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“WORLDS WITHOUT END”: THE COSMOLOGICAL THEODICY OF

BRIGHAM YOUNG

by

James Chase Kirkham

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

History

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Logan, Utah

2012

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ABSTRACT

“Worlds without End”: The Cosmological Theodicy of Brigham Young

by

James Chase Kirkham, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2012

Major Professor: Dr. Philip L. Barlow
Department: History

A striking characteristic of Brigham Young’s theology was his inclusion of a cosmology in his teachings. In his speeches as President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Young juxtaposed cosmological pronouncements with practical advice. Young regularly opined on such topics as the eternal nature of matter and light and the interaction of gods and humans with these substances. Dovetailed to his cosmic musings was down-to-earth advice on raising children, avoiding the evils of the gold rush, and controlling one’s temper.

This paper argues that Young’s mingling of the abstruse with the mundane functioned as a theodicy for the nineteenth-century Mormons. In order to justify an omnipotent God’s allowance of Mormon suffering and persecution, Young framed God and the human experience within a cosmology. He taught that humans exist with the express purpose of accumulating light and truth. This accumulation would continue after

death throughout eternity. Young taught that an ineluctable factor in this progression was suffering and for this reason, Young condoned God's allowance of Mormon hardship.

By weaving these cosmological teachings with his pragmatic counsel, Young taught the Latter-day Saints to view their daily lives—full of struggles, pain, and fear—within a cosmological framework. Young believed that such a mindset would bolster the faith of the benighted Mormons.

(88 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

“Worlds without End”: The Cosmological Theodicy of Brigham Young

James Chase Kirkham

This thesis proposes an analysis of the teachings of Brigham Young, second President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The study focuses on Young’s more striking doctrine—namely, the eternal nature of matter, the capability of humans to live after death where they would eternally gain knowledge, a universe governed by a race of exalted human beings called gods, and the potential for humans, upon reaching the status of gods and goddesses, to create planets and populate them with their children.

This study uses a three-fold method to understand why some of Young’s teachings were so remarkable. First, it analyzes the context from which his teachings were developed—in this case, nineteenth-century America. Second, it examines his striking teachings within their historical context. Third, it inquires as to how these teachings functioned for Young and his followers. Although this research method engages Mormonism as its case study, the principles of this method are equally suitable for studying other religions’ doctrines. This thesis argues that Young’s teachings were so remarkable because they attempted to comfort the persecuted, early Mormons as well as to convince them of the existence of God despite His allowance of their suffering.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I freely acknowledge the assistance of a number of friends, mentors, and associates, without whom I would not have completed this thesis or degree. To Phil Barlow, I bestow an eternal weight of gratitude for mentoring me through the vicissitudes of the past two years. Phil is a rare teacher who has Job-like patience for and shows Jonathan-like friendship to his students. He has trusted me to lecture twice in his classes and to have helped him in researching, writing, annotating, and publishing two of his articles. Phil, it has been an honor and a pleasure.

I thank Norm Jones for his support, genuine interest, and contributions to this work and especially for helping me to circumscribe the rich constellation of early Christian history. I also thank Richard Sherlock for his contributions and support, especially in reigning in my ambitious, academic proclivities to craft a workable thesis.

Mom, Dad, and my brother Joey have shown indefatigable love, support, and encouragement while I worked on this degree as well as towards the paths that my passion for learning has taken me. I am here because of you three.

I sincerely thank the history department and Utah State University for funding my education through two graduate assistantships, and the Leonard J. Arrington family for their generous donations that have allowed me to work as Dr. Barlow's research assistant.

I also note the assistance of several professors who have contributed to this thesis: Kyle Bulthuis, John Fowles, Mick Nicholls, Len Rosenband, Jamie Sanders, and Steve Siporin. I thank Sue Shapiro and Mark Damen for letting me study Greek with them. I

acknowledge my friends at the University of Utah who prepared me for the rigors of graduate work, especially Mark Matheson, John Peterson, and Wilfred Samuels.

Finally, I warmly thank all my friends who have slogged along with me in the world of graduate school and who have made this a memorable experience indeed.

Chase Kirkham

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On August 14, 1853, President Brigham Young of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints addressed his followers at a conference in Salt Lake City.¹ 1853 also marked four years since the discovery of gold in California. The lure of the mines drew fortune hunters from the United States as well as from South America, Europe, and Asia.² But as powerful as the gold lust was, it failed to seduce Brigham Young. Observing the tendency of “all people” to talk about “wealth and poverty,” Young thought it needful to clarify the nature of “true riches” (1:264).³ For Young, possession of “gold and silver, platina, zinc, copper, lead, and every element that there is in any part of the earth” did not signify true wealth: “To possess this world’s goods is not in reality wealth, it is not riches, it is nothing more nor less than that which is common to all men” (1:268, 267). Furthermore, these elements “are the things of this world, made to decay, to perish, or to be decomposed, and thus pass away” (1:267).

Young saw nothing evil in the “things of this world”: “It is all good, the air, the water, the gold and silver...” and noted that “we cannot do very well without them [the things of the world], for we are of the world”; however, he cringed when the Saints “wander[ed] off” and “set their hearts upon them” (1:272). Instead of seeking after

¹ Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were pejoratively known as “Mormons” due to their use of the Book of Mormon. They were also known as “Saints.” These names, “Mormons” and “Saints” or “Latter-day Saints,” will be used interchangeably to describe Brigham Young’s followers.

² Susan Lee Johnson, “On the Eve of Emigration,” in *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 57-95.

³ Note: This thesis includes a high volume of direct quotations from the primary source for Brigham Young’s speeches, the *Journal of Discourses*. To reduce the number of footnotes, citations from the *Journal* will be parenthetical. Furthermore, only slight corrections have been made to these quotations; otherwise, the quotations are as they appear in the *Journal*.

wealth, the Saints, Young declared, should “direct [their] course” to “obtain the true riches” (1:268, 266). And what did it mean to “possess” true riches (1:270)? Young explained: “I will tell you when you and I may consider ourselves truly rich—When we can speak to the earth—to the native elements in boundless space, and say to them—‘Be ye organized, and planted here, or there, and stay until I command you hence’” (1:269). Moreover: “when we can call gold and silver together from the eternity of matter in the immensity of space, and all the other precious metals, and command them to remain or to move at our pleasure; when we can say to the native element, ‘Be thou combined, and produce those commodities necessary for the use and sustenance of man, and to make this earth beautiful and glorious, and prepare it for the habitation of the sanctified;’ then we shall be in possession of true riches” (1:269).

As arresting as this teaching seems—the ability to manipulate matter—Young saw it compatible with New Testament doctrine: “When the only begotten Son of God was upon the earth, he understood the nature of these elements, how they were brought together to make this world and all things that are thereon, for he helped to make them. He had the power of organizing, what we would call, in a miraculous manner” (1:270). Referring to the bread and fish which Jesus multiplied, Young said: “This [bread and fish] the Saviour called from the surrounding elements; he was quite capable of doing it, because he had the keys and power of true riches, if any man possess which, he is rich in time, and in eternity both” (1:270).

Young’s disdain at the Saints’ “covetous[ness]” originated from his belief that the nature of this “world’s goods” was “to decay, to perish, or to be decomposed, and thus

pass away” (1:267). Contrariwise, the principles of eternity—true riches—“will endure” (1:269). One who has true riches not only controls the elements but “has power over death, hell, the grave, and him that hath power of death, which is the devil” (1:271). For those desiring true riches, Young echoed Jesus’ counsel to “Seek first the kingdom of God” (1:266, 271). By following Jesus’ teachings, Young explained that the Lord would share his power with the Saints after the resurrection (1:271). In an immortal state, all the elements and the powers of death and hell would be subjected to the Saints (1:271). Furthermore, the Saints would be able to create their own worlds: “Remember, that true riches—life, happiness, and salvation, is to secure for ourselves a part in the first resurrection, where we are out of the reach of death...then we are exalted to thrones, and have power to organize element. Yes, they that are faithful, and that overcome, shall be crowned with crowns of eternal glory....If you want a world of the most precious substance, you will have nothing to do but say the word, and it is done” (1:276).

Brigham Young’s method is striking. To curb the Saint’s desire for wealth, Young expounded the nature of matter, and the potential for Jesus’ followers to create worlds. However, the distinguishing mark of this discourse is not these striking teachings but the ease with which Young blended abstruse speculation and practical counsel. If the Mormons followed the New Testament and lived peacefully with their neighbors, then that way of life would lead them to “be exalted to thrones, kingdoms, governments, dominions, and [to] have full power to control the elements, according to our pleasure to all eternity” (1:273, 275).

Young's tendency to blend the supernatural and natural was not a religious aberration but a prominent characteristic of Second Great Awakening America from which Mormonism sprang. In fact, this tendency was one of three elements that characterized the Awakening along with an emphasis on the individual's experience with God and an independent search for truth rather than relying on religious leaders for guidance. These three highlights of the Second Great Awakening are also the foundational principles of Young's cosmology. However, this correlation fails to explain why Young's cosmology was so striking. This thesis argues that Young's cosmology crossed over the border of the ordinary into the frontier of the extraordinary because it functioned as a theodicy for the early Mormons.⁴

The term "cosmology" has been weighed down with various meanings by its scientific, astronomical, and philosophical contexts. In this study, I define "cosmology" as the study of reality or Young's attempt to make sense of his world. "Cosmology" is a combination of two Greek words: *cosmos* and *logos*, which respectively mean "order" and "the study of." Brigham Young never used the term "cosmology." I use it, because its definition captures the function of his more abstruse teachings. Of all the varied meanings this term carries, I choose this definition because it opens up a new avenue by which to interpret Young's teachings, namely one that examines the "whys" of his doctrine rather than the "whats." Furthermore, I use "cosmology" instead of "metaphysics" or even the phrase, "the study of reality," to classify Young's abstruse teachings because of "cosmology's" astronomical connotations. In Young's case, his

⁴Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), *passim*.

reality consisted not only of the North American desert but included as much of the universe as his imagination allowed. Thus, this thesis will answer why Young emphasized a reality full of planets, solar systems, gods, devils, a hierarchy of angels, and an inexhaustible supply of matter.⁵

Young's importance has been cast by Mormon and non-Mormon scholars who have produced a prodigious amount of scholarship on his life, conflicts, and work, the most recent of which is John Turner's forthcoming biography from Harvard University Press. One of these biographers, Eugene England, has correctly noted that of all the roles that Young fulfilled, he is remembered mostly as an economic and political leader rather than as a visionary prophet. While it is true that Young's pragmatic accomplishments stand out among nineteenth-century religious leaders, a stereotype of him as nothing more than a "charismatic leader" misrepresents Young and his role in the development of Mormonism. This thesis, therefore, seeks to understand his underappreciated theology, specifically the cosmology that he juxtaposed with practical advice. For example, in the speech on "True Riches," Young taught about controlling matter, a race of gods, and the Saints' exaltation with the express purpose of keeping them from moving to California. Even though his blending of heaven and earth is a Second Great Awakening tendency, treatments of Young have not taken much notice of this, and Young's teachings are yet more notable because they show the extreme to which this principle can be carried.⁶

⁵ This definition comes from a glossary of terms prepared by Trudy McMurrin in Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000), xvi: "[t]he theory of the structure of reality; the attempt to find an intelligible order in the world, either by scientific investigation or by metaphysical speculation"; Helge S. Kragh, *Conceptions of Cosmos: From Myths to the Accelerating Universe: A History of Cosmology* (New York: Oxford, 2007), 1.

⁶ Eugene England, *Brother Brigham* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 198.

This study is not the first attempt in Mormon scholarship to address Young's cosmological inclination. In the 1970s, the field of Brigham Young studies was rekindled by the newly available collection of primary documents on Young in the LDS Church Archives. About the records available, historian Leonard J. Arrington noted that they include "three holograph diaries...ten office journals...forty-seven thick, handwritten 'histories,' representing almost fifty thousand pages...twenty-one thousand-page volumes of letterpress copybooks containing about thirty thousand letters signed by Young...[and] several hundred archival boxes of paper including...transcripts of his speeches." From these records came a prolific number of journal articles—some of which are included in this bibliography—and several books examining Young's life and early Mormonism.⁷

The seminal biography on Young to come from this scholarship was Leonard J. Arrington's *Brigham Young: American Moses*. Arrington's book succeeded as a survey of Young's life based on the newly available source material from the LDS archives. Arrington noted that his was not the first scholarly work that culled these primary records; however, he believed that some of these works, *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* by Dean C. Jessee, *Brother Brigham* by Eugene England, and *Brigham Young, Modern Moses/Prophet of God* by Francis Gibbons, were directed at a Mormon audience. Although England's book in particular illuminated aspects of Young's life, a drawback with devotional works such as his and Gibbons's is that they lionize Young to the

⁷ Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), xv.

exclusion of more “controversial topics.” Arrington’s biography stands out because he balanced his study with the accomplishments of and controversies surrounding Young.⁸

Arrington never intended for his biography to be exhaustive and observed that the amount of primary source material available on Young could fill seven volumes: one on Young in his familial roles, another as Church President, his time as territorial governor and Indian superintendent, his role as colonizer, his business ventures, and one on his theology. Arrington examined Young’s cosmology in a chapter exploring Young’s presidency. This chapter succeeds as an introductory survey to Young’s cosmology and the Adam-God debacle and briefly compares Young to his nineteenth-century contemporaries but does not address the “why” of his teachings in the way that this study proposes.⁹

One year after Arrington’s biography, Newell G. Bringhurst published *Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier*. Bringhurst praised Arrington’s work but gauged that Arrington failed to address “certain controversial topics, including division within Mormonism and tension within Young’s own large, diffuse family.” In contrast to Arrington’s chapter on Young’s presidency and theology, Bringhurst wrote two pages discussing his preaching, but focused on style rather than the content. He spent one page covering Young’s cosmology and one paragraph glossing the Adam-God teaching.

⁸ Arrington, *American Moses*, xv-xvi, xxvi; for the examination and avoidance of “controversial topics” in Young scholarship, see Newell G. Bringhurst, *Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 222-23.

⁹ Arrington, *American Moses*, xvi, 192-209.

Bringhurst's book succeeds as another survey of Young's life, especially on "controversial topics," but fails to engage Young's thinking in the way that I propose.¹⁰

Other books about Young include *Brigham Young* by M. R. Werner, *Brigham Young, the Man and His Work* by Preston Nibley, *Kingdom of the Saints: The Story of Brigham Young and the Mormons* by Ray B. West, and *The Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young* by Stanley P. Hirshson. Bringhurst noted that Werner and West's works succeeded as "general" studies of Young and early Mormonism but lacked "biographical focus" due to a scanty use of primary source materials. Nibley's portrayal of Young, like England's, was too "idealistic," and Hirshson's was based on eastern newspaper articles about Young that vilified him to the exclusion of Young's "humanity."¹¹ In relation to this mountain of research, my thesis intends to augment, rather than discard, the scholarship on Young by addressing the "why" of Young's cosmology rather than the "what."

At the core of this thesis is an examination of how Young's cosmology acted as a theodicy to concretize the Saints' faith in God, notwithstanding His seeming abandonment at times. Thus, my study is also an examination of a theodicy. But why focus on Mormonism specifically? The means by which Mormonism achieved a theodicy, expounding astonishing doctrines on the nature of reality, are unparalleled in American history. No other religion originating from the Second Great Awakening articulated such a detailed cosmology; thus, I choose Mormonism as my case study partly due to its striking nature in America's religious milieu. Furthermore, a microhistory (of

¹⁰ Bringhurst, *Brigham Young*, 120-21, 129, 206, 222.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 222-23.

which this thesis is), especially one of an extraordinary nature, can concisely capture the extremes to which a certain idea or cultural characteristic can be carried. In this case, Young's cosmology can instruct on the theological frontiers of Mormonism and of the Second Great Awakening.¹²

Consequently, this thesis also offers a method that illustrates how to understand the formation of any religious idea as well as to understand its implications for its respective religion. Religions and theologies form, in part, as responses to political, economic, and social forces. Understanding the formation of a doctrine or any religious teaching has implications for the academic and the layman, especially if the doctrine leads to malicious behavior. Take Jim Jones and David Koresh for instance. If historians could articulate for the non-academic not only the teachings these men embraced but the cultural forces that fostered the development of their religious thought, then it is conceivable that society could prevent the rise of future cult leaders by foreseeing and preventing the aggregation of cultural conditions similar to those that gave rise to Jones and Koresh. Alternatively, what conditions and teachings shaped a Gandhi, a Mother Theresa, or any number of beneficent leaders the world has known? When understood, could society reshape itself to foster the teachings that gave rise to the great men and women of the world? It is possible, but such an understanding is dependent on how well the development, meaning, and function of a doctrine can be expressed.

My method for understanding the development of a religious doctrine, which I will use to analyze Young's cosmology, is first, to understand the forces that work on the

¹² See Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), xix-xx for further explanation on the benefits of limiting one's research scope.

one who develops and expounds the doctrine; second, to understand the doctrine, not in isolation, but in interaction with the cultural forces that triggered its development; and third, to understand the implication of such doctrines on their respective belief systems. Thus, this thesis has value, if only for the method it prescribes. Furthermore, my method encourages the participation of a number of disciplines to engage in analyzing religion: linguistics, economics, philosophy, history, political science, literary criticism, and so on. Such disciplines are essential to understand the context from which a doctrine arises. Therefore, I proceed with a brief overview of how this method applies to my thesis.

Chapter two will examine the culture that molded Brigham Young's thinking. It will briefly examine the political, economic, and social forces of early America, the Second Great Awakening, and Brigham Young's youth. It is important to understand what this chapter is not: it is not a comprehensive history of early America, nor is it an exhaustive study of the Second Great Awakening. It is also not a biography of Brigham Young. Chapter two functions much like the different rock strata do for a paleontologist studying a dinosaur fossil. Studying the fossil yields valuable information about the dinosaur, but to fully understand the dinosaur's life the paleontologist must study the rock strata below and above the fossil. The fossil under inspection is Young's cosmology; and the strata consist of Young's life until he joined Mormonism, which was shaped by the Second Great Awakening, and which was in turn influenced by the developing political, economic, and social forces of the new American Republic. Thus, sufficient samples will be taken from the surrounding strata to understand the major forces that allowed him to engage cosmology with homiletics.

Chapter two argues that Young’s striking cosmology is not as anomalous as it might seem to twenty-first century readers. When looked at within its nineteenth-century context, the function of these teachings comfortably dovetails with the underlying foundations of Second Great Awakening thought. This chapter is not an apology for Young but examines him in a style similar to historian Jan Shipps’s treatment of early Mormonism. Shipps prefaced her study with this comment: “A disadvantage of this manner of proceeding [comparing similarities among the development of Judaism, Christianity, and Mormonism] is its tendency to make my argument appear somewhat apologetic at times—an irony since I am not a Mormon—but this disadvantage is far outweighed by the effective means this stylistic strategy provided for reconstructing the picture of early Mormonism *as perceived from the inside*, a reconstruction that is crucial to the illumination of parallel patterns of development in early Christianity and Mormonism.” Like Shipps, I place my subject in a broader historical context to accent the similarities between Young’s teachings and the culture from which they sprang.¹³

Chapter three will analyze Young’s cosmology. Unlike previous scholarship, this explication will map out Young’s cosmology within the Second Great Awakening framework that chapter two established. One of the heartstrings of young’s cosmology was the eternal, progressing individual. Young’s teachings, based on Joseph Smith’s revelations, posited that one existed as an individual before one’s birth and would

¹³ Fox News correspondent Ben Ferguson in response to Mitt Romney’s presidential campaign, asked: “Would you vote for someone for president that believes in their religion, that if they’re a good person, you will get their own planet?” Michael De Groote, “Mormon Defense League Launched,” *Deseret News*, August 4, 2011. See also Priscilla, “Is Fox News Anti-Mormon?” *News Hounds* (blog), July 28, 2011, http://www.newshounds.us/2011/07/28/is_fox_news_antimormon.php for a video link of Ferguson asking this and other questions about Mormon beliefs to potential voters; Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985), xii.

continue to exist in a conscious state after death. Coupled with Jesus' grace, believers' adherence to God's commandments would secure them an existence in the hereafter as a resurrected being capable of increasing in knowledge and glory forever (1:41, 238-39). Young's thinking rested on the principles of an infinite quantity of matter in the universe and an infinite supply of light or truth. Matter existed to be organized or disorganized by gods to provide material bodies for their spirit children and for planets on which their children could experience mortality. An infinite amount of light and truth would provide the gods a chance to progress eternally. Young's cosmology opened up a cosmic point of view for the Saints to comprehend their lives. This chapter also argues that a mythological element existed in Young's cosmology.¹⁴

Since an exhaustive study of Young's extant 800 speeches is impossible for this project, I have focused on the *Journal of Discourses* as my primary source. Although Richard Van Wagoner has recently published Young's complete discourses, I have chosen to cull the *Journal* for primary source material because the discourses contained in these volumes comprised an official record of Young's speeches for the nineteenth-century Church. While a more exhaustive study would include more than just the *Journal*, these speeches will suffice for my purposes because they offer an informative cross-section of Young's teachings.¹⁵

A large number of Young's quotations from the *Journal* have been included for three reasons. One, to give the reader, who may or may not be familiar with Young's

¹⁴ See Boyd Kirkland, "Of Gods, Mortals, and Devils," *Sunstone* 10, no. 2 (November 1986): 6-12; Eugene England, "Brigham Young as Orator and Intellectual," in *Why the Church is as True as the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 93-108 for examples of scholars who have mapped out Young's cosmology.

¹⁵ For speeches see Ronald Walker, "Raining Pitchforks: Brigham Young as Preacher," *Sunstone* 8, no. 3 (May-June 1983): 5.

speeches, a chance to experience the flavor of Young's language; two, to provide a reference for some of Young's most striking doctrine as well as a form that circumscribes and attempts to make sense of twenty-five years of sermons; and three, to let the reader learn about Brigham Young's cosmology from Young himself rather through my paraphrases.

I compare chapter three to a professor teaching an introductory course on biology to students who had never heard of DNA. If the professor immediately began her lecture with detailed descriptions of Adenine, Thymine, Guanine, and Cytosine, the building blocks of DNA, she would lose the class. However, if she taught using a model of the double helix before explaining the details, the students would better grasp DNA. Young never synthesized the various parts of his cosmology in a single discourse or document; rather, he interspersed them throughout his sermons: a flash of insight here, an explanation there. I have structured chapter three to bring form to his scattered ideas so the reader may see the constellation of Young's cosmological teachings. Chapter three, therefore, will present the "double helix" of Young's cosmology rather than an exhaustive description of its constituent parts.¹⁶

The intent of this study, then, is not to place any theological value on Young's teachings, but to understand their function in his theology and the nineteenth-century church. This chapter, as well as this thesis, follows historian Joseph Dan's approach to history: "the role of the historian of ideas is not to uncover what something 'really' is, but to present the development of a concept's meanings in different historical and cultural

¹⁶ "What is DNA?," *Genetics Home Reference*, March 19, 2012, accessed March 26, 2012, <http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/handbook/basics/dna>.

contexts, seeking to determine as far as possible the many usages and definitions that it has acquired throughout its history.”¹⁷

Chapter four will address the “why” of Young’s cosmological thrust. Thus far this thesis will have shown that his cosmology was fostered by Second Great Awakening America. But understanding his teachings within a broader context fails to explain why they went to such extremes—creating planets for instance. This chapter argues that Young’s teachings took the form they did because they responded to and were triggered by suffering and persecution. They act as a theodicy. I argue that Young combined cosmology with practical advice to reconcile God’s existence with His allowance of Mormon persecution and suffering. Justifying God’s ways to the Saints as well as finding purpose in perpetual adversity is possible in Young’s mind because suffering is an essential part of his soteriology.¹⁸

¹⁷ Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7-8.

¹⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (New York: Pearson Education, 2007), 1.60; Soteriology means the study of salvation.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT

Brigham Young's appearance in the world was a commonplace birth to an inconsequential family on an unprofitable farm. Despite his inauspicious beginnings, Young succeeded Joseph Smith in 1844 as the leader of a 26,000 member church. What was it about the culture of the early Republic that fashioned Young, a backwoods nobody, into the prophet, seer, and revelator of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Ironically, Young's inconsequentiality was the catalyst. For Young grew up during and was shaped by the Second Great Awakening—a time in American history characterized by a surge of excitement in Christianity and by an earnest expectation of Jesus' imminent return—that empowered and gave voice to insignificant people like Brigham Young. The Awakening exploded while the “republican” magma of the revolutionary eruption was still flowing. In terms of religious impact on the American populace, historian Gordon Wood parallels the Second Great Awakening to the Reformation. It is no exaggeration, then, to argue that the foundational principles of the Awakening had an intense effect on Brigham Young; its impact on Young can best be appreciated when understood within the transformative political, economic, and social forces that engendered this religious movement.¹

¹ For brevity's sake, I will also refer to the Second Great Awakening as the “Awakening”; for a detailed analysis of Young's early family life, see Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 7-13; Newell G. Bringhurst, *Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 1-12; *Deseret News 2012 Church Almanac: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2012), 203; Gordon S. Wood, “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,” *New York History* 61, no. 4 (1980): 372.

Early America was an “experiment in self-government.” This contributed to the creation of a new group of people called “middling men” who found themselves somewhere between the lower classes and the “gentlemen.” These men were “bakers,” “bricklayers,” “goldsmiths,” “farmers,” and “master artisans” who worked, held property, and gained “wealth” and “learning.” They were unique in history, for in America, the democratizing spirit of the revolution still lingered while the influence of the European hierarchy waned; hence, these men saw themselves on equal footing with the American “aristocracy.” The Revolution awoke the middling men to their “egalitarian” potential and disenchanted their view of the elite. Thus, the middling men were redefining themselves in a culture that had dislocated them.²

Understanding the middling men in the early Republic is important for three reasons: one, Brigham Young was one of them; two, these types of men energized the Awakening; and three, their existence influenced the political debate between Federalists and Jeffersonian Republicans. This debate would define the United States as a Republic run by the people, and the Republic, in turn, would give rise to the democratic Awakening. The Federalists, championed by George Washington’s Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, gauged the middling men as a threat to the prosperity of the nation. Federalists, therefore, supported the Constitution because it would siphon power from the middling men to the national government. The Constitution was partly written to curb the rise of the middling men’s involvement in individual state governments because certain delegates thought these men lacked the sophistication to

² Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7, 31, 28, 29, 16, 27; for further explanation on disintegrating hierarchies and the rise of egalitarianism, see Wood, “Evangelical America,” 361, 365, 366, 374.

lead. Furthermore, the middling men threatened the Federalist vision of the United States: a vibrant commercial and industrial nation. The only way to become such a nation would be to fashion the Republic after European monarchies. This meant that unsophisticated middling men like Brigham Young would have little role in governing hierarchical and exclusionist, Federalist America.³

However, Hamilton's vision of a monarchical United States failed to materialize. The Federalists' opponents, who eventually coalesced into the Jeffersonian Republican party, found leadership in the party's namesake, Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson believed that Hamilton's policies would destroy the Republic by transforming it into a British style monarchy. Jefferson and the Republicans predicted monarchical like problems for the Federalist vision: "bloated executives, high taxes, oppressive debts, and standing armies." Jefferson, on the other hand, championed minimal government involvement. He envisioned that citizens in a Republic would set aside "selfish interests" and foremost seek the security of the Republic. Thus, middling men like Brigham Young would shoulder the Republic's success. Jefferson was so confident that he believed the Republican model would even establish world peace.⁴

On February 17, 1801, almost three-and-a-half months before Brigham Young's birth, Jefferson was elected as the third President of the United States. His election empowered the middling phenomenon as well as marked the demise of Hamilton's monarchical America. The nascent nation was changing, and under Jefferson the common man would expedite the transformation. With Jefferson in power, governmental

³ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 16, 18, 29-31, 31-33, 34, 100, 107, 276, 576.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 108, 154, 277, 301; Note: the Jeffersonian Republican party is not the same party as the modern day Republicans.

positions opened up to common men. Public opinion was now the driving force propelling “American government, society, and culture.” The empowered middling men were here to stay as well as to take an active role in the new Republic.⁵

The changing economy intensified the individual’s sense of dislocation that the political climate engendered. Historians have yet to agree about nineteenth-century American economic history. Historian Charles Sellers casts the economy in a revolutionary light where the United States precipitated from a subsistence economy to an international economy. Other historians, such as Daniel Howe and Richard Bushman, argue that a change in the economy did occur—but happened much more gradually. Either way, these historians do concede that the economy transformed. This transformation redefined the family and consequently redefined the individual.⁶

The subsistence agrarian economy, in which Brigham Young grew up, was sustained by the family farm. A couple would marry and raise children who would work the farm to support the family and produce a “surplus” for the sons’ inheritance. Sellers observed that this cyclical, agrarian lifestyle afforded these farm children a clear vision of the future. Children grew into adults on the farm and thus had “few identity crises.” However, such an economy would not endure in the American experiment.⁷

Historian Paul Johnson notes that the rise of capitalism from the Presidencies of Jefferson to Jackson produced a “nation of rootless individualists.” These dislocated

⁵ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 285, 278, 288, 308.

⁶ See Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5; Richard Lyman Bushman, “Markets and Composite Farms in Early America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 55, no. 3 (July 1998).

⁷ Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 9, 10, 11.

individuals rose because of communication and transportation innovations, westward growth of the nation, and the transformation of the economy to an industrialized one. Such economic changes transformed the Northern American family. No longer did children need to stay on the farm till adulthood. They could, and did, leave to work in cities; such a change called for one to redefine oneself not as a member of a family but as an individual: “The market fostered individualism and competitive pursuit of wealth by open-ended production of commodity values that could be accumulated as money.” Thus, the changing economy transformed the individual from one who worked in a family to an individual who worked for money.⁸

Historian Lawrence Foster opines that the most aggravating factor for social change in Second Great Awakening America was the economy. Men left the farm to work in the “individualistic world outside,” and women identified themselves as rulers of the home. This familial disintegration also brought a sense of individuality to children who now had more freedom to choose whom they would marry. Foster notes that this new found “individualistic ‘romantic love’” paralleled the “increasing individualism of the whole society.”⁹

The political, economic, and social changes that occurred in the new Republic created this dislocated individual. Through the Jeffersonian revolution, the middling individuals lost respect for the elite and considered themselves capable of relying on themselves. The changing economy altered the nature of the family and thus reoriented

⁸ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York 1815-1837*, 1st ed. rev. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 9; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 5, 525-26; Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 22, 15; Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 5.

⁹ Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 12, 13.

one's perception of oneself. These dislocated middling men lagged behind a country progressing faster than they and thus were primed to be "molded" by the Second Great Awakening.¹⁰

Foster, referencing anthropologist Victor Turner and ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep, notes that "rites of passage" that occur at "crisis points" in one's life consist of three stages: a "breakdown" of one's world, a transitional or "'liminal' period," and an "establishment of a new order." Foster notes that those in this liminal state experience an ambiguous individuality: they do not know who they are or who they will become. When they step into their new life they are "malleable, capable of being molded by their leaders into cultural forms of great beauty and power." Gordon Wood notes that Americans in the Awakening found themselves in this "marginal" or "liminal state." For Americans like Young, the Second Great Awakening offered an escape from the liminal life of the dislocated individual.¹¹

Briefly and broadly defined, the Second Great Awakening was a period—1780-1830¹² in American history that experienced a renewed excitement in religion, especially with the growth of the Baptists and Methodism, as well as the creation of new religions. In the old world, despite one's passive or active religious attitude, religion structured one's life. Conversely, the influence of religion in the new Republic depended on a person's active participation—hence, the emphasis on the individual. This era of democratized Christianity, a type of Christianity that permeated "popular culture,"

¹⁰ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 27; Wood, "Evangelical America," 374; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 166.

¹¹ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 8, 166; Wood, "Evangelical America," 367.

¹² This is not a hard and fast date. Historian Mark Noll estimates it beginning later at 1790; Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 567.

affected American culture more so than any other in American religious history. A “shift” towards “liberal individualism” permeated the new Republic, and the Jeffersonian revolution freed the individual to find religion for himself. Gordon Wood even correlated the rise of the middling group to the Awakening’s prominence.¹³

The Awakening enabled the believer to encounter God outside of “learned theologians and traditional orthodoxies.” Wood observed that the Awakening affected people who were mobile and suffered from “anxieties” resulting from weak political, social, and economic situations. These experiences led middling Americans to find understanding for their lives through religion. Furthermore, the disregard middling men held for their political superiors easily transferred onto their religious leaders, for they refused to acknowledge the clergy “as a separate order of men.” Hatch especially noted the leaders of the Awakening “all offered common people, especially the poor, compelling visions of individual self-respect and collective self-confidence.”¹⁴

The Awakening emboldened those middling men finding themselves in spiritual dearth to supplicate god directly for religious fulfillment and to gather in “religious communities” for strength. Furthermore, revivals gathered isolated Americans for spiritual and social nourishment and empowered individuals to make their own decisions about “salvation.” Individuals were empowered by the many religions from which they could choose, and these religions in turn “molded” individuals into believing communities. Daniel Howe observed that “Religion stimulated innovation in society, as believers tried to bring social practice more into conformity with religious precepts.”

¹³ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 6, 9; Noll, *America’s God*, 166, 210, 567; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 576, 580-1, 594.

¹⁴ Hatch, *Democratization*, 4, 9-10; for “anxieties” and “understanding,” see Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 595.

Hatch notes that religious leaders emphasized individualism and simultaneously preached that an age of “equality” approached. Thus, as important as the individual was in Second Great Awakening America, they were inseparable from the group: the individual empowered the community and the community defined the individual.¹⁵

Spurning their religious leaders, the “common folk” began “to lean on their own scriptural interpretations.” Furthermore, scripture was the only acknowledged mediator for salvation. William Miller, leader of the Millerites, said: ““We have sought to spread the truth, not by fanatical prophecies arising out of our own hearts, but by the light of the scriptures, history and sober argument. We appeal only to the Bible, and give you our rules of interpretation.”” Americans in this time declared ““No creed but the Bible”” and some leaders went so far to repudiate the Christian creeds and seek none other doctrine than what the New Testament offered. The fluctuating political, social, and economic culture of Second Great Awakening America offered no way for Americans to cope with the changes: ““These events seemed so far outside the range of ordinary experience that people rushed to biblical prophecy for help in understanding the troubled times that were upon them.””¹⁶

The third hallmark of the Awakening was the inclination for believers to blend heaven and earth. With barriers between social classes dissolving, Christians losing confidence in their clergy, and the dislocated middling individual’s belief that they could

¹⁵ Hatch, *Democratization*, 14, 40-43; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 580; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 177-8, 187; Wood, “Evangelical America,” 376; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 166.

¹⁶ Hatch, *Democratization*, 6, 136; Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 7; Noll, *America’s God*, 173; For “creed,” see Hatch, *Democratization*, 81, 166; Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible* 7; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 181-2.

encounter God on their own, the boundaries between the spiritual and the practical lost their permanence. Hatch notes “the crucible of popular theology combined odd mixtures of high and popular culture, of renewed supernaturalism and Enlightenment rationalism, of mystical experiences and biblical literalism, of evangelical and Jeffersonian rhetoric.” Jeffersonian culture allowed the middling religious to blend their folk practices and superstitions: “[d]ivining rods, fortune-telling, astrology, treasure seeking, and folk medicine” with Christianity. Wood went so far to argue that this “syncretism” contributed to Mormonism’s origin. This blending phenomenon existed because of “the primacy of the individual conscience” and the belief that “divine insight was reserved for the poor and humble rather than the proud and learned.” The eccentric but famous preacher Lorenzo Dow observed the Awakening “as an ‘Age of Wonders,’ in which the divine continued to permeate everyday life.”¹⁷

God for these people was not a being or power or essence to be found through ritual controlled by the religious elite but could be freely encountered in day-to-day life. Mormonism embraced this view: “Wherefore, verily I say unto you that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal; neither any man, nor the children of men; neither Adam, your father, whom I created” (Doctrine and Covenants [D&C] 29:34). A driving force behind this blending was the democratic forces overtaking old world hierarchies which forces “forged a new popular amalgam” of gentry and folk traditions. A tendency to join the “physical and spiritual

¹⁷ Hatch, *Democratization*, 34-40; For magic and Mormonism see Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 300.

worlds” helped to foster the Mormon cosmological teaching that man and God were of the same race.¹⁸

Historian Catherine Albanese has argued that part of the American religious movement responded to the need for “solace, comfort, therapy, and healing,” and specifically defined salvation as a “practice” of “healing and therapy.” She rhetorically asked, “Who in America needed such salvation and healing[?]...practically everyone.” Although her work’s scope includes religion in America from its conception to the present day, the principles apply to the Second Great Awakening too. Thus, the blending of heaven and earth viewed through Albanese’s thesis can be seen as an attempt to heal the dislocated individual. Young’s cosmology offered such healing for the abused and benighted Latter-day Saints. Furthermore, Young’s cosmology may be unique in nineteenth-century America, but an underlying principle—healing—is, as Albanese explains, common in the American religious ethos.¹⁹

The Second Great Awakening, as I have shown, empowered individuals. Brigham Young rose to such prominence in Mormonism because as an Awakening faith, it empowered dislocated individuals. Young’s pre-Mormon life, affected by political, economic, and social forces, cultivated within him a strong sense of independence, an awareness of God, and a sense of dislocation. Such a life anticipated active involvement in the Second Great Awakening.

Part of Young’s sense of independence grew from his home-life. Before his sixteenth birthday, he had helped on the family farm by “cutting down the hemlock,

¹⁸ Hatch, *Democratization*, 40; Wood, “Evangelical America,” 368, 385.

¹⁹ Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Spiritual Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 15.

beech, and maple trees and then rolling them together, burning the logs, splitting the rails, and fencing the little fields.” Young also noted his experience of ““logging and driving a team, summer and winter, not half clad, and with insufficient food until my stomach would ache....”” Young was raised in poverty and knew hunger. One story from his childhood captures his independent but indigent life. When Young was fourteen, he and his younger brother Lorenzo Dow were left alone for two days while their father traded in town. For food, the boys had an “empty flour barrel” and a robin killed by Young. As a child Young lost his mother; her death, alongside experiences of isolation and “frontier depression,” forced an adolescent Young to rely on himself.²⁰

This nascent independence was exhibited in refusing his father’s request to sign a temperance pledge. Temperance pledges, which were common in American culture, bound the signer to abstain from “hard liquor.” Young refused on the grounds that living by a pledge was not as powerful as if he were to abstain through will alone. Historian Rebecca Cornwall and newspaper correspondent Richard Palmer observed that a tough life, such as Young’s, was not uncommon in nineteenth-century America. Such an environment “develop[ed] self-reliant, stoic youth who suffered from chronic frontier depression.” They also note that this dismal life prefaced a religious awakening; such was the case for Young.²¹

As his home-life forged his independent spirit, Young’s entrance into the wage-world heightened his sense of dislocation. When Young turned sixteen, his father told

²⁰ Arrington, *American Moses*, 10, 11, 12; Bringhurst, *Brigham Young*, 10; Rebecca Cornwall and Richard F. Palmer, “The Religious and Family Background of Brigham Young,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 18, no. 3 (Spring 1978): 305.

²¹ Bringhurst, *Brigham Young*, 10-12; Cornwall and Palmer, “Religious and Family Background,” 305, 308.

him the time had arrived to leave home and be on his own—his future, like the future of other nineteenth-century youth, was uncertain. Young found work as an apprentice for carpentry, painting, and glazing but worked under the shadow of the changing economy. Along with the changing agrarian economy, the artisan system of “master craftsmen, journeymen, and apprentices” dissolved to the “sweating system” that produced furniture and ready made parts of houses. Ironic though, that a nobody like Young whom the economy bandied about would later make “a permanent mark on the economy of the western United States.”²²

Such an independent and dislocated life as Young’s made him an ideal participant in the Second Great Awakening. Additionally, Young had been exposed to religion from a young age. He recollected that his parents were “some of the ‘most strict religionists that lived upon the earth.’” His father, an “austere” Methodist, forbade dancing and music, and his mother emphasized prayer and faith on “every word” of the Bible. The Youngs were middling farmers who had settled and resettled in Massachusetts, Vermont, and New York with subsequent moves in between. And farmers were generally, Newell Bringhurst observes, attracted to religion.²³

Bringhurst also notes that the Awakening introduced the Young family to the “Episcopalians, Presbyterians, New Lights, Baptists, Freewill Baptists, Wesleyan and Reformed Methodists, and [to] almost every other kind of religion.” When around six years old, Young heard Lorenzo Dow speak; his preaching affected Brigham’s father

²² Arrington, *American Moses*, 13; Laurie, *Artisans into Workers*, 35, 42; Cornwall and Palmer, “Religious and Family Background,” 286.

²³ Bringhurst, *Brigham Young*, 7; Cornwall and Palmer, “Religious and Family Background,” 296, 304; Arrington, *American Moses*, 8-12.

John Young, so much that John even named one of his sons Lorenzo Dow Young. Ultimately, Young joined the Methodists and three of his brothers became Methodist ministers. Joining the Methodists however was not a knee-jerk reaction to the religious excitement. Young kept a rational head about religion and only joined the Methodists, Bringham concludes, as part of Young's emphasis on "self-improvement"—which emphasis was part of American culture. And when Young became interested in Mormonism, he renewed his methodical approach and spent a year-and-a-half independently investigating the faith before joining.²⁴

Thus, this chapter has clearly shown that the political, social, economic, and religious forces of nineteenth-century America directly affected Brigham Young as well his reality. As a dislocated, middling, and independent individual, Young, like other middling people, embraced the ideologies of the Second Great Awakening: an independent search for God, an unmediated appeal to scripture, and a perception of everyday life infused with the divine. Within this context, chapter three will examine Young's cosmology to explain the nature of his teachings and to establish the influential connection between his cosmology and the ideologies of Second Great Awakening America.

²⁴ Bringham, *Brigham Young*, 7, 8, 14, 20; Cornwall and Palmer, "Religious and Family Background," 306.

CHAPTER 3

COSMOS

Chapter two concluded that the political, social, economic, and religious forces of the new Republic cultivated Brigham Young's worldview. Young was a dislocated individual who was reoriented through the Second Great Awakening, specifically through Mormonism. His new worldview, which was constructed from and which expanded on Joseph Smith's revelations, included the entirety of the cosmos. This chapter will examine the cosmological doctrines within the context chapter two established. While these doctrines are striking, the underlying foundations of the cosmology reflect the basic principles of the Awakening that reoriented Young from his dislocated status—namely, an individualized search for truth, the potential to have a direct encounter with God, and the tendency to blend the divine with the commonplace. Since these teachings are complicated, especially for those encountering Young for the first time, the following paragraphs are offered as an outline of Young's system.

In brief, Young's cosmology articulated the potential for humans to retain their identity and accumulate truth and knowledge through eternity. For him, men and women are composed of two things: a physical body that houses an anthropomorphic spirit. These spirits are conscious, are composed of a finer grade of matter than their bodies, were begotten or brought into existence by heavenly parents in a previous life, and have an infinite capacity for retaining truth.

The universe in which these humans live is cyclical in nature. The whole cosmos is composed of matter, and this matter or element exists in a fluctuating state: it improves

until it reaches perfection and then begins to disintegrate. Once it troughs, it begins to grow again. Thus, humans are beings constituted from element that will eventually decompose. To escape this impending dissolution and to subordinate the cyclical nature of the cosmos, Jesus died and resurrected. Thus, those who followed Jesus' commandments were promised an escape from the cyclical nature of the cosmos so as to exist in an improving state forever: this state was called exaltation, and such an exalted being was called a god. Hence, the cosmos is filled with an infinite number of gods and goddesses: exalted human beings who are improving *ad infinitum*.

Knowledge of the potential for men and women to accumulate truth through eternity formed one of the foundations of Young's cosmology. Truth, for Young, was not "a single, monolithic 'reality'" controlled by the single deity who had brought it into being," nor was it an abstract, elusive concept, but was a precept inextricable to one's existence.¹ Young defined truth as "any thing, principle, or fact that actually has an existence. If a falsehood, yet it is true that falsehood exists. It is as true that devils exist, as that Gods exist" (1:116). Young continued: "Jesus says, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' The devil also says, 'I am, I exist;' and consequently, by the same rule, 'I am Truth.' How far short is this of what the Lord reveals by His Holy Spirit! Jesus Christ, his Father before him, all the faithful, the Gods of eternity, and all organized elements, have been organized for the express purpose of being exalted to an eternal increase: or suppose I say to eternal truth" (1:116).

Young gauged Jesus and Satan as champions of two truths or two realities: "The Lord Jesus Christ works upon a plan of eternal increase, of wisdom, intelligence, honor,

¹ Carlos Eire, *A Very Brief History of Eternity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 36.

excellence, power, glory, might, and dominion, and the attributes that fill eternity” (1:116). Conversely, “Satan is the way, the truth, and the death; or the way, and the falsehood” who endeavors “to destroy, dissolve, decompose, and tear in pieces” (1:116). In the cosmos, then, there exist two truths or realities: a being—Jesus—who builds and a being—Satan—who destroys: “The principle of separation, or disorganization, is as much an eternal principle, as much a truth, as that of organization” (1:116).

Caught within this cosmic strain are human beings who have a boundless capacity for knowledge: “Mankind are capable of collecting and retaining an immense amount of knowledge, if they will diligently apply the ability God has given them; in fact, they are made to travel on through an endless progression of improvement” (9:258). Knowledge was a purifying agent that would purge the dross of shallow thinking so the Saints would be fit companions for the gods: “But the beauty and excellency of the wisdom that God has revealed to us is to fill everybody with wisdom, bringing them up to the highest standard of knowledge and wisdom, purifying us and preparing us to enter into the highest state of glory, knowledge and power, that we may become fit associates of the Gods and be prepared to dwell with them” (19:96-97).

To prepare themselves for their apotheosis, men and women must join themselves to truth. If one is sustained by eternal truth, specifically the truth Jesus personifies, one in turn becomes eternal (1:352, 2:91). One assimilates into eternity through accumulating knowledge and truth because truth is a self-sustaining principle: “truth is calculated to sustain itself; it is based upon eternal facts and will endure, while all else will sooner or later perish” (14:115). Already, these bold teachings on two eternal realities and on

accumulating truth to prepare for association with the gods smack of Awakening influence—namely, studying scripture alone for God’s truth. However, Young augments this Awakening principle by infinitely lengthening the time one has to learn: “He has made truth his theme; and what is it? I will say it is that which endures; it is eternity, and its power is to grow, increase, and expand, adding life to life, and power to power, worlds without end” (2:129).

Reinforcing the Awakening attitude of seeking truth from the source rather than through mediation, Young taught that all truth originated in God: “All true philosophy originates from that Fountain from which we draw wisdom, knowledge, truth, and power” (7:140). “Whatsoever is good is of God, no matter by whom possessed or presented....But that which is of God is pure, lovely, holy and full of all excellency and truth, no matter where it is found, in hell, in heaven, upon the earth, or in the planets” (11:240). Thus, the Saints, like their religious contemporaries, were encouraged to collapse any boundaries hindering them from truth.

Young’s belief about the origin of truth shaped his egalitarian attitude towards other religions: “I think what a pity it is that we Christians cannot see far enough and understand enough to be willing that every truth should take effect on the minds of the people, for every truth that is taught, believed and practiced, is good for mankind” (15:121-122). In fact, the Saints were the rightful heirs to all truth: “All...philosophy, even every iota of it which is true, belongs to the religion of the Latter-day Saints” (18:231). Not only did Young synthesize heaven and earth but he found every religion that taught truth compatible with Mormonism:

You say you belong to the Presbyterians; it is no matter if you have got the truth. Are you a Calvinist, or a Wesleyan? It is no matter, if you have got the truth; that truth is also mine. Do you belong to the Methodist's society? And have you got the truth? It is right, that truth is "Mormonism," it is my property. Are you a Quaker? It is no matter, if you have the truth, that same truth is mine. Are you a Catholic, and have got the truth? That is my doctrine, and I will not quarrel about it. "Well," says one, "I am a Jew; I guess I can get up a quarrel with you." No, you cannot. I shall not contend with you, for the Jews have got true principles, and they possess no truth but what belongs to "Mormonism;" for there is *not a truth on earth or in heaven, that is not embraced in "Mormonism."* (1:243-4; italics kept from original)

And despite his expulsion from the United States, Young held fast the Awakening passion for truth—so much so that he chided those Saints who limited their education to *sola scriptura*:

Shall I sit down and read the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Covenants all the time? says one. Yes, if you please, and when you have done, you may be nothing but a sectarian after all. It is your duty to study to know everything upon the face of the earth, in addition to reading those books. We should not only study good, and its effects upon our race, but also evil, and its consequences....And inasmuch as the Lord Almighty has designed us to know all that is in the earth, both the good and the evil, and to learn not only what is in heaven, but what is in hell, you need not expect ever to get through learning. (2:93-94)

But learning would not consist of study alone. Before they could associate with the gods, the Saints had to discern good from evil, and their tutor was the swift switch of mortal experience. Commenting on his own sermons, Young cautioned: "always have enough of the spirit of truth to know whether they are false or true; always so enjoy the Spirit of the Lord, that you can discern between truth and error, and know the spirit of evil from the spirit of righteousness" (3:153). Appreciating the good could only come by comprehending its opposite: "How can you know truth but by its opposite, or light but by

its opposite? The absence of light is darkness. How can sweetness be known but by its opposite, bitter? It is by this means that we obtain all intelligence” (2:6-7).

Omniscience was a lofty goal but it need not overwhelm the Saints, for this deified injunction was fulfilled through slow improvement: “[God] gives a little to His humble followers to-day, and if they improve upon it, to-morrow he will give them a little more, and the next day a little more. He does not add to that which they do not improve upon, but they are required to continually improve upon the knowledge they already possess, and thus obtain a store of wisdom” (2:2). The possibility of omniscience is indeed striking, but the means to attain it, “self-improvement,” was a well-known mantra of nineteenth-century Awakening culture. In fact, some Americans held out the possibility of “moral perfectionism” through the principle of improvement.²

But until they joined the godly society, the Saints, through obedience to God’s spirit, could learn directly from God and become a prophet in their own right: “If you will follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and his Apostles, as recorded in the New Testament, every man and woman will be put in possession of the Holy Ghost; every person will become a Prophet, Seer, and Revelator, and an expounder of truth. They will know things that are, that will be, and that have been. They will understand things in heaven, things on the earth, and things under the earth, things of time, and things of eternity” (1:243). Godhood need not be achieved in mortality, for growth and improvement would continue after death. The next major principle in Young’s cosmology, eternal matter, establishes the reasoning behind eternal improvement.

² Newell G. Bringham, *Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 14.

Matter or element, the fundamental and eternal component to the universe, permeates the entire cosmos (1:276). All things are composed of matter: stars, planets, gods, spirits, plants, animals, and humans. The basic elements that comprise a pen for instance are as primeval and eternal as the God who created the earth: “Astronomers estimate that there is between us and the nearest fixed star matter enough from which to organize millions of earths like this. There is an eternity of matter, and it is all acted upon and filled with a portion of divinity. Matter is to exist; it cannot be annihilated. Eternity is without bounds, and is filled with matter; and there is no such place as empty space” (7:2).

Furthermore, all matter, whether it constitutes a planet or a piece of seaweed, is in a constant state of change: it is either improving and growing or dissolving and decomposing: “The elements of which this terra firma is composed, are every moment either composing or decomposing. They commence to organize or to compose, and continue to grow until they arrive at their zenith of perfection, and then they begin to decompose. When you find a rock that has arrived at its greatest perfection, you may know that the work of decaying has begun” (1:219).

As arresting as these teachings appear, Young found evidence for fluctuating matter in the observable world: “We grow our wheat, our fruit, and our animals, there they are organized, they increase and grow; but, after a while, they decay, dissolve, become disorganized, and return to their mother earth. No matter by what process, these are the revolutions which they undergo; but the elements of the particles of which they were composed, still do, always have, and always will exist, and through this principle of

change, we have an eternal increase” (1:116). Additionally, it needs noting that Young’s conclusions on the cyclical nature of matter were bolstered, in this example, by farming: an occupation he had participated in since childhood. And by using an everyday activity, farming, to explain eternal element, Young seamlessly blended heaven and earth.

Another example of this “blend” is when Young resolved to construct the Salt Lake Temple with adobe because adobe had yet to peak in its cycle (1:218-220). Stone, the preferred element, would not have lasted “through the millennium” because it had peaked and would begin to dissolve (11:372). Again, Young summoned the observable world to prove the superiority of his adobe temple: the pyramids which were built with “clay mixed up with straw,” remained while the House of Representatives’ building had already used “eighty thousand tons of putty” to repair the stone (1:219-20). About this observation, Young concluded: “Here we have actual proof that the matter which is the furthest advanced to a state of perfection, is the first to decompose, and go back into its native element, at which point it begins to be organized again, it begins to congeal, petrify, and harden into rock, which grows like a tree, but not so perceptibly (1:219).”

Another characteristic of eternal element is that, like a sponge, matter can absorb an infinite amount of intelligence: “matter can be organized and brought forth into intelligence, and to possess more intelligence, and to continue to increase in that intelligence” (7:3). Thus, humans are composed of eternal and living substances: “The life that is within us is a part of an eternity of life, and is organized spirit, which is clothed upon by tabernacles, thereby constituting our present being, which is designed for the attainment of further intelligence” (7:285).

The terms intelligence and spirit lack fixed definitions in early Mormon doctrine. Sometimes intelligence indicates knowledge gained from study. Other times it refers to a pre-mortal spirit child who was begotten by heavenly parents. Joseph Smith's Abraham beheld a vision of these spirit beings and learned a hierarchy was established among them based on intelligence; furthermore, God, in this vision, defined himself as the most intelligent being (Abraham 3:18-19). The Holy Ghost, the third member of the Mormon Godhead, is characterized as "a personage of spirit" (D&C 130:22).³ Spirit and element at one point seem to be separate substances and in another one, spirit is expressly defined as a type of matter (D&C 93:33; 131:7-8). However, despite their varied meanings, the objects of these various terms awoke the Mormons to a realization of their eternal natures: "Can you realise that the intelligence which you receive is eternal? I can comprehend this, just as well as I can that I am now in possession of it. It is as easy for me to comprehend that it will exist eternally, as that anything else will" (1:5).

God's purpose for housing spirits—composed of a finer grade of matter—in physical bodies—organized from a coarser grade of matter—was for the individual to find "Happiness" (7:3, see D&C 131:7-8). Happiness for Young was a state where men and women could act independently as the gods (3:316): "[Matter] is brought together, organized, and capacitated to receive knowledge and intelligence, to be enthroned in glory, to be made angels, Gods—beings who will hold control over the elements, and have power by their word to command the creation and redemption of worlds, or to

³ In Mormon parlance, "Godhead" comprises the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Mormons assert that the Father and the Son are separate spirit personages housed in bodies of flesh and bone, whereas the Holy Ghost, just as much a personage of spirit as the Father and the Son, lacks a body.

extinguish suns by their breath, and disorganize worlds hurling them back into their chaotic state. This is what you and I are created for” (3:356).

Young firmly believed that if all people understood their divine nature and the purpose of the creation that “their views, feelings, faith, and affections would be very different from what they now are” (7:282). This transcendent insight did not merely culminate in a mystical experience but enriched one’s day-to-day life. Thus, Saints should seek to improve their lives at every instant rather than expect an apocalyptic transformation (note the emphasis on self-improvement): “Is every act of their lives made to increase their intelligence, to add to their faith, virtue, and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge, temperance, and to temperance, patience, and to patience, godliness, and to godliness, brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness, charity, and to improve upon every gift and grace which God has bestowed on them through the Gospel?” (9:256). A life engaged in perpetual improvement prepares one for eternity because such a lifestyle is a godly lifestyle in embryo: “Honour this earthly house, for in it are concealed the rudiments of all knowledge...if they will diligently apply the ability God has given them; in fact, they are made to travel on through an endless progression of improvement” (9:258).

Hence, the parallels between the Second Great Awakening and Young’s cosmology: individuals seeking truth for themselves, an emphasis on continual improvement, and a reality where heaven is infused into the Saints’ day-to-day lives. Young’s cosmology is an echo of the Second Great Awakening but an extreme echo indeed!

Salvation, in part, was for humans to escape the cyclical nature of the universe and improve forever: “To save the inhabitants of the earth, to get them all back into some kind of a kingdom where they can be administered to, and not have this organized matter return again to its native element, for we wish this work to be preserved” (3:373).

Salvation was a state of eternal progression: “The greatest gift that God can bestow upon the children of men is the gift of eternal life; that is, to give mankind power to preserve their identity—to preserve themselves before the Lord” (6:333).

The inevitable result from eternally escaping material dissolution was an eternal growth. Young called this growth exaltation: “Then will they become gods, even the sons of God; then will they become eternal fathers, eternal mothers, eternal sons and eternal daughters; being eternal in their organization, they go from glory to glory, from power to power; they will never cease to increase and to multiply world’s without end. When they receive their crowns, their dominions, they then will be prepared to frame earth’s like unto ours and to people them in the same manner as we have been brought forth by our parents, by our Father and God” (18:259).

This eternal growth includes mental improvement but it also signifies propagating the species. Exalted humans would give birth to spirit children and would prepare planets on which they too could experience mortality as a trial for exaltation:

But I expect, if I am faithful with yourselves, that I shall see the time with yourselves that we shall know how to prepare to organize an earth like this—know how to people that earth, how to redeem it, how to sanctify it, and how to glorify it, with those who live upon it who hearken to our counsels. The Father and the Son have attained to this point already; I am on the way, and so are you, and every faithful servant of God....and when the work is finished, and it is offered to the Father, then they will be crowned and receive keys and powers by which they will be capable of

organizing worlds...After men have got their exaltations and their crowns—have become Gods, even the sons of God—are made Kings of kings and Lords of lords, they have the power then of propagating their species in spirit; and that is the first of their operations with regard to organizing a world. Power is then given to them to organize the elements, and then commence the organization of tabernacles. (6:274-5)

The life to come cannot fully be comprehended, but the general principles of a divine lifestyle—the individual improving throughout eternity—could help the Saints orient their everyday lives to an exalted pattern as well as buttress the faith of the “least Saint”:

Can eternity be circumscribed? If it can, there is an end of all wisdom, knowledge, power, and glory—all will sink into eternal annihilation. What is life to you and me? It is the utmost extent of our desires. Do you wish to increase, to continue? Do you wish to possess kingdoms and thrones, principalities and powers; to exist, and continue to exist; to grow in understanding, in wisdom, in knowledge, in power, and in glory throughout an endless duration?⁴ Why, *yes*, is the reply...I say, when we have lived long enough in them to see the least Saint, that can be possibly called a Saint, in possession of more solar systems like this, than it is possible for mortals to number, or than there are stars in the firmament of heaven visible, or sands on the sea shore, we shall then have a faint idea of eternity, and begin to realize that we are in the midst of it. (1:353)

Young considered himself living in eternity already—an effect of joining heaven and earth. It would be tempting in light of Young’s teachings to see such common undertakings as plowing a field, raising a child, or mending a fence as trite compared to forming planets, but Young saw no difference among these activities. “Time [he said] is a certain portion of eternity allotted to the existence of these mortal bodies” (2:8). Thus, mundane events occurring in mortal bodies were eternal activities. In fact, eternal life

⁴ One of Paul’s phrases that found its way into Young’s teachings is “thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers” (Col 1:16, Eph 1:21). One Biblical commentary notes that these designations are not “earthly rulers. These are the designations of various classes of angelic beings—exalted spirits, sometimes regarded as beneficent, sometimes as tyrannous—who were believed to hold sway over different departments of the universe.” George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 10:634.

presupposed one had mastered the common elements—the soil where they farmed for instance—of this temporal world: “Suppose that the whole people could see things as they are, they would soon be able to control the elements by the power of their faith. This people, since we believe that they are in the kingdom of God, must so live as to gain power and faith to control all things of a perishable nature, and thus prepare themselves to endure for ever and ever; while every other creature will, ere long, return to its native element” (7:174).

The temporal was a part of the eternal, and for that reason, although he preached on eternal lives, Young did not concern himself with the future other than to gain perspective and consolation: “I am on my way to this great exaltation. I expect to attain unto it. I am in the hands of the Lord, and never trouble myself about my salvation, or what the Lord will do with me hereafter. It is for me to do the will of God to-day, and, when to-morrow comes, to inquire what is his will concerning me; then do the will of my Father in the work he has appointed me to do, and that is enough for me” (6:276).

Death opposed exaltation, and Young pragmatically concluded that the opposite of retaining one’s identity throughout eternity would be for one to lose it completely: “The rebellious will be thrown back into their native element, there to remain myriads of years before their dust will again be revived, before they will be re-organized. Some might argue that this principle would lead to the re-organization of Satan, and all the devils. I say nothing about this, only what the Lord says—that when he comes, ‘he will destroy *death*, and him that has the power of it.’ It cannot be annihilated; you cannot annihilate matter. If you could, it would prove there was empty space” (1:118). In other

words, the very elements that compose one's identity would be dissolved and returned to the native element to be organized again.⁵

Furthermore: "We read in the Scriptures of the second death not having power over certain ones. The first death is the separation of the spirit from the body; the second death is, as I have stated, the dissolution of the organized particles which compose the spirit, and their return to their native element. The wicked spirit will have to endure the wrath of the Almighty, until it has paid the uttermost farthing where the 'worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.' Every debt that has been contracted by it must be cancelled" (9:149). This abstruse teaching exemplifies how the Awakening's emphasis on scripture affected theological reasoning. Note especially how Young bases this particular teaching on scripture, especially on Jesus' words.

The agents who draw humans to this unfathomable end are the Devil and his followers. These fallen angels oppose God because they were cursed to not have the gift of eternal lives: "Permit me to inquire what was his [Satan's] curse? It was, that he should not increase any more, but come to an end" (1:116). Thus, he seeks to destroy humans because the only other truth to embrace besides growth is death: "What principle does the devil work upon? It is to destroy, dissolve, decompose, and tear in pieces. The principle of separation, or disorganization, is as much an eternal principle, as much a truth, as that of organization. Both always did and will exist" (1:116).

Consigning the wicked and the rebellious to a fate of dissolution also meant the dissolution of the traditional Christian idea of hell as an inescapable punishment: "'Why,'

⁵ For another examination of the second death see Boyd Kirkland, "Of Gods, Mortals, and Devils," *Sunstone* 10, no. 12 (November 1986).

some say, ‘we thought that the wicked were sent to hell to dwell with eternal burnings for evermore.’ They go to hell and will stay there until the anger of the Almighty consumes them and they become disorganized, as the elements of the fuel we burn are disorganized by the action of fire and thrown back again to their native element” (7:287).

Although the traditional hell proper does not exist, God’s punishment is still everlasting because He is perpetually creating worlds to send His spirit children to gain an experience: “The punishment of God is Godlike. It endures forever, because there never will be a time when people ought not to be damned, and there must always be a hell to send them to. How long the damned remain in hell, I know not, nor what degree of suffering they endure....God’s punishment is eternal, but that does not prove that a wicked person will remain eternally in a state of punishment” (9:147-8).

Brigham Young’s hell resembles Catholic purgatory. It is not the final destination for the wicked but a place where they will suffer God’s punishment. The second death, then, is reserved only for those who have committed the unforgivable sin—permitting the flesh to gain victory over the spirit:

And when the flesh attains this victory over the spirit, then is the time spoken of when man has sinned to that degree that, says the Apostle, “ye shall not pray for them, for they have sinned a sin unto death.” Then the spirit of the Lord ceases to strive with them, they no longer receive light, having passed the day of grace. Until then every man and every woman is on saving ground, and they can be redeemed from sin. (18:259)

In general, the Saints need not concern themselves with this sin because this unimaginable fate is reserved only for those who “sin against the [Holy Spirit].”⁶ In fact

⁶ Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 361.

meriting this punishment requires one to exert effort comparable to one who is qualifying for exaltation:

Are you going to cast them down, and sink them to the bottom of the bottomless pit, to be angels to the devil? Who are his angels? No man nor woman, unless they receive the Gospel of salvation, and then deny it, and altogether turn away from it, sacrificing to themselves the Son of God afresh. They are the only ones who will suffer the wrath of God to all eternity. How much does it take to prepare a man, or woman, or any being, to become angels to the devil, to suffer with him to all eternity? Just as much as it does to prepare a man to go into the celestial kingdom, into the presence of the Father and the Son, and to be made an heir to His kingdom, and all His glory, and be crowned with crowns of glory, immortality, and eternal lives. Now who will be damned to all eternity? Will any of the rest of mankind? No; not one of them. (3:93)

But ironically, the Saints need the Devil and his angels because God has assigned them as the agents to try and tempt the Saints: “God gave Lucifer power, influence, mastery, and rule, to a certain extent, to control the life pertaining to the elements composing the body” (3:277). Furthermore: “We cannot clear ourselves from the power of satan; we must know what it is to be tried and tempted, for no man or woman can be exalted upon any other principle, as was beautifully exhibited in the life of the Savior. According to the philosophy of our religion we understand that if he had not descended below all things, he could not have ascended above all things” (3:365).

Again, although Young understood the meanings of life and death somewhat differently than his Christian contemporaries, his views were influenced by the Second Great Awakening as well as his observations of the natural world. Another of the foundational principles of the cosmos was life: “There is life in all matter, throughout the vast extent of all the eternities; it is in the rock, the sand, the dust, in water, air, the gases, and, in short, in every description and organization of matter, whether it be solid, liquid,

or gaseous, particle operating with particle” (3:277). Thus, a healthy child evinced the principle of life equally as a rotting corpse because both are made of element.

Death is only a separation. And the second death is a complete dissolution of one’s spirit back to its native element, but the dissolving elements are still being acted upon by life:⁷

what we call death is the operation of life, inherent in the matter of which the body is composed, and which causes the decomposition after the spirit has left the body. Were that not the fact, the body, from which has fled the spirit, would remain to all eternity just as it was when the spirit left it, and would not decay. What is commonly called death does not destroy the body, it only causes a separation of spirit and body, but the principle of life, inherent in the native elements, of which the body is composed, still continues with the particles of that body and causes it to decay, to dissolve itself into the elements of which it was composed, and all of which continue to have life. When the spirit given to man leaves the body, the tabernacle begins to decompose, is that death? No, death only separates the spirit and body, and a principle of life still operates in the untenanted tabernacle, but in a different way, and producing different effects from those observed while it was tenanted by the spirit. There is not a particle of element which is not filled with life, and all space is filled with element;...The spirit leaves a body, and then the body begins to pass away by another system of life. (3:276-7)

Despite the expansive nature of Young’s speculation, Jesus Christ remained central to Young’s message, faith, and cosmology: “I labor faithfully to instruct the people in the way of life; and the most important point of all my preaching and sayings is that they rest upon the words of the Saviour” (6:330). It was faith on Jesus that had sustained the Saints: “I said it was faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that enabled us to endure. A lady present said, ‘That is right, I believe in exercising faith in him. Have faith in God, for God will bless all who have faith in Him, no matter who they are nor by whom called; if you have faith in God, and live according to the light you have, God will lead you to

⁷ Technically this idea of a second death is in fact the process of life working on a rebellious soul.

glory” (13:178). Even the scriptures’ efficacy depended on Jesus: “But take away the atonement of the Son of God and the Scriptures fall useless to the ground” (14:41). Jesus was chosen by God in the pre-mortal realm as heir to the human family to redeem all human beings from death or eternal separation:

“For my kingdom must be established upon the earth in the latter days,” saith the Father, “and I have given it to my Son Jesus Christ. He has died to redeem it, and he is the lawful heir pertaining to this earth.” Jesus will continue to reign with his Father, and is dictated by his Father in all the acts and ruling and governing in the building up and overthrow of nations, to make the wrath of man praise him, until he brings all into subjection to his will and government. And when he has subdued all his enemies, destroyed death and him that hath the power of death, and perfected his work, he will deliver up the kingdom spotless to his Father. (7:144)

Jesus held the same role in Mormonism as He did in traditional Christianity, and Young encouraged the Saints to teach their children about His atonement: “We must teach our children that Christ came in the meridian of time; that he suffered and died for the original sin Adam committed in the Garden of Eden, and tasted death for every man. He suffered for every man upon the earth. This is the character of him whom we receive as our Savior” (19:48). But His role of redeemer was elevated to one who redeems matter from eternal dissolution in addition to a redeemer from sin. In fact, the very power that keeps exalted matter from dissolving is called the law of Christ: “We call it the law of Christ: it is the law of eternal life. When we speak of the law of Christ, we speak of it as the power to keep matter in its organization” (6:333). Thus, echoing his earthly career, Jesus was a cosmic carpenter whose death dovetailed matter and spirit together never to be separated.

The final point about Young's cosmology is his controversial and confusing views on Adam, Eve, and the creation. Called the Adam-God theory, the teaching circumscribes Young's belief that Adam was not only the creator of the earth but its God as well (1:50). Much has already been written about this confusing teaching by Mormon apologists, non-Mormons, and LDS Church leaders, and it is not the intent of this thesis to add yet another paper to the Adam-God pile. An examination of this recondite idea will neither affirm nor deny the validity of Young's teachings on Adam. It will however seek to understand the "why" of his thinking, and what Young's "Adam consciousness" did for his cosmology. As has been stated, Young's cosmology included a reality of numberless gods and goddesses who were continually bringing worlds into existence to exalt their spirit children. Thus, this earth and the conditions of humankind are not unique. In fact, Young went so far to declare that each earth had an "Adam" an "Eve" and a "Redeemer."⁸

Despite the existence of a pantheon of gods, humans on this earth are only accountable to one of them. Eloheim, Young's title for God, directed Michael, noted in the bible as the archangel, to create this planet. Michael thus becomes the creator of this world and also its God. Again, for Young, there are "gods many, and lords many," but

⁸ See John Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Spring 1982); Matthew B. Brown, "Brigham Young's Teachings on Adam" (paper presented at the FAIR Conference, Sandy, UT, April 7, 2009), accessed March 28, 2012, http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2009_Brigham_Youngs_Teachings_On_Adam.pdf; the phrase "Adam conscious" came from Philip L. Barlow, "Religion and the Concept of Time" (class lecture, Utah State University, Logan, UT, Spring Semester, 2011); it should be noted that Young's cosmology differs on a number of key points from Joseph Smith's as well as foundational Mormon doctrines in the Book of Mormon (see Kirkland, "Of Gods, Mortals, and Devils"; Brown, "Brigham Young's Teachings"); Brigham Young, *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young*, ed. Richard S. Van Wagoner (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2009), 2:849; Again, as confusing as these ideas are, this paper provides not the forum to examine where these ideas came from or to fully explicate them. It is sufficient to know that these doctrines were presented.

Young is concerned with only those deified beings in charge of this world (1 Cor. 8:5). To people this new world, Michael descends to this earth with one of his wives, to become the first two people on the earth—Adam and Eve. The problem is that Young also taught that Michael/Adam and his wife Eve had already lived on a planet, believed in a Savior, died, and were resurrected. Thus, one of the controversies in Mormon doctrine is that Michael who had been resurrected, descended to become mortal again—a doctrine which disagrees with the Book of Mormon. After creating the earth, Adam took his wife Eve to eat the fruit of this world so that their “systems were charged with the nature of Earth, and then they could beget bodies, for their spiritual children.” Once they had finished their mortal stewardship, they would ascend and resume their places as deities.⁹

The key to understand this teaching’s function is that Young viewed Adam simultaneously as a historical figure and as a myth. Placing Adam in a mythical-historic context is key for understanding how Young’s cosmology functions as a theodicy (this function will be explained in chapter four). A myth is not a fictitious story so much as it is a tale by which the listener can chart his or her life. Explaining the function of myth, historian Peter Burke paraphrased anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski’s observation: “A myth...is a story about the past which serves...as a ‘charter’ for the present.” In this case, the Adam and Eve story, according to Young, functioned not only as a history of the creation and fall of man but also as a story by which one could navigate oneself in the “present.” Young taught that “every world has had an Adam, and an Eve: named so, simply because the first man is always called ‘Adam’ and the first woman ‘Eve.’” Young

⁹ For “Michael,” “beings in charge of this world,” “Adam descending with his wife,” “doctrinal disagreements,” and “ascending” see Brown, “Brigham Young’s Teachings,” 1, 3,4; all others see Young, *Discourses*, 2:849, 850, 852.

viewed the names “Adam” and “Eve” not only as names of earth’s first parents but as titles signifying the names of each earth’s progenitors. Historically, Adam and Eve were temporal beings who begat the human race. Mythically, they were titles for the parents of each earth: “How can they do it [create a world and people it]? Have they to go to that earth? Yes, *an* Adam will have to go there, and he cannot do without Eve; he must have Eve to commence the work of generation, and they will go into the garden, and continue to eat and drink of the fruits of the corporeal world, until this grosser matter is diffused sufficiently through their celestial bodies to enable them according to the established laws, to produce mortal tabernacles for their spiritual children. This is a key for you” (6:275 italics added).¹⁰

Thus, Young affirmed that Adam and Eve actually lived on this earth: “How our faith would stretch out and grasp the heavenly land where our father Adam dwelt in his paradisiacal state! That land is on this continent. Here is where Adam lived. Do you not think the Lord has had his eye upon it? Yes” (8:67). But the power of this story comes because it is viewed mythically. Much like Young blended heaven and earth, he blended history and myth. Speaking to the women, Young said: “You will see the time when you will have millions of children around you. If you are faithful to your covenants, you will be mothers of nations. You will become Eves to earths like this; and when you have assisted in peopling one earth, there are millions of earths still in the course of creation. And when they have endured a thousand million time longer than this earth, it is only as

¹⁰ Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 112; Brown, “Brigham Young’s Teachings,” 3, quoted in Eugene E. Campbell, *The Essential Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 93.

it were the beginning of your creations” (8:208). Thus, one day, the Mormon women would be able to take upon them the title of Eve.

Young’s reasoning about Adam and Eve as historical and mythical beings could have been influenced by Freemasonry. In their induction ceremony, Masonic initiates performed the rituals symbolically as Hiram Abiff, the legendary architect of Solomon’s temple. Hinting at Abiff’s historical life, Young said: “We enjoy privileges that no other people enjoy, or have enjoyed. In the days of Solomon, in the Temple that he built in the land of Jerusalem, there was confusion and bickering and strife, even to murder, and the very man [Hiram Abiff] that they looked to to give them the keys of life and salvation, they killed because he refused to administer the ordinances to them when they requested it; and whether they got any of them or not, this history does not say anything about” (19:220-1).¹¹

It can be inferred that Young simultaneously understood Abiff as a historical and mythical figure. Historical—he was a living figure in the past. Mythical—all who entered the Masonic rites went through as Hiram Abiff. Richard Bushman has noted that Joseph Smith was “intrigued” by Masonic rituals as he formulated the Nauvoo temple endowment and “turned the [Masonic] materials to his own use.” Instead of being initiated as Hiram Abiff, couples went through the temple rites as Adam and Eve. It is possible, as evinced by his sermons, that the mythical-historic point of view Young learned from Masonry, which was then underscored by Smith’s endowment, led him to posit that Adam and Eve were at once living, exalted beings as well as prototypes of

¹¹ Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 451; Special thanks to my friend Brandon Berrett for alerting me to Young’s assertion of a historical Hiram Abiff.

every man and woman. Thus, a more proper characterization of Young's Adamic teaching should be the "Adam-Eve-God myth" rather than "Adam-God theory."¹²

No doubt Yong's cosmology is striking, but its abstruse nature should not divert attention from its Second Great Awakening underpinnings. The emphasis on the individual spirit retaining its identity throughout eternity in a never ending quest for truth is a variation on the duty of all to seek truth either at a revival or alone with the Bible. Young's teachings about gaining knowledge directly from God echo the nineteenth-century middling man's realization that he has access to truth without the mediation of the religious elite. Even the Adam-Eve-God myth was influenced partly by Young's involvement in Freemasonry—a fraternity that flourished in America.¹³ And finally, Young's tendency to blend a cosmology with counsel on everyday matters reflected the wider tendency in nineteenth-century Awakening America to intertwine the common with the divine.

This blending is key for two reasons: One, including abstruse topics with common-day subjects shows the influence of Second Great Awakening culture on Young's mind. For instance, the 1854 teaching of the Adam-Eve-God myth was explained amid pronouncements on the moral evils of prostitution, the sins of men who abuse women, and the importance of marriage. Another example: Young's teaching on the cyclical nature of matter and explanation on why the Salt Lake Temple had to be built of adobe was taught alongside lessons on tithing and the management of logging in the canyons (1:209-20). Reason two: by joining heaven and earth in his sermons, the

¹² Ibid., 450, 451

¹³ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 50-52.

mystery of the gods and the expected glories of eternal life functioned as consolatory teachings for the Saints. With a cosmic point of view, the Saints had purpose to their lives and could sustain faith in God in the midst of his seeming abandonment. Scholars call teachings that justify God in the wake of suffering a theodicy. Chapter four will explore specifically how Young's cosmology, influenced by Second Great Awakening America, consoled the Saints and sustained their faith in God.¹⁴

¹⁴ Young, *Discourses*, 2:854, 853.

CHAPTER 4

CONSOLATION

About the Mormons' suffering, practicing Jew and Harvard law professor Noah Feldman concluded: "The LDS Church has suffered greater religious persecution in its history than any other religious group in American history." Gordon Wood similarly observed: "Mormonism was undeniably the most original and persecuted religion of this period or of any period of American history." Categorizing Mormon suffering with the superlative degree is a bold conclusion. Yet, such an extreme conclusion helps explain the abstruse nature of Young's teachings. The early Mormons needed to make sense of their lives inundated by perpetual waves of suffering and persecution. One role Young's cosmology served, which cosmology he built on the teachings of his predecessor, was to give the Mormons a framework with which to make sense of their suffering and to justify God's allowance of their persecution.¹

Contemplating his buffeted life, Joseph Smith said: "And as for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of life;...But, nevertheless, deep water is what I am wont to swim in; it all has become second nature to me. And I feel, like Paul, to glory in tribulation" (D&C 127:2). Smith's induction to work with divinity came through an initiation into the "fellowship of...sufferings" (Philip. 3:10). When a child, doctors removed bone from Smith's leg as an attempt to cure infection caused by

¹ For "Feldman" see Hal Boyd, "America and the Meaning of a Mormon President," *Deseret News*, June 3, 2011; Gordon S. Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism," *New York History* 61, no. 4 (1980): 379.

typhoid. Shortly after the first official conference of the church in June 1830, Smith was arrested “on the charge of being a disorderly person,” and at the end of his life he had become well acquainted with the defendant’s bench. Three years after Smith established the church, his Saints were violently driven from one of their gathering places—Missouri. Partly due to the financial crisis of 1837 and the failure of the Kirtland bank, some of the church’s most influential leaders renounced Smith. And in 1844, in Nauvoo, Smith was assassinated, leaving the Mormons without their seer.²

Thus, Smith and the Mormons were well acquainted with turmoil. To justify God’s existence to man in the midst of increasing persecution, cosmological themes appeared in Smith’s teachings. For instance, referencing his 1830, arrest Smith said: “I will say, however, that amid all the trials and tribulations we had to wade through, the Lord, who well knew our infantile and delicate situation, vouchsafed for us a supply of strength, and granted us...a precious morsel [of knowledge].” This “precious morsel” was recorded in the Pearl of Great Price as Moses 1 and included a creation story, the purpose for God’s existence, and a hint that God had peopled numberless worlds like this earth. Consoling the persecuted Missouri Saints, Smith revealed: “all those who suffer for my name [God’s] shall reign with me.” And Smith’s Dante-like vision of heaven and hell was predicated by his concern for God’s social justice. He reasoned that for God to be just “‘Heaven,’ ...must include more kingdoms than one.”³

² Joseph Smith et al., *History of the Church of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B.H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978 printing), 1:84, 88, 88, 426-440, 5:143; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 20-21, 332, 336-338.

³ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (New York: Pearson Education, 2007), 1.26; Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:98, 454, 245-252.

But the crucible which brought cosmology to the fore in Mormon thought was Smith's imprisonment in Liberty Jail during the winter of 1839. The inhumane conditions of the jail and the fear of being "convicted of treason" oppressed the Mormon seer. From prison, Smith composed a letter to the Saints containing a revelation that counseled Smith about his suffering. God as voice calmed Smith: "My son, peace be unto thy soul; thine adversity and thine afflictions shall be but a small moment; And then, if thou endure it well, god shall exalt thee on high." This counsel is well-known in contemporary Mormon culture as is God's counsel that "all these things [Smith's suffering] shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good." However, little attention is given to the cosmological portion of the letter where God promised Smith that He would soon reveal knowledge that had never been revealed such as the plurality of gods—"All thrones and dominions, principalities and powers"—and all the "glories, laws, and set times," of planets and stars.⁴

A key to understanding Young's cosmology lies in this letter. Smith's consolation partly came by a promise that knowledge concerning a plurality of gods, a hierarchy of angels, and the "glories, laws, and set times" of planets and stars would presently come. This cosmological expectation enlarged Smith's perspective. No longer was his reality circumscribed by a jail cell but was protracted by the cosmos. His fellows in suffering were not only the other prisoners but the gods whom Smith would later reveal experienced mortality on an earth. The promise of experience factored into this consolation. Bushman commented: "The word "experience"" suggested life was a passage. The enduring human personality was being tested. Experience instructed. Life

⁴ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 374, 375; D&C 121:7-8, 26-32; 122:7.

was not just a place to shed one's sins but a place to deepen comprehension by descending below them all. The Missouri tribulations were a training ground." Smith was also reminded that Jesus had suffered more: "The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (D&C 122:8). Smith's Jesus was the prototype for all suffering servants, and to descend with Him meant that one would ascend with Him into the kingdom of heaven. Upon leaving Liberty Jail, Smith entered the Nauvoo period of the church where the fullness of his cosmology became public. It culminated in the famous King Follet sermon where he publicly declared that fallen men and women are of the race of the gods and that they can re-ascend to co-rule with the Father as Jesus did. And, as cosmologically striking as the Follet doctrine is, it was taught in part to console those whose friends and family had died.⁵

This brief history of the pre-1844 church shows what kind of church Young inherited upon Smith's death: a people that had been violently bandied across three states and who would soon trek into the Mexican wilderness under American duress. To reinforce God's omnipotence and to anchor the Saints' faith, Young regularly infused his speeches with cosmological themes: eternal matter, the existence of a devil and his hordes, eternal intelligence, and a plurality of gods. These gods were beings who had arrived at their deified stations through suffering. Young said: "But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds, and when men were not passing through the same ordeals that we are now passing through. That course has been from all eternity,

⁵ D&C 121:31-32; Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 344-5, 357; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 380.

and it is and will be to all eternity. You cannot comprehend this; but when you can, it will be to you a matter of great consolation” (7:333).

Brigham Young and the portion of Saints who believed him the successor of Joseph Smith followed Young out of the United States to settle near the Great Salt Lake in what was then Mexican Territory. However, leaving the United States did not mean that the Mormons left their problems. In addition to natural affliction—drought, cricket plagues, and freezing winters—the Great Salt Lake Saints remained apprehensive of attacks from Native Americans. But the most formidable threat to the Saints was the United States Federal Government. After the Mexican American war ended in 1848, the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo allotted the Mexican territory to the United States. Finding themselves in United States territory again, the Mormons resumed their imbroglio with the federal government. The tensions on both sides intensified until President Buchanan sent 2,500 troops to force the Mormons to comply with Federal regulations: once again the Mormons were on the brink of war. The situation became so bleak that Young considered moving the Saints to Alaska or Central America.⁶

Understanding the Mormons’ resilience is in part due to Young’s cosmology. Teachings about gods, planets, and eternal matter had a function, and that function was in part to console. By placing the Saints’ life—full of dashed hopes, sorrows, and fears—within a cosmic context, Young attempted to transform the Saints’ response to trial from one of bitterness to one of appreciation because suffering was necessary for exaltation.

⁶ Newell G. Bringham, *Brigham Young and the Expanding American Frontier* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986), 138.

Young's cosmology succeeded because it was shaded with eschatological overtones. Eschatology—the study of the end times—orients one's belief to the reality of life after death and the reality of heaven and the glory that awaited the Saints there: “The privileges and blessings of the Saints of the Most High God, are many. Yes! All there is in heaven, and on the earth—kingdoms, thrones, principalities, powers, heights, depths, things present, and things to come; with all you can see, hear, or think of, realize or contemplate; everything in heaven, earth, or hell, is for your glory, exaltation, and excellence,...and, in the proper time, all will become subservient unto you, but not until then” (1:114).

This is a “pie in the sky” mentality, but quixotic thinking Young's teachings are not, for they emphasized that the pie could only be enjoyed by those who had been tried. And the fact that there was a pie to be enjoyed enticed the Saints to improve every moment of their earthly lives rather than running out the mortal clock expecting a reward. Thus, the suffering in Missouri and Nauvoo, the trials of emigrating from Europe, newly baptized members forced to leave families, and walking across North America would all prepare the Saints for life in heaven. But despite their afflictions, Young opined that no sacrifice had been made by any Mormon: “I have not known or seen a single sacrifice that this people have made. There has not been one such providence of the Almighty to this people, that was not calculated to sanctify the pure in heart, and enrich them with blessings instead of curses—enrich them not only with earthly blessings, but with crowns of glory, immortality, and eternal lives in the presence of God” (1:314).

Lest Young's sermons seem callous or hypocritical, he reminded the church that he had experienced the thick of the persecution:

I have been in the heat of it, and I never felt better in all my life; I never felt the peace and power of the Almighty more copiously poured upon me than in the keenest part of our trials. They appeared nothing to me. I hear people talk about their troubles, their sore privations, and the great sacrifices they have made for the Gospel's sake. It never was a sacrifice to me. Anything I can do or suffer in the cause of the Gospel, is only like dropping a pin into the sea; the blessings, gifts, powers, honour, joy, truth, salvation, glory, immortality, and eternal lives, as far outswell anything I can do in return for such precious gifts, as the great ocean exceeds in expansion, bulk, and weight, the pin that I drop into it. (1:313)

Thus, the Saints need not doubt God's justice in their past or fear His abandonment in any future trial, for all suffering and persecution would prepare them for divine glory:

You recollect brother Taylor telling about a woman in Far West who had her house burnt down some four or five times; she finally said, "she would be damned if she would stand it any longer." If her eyes had been opened to see, she would have thanked the Lord for that, more than for anything else; that persecution was more precious to her than riches, because it was designed to teach her to understand the knowledge of God. Do I acknowledge the hand of the Lord in persecution? Yes, I do. It is one of the greatest blessings that could be conferred upon the people of God. I acknowledge the hand of the Lord in leveling His people to the dust of the earth, and reducing them to a state of abject poverty. Time and time again have I left handsome property to be inherited by our enemies. Suppose we were called to leave what we have now, should we call it a sacrifice? Shame on the man who would so call it; for it is the very means of adding to him knowledge, understanding, power, and glory, and prepares him to receive crowns, kingdoms, thrones, and principalities, and to be crowned in the glory with the Gods of eternity. (2:7)

Suffering and temptation also gave the Saints essential knowledge: the knowledge of good from evil: "You cannot give any person their exaltation, unless they know what evil is, what sin, sorrow, and misery are, for no person could comprehend, appreciate, and

enjoy an exaltation upon any other principle” (3:369). The gods arrived at their exalted station only after they learned to discern good from evil: “If we do this [endure suffering], when we have crossed the dark valley of the shadow of death it will be so easy to turn round and behold the path that we have walked, wherein we have had the privilege, the same as the Gods, of learning the difference between good and evil” (17:142). The Saints’ path through a world of misery has been well travelled by the gods who have gone before. Their downtrodden lives viewed within Young’s cosmological framework are not cosmic aberrations. In fact, the great council of gods are beings who have arrived at their stations by descending below all things: “All beings, to be crowned with crowns of glory and eternal lives, must in their infantile weakness begin, with regard to their trials, the day of their probation: they must descend below all things, in order to ascend above all things” (6:333; Psalms 82; D&C 121:32).⁷

Young even said that the doctrine of gods descending to various earths to learn through suffering was for the Saints’ consolation:

He is our Father—the Father of our spirits, and was once a man in mortal flesh as we are, and is now an exalted Being. How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds, and when men were not passing through the same ordeals that we are now passing through. That course has been from all eternity, and it is and will be to all eternity. You cannot comprehend this; but when you can, it will be to you a matter of great consolation. It appears ridiculous to the world, under their darkened and erroneous traditions, that God has once been a finite being; and yet we are not in such close communion with him as many have supposed. He has passed on, and is exalted far beyond what we can now comprehend. (7:333-4)

And the reward for the Saints who endure to the end?:

⁷ Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Anchor Books, 1991), 151.

We cannot, neither in this time nor in the spirit-world, possess the least particle of element or our own beings, and call them ours, until we pass the ordeals the Gods have passed, and are crowned with crowns of glory, immortality, and eternal lives. And when we pass through the spirit-world and hear the trump of Gabriel sound, and our bodies rise from the dust and again clothe our spirits, even then we are not our own. We have not passed through all the ordeals until the Father crowns a son and says, “You have passed so far in the progression of perfection that you can now become independent, and I will give you power to control and organize and govern and dictate the elements of eternities. There is a vast eternity stretched out before you; now organize as you will.” Not until then shall we possess one particle that is really our own, and yet we see people clinging to the earth. (8:341)

The idea of creating planets is one of Young’s most striking teachings. However, when placed within the context of suffering, another reason appears for this doctrine’s existence. The consolation provided by this extraordinary promise perhaps cannot be appreciated by twenty-first century culture. The Saints had not only been persecuted by their fellow human beings but had suffered the elements, made fertile the uncultivated desert soil, endured cricket infestation, and weathered Great Basin winters. Furthermore, disease haunted the Saints in a way that it does not modern society due to medicine. In the Saints’ nineteenth-century reality, where all things from the elements to the government warranted the Saints’ destruction, what greater consolation could exist than the knowledge that at some future time they would control the very elements and forces of nature that had afflicted them. Thus, preaching on planets and an eternal God who was once finite held fast the Saints’ faith that their God had not forsaken them and that they would overcome all affliction. But before they enjoy an exalted life, the Saints had to experience the struggle of overcoming:

The reason of our being made subject to sin and misery, pain, woe, and death, is, that we may become acquainted with the opposites of happiness

and pleasure. The absence of light brings darkness, and darkness an appreciation of light; pain an appreciation of ease and comfort; and ignorance, falsehood, folly, and sin, in comparison with wisdom, knowledge, righteousness, and truth, make the latter the more desirable to mankind. Facts are made apparent to the human mind by their opposites. We find ourselves surrounded in this mortality by an almost endless combination of opposites, through which we must pass to gain experience and information to fit us for an eternal progression. (11:42)

Rather than distancing God from evil, Young boldly held God responsible as the cause of the Saints' suffering. Nature, disease, and mob violence were tools that God employed to try the Saints: "God is our Father, Jesus Christ is our Elder Brother, and we are all brethren, and of one family, and our Heavenly Father is subjecting us to sin, misery, pain, and death for the exquisite enjoyment of an exaltation" (11:42). Because the Saints are beings with potential for eternal growth, evil and suffering become necessary: "If it is necessary for us to be tried in all things, then weep not, mourn not because we are tried, neither let us object to the Lord directing our course in that path wherein the trials necessary for our perfection lie....the Lord leads His people in this way expressly to give them trials which they have not passed through before, and which it is necessary they should have" (12:163).

Lest Young's God seem cruel, it should be remembered that He is a being who arrived at His eternal state only after experiencing mortality on an earth. Young reasoned: "He does not want to slay His children who love and serve him, He is not a hard master, nor a severe Father, but when He chastens, it is because He wishes to bring His children to understanding, that they may know *where* the true riches are, and *what* are the true riches of eternity, and rejoice with Him in His presence, being made equal with Him" (1:272).

Furthermore, God allows suffering so as to awake the Saints from their slumber of greediness to the reality of eternity: “They have forsaken their former homes, the countries in which they were born, their friends and family connexions, for the Gospel’s sake; they are here in the midst of these mountains, and many of them will be damned, unless they awake out of their sleep, unless they refrain from their evil ways. Many are stupid, careless, and unconcerned, their eyes are like the fool’s eye, to the ends of the earth, searching for this, that, and the other, they have become greedy, and slow to fulfill their duty” (3:115).

As was mentioned in chapter two, Jesus formed the foundation stone for Young’s faith; likewise, Jesus is the corner stone of consolation for the Saints. Following Jesus, as Smith learned in Liberty Jail, meant more than squaring one’s life to Jesus’ ethics, but included suffering with Him: the Saints were to descend below all things like Jesus:

It seems to be absolutely necessary in the providence of Him who created us, and who organized and fashioned all things according to his wisdom, that man must descend below all things. It is written of the Savior in the Bible that he descended below all things that he might ascend above all. Is it not so with every man? Certainly it is. It is fit then that we should descend below all things and come up gradually, and learn a little now, and again, receive “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little.” (15:3)

But one difference was that the Saints’ suffering was relative and did not have an atoning quality as did Jesus’:

For this express purpose the Father withdrew His spirit from His Son, at the time he was to be crucified. Jesus had been with his Father, talked with Him, dwelt in His bosom, and knew all about heaven, about making the earth...The light, knowledge, power, and glory with which he was clothed were far above, or exceeded that of all others who had been upon the earth...at the hour when the crisis came for him to offer up his life, the Father withdrew Himself....That is what made him sweat blood...he then

plead with the Father not to forsake him. ‘No,’ says the Father, ‘you must have your trials, as well as others.’ (3:206)

Although all the gods had experienced a mortality, Jesus was appointed heir of this world and became the means of salvation and the prototype for one who is saved:

According to the philosophy of our religion we understand that if he had not descended below all things, he could not have ascended above all things. As he was appointed to ascend above all things, his father and his God so brought it about by the handiwork of His providence, that he was actually accounted, in his birth and in his life, below all things. Did he descend below all things? His parents had not a house nor even a tent for him to be born in, but were obliged to go to a stable, doubtless because they were denied the privilege of a house. The Son of Man could not be born in a house, and the poor mother in her distress crawled into a manger, among the litter that had been left by the cattle. Others may have been born in as low a state as this, but it is hard to find anybody, among the civilized portions of mankind, that gets any lower. (3:365-6, see also 7:144).

Despite what the Saints may have suffered or would yet endure, Young reassured them that because of Jesus, all who wanted salvation would receive it because: “He suffered for every man upon the earth. This is the character of him whom we receive as our Savior” (19:48).

God has two other reasons for allowing the Saints to suffer: one, to prove the Saints’ devotion: “For He wishes to throw temptation and trial before His people, to prove them preparatory to their eternal exaltation; consequently, if the people have not an opportunity of proving themselves before they die, by the ruler of their faith and religion, they cannot expect to attain to so high a glory and exaltation as they could if they had been tried in all things” (4:90). Surprisingly, one’s degree of suffering correlated to one’s heavenly glory. Indeed, a reassuring thought for those Saints who had lost all in following Young out west.

And two, to justify the punishment of the wicked:

If your eyes were opened, you would see his hand in the midst of the nations of the earth in the setting up of governments and in the downfall of kingdoms—in the revolutions, wars, famine, distress, and wretchedness among the inhabitants of the earth....The wonderful developments of his providence are oft-times mysterious to us...He makes the wrath of man to praise him, and that which he cannot bring about to promote his kingdom and his purposes he restrains. The wicked he permits to go far enough to produce a result that will serve his purpose....And when he [Jesus] has subdued all his enemies, destroyed death and him that hath the power of death, and perfected his work, he will deliver up the kingdom spotless to his Father. You may preach upon that text. It is a source of great consolation to me, for it will be fully accomplished, and all that transpires will be overruled to redound to the glory of God. (7:144-5)

Yet, Young allows the wicked, as long as they are innocent of the unpardonable sin, a place in God's kingdom:

Jesus will bring forth, by his own redemption, every son and daughter of Adam, except the sons of perdition, who will be cast into hell. Others will suffer the wrath of God—will suffer all the Lord can demand at their hands, or justice can require of them; and when they have suffered the wrath of God till the utmost farthing is paid, they will be brought out of prison. Is this dangerous doctrine to preach? Some consider it dangerous; but it is true that every person who does not sin away the day of grace, and become an angel to the Devil, will be brought forth to inherit a kingdom of glory. (8:154)

This bold doctrine implies that Mormon antagonists Boggs, Van Buren, and Buchanan, and countless mobs would be saved in heaven.⁸ Young's resilient faith even cast persecution as a means of expediting God's work: "Every time you kick 'Mormonism,' you kick it up stairs: you never kick it down stairs. The Lord Almighty so orders it. And

⁸ Governor Lilburn Boggs issued an extermination order against the Missouri Mormons, Martin Van Buren was President of the United States who would not offer the Saints redress from their losses during the Missouri persecutions, and James Buchanan was President of the United States who sent Johnson's army to force the Great Salt Lake Saints to comply with federal regulations.

let me tell you that what our Christian friends are now doing for us makes more for the kingdom of heaven than the Elders could in many years preaching” (7:145).

All suffering is necessary, and Young declares that not a moment of affliction is wasted in life; for the salvation or exaltation that Young proposes is salvation through physical trial—not from it: “Every vicissitude we pass through is necessary for experience and example, and for preparation to enjoy that reward which is for the faithful.... We only understand in part why we are required to pass through those various incidents of life. There is not a single condition of life that is entirely unnecessary; there is not one hour’s experience but what is beneficial to all those who make it their study, and aim to improve upon the experience they gain” (9:292). Thus, the Saints, especially those who had been persecuted in Missouri and Nauvoo, were reassured that their suffering was not in vain.

The Saints could not fully comprehend God’s kingdom because the beings who dwell there have undergone a change—by resurrection—into a new state. Much like a caterpillar fails to comprehend flight before it transforms, Young’s cosmology promised the Saints a heavenly life as foreign to mortality as a flying butterfly is to its slow-moving predecessor:

Because the curtain is shut down before us, and the vision of our minds is closed up for a trial for us, for us to prove ourselves, and to show whether, while passing through darkness and affliction, in ignorance and with clouds of unbelief over us, after being made acquainted with the things of God, we will persevere and be firm to our faith, and so prove ourselves worthy to receive a glorious resurrection, a change to a more exalted state of being than we can possess and enjoy here on this earth. We are made expressly to dwell with those who continue to learn, and who receive knowledge on knowledge, wisdom on wisdom; we belong to the family of heaven. (17:141)

One final way Young's cosmology acts as a theodicy is through its mythical overtone. One of the ways in which the Mormons could gain consolation through their cosmology was through the Adam-Eve-God myth.⁹ If, as Young believed, Adam and Eve were resurrected beings who had overcome death through faith on a Savior and were empowered to create worlds, then Mormons could have a sure knowledge through the myth that their mortal tribulations would pass. For example, Young cast Adam and Eve's story in a mythic light for the women who had not been able to raise children:

Let me here say a word to console the feelings and hearts of all who belong to this Church. Many of the sisters grieve because they are not blessed with offspring. You will see the time when you will have millions of children around you. If you are faithful to your covenants, you will be mothers of nations. You will become Eves to earths like this; and when you have assisted in peopling one earth, there are millions of earths still in the course of creation. And when they have endured a thousand million times longer than this earth, it is only as it were the beginning of your creations. Be faithful, and if you are not blest with children in this time, you will be hereafter. (8:208)

Scholar Mircea Eliade has noted that myths alleviated suffering because one's sufferings were first experienced by a "prototype." For example: "In the Mediterranean-Mesopotamian area, man's sufferings were early connected with those of a god. To do so was to endow them with an archetype that gave them both [a new] reality and normality." Thus, when the ancients suffered, they could find consolation that a God had suffered with them. Like Young, Eliade observed: "This consoling myth of the god's sufferings" alleviated the fear of death. Their new "reality," then, was cyclical instead of terminal: "For this mythical drama reminded men that suffering is never final; that death is always

⁹ Not everyone found "mythical consolation" with Young's teachings on Adam. Apostle Orson Pratt was Young's most outspoken critic against these views. See Gary James Bergera, *Conflict in the Quorum: Orson Pratt, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).

followed by resurrection; that every defeat is annulled and transcended by the final victory.”¹⁰

Whether it was the knowledge of God the Father experiencing mortality, the mythic-historical Adam and Eve resurrecting to create worlds, or Jesus’ atoning and redeeming suffering, the Saints knew that when they wept, God was weeping with them (Moses 7).

Classifying Young’s cosmology as a theodicy helps to explain its remarkable character. Fundamental to his teachings are the Second Great Awakening principles of an individualized search for truth and a tendency to blend heaven and earth. But his teachings swell to such extremes because they attempt to justify God’s allowance of Mormon persecution and suffering. Man is of the race of the gods and as such has the potential to advance and ultimately participate in the divine life of creation and cosmic growth. Such an extreme promise consoled the benighted Saints. Suffering, the necessary school-master, prepared the Saints for their apotheosis because exaltation could only be comprehended if one had descended below all things.

This chapter has shown that one function of Young’s cosmology was to console the Saints and to justify God’s existence. The Mormon cosmological theodicy was partly triggered by Joseph Smith’s suffering and was augmented by Young to suit the needs of his persecuted followers. This chapter, as well as this thesis, argues that the Mormon cosmology is inextricably tied to every-day life. Young expounded on gods and multiple worlds to give the Saints, who suffered more often than not, consolation and perspective.

¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 96, 100, 101.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Catholic theologian Stephen H. Webb argues that religion is naturally hyperbolic or excessive: “Is it not the role of religion, as well as art, to speak in excess, to break the bondage of everyday caution, to be hyperbolic?” He poses this question fearing that Western religion is currently perceived as an enervated force that has been short-changed of its power to enlarge “visions.” Webb challenges this perception by arguing that hyperbole is “essential” in religion. He asks: “Can we today learn again to imagine more than we know, say more than we dare to believe, act more boldly than we know is wise and rational, see more than realism displays, hope more broadly than the facts would allow? Can we again find the connection between religion and hyperbole—a hyperbolic imagination?” Brigham Young’s cosmology embodies the kind of religion that Webb describes.¹

A more pragmatic leader than Brigham Young the LDS Church has yet to have. Such a commendation is granted because Young led and helped the church to flourish in spite of incredible opposition. But as this thesis has shown, Young succeeded in his practical endeavors partly because, in Webb’s parlance, his hyperbolic claims about the future of men and women, the purpose of the creation, and the society of heaven redirected the church’s focus from the here and now to the here in eternity.

Webb also noted that reducing religion, in his case Christianity, to a system of ethics jeopardizes its ability to effectuate, for instance, the power of love expressed in the

¹ Stephen H. Webb, *Blessed Excess: Religion and the Hyperbolic Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), xii, xiii, xvii.

New Testament. Young's cosmology kept the Mormon religion from being reduced to such a system because it gave a cosmic context to morality and infused the eternal, ineffable world into day-to-day life. And for Young, holding to this cosmic vision was paramount for his faith. Mormon scholar and apologist Hugh Nibley, commenting in a Socratic manner on the cosmological speculation of the early LDS Church leaders, concluded that a "hyperbolic imagination" is akin to salvation: "Q[uestion]. But weren't Brothers Joseph [Smith], Brigham [Young], [John] Taylor, [Wilford] Woodruff, [Lorenzo] Snow, and so on, looking beyond the mark? Aren't such things out of range of our feeble vision and even more beyond our capacity, best left for the present out of sight and out of mind? Shouldn't we keep within the safe and familiar boundaries of the world as we know it, the real world? A[nswer]. That, dear brethren, is the condition known as being damned. Do you want to settle for that?" Nibley's comment captures the flavor of excess that characterized early Mormon cosmology and that Webb posits as an essential "role" in religion.²

Twenty-first century responses to Young's hyperbolic cosmology fall on a continuum ending in lampoon or a consignment to folklore. Both of these extreme conclusions meet in an interview conducted with Richard Bushman by CNN highlighting "The Book of Mormon" musical. The Tony Award winning musical lampoons part of this cosmology with the lyrics: "I believe that God has a plan for all of us. / I believe that plan involves me getting my own planet." Responding to this statement's place in Mormon theology, Bushman commented:

² Webb, xiii, 148-9; Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, ed. Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 285.

Take the issue of getting your own planet, for example. Elder Price talks about a planet for himself and one for Jesus. Those are not really core Mormon beliefs. Mormon scriptures and Church leaders don't say anything about people getting their own planets. The idea is more like lore than doctrine. Mormons do believe in the principle of theosis, the doctrine that God wants humans to become like himself—in effect gods. That belief leads Mormons to speculate about creation. Will beings with god-like qualities have the powers to form earths? Perhaps, who knows? There is no fixed doctrine on the subject. Mormons themselves joke about the planet business. But they do take seriously that we may grow up to be like Our Father in Heaven.³

It is doubtful that this “planet business” is given serious thought by rank-and-file members. In fact, Bushman notes the musical “is not meant to explain Mormon beliefs.” Nevertheless, the musical affixes a belittling tone to the Mormon cosmology.⁴

Bushman correctly gauged the twenty-first century Mormon responses to Young's cosmology; however, relegating Young's teachings to folklore overlooks their key function that this thesis has articulated. (Granted, Bushman's answer, which was given in an interview, required pith). Both responses—lampoon and folklore—fail to explain why Young's hyperbolic thinking flourished in the nineteenth-century church. Thus, this thesis stands apart from existing Brigham Young scholarship in that it offers an explanation for some of Young's most challenging teachings without reducing them to a caricature or dismissing them as quaint reasoning from unenlightened desert folk.

Regarding early Mormon doctrine and early Mormon history in general, this study has drawn two conclusions: one, the doctrine is complicated and requires acumen to understand how it fits together as well as to appreciate its impact as an operative that

³ Jay Kernis, *In the Arena* (blog), June 27, 2011, <http://inthearena.blogs.cnn.com/2011/06/27/richard-bushman-the-book-of-mormon-is-like-looking-into-a-fun-house-mirror-the-reflection-is-hilarious-but-not-really-you/>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

responds to and critiques social forces. And perhaps, for this reason, the lampooning and folklore responses can be forgiven; these responses belie the facts because the facts are complicated and not readily understood.

Two, the already-furrowed field of early Mormon studies remains capable of yielding a crop—in this case a new look at an abstruse topic; however, work still needs to be done in order to more fully comprehend the Mormon cosmology. Such directions for further study include, but are not limited to, the following questions. How did the Saints respond to Young's teachings? Did responses differ according to geography: would a Saint in a Mormon outpost receive Young's teachings the way a Saint in Salt Lake would? How did gender affect the reception? Furthermore, what conclusions can be drawn from the Mormon cosmology when its origins with Joseph Smith, its systematization by Brigham Young and Apostles Orson and Parley Pratt, its reception and perception by Mormons and non-Mormons, and its place in current LDS theology and culture are understood?

Only the general social, political, economic, and religious factors affecting Young have been discussed here. A more comprehensive study would also include, for example, the influence of European hermeticism on cosmology. Works such as Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, John Brooke's *The Refiner's Fire*, and Catherine Albanese's *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* have examined the functions of magic and European hermeticism as well as how they affected American religious culture and the emergence of Mormonism. Brooke's work in particular was novel for arguing causal links between hermeticism and Mormonism. His conclusions were rigorously

critiqued, but one of his critics, Richard Bushman, despite his negative assessment of Brooke's work noted that: "[Brooke's arguments] leave in question whether or not hermeticism influenced Mormon theology (a question that, despite my negative comments, I believe deserves further consideration)." This thesis has also shown the potential for further study of the Mormon cosmology.⁵

Finally, I conclude that not only is this cosmology for Mormonism, but it is a cosmology for America. (Note that the object of the preposition "for" is America and not Americans). America has been identified as an experiment in government which asks in part: are people capable of self-government? This experiment continues to the present day.

Throughout its history, the American experiment has employed a number of theories—economic, political, social, racial, gendered, and religious—to articulate the nature of the United States and those who participate therein. Thus, the experiment is composed of disparate ideologies, cultures, and peoples that test the purpose and function of America. All peoples, then, despite their backgrounds are affected by the experiment, even though one group does not embrace the ideologies of another group. For example, as a white, male, middle-class, Christian American, I am affected and influenced by such events as the Civil Rights movement, the experience of the Japanese in World War II internment camps, and the Women's revolution even though I am not Black, Japanese, or a woman. These experiences affect me because they inform my understanding of what America is.

⁵ Richard L. Bushman, "The Mysteries of Mormonism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 504.

Mormons comprise a minority religion in the United States but they are as much a part of the American experiment as the Puritans, Methodists, Baptists, or any religious group that rose to prominence in the Second Great Awakening. One of Mormonism's contributions to the experiment was its cosmology. Here, as articulated by Brigham Young, was a teaching simultaneously compatible with and unparalleled in its culture. The great empires and civilizations of history have had cosmologies—teachings that position one within a cosmic context. The modern inheritors of these cultures do not necessarily hold to these cosmologies as literal articulations of reality but nevertheless hold them as part of their cultural inheritance. Likewise, I argue, Young's cosmology should be viewed as a piece of religious Americana and not primarily as folklore or an object of ridicule.

My thesis has aspired to two things: to give shape and meaning to striking Mormon doctrines and to provide a method that is applicable to any religion for uncovering the function of doctrine: whether it is as striking as creating planets or as well-known as baptism. The method, again, is to one, examine the cultural forces that influenced the doctrine's creation; two, to find a structure of the doctrine as well as to see the connections between the teaching and its culture of origin, and finally to understand the function of that teaching among its people within its historical context. Chapter two succeeded in showing that Brigham Young was immersed in his nineteenth-century culture and was shaped by its political, economic, and social forces. Chapter three explained that this culture provided a framework on which Young could build his cosmology, showing that even his most abstruse ideas were informed by his culture.

Chapter four strove to explain the function of these ideas: not as quixotic speculation but as a thought out theodicy.

Thus, Young's hyperbolic thinking exemplifies one response of a religion to suffering and evil. To retain faith in God when the world falls apart, Brigham Young's Mormonism expanded the scope of his world to allow for a God who permits suffering as well as natural and premeditated evil. The desert prophet deserves the last word:

If people would contemplate the stupendous works of God, and be honest and candid in their investigations, there is much to be learned that would show them how comparatively worthless are earthly things. We see the spangled vault of the starry heavens stretched over us; but little is known of the wonders of the firmament. Astronomers have, by their researches, discovered some general facts that have proved useful and instructing to the scientific portion of mankind. The phenomena of the motions of the heavenly bodies, and their times and seasons are understood pretty accurately. But who knows what those distant planets are? Who can tell the part they play in the grand theatre of worlds? Who inhabits them, and who rules over them? Do they contain intelligent beings, who are capable of the happiness, light, glory, power, and enjoyments that would satisfy the mind of an angel of God?...Let every intelligent person seriously contemplate this subject, and let the true light of reason illuminate the understanding, and a sound judgment inspired by the Spirit of Christ be your guide, and what will be your conclusions? They will be what mine are—that the Lord Almighty reigns there. (2:122)

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