The Catholic Experience in Utah

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Recommended Citation
THE CATHOLIC EXPERIENCE IN UTAH

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DEPARTMENTAL HONORS in Religious Studies in the Department of History

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Summer 2009
The Merrill-Cazier Library at Utah State University has in its collection an infamous book that is talked about by both Mormons and non-Mormons alike: the first edition of Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine*.¹ Shocking and controversial when it first appeared in print for its characterization of the Catholic Church, among other controversial assessments, I had heard about it myself growing up as a member of the L.D.S. Church in various tales of Mormon folklore. McConkie’s penchant for brusque, un-apologetic apologetics and bold declarations of the truth of the Mormon faith was legendary.

One day, as I perused the book in the Library, I noticed several notes scribbled in pencil throughout the book. The first such scribbling reads “*[Mormon Doctrine] IS F__ KED Anti-Christian Bulls__t.*”² He continues his assessment of McConkie’s work by writing:

This book is total bulls__t made up by emotional fools! If you mormons had enough guts to examine your religion with facts and objectivity - not emotion, you would find that it was totally created by men. It is a marriage of Christianity and freemasonry, wed by utter irrationality.³

What follows on a dozen subsequent pages is a critical and hostile interpretation of Mormon theology and culture as the unknown Roman Catholic reacts to the content of Bruce McConkie’s assessment of his faith.⁴ On the other hand, McConkie writes that Roman Catholic beliefs are “senseless, unintelligent, and incomprehensible.”⁵ He states, with a thinly veiled attack on those who believe in such things, “Enlightened persons can judge for themselves…”⁶ In response to this, our unknown writer scribbles, “The catholic church does not attack others - does not defend its validity through aggression, Mormonism does, so does the devil!”

¹ McConkie, Bruce R. 1958. *Mormon doctrine*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft. McConkie’s controversial comments were not limited to Catholicism, but only this topic will be treated in this paper.
² McConkie 3. Capitalization retained, expletives censored on all transcriptions of the notes.
³ McConkie 7
⁴ For the sake of this paper, I will assume that this commentator is a young, male USU student that is a faithful and zealous Roman Catholic. This impromptu analysis owes to the look of his handwriting and the nature of his comments, but is not by any means the only possible profile.
⁵ McConkie 55 (with pencil commentary)
⁶ McConkie 55 (with pencil commentary)
Later, the commentator responds directly to McConkie's infamous attack on the Catholic Church. In the entry for "Church of the Devil," McConkie announces that the Catholic Church was founded by the devil and that its historic place as a "satanic organization" has lead to countless murders, persecution of faithful Christians, and sexual immorality. This is in juxtaposition to the pencil commentator. Citing ancient prophecy concerning the tumultuous end times, or "Last Days", when the Church of the Devil will disintegrate McConkie predicts that the "entanglements between the Catholic Church and [other] forces could well lead to a fulfillment of this prophecy." As a counterpoint, the scribbling reads "In the last days The church of the devil will have control. If the present time period is the last days and the catholic church is shrinking and LDS growing then Mormon is the Anti-Christ!" Again, the opposing point of view is branded with Satan and placed in striking opposition to the logic and holiness of the other.

Although subsequent editions were redacted, McConkie's rise to the L.D.S. Church's Apostleship ensured that the first edition of *Mormon Doctrine* would not be forgotten by Catholics and Mormons alike. What does this book and the pencil comments tell us about Catholics in Utah? Surely we see that at least one Utah Catholic feels threatened by the L.D.S. Church and its doctrines, but is this a general tension felt by all Catholics? In 1993 in an audience in Denver, CO, Pope John II greeted Utah Bishop Weigand as "Our Mormon Bishop". This response is typical of John Paul II as he continually sought to build bridges with other faith groups across the world and keep the reformative spirit of the Second Vatican Council alive.

This is the Supreme Pontiff who, under much criticism from his fellow Catholics, would

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7 McConkie 130 (with pencil commentary)
8 The second edition of Mormon Doctrine changed many passages to reflect a more positive and less pejorative attitude about the nature of Roman Catholicism with respect to Mormonism.
10 The Second Vatican Council, the latest in a long line of Christian ecumenical councils over the last two millennia, was a series of meetings in Vatican City where worldwide Roman Catholic officials met from 1962-65. The result was 16 documents, 3 of which dealt exclusively with Catholic interaction and attitudes toward those of other churches.
participate in religious rituals of other faiths and be as religiously inclusive as possible. Catholic Priest William Taylor offers an alternate glimpse of what life is like for non-Mormons in the Intermountain West, which coincides more with our anonymous scribbling friend. He says:

If he is a non-believer [non-Monnon], he struggles with a sense of persecution, with an uneasy awareness of the church as an economic monster, a subtle, dominating presence throughout the political and intellectual life of the community. There is little neutrality about the subject of Mormonism. Salt Lake City looms over the Intermountain West the way Vatican City looms over Italy. Which of these paradigms is more correct for Utah Catholics? On the one hand, we see a Catholic leader characterizing the leader of the Church in Utah as a "Mormon Bishop". This suggests a pervasive but optimistic influence of Mormonism; a relationship that is agreeable and pleasant. On the other hand, we see a priest on the ground who describes uneasiness, persecution, and domination. So just how important is Mormonism's presence in Utah for Catholics? Are Catholics "allowed to be Catholics?" Could our Catholic student's rancor be indicative of more than just McConkie's less than glowing review of his brand of Christianity? Ultimately, what is it like to be a Catholic in Utah?

These questions will be answered by two approaches. First, I will look at how Utah Catholics function in relation to the larger Catholic worldview. This will show if Mormonism has some unique hold on Utah's Roman Catholics. Second, I will analyze a number of apologetic and comparative works by Utah Mormons and Utah Catholics to see if the same tone, arguments,

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11 One extreme example of this includes the monks of the Most Holy Family Monastery in Fillmore, NY who are dedicated to "exposing the false post-Vatican II Counter Church." They publish countless articles, books, and tapes that show how contemporary Popes are ruining the Church. See <http://www.mostholyfamilymonastery.com>.
12 Taylor 11
13 Though technically not in Utah, Taylor describes a nearly identical cultural setting in nearby southern Idaho. Van der Donckt, another Catholic Priest and commentator on Mormonism, corresponded and interacted with Mormons in the same town of Pocatello, ID and engaged noted Mormon apologist B.H. Roberts in debates.
and issues are present in them as they are in McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine* and the impromptu pencil dialogue found within its pages.

These Mormons, or members of Salt Lake-based *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, now have and historically have had religious, social, political, and social dominance since the first Mormons entered Utah territory in 1847. We will see that the Mormon majority does not completely monopolize the time and attention of Catholics. The problem, if it can even be characterized as a problem, is a regional one for the Roman Catholic Church.
PART I: THE CATHOLIC EXPERIENCE IN UTAH

In his book *The Catholic Experience*, Notre Dame theologian Lawrence Cunningham identifies several aspects of religious life that pertain especially to Roman Catholics that will be used as headings in this section. Cunningham's framework is admittedly from an insider perspective, but that is precisely what will be useful in this context. He bases his dimensions from classic religious theorists (such as Mircea Eliade and Emile Durkheim) and many important Catholic commentators and theologians. This will be used to place the Utah Church into the Catholic whole. This framework does not seek to replace history; in fact it is fundamentally tied to the historical analysis. What it does do is place Utah Catholicism into the larger whole that highlights more than just facts about the past, but how the past effects the current moment of Catholic history in Utah.

*Experience* to Cunningham is a multi-faceted arrangement filled with history, theology, sociology, anthropology, and literature. Adding to the complexity is the fact that these dimensions are not static, but work in the dynamics of time and space. Easing the complexity of the analysis are two simple facts; the Church in Utah is a relatively new development and Utah Catholics share much in common with their brothers and sisters in the rest of the United States and in the world. These facets of being Catholic show "the various ways in which people have lived out their callings as Christians in various ages of the church’s life." As such, two of these facets (story and persons) deserve more attention in the context of Utah, because they give Utah Catholicism its distinctness and flavor.

With any broad and theoretical look, flaws become immediately present. It is impossible to capture *every* nuance and every specific case that could possibly arise in such a large diverse

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15 Cunningham
organization. With few exceptions, this "Catholic Experience" pertains to the institutional Roman Catholic Church in Utah. This paper analyzes mostly Catholics who are "faithful" in terms of Church attendance and personal self-recognition as being part of the Utah Roman Catholic community with a few deeper looks into alternative forms of Roman Catholic practice.

The place of time and space will be examined separately, but they will ultimately answer two basic questions of Catholicism proposed by Cunningham. If they are like other Catholics, Utah Catholics live their religion by an "insertion into a long tradition extending into time and space". Second, they must use institutional Roman Catholicism to make "present of Jesus the Christ in time and space". Many things, like Benedict XVI's book *Jesus of Nazareth*, help draw Catholics into these questions, but how these aspects are alive in Utah will be analyzed.

**SPACE**

In attempting to isolate a large and complex body of religious adherents into a geographical construct, space becomes an important practical and theoretical matter. By "insertion into a long tradition," Utah Catholics are able to overcome the social, religious, and political monopoly that Mormons have over them in Utah. This is important in a place such as Utah where many may have the same feelings as the author of *Mormon Doctrine*.

After Joseph Smith's death in 1844, Brigham Young became the leader of most of Smith's followers and moved the Church to modern-day Utah, then a part of Mexico territory. This laid the foundation for the specific geographic challenges faced by the various bureaucratic...
administrations that lead and ministered to Catholics, which eventually culminated into the Diocese of Salt Lake that now comprises the exact confines of Utah.20

Cunningham observes that the “American Catholic experience of sacred space was largely confined to the experience of the church building itself.” 21 He says that “Erecting beautiful buildings had an almost sacramental meaning”22 just like the Mormon neighbors who had been erecting fine temples at great expense and personal sacrifice for years before arriving in Utah. Though never as well-publicized as the nearby, world-famous L.D.S. Temple, The Cathedral of the Madeleine, like St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, is “an organizing metaphor of its complex historical reality.”23 Many are shocked at the massive and beautiful Catholic cathedral in the heart of Mormon country.

Height in Gothic architecture “had a theological as well as a functional knowledge” to “glimpse the world beyond”24. While sitting in the parish offices one Friday afternoon waiting for an appointment with the presiding priest, I observed two men who almost stumbled over themselves looking up at the spires as their eyes were drawn heavenward. Yet, the Utah church experienced a shift in architecture like most other dioceses in the United States after the Second Vatican Council. The modern, but equally impressive St. James the Just Parish on the outskirts of the city boasts a completely different type of architecture.

TIME

In another response to being called “The Church of the Devil”, our Utah Catholic friend writes in defense by saying:

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21 Cunningham 28
22 Cunningham 31
23 Cunningham 10
24 Cunningham 14-15
The Catholic Church, as stated by Peter, Paul, etc. grew through the ages to the present. Christ gave Peter the authority. The rock upon which the church was built + the devil will not prevail against it! Christ would not abandon his church!²⁵

Sacred time is important in understanding how a religion operates through history and how this affects the perceptions of believers, especially in terms of growth and “destiny”. The commentator connects his Catholic experience with the events of early Christian history. Locally, the physical Catholic presence in Utah began in the year 1776 when two priests from New Spain, Fathers Dominguez and Escalante, lead an expedition in search of a quick route to Monterey, CA. In this way it predates not only the Mormons, but the United States itself.²⁶ Any threat from Mormon doctrine and culture can always be seen through the lens of this temporal (and spatial) superiority.

In another aspect of time, Cunningham states that the Catholic experience results in “shifting back and forth from mundane to contemplative time”²⁷ Modern Catholicism may have lost a lot of this flavor for the individual adherent, but some Utah Catholics spend their lives trying to be continually caught up in this transcendental time. Two abbeys, one in Murray and one in Huntsville, are home to monks and nuns who spend their days in prayer. Mormons have no religious specialists quite like monks and nuns whose life’s pursuit is to contemplate and to pray. In addition to its many changes, the Vatican II Council marked a “shift from where to when.”²⁸ Sacred space gave way to sacred time. This is evident all around Utah where, although there are daily masses, the vast majority of Catholics attend on Sunday. Mormons and Catholics share the Sabbath as their primary day of worship.

²⁵ McConkie 129 (with pencil commentary). “Plus” symbol retained.
²⁷ Cunningham 41
²⁸ ibid.
Cunningham describes the most common experience of sacred time for Catholics originates in going to a weekly church meeting, receiving the sacraments in proper time (discussed below), and participation in “quasi-liturgical” acts of devotion such as personal prayer.\textsuperscript{29} This was severely curtailed in the early days of Utah Territory\textsuperscript{30}. Yet for the unknown adherent of modern Roman Catholicism that scribbled in the book, with few exceptions, has access to all the sacraments of the Church even in the midst of real and imaginary Mormon persecution.

**SACRAMENTS**

Through the seven Roman Catholic sacraments “Christ is still proclaiming his Gospel.”\textsuperscript{31} Roman Catholic sacraments are one of the primary ways that Catholics connect with their tradition through time and space. Cunningham states that the sacraments ultimately do not describe “a set of doctrines, but the reality of a person”\textsuperscript{32}, namely the historical Jesus. The constant reminder of this historical and conceptual link to Jesus is the sacrament of the Eucharist, or the Mass. In many areas of Utah, the Mass is offered daily.

Since the Vatican II conference, parishes have required permission to celebrate the Tridentine Mass, or the mass in the traditional Latin.\textsuperscript{33} This practice has drawn praise and criticism from Catholics who view it either as a step backwards or a positive option that promotes tradition. Fr. Leander Dosch of the Abbey of the Holy Trinity has privately celebrated Mass in Latin for years, but in July 2007, the new Pope decreed that priests could celebrate Latin

\textsuperscript{29} Cunningham 53
\textsuperscript{30} Utah’s first Roman Catholic Bishop Lawrence Scanlan traveled to all areas of the state to visit miners, railroad workers, and the other migrant workers that made up the bulk of the Catholic population in the 19th century. Most Catholics were only able to receive the sacraments a few times a year, if at all. Scanlan’s travels are well documented by Mooney, Scanlan, and the current archivist of the Salt Lake Diocese, Gary Topping.
\textsuperscript{31} Cunningham 39
\textsuperscript{32} Cunningham 5
\textsuperscript{33} After Vatican II, Cunningham reports that some stalwart Catholics were heard to say "when they dropped Latin, I dropped them". See pages 32-33.
mass if a group desired it without the permission of the Bishop. Since that time, priests at the Abbey have been conducting Latin Mass on Sunday mornings and advertising it in surrounding parishes. Fr. Dosch states:

There are people who want greater reverence at Mass, especially when they have experienced some of the irreverent ways in which the [English] Mass is celebrated. They prefer the more frequent reverential gestures of the priest. They may also prefer the older form simply because they see it as a continuation of Tradition.34

As Father Leander describes, the presence of this traditional Catholic sacrament in Utah demonstrates the Utah Catholic’s ability to connect with the long tradition of the Church. It also shows the presence of choices available to Utah Catholics in how they may approach their religion and make it personally meaningful, even in Mormon-dominated Utah.

STORY

Mooney and Fitzgerald's *Salt of the Earth*, in its third edition, is the centerpiece of written works about the historical Utah Catholic experience. The work represents the culmination of a century of increasingly more sophisticated and systematic efforts in archival research. This and other work done on Utah Catholics has been done by Catholics themselves and fails to take into account some notable and controversial figures such as Ammon Hennacy and Isaiah Bennett.35 Additionally, they tend to overlook some relevant information about some priestly activity with regard to the Mormon Church, specifically from Fr. Stoffel, Fr. Richtsteig, and Fr. Leander.

34 Personal correspondence. 28 March 2009.
35 Hennacy was a Catholic convert who ran a homeless shelter for several decades near downtown Salt Lake. He was an active anarchist demonstrator, frequently corresponded with other notable Catholic anarchists like Dorothy Day and wrote for national Catholic anarchist periodicals. Bennett was a Roman Catholic priest who converted to Mormonism, moved to Utah, and then left the Church. He rejoined the Catholic Church and began writing informational books about Mormon doctrines and practices for Catholics.
Dosch, who have expressed thoughts and feelings similar to the *Mormon Doctrine* commentator through writing and television appearances.\textsuperscript{36}

Despite these omissions, Catholic commentators have a distinct story to tell that, while serving to insert itself into the universal whole, serves as a rallying point for Utah Catholics. On the 200\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the arrival of Dominguez and Escalante in Utah, the Salt Lake Diocese rented Utah's Salt Palace and had a major celebration that included representatives from the whole state.\textsuperscript{37} This festivity also demonstrated the important aspect of space showing the "increasingly common practice celebrating important rites of the church outside the confines of the church building itself," as Cunningham states.\textsuperscript{38}

The ongoing Clergy sex abuse scandal throughout the United States has been a defining characteristic of Roman Catholicism in the last decade that has dramatically altered the Catholic story. Fortunately for Utah Catholics, the Diocese has been largely unaffected by the storm having only two known cases of a sexual misconduct by active priests.\textsuperscript{39} The Diocese website contains a prominent warning on its front page and a series of pamphlets containing the same information as the website which are available in parishes throughout Utah. Fr. Dosch of Holy Trinity Abbey has published a booklet available at the Abbey's bookstore that claims that the modern crises faced by Catholics is due to homosexuality rather than pedophilia, as most news media and pundits characterize it.

**CATHOLICITY**

\textsuperscript{36} These three priests have written or presented specifically on Mormonism. Richtsteig has appeared on national Catholic programs recalling his conversion to Catholicism from a Mormon background.

\textsuperscript{37} Mooney 9-10

\textsuperscript{38} Cunningham 20

\textsuperscript{39} Priest Mario Arbelaez Olarte had an internet online sex chat with a police officer posing as a 15-year-old boy, but fled the country before sentencing (2003). Priest James F. Rapp was accused of repeated offenses but the case was thrown out due to the statute of limitations (2007). Many dioceses across the nation have had so many cases of this kind that is has caused membership decreases and has forced the payout of millions in lawsuits.
“Catholic” means “universal”. Roman Catholics see themselves as the legitimate, worldwide tradition of Christianity. This universality is evident in the relationship of cross-cultural religious experience that Catholics face in Utah. Instead of a disjuncture existing between the stories of Spanish colonialism and its inherent spread of Catholicism, the Anglo-Catholics of Utah see the Dominguez-Escalante expedition as part of their story. Roman Catholic numbers have grown recently to include 7-9% of Utah’s population, thanks in large part to Hispanic immigration.40

St. Juan Diego Parish and High School in Sandy honors a recently canonized Mexican saint and a story that vastly affects the lives of Mexican Catholic communities around the nation. In colonial Mexico, “Juan Diego” reported several visitations from Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus Christ. This apparition became known as the Virgin of Guadalupe and she became the symbol for Mexico and, according to Pope John Paul II, the patroness of all the Americas. Yet, despite the catholicity and inclusion of elements of Mexican Roman Catholicism within Utah, there does not seem to be a complete universal spirit within Utah. Some priests note that, due to language and cultural concerns, Anglos and Hispanics attend different meetings and normally do not socialize together.41

Catholic clergy in Utah also deal with the problem of “folk religion.” Latin Americans bring their local and distinctly “unofficial” Catholic practices that may disrupt the homogeneity of Catholic practice. Though this is not preferred, one Catholic priest notes that this tendency is often overlooked in English-speaking Catholics who may practice other folk beliefs such as

40 See the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) online at http://www.thearda.com/mapsReports/reports/state/49_2000.asp for detailed analysis of the numbers of various religious adherents in Utah. Their breakdown reports the numbers of Catholics at 97,085, and increase of 64% over the last 20 years. Other reports indicate that the relative population of Mormons is shrinking (see Salt Lake Tribune July 24, 2005, “The Shrinking Majority”).
41 Personal interviews with Father Rick Sherman (21 July 2008) and Father Erik Richtsteig (20 August 2008).
burying a St. Jude statue.\textsuperscript{42} One universal symbol of Roman Catholicism that manifests itself in Utah is that of the Virgin Mary. Sally Cuneen remarks that Mary is able “to make women and men, despite conflicting religious needs and opinions, feel they are part of a community.”\textsuperscript{43} In this spirit, Utah has joined the vast throngs of communities that boast an apparition of the Virgin Mary, in this case, in a tree just outside of downtown Salt Lake. Many “official” Catholics, however, have not even heard of it, let alone visited the site for religious observance.

One significant and overlooked aspect of the history of Catholics in Utah is Hispanic Catholic ties to the Mexican Cristero Rebellion (1927-9). This rebellion was caused by Mexican government intervention in the Mexican church and resulted in religious persecution and armed rebellion. Many fled the country and ended up in Utah.\textsuperscript{44} Other historical migrations caused Hispanic Catholics to move into Utah, but many were converted to Mormonism due to L.D.S. social welfare plans and cultural religious backlash.\textsuperscript{45}

Immigration is significant in Utah due to the common issues in the Catholic Church as a whole, but also in terms of the leadership in Utah. The current leader of Utah Catholics, Bishop John Wester, is chairman of Migration Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. This Committee has drafted important documents that have established the position of American Catholic diocese with respect to the massive wave immigration from Latin America. Bishop Wester frequently travels throughout the United States and spreads the Church’s inclusivity with matters pertaining to immigration and its consequent social and ethical problems, such as the dissolution of families and the illegality of most border crossings. In fact, Bishop Wester

\textsuperscript{42} Personal interview with Father Erik Richtsteig. 20 August 2008.
\textsuperscript{43} Cunningham 23
\textsuperscript{44} Hispanic Oral Histories. University of Utah Marriot Library Special Collections. Accn1369 (Box 1, Folder 2).
participated in a joint meeting with other Utah faiths in 2006 that included LDS general Authorities.

COMMUNITY

Despite being somewhat disjointed with language and culture, Utah Catholicism represents a “household of faith” that is largely homogeneous in doctrine and practice. Cunningham calls Catholicism “a vast storehouse of memory refracted through a long and complex history by persons who remember.”

Interestingly, Utah Catholics are not afraid to see strength in certain Mormon practices. After services one Sunday at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Hyde Park, attention was directed to two boards (one in English, one in Spanish) that had various costs associated with the parish. A well-dressed lay member explained the financial situation and talked about the L.D.S. Church structure and their consolidated way of receiving offerings from Church members. He cleared the apparent, commonly-held misconception that their Church operated in a similar way. He explained that funds do not come from the Diocese, but from purely local sources. The parish priest then challenged each family to donate $1,000 dollars in 2008 to finish paying off the new Chapel and Church complex. This example shows that the Mormon influence does not necessarily need to be detrimental, but can actually serve as a rallying point for increased devotion.

With few exceptions, Catholics are their “own people” in Utah. Glancing through any edition of Utah’s Intermountain Catholic, one sees a dynamic and fully formed religious institution that has a complementary community of individuals with a strong sense of identity.

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46 Cunningham 7
47 Personal notes. 02 March 2008.
and purpose.\footnote{For a discussion of the history of the Intermountain Catholic newspaper, see Mooney 31 or visit the website at <http://www.icatholic.org>}. History shows that this was not always the case, but modern Utah Catholics enjoy a thriving Diocese that is free from many of the modern issues of public scrutiny. Lack of sex abuse cases allows them relative anonymity with the Mormon majority acting as a "trial of their faith" and more reason to keep moving forward. From the buildings to the history, Utah is not a peculiar place with respect to Roman Catholicism. The Mormon majority offers a unique challenge, but does not define the "Catholic Experience" in Utah.
PART II: LITERATURE AND DIALOGUE

What then of the Catholic Pencil Commentator? Where does his anger come from? Likely, the very diction and tone foment the bitter response, but is there more to this debate than just Bruce R. McConkie? This section analyzes the history of works such as *Mormon Doctrine*. As it turns out, McConkie was not the first (and is not the last) Mormon commentator on Roman Catholicism. This brief analysis also shows that there are and have been a number of Catholic commentators that take on Mormonism, as well. *Mormon Doctrine* is an important text for Catholic and Mormon commentators as they interpret Mormonism, but McConkie definitely drew from earlier Mormon authors in his harsh and unforgiving attitude toward Roman Catholic history.

This analysis is not meant to be comprehensive, but representative. On the Mormon side, this analysis will show the precedent for McConkie’s style and some notable divergence. From the Catholic side, it will demonstrate that there is ample room within Mormon Utah for Catholic voices despite there being few who want to hear. Both of these lists of apologetic and proselytizing sources include items that are not considered “official” positions by either Church. All the resources are included because whether they are completely sanctioned by the contemporary leadership or not, they had an impact on the ongoing debate and the formation of the general Mormon and Catholic consciousness against the other group.

The beginnings of Mormonism gave rise to a new paradigm in thinking about God, Church, and man’s relationship to them. Joseph Smith’s *First Vision* established an important precedent for interpreting Mormon’s relationship with Catholicism. According to Smith, God and Jesus Christ appeared to him as an answer to a prayer he offered seeking to know to which church he should join. Smith recounts the experience by saying “I was answered that I must join
none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight."\(^{49}\)

Yet despite this comprehensive, damning declaration from heaven against creedal Christianity, Smith advised early missionaries against trying to find the hidden meanings of who were the creatures spoken of in the Book of Revelation of the Bible. He said, "Declare the first principles, and let mysteries alone." He continues:

Some spiritualizers say the beast that received the wound was Nebuchadnezzar, some Constantine, some Mohammed, and others the Roman Catholic Church. Some say it means the kingdom of the world. One thing is sure, it does not mean the kingdom of the Saints.\(^{50}\)

As this pragmatic approach to preaching shows, Joseph Smith was often more engaged in the survival of his Church in the midst of persecution, though he did offer an interpretation of the given revelation shortly thereafter. Having felt the cold hand of political and religious injustice, he often looked empathetically at other religions facing these same types of injustice, despite believing that their institution lacked heavenly favor. Smith once remarked:

I am to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholics, or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves.\(^{51}\)

Yet, consistent with the First Vision and other Mormon scripture, ultimately Smith believed that any institution that acts "without authority from God" is destined to "crumble to dust."\(^{52}\) Ultimately though, we see in these quotes that Smith differentiates between Catholics as


\(^{50}\) Smith, Joseph, and Joseph Fielding Smith. 1976. Teachings of the prophet Joseph Smith. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co. Pg. 293.

\(^{51}\) Smith 313

\(^{52}\) Smith 376
authorized servants of God and as political actors. Other L.D.S. Church Presidents echoed this dualistic approach, as the situation required. 53

Despite these theological and ecclesiastical concerns, it is important to remember that structurally, both faiths shared a concentrated power structure that relied on transmission of authority. Foster remarks “Mormonism, reacting against the cacophony of religious claims in nineteenth-century America, sought to return to an authoritative Church structure with similarities to that of Roman Catholicism.” 54 Perhaps a difference in this “authoritative Church structure” was the empowerment of the lay, male L.D.S. member to have the very same authority that the presiding officers of the Church had. 55

As Mormons established themselves in the relative comfort of Utah, more time could be spent developing theological matters at home and abroad in the various missions of the Church. LDS Apostle Orson Pratt was responsible for some of the earliest biblical exegesis with regard to the Roman Catholic Church and its relationship to Mormonism in his newspaper The Seer. Pratt uses the same dichotomy that Joseph Smith uses by treating the Roman Catholic Church as a religious force and separately as a social unit worthy of political protections. Orson Pratt boldly shows a precedent for Bruce R. McConkie’s declarations in Mormon Doctrine. In an article from The Seer, after posing the question “Who founded the Roman Catholic Church?”, Pratt answers “The Devil...” 56 In a practice that characterizes Mormon thought up to the present day, Pratt praises the Reformers who “distinguished themselves in their persevering, bold, and fearless

53 This view is reflected by other early L.D.S. Church Presidents. See Young, Brigham, and John Andreas Widtsoe. 1971. Discourses of Brigham Young: second President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 1971 ed. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company. Pg. 10. and Woodruff, Wilford, and G. Homer Durham. 1946. The discourses of Wilford Woodruff: fourth president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft. Pg. 191
opposition to the corrupt powers of Catholicism." Yet, owing to their inheritance of a lack of heavenly authority, the Reformers and their subsequent Protestant Churches have no superior status as to the salvation of mankind, according to Pratt. Pratt does not “let mysteries alone” as Joseph Smith warned earlier Mormon missionaries. He states:

...the dragon, in order to hush the consciences of men, invented a spurious religion, and gave it the sacred name of Christian, and palmed it off upon all kindreds, tongues, and nations; from this apostate religion, formed by the dragon, sprang all the Catholic, Greek, and Protestant religions which have so extensively prevailed among all the generations and nations.

Yet, despite this clear mistrust and even contempt for Catholic history and doctrine, Pratt argues for right of religious freedom for Roman Catholics within the United States. Pratt denounces the “abominable” practice of infant baptism, but defends the right to practice it. Pratt asks, “Must their customs be denounced as criminal and be prohibited by law, because they are different from those of the nation?”

As shown in Kathleen Flake’s book *The Politics of American Religious Identity*, the election of Mormon Apostle Reed Smoot to the U.S. Senate began to transform the Mormon kingdom in Utah to a more traditional church-like structure. Because of the sensational nature of the practice of plural marriage, a Protestant backed coalition attempted to block the seating of the senator. This was generally not supported by Catholics in Utah and Washington because, as Flake puts it, “Religious liberty did not come naturally to Americans.” A Senator from nearby Idaho wrote in a letter to then-Church President, Joseph F. Smith, “If we close the doors of the Senate today against Smoot why not against the members of the Catholic Church next session.”

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61 Flake 15
62 Flake 87
This shows the same tendency as Mormons to regard the other church as an important political actor in the quest for true religious freedom within the United States. Yet, despite this increased political tolerance, 20th century religious dialogue between the groups mostly grew deeper and deeper entrenched in theological and historical claims of authority.

The most cited Mormon author on the Roman Catholic Church, surpassing even Bruce R. McConkie, is Apostle James E. Talmage. In *The Great Apostasy*, published in 1909, Talmage documents the establishment of the Church of Christ and its descent into hell. He demonstrates, from the Latter-day Saint point of view, the corruption of Christ’s teachings with philosophical systems and unauthorized additions and changes to necessary rituals and practices established by Christ and his followers. On one such issue, Talmage writes:

> Celibacy was taught as a virtue, and came to be made a requirement of the clergy, as it is in the Roman Catholic church today. An unmarried clergy, deprived of the elevating influences of home life, fell into many excesses, and the corruption of the priests has been a theme of reproach throughout the centuries.63

Mormon authors frequently use Talmage’s *The Great Apostasy* as a resource. Yet, as we see with Joseph Smith’s First Vision and his related writings and sermons, Mormon identity is inextricably linked with the notion of a restoration of a pure Christianity from a degenerate form. Talmage’s comprehensive approach and his popularity as an author (especially with the subsequent *Jesus the Christ* which also interwove the same themes) made this book a Mormon classic. This book may have solidified the link between degenerate Christianity and the Catholic Church in popular Mormon thought.

In 1913, former Protestant minister and Mormon convert, Janne Sjodahl, published the book *The Reign of the Antichrist* under the official auspices of the L.D.S. Church. This book was significant because it further developed the idea that the Antichrist spoken of in the New

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Testament was meant to convey the entirety of the apostate history of the Christian church. In 1917, Mormon Apostle Orson F. Whitney offered a more inclusive look at the relative theological merits of Mormonism and Catholicism. Although he essentially agreed in all the points of Talmage and Sjodahl, he related a personal experience with a highly educated Catholic priest that puts Roman Catholicism in a more logically viable light. His priest friend stated that:

You Mormons are all ignoramuses! You don't even know the strength of your own position. It is so strong that there is only one other tenable in the whole Christian world, and that is the position of the Catholic Church. The issue is between Catholicism and Mormonism. If we are right, you are wrong; if you are right, we are wrong; and that's all there is to it.64

Whitney's inclusion of this quote highlights the importance of priesthood authority in each religion. For one to be legitimate, the other must be illegitimate and, in Christian terms, influenced by the devil. Often Mormon authors address the issue of Roman Catholic illegitimacy as a means of describing some other Mormon-related theme, even if the topic at hand is not directly related to Catholicism. One example of this tendency is found in Porter and Ruf's book entitled *Chosen Missouri and the Question of Zion* published in 1960.65 As with Talmage and others, Porter and Ruf accuse Catholics of a lack of authority and doctrinal corruption. They, like many other authors, draw heavily from James E. Talmage and other Mormon theologians. Additionally, they praise the Reformation and its leaders, which has been and continues to be a popular LDS practice. In order to explain better the power and authority needed by Mormon leaders in the US, the authors attempt to show the corruption and logical removal of God's power among the Church based in Rome. They write:

65 Another example, out of many, is Petersen, Emma Marr. 1971. The church that Jesus built. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft. In it, Petersen addresses issues in early Christianity for a young audience and devotes several chapters to the Great Apostasy and the rise of the Roman Catholic Church. There are countless examples in Mormon literature of the continual reference to the Apostasy of the Christian Church and the rise of the Roman Catholic Church.
Much has been written concerning the Keys of the Kingdom given by the Lord to Peter. We recommend that the reader study carefully the early development of Christianity and the rise to power of the Roman Catholic Church. Who was truly the successor to Peter? We feel certain that no one can find sufficient evidence to prove that the keys of succession to the Presidency were given by Peter to Linus, who supposedly was the first Bishop to Rome.66

Here, the ubiquitous and open-ended term “Keys of the Kingdom” is refined into the modern Mormon concept of “Presidency”67. Earlier in the chapter, the authors use various quotes from Jesus about the future of the Christian Church to show that corruption was imminent. Yet, they claim that that God would shortly and logically, “withdraw the Authority to act in his name.”

Two more examples of including critique of Roman Catholicism to prove a broader point and in supporting it with work by Talmage include Hunter’s The Gospel Through the Ages and Howell’s His Many Mansions. 68 Milton R. Hunter uses the Catholic Church as the source of apostasy in the Christian world, though only briefly. Rulon S. Howells’ book was published simultaneously by a Mormon press and a national press and, as such, was intended for a larger national audience and not just for Mormons. Howells’ book is ostensibly a purely comparative work with many charts and diagrams, but no doubt sprang from his Mormon origins. He emphasizes the dynamic doctrine during the early Christian period and, in fact, published a later addendum for his comparative charts entitled Apostasy and Restoration Chart that uses his previous work to compare all Christian Churches to their relative truth against the Mormon Church and their conception of restoration. Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., then in turn used the same

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67 Mormons see the New Testament trio of Peter, James, and John as a Presidency, or separate, higher body of Apostles.
68 Talmage is mentioned as a source though he had been dead for almost a decade, so clearly Howells is drawing from his books.
comparative information developed by Howells to write a more apologetic book entitled
*Religious Truths Defined.*

Two years after *Mormon Doctrine* first appeared, Melvin R. Brooks produced a similar
book called the *LDS Reference Encyclopedia.* Brooks' format and content was almost identical,
but with a tone that softened allegations of apostasy against the Catholic Church. Brooks drew
many of his facts from earlier LDS works of Talmage and Howells, but, in seemingly as a
reaction to McConkie's harshly worded positions adopted a more neutral tone like that of
Howells. For example, Brooks refutes the principle of priestly celibacy with various biblical and
LDS scriptures, then states, "The discipline of *one large Christian church* prohibits their priests
to marry after their ordination" [italics added].

Though seemingly ambiguous, he supports this
claim by referencing *Faith of Our Fathers,* a classic Roman Catholic work by Cardinal John
Gibbons.

The entry for the Roman Catholic Church itself contains no doctrinal concerns but merely
lays out the Church’s history in a short, generalized manner. In this same way, Brooks’ treats
terms that do not overlap with LDS theology in a neutral way often citing non-LDS references.

However, with terms like “Deacon”, where there is a clash of terminology, Brooks omits
opposing definitions, including the Roman Catholic conceptions of such terms.

Rev. William Taylor, despite being from a Mormon background, became a Roman
Catholic priest and authored comparative works. Though not in Utah proper at the time of his
writing, he makes claims about the generalizability of life in his Pocatello, ID, that applies

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Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft.
71 Gibbons, James. 1917. *The faith of our fathers: being a plain exposition and vindication of the church founded by
72 For example, see entry for “Cardinal,” Brooks pg. 64.
73 Brooks 100
equally to the almost contiguous body of Latter-day Saints that extend from Utah into southern Idaho. His book, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1980), seeks not to attack Mormons because he has “too much love and respect for the gentle and beautiful Mormons in [his] family…”74 Rev. Taylor quotes heavily from McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine*.

Taylor characterizes the usual order of religious discussions and by so doing describes fairly accurately the initial writings of McConkie and the anonymous Catholic margin writer.

Too often religious discussions begin on a lofty note, only to break down into open warfare. This seems to happen when opposing views begin to demand “proof.” Both sides move behind impregnable barricades fashioned out of scraps of scripture, pointed logic, and horror weapons from the debater’s arsenal. Since only the pre-convinced are really convinced by any of this, the usual result is greater hostility and further suspicion.75

Despite being intended for Catholic audiences, the LDS side of the story is told “from the perspective of a Mormon” which seems to accomplish the author’s goal of decreasing hostility and suspicion.76 Instead of using words like “claim” and “purports,” Taylor opts to describe Joseph Smith’s story and all the subsequent Mormon doctrines as if they actually happened or were true. Furthermore, Taylor sees quite a few similarities within the two faiths, such as extra biblical sources of God’s word. He praises the Mormons for their organization and zeal by referring to a disaster cleanup after a flood. However, any praise and admiration are quickly lost toward the end of the book where Taylor seems to descend into “open warfare” with Mormon belief.

Father Erik Richtsteig, Ogden priest and Utah native, does not write about Mormons, but has given lectures and appeared on national Catholic television programs as a commentator of Utah Mormonism. Also, Richtsteig writes an award winning weblog where he has posted a

75 Taylor 3
76 Taylor 7
permanent comment that reads “Utah: home of America’s most powerful weirdos.”

A video recording of Father Richtsteig talking about his conversion to Catholicism from the clutches of cultural Mormonism is available at Catholic bookstores in the Ogden area. The video shows reactions of the Roman Catholic crowd that reveal the mild and heavy disdain for Mormons and the sense of community that the listeners feel. With regard to Bruce R. McConkie’s caustic words in *Mormon Doctrine*, Fr. Richtsteig feels that the First Presidency, the highest L.D.S. governing body, needs to apologize for these remarks before any true interfaith relations and religious dialogue can begin.

Popular husband and wife authors Bob and Penny Lord describe Mormonism and other smaller non-traditional religious movements as *cults*, reminiscent of Evangelical Apologist Walter Martin’s use of the word. The use of the word *cult* in American religious society has become a very curious, but powerful phenomenon. Though not a work produced in Utah, it is available at all Catholic bookstores and undoubtedly influences Catholic thought within the state.

Father Leander Dosch, a monk of Utah’s Trappist Monastery, wrote a booklet entitled *Monks and Mormons*. Dosch relies almost exclusively on *Mormon Doctrine* for his source material on Mormonism. Because of this, perhaps much like our pencil commentator, he concludes that “It is difficult to dialogue with such vastly different presuppositions.”

In 1995, Jerry Johnston of the L.D.S. owned Deseret News, moderated a roundtable discussion between Davis Bitton, a noted Mormon historian, and Msgr. M. Francis Mannion, rector of the Cathedral of the Madeleine. This roundtable focused on finding “common

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78 Personal interview. 20 Aug 2008.
79 Ironically, *Mormon Doctrine*’s McConkie has used this the term in its pejorative form when referring to schismatic movements within Utah Mormonism [see Gerald and Sandra Tanner’s *LDS Apostle Confesses Brigham Young taught Adam-God Doctrine*, 1982. Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry].
81 Dosch 2
Mannion cited many instances of Mormon and Catholic unity, such as an L.D.S. fast and collection for Ethiopia in which Catholic Charities administered collected funds, and various efforts against drug abuse and pornography. No theological unity can be expected, but work can be done “to be more humane and Christ-like.” Mannion warns against religious relativism where “people don’t respect each other enough to say there are even differences.” Yet, Mannion points out that this “respectful coexistence” is a “fine line to walk.” In perhaps an issue that reaches to the heart of the questions posed in this paper, Bitton points out, that the Catholic Church as an institution does not engage in “anti-Mormonism,” as he calls it.

This dialogue presents a surprisingly candid look at Mormons’ and Catholics’ perceived enemies, liberalism, and relativism. Mannion closes the roundtable by saying:

Where people used to fight over doctrinal issues, now they fight over cultural issues. The divisions today are within denominations, not across denominations. For me, that’s why the Catholic Church and the LDS Church have such a good alliance. The challenges are the same.

The optimism of this quote is commendable, but, as we have seen with Dosch, Stoeffel, and Richtsteig, this unity is not always the case. But Mannion clearly points out the fact that the main sources of agreement among the two faiths will always their commitment to rooting out liberalism in American society.

In his book *A Comparative Look at Mormonism and Catholicism*, BYU Professor Alonzo Gaskill interprets the oft-repeated relationships between Mormon exegesis and the Roman Church in a different and less accusatory way. An important factor that shows the distinct nature of Gaskill’s comparative study is the fact that a Catholic priest acquaintance of his wrote
the preface to the book. The content of Gaskill’s book promotes an understanding that is mutually beneficial despite looking critically at Catholic doctrine. However, it is not immune to criticism. Fr. Dosch, for example, disapproves of Gaskill’s assertion that Catholics can have different opinions about doctrine within Catholicism.89

89 Review of Gaskill’s *A comparative look at Mormonism and Catholicism* by Father Leander Dosch. Copy in author’s possession.
CONCLUSION

Recently, L.D.S. Apostle Jeffrey R. Holland devoted the majority of an address to the issue of early Christian history. Echoing Bruce R. McConkie's disbelief in Catholic conceptions of God, Holland stated "We agree with our critics on at least that point—that such a formulation for divinity is truly incomprehensible," to which the audience erupted in laughter.\(^90\) Yet, our anonymous Catholic friend says of McConkie, "Does he think Mormonism makes any sense? There is no credence to support it! NONE!"\(^91\) Neither party thinks the other is working under rational thought and logic.

Yet in 2008, Mormons and Catholics combined their forces against gay marriage in the California "Yes on 8" campaign. Proposition 8 created huge fallout for the L.D.S. Church which was accused of, among other things, improper tax claims on members' efforts. After raucous protests and bitter editorials statewide, the Mormons were defended in the media by none other than William Weigand, Pope John Paul's "Mormon Bishop," (now Bishop of Sacramento, CA) and Archbishop Federal of San Francisco (the 7\(^{th}\) Bishop of Utah). Just as Mannion and Bitton point out, the great divide that theology often places between the two religions can be temporarily erased by common political and moral pursuits. Like Pratt and Smith show, Mormons may oppose Roman Catholic doctrines, sometimes quite vehemently, but at the same time believe in their political rights and goals.

William Taylor states that "Catholics and Mormons simply do not live in the same religious world."\(^92\) To correct Rev. Taylor, we see through the preceding analysis that Catholics and Mormons do not live in the same theological world, but can often live in the same moral

\(^{90}\) Holland, Jeffrey R. "The Only True God and Jesus Christ Whom He Hath Sent" 177\(^{th}\) Semiannual General Conference. October 2007 CR. Laughter observed by author during live broadcast.
\(^{91}\) Page 55 of the aforementioned copy of Mormon Doctrine in USU Special Collections.
\(^{92}\) Taylor 3
world. There is the pragmatic and socially responsible side of this relationship to which Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith explained, “God never will acknowledge any traitors or apostates. Any man who will betray the Catholics will betray you.” To Smith, the founder of Mormonism, Catholics do not always have to be apostates.

Is that anonymous student who wrote in the margins of *Mormon Doctrine* typical of Utah Catholics? Probably not. This exchange took place between two people separated by time, age, ecclesiastical status, etc. The sheer size of the Roman Catholic Church coupled with its historical dominance on the world stage would seem to choke out any importance the relatively tiny L.D.S. Church would have. Yet, Utah’s large majority of geographically clustered Mormons give the Roman Catholic experience in Utah its own flavor.

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93 Smith 376


