platonic sense, it means "conversion", to guide one out of the dark lower world of Plato's cave and into the light above. Education today, which we [modeled from the Prussian Military to create industrialized obedient factory workers](#), is how I believe the *Covenant of Christ* uses the words, which due to its application has come to mean something more closely resmpling [indoctrination](#): *to imbue with an idea or opinion*. Modern education teaches students what to think, not how to think.

<sup>41</sup> Margret Barker is the best scholarly source i have found to learn more about this Deuteronomist history.

[branch of Joseph](#), Nephi's family, across the Atlantic to preserve and yield good fruit- a Gospel way of life.

Because the canonized Bible emerged out of a corrupt Jewish culture, one far different than the Nephite's culture, the Bible is not the noble sidekick or dynamic duo to the Book of Mormon. Yes, they both testify of Christ- well, the New Testament at least- but their incongruencies reveal many gaps in the canvas of the original Gospel. The Bible is more like the Book of Mormon's grouchy and weird boomer uncle at Thanksgiving dinner who is stubbornly stuck in his backward 1960s way of thinking. You avoid bringing up politics and religion with him to keep the peace. You are still a family who love and respect one another. Although your hippy uncle is loud and dominates the conversation, setting the tone for the meal and ensuring the discussion remains relevant to his views, other relatives at the table are not corrupted by his era and see more eye-to-eye with you. For The Book of Mormon, those relatives can be found among the many Apocryphal Books, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the text at Nag Hammadi.

Among those documents are records of people who didn't fully jump on board the Deuteronomist bandwagon, nor did they hop aboard the Nephite boat. Because they remained in the political hotbed around the Sinai peninsula, they faced tremendous persecution and ostracism. As a result, they were not the victors of history whose voice came to dominate the canons of Judaism. Despite that, they still sought to preserve fragments of the culture and religion contained in those Brass Plates which Nephi escaped with. Studying the Book of Mormon in tandem with those texts can paint the missing parts of the canvas the Bible and Book of Mormon disagree upon- revealing the artistic superiority of the Nephite record to that of his strange Deuteronomist uncle. Jonah Barnes, an LDS author, wrote a book compiling just that titled, "[The Key to Keystone: How the Apocryphal Text Unlock the Book of Mormon's Brass Plates](#)." I would highly recommend his work.<sup>42</sup>

Another recent book published by the same printing company is "[In the Language of Adam](#)" by D. John Butler, also LDS<sup>43</sup>. He claims that the Nephite prophets were temple initiates of a Holy Order that had been lost to history but had been restored to Joseph Smith. Because he is a faithful Latter-Day Saint, I respectfully disagree with him on how well his church has preserved those ordinances, but I can still find resonances with the scriptures and questions he lays out.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> I recommend reading Barnes first if you struggle to read scholars like Nibley and Barker (it's a chore for me). He is hilarious, cites all his references, and simply presents the Apocrapha's depth without making it simplistic. The book/audiobook has a QR code at the end of each chapter that takes you to a podcast episode where the author discusses each chapter's content dialogically with others, which is a very useful forum for learning. You don't need to be an academic to begin learning and appreciating these things.

<sup>43</sup> D John Bulter is very "chapter and verse" in his writing. He doesn't endless quote general authorities, he keeps it all grounded in scriptures.

<sup>44</sup> Many of us have a terrible history with the LDS church, which can turn us off from considering good things that emerge out of that institution. But having that attitude can cut us off from many good things that could be beneficial, or even necessary, to accomplish the work God would have us do.

*If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy, we seek after these things. ([T&C 146:33](#))*

To more fully understand what the Nephites are writing about, we need to be immersed in the same ritual life they are participating in. Going through their same ritual experience puts us in the same orientation and framework the writers of scripture were in when they wrote their records. We need to enter into or create that same culture and way of life to know the mysteries of God all prophets speak of. When we do, we can adequately perceive the significance and meaning of their language because we are grounded in the same participatory foundation of knowledge, which is life in Christ. Just reading about the gospel is inadequate if we don't have a shared reality, that shared tradition/culture in which our language can participate. Without the medium of an ordinance to embody heavenly knowledge, the spirit will fly over our heads- or worse, cause us to *fly to pieces as glass*<sup>45</sup>.

## Communion of the Transhumanist<sup>46</sup>

There is a massive gulf of reality between the authors of scripture and us as readers. We need to participate in the *proper mediums of knowledge*<sup>47</sup> if we desire to comprehend the Gospel. Below are excerpts from a non-religious book on Neuroplasticity by David Eagleman, [Livewire, from Chapter 4, "Wrapping Around the Inputs."](#) Eagleman paints a picture of just how much language is connected to experience. How much of our sense of community is grounded in the foundation of a shared way of life? His findings in neuroscience can give us a good feel for the need and importance of ritual.

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*What if you could detect not only the magnetic field around objects but also the ones around the planet? After all, animals do it. Turtles return to the same beaches on which they were hatched to lay their own eggs. Migrating birds wing each year from Greenland to Antarctica and then back again to the same spot. Pigeons who carry messages between kings or armies navigate with better precision than human messengers.*

*The Russian scientist Alexander von Middendorff wondered how these animals accomplished their magic, and in 1885 he correctly guessed that they might be using an internal compass, "like a magnetic needle for ships, those sailors of the air possess an*

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<sup>45</sup> "I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them, after suffering all they have for the work of God, **will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions**: they cannot stand the fire at all. How many will be able to abide a celestial law, and go through and receive their exaltation, I am unable to say, as many are called, but few are chosen." (DHC 6: 184-185)

<sup>46</sup> Transhumanism: not to be confused with transsexualism, although they can work in tandem. Transhumanism is a philosophical movement that aims to improve the human condition through technology. It's based on the idea that humans can use technology to overcome biological limitations.

<sup>47</sup> [Marshal McLuhan, The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects](#)

*inner magnetic feeling, which might be linked to the galvanic-magnetic flows.” In other words, they used the magnetic field of the planet to pilot their course.*

*Starting in 2005, scientists at Osnabrück University wondered if a wearable device could allow humans to tap into that signal. They built a belt called the feelSpace. The belt is ringed with vibratory motors, and the motor pointing to the north buzzes. As you turn your body, you always feel a buzzing in the direction of magnetic north.*

*At first, it feels like a pesky humming- but over time, it becomes spatial information: a feeling that north is there. Over several weeks, the belt changes how people navigate: Their orientation improves, they develop new strategies, they gain a higher awareness of the relationship between different places. The environment feels more ordered. The layout of locations can be more easily remembered.*

*As one participant described the experience, “The orientation in the cities was interesting. After coming back, I could retrieve the relative orientation of all places, rooms and buildings, even if I did not pay attention while I was actually there.” Instead of thinking about moving through space as a sequence of cues, they thought about their routes from a global perspective. As another user put it: “It was different from mere tactile stimulation because the belt mediated a spatial feeling.... I was intuitively aware of the direction of my home or of my office.” In other words, his experience is not of sensory substitution (feeding vision or hearing through a different channel), nor is it sensory enhancement (making your sight or hearing better). Instead, **it’s a sensory addition. It’s a new kind of human experience.** The user goes on:*

*During the first two weeks, I had to concentrate on it; afterward, it was intuitive. I could even imagine the arrangement of places and rooms where I sometimes stay. Interestingly, when I take off the belt at night I still feel the vibration: When I turn to the other side, the vibration is moving too—this is a fascinating feeling!*

*Interestingly, after users take off the belt, they often report that they have a better sense of orientation for a while. The effect outlasts the tech. Just as we saw with the balance helmet, internal whispers of signals can get strengthened when an external device confirms them.*

**Whatever data the brain receives, it makes use of.**

....

**The fact that you can’t imagine a new color is extraordinarily revealing.** *It illustrates for us the fence line of our qualia, beyond which we simply cannot walk. So if the ability to create new senses proves possible, a striking consequence is that we won’t be able to explain the new sense to another person. For example, you have to experience purple to know what purple is. No amount of academic description will ever allow a color-blind person to understand purpleness. Similarly, make an attempt to explain vision to a friend born blind: you can try all you’d like, and your blind friend might even pretend to understand what you’re talking about. But in the end, it’s a fruitless attempt. To understand vision requires experiencing vision.*



*Likewise, if you plug in an entirely new sense—and develop brand new qualia—you won't be able to communicate it to others. **First, we have no shared word for it. No one will understand. Language isn't all encompassing; it's only a way to tag things that we already share. It's a system of agreement about communal experiences. It's not that you couldn't attempt to articulate your new sense- it's simply that no one else has the foundations to understand it.***

*In a report of participants who had worn the feelSpace belt (the device that indicates magnetic north), the researchers wrote that the two users reported a change in perception and yet:*

*articulating the perceptual quality they accessed and the qualitative experience arising from the different kind of spatial perception was hard. The observer got the impression that they lack concepts for what happens, such that they could only use metaphors and comparisons to come closer to an explanation."*

*But was the problem the subjects' ability to articulate or the experimenters' ability to fathom? As the authors noted later, **"It was much easier to talk about changes in perception between experimental subjects than to communicate it to naïve controls."***

***This is how things will go with the development of new senses.** To understand them, we will have to feed in the data and learn the experience. So in some decades from now, if you're ever feeling lonely and misunderstood as you sit around with your new sense, the best solution will be **to build a community of people who receive the same inputs.** Then you can make up a new word for the internal experience—call it, say, "zetzenfabish." **The word will make sense to your community, and no one outside it.***

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If Eagleman report set off your *Tower of Babel* alarms, buckle up! That is just the tip of the neuro-technology being developed at a surprisingly low-cost <sup>48</sup>. We do not need to fear if our

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<sup>48</sup> This is just the tip: there is so much more coming down the pipeline; however, technology altering our cognition, perception, and state of being and leading to Babel-like division is not a new phenomenon. The documentary, [The Social Dilemma](#) interviews many of the top engineers and CEOs of Google, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, who have stepped down from their corporate positions because of deep concerns about the ethical ramifications of their technology. One of their primary concerns is how social media drastically alters human perception on a widespread scale, making us more and more politically polarized. The top engineers and CEOs for these social media platforms do not allow their children to access the very networks they created. Why? Because it is a cognitive drug designed to hijack and exploit the attention system for monetization- destroying the user's mental health and communal/family life in the process.

Were humans designed to constantly be digitally plugged into a worldwide network? Did we evolve to navigate so many superficial relationships and to process the massive amount of superfluous information the internet provides, or were our brains optimized for less but more intimate relationships and to process the information relevant for solving local problems? When does the smartphone go from a *sensory*

shared reality is in Christ, which may become a much more stark decision in the coming decades. I feel the need for the Temple, a place that communally grounds us to what is most real, will be the light that gathers out the righteous from among all nations to Zion when the rest of the world is diabolically<sup>49</sup> ripping itself apart through the violent babel of [fratricidal and genocidal warfare](#).

My purpose in sharing Eagleman's research is not to discuss the Tower of Babel motif—although that is always a fun topic! Instead, I want to show how our ability to receive and comprehend anything—whether it be through verbal communication with one another, across time through writing, or through the veil with angels and God—requires us to be participants in the same reality and possess the same senses as the beings with whom we are seeking communion.

The subjects in Osnabrück experiments' contact with magnetic north is mediated through the *Feel/Space* belt. By accessing the electromagnetic field through this medium, they change psycho-neurologically into a human compass.<sup>50</sup>

For us who hope to be in contact with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and inhabit Zion,

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*enhancer to a sensory addition? At what point would we cease to be human? What did God intend for the human experience? How does He want us to relate to the world and those around us?*

<sup>49</sup> [Symbol\(sym-ballein\) means to gather, or throw, together into one](#). Diabolic (dia-ballein) is the opposite of symbol, to scatter, or throw, apart.

<sup>50</sup> Transhumanistic neuroscience is proving that [the brain rewires and becomes one with whatever tool it uses](#) as its participatory medium to reality. I believe this is true principle beyond science. We are transformed into the image of the medium we choose to perceive reality by. If we see the word in a negative light, we **become** negative. If we see by the Spirit of Christ, we see Christ. [If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light, but if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.](#)

*If the medium is light, our whole body shall be right;  
if the eye is dark, hand and head bear Satan's mark.*

Are we being transformed into the image of the smartphone through our habitual reliance on it as our participatory medium with reality?

*Technology itself is a kind of liturgy that teaches us to frame our experiences in the world in certain ways and that if we aren't careful, profoundly distorts our relationship to God, to other people, and to the material world and even our self-understanding...Online technology, in its various forms, is a phenomenon that by its very nature fragments and scatters our attention like nothing else, radically compromising our ability to make sense of the world, physiologically rewiring our brains and rendering us increasingly helpless against our impulses..The web makes it infinitely easier to find information but much harder to devote the kind of sustained focus it takes to know things. ([The Benedict Option, Chapter 10: Man and the Machine](#)).*

How does a scattered and fragmented mind come to know God when the "[The things of God are of deep import. Only time, experience, and careful, ponderous and solemn thoughts can find them out](#)"?

to share in the Heavenly gift and all the Mysteries of God, the medium is not a book<sup>51</sup>. The medium is a shared way of life; it's participation in the Doctrine and Law of Christ in all its ritual and ceremonial ordinances, and most of all, it is to love one another. These are the things that afford us the ability to speak the language of the Holy Ghost- the tongue of angels<sup>52</sup>.

## Back to the Question

So, to return to the question, "How would we, in this movement, participate in Godly rituals? Who would compose the rituals?"

I think the answer is in the *Covenant of Christ*, which we have been undeservedly blessed to inherit. I believe the relationship between that Nephite record and the Godly rituals we wish to participate in will reveal themselves in a reciprocal feedback manner. It is a process similar to how the people learning to use the *fee/Space* belt slowly orient to the earth's electromagnetic field or how a babbling and blundering toddler, through years of awkward growth, refines their speech and hones their dexterity. It is a developmental process: learning to calibrate and conform ourselves to the ways of Heaven through a reciprocal feedback relationship with Jesus Christ. His Gospel requires us to understand and perceive through a completely different way of life. A life we each began at baptism. *It is not to be comprehended all at once.*<sup>53</sup>

We are but little children in the faith, ill-mannered, blundering, and babbling toddlers just recently born into this respectable high society of dignified gods. To more fully understand the Covenant of Christ and all its mysteries, we have to participate in that culture and way of life, be initiated into the Gospel through the ordinances, and develop the same perspective from which its authors wrote. However, since we came across their record in a time of apostasy, we don't have much from their heavenly culture except a book that contains minimal- just the basics([not](#)

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<sup>51</sup> *There is no written record, including the scriptures, which are able to tell man all he must know. One can only know the truth by having it revealed to him from Heaven itself (see T&C 69:29). This is the reason Joseph said, "If you could gaze into Heaven for five minutes you would know more than you would by reading everything that has ever been written on the subject".- [Glossary:Gospel of Jesus Christ](#)*

<sup>52</sup> *And now behold, my beloved brethren, I suppose that ye ponder somewhat in your hearts concerning that which ye should do after ye have entered in by the way. But behold, why do ye ponder these things in your hearts? Do ye not remember that I said unto you **that after ye had received the holy ghost, ye could speak with the tongue of angels?** And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels save it were by the holy ghost? **Angels speak by the power of the holy ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ.** Wherefore, I said unto you, **Feast upon the words of Christ;** for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do. ([2nd Nephi 14:1](#))*

<sup>53</sup> *"You thus learn some of the first principles of the Gospel, about which so much hath been said. When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel — you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. **It is not all to be comprehended in this world;** it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave" (TPJS, 348; WJS, 358).*

[even a hundredth part](#)). Because we have been enculturated by a society far removed from theirs, we can't begin to grasp and participate in that Zion culture unless we have a clear understanding of their record.

- We can't understand scriptures properly because we lack the perspective afforded through higher ordinances.
- We can't participate in those higher ordinances unless we understand what the scriptures reveal about them.
- It's a chicken-egg paradox.

I believe the *Answer and Covenant* is the catalyst that will break us out of that paradox and into the reciprocal feedback loop of growth.

- As we live the ordinances and rituals we presently have access to through the Covenant of Christ, the more we bring our lives into harmony with that Zion way of living. Living, or abiding<sup>54</sup>, in the covenant is crucial to catalyze this process.
- Living in a manner more in harmony with the authors of scripture will make the voice of God in their writings *louder and clearer*<sup>55</sup> because we will see the world more and more like them. Our understanding will increase as we perceive their writings' significance, meaning, and intent more properly. Although we are separated by time, we will be grounded in the same participatory foundation of knowledge: life in Christ.
- The sealed portion of the Book of Mormon, the things on those brass plates that the Nephite prophets took as so foundational to their way of life that it didn't need to be explained explicitly- those things will become salient to us, and so will their godly rituals, ways, and culture. Hidden things will become more and more self-evident as we live the same gospel they did, as we become Christ's.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> **You have sought to recover the scriptures because you hope to obtain the covenant for my protective hand to be over you, but you cannot be Satan and be mine. If you take upon you my covenant, you must abide it as a people to gain what I promise. ([T&C157:10](#))**

<sup>55</sup> **I ask in your name that you bless the people who have heard your voice to this point, *that it become louder, clearer, and that their understanding increase always.* - [From the prayer offered by Denver on behalf of those who have accepted the Covenant of Christ.](#)**

<sup>56</sup> **I, the Lord, say to you, with these additions, what you have gathered as scriptures are acceptable to me for this time and contain many plain and precious things. Nevertheless, *whoso is enlightened by the spirit shall obtain the greater benefit, because you need not think they contain all my words nor that more will not be given, for there are many things yet to be restored unto my people. It is ordained that some things are only to be given to people who are mine and cannot otherwise be given***

- That perspective will illuminate **how** to live out the gospel more fully today, including the communal and ritual ways of being. The proper perspective will inform us about how to participate in the rituals and ordinances and how to love one another. This perspective will allow God *to be with, guide, and always accompany* us.<sup>57</sup>
- The feedback loop continues upwards and onwards:
  - Perspective sheds a clearer understanding
  - A clearer understanding deepens participation
  - Deepened participation brings about a greater perspective

This process is developmental, it is sacramental in that it has to be lived and participated in. This is how we individually mature in our faith and relationship with Jesus. Would communal growth be any different? The covenant and realizing Zion is not an individual solitary pursuit; it is a collective effort<sup>58</sup> to become a body of believers the heavens can take notice of and indwell. Similarly to how Adam was [formed from the dust of the earth and God breathed the breath of life into him, and man became a living creature](#), we who have entered into this covenant are also seeking to *build a body*<sup>59</sup>. It's not an individual, material body of fleshly blood and organs nor a robotic transhumanist body; it's a communal body of believers- a family of brothers and

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*to mankind on earth. **You do not yet understand the glory to be revealed unto my covenant people.*** [\(T&C 157:44\)](#)

<sup>57</sup> *As they have responded to your voice and witnessed unto you by their acceptance of Covenant of Christ that they hear you I ask that your voice get louder, that it increase in clarity, that the understanding of these people increase, that they have your blessing, your guidance, and your voice **to be with, guide and always accompany them.*** - [From the prayer offered by Denver on behalf of those who have accepted the Covenant of Christ.](#)

<sup>58</sup> I cannot keep the covenant.  
 You cannot keep the covenant.  
 Only we can keep the covenant.  
[\(Civilization Talk\)](#)

<sup>59</sup> This "building body motif" is the gathering of plurality (dust) into unity (spirit). The Neo-Platonists incorporate this motif in their philosophy of the "Many into One", where things become more **real** as they are gathered (integrated) together to the Logos. This gathering-together motif is a *symbolic* (see footnote 49) theme found throughout scripture in the image of the Mountain, the temple, the tree, the Torah, the Throne of God, and much more. I was introduced to this image by Matthieu Pageau in his book ["The Language of Creation: Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis."](#) He is an engineer who writes from a very left-brain analytical perspective- straight to the point and provides a lot of simple diagrams. It still took me several months to read and think deeply through it until I finally saw it. After that, I couldn't stop seeing the symbolism and patterns everywhere!



sisters in Christ. If we can gather together and be one<sup>60</sup>, to love one another, God can breathe His breath of Life and shine His Light into that community.<sup>61</sup>

As to who would compose the higher rituals of such a community? A sent one, a messenger, an angel would have to. Not only is it part of their job description<sup>62</sup>, but dust cannot breathe life into itself, and we are nothing but the dust of the earth. A higher principality, something “non-dust” that can breathe spirit<sup>63</sup>, someone beyond our framework- outside the operating system of this reality with more spiritual maturity- has to prepare a way for us to transcend. I don’t know the particulars of that sent one, nor do I have the confidence to dare predict who, how, and when it will all come about. It’s a *mystery* we will have to experience, but I do know my particular and present responsibility in all this. They are laid out in the Answer and Covenant. As we **live** the covenant in our families and fellowships, we collectively change through it. As a result of that change, the mysteries will become a more and more self-evident way of life, which will afford us the perspective to recognize the signs and tokens of a true messenger.

*You pray each time you partake of the sacrament to always have my spirit to be with you. And what is my spirit? It is to love one another as I have loved you. Do my works and you will know my doctrine, for you will uncover hidden mysteries by obedience to these things that can be uncovered in no other way. This is the way I will restore knowledge to my people. [\(T&C 157:51\)](#)*

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<sup>60</sup> I descended below it all, and know the sorrows of you all, and have borne the grief of it all, and I say to you, Forgive one another. Be tender with one another, pursue judgment, bless the oppressed, care for the orphan, and uplift the widow in her need, for I have redeemed you from being orphaned and taken you that you are no longer a widowed people. Rejoice in me, and rejoice with your brethren and sisters who are mine also. **Be one.** [\(T&C157:50\)](#)

<sup>61</sup> I ask that all followers and believers may **be united as one**, as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, that they also may be united as one in us. By them becoming one, the world will have reason to believe that you sent me. And the **light which you gave to me I have given to them. This allows them to become united as one, even as we are one:** my light in them, and your light in me. The light will lead them to be made perfect in one. [\(TSJ10:22\)](#)

<sup>62</sup>...neither have angels stopped ministering to mankind. They are obedient to Him, to minister according to His commands, revealing themselves to those of strong faith and of a firm mind in every form of godliness. **The responsibility of their ministry is to call people to repentance, and to fulfill and do the work of the Father’s covenants that He’s made to mankind, to prepare the way among people by declaring Christ’s word to the Lord’s chosen vessels, so they can bear testimony of Him.** [\(Moroni 7:6\)](#)

<sup>63</sup>Or maybe something with the power to turn dust into clay