POLICING THE BORDERS OF IDENTITY AT

THE MORMON MIRACLE PAGEANT

Kent R. Bean

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Jack Santino, Advisor

Richard C. Gebhardt,
Graduate Faculty Representative

John Warren

Nathan Richardson

William A. Wilson
ABSTRACT

Jack Santino, Advisor

While Mormons were once the “black sheep” of Christianity, engaging in communal economic arrangements, polygamy, and other practices, they have, since the turn of the twentieth century, modernized, Americanized, and “Christianized.” While many of their doctrines still cause mainstream Christians to deny them entrance into the Christian fold, Mormons’ performance of Christianity marks them as not only Christian, but as perhaps the best Christians. At the annual *Mormon Miracle Pageant* in Manti, Utah, held to celebrate the origins of the Mormon founding, Evangelical counter-Mormons gather to distribute literature and attempt to dissuade pageant-goers from their Mormonism. The hugeness of the pageant and the smallness of the town displace Christianity as de facto center and make Mormonism the central religion. Cast to the periphery, counter-Mormons must attempt to reassert the centrality of Christianity. Counter-Mormons and Mormons also wrangle over control of terms. These “turf wars” over issues of doctrine are much more about power than doctrinal “purity”: who gets to authoritatively speak for Mormonism. Meanwhile, as Mormonism moves Christianward, this creates room for Mormon fundamentalism, as small groups of dissidents lay claim to Joseph Smith’s “original” Mormonism. Manti is home of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days, a group that broke away from the Mormon Church in 1994 and considers the mainstream church apostate, offering a challenge to its dominance in this time and place.
Dedicated to Grace Johnson.
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Introduction

“There Is Something about This Pageant”:1

Situating *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*

A major American poet, perhaps one called a Gentile by Latter-day Saints, some time in the future will write their early story as the epic it was. Nothing else in all of American history strikes me as *materia poetica* equal to the early Mormons, to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley and Orson Pratt, and the men and women who were their followers and friends.

—Harold Bloom

*The American Religion* (1992)

I. Encountering the Pageant

I first encountered *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* when my family moved to Manti, Utah in the fall of 1981. Actually I didn’t encounter the pageant itself, since it had been over for some three months when we arrived. What I encountered were frequent references to “the pageant” dropped easily into most any conversation (not just any pageant, but “*the* pageant”). I was a young man on the precipice of my teenage years, struggling with the vicissitudes of puberty, already feeling awkward because of my outsider status in this new community. At school I would hear two boys pass me in the hallway, laughing to themselves: “Remember this year in the pageant when you . . . ?” I
felt as if I lacked the password providing entrance into some secret cabal. What was this pageant to which everyone kept referring?

One October day as the last remaining golden leaves struggled to cling to the autumn trees, I walked home with my newfound friend Manny Mellor. (Unbeknownst to me on that crisp fall day, Manny would become my brother-in-law nine years later. Such were the ways of friendship in small towns.) I plucked up the courage to ask him about what I only knew then as “the pageant,” a phenomenon that seemed to have the entire town in its grasp.

“Oh,” he said as if communicating the blatantly obvious, “it’s The Mormon Miracle Pageant.”

I asked the only question I could think of: “What’s that?”

“You’ve never heard of The Mormon Miracle Pageant?” said Manny, pronouncing each word slowly for effect. The way he said it, I may as well have admitted that I didn’t know who Brigham Young was.

I was raised in American Fork, Utah and the only pageant I had ever heard of was the annual Utah Pageant of the Arts—but that certainly didn’t hold sway over the American Fork imagination like “the pageant” did over the imaginations of the residents of Manti. Indeed, when I lived in American Fork I was usually unaware of the passing of that pageant, I had never actually attended it, and I had only known one of my schoolmates who had participated in it—and his participation had been secured by the stern insistence of his mother.

“Well,” I said defensively, “have you ever heard of the Utah Pageant of the Arts?”
“No,” answered Manny.

“See? That pageant happens every year in American Fork.” I had redeemed myself . . . somewhat.

“Okay, sorry,” said Manny. “I guess not everybody has heard of the pageant.”

“So, what’s it about?”

Manny’s brown hair hung limp over his ears. A stubborn cowlick on his forehead and a mischievous smile gave him a comical look, one which caused people to trust him. “Well,” he began with no small enthusiasm, “it starts off telling the story of Joseph Smith and how he sees God. Then he translates the Book of Mormon—and it has some cool battle scenes. And then there’s Samuel the Lamanite. And then, um, let’s see, then it goes back to Joseph Smith, but he gets killed in Carthage Jail by a mob. And then the pioneers have to leave Nauvoo and follow Brigham Young west to Utah. And then a group of pioneers come to settle Manti and one of them gets shot by an Indian arrow and he dies and he goes to heaven and reunites with his wife and angels sing and the end.”

I paused and said the only thing I could think of: “Wow.”

“Yeah, it’s fun.”

At that point in my life I was more interested in discussing that Friday night’s episode of *Dukes of Hazzard* with my friends than paying attention to the world around me, but even I had noticed how often Mantians referenced the pageant, in virtually any setting and apropos of nearly anything. A Sunday school teacher might use a scene from the pageant to illustrate a spiritual truth in a lesson. A middle-schooler playing a brutal game of dodge ball might recall the pageant battle between the Nephites and Lamanites. Two high-schoolers signing each others’ yearbooks might write, “See you at pageant!”
(One friend wrote in my 1984 yearbook: “I’ll be seeing you during the pageant this year[.] Be a cool dude Nefite [sic] and not one of the jerk lamonites.” [sic]) And perhaps most simply, people in Manti marked time by the coming and going of the pageant: “Just three more months until pageant tryouts.” “When pageant is over, school starts in less than a month.” “You’d better get your shopping done before pageant. The shelves’ll be bare when all the pageant visitors arrive.”

Another thing I noticed—and this was odd indeed—is that no one criticized the pageant. In any school there are the “toughs”—the kids who stake their claim on rebellion—and in Manti we had ours. (For example, if the community says smoking is unhealthy and sinful, these kids could be caught stealing a smoke behind the armory.) But I don’t have any youthful recollection of them or anyone else ever disrespecting the pageant at any time. In fact, I remember two of these toughs participating in the pageant in their early teenage years (before they got their drivers’ licenses and a greater degree of freedom, that is). And I remember seeing all of the tough kids at one time or another in Manti during the eight-day run of the pageant, enjoying the festive atmosphere, as the small town of 2,000 became a city of 20,000 in one night. I don’t believe that social or physical pressure was exerted on anyone to respect the pageant—which you certainly might imagine, given the overwhelming Mormon majority of the town. I do not want to deny that such coercion might have gone on, but if it did it was without my knowledge—and given the smallness of the town and the closeness of the social situation, I would be surprised if bullying of the town rebels went on without my knowledge. Besides, I can’t imagine that they’d be too intimidated by their Mormon peers: What else does it mean to be a town rebel if you’re not going to rebel against the dominant majority? No, I believe
that even the rebellious kids saw the pageant as just a fact of Manti life, and a happy fact at that. It turned our sleepy desert town into a bustling city for almost two weeks every year.

I was quite nervous as Manny and my other new friends spoke so glibly about the pageant in the months after my arrival in town. I had never been in any type of dramatic production and I was certain I didn’t have anything to offer. I was delighted when Manny told me that anyone could be involved—*and* there were no speaking parts! You see, the pageant takes place on steep hill, and due to the great distance between audience and performers, the dialogue of the pageant, along with music and sound effects, had been committed to a soundtrack. All we “actors” had to do was learn where to stand and how and when to move. Simple, right? Manny assured me that you didn’t even get nervous. Heck, you couldn’t even really see the audience because of the spotlights!

“It’s easy,” said Manny. “First we’ll be standard bearers. All we do is stand there and hold a flag during the Nephite and Lamanite battle.”

“We just stand there?” I asked incredulously.

“Yep.”

“Just stand there?”

“Yes,” he said impatiently.

I was hooked.

“And then after that scene,” continued Manny, “we’ll run down the hill outside the spotlights, change into pioneer clothes, and be in the handcart scene with Brigham Young.”

Hmm, that didn’t sound as easy as just *standing* there. “Well . . .”
“It’s easy,” said Manny. “Don’t worry, the adults around us will tell us when to go. You just follow them. Walk when they walk. Sit when they sit. Look at Brigham when they look at Brigham. Easy.”

Okay, I was hooked again.

As the months slowly passed during my first year at middle school in Manti and as I adjusted to life among rough-and-tumble farm kids—a far cry from the pampered “city” kids in American Fork (a ’burb located about equidistant between the populous Salt Lake City and Provo)—my anxiousness to experience “the pageant” grew with all the complicated emotions that accompany those turbulent early teen years. Not only did I feel a desire to be a part of the pageant, but I was particularly attracted to the thought of being a standard bearer in the battle scene. Even though we only stood there, Manny explained to me that one had to be twelve years old and a certain height to qualify to be in the scene. I understood from talking to him and from talking to some thirteen year olds who had been standard bearers last year that this was a particular rite of passage, a beginning, a threshold. Two years as a standard bearer and one would “graduate,” at the age of fourteen, to become a full-fledged warrior in the thick of armed combat.

Even though it was only April or May, Manny and I celebrated our impending standard-bearer status by hiking into the nearby hillside with our pocketknives in hand, hewing down the straightest branches we could find, and whittling them into crude swords. We used these to daily hone our standard-bearer skills. (At the young age of twelve I was never quite able to figure out why the Nephites would have a row of able-bodied men standing with long spears doing absolutely nothing during a violent battle. But such were the mysteries of the adult world that I was not to question. . . .) Manny
and I stabbed and jabbed at one another relentlessly with our homemade swords and only ended our mortal combat when one of us received a nasty rap on the knuckles.

And then the night came for tryouts at the tail end of May. I remember being terrifically nervous. I envisioned having to stand in the center of a room of critical adult observers demanding to see a display of dramatic talent—of which I had none. We met at the local seminary building. After hearing several short speeches, first from the pageant director Macksene Rux, then from her assistants Helen Dyreng and Jane Braithwaite, I was greatly relieved to find out that all I needed to do that night was to sign my name to a sheet that said “Standard Bearers.” We met once a week and practiced our part during the month of June. We learned to stand valiantly.

During the month of July the pageant shifted into high gear. We began to practice more often and soon had dress rehearsals in anticipation of the eight-night run. Because Sunday is a holy day for Mormons and because Monday night is reserved for families (called “family home evening”), the pageant ran from Tuesday through Saturday during mid-July. I remember the flurry of activity during the week before the pageant. While the majority of pageant visitors wouldn’t arrive until the day of the pageant, people were even now beginning to fill up the town.

But then something strange happened, quite unexpected. The day before the pageant I was walking with Manny and a brown bus came down Highway 89 into Manti. Manny laughed and said, “All right! It’s the Saints ’n’ Jive!”

“Who?” I asked.

“The Saints ’n’ Jive,” Manny said in that aggravating way he had of making everything sound as if it were perfectly self-evident.
“Come on,” I said, “that’s not a real name.”

“Sure it is,” he protested.

“Well, who are they then?”

He explained that they came down every year to hand out anti-Mormon literature.

“And they’re called the Saints ’n’ Jive?”

“Oh, no, they’re really called the Saints Alive, but we just call them the Saints ’n’ Jive for fun.”

I was rather disturbed by the whole thing. Oh, I had heard talk about anti-Mormons my whole life—that is, to a great extent Mormon history is based on stories of persecution by anti-Mormon forces: the murder of our prophet Joseph Smith at the hands of a mob; Governor Lilburn W. Boggs’s infamous order of extermination against the Mormons in Missouri; the expulsion from Nauvoo and the death of so many while crossing the plains to Utah. Because no one went around tar-and-feathering or burning down the houses of Mormons any longer, I had assumed that the days of anti-Mormonism were behind us. Were there really people who were against us—and to such an extent that they would bring a busload of people every year to this small town to protest this Mormon miracle? I was troubled by both the presence of this group calling itself Saints Alive in Jesus and Manny’s cavalier attitude toward them.

Later that night I was sitting with my mother while she folded clothes. “Mom,” I said, “did you know that the Saints Alive came to town today?”

“Who?”

“The Saints Alive. They’re anti-Mormons. They came to hand out anti-Mormon stuff at the pageant.”
“Really?” she said, a bit surprised but none too shocked. In her time she had seen street preachers railing against the church outside the gates at the Salt Lake Temple and at other church landmarks. She was perhaps only surprised because Manti was such a small town and the Saints Alive had made the effort to travel all the way here.

“Maybe Dad should go argue with them,” I proposed. I didn’t feel quite right about the proposal, but I definitely felt something should be done, some action should be taken.

“No,” said Mother, “the best thing to do is just leave them alone. Just be courteous. We don’t argue about religion.”

I felt ambivalent about my mother’s advice. On the one hand, it appealed to the budding grown-up in me, for there was something very mature about not arguing with someone who had come specifically for that purpose. On the other hand, I was still troubled by the fact that these people were being allowed to spread their anti-Mormon message without rebuttal. If we didn’t stop them, wouldn’t their anti-Mormon seeds take root and spread? Was no one besides me concerned about this?

The first pageant night came and the town was flooded with cars and people. Our small town of just over 2,000 residents now struggled to contain somewhere between ten and 20,000 visitors. Volunteers directed traffic and helped park cars. Manny and I walked the streets, seeing how many license plates we could find from different states. Our usual haunts—Miller’s Bakery, the Bright Spot, Simmons Hardware Store, Manti Grocery—were too crowded to tolerate. Manny’s house was located on Main Street and we spent much of the day sitting on his front porch watching the hustle-and-bustle. Manny and I were too young to drive, of course, but we discussed how if we could drive
we would be able to get around the town despite the traffic because we knew the back roads and the shortcuts. We felt quite superior as we looked out upon the mass of humanity visiting our town.

After eating dinner, we made our way to the seminary building where the costumes were kept. Manny and I put on our standard bearer outfits and went outside to sit on the grass—to enjoy the night air and the flurry of pre-pageant activity. My older brother arrived fashionably late in our Reliant K car. It was the summer of Def Leppard’s *Pyromania* and several of the “cool” kids gathered around the car to listen to the music. The cool kids fancied themselves rebels and so they were Lamanites, of course. A small tent was erected every year in the seminary parking lot. White boys entered; reddish-brown boys emerged. The paint stained everything so once they had painted themselves up they could not enter the building, touch the building, walk on the sidewalk, or get near any of the other costumes. And when we got on the temple hill, they could not, under any circumstances, touch the temple. These “rebels” were truly untouchables.

We were urged to arrive and costume ourselves early because each night we had a devotional. The pageant directors wanted to impress on the cast the importance of the pageant as missionary work, as spiritual work. We sang a song, had a prayer, and then usually had a ten-minute speaker. That first night I remember being so anxious to get to the hill to perform my part—to be a standard bearer—that I was annoyed at the intrusion of the speaker, even though I struggled with the budding adult in me who told me that these formalities were necessary. But the devotional ended at last and a bus took us up to the temple hill.2
Manny was right about one thing: Adults directed us every step of the way. The pageant was highly organized. Nothing was left to chance. No gap was left unmanned. When the pageant began, everything moved like clockwork.

“I’m a bit nervous,” I said to Manny, as we sat on the west side of the temple lawn, waiting for our moment in the spotlight.

“Nothing to worry about,” he said, with a toss of his head. A strange electricity pulsed through the night air. “You know what?” I said. “I just realized that I can’t wear my glasses!”

“Better,” said Manny, “you won’t be able to see a thing anyway.”

And then someone was calling for us. One of the most memorable meetings between the two hostile forces . . . We moved toward the south side of the temple hill, where the action was taking place. . . . reached a climax when Moroni, not the Angel Moroni who appeared to young Joseph . . . “Get down! Get down!” a crewman whispered to us. . . . but a young Nephite by the same name . . . We had to hunker down like soldiers avoiding overhead fire. Then it was our turn. . . . who lived generations before . . . The lights went off and we ran to pick up our spears. . . . and at the age of twenty-five years was made captain over all the Nephite armies . . . We stood along the wall as we’d all practiced. . . . confronts Zerahemnah, chief of all the Lamanites . . . I removed my glasses.

. . . on the field of battle.

And then the lights came on.
II. The Birth of the Pageant

While certainly the importance of the small Manti settlement was secured by the construction and daily encounter with the oolitic temple that stands like a sentinel at the northeast corner of Manti (see Figure IA), *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* has only further entrenched in the minds of many the spiritual importance of the town. Prophesy and heavenly confirmation were important in the establishment of the pageant. In 1956, years before pageant was even conceived, Manti Temple President L. R. Anderson prophesied to a member of a crew excavating a new parking lot, “Now I am going to tell you something that you cannot at this time see or comprehend. The time will come when there will be many people gathered here on this side of the temple hill” (qtd. in Rasmussen 135). This is an oft-told story, a reminder that God’s hand from the beginning was guiding the creation of the pageant, and unlike other pageants performed annually in Utah, *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* has God’s imprimatur. A pageant booklet in 1991 exclaims, “Surely the Lord’s hand was in the making of a setting for the Mormon Miracle Pageant. The wide, sloping lawn under the shadow of the great temple offers peace and serenity, beauty and simplicity found in but few places on the earth” (Findlay, et al. 7).

Grace Johnson, described in her autobiographical *The Story of the Mormon Miracle* (1973) as “[a]uthor, lecturer, humanitarian” (81), wrote the script of *The Mormon Miracle* while “pondering man’s existence” (Findlay, et al. 10). Initially written as a dramatic lecture, she presented it throughout the eastern United States. The success of Johnson’s lecture reached Mormon Church headquarters in Salt Lake City and she was invited to present it during the church’s June conference in 1947 celebrating the one-
hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley. She continued her lecture tour throughout Latter-day Saint congregations in the southwestern United States. In 1964, *The Mormon Miracle* was presented at Brigham Young University with a cast, narrators, and a choir.

Meanwhile, Mormons in Ephraim were wondering what they could do to better celebrate July 24th (the annual celebration of the arrival of the first pioneers in the Salt Lake valley). “And then someone said, ‘Why not dramatize Grace Johnson’s Mormon Miracle?’ It was as if many people were thinking along the same lines at the same time” (Findlay et al. 10). Helen B. and R. Morgan Dyreng, Manti natives, adapted Johnson’s booklet into pageant form (42).

Significantly, this was not the first dramatic production or pageant performed in Manti; indeed, Manti has a history of theater and pageantry. Mrs. Adelia B. Sidwell remembers that a theatrical company was created in Manti shortly after the settlers’ arrival: “This company styled themselves ‘Amateur Thespians’ and many a long dreary evening was enlivened by their attempts to portray various phases of human life” (qtd. in Ray P. Dyreng, et al. 26). In 1878, Mormon artist C. C. A. Christensen presented a traveling lecture on the Mormon story accompanied by his dramatic paintings and found a receptive audience in Sanpete (Bitton “Ritualization” 180). To celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Manti Temple in 1938 (fifty years after the temple’s completion), M. W. Smith wrote a pageant titled *Hearts of the Children*. Presented in Manti on June 14 to 19, the pageant focused on “the building and dedication of the Manti Temple, and the spirit of Elijah which now finds expression within its sacred walls. It glorifies, in drama and music, the faith and unselfish devotion manifested by the builders who made of this
magnificent edifice an inspiring monument symbolizing a prophet’s vision and a people’s faith, industry and cooperation” (Manti Temple Golden Jubilee). In 1942 a centennial pageant celebrating the growth of the Relief Society was presented as a joint effort by Manti’s three wards (Ray P. Dyreng, et al. 61). Another pageant was prepared and presented in honor of the centennial of the arrival of the Mormons in Manti on November 22, 1849. Written by A. M. Mellor, the pageant was titled Manti Centennial: A Pageant (Ray P. Dyreng, et al. 152).

Manti was not unique in its use of pageantry. Many in the Mormon Church celebrated with pageants—indeed, it may be the preferred artistic form in the church. (So prevalent is pageantry in Mormonism that Mormon science fiction author Orson Scott Card wrote a short story entitled “Pageant Wagon” about a post-apocalyptic world where, lacking television and radio, Mormons rely on pageant wagons for entertainment.)

Theatrical endeavors, according to historian Howard R. Lamar, were “not just a casual interest of Joseph Smith” (5). In Nauvoo, Illinois, Smith built a “fun house” for performances and dances, and Brigham Young and others performed Pizarro there. The Mormons had very little time to think about theater after being driven out of Illinois and coming to the Salt Lake Valley, but a mere three years after their arrival the Deseret Dramatic Association was formed (5). “The Deseret Dramatic Association argued from the first that having a theater proved that the Mormons were cultural and educated. Years later others argued that plays inform people who were not otherwise well educated about history and morality. This assertion has been repeated over and over again down to the present” (6). Interestingly, notes Lamar, virtually all of the plays performed between 1850 and 1890 featured “kings and nobles, fancy costumes, and European hierarchy
rather than themes of democracy and equalitarianism”—although the main theme is “the triumph of virtue”\(^3\) (14). Fifteen years after the settlement of the Salt Lake Valley, the Salt Lake Theater was built in 1862, the largest between St. Louis and San Francisco (9). And while other arts often suffered the disapprobation of church leaders—Apostle George Q. Cannon said in 1884, “Novel reading has the same effect on the mind [. . .] as dram drinking or tea drinking has upon the body. It is a species of dissipation” (Cannon 312)\(^4\)—theater and pageantry seemed to enjoy willing ecclesiastical approval. Says Lamar, there “has been a remarkable continuity and intimacy in the relation of Mormon culture and life to the theater” (18).

On April 6, 1930 the church commission and presented *The Message of the Ages: A Sacred Pageant Commemorating the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, the first of the great Mormon pageants (Ostling and Ostling 243). Other pageants and celebrations followed (see Eliason’s “Celebrating Zion: Pioneers in Mormon Popular Historical Expression” [1998]), including *The Hill Cumorah Pageant* which began in 1937 and has run continually to this day (Jill B. Adair). The church now officially sponsors the following pageants:

- *The Arizona Easter Pageant: Jesus the Christ* in Mesa, Arizona
- *The Oakland Temple Pageant* in Oakland, California
- *The Castle Valley Pageant* in Castle Dale, Utah
- *The Clarkston Pageant—Martin Harris: The Man Who Knew* in Clarkston, Utah
• *The City of Joseph Pageant* in Nauvoo, Illinois (which gave its final performance in 2004 after twenty-nine years [David Grimes])

• *Nauvoo Pageant* in Nauvoo, Illinois (a one-time pageant to celebrate Joseph Smith’s bicentennial birthday and the 175th anniversary of the church’s organization [Moore “Producers Finishing”])

*The Hill Cumorah Pageant* and *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* vie not only for most popular Mormon pageant, but for most popular outdoor dramatic production in the United States period. Reports in 1980 and 1992 from North Carolina’s Institute of Outdoor Drama rank *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* as the outdoor drama with the largest average nightly attendance (“Present Pageant” and Peter Scarlet).

It is likely that the Mormon Church’s interest in pageantry was part and parcel of the pageantry craze of the early twentieth century, recounted by David Glassberg in *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (1990), a fad that had mostly died out after World War II. Glassberg notes that historical pageantry is important for many reasons:

• “Images of a ‘common’ history provide a focus for group loyalties”

• Historical pageantry provides “plots to structure our individual memories”

• It also provides “a larger context within which to interpret new experiences. Ultimately, historical imagery supplies an orientation toward our future action” (1).

Glassberg notes that there is one use of historical pageantry that is unique to the twentieth century: “the belief that history could be made into a dramatic public ritual through which the residents of a town, by acting out the *right* version of the past, could bring
about some kind of future social and political transformation” (4 my emphasis). While Grace Johnson originally published *The Mormon Miracle* in 1950, it was adapted and first performed as a pageant in Manti in 1967, and in 1970 it was committed to audio tape with music, sound effects, and additional dialogue. Certainly the United States and much of the globe was experiencing a cultural upheaval at the time, and we cannot overlook the desire of those involved with the early pageant to, as Glassberg says, “bring about some kind of future social and political transformation.” For example, in a later scene in the pageant, the Nephites become licentious and materialistic. The narrator explained to the 1970s’ audience that the Nephites only cared for “new, untried pleasures of the flesh,” and then rhetorically asks, “Surely these people are speaking to this generation?”

Fitting into a relatively strong dramatic local tradition, *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* was first performed in the Sanpete County fairgrounds on July 23, 1967, with a choir, orchestra, and actors. Those who attended that first night remember that it was stormy. (Those who didn’t attend that first performance but who participated in subsequent years are told the following story, one that has entered into the cache of pageant legends.) Grace Johnson remembers quite dramatically the black clouds that plagued the sky that first night: “Like evil genii, the clouds had trebled in size and darkness. *Oh please, please, not today . . .*” (Story 49). An invocation was offered and the elements abated. The pageant proceeded without a drop falling on cast or audience. But as the twenty-fifth memorial booklet for the pageant explains, “Then as the pageant concluded, before everyone could get to their cars, the clouds broke apart, and rain came down in torrents” (Findlay, et al. 3). Johnson asks rhetorically, “Coincidence? Or did the Master of Ocean and Earth and Skies see in THE MORMON MIRACLE a powerful
future voice directing its answering message toward the wavering hope of a despairing world[?]” (Story 52). Helen B. Dyreng, the pageant director that first year, corroborates the event. After the benediction was offered, “[t]he storm clouds split and dumped moisture to the north and to the south, but a beautiful temperate evening lasted in that vicinity just until the crowd dispersed. THE MORMON MIRACLE PAGEANT WAS BORN!” (qtd. in Rasmussen 136). This story, recounted each year, makes clear that God not only approves of the pageant but sends heavenly aid to protect it.

This supernatural claim that the pageant is never rained upon—or at least never more than sprinkled upon—is so well known that when I mentioned to an LDS friend living in Ohio, who had grown up on the East Coast, that the pageant had to be cancelled in 2004 on the opening night due to rain and lightning, she responded somewhat teasingly, “But I thought that wasn’t supposed to happen!” Indeed, this was the first time in the pageant’s history it had to be canceled due to the elements. Cast and crew took the cancellation rather hard, given that they hear this story of the first pageant countless times. God’s climatological protection of the pageant carries two morals, well known to participants: First, his tempering of the elements is what allowed The Mormon Miracle Pageant to be born. (As Grace Johnson remembers, “It was inevitable that my mind should go back to that fearful night of the pageant’s first presentation, when the infant MORMON MIRACLE PAGEANT, standing bravely on its unsure and frightened legs, was threatened with an untimely death before the black and colliding storm giants of a summer cloudburst!” [Story 48].) Second, the pageant’s perfect record implied that God was protecting it, approving of it (thus my Ohio friend’s comment). The cancellation was of sufficient magnitude that it prompted a comment from the mayor:
“We’ve all hung our hats on the fact that the pageant has never been rained out before,” said Manti Mayor Kim Anderson last Friday. “Now we’ll have to find a different place to hang them.” (David Call “Heavens Open” A2)

A year before this fateful incident, the following was published in the Salt Lake Tribune:

“On opening night last Thursday, heavy black clouds descended and fierce winds blew, but [Pageant President] Halling looked upon it all with unflappable resolution. The show has never been canceled or postponed for any reason, he says. Members see the weather, opponents and difficulties as evidence that their work is for a good cause” (Karras “Manti Miracle”). The loss of this perfect record was a significant blow to the legend of the pageant.

The second year of the pageant’s existence it moved to the Manti Temple grounds, certainly a much more appropriate and beautiful venue. The pageant was then still live, accompanied by a choir and orchestra. Some trees at the base of the temple hill had to be removed so that the constantly expanding audience could see the full scope of the production. In 1970 Macksene Rux, a professional actress, was asked to direct the pageant. Rux dramatized Johnson’s script on audio tape with sound effects, music, narration, and dialogue. The audio technology allowed for a larger audience to hear the pageant and for a broader scope for the production on the temple hill (which is larger than a football field). An official church committee was formed in 1972: “[B]usiness included a pageant budget of $15,000 from general church funds, improvement of roads, publicity, arrangements for restroom facilities, and the sale of programs” (Findlay, et al.
5). In 1973 the pageant’s run was extended to eight nights to accommodate the growing crowds (4-5).

The Mormon Miracle Pageant has since become identified with Manti and Manti with the pageant. Manti residents have internalized a sense of pride, even a sense of mission. When the pageant was still young and growing rapidly in popularity, rumors circulated that certain church authorities in Salt Lake City were considering moving it to a larger venue (which certainly makes logical and logistical sense). Mrs. Mabel Anderson, wife of Pageant Executive Committee Chairman R. Clair Anderson, wrote the following in 1972 upon hearing these rumors:

We believe that more and more our valley will become identified with The Mormon Miracle Pageant. That people will come again and again to renew their spirits and that visitors from all over the world will find their way to our hillside, that it will be the mecca for many a pilgrimage.

(qtd. in Findlay, et al. 5)

Anderson’s letter affirms several important concepts. First, she intuits (and, I suppose it could be argued, prophetically so) that Manti “will become identified with The Mormon Miracle Pageant.” Indeed, the same pageant held in Salt Lake City would lose much of its force: it would be merely an entertaining dramatic production among the rest of the city’s entertainment alternatives. In Manti, however, the place and the pageant are in a dialogic relationship, each nourishing the other. Second, she reaffirms the spiritual importance of Manti as place, a spiritual center to which “people will come again and again to renew their spirits [. . .].” Not only will it renew the spirit, but “it will be the mecca for many a pilgrimage.” Because of the high concentration of people in and
around Salt Lake City, the trek motif would have little meaning if the pageant were performed there. But having to journey to the small town of Manti, which is itself a spiritual center (as I will explain in Chapter One), is a religious journey of sorts. (In an interview with Bryan Bean, he reaffirmed the same with a touch of laughter: “I mean the, the fact that it’s in this little town in the middle of, uh, no civilization, just some turkey farms out and about, um, makes it kind of an interesting—, it’s like a journey to Mecca [. . .].”)

And come they did. *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*’s attendance grew each year. A pageant booklet proclaims that in 1979 the Institute of Outdoor Drama noted that *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* had the highest average attendance per night (averaging 16,250) of forty outdoor dramas in America (Findlay, et al. 7). Large groups and tour buses often include the pageant on their circuit. “Groups were mostly from Utah, bus tours also originated in all the western states and from as far away as Minnesota, Texas and Alabama. The record number of busses in a single night was 96. Thirty to fifty was average” (12). The small town of Manti, currently containing around 3,000 people, may swell to as many as 25,000 on pageant nights, and the annual total of the eight performances is around 120,000 (Karras “Manti Miracle”).

III. *The Mormon Miracle Pageant and Imagined Communities*

As I will explain in greater detail in subsequent chapters, *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* is something of a “pressure cooker” where/when issues of identity play out among Mormons, Evangelicals, and members of the TLC—issues that are active all year long among these groups but become much more visible and vocal during the two weeks
of the pageant. While Erving Goffman allows us to understand issues of performativity—the what of what is going on—Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983, 1991) will give us an entrée into the why. Indeed, why would Evangelicals travel hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miles to protest a pageant in a small desert town in the middle of Utah? Why would they expend so much energy writing, printing, and distributing pamphlets, making DVD exposés,\(^8\) and making “Anti-Manti Miracle Storm” T-shirts\(^9\) for the pageant? Why would they so often insist that Mormons aren’t just theologically wrong in their doctrine, but, as one Evangelical charges of Mormon leaders, they are “engaged in [. . .] an insidious deception” (Champneys *Christianity Re-Defined by Mormonism* 1)?

Quite simply, Mormons are too close to Christians for comfort. This, of course, was not always so. During the nineteenth century, Mormons practiced polygamy, lived in communal arrangements, and had other doctrines that set them apart from mainstream Christians. After the maltreatment at the hands of their fellow countrymen—specifically, being driven out of several states and having their prophet murdered before finally settling in Utah—Mormons reacted by emphasizing the differences between their doctrines and those of mainstream American Christianity. Indeed, some early Mormon leaders went so far as to exclaim, “The sooner the present generation lose all reverence and respect for modern ‘Christianity,’ with all its powerless forms and solemn mockeries, the sooner they will be prepared to receive the Kingdom of God” (Pratt *Key to the Science of Theology* 113).

But as modernity and the U. S. government caught up to the Saints in Utah, polygamy was abandoned in 1890\(^{10}\) and, ever since, the Mormons have been on a path
towards American middle-class respectability. They have become not just good citizens, but the most patriotic citizens. They have become not just good employees, but the most dependable employees. They have become not just good Christians, but über-Christians. Harold Bloom notes that “there are no more patriotic Americans than the people called Mormons. Pragmatically, this is beyond reasonable dispute, even as no American grouping is currently more dedicated to monogamy, or more strenuously insists upon itself as being Christian. [. . .] Their future is immense: the Mormon people consistently are the hardest-working, most cohesive bloc in our society” (90, 113). Mormons are also better educated and live eight to ten years longer than the average American\textsuperscript{11} (Ostling and Ostling xxiv, 176). A 2002 Washington Post article notes that

Mormons practice their faith with admirable intensity. They attend church more regularly than Catholics and Protestants, including members of the burgeoning nondenominational evangelical movement [. . .]. Mormons pray more often than Presbyterians and Catholics. They share their faith more often than Lutherans and Methodists. They attend Sunday school twice as often as Baptists and three times as often as Seventh-day Adventists. And they read the Bible at the same rate as the highest-reading groups—Assemblies of God, Pentecostals and nondenominational Protestants. (Broadway B9)

A more recent study of religion and teenagers found that “Mormon teens pray more, have sex less and in general rank No. 1 when it comes to the effect of religion on their lives, according to a just-released study of American adolescents\textsuperscript{12} (Jarvik). And contrary to modern conventional wisdom linking education to declining religious devotion, studies
show that as Mormons increase their level of education, their religious devotion concomitantly increases (see Ostling and Ostling 224; Rod Decker 43). Indeed, “[t]he data suggests that the most committed Mormons who attend church weekly are substantially more educated than are frequent church attenders nationally” (“Education and Religious Activity” 20).

Mormons, in other words, have completely assimilated into American society. Or have they? Wallace Turner maintains that “[t]o be a Mormon is to be born with a second nationality. The duties required to maintain this connection are at least as demanding as those of the American citizen, and perhaps much more demanding” (4). Turner is correct, and, I should note, for any dedicated Mormon his or her Mormon identity comes before his or her American identity—although the two generally don’t conflict, as Mormon-ness has to a large degree come to mean American-ness.

So what’s all the fuss about? If Mormons are no longer polygamists living in communal settings, why do Evangelicals bother traveling hundreds of miles to confront families out for an evening’s enjoyment at a local pageant? Rather, Evangelicals should be celebrating these “black sheep” who have returned to the fold—because, if Bloom is correct, they are the hardest working, most dedicated Christians around! But Evangelicals cannot celebrate them because Evangelicals believe Joseph Smith’s fundamental doctrines are still alive and well in the church. Bloom agrees: “Yet the Mormons, if they are at all faithful to the most crucial teachings of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, no more believe in American democracy than they do in historical Christianity or in Western monogamy” (91). But that still might not satisfy our inquiry into why Evangelicals make the trek to Manti each year, and in such great numbers. Here
Bloom tells us precisely what is the scandal of Mormonism: “Mormonism, a religion truly as different from Christianity as Islam is, exposes how contrived and arbitrary all theology is, indeed how strange and unexpected all religion evidently has to be” (116). And it is that strangeness, that unexpectedness, that is currently threatening to drift into the boundary occupied by Christian.

Mormonism, I assert, is in the paradoxical position of being both too close and too far away from Evangelical Christianity. The assertion by Evangelical critics is that one should not be fooled by this benign face that so resembles the Christian mien—indeed, may outshine the Christian’s. Richard John Neuhaus notes a tension in modern Mormonism: “The leadership of the LDS will have to decide whether its growth potential is enhanced or hampered by presenting Mormonism as a new religion or as, so to speak, another Christian denomination. Sometimes they seem to want to have it both ways, but that will become increasingly difficult” (“Is Mormonism Christian?” 102, my emphasis). One counter-Mormon tract given to me at the pageant seems to corroborate Neuhaus’s observation, although the author of the tract assumes “bad faith” on the part of LDS leadership:

Mormons do not want to be seen as “way out,” intolerant cultists with strange and unusual beliefs, but as respectable, mainstream Christians. Certainly no one can disagree with their heart-warming messages encouraging us all to be more caring. Talking further with these wonderful people often leaves us wondering how anyone could say that they are not Christians, for they speak of such familiar things as “faith in Jesus” who died for their sins. However, a more careful look reveals that
the vast majority of religious terms used by Mormons have been radically
re-defined by their leaders. Here’s a look at some of these definitions
which help us to see that the difference between Mormonism and
Christianity is as contrary as night and day, and that the slick public
relations campaign their leadership is engaged in is actually an insidious
deception. (*Christianity Re-Defined by Mormonism* 1)

The tract’s author, Mark D. Champneys, is clear to distinguish between the “wonderful
people” who inhabit the church and the leadership engaged in an “insidious deception.”
In other words, the leadership knows what it is doing, knows the “truth” about
Mormonism, and is actively trying to conceal that truth. To bring that point home, the
cover of the tract has a rudimentary picture of a Christian church with a cross morphing
into a Mormon church atop which stands the Angel Moroni. The implication is clear:
Mormonism wants to transform Christianity into itself, slowly but surely.

In the following dissertation I show that what occurs at *The Mormon Miracle
Pageant* is primarily a contest over power. Not only do we have competing cosmologies,
but we have, in the case of Evangelical Christianity, a cosmology that is threatened by the
emergence of Mormonism. Due to the success of Mormonism both in winning and
retaining converts, Christians feel threatened at a basic level: Mormons are attracting
many Christians to the Mormon fold. But there is an even deeper layer: As Mormons
become respectable American citizens, they threaten to influence American Christianity,
changing it into something new. There is an element of nationalism here, because
Christians have assumed Americanism to be theirs; that is, to be truly American is to be
Christian. But as Mormons evermore enter the American mainstream, Protestant
hegemony is threatened by this church that is simultaneously Christian and non-Christian. Meanwhile, the Latter-day Saint movement towards respectability creates space, both in religious and national contexts, for groups who want to reclaim the space and power of Mormon originality; in other words, it creates space for a new Mormon fundamentalism. Manti is home to one such group, the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days (TLC), and it claims that the mainstream Mormon Church has gone astray because of its attempts to “Christianize.” The TLC claims to recapitulate Joseph Smith’s Mormonism. However the Mormon Church wants to control this border as well, retaining for itself the space of Mormon originality while simultaneously moving away from it. In other words, the LDS Church wants to be the only Mormonism, arguing that there can be no Mormon fundamentalism because the mainstream church is still Joseph Smith’s.

**IV. Outline of Chapters**

The Introduction acquaints the reader with *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* and Manti in the same way that I was: by moving there as a wide-eyed seventh grader and hearing “the pageant” dropping from everyone’s lips in everyday conversation. The pageant history is also outlined, from Grace Johnson’s initial idea to first production in the Sanpete County Fairgrounds to current eye-popping spectacular at the base of the Manti Temple. I also present the thesis that the pageant is the time and place where issues of power are wrangled over among three groups: Evangelical Christians, Mormons, and members of the TLC.
After adequate background information has been presented in the Introduction, Chapter One looks at Manti as place, positing that Manti has a special position in the Mormon popular imagination. Other groups and individuals have also championed the special nature of Manti and the Sanpete Valley. The history of the settlement of Manti and the building of the Manti Temple become important as we consider Manti as place, and the Manti Temple is shown to be an axis mundi (a “central place” thought to connect the heavens and earth). The history of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days is considered, as is the history of counter-Mormonism. Next The Mormon Miracle Pageant is considered as spectacle and how it ritualizes history. The plot of the pageant is reviewed in some depth.

Once the reader has been thoroughly acquainted with Mormonism, Manti, and The Mormon Miracle Pageant, I review the methodology in Chapter Two by examining the question of how Mormons, Evangelicals, and the TLC are linked. The question of whether Mormons are Christian is considered, which leads to a discussion of doctrinal differences between Mormons and Christians; doctrine of the TLC is also discussed. Sociologist Erving Goffman helps to explain identity construction and performativity. Then discussed is public display using Jack Santino, Roger D. Abrahams, and others. Performativity and public display explain the micro of what is happening at the pageant; Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities explains the macro of what is happening: an attempt to police and maintain borders. Mormons are moving too close to Christians for Christians’ comfort, but the “Christianization” of Mormonism makes room for a new brand of Mormon fundamentalism of which the True and Living Church is an example. The new ethnography is then explained: what is it and how is it written? I review how I
obtained interviews from Latter-day Saints, Evangelicals, and members of the True and Living Church.

Chapter Three deals with issues of public display. Clearly there will be some overlap with Chapter Four, as issues of naming and issues of public display cannot be easily disentangled. The pageant is a stunning spectacle, one that relays history and builds Mormon devotion. I consider John J. MacAlloon’s theory of spectacle and relate it to the pageant, arguing that the hugeness of the pageant displaces Christianity as de facto center and makes Mormonism the central religion. Cast to the periphery, counter-Mormons at the pageant must attempt to reassert the centrality of Christianity. I also consider the use of signs and T-shirt to demarcate space and proclaim group allegiance.

Having established in Chapter Three that spectacle allows Mormonism to assume the central position in Manti, Chapter Four engages issues of naming at *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*. I use the term *naming* to cover not only the quest for control of such basic terms as *Mormonism, Mormon, Christianity*, and *Christian*, but to also cover issues of doctrine; for example, Christians deny Mormons the label of *Christian* because of doctrinal unorthodoxies. These “turf wars” over issues of doctrine are much more about issues of power: who gets to authoritatively speak the doctrine, with both sides claiming they are speaking the truth and that the other side should not be trusted. Issues of history are also wrestled with, as the pageant itself presents a version of Mormon history. This version of history is contested by the counter-Mormons who claim that the pageant, and the LDS Church as a whole, attempts to sanitize unflattering church history.

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation. Having considered public display and naming in the context of border disputes, I am now ready to consider my own
involvement in these disputes. I am not an unbiased scholar, although I strive for fairness. I am a Mormon, having grown up in Manti. I participated in the pageant as a youth. I’m an insider. I tend to sympathize with Mormon interests, and when I criticize the church, I do so as one who wants to make it better, not as one who wants to do away with it. I found the Evangelicals at the pageant mostly pleasant and helpful, yet I also wearied of their constant attacks on my religion and attempts to proselytize me. I do not fault them for this, but my reaction is a reality of my time at the pageant at it plays into how I interpreted the scene. Not only that, but I became a participant as both a Mormon and a scholar as I presented myself to Mormons, Evangelicals, and the TLC. I reevaluate the notion of Mormons as model Americans and model Christians and make modest projections: Will Mormons enter the mainstream of Christianity, rejecting some of their heterodox doctrines, or will they hold fast, maintaining their original doctrines? Will American-ness move away from Mormon-ness, or will the two continue to mainstream? The work of this dissertation will guide me in answering these questions.
Chapter 1

“A Place Apart, yet in the Very Heart of Things”:

The Intersection of Place, Pageantry, and People in Manti, Utah

Manti for me!
Say, don’t you see!
That’s the place I long to be.
My friends are there,
What do I care
If there are other places far or near?

—E. E. J.
(qtd. in Ray P. Dyreng, et al. 102)

[T]he world becomes apprehensible as world, as cosmos, in the measure in which it reveals itself as a sacred world.

—Mircea Eliade

The Sacred and the Profane (1957)

1. Manti as Place

In 1942 author Wallace Stegner said of Manti in Mormon Country: “Manti is a temple town, almost exclusively Mormon and with its share of village narrowness” (188). Surprisingly little has changed: it is still a temple town, almost exclusively Mormon, and, it could be argued, the villagers are even narrower. Indeed, Manti has appealed to
many at the latter end of the twentieth century because it seems to offer a safe refuge from the worldly storms of immorality and violence. For example, a splinter religion from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon), calling itself the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days (TLC), headquarters itself in Manti and proclaims, “We know that both Manti and the Sanpete Valley in Utah have a manifest and prophetic destiny in the last days. It will be a place of safety for the Elect while the judgments of God are being poured out upon the nations of the earth without measure” (“About the True and Living Church”). Mainstream Mormons also find peace and tranquility in the quiet hills of Manti. Grace Johnson, author of *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*, exclaims in *The Story of the Mormon Miracle* (1973), “For nowhere else . . . not in Utah, in America or anywhere else in our world, is there a spectacle of a white Temple built upon a hill commanding for thirty miles the sweeping distances of mountain and valley” (2). She reports that a man said to her at one performance of the pageant, “I feel as if I had been lifted up and set down where things are fresh from the hand of God” (2). Still others feel that Manti is a place of great mystery, the home to ancient, hidden treasures and religious artifacts. A common folk-belief is that Moroni, the last of the Nephite prophets, passed through the area sometime around 400 A.D. and blessed the Manti hill for a future temple. (The Book of Mormon, an ostensible divine history of the Americas translated by Joseph Smith, recounts the history of a family that landed in the Americas circa 589 B.C. and split into two factions, the Nephites and the Lamanites. While the Nephites left no descendants due to prolonged civil war with the Lamanites, the Lamanites are often thought by Mormons to be the ancestors of modern-day Native Americans.)
Eric Eliason, folklorist and Mormon scholar, notes that at one time in the territory of Utah “regional history and identity and church history and identity were virtually inseparable. This is no longer the case” (“Pioneers and Recapitulation” 196). While Eliason is certainly correct in regards to such previous all-Mormon towns as Salt Lake City, Provo, and Logan, I believe the town of Manti is an exception, with many of its residents still drawing their sense of identity from both the church and the environment—indeed, conflating the two—with little care for the larger cultural milieu that exists outside the confines of Sanpete County (and Manti is still 90 percent Mormon [Karras “Manti Miracle”]). (Of course, Native American history precedes Mormon history in these areas and has, sadly, been largely forgotten in Mormon popular history. The reasons for this cultural devaluation are complicated; see Eliason’s “Celebrating Zion: Pioneers in Mormon Popular Historical Expression,” 1998, and Armand L. Mauss’s All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage, 2003.)

Why has Manti generated feelings of security, comfort, and mystery for both residents and visitors? Of all the small desert towns in Utah, why has Manti captured the spiritual imaginations of so many? Perhaps the two most obvious reasons are the magisterial limestone temple which stands as a sentry at the head of the town, visible for miles around, and The Mormon Miracle Pageant, one of the largest outdoor pageants in the nation, which attracts over 100,000 people to its two-week run each year (David Call “Mormon Miracle” A1). But as in the proverbial case of chicken and egg, perhaps the temple and the pageant get their power from being located in Manti rather than vice versa. Instead of attempting to dissect perceptions from place (as if each occurred separately in some ideal sphere), I believe the two exist in a dialogic relationship, with
preconceived notions affecting one’s apprehension of Manti, and one’s apprehension of Manti affecting one’s notions. As Yi-Fu Tuan explains in *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (1974), “Natural environment and world view are closely related: world view [. . .] is necessarily constructed out of the salient elements of a people’s social and physical setting” (79).

While this dissertation will concern itself with issues of identity—specifically the question of who gets to control the identity of Mormonism—we must spend some time considering the sense of place as it relates to Manti, given that the “pressure cooker” of identity struggle takes place in this historically rich location. Mantians are very concerned with not only their historical place as Mormons (that is, descendents of Mormon pioneers), but in the place that is Manti. Manti is a refuge from the rest of the world, and many Manti Latter-day Saints express wonder that people would choose to live elsewhere. The TLC could be seen to compound this sentiment, seeing a specific religious significance to the vaguer sentiments of belonging felt by LDS Mantians. TLC members feel that the Sanpete Valley has been set apart as a gathering place for the righteous. Evangelicals, in contrast, often commented to me that the distant location of Manti was responsible for the religious “illiteracy” of Mormons: they have no other religious options available to them in this austere place.

Place has always been crucial to Mormon cosmology. Steve L. Olsen explains in *The Mormon Ideology of Place: Cosmic Symbolism of the City of Zion, 1830-1846* (2002) that Mormonism was initially part of a backlash against “industrializing, commercializing, and individualizing urbanism” (12-13). Founder Joseph Smith hoped to create a Mormon City of Zion based on “the principles of cosmic urban symbolism” in
an American setting (13). Olsen explains that Smith’s “vision of Enoch” (which Olsen calls “one of Mormonism’s most remarkable theological innovations” [24]) helped clarify the idea of the City of Zion by giving “theological, cosmological, eschatological, social, and personal sanction to the quest for Zion” (26). Most importantly, the “quest for Zion” became *exterior*, a community effort, not simply an interior, “Gnostic” quest. Of course such a doctrine could not be expounded only in theory: the question arose as to where the City of Zion was to be built. In July 1831 Smith located Zion at Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, the place upon which would be built the New Jerusalem. The church began to buy up land and gather in Independence, but, as history records, was driven out by early 1834 under threat of extermination.

Still, the theology of place has never left Mormonism, although it can be said that it has become less important since the turn of the twentieth century when new converts were urged to remain in their own countries and build up the church there rather than gathering to Utah. Yet in certain places such as Manti, where the tie to the past is so striking both visually (so many old pioneer houses and barns, as well as a temple built by pioneer hands, visible from anywhere in town) and genealogically (so many families descended from pioneer stock), the sense of place can be quite visceral. Tuan explains that all people tend to structure geographical and cosmological space with “themselves at the center and with concentric zones (more or less well defined) of decreasing value beyond” (27). In the case of Manti, this sense of decreasing cosmological value is sustained by the landscape. The Sanpete Valley is a Y-shaped valley, accessible only by narrow passes. Manti is the approximate center of the valley (see figure 1A), at the approximate center of the state (see figure 1B). If one stands in Manti, one can literally
see mountains all around, so that living in Manti may give one the impression of living in a long bowl, enclosed on all sides, secure. While the Mantian knows that a world exists outside Sanpete County, it is nonetheless a world out there. Mircea Eliade notes in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957) that not all space is equal; indeed, for the religious individual there is “an opposition between space that is sacred—the only real and real-ly existing space—and all other space, the formless expanse surrounding it” (20).

Not only is the town of Manti sparsely populated but the surrounding desert is quite barren; very few trees grow outside of the town itself to obscure the vision. Tuan explains that the “stark environment” of the desert “is contrary to the normal human desire for ease and abundance.” Paradoxically, “people are known to have sought, repeatedly, the wilderness, to escape from not only the corruption but the voluptuous luxury of city life” (51). The Mormon exodus, it can be argued, was motivated by both desires. Certainly the Mormons were fleeing the unjust persecution of their supposedly Christian countrymen (persecution being the fruit of corruption?), but they were also desirous to avoid the “voluptuous luxury” of the city by building cities to God, based on Joseph Smith’s plans for the city of Zion (see Lowell L. Bennion 187-88). The pioneers’ religious perspective could very possibly have been intensified by Manti’s desert setting. Tuan explains that the desert can be “the austere stage for epiphany” (51), the bare landscape mirroring “the purity of faith” (52).

Manti is a mountain-enclosed center, both of Sanpete County and also of Utah, and this center becomes marked as religious given that Utah is commonly known as the home of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Others have noted Manti’s
place in/as the heart of Utah. Says Eliason, “[M]any scholars and aficionados of Utah culture consider Sanpete County to be the idyllic heart of Mormon Country” (219). A pageant booklet explains to visitors that “Manti became a nucleus for later settlements in what is now Sanpete, Sevier, Emery, Grand, Piute, Carbon and Wayne Counties” (Findlay, et al. 36). Manti was central in another way: “[T]he settlement at Manti, 120 miles south of Salt Lake City, put Mormons in the heart of Ute Indian territory” (Antrei and Roberts vii).

It becomes even more salient that Manti contains a temple, built by pioneers, considered to be one of the most beautiful temples in the Mormon kingdom. (A temple, in contrast to a church, is a sacred structure wherein are performed sacred ordinances for the living and the deceased. While anyone may enter a church—indeed, all are eagerly invited, given Mormonism’s missionary program—only those who meet certain requirements of the faith may enter temples. Thus, temples are the most sacred of places on earth, the literal houses of the Lord, and only the worthy may enter.) While the image of the Salt Lake Temple is surely the most iconic Mormon structure, it does not have the dramatic power of the Manti Temple. The Salt Lake Temple is surrounded by Mormon and government buildings and local businesses. Indeed, it is just one part of the distinctive Salt Lake cityscape. But the Manti Temple stands majestically and abruptly in sharp contrast to the sparseness of the desert landscape. One cannot help but see it—have one’s eyes drawn to it—from virtually any point in Manti. Historians Albert C. T. Antrei and Allen D. Roberts note, “The third LDS temple completed in Utah, the Manti temple with its sentinel-like location above Manti is considered by many to be the symbolic heart of Sanpete Valley” (viii). The documentary *History at Temple Hill Manti*
proclaims that the Manti Temple is “the jewel of Mormon temples” and “it came to symbolize the spiritual center of the people’s lives.”

All of this has eschatological significance for Latter-day Saints gathering from overseas and from the eastern United States to Utah. If Utah is the gathering place, then Manti is the heart of that gathering place, and if all this is seen in religious terms, then the temple is the physical manifestation of that spiritual reality, the physical manifestation of the central place. Eliade explains that the “center, then, is pre-eminently the zone of the sacred, the zone of absolute reality” (“Ritual and Myth” 196). Eliade gives us three criteria for the architectonic symbolism of the center:

1. The Sacred Mountain—where heaven and earth meet—is situated at the center of the world.

2. Every temple or palace—and, by extension, every sacred city or royal residence—is a Sacred Mountain, thus becoming a Center.

3. Being an axis mundi, the sacred city or temple is regarded as the meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell. (“Ritual and Myth” 194-95)

Eliade expands in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957) that, for the religious, “‘our world’ is holy ground because it is the place nearest to heaven, because from here, from our abode, it is possible to reach heaven; hence our world is a high place” (39 emphasis in original). Mormons saw their move up into the mountains of Utah as a fulfillment of prophecy, and often cite Isaiah 2.2 as support: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it” (my emphasis).
We have ample evidence that Mantians consider their town more than simply another desert farm town colonized by Utah pioneers. *Mormon Miracle Pageant* author Grace Johnson writes that, “For nowhere else . . . not in Utah, in America or anywhere else in our world, is there a spectacle of a white Temple built upon a hill commanding for thirty miles the sweeping distances of mountain and valley” (*Story* 2 my emphasis). She later realizes that Manti is a “place apart, yet in the very heart of things” (44 my emphasis). Johnson’s insight is profound: she captures in this small phrase the essence of the Mormon doctrine of place. Manti, indeed, is a place set apart from the profane world, yet, in a very real sense, it is the most real of all places, given that eternal realities hold much more sway there:

> With location, space, scenic beauty, spectacle, history, climate[—]is not the Manti Temple area divinely endowed as a spiritual shrine to join in the answer to that wavering hope of a despairing world? (*Story* 45)

Perhaps it is. To support Johnson’s assertion, Eliade notes that around the *axis mundi*—the Manti Temple—lies the world; “hence the axis is located ‘in the middle,’ at the ‘navel of the earth’; it is the Center of the World” (*Sacred and the Profane* 37).

Even the language of Mantians reflects their local bias. Writing in the local paper in 1972, the Mormon Miracle Pageant Committee thanked the cast and crew and then made this comment, “One fact that puzzles many of our friends in the outside world is the fact that everyone who takes part in the pageant [. . . ] receives not even one red cent for his or her efforts” (1). Perhaps this would not seem so strange if Manti were buried in the canyonlands of Utah, but Manti is only two hours by car from Salt Lake City, an hour and a half from Provo, certainly not so far away that one might consider that “world”
outside. Indeed, a visitor to Utah unaccustomed to Mormonism might not be able to
distinguish much difference between the culture of Provo, an hour and a half north and
home to Brigham Young University, and Manti.

Mormons are not the only ones to revere Manti. The True and Living Church—a

group that splintered from mainstream Mormonism and, therefore, has many of the same

foundational documents—believes that the Sanpete Valley, and specifically Manti, is the
gathering place for the righteous before Armageddon. They believe that the Manti

Temple has eschatological significance because Christ will personally return to “endow

His people with power, even the Fullness of the Priesthood” before the Second Coming

(“Why Is Manti, Utah the Gathering Place for the TLC?”). They continue, “We know by

the Spirit that the Sanpete [V]alley in Utah has a manifest destiny in the work of the

Lord, and we testify that great and marvelous events will yet transpire in this prophetic

valley” (“The Gathering of the Elect”).

Individuals have also found the Sanpete Valley to hold special significance—and

in some cases, special artifacts. In 1975, John Brewer, a Sanpete native then in his mid-
forties, claimed to have found a cave (actually, it was shown to him by, in Brewer’s

words, “a Negro that lived in Manti” after Brewer bribed him with “a couple bottles of

wine”). Inside the cave were boxes with metal plates inscribed with writing, two

mummies, “and a lot of gold stuff and figurines and stick-like things.” When Brewer

presented several plates to the University of Utah to be verified, Dr. William S. Adams

pronounced them “the haphazard scratchings of a forger” and Dr. Jesse Jennings called

them a “ridiculous” hoax. Brewer probably could have cleared up the matter had he been

willing to take said archeologists to his cave, but he offered this convoluted excuse: He
claimed private collectors had “offered me six and seven place figures” for the cave; “I’m
deep in debt, but so is everybody else. I won’t sell” (“John Brewer” 10B). Brewer is not
without his defenders. Kerry Ross Boren and Lisa Lee Boren (who I will discuss later in
this chapter) call the Deseret News article about Brewer “defamatory” and they doubt the
reliability of the “so-called authorities and the biased press” (19).

What is important in the above example, and in those that precede and proceed, is
not so much the nuance of the content as the location of the events. Certainly Brewer
could be seen to fit into an earlier Mormon tradition, one which historian D. Michael
Quinn would call the magic world view; after all, the idea of metallic plates inscribed
with an ancient language did not originate with Brewer. Yet in these examples, it is the
location that is crucial.

Ephraim resident and 2004 presidential candidate Sterling D. Allan hosts a
webpage that is a mélange of political and spiritual conspiracy theories (“Bush
Complicity in 911,” “Near Death Exper.,” “Bible Codes”) and he seems to go beyond the
TLC in viewing the Sanpete Valley as a sacred location, providing geographical/political
reasons and historical precedence, as well as examining its prophetic destiny. Allan
claims that Sanpete is the largest valley in the world surrounded on all sides by
mountains. He also urges readers to consider gathering to Sanpete because it is “[n]ot as
susceptible to nuclear fall-out.” Allan’s website carries the testimony of others who also
feel the Sanpete Valley to be a divine location. He relates the vision of a woman he calls
Joseph (a pseudonym), in which she recounts the prophetic destiny of Sanpete. In one
particularly prominent moment she
was shown in vision that the canyon entrances to the valley would be
blown shut, creating a sort of protective “wall” to keep the enemy out,
while still allowing entrance to the upright in heart. She was shown that
there would be men of sufficient righteous discernment that would stand
as sentinels at the places of entrance. She was also shown that there
would be a cloudlike protection surrounding the valley, like the children of
Israel had, which would bar the enemies and their destroying elements
from entering the valley. (“Joseph . . .’s Vision”)

Like the TLC who urge the righteous to gather to Sanpete, Allan wants readers to
consider that the following are the types of people who have made Sanpete their home:

1. Valley [s]ettled by Mormon [p]ioneers, remains predominantly LDS
   and LDS-fringe/outcasts.
2. Simple, small town farmer types.
4. Far more people per capita are prepared.
5. Sense of community.
6. Good energy in valley compared to other places.

- No major industries to draw Babylon types. It requires humility and
  faith to come here. (“Sanpete Valley”)

Clearly Allan is making a distinction between “us” and “them,” Sanpete and “the world.”

The valley is, in part, sacred because of the people, and the lack of major industries
(mammon) will draw the righteous and repel the unrighteous. And perhaps Allan is right.

After all, in 1900 Manti’s population was 2,425 (Daynes 9). The 2000 census gives
Manti an increase of only 615 souls (“Manti, Utah”). Indeed, the population of Manti actually \textit{dipped} during the twentieth century to 2,268 in 1990 (“Manti[,] Utah”). During the ’90s, the newly formed True and Living Church did have an impact on the population of Manti as it attracted true believers to the area. While it is difficult to assess the membership of the TLC, Greg Dart, in a 2002 news story, put their membership at 400 (“TLC Church Requests Dismissal”). On their own website\textsuperscript{4} they claim that the majority of their members live in the Sanpete Valley. However despite the influx of True and Living Church converts, eighty percent or more of the residents of the Sanpete Valley still “adhere to the same church as their Mormon forebears” (Daynes 1; also Peterson and Bennion 23).

Sanpete also has a lofty past, believed in by those with an affinity for the more “cabalistic” elements surrounding Mormonism and Christianity. Jerry Mower, Allan’s colleague, claims that Adam and Eve used to live in the Sanpete Valley, and that Noah launched his ark from there. Allan and Mower are not the only ones to believe in Sanpete’s divine past. Kerry Ross Boren, who lists among his accomplishments publications in the \textit{Chicago Tribune} and \textit{National Geographic}, as well as serving as a research assistant on Alex Haley’s \textit{Roots}, published with his wife Lisa Lee Boren \textit{Following the Ark of the Covenant, the Treasure of God: Solving the Mystery of Sanpete Valley, Utah} (2000). For the Borens, the Sanpete Valley will be “instrumental in fulfilling prophetic designs for projected world history” (133 my emphasis). Among their many assertions are that Jason and the Argonauts, circa 1194 B.C., traveled to the Americas in search of gold and “constructed a temple on the very hill where now stands the Manti Temple” (133). They also contend that Madoc ap Owain Gwynedd, the Prince
of Wales, came to the Americas, became King of the Aztecs around 1170 A.D., and built another temple at Manti. He brought with him the Ark of the Covenant which he hid in caves underneath the Manti Temple hill or somewhere nearby (133). While the purpose of this dissertation is not to criticize the historical perspicacity of the Borens or the honesty of Brewer, it is important to note that they would choose Manti as the nexus of a cabbalistic world history. Certainly the belief, as stated by Eliason, that Mormons felt/feel like they were/are “at center-stage in the unfolding drama leading up to the Second Coming of Christ” could lead to greater and unrestrained speculation that Manti—given its centrality, its geography, its history, and its theology—must somehow fit into the whole of world history.

I must pause and state that as a former resident of Manti and a Latter-day Saint, I am certain that, first, most residents of Sanpete, being LDS, would be unfamiliar with the assertions of Allan, Mower, and the Borens, and second, if they were to hear their assertions, would be perplexed and probably embarrassed by them—like the embarrassment Utah Mormons usually feel when modern-day polygamists make national headlines as “Utah Mormons.” (Perhaps not unimportantly, my copy of Following the Ark of the Covenant was secured at a grocery store in northern Utah, not in Manti.) However what concerns us here is that Mormons, members of the TLC, and others, see the Sanpete Valley as a special place, set apart from the world, and while the majority of the residents of the valley might feel uncomfortable with the degree of theological or eschatological significance attached to Sanpete by the minority, even those residents believe the valley to have a theological importance.
II. The Settlement of Manti

In order to better understand the dialogic relationship of place and perception in the minds of Manti residents and visitors, we must first examine the settlement of Manti by Mormon pioneers and the construction of the Manti Temple. As Tuan reminds us, “Awareness of the past is an important element in the love of place” (99). Mrs. Adelia B. Sidwell, one of the original pioneers, records that on October 28, 1849 the “Pioneers leave Salt Lake for Unknown Wilderness [. . .] their destination being Sanpitch, to them, like the Garden of Hesperides of the ancients—a fabled land” (qtd. in Ray P. Dyreng, et al. 19). Interestingly, before Manti had been settled—before it was even seen by the pioneers—Sidwell ascribes it a sacredness, even an ancient sacredness with her allusion to mythology. Eliason, in his dissertation on Pioneer Day celebrations in Utah, explains that early Mormon pioneers perceived their time as sacred; they felt they were literally reliving in the latter-days the biblical exodus led by Moses. Says Eliason, “Latter-day Saints even exceed the Puritans in the literalness and pervasiveness in which they regard their faith as a return to Biblical religion. [. . .] Mormons believed that the canonical clock of sacred history had restarted and that they were at center-stage in the unfolding drama leading up to the Second Coming of Christ” (19, 20). Sidwell, compounding this sense of religious destiny, reports that Isaac Morley, the leader of the expedition, “pointing with prophetic finger to an eminence arising in the distance[,] said, ‘There is the termination of our journey; in close proximity to that hill, God willing we will build our City’ ” (20). Others wanted to move on. A man named Taft exclaimed, “‘This is only a long, narrow canyon, and not even a jack rabbit could exist on its desert soil’ ”
Morley was adamant: “‘This is our God appointed place, and stay I will, though but ten men remain with me’” (20).

Others recognized the special nature of the settlement in Manti. The scribe of Brigham Young’s visiting party in 1850, as recorded in Sanpete Stake Records, reported that “he never visited a branch of the Church where a better feeling was manifested than in the Sanpete settlement” (qtd. in Ray P. Dyreng, et al. 32). During the LDS Church’s General Conference in Salt Lake City in 1850, Young, considered by Mormons to be God’s mouthpiece on earth, commented that when he was in the valley, “I prayed to God that he never would suffer an unrighteous man to live there” (32). Young’s prayer certainly must have resonated in the hearts of Mantians, as they continually rededicated their lives to spiritual living in that God-appointed place.

While I will deal with Mormon doctrine in greater depth in a later chapter, I must pause here to explain the importance of prophecy in Mormonism. Unlike mainstream Christianity in which the canon of Scripture is closed (whether doctrinally or pragmatically so), the canon of Scripture in Mormonism is open-ended, although only the prophet is officially authorized to add to it. Thus Joseph Smith, church founder, brought forth the Book of Mormon as another book of Scripture, having equal authoritative weight as the Bible. Smith also produced a book of revelations for guiding the church called the Doctrine and Covenants, and a shorter book of assorted writings called the Pearl of Great Price. While later prophets of the LDS Church have only rarely added to the official canon of the church, when they have, their pronouncements are considered scriptural. This is important because when Brigham Young organized a party to settle in the valley of Sanpete, he was not simply a savvy organizer directing colonizers to an area
where they would have the best chance for a fruitful existence; rather, he was God’s prophet on earth, guiding the chosen people of this last dispensation to a special place where God specifically wanted them to prepare the earth in anticipation of his son’s Second Coming. As Eliason asserts, “Mormons were not merely ritualistically repeating Biblical history, but were[,] according to Philip Barlow, ‘living through the stories of Israel and early Christianity—reestablishing the covenant, gathering the Lord’s elect, preaching the gospel, building up the kingdom, living in sacred time and space.’ Mormons believed that the canonical clock of sacred history had restarted and that they were at center-stage in the unfolding drama leading up to the Second Coming of Christ” (“Celebrating Zion” 20).

Thus for Mormons newly-arrived in Manti, they were not simply colonizing a new area, nor were their appeals to deity and prophesy mere rhetorical blandishment. So when Sidwell says rather dramatically, “their destination being Sanpitch, to them, like the Garden of Hesperides of the ancients—a fabled land,” I believe her intent is far more than pretty language. She is seeing herself in an ancient, fabled land. And when she mentions that Morley pointed “with prophetic finger to an eminence arising in the distance [and] said, ‘There is the termination of our journey; in close proximity to that hill, God willing we will build our City,’ ” she is saying that he was literally a prophet, in tune with a personal God; and that he, like God, understood the importance of the Manti settlement in the Mormon trek toward perfection. Eliade notes that most every creation or settlement is, in a very real way, modeled after the original cosmogonic act of God; thus, “we constantly find the same cosmological schema and the same ritual scenario: settling in a territory is equivalent to founding a world” (Sacred and the Profane 47 emphasis in
original). In settling Manti, the Mormon pioneers were doing more than finding a place to live: they were establishing a religious kingdom.

Prophesy entrenched the sense of Manti as a sacred place. While visiting the settlements in Sanpete County in 1850, Brigham Young pointed to the Manti hill and “prophesied that a temple should one day stand thereon” (Manti Temple Golden Jubilee).

Even the name of the town had religious significance: Isaac Morley chose the name Manti after a name in the Book of Mormon (Sidwell qtd. in Ray P. Dyreng, et al. 33).

Young wanted the temple built on the promontory at the north end of the town. Realizing the difficulty of the job, many members wanted to build the temple on the valley floor, or, more practically, equidistant between the settlements of Ephraim and Manti. Orson F. Whitney records Warren S. Snow’s recollection of an encounter between himself and Brigham Young:

We two were alone: President Young took me to the spot where the Temple was to stand; we went to the southeast corner, and President Young said: “Here is the spot where the Prophet Moroni stood and dedicated this piece of land for a Temple site, and that is the reason why the location is made here, and we can’t move it from this spot [. . .].” (qtd. in Whitney Life of Heber C. Kimball 436)

While there is no record of Young verifying this statement (giving it his prophetic imprimatur), the temple was, indeed, built upon that site, and if we accept this third-hand account, Young was specifically invoking a sacred past in establishing a sacred present. The tradition still exists in Manti that Moroni dedicated the land upon which stands the Manti temple. As Jane Braithwaite, former assistant director, told me in an interview,
those who accept as fact Moroni’s ancient visit are more dedicated to the pageant and its mission than those who consider the story legend. *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* narrator mentions Moroni’s passage through Manti and his dedication of Temple Hill: “And there is a tradition that once he stood upon the crest of this very Manti hill and here he did a strange and wonderful thing: he knelt down, bowed his head in prayer, and dedicated this hill for the building of a temple to the glory of the Lord.” Predictably, the topophilic sentiments of Manti’s Mormon residents encourage them to accept as credible the folk-historical accounts of Manti’s ancient world tie-ins. The mainstream church, however, has never validated (or refuted) these claims; it has never substantiated Young’s statements that Moroni passed through Manti (probably because they were reported secondhand by Warren S. Snow, and Snow was, in turn, recorded by Orson F. Whitney).

**III. The Building of the Manti Temple**

On April 25, 1877, Brigham Young officially dedicated the temple site and work began. During the dedicatory prayed, Young said the following:

> We ask Thee, in the name of Jesus Christ Thy Son, that [T]hou wilt hide up the treasures of the earth, that no more may be found in this section of the country. Wilt Thou, O Father rule and overrule in this? [. . .] We do humbly pray that Thou wilt preserve Thy people from the inducements which these perishable things offer, which are liable to decoy the minds of Thy Saints from the principles of the Holy Gospel, that they go not after the things of this world, and cause that these things may not come in their path to tempt them or lead them astray; *but that Thy people may live in*
these valleys to glorify Thy name, and to rear their children in Thy fear and in the knowledge of Thy Gospel. (qtd. in Lund “Story” 2 my emphasis)

For whatever reasons, the Sanpete Valley has never been economically prosperous (as Sterling D. Allan would say, “No major industries to draw Babylon types”). Indeed, the current median income for a Manti household is $32,844 (“Manti, Utah”). Young believed that life in the Sanpete Valley, deprived of the niceties of life, would cause the Latter-day Saints to reflect upon spiritual realities. Tuan sheds light on the preference for the “stark environment” which is “contrary to the normal human desire for ease and abundance.” He explains: “The yearning for simplicity, when it transcends social norms and requires the sacrifice of worldly goods, is a symptom of deep-seated bias; the behavior that it conduces cannot be explained solely by the cultural values of the time. [. . .] Ascetic practice can be perceived as will, the lordship of spirit over matter, and the desert the austere stage for epiphany” (51).

That which consecrated the Sanpete Valley was the Manti Temple. The temple at once gave the valley a center and a sacred place. The Manti Temple was constructed of white oolitic limestone taken from the hill on which the temple now stands. It took two years to blast away the top of the hill and clear away the fragments for the temple base (Findlay, et al. 37). On April 14, 1879 the cornerstones of the temple were laid. The temple was completed in 1888. One of my ancestors, George Albert Beal, worked on the Manti Temple. He said of the edifice: “It is just like a part of the mountain itself, just as though it had grown right out from the hill on which it stands” (qtd. in Merrill D. Beal 166). Certainly this only further affirms the idea of the temple as an “axis mundi, the sacred city or temple [that] is regarded as the meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell”
(Eliade 196): the temple always existed, only awaiting the moment of its birth into this world. Grace Johnson seems to posit the same idea, asserting that God planned thousands of years ahead of time for the eventual emergence of the temple: “To that day lost in the mists of forgotten millennia when the Master Architect of Geological Forces submerged the Manti Area in ancient seas. Moving to assemble billions of marine lime formations on an ancient beach and with the weight of the years and of later seas and of vanished mountains creating the delicate oolite stone and becoming a hill to be known as the Manti Temple, within a continent to be known as the American” (Story 53 my emphasis).

Miraculous stories surrounding the Manti Temple testify to its divine importance, affirming its importance as an axis mundi. One of the most oft-told stories about the temple ground—before the temple had been built—involved the Mormon pioneers’ first spring in Manti. They arrived late in fall and made quick living arrangements at the base of Temple Hill. Yet when the spring sun cleared away the winter snow that first year, Sidwell recollects that “the very earth seemed writhing with great gaunt spotted-backed rattlesnakes” (qtd. in Ray P. Dyreng, et al. 23). The snakes invaded homes, cupboards, and beds. “The remarkable feature of the invasion was that not a single person was bitten by the repulsive creatures” (24).

During the dedicatory prayer of the Manti Temple site, Brigham Young promised the Saints that if they built the temple their crops would not fail. Victor J. Rasmussen relates many miraculous incidents in The Manti Temple Centennial: 1888-1988 (1988), a book published especially for believing Latter-day Saints. “In 1880 the grasshoppers came in myriads and many thought the crops would be destroyed, and thus show
President Young to be a false prophet; but in a very few days, there were no hoppers to be seen, they having mysteriously disappeared” (5). During the construction of the temple, master mason Edward L. Parry had a dream in which a worker fell from one of the temple scaffolds and was seriously injured. He arose from his bed, went to the site, and found that an important rope had worked itself loose. Because he heeded this heavenly warning, no one was injured (25). A young man named Lewis Anderson also experienced the miraculous after being involved in a serious accident and breaking many bones. He was caught up in some sort of waking vision wherein he saw a beautiful white edifice. Later in life he was called to serve in the Manti Temple. When he approached the building for the first time, he exclaimed, “There is the building I saw as a boy.” He later became the temple president and served for twenty-seven years (37-39).

Even weather is seen as an aspect of the supernatural, both godly and satanic. Rasmussen relates an incident in which a strong wind blew away many planks that were gathered for use in the temple. He asks rhetorically, “What power would have liked to have the work on this building come to an end?” (26). Another natural phenomenon that demonstrated the power of God was a nearby spring that supplied the temple with its water. Says Rasmussen, “From the beginning as the water needs increased, the spring has responded with a greater flow!” (44). We understand, of course, that the elements themselves are arrayed either for or against the Manti settlers—God and the Devil in a heavenly tug of war. Wilford Woodruff, at a private dedication service of the temple, affirmed, “As Joseph [Smith] said, ‘You build a Temple and you stir up all hell; you stir the spirit and power of the devil’ ” (qtd. in Rasmussen 47). Mormons saw themselves as part of an eternal plan and they interpreted events in Manti in light of that timeless
perspective: they were helping God in the fulfillment of his work, much to the chagrin of Satan.

When the temple was dedicated, many individuals reported heavenly manifestations. Barbara Lee Hargis records in “A Folk History of the Manti Temple: A Study of the Folklore and Traditions Connected with the Settlement of Manti, Utah, and the Building of the Temple” (1968) that some testified to hearing angelic voices. They “turned their heads in the direction of the sound, wondering if there was another choir in some other part of the building” (69). Clair Noall, remembering her mother’s experience, wrote,

“I was one of those,” said my mother, “who heard the heavenly music during the dedication. . . . It was like the voices of angels, or divine choir singing above our heads, and perhaps back of us in the clear high tones. Ethereal . . .” (qtd. in Hargis 70)

Albert C. T. Antrei records in The Other Forty-Niners: A Topical History of Sanpete County, Utah, 1849 to 1983 (1982) that some of the congregation reported seeing halos about the heads of the speakers, “and that a voice was heard to declare above the services, Hallelujah, hallelujah, the Lord be praised!” (71). Sister Emma G. Bull of Salt Lake City reported seeing the personages of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and John Taylor, all past presidents of the church (Rasmussen 56-57). Rhoda W. Smith reported that Apostle John W. Taylor “seemed to be transformed into a heavenly being” while speaking (qtd. in Rasmussen 57). In 1938, Assistant Church Historian A. William Lund wrote, “The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was of a Pentecostal nature. Many Saints heard heavenly music before the commencement of the services; others saw the spirits of
President Brigham Young, John Taylor and Jedediah M. Grant and others saw halos of light surrounding the speakers” (“Story of the Manti Temple” 8).

The veracity of these stories is not our concern here; what they tell us about the Mormon mindset is. As Mormon folklorist William A. Wilson reminds us, “Those stories that continue to be told can serve, therefore, as a barometer of our principal concerns at any given time. If we want to understand Mormon hearts and minds, we should pay close heed to Mormon oral narratives” (“The Study of Mormon Folklore: An Uncertain Mirror for Truth” 97). Many of these stories continue to be told as evidence of God’s approval of the Mormon mission. Certainly they interest us in that they validate the claim that the Manti Temple holds a special place in the Mormon Kingdom. (Of course, while all temples have their share of supernatural folk narratives—and the older temples even more so—I would argue that the Manti Temple, because of its geographical centrality in the Mormon Kingdom and its striking visual centrality in the town of Manti, is set apart from other temples.)

The architecture of the temple also bears witness to the Mormon cosmos. Eliade says of temples in general,

But the cosmological structure of the temple gives room for a new religious valorization; as house of the gods; hence holy place above all others, the temple continually resanctifies the world, because it at once represents and contains it. In the last analysis, it is by virtue of the temple that the world is resanctified in every part. (Sacred and the Profane 59 emphasis in original)
Certainly Mormons believe that, literally, the temple resanctifies the world in that it is literally the house of the Lord on earth, his dwelling if he should choose to visit the earth. But the internal structure of the Manti Temple reifies the structure of the Mormon cosmos. It consists of a creation room (Rasmussen 98-99), a telestial, or world, room, a terrestrial room (100-01), and a celestial room (102-03), each room slightly higher than the preceding. During one particular ritual, initiates move from room to room, symbolizing their eternal progression upward. So, not only does the temple resanctify those who attend and move throughout—and up—it, but it resanctifies the surrounding community by its continual presence. The temple is the literal structure of the Mormon cosmos.

IV. The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days

Now that we have considered Manti as place and the importance of the temple as an *axis mundi*, we must consider another religion that makes its home in Manti: The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days (TLC). One immediately notices the similarity between its name and that of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon). The former church came out of the latter and is composed of disenchanted Latter-day Saints who consider the mainstream Mormon Church to have fallen into apostasy. The history of the TLC is complex, but it seems to have been born during the turmoil of the early 1990s and the end of the Cold War. James Harmston and his wife, following the advice of Mormon Church President Ezra Taft Benson to study the Book of Mormon more fervently, became troubled by what they considered departures from original doctrines and the current practices of the
By 1989 Harmston had quit his job, trusting that the Lord would provide. A year later, he and his wife moved to Manti “where they discovered that they were part of an apparently spontaneous gathering of ultraconservative Saints alarmed by such things as the Church’s apparent support of the New World Order and changes in Church doctrine and ritual” (Duffy “Making of Immanuel” 39).

The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported in 1991 that a “new political/religious movement, energized by a passionate belief that the end of civilization is imminent, is emerging in Utah and spreading rapidly throughout the West” (Stack and Jorgensen). This approximately 5,000-member group called itself the American Study Group and based its apocalyptic conclusions on Christian and Mormon Scripture, the writings of conservative Mormon leader Ezra Taft Benson, and the works of a biblical scholar named Avraham Gileadi. Some members began to build bomb shelters in “places of refuge,” including Manti. The group was formed in 1990 by Sterling D. Allan, a former John Birch Society member who was frustrated that he couldn’t talk about politics in church. While the group was ostensibly nonreligious, it was composed mostly of Latter-day Saints and had the “informal feel of a Mormon Sunday School class” (Stack and Jorgensen). Despite the religious overtones of these political meetings, American Study Group leaders and members began to express displeasure with Mormon Church leaders:

Mr. [Robert] Porterfield [head of the Midvale chapter] complained that Mormon leaders, including President Benson, have fallen silent lately on the subject of the last days and the evils of communism.
Mormon leaders, he said, have had to tone down their warnings and appear politically impartial to be allowed to recruit in Russia and Eastern Europe.

“The price we [the LDS Church] have had to pay in order to get into their country is silence on the issue of communism and socialism,” said the group’s president, Mr. Allen. [sic]

He believes the price is too high. Apparently some church authorities read the coverage of the American Study Group’s activities in the *Salt Lake Tribune* with displeasure. In 1991, the group decided to disband because, according to Allan, “the [media] misrepresentation of the group’s true purpose and tone was accepted as factual by many people, including, apparently, some ecclesiastical leaders” (qtd. in Dawn House).

But ultraconservative dissatisfaction with the church’s ostensible political neutrality and fin-de-siècle anxiety ran high. Mormon Church spokesman Don LeFevre said that church leaders had become increasingly concerned about ultraconservative “super patriots” and survivalists, “many of whom have quit their jobs and moved their families to mountain retreats” (Jorgensen and Stack A1). In a move that surprised many, the church excommunicated “hundreds of Mormon dissidents […] preoccupied unduly with Armageddon” in 1992. Quoted in the story is Elaine Harmston, wife of Jim Harmston, the soon-to-be prophet of the TLC, who is mentioned as one of those excommunicated with her husband (“It’s Judgment Day for Far Right: LDS Church Purges Survivalists”). Becky Johns noted that in the fall of 1992, news reports told of “several dozen” Sanpete County residents being excommunicated for “excessive” food
storage and performance of temple rituals outside the temple. “LDS members I spoke to were either appalled that such issues could warrant excommunication or they shook their heads in disbelief that so large a group of members could be so misguided” (30).

Meanwhile, Sterling D. Allan, after terminating the American Study Group, became convinced that the Russians were going to rain nuclear missiles down on the United States. He fled with a friend to “a secret retreat in a remote section of California.” The bombs, of course, never fell. Allan called the episode “humiliating” (Jorgensen “Longtime Doomsayer”). Allan, like other ultraconservatives, felt the ire of the church upon his return from the California desert, but promised his leaders that his days as survivalist gadfly were over. (Alas, such was not the case, as his own website testifies that in 1993 he was excommunicated for “extreme beliefs regarding Davidic Servant.”)

In 1992 a group of excommunicants met in Manti to study the original doctrines of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, engage in discussions of the mysteries of the spirit, and receive revelations. Unfortunately many of their revelations conflicted and contentions arose. A de facto group was organized—known as “The Council”—to review revelations and vote on their veracity. A short-lived harmony was established after the Council formed a “nation under Iroquois guidelines and appointed Harmston the medicine man” (Campbell “Miracles in Manti?” 10; Jorgensen “Schism”). This harmony was destroyed by Harmston. Many of the men in the group had taken up the practice of sleeping with their multiple wives at the same time. Harmston declared one evening that the Lord had revealed to him that such a practice was an abomination (Jorgensen “Schism”).
Out of this milieu arose the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days. The church was officially organized on May 3, 1994, by James D. Harmston and a select group in a white teepee on Beaver Mountain (Campbell “Miracles in Manti?” 9). Carolyn Campbell states that for anyone who has studied Mormon fundamentalist break-offs, aspects of Harmston’s story sound familiar. Such believers state that the modern Mormon Church has changed numerous early doctrines such as re-baptism, polygamy, United Order and the law of consecration to make the church more palatable worldwide. [. . .]

Jim and Elaine Harmston proclaim they watched such doctrinal dilution in the Mormon Church for years. (“Miracles in Manti?” 9)

As the TLC website explains, the straw that broke the camel’s back for the Harmstons and others were the “disastrous changes” in the temple endowment ceremony which occurred on April 10, 1990 (Harmston). (The endowment ceremony is a ritual performed in the temple for the self or vicariously for someone who has passed away. It “include[s] a recital of the most prominent events of the Creation, a figurative depiction of the advent of Adam and Eve and of every man and every woman, the entry of Adam and Eve into the Garden of Eden, the consequent expulsion from the garden, their condition in the world, and their receiving of the plan of salvation leading to the return to the presence of God” [Ludlow, ed. 455].) Harmston and his followers left the mainstream church and began the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days.

The Mormon mythos—that the authority of the priesthood was literally restored to the earth by the visitation of heavenly messengers to Joseph Smith—is also what
sustains the TLC. For example, Harmston claims that four beings—Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses—laid their hands upon his head, ordaining him “to administer the everlasting gospel and to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn. The Apostleship and keys of the Kingdom were given to conclude the work of the last dispensation; to reclaim the true house of Israel, to redeem Zion and repossess the earth” (“Testimony of the Prophet James D. Harmston”). This ordination was done “under the direction of Joseph Smith, Jun.” (“About the True and Living Church”). Joseph Smith, of course, claimed that he had received his mandate to form a new church directly from God the Father and Jesus Christ who appeared to him at the age of fourteen. He was given the Aaronic Priesthood when John the Baptist laid his hands upon Joseph’s head (see Doctrine and Covenants 13). He was later given the Melchizedek Priesthood in the same manner from Peter, James, and John (see Doctrine and Covenants 27.12-13). Apparently Harmston didn’t need the visit of the Father and the Son as did Smith for his restoration, but only the restoration of the priesthood keys through Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses (since the teachings of the LDS Church were still mostly valid). The website claims, “All this [is] being done in the face of the LDS failure to fulfill its mission” (“About the True and Living Church”).

The TLC is an apocalyptic religion, believing that “[t]he destroying Angels are awaiting the command to reap down the fields”; these events are “now beginning to take place.” Into this millenarianism is the theological importance of Manti as place. The TLC website proclaims, “We know that both Manti and the Sanpete Valley in Utah have a manifest and prophetic destiny in the last days. It will be a place of safety for the Elect while the judgments of God are poured out upon the nations of the earth without
measure” (“About the True and Living Church”). But Manti is not merely a safe haven: “The Lord has commanded His saints to gather to Manti” (“Why Is Manti” my emphasis). Indeed, one of the TLC’s proofs for the apostasy of the LDS Church is that it has abandoned the imperative of the physical gathering. The tenth Article of Faith as penned by Joseph Smith explains, “We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.” Eric Eliason explains that in the early days of the church, Mormons believed that “they needed to gather together in the same communities and participate in exclusive, communitarian economic arrangements” (“Pioneers and Recapitulation” 177). Indeed, much of early Utah history was an attempt to create a working theocracy as new converts literally gathered to the area. However around the time of the Great Depression, the LDS Church began to de-emphasize the idea of a physical gathering, instead urging new converts to remain in their countries of origin and “gather” the church there (179). Whereas the entire territory of Utah was once conceived of as a land to which the Lord’s anointed would gather, now the TLC sees the Sanpete Valley as the blessed locale. “[G]reat and marvelous events will yet transpire in this prophetic valley” (“Gathering of the Elect”).

A 1994 news story reported that the TLC had 500 baptized members (Jorgensen “Ex-Mormons”), although some Manti residents and LDS officials put the total number closer to 100 (Jorgensen “Schism”). The influx of religiously motivated settlers into the Mormon-dominated Manti created tension. Chris Jorgensen reported that the “population
boom has made housing and jobs scarce,” and many Mantians have not hidden “their bitter resentment” towards the new residents (“Ex-Mormons”).

All was not well in the newly formed church, however. In 1995 a power struggle occurred and forty percent of the membership left. Two years later several excommunications occurred, one being a woman who later sued the church for the $250,000 she claims she gave to the organization with the promise that she would meet Jesus Christ face-to-face (Daynes 2). Then disillusioned TLC member Rodney Clowdus surreptitiously made audio and videotapes of “fiery” Harmston sermons in which the TLC leader called Mormons “morons” and vowed to turn one of the Mormon apostles black. Clowdus said he wanted to expose Harmston for the “cold-natured, non-compassionate-type man, in the way he robs the poor.” The tapes were distributed to Manti townsfolk and ended up being broadcast on statewide news (Egan “Hex, Wives and Videotape”). Clowdus turned one tape into the Sanpete County Sheriff’s Office in which Harmston admitted to marrying a fifteen year old (Campbell “Dangerous Liaisons” 17).

What has been the effect of all this on the church? One source says groups such as the TLC thrive on a fortress mentality:

They are saying, “See, the world is persecuting us. Satan has brought a lawsuit against our prophet.” But they need the persecution to keep the flames going. And secretly, the leaders love it. There has to be a cause or someone to battle against. With the polygamists, it’s the LDS Church and the government [. . .]. (qtd. in Campbell “Dangerous Liaisons” 19)
While the observation of this source makes sense, perhaps the TLC did not enjoy all of this negative attention because on April 15, 1999 it removed the contents of its website from the internet and replaced it with a one-page warning to the world, explaining that “God has commanded us by revelation to cease our labors of preaching and warning to errant Israel and the nations of the earth.” According to Eric Johnson of *Mormonism Researched* (a counter-Mormon ministry), the TLC has not grown since 1998 (“Manti Polygamous Group” 8). Johnson, who interviewed TLC President Dan Simmons, claims that as of the writing of his article in 2000, several of the Twelve Apostles have left the TLC, and, indeed, the printout I have of the general leadership of the TLC has three apostles whose pictures and names have been “Removed By Request.” In trying to contact the other apostles for this dissertation, one denied me an interview, telling me that he was in the process of moving and that he no longer pertained to that church. When I went to another apostle’s address, I was told by the occupants of the house that he had moved to California—certainly something you would not do if you believed that the Sanpete Valley was the only safe place to avoid the outpouring of Armageddon. I did find one new apostle to make up for these defections, but it does indeed appear as if the True and Living Church is suffering under the strain of recent events.

**V. Evangelical Counter-Mormons**

**A. Defining counter-Mormonism**

While they do not reside in Manti like the TLC, “counter-Mormons”\(^{10}\) are crucial to a full understanding of *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*, perhaps even more important than the TLC. These counter-Mormon demonstrators have changed considerably in size
and tone over the years, if my memory serves. I spent my adolescence in Manti in the
1980s and participated in the pageant several times. At that period of my life I spent the
lion’s share of my mental energy concentrating on the joys of Led Zeppelin and the
frustrations of unrequited teenage love; therefore, I didn’t pay too much attention to the
“strange” people who would travel down every year in a brown bus to stand around in the
street, hand out literature, and engage pageant-goers in debates. What I do remember is
the one brown bus coming to Manti, carrying a load of maybe fifteen to twenty people.11
While they caused something of a sensation out there on the street, they weren’t much of
a presence compared to the thousands of Mormons. They struck me as insolent,
intentionally trying to provoke and demean. I cannot deny, however, that many of my
own townsfolk behaved badly in these encounters,12 as if this were a high school
basketball rivalry and we had just found players from the opposing side sitting on our
bleachers.

That atmosphere has changed considerably, due to the efforts of Chip Thompson,
Pastor of the Ephraim Church of the Bible, a small Evangelical church located in
Ephraim, Utah, just seven miles north of Manti. Thompson moved to the area in 1991,
claiming that he felt called of God to come to Ephraim because of the dearth of Christian
churches down the Mormon Corridor. While he has no authority over any of the
Evangelicals who gather to Manti to witness, he has been quite successful in urging them
to gather each pageant morning to his church for a prayer service and a lecture on
Mormonism. At these meetings concerns are aired and misbehavior is discouraged.
Thompson has nurtured relationships with not only neighbor Mormons in Ephraim, but
with pageant personnel and security, and has asked them to report to him any bad
behavior by Evangelicals. Again, while he has no actual power over any of the diverse groups that meet in the area, he has had, from my perspective, a remarkable degree of success in creating an atmosphere of courtesy—at least, comparatively speaking. There are still those Evangelicals who choose to stand near the temple grounds and yell, “You’re all going to hell! You believe in a Mickey Mouse Jesus who can’t save you!” Others wear shirts that feature a picture of Brigham Young and a red circle and bar over his face and the logo “NO FALSE PROPHETS.”

Not only has the atmosphere changed (for the most part), but so has the size of the Evangelical host. The size has gone from twenty or twenty-five counter-Mormons in the 1980s to around two hundred or more\textsuperscript{13} during the 2004 season. I spoke with Evangelicals from Missouri, Texas, and Washington. Eliason even mentions an Evangelical youth group from as far away as Canada coming down to “perform street theater” in 1994 (“Celebrating Zion” 205-06). Indeed, for good or ill, “[t]hese kinds of demonstrations have turned many Mormon pageants into multi-vocalic spectacles offering diametrically opposed interpretations of the Mormon Experience” (206). Ostling and Ostling explain that these counter-Mormons are “almost without exception [. . .] Evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestants, who simultaneously view Mormons as moral soulmates and major religious rivals” (346).

Given the desire not to offend, I will use the terms \textit{Evangelical Christian} and the more descriptive \textit{counter-Mormon} throughout this dissertation to describe those individuals with the specific goals of proselytizing the Mormons during pageant season. The term \textit{anti-Mormon} is commonly used by Latter-day Saints to describe people who hand out literature, write books, host websites, or engage in other activities critical of
Mormons. While it could be charged that *counter-Mormon* is just another way of saying *anti-Mormon*, I believe it is descriptive, whereas the latter term is ultimately antagonistic. Also, *anti-Mormon* has historical baggage, being tied to actual people who drove Mormons from their homes during the nineteenth century—not to mention that it calls to mind *anti-Semitism*. I feel justified in using *counter-Mormon* here to describe the activities of those Evangelicals who attend the pageant because, virtually always, their method of proselytizing focuses on instilling doubt into the Mormon subject about the veracity of the Mormon truth-claims. Indeed, when I visited the Ephraim Church of the Bible, one speaker explicitly stated that before you can proclaim the true doctrine of Christ, you must instill doubt about Mormonism in the Latter-day Saint. So rather than actively “selling” Evangelical Christianity, Evangelicals are first and foremost attempting to disrupt Mormonism. Thus, the terms *counter-Mormon* and *counter-Mormonism* seem wholly appropriate as descriptive terms, while passing no judgment on the value or appropriateness of their proselytizing efforts.

I will use the term *anti-Mormon* only to describe the more extreme manifestations of the counter-Mormon impulse. Still, I certainly do not want to imply by the term *anti-Mormon* that anyone who disagrees either theologically or politically with Mormons is anti-Mormon. I do not use the term here flippantly, as merely a way to forestall discussion or malign theological opponents. I define anti-Mormons as those who twist, mutilate, and outright lie about Mormon history and theology. Surprisingly, the term is not used exclusively by Mormons: several “anti-Mormon” writers, including lifelong LDS Church critics Jerald and Sandra Tanner, employ the term. However I must note that such is the currency of the term *anti-Mormon* that many of my subjects, especially
Mormon subjects, referred to those Evangelical Christians who attend the pageant as anti-Mormons, not counter-Mormons. This is not to say that they believe all Evangelicals are anti-Mormons, but they are certainly suspicious of the motivations of those who attend The Mormon Miracle Pageant each year. Most of this perception, I believe, is cultural: Mormons with whom I spoke simply cannot understand why someone would travel to their religious pageant to present their point of view. “I would never go to their pageant or stand outsider their church,” was the common rejoinder. What the Evangelicals perceive as an act of love, many Mormons perceive as an act of, at best, crassness, at worst, anti-Mormon bigotry.

B. History of counter-Mormonism

Much of the current cultural moment at the pageant can be explained if one understands the history of modern Evangelical Christianity, and especially those Evangelicals who have dedicated themselves to counter-Mormon activities. Modern-day counter-Mormons generally consist of Evangelical Christians (Introvigne “Devil Makers” 157) who consider Mormonism a non-Christian cult, a false religion that draws people away from the true Christ under the clever guise of a Christian church. Daniel C. Peterson15 sees the modern-day counter-Mormons arrayed on a spectrum, with “old-time traditional” counter-Mormons on one end and “New Age” counter-Mormons on the other. The former, explains Peterson, argue that Mormonism is untrue because 1) it is scripturally incompatible with the Bible and 2) Joseph Smith’s environment and/or his wicked/pathological character (plus a handful of conspirators) are sufficient to account for the success of Mormonism. “There is, in the view of most traditional anti-Mormons,
nothing remarkable in Mormonism, little that requires for its comprehension more than an understanding of human depravity and frailty” (232). People such as Eber D. Howe, Walter Martin, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, and Wesley Walters are representative of traditional counter-Mormons, writing books and pamphlets that account for the banal truth behind the supposed miracles of Mormonism, exposing potentially troublesome Latter-day Saint history (such as polygamy, blacks’ exclusion from the priesthood, etc.), and bringing to light ostensibly contradictory statements by Mormon authorities (thus negating their claims to divine leadership).

Peterson compares these traditional anti-Mormons to what he calls “New Age” counter-Mormons (232), a phenomenon that began in 1986 (Introvigne “Devil Makers” 168). While Peterson acknowledges that these Evangelicals would bristle at the term New Age (given that they consider anything New Age satanic), he believes they have at their core a deep mysticism not unlike the New Age movement. Unlike traditional counter-Mormons that are content to argue that Mormonism is simply historically false, New Age counter-Mormonism admits the presence of the supernatural in the founding events of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is quite willing to acknowledge continuous supernatural influence in the life of the Church today. Indeed, it revels in the supernatural. Environmental factors and the nineteenth century do not and cannot account for what New Age anti-Mormonism sees in the Gospel and the Kingdom. However, unlike faithful Latter-day Saints, New Age anti-Mormons see the progress of the Church as demonic, occultic, diabolical, Luciferian. (233)
Massimo Introvigne explains that Satan’s jump “from obscurity to prominence in counter-Mormonism” can only be understood in light of changes in the Evangelical world (“Devil Makers” 158-59). What is often called the Third Wave of Evangelical Christianity had, by the 1990s, attracted somewhere around thirty million followers in the United States. The Third Wave emphasized spiritual warfare, the earth being the literal battleground between Satan and God. Explains Introvigne, “Whereas some humans may have become ‘demonized,’ others are ‘Christian warriors’ and will provide the ‘prayer cover’ needed by ‘heavenly warriors’ (angels)” (“Devil Makers” 160). Without such prayer cover, heavenly warriors are susceptible to demons. These heavenly warriors rely on human agents to perform exorcisms, using the name of Jesus Christ to cast demons out of the “demonized” and defeat Satan.  

While the Third Wave has a substantial following, there is a large body of critical literature written by Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians who see it as anti-intellectual and spiritually harmful. 

Counter-Mormon heirs of the Third Wave are Ed Decker, James Spencer, William J. Schnoebelen, and Loftes Tryk. For example, Decker is responsible for one of the most (in)famous pieces of anti-Mormonism in modern times, The God Makers, a film that premiered on December 31, 1982 before an audience of Evangelical Christians. (Peterson calls The God Makers the “preeminent cultural monument” to New Age counter-Mormonism [239].) The film garnered considerable attention on the Evangelical circuit, and in 1984 Decker teamed with anticult author Dave Hunt to produce a book with the same title. Energized by his success, Decker made The God Makers II in 1992 and followed it with a book in 1993. Introvigne says that second film and book “are worse than the first: they include an explicit call to hatred and intolerance.
that has been denounced as such by a number of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish organizations” (“Devil Makers” 154).

It was the tactics of Decker and other proponents of the spiritual warfare movement that caused an internecine feud that boiled over in 1986 between traditional counter-Mormons and New Age counter-Mormons (Introvigne “Devil Makers” 168).

For example, traditional counter-Mormon writers Jerald and Sandra Tanner have been critical of Decker’s methods, charging him with “sensationalism,” an “ability to fabricate evidence to support his own opinions,” and “faulty reasoning,” which they feel is counterproductive to the effort to rescue people from Mormonism (qtd. in Daniel C. Peterson 233 note). Not liking the rebuke, Loftes Tryk accused the Tanners of being “Mormon double agent[s] [. . .].” Not to be outdone, James Spencer, William J. Schnoebelen, and other allies of Decker have accused the Tanners of demon-possession (qtd. in Daniel C. Peterson 259). According to Peterson, the struggle for control of the counter-Mormon forces seems to be swinging in the direction of the New Age counter-Mormons: “Old guard anti-Mormons, with their scriptural arguments and their sometimes rather intricate historical arguments, can hardly hope to compete” with the New Age counter-Mormons’ “horrifying tales of Satanism and sedition and conspiracy” (235). And, indeed, it seems rather boring to argue that Joseph Smith was merely a charismatic charlatan, especially when compared to Tryk’s purple prose: “Mormonism is so insidious and such a diabolical plot, that it is actually a form of devil worship, that the head ringleader behind the scenes is Beelzebub, himself, Satan” (qtd. in Daniel C. Peterson 234 note).
These New Age counter-Mormons have not contented themselves with writing counter-Mormon literature and producing counter-Mormon films, as their attendance at LDS pageants and conferences attests. As if to prove the point that “the world is a battlefield” on which the righteous fight “real demons and demonized human beings” (Introvigne “Devil Makers” 169), self-proclaimed street preachers in Salt Lake City have recently taken to outrageous and offensive behavior. For example, during a large conference for Mormon faithful, several street preachers called Mormon women “whores” and “harlots” (Heather May “Protestors”), as well as sneezed into and wiped on their buttocks clothing considered sacred to Mormons\(^\text{18}\) (Rhina Guidos).

\section*{C. The effect of counter-Mormon activity}

While the purpose of this dissertation is not to study the phenomenon of counter-Mormon literature, one generalization can be made: the result of all the activity has been to create a sense of distrust between the Mormon and the Evangelical community. Evangelical Craig L. Blomberg admits that one of the primary ways in which Evangelicals learn about the Mormon faith is through “anticult literature, written by fellow Evangelicals in an often polemical spirit” (Blomberg and Robinson 22). Indeed, those Christians with the point of view that the earth is a spiritual battlefield become susceptible to works like \textit{The God Makers} which allege that Mormonism isn’t just a religion full of good but confused people, but a veritable satanic conspiracy. Needless to say, the average Evangelical, weaned on such anticult material, may not be prone to believe the mild-mannered, unassuming Mormon he or she encounters on the street who professes a belief in Jesus Christ and the Bible. Thus, very often the initial encounter
between Mormon and Evangelical is not over the truth of any particular doctrine, but over what doctrines the Mormon really believes. The Mormon says, “I don’t believe that,” and the Evangelical says, “Oh yes, you do.”

Attempts at rapprochement have been made between Mormons and Evangelicals in recent years. After the outrageous behavior of the street preachers, almost two dozen local pastors gathered near the LDS Conference Center on October 21, 2003 to condemn the street preachers who desecrated clothing sacred to Mormons. The coalition, Standing Together, united to “speak firmly against any actions that forward activities of hate and discrimination as qualities associated with genuine Christian witness or behavior,” the Rev. Greg Johnson said (qtd. in Moore “Pastors”).

In a move that surprised many, internationally known Evangelical apologist, philosopher, and author Ravi Zacharias agreed to speak in the Mormon Tabernacle on November 14, 2004, the first Evangelical to speak there since Brigham Young invited Dwight L. Moody to speak in 1871 (Moore “Evangelist to Speak”). Richard J. Mouw, President of Fuller Theological Seminary, spoke before Zacharias and said, “Let me state clearly. We evangelicals have sinned against you. […] We’ve often seriously misrepresented the beliefs and practices of members of the LDS faith. […] It’s a terrible thing to bear false witness … We’ve told you what you believe without first asking you” (qtd. by Cory Miller). Some Evangelicals in attendance were vexed by his comments. According to Mike Gray, Pastor of the Southeast Baptist Church in Salt Lake, the comments blur the lines between Evangelical and Mormon teachings. Tim Clark, Executive Director of the Utah-Idaho Baptist Convention, claimed, “It sets back our work as Christian witnesses in Utah and Idaho” (qtd. in Cory Miller). Roger Russell,
Pastor of Holladay Baptist Church in Salt Lake, said Mouw’s comments left him “red-faced.” Mouw, responding to the controversy, mentioned a “discernible pattern of [Evangelicals] sinning against LDS” members. For example, he mentions Walter Martin, author of *Kingdom of the Cults*, who has “oversimplified Mormon teaching,” and Dave Hunt, who represents Mormonism as “Satanic in its inspiration and practice” (qtd. in Cory Miller). While doubtless many Mormons nodded their heads in assent to Mouw’s comments, Evangelicals’ reactions demonstrate the tension surrounding Evangelical-Mormon relations.

How this all plays out at *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* is not immediately clear. While it would be tempting to categorize the majority of those who make the trek to Manti as the more zealous Evangelical element, and, therefore, more likely to be part of the spiritual warfare movement, seeing Mormonism as a satanic plot, its leaders diabolical and its people as entrapped, this may or may not be accurate. The pamphlets given to me seem to represent the “old-time” traditionalist approach—their main tactic being to prove that Mormonism is too difficult, that it is an impossible gospel even by Mormon standards (using Mormon scriptural proofs), and that, therefore, one should accept the free gift of Christ’s sacrifice. The information on the websites held aloft on posters at the pageant (“JosephLied.com,” “MormonInfo.org,” “HisMin.com,” “PerfectRighteousness.com,” “UTLM.org”) seems to be a combination of the traditionalist approach and the spiritual warfare movement. For example, at JosephLied.com, the author Mike Norton proffers historical evidence to suggest that Joseph Smith was not a translator, and, therefore, could not have translated the Book of Mormon (had he ever really had golden plates to begin with) (“The Most Compelling
Evidence of Fraud Yet”). In relating his autobiography, however, he seems to lean to the spiritual warfare side of the spectrum. He then relates a letter written by his brother, also an ex-Mormon, who claims,

> The foundation of my testimony was not built upon the rock of our Redeemer, but rather upon the sand of Joseph Smith’s lies that were cleaned up to the sweet story we have today. It took me a very long time to realize that. [...] When I prayed to “know if the church was true” (another LDS catch-phrase), I did so with a finite understanding of the nature of the beast. [...] We teach our kids songs like, “I hope they call me on a mission, when I have grown a foot or two . . . . .”

> Little children are doing “REPEAT after me” testimonies whispered in their ear as soon as they can talk!

> (“I know this church is true. I love my mom and dad . . .”) That’s not brainwashing? Hello?! (qtd. in Mike Norton “Bicentennial Boy”)

While the Nortons’ assertions can be debated—and perhaps seem manifestly unfair—their tone is what is important. They maintain that the Mormon Church is a tyrannical, repressive, mendacious, brainwashing institution, and that charge is sustained by an attitude of righteous indignation. The use of the phrase “the nature of the beast” may simply be a colloquial term for “the nature of the organization,” but given the religious connotation of the webpage and the term “beast,” it seems probable he intended to associate Mormonism with at least some degree of diabolism.
Mormons are at somewhat of a disadvantage in these encounters, given that there really is no counter-Evangelical movement similar to the counter-Mormon movement. There are self-appointed Mormon apologists (none officially sponsored by the church) who respond to the charges leveled by the most well-known Mormon critics. (But even these Mormon apologists have on occasion been rebuked by Mormon leaders for their contentious rhetoric; see John-Charles Duffy “Defending the Kingdom, Rethinking the Faith,” 22-55). But Mormons cannot really be counter-Evangelicals in the way Evangelicals can be counter-Mormons because Mormons accept large portions of the doctrines accepted by mainstream Christianity; therefore, they have no inclination to counter those doctrines. (For example, Mormons don’t want to challenge the authenticity of the Bible like Evangelicals want to challenge the authenticity of the Book of Mormon; Mormons don’t want to challenge the authenticity of the prophetic calling of Moses or Isaiah like Evangelicals want to challenge the authenticity of the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith, etc.) When I was at The Mormon Miracle Pageant during the summer of 2004, I spoke with several counter-Mormons. In one instances I asked an Evangelical if he realized that the arguments he was using against Mormonism could be turned around by an atheist, for example, and used against Christianity. He simply shrugged his shoulders and continued to challenge the prophetic claims of Joseph Smith and the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.¹⁹
VI. The Mormon Miracle Pageant

A. The Mormon Miracle Pageant as spectacle

Speaking of the construction of historical memory, Eliason notes that the celebration of Pioneer Day and Mormon historical pageants “are by no means straightforward representations of historical events—nor are they intended as such. They are the products of a selective combing through history that has chosen certain aspects for highlighting while omitting and downplaying others” (“Pioneers and Recapitulation” 192). While I have heard criticisms of the historical accuracy of the pageant from both Mormons and non-Mormons, I consider such criticism to be largely a misunderstanding of the genre of the dramatic historical pageant, a misunderstanding of both its limitations and its freedoms (some of which I discussed in the Introduction). This is not to imply that pageants or spectacles should be immune from criticism, only that they should be criticized according to genre-specific criteria. For example, Mike Austin reports that he attended The Mormon Miracle Pageant when he was pursuing a degree in literature at Brigham Young University. “As one might imagine, the Manti Pageant was, for me at that time, just one more excuse to feel superior. All the way home, I kept telling the people in my ward [i.e., congregation] how utterly devoid of literary merit the pageant is, how Mormons should be ashamed of themselves for producing such facile art, and how dangerous it is for us to settle for cheap sentimentality” (16). Austin later realizes, however, that the pageant’s purpose is not to achieve literary fine art, but to “show people their heritage and give them a link to their religion, their country, and the world [. . .]. They provide continuity and, ultimately, identity” (17). As a literature major, Austin has a difficult time explaining why these pageants move so many people emotionally, “but
they seem to do so anyway” (17 my emphasis). Similarly, Peggy Fletcher Stack, a reporter for the Salt Lake Tribune, says of the pageant, “It’s hokey and didactic, but it works” (“For 25 Years” my emphasis).

According to John J. MacAloon in “Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies” (1984), the spectacle is the least understood of the performative genres by anthropologists (243). By “understood” he means, of course, intellectually understood, but I would add that the spectacle is probably the least empathetically understood as well, at least by those who fancy themselves intellectuals. It has been my observation that many academics demonstrate a great deal of disdain for large-scale spectacles, such as the pageantry and the pomp surrounding the Olympics. MacAloon notes that “we are suspicious of spectacles, associating them with potential tastelessness and moral cacophony” (246). Indeed, during the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City I heard many exclamations of revulsion directed not at the games, but at the opening ceremonies. One fellow graduate student decried the historical first of the five Utah Indian tribes coming together for the event. He didn’t explain why he was bothered by this—I assume he considered it ersatz drama, racial politics meant for mass consumption—but the disgust that registered on his face was complete. Another student related being utterly mortified while watching the event with her foreign roommate. She begged her roommate to believe that such spectacle was not an accurate representation of America—or, at least, not an accurate representation of her. Other students, like angry villagers taking up pitchforks against the Frankenstein’s monster, labeled the opening ceremonies “New Age nonsense.” One student expressed her anger that the production was not “historically accurate” and didn’t show the Mormon pioneers slaughtering the
Indians. While such a massacre sequence likely would have put a damper on the evening’s lighthearted festivities, I had to inform her that it would also have been historically inaccurate, as the Mormons never slaughtered the Indians upon their arrival.\textsuperscript{20} Still, the demand that the spectacle be historically accurate (and this, finally, was at base what so irked my classmates) seemed strange to me, although I wasn’t quite able to express why at the time. Yes, I agreed that the opening ceremonies could be seen as “New Age nonsense,” yet I wasn’t sure that was a bad thing considering the goal of the ceremonies: to make a visually appealing extravaganza that would be emotionally accessible to a worldwide audience. (And, I must admit, I’m in favor of any program that puts Sting \textit{and} the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on the same bill!)

So what, exactly, is the phenomenon of a spectacle that draws the ire of some and the awe of others? Spectacles give primacy to the visual, but the visual on a grand scale. In spectacle, the “bicameral roles of actors and audience, performers and spectators” are “normative, organically linked, and necessary to the performance” (MacAloon 243). (Thus, the 14,339 chairs set out at \textit{The Mormon Miracle Pageant} become part of the pageant itself [Hales A1].) Spectacle demands “movement, action, change, and exchange on the part of human actors who are center stage, and the spectators must be excited in turn” (MacAloon 244). Whereas ritual and festival may have specific goals, spectacle “denotes no specific style or mood aside from diffuse wonder or awe” (246). But while MacAloon notes that spectacle is morally ambiguous, neither inherently liberating or reactionary, it does have the potential for individual engagement:

Those who have come simply to watch and to be watched, to enjoy the spectacle or to profit from it, may find themselves suddenly caught up in
actions of a different sort at levels of intensity and involvement they could not have foreseen and from which they would have retreated had such participation been directly required or requested of them. [. . .] Spectacle additionally gives the metamessage “all you have to do is watch,” thus liberating individuals to want to, to be free to do more than watch. (269)

While MacAloon suggests that the spectacle surrounding the Olympic games makes the “games” more than mere games and into truly epic contests, I believe the above quote helps us to understand how the “gigantism” of the spectacle of *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* could “free” an individual in unpredictable ways—and not merely the dramatic presentation of the pageant on the hill, but also the spectacle of ten to 20,000 people gathering in one place to witness the pageant, as well as the Evangelicals congregated outside the pageant grounds distributing counter-Mormon literature.

**B. The ritualization of Mormon history**

In the specific case of *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*, most spectators come prepared to “participate,” given that at least ninety percent of the audience is Mormon21 (Stack “For 25 Years”); that is, most spectators are familiar with the story that will unfold before them, and so spectatorship is not so much taking-in as reviewing and accepting. The criticism can be leveled, however, that the pageant is not historically accurate in its details, and so Latter-day Saints are not learning “true” Mormon history. (We will leave aside the question of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s visions.) Mormon historian Davis Bitton notes that the history presented in pageants, parades, and other celebrations is ritualized, and that means, by definition, it is
simplified: “It celebrates that which is celebratable, ignoring much of the past as it was” ("Ritualization of Mormon History" 183). Of course this leads to charges from intellectuals, as I’ve noted, that spectacles are disingenuous; in the case of The Mormon Miracle Pageant, counter-Mormons level the charge that Mormons are “sanitizing” unflattering history, perhaps even brainwashing their faithful followers. Bitton helps us to understand the need for ritualized history:

   It would be pedantic of historians to ridicule all ritualization of the past.
   Indeed, awareness of the way in which ritual has created and perpetuated public memory in many different settings should leave the historian unsurprised to find the same icons being employed within Mormondom.
   The fact is that most people are not historians—which is to say that most of us will possess our history ritualistically or not possess it at all. (183 my emphasis)

This is certainly the case, given that most Mormons, indeed most Americans, do not have the time or the inclination to pour over historical texts to determine the “truth” of history. While there will always be those who bemoan this fact, it is nevertheless a fact: history is generally simplified—and then ritualized—in order to be ingested and turned into something useful. One may disagree with the aims of The Mormon Miracle Pageant, but it should not be condemned solely for ritualizing history, for there are numerous such instances in American society: the Democratic or Republican National Conventions, the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games, a 4th of July parade, etc. This is a point Eliason makes in a tome entitled Usable Pasts: “Rather than regarding invented traditions and identities as pathological false consciousness, we can view them as creative
cultural responses to new situations. I would suggest too that in painting sinister and manipulative portraits of the inventors of tradition, we may be applying historiographic assumptions and patterns of social analysis to groups whose goals and truth claims are of little relevance to those held by the observing culture” (“Pioneers and Recapitulations” 205).

C. The Mormon Miracle Pageant: An overview

Important to a full understanding of the phenomenon of the pageant is an understanding of the content of The Mormon Miracle Pageant itself. Pageant visitors are welcomed by the pageant president and admonished to “consider your place in God’s plan.” A prayer is offered and then “God Bless America” is sung. The pageant proper begins with a clarion call. The narrator intones:

Tonight you will see a story unfold that is based on this one singular event [i.e., Joseph Smith’s First Vision]. It is a story that cannot be told dispassionately. Because it is a true story, it is colored by the hues of heroic drama, by violence of life and death, by sublime faith, deep and moving tragedy, by curse, prayer, temple, and tomahawk—for this is the story of the Mormon miracle!

The year is 1820 and religious revival splits the community. A fictional couple, Robert and Mary Henshaw, shuffle among three contentious congregations, all preaching contradictory doctrines. Robert asks, “But why don’t you tell us why we’re here? What’s the purpose of this life?” but he gets no answer. At another congregation Mary asks a question and is also ignored. At the third congregation, the preacher deigns to
answer Robert’s question, telling him he’ll go to hell if he doesn’t pertain to that sect.

Robert and Mary serve as our entry into the events of the pageant. We, like them, are searching for truth. The Pageant Presidency makes this clear in a newspaper distributed at the pageant: “In the pageant is a story of a couple searching for truth—God’s truth—that ultimately leads to peace. [ . . . ] They are fictitious characters; however their lives in many regards mirror our own as each of us seek for truth, act upon it, and then reap the peace that comes from living according to that truth” (“The Mormon Miracle—A Message of Peace” 2).

Then the narrator focuses our attention on a boy at the edge of the various congregations, confused at the religious strife: he is Joseph Smith. Later at home he reads in James 1.5: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” He determines to pray the following morning and is visited by the Father and the Son. He is told to join no extant church.

The vital spark and force of this miracle lies in the fact that Joseph Smith never denied these words. He never denied these words even when he was hounded like a fugitive from six states—not even when he was arrested thirty-eight times, imprisoned in vile jails, cold, filthy, without a bed to lie on, sickened with rotting food—not even when he was abducted, stripped and beaten, his bleeding body covered with tar and feathers and left for dead—not even when later his followers were driven from state to state, and Governor Boggs of Missouri issued his exterminating order—and
finally, not even when he looked out of the windows of a jail in Carthage, Illinois into the painted faces of a mob bent on his murder.

When Joseph tells people of his vision, they persecute him, especially professors of religion and their congregants.

The pageant then relates the visitation of the Angel Moroni who informs Joseph of the existence of golden plates, buried in a nearby hillside, plates upon which are recorded the history of the former inhabitants of the American continent. Joseph obtains the plates and begins to translate. He learns of three civilizations in this hemisphere, of three separate migrations, the first occurring around 2,000 B.C. “And now, in 1829, the voices of these people rise from the dust to again be heard and speak to this generation; thus, the curtain rises, shedding light for the first time on American antiquity!” Another clarion call is heard and the audience sees Moroni atop the Manti temple, a herald trumpet to his lips. The narrators speak of Moroni’s ancestors who came to the Americas circa 600 B.C. and left vast ruins in Central and South America. From one family sprang two mighty nations: the Nephites and the Lamanites. At the bottom of the hill, we see Joseph in his room translating, while on the center of the hill we see scenes from the Book of Mormon. The first scene is a confrontation between the righteous Captain Moroni and the wicked Zerahemnah and their respective forces. Zerahemnah refuses to take an oath of peace and the two armies clash, with Moroni’s forces decimating those of Zerahemnah. To commemorate the occasion, Captain Moroni erects the Title of Liberty: “For [Captain] Moroni knew that you cannot compromise with evil; if you do, evil always wins.”
However the Nephites soon fall into apostasy—the wealth the Lord has blessed them with makes them arrogant and oppressive—while the Lamanites becomes converted to the Lord. “And so the tables are turned.” Samuel the Lamanites comes to the Nephites to call them to repentance and prophesies of the birth and death of Jesus Christ, and of signs that will accompany those events. Some believe in Samuel’s words and repent, but most do not. At Christ’s death, there arises a great storm, as well as lighting, fires, and earthquakes that kill many, followed by three days of darkness. When the darkness disperses, the resurrected Christ appears to the people. He teaches them the gospel, organizes the church, heals the sick, and blesses the children.22 So powerful is Christ’s visit that the people live peacefully with one another for 200 years. “But then, as now, the old, familiar pattern of greed, deception, and the rise of class hatreds gradually usurped their peace and ushered in 200 years of decline, ending in the complete loss of the brotherhood of man.” The Nephites become slothful, searching for “new, untried pleasures of the flesh—surely these people are speaking to this generation.” The Lamanites also become wicked, but are less wicked. General Mormon abridges the numerous records. He sends for his son Moroni and delivers up the golden plates, knowing that his people, the Nephites, will be exterminated in civil war. As Moroni looks for a place to bury the plates, he speaks as if to the audience, breaking the fourth wall: “Remember, oh remember, he that doth possess this land shall serve God or be swept off. Behold, I speak unto you as though from the dead, for I know that ye shall hear my words. Be wise in the days of your probation.”

Joseph Smith finishes the translation, publishes the book, and reaction is swift: the soundtrack is filled with numerous angry voices. Joseph contends that the book is
true, calling it “American Scripture.” Robert and Mary ask Joseph the questions they could not get answered from others and he answers them with ease. He also tells them they will be an eternal family, a prospect they heartily welcome. The narrators explain:

The secret of the Mormon miracle lies in its theology. In a day when man’s esteem of himself was uniformly wormlike in character, when the body was looked upon as something lowly, to be despised, Joseph Smith declared the supreme worth of human personality, the body an instrument of infinite dignity and importance. Couched in the authoritative language of “Thus saith the Lord,” the Mormon prophet pronounced a revolutionary concept of man and his destiny.

Robert and Mary embrace Joseph as a latter-day prophet.

The narrators then pause to tell us that nothing could stop the steady march of Mormonism: not evictions, not “killings, beatings, burnings.” In a short scene, a pioneer woman, driven from her home, shelters her baby from the cold rain with her back. Then, the “Nauvoo family” gives thanks to God for finally having a city they can live in peacefully—not knowing they will be driven from it in a few short years.

Then we move to Carthage Jail. The year is 1844 and Joseph Smith is thirty-eight years old. The narrator tells us that Joseph knew he was going to die. Joseph is incarcerated with four other men, one of them his brother. He asks one of the men to sing. After singing one verse of “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief,” the mob arrives. Hyrum, Joseph’s brother, is shot and falls down dead. Joseph, distraught by his brother’s death, tells the other men to save themselves, that it is him the mob wants. He is shot,
exclaiming, “Oh Lord, my God!” The narrator explains, however, that the mob’s victory was Pyrrhic: “In life he had but one voice; in death, he acquired a thousand.”

Brigham Young then takes control of the church when the Mormons are expelled from Illinois two years later. Young tries to animate the cold and tired pioneers by starting up a square dance. The dance is soon interrupted by Captain James Allen of the United States Army. He announces that the U.S. Army is at war with Mexico and he was sent to “accept the services” of able-bodied Mormon men.

Brigham Young indignantly asks, “Do you realize that we have been refused our constitutional right of religious liberty by the United States?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you realize that we are now in the act of leaving the boundaries of the United States?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you also realize that many of our able-bodied men are scattered over these plains helping those less able-bodied?”

“Yes, sir, but those are my orders, sir.”

Young then turns his back on Allen and meditates. He thinks first upon Moroni and the Title of Liberty, then upon an anonymous Native American who discourses on our duty to the earth, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Joseph Smith speaking about our duty to sustain the law of the land—all presented in tableaux on the hill. Young then agrees to send men to the cause. “If we cannot find enough young men, we shall find old men.” Patriotic music fills the soundtrack as men say goodbye to their families and go off to war.
The pageant returns to the pioneers and the problems encountered during the move westward. The pioneer woman who had sheltered her baby with her back is now burying her infant. Mary Henshaw is also upon her deathbed. She promises to come for Robert. Winter comes too early and catches the pioneers unprepared. Robert buries Mary.

In the summer of 1848, Robert’s company makes its way to the Salt Lake Valley and is discouraged by the vast desolation they see before them. Brigham Young greets them and enthusiastically tells them of his plans to make the desert blossom as a rose. He informs Robert that his company will go south to a valley called Sanpete. The narrator explains, “At long last, they would have a home from which they would never again be expelled.” Approaching Manti, the company hears a wolf howl.

Robert whispers, “Indians!”

Another responds, “No, that’s a wolf.”

“No, that’s how they signal to each other!”

They corral the handcarts, but it’s too late: Robert is hit by an arrow. He dies and is greeted by Mary. The two walk together to Paradise. The narrator intones: “The Mormon miracle secures the knowledge that was lost in the confusion of the Dark Ages: that no matter what the suffering or tragedy of this life might bring, nothing is lost. For all human experience moves forward to the glorious triumph of the resurrection, the reuniting of the spirit with the physical body.” The lights go out and the pageant is over.

When the lights come back on a narrator informs pageant-goers that what they have seen is true and that if they would like a complementary copy of the Book of Mormon they may pick one up at an information booth.
D. The purpose of the Mormon Miracle Pageant

The purpose of The Mormon Miracle Pageant is not simply to present a straightforward chronology of the development of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Indeed, the pageant seeks to “collapse” time, making past, present, and future synonymous. Explains Glassberg,

Pageant depictions of orderly, stable progress appeared in the way the sequence of historical episodes unfolded. While individual pageant episodes suggested a particular “lesson” from the past—the importance of idealism, hard work, wholesome recreation, or community cohesion—the entire sequence of episodes embodied a vision of how change occurred. The succession of episodes across the pageant grounds placed past, present, and future within a single framework, offering a coherent plot within which local residents could interpret their recent experiences and envision their future progress. (139 my emphasis)

Mary and Robert, finally, achieve the ultimate future progress, and spectators of The Mormon Miracle Pageant are urged to vicariously go with them. Indeed, using the pageant as our guide, we can see that our “suffering or tragedy of this life” can be interpreted through the lens of the pageant and envisioned in terms of eternal progression.

Eliason notes that “perhaps no art is more integral than drama to the Mormon experience,” specifically historical pageants (“Celebrating Zion” 199). There is a paradox for the Latter-day Saint spectator of The Mormon Miracle Pageant: on the one hand, he or she is viewing a drama that concerns events that happened over 150 years ago, yet these events are clearly supposed to be applicable to the viewer now. In many
ways, the Latter-day Saint cannot look back on this sacred history but with envy, for the present seems banal by comparison. While few might want to return to the days of harsh persecution, pageant-goers cannot help but envy the spiritual heroes presented in such dramas. Again, to a certain degree, pageants help to collapse time, making the past and present synonymous. Explains Eliason:

Through these genres of pioneer remembrance, modern Mormons appropriate their sacred past into their own experience in the present. This is important because many of today’s Mormons suspect that despite the fact the LDS scripture canon remains open and the Church is led by a living prophet of God, their heroic “living through” of sacred history peaked in the nineteenth century, making their own lives rather mundane when compared to the cosmically significant pioneer endeavor. However, through recapitulations and renditions of an idealized pioneer past, modern Mormons can return to sacred time and space. (“Celebrating Zion” 83)

The average Mormon’s life can seem mundane in comparison to the heroic and spiritually ecstatic lives of the early Mormons. Indeed, groups like the True and Living Church, I would argue, are attempting to re-attain the religious fervor of those former days when communing with the divine was commonplace (actually, I would not have to argue this; these groups specifically state so in their literature). Productions like The Mormon Miracle Pageant bring the past—with all its heroism and spiritual ardor—into a modern era filled with day-to-day trivialities that sap religious devotion of its romance.
Chapter 2

“[W]hen It Comes to Their Religion, They Throw All the Rules Out, and [...] Logic Means Nothing Anymore”¹: Methodology

I. Mormons, Evangelicals, and Members of the TLC

If The Mormon Miracle Pageant is one’s subject, it only follows that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be of interest; but why Evangelical Christians and members of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days would be of interest is less clear and requires some explanation. Indeed, one member of the TLC who responded to my request for information via e-mail stated, your premise seems to me to be in error. You seem to be interested in examining the cultural intertwinings of the Mormons, Evangelicals and the TLC. It seems to me that there has to be an element of caring before there is any significance to the cultural intertwinings. This caring could be animus or alliance, but there has to be caring. If contiguous groups couldn’t care less, if there is no relevance in a relationship, it seems like there is then, by definition, no cultural significance or intertwining. Thus your research is a nonsequitur. You draw a conclusion that there is intertwining cultural relevance because of contiguity. (Don L. Peterson, my emphasis)

While I do think that members of the TLC have a doctrinal investment in perceiving themselves as separated out from the rest of the world (and I touched upon their belief in the “gathering of the Lord’s people out of the world” in the previous chapter [“Gathering of the Elect” my emphasis]), Peterson’s thoughtful comments deserve scrutiny. I agree  

¹. Methodology
with him that, finally, for meaningful cultural exchange to occur, contiguous groups must “care” about one another. Does such caring exist among the three groups under consideration here?

It takes little effort to establish that a dialogic relationship exists between Mormons and Evangelicals. Evangelicals annually travel hundreds of miles to attend The Mormon Miracle Pageant. During the 2004 season, I spoke with Evangelicals from as far away as Texas, Missouri, and Washington. When Eliason conducted research into the pageant for his dissertation in 1994, he reported an Evangelical “youth camp” coming down from Canada (205-06)! Some of the Evangelicals with whom I spoke told me they were full-time missionaries to the Mormons, and that they traveled to many of the church’s pageants, as well as to temple dedications and the church’s biannual General Conference in Salt Lake City. While they conceded that they would “save” anyone, their life’s mission was specifically to save Mormons.

I was given many pamphlets at the 2004 pageant, and they all implicitly or explicitly bear witness to an ongoing dialogue between Evangelicals and Mormons. For example, the following is the introduction to Epistle to My People (2001), a pamphlet written by Mark D. Champneys of Saints Alive in Jesus: “An actual letter written by an ex-Mormon Christian to a hurting LDS lady who had written in response to Mark’s web site: exmormon.net. However, this is really a letter reaching out to all Mormon people from one who found an amazing joy and peace outside the LDS Church—not from a church, but from a wondrous God in a personal way” (1). In another tract, The L.D.S. Gospel in a Nutshell (2004), Champneys plaintively explains, “The person who gave this tract would love to explain this good news to you. Would you be willing to talk to
him/her? In Mormonism you have nothing, so what is there to lose?” A pamphlet distributed by Mormonism Research Ministry, Some Questions to Ponder, states, “We are a group of Evangelical Christians who are deeply concerned for the Mormon people.”

Clearly Evangelicals “care” about Mormons. Establishing whether Mormons care about Evangelicals is somewhat more difficult, given that Mormons don’t intentionally travel from Manti to attend Evangelical pageants. Indeed, Mormon periodicals and the local newspaper only obliquely acknowledge this annual visitor. I will not deal with this subject at length here, since the following chapters will discuss in much greater detail the interaction between these two groups on the streets of Manti. Suffice it to say that Mormon visitors to the pageant do take the Evangelicals’ pamphlets, do stop in the street and wrangle over Mormon history and doctrine, and are always aware, usually with some disdain, sometimes with a sense of humor, the presence of the “anti-Mormons.”

While most of my Mormon subjects found their tactics mildly annoying but didn’t begrudge their right to spread their version of the gospel, one Sanpete native told me, “I think they are Satan’s tools in his hands; what they’re trying to destroy, the true church. I think they’re evil people, I do.”

So how does the diminutive TLC figure into what seems to be an encounter between two religious titans? Is Peterson correct in asserting that the TLC is not involved in any way, and has neither “animus [n]or alliance” to either group? Evidence suggests otherwise. The True and Living Church is not merely a Protestant church with an anonymous preacher at its head; it is a “splinter” religion, having broken away from the mainstream Mormon Church. But more than that. The TLC claims that the Mormon Church fell into apostasy and lost its claim to be “the only true and living church upon
the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased” (Doctrine and Covenants 1.30). True and Living Church Prophet, James D. Harmston, proclaims that on November 25, 1990 he was visited by Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, all who placed their hands upon his head and “[o]nce again, the everlasting gospel was committed to man on earth by the angels of God” (“Testimony of the Prophet James D. Harmston”). However to establish its legitimacy, Harmston and his followers needed to not only ground their religion spiritually, but they needed to delegitimize the Mormon Church. Their rhetoric is often quite heated, as they attack the Mormon Church both politically and spiritually. They accuse the church of “dark involvement and collusion with wicked government and secret combinations such as the United Nations and the Federal Government” (“Declaration to the Apostles of the LDS Church”). Further,

This church is now the whore which has polluted her promise of becoming the bride of Christ and has been infiltrated by evil to the extent that it will soon be destroyed when the destructions of the Lord are sent upon the earth. […] We, as Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, bear solemn witness that the LDS Church has gone whoring after Babylon and the vain things of the world, has built up the kingdom of the devil and apostatized from her earlier mission and charge.

Given the predominant Mormon population in Manti, it is little wonder that, according to one news story written in 1994, some “longstanding residents […] have not hidden their bitter resentment toward the rapidly growing group” (Chris Jorgensen “Ex-Mormons”). Such rhetoric is not intended to build bridges. Indeed, the TLC website featured several direct attacks on the Mormon Church: “Declaration to the Apostles of the LDS Church,
25 May 1995,” “To the First Presidency, Quorum of Twelve Apostles and Authorities of the LDS Church,” “Stop Worshiping the LDS Church,” and “Why Do We Specifically Call Out the Iniquity and Apostasy of the LDS Church?” Even those topics and testimonies that don’t specifically deal with the Mormon Church often mention it in passing; for example, Bart L. Malstrom, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, shares his testimony of leaving the Mormon Church for the TLC: “The L.D.S. church has rejected or changed all of the saving ordinances and laws of the Gospel, thereby offering many a false hope in Christ to all who believe in her.”

Certainly these attempts to delegitimize the mainstream church belie Peterson’s claim that the TLC has neither “animus [n]or alliance” to the Latter-day Saints. His claim probably rests on the fact that on April 15, 1999 the TLC removed the contents of its large website and posted only this:

This is an official and binding pronouncement sent out to the peoples of the earth on behalf of the Priesthood leadership of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of The Last Days in Manti, Utah.

God has commanded us by revelation to cease our labors of preaching and warning to errant Israel and the nations of the earth. The day has now arrived that God has shut the mouths of His servants and will begin to do His own work of rendering judgment and calamity upon the wicked and ungodly. (“True and Living Church”)

Thus, Peterson and other members of the TLC may maintain that they now no longer care about what happens to the outside world: “In the days of Noah, the time arrived that Noah ceased his warnings and exhortations to a wicked generation and boarded the Ark.
It is now time for the rains of destruction to begin to consume the nations of the earth” (“True and Living Church”). Yet logic would suggest that the TLC’s legitimacy continues to rest upon the Mormon Church’s illegitimacy, and thus it would continue to be of concern to members. Couple that with the fact that members of the TLC are a small minority living among an overwhelming majority of Latter-day Saints. Constant interaction cannot be avoided—indeed, is not avoided—and this daily reminder of the presence of the Other would suggest a continued “caring.” Finally, when I spoke with members of the TLC during the summer of 2004, they confirmed their continued interest in the Mormon Church. One member who wishes to remain anonymous denounced the Mormon Church in harsh terms, justifying his theological arguments to me by arguing first against what he considered the Mormon Church’s false doctrines. Even Peterson, who considered *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* “irrelevant,” claimed that the aberrant doctrine communicated therein “pollutes Manti, temple hill, and the Sanpete [V]alley.”

Establishing “care” between Evangelicals and the TLC is a more difficult task than establishing such between either Evangelicals and Mormons or Mormons and the TLC, given that Evangelicals specifically travel to Manti for the crowds gathering for *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*, and those crowds are overwhelmingly Mormon. Evangelicals focus the majority of their efforts on the area immediately around the pageant grounds and thus are less likely to encounter members of the TLC unless those members make an appearance at the pageant. Still, some Evangelicals have taken an interest in the True and Living Church, seeing in it a logical outcome of the “cultish” doctrines of Mormonism. Evangelical Tim Martin of the Watchman Fellowship (a “ministry of Christian discernment, focusing on cults and new religious movements”) provides an internet
profile of the TLC to interested Christians. While Martin’s goal is ostensibly educational, he seems most interested in the sensational: “Harmston reports having lived several important roles in religious and secular history: Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Benjamin Franklin. Gordon B. Hinckley, the current prophet of the LDS Church, was Cain in the Bible” according to Harmston. (In 1999, the Watchman Fellowship conducted a mission trip to Manti, so they may have encountered members of the TLC.) The website *Helping Mormons Reach Perfection* contains a news story about *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* that spends a great deal of space discussing the TLC (including stills from an A&E documentary on the group). The same website also hosts the entire, now-defunct TLC website—much to the chagrin of a couple of TLC members with whom I spoke. Mormonism Research Ministry publishes *Mormonism Researched*, a quarterly newsletter. It has dedicated two of its issues to examining the True and Living Church: “Manti Splinter Group Predicts End of Time” (1999) and “Manti Polygamous Group Now Unsure of Exact Timing of the Second Coming” (2000). The group’s director, Bill McKeever, frequently attends the pageant, and I interviewed him during the 2004 pageant season. While the Evangelicals’ primary focus is on members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it seems abundantly clear that they “care” about members of the TLC, harboring some mixture of “animus or alliance.”

Can we establish that the TLC “cares” about Evangelicals? Doing so is more difficult, given that they have less direct contact with Evangelicals unless they choose to attend the pageant or place themselves in the area surrounding the pageant grounds. And while the now-defunct TLC website overflows with heated rhetoric about the apostate
Mormon Church, it says little about other religions. I specifically asked Don L. Peterson what he thought of the Evangelicals at the pageant and he replied,

> Mostly we think the Evangelical Christians are fools. They do not comprehend the Bible, ‘primitive’ or ancient Christianity or even what they think they believe. For the most part, the E. C. are just promoting broad[-]based Christianity of the “feel good, love everybody, and be tolerant” type of religion[.] except they are not tolerant of Mormons or fundamentalist Mormons.

Philip Savage, presiding patriarch of the TLC, seems to disagree with Peterson’s assessment. Rather than not comprehending the Bible or even knowing what they believed, Savage praises Evangelicals for being “well-equipped scripturally.” In fact, “Mormons are basically [. . .] not scriptorians; most Mormons do not understand doctrines, and so when they meet one of these Evangelical people, uh, the Evangelical people will eat them alive when it comes to doctrine and Scriptures [. . .].” An anonymous TLC source told me that he once attended the pageant and was listening to a debate between a Christian and a Mormon, the Christian being knowledgeable (in his assessment) and the Mormon not. When he interrupted to agree with the Evangelical on some point *against* the Mormon, he said the Evangelical—knowing he was a member of the TLC—viciously turned on him. He said he had no respect for someone who couldn’t master his prejudices for the truth’s sake.

While I admit that the TLC’s “care” for Evangelicals is the weakest link in our multidirectional triumvirate of care among the three groups, the evidence seems to strongly suggest that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints living in
Manti, Evangelicals Christians who travel to Manti, and members of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days are not merely culturally contiguous groups that share neither animus nor alliance, but are, indeed, culturally contiguous groups that share a complex mixture of animus and alliance. The two weeks of The Mormon Miracle Pageant are an ideal place to study the interaction of these three groups, given that the time and place of the pageant provide us with a microcosm of the larger Mormon culture. The pageant can be viewed as something of a “pressure cooker” wherein the many ingredients that exist throughout the year are brought together into one limited place during one set time to interact with—positively or negatively—one another.

II. How Wide the Divides

A. Are Mormons Christians?

So why do these three groups come into conflict? As Stephen E. Robinson, Professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University, notes, “I must confess my amazement that two communities with as much in common in so many areas as Latter-day Saints and Evangelicals are not on better terms” (Blomberg and Robinson 10). The issues are many and deep, and it is not the purpose of this dissertation to explore and exhaust them all, but merely to reveal the most salient. Perhaps the ideal starting point is the Mormon desire to be seen as Christian—and the Christian desire to deny them entrance into that community. In a survey done by Scott Gordon and Dennis Egget in 2000, only six percent of Christian clergy categorized Mormons as Christian. Bill Broadway notes that
The rejection of Mormonism extends well beyond Southern Baptists and other evangelicals to include the most liberal Christian denominations. In a key sign of that rejection, a theological line in the sand, most traditional churches require baptism of all Mormon converts to their faith—the same way Mormons require converts from other churches to be rebaptized.

(B9)

Some Evangelicals claim that Mormons fired the first salvo in this doctrinal offensive when Joseph Smith claimed that God told him he must join no existing church, “for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that 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’ ” (Joseph Smith—History 1.19). Bill McKeever, Director of Mormonism Research Ministry, told me, “We can’t forget that it was Joseph Smith who launched the first attack; he’s the one that claimed that God told him that all the churches were wrong, that all their creeds were an abomination.” Some argue, such as Protestants Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling in *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (1999), that Mormon “scriptures virtually forbid [Latter-day] Saints to recognize that the great churches of Christianity—Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant—have any authentic claim to be Christian” (319-20). Despite theological claims and counterclaims, the Christian community as a whole is clearly dominant in this terminological power struggle, and some Evangelicals have been so successful in branding Mormonism a non-Christian cult
that in 1995 the Mormon Church hired an international public-relations firm “to combat what they saw as unfair media characterizations” (Sheler 33).

Mormons claim they are Christian because, quite simply, they believe in Jesus Christ. When an Evangelical refuses a Latter-day Saint the designation of Christian, a common Mormon rejoinder is, “But the name of our church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints!” Evangelicals and other Christians argue that more than mere belief in Christ is necessary to qualify for the moniker Christian—after all, David Koresh and Jim Jones, to one degree or another, preached Christ. Richard John Neuhaus claims that Christianity is defined by more than just doctrine:

- Christianity is the past and present reality of the society composed of the Christian people. As is said in the Nicene Creed, “We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” That reality encompasses doctrine, ministry, liturgy, and a rule of life. Christians disagree about precisely where that Church is to be located historically and at present, but almost all agree that it is to be identified with the Great Tradition defined by the apostolic era through at least the first four ecumenical councils, and continuing in diverse forms to the present day. (“Is Mormonism Christian?” 101)

Because this “is the Christianity that LDS teaching rejects and condemns as an abomination and [a] fraud,” Mormonism cannot be considered Christian (101). While Neuhaus considers Mormonism a “Christian derivative,” he argues that a “closer parallel might be with Islam”—Islam being a derivative of Judaism and Christianity (102). Interestingly, in a short article written five years later, Neuhaus concludes that individual
Mormons may be Christian despite their doctrine: “So are there Mormons who are Christians? I think so. Is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day [sic] Saints a Christian communion? I think we must answer no” (“While We’re at It” 63-64).

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the question of what is precisely Christian in light of the nuance of history, I can examine certain central doctrines⁵ that seem to separate Mormons and Christians, doctrines that I encountered again and again while speaking with Evangelicals at The Mormon Miracle Pageant. A Christian must believe in the concept of the Trinity (that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are three aspects of the same being), that the Bible is the sole word of God, and that salvation is through grace alone. (Of course, even using these three standards is not without controversy, because some Evangelicals define Christian so narrowly that Catholics are defined outside the term, even other Protestants.)

First, Mormons believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are three separate beings, though completely united in purpose. The First Vision—perhaps the defining doctrinal moment in Mormon history—communicated two important pieces of information: 1) that the Father and the Son are separate beings and 2) that they both have physical bodies of flesh and bone. Mainstream Christians consider both assertions heretical. Believing that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are separate beings leads, inexorably, to polytheism,⁶ and believing that God inhabits an actual body limits him—no longer is he an infinite being.⁷ (Christians do believe that the Son became incarnate during his earthly ministry and resurrected, but God persists in spirit. Mormons believe the Father and the Son are permanently embodied.)
Second, Mormons do not believe that the Bible is the sole word of God. Indeed, one of the most striking theological innovations of Mormonism is to declare that the heavens remain continually open, that the canon of Scripture is therefore open-ended. Mainstream Christians believe that the Bible contains everything necessary unto life and salvation; to assert that any new revelation could be had or needed would be to assert that the Bible was deficient. Mormons believe in the Bible, the Book of Mormon (a work of Scripture purportedly chronicling ancient American history), the Doctrine and Covenants (a collection of revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith), and the Pearl of Great Price (a collection of smaller writings, such as an ostensible translation of an Egyptian scroll, Smith’s revision of a chapter of Matthew, Smith’s personal history, et al.). But beyond that, Mormons believe that the words of their leaders, while not canonized as Scripture, may be just as scriptural in their timeframe. (For instance, the current prophet may give a talk in which he gives specific guidance to the members. This is taken to be binding upon the membership of the church—revelation from God—although timely in its importance. Ten years down the road, the church may have a new issue to deal with.

As Mormon Stephen E. Robinson notes, the pronouncements of church leaders are actually more authoritative than printed Scripture, given that they are the official interpreters of Scripture: “For Latter-day Saints, the church’s guarantee of doctrinal correctness lies primarily in the living prophet, and only secondarily in the preservation of the living text. This is, after all, the New Testament model. The ancient apostles and prophets themselves were the primary oracles” (Blomberg and Robinson 57). Evangelical Richard J. Mouw, President of Fuller Theological Seminary, agrees with Robinson’s assessment: “[I]n restoring some of the features of Old Testament Israel,
Mormonism has also restored the kinds of *authority patterns* that guided the life of Israel. The Old Testament people of God were not a people of the Book as such—mainly because for most of their history there was no completed Book. Ancient Israel was guided by an open canon and the leadership of prophets. And it is precisely this pattern of communal authority that Mormonism restored” (11). Mouw concludes, “Evangelicals may insist that Mormonism has too many Books. But the proper Mormon response is that even these Books are not enough to give authoritative guidance to the present-day community of the faithful.”

Third, Evangelicals deny Mormons the label *Christian* because they claim Mormons do not believe in salvation through grace alone. Evangelicals often cite 2 Nephi 25.23 (from the Book of Mormon) as evidence against Latter-day Saints, which says, “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (my emphasis). Evangelicals charge that Mormons do not believe that Christ’s atonement was sufficient in and of itself, but that, in addition to his atonement, Mormons believe they must engage in good works to earn their way to heaven. When I attended the Ephraim Church of the Bible on June 24, 2004, Pastor Chip Thompson made this point emphatically by saying that Mormons spit on Christ’s free gift to them. Evangelicals claim that there is arrogance on the part of anyone who thinks that any good work can narrow the gap between him- or herself and God.

Certainly it is not my purpose to resolve this issue here, but I think it is more complex than the other issues I have mentioned. The Book of Mormon makes it clear in several verses that if Christ had not atoned for humanity’s sins, we would be inexorably
lost (for example, “For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished” [Mosiah 15.19]). The Mormon response is that, yes, we are saved by grace in the sense that without Jesus Christ we would all be forever barred from salvation; however, the fact that Christ atoned for our sins does not mean that he wishes for us to cease working goodness and repenting of our sins. The goal of this life is, after all, to become more and more like our Heavenly Father. Indeed, this is the linchpin of the issue: What is the purpose of this life? For an Evangelical, the purpose of this life is to accept Jesus Christ as one’s savior; that being done, one is saved. It may be nice to help old ladies across the street or perform missionary work or do charity work, but one is still saved (that is, good works do not add to one’s chances of being saved in any way). For a Mormon, the purpose of this life is to become more and more like God, which means excelling in righteousness, but also means excelling in school or athletics or the arts. One constantly grows by making good choices and by striving to refine oneself. It is not about attaining a better celestial mansion, but the perfection of the self becomes the goal.9

The question of salvation also becomes important in the discussion of grace. What is meant by salvation? Most Evangelicals mean going to heaven (which also means, not unimportantly, avoiding hell). One reason that Mormonism has been considered heretical by some Christians is that virtually everyone is saved in a kingdom of glory. (There is no place where souls burn for eternity in lakes of fire.) Mormonism posits a three-tiered “heaven,” or three different kingdoms of glory. Rather than accepting Jesus at some point in one’s life and going to heaven (= not going to hell),
Mormons believe that life is a time of preparation, and at the final judgment God will be not so much a judge as an arbiter, sending us to the kingdom of glory for which we have prepared ourselves. Evangelicals are essentially correct in asserting that in Mormon theology the believer who merely accepts Jesus as Savior will not necessarily reach the highest, or Celestial, kingdom—he or she must prepare for that kingdom by engaging in certain works and living a certain lifestyle. While this may seem like hair-splitting to the outsider, the Evangelical assertion that Mormons “believe they can work their way to heaven” is not precisely true—at least, the implications Evangelicals imbue the statement with are not true. Mormons cannot “work their way to heaven,” they must rely on Christ’s atonement; Christ now having atoned, Mormons can prepare themselves for a certain kingdom of glory. The Evangelical assertion that Mormons do not believe in salvation through grace is, in my opinion, considerably misleading since Mormons believe that virtually all people will inherit a kingdom of glory (as opposed to the Evangelical belief that the majority of humankind will suffer for eternity in hell).10

B. Additional Mormon doctrines

In addition to the doctrines listed above, several other Mormon doctrines merit further discussion, as they will be necessary to understand the complexities of identity construction, naming, and public display at the pageant. The following list is not comprehensive, but will highlight those doctrines most salient to modern-day Mormon identity.

While certainly all religions help to construct the worldview of their devotees, Mormonism offers its adherents not only a theological location in the cosmos but an
entire lifestyle. Mormonism does share with other religions a contradistinction between the physical and the spiritual, but it is not so pronounced; indeed, at times the distinction collapses completely. For example, as mentioned above, Mormons believe that God is much closer to humankind in his appearance and being: He inhabits a body of flesh and bone. This creates limitations; God is not omnipotent, at least not in the traditional sense of the term. God cannot do merely as he pleases but is bound by the laws of righteousness which exist outside of and external to himself. The Book of Mormon teaches that if God were to work unrighteousness, “God would cease to be God” (Alma 42.13). In other words, God does not decide by fiat what is righteousness or sinfulness; rather, he adheres—like we do—to a series of external, irrevocable, unchanging laws. The believer must learn to adapt to certain unchanging, eternal laws rather than, in postmodern fashion, shaping life to suit him or herself.

The implications of these ideas is that the earthly sphere replicates (or should) the heavenly sphere. We have not only a Heavenly Father but a Heavenly Mother, and our life’s purpose is to find an eternal mate and become like our heavenly parents. We, like God, exist in social relationships (with spouses, children, and relatives) that can exist throughout eternity. The righteous family life a Mormon develops on this earth is a precursor to the eternal relationships he or she will have in the afterlife; indeed, this life is “training” for godhood, a time not to be wasted. (This Mormon ideal minimizes, if not erases, the distinction between now and eternity. Eternity is now, and now is eternity. To fritter away the days in trivial pursuits while awaiting one’s heavenly reward is to misunderstand the nature of eternity.) One implication of these doctrines is that the afterlife is not, in most respects, much different than this life. If the Mormon cannot
learn to live happily and productively in family and social relationships here, he or she will be unprepared to do so there. This is further emphasized by the fact that in Mormonism salvation cannot be an individual effort, but must be accomplished as a community. Parents must “seal” themselves to their children and children to their parents, and genealogy work must be done for those who have passed on, so that all can be united in a great “chain” of relationships. (This uniting does not ensure that any individual will be saved in the Celestial Kingdom—one must still prepare oneself—but one cannot hope to inherit God’s highest kingdom if he or she does not unite with a community of believers.)

Mormonism also claims to encompass all truths; or, said differently, there is no distinction between theology and any other “-ology.” Mathematics, biology, and chemistry are as much a part of the gospel as charity, brotherly love, and the law of chastity (although, for fairly obvious reasons, Mormon Church services tend to focus on the spiritual subject matter as opposed to secular). As Joseph F. Smith explained in 1908, “We believe in all truth, no matter to what subject it may refer. [. . .] We are willing to receive all truth, from whatever source it may come; for truth will stand, truth will endure” (1). The implication of this belief is that plowing a field or building a fence can be seen as part of an entire lifestyle that is religious in nature. Traditional Christianity seems to posit that this life is a time of trial and hardship to be followed by an eternity of celestial rest. Mormonism, in contrast, sees this life as part of eternity, a time to develop and refine skills that we will continue to develop and refine even after death. Indeed, there is no celestial rest that awaits us, only a continuous celestial work.¹⁴
C. Evangelical doctrines

While wading through Mormon doctrine can be difficult, Evangelical Christian doctrine is generally easier to comprehend. As we have examined, Evangelicals believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, believe that the Bible is the sole word of God, and believe that salvation is through the grace of Jesus Christ. Craig L. Blomberg defines Evangelicals as “theologically conservative Protestants who make the truthfulness, authority and relevance of the Old and New Testaments central to their worldview, who have come to experience salvation from sin through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the forgiveness he offers on the basis of his death on the cross, and who believe in the importance of actively sharing that faith with others” (Blomberg and Robinson 27-28). Blomberg further defines Evangelical as one who dissociates him- or herself from theologically liberal Christians on the one hand and fundamentalists on the other (28). Determining doctrine beyond that can be difficult, and even counterproductive, as many Evangelicals specifically eschew doctrine in favor of the simplicity of pure devotion. One of the reasons for avoiding doctrinal tests is that, since the Reformation, Protestants have developed the belief that one is saved by grace alone, and not through any additional work or adherence to doctrine. While Blomberg readily admits that “[b]eyond their essential beliefs, Evangelicals disagree on all sorts of questions” (31), these disagreements are held to be theoretical at worst, not affecting the salvation of the believer. Thus, Evangelicals tend more toward devotion than theological rigor. Blomberg does make a few observations about Evangelicals that could be considered doctrinal:
• “Evangelicals stress that no ecclesiastical body or individual Christian can make proclamations that are on par with the authority of Scripture.”

• “[T]he Bible is inerrant” (33 emphasis in original).

Does doctrine matter for Evangelicals? When I attended the Ephraim Church of the Bible, an individual who offered a prayer praised God that people from so many different Evangelical denominations with doctrinal differences could put aside issues that ultimately didn’t matter—after all, they had all been saved through the grace of Jesus Christ—and could unite to witness to the Mormons. The counter-Mormon website MormonInfo.org says that, in contrast to Mormonism’s claim to be the one true church, Christianity is “made up of all those true believers from various local denominations or visible churches. Unity in the Church does not demand complete uniformity in its various manifestations. God loves diversity. Yet the Church’s unity is Christ” (“Differences between Mormonism and Christianity”).

D. Doctrines of the True and Living Church

The True and Living Church makes essentially the same claim as the Mormon Church—that Christ’s original church fell into apostasy soon after his death and had to be restored in these latter days by Joseph Smith—with the additional claim that the church led to Utah by Brigham Young also fell into apostasy, requiring God to again restore his church. Most members of the TLC cite the changing of the temple endowment in 1990 as the “final straw” in their litany against the LDS Church, although they also claim other moments as causing them trouble, such as when the church ordained black men to the priesthood in 1978 (“I remember the year after I returned home from my L.D.S. mission
when they gave the Priesthood to the seed of Cain”) and the church’s silence about crucial events regarding the Second Coming during the 1990s (“I watched for the leaders of the L.D.S. Church to tell us what was going on and what we should do to rid ourselves of evil government. To my amazement, the L.D.S. leaders not only failed to warn us, but they sided with and even promoted wicked government” [Scott Lavell Koller]).

The True and Living Church believes in most of the fundamental doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Considering that church apostate, however, and that they now have a mandate for restoration, they have returned to the doctrines as they believe Joseph Smith had them in his day. One of the most radical returns is to polygamy: “We declare, as was taught by Joseph Smith and the former prophets of this dispensation, that plural marriage is the marriage order of the heavens. […] We believe as Joseph and his contemporaries taught, that a man or a woman cannot attain the highest degree of exaltation without living this high and refining principle” (“True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days: Official Statement”). However, unlike some polygamous groups, the TLC claims to forbid arranged marriages, and “no woman is forced to stay in the marriage against her wishes” (Pratt “Plural Marriage”). Purportedly about half the adult male members have more than one wife (Dan Egan “Manti”).

The TLC walks an interesting line between claiming to be the authentic representation of Joseph Smith’s Mormonism and creating a few doctrines that are completely unique. This is a perilous position because the TLC’s claim to legitimacy rests upon the fact that the LDS Church has either altered or dispensed with some of Smith’s teachings. To create new teachings could pose a dilemma—and at least five of
their Twelve Apostles have left the church since its founding, although I do not know the reasons for their departure. Kathryn M. Daynes, author of *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840-1910* (2001), notes that

these dissenting polygamous groups form as a protest against adaptations to the changing modern world made by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Claiming to be the true heirs of the nineteenth-century church, groups such as the TLC reestablish the practice of polygamy. They seek to be—to rework Jan Shipps’s phrase—a “latter-day recapitulation” of early Mormonism. But their recapitulation is incomplete: in attempting to recover some practices from the past, they jettison or ignore others. (213)

This creates a necessary tension, as the TLC offers for legitimacy its return to original Mormonism, yet also, for various reasons, offers doctrinal innovations that are clearly at odds with claims of recapitulation.

One doctrine that the TLC does speak of at some length is multiple mortal probations. The idea, explains Apostle Randolph Maudsley, “is reincarnation in the strictest sense of the word.” The TLC does not believe that members will be reincarnated as animals, insects, or vegetation (as do some Eastern religions), but as different degrees of humanity. Multiple mortal probations allow a person to have several lifetimes’ worth of experience. However what this doctrine implies is that different races are at different stages in their eternal development, and that, depending on their valiance in this life, they may be reborn “higher up” the racial ladder in a succeeding life. “Harmston believes that black persons are ‘cursed by God’ and must prove their worth in their time here on earth.
He teaches that each person goes through ‘multiple mortal probations’ where this proving and testing goes on. Those who fail are reborn as blacks” (Johns 36). An anonymous TLC informant analogized the priesthood denial to blacks as similar to putting a child in time-out: You do not do so because you hate the child, but because you want to correct the child. Blacks have been put into “time-out” for this life, and when this life is over, if they have been righteous, they will “move up.” Likewise, whites, if disobedient, will “move down.”

But the doctrine also implies that one has lived several past lives. Anticult websites such as the Watchman Fellowship take delight in relating that Harmston believes he was Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and Benjamin Franklin. Eric Johnson of Mormonism Researched says that Harmston also claims he was Joseph Smith. Perhaps the allure of such a doctrine is that it allows an individual to claim a noble heritage while tarring opponents with a scurrilous one (Harmston claims that LDS Prophet Gordon B. Hinckley was Cain, according to Evangelical Tim Martin). Apostle Bart Malstrom said the doctrine “was like someone took a load off of my back. To know this gave me the confidence to be who I am” (qtd. in Johnson “Manti Splinter Group” 6-7).

The TLC also believes, like the Mormon Church, in vicarious ordinances for those who have passed on. The Mormon Church believes, however, that for God to be just, these ordinances must be offered to all people who have ever lived. Individuals in the spiritual world will then have the chance to accept or reject these ordinances. (This is largely a theoretical belief since, obviously, it is impossible to know the identities of everyone who has ever lived.) The TLC, in contrast, performs selective ordinances,
believing that not everyone deserves the offer of redemption. TLC Patriarch Philip Savage gave as an explanation that Mormons “will take anybody’s name through the temple and seal them they say in, in a lineage to be resurrected and, uh, that means into the presence of Christ, and, uh, that’s a utter satanic [sic], I mean, it, it, it just doesn’t make any sense [. . .].” While, contra Savage, Latter-day Saints do not believe that the act of sealing family members together ensures entrance into the presence of Christ (see my discussion of Mormon doctrines above), TLC doctrine is, apparently, that only those considered worthy are to have vicarious ordinances performed in their behalf.

III. Public Display

Jack Santino, in his Signs of War and Peace: Social Conflict and the Use of Public Symbols in Northern Ireland (2001), includes under the rubric of public display such things as parades, flags, musical instruments, costumes, murals, fireworks displays, effigy burnings, and spontaneous shrines (2). These forms of public display can differ from one another quite dramatically; “for instance, a parade can exist simply as a parade, or it can be one component of a larger celebratory or ritual event. Conversely, these forms can be broken down into other constituent components, also symbolically significant” (12). But he also notes that people can be “public displays”: “In addition to all this are the patrols of British soldiers [in Northern Ireland], on foot and in armored vehicles through the streets, a visual and tangible presence of another sort” (1). Santino notes that “[t]he materiality of these objects and events notwithstanding, in most cases we are dealing with kinesthetic processes: parading, beating a drum, wearing a uniform, and marching” (12). Public displays, therefore, can be both product and process. The term
“public,” as used by Santino, implies unrestricted public access to an event, usually held outdoors: “The term ‘public’ here has to do with spectatorship, rather than a Habermassian sense of shared civic interest” (29). Roger D. Abrahams uses the term public display to explore “the parade, the pageant, or the ball game [. . .] expositions and meets, games and carnivals and auctions” (“Shouting Match” 303, 304). Abraham uses the term to refer to “planned-for public occasions” in which “accumulated feelings may be channeled into contest, drama or some other form of display” (303).

In considering The Mormon Miracle Pageant and its environs, I will take into account both human and material aspects of public display. For example, I will consider the pageant not so much for its message, but for its meta-messages: the sight of ten to 20,000 Mormons gathered together in one small area to celebrate and reaffirm Mormonism. I will also consider the message of the Evangelical Christians on the street outside the pageant, turning the street into something of a “gauntlet” through which Latter-day Saint pageant-goers must pass before they can reach the “safety” of the pageant grounds. Other examples of public display will be considered, from the signs held aloft by some Evangelical Christians to the anti-Brigham Young T-shirts worn by others. Disruptions of public display will also be considered, as some individuals attempt to subvert the simple binary of Mormon/Evangelical.

Public display becomes paramount at The Mormon Miracle Pageant because of Mircea Eliade’s assertion in The Sacred and the Profane (1962) that a people can become what they display (see also Conquergood “Communication as Performance” 35). Roger D. Abrahams calls events like public dances, parades, pageants, etc. “display events”—“in which actions and objects are invested with meaning and values [and] are put ‘on
display’” (“Shouting Match” 303). In his article “Shouting Match at the Border: The Folklore of Display Events” (1981), Abrahams notes that local pride movements, even those with separatist political orientations, highlight differences “not in order to close off the community’s borders but to give the community a more powerful position in the national polity or the world of nations” (308). Such folk festivals are usually framed so that “non-members of the group may understand and appreciate what is going on” (308).

In the case of *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*, Latter-day Saints, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, do have the paradoxical desire of seeing themselves as separated from mainstream American society (ultimately belonging to a society that transcends the United States of America), while at the same time being the ultimate Americans. The pageant’s goal, however, is clearly proselytism, and it is trying to reach out to both a knowledgeable Mormon audience and an uninitiated non-Mormon audience.

**IV. Identity Construction and Performativity**

The notion of performativity will be important for a full understanding of what occurs at *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*, for not only do we have an actual theatrical performance in the pageant, but we have the performance of the pageant in the streets of Manti, as Evangelicals, Mormons, and members of the TLC “perform” their identities—and in the performance thereof they “find” themselves. Erving Goffman’s classic sociological work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) will help me to discuss issues of self- and group-identification at *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*. 
Goffman’s perspective is that of “the theatrical performance; the principles derived are dramaturgical ones. [. . .] The part one individual plays is tailored to the parts played by the others present, and yet these others also constitute the audience” (xi). Goffman believes that people possess two main features when conceived of as actors: performer and character. An individual will “perform” a character to an audience with the hope of communicating some sort of message. Roles are often arbitrary and fluid, and this explains the context-dependant nature of the actor’s self. Certain “characters” are more effective for certain audiences—that is, certain characters make the information delivered seem more believable or credible.

The same functions that pertain to individuals also pertain to groups, helping to explain the structure and function of institutions. Goffman believes that individuals rarely act alone; instead, they often belong to and act in accordance with the wishes of a team, group, or other larger social structure. The roles the various groups perform or offer represent the basic structure of institutions; corporate in nature, they reflect the complexity of the internal workings of organizations. Not only do organizations have a vested interest in proactively defining themselves, but they have an interest in defining themselves against other organizations that may seem similar in nature (i.e., organizations that offer or perform similar roles).

Another basic feature of Goffman’s theatrical metaphor is the role of staging and props. His primary spatial metaphor is the distinction between backstage and frontstage. Frontstage is where actors perform specifically for their intended target audience (107). It usually contains props or scenery that reinforce the message, identity, and image that the actors are trying to convey (e.g., a pharmacist wearing a white lab coat). The
backstage is where actors, shielded from the target audience’s view, may switch from their onstage roles to ones intended only for in-group interaction (112) (e.g., a pharmacist laughing with other pharmacists that what would cure the hypochondriacal Mrs. Johnson is a daily dose of red Skittles).

V. Imagined Communities

A. Policing the boundaries

Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983, 1991) helps us to make sense of these notions of community and nationality by defining *nation* as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). With little alteration, this definition can be applied to the Mormon, Evangelical, and TLC communities. While not sovereign in a political sense, they imagine themselves as ultimately sovereign, falling under the jurisdiction of the greatest authority, one who will someday establish a kingdom to supersede all earthly governments—and except for the TLC, the members of these organizations “will never know most of their fellow-members [. . .], yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Anderson continues: “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). These three religions are, from a certain perspective, projections of one another: Protestantism came out of Catholicism, Mormonism came out of Protestantism, and the True and Living Church came out of Mormonism. They are
imagined differently, yes, but the *style* in which they are imagined poses a threat, each to the other: Mormonism threatens Christianity and the True and Living Church threatens Mormonism; while Christianity poses its own challenges to the uniqueness of Mormonism, and a “return” to the fundamentals of Mormonism poses a challenge to the TLC. Thus, depending on circumstances, each group may want to maintain, expand, or shrink its own borders or that of the encroaching Other.

It is the limitedness of the community that concerns us here, for, I argue, each one of these groups poses an affront to the boundaries of the others. Anderson explains that as colonizing states entered the age of mechanical reproduction, they used the census, the map, and the museum as means of containment: “together, they profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion—the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry” (163-64). The census interests us here because, with the rise of modernity, the census-makers had little tolerance for ambiguity and incompleteness: “The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one—and only one—extremely clear place” (166). The effect of not only the census, but, as Anderson argues, the colonial imposition of census, map, and museum

was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state’s real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth.

*The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore—in principle—countable.* (184 my emphasis)
Mormons, in contrast to the clarity described, threaten to pollute the “clear place” of Evangelical Christianity by being even, as I mentioned in the last chapter, better Christians than Christians. They are simultaneously distant from mainstream Christianity while being the prime examples of Christianity. For example, *Christianity Today*, in an article examining the success of Mormonism, relates the story of Michael B. Bennett who grew up hearing “the accusations many times: Mormons are not Christians.” Baptized at age twelve into the Baptist Church, he found members’ behavior inconsistent: “His friends at youth group fervently testified about Christ one week, then smoked dope the next. An adulterous deacon continued to hold office after a hasty confession. Gossip and backbiting preoccupied many churchgoers.” When he heard that Mormon Church leaders served without pay, his interests were piqued. He soon joined. “While LDS theology is what separates Mormonism from orthodox Christianity, it had little to do with Bennett’s attraction to America’s most successful homegrown religion.” Bennett was drawn to a community that “seemed genuinely to care and love” (Kennedy 25).

Bennett’s case is interesting in that it demonstrates the paradox of the “Mormon non-Christian Christian”: while doctrinally heterodox, Mormons are pragmatically orthodox. Bennett’s conversion had little to do with doctrinal commitment and mostly to do with communal devotion. This serves to illustrate the point that Mormons are committing a category error by aspiring to the designation of *Christian* while still espousing particular Mormon doctrines—indeed, their success at living a Christian lifestyle only exacerbates the problem, rather than alleviates it. The case of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) serves as an instructive counterexample here. After the murder of Joseph Smith, a power struggle for leadership
occurred in the church among Brigham Young and several others. While the majority followed Young to Utah, a handful of others followed diverse individuals and created such groups as the Bickertonites, Cutlerites, and Strangites (Ostling and Ostling 336). Among the most successful of the splinter groups was the Reorganized Church, headquartered in Independence, Missouri, and lead by Joseph Smith’s son, Joseph Smith III—the sole criterion for “prophetship” in this new organization being literal descent from Smith (Launius “RLDS Story” 84). While the RLDS Church espoused most of Joseph Smith’s original doctrines, they resolutely rejected polygamy, even going so far as to claim that Young had been the originator of the doctrine, not Smith. While I will not review the history of that organization here (see William Dean Russell or Roger D. Launius), in the twentieth century they liberalized their doctrines, including ordaining women to the priesthood in 1984 and ordaining a non-Smith descendant as prophet in 1996 (moves which, along with others, may have cost them as many as 100,000 members [Launius “RLDS Story” 84]). For numerous reasons, they found it expedient to Christianize their theology in a way unthinkable to Mormons: they changed their name to the Community of Christ, accepted the traditional concept of the Trinity, and, while still “recognizing” the Book of Mormon as scriptural (“Frequently Asked Questions”), there have been doubts expressed at the highest levels of leadership going back to the late 1960s about the book’s historicity (a “position paper” authored by the RLDS education department, including some members of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve, viewed the book as fiction authored by Joseph Smith [William Dean Russell 15]). While the Community of Christ still owns and maintains the Kirtland Temple in Kirtland, Ohio (a favorite tourist site for Mormons), and while they still profess interest
in early Mormon history, regarding Joseph Smith to be an interesting and charismatic American religious personage, they no longer believe in his exclusivist, restorationist mandate: they have become much more ecumenical. (Even an anticult website that harshly decries Mormonism says that the “RLDS are much more ‘Christian’ in their theology than the LDS. Many of the obvious excesses of the Mormons are not present” [Peter Scott].) Thus, the RLDS have given credence, unlike the Mormons, to the assertion that there is “one—and only one—extremely clear place.” The Mormons, in contrast, want the moniker of Christian without the concomitant dismissal of their distinctively non-Christian beliefs, thus creating a category problem.

Similarly, Evangelical Christianity threatens the uniqueness of Mormonism. While Mormons have been “Striving for Acceptance” (as one Washington Post article put it [Broadway, 2002])—which often means stressing similarities with mainstream Christianity—some Mormons have felt the loss of their own originality. When I interviewed Stephen Jensen, who participated in the pageant as a teenager in the 1980s, he said he had spoken with his mother about the new changes to the pageant. She commented that, perhaps, the reason they didn’t like the changes is that they were “biased” in favor of the old. Stephen responded:

“You bet it is we’re biased because we want it this way, you know, this is the way we saw—, this is the way we see Mormonism; we don’t see it whitewashed, we see it the way it is. We don’t want to blend in; we want to be different, you know. That’s it: we want to have our own identity, that’s who we are. Why should we be ashamed of it?” You know, versus, “Okay, let’s, let’s give in a little bit.” I think that’s the—, because we
have a history, I mean, I have a history that goes back, you know, in
Mormonism a hundred years, over a hundred years, a written history. So,
you know, I think that’s what separates them, versus a lot of new converts
and people in the city and people like that; they don’t have a history.18

While impossible to quantify, certainly the modern Mormon who has deep roots in the
church, as opposed to the recent convert (as is over half of the church’s membership at
present [Kennedy 28]), can chart his or her feelings towards the church’s course on a
spectrum from outright approval to neutrality to outright disapproval, with ambivalence
being the default position. Outright disapproval, of course, results in such groups as the
True and Living Church who state unequivocally that the “course of the LDS Church in
this 20th century has clearly been a compromise of the beliefs, doctrines, practices and
principles which Joseph Smith restored to this dispensation. The fear of men and
governments has been a more powerful force to [the LDS Church] than fearing God”
(“Declaration to the Apostles of the LDS Church”). But the point is that the more
Mormons emphasize doctrines they have in common with Christians, the “blurrier” the
line becomes between Mormon and Christian (Blomberg and Robinson 68), causing
Mormons to lose their originality.

Anderson’s discussion of Creole pioneers is instructive in this context. He notes
that in the 1800s, a Spaniard born in the Americas just days after his father’s arrival
would be consigned to a life of subordination, despite the fact that he shared with his
father a common ancestry, language, religion, and manners. This prejudice created
problems, as might be expected. Unlike the Indians that populated the Americas, the
Creoles
had readily at hand the political, cultural and military means for successfully asserting themselves. They were to be economically subjected and exploited, but they were also essential to the stability of the empire. One can see, in this light, a certain parallelism between the position of the creole magnates and of feudal barons, crucial to the sovereign’s power, but also a menace to it. (58)

Here we may draw a comparison between Evangelical Christianity and Mormonism. On the one hand, Mormonism is the necessary Other against which Evangelical Christianity recognizes itself as self, yet, on the other hand, Mormonism speaks the same language as Evangelical Christianity (both literally and metaphorically in America), has similar manners, a common ancestry (more or less), and, arguably, a similar religion. In other words, Mormonism is “a menace to” the “sovereign’s power” because it can successfully assert itself. An unnamed Evangelical interviewed on the counter-Mormon documentary Mission to Manti opined, “I believe in 200 years that, uh, if Evangelical Christianity doesn’t do anything that the LDS Church will wipe them out.” While this is hyperbole most likely aimed at motivating Evangelicals, a point still arises from his prophesy: Mormons are a force with which to reckon.

Yet the closer that Mormonism moves toward Christianity, the more room there is for a fundamentalist Mormonism. (I should note, however, that there has been a fundamentalist Mormon movement since the church renounced polygamy in 1890 and those who wished to continue living “the principle” could not do so within the confines of the LDS Church. Many of those so-called fundamentalist Mormons, however, harbored sympathetic feelings towards the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,
considering their brand of Mormonism simply a more difficult version of the religion, or a higher law. This is in contrast to the TLC who considers both Mormonism and fundamentalist Mormonism to be apostate and corrupt.) However despite the LDS Church’s “Christianization,” the TLC still finds it necessary to police the boundaries between the LDS Church and itself, creating a sharp distinction in rhetoric (“the LDS Church has gone whoring after Babylon” [“Declaration”]), if not always in doctrine. Indeed, as Evangelical Christians and others argue, Joseph Smith’s original doctrines still remain in effect, although unpracticed, at present in the LDS Church. Harold Bloom “cheerfully” prophesies that “some day, not too far on in the twenty-first century, the Mormons will have enough political and financial power to sanction polygamy again. Without it, in some form or other, the complete vision of Joseph Smith never can be fulfilled” (123). While I “cheerfully” disagree with Bloom—I simply cannot imagine a church that has worked so hard for American middle-class respectability abandoning it for the theological imperative of polygamy—his observation reveals that which is profoundly not Christian, American, or middle-class at the heart of Mormonism. By way of confirming that observation, Columbia University historian and faithful Latter-day Saint Richard Bushman remarks that current church president Gordon B. Hinckley plays down millenarianism not because belief in its literalness is dying but for precisely the opposite reason: “If the President were to blink an eye toward Jackson County, Missouri, people would flow there. The belief is still potent, but it’s latent. That’s still our view of history. All that nineteenth-century stuff is still in our culture. The church could, in a flash, constitute a complete society” (qtd. in Ostling and Ostling 93). In other words, after all the blurring of the boundaries between Christians and Mormons, after all the
move into the middle-class, perhaps people like Champneys are right in substance if not in tone: Don’t be fooled, Mormons are Mormons.

B. Conflating religion and nationality

Anderson notes that the end of the era of nationalism is not in sight, but, in fact, “nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (3). While Jesus argued that no one could serve two masters (Matthew 6.24), American Evangelicals have had little difficulty in attributing eschatological significance to America in what are considered these end times. Thus, national identification becomes important to religious identification, the two existing in a dialogic relationship, although often a tense relationship. Anderson notes three paradoxes in conceptions of nationalism:

(1) The objective modernity of nations to the historian’s eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists.

(2) The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept—in the modern world everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as he or she ‘has’ a gender—vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations, such that, by definition, ‘Greek’ nationality is sui generis.

(3) The ‘political’ power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. (5)

These concepts of nationalism qua nationalism are important in this dissertation, but we must also infuse the concepts with religious and communal signification, as we will consider not only nationality but religious community. Interestingly, each group under
consideration has a “telescoping” notion of place, from larger and broader to smaller and more specific. Evangelicals, according to Richard J. Mouw in “What Does God Think about America? Some Challenges for Evangelicals and Mormons” (2005), explains that “the conception of America as having a special divine appointment among the nations has often loomed large for American Evangelicals,” yet he qualifies this by noting an ambivalence, perhaps a deep ambivalence: “[T]here are times when a very different mood emerges, and America is seen as an ungodly place where true Christians are living as exiles” (13). Evangelicals, however, only turn their backs with reluctance on America. Their conception of America has been shaped by a story, drawing upon the biblical motif of the “errand into the wilderness”: “where a godly people took over a land from its previous occupants, thereby bringing godliness to the North American continent” (18). Therefore, Evangelicals consider American a Chosen Nation in general terms.

In contrast, Mormons think of America as a Chosen Nation in specific terms. Indeed, the Book of Mormon proclaims, “And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them” (Ether 2.9). But further: Mormons consider a specific location in America to be the location of the New Jerusalem. Steve L. Olsen explains in The Mormon Ideology of Place that the city of Zion as envisioned by Joseph Smith “would be permeated by religion. Religion, not the government, would ensure domestic tranquility. Religion, not the military, would provide for a common defense. Religion, not the market, would promote the general welfare” (25). In July 1831 Smith revealed that Independence, Jackson County, Missouri was the “center place” upon which the New Jerusalem would
be built (see Doctrine and Covenants 57.1-3). Smith’s vision was not simply an “ethnic or national community as the unique object of God’s special favors” (Mouw 7), but a very specific location that made little distinction between the physical and the spiritual. Comments Bloom, “Visionary and pragmatist at once, the Prophet Joseph had the American concern with the earthly paradise, and so he taught [Brigham] Young, at least by example, that the mysteries of the Kingdom had to be enacted *in the here and now*, privately if possible when hemmed in by Gentiles, and publicly though by no means universally when a stable Zion at last could be founded” (108 my emphasis). While Jackson County, Missouri had to be abandoned because of anti-Mormon persecution, the belief that the New Jerusalem will one day be built there still exists in the Mormon Church.

The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days takes us into even more specific territory: Manti, Utah. While members of the TLC believe in the establishment of the New Jerusalem in Jackson County, they place much more emphasis on the importance of the Sanpete Valley and the town of Manti, Utah, given how much they talk about them in the materials on their website. Manti has been designated as the center place. Philip Savage, Presiding Patriarch for the TLC, told me that when 3 Nephi mentions Christ returning to the land of Bountiful, that is a reference to the Manti Temple; thus, the land of Zion will get its foothold in Manti before being fully restored in Jackson County. “We believe that before His coming in glory, the Lord will return to the Manti Temple to endow His people with power, even the Fullness of the Priesthood” (“Why Is Manti”).
So how do these three groups’ conceptions of place relate to conceptions of nationality? To a certain extent, religious boundaries become conflated with national boundaries, and the way to religious respectability is through American respectability. Bloom notes that “there are no more patriotic Americans than the people called Mormons” (90), and Ostling and Ostling note the irony of history, how “these radical Mormon communitarians of the nineteenth century assimilated into the American economy and are now commonly right-wing capitalists and respectably Republican (though the church is officially nonpartisan)” (xxv). In other words, not only do Evangelicals need to clamp down on Mormon doctrine, but they need to convince people that the veneer of Mormon American-ness is fraudulent, that this group cannot be acceptably mainstream despite how comfortably nestled they are in the American dream.

In contrast, the True and Living Church celebrates its non-mainstream-ness, and, in a very real sense, it can be seen as a reaction against late-twentieth century globalization—something of which it accuses the LDS Church of being complicit in. Arjun Appadurai suggests in Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (1996) that religion “is not only not dead but [. . .] may be more consequential than ever in today’s highly mobile and interconnected global politics” (7). I agree with Appadurai and think that many religions, for good or ill, provide people with room for resistance against an ever encroaching globalization that cannot always be intellectually grasped but is always felt. In the case of the TLC, the group is clearly reacting against global forces with its focus on the United Nations and the Federal Government; for example, it specifically charges the LDS Church with “creating unholy alliances with wicked government and various secret combinations to ensure success of the Church institution”
“[a]bandoning all principles and ordinances that are not politically correct with Satan’s kingdom, or the world” (“Declaration to the Apostles”). Unlike people such as Sterling D. Allan (mentioned in the previous chapter) who are politically ultraconservative and dedicated to an extreme view of American exceptionalism, members of the TLC forgo talk of the Founding Fathers and a return to a purified America (at least in the literature I have reviewed) and focus instead on a soon-to-be established millennial kingdom. Their return to Manti—and, we must note, Manti’s specific geography—cannot be overlooked in this global context.

V. Writing the New Ethnography

A. What is the new ethnography?

Having decided upon the pageant as my topic, how do I go about writing it? My temperament and my training both draw me towards what is known as the new ethnography. My bachelor’s and master’s degrees were both in literature, and as such I have a respect for the power of the well-polished phrase, the clever metaphor, and the deft rhetorical silence that speaks volumes. A good fiction writer can draw a reader into quite real worlds of imagination. A writer of the new ethnography, employing many of the same rhetorical tools of writers of fiction, can do the same: draw readers into a world, a space, a particular time and place.

This was not always the aim of ethnography. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, in the introduction to the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2000), sketch the evolution of the ethnography. Traditional ethnography, covering the span of time from roughly the beginning of the twentieth century to mid-century, reflected the positivist
scientific paradigm, “concerned with offering valid, reliable, and objective interpretations in their writings. The ‘other’ who was studied was alien, foreign, and strange” (12).

During this period, a lone ethnographer, usually white and male, would make his way to some remote corner of the world (remote compared to his as-yet untenured office). With pad and pencil in hand, and perhaps a camera, he would observe the life of some “simple” tribe. He, of course, was empowered to look at and interpret them, but they were not able to look at and interpret him; they simply existed, unaware of why they did what they did, unable to interpret the meaning behind their daily existence (and certainly unable to scrutinize the perorations of a university-trained scholar). The lone ethnographer had four beliefs and commitments: 1) a commitment to objectivism, 2) a complicity with imperialism (with its assumption of cultural superiority), 3) a belief that “ethnography would create a museumlike picture of the culture studied,” and 4) a belief in timelessness (13).

After traditional ethnography came the modernist phase from roughly 1950 into the 1970s. This phase was marked by an attempt to give voice to society’s underclass (14). Denzin and Lincoln call the period from 1970 to 1986 the era of blurred genres in which researchers toyed with “symbolic interactionism to constructivism, naturalistic inquiry, positivism and postpositivism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, critical theory, neo-Marxist theory, semiotics, structuralism, feminism, and various racial/ethnic paradigms” (15). 1986-1990 was marked by a crisis of representation, as writing became more reflexive, and issues “such as validity, reliability, and objectivity, previously believed settled, were once more problematic. Pattern and interpretive theories, as opposed to causal, linear theories, were now more common” (16). Denzin and Lincoln
break the past fourteen years into three periods: 1990-1995 is the postmodern, “a period of experimental and new ethnographies”; 1995-2000 is concerned with postexperimental inquiry; and 2000-onward is a period concerned with “moral discourse.” “The seventh moment asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community” (3).

While we will return to the “seventh moment” in the development of qualitative research later, we must first explore the rift between social scientists and qualitative researchers. The crux of the rift centers on the issue of reproducibility. Preeminent for social scientists is the need to create a method that will allow for reproducible results. The charge is often made against qualitative research that it fails “to describe the study methods in such clear and exacting detail that others can replicate the work” (Lindlof 8).

However for the qualitative research, reproducibility of results in not a chief concern, perhaps not even an abiding concern. When reproducibility of method is no longer a driving concern, but the power of “the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers” (Geertz Interpretation 16), our focus shifts, our research purpose changes. Having coined the notion of “thick description,” Geertz notes that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, [and] I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Interpretation 5). Geertz claims that “culture [. . .] is a context,” something within which construable signs or symbols can be “intelligibly—that is, thickly—described” (14). Thick description can expose a people’s “normalness without reducing their particularity. [. . .] It renders them
accessible: setting them in the frame of their own banalities, it dissolves their opacity” (14). For example, thick description has the power to reveal the internal logic upon which all societies function, logic which may not be apparent to the outsider.

Yet given that so much of what Geertz accomplishes in an essay such as his famous “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” is based on his own observation, meditation, and writing skill, there is no clear way in which his “method” of thick description could be reproduced by another researcher to produce the same results. This often leads to the charge that qualitative research is “soft,” that it fails the tests of prediction and control (Lindlof 8-9). However I think social scientists who make this charge misunderstand the goals of qualitative research, in that qualitative researchers attempt to understand what they study, not merely quantify it. Whereas social scientists have more in common with the hard sciences, qualitative researchers try to bridge the gap between the sciences and the humanities.

The situation has grown increasingly more complex in recent years with the understanding that reality doesn’t exist “out there” waiting to be discovered and quantified but is always “socially constructed or semiotically posited” (Kincheloe and McLaren 293). This issue was brought to the fore in the early 1990s. John Fiske, in a book review of Donal Carbaugh’s book Talking American: Cultural Discourses on Donahue (1988), argued that Carbaugh’s book was reactionary because he did not specifically address issues of power (essentially that if you do not fight the status quo you support it). “Its reduction of social difference to individual difference is politically reactionary because it constructs individuals as equal and not as members of differentially empowered, or disempowered, social groups. [. . .] For an uncritical analysis ends up
by being supportive of its object” (451 my emphasis). The review ignited something of a brouhaha, given its implications: essentially every book, every essay, every film, etc., would have to be politically progressive, because political “neutrality” was de facto reactionarism. In a later issue of the Quarterly Journal of Speech, Carbaugh made clear that he came from the school of cultural interpretation, and his goal was first and foremost to understand, not to criticize. He explains,

Although a critic might dislike the cultural pattern and call it “politically reactionary,” it is nonetheless used by these people—men, women, Blacks and Whites alike; it is important and appropriate to them, and thus is an important practice to understand, which is the goal of the cultural interpreter. (340 my emphasis)

While the goal of understanding is indeed noble, it seems perhaps a tad naïve with the recent criticisms of postmodernism. Understood by whom? from what perspective? who is understood? for what purpose? What gives Carbaugh the power to “understand” the people on the Donahue show? What does it even mean to understand?

Fiske raises important issues that will form the basis for my justification for employing the new ethnography in this dissertation. In response to Carbaugh’s assertion that he is simply viewing and understanding the site of the Donahue show, Fiske makes the following assertion:

I believe that we have to theorize a “reality” with an extra-discursive or non-discursive existence while recognizing that such a theorized reality is inert, polymorphous and insignificant until put into discourse and thus made apprehensible and thus meaningful. The act of putting into
Thus our project changes from a scientific, or an empiricist, project, to a discursive one. ("Qualitative research involves the production of knowledge, not its discovery" [Lindlof 25].) Our discourse generates knowledge, and that knowledge can never be value-free. Thus, the thinking of scholars like Fiske places a burden on the researcher: “The point of producing knowledge is not just to understand our social conditions but to work to improve them” (334).

So how would the writing of the new ethnography differ from that of social science? Quantitative researchers have generally been taught to avoid seeing language as one of the tools of their trade; indeed, language was seen (as it is still mostly seen) as a neutral, objective, transparent instrument for the transmission of data. Given language’s function as a vehicle for data, the researcher was trained to be self-effacing in the writing of his or her research (Lindlof 247-48). Indeed, such researchers avoided “rich descriptions” because any in-depth detail would interrupt the scientific process of developing generalizations (Denzin and Lincoln 10).

The new ethnography turns all of this on its head. Gone are the days when language can be viewed as a neutral vehicle for the transmission of knowledge from one person to another. Language creates knowledge, and in so doing imbues it with value-claims. No longer is the researcher to be self-effacing, as if his or her presence had no impact upon the object under study. No longer are rich descriptions to be avoided if they add to the “truth” of the researcher’s experience in gathering the data. Quite simply, at
the core of these changes is language. The new ethnology, as I understand it and as I plan to employ it in this dissertation, is an attempt to bring the reader to a certain place, to a deeper understanding of a phenomenon—not simply an intellectual understanding but also a felt understanding. For readers who have not attended *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* and who probably never will, I want to introduce them to it, introduce them to the phenomenon of Mormons and Evangelicals meeting on the streets of Manti to debate the nature of salvation; I want to introduce them to a small religion known as the True and Living Church that claims to be the authentic Mormonism, and how they claim a right to the title of *Mormon*. I want to bring such readers to a time and place that I experienced and communicate it to them through my understanding, but hopefully with enough honesty and scholarly insight so that they can gain insight into the complexities of our world.

But I exist with a tension between Carbaugh and Fiske. On the one hand, temperamentally I find myself aligned with Carbaugh. I respond to the idea of being a presenter of ideas, one who allows the reader to understand a scene and leave with what he or she may. On the other hand, I intellectually find myself persuaded by Fiske. I have been trained in cultural studies and cannot overlook the power relations in which we all swim. Indeed, to simply present *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* as an event and myself as a transparent medium through which facts spontaneously appear would be disingenuous; I would be backing a reactionary worldview that I cannot, in good conscience, countenance. Perhaps I balk at the complete acceptance of Fiske not because of his philosophical stance but because of his political stance: I am not as politically liberal as Fiske, nor as many of my intellectual peers and professors. With the onslaught of
globalization, I believe religions will provide interesting and unexpected space for resistance to what feels too often like corporate homogenization. In many ways, I respect Mormons, Evangelicals, and members of the True and Living Church for their resistant and vibrant cultures (while also finding plenty to criticize). Knowing my intellectual peers, I’m certain many of them would have nothing but disdain for the religious commitments of these groups, while respecting their human dignity (and I have spoken with some of them on this subject). Eliason has noted the following blind spot in cultural studies:

Recognizing class, gender, ethnicity, nation, race, and sexuality as a limited set of sufficiently explanatory human concerns, cultural studies has failed to even acknowledge religion as a significant aspect of human experience and identity let alone provide any useful theorization of its operation. Cultural Studies [sic] has not moved far beyond Marx’s facile “opiate of the masses.” Without acknowledgment, religion and religion-like cultural forms tend to be marginalized and grossly misunderstood by scholars influenced by cultural studies. (“Celebrating Zion” 111 note)

But, vis-à-vis Eliason, if this dissertation demonstrates anything, it demonstrates the power of religious ideas and practice. While some scholars may argue that religious devotions can, perhaps must, be broken down into its constituent parts (class, gender, ethnicity, etc.), I would argue that we would only end up doing violence to our religious understanding of these phenomena if we were to do such. We must understand them, to some degree, on their own terms or we risk turning our scholarship, again, into a lone ethnographer going into a scene and telling the natives what they’re all about. But to
return to the point I’m making here, I accept and will utilize the philosophical commitments outlined by Fiske, but I may not accept his political commitments.

**B. Writing the new ethnography**

So how will I write this dissertation? H. L. Goodall, Jr., in *Writing the New Ethnography* (2000), explains that in the mid-1980s a confluence of events resulted in a historical turn in ethnography: “[T]he way in which texts were written—the rhetorics of their construction—could no longer be assumed to be a direct, unmediated reflection of the fieldwork experience. [. . .] Textually, this cultural turn in the discipline of ethnography tends to make the writing done in its name virtually indistinguishable from writing done in the name of *literary journalism* or *creative nonfiction*” (77). One of the ways in which the new ethnography is more like these other forms of writing than traditional social science writing is that it does not attempt to occlude the writer and his or her experiences, but those experiences become an integral part of whatever is under consideration. Goodall explains that

> [a]t some point it will become clear to you that new ethnographers have an obligation to write *about* their lives. I say “obligation” because new ethnographic texts require that your observations and evaluations of others be firmly rooted in a credible, self-reflexive “voice,” which is to say a believable, compelling, self-examining narrator. (23)

While I will use discretion in referencing myself, not wishing to indulge in therapeutic navel-gazing at the expense of the pageant and those whom I interviewed, ultimately this particular method demands that I acknowledge that there is a researcher speaking this
information, that the information is not magically speaking itself. Indeed, Chapter Five will be an extended autoethnography in which I consider myself as a research site, for I cannot easily dissociate my scholarly interests from my dedication to Mormonism and my adolescence in Manti.

What are the benefits of these practices? One advantage of autoethnography is “inverting the critical lens,” so to speak. In a very real sense, when we engage in ethnographic fieldwork, we colonize others and their experience; we place ourselves, as authors and interpreters, in a superior position. Autoethnography demonstrates a willingness on the part of the researcher to “place ourselves, our lives, our families, under the same critical scrutiny” (Goodall 110). Not only our research, but our researching, becomes subject to scholarly scrutiny.

VI. Gathering Information for the Dissertation

A. Interviews with Latter-day Saints

I began gathering ethnographic research by interviewing members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who had participated in The Mormon Miracle Pageant. I conducted my first interviews in the summer of 2002. Since I was still in the preliminary stages of my dissertation, I decided to conduct interviews with only a few family members and friends. This would allow me practice interviewing and also help me determine what types of questions would be most fruitful. In total, I interviewed eleven people. Since I had participated in the pageant as a youth (from 1982 to 1986), I interviewed people with whom I had participated or with whom I had some sort of
tangential relationship (e.g., brother of a friend, wife of a friend, etc.). All interviews were conducted with a tape recorder, usually one-on-one with the interviewee.

During the summer of 2003, I conducted another fourteen interviews with Latter-day Saints who had participated in the pageant at some point in their lives. I used a “snowballing” technique: getting interviews with a few friends with whom I had participated in the pageant and then asking them for leads. I generally interviewed people who still lived in the Manti/Ephraim area, so they still had contact with the pageant. I also interviewed Pageant Director Ivo Ray Peterson, past Pageant President David Willmore, and pageant historian Merilyn Jorgensen.

B. Interviews with Evangelicals

During the summer of 2004, I conducted ten interviews with Evangelicals on the streets of Manti. Prior to the writing of this dissertation, I did not know any Evangelical Christians who traveled to The Mormon Miracle Pageant for the purposes of witnessing. Indeed, I did not know what type of reception I would receive there, whether it would be friendly or hostile, open or suspicious. My method for choosing my first subject to interview was no more complicated than finding the first available individual on the scene who was not busy witnessing. I approached him, asked him his name, told him mine, explained the nature of my project, and asked him if he would be willing to participate in a taped interview. After this first interview, I did the same with another man. The third interview was generated by an old friend who was working as pageant security. He knew one of the Evangelical women and introduced us, explained to her my project, and I interviewed her. The next night, I approached only one man. The third
night, however, I returned to the woman I had interviewed and asked her if she could introduce me to other Evangelical females. She lined up three interviews that evening. Only one man that night turned me down, saying that he did not trust Mormons. My only criterion in interviewing Evangelicals was to try to interview an equal number of males and females, a goal I almost achieved: six males and four females.

C. Interviews with members of the True and Living Church

Arranging interviews with members of the True and Living Church proved to be difficult. My starting point was a printout of the website listing the church leaders (a website that is now superannuated; it is now hosted by a counter-Mormon group). I then used the Internet to find phone numbers and addresses. I was able to get addresses for nine of them. I tried simply knocking on their doors, hoping to present myself, explain my project, and set up a later appointment. I thought that a face-to-face encounter would be more likely to yield an interview than a phone call from a stranger. I was only able to find one individual at home, and he granted me an interview the following day. He also told me of a new member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles who was not listed on my obsolete website printout and urged me to speak with him. I did speak with said individual, but he declined to be interviewed on tape or have his name used. I then tried phoning the leadership of the TLC, but I was unable to contact them at home due to their work or other circumstances. Given my lack of success at securing interviews, I secured addition clearance from the Human Subjects Review Board to gather information via mail and e-mail. I sent letters to all of the leadership of the TLC in September, but only received back one e-mail response. While I am disappointed, I am not surprised. The
TLC has officially cut off contact with all media. Although I tried to assure them in my letter that I was not from the media and that my desire was to represent them fairly (I am not a media outlet hoping for a sensationalistic story or a counter-Mormon interested in a cult exposé), I fear that I may not have been trusted.

D. Other information

Finally, the materials I quote from in this dissertation—apart from, of course, the normal texts such as books and journal articles culled from the library—were gathered at the pageant. If I quote from a tract, I got that tract at the pageant. If I quote from a website, I got the website address from a sign held aloft by someone at the pageant or from the inside of a tract. There are hundreds if not thousands of Evangelical counter-Mormon websites, tracts, and books to choose from. I had to find a way to limit myself so I decided to limit myself to whatever was available at the pageant during the 2004 season.
Chapter 3

The Politics of Public Display at The Mormon Miracle Pageant

I. Introduction

Every June in Manti, The Mormon Miracle Pageant becomes a flashpoint for issues that percolate throughout the year among three groups: Evangelical Christians, Latter-day Saints, and members of the True and Living Church. The fact that these events occur in Manti only adds to their potency, for Manti is considered a sacred location by both Mormons and the TLC, consecrated by a temple built by pioneer hands. How Evangelicals feel about Manti is less clear, although they certainly don’t consider it holy. While some may feel neutral about the area, others, influenced by the spiritual warfare movement of Evangelical Christianity, may consider the area accursed, given that eighty percent of the residents of Sanpete County are Mormon (Daynes 1) and that percentage rises to ninety in Manti (Karras “Manti Miracle”). While I personally doubt that most Evangelicals consider Manti an evil place, I watched a group of them getting together for a photograph with the Manti Temple in the background when one man said to the photographer, “Make sure to get the devil in the background.”

While the analogy should not be stretched, Manti can be compared to Jerusalem as three religious groups stake their claim to the site, each for theological reasons. Mormons originally settled the area, building a temple, an axis mundi, a “pre-eminent ‘link’ between earth and heaven” (Eliade The Sacred and the Profane 39). The TLC officially arrived in 1994, helping to boost the population of Manti from 2,268 in 1990 to
2,643 in 1998, a 375-person increase (“Manti[,] Utah”). They claim that God has commanded them to gather to Manti and that “Manti has always been believed by the pioneers to be a special place, one with significance in the Last Days” (“Why Is Manti, Utah the Gathering Place for the TLC?”). Indeed, when the Lord returns again he will come to the Manti Temple “to endow His people with power, even the Fullness of the Priesthood.” And while Evangelicals don’t consider the area sacred, there is certainly an irony in the fact that they come in droves to a town, imbued with religious significance, to proselytize Mormons who are specifically attending a pageant to affirm their belief in Mormonism. While this is striking at “the belly of the beast,” so to speak, it also seems least likely to produce the desired results of turning Latter-day Saints away from Mormonism, given that they are arriving in Manti for the express purpose of celebrating Mormonism. As Eliason notes, Mormon pageants “are a site of contested meaning not only between rival interpretations of the Mormon historical events portrayed in the pageants but in the meaning of pageant experience itself which becomes all at once for different attendees an opportunity to share religious experiences, a pleasant evening with friends and family, and a contest arena for saving souls” (“Celebrating Zion” 216-17). The public display that occurs in this place is not the equivalent of public display that might happen on the streets of Salt Lake City or Provo or Ogden. As Grace Johnson, author of the pageant, says, Manti is a “place apart, yet in the very heart of things” (Story of the Mormon Miracle 44).
II. The Public in the Pageant: The Pageant in the Public

A. The hugeness of the pageant

Certainly one of the purposes of the pageant, if not the purpose of the pageant, is to normalize Mormonism, to take that which was once despised, shunned, and very much in the nineteenth century and to bring it firmly and solidly into the twenty-first century. While Christianity may be the dominant religion in the United States, Mormonism, for a time, becomes the dominant religion of one’s experience in Manti, with Christianity receding to the periphery. It is the hugeness of the display that becomes paramount in Manti during the two weeks of the pageant, a hugeness that would not be possible, or at least not nearly as dramatic, if the pageant were moved north to Provo or Salt Lake City. If the pageant were in a large city, it would “drift” into the rest of the city’s clamor, thus negating this particular effect. But in Manti, with the dramatic sight of the temple, the booming speakers that can be heard throughout the town, the pageant filling the entire temple hill, the cast of 850, the 14,339 chairs set out for the 20,000-plus visitors, at least ninety percent of whom are Mormon, if not more (see Call “Mormon Miracle” A1; Hales A1; Stack “For 25 Years”)—all of this creates an effect that engulfs the visitor in Mormonism, creating a centrifugal force about Mormonism that displaces Christianity from the center (see Figure 3A). Once in the center position, Mormons can argue that they are “normal,” “average,” or, if you will, simply American. From this position, they feel, it seems quite strange, beyond the pale of commonsense, to deny them entrance into the Christian community. MacAloon alludes to the process by which spectacle may contribute to new social formations in “Olympic Games and the Theory of Spectacle in Modern Societies” (1984):
Spectacle may be that genre which most reflects and refracts this social expansion, this extension of vision, this opening of the “eye.” More than the worship of “bigness” for its own sake, more than cheap thrills and decadent pleasures is required to account for the triumph of the spectacle as an organizing genre of cultural performance. If, in our daily lives, we must increasingly take account of the “size” of the earth, then our performances must surely take account of it too. Spectacle may be society in action, groping on the level of expressive culture, toward a new order in a changing world. (267-68)

The term “groping” here is certainly appropriate, for I do not think that the pageant’s overt goal is to propel Mormonism into the central position, but that is happening nonetheless through the hugeness of the event in the smallness of the town of Manti. As the Mormon Church deemphasizes its unique doctrines and emphasizes the doctrines it holds in common with mainstream Christianity (or, at least, emphasizes its “Christian-ness”), the spectacle of the pageant is the perfect vehicle to reflect and refract this “social expansion, this extension of vision, this opening of the ‘eye.’ ”

Of course Evangelicals enter this milieu and attempt to convince attending Mormons that their feeling of centrality is illusory, that, in fact, Evangelical Christianity is America’s religion. And while it was my perception at the 2004 season of The Mormon Miracle Pageant that there were more Evangelicals than willing Mormon listeners,³ the sheer number of Evangelicals on one block of one public street is perhaps more important than the fact that they have reached and exceeded saturation-point in terms of efficiency (see Figure 3B).
MacAlloon gives us insight into the nature of spectacle that will help us understand how the hugeness of the pageant “centers” Mormonism for its adherents. He explains that “[s]pectacles give primacy to visual sensory and symbolic codes; they are things to be seen” (243). Certainly this is true of The Mormon Miracle Pageant, but it is true of more than the pageant: it is true of the almost ceaseless traffic streaming into the town of Manti (see Figure 3C); the streets filled to capacity with parked cars (see Figure 3D); the church buildings filled with pageant visitors eating Sanpete’s specialty, barbequed turkey; the “antis” in the street in front of the temple, arguing with pageant-goers about Mormonism (see Figure 3E); the Manti Temple itself, rising up like a sentinel at the head of town; the pageant actors walking in costume among the audience before the performance, answering questions (see Figure 3F)—all of this is part of the pageant experience. MacAlloon mentions this aspect of the spectacle: “Spectacles institutionalize the bicameral roles of actors and audience, performers and spectators. Both role sets are normative, organically linked, and necessary to the performance” (243). This is not such a simple formulation as to say that the spectacle could not exist without an audience: the spectacle, in a very real sense, is itself and the audience. Thus, The Mormon Miracle Pageant is the totality of the experience, not simply the play on the hill, for all involved.

B. Transposing public and private

But the pageant is still crucial, the draw for which people travel to Manti, beyond the rest of the event. Clifford Geertz says that, “Where for ‘visitors’ religious performances can, in the nature of the case, only be presentations of a particular religious
perspective, and thus aesthetically appreciated or scientifically dissected, for participants they are in addition enactments, materializations, realizations of it—not only models of what they believe, but also models for the believing of it. In these plastic dramas men attain their faith as they portray it” (Interpretation of Cultures 113-14). While some visitors to the pageant, such as the counter-Mormons, will consciously distance themselves from the proceedings of the pageant, given the definition of spectacle we are using, most of the visitors are participants. Geertz’s observation becomes quite telling: the pageant is not merely a passive play of Mormon history but, to use a word much in use today, it is, in a sense, interactive.

The gates to the seating area open at six o’clock in the evening, and pageant-goers begin to fill the area soon thereafter, filling up the best seats to await the evening’s entertainment that will begin at 9:30. Performers, dressed in their costumes, appear sometime later, walking among pageant visitors, talking to people, answering questions about the pageant. Importantly, this area is the square block of the temple lot owned by the Mormon Church and, as private property, the counter-Mormons are not allowed to enter and distribute literature or engage attendees in conversation. Counter-Mormons must remain outside this area while they engage in their proselytism. Thus, the area is set apart for Mormonism. Mormon missionaries walk around among the pageant-goers. Pageant booths are set up where interested individuals can receive a complementary Book of Mormon and church literature. Also, pageant greeters stand at each entrance and distribute programs to the arriving guests.

Before the pageant even begins, then, Mormonism is affirmed as central with Evangelical Christianity cast to the periphery. This is ironic because, legally, the temple
lot is *private* property, wherein free speech restrictions apply, and the public street
outside is *public* property, where, in the words of Evangelical Becky Walker, “this is a
free-for-all out here [. . .], there’s freedom of speech.” Spectacle enables this
paradoxical turnabout to happen, for the hugeness of the event *inside* consecrates it with
significance—“diffuse wonder or awe” (MacAlloon 246)—that the events *outside*, by
comparison, lack. In other words, inside the gates is the private property that is truly the
public place to be, whereas outside the gates, in the legal public property, is the margin.
In his examination of the conflict in Northern Ireland, Santino asserts, “Space—claiming
territory and the power and right to name it, to traverse it, to celebrate it—is a recurrent
trope in the North of Ireland” because “through ritualizing space [. . .] many profoundly
important battles are fought and won, at least in the minds of the participants” (*Signs of
War and Peace* 16).

The temple intensifies this sense that what exists at the base of the hill is the
ultimate public space (see Figure 3G). The Manti Temple is one of the few temples in
the Mormon Kingdom to have a room called the Holy of Holies. This room is so sacred
that the only individual allowed to enter is the president of the church. This tradition
comes from ancient times, specifically the tabernacle used by Moses that was later made
into a permanent temple by Solomon. The Holy of Holies was a room that contained
only one object, the Ark of the Covenant, and the priest could only enter once a year.
Rabbi Pinhas ben Ya’ir, a Talmudic sage of the second century, states: “The house of the
Holy of Holies was made to correspond to the highest heaven. The outer Holy House
was made to correspond to the earth. And the Courtyard was made to correspond to the
sea” (qtd. in Patai 108). Thus, when the president of the Mormon Church enters the Holy
Figure 3G
of Holies, he is symbolically in the highest heaven, the most private of all places. This private-ness radiates outward in concentric circles of increasing public-ness: the Celestial Room, the Terrestrial Room, the Creation Room, the baptistery, the main corridor, the exterior of the temple, the landscaping at the base of the temple, the sloping lawn upon which the pageant is performed, and the temple lot enclosed by a fence. What is important is that this cosmos here is Mormon, from top to bottom—a replica of the world not as it is, but as it should be. The founding of Manti and the building of the temple established this organization: “It must be understood that the cosmicization of unknown territories is always a consecration; to organize a space is to repeat the paradigmatic work of the gods” (Eliade *The Sacred and the Profane* 32). Of course, Latter-day Saints are aware of those outside of the gates, but they are truly inconsequential, marginal, the “rabble,” so to speak. Tuan notes, “People everywhere tend to structure space—geographical and cosmological—with themselves at the center and with concentric zones (more or less defined) of decreasing value beyond” (27). The “reality,” however—the reality constructed by the spectacle of the pageant—is that Mormonism becomes central, and the public becomes a Mormon public at the base of the temple hill. Jonathan Russell remembers participating in the pageant as a child and describes it thus: “it was a taste of the big world for a little kid to see” (my emphasis). In contrast, the counter-Mormons, despite the fact that they are on a legally defined public street, are relegated to the margins. Part of their mission, then, becomes to convince the Mormon throng that what they are seeing and feeling is an illusion; that, in fact, Evangelical Christianity is central and this Mormonism, no matter how gargantuan at the moment, is, and will remain, peripheral.
C. How the pageant works

The pageant takes place in the ultimate Mormon reality, below the Manti Temple. Lifelong Ephraim resident Andy Russell says that the pageant wouldn’t work “without the temple. Without the temple, Manti would just be another small town. It [the pageant] has to be in Manti. The pageant has to be done at that place.” As mentioned, the temple, functioning as an axis mundi, or “universal pillar,” “connects and supports heaven and earth [. . .]. Such a cosmic pillar can be only at the very center of the universe, for the whole of the habitable world extends around it” (Eliade The Sacred and the Profane 36).

Why is this important for the pageant? The Mormon Miracle Pageant is a drama of Mormon origins. Eliade explains that the reason for the sacralization of the world is that “[l]ife is not possible without an opening toward the transcendent; in other words, human beings cannot live in chaos” (34). So while the temple anchors Manti and Mormonism physically, the pageant anchors it doctrinally. Eliade explains that

Through the paradox of rite, every consecrated space coincides with the center of the world, just as the time of any ritual coincides with the mythical time of the “beginning.” Through repetition of the cosmogonic act, concrete time, in which the construction takes place, is projected into mythical time, in illo tempore when the foundation of the world occurred. Thus the reality and the enduringness of a construction are assured not only by the transformation of profane space into a transcendent space (the center) but also by the transformation of concrete time into mythical time. Any ritual whatever [. . .] unfolds not only in a consecrated space (i.e., one different in essence from profane space) but also in a “sacred time,” “once
upon a time” (*in illo tempore, ab origine*), that is, when the ritual was performed for the first time by a god, an ancestor, or a hero. (*Myth of the Eternal Return* 20-21)

This needs to be discussed in some detail, but the most salient point is that place and ritual exist in a dialogic relationship, with each nourishing the other. It is certainly no coincidence that most of the church-sponsored pageants happen at locations important in the Mormon cosmos: *The Hill Cumorah Pageant: America’s Witness for Christ* takes place at the Hill Cumorah, where Joseph Smith allegedly unearthed the golden plates at the Angel Moroni’s direction; the *Nauvoo Pageant*, a special one-time pageant written to celebrate the 200th birthday anniversary of Joseph Smith will be performed in Nauvoo, Illinois, the city inhabited by the Mormons before they were expelled westward (Iutzii); and several pageants are performed in historic Utah locations, including *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* in Manti. And just as Manti “coincides with the center of the world,” so the pageant “coincides with the mythical time of the ‘beginning’ ” of Mormonism.

Because this is a pageant and not a film or a work of literature (such as the Joseph Smith story in the Pearl of Great Price with which Mormons are intimately familiar), pageant-goers see Joseph Smith on the hill, *alive* and *embodied*, searching for the true church. As spectacle, the pageant has the potential to engage those who attend; the audience is part of the show. Spectacle “gives the metamessage ‘all you *have* to do is watch,’ thus liberating individuals to *want* to, to be free to do more than watch” (MacAloon 269). The pageant begins by addressing the audience: “Tonight you will see a story unfold that is based on this one singular event [i.e., Joseph Smith’s First Vision]. It is a story that cannot be told dispassionately. Because it is a true story, it is colored by
the hues of heroic drama, by violence of life and death, by sublime faith, deep and
moving tragedy, by curse, prayer, temple, and tomahawk—for this is the story of the
Mormon miracle!” By addressing the audience, the spectators are “sutured” into the
drama. The narration implies that the audience is Mormon, or, at least, that the story is
Mormon in that it “cannot be told dispassionately.” Of course passion is immediately
followed by true, implying that the passion in the story and the truth in the story are one
and the same: Mormon.

Joseph Smith translates the Book of Mormon before the audience’s eyes and, contra the claims of the counter-Mormons and other skeptics, the book comes alive on the hill as Joseph translates. The “fourth wall” is explicitly broken several times in the pageant as the narrator speaks directly to those gathered: “And now, in 1829, the voices of these people [in the Book of Mormon] rise from the dust to again be heard and speak to this generation” (my emphasis). And even when the fourth wall isn’t explicitly broken, it is implicitly “broken” as embodied Joseph Smiths and Moronis and pioneers portray Mormon origins, inviting the audience to join in the portrayal via their religious devotion. This is not the same as actors on a stage performing roles. In this context of spectacle, we have a mostly Mormon audience watching a drama of religious origins with which they are already familiar. These “characters” and events are not fictional but factual to them, and as the pageant proceeds, it is as if they are reliving Mormon history. As noted in Chapter One, a collapsing of time occurs in which the past and present coexist. Eliason asserts that “[t]hrough these genres of pioneer remembrance, modern Mormons appropriate their sacred past into their own experience in the present. [. . .] [T]hrough recapitulations and renditions of an idealized pioneer past, modern Mormons
can return to sacred time and space” (“Celebrating Zion” 83). Indeed, note the strangeness of Grace Johnson’s words: “And now, in 1829” (my emphases). While the “now” in this context may be thought of as a colloquialism, a mere “throwaway” word, in light of the Mormon intention to collapse time it becomes important, as the present collapses into 1829. Indeed, “now” and “1829” are then speaking “to this generation.” The collapsing of time is complete.

Joseph Smith’s followers are then persecuted for their beliefs—and the descendants of Smith’s followers, either by blood or by religious adoption, sit in the audience and watch as their forebears endure persecution. Joseph is imprisoned and killed by an angry mob. The Saints are driven from their homes, forced to endure the bitter winter winds. Arriving in Utah, they escape persecution but have only the prospect of days and months and years of work ahead of them to make the desert “blossom as a rose.” One of their members is killed as they travel to Manti, but he awakens to a new reality—the reality—as his wife, who had died earlier on the trek, greets him and leads him towards Paradise. The narrator tells us, “The Mormon miracle secures the knowledge that was lost in the confusion of the dark ages, that no matter what the suffering or tragedy of this life might bring, nothing is lost.” The pageant ends with a voice telling the audience that if they would like a free copy of the Book of Mormon, they may ask for one at one of the information booths.

Davis Bitton’s “The Ritualization of Mormon History” is an important essay to help explain why not only Mormon pageants but all historical pageants, parades, and other commemorative activities almost inevitably simplify their source material in order to make it “useful.” Bitton explains, “The ritualization was not invention; it was a
selecting out of certain aspects, dramatizing them, memorializing them, and giving to the whole the simplicity of a morality play” (177). But perhaps ritualization is not the most accurate term in regards to The Mormon Miracle Pageant, since it implies the occurrence of ritual. Jack Santino explains that rituals, while not always religious, are always sacred: “[W]e think of ritual as social dramatic enactments that the participants believe to have some transformational or confirmatory agency and to derive this power from an overarching parahuman authority such as a deity, the state, an institution such as a university, and so on” (Signs of War and Peace 29). David I. Kertzer further asserts,

Ritual action has a formal quality to it. It follows highly structured, standardized sequences and is often enacted at certain places and times that are themselves endowed with special symbolic meaning. Ritual action is repetitive and, therefore, often redundant, but these very factors serve as important means of channeling emotion, guiding cognition, and organizing social groups. [. . .] Ritual action not only gives meaning to the universe, it becomes part of the universe. (340)

While one certainly sees analogies with the pageant in the above descriptions of ritual, the pageant cannot, I argue, be pure ritual because of its status as spectacle. As MacAloon notes, one of the criteria for the spectacle is a diffuse sense of wonder or awe (246). Ritual, in contrast, is formal and specific—it intends to do something. This is important in our discussion of public display because “ritual knowledge,” as Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. explains, is gained through bodies in motion:

Ritual knowledge is gained through a bodily action which alters the world or the place of the ritual participant in the world. This summary statement
proposes three interrelated aspects to the way of gaining knowledge in
ritual: It is primarily corporeal rather than cerebral, primarily active rather
than contemplative, primarily trans-formative rather than speculative.

(327)

Again, there is much here that reminds us of *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*. Still, the
openness of the pageant, its public-ness, leaves it shy of true ritual. After all, while the
spectators are part of the spectacle, they are not *per force* participants. Ritual must have
an initiate for the ritual to proceed, but, theoretically, the pageant could proceed without
an audience (it just wouldn’t be spectacle). Indeed, the spectacle “specifies doubt,
skepticism, reflexivity, moral ambiguity and ambivalence” as well as liberating the
spectator to accept the spectacle’s message (MacAloon 270). The ritual, in contrast, is
about reaffirmation, about deepening the subject’s commitment to the community.

Santino has formulated the term *ritualesque* (a parallel to the term *carnivalesque*)
to denote public symbolic events, usually done in reference to some overarching or
transcendent institution (like a religion). These events may be clearly symbolic and
intended to address social issues, but are not fully regularized or institutionalized rituals
or ceremonies. The pageant is certainly ritualesque because it has the twin goals of the
ritual (though less regularized and clearly defined) and the spectacle. *The Mormon
Miracle Pageant* wants to *do something* to the people who view it. To the Mormon
visitors, the pageant wants to reaffirm and deepen their commitment to Mormonism; to
non-Mormon visitors, the pageant hopes to convince them of the truths of the Mormon
story. Jennings explains that “[r]itual is not a senseless activity but is rather one of many
ways in which human beings construe and construct their world” (325). Indeed, “we
could say that ritual does not depict the world so much as it *founds or creates the world*” (328)—and in founding the world, it creates devotees of that particular world. The importance of ritual, in fact, the importance of the pageant, is that it teaches one not only how to conduct the ritual itself, but how to conduct oneself outside the ritual space—in the world epitomized by or founded or renewed in and through the ritual itself. (329)

Yet because the pageant is spectacle, it cannot affect one with the immediacy of, say, a baptism or a marriage ceremony—or, perhaps better said, spectacle *diffuses* certain ritual elements, making the pageant function like a ritual but not categorically fit as a ritual; in other words, it is ritualesque. People are touched by the pageant, their faith is deepened, but precisely what happened to them they may not be able to say. They may enthusiastically endorse the pageant to other Latter-day Saints (“Oh, you *have* to see the pageant!”), but it does not have the same transformative power as a ritual like a baptism.

**D. Public display and the creation of reality**

Perhaps this ultimately comes down to a question about reality, and how reality is reified through public display. MacAlloon, writing in 1984, suggested that “the question of the relationship between appearance and reality has become a particularly vexing, even obsessive preoccupation of modern men and women. [. . .] Few of us [. . .] seem any longer so confident in our abilities to tell the apparent from the real. Many of us, to hear us talk, even seem to doubt the existence of a ‘reality’ itself” (270). Certainly MacAlloon’s observation proved prophetic, as postmodernists such as Baudrillard have staked their claim on doubting the existence of a “reality” itself, and, if anything, our
concern with “the relationship between appearance and reality” has only intensified in the intervening twenty-one years.

The pageant is not just about a reality, but the ultimate reality. But in our age of radio and television and personal DVD players and iPods and cell phones and the internet and a seemingly endless array of ways to both represent and “plug into” reality, why would a pageant, with its potential association with “tastelessness and moral cacophony” (MacAloon 246), help us break through the accumulation of appearance and approach the purity of reality? Because the pageant embodies the experience, making it immediate and alive. Other forms of media put the control of the media into the hands of the viewer, whereas the pageant—like reality—is out of the viewer’s hands. For example, with a television, the viewer can turn it off or turn to another station. With a DVD player, the viewer may fast forward, rewind, pause the image, or skip troubling incidents. Cell phones are more immediate, plugging one into to a real person (usually), but the individual may simply terminate the call at will. Yet the pageant, in contrast, is immediate. It occurs outdoors, and one must travel to it. One sees the actual characters going through their motions, and they cannot be stopped. One may chose to remove oneself from the proceedings (as one may do in an actual situation), but the proceedings will continue. Mormon history lives on the hill.

In contrast, the Evangelicals on the street, in an attempt to destabilize Mormonism and present themselves as the true center, engage pageant-goers (before the pageant begins) in conversation and distribute literature from their position at the periphery. Yet their conversation about Mormon doctrine and history, and especially their tracts, seem “dead” when compared to the embodied, living presentation on the hill. The
Evangelicals may be able to match the pageant’s immediacy, with their 150-plus presence on the street every night, but their mere discussion of Mormon doctrine and history pales in comparison to the vivid, colorful, embodied pageant. Eliason notes that counter-Mormons “have turned many Mormon pageants into multi-vocalic spectacles offering diametrically opposed interpretations of the Mormon Experience” (“Celebrating Zion” 206). This is true, but not all space and not all voices are created the same. Evangelicals are relegated to a margins and their voice is delegitimized by the presence of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Captain Moroni and others. The “reality” of Mormonism is brought to life in the form of a pageant.

Counter-Mormons do have more than just conversation and tracts, although these are the two main forms of communication. One Evangelical appeared on the scene with an eight-foot wooden cross (see Figure 3H). The size of the cross drew attention to itself, and because it had no base, it necessitated that he, or another Evangelical, hold it at all times so that it would not fall. It marked the area as Evangelical territory, in stark contrast to the Mormon territory just yards away within the temple gates. (Mormons do not use the cross on their buildings or as jewelry, preferring to focus on Christ’s resurrection as opposed to his suffering and death.) Indeed, the Evangelicals “consecrate” their area by kneeling down in the street and praying before witnessing each night (see Figure 3I).

Interestingly, I was told by several Evangelicals that the pageant sound crew would intentionally try to disrupt their nightly prayer service by turning up the music that plays over the loudspeakers beginning at around six o’clock and continues until the
pageant begins. In fact, Pastor Chip Thompson mentioned this as an example of the
crassness of those they were witnessing to, an example of precisely the type of
undignified behavior the Evangelicals should avoid. I decided to investigate and I asked
one of the sound crew whether they intentionally turned up the volume to annoy the
Evangelicals during their prayer service. Of course, I was prepared for the fact that he
might equivocate if, in fact, he were engaged in this chicanery. But when I asked him the
question he seemed to misunderstand what I even meant, and he explained that the songs
on the pre-pageant tape play at different volume levels because they come from different
CDs, and the different CDs are all recorded at different levels. When I then re-explained
the Evangelicals’ complaint, he seemed surprised and explained that he wasn’t even
aware that they prayed each night before the pageant.⁸ I mention this incident because it
demonstrates several important things. First, the Evangelicals are intent on doing more
than simply praying each night before the pageant; they are intent on claiming this space
for their own, even in the face of what they consider opposition. Second, they assume
that opposition must be in this space, or, rather, that the Mormon-ness around them is
threatening to leak into their space. Third, so secure are Mormons of their dominance—
of their central position—that they don’t even notice the goings-on of the Evangelicals
just yards away from them. This is somewhat of an overstatement: they do notice, but
they don’t need to notice.

The man holding the cross also had on a shirt that declared “NO FALSE
PROPHETS” below which was a picture of Brigham Young, a red circle around his head
and a red slash going through his face. Other Evangelicals wore T-shirts. A group
appeared on the scene wearing a white shirt with a stop sign (see Figure 3J). The shirt
asked “Have You Stopped?” and in the stop sign was the Book of Mormon reference Alma 11.37. The reference is supposed to demonstrate the impossibility of the Mormon gospel: “And I say unto you again that he [Christ] cannot save them in their sins; for I cannot deny his word, and he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven; therefore, how can ye be saved, except ye inherit the kingdom of heaven? Therefore, ye cannot be saved in your sins.” As Becky Walker, one of those wearing the shirts, explained in an interview, “[I]f Jesus can’t save you in your sins then what condition are you going to have to be in? You’re going to have to be out of your sins, and that’s impossible.” While the effectiveness of the T-shirts is probably impossible to gauge, certainly they function to almost immediately identify the Evangelicals as Evangelicals to the arriving Mormon pageant-goers. While there is nothing wrong in taking pride in one’s identity, appearing together as Evangelicals in uniform shirts may be interpreted as brash by many who see them. I asked Melanie Reeves, one of those wearing the shirts, if people were friendly in Manti. She responded:

People are very friendly; uh, they haven’t been as friendly since we’ve been wearing these shirts [laughs].

BEAN: Oh, really?

REEVES: Yes, um, it’s interesting because when they think we’re Mr. and Mrs. Joe Mormon they, they’re very friendly, but once they find out what we’re here for then they’re not friendly. But these [shirts] kind of just scream, “Okay, we’re not Mormon,” and, uh, so people have not been very friendly.
Signs are a major form of public display used by counter-Mormons at the pageant (see Figure 3K). Most signs direct the viewer to a website, for example:

- JOSEPH
- MORMON
- LIED
- INFO
- UTLM
- ORG
- COM
- ORG
- COM
- COM

What is interesting about these sites is, first, the limited number of websites (given the huge amount of counter-Mormon material available on the internet) and, second, the “standardized” look of the signs. While I do not know if these signs were distributed by one central “authority” or individual, or if one group gave instructions to the rest on how to make the signs or which websites were the “best,” the fact is that the signs bear a striking similarity to one another, giving the counter-Mormons a unified “feel.” This is important in confronting Mormonism, because if Mormonism is anything, it is unified. (For examples, all bishops and stake presidents in Mormonism use the same Handbook of Instructions so that their decisions are, theoretically, the same. Sunday school manuals are correlated so that one should receive the same lesson no matter what Mormon church one travels to, whether in Salt Lake City or Guatemala City.) Indeed, Mormons often take the disunity of Christianity as proof of the restored gospel.

Another important aspect to these website addresses is that, in most cases, they are memorable. JosephLied.com does not easily leave the consciousness of the Mormon
who sees it. On the other hand, of course, it runs the risk of causing serious offense.

Joseph Smith ranks alongside Moses and Abraham in importance to Latter-day Saints—
to make desultory remarks about him is to invite Mormons to turn their backs on you and
your message in disgust. Of course, when many Mormons do turn their backs in disgust,
counter-Mormons accuse them of close-mindedness. MormonInfo.org sounds more
neutral, perhaps offering only information on Mormonism. PerfectRighteousness.com
plays into the Evangelical narrative (to be explored in greater depth in the next chapter)
that Mormonism is an impossible gospel, that it requires one to be perfectly righteous in
order to be saved. This, of course, is impossible. However the average Mormon may be
unaware of this Evangelical charge against Mormonism. HisMin.com is more
ambiguous, more Evangelical in tone, simply denoting His Ministry. UTLM.org is the
most obscure; in fact, I did not realize it referred to Utah Lighthouse Ministries—run by
Jerald and Sandra Tanner, lifelong professional counter-Mormons—until I logged on.

The importance of these websites is similar to the importance of tracts, but even
amplified because of the quantity of information therein: it allows counter-Mormons to
“extend” their presence. Even after they are gone, they can continue “preaching,” in a
sense, extending their two-week stay. And for the Mormon who is afraid of the cultural
censure that may ensue if she were to speak to the Evangelicals, she may log on in the
privacy of her own home, away from prying eyes—at least, this is the hope of those who
host these webpages.

A few counter-Mormons held less “professional” signs made with permanent
marker which contained messages or questions (see Figure 3L). Several of these were
held by teens; for example:
Figure 3L
What is interesting about these examples is that, like the cross, they serve primarily to establish the area and the bearers as Evangelical. It is unlikely that these signs are meant to appeal to the Mormon faithful arriving to the pageant for the specific purpose of having their faith reaffirmed in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. The signs also clearly demarcate the boundaries between Mormons and Evangelicals: there can be no compromise here. While Mormons may be moving closer to Christians (to be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter), Christians state categorically that the Mormon gospel is false. The signs are also clearly confrontational; they seem to demand a response. While, as mentioned, many Mormons will simply turn their backs in disgust at the disparagement of their prophet and beliefs, some will feel the need to launch a counteroffensive. Rather than holding aloft a sign describing Christian beliefs (something like “YOU CAN ACCEPT CHRIST’S FREE GIFT”), these Evangelicals have chosen to hold aloft signs designed to provoke a response. And provoke a response they do: many Mormons stop to contend with them. In one instance, a local teen made his own sign across which was scrawled “JOSEPH WAS A TRUE PROPHET” (see Figure 3M). He would stand in front of an Evangelical waving a sign. While he seemed
rather inarticulate as a spokesman for Mormonism—the Evangelicals would challenge him on specifics of Joseph Smith’s life and doctrine—his resolve was firm and he stood with his sign amongst them for several hours, apparently feeling the need trade sign for sign.

There is also something quite imposing about the signs. While some are small, most are large (Figure 3N). Holding the signs aloft, one adds to one’s height. The sign and the bearer are not to be distinguished. Certainly this is an attempt to counterbalance the overwhelming dominance of the Mormon presence which has cast Christianity to the margins. In a sense, Evangelicals want to retake the center by becoming larger than life.

Another “homemade” sign takes the pageant itself to task:

JOSEPH SMITH KILLED
TWO PEOPLE
WHY WAS IT TAKEN
OUT OF THE PAGEANT?

Unlike the other two signs, this is meant to instill doubt into the Mormon who sees it. First, I doubt that most Mormons are aware of the allegation that Joseph Smith killed two people. Counter-Mormons make this charge based on the testimony of John Taylor, one of the men imprisoned with Smith when he was murdered. Taylor, many years after the incident, was asked to write his memory of the event. When the mob attacked Carthage Jail, he recalled that a bullet passed through the door of the room where the four men were being kept and struck Joseph’s brother in the face, killing him. Joseph ran to him, exclaiming,
‘Oh! my poor, dear brother Hyrum!’ He, however, instantly arose, and with a firm, quick step, and a determined expression of countenance, approached the door, and pulling the six-shooter left by Brother Wheelock from his pocket, opened the door slightly, and snapped the pistol six successive times; only three of the barrels, however, were discharged. I afterwards understood that two or three were wounded by these discharges, two of whom, I am informed, died. (qtd. in Roberts History of the Church 102-03)

This is the piece of evidence counter-Mormons use to sustain the charge that Smith killed two people, and clearly it is less than solid historical evidence—“I afterwards understood,” “I am informed.” Indeed, the historical evidence suggests that the three men wounded were not killed but fled the state to avoid prosecution (their wounds being incontrovertible proof of their part in the mob attack). 9

Second, because most Mormons are unaware of the allegation that Smith killed two men, the charge that he did, and that, further, it was removed from the pageant, implies conspiracy. A common counter-Mormon allegation is that the truth cannot be obtained from Mormons because a) either Mormons don’t know the truth about their own gospel (because their leaders are actively hiding the truth from them or Mormons are too lazy or unwilling to look for it) or b) Mormons don’t want you to know the truth about their religion and so will give you a simplified version of their gospel, hiding unflattering history and doctrine. It is ironic, then, that the allegation that Joseph Smith killed two people comes from John Taylor, a former Mormon prophet and president, and one of the men who witnessed Smith’s death. However the charge is made that vis-à-vis the
pageant Mormons are trying to elide unflattering church history. Indeed, the counter-Mormon sign in question implies just such a conspiracy: “WHY WAS IT TAKEN OUT OF THE PAGEANT?”

The scene in question is the Carthage Jail Scene in which Joseph Smith is killed. During the history of the pageant, Smith was depicted in the jail with his three cellmates: his brother Hyrum, his friend John Taylor, and Dr. Willard Richards. Joseph requests that John sing “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief.” After the song, Joseph says, “Sing it again, John.” When John begins to sing again, the sounds of an approaching mob can be heard. The men try to brace the door and Hyrum is shot. He falls back, dead. Joseph exclaims, “Oh, my poor, dear brother Hyrum!” He then fires twice at the door before being shot. All is quiet as he utters the words, “Oh Lord, my God!” and sinks down dead in the window frame.

Joseph Smith was depicted as firing twice at the mob (which we hear but never see), but he was not depicted as killing anyone. Thus, the allegation that Smith killed two people and it was removed from the pageant, while it may be an effective counter-Mormon “hook,” is not precisely accurate. What this Evangelical is probably referring to is likely the fact that Joseph Smith is no longer portrayed firing into the mob. This fits into the counter-Mormon narrative that Mormons are attempting to occlude unflattering history and doctrine. Chip Thompson said in an interview:

[T]hey’ve skimmed the cream off of LDS history and put it all into one play and make it look as good as they can [sic], and I think that some, some parts of the play, especially, especially the part where they took the gun out of Joseph Smith’s hand really bugs me, because I came for years
and they had the gun in his hand, and that’s part of his—, that’s part of LDS history, and to remove the gun seems to me to be nothing more than a deceptive thing to do to try to make it look like Joseph Smith was even more of a lamb to the slaughter than he really was, so to me that’s—, I don’t, I don’t like it at all that they took the gun out of his hand; that, that bothers me.

What I find most interesting about Thompson’s comment, perhaps even more interesting than the comment itself, is that Thompson is an Ephraim resident. Unlike other Evangelicals who come from distant places, he lives in Ephraim and, if he doesn’t know the pageant director personally, he at least knows him by name, Ephraim being such a small town. He knows from reading the town newspaper and listening to the local radio that Ivo Peterson teaches at Snow College. He could very easily do what I did: drop by his office at Snow and ask him about the change. Why he and other Evangelicals don’t seek answers to their questions is important: because the questions and the ownership of the questions is more important than having an answer.

Indeed, the reason why the gun was removed from Smith’s hand is rather banal. Previous pageant directors, during the Carthage Jail Scene, wanted to emphasize Joseph Smith as victim of mob violence. Peterson wanted to change the emphasis of the scene from Smith as victim to Smith as servant. Therefore, Peterson has Smith perform some sort of service for each man in the jail while Taylor is singing. However given that the pageant is on an audio tape and that the scene is a fixed amount of time, Peterson explained that he could not figure out a way to have Smith perform a service for each of the three men in jail, grab the gun, and position himself at the doorway. (Altering the
audio tape was not an alternative either, since it would involve rerecording the entire scene which, at present time, is both cost prohibitive and would require altering other scenes.) Thus, the removal of the gun from Smith’s hand was not, according to Peterson, intended to sanitize Mormon history; it was simply the result of blocking problems.  

Obviously Evangelicals could argue that Peterson must leave the gun in his hand for the sake of historical accuracy, and this is not an untenable position. But another position is that pageants are not history lessons, but “ritualesque” creations meant to do something for their intended audience. As David Glassberg notes, “Historical pageantry’s making of history into ritual depended—even more than other forms of drama—on the audience’s complete identification with the special world created on the pageant field, a world at once real and prophetic” (149). Thus, Peterson’s decision to “create” Joseph Smith as a servant to his cellmates is completely within keeping with audience expectations. In fact, his decision to move away from Joseph as victim of mob violence is keeping with evolving Mormon expectations. In earlier days, Mormons focused more on their victim narratives. But as they travel further into the twenty-first century, such narratives, while not disappearing entirely, are drifting out of their religious psyche as they become less provincial and more of a world religion.

Yet the notion that Mormons are not honest about their history is so entrenched in the counter-Mormon mind that even when the gun was in Smith’s hand, some Evangelicals expressed wonder about it. For example, on a webpage written in 2000, one Evangelical said,

That evening as we watched the dress rehearsal I was amazed that in one segment where they are depicting the shootout that happened at the
Carthage Jail, where Joseph Smith is killed, they finally owned up to the truth of the story. They showed Joseph Smith, with a Pepper Box Six Shooter, actually firing back at his assailants. *I couldn’t believe it.* Even when I had visited the Carthage Jail, near Nauvoo[,] Illinois, they conveniently overlooked this important point. It may be because Joseph Smith made the statement that he was going as a lamb to the slaughter, words that originally were used in reference to Jesus Christ in the Bible. It also may be that the Mormon church [sic] refers to Joseph Smith as a Martyr, yet if he was truly a martyr would he have shot back at those who were trying to kill him? So . . . Why are they *now finally* fessing up to the whole truth of the story? (“Mormon Miracle Pageant—Manti, Utah 2000” my emphases)

This Evangelical is amazed that Mormons would portray Joseph with the gun in his hand, given the counter-Mormon narrative that Mormons are loath to discuss “unflattering” history. More interesting is the insinuation that now that the church is “finally fessing up,” something must still be amiss; that is, there is the hint of subterfuge of some sort (“Why are they now finally fessing up to the whole truth of the story?”) given the church’s obvious reluctance to talk about anything unflattering.

While, I believe, most Mormons are probably unaware of the allegation that Smith killed two people, they are aware that he fired back at his assailants. (I make this claim from personal experience in the church, not from any survey data. It is possible that new converts are unaware that Smith defended himself against his attackers.)
III. Can The Absence of Public Display Be Public Display?

A. The move from visible to less visible

In this dissertation I have asserted that the pageant serves as a flashpoint for issues that percolate all year long among three groups: Mormons, Evangelical Christians, and members of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days. Yet in our discussion thus far, the TLC has been conspicuously absent from the pageant scene. Indeed, the immediate vicinity of the temple grounds seems to be a religious contest between Mormonism and Evangelical Christianity, with the occasional outbreak of an “other”: a man holding an anti-abortion sign told me he was an excommunicated Mormon protesting what he considered the church’s liberal stance on abortion¹¹ (see Figure 3O). (Interestingly, a few Evangelicals told me that he was a fundamentalist Mormon with several wives. He denied the charge, saying he had only one.) Another excommunicated Mormon seemed to find great joy in “teasing” the counter-Mormons, and came dressed one night as Moses¹² (see Figure 3P). A third excommunicated Mormon stood on the sidelines, rarely speaking. One night he appeared in a pro-life T-shirt. I was told by a Manti native that in 2003 TLC prophet “Jim Harmston was down there carrying a poster,” although she didn’t personally see him; she was told about it by someone else. Pageant President Ivo Peterson claims he has never seen the TLC amidst the throng of counter-Mormons carrying signs or likewise protesting in anyway.

After organizing in 1994, the TLC was quite open during pageant time, hoping to attract people to their buildings and generate interest in what they considered the restored gospel. TLC patriarch Philip Savage told me that in the early days of the church they were missionary-oriented, wanting to make their doctrines available for all. Along with
hosting a detailed website, they would open their buildings during pageant season where they would sell CD-ROMs of their website, sell pamphlets and books, and spend hours answering the questions of passing pageant-goers, as well as showing them their facilities. A large sidewalk sign invited visitors to come inside and get to know the TLC. But according to Savage, “we found that what we were teaching basically was too hard for most people to be willing to, uh, sacrifice [for].” They realized that their missionary effort was not “bearing any fruit” and that most people were “not interested but [only] curious [. . .].” In 1999 they didn’t open their doors or put out their sidewalk sign (Johnson “Manti Splinter” 4). While some TLC may occasionally still “go to the pageant environs to discuss ideas,” according to Don L. Peterson (e-mail to author), they do not open their buildings during the pageant or make any sort of a visible presence.

This brings me back to the header of this section: Can absence of public display be public display? To put it another way: Can the absence of something be so striking that its very absence elicits its presence? While we have discussed the importance of Manti in the Latter-day Saint imagination, Manti is just one of several spiritual centers—and, it must be admitted, every spiritual center in Mormonism must finally defer to the ultimate spiritual center which is Jackson County, Missouri. The TLC, in contrast, makes Manti into the spiritual center of this world: “I prophesy that the City of Manti is to become a City of Zion and that the Lord Jesus Christ will come to His temple and to a people who have put spiritual things to the forefront” (Maudsley “Randy Maudsley Bio”). The TLC, like the LDS, believes that a literal Zion will be established in Jackson County, but their literature seems to imply that this will be after Christ has returned; for now, Manti and the surrounding valley is the spiritual safe haven for the righteous
remnant. Savage told me that when the book of 3 Nephi talks of Christ returning to the land of Bountiful, it is referring to the Manti Temple; thus, the land of Zion will get its foothold in Sanpete County. Don L. Peterson explains that “Zion will be established in the mountains before the redemption of the New Jerusalem,” and that “is the city where Manti, Utah now stands” (“Don Peterson Bio” my emphasis).

Given the prime importance of Manti in the theology of the True and Living Church, how can we interpret their decision to withdraw themselves from the swirl of activity that literally engulfs Manti each June? During the mid- to late-1990s, the TLC was quite open with the media, granting interviews and access to journalists and their probing cameras. They appeared on 20/20, Leeza, and A&E’s Investigative Reports, and “countries in England, France, Israel, Germany, and Spain have produced documentaries on this religion” (Johnson “Manti Splinter” 4). While the TLC certainly knew that they were not going to be portrayed amicably, they also knew—or at least hoped—that their message of the restored gospel would get out to a large audience and generate interest. However many of the programs were less than even-handed, to say the least.

Investigative Reports mixed footage of the TLC with other fundamentalist polygamous groups, and alleged that it was guilty of physical and sexual abuse by conflating it with groups that had done the same. On April 15, 1999 the TLC removed the contents of its website and left only a statement that said the time of warning was over and God would do “His own work of rendering judgment and calamity upon the wicked and ungodly” (“True and Living Church”). While these negative media portrayals may not be the reason for the TLC’s withdrawal from the public square, they have nonetheless withdrawn.
B. Absent presence

It is difficult to gauge just how many visitors to Manti know about the True and Living Church, but I would estimate that the majority are unaware of the group, or, at least, of its precise claims (that is, they may know that there are “some polygamists” in Manti, but not much beyond that). Yet if they spend any time walking the streets of Manti, they likely see the Red Brick Store on Main Street—a “store” which calls attention to itself because it is not a store but is called such after a building in Nauvoo, Illinois. Indeed, the building does look like something out of Mormonism’s past, but above the doors is the name of a church—and the church is not the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Just around the corner off Main Street is the Assembly Hall, another religious edifice not of the LDS Church, conspicuous in this Mormon town (see Figure 3Q). Pageant visitors are likely to wonder about these buildings and the “mystery” of their inhabitants. In a town that seems so thoroughly saturated in Mormonism—with temple and pageant—what is this undisguised outbreak of something that resembles Mormonism’s past? It seems brazen, perhaps even wrong to the Mormon visitors.

For Latter-day Saints who live in the Sanpete Valley and either attend the pageant or participate in it, they are likely well aware of the history and the claims of the TLC. Some may have even have known members of the TLC when they were still Mormons. Merilyn Jorgensen said she knew Jim Harmston when he was still in her LDS congregation and she watched the process as he went from faithful member to apostate. When I asked Latter-day Saint David Simmons why he thought the TLC settled in Manti, he speculated that it was the draw of the temple but also the smallness of the town:
Figure 3Q
“[T]hey can kind of take over and they can be a substantial power in the town.”

Doubtless Simmons is correct: the TLC has been a “substantial power” in Manti, causing no small stir in the town of Manti during the eleven years of their existence. For those who are aware of their existence, especially those living in Sanpete who have watched the emergence, rise, and decline of the TLC, and may even have had friends or relatives leave Mormonism for it, they cannot but be aware of its presence when stepping foot in Manti.

Thus, in a very real way, the True and Living Church is the absent presence at The Mormon Miracle Pageant. They are conspicuous in their decision not to enter the fray near the temple grounds, carry signs, or at least open their buildings during pageant time to try to lure tourists into their buildings. And what makes this absence even more conspicuous is the content of the pageant itself, which harkens back to an earlier era of Mormonism in its replaying—and relishing in—the trauma narratives of the early Latter-day Saints. In a sense, the pageant tilts more toward the TLC than the LDS: the pageant captures the culture of an earlier time, one which the mainstream church has been downplaying as of late. While pioneers are still memorialized, they are more likely to be remembered as victors over incredible odds than as victims of an unfeeling society and a harsh environment. Indeed, one anonymous TLC informant told me that the Latter-day Saints watching the pageant don’t understand what they’re watching, for the pageant is preaching of the gathering of the saints out of the world, a doctrine the LDS Church has done away with. In other words, he understands the doctrine in the pageant that the Latter-day Saints are missing due to their current religio-cultural blindness.
The very content of the pageant—its emphasis on the Joseph Smith story and Mormonism’s pioneer heritage—all hearken back to an earlier age. As Eliason notes, one of the purposes of pageants and Pioneer Day celebrations is to collapse time, to impart some of the essence of the mythical time of the beginnings of Mormonism into the present. These pageant and other celebrations, of course, are transitory, and Mormons then return to their workaday lives, secure in middle-class America. However fundamentalist Mormon groups like the TLC try to establish a permanent recapitulation, not collapsing time but returning to the “once upon a time” of Mormon origins. The content of the pageant seems as if it would suit the TLC because it only goes so far as the settlement of Manti, bespeaking nothing of the church’s later period of modernization.

The fact that the pageant fits so well into the TLC’s mission to recapitulation early Mormonism and the fact that the TLC has removed itself from the pageant scene may explain why some TLC members need to use harsh language to condemn the pageant. This spectacle in this town should be a celebration of TLC-ness, yet it is celebrating Mormonism, and yet, ironically, Mormons are moving away from this representation of themselves. In a way, Mormons don’t deserve to have this pageant, yet have it they do. One anonymous TLC informant called the pageant “silly,” “hollow,” “stupid,” “nauseating,” and “foolish.” Don L. Peterson says that the fact that the pageant takes place in Manti is “irrelevant”; in fact, he calls it a “‘cute’ cultural phenomenon [. . .].” Yet he then asserts that the doctrine conveyed in the pageant “pollutes Manti, temple hill and the Sanpete [V]alley” (e-mail to author). Philip Savage was more sanguine in his assessment: He said that if it came down to a vote to keep the pageant or discontinue it, he would vote to keep it. He said, however, that it is his “conviction that
there are a lot of errors, uh, uh, presented, um, there are doctrines that are presented that are skewed to my, to my view,” which will necessitate parents teaching the true doctrine to their children after watching the pageant. Peterson sees this as a “dumbing down of the real history,” part of the Mormon Church’s “philosophy of making everything look, feel, smell and seem to be good, sweet and just plain nice.”

IV. Conclusion

I asked many Latter-day Saints whether or not The Mormon Miracle Pageant would be the same pageant if it took place in another location, such as in a large city like Salt Lake or Provo. Most had never considered the question. Some thought that it could be taken to another location without too much violence to the production; after all, it was the subject matter that was ultimately important. Others, however, said that the backdrop of the Manti Temple would be hard to replace. They are right about that—but that is only part of the answer. It is the hugeness of the pageant in the smallness of this particular town, imbued as it is with a pioneer heritage and consecrated with a temple. The hugeness of the pageant enables Mormonism to occupy the central position that Christianity normally occupies in America, throwing Christianity temporarily to the periphery.

Paradoxically, this probably accounts for the Evangelical interest in the pageant as mission destination. While we would certainly expect some Evangelicals to choose this place as their mission site, the fact that so many have chosen to crowd the streets—reaching and surpassing saturation point—implies that the area is providing them with more than just a crowd of Mormons. Indeed, there are so many counter-Mormons that
one homemade sign announced “Pro-LDS ‘Free Book’ ” (see Figure 3R). The fact that the sellers felt it necessary to attach “Pro” to “LDS” testifies to the ubiquity of the counter-Mormons during pageant season. While counter-Mormons engage in many evangelizing efforts—appearing outside of Temple Square in Salt Lake, occasionally proselytizing Brigham Young University, targeting temple openings—their presence at The Mormon Miracle Pageant in such large numbers is surprising. This is likely due to the fact that in Manti the difference between Christianity and Mormonism is pronounced.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been moving inexorably Christianward. While it still has heterodox doctrines, many are downplayed as reliance on Christ as Savior is accentuated. However the difference between Mormonism and Christianity is larger in Manti than elsewhere (such as in Salt Lake City, or at a recent temple opening such as in Boston). Not only does the pageant play up the differences, but the people of Manti tend to be the “old Mormons” with a written history, proud to admit to those doctrines that set them apart from mainstream Christianity. In a very real way, the “border” between the two religions is clearer in Manti than in other places, and the creation and maintenance of an identity is easier in an area where the differences are vivid.

Perhaps this also explains some of the reluctance of the True and Living Church to participate in the public display at the site of the pageant. Whereas the Mormon Church’s move toward Christianity has made room for fundamentalist groups like the TLC, such differences are not as pronounced among Manti Mormons, and not spoken of in the pageant itself. The TLC could make an appearance—but to what end? The goal of Evangelicals seems quite clear, but what would the goal of the TLC be? Would they
Pro-LDS
"Free Book"
in purchase of
autographed copy of NEW
Mothers of the
Prophets series
Lucy Mack
Smith

Figure 3R
disagree with the content of the pageant? As noted, they do disagree with the “dumbing down” of the pageant, but not with the actual history the pageant represents.

If the Mormon Church is, in fact, Christianizing, and if Christians find this threatening (as I have argued), why would they expend so much time and energy at the pageant? In other words, if the border was so clear at the pageant, why spend their time there rather than in Salt Lake City or at a temple opening, where the border is becoming increasingly fuzzy? Fredrick Barth notes that “ethnic groups only persist as significant units if they imply marked difference in behaviour, i.e. persisting cultural differences” (301)—in other words, group boundaries exist because group members enact difference. Evangelical Christians know themselves because they know that which is not them.

While the movement of Mormons toward Christianity—and, especially, Mormons performance of Christianity—cause Evangelicals no small concern, such movement also threatens to erode Evangelicals’ ability to define themselves. However at the pageant in the place of Manti, Utah, they are still able to perceive a clear difference between themselves as Christians and Mormons as Mormons.
Chapter 4

Christianity Re-Defined by Mormonism:
The Politics of Naming at The Mormon Miracle Pageant

I. Introduction

The title of this chapter comes from a tract given to me at the 2004 season of The Mormon Miracle Pageant by an Evangelical Christian: Christianity Re-Defined by Mormonism: “A Glossary That Will Open Your Eyes” (2001). The pamphlet gets at the heart of the ongoing power struggle between Mormons and Evangelical Christians: Mormons, it is claimed by its foes, want to be seen as one thing when they are in reality another. The tract’s author, Mark D. Champneys, explains that “Mormons do not want to be seen as ‘way out,’ intolerant cultists with strange and unusual beliefs, but as respectable, mainstream Christians” (1). While Mormons use many of the same terms as Christians, Champneys believes that Mormon leaders are actively re-defining Christianity. Despite the fact that the different term usage could be explained as the common phenomenon of different groups using the same words to define different things, Champneys assumes bad faith on the part of the Mormon leadership: “[T]he slick public relations campaign their leadership is engaged in is actually an insidious deception” (1). (Members of the True and Living Church would likely agree with the preceding allegation, although they would disagree vigorously with Evangelicals over the true nature of the gospel.)

Virtually all tracts given to me at the 2004 season of the pageant attempt, like Champneys’s, to expose how Mormonism uses Christian terms to mean something quite
different. For example, a pamphlet from L.D.S. Outreach entitled *Whom Do Ye Say That I Am?* is subtitled, not unimportantly, *A Study in Contrasts* and is divided into two columns, one dedicated to “The Biblical Jesus” and the other to “The Mormon Jesus.” Champneys’s *The Greatest Blessing of Being L.D.S.: To Dwell with Heavenly Father* (2000) contains such subheadings as “What the LDS Church Means by ‘Repent?’ ” (5) and “The Way to Heavenly Father: The Bible’s Good News” (9). Numerous pamphlets (e.g., *Are You Abiding a Celestial Law?*; “*Be Ye Therefore Perfect*”; *A Summary of Mormon Salvation*; etc.) focus on the Mormon concept of working towards perfection, a goal considered impossible by Evangelicals. They contrast accepting the grace of Jesus as a free gift with Mormons’ belief that they can literally become like Heavenly Father. All of the tracts have the same thing in common: They assume that there is a stark difference between Mormonism and Christianity, despite the same term usage, perhaps even the same outlook and mannerisms.

Mormons, on the other hand, are often baffled by the charges of intentional or unintentional deception—they simply see some things differently, they claim, but that different perception is no reason to deny them entrance into the Christian community. “After all,” you will hear many a Mormon counter, “the name of our church is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” Quite often, Mormons are unfamiliar with the nuanced claims of modern-day Christianity and would not know why Evangelicals are loath to grant them entrance into the Christian community. Mormons know that Mormonism goes beyond traditional Christianity, but many may not know why this disqualifies them as Christians in many—perhaps most—Christians’ eyes, thinking simple belief in Jesus is enough.
Pageants have become one “battleground” where issues of naming can be discussed and tussled over. Identity claims can be staked out by all those involved: “I am this; you are that.” “No, I am this; you are that.” Boundaries are explored in the process and territory is claimed. Eliason believes that counter-Mormon “demonstrations have turned many Mormon pageants into multi-vocalic spectacles offering diametrically opposed interpretations of the Mormon Experience” (“Celebrating Zion” 206). Certainly the presence of the Evangelical Christians, their usual places outside the temple gates, their pamphlets in hand, their “JosephLied.com” signs held high, their T-shirts with counter-Mormon messages, their sincere smiles, and sometimes their obnoxious techniques (“You’re all going to hell!”) turn the streets surrounding the Manti Temple into a First Amendment free-for-all in which Mormons and Evangelicals wrestle for the privilege to define such terms as Christian, Christ, and canon.

II. Questions of Identity at The Mormon Miracle Pageant

A. A contest over truth?

The question of identity is central to the yearly phenomenon that is The Mormon Miracle Pageant. While the performance of Mormon identity occurs within the drama of the pageant itself, it also occurs nightly as Evangelicals and Mormons encounter one another on the streets outside the Manti Temple gates. The True and Living Church, while not as visible in this nightly melee, is nonetheless a participant in the question over Mormon identity. Essentially everyone at the pageant is claiming the same thing: “I know what Mormonism is, and you aren’t being honest about it.” Evangelicals assert that they know what Mormonism is, that they have studied it, and they have come to Manti to
tell the truth about it. Knowing what they consider to be the truth about Mormonism, many Evangelicals conclude that Mormons perforce must be dishonest: the cheerful face they present to the world is, as Champneys alleges, an “insidious deception” behind which they hide their shameful history and untenable doctrine. Each morning of the pageant, many of the attending Evangelicals meet at the Ephraim Church of the Bible to sing, pray, discuss witnessing strategies, and listen to a speaker. I attended one of these meetings. The speaker was discussing what he considered to be philosophical impossibilities in Mormon thought when the following exchange occurred between the speaker and a congregant:

Speaker: “So what does this tell us about Mormons?”

Congregant: “That they’re liars!”

Other Evangelicals, by way of contrast, only consider Mormons deluded or confused, as opposed to actively deceptive. Indeed, in this particular exchange the speaker responded, after a slight pause, “Well, I wouldn’t call them liars; I would call them confused.” Still, the basic question for Evangelicals is one of honesty, because Evangelicals believe that if Mormons were honest with themselves, they would see Mormonism for the fraud that it is. (Evangelicals have less contact with the TLC, but their outlook on that group is the same.)

Similarly, Mormons say, “I know what Mormonism is, and you Evangelicals aren’t being honest about it.” Mormons feel as if their knowledge of Mormonism needs no justification: they live it. Mormonism is not simply a collection of doctrines they have assembled from sundry texts, but a lifestyle that is dynamic. The Evangelical assertion that Mormons don’t really understand Mormonism strikes some as odd, others
as offensive. Historian Davis Bitton explains that counter-Mormons often “find a quotation of the 1870s, or the 1850s, or the 1830s and try to hang it around the neck of people who have never heard of it” with little “regard for context” (“Spotting an Anti-Mormon Book”). Mormons often feel that Evangelicals are being dishonest—twisting, mutilating, and decontextualizing Mormon history and doctrines in order to confuse and frighten. If Evangelicals were honest, Mormons feel, there would be very little to discuss, very little to sensationalize.

The True and Living Church is not as visible during the current pageant season as they once were, having found that the time they spent proselytizing during pageant bore little fruit. Still, the TLC participates in the struggle over identity, claiming that they are the true Mormons—representatives of Joseph Smith’s Mormonism—and that the Mormons who visit Manti and those who participate in the pageant are not being honest about Mormonism. If they were honest about it, reasons the TLC, they would realize how far the LDS Church has strayed from Smith’s original vision. Don L. Peterson says the “aberrance in doctrine” presented in the pageant “pollutes Manti, temple hill and the Sanpete [V]alley” (e-mail to author).

Thus, each group in Manti claims to represent the truth about the term Mormonism, while claiming the other two groups are intentionally or unintentionally dishonest. Evangelicals with their street preaching, their pamphlets, and their DVD exposés promise to tell the truth about Mormonism. They are certain that the truth will not be had from Mormons, and they consider the TLC just the bastard child of a licentious parent. Mormons consider themselves able to represent the truth about themselves (whether one agrees with their truth claims or not), while they certainly doubt
an Evangelical’s ability to give a fair rendering of Mormon doctrine and/or history, and they consider the average TLC member so misguided and embittered against the LDS Church that they doubt if he or she would be much better. The TLC member certainly feels the average Mormon to be either unwilling to talk about or uneducated in early Mormon history and doctrines, and so would not trust him or her. And while I did hear a couple TLC members express admiration for the Evangelicals’ biblical knowledge, they consider them lost.

We should not overlook the importance for identity formation of having an Other against which to define oneself. John R. Lewis notes that

societies need enemies, particularly societies that are going through a disturbing period of change. External threats provide motivation for a people to overcome internal divisiveness in order to work together as a unit. Having an enemy one can portray as evil and perverse also provides support for the normative values and institutions of one’s society: “They” are communists; “we” are capitalists. “They” are totalitarian; “we” are democratic. (37-38)

While it is probably too harsh to use the term “enemy” in reference to the groups in question—that is, Mormons don’t consider Evangelicals enemies, nor vice versa—Lewis’s observation is still applicable. Actually, I should not be too hasty in saying they do not consider each other enemies, for certainly some members of each group consider members of the other groups to be, quite literally, enemies of righteousness. But the important point is that in the defining of someone as an enemy—indeed, in the manufacture of some Other as an enemy, which is arguably what is happening in some
extreme instances of counter-Mormon activity and Mormon response—there is group cohesion. When I went to the Ephraim Church of the Bible, one Evangelical said a prayer in which he thanked God that so many Christians from diverse religions with diverse outlooks could set aside their differences for the goal of witnessing to Mormons. Likewise, certainly the remarkable cohesion of Mormons (“the Mormon people consistently are the hardest-working, most cohesive block in our society” [Bloom 113]) is in part a legacy of their persecution: they have learned to depend on and trust one another because they could depend on and trust no one else. While historical forces have changed so that they are no longer in physical danger, the continual counter-Mormon offensive provides them with a reason to remain unified. And in the case of the TLC, recent legal action brought against them by ex-members has exacerbated their self-perception as God’s persecuted people. Elaine Harmston, wife of the TLC prophet, said on the day the jury awarded a former member $300,000: “It is a sad day for the entire TLC and we’ll have a tough time getting through this. God’s people have always been persecuted and right now is no different” (qtd. in Dart “Jury”). But even before these court cases, the TLC constructed the LDS Church as its apostate enemy.

B. The power to speak

But the question is not simply one of truth—who gets to define the “truth” of Mormonism? There is nothing too remarkable in the revelation that there are many truths about Mormonism, many ways of looking at this complex phenomenon, many ways of understanding the diversity of responses to the pageant. For example, when I was at the pageant I spent a half hour talking to an Evangelical woman whose son recently returned
from a Mormon mission. As she spoke, I could tell that all was not right at home, and she began to blame the Mormon Church for turning her son against her. I listened to her recitation of grievances without interruption. Yet my impression, after some time, was that she and her son were locked in a power struggle that had little to do with religion; it was simply the battleground upon which they had chosen to wage war. Her son did not want her to be at the pageant distributing counter-Mormon literature, as he was going to be attending the pageant with his new Mormon girlfriend. She told me, a note of defiance in her voice, that she would witness of the Lord anywhere she pleased—“he’ll just have to learn to live with my dedication to Christ!” So what is the “truth” of the Mormon Church in this encounter? Was the church the enemy she perceived it to be? I could not deny that the tears in her eyes were real, as was her anger at the church. Hers was certainly a truth I found at the pageant, and it would have been brutish of me to dismiss it.

The question is not so much truth as identity, and who gets to speak that identity, and how that identity gets deployed in “border disputes.” Stephen E. Robinson, addressing this specific issue in a conversation with an Evangelical, says, “[A] distorted stereotype of the LDS has become a religious conviction for some Evangelicals. It has become their orthodoxy that Mormons believe X, Y and Z, even though the Latter-day Saints emphatically deny it. This is why the initial disagreements between us are always about what Mormons believe instead of whether or not it is true” (Blomberg and Robinson 12 last emphasis mine). This Evangelical unwillingness to take Mormons’ words at face value contributes to the Mormon perception that the average Evangelical is “mean-spirited and dishonest” (11), because before a discussion of issues has even begun
Mormons feel put on the defensive, having to assert that they indeed believe what they believe. The Evangelical very often comes from a position of disbelieving the Mormons’ assertions, assuming that they have a hidden agenda that, of course, they are reluctant to reveal in public. Robinson exclaims in frustration, “I know what I believe. Why won’t Evangelicals believe I believe it?” (162).

There may be some substance to the Evangelicals’ perception, although not for the reasons necessarily alleged by them. Erving Goffman notes a distinction between “frontstage” and “backstage,” and how we all act differently depending upon the “audience” for which we are “performing.” In the frontstage, an individual may give the “appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards” (107), while in the backstage an individual’s “performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course” (112). While Goffman is referring mostly to corporate behavior, his insights are applicable to religious organizations. For example, Mormons will, not surprisingly, portray to the world a frontstage of familial happiness and Christian unity, while in the backstage—such as in private church meetings or Mormon neighbors talking over the phone about a recent church decision—question the wisdom of a certain action. The knowledge that Mormons act differently with Mormons is little insight, for most, if not all, groups do this. When I visited the Ephraim Church of the Bible, I was guided to my seat by Keith and Becky Walker of Evidence Ministries who had invited me there a few days earlier. There were a few moments during the meeting when I felt them shift uncomfortably in their chairs, due to the fact that many, perhaps most, of the people in the congregation did not know I was a Mormon and they continued on in their backstage presentation. One man called Mormons liars and one woman said they were going to
burn in hell like bacon. During the presentation of the main speaker, there was considerable laughter and derision of Mormon doctrine. This was significantly different from the generally polite frontstage presentation at the pageant where, as I have noted earlier, they make an attempt to be courteous.

There could be another explanation, perhaps one that accords more fully with Champneys’s allegation of an “insidious deception.” Mormonism is a religion born of intense persecution—persecution at the hands of Americans, Christians, and American Christians. Since Mormonism’s renunciation of polygamy, it has attempted to make a rapprochement with both America and Christians. But, as James C. Scott notes in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990),

> Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a “hidden transcript” that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful, for their part, also develop a hidden transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed. A comparison of the hidden transcript of the weak with that of the powerful and of both hidden transcripts to the public transcript of power relations offers a substantially new way of understanding resistance to domination. (qtd. in Rodríquez 143)

Mormons may, indeed, have developed an instinct not to tell too much, or not to trust too readily. The “hidden transcript” spoken of by Scott could be the re-definition spoken of by Champneys: words with similar definitions but used to mean something different. The sense that Evangelicals have that Mormons are not being completely forthright may be partially explained by this notion of a subordinate critique of power. After all, Ostling
and Ostling contend that Mormons’ “own scriptures virtually forbid Saints to recognize that the great churches of Christianity—Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant—have any authentic claim to be Christian” (319-20), yet Mormons claim to want entrance into this Christian community. Perhaps Mormons do want entrance, but on their own terms, terms shared only fully with other members of the group.

Mormons in and around Manti also have a way of exercising power, although it is different from the Evangelical attempt to deny Mormons the agency to define their own terms—or believe that they are being honest in their accounting of those terms. While Mormons are certainly not the dominant culture in the United States, they are the dominant culture in Utah and in many of the towns throughout the Southwest. Being the dominant culture allows them to decide how much contact and upon what terms they would like to have contact with “minority” cultures. As William Booth notes, “There is, however, really no other place in America where one religion so dominates daily life. The role of the Mormon faith in Utah is often compared, favorably, to Catholicism in Rome and Judaism in Israel, or unfavorably, by its critics, to Islamic theocracies in the Middle East” (A6). While the charge that the Utah Mormon culture is insular is unfair, it is certainly not unfair to note that there are insular Utah Mormons—a privilege that exists by virtue of sheer numbers. One may grow up in certain places in Utah—like Manti—with Mormon parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, friends, and neighbors; in fact, such was my experience. While Evangelicals may misrepresent or disbelieve the claims of Mormons, Mormons very often do not even understand Evangelical doctrine to begin with.³ One Mormon youth who encountered the counter-Mormons at The Mormon Miracle Pageant said, “I don’t know what motivates them to do that. It’s just odd to me
that they’d think they have an audience” (qtd. in Karras “Manti Miracle”). Similarly, when I ran into several Mormon acquaintances at the pageant and told them I was there to interview Evangelicals, they expressed interest. They seemed puzzled as to the Evangelicals’ presence and wanted me to explain it to them. I found it curious that they wouldn’t simply satisfy their curiosity by walking up to one of the 200 Evangelicals and asking, “So, why are you here?” As the saying goes: Knowledge is power. In this situation, ignorance is power. If they remain ignorant of others’ faith claims, they do not have to deal with them. This may occur actively—Mormons actively avoiding contact with other religions for whatever reasons (fear of doctrinal contamination, assumption of persecutory intent, cosmological incompatibility, etc.)—or passively—Mormons simply not knowing anyone from another religious group (e.g., until Chip Thompson came to Ephraim, there was no alternative to the Mormon Church in that town).

III. Boundary Maintenance: Evangelicals and Mormons

A. Who is a Christian?

As discussed in the previous chapter, the struggle over the term Christian is perhaps the most important terminological struggle between the Mormon and Evangelical communities. Harold Bloom notes of the Mormons that “no American grouping [. . .] more strenuously insists upon itself as being Christian” (90-91). Ostling and Ostling assert that “Mormons obsess about the question ‘Are Mormons Christian?’ ” (317) and even devote an entire chapter of their book Mormon America to the question. Indeed, there seems to be two issues at play, both captured in the Ostlings’ pithy chapter title “Are Mormons Christians? Are Non-Mormons Christians?”: 1) Mormons’ desire to be
accepted into the mainstream Christian community and 2) Mormonism’s claim that it is the restoration of the original church of Jesus Christ and, thus, the one true Christianity.

Mormonism’s claim to be the restored church of Jesus Christ has a direct bearing on other Christians’ willingness to accept them into the Christian fold, other doctrinal issues notwithstanding. The foundational Mormon narrative is that soon after the death of Christ and his apostles, the Christian church fell into apostasy and disappeared from the earth in its fullness. (Mormons do not argue that Christian variants existed, only that the church in its fullness, and the authority to act in God’s name—i.e., the priesthood—was gone from the earth.) The restoration of the church began in 1820 with Joseph Smith’s First Vision. Through subsequent visions, the priesthood was restored, along with long-lost doctrines. Given the Mormon story, it logically follows that other Christian churches are incomplete and should, therefore, abandon their doctrines and unite themselves to the restored Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The question arises, then, “Are Non-Mormons Christians?” Catholic Richard John Neuhaus writes in the Christian journal *First Things,*

The emphatic and repeated answer of the Mormon scriptures and the official teaching of the LDS is that we are not. We are members of “the great and abominable church” that was built by frauds and impostors after the death of the first apostles. The true church and true Christianity simply went out of existence, except for its American Indian interlude [mentioned in the Book of Mormon], until it was rediscovered and reestablished by Joseph Smith in upstate New York, and its claims will be vindicated when Jesus returns, sooner rather than later, at a prophetically
specified intersection in Jackson County, Missouri. (“Is Mormonism Christian?” 100)

Neuhaus is both right and wrong, but his answer sheds light on the anxiety the question generates in Christians, both Catholic and Protestant. Neuhaus’s comments must be historically situated, because, as noted earlier, after being so mistreated by their fellow countrymen, many Mormons found it in their interests to emphasize the differences between their doctrines and those of mainstream Christianity (Blomberg and Robinson 68). In recent times, however, the Mormon Church has moved away from the more polemical discourses of the nineteenth century towards a more conciliatory attitude towards Christianity. Stephen E. Robinson believes that, beginning with LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson’s emphasis on canonized Mormon Scriptures (i.e., the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price) as opposed to speculative sermons or popular theology during his tenure in the 1990s, Mormons have “been perceived as moving closer to Evangelicals” (69). Evangelicals have charged that Mormons are deceptively trying to “Christianize” their religion when, Robinson argues, these doctrines have been part of Mormonism all along. The Mormon Church has made further attempts to work with other Christian religions, and I will not try to make any sort of attempt to catalogue the relief efforts where Mormons have worked alongside members of other religions, or where the Mormon Church has donated money or manpower to other religions to rebuild their edifices after some catastrophe.

Most recently, Mormon Church President Gordon B. Hinckley opened the church’s 2005 worldwide General Conference by noting the pope’s passing: “Pope John Paul II has worked tirelessly to advance the cause of Christianity, to lift the burdens of the poor, and
to speak fearlessly in behalf of moral values and human dignity” (4). What is important is that while not abandoning its exclusionary truth claims, the LDS Church is attempting to reach out to other religions.

While it is true that there was a time during the dark days of persecution when many, if not most, members of the Mormon Church looked upon the other Christian religions as “the great and abominable church” that was “built by frauds and impostors,” that day, I believe, has passed. However, while it may be doctrinally true, as the Ostlings contend, that Mormons’ “own scriptures virtually forbid [the] Saints to recognize that the great churches of Christianity—Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant—have any authentic claim to be Christian” (319-20), it is practically not so. Indeed, in all my 36 years as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have never heard any member argue that other commonly recognized Christians churches were, in fact, not—only that they did not have the complete truth and authority.

This leads to Mormons’ desire to be accepted by mainstream Christians. If Mormons were content with their minority status and their heterodox doctrine, they would not “obsess” when Christians denied them the label of Christian. Indeed, probably the greatest argument that Neuhaus and the Ostlings are largely wrong (that Mormons condemn all Christianity to non-Christian status) is that Mormons want the Christian community to remain, so that they can gain entrance into that community and thereby partake of the credibility of that community.

Christians have a stake in policing the boundaries of what qualifies as Christian, and for reasons discussed in Chapter Two, Mormons do not qualify by most Christians’ standards. Of course this border is malleable, and it depends in large part on who is
doing the defining. For example, some Evangelicals define the term so stringently that even Catholics are left outside the boundary. For example, Search and Rescue Ministries boldly declares, “Catholics who believe they are Christians must be lovingly confronted with the truth of the Bible. Evangelicals, who have mistakenly united with Catholics, must be warned” (Mike Gendron). The same website places the Catholic Church into the category of a cult in the essay, “Surprising Similarities between *Roman Catholicism and Mormonism!*” (Marshall Almarode). (I wonder who suffers more by comparison in that exchange?) Another site speaks of “Christian Counterfeiters” and mentions, along with Joseph Smith, Oral Roberts and Bob Jones! In general, however, for all their internal boundary disputes, the Christian community stands quite united in denying Mormonism entrance into its community.

While Mormons may be denied the title of *Christian*, given their unorthodox doctrine, it becomes more difficult to deny them the quality of *Christian-ness*, as their *performance* of Christianity is, by most measures, pragmatically orthodox. In fact, one website, *Helping Mormons Reach Perfection*, claims that one of its goals is to “help them [Mormons] understand the difference between ‘Mormon Christianity’ and Biblical Christianity.” While Mormons are predictably denied entrance into the Christian community by those who host the website, what is important is the acknowledgment that there is such a thing as “Mormon Christianity,” or that Mormonism is approaching or resembling Christianity. But deny it Christians must, or Mormons’ *Christian-ness* will ultimately become part of *Christianity*, changing the face of American religion.

Christians have two fronts upon which they can launch their attack against the encroach
of Mormonism: 1) they can attack Mormon doctrine and 2) they can attack the façade of
Mormon American middle-class respectability.

B. How the Christian boundary is policed

Mainstream Christians, I argue, rely upon “foot soldiers” to launch these
“attacks,” specifically those I refer to as counter-Mormons. Most mainstream Christians
cannot be engaged in the “battle” to defend and define Christian territory. Perhaps most
do not even understand the issues that separate the different Christian denominations,
much less what separates them from Christian variants like Mormonism, the Jehovah’s
Witnesses, or the Christian Scientists. They rely upon self-appointed “anticultists” to
educate them in the inner-workings of these “strange” groups and make overt the
differences between Christian and non-Christian groups. For example, I met Keith
Walker of Evidence Ministries at the pageant. His website proclaims that Evidence
Ministries’ “threelfold purpose is to REACH Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons for
Christ, to TEACH Christians the differences between these two cults and Biblical
Christianity, and to WARN the community about the dangers of these groups” (Walker
“About Us”). Clearly the goal of Evidence Ministries is not ecumenical; it is not to
engage in cooperative dialogue or even to understand Mormonism as its adherents
understand it. It assumes that Mormonism is dangerous and that the community (which
is presumed to be Christian) must be warned. That Mormonism should be accepted or
acknowledged for its positive values or simply left alone are not options. Evangelical
Craig L. Blomberg explains that most Evangelicals get their information about
Mormonism from three sources:
(1) anticult literature, written by fellow Evangelicals in an often polemical spirit, (2) doorstep conversations, as members of the two groups share their faith house to house using a standardized and extremely simplified presentation of their beliefs, and (3) information from ex-Mormons who have left the Church because they are bitter about how it treated them.

(Blomberg and Robinson 22)

Of course the first and third source, notes Robinson, lead many Mormons to believe that the average Evangelical is “mean-spirited and dishonest” (Blomberg and Robinson 11), and the second source leads to a facile understanding. (Of course Mormons are not blameless here. Blomberg notes that while some Evangelicals have written caustically about Mormons, some high-ranking Mormons have retorted in kind [23-24].)

Still, the primary source of information on Mormonism for Evangelicals is “anticult” literature, and this literature performs a policing function. One of the best-known works in this “genre” is Walter Martin’s The Kingdom of the Cults, first published in 1965 and still in print. Perhaps the book’s content is not as important as the title: Mormonism, one of the several religions dealt with by Martin, is defined as a cult; also, the connection of these groups to a “kingdom” brings forth conspiratorial fears, as if these groups are working to set themselves against Christianity and/or democracy—perhaps Christian democracy. Religious disagreement becomes a xenophobia of sorts.

I return to the fact that most Christians, comfortably ensconced in Christian America, do not have the time, energy, or inclination to ensure that the boundaries of American Christianity remain stable. They rely upon Walter Martin, Evidence Ministries, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Ed Decker, Mormonism Research Ministry, and
others to tell them where heresy resides and assure them that it is being dealt with. Such individuals and groups become, in a sense, the bulwark against the ever-expanding Mormon Church. When a family member begins to investigate the Mormon religion, these groups and individuals provide a warehouse of easily accessible information and materials to combat this new sect that looks so benign and inviting, its members friendly and decent. Counter-Mormon Mark D. Champneys acknowledges that talking with “these wonderful people often leaves us wondering how anyone could say that they are not Christians” (Christianity Re-Defined by Mormonism 1). But that is precisely why Champneys is needed: “[T]he difference between Mormonism and Christianity is as contrary as night and day [. . .].”

C. Jesus vs. Jesus

So what are the issues that are disputed in the literature distributed at the pageant? How are the borders being defined, and once defined, how are they policed and maintained? Not only do Evangelicals need to guard the name Christian, but they must assert that Mormons worship a different Jesus. This is largely because of Mormonism’s extra-biblical claims about Jesus, such as the Book of Mormon’s assertion that Jesus visited the Americas after his resurrection as well as Joseph Smith’s assertion that he was visited by the Father and the Son (and the fact that Mormonism physically separates the Father and the Son). What complicates matters is that Evangelicals generally despise doctrinal tests for salvation, believing that the only thing necessary for salvation is the acceptance of Jesus Christ as one’s personal savior. If one believes in an incorrect doctrine—indeed, if one believes in no doctrine apart from the saving grace of Jesus
Christ—one is still assured of salvation. The question then arises: If Mormons accept
the biblical Jesus, despite any other error they may sustain, why contend that they are
beyond the pale of salvation? Stephen E. Robinson agrees, asking,

> Even if the rest of Mormonism—apart from our faith in Christ—is not
true (though I firmly believe it is), then which is more potent, my
theological “error” in believing the Book of Mormon or Christ’s saving
blood as I call upon his name? Was God’s promise (Rom 10:9-13) truly
unconditional, or is there an implied exception just for Mormons who
might believe and confess? Are Christians saved by the grace of Christ or
by “proper” theology—by the atonement or by catechism? If Evangelicals
demand the latter of Mormons, then they have come full circle since the
Reformation and have established a “new magisterium.” (Blomberg and
Robinson 164-65)

This is why—and Robinson rightly intuits so—Evangelicals must assert that Mormons do
not believe in the real Jesus. They certainly cannot argue that Christ’s saving grace is not
powerful enough to overcome Mormons’ theological errors; therefore, they must argue (if
they are to maintain that Mormons are indeed unsaveable as Mormons), that Mormons
are calling upon a fictitious Jesus.

Marshall Almarode, in the counter-Mormon tract *A Summary of Mormon Salvation*, notes that belief in the true Christ is no easy thing:

> The first requirement [for salvation] is to believe in Christ; which should
be most obvious for anyone claiming to be a Christian. As easy as this
may sound, the problem comes because we must determine from all the
people and organizations out there in the world that have defined Christ, which Christ is the true one to believe in. [. . .] Those who invent or redefine what Jesus did and said, have invented and defined false Christs. (emphases in original)

One particularly loud Evangelical, walking up and down the sidewalk in front of the temple gates outside the pageant during the 2004 season, referred to Mormonism’s Jesus as a “Mickey Mouse Jesus” who had no power to save. A tract-questionnaire given to me at the pageant (with a challenge that if I filled it out and returned it to the Evangelical who gave it to me, he would take me to Miller’s Bakery for a burger), states, “We can be saved only by putting faith in the Jesus of the Bible (God the Son) and in Him alone. [. . .] You are accountable to the God of the Bible. If you choose to worship and serve another god (one with a body, one who was created, or one who was once a man) then you have rejected the person and words of the only God that can (and wants to) save you from your sins. Don’t make an eternal mistake; be sure you are trusting the real Jesus Christ” (Basic Teachings of the Church my emphasis).

D. What is truth? or, “Feelings, nothing more than . . .”

On the Helping Mormons Reach Perfection website, two photo captions provide interesting insight. One shows an Evangelical talking to a Mormon and says, “Here Timothy Oliver (and his wife) is sharing with an LDS man who promised he would come by the camp and talk with Timothy. It turned out that he really came to defend his church and had no interest in listening to the facts and truth.” The next photo says, “Here Timothy is sharing with a group of youths the truth and facts about Mormonism. It went
fairly well” (“Mormon Miracle Pageant—Manti, Utah 2000” my emphases). Evangelical Tom Norton, on the website JosephLied.com, fairly yells at a Mormon friend, telling him that because he is Mormon he likely wants nothing to do with “FACTS.” Norton recovers enough optimism to declare, “And because you are a well[-]educated person in the twenty-first century, I trust you can discover and handle the truth” (qtd. in Mike Norton “Bicentennial Boy” my emphases).7

One of the consistent counter-Mormon assertions is that they are objective truth-seekers in contrast to Mormons, who simply “feel” their religion. The assertion that Mormonism is nothing more than a subjective experience comes in part from the challenge in the Book of Mormon found in Moroni 10.4: “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.” This verse is used by all Mormon missionaries to challenge those investigating the church. After reading the Book of Mormon and pondering upon its contents, as well as upon the contents of the lessons of the missionaries, investigators are told to pray to God for heavenly confirmation. Another verse is often cited by Evangelicals to corroborate the subjectivity of the Mormon experience, found in Doctrine and Covenants 9.8: “But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right” (my emphases). During my time with the Evangelicals during the 2004 season, I heard several sarcastic references to the “burning in the bosom.” Tom Norton, an ex-Mormon, says that his testimony of
Mormonism was just “warm-fuzzies” which he was told was the Spirit (qtd. in Mike Norton “Bicentennial Boy”).

I interviewed one Evangelical on the condition that he be allowed to witness to me after our interview. After spending about twenty minutes trying to convince me of the folly of Mormonism, he concluded by saying, “Now, go home tonight and think about these things.” I would, I assured him. “Go home and think about them,” he reiterated. Then he added, “But don’t pray about them—just read your Bible and think about them.” I was a bit taken aback that he would advise me not to pray about these things, since Evangelicals are quite well known for their charismatic prayers: hands held aloft, eyes closed, body swaying ever so gently. I learned, after speaking to several Evangelicals, that they emphasized the “logical” nature of Evangelical Christianity over the “illogical” or feelings-oriented nature of Mormonism. Indeed, when I purchased the DVD Mission to Manti, the filmmaker mentioned he was preparing to make another exposé in which he would compare and contrast postmodernism to Mormonism: both are the creations of whatever one feels as opposed to external reality.

Counter-Mormons’ concern with what they consider objective truth is evidenced by the names of many of their organizations: Evidence Ministries, Mormonism Research Ministry, Freedom in Truth Outreach, Utah Lighthouse Ministry. Mark D. Champneys’s tract The Greatest Blessing of Being L.D.S.: To Dwell with Heavenly Father (2000) expands on the theme of evidence versus feelings. After explaining the difficulty of repentance under Mormonism and the free gift of repentance under Christianity, Champneys says, “Jesus loves you so much[.] He wants to declare an eternal pardon of all your sin. Choose now to take the Lord (not a church) at His word! It is a decision.
Don’t depend on feelings; just believe His word, tell the Lord of your decision, and remember this day of faith” (14 my emphasis). He further emphasizes this point by stating, “Then you can truly say, ‘I know I am forgiven. I have legal perfection. I do know that I have eternal life’ ” (14 my emphasis). To solidify the contractual nature of the tract, Champneys offers of space where the newly repentant, and, we assume, ex-Mormon, may sign:

DID YOU SAY “YES” TO CHRIST’S FORGIVENESS TODAY?

Sign here so as

to never forget ________________________  Date ______________

YOU CAN LOOK FORWARD TO JESUS’ RETURN (14)

How can Evangelicals maintain that they are objective when so much of religion seems to be manifestly subjective? The Bible becomes the final, infallible, objective, arbiter of all doctrines, nay, of everything, including science, politics, and philosophy. No man or idea can take precedence over the authority of the Bible. The Bible is held up as an objective standard against which feelings become superfluous. Sandra Tanner of Utah Lighthouse Ministry puts the case plainly: “If you were lost in the woods would you trust your feelings or use a compass? Christians use the Bible to determine trust, not feelings” (“Sharing Your Faith with Latter-day Saints” emphasis in original). Despite one’s sentiments about Mormonism, Evangelical Christianity, or simply religion in general, it is difficult not to notice the circular nature of the argument involved by Tanner and others. For example, consider what she says to further her argument:

The Mormon will often say that he knows the LDS Church is true from prayer and inner conviction. We need to point out that people all over the
world have come up with different beliefs about God. Obviously sincerity and prayer are not enough to guard against false claims. That is why God has given us the Bible, so that we will have a standard measurement for truth claims. [. . .] While Christians value prayer and seek direction from God, this is not the Biblical method of testing a prophet. Every leader and doctrine must be examined in light of the Bible.

While I will not comment on the truth of this claim, it is, in fact, circular: Biblical Christianity is true because it conforms to the Bible → the Bible is the word of God and, thus, biblical Christianity conforms to it. It is a perfectly enclosed system that allows no passage outside of it to verify that its terms or conditions are accurate. Tanner explains, “We don’t need to pray to know if we should rob a bank, or commit adultery, since God has already spoken on the issue.” The Bible is self-verifying; thus, there is no need to exit the “system” for confirmation that the system is accurate.

Of course the reliance upon the Bible is not without problems, even if epistemological considerations were not our only concerns. Counter-Mormons always speak of the Bible’s meaning as if it were transparent, as if one could read this sixty-six book tome and inexorably come to one conclusion—that is, if one were honest or not hindered by false consciousness. One need not be familiar with current literary theory to understand the difficulties involved in interpreting a text—although many Evangelicals will not even acknowledge that they interpret the Bible. (They cite 2 Peter 1.20: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of this scripture is of any private interpretation” to condemn the use of the Scriptures for “private interpretation.”) Ellen M. Rosenberg, writing about the Southern Baptists, comments upon their use of the Bible as thing as
opposed to complex text; her quote can just as readily be applied to many counter-
Mormons:

In the absence of a creed, or a set of interpretive rules by which new
challenges might be evaluated, Southern Baptists can hold together only
with a core belief structure of extraordinary generality and ambiguity. The
Bible fills the need; it becomes a projective test, a protean Rorschach. As
the code words have become “Biblical inerrancy,” the Bible itself is less
read than preached, less interpreted than brandished. Increasingly, pastors
may drape a limply bound Book over the edges of the pulpit as they depart
from it. Members of the congregation carry Bibles to church services; the
pastor announces a long passage text for his sermon and waits for people
to find it, then reads only the first verse of it before he takes off. (134)

As the “objective” arbiter of truth, the Bible’s complex message(s) must necessarily be
simplified. This often provides Evangelicals with a powerful tool to utilize against
Mormonism, because although some Mormon leaders have tried to “correlate” Mormon
doctrine, to a large degree it remains amorphous and speculative beyond its basics. In
contrast, Evangelical Christianity seems defined by its simplicity: you are saved by the
grace of Jesus Christ and not by any work that you might do; accept him as your savior
and you are saved. Biblical passages can be found to substantiate this reading; other
passages are avoided. The Evangelical, then, uses the Bible in a sense as a thing, held in
the hand, a unified whole—objectivity incarnate—in contrast to the confusion of
Mormonism.
The message that the Bible was the objective answer to Mormonism’s subjective, feelings-oriented gospel was mostly consistent at the 2004 season of *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*; I only encountered the occasional slippage. Mike Norton, host of JosephLied.com, relates his fall from Mormonism into the truth of Evangelical Christianity, and his is one of the few narratives that deviates from the standard response that the Bible is the objective answer. He notes that he was struggling with feelings of guilt as he doubted his testimony of Joseph Smith, and he wanted an answer to prayer that would be “[u]nlike the answers to my prayers I had received throughout my life regarding Mormonism,” which were a “still small voice [. . .].” He now wanted “a HUGE BOOMING VOICE from the Heavens proclaiming[.] ‘MIKE, YOUR WORST FEARS ARE TRUE! JOSEPH SMITH WAS A FRAUD’ or better yet, a booming voice telling me that my fears were for naught and the Church was indeed the one true church on earth.” Norton received the sign he is looking for. A tremor in his right hand, attributed to Parkinson’s disease, disappeared (“Bicentennial Boy”). He interpreted this miracle as proof against Mormonism.

The allegation of brainwashing provides another moment of slippage in the mostly coherent assertion that Mormonism is feeling-driven. Ex-Mormon Tom Norton mentions that as a missionary he was taught to identify the Spirit for others (“It is a blatant brainwashing tactic”) and mentions parents helping their children to bear a testimony (“That’s not brainwashing? Hello?!”) (qtd. in Mike Norton “Bicentennial Boy”). The idea of brainwashing seems to undercut the notion of a feelings-oriented “gospel,” one in which the devotee adheres through no rational or even emotional choice;
the believer must adhere. Freedom in Truth Outreach makes a similar point in “Sharing the Truth with a Mormon”:

Give your friend your testimony of how Christ saved you, and what He is doing in your life right now. Then ask him for his testimony. It will go something like this: “I testify to you that the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God.” This testimony is memorized. Point out the differences between your testimonies—that yours is not simply a memorized statement, but is about a real, dynamic relationship with the true God [. . .]. (my emphases)

Mormon testimonies here are memorized, not felt, as usually asserted. This is contrasted against the Evangelical testimony which, though the word felt is not used, is implied to be an emotional experience because it is a “dynamic relationship” with God. However this paragraph is immediately followed by instructions to challenge the Mormon’s testimony of Joseph Smith’s reception of priesthood authority. “Your friend’s answers will be that he prayed about it and received a subjective experience (a warm sensation, a tingling, or perhaps a visit from a dead relative). Explain to him that this is not the way God told us to evaluate such things. God has given us an objective source of truth in the Bible.”

E. Impossible Mormon gospel versus Christ’s saving grace

The charge that Mormonism is a feelings-oriented religion, along with the charge that Mormonism is an impossible gospel that can only lead one to feelings of despair and shame, were probably the two most commonly deployed accusations by counter-Mormons at the 2004 pageant. Many tracts mention the impossibility of the Mormon
gospel. One counter-Mormon tract states: “This [Mormon] doctrine, salvation through commandment keeping[,] can be burdensome and frightening” (Martin “Be Ye Therefore Perfect”). Mormons read literally the verse in Matthew 5.48 wherein Jesus commands, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” As explained in the previous chapter, Mormons believe that, while all are “saved” in the sense that virtually all humans who have ever lived will inherit a kingdom of glory, those who wish to inherit the highest, or Celestial, kingdom, must become perfect like God. Evangelicals believe that humans will never be able to bridge the gap between ourselves and God, remembering always Isaiah 64.6: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”; in other words, nothing we can do can please God. The only way the gap can be bridged is by Jesus Christ. Our sins are erased by his sacrifice and we are made perfect; we are thus made acceptable to the Father and able to enter heaven.

Counter-Mormons focus on the issue of repentance in Mormonism, specifically using the Book of Mormon and other Mormon Scriptures to make their case that the Mormon gospel is too difficult to live. Marshall Almarode’s tract A Summary of Mormon Salvation is representative of the argument made against Mormonism. He represents Mormon repentance as consisting of the following:

1. The first part of repentance is keeping all the commandments and ordinances of the gospel in this lifetime. [. . .]
2. The last part of repentance is to stop all sinning and endure perfectly to the end with no repetition of any sins.
Of course the emphasis upon “all” in both instances is the crux of the matter, for the “all” points to the impossibility of the task. To further strengthen his case, Almarode quotes several verses from Mormon Scriptures to show that we have only this life in which to “save” ourselves. He quotes Alma 34.32-33 which talks about this life being “the time for men to prepare to meet God,” and that if we “do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.” He also quotes Doctrine and Covenants 42.25 which speaks of repenting with all one’s heart. He also quotes extensively from a book written by former Mormon Church president Spencer W. Kimball, entitled The Miracle of Forgiveness (1971), which also speaks of the importance of repenting during this lifetime, repenting fully, and not returning to one’s former sins. (Indeed, Kimball’s book is so “popular” that I saw several counter-Mormons carrying it around with them at the pageant.) Almarode quotes from 3 Nephi 27.17 to show that, once repentance has been accomplished, the believer must now endure to the end: “And he that endureth not unto the end, the same is he that is also hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence they can no more return, because of the justice of the Father.” Almarode ends his tract with this conclusion:

The standard according to Mormonism, is complete perfection. The only way to be worthy to receive grace in Mormonism is to completely cease all sinning, even the smallest sin. Since it is impossible to “do all you can do” and none of us can ever be perfect, it is impossible to ever become worthy of Grace [sic] in Mormonism. Mormonism teaches an impossible, false gospel. We need to choose the true biblical gospel where it is
possible for man to be saved; that gives God’s grace freely to sinners.

(emphases in original)

Thus, Almarode’s summary of Mormon salvation is that it is impossible, even by its own standards.

Champneys’s *The L.D.S. Gospel in a Nutshell* (2004) alleges the same thing: “In Mormonism, before you can be forgiven of a particular sin by the atonement, you must successfully stop that sin permanently. So in order to be forgiven of all sin for time and all eternity, you must successfully stop all sin permanently.” Champneys then refers to many of the same verses referred to by Almarode. Following this he addresses the Mormon reader and contrasts his or her gospel to Evangelical Christianity: “If the hopelessness of Mormonism has just slapped you in the face . . . Then I have good news for you! The word, gospel, actually means ‘good news,’ and the Bible gives us the real gospel. Unlike the gospel of Mormonism, the Biblical gospel actually has power to save you from the penalty of your sin through the forgiveness of sins, based upon the blood of the perfect Lamb upon the cross. [. . .] In Mormonism you have nothing, so what is there to lose?”

I should pause to explain that most Mormons I have encountered do not know how long “perfection” will take, or even what perfection really means, only that it is the goal—repentance being part of the process towards perfection. While many Latter-day Saints acknowledge that the “doctrine of perfection” (for lack of a better term) can cause feelings of inadequacy, most that I know and have spoken to realize that one can only do better today than yesterday; in other words, the goal, contra the impression given by Evangelical tracts, is not to become like God immediately, or even proximately (that is,
in a few years, before I die, whatever), but to become better *gradually*. While the verses
counter-Mormons quote from Mormon Scripture are meant to terrify the Latter-day Saint
(one tract proclaims, “Let’s face it, if Mormonism is true, you are doomed to failure and,
accordingly, on the road to damnation” [McKeever]), I don’t personally know any
Mormon who is frightened that God will deny him or her entrance into the Celestial
Kingdom if she or he is trying to live a decent life, improving as the days pass. This is
not to say that the Evangelicals have misread Mormon Scripture: indeed, they are citing
the verses correctly (although there is room for debate as to the interpretation of the
verses; and, of course, there are other verses which provide for counter-readings). But it
*is* to say that Evangelicals read Mormon Scripture mostly, if not completely, divorced
from the context of Mormon culture, which gives Mormon Scripture a fuller structure.
Evangelicals arrive at the pageant with a textual construction of Mormonism, made from
the fabric of sundry Mormon texts (many which the average Mormon does not read or
would only pull down from the shelf as a reference book), and they proclaim it
*Mormonism*. Mormons, living their day-to-day lives, often uneventful but filled with the
simple, repetitive joys of family, job, and weekly church attendance, are baffled by the
strange thing presented to them by the Evangelicals, and their first instinct is to charge
dishonesty. The Evangelicals, in turn, having studied selected Mormon documents,
assume dishonesty on the part of the Mormons. How could they not recognize this as
truth, for it is in their own books?
F. Conclusions

All of these tracts have a function beyond simply challenging Mormon doctrine: they establish Evangelical Christianity as a community. Benedict Anderson talks about the importance of print-capitalism to the emergent idea of an imagined community. During the eighteenth century, printers discovered a new and indispensable source of income: the newspaper (61). However what was it that separated these local newspapers from one another, with their often generic reports of engagements and marriages, arrivals and departures of ships, and prices of foods and goods?

[W]hat brought together, on the same page, *this* marriage with *that* ship, *this* price with *that* bishop, was the very structure of the colonial administration and market-system itself. In this way, the newspaper of Caracas quite naturally, and even apolitically, created an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers, to whom *these* ships, brides, bishops and prices belonged. In time, of course, it was only to be expected that political elements would enter in. (62 emphases in original)

In other words, the newspaper created a group of readers who imagined themselves as a community, linked by a common geography, religion, economy, and politics. The awareness of other communities with their own “ships, brides, bishops and prices” only deepened the sense of their own uniqueness as a community. It may not have been easy for a resident of Buenos Aires to declare precisely how they differed from residents of Tegucigalpa, but the newspaper created the sense that, in fact, they did. Also, the daily
fact of reading the newspaper, and of imagining others reading the same paper, created a
people with a community of knowledge—created a community.

And once that community exists in print, it can be deployed beyond its physical
boundaries and imagined in various ways. The Evangelicals can only travel to Manti for
a finite period of time each year to attract the attention of Mormons and others. But
tracts, left behind, have the value of engaging the Mormon reader in an imaginary space,
and more than that, in an imaginary community. The tracts, taken together, create a
coherent community that is not Mormonism. In the previous chapter I made that case
that the hugeness of the pageant in Manti centralized Mormonism and cast Evangelical
Christianity to the periphery. Through the written word, Evangelical Christianity can
establish itself as a mostly coherent community in contrast to what is, at that moment, an
overwhelming Mormonism. This is crucial because the Evangelicals who arrive in Manti
are a rather disparate bunch, arriving from churches in Missouri, Texas, California, and
elsewhere. Some travel in fairly large groups; others travel as pairs or trios. Some get
along quite well, especially after the efforts of Pastor Chip Thompson of the Ephraim
Church of the Bible; others do not get along so well, disliking the vocal, in-your-face
proselytizing tactics. Some are experienced pros, making a living lecturing on
Mormonism, hosting websites, writing books and tracts, and attending pageants and
temple openings; others are first-timers who don’t know what to expect. However the
literature presents a Christian community that, while not always united in how it
condemns Mormonism, is united in its message of Christ’s free gift of salvation.

This unified community is different from the community of just twenty years ago
when only a handful of counter-Mormons attended the pageant. I cannot talk as
confidently about these Evangelicals, as my recollection and the recollection of others is sketchy, but they seemed less unified, less coherent in their message. They seemed more intent on stirring people up than on selling their version of the gospel, or even reclaiming people from Mormonism. In other words, they had not established themselves as a coherent community, but were still disparate individuals deploying their own methods at the site of the pageant. In contrast, the counter-Mormons today, with their similar signs, their similar approaches, their similar tracts—present a “front” that bespeaks unification. While there are most certainly benefits to the previous approach, it had to yield to the latter: Evangelical Christianity had to envision itself as a coherent community in order to combat the ever expanding Mormon community. Asserting that Mormons believe in a false Jesus, that Mormonism is a feelings-driven religion, and that Mormonism is an impossible gospel are all ways that Christianity attempts to police the boundary.

The “boundary” is policed in many ways. Evangelical Darlene Adams says that “most people think we’re standing out here to protest but we’re not, we’re here to share the truth with them about who Jesus is according to the Bible, um, because we feel like the LDS people are trapped in false doctrine and are being deceived [. . .].” John Kauer says that his goal at the pageant is to “see somebody being, uh, transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light right before my eyes [. . .].” Bill McKeever says he wants to challenge Mormons regarding salvation “and show them that if Mormonism is true they will never meet the requirements that their church has set forth; hopefully get them to see that they’ll never meet those requirements; and, and perhaps put their total trust in the completed work of Christ.” McKeever further explains that the term anti-Mormon is used for “dissident control,” “because if you can put a label
like that on an individual, many Mormons won’t talk to you, because once you’ve been labeled an *anti*, you’re obviously there because you don’t like them or you’ve got hatred or bigotry.”

*IV. Boundary Maintenance: Mormons and . . . Other Mormons?*

*A. Can there be a Mormon fundamentalist?*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints deemphasizes its unique doctrines and emphasizes the doctrines it holds in common with Christians, it creates room for Mormon fundamentalism. This first began when the church formally ceased practicing polygamy in 1890 and has continued with each doctrinal “update” that moves it closer to American middle-class respectability (such as ceasing to gather to Utah at the dawn of the twentieth century, ordaining black men to the priesthood in 1978, making changes to the temple ceremony in 1990, and, more generally, focusing on extending the hand of friendship to non-Mormons). Each of these doctrinal changes or shifts in emphases, as well as a cultural alignment with modernity, has allowed 1) Christians to charge Latter-day Saints with disingenuousness, often bordering on the conspiratorial (“the slick public relations campaign their leadership is engaged in is actually an insidious deception”), and 2) Mormon fundamentalists to broaden their charge of apostasy against the LDS Church, thus allowing more “room” for a Mormon fundamentalist movement.

While the media occasionally use the term *Mormon* to refer to anyone who believes in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon (and, according to Ostling and Ostling, there have been somewhere between 130 and 200 Smith-inspired splinter
religions since his death, most lasting less than a decade [336]), the mainstream church greatly discourages the use of the term to refer to anyone except baptized members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In fact, the church hosts an area on its website for reporters, instructing them in the proper use of the terms *Mormon, LDS Church*, and *Latter-day Saint*. About the term *fundamentalist Mormon*, the website says:

> When referring to people or organizations that practice polygamy, the terms “Mormons,” “Mormon fundamentalist,” “Mormon dissidents,” etc. are incorrect. The Associated Press Stylebook notes: “The term *Mormon* is not properly applied to the other . . . churches that resulted from the split after [Joseph] Smith’s death.” (“Style Guide—The Name of the Church”)

So intent is the LDS Church in guarding the term *Mormon* from an association with polygamy that it has even sent out correctional news briefs when reporters conflate the two⁸ (see, for example, “Correction”).

If “Mormons”—that is, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—were truly interested in deemphasizing their differences and emphasizing their similarities with mainstream Christianity, why would they care if several thousand polygamists living in Southern Utah and Arizona were referred to as Mormon fundamentalists? Indeed, one could argue, the term might only heighten the difference between those poor, benighted souls who have failed to modernize and modern-day, respectable Mormons, the comparison redounding to the benefit of the latter. (And does not Christianity have its snake handlers and strychnine drinkers who, in essence, function to “normalize” Evangelicals and charismatics?) But the term *Mormon* must be protected for two reasons: First, Mormons, despite their amazing strides at assimilating into the
American mainstream, are still not respectable, if respectability is defined by other Christians’ perceptions of Mormons. (In a 2000 survey of Christian clergy, only 6 percent categorized the Mormon Church as Christian. And while 47 percent of the clergy considered themselves very knowledgeable about Mormonism and 37 moderately knowledgeable, by far their most popular source of information was Ed Decker’s jaundiced *The God Makers*.) The Mormon hierarchy believes it must shed any overt connection to its polygamous past, so while Brigham Young and the pioneers are memorialized in bronze, in pageants, and on film, there are no memorials to polygamy. While it does not overtly deny this past, it clearly does not wish to dwell on this aspect of its history. Thus, the term *fundamentalist Mormon* can only serve to remind people of the LDS Church’s polygamous history while simultaneously calling attention to the fact that there still exists a considerable number of polygamists who can ultimately be traced back to Joseph Smith. This will most likely only weaken the LDS Church’s bid for American middle-class respectability, a constant reminder that its founder is also the originator of those who turn up on *Oprah* telling tales of marriage at age fourteen to a second cousin in a secretive clan. While Mormons can deny that they have anything to do with these people—indeed, most Mormons, even Utah Mormons, have no traffic with them, and the polygamists’ lifestyles are almost as foreign to them as they are to the average American—they are likely not to be believed. They cannot fully escape the taint of the Mormon fundamentalists.

A second reason that the LDS leadership objects to the term *Mormon fundamentalist* is that Mormons, for all their movement towards Christianity, do want to preserve their status as a chosen people. The term *Mormon fundamentalist* implies, at its
simplest, that there can be such a thing. However the LDS Church wishes to preserve the right to define for itself its own doctrines and its own doctrinal “space.” It wants no competition in this area—no fundamentalisms or liberalisms, just one Mormonism. It is this Mormon originality that gives Mormonism its drawing power and its staying power. Historian Richard Bushman, as I noted in the previous chapter, opined that if a church prophet “were to blink an eye toward Jackson County, Missouri, people would flow there. [. . .] All that nineteenth-century stuff is still in our culture” (qtd. in Ostling and Ostling 93). Despite their Christianization, they still are American originals (to borrow Bloom’s term). Mormon fundamentalism threatens the space of their originality, for while they may now move towards Christianity and American middle-class respectability, they must preserve the ability to move back to the space of their Mormon originality, or at least preserve the area in their religious imagination (“the nineteenth-century stuff”). But groups like the True and Living Church occupy that space, forcing them into the uncomfortable position of defining themselves against people who are doctrinally similar to their ancestors. Many Mormon fundamentalists have commented on the irony that some of the most “rabid” anti-polygamists are, today, Latter-day Saints, yet their own great-grandparents were polygamists proudly standing against oppressive government forces.¹¹ This eruption of fundamentalist Mormonism is certainly troubling for many Latter-day Saints with roots in the church, in that at one and the same time they are expected to celebrate their ancestors and aspire to recapitulate their ancestors’ spiritual achievements—after all, Mormonism is a millenarian religion, believing that Christ will literally return to earth again, that a New Jerusalem will literally be establish
in Jackson County, Missouri. Thus, Mormons may once again be called upon to be pioneers of sorts. How, then, can they despise those who chose to live that way now?

B. The True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days

There are those who solve the dilemma by forsaking the LDS Church altogether and uniting themselves with Mormon fundamentalism. As the LDS Church moves closer to Christianity, they wish to partake of that which was/is most original about Mormonism. Mormon fundamentalists have existed since 1890, but the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days officially organized in 1994 in response to the LDS Church’s increased Christianization/modernization as well as fin-de-siècle anxieties (see Chapter One). The TLC makes a different claim than many other Mormon fundamentalisms that began in 1890 after the Manifesto ending the practice of polygamy. Wilford Woodruff, the church president and prophet who ended polygamy, claimed that he saw in “vision and revelation exactly what would take place if we did not stop this practice,” which would be the imprisonment of church members, confiscation of church property, and the ultimate dissolution of the church (Doctrine and Covenants p. 293)—events that seemed fairly certain, and that were already underway, given recent court decisions and national opinion. A Manifesto was issued to the nation declaring that the Mormons would submit to the laws forbidding polygamy. At the church’s October General Conference the Manifesto was voted on and accepted unanimously, although a small number of members could not understand how a commandment of God could be rescinded, no matter how great the pressure.
These first “fundamentalist Mormons” began to doubt the prophetic powers of Woodruff. Rather than seeing the LDS Church as apostate, fundamentalists created a distinction between the temporal church and the spiritual church sometime after the death of John Taylor, the predecessor of Wilford Woodruff. As Ken Driggs explains in “Twentieth-Century Polygamy and Fundamentalist Mormons in Southern Utah” (1991), “Fundamentalists consider themselves part of the LDS Church, living within special priesthood organizations set apart to continue and preserve sacred ordinances” (53). The LDS Church is the temporal church and, as such, the pronouncements of its leadership are not binding upon them. The spiritual church is fundamentalism, and its leader is the head of the priesthood—his pronouncements are binding (53). Driggs, who has spent time among the fundamentalists, says that their church services are not remarkably different from Mormon Church services, and that fundamentalists may quote “approvingly” from LDS publications or LDS leaders (55).

The foundational claims of the TLC are considerably different and, in a way, mirror the foundational claims of the LDS Church. The foundational story of the LDS Church is that shortly after the death of Christ and his apostles, the church fell into apostasy. God called upon Joseph Smith to restore the true church to the earth, being the first prophet of the last dispensation before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Thus, the LDS Church is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased” (Doctrine and Covenants 1.30). The TLC alleges that Joseph Smith restored the church, but that that church fell into apostasy as well, necessitating another restoration (in other words, both the LDS and the fundamentalists are apostate). Jim Harmston is the prophet of the next restoration; indeed, Harmston’s
autobiography overtly mirrors Joseph Smith’s own struggle to find the truth which ultimately led to the First Vision and the restoration of the gospel (“Testimony of the Prophet James D. Harmston”). Thus, while members of the TLC do not call themselves Latter-day Saints, they may certainly lay heirship to the title Mormon. Indeed, they would argue that they are the truest Mormons, the restoration of Joseph Smith’s original gospel, the one corrupted by the LDS Church. Indeed, the name of their church bears witness to that fact: the True and Living Church.

Their name serves two purposes. First, it alludes to Doctrine and Covenants 1.30, where the Lord, speaking through Joseph Smith, calls the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually [. . .].” This is a crucial verse for Latter-day Saints, in which the Lord acknowledges that the LDS Church is acceptable to him and grounds its exclusivist truth-claims. Second, given that the TLC charges that the LDS Church has apostatized from its mission, the TLC now becomes “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.” Thus, they are true and living in contrast to the apostate and defunct Mormon Church. As TLC apostle Don Larry Peterson explains, “I bear witness that this church is not just a branch or break-off of Mormonism, or just a ‘faulty’ Christian cult. I bear witness that this is the gospel that was taught to Adam in the Garden, the gospel that includes the fullness of the priesthood.”
C. The terms of control

The True and Living Church’s charge that the LDS Church has apostatized from the truth is more than a charge of apostasy, it is a charge that the latter church is no longer worthy of the titles it has been given (Latter-day Saint, Mormon, the restoration, etc.), nor its originality. For example, in “Declaration to the Apostles of the LDS Church,” the TLC leadership declares that the Mormon Church’s “deadly course continues with more rapidity today until everything that was royal and peculiar about the Latter-day Saints has been lost” (my emphases). In contrast, one of the TLC’s goals is to preserve Mormonism’s originality. In the essay “The Gathering of the Elect,” they argue, “The Lord’s elect are called to gather themselves out from the world unto one place upon this continent, to be separate from the world, a peculiar people unto God” (my emphasis).

The TLC draws a clear line demarcating itself from the LDS Church. Perhaps because it has so many doctrines in common with the LDS Church, it has to resort to vitriol to create a clear boundary between itself and the mainstream church. For example, those who lead the LDS Church are “false prophets and apostles,” “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (“Declaration of the Apostles”), and “Satan’s kingdom masqueraded as truth” (“To the First Presidency”). Indeed, the TLC actively renames the LDS Church: “This church is now the whore which has polluted her promise of becoming the bride of Christ [. . .].” Ron Taylor says, “They have had intercourse with Babylon and have become the whore of the earth [. . .].” Apostle Jeff Hanks’s essay “Stop Worshiping the LDS Church” is the quintessence of the word jeremiad. He levels the following accusations against the church and Latter-day Saints:12
• I solemnly declare with voice upraised that the LDS leaders AND Church are in a complete and harrowing state of apostasy.

• [T]he Lord is disgusted with the LEADERS of modern Israel and of His wrath that He will send upon them for their rebellions and collusions with Satan. [sic]

• They are about to be destroyed along with their corporate empire[,] and the system of false worship that prevails among the LDS will be cast down.

• When the LDS leadership embraces the United Nations, New World Order, government ‘political correctness’ and the ways and appetites of Babylon, then you can know that they are ripe for destruction.

• They have rejected the fountain of righteousness and have played the harlot with the world.

• They love Satan more than God, they love the Telestial achievements and acquisitions and numbers to the extent that they do not need or desire the Terrestrial order!

• [The LDS prophet and apostles] are insensible shepherds who do not take care of the flock. They are pastors who devour and feed upon the people. They mock God to His face.

• It is my firm and unwavering testimony that God has rejected the LDS Church as a whole, from top to bottom. The whole head is sick and there is no table that is not filled with vomit.
A statement signed by the Apostles of the TLC declares, “Satan is your Father and will claim you his because you have sought to do his iniquity and works of darkness. The glory and praise of the world that you love to have heaped upon you will prove your overthrow. Pride is your destruction. The praise of the world is your folly.” Indeed, after all of this invective, one wonders precisely how much “glory and praise of the world” the LDS Church has received that would cause the TLC such ire. While one of the main arguments of this dissertation is that the LDS Church is making remarkable headway towards American middle-class respectability, the prodigious increase in counter-Mormon activity at the pageant—from around twenty in the 1980s to around 200 now—mitigates against the TLC’s claim that the LDS Church is reaping the “praise of the world.”

This is one of the TLC’s main narratives against the LDS Church—that it has actively changed its doctrines in order to become popular, or acceptable, to the world (world being loosely defined). There can be no doubt that the LDS Church has changed, beginning with the Manifesto ending polygamy in 1890. Of course, the church changed before that, as all institutions do, and, if one wishes to be candid, there never was a moment when there was a “pure” Mormonism, frozen in time, all of its doctrines intact—indeed, the history of the Mormon Church from the First Vision onward is one of change. Yet the narrative told by the TLC and other Mormon fundamentalists (and fundamentalists of other religions, certainly), is that there is something pure to return to, an essence of sorts, that has either been lost or actively turned away from. Obviously one can return to former doctrines—such as polygamy or refusing priesthood ordination to
black men—but in a way, these are arbitrary returns, as one must pick a point in religious
history and determine to replicate it.

Mircea Eliade speaks of what we might call the fundamentalist urge in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1949). He says that a striking characteristic of traditional, pre-modern societies is their “revolt against concrete, historical time, [and their] nostalgia for a periodical return to the mythical time of the beginning of things, to the ‘Great Time’ ” (ix). He explains that this “Great Time” is found in conjunction with an “age of gold,” always occurring at the beginning of a temporal cycle, and this age of gold is recoverable (112). Movement away from that golden age is seen as degeneration. He states that in the Hellenistic-Oriental world, “the contemporary historical moment (whatever its chronological position) represents a decadence in relation to preceding historical moments. Not only is the contemporary aeon inferior to the other ages (gold, silver, and so on) but, even within the frame of the reigning age (that is, of the reigning cycle), the ‘instant’ in which man lives grows worse as time passes”¹³ (131-32). A simple perusal of TLC literature demonstrates their conviction that the LDS Church has departed further and further from the truth with the passing of time, as this passage indicates: “The *course* of the LDS Church in this *the 20th century* has clearly been a compromise of the beliefs, doctrines, practices and principles which Joseph Smith restored to this dispensation” (“Declaration to the Apostles” my emphases). Yet, as Eliade notes, this scenario is not a hopeless one:

This tendency toward devaluation of the contemporary moment should not be regarded as a sign of pessimism. On the contrary, it reveals an excess of optimism, for, in the deterioration of the contemporary situation, at least
a portion of mankind saw signs foretelling the regeneration that must necessarily follow. Since the days of Isaiah, a series of military defeats and political collapses had been anxiously awaited as an ineluctable syndrome of the Messianic illud tempus that was to regenerate the world.

(132)

Indeed, while the TLC’s talk of apocalyptic economic and geopolitical destruction may sound frightening to the outsider, to the insider it sounds like the final judgments upon a wicked world before the glorious Second Coming of Jesus Christ. So while it is true that the world is getting worse and worse, it is only a precondition for getting better. Indeed, according to Eric Johnson, TLC prophet Jim Harmston prophesied that “everyone not associated with the TLC who lived in the Sanpete Valley [. . .] would be swept from the earth between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (between September 11 to September 20)” 1999 (“Manti Polygamous Group” 4). Before the first snowfall, Chinese, Russian, and Islamic forces were to invade America. “It was predicted that the enemy forces were to be stopped at Manti.” These end-times events were recalculated for 2000 when they did not happen in 1999. In light of Eliade’s schema, this failed prophecy demonstrates the TLC’s desire to not just restore the “golden age” (that is, return to Joseph Smith’s Mormonism), but to usher in Christ’s permanent millennial reign (“the Messianic illud tempus” that will “regenerate the world”).

In fact, a major complaint the TLC lodges against the LDS Church is that it has failed to remain apocalyptic; that is, it has failed to warn the world of the impending calamities before Christ’s Second Coming. For example, Scott Lavell Koller, while still a Mormon, says he “watched for the leaders of the L.D.S. Church to tell us what was
going on and what we should do to rid ourselves of evil government. To my amazement, the L.D.S. leaders not only failed to warn us, but they sided with and even promoted wicked government.” Bart Malstrom tells of his parents coming to stay the weekend in 1988 and sharing “startling news they had learned about the closeness of Christ’s Second Coming, of the awful state of affairs of the Nation and Government, and also of the coming of the New World Order. All this information they backed up with the scriptures.” In both Koller and Malstrom’s cases, they leave the church, in part, because of its failure to prepare them for the coming calamities.

D. The TLC’s doctrinal innovation

However much that the True and Living Church would like to reclaim Mormonism’s originality, it has made doctrinal innovations. These innovations, while making the TLC its own unique religion, belie its desire to recapitulate Joseph Smith’s Mormonism. Perhaps the most striking doctrinal innovation is that of multiple mortal probations, a type of species-specific, gender-specific reincarnation where individuals progress up or regress down the ladder of eternity (until the Second Coming puts an end to our mortal probation). TLC apostle Randolph E. Maudsley explains the doctrine, attempting to justify its existence through Bible verses, Mormon Scripture, early Mormon writings, the Jewish cabbala, and Clement, the first bishop of Rome. Maudsley’s attempt to historically justify the doctrine is important, for he intuits that the creation of a new doctrine conflicts with the TLC’s earlier raison d’être of recapitulation. And while I do not wish to enter into a debate with Maudsley, most of the sources he quotes from seem tentative in support of his proposition. For example, he quotes Doctrine and Covenants
“For he will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept; and I will try you and prove you herewith. And whoso layeth down his life in my cause, for my name’s sake, shall find it again, even life eternal.” Maudsley explains, “In other words, now pay attention, we will not only rise again or live in another probation, should we lose our lives for His sake, but we will find the lives we lost in one of our future lives—memories restored through revelation” (“The Doctrine of Multiple Mortal Probations”). While Maudsley’s reading can be sustained, I believe that no one, apart from the TLC, currently reads this verse in this way. The traditional reading is that 1) those who literally lose their lives in God’s service will find eternal life, or 2) those who figuratively lose their lives in God’s service (for example, serving other people, missionary work, etc.) will find eternal life. The idea that we have lived previous lives and, if spiritual enough, can remember the content of those previous lives (who we were and what we did) is, to say the least, not overtly sustained by Mormon Scripture or Mormon Church leaders, either past or present, and no historian has ever argued that Mormon Church leaders ever taught such a doctrine. This does seem to be a doctrinal innovation, despite Maudsley’s attempts to link it to earlier Mormon leaders and, indeed, earlier Judeo-Christian leaders.

E. Conclusions

Policing the border—perhaps, creating the border—between the True and Living Church and the LDS Church is more difficult than policing the boundary between Evangelicals and Mormons. In the first place, the TLC is attempting a doctrinal recapitulation of early Mormonism and, for all their heated rhetoric, current-day
Mormonism is still unique enough to be Mormon and not fully Christian. In the second place, they are attempting this recapitulation in the heart of Mormon country: Manti, Utah. They might be able to maintain border much easier if they had created their community farther north in Salt Lake City or Provo, for the community is much more diffuse and the Mormons there are, generally speaking, invested in the conditions of modernity. However to create a community in Manti requires vitriol in order to sustain the border that separates Mormon from member of the TLC, because Manti Mormons, in the words of Steven Jensen, are the “old Mormons” who “hate change; in fact, they see change as wrong, especially when it comes to do with dealing with God.” In other words, they are Mormons who are more hesitant to embrace modernity, with all that it entails. When I interviewed Manti resident Merilyn Jorgensen, the pageant historian and one of the few people to have participated in the first performance of the pageant in 1967 and virtually every performance since, she expressed wonder that anyone would willingly choose to submit themselves to the hectic pace “up north.” There is something that sets the small town Mormons with “a written history” that goes back “over a hundred years” apart from the Salt Lake City Mormons and non-Utah Mormons who are more invested in jobs and the American way and modernity. Thus, for the TLC to stake their claim in Manti is to define themselves against people who are not remarkably dissimilar from themselves. Vitriol becomes at one and the same time a hollow and powerful way to distinguish themselves from the surrounding Mormons. On the one hand, it is hollow: What does it precisely mean that that LDS Church is “now the whore which has polluted her promise of becoming the bride of Christ” or that “the LDS Church has gone whoring after Babylon” or that the LDS Church has “had intercourse with Babylon” and has
“become the whore of the earth” (“Declaration to the Apostles” and Ron Taylor)? On the other hand, it is powerful: Such words cannot help but alienate TLC members from their fellow Mantians.

V. Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Identity

A. Mormonism as ethnicity

All of this points to the question of identity, for the confrontation among Mormons, Evangelicals, and TLC members is not initially over truth but over identity, and who gets to speak that identity. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* reminds us of two things crucial to this project: the importance of the *imaginary* nature of the communities under consideration (“[c]ommunities are to be distinguished [. . .] by the style in which they are imagined” [6]) and the concept of the *nation* (“nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” [3]). While the three communities under consideration are religious, they are also enveloped in concepts of nationality, as was discussed in Chapter Two. Indeed, in the case of the Mormon Church, its bid for respectability has not been merely a bid for Christian respectability, but, in fact, has been *mostly* a bid for American respectability, and that American respectability translates (necessarily?) into Christian respectability. Likewise, the counter-Mormon response has not solely been one of responding to Mormons’ doctrinal heterodoxy, but of attempting to assert that Christians should not be fooled by Mormons’ veneer of American middle-class respectability.

One of the reasons that Mormons have been remarkably successful at their transition from “radical [. . .] communitarians” to “right-wing capitalists and respectably
Republican” (Ostling and Ostling xxv) has been their sense of themselves as a people. Indeed, argues Bloom, Joseph Smith’s “genius [was] to see that only by becoming a people could the Mormons survive” (83). Mormonism functions as an ethnicity, or at least there are strains of it that qualify as such—e. g., the pioneer descendants that one finds in Manti. Max Weber notes that ethnic groups can “entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration [. . .] it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists” (qtd. in Mauss All Abraham’s Children 12). While it may seem a stretch to call Mormons an ethnic group, Harold Bloom asserts that it was Joseph Smith’s project all along to make the Mormons into a people: “[T]he Mormons, like the Jews before them, are a religion that became a people. That [. . .] was always Joseph Smith’s pragmatic goal, for he had the genius to see that only by becoming a people could the Mormons survive” (83). Sociologist Armand L. Mauss, in All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage (2003), argues that this Mormon “ethnicity” became explicit under the duress of anti-Mormon persecution, the trek to Utah, and the struggle to create a theocracy in the west.14 “Their retrospective construction of a ‘chosen’ lineage identity also enabled them to resist the growing national and international definition of Mormons as a despicable people” (4). Thus, the construction of Mormonism as an ethnicity was not only a means of physical protection, but a means of psychological protection as well. Mormons began to see themselves as a people, not simply a religion. When Wallace Turner notes that “[t]o be born a Mormon is to be born with a second nationality” (4), he is not being simply hyperbolic. This is also what Steven Jensen, quoted in Chapter Two, was commenting on
when he mentioned the difference between those Mormons with “a written history” versus “new converts and people in the city [. . .].” Jensen views himself as part of the Mormon people, whereas new converts and people in the city may tend to see themselves as converts to a religion—a demanding religion, yes, but a religion nonetheless. Perhaps it is not so much the “Christianizing” of Mormonism that bothers some—as Stephen E. Robinson argues, the Christian elements currently being emphasized in the Mormon Church have always been a part of its doctrine (Blomberg and Robinson 68-69)—but the “religionizing” of it.

This religionizing is necessary, however, if Mormonism is going to downplay itself as a people arrayed against the world, including America. After all, the survival mentioned by Bloom (Joseph Smith’s pragmatic goal) has been achieved; indeed, the church is not merely surviving but thriving: sociologist Rodney Stark projects that Mormonism will become the next major world religion, with a membership of 267 million by 2080 (the membership is currently 12 million) (Kennedy 28). Indeed, to a great extent the “need” for Mormons to be a people has disappeared. Where once Mormons lived together in the Great Basin and depended upon one another for their very survival, today their church is worldwide due to intensive proselytizing. Not only that, but many Utah Mormons have had the experience of serving missions in foreign lands; their parochial visions have been widened. In fact, it was “the unintended consequences” of the church’s proselytizing program, argues Mauss, that “gradually transformed the Latter-day Saints from a ‘peculiar people,’ preoccupied with invidious divine distinctions among lineages, into a worldwide movement embracing all humankind as ‘Abraham’s children’” (All Abraham’s Children 2).
While some Mormons may be moving away from their sense of ethnicity, I believe they cannot move away from it altogether. However, what is more important is that as they have moved away from their ethnicity—from the comfort and *necessity* they take in themselves as a people—they are finding comfort and “necessity” in themselves as Americans. Bloom is right that Mormons are consistently the most patriotic of Americans. Writing the forward to Klaus J. Hansen’s *Mormonism and the American Experience* (1981), Martin E. Marty says, “Today [. . .] Mormons are very American, sometimes super-American” (xiii). As a people that are “super-American,” they become, by default, “super-Christian.” The fact that they *perform* Christianity so well, despite the fact that their doctrine does not square with Christianity point for point, only adds to their case that they are Christians. In other words, despite Christians’ attempts to deny them entrance to the Christian community, they seem inexorably to be coming in.

**B. The counter-Mormon case against Mormon American-ness**

Evangelicals intuit that in order to successful “attack” Mormonism, they must not only challenge its doctrines, they must challenge Mormonism’s bid for American respectability. Given that Christianity is a religion that has become synonymous with America, Evangelicals cannot allow Mormonism to also become synonymous with America. The sight of Mormons in business suits, Mormons in white lab coats, Mormons in the halls of academia, Mormons filling the halls of congress—perhaps even a Mormon as President of the United States as Mitt Romney positions himself for a possible 2008 presidential run**15** (with Harry Reid as the ranking senate Democrat, no less)—is certainly making Mormonism more and more synonymous with America. Harold Bloom declares,
“It is weirdly true, in 1991”—when he wrote *The American Religion*—“that the Mormons are as mainstream as you are, whoever you are, at least in terms of the religion of politics, and the politics of religion” (88), and, I believe, they are even nearer the mainstream in 2005. While this perhaps does not completely explain the increased Evangelical presence at *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* since the 1980s, one cannot help but wonder at the astronomical growth of counter-Mormons from between 15 to 25 in the 1980s to 150 to 200 today. As Mormons approach the American mainstream, the necessity to counter their American-ness becomes paramount.

Keith Walker of Evidence Ministries discusses visiting Manti on his website. He specifically mentions meeting with Chip Thompson, the pastor of the Ephraim Church of the Bible. He quotes Thompson as saying about towns such as Manti and Ephraim,

> America should be ashamed. A Christian nation where there are communities that are 150 years old that have never had a Christian witness and we’re sending Christian missionaries to Africa and we’ve got people right in the middle of the U.S. who have never had a Christian witness in their community. (“Evangelizing Utah”)

In this formula the Christian nation America is implicitly set against 150-year-old towns like Manti and Ephraim to which Thompson refers. (Certainly it would make little sense for Manti and Ephraim to be “ashamed”; thus, they are not part of the formulation “America.”) Such Mormon towns share a tacit connection with Africa, to where Christian missionaries are sent to redeem the non-Christian. Walker adds to Thompson’s formulation:
Sharing this time with Chip and also getting to meet and spend time with his family was extremely enlightening and encouraging. Please pray with us as we work on planning other short-term mission trips into Utah to help support pastors such as Chip, who are truly missionaries in a foreign land. (my emphasis)

Thompson’s implicit analogy of Mormon communities to African communities now becomes explicit in Walker’s formulation: Utah is now a foreign land. Thus, Mormons, who Bloom refers to as the most patriotic Americans (90), are actually foreign interlopers in Christian America.

Mormonism is often association with un-American values. This has historically been the case, according to Martin E. Marty:

Yet for all the apparent Americanism, Mormonism was consistently seen as un- and anti-American. Its founder wanted to run for president of the United States, wanted to set up a counterkingdom. The practice of polygamy offended all non-Mormons. Warfare between the United States and partisans of the Mormon kingdom was a virtually unique expression of holy war on North American soil. To critics reposed in the Protestant empire, Mormonism was worse than Roman Catholicism, infidelity, and barbarism. (qtd. in Hansen xiii)

Counter-Mormons, then, have a vested interest in continuing the “trope” of Mormons as as “un- and anti-American.” Several counter-Mormons held aloft signs at The Mormon Miracle Pageant. One particularly brash sign was “JosephLied.com.” The site’s host, Mike Norton, writes an autobiography entitled “Bicentennial Boy” in which he speaks of
his baptism into the Mormon Church on July 4, 1976. Like many counter-Mormon narratives, his begins by establishing his Mormon roots: “My father was as Mormon as they came. His parents were Mormons as were their parents before them and as far as I know, their parents were before them.” Having established his credibility, he then states: “I look back now and can appreciate the irony of joining a religion that discouraged intellectualism and free thinking on the same day the country was celebrating it’s [sic] independence from tyranny and repression. Little did I know at that young age how far removed I was from true independence.” Here, Mormonism is explicitly defined against the values of America: intellectualism and free thinking. Indeed, Mormonism is defined as an affront to America, given that America fought a war of independence to rid itself of the twin evils of tyranny and repression, and the Mormon Church was again establishing them inside the borders of the United States by discouraging free thinking and intellectualism.

C. Mormonism as cult: cult as un-American

Norton’s observation is important, for he overtly establishes the American values against which many counter-Mormons will condemn the religion: Mormonism as cult. There may be no more un-American aberration in the popular imagination than that of the religious cult, for not only is it a religious aberration but it violates the principles of American democracy, subjugating one’s bodily and mental freedom; thus, it is doubly damned. Many counter-Mormons approach the matter in a quasi-scientific fashion, providing criteria for what constitutes a cult and then comparing Mormonism to the
criteria. Other counter-Mormons simply take it as a given that Mormonism is a cult and apparently feel no need to justify their evaluation.

Definitional outlines to determine if Mormonism is a cult or not range from the simple to the complex. Search and Rescue Ministries lists only two reasons why Mormonism is a cult: it has redefined God and salvation (Almarode “What Is a Cult?”). Search and Rescue bases its condemnation of Mormonism upon its reading of the Bible. Mormonism is not biblical; ergo, it is cultic. (Search and Rescue also condemns Roman Catholicism to cult status.) James R. Lewis, editor of Odd Gods: New Religions and the Cult Controversy (2001), notes that “the target of much Christian anticultism is a minority religion’s deviation from traditional doctrine” (24). He notes that cult is a socially negotiated label and it “often means little more than a religion one dislikes for some reason. To certain conservative Christians, for example, a ‘cult’ is any religion that departs from a certain traditional interpretation of scripture. Alternatively, ultraconservative Christians who take a strictly fundamentalist approach to scripture often appear ‘cult-like’ to many mainline Christians. In other words, one person’s cult is another person’s religion” (51).

Judith Butler explains the power of words and labels in Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performativ (1997). Language is not something we merely use, like a tool, to describe the world around us. Instead, language constitutes the subject. The implication, then, is that a subject cannot recognize him- or herself, but must be recognized first by others:

Thus, to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of
existence becomes possible. One comes to “exist” by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One “exists” not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable. (5)

Logically, then, if language is used to create subjectivity, language can be used to alter or undo subjectivity. Language becomes about the wielding of power. Butler notes, “One is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence” (2). The attempt to affix labels can have unintended consequences, both good and bad.

Sandra Tanner of Utah Lighthouse Ministry notes that there are two ways to interpret cult, sociologically/psychologically and religiously. Biblically, Mormons are cultists because

- They add to the Bible.
- They subtract from the person and work of Jesus.
- They multiply the requirements for salvation.
- They divide between themselves and Christianity.

What makes Tanner’s “biblical” definition of a cult interesting is that it is a self-contained, in-group definition. The group in question determines criteria for cult and then applies them to groups that it wishes to label. Butler says that injurious speech exposes “the volatility of one’s ‘place’ within the community of speakers; one can be ‘put in one’s place’ by such speech, but such a place may be no place” (4). In a sense, the
attempt to call Mormonism a cult because it is not biblical is an attempt to displace it; it is not Christian, certainly, but perhaps it is not anything.

Tanner, understanding that the criteria for cult from a biblical perspective work only from an in-group perspective, provides criteria from a social science perspective:

- The Doctrine is Reality
- Reality is Black and White, Good Versus Evil
- Elitist Mentality
- Group Will over Individual Will
- Strict Obedience\[\ldots\] Modeling the Leader
- Happiness through Good Performance
- Manipulation through Fear and Guilt
- No Way Out

Tanner gets her checklist from Steven Hassan’s _Combatting Cult Mind Control_ (1988), a narrative of a former “moonie” who was deprogrammed by his father and now looks back with a critical and personal eye upon all religious cults. Tanner concludes, “Many people coming out of the LDS Church report just such things in their experience as a Mormon, especially the returned LDS missionary” (“What Is a Cult?”). Even though the above criteria are ostensibly from a sociological/psychological perspective, they still reflect Evangelical Christian biases; that is, the idea that works are important to salvation (and, since one can never be good enough, shame will result), the idea that a religious organization is important for one’s salvation, and the idea that one will strive to please the community rather than have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
The desire to link Mormonism to culthood is an attempt to illuminate its ultimate un-American-ness. America, as encapsulated in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, is finally about freedom. “Freedom,” as Bloom argues, “in the context of the American Religion, means being alone with God or with Jesus, the American God or the American Christ. [. . .] The soul stands apart, and something deeper than the soul, the Real Me or self or spark, thus is made free to be utterly alone with a God who is also quite separate and solitary, that is, a free God or God of freedom” (15). The cult, on the other hand, is the antithesis of this vision. Indeed, the word cult can no longer be used merely descriptively, so loaded is it with negative connotation. In Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion (1999), Marc Galanter notes that “[w]e used to think of ‘cults’ as obscure offshoots of mainstream religions with their own devotional practices. But over the course of a generation the term has acquired grim connotations of the potential for mass suicide, assault, or fiery death” (111). M. Lou Chandler, a public relations specialist and a Latter-day Saint, says that in regards to cults, “[n]either the reality of the situation nor the viewpoints of ‘experts’ are as critical to the issue of resolving public relations problems as is public perception” (126). In other words, if Mormonism and cult can be successfully linked in the public mind, any objective social science criteria becomes largely irrelevant.

D. The history of the Mormon mind-control trope

Protestantism is associated with America in the national consciousness—or at least it once was and, I would argue, still largely is. The conflation of Protestantism and America has existed since the founding of the Republic, and Protestants have worked to
maintain that connection. Both Catholics and Mormons suffered persecution in
nineteenth-century America at the hand of Protestants determined to maintain the
boundaries of *American* Christianity. Lewis states, “While contemporary Americans
accept Catholicism as a natural part of the religious landscape, in the early nineteenth
century, ‘Popery’ (or ‘Papism’ as it was popularly referred to) was an object of contempt,
not unlike the way ‘Moonies’ are regarded in the late twentieth century” (25). Referring
to a nunnery that was attacked near Charlestown, Massachusetts in 1834 after rumors ran
riot through the community of a nun held against her will, Louise Whitney, a student at
the nunnery school, wrote, “The whole establishment was as foreign as the soil whereon
it stood, as if, like Aladdin’s Palace, it had been wafted from Europe by the power of a
magician” (qtd. in Lewis 25). Probably the first cult motif was that of the nun,
imprisoned in a nunnery, witness to and participant in unspeakable abuse and immorality
(Lewis 25-26). However the second cult motif—and a *much* more enduring one—is
found in early anti-Mormon literature. Unlike captive nuns, Mormon polygamous wives
were apparently free to leave their husbands. How, then, to account for the fact that so
few did? “Thus, [... ] one finds the first theory of ‘hypnotic mind control’ in anti-
Mormon literature” (Lewis 29). Lewis notes the following:

> Contemporary anticult literature bears [... ] certain similarities to
nineteenth century anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon tales. In the
contemporary period, however, *the notion of brainwashing or cult mind
control has become the center*—rather than a subsidiary theme—in the
debate over stigmatized religious groups. (30 my emphasis)
Much anticult literature written by those who have left, or, quite often, those who have been kidnapped and “deprogrammed,” is similar to nineteenth-century fictional anti-Mormon literature: the subject loses his or her will to a charismatic leader.\textsuperscript{18}

Mormonism, then, was the frame upon which anti-Mormon novelists constructed a lasting trope; one which may, indeed, have sociological foundation, but one which, certainly, has far more popular cachet than psychological credibility. The ability to explain any behavior we find mystifying (“Oh, he’s brainwashed”) explains the usefulness and elasticity of the trope. During the religious experimentation of the 1960s and ’70s, it was used to explain the behavior of many young people who left mainstream Protestantism to unite themselves to new religious movements, much to the horror of their middle-class parents. Since that time, counter-Mormons have found the term \textit{cult} and its associated cultural baggage to be a useful tool in their offensive against the LDS Church. Mormonism, then, becomes associated with the ultimate un-American activity: mind control.

The Freedom in Truth Outreach website points to the cultic nature of Mormonism. It asserts that “God has given you intelligence, but you will not be allowed to use what God has given you. You will be told what to believe, how to dress, how to comb your hair, whether you can have a beard, how to act, what you can celebrate and what to read.” Most counter-Mormon websites (at least, the ones I viewed in connection with the pageant) are not as brash in asserting that Mormonism controls one’s life; rather, they lay down criteria for what constitutes a cult and then allow you to make the association with Mormonism. Of course, as shown, the criteria are so “loose” that many features could just as easily apply to Christianity or to a secular organization.
There are, needless to say, religious groups that are dangerous, and Lewis provides several criteria for determining what constitutes a dangerous new religious movement. However what concerns us here is the angst generated by new religious movements—although, at 174 years of age, one wonders how long Mormonism will be considered a new religious movement. This angst takes on a special “tone” in America, where we define ourselves as physically and mentally free; the reality is not so simple:

One of the more important cultural contradictions that gets projection onto alternative religions is tied up in the brainwashing/mind control notion that is the core accusation leveled against such groups. Discourse that glorifies American society usually does so in terms of a rhetoric of liberty and freedom. However, while holding liberty as an ideal, we experience a social environment that is often quite restrictive. Most citizens work as employees in highly disciplined jobs where the only real freedom is the freedom to quit. Also, we are bombarded by advertising designed to influence our decisions and even to create new needs. Our frustration with these forms of influence and control is easily displaced and projected onto the separated societies and alternative religions, where the seemingly restricted flow of information offers a distorted reflection of the situation we experience as members of the dominant society. (Lewis 40)

Perhaps new religious movements suffer the displaced anxiety of Protestant America’s quest for freedom (as Bloom says, the freedom to be “alone with God or with Jesus, the American God or the American Christ” [15]) and their inability to attain that freedom,
their forced participation in American capitalism which drains them of so much time and energy. Evangelical Todd Martin says that attending *The Mormon Miracle Pageant* is “easily the spiritual highlight of my year”—for which he sacrifices his two weeks of vacation time—yet he spends the rest of his year teaching finance classes at an Air Force base in San Antonio. Does he question the lopsidedness of this equation? For Martin, the ultimate reality is Jesus Christ and sharing the gospel; finance classes are transitory in importance. Yet he works his entire years so he can dedicate two weeks to what he considers of ultimate importance. The inability to achieve and sustain that perfect unity with Christ, as Bloom asserts is the Evangelical goal, perhaps creates the desire to displace onto an Other the anxieties of lost freedom, especially in a country that promises it in unlimited quantities.

**E. Mormonism as beyond the pale of American-ness**

Apart from the cultic nature of Mormonism, there is simply the category of “other”: strange “facts” meant to impugn Mormonism that don’t fit into any easily definable classification. Freedom in Truth Outreach has a page entitled “Facts Mormon Missionaries Won’t Tell You When Calling at Your Door.” These facts are so odd that they can only be intended to render Mormons as Other, not Christian, not even Christianlike. Mormons are beyond the pale and, therefore, un-American. Consider the following “facts” about Mormons:

- THAT they believe your church is wrong, your Christian creeds are an abomination to God and your Pastor or Priest is a hireling of Satan.

[...]
• THAT those who have been through their temples are wearing secret underwear to protect themselves from “evil”. [sic] This “evil” includes non-Mormons like you. [. . .]

• THAT they think “familiar spirits” are good, and that their Book of Mormon has a “familiar spirit”. [sic] [. . .]

• THAT women receive salvation only through their Mormon husbands, and must remain pregnant for all eternity. [. . .]

• THAT they intend to have many wives in heaven, carrying on multiple sex relations throughout eternity, until they have enough children to populate their own earth, so they can be “Heavenly Father” over their own planet. [. . .]

• THAT the “heavenly father” they ask you to pray to with them is really an exalted man that lives on a planet near the starbase Kolob and is not the Heavenly Father of the Bible at all. [. . .]

• THAT many of their secret temple oaths are based on Scottish Rite Freemasonry. [. . .]

• THAT Joseph Smith taught that there were inhabitants on the moon and Brigham Young taught there were inhabitants on the sun as well.

The page ends with: “WHY WON’T MORMONS TELL YOU THESE THINGS? [. . .]

The Missionaries [sic] are well trained to keep most of these facts from their potential converts.”

Freedom in Truth continues with a page called “Danger! If You Join the Mormons.” It claims that in Anton LaVey’s *Satanic Bible* (1971) “the page listing
infernal names, ‘The god the ghoul’s [sic] (an evil being obsessed with the dead) is named Mormo’. [sic] His followers would by [sic] called Mormons.” As if this were not evidence enough, the webpage states, “In Chinese Mormon means the ‘The [sic] Gates of Hell.’” 21

Most of these assertions have some basis in fact, but they are stretched ludicrously out of kilter. It is almost as if the webpage had been written by some Mormons making a parody of counter-Mormon literature, typos and all. Daniel C. Peterson, a Mormon apologist, asked rhetorically when reading the counter-Mormon book The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon (1988), “‘Can this fellow be serious? Does he really believe this?’ I actually thought for a while that the book must be a joke. Somebody with the obviously spurious name of ‘Loftes Tryk’ had managed to insinuate himself into the largely humorless ranks of the anti-Mormons, persuading them to publish a side-splitting satire of themselves” (231-32). These types of counter-Mormon assaults—those that lack the historical respectability of Jerald and Sandra Tanner—seem very unlikely to persuade the Mormon reader. Their purpose seems to be to inflame the Evangelical who knows little to nothing about Mormonism and trusts that the representation he or she is getting is correct. The representation secures the boundaries of Christianity against Mormonism, no matter how good Mormons’ performance of Christianity and American-ness. Mormons are rendered “dangerous,” “foreign.”

F. Ambivalence of the pageant

The Mormon Miracle Pageant is an interesting eruption of Mormonism because, as Mormonism moves further into the twenty-first century with apparent ease, the
pageant retains much that harkens back to the anxieties of the cultural turmoil of the 1970s. Not only that, but having originated at the hand of native Sanpeter Grace Johnson, the pageant harkens back to what Steven Jensen calls the “old Mormons” who “knew what Mormonism was eighty years ago” and “they hate change; in fact, they see change as wrong, especially when it comes to do with dealing with God.” Perhaps because the pageant does recall an older age, there have been rumors since the late 1980s that the church wished to significantly alter the pageant; but, not holding the copyright, it could not. The church now holds the copyright and it has made some changes, but a complete overhaul of the pageant would take considerable time, effort, and money, since the present pageant is recorded on an audio tape and pageant directors, while updating costumes and sets, must make the story conform to the tape. While a new pageant is in the works, pageant director Ivo Peterson told me only that it would probably take several years before it was rewritten, worked its way through the several church committees for approval, and was finally recorded on audio tape with voice actors and music.

The pageant is ambivalent in its association of Mormonism and American-ness. On the one hand, Mormons are depicted as abused by Americans. This narrative is sustained and, while tragic and touching, also occasionally sinks into bathos. The pageant wants you to know that the Mormons suffered at the hands of other Americans, driven from state to state, their prophet killed. Children die from exposure because the Mormons are driven from their homes. On the other hand, Mormons are depicted as uncompromising Americans, beginning with “The Star-Spangled Banner” that opens the pageant in front of a huge American flag. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson
make an appearance in the pageant, and they are conflated with Joseph Smith and Captain Moroni with his Title of Liberty.

Two narratives coexist in the pageant. The first is that Mormons have been abused in America and, therefore, are *outside* of American-ness. While they may hope to call upon the protections available to all Americans by right of citizenship, they can truly only depend upon one another, for the government and other citizens are often cruel. The second narrative is that Mormons are *inside* of American-ness, and truly inside, by virtue of the abuse they have suffered. Indeed, the abuse they have suffered so patiently makes them the ideal Americans, proving their loyalty to a country that has mistreated them. Yet, as I have noted, the pageant is something of a throwback to an earlier time, having been committed to audio tape in 1970 and existing in 2005 in a mostly unaltered form. The church seems to be moving away from the constant replaying of “trauma” narratives; that is, while speakers will still invoke stories of suffering pioneers and the unjust murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, these stories are not told as often, and when they are told emphasis is put on Mormons as victors over incredible odds as opposed to Mormons as victims of abusive society and harsh environment. The pageant feels like something from an earlier era, not only because of the themes treated in the pageant but because of the conservative town of Manti, the now-retro sound-effects and music, and the dialogue that seems as if it were lifted from a Cecil B. DeMille epic. Ivo Peterson admitted to me in a conversation in 2004 that there is a strange clash between the modern, expensive special-effects (several fountains that shoot fire into the air; lighting towers; fake rock walls that hide rooms [see Figure 4A]) and the audiotape with its 1970s “feel.”
What this means is that as Mormons two hours north in Salt Lake City (and elsewhere in America) “are very American, sometimes super-American” (Marty qtd. in Hansen xiii), the pageant’s response is yes, no, and maybe. Perhaps this is a key to the popularity of the site for counter-Mormons, for in this location Mormonism is not presented as consistently American as it is in its official publications, but harkens back to the nineteenth-century.

G. Ambivalence of Manti

Just like the pageant, Manti is also ambivalent about its place in America. First, Manti was settled just two years after the pioneers arrived in Utah in 1847. As the pageant relates, the pioneers were attempting to leave the boundaries of the United States. In a bit of fictional dialogue with Captain James Allan, Brigham Young asks him if he understands that the Mormons have been denied their constitutional rights by the United States government and are, therefore, leaving. The Mormons did, indeed, leave the boundaries of the United States and settled in the territory of Utah, which was then part of Mexico. A year later, however, after the Mexican-American War, the territory became part of the U.S. The Mormon history with the United States government from that point on is well documented. On the one hand, Mormons believed the founding documents of America to be inspired by God, and sought protection for themselves and for the institution of polygamy under the First Amendment (see Sarah Barringer Gordon’s The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America, 2002); on the other hand, they considered most of the government and its politicians corrupt and saw the impending Civil War as God’s wrath. Indeed, the
government hounded the Mormons, imprisoning many of them for polygamy, compelling others into hiding, and finally forcing the church to abandon the practice if it wished statehood—which it did, in 1896.

Second, the Sanpete Valley, as I discussed at some length in Chapter One, “is like a bowl, tilted in a southwesterly direction” (Antrei and Roberts 2), and Manti is at the heart of that “bowl.” In other words, ensconced in the Sanpete Valley, one can feel both a part of and apart from the world. Grace Johnson’s words capture the feeling best: Manti is a “place apart, yet in the very heart of things” (Story of the Mormon Miracle 44). Certainly this is America, but it is paradoxically both more than and less than America. If America is becoming corrupted (moving inexorably away from its “golden age”), then Manti is preserving that golden age. But what Manti is preserving is a vision of Mormonism that transcends America—or ultimately will. But those who hold to this version of America assert that America is ultimately based on spiritual principles, not secular ones, and so their Mormon version of America is ultimately the truest version.

Manti has its share of ultraconservatives—not to mention just plain conservatives—and, as mentioned, the True and Living Church is an outbreak of ultraconservative sensibility, although it seems to have take a mostly religious sensibility. Scott Lavell Koller, a member of the TLC’s First Presidency, said that growing up in the Mormon Church he remembered thinking he was “going to live the American dream and become rich, not only temporally, but spiritually also. I remember thinking that I could have it all. I could live and participate in Babylon and receive all that it had to offer, and also receive eternal life […].” Phillip P. Savage also notes that he was “following the examples of the Mormon leadership in becoming a ‘prudent man’ of the world. Indeed, I
was very much involved with the ways of Babylon” (“Phil Savage Bio”). Ron Taylor said that he began studying the writings of Ezra Taft Benson and the “thing that most troubled me was seeing the [Mormon Church’s] continued compromise of principles in order to become popular with the world.” In these formulations, “evil government” and “the world” are implicitly contrasted against the purity of the gathering place of Manti. Again, this may help explain the counter-Mormon interest in attending the pageant in such large numbers, especially since they have exceeded, in my opinion, “saturation-point.” Manti intensifies the sense that Mormonism conflicts with the American vision, whereas other Mormons in other locations in America seem to be willing collaborators with modernity and the American dream.

VI. Conclusion

The creation, marking, and maintenance of boundaries that takes place among Mormons, Evangelical Christians, and members of the True and Living Church occurs throughout the year, but The Mormon Miracle Pageant serves as a flashpoint where these issues play out more vividly. As shown, this process is not uncomplicated, and each group is invested in not only defining itself, but defining the others. Each group plays offensive and defense, defining itself and others, and guarding against the attempts to be defined by others. Nor is this process of self- and group-definition always philosophically coherent. Ultimately, the process is multifaceted, a creation of numerous individuals over time. And while it may give the appearance of stability to its adherents, it is, in fact, a negotiated group construct.
Conclusion

Writing Them, Writing Me:
The Self as Research Site

You also should not rely on method to validate your work. We are more systematic, more methodical, than our critics give us credit for, but we could spin our wheels forever trying to convince them.

—Harry F. Wolcott

Writing up Qualitative Research

Several Evangelicals agreed to speak with me on the condition that they be given the chance to witness to me afterwards. They knew I was Mormon, for almost the first question out of their mouths after I told them about my research project was “Are you LDS?” After the interview, my first Evangelical interviewee proceeded to lay down philosophical groundwork using the Book of Mormon.

“Kent, let’s read Moroni 32.10. Do you mind if we do that?”

“Read on.”

“‘Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.’” He paused meaningfully. “Man, Kent, do you understand what this is saying?”
“I think so.”

“Do you, Kent? You see, I believe in a Christ who was powerful enough to pay the price for all our sins. Isn’t that amazing? It’s all done, all done. All we’ve got to do is accept Jesus as our Savior and we’re saved. He did the rest. But here in your Book of Mormon it’s telling us that you have to be perfected in Christ. Are you perfect, Kent?”

“No, I’m sure not.”

“Me neither, man. We’ve got that in common. You’ve also got to deny yourself of all ungodliness. All of it. Is that possible, Kent?”

I paused. I felt conflicted. On the one hand, I wanted to maintain the appropriate scholarly distance and not get into a religious debate. (For that matter, I didn’t want to get into any kind of debate.) On the other hand, I didn’t feel as if I could simply nod and let him continue along making the assumption that I agreed with the conclusions that I knew were inevitably to follow. After all, he had been honest with me when I interviewed him; I should be honest with him. Maybe I could simply answer the question philosophically.

So I said, “Do you think that denying yourself of all ungodliness is the same as being free of all ungodliness?”

“So you think there’s a difference?”

“Maybe. I’m just putting that out there.”

“Well, how about loving God with all your heart, might, mind, and strength. Do you think you love God that much?”

“That’s the goal.”
“I don’t know, Kent. It sounds tough. Wouldn’t you rather just be saved by grace?”

I shrugged my shoulders in as ambiguous a way as possible.

“You see, Kent, what I’m trying to get across to you is that, even by your own standards, you’ll never make it to heaven. See, I’m not using the Bible here. This is the Book of Mormon, right?”

“Right.”

“And it’s just too much. Let’s go to Alma 34.35, okay? I promise I won’t keep you too much longer.” He laughed. “Let’s read this-here scripture: ‘For behold, if ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil, and he doth seal you his; therefore, the Spirit of the Lord hath withdrawn from you, and hath no place in you, and the devil hath all power over you; and this is the final state of the wicked.’” He shook his head sadly. Another Evangelical, younger, probably in his early twenties, had come up and was now listening. “Kent, do you know what this is saying?”

“I think so.”

“It’s saying that if you don’t repent of all your sins, all of them, that when you die your spirit will become subjected to the devil. Kent, do you think you’re free of every single sin?”

“I doubt it.”

“So what’s going to happen when you die?”

“That’s a tough one.”
“You’ll be subjected to the devil. I mean, Kent, imagine that you’re driving down the street and you see a beautiful woman, right?”

“Right.”

“And you know it’s wrong, but you undress her in your mind. And the next thing that happens is you get in a car wreck and die. You’ve got that sin on you and you haven’t had the chance to repent, have you?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“What’s going to happen to you, Kent?”

I simply nodded and pursed my lips. Again, I wasn’t quite sure how to end this conversation. I didn’t want to answer, because an answer would lead to a counter-answer, and that would lead to a counter-counter-answer, and that would lead . . . well, I’m sure you can see the difficulty. Not that I mind debating religion, but I don’t see the point when two people are firmly entrenched in their positions. I usually reserve debate for subjects that are more productive—and religion can be one of them—but subjects in which the participants to the debate can actually influence one another. Clearly my Evangelical friend didn’t want to be influenced by my Mormon opinion. He was working for one goal only: my conversion out of Mormonism.

“That is an interesting verse that I need to think about,” I said. “But I’ll be honest with you: I’m not going to take one verse and change my life in an instant out here on the street. I’ll take what you said and think about it.”

“Right, right, Kent, and I understand, you’re a thoughtful guy. But I just want to see you in heaven. And I’m scared, Kent, I’m scared because your own Mormon
scriptures say that it’s impossible for you to ever get there. But I know the real Jesus, and
he’s made it possible for you to get there, and I want to see you there, man.”

“And I want to be there.”

How could I explain to him that his efforts were in vain? How could I say, “You
know, even if you managed to talk me out of Mormonism, I would never be an
Evangelical”? The other day at the Ephraim Church of the Bible a woman testified that
what brought her out of Mormonism was when an Evangelical lady stuck her finger in
her face and said, “So you think you’re going to be a god, huh? You’re not going to be a
god—you’re going to fry like bacon!” The congregation let out a big laugh over that one.
That’s what I think of when I think of Evangelical Christianity. Maybe it’s not all like
that, but that’s what I’ve seen: I’m right, you’re wrong, and you’re going to hell. I just
can’t buy the proposition that God creates children for no other reason than to send them
to hell—just for the mistake of not worshipping him the right way.

But beyond that, my Evangelical friend’s tactics were all wrong. They might
work on a new convert to Mormonism who wasn’t secure in his or her faith, but did he
think some logical back-flips and scripture chains were going to convince me to leave my
religion? Did he really think that Mormonism was just a series of logical syllogisms in
my mind, nothing more? How could I explain to him my Mormonism was being a five-
year-old boy, running through the darkened halls of the church at the annual Christmas
banquet? Only the cultural hall was lit where people were dining, but the rest of the
building was shrouded in darkness, something that seemed so strange to me and my
childhood posse. We ran through the building, playing tag, trying to avoid the adults who
would certainly put a stop to our roughhousing. How could I explain that my religion
was running into my dad’s office at church—he was the bishop for a time—and stealing a Certs out of his desk, my mischievous six-year-old grin breaking out over my face when he caught me? How could I explain that my religion was sitting on a pew, now eight years old, listening to my mother sing “I Stand All Amazed”? She never sang in the ward choir because, I now realize, she did not have a very good singing voice, but at that moment as I sat by her, she sounded angelic. How could I explain that my religion was the excitement of my oldest brother getting his mission call to Madrid, Spain when I was twelve, and trying to write letters to him every week but usually managing to write to him every month or two? How could I tell him about my grandfather who managed a dairy farm in Idaho, and the afternoon he came in from working in the field, his body giving off the sweet smell of sweat, and he wanted to have a discussion with those gathered about Emma Smith? I remember the hot summer afternoon somewhat mitigated by the shade of the cottonwood trees, as the adults discussed the prophet’s wife. To me, sitting there as an impressionable youth, listening to the adults talk about Mormonism was as normal as listening to them talk about car troubles or politics or the latest bargain.

Perhaps my Evangelical friend knew all of this, however. The Evidence Ministries website mentions that “Mormonism is not just a religion, it’s a culture. There is a HUGE cost to becoming a Christian in Utah because when people leave Mormonism, they leave everything they have every [sic] known and they get treated that way” (Walker “Evangelizing Utah”). Evidence Ministries is correct; however, where they figure this Mormon culture as a negative—a hindrance to the goal of Christianizing—I view it as a positive. This culture has provided me with support, happiness, and comfort. Yes, I
experience frustrations with my fellow Mormons, but I want to ameliorate their flaws, not do away with Mormonism.

And so I wonder. I wonder just what it is these Evangelicals are hoping to accomplish. Manti is, in a very real sense, the heart of Mormonism. David Willmore, a former pageant president, acknowledged to me that The Mormon Miracle Pageant is one of the church’s least “productive” pageants in regards to missionary work; that is, it is attended mainly by believing Latter-day Saints, unlike some of the other pageants that draw more nonmembers. So why, at this particular location, are the Evangelicals spending so much time trying to convince us that we’re doctrinally incorrect? Is it more about them than us?

. . . tired . . .

I guess that would be the dominant emotion. Yes, emotion. I spent several nights among the Evangelicals at The Mormon Miracle Pageant, watching them, talking to them, interviewing them. The word about me spread quickly among the throng out there on the street, and many came up to inquire into the nature of my project. I was like a Democrat spending a week at the Republican National Convention. Oh, hi, nice to meet you. You say you’re a Democrat doing a research project? That’s great! You’re wrong, you know—but I’m still glad you’re here. How interesting it must be for you. Did I mention that you’re wrong? My, but it’s good to have you here. What an interesting project. Wouldn’t you like to become a Republican? No? Really? How odd . . . Well, that’s okay, but it sure sounds like an interesting project. Sure you don’t want to be a
Republican? I cannot say that I was treated anything but cordially by the counter-Mormons, yet . . .

. . . my resistance wore down, slowly, until I just felt tired.

Should I be admitting this? Wouldn’t it be better to just hide this unflattering truth about myself—that I’m not, in fact, objective? Not that I threw myself heedlessly into the deep waters of subjectivity, but I am what I am: I’m a member of the Mormon community who spent my adolescence in Manti, participated in *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*, and feel certain loyalties. In *The Matachines Dance: Ritual Symbolism and Interethnic Relations in the Upper Río Grande Valley* (1996), Sylvia Rodríguez makes the point that being a cultural insider is not always a benefit.

The native ethnographer may enjoy epistemological privilege with respect to basic cultural knowledge and understanding, as well as a degree of automatic social entrée into the community under study. At the same time, native familiarity and standing can pose problems and liabilities, such as unconscious blind spots because too much is taken for granted, or susceptibility to the social affinities, restrictions, alliances, and enmities that membership in a community invariably entails. (xi)

I cannot deny Rodríguez’s observation. While at work on this project, I have been surprised by what I could see that others could not due to my insider status, but I have also been surprised by my own “blind spots,” revealed to me when a colleague or advisor would make a remarkably simple observation about something that I should have seen.

Does this mean that I should have avoided the project altogether, choosing instead something I had no connection to? Perhaps I should have studied street kids in Toledo,
or the image of the hillbilly in Southern film, or whether Satan is the true dramatic hero of *Paradise Lost*. No, for while my insider status presents challenges, *all* ethnographic work presents challenges—and challenges should not terminate research. Richard Bauman examines the complications faced by folklorists, and he notes that insiders can provide a valuable service:

In working with a familiar culture in one’s own country, as folklorists often do, there is a natural tendency to assume that the meaning of folklore is readily accessible because the people are. But as both laymen and scholars become more aware of society as an organization of diversity, *we should come to recognize that meaning is problematic in all cultures, subcultures, and communities, especially in our own complex and heterogeneous society*. Here, trained folklorists who are themselves members of the groups whose folklore they study, can perform a valuable service by elucidating the cultural meaning of materials gathered from those groups. (363 my emphasis)

I hope that I have performed “a valuable service by elucidating the cultural meanings” of Mormonism. Likewise, I hope that I have adequately represented Evangelical Christianity and the True and Living Church.

But I have allegiances to more than just Mormonism, lest I give the wrong impression. I am also a scholar, and I know that I will be evaluated by other scholars. If the data does not support a theory, I dispense with the theory. If the data persuades me to draw a conclusion I’m emotionally disinclined to draw, I draw it anyway. In other words, I do feel like two people writing this dissertation. On the one hand, there is Mormon
Man who feels devoted to the Mormon religion. Mormon Man has many Mormon relatives, friends, and associates and attends church regularly. Mormon Man generally wants to see Mormonism triumph over Evangelical Christianity and the True and Living Church; that is, if Evangelicals quit coming to the pageant, take down their websites, and quit publishing their counter-Mormon material, and if the True and Living Church quits berating the LDS Church, he would feel pleased. On the other hand, Scholarly Guy stands above it all, uncaring. Scholarly Guy has no interests in the truth-claims of these groups. Scholarly Guy observes with mild interest their power plays and sees only little difference among their doctrines. Their feuding is a curiosity to him, nothing more.

The scandal, of course, is that Mormon Man and Scholarly Guy overlap. While not occupying the same space, they do overlap, each fighting for recognition.

But I return to that simple fact: I am what I am.

Have I given a fair accounting of the groups represented in this dissertation? I can only say that I tried. But sooner or later I had to move from simply observing the different groups at the pageant to evaluating. That necessarily involved making judgments, and my judgments were tinged with the hues of my experience, my training, and my scholarship. I can’t pretend that this was a neutral process. Joe L. Kincheloe and Peter McLaren argue that critical social theory is concerned with issues of power and justice as they relate to race, class, gender, religion, and other social institutions, and how “cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system. [. . .] In this context critical theory analyzes competing power interests between groups and individuals within a society—identifying who gains and who loses in specific situations” (281). What occurs at the pageant each year qualifies as competing power interests among groups, and there
are “winners” and “losers” in that situation. Indeed, as I have argued, the “border
dispute” at the pageant is all about trying to “win” over the other two groups, to put it
crassly.

Does this study ultimately say more about me than the three groups involved or
*The Mormon Miracle Pageant?* H. L. Goodall, Jr. argues that facts are interpretations
that “represent conclusions drawn from partial truths, partisan perspectives, and
problematic methods of asking questions. Facts are interpretations derived from forms of
learning or discovering, and from ways of knowing and being in the field. As such, facts
are *social representations*” (92 emphasis in original).

It was a summer afternoon in July. I sat on a porch swing with Philip Savage, the
79-year-old Patriarch of the True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last
Days. The heat was bearable if we sat still. He told me of joining the LDS Church in the
1950s and holding many church callings. But something was missing. He realized that
the “glow” that was supposed to radiate from Mormons was not there. He began to
realize the church he loved was in apostasy. He talked calmly, as if relating an oft-told,
well-worn narrative. Then he spoke of meeting Jim Harmston and participating in a two-
day session of classes called the Models. Savage’s wife called it “tommyrot”; Savage
called it “absolute truth.” Savage moved to Manti to unite himself with the group, his
wife divorced him, and now, he says, his children no longer want anything to do with
him.

As he spoke, I looked ahead mostly, gazing out from the shade of the porch into
the heat of the afternoon. But when he told me that his children would no longer speak to
him, I had to steal a glance. His voice had not cracked, nor had he slowed his story or
paused in any dramatic way to indicate the intensity of his sacrifice—but I had to look. His eyes were rimmed with tears . . . I thought. Could I be sure? Sometimes old men have rheumy eyes.

His was a story I had heard many times, but always within Mormonism. An individual, often from another country, listens to the missionaries. He or she responds to the “absolute truth” of the message. His or her parents think Mormonism is “tommyrot” and threaten to disown the errant child. The investigator, however, proceeds and is baptized. True to their word, the parents kick him or her out of the house. Such sacrifice for the gospel! Yet here was a man who had united himself to the TLC, an organization that said hateful things against my church, and he was relating the same sacrificial narrative that I had heard many times growing up.

Goodall says, “Facts are personal interpretations. Examined reflexively, they show us not only how we see the world, but also why we interpret it as we do” (95). The above narrative about Philip Savage is a fact; that is, I am honestly reporting the event, and his words were transcribed from an audiotape of our conversation. This fact is a personal interpretation. As I listened to Savage, I felt great empathy for him. While I doubted the wisdom of his choice, I could not doubt the sincerity of his conviction. I wished him well. But, returning to my original question: Does this dissertation ultimately say more about me than about the three groups at the pageant? Does the above anecdote illustrate why I interpret as I do?

Ultimately all of these questions point to one conclusion: That my dissertation is one voice. If it is a Mormon voice, then so much the better. The solution is not to eradicate the Mormon-ness in a quixotic quest for objectivity, but for Evangelical and
TLC scholars to write their own ethnographies and scholarship detailing their understandings of the interaction among the three groups at *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*. Wolcott says that interpretation, as opposed to analysis, “is not derived from rigorous, agreed-upon, carefully specified procedures, but from our efforts at sensemaking, a human activity that includes intuition, past experience, emotion—personal attributes of human researchers that can be argued endlessly but neither proved nor disproved to the satisfaction of all” (33 my emphasis). The remedy for this state of affairs is an ongoing dialogue. Hopefully this dissertation will be one step among many in a conversation on Mormonism, the Mormon culture, and those groups who concern themselves with it.

✦ ✦ ✦

My hope is that this dissertation will also be useful in broadening American Culture Studies. The tendency of ACS has been to reduce all phenomena into the triumvirate of race, class, and gender. Thus, religion is not considered as religion, but is broken down into something else—it becomes just another phenomenon of class hegemony or sexual dominance. I have no quarrel with scholars who wish to look at religion through these lenses, for looking at it through these lenses yields important insights. My quarrel is with the tendency to look at religion *only* through these lenses. Refusing to look at religion *as* religion—that is, as its own complete cultural phenomenon—does irreparable harm to our understanding of it. Once cannot understand Mormonism if one sees it only as an attempt to manipulate class or gender or race. Such manipulative elements exist in any large-scale system, but to see only those elements is to miss that which transcends the triumvirate. Especially in culture studies, the need to understand how religion fulfills people’s inner lives needs to be further explored and
understood—and religion fulfills people in a way that class, gender, and race never can. Indeed, I would go so far as to assert that scholars ignore religion at their own peril. Clearly America is not on a path towards secularization. Understanding religion as religious devotees understand it will increase our empathy as well as our ability to create adequate social policies.

♦ ♦ ♦

I have argued throughout this dissertation that Mormons are model Americans and, while having heterodox doctrines, are in many ways model Christians. The question is whether Mormons will continue to move toward mainstream Christianity, sloughing off some of their more heterodox doctrines in favor of appeasement, or will they hold fast to that which makes them American originals? Jettisoning an established doctrine in a religion is always a difficult thing and will meet with resistance. Unlike changing a man-made law, getting rid of a doctrine is akin to saying that God made a mistake; or, if one doesn’t want to attribute the mistake to God (and one certainly doesn’t), then one has to attribute the mistake to his servants. But that raises a fearsome possibility: If his servants, in whom we trust to relay his will, were wrong about that doctrine, maybe they’re wrong about this doctrine that they now appear so certain about.

In the case of Mormonism, this dilemma has been solved in several ways. One way is postponement. In the case of polygamy, for example, the church has not rejected the doctrine but simply says that at present it no longer practices it. (To reject the doctrine would be to imply that those who practiced it before—Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, as well as all the Old Testament prophets—were wrong.) Another way to solve the dilemma is simply changing the meaning of the doctrine. The doctrinal imperative of the gathering insisted that all Latter-day Saints congregate in the Rocky Mountains.
However, around the 1930s the church realized that this was no longer feasible and urged new members to “gather” in their countries of origin; that is, to build up the church in the town where they were baptized. Yet another way to solve the dilemma of changing doctrines is to plead ignorance. For example, black men were prohibited from holding the priesthood until 1978. While the reasons for this ban clearly appear historical in origin, present-day church leaders say that we simply don’t know the reasons for blacks’ exclusion from the priesthood and that it will someday be revealed.

Changing a doctrine, then, raises clear problems, although these problems are not insurmountable. The church body has been able to sustain many doctrinal changes, and has even thrived with these changes, but such change has always been with a price: some members, convinced that God never changes, become disaffected from the church. The church leaders know this and would not lightly change a doctrine. Indeed, I cannot conceive of a major doctrine that they would at present change to become more “acceptable” to mainstream Christianity (such as accepting the Trinitarian concept of God, ceasing baptisms for the dead, ceasing to accept the Book of Mormon as scriptural, etc.).

However the movement toward Christianity continues in non-doctrinal ways. For example, several years ago the logo of the church that adorns all church buildings, letterheads, etc., was changed from

The Church of

Jesus Christ

of Latter-day

Saints
The clear goal of the new logo is to emphasize the Christian nature of Mormonism, putting Christ in the center of the church. Likewise, *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*, I have been told by several sources, is currently being rewritten. While I have not seen the rewrite of the pageant—indeed, the church is quite secretive about such things and I’m sure I would not be allowed a peek—I have no doubt that the new version will downplay the victimization of the pioneers (I’ve even heard rumors that it will not be titled *The Mormon Miracle Pageant!*). I am not sure what the new pageant will present, but I feel confident in asserting that it will be quite different from Grace Johnson’s 1950s, Sanpete vision. Like the logo of the church, it will doubtless reflect the centrality of Jesus Christ. As the church Americanizes, the specificity of Manti becomes less important to the majority of members—to the detriment, perhaps, of Mantians.
Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. “There is Something about this Pageant” is the title of one of the chapters in Grace Johnson’s autobiographical The Story of the Mormon Miracle (1973) and is a phrase she continues to incant throughout the book.

2. During Mackese Rux’s tenure, the costumed cast was not supposed to mix with the audience. While one was free to mix with pageant visitors in street clothes, once in costume one was strongly urged to avoid mixing with visitors. While I don’t know Rux’s reasoning for this decision (and she has since passed away), I assume it was to preserve the theatrical illusion. During the 1980s, pageant costumes were quite rudimentary. From a distance they may have looked authentic; up close they looked hokey. Today, however, the costumed cast is urged to mix with pageant-goers for the purpose of missionary work.

3. “None of the plays performed involved hostility toward American political persecution, or a defense of polygamy or other church doctrines. Although each play, and rehearsals as well, began with a prayer, the plays themselves were not religious tracts. Nor did the plays echo frontier beliefs, although a play about Davy Crockett was very popular. As suggested earlier, the plays were often set in Europe” (Lamar 20).

4. “Novel reading has the same effect on the mind [. . .] as dram drinking or tea drinking has upon the body. It is a species of dissipation. The mind, under the influence of such a habit, is stimulated and the imagination unduly fed, until such people are almost unfitted for the everyday work of life. They become day-dreamers and are not happy
when surrounded by difficulties. They are only happy when they take refuge, as a dram drinker would to liquor, in novel reading. They bury themselves in their novels and allow their feelings to be wrought upon by the painful trials and woes of their heroes and heroines, who only exist in the imagination of their authors” (Cannon 312). We cannot overlook the fact that numerous popular anti-Mormon novels were published at this time, and, doubtless, Mormon leaders felt assaulted not only by an unsympathetic press, but by an unsympathetic fictional media.

5. “‘We expect this year’s production to be only a beginning,’ South Sanpete Stake President Vernon Kunz explained. ‘We hope to have ‘The Mormon Miracle’ become an annual event, presented in several evening performances and appealing to an even widening audience of local people and tourists’” (‘‘Mormon Miracle’ to Be Presented” 1).

6. Here is an interesting moment in the ritualization of Mormon history. The twenty-fifth anniversary booklet for the Mormon Miracle Pageant remembers the first performance with anxious and enthusiastic cast and audience (Findlay, et al. 3). Grace Johnson, however, in her pageant memoir The Story of the Mormon Miracle, remonstrates the townsfolk for their lack of enthusiasm for the first presentation of the pageant (35-36).

7. Benedict Anderson makes this observation: “In a pre-print age, the reality of the imagined religious community depended profoundly on countless, ceaseless travels. Nothing more impresses one about Western Christendom in its heyday than the uncoerced flow of faithful seekers from all over Europe, through the celebrated ‘regional centres’ of monastic learning, to Rome” (54).
8. When I attended the Ephraim Church of the Bible, I purchased the DVD *Mission to Manti*, produced by Regeneration TV Show. The host of the show, Bunjee Garrett, who happened to speak that day, told the congregation he was working on another DVD about the connection between Mormonism and postmodernism, his assertion being that Mormons merely “feel” their religion in postmodern fashion. (I’m sure committed postmodernists would be surprised to find themselves associated with Mormons!) I saw another two Evangelicals filming an amateur documentary on Mormonism and the pageant while I was observing during the 2004 season.

9. I saw a man wearing a T-shirt at the Ephraim Church of the Bible that read: “The Anti-Manti Miracle Storm.” First, I cannot help but wonder if there is an allusion to Operation Desert Storm, the United States’ invasion of Kuwait to dispel Saddam Hussein in 1991. If this is what is intended, the Evangelicals must represent the United States’ military might storming into Manti, their righteous strength ready to dispel the illegal invaders. Likewise, the Mormons represent, ostensibly, the forces of Saddam keeping innocent souls captive, while pillaging and plundering for their own greedy purposes. (The Evangelical belief that higher-ups in the Mormon Church have sinister designs is not uncommon.) This analogy is more than a little troubling. If Desert Storm is not alluded to, the reference to Evangelicals as a storm, and a pretty nasty storm at that (the “Anti-Manti” storm), still remains.

There is also something euphonious about it: We have the agreeable rhyme “Anti-Manti” followed by the alliterative “Manti Miracle.” I assume that the designer of the shirt decided on “Anti-Manti” as opposed to the more accurate “Anti-Mormon Miracle Pageant” because of the rhyme value of the former. But what we are left with is
confusing. Is the wearer of the shirt against the town of Manti, Utah? Or is he against the “miracle” taking place in Manti (“Anti-Manti Miracle”), the miracle being the pageant? Or is the miracle that a “storm” of Evangelicals has come to Manti, and the “storm” mentioned is “anti-Manti”? Needless to say, I think we can conclude that he’s against the pageant. Or is he? After all, the existence of the pageant brings to one location thousands of Mormons for him to witness to.

Finally, there is simply the need to have a T-shirt at all. He wants everyone to know instantly who he is and what he is about. While the reference to “Anti-Manti Miracle Storm” might be lost on anyone outside of the Sanpete Valley, the shirt marks him as Evangelical the instant he appears on the scene. His identity is secure. He will not be mistaken for a Mormon while walking through the streets of Manti, carrying Scriptures, during the period of The Mormon Miracle Pageant. Otherwise he might. And that would be intolerable.

I saw other Evangelical T-shirts at the pageant, worn by a specific church or “team” of Evangelicals working together.

10. For the sake of historical accuracy, I should note that there is strong evidence that secret polygamous unions were sanctioned by the church hierarchy even after the Manifesto forbidding the practice in 1890. As Ken Driggs notes, “Despite official denial, the Manifesto of 1890 did not bring an end to LDS church-approved plural marriages. It did, however, inaugurate an era of confusion, ambiguity, and equivocation in the Mormon community. After two generations of bitter struggle and the creation of thousands of plural families, one could hardly expect polygamy to simply disappear” (44). The church issued a second Manifesto in 1904, reassuring the nation of its
abandonment of the practice, and in 1918 “Church officials made concerted efforts to
purge the Church of the most zealous advocates of plural marriage” (45).

11. “Mormons live, on average, eight to eleven years longer than other
Americans, and death rates from cancer and cardiovascular diseases are about half those
of the general population. [. . .] In addition, a strong emphasis on chastity sharply
reduces sexually transmitted diseases, while a tightly knit and supportive community
makes homicide and suicide rare. Put it all together, and one concludes that Mormonism
is good for your physical health” (Neuhaus “Is Mormonism Christian?” 98).

12. “‘The story we tell about Mormon youth is not that all is well, but compared
with other teens they’re more knowledgeable about their faith, more committed to their
faith and have more positive social outcomes associated with their faith,’ says John
Bartkowski, who helped conduct research for the National Study of Youth and Religion.
[. . .] ‘I’m not saying they’re all perfect,’ adds the study’s lead author, UNC sociology
professor Christian Smith. ‘I’m not trying to idealize Mormon kids.’ But when belief
and ‘social outcomes’ are measured, he says, ‘Mormon kids tend to be on top.’ [. . .]
Oddly, one of the few areas where LDS youth didn’t outrank their peers was ‘belief in
God’—84 percent said they believe, compared with 97 percent black Protestants, 94
percent conservative Protestants and 86 percent mainline Protestants” (Jarvik).

CHAPTER 1

1. This line comes from Grace Johnson’s *The Story of the Mormon Miracle*
(1973). Here is the line in context:
When I was a child, and in the way of children, I thought everybody had a Temple.

Now I was to realize that *no one else had such a Temple*. No, “not in Utah, America or anywhere else in our world is there a spectacle of a white Temple on a hill,” rising from an unblemished mountainous setting with grace, grandeur and sublimity, and in this era of congestion, possessing that fast disappearing treasure of earth—space—space—and remarkably, only 130 miles south of Salt Lake City on U. S. 89, a close parallel to Interstate 15.

A place apart, yet in the very heart of things.

What was the vision that Brigham Young and Lorenzo Snow had seen? For what purpose the Temple’s seeming “patient sense of waiting?” (43-44)

2. In this excerpt Eliason does mention that Spring City, located about eighteen miles north of Manti, is the “best preserved” example of the nineteenth-century Mormon village and “archetypal of the patterns of settlement and material culture used to characterize the Mormon Culture Region” (219-20). However I would still make the case that Manti is the *heart* of Sanpete County and is a much more important town in the cultural and theological imagination.

3. Although I am making the case here that Manti is the literal center of the Mormon Kingdom and, therefore, the Manti Temple the literal *axis mundi* of Mormonism, Eliade notes that such literalness is unnecessary, for there can exist a multiplicity of “centers”: “The multiplicity, or even the infinity, of centers of the world
raises no difficulty for religious thought. For it is not a matter of geometrical space, but of an existential and sacred space that has an entirely different structure, that admits of an infinite number of breaks and hence is capable of an infinite number of communications with the transcendent” (*Sacred and the Profane* 57).

4. The TLC used to host an extensive website. However on April 15, 1999 the church ceased granting interviews to the media and removed the contents from their website, leaving only a statement that read that the time or warning was over and that the Lord’s wrath would soon be poured out upon a wicked world. Previous to this date, however, the TLC would sell copies of its website as CD-ROMs. A group of counter-Mormons visiting Manti to witness during the pageant purchased one of these CD-ROMs and has put the TLC website on the web. The material that I use in this dissertation about the TLC was written by the TLC but is now hosted by Evangelical anticultists.

5. “[T]he Templars believed that as many as six Arks were built (and perhaps even more later) for the specific purpose of forming a powerful communication device” (Boren and Boren 154).

6. The Mormon Church is highly organized. Generally speaking, “wards” (like Catholic parishes) are collections of about 200 to 500 people in a given geographical area, overseen by a bishop and his two counselors. “Stakes” (like dioceses) are collections of from five to fifteen wards, overseen by a stake president and his two counselors. The organization of the church is such that if a ward member has a problem, he or she goes to the bishop. If the bishop cannot solve the problem, he goes to the stake president. If the stake president cannot solve the problem, he goes to the Council of the Twelve Apostles and the Prophet. The Prophet, of course, can go to God if necessary. In
other words, the system is meant to connect the “least” member to the “greatest”
authority in an eternal chain.

7. I must note that this story is neither accepted nor rejected as an official LDS
belief. (I personally believe the story is not related as canonical because the church does
not want to tie itself to any specific geography in regards to the Book of Mormon.)
Understandably the belief is popular in Manti, despite its non-canonical status—although
one wonders if the tradition is waning. In a special edition of the *Messenger-Enterprise*
given to pageant guests, one story muses, “According to *legend*, two prophets [Brigham
Young and Moroni] selected the Manti Temple site” (“Legend Tells of Ancient Prophet’s
Dedication of Manti Temple Hill” 12 my emphasis).

8. Johnson is referring to Lake Bonneville, an ancient lake which covered the
majority of what is now Utah.

9. Becoming aware of some political threats to the church, Dallin H. Oaks, a
member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, spoke to a large gathering at Brigham
Young University on June 7, 1992. While the talk is not specifically aimed at
ultraconservatives, many of its themes are clearly aimed at the growing admixture of
politics and religion in the church that is resulting in ultraconservatism. He specifically
focused on

- the danger of “gospel hobbies” (that is, obsessing on one gospel principle to
  the exclusion of all others)

- a desire to seek answers to “obscure mysteries” rather seeking a firmer grasp
  of the gospel basics

- a desire to be led by the Spirit of the Lord in all things rather than trusting in
our own judgment

- a penchant for asceticism

- using the gospel to manipulate others

- excessive patriotism (“There are some citizens whose patriotism is so intense and so all-consuming that it seems to override every other responsibility, including family and Church” [17])

- and materialistic self-reliance (“Our Strengths” 11-19)

Certainly Oaks’s most striking warning is against “potentially dangerous manifestations” of following the prophet’s counsel. Adhering to the words of the prophet is a staple of Mormonism, taking precedence over even the Scriptures (that is, the prophet is the official interpreter of the Scriptures; therefore, his words carry more weight than a simple reading of them). Indeed, in 1979 N. Eldon Tanner, First Counselor to then-Prophet Spencer W. Kimball, reaffirmed the position that when the prophet speaks, the debate is over (“‘The Debate Is Over’” 2-3). This position is consistent with the claims of a revealed religion wherein the prophet claims to receive heavenly revelation, providing to the people God’s word. How can Oaks’s position be reconciled to the longstanding Mormon belief? Oaks makes a distinction between current prophets and former ones, a distinction that relies on the doctrine of continual revelation, a staple of Mormonism. Says Oaks: “I have heard of more than one group so intent on following the words of a dead prophet that they have rejected the teachings and counsel of the living ones” (18). While he does not specifically mention Ezra Taft Benson, Oaks is almost certainly implying him as the “dead prophet” to whom “more than one group” is so intent on
following (indeed, Oaks mentions a few paragraphs later how some have tried to use Benson’s words to avoid paying taxes).

10. The more commonly used term is *anti-Mormon*, however I have decided to use the term *counter-Mormon* for two reasons. First, *anti-Mormon* has a history that goes back to the early days of the Mormon Church when anti-Mormons were people who did such things as tarred-and-feathered, raped, burned down homes, and even killed Mormons. Obviously there is a great difference between that type of individual and someone who has theological issues with Mormonism. Second, *anti-Mormon* carries with it an immediate negative connotation—both historical (as mentioned) and rhetorical. *Counter-Mormon* seems more neutral and accurate, for while they are proactively trying to proselytize Mormons (which, in itself, isn’t “counter”), their techniques qualify as “counter”; indeed, their approach is to show the Mormon how he or she is misguided.

For example, Evangelical Todd Martin, while claiming that he says nothing “anti-Mormon,” explains that their tactic is to “plant seeds of doubt” (qtd. in Karras “Manti Miracle”). As Chip Thompson, Pastor of the Ephraim Church of the Bible, said during a meeting I attended, the Mormon gospel must be destroyed *before* the true gospel of Jesus Christ can take root.

The term *counter-Mormon* is not without precedence. Massimo Introvigne uses it in his essay “The Devil Makers: Contemporary Evangelical Fundamentalist Anti-Mormonism” (1994). Introvigne asserts that it “is possible to distinguish between a secular *anti-Mormon* and a religious *counter-Mormon* movement. The first attempts to expose Mormonism [by] assert[ing] that Joseph Smith was a fraud; the second is primarily interested in ‘winning Mormons for Jesus’” (157 emphasis in original). While
Massimo finds it useful to distinguish between anti- and counter-Mormons, I will use the latter term, except in severe cases.

11. John Willmore, a teenager in the 1980s, writes that it “seems like there was 10 to 15 adults and about 5 youth” (e-mail). James Willmore, also a teenager in the 1980s, writes, “I can’t say that I was really paying a lot of attention, but I would guess about ten or so” (e-mail). Bryan Bean, a preteen in the 1980s, writes, “I wasn’t really counting, but I observed a handful, ten or less” (e-mail).

12. In one admittedly extremely example, Ted Hadley remembers when he was a teenager in the 1980s and a senior missionary couple that was there and an older guy just slugged, he actually physically slugged one of the anti-Mormon guys, you know, just lost his head on him and just slugged him.

BEAN: Really?

HADLEY: Oh yeah, and, and just—, that’s what, I think that’s what they wanted to accomplish is just to cause contention more than anything else.

BEAN: What did the anti-Mormon do?

HADLEY: He said, “I will remember that. I will remember that I just got hit by—, that I was just punched by one of the elders of the Mormon Church.” That was his—, and he said that very loud so everybody could hear that. So they were just trying to bai—, basically draw attention and maybe cause contention was their primary goal.

BEAN: How old were you when you saw that?
HADLEY: I was a teenager, probably seventeen or so.

BEAN: Did that—, I don’t know, how did that affect you?

HADLEY: Well, it, it bothered me that the—, you know, that’s not the way that, that’s not the way to share your religion—

BEAN: True.

HADLEY: —and that’s not the way to, to prevent others from sharing their religion. So in my mind it, it was very small of the, of the missionary to do that, you know. And I guess it just bothered me that he, he’d been pushed to that point and those true feelings came out, and, you know, he just lost his temper and did that.

13. This is my estimate. I spent six nights walking among the Evangelicals during the 2004 pageant seasons. David Parrish, who was called by the church to head pageant security and is at the pageant every night, estimates that between 150 to 200 Evangelicals attend each night. “Probably 50-75 are the same people throughout the 2 weeks with the others rotating in.”

14. Jerald and Sandra Tanner run Lighthouse Ministries in Salt Lake City and produce tracts and books decrying Mormonism. In their book The Negro in Mormon Theology (1967), they use the term “anti-Mormon” to describe the contents of a book from which they quote. I mention this to show the wide currency of the term.

15. For the purposes of full disclose, I must mention that Daniel C. Peterson teaches in the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages and is co-director of research for BYU’s Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts. He is a well-known writer of Mormon apologetics, contributing to such Mormon groups
as FAIR (Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research) and the founding editor of the *FARMS Review* (FARMS is the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies). I use his article for informational purposes (as does non-Mormon Massimo Introvigne in his article on counter-Mormons) and not to substantiate Mormon claims or delegitimize Evangelical claims.

16. One Evangelical I interviewed, Melanie Reeves, used the language of the “spiritual warfare” movement:

> And I tell you one, one thing, and my husband’s sitting over there [. . .], we work as a team; he, uh, he’s, he’s much better at talking with people and, uh, and I’m the prayer warrior so I, I—, as somebody told me, he’s the, uh, he’s the [. . .] the soldier and I’m the frontline, the firstline artillery, yeah [laughs].

Another Evangelical at the pageant, Darlene Adams, told me,

> I think that unfortunately that the enemy, Satan, has allowed the Mormon people, or the Mormon organization, to deceive a lot of people. And I think that some of what goes on in the temple is from the enemy, it is satanic. Um, so I think I could be, I wouldn’t call myself like a radical, it’s just, just an understanding of—, like the Bible talks about spiritual warfare and how, how Satan works and how, how God works. And, um, and I believe that there is only one way to God, and if you’re not following that true way then you are being deceived by the enemy.

17. Rhonda M. Abrams, Regional Director of the Anti-Defamation League of the D’nai B’rith, said of *The God Makers*, “I sincerely hope that people of all faiths will
similarly repudiate ‘The Godmakers’ as defamatory and untrue, and recognize it for what it truly represents—a challenge to the religious liberty of all” (qtd. in Mackey 14). The National Conference of Christians and Jews assembled an ad hoc committee to view the film and report its findings. The committee determined the following:

- The film does not fairly portray the Mormon Church, Mormon history, or Mormon belief. It makes extensive use of half-truths, faulty generalizations, sensationalism, and is not reflective of the true spirit of Mormon faith.

- We find particularly offensive the emphasis that Mormonism is some sort of subversive plot—a danger to the community, a threat to the institution of marriage, and destructive to the mental health of teenagers.

- We are of the opinion that the film relies heavily on appeals to fear, prejudice and unworthy human emotions.

- We believe that continued use of The Godmakers poses a genuine danger to the climate of harmony and good will between neighbors of differing religious faith.

- It is basically an unfair and untruthful presentation of what Mormons believe and practice. (Eagle 36-37)

18. The sacred clothing is called a garment, worn underneath one’s normal clothing by one who has been through the temple. The garment’s main function is to serve as a constant reminder of the covenants which one has made in the temple.
At the 2004 season of the pageant, I never witnessed any behavior as offensive as the reports of the street preachers mentioned above. Indeed, many of the Evangelicals with whom I spoke told me they were praying that the street preachers, who were rumored to be on their way to Manti, would not make an appearance.

19. This was the summer following the Passion of the Christ (2004) controversy. There had been an article in the Bowling Green State University student newspaper, the BG News, written by a student challenging the historical authenticity of the Bible and even Jesus’ historical existence. I mentioned these things to my counter-Mormon friend in the context of our conversation. Certainly if we rely solely on archeological evidence for our belief in Scripture—as he wanted me to do with the Book of Mormon—we also find ourselves in trouble with the Bible as well (although, doubtless, there is more archeological evidence corroborating the Bible).

20. Eric Eliason says the following in “Celebrating Zion”:

Latter-day Saints have felt a special affinity for Native Americans. This is in part because after Native Americans, Mormons have the longest history of inhabitation in many parts of the West, and Mormons recognize Native Americas as a people who have suffered persecution, brutality, and violence greater even than their own.

The greatest reason for Mormons’ interest in Native Americans is theological. The Book of Mormon indicates that America’s aboriginal inhabitants are descended from a lost branch of the house of Israel making them a chosen people like the Mormons. Joseph Smith’s first major organized missionary effort was directed at Trail of Tears refugees
camped on the Western bank of the Mississippi. Other revelations suggest to Latter-day Saints that Native Americans have a central role to play in preparing the Earth for the Second Coming of Christ.

Frontier Mormons entertained a split consciousness about Native Americans. On one hand they were Lost Israel, allies, and spiritual brothers and sisters. On the other hand, Indians stole their horses, occasionally waged war against the Saints, and otherwise competed for scarce resources. (171-72)

While I do not want to give the impression that all was bliss between the Native American and the Mormon communities (see Michael Hicks’s “Noble Savages”), many historians regard their encounter as the best example of Indian-white encounter in our nation’s history.

21. The estimate of 90 percent LDS was made by then Pageant President Douglas Dyreng (Stack “For 25 Years”). I would personally put the estimate higher than that.

22. The destruction scene and Christ coming to America were recently added to the pageant. I mention this because Evangelicals charge that Mormons are attempting to “Christianize” their religion. For most of the pageant’s history it did not feature a scene with Christ.

23. While I admit that this moment has dramatic power, I’m troubled by Johnson’s use of Indians here to propel a white (and apparently God-approved) narrative. Especially in the case of the historical settlement of Manti, this scene is not accurate. While there were tensions generated by the obvious cultural clash of Mormons and Native Americans, the Mormons were initially invited to settle Manti by Chief Walker
who wanted to learn farming techniques from the Mormons, given that his people were suffering privation. In fact during the first winter, the Mormons made the hungry Indians quite happy by sharing their cattle that died from exposure (they had not had time to build proper enclosures before the winter snows). It was a few years later when tensions originating farther north created difficulties between Mormons and Indians in Sanpete. In other words, it is quite unfair to use an Indian to kill the protagonist in order to propel the pageant’s plot. And worse still, rather than having a visible Indian who communicates some plausible reason for wanting to kill Robert, we have an invisible Indian, sneaking through the darkness, cowardly in his refusal to engage the pioneers on the visible field of battle, killing Robert for no apparent reason. Apparently Indians shoot pioneers because that’s just what Indians do.

CHAPTER 2

1. This quote comes from an interview I had with Bill McKeever, Director of Mormonism Research Ministry.

2. Eliason’s dissertation focused on Pioneer Day celebrations throughout the “Mormon corridor.” He briefly touched upon Mormon pageants.

3. For example, lifetime Manti resident and active Latter-day Saint Todd Jorgensen told me, “It was his [Harmston’s] son-in-law that I think is their President of the Quorum of the Twelve (I don’t know what they call him); he was a guy who played on our city softball team. We, we enjoyed his company immensely. I still think he’s a great guy.”
4. While the Ostlings are *logically* correct—that is, that Mormonism makes the claim that it is the only Christian church containing all of God’s truth and his authority, and thus, in this sense, all other churches would be non-Christian—they are *practically* wrong. In all my years as a member of the Mormon Church I have never met a member who didn’t think that other churches (whether they be Catholic, Evangelical, whatever) were authentically Christian, only that they were incomplete.

5. The doctrines discussed in Chapter Two are not meant to be exhaustive. For example, other doctrines that divide Christians and Mormons that I don’t discuss are: the concept of an ex nihilo creation (Mormons do not believe God created our world out of nothing; mainstream Christians do); the concept of God (Mormons believe that God and man are the same species of being at different moments of development; mainstream Christians believe that God and man are irreconcilably different).

6. Says Evangelical Craig L. Blomberg: “We get the impression [. . .] that Mormons see Christ as a created being, even if he is the first and highest of all creation. Thus the door at least remains open for polytheism and hence for worshiping created beings” (Blomberg and Robinson 121).

7. Blomberg: “But the omnipresence of the Father (see esp. Ps 139) is hard to square with having a body; how can God be everywhere present, not just by the Spirit, but in a body, at one and the same time? Similarly, we read that no human building can contain God, *not even the totality of earth and heaven* (1 Kings 8:27), that God is invisible (1 Tim 1:17), and that no mere human being can see or ever has seen God (1 Jn 4:12; Jn 1:18). Evangelicals are determined to preserve the distinction between the Creator and the creation, particularly in light of Paul’s teaching in Romans 1:18-32 that
the heart of idolatry and rebellion against God is to worship the creature rather than the Creator. We are mindful, too, of the second of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:4), which forbade the Israelites to make any graven image of their God, in sharp differentiation from the pagan, polytheistic cultures surrounding them. If God were an exalted [and embodied] man, why should this matter?” (Blomberg and Robinson 97 emphasis in original).

8. Recently the prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, gave a talk in the April 2005 General Conference in which he condemned gambling. While the church has always proscribed gambling, one need only look at the recent popularity of gambling and the sudden upsurge of advertising for gambling websites on television to see that gambling may be a contemporary problem that the church did not face ten years ago. What new problem will the church face ten years from now?

9. Sterling M. McMurrin makes this point in The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion (1965): “[T]he meaning of the atonement [for Mormons] is that by the grace of God through Christ it is made possible for man, who is by nature neither corrupt nor depraved, to merit his salvation by free obedience to the law. By the fall man gained the possibility of a moral life through the implementation of his freedom, and by the atonement he gained the possibility of salvation in eternal life through merit” (70-71).

   For a more in-depth discussion, see “On Salvation by Grace,” pages 68-77, in McMurrin—although my discussion in Chapter Two disagrees somewhat with McMurrin’s conclusions.

10. Mormons do believe in a hell, called Outer Darkness, but this hell is not a place of eternal burning; it is described only as a place of “weeping, and wailing, and
gnashing of teeth” (Doctrine and Covenants 133.73). Outer Darkness is reserved for those who are truly irredeemable; that is, personages such as the Devil and his angels who have nothing of goodness left within them. Even those who have committed heinous crimes but who have some goodness still left within them will find a place in God’s kingdom, just not in his Celestial Kingdom.

I make the assertion that, in Evangelical theology, the majority of those who have ever lived will go to hell based on the simple fact that most people who have ever lived have not accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. According to the Evangelicals with whom I spoke at The Mormon Miracle Pageant, you must accept Jesus Christ as your savior in this life in order to avoid hell. When I asked one Evangelical about the justness of God sending a good individual to hell who had never even heard of Jesus (someone who lived in China or India or Africa, for example)—thereby never having had the chance to accept or reject Christ—he said, “You can’t use finite human understanding to judge an infinite God.” I heard a preacher on the radio say that God knew that certain individuals would never accept Jesus as their savior and he sent those individuals to countries where they would never hear of him. Thus, God is justified in sending them to hell because they would have rejected Jesus anyway.

11. Evangelicals have many problems with Mormon doctrine, but Blomberg sums up perhaps their largest concern with the following comment: “Evangelicals are determined to preserve the distinction between the Creator and the creation [. . .]. To be ‘like God’ is different from ‘becoming’ or ‘being’ God (or being identical in kind to God). We will never be objects of worship in our own right” (97, 102). Evangelicals and most of Christianity believe that there is a clear distinction between the type of being that
God is and the types of beings we are. Mormons posit that we are literally God’s children and that we can aspire to be like him: how this will occur, how long it will take, or even precisely what it means, we do not know, but we are the same species as God.

12. Omnipotence, of course, is not a concept without philosophical problems. Even Evangelicals such as Blomberg admit that “divine omnipotence does not mean that God can create a stone so big God can’t lift it or that God can sin. Omnipotence means that ‘God can do anything that is an absolute possibility (i.e., is logically possible) and not inconsistent with any of his basic attributes’ (e.g., holiness)” (Blomberg and Robinson 102). I don’t think Mormons would disagree with that definition of omnipotence.

13. Lowell L. Bennion in The Religion of the Latter-day Saints (1940): “The Lord is neither capricious nor arbitrary in his creative work with nature and men. We believe him to be law abiding, working in and through his knowledge and understanding of the nature of things, and of the principles and laws pertaining to ‘matter,’ energy, and life” (34).

14. Perhaps the most oft-quoted verse in the Mormon repertoire is Moses 1.39 in which God explains, “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.” God’s entire purpose is to help his children attain the same celestial glories and powers he enjoys. Once we enjoy those glories and powers, we will work like him.

15. The notion that most doctrines are flexible, perhaps even dispensable, is the most foreign to Latter-day Saints. Indeed, counter-Mormons use this against Mormons. They find instances where two Mormon authorities say contradictory things and present it
to the Mormon individual and say, “If your leaders were truly inspired, would they contradict one another?” Mormons will often try to rationalize the contradiction away, assuming that their leaders cannot contradict each other because, since their leaders are inspired of God and since doctrines are eternal, there should be no contradiction.

Ultimately Evangelicals agree that doctrine is not flexible or dispensable, but it may appear that way since they have simplified the gospel to its most essential element: that one is saved by the grace of Jesus Christ, not by work or belief in correct doctrine.

16. One member of the TLC (who wishes to remain anonymous) told me that the LDS Church’s apostasy began even during Joseph Smith’s lifetime. When Joseph left the state of Illinois with his brother Hyrum, his wife Emma sent him a letter asking him to come back. Several other men urged Joseph to return to Nauvoo and trust in the government of the state of Illinois for protection. Joseph was disheartened by their pleadings, feeling that if he returned to Illinois he would be killed. He said, “If my life is of no value to my friends, it is of none to myself” (qtd. in Roberts A Comprehensive History 247). My TLC informant said that “friends” in this context has a very specific theological meaning: it refers to those with whom one makes special covenants. Thus, if the people with whom Joseph made his most important covenants would no longer support him, they were obviously apostates.

17. This is from the Community of Christ website:

The issue of Joseph Smith Jr.’s connection to polygamy has its roots in the early days of our movement. The controversy, resulting from a lack of definition of that connection, still lingers today. Church members, wanting to protect Joseph Jr.’s good name, embraced Emma Smith’s 1879
testimony given in the last weeks of her life that disavowed any connection between her husband and the aberrant marital practice. Joseph III agreed with his mother but held out the possibility of his father’s involvement. He determined that his father would have been wrong if he had advanced such a belief.

Today, Community of Christ acknowledges that there is no conclusive evidence that unquestionably links Joseph Jr. to polygamy. But the church acknowledges that there is a body of circumstantial evidence from sermons, diaries, newspaper articles, personal testimonies, and even specific historical events that could be interpreted as pointing directly to Smith as the author and practitioner of polygamy. (“Frequently Asked Questions”)

18. Jensen may be correct. “‘At any moment, the majority of Mormons are first-generation converts,’ says Rodney Stark, author and University of Washington sociologist. Most have significant attachments to non-Mormon relatives and friends, who then are ripe for conversion themselves. Stark projects that Mormonism will become the next world religion, with a membership of 267 million by 2080” (Kennedy 28). This majority of first-generation converts can’t help but cause some anxiety for generational Mormons with deep roots in the church who feel as if their church is being changed to accommodate this influx.

19. Outright approval would be a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who follows church leaders with full confidence.
20. I suppose, from a certain perspective, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints could be considered a reform, or liberal, Mormonism, in contrast to Mormon fundamentalism, given the schema I’m using here.

21. Evangelicals break into three camps when considering the question of the promises made to Abraham, promises including that Jehovah would “make of thee a great nation” (Genesis 12.2). The descendants of Abraham settled into the promised land. When they were eventually driven from their “home land,” they were assured by God that they would once again reclaim their rightful inheritance. “A glorious New Jerusalem would be established, from which righteousness would flow and a marvelous shalom would cover the earth” (Mouw 7). Following this story, Evangelicals break into three camps in their interpretation of end-times events:

   The first option for finding the New Israel, then, takes all of this in a fairly straightforward sense. God has not forgotten the glorious future promised to the ethnic descendents of Abraham. The establishment of the modern state of Israel is seen as the beginning of a prophetic scenario that is now unfolding. This line of argument says that if you want to observe the first fruits of the New Israel and the New Jerusalem, do the obvious thing: keep your eye on the collective life of the present-day Jewish people.

   The second option sees the promises given to Abraham as having been transferred to the New Testament church. The theological basis for this view has been very clearly articulated by some Reformed theologians. They argue that when the Jewish people of Christ’s day rejected him as
the promised Messiah they forfeited their right to inherit the promises to ethnic Israel. The Gentile church as the New Israel is now the proper recipient of these promises. The only way, for example, that a Jew can claim the benefits of the old covenant is by joining the New Israel, the community of the adopted spiritual heirs of Father Abraham.

Yet a third option is to see some present-day ethnic or national community as the unique object of God’s special favors. America as the Chosen Nation, as the place where the New Jerusalem will be established, is an obvious example of this identification. (Mouw 7)

CHAPTER 3

1. These were two competing signs at the 2004 season of *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*. Evangelical Christians held aloft several placards for web addresses, one of which was “JosephLied.com.” A young man—I presume a Mormon from Manti annoyed at the counter-Mormon tactics—brought his own homemade sign to the pageant that read “Joseph Was a True Prophet.” He would stand in front of Evangelicals as they tried to engage pageant-goers in conversation. When Evangelicals engaged him in conversation, he didn’t seem too able to defend his religion, but his conviction was solid.

2. I was standing about twenty feet away when I heard this comment. I suppose that he could have said “temple” rather than “devil,” since both words have two syllables and, admittedly, are similar. However he said the comment out loud, for all to hear, as if making an in-group joke, and I can only report that I distinctly heard “devil.” It’s simply
my desire to assume that someone would not be so crass as to refer to another’s sacred religious edifice as a “devil” that makes me want to give him the benefit of the doubt.

3. In fact, the morning I attended the Ephraim Church of the Bible, Pastor Chip Thompson chastised Evangelical teens for wasting their time playing hacky sack rather than witnessing to Mormon youth. While I could understand his annoyance—after all, they had traveled hundreds of miles so they could witness to Mormon youth, not play hacky sack—I could also sympathize with the Evangelical youth: there just wasn’t a steady stream of Mormon teens to listen to their message.

4. Counter-Mormons can, of course, enter and watch the pageant like anyone else. But if they’re caught distributing literature within the temple gates or engaging people in religious conversations, they are asked to leave. This speech-restriction applies to other church-owned property in the area. This can result in some tense situations. For example, during the 2004 season I was talking with an Evangelical. We had taken refuge under a tree on church-owned property adjacent to the public street due to rain. We were not talking about anything in particular when a Mormon security officer came up and reminded the Evangelical that proselytizing on church-owned property was not allowed. His tone was not rude, but it was not urbane, either.

David Simmons, who grew up in Manti, alleges that when the counter-Mormons first came to Manti in the 1970s, some would “infiltrate” the temple grounds, handing out literature critical of the church. Only after pageant-goers received the literature did they realize it was counter-Mormon. Manny Mellor alleges the same thing in an interview. Temple security, according to Simmons, soon caught on.
In 2003, an Evangelical walked onto temple grounds and began preaching loudly. He was asked to leave by church security personnel and, apparently, would not. The local police were called and he was escorted from the premises, at which time the seated pageant-goers cheered. The following letter to the editor, “Church Members Acted Hypocritically,” written by Mike Palmer, describes the event:

I was horrified by the un-American behavior of some of the members of the Church during the pageant, and thought the 4th of July would be an appropriate time to write about it.

What separates our country from, say, a Muslim country is our Constitution and Bill of Rights. Unlike Islamic countries for which our troops are dying trying to liberate, we have the right to free speech and freedom to practice religion, even when contrary to the prevailing religion of the region. When asked, most members think the Constitution is a good thing and claim to be patriotic Americans.

And yet, when an Anti dared step on the public sidewalk near the temple on the last night of the pageant, a sister called the police. When the sheriff’s deputies started dragging the Anti off, many people started applauding. They should’ve been outraged instead, and if it’d been missionaries instead of an Anti, I’m sure they’d have a different say.

And these are the same people, who minutes later, proudly sang our national anthem. Actions speak louder than words. Jesus was right. What hypocrites!
Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed when Sheriff Larsen came on the scene. Apparently he explained the Constitution to his deputies, and truth, justice and the American way prevailed for a little while longer.

Still, it seems to me may of the members need to repent, think about what it means to be an American, even when it’s uncomfortable, and consider “The Golden Rule.”

Ivo Ray Peterson, the pageant director, said the following to me in an interview about the above incident:

PETPERSON: Now, um, it’s interesting because this year there was an incident, and it’s interesting because there’s a letter to, to the editor that paints a very different picture of it, but actually, um, one of the rules is that they cannot distribute their literature within temple gates, and he did and he was removed, um, but, um, that’s, that’s our requirement. Many people have tried to get us to get injunctions against those people, and basically that is a part of their freedom to do what they are doing [and it] is what we are celebrating.

BEAN: Well, you, you’re the second person who has mentioned this incident today [. . .].

PETPERSON: There was a protestor who came onto the temple grounds and loudly proclaimed his viewpoint and he was asked to leave by security and when he didn’t the police came and they escorted him off the temple grounds. And at that point, that was the end of it. The only, the only issue to the pageant was that it’s the private property, we consider it sacred
property, and there is no permission in the laws of, of the United States; you just aren’t allowed to do on private property what you can on public.

BEAN: Sure.

PETE RSON: So as long as he’s on the street, on the sidewalk, as long as he stays outside the [temple] fence, and, and that, that was, that was the issue. But the letter was correct in that some of the people I know, when he was escorted out, cheered—

BEAN: Oh.

PETE RSON: —and, and that disturbed him, and it probably wasn’t a good thing.

One Evangelical attempted to circumvent this private property restriction by standing on the sidewalk outside the gates of the temple lot, yelling loudly to the crowd within.

5. Walker contrasts Manti to other places, like temple openings, where she feels the Mormon Church makes it difficult for Evangelicals to exercise their freedom of speech. Walker and her husband run Evidence Ministries. They provide several examples at their website <www.evidenceministries.org> of alleged harassment by Mormon security. While the website portrays Mormon security as excessively paranoid and counter-Mormons as harmless, the Mormon Church is not without some justification in having appropriate security at its temple openings and other events, given that certain groups and individuals would like to use the events to make political and/or religious statements. This, of course, does not excuse Mormon security if they act inappropriately.
6. Bitton is speaking here specifically of the ritualization of events surrounding the Mormon Battalion, but the quote equally well applies to The Mormon Miracle Pageant and other pageants, parades, and commemorations.

7. Dr. Santino presented this formulation to me in private conversation.

8. The sound crewman did say, however, that as the pageant crowd grew larger and noisier as the night went on (before the pageant began), he would increase the volume of the soundtrack to compete with the ambient noise. Still, this should have had no effect on the Evangelicals’ pre-proselytizing prayer, since that occurred around 6:30 p.m. before many people had arrived at the pageant grounds.

9. John Hay, the Secretary of State, published an article in the Atlantic Monthly in 1869 on the tragedy of Joseph Smith. He reported the following:

Joe Smith died bravely. He stood by the jamb of the door and fired four shots, [sic] bringing his man down every time. He shot an Irishman named Wills, who was in the affair from his congenital love of a brawl, in the arm; Gallagher, a Southerner from the Mississippi Bottom, in the face; Voorhees, a half-grown hobbledehoy from Bear Creek, in the shoulder; and another gentleman, whose name I will not mention, as he is prepared to prove an alibi, and besides stands six feet two in his moccasins. (qtd. in Whitney Mormon Prophet’s Tragedy 75)

Dallin H. Oaks and Marvin S. Hill, authors of Carthage Conspiracy: The Trial of the Accused Assassins of Joseph Smith (1975), report that a witness saw Wills, Voras, and Gallaher: “Voras was wounded in the shoulder, Wills in the arm, and Gallaher in the face (‘in the cheek, like as if a ball had taken the skin off’)” (151).
Very little is known about four of the men who were indicted. Allen, Wills, Voras, and Gallaher were never arrest and never appeared for trial. John Hay, who lived in the county as a boy, indicated that Allen was “six feet two in his moccasins.” Wills, Voras, and Gallaher were probably named in the indictment because their wounds, which testimony showed were received at the jail, were irrefutable evidence that they had participated in the mob. They undoubtedly recognized their vulnerability and fled the county. A contemporary witness reported these three as saying that they were the first men at the jail, that one of them shot through the door killing Hyrum, that Joseph wounded all three with his pistol, and that Gallaher shot Joseph as he ran to the window. (52)

10. However the entire pageant is scheduled to be rewritten, so we’ll see if the gun is reintroduced or not.

The 1940 film *Brigham Young* features the Carthage Jail Scene in which Joseph Smith (played by Vincent Price!) is shot down in cold blood, without lifting a finger to protect himself. Oddly, I’ve never heard counter-Mormons reference this film as historically improper—perhaps because it was made by non-Mormons.

11. I assume that most people would consider the Mormon Church rather conservative on the issue of abortion. I asked Kelly Sharpe if he thought the church was conservative on abortion.

No, because if you allow abortion in the case of incest, rape, maldeformity, life of the mother, or if a competent doctor says it’s okay, then that’s every form of abortion except for one, and that’s elective
abortion [in] which a girl says, “Well, it’s legal to kill. I’m going to get pregnant and kill it because the law says I can.” So conservative? I don’t think it’s conservative. It’s totally pro-choice; it’s totally against the laws of God. “Thou shalt not kill, shed innocent blood,” so they’re out of the way. So we’re here to warn them.

The Encyclopedia of Mormonism says the following:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints considers the elective termination of pregnancy “one of the most . . . sinful practices of this day” although not necessarily murder. The Lord has said, “Thou shalt not . . . kill, nor do anything like unto it” [. . .].

Members of the Church must not “submit to, be a party to, or perform an abortion” [. . .]. The only exceptions are where “incest or rape was involved, or where competent medical authorities certify that the life of the mother is in jeopardy, or that a severely defective fetus cannot survive birth” [. . .]. Even these exceptions do not justify abortion automatically. Church members are counseled that they should consider abortion in such cases only after consulting with their bishop and receiving divine confirmation through prayer. (Ludlow, ed. 7)

12. His name was Bob. I did not talk to Bob. Quite frankly, I was a bit scared of Bob. He was tall, thin, and had the leathery tan of someone who spent time working under the Sanpete sun. He looked to be in his sixties, mostly bald.

Bob was a provocateur.
The first time I saw him was during the second week of the pageant. I was speaking with Keith Walker, an Evangelical from Texas, when Bob stalked up to us. “I don’t like what anyone else here has to say,” he declared, gesturing dramatically at the Evangelicals in the streets. “But you,” he said, poking his finger into Keith’s chest, “I like your preaching.”

“Thanks, Bob,” said Keith.

Bob walked away, and as he did so he glared at me suspiciously. Apparently I had not been included in the good graces extended to Keith.

“Yesterday I talked with Bob,” said Keith. “I’m not sure why he would like my preaching, seeing as how I’m saying pretty much what every other Evangelical here is saying.” Then Keith lowered his voice: “Bob’s an excommunicated Mormon,” he said by way of explanation. “He’s got some straaaange ideas. Yesterday he was trying to tell me that the staff that Moses held up during the battle with the Amalekites had a hard drive in it.”

I laughed. “I didn’t know they had that technology back then.”

“Bob says all sorts of weird things, and then if you challenge him on it and prove he’s wrong, he’ll say, ‘I don’t believe that!’ And then he comes out with some more bizarre doctrine. It’s like he’s making up doctrine right on the spot.”

I continued watching Bob from afar. One could very easily have drawn the conclusion that he was mentally unbalanced. Most of that night he was surrounded by Evangelicals. He would flail his arms about, make exaggerated facial movements, challenge them on points of doctrine, and make bold, declarative statements in a loud voice, as if channeling heavenly revelation. Indeed, that night I did come to the
conclusion that Bob was probably the local town eccentric, harmless but mentally unhinged, basking in the audience provided him by the scores of Evangelicals in attendance to proselytize the Mormons. I honestly thought it rather “unchristian” of the gathered Evangelicals to be having such a good time at the expense of a loon. But I learned that Bob was actually something of a rascal, and there was method to his madness.

That same evening Bob had noticed two Evangelicals making an amateur documentary about proselytizing in Manti. The next day, Bob went to a pawn shop and got hold of an old, broken video camera and some fake “hillbilly” teeth. Bob arrived on the scene around 6:30 p.m., the same time most Evangelicals make their appearance. The pageant doesn’t start until 9:30, so the Evangelicals have about three hours to hand out tracts and engage pageant-goers in conversation as they arrive to the pageant grounds.

Before the Evangelicals begin proselytizing, they sing a song and have a group prayer. Bob strode up to this group and began to film them, providing running commentary to himself as if he were creating a documentary. He would point his camera in some Evangelical’s face, mere inches away, and ask a pointed question on a doctrinal matter. He would immediately tell his victim not to worry, that the camera was broken, but he wanted an answer anyway. As I watched Bob ply his trade, I heard two teenagers—locals, I presume—say, “Hey, have you seen what Bob’s doing?” “Bob?” “Yeah, you know Bob.” “That guy’s hilarious!” Many of the Evangelicals knew who Bob was and were either amused—or not—by his strange comedy show. I could tell, however, that some were shocked at the strange spectacle of a man with rotted-out
hillbilly teeth approaching them with a camera and demanding answers to doctrinal questions.

That night Bob got another idea during a “debate” with Marshall Almarode, one of the more vocal and confrontational counter-Mormons. While the Evangelicals have many “sales pitches” they use against the Mormons, one is that their God is “bigger” than the Mormon God. (One Evangelical woman asked me very plaintively, “Don’t you know that my God is bigger than your God?” She seemed genuinely distressed when I didn’t seem bothered by the assertion.) Almarode demanded of Bob, “If your God is so powerful, how come he can’t make hair grow on your head?” The question drew laughs. Certainly Almarode’s intention was to shame Bob, and while the question would have embarrassed some people, it only invigorated Bob.

He drove to Provo the next morning to a costume shop and bought a wig of long, white hair. The next night he arrived on the streets wearing a white bathrobe, his wig of white hair, sandals on his feet, his hillbilly teeth, and in his hands he carried a long stick. He looked—but didn’t act—like Moses. “Look at my hair,” he intoned, “I’m so pretty. I’ve always wanted long hair and God made my hair grow like magic. Ain’t I good looking now, just like a girl?” he said, tossing his head back and flipping it nonchalantly with a wave of his hand. Of course the crowd around him was large and the laughter flowed freely, as Mormons and Evangelicals alike gathered around the spectacle of Bob. He then found his Evangelical nemesis from the night before and declared the power of his God. Almarode seemed to realize that this type of attention was counterproductive, sapping whatever precious credibility he might have, and he said, “You look stupid, Bob.”
“Right,” answered Bob, not missing a beat, “stupid enough that I can finally talk to you!”

Laughter and cheers erupted from the gathered crowd.

But Almarode pressed on, trying to discredit Bob—a nearly impossible task, since Bob was the incarnation of discredit. He launched several salvos at Bob, insulting him on a personal level. Bob finally had had enough—or at least he *acted* as if he had. He said, “Oh, now you’ve done it. Everyone,” he said, sweeping his arms about grandly, “*get back!*” The crowd obeyed, not knowing what he would do next. He took his staff and leveled it at Almarode. His eyes grew wide and he began to shake. I don’t know what I expected, but Bob’s acting skills were so good I fully expected *something* to happen: a burst of light from the staff? Perhaps it contained a hard drive? But nothing happened, and the confrontation continued.

I spoke with Bob’s friend later that evening. Unlike Bob, his friend was an introvert, standing alone, wearing a T-shirt that condemned abortion. He approached no one, and only spoke when spoken to. His words were deliberate and measured.

“So why is Bob doing this?” I asked.

“Someone has to answer these Satan-spawned preachers.”

“You think they’re Satan-spawned?” I asked.

“Don’t you?”

“Why would they be Satan-spawned?”

He went on to explain that they were drawing people away from the true restored gospel—but that gospel wasn’t within the gates of the Manti Temple. He went on to explain that the LDS Church was in apostasy, in essence not much better than these
“Satan-spawned” Evangelicals. It had departed from the original gospel and ordinances of its founder Joseph Smith.

13. I’m sure the TLC would disagree with this claim, asserting that the locals are unaware of the history of early Mormonism and, therefore, couldn’t truly understand the TLC. Also, I’m sure that, as “grapevines” go, many of the residents of Sanpete do have incorrect information about the TLC. What I mean is that Sanpeters probably know that basics about this group—that it was started by ex-Mormons who felt the LDS Church had gone astray; that it claimed new revelations; etc.

CHAPTER 4

1. Specifically, she said that she was a fourth- or fifth-generation Mormon. (I’ve noticed that many counter-Mormon narratives begin by establishing one’s genealogy in Mormonism, as a way to establish credibility.) She said what brought her out of Mormonism was an Evangelical woman who walked up to her and said, “You think you’re going to become a god? You’re not going to become a god—you’re going to fry like bacon!” At this point the congregation erupted in approving laughter. This “shock” to her delicate sensibilities is what eventually brought her out of Mormonism. She related this to the group because, apparently, some had been critical of the techniques of a few of the more vocal counter-Mormons. She said that being in-your-face is what some Mormons need to wake them up, so they should not be critical of those Evangelicals who chose to use those tactics.

2. I told a Mormon friend in Ohio about my visit to the Ephraim Church of the Bible. He asked me, “So, tell me: Do we Mormons treat other religions better than they
treated us?” I was in “scholarly mode” so I strove to be as objective as possible in answering his question. I have seen Mormons in Sunday school lessons, for example, express incredulity over the beliefs of others: “They believe that?” On one occasion, a Seventh Day Adventist interrupted a Sunday school lesson to propound his beliefs and, in my opinion, the class didn’t treat him as kindly as they should have, despite his obnoxiousness. But I had to admit to my friend that, no, I’ve personally never seen a room full of Mormons, for a sustained period of time, mock the beliefs of others. Perhaps the Evangelicals that morning would not define what they were doing as mocking; they would probably define it as learning. But even if that had been discussing a belief system that was not my own, I think I would have found their demeanor troubling. They seemed to take pleasure in pointing out and laughing at what they considered inconsistencies in Mormon thought. I have seen academics similarly mock the beliefs of Christians, yet I’m sure Christians would feel rather put-out by that type of condescension.

3. Although this, of course, is not a Mormon problem, but a cultural problem. Someone growing up in an all-Evangelical environment probably understands little of other religions, or understands them from an Evangelical perspective.

   Also, the opposite is true: Those who should know about Mormonism often don’t take the time to understand this very American (and influential) religion. *U. S. News and World Report* recently published a magazine entitled *Mysteries of Faith* (2003). The magazine profiled all of the major religions in America, devoting several pages to Mormonism. The article on Mormonism was entitled “In John Smith’s Steps” (my emphsis). How that mistake could have passed by a religion editor unnoticed is beyond
me—not to mention the religion report who wrote the essay! Also, a recent issue of *Life* (2005) magazine was published in conjunction with the Discovery Channel to celebrate the greatest Americans. The list, which featured inventors, athletes, entertainers, etc., would be voted on by the audience to the program until it arrived at the greatest American. Joseph Smith is listed as one of the greatest Americans, but the photograph included is not that of Joseph Smith (because there is no extant photograph of Smith), but of Joseph F. Smith, the sixth prophet of the LDS Church and son of Hyrum Smith, Joseph’s brother. I only mention this to point out that cultural ignorance comes from many directions.

4. I must note that Bloom follows this statement with, “Yet the Mormons, if they are at all faithful to the most crucial teachings of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, no more believe in American democracy than they do in historical Christianity or in Western monogamy” (91). Of course, Evangelicals agree with Bloom’s assessment, demanding that behind Mormonism’s benign American middle-class façade is cultish rot. Mormonism is surprisingly malleable; indeed, built into the fabric of Mormonism is the mechanism to “update” the doctrine through prophetic utterance. Is Bloom’s assessment correct? Perhaps. Or have Mormons truly left behind their nineteenth-century doctrines and become mainstream American quasi-Christians? Perhaps.

5. While some may argue that *cult* can be used in a non-pejorative sense to indicate the early stage of a religious movement, when a small group follows the teachings of a prophet or a visionary leader, I would argue that the term has become so imbued with negative connotation that, outside tight academic circles, it is little more than a club to be wielded against religions or groups with which one disagrees. James R.
Lewis, editor of *Odd Gods: New Religions and the Cult Controversy* (2001), rejects the word altogether, preferring “new religious movements (the preferred term among academics), alternative religions, nontraditional religions, or minority religions. Recognizing the term’s problematic status, *cult* will be avoided when referring to a specific religion throughout this book. It is, nevertheless, still useful to talk about the *cult controversy*, and, where appropriate, ‘cult’ will be utilized when discussing the stereotype associated with minority religions more generally” (24).

6. The two main “attacks” launched by counter-Mormons at the pageant against Mormons are 1) that the Mormon gospel is impossible (and, thus, will lead to feelings of despair, guilt, and shame) and 2) that Mormons deny Christ’s free gift of grace and feel they must “earn” salvation by works. Given the latter charge, I’m surprised that most modern-day Evangelicals seem to be making overtures towards Catholics, and vice versa, given that the same charge can be waged against Catholicism (regardless of the veracity of the charge against either Catholicism or Mormonism). Perhaps I’m wrong, but Catholics seem often to be allies in the “culture wars” with Evangelicals.

7. Interestingly, Tom’s brother Mike ends an autobiographical sketch with this statement: “Remember, the truth is a whole lot easier to see when you stop assuming you already have it” (Mike Norton “Bicentennial Boy”). I must assume that Norton wants this statement only to apply to Mormonism. For example, does he want us to doubt his claim that Joseph lied? Does he want us to question the claims of Evangelical Christianity? Does he want us to question the accounts in the New Testament? The statement assumes that there is truth out there to be had, and we can see the truth once we stop assuming we have it. But once we have the truth, should we continue to assume that
we don’t have it, just to be safe? This statement seems much more postmodern than Evangelical.

8. Yet even the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992), written under the direction of the church, was forced to use the term when referring to schismatic groups. It did, however, put the term in quotation marks (Ludlow ed. 531-32).

9. The survey was performed by Scott Gordon and Dennis Egget and presented at the 2000 conference of the Foundation of Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR), an organization dedicated to Mormon apologetics with no official connection to the LDS Church. I would have used a “nonpartisan” source had one been available, but as far as I know this is the only survey of its kind. Gordon and Egget mailed out 430 surveys to clergy in Utah and California; 95 clergy responded. There was no appreciable difference between Utah and California clergy in their responses. The question “Which phrase best describes Mormons to you?” yielded the following results: Good Christians (2.15%), well-meaning but misguided (54.84%), non-Christian cultists (22.58%), a major threat to all Christian denominations (11.83%), well-meaning but misguided non-Christian cultists (7.53%), and well-meaning but misguided non-Christian cultists who are a major threat to all Christian denominations (1.08%). Also, this from *Touchstone*: “In a Gallup Poll taken in 1999, 17% of Americans said they would not vote for a Mormon, the same percentage as in 1968, while the percentage who said they would not vote for a Jew or a Catholic dropped sharply. The percentage who wouldn’t vote for a Baptist actually rose, from 3% to 4%” (“News: Church and State” 53).

10. Counter-Mormons, I’m sure, would disagree with this claim. For example, a fairly recent Sunday school manual focusing on the teachings of Brigham Young
mentioned only one of his wives, giving, some would argue, the impression that he was monogamous. I only mean that 1) the church has never overtly denied its polygamous past, as the Reorganized Church did (the RLDS Church for many years blamed Brigham Young for the doctrine and tried to maintain that Joseph Smith never practiced polygamy) and 2) that the LDS Church does not censor historical materials or deny scholars access to such materials.

11. Historian Davis Bitton outlines in “Polygamy Defended: One Side of a Nineteenth-Century Polemic” the many arguments employed by early Mormons to defend the institution of plural marriage against its critics. What is fascinating is that many of same arguments used by polygamy’s critics are now employed quite confidently (and usually without irony) by Latter-day Saints against contemporary polygamists. As Harold Bloom notes, “[N]o American grouping is currently more dedicated to monogamy” (90).

12. Hanks does not use bullet points. I use them here for the sake of clarity.

13. “I have many times asked myself, not without wonder, the source of a certain error which, since it is committed by all the old without exception, can be believed to be proper and natural to man: namely, that they nearly all praise the past and blame the present, revile our actions and behaviour and everything which they themselves did not do when they were young, and affirm, too, that every good custom and way of life, every virtue and, in short, all things imaginable are always going from bad to worse. And truly it seems against all reason and a cause for astonishment that maturity of age, which, with its long experience, in all other respects usually perfects a man’s judgement, in this matter corrupts it so much that he does not realize that, if the world were always growing
worse and if fathers were generally better than their sons, we would long since have become so rotten that no further deterioration would be possible” (Baldesar Castiglione 107).

14. However it was also Mormon leaders’ adoption of two ideas from outside of Mormonism that created a sense of Mormon peoplehood: British Israelism and Anglo-Saxon triumphalism. British Israelism was the belief that the British Isles were inhabited by Israelites, mostly from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and that England was destined to be a gathering place for the “lost” tribes (18). Anglo-Saxon triumphalism was the secular counterpart of British Israelism in which Western scholars of the nineteenth century classified humans into three general categories: white, black, and yellow (19). Obviously these “scholarly” inquiries, as the name Anglo-Saxon triumphalism so manifestly suggests, were dedicated to proving the superiority of the white man. Mormon missionaries were in England at the same time that these ideas were propagated, and they certainly encountered them. The concept of lineage became very important in Mormonism during the next century, before finally losing salience at the twilight of the twentieth. Though acceptance of British Israelism and Anglo-Saxon triumphalism had racist side-effects that would persist well into the twentieth century (and, arguably, to this day), they provided a shield against many of the vicious assaults launched by an unsympathetic press in the early days of Mormonism.

15. Several news stories, however, have noted that Romney’s faith may hurt him in a presidential run, something that usually doesn’t hurt a Republican candidate, which may be why he is underplaying his Mormonism.
Millions of Americans think John F. Kennedy put to rest the issue of religion in presidential politics when, in 1960, he became the first Roman Catholic to win the White House.

Another Massachusetts politician, Republican Gov. W. Mitt Romney, may find out that is not the case should he run for president in 2008, as many people believe he is angling to do.

Romney is a devout member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, more commonly known as the Mormons. Its members, however, are not considered Christians by a number of other denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention and the United Methodist Church, the largest Protestant denominations in America and two faiths whose membership is heavily concentrated in the South.

Given that the South has become a GOP stronghold in recent presidential races, some believe Romney’s religion would emerge as an issue there should he seek to become the 44th president.

“I think it likely will matter,” said Charles Reagan Wilson, director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. “I think he will have to be very savvy and skillful in talking with evangelicals, and I don’t know what experience he has doing that.”

Romney’s late father, George, who was also Mormon, ran for president in 1968 when he was the governor of Michigan. He dropped out before the primaries, but in an April 1967 Gallup Poll 17 percent of respondents
said they would not vote for a Mormon for president, even if their party
“nominated a generally well-qualified person” of the faith. Thirteen
percent said they would not vote for a Jew; 8 percent would not vote for a
Catholic; and 3 percent would not vote for a Baptist.

A Gallup Poll in February 1999 that repeated the question attain found
17 percent of respondents saying they would not vote for a Mormon, while
6 percent opposed a Jew and 4 percent said they would be against a
Catholic or a Baptist candidate. (McAuliffe)

16. Joseph Smith did run for president of the United States, and Mormonism was
an attempt to set up a “counterkingdom” to the United States, but Martin’s sentence
seems to imply that he was running for president of the United States so that he could
take control of the country. Actually, he was running for president as a protest candidate,
having no illusions about his chances of winning. He was trying to generate publicity
about the plight of the Latter-day Saints and the abuses they had suffered.

17. James E. Lewis notes, “Nontraditional religions are often criticized for
offering their followers the ‘easy’ answers that come with black-and-white thinking.
However, to many of the people who belong to such religions, the seeming narrowness of
such thinking can be a liberating experience: Once one has stable criteria for what is
good and true, this clarity and stability can then free one to go about the business of
working, loving, and living life without debilitating anxieties about transcendent meaning
and value. This is not, of course, to advocate a rigid belief system, but rather to point out
why such a system is attractive without depreciating adherents as being somehow weak
or defective” (48). Quite frankly, I’m rather surprised that Tanner would include this as
an indictment against cults, since I’m fairly certain that she believes, as most Christians do, that the world is divided between good and evil, right and wrong, God and Satan. I’m also rather certain she believes that the Bible is the word of God—period. If she allows that reality is not black and white, and that there is some “wiggle room” between good and evil, does she allow for the possibility that Mormonism is somewhat true? Does she think that Joseph Smith may have been a partially true prophet, that perhaps some of his heavenly visitations were real? Reading her website, I rather doubt that.

18. For example, Chris Edward writes in *Crazy for God* (1979) of being lured into the “moonies”: “She took my hand and looked me straight in the eyes. As her wide eyes gazed into my mind, I felt myself rapidly losing control, being drawn to her by a strange and frightening force. I had never felt such mysterious power radiate from a human being before . . . touching something within me that undermined thought itself” (qtd. in Lewis 30).

19. Lewis: “[O]nce we get beyond such actions as torturing and murdering other human beings, the criteria for what one regards as harmful can be quite subjective” (52).

- In the first place, the mere fact that a group is headed up by a charismatic leader does not automatically raise a red flag. [. . .] Also, to found a new religion, a leader usually makes some sort of claim to a special insight or to a special revelation that legitimates both the new religion and the leader’s right to lead. [. . .] Far more important than one’s claim to authority is what one does with the authority once he or she attracts followers who choose to recognize it. [. . .] One of the clearest signs that leaders are overstepping their proper sphere of
authority is when they articulate certain ethical guidelines that
everyone must follow except for the guru or minister. (53, 53-54)

- Perhaps the most serious danger sign is when a religious group places
itself above the law, although there are some nuances that make this
point trickier than it might first appear. (54)

- Another misconceived criterion is perceiving groups as dangerous
because of apocalyptic theologies. Almost every religion in the larger
Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition has an apocalyptic theology [. . .].
An apocalyptic theology is only dangerous when individual followers
believe they are going to be called upon to be foot soldiers in God’s
army, and prepare themselves by stocking up on weapons and
ammunition. (54)

- Another false yet frequently voiced criterion is that religious groups
are dangerous which see only themselves as saved and the rest of the
world as damned. [. . .] A more meaningful characteristic should be
how a religion actually treats nonmembers. (55)

- Another criterion is a group’s relative isolation. This trait is somewhat
more complex than the others we have examined. [. . .] [L]et us
instead assert that the relative lack of such boundaries indicates that
the group in question is almost certainly not dangerous. (55)

- A final early warning sign is a group’s readiness to deceive outsiders
(and, to a lesser extent, the systematic deception of insiders). (55)
Lewis concludes with this caveat: “With the exception of placing the group’s actions above the law, none of these characteristics, taken by itself, is necessarily cause for alarm. On the other hand, a group possessing more than one or two of the above traits might well bear closer scrutiny. As a corollary to this line of analysis, minority religions possessing none of the above traits are, from a public policy standpoint, almost certainly harmless” (56).

20. Given the age of the Mormon Church—that is, because it can no longer justly be called a new religious movement—the use of recent literature/rhetoric concerning “cults” is rather unfair, not to mention terminologically unsound. Mormonism, not being widely understood, is thus tarred with the same rhetorical brush used to define other groups as outside the mainstream of American-ness.

21. A friend of mine, Karl Mellor, served an LDS mission in China and speaks fluent Chinese. I asked him what Mormon means in Chinese. Here is his reply via e-mail:

First of all, you have to understand a little bit about the Chinese language. There is no alphabet per se. Instead, each syllable sound has its own distinct character. The real difficulty in learning Chinese is the fact that you cannot look at a character and try to sound it out. You must memorize it and either you know it, or you don’t. There are about 7,000 characters in the Chinese language. You have to know about 3,000 characters in order to read a newspaper. The average adult knows between 3,500 and 5,000 characters. (Mandarin and Cantonese, when spoken, are as different as English and Spanish; however when written
they use exactly the same characters. They simply memorize a different pronunciation.)

If you are thinking in English terms, each character represents a word root. Most “words” are made up of two character combinations. In their truest sense, however, characters carry so much more meaning than just mere words. A single character can represent a complete thought or concept. The famous sayings by Chinese philosophers like Confucius are all only four characters long and yet they are full of such deep meaning and emotion. That said, in simple terms you can still say that each character equals a syllable in a word.

The name “Mormon” by itself did not exist as a name in the Chinese language until the Book of Mormon was translated into Chinese characters. Then, like all other foreign names, the translator found two characters that sound similar. In this case “Mor-mon” became “Mwo-men.” Like English, there are many words in Chinese that may sound the same but have completely different meanings. So, while it is possible to translate the sound “Mwo-men” into “Gates of Hell” or “Devil’s Gate,” those are not the actual characters used in the official name “Mormon.” The characters in the Chinese Book of Mormon for the name “Mormon” literally translated mean “Latter-Day Gate” or “Gate to the Last Dispensation.” Many foreign names translated into Chinese are simply sound-alikes and don’t have any particular meaning, but this one is pretty good, don’t you think?
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The following is a list of articles taken from local papers, including the *Manti Messenger*, the *Messenger-Enterprise* (formerly the *Manti Messenger*), the *Sanpete Messenger* (formerly the *Messenger-Enterprise*), and others containing stories about *The Mormon Miracle Pageant*. While not exhaustive, the list provides a window to the importance of the pageant in the lives of the people of Sanpete, as well as the issues surrounding the growth of the pageant. I have arranged the articles chronologically so that the reader can get an idea of the historical development of the pageant.

- **1967**


  “9:00 Is the Hour—Special LDS Pageant Scheduled July 23.” *Manti Messenger* 20 July 1967: 1.

- **1968**


• 1969


• 1970


• 1971


- **1972**


- **1973**


- **1974**


- **1975**


- **1976**


**1977**


- **1978**


“125,000 Expected to Attend Mormon Miracle Pageant.” *Manti Messenger* 6 July 1978: 1.


- **1979**


Findlay, Linnie M. “Many People Involved in Producing Mormon Miracle Pageant.”


- **1980**


Jennings, Bruce. “Performance Will Climax Months of Preparation.” *Manti Messenger*
10 July 1980: 1.
Madsen, Eleanor. “Pageant Ladies Guild Sponsors Afternoon Tea, Fashion Show.”


**1981**


- 1982


Findlay, Linnie M. “Over 100,000 Visitors Expected to Attend.” Manti Messenger 1 July 1982: 1+.


• 1983


Findlay, Linnie M. “Highways Crowded, but Manti Easily Accessible.” *Manti


**1984**

Jennings, Bruce. “Casting Completed, Rehearsals for Pageant Now in Full Swing.”


1985


1986


- 1987


Dyreng, R. Morgan. “A Special Thanks to Everyone.” *Manti Messenger* 23 July 1987:

• 1988


• 1989


Jennings, Bruce. “1989 Manti Miracle Pageant Attendance Estimated at 134,000.”


- **1990**


- **1991**


**1992**


Scarlet, Peter. “Growing Manti Mormon Miracle Pageant Remains Close-Knit


• 1993


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• 1994


• 1995


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**1996**


Dyreng, Douglas, et al. “To All of You Involved in the Mormon Miracle Pageant.”


**1997**


“National Anthem to Be Sung Largely by Local Performers.” *Manti Messenger* 19 June


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Mims, Bob. “Thespian Finds Most Difficult Role Is Off Stage—as Director of Manti


- **1999**


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• 2001


• 2002


Dean, Suzanne. “36th Mormon Miracle Pageant Beckons.” Messenger-Enterprise 13
June 2002: 1+

“Thirty-Sixth Mormon Miracle Pageant Beckons.” Manti Messenger 13 June 2002: 1+

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2003


Call, David. “Mormon Miracle Will Reach 4 Million Milestone in 2003.” Messenger-


2004


Agren, Darlene, and Merilyn Jorgen. “Leapin’ Lamanites! Rowdy Redskins Share a
Unique Kinship.” Sanpete Messenger: Mormon Miracle Pageant Special Edition

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Hales, Sean. “Organizing Chaos: Determined Directors Pull Pageant into Focus.”

Pageant Presidency. “Experience the Miracle with Us.” Sanpete Messenger: Mormon

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