

15

SACRAMENTAL LIVING: REFLECTIONS ON LATTER-DAY SAINT RITUAL

As seen throughout this volume, Latter-day Saint rituals, like other ritual behavior, play a predominant role in establishing and maintaining relationships with one another here on this earth. But they also play an important, salvific role in establishing and maintaining relationships with the divine world as well. Robert Millet's essay reflects on this aspect of our ritual behavior by highlighting three general categories of Latter-day Saint ritual: salvific ordinances, ordinances of comfort, and personal sacraments. Through performing each, he suggests that we are able to commune with God as Saints, as brothers and sisters in the gospel, and ultimately as children of God—which, in the end, may be why God instituted these rituals in the first place. —DLB

WHILE ON HIS WAY TO heal the daughter of Jairus, “a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living on physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind [the Lord], and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanch[ed] [ceased]. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me” (Luke 8:43–46). Commenting on this episode, the Prophet Joseph Smith

Robert L. Millet is Abraham O. Smoot University Professor and a professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.

pointed out that “the virtue here referred to [as described in the Gospels] is the spirit of life; and a man who exercises great faith in administering to the sick, blessing little children, or confirming, is liable to become weakened.”¹

While the King James Version renders the word as *virtue*, the Greek word *dunamin* means “power, strength, authority,” so many modern translations use the word *power* in verse 46 (New Revised Standard Version, Revised English Bible, New American Standard Bible, English Standard Version, New International Version, New Jerusalem Bible). Herein is a fascinating insight: a worthy individual can be the means by which life or power is conveyed to another person. This speaks particularly about why the sacraments or ordinances are so central to the religious practice of Latter-day Saints, as well as Christians in general. Followers of the Christ strive to qualify for that life that is his, eternal life, and so participate in those spiritual exercises and disciplines that engender such life. These rites are more than enjoyable, much more than uplifting; they are vital. Sacraments or ordinances are essential rituals. As Truman G. Madsen pointed out, “in ritual (or what we would call ordinances), our deepest motivations and deepest understandings merge. . . . We need to recognize that ceremony is indispensable.”²

On Defining Terms

In the paragraphs above, I’ve used the term sacraments interchangeably with the term ordinances, but what are sacraments? Latter-day Saints are prone to use the terms *sacrament* and *ordinance* interchangeably, though the former is only used in one ritual context. Roman Catholics often speak of the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, communion, marriage, ordination, holy orders, last rights), while most Protestants focus on baptism and the Eucharist (Communion, or sacrament of the Lord’s Supper). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers the following: “The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the Body of Christ and, finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it. . . . The sacraments

are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us.”³

The word *sacrament* is made up of two Latin roots and means literally “to make sacred.” Christians would thus speak of sacraments as rituals or sacred practices that help to escort us into the realm of divine experience. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland explained: “A sacrament could be any one of a number of gestures or acts or ordinances that unite us with God and his limitless powers. We are imperfect and mortal; he is perfect and immortal. But from time to time—indeed, as often as is possible and appropriate—we find ways and go to places and create circumstances where we can unite symbolically with him and, in so doing, gain access to his power.” These are “moments when we formally take the hand of God and feel his divine power.”⁴

What then do we mean when we use the word *ordinance*? In the broadest sense, an ordinance is a law, a statute, a commandment. Within that larger category are what we might call ordinance-rites or ceremonies that are channels for the grace and goodness and power of God. Elder Boyd K. Packer observed: “The word *ordinance* comes from the word *order*, which means, ‘a rank, a row, a series.’ . . . The word *ordain*, a close relative to the other two words, has, as its first definition, ‘to put in order, arrange, make ready, prepare’; also, ‘to appoint or admit to the ministry of the Christian church . . . by the laying on of hands or other symbolic action.’” Later Elder Packer noted that such actions “are more than advisable or desirable, or even than necessary. More even than essential or vital. They are *crucial* to each of us.”⁵

Because we know that the great plan of happiness is eternal and that salvation in any age is accomplished only in and through the mediation of the Redeemer, we also know that the covenants and ordinances are likewise eternal and unchanging. “Now taking it for granted that the scriptures say what they mean and mean what they say,” the Prophet Joseph noted, “we have sufficient grounds to go on and prove from the Bible that the gospel has always been the same; the ordinances to fulfill its requirements, the same, and the officers to officiate, the same; and the signs and fruits resulting from the promises, the same.” He continued

with an illustration of this principle: “Therefore, as Noah was a preacher of righteousness he must have been baptized and ordained to the priesthood by the laying on of the hands.”⁶ In short, the Lord “set the ordinances to be the same forever and ever.”⁷ That is, “ordinances, instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved on the same principles.”⁸

In that spirit, and knowing what we do about the everlasting nature of the gospel, the Church and kingdom, and the principles and ordinances pertaining thereto, we know from Restoration scripture and revelation that many of the ancients had the gospel. Many of them knew the Lord, taught his doctrine, and officiated as legal administrators in his earthly kingdom. Isaac, Israel, Joseph, and all the patriarchs enjoyed personal revelation and communion with their Maker. We would suppose that Eve and Sarah and Rebekah were baptized; that Jacob received the same blessings and covenants as we do in our temple endowment; that Micah and Malachi stood in the prophetic office by divine call and not because they assumed that role on their own. Surely Nephi, son of Lehi, was baptized by water and received the gift of the Holy Ghost, as well as the high priesthood, although an account of the same is not stated directly in the Nephite record. That the blessings of the holy temple were available to the Former-day Saints is made clear in the Prophet’s translation of the Egyptian papyri. We are told that one particular figure represents “the grand Key-words of the Holy Priesthood, as revealed to Adam, in the Garden of Eden, as also to Seth, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, and all to whom the Priesthood was revealed” (Explanation of Figure 3 in Book of Abraham Facsimile No. 2). Because of what has been made known through Joseph Smith—principles of doctrine and priesthood government—we know what it takes to operate the kingdom of God and what things the people of God must do to comply. As our study unfolds, we will see that *all ordinances are sacraments, but not all sacraments are ordinances*. Let us speak now of those ordinances that are directly related to and required for eternal life. We will then speak of the other sacraments.

Ordinances of Salvation

Officially the Church speaks of the “ordinances of salvation” as baptism, confirmation, ordination to the priesthood for men, the endowment, and temple sealings.

Baptism is the first ordinance-rite or sacred ceremony that places us on that gospel path that leads to life eternal. In speaking of those who inherit the celestial kingdom, the revelation declares: “They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given—that by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power; and who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true” (D&C 76:51–53).

When we are baptized, we go down into the watery grave, even as the Savior’s body was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. We then come forth from that water and walk in newness of life (see Romans 6:3–5), even as our Lord and Master burst forth from the tomb on that first Easter morning in glorious, resurrected immortality. Joseph Smith addressed himself to the symbolic nature of baptism as follows:

“God has set many signs on the earth, as well as in the heavens; for instance, the oak of the forest, the fruit of the tree, the herb of the field, all bear a sign that seed hath been planted there; for it is a decree of the Lord that every tree, plant, and herb bearing seed should bring forth of its kind, and cannot come forth after any other law or principle. Upon the same principle do I contend that baptism is a sign ordained of God, for the believer in Christ to take upon himself in order to enter into the kingdom of God. . . . Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God, and there is no other way beneath the heavens whereby God hath ordained for man to come to Him to be saved, and enter into the Kingdom of God, except faith in Jesus Christ,

repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins, and any other course is in vain; then you have the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost.”⁹

Of all the ordinances, baptism by water appears to me to be the most complete symbol, the most perfect representation of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, including his Resurrection from the dead. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is also richly symbolic, as it points to the broken flesh and spilt blood of the Redeemer, but the typology of the other ordinances do not demonstrate the same depth and detail. To be sure, sacraments or ordinances are far more than symbols, but in many cases the beauty and depth of the symbol add immensely to their spiritual impression. Someone has observed that “the key to the universe may not be mathematics but metaphor, the language of compared qualities, the language of feeling. Ordinances are living metaphors or, as Orson F. Whitney put it, ‘poems in action.’”¹⁰

The next salvific ordinance is confirmation. Confirmation is required for salvation because it is the ordinance that opens the door to the receipt of the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is a teacher, a revelator, a comforter, the source of testimony and conviction, all of which are critical facets of the Christian faith. But the third member of the Godhead is also the sanctifier, the means by which sin and worldliness and filth and dross are burned out of the human soul as though by fire, giving rise to what the scriptures call the “baptism by fire.” In point of fact, there is a very real sense in which confirmation is the confirming and sealing element of baptism. “You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man,” the Prophet Joseph clarified, “if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost.”¹¹ Elder Bruce R. McConkie put it this way: “Sins are remitted not in the waters of baptism, as we say in speaking figuratively, but when we receive the Holy Ghost. It is the Holy Spirit of God that erases carnality and brings us into a state of righteousness. We become clean when we actually receive the fellowship and companionship of the

Holy Ghost.”¹² These sentiments are consistent with the teachings of Nephi, who explained that after one enters the path of repentance and baptism, “then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 31:17).

Though less prominent than baptism, the rite of ordination of men to the priesthood is essential to our salvation. Why? Because the priesthood is “the channel through which all knowledge, doctrine, the plan of salvation and every important matter is revealed from heaven.”¹³ It is the power and authority of God, delegated to men on the earth, to act in all things pertaining to the salvation of the human family. It is through the power of the Aaronic Priesthood—delivered by John the Baptist to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery—that members of the Church are entitled to the ministry of angels (D&C 13). It is through the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood—delivered by Peter, James, and John—that apostolic authority, the power to bind on earth and have those actions ratified and sealed in the heavens (Matthew 16:18–19; 18:18), is exercised among God’s children. It is by virtue of the keys restored by Moses that Israel is gathered (D&C 110:11), that the message of the Restoration is taken to the far corners of the globe, and by which people come into the Lord’s Church and kingdom.

The last set of rites essential for our salvation are those ordinances experienced in the temple. It is by virtue of the keys restored by Elias that the patriarchal order of the Melchizedek Priesthood is put in place, whereby the gathered ones are formed into eternal family units in the temples of God through the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (D&C 110:12). And it is by virtue of the keys restored to Elijah that those family units are united and sealed together forever, and also by which the fullness of the Melchizedek Priesthood is attained (D&C 110:13–15).¹⁴ The temple endowment and the sealing ordinance within the house of the Lord—the highest and most sacred of Latter-day Saint ritual—are associated with what we have come to know as the ordinances of exaltation, the highest order of salvation, the salvation of the family. While salvation is an individual matter, exaltation is a family affair.¹⁵ A modern revelation summarizes the power and privileges of priesthood as follows: “The

power and authority of the higher, or Melchizedek Priesthood, is to hold the keys of all the spiritual blessings of the Church—to have the privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to have the heavens opened unto them, to commune with the general assembly and church of the Firstborn, and to enjoy the communion and presence of God the Father, and Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant” (D&C 107:18–19).

In each of these rites, while the symbolism is powerful, the rite itself appears to be as significant as the meaning. Maybe it has to do with the physical nature of the performances and the promise of an embodied salvation inherent within our doctrine. In any case, these salvific rites, these necessary sacraments, are essential components of the true and living church of God.

Ordinances of Comfort

Apart from the salvific ordinances, there are those priesthood ordinances that, while not necessary for salvation, we understand as integral to our spiritual development; these I term the ordinances of comfort. Perhaps the best illustration is the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, or as we generally label it, the sacrament. While strictly speaking it may not be considered to be an ordinance of salvation, the weekly ritual of partaking of the sacrament contributes as much to the purification and weekly reorientation of the soul as anything Latter-day Saints do. The sacrament is that sweet portion of the most sacred meeting of the Church in which we are involved intensely in meditation, introspection, covenant, and reconciliation.¹⁶ We have been counseled that it is a time of serious pondering on the ministry and atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which we contemplate soberly what it cost the Father to give His Son, and in which we center our souls on the body and blood of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (see Revelation 13:8; Moses 7:47). We have been taught that it is a period of heartfelt reflection upon our own lives; a moving moment in which we undertake a serious assessment of our attitudes and actions of the previous week; and a time to repent of those sins and resolve, before God, that we will do better in coming days. It is a time for covenant renewal, a setting in which we “make new” or fresh in our

minds the promises we made at the time we were baptized and received the gift of the Holy Ghost.

It has been my experience, after more than three decades as a religious educator at Brigham Young University, that many of my students have not grasped or comprehended that this is in fact a time in which we may enjoy a remission of sins and thereby shed the foolishness and misbehavior of the past. Elder Melvin J. Ballard inquired:

“Who is there among us that does not wound his spirit by word, thought, or deed, from Sabbath to Sabbath? We do things for which we are sorry, and desire to be forgiven, or we have erred against someone and given injury. If there is a feeling in our hearts that we are sorry for what we have done; if there is a feeling in our souls that we would like to be forgiven, then the method to obtain forgiveness is not through rebaptism, it is not to make confession to man, but it is to repent of our sins, to go to those against whom we have sinned or transgressed and obtain their forgiveness, and then repair to the sacrament table where, if we have sincerely repented and put ourselves in proper condition, we shall be forgiven, and spiritual healing will come to our souls. It will really enter into our being.”¹⁷

This ordinance is important too, because it will serve a special role in the future. The revelations declare that a grand “Thanksgiving meal” will be held in which the Saints of God will partake of the emblems of Christ’s body and blood with an almost “Who’s Who” of prophetic figures: John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Elijah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Michael or Adam, “and also with all those whom my Father hath given me out of the world” (D&C 27: 7–14; compare Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18).¹⁸

And then there is anointing the sick, the blessing of babies, father’s blessings, patriarchal blessings, blessing a home, casting out devils, and the dedication of graves, none of which are strictly essential for salvation, but which are important facets of the faith. These ordinances of comfort become inspiring moments in our Church and family lives when,

through the authority and the power of God, by their performance there is channeled to us the grace and love of our Father in heaven and his Only Begotten Son. In a great revelation on priesthood, the Lord explained that “this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God. Therefore, *in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.* And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh. For without this”—without the powers of godliness—“no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live” (D&C 84:19–22; emphasis added). In offering a clarification, Elder McConkie has written that “*in and through the holy priesthood, including all the laws and rites that go with it, the power of godliness, or in other words the power of righteousness, is brought to pass in the lives of men.* Without these priesthood laws and powers, God’s power and glory would not be revealed to man on earth.”¹⁹ In short, we participate in, perform, and receive the ordinances of the priesthood as often as we have occasion, for in this manner we are endowed with power from on high; we draw closer to him whose priesthood it is.²⁰

Our “Other” Sacraments

Beyond the salvific ordinances and the ordinances of comfort, there are more formalized spiritual exercises, which are not ordinances but which exist in our repertoire of ritual. These may include: family home evening, which in many homes is a very standardized, formalized event; interviews, which range from the highly formal temple recommend interview to the more casual parental interview; and perhaps Church sports programs, with their quasi-institutionally sanctioned violence! On a more serious note, two spiritual exercises in particular may be understood as sacraments in the sense that they shorten the distance between weak and stumbling mortals and a perfect, infinite, and eternal Deity ushering us into the divine, that bridge the chasm between heaven and earth. I speak here of prayer and scripture study. Both, when undertaken in sincerity and reverence, result in *communion*, a beautiful word that means simply “being with.” We commune with God when we are with him.

While not an ordinance, prayer is a sacrament in that it is the means by which a commended and commanded connection between man and God is established, a connection that links him who hears all earthly petitions and those who utter them. Let me be a bit personal, if I may. I rejoice in the privilege it is to talk of Christ, to converse reverently on his name and nature, to speak boldly of his mission and ministry, to declare with conviction his immortality and infinity. In short, there are few things I delight in doing more than *speaking of* the Lord. There is, however, one thing I enjoy more, and that is *speaking to* our Heavenly Father. We call that form of communication prayer. Regular and consistent and sincere and dedicated prayer is a sacred activity, one that transforms us into people of purpose and of power, into men and women wholly surrendered to the mind and will of God and holy in our separation from the fleeting distractions of this world. Surely more miracles would be wrought if more and more of us took the time and exerted the energy to petition our God in behalf of a darkened world that is traveling toward its spiritual dissolution. As the beloved Christian theologian John Stott suggested, “I sometimes wonder if the comparatively slow progress towards world peace, world equity and world evangelization is not due, more than anything else, to the prayerlessness of the people of God.”²¹

We pray because we read that some of the greatest men and women in history turned heavenward when they needed clarity and conviction. We pray because the Lord and his prophets and apostles counsel us, in the strongest of terms, to request wisdom from God (see James 1:5–6), to ask, to seek, to knock (see Matthew 7:7), to persist and importune (see Luke 11:5–8). We pray because we so often find ourselves up against the wall, uncertain and unsure where or to whom we should turn, confident that no human being has the answers to our personal struggles. It is not unimportant that the English word prayer comes from the Latin root *precarius*—yes, a cousin to our word *precarious*. We pray out of desperation; we don’t know where else to turn.²² We pray because a blessing has come into our lives, a heavenly gift that we definitely know did not come from friends, neighbors, and acquaintances; we feel driven to offer gratitude to an omniscient, omnipotent, and omni-loving Father. We pray, not to

change God's mind but rather to learn the will of God and then to align our own wills with his.

We pray because our mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, taught us as little ones to close our day with "Now I lay me down to sleep." The words may have been simple, the deeper purposes for the action not wholly grasped at the time, but a pattern was established, a pattern of prayer, a pattern that would serve us well as we moved into adulthood. We pray because somewhere along the road of Christian discipleship we learned by precept and example to rely wholly and alone upon the merits, mercy, and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (see 2 Nephi 31:19; Moroni 6:4). We pray because we want to acknowledge God, because we desire to praise his Holy Son, and because we long to feel comforted and empowered by his Holy Spirit.

Some years ago I was just finishing my reading of Billy Graham's autobiography and was deeply touched by these words:

Although I have much to be grateful for as I look back over my life, I also have many regrets. I have failed many times, and I would do many things differently.

For one thing I would speak less and study more, and I would spend more time with my family. . . . *I would also spend more time in spiritual nurture*, seeking to grow closer to God so I could become more like Christ. *I would spend more time in prayer*, not just for myself but for others. I would spend more time in studying the Bible and meditating on its truth, not only for sermon preparation but to apply its message to my life."²³

In short, we pray because we have been commanded to do so, because we need to, because we want to. For the unconverted, prayer may seem like a burden, at best a duty. But for the seasoned Saint, one who has begun to grow up in the Lord and mature in the gifts and fruit of the Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12–14; Galatians 5:22–25), prayer is a blessed opportunity, a consummate privilege, a remarkable honor. It is what I have chosen to call an unofficial sacrament.

Scripture study, like prayer, functions to narrow or bridge the gap between us and the divine. It does so as we read and contemplate holy things, by which we become intimately acquainted with the learning and logic of holy men of God who spoke in times past by the power of the Spirit (see 2 Peter 1:21). We read and reflect upon scripture to immerse ourselves in the will of the Lord, the mind of the Lord, the word of the Lord, the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation (see D&C 68:4). In a very real sense, holy scripture is the mediated word of God. That sacred word has a “more powerful effect upon the minds of the people than the sword, or anything else” (Alma 31:5). Indeed, the word of God heals the wounded soul (see Jacob 2:8). As Paul explained, “All scripture given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man [and woman] of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (Joseph Smith Translation, 2 Timothy 3:16–17). Scripture, as Alma taught, enlarges the memory, convinces straying souls of the error of their ways, and brings them “to the knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls” (Alma 37:8). Samuel the Lamanite pointed out that studying holy scripture leads people to faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, a mighty change of heart, and to firmness and steadfastness in the faith (see Helaman 15:7–8).

Why is it that we read the scriptures over and over, again and again, from front to back and from topic to topic? Other than being obedient to the prophets and the sheer discipline it develops within us, what good can come from such repetition? For one thing, the more we immerse ourselves in the word of God, the more clearly we begin to uncover and discern the character and personality and virtue of our Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ. God is holy, and he has called us to holiness (see Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15–16). He is patient and longsuffering, and he has charged us to become the same. He is pure and virtuous, and the followers of Jesus Christ are commissioned to be like him. Scripture becomes a catalyst to divine guidance, a means to spiritual transformation and sanctification. As a channel for divine power, a channel for virtue, scripture becomes a sacrament. Scripture study thus becomes a

principal means by which we “practice virtue and holiness before [God] continually” (D&C 46:33; compare 38:24); a spiritual exercise by which we “walk in paths of virtue before the Lord” (D&C 25:2); and obviously a vital dimension of having virtue “garnish [our] thoughts unceasingly” (D&C 121:45).

In speaking of the revelations contained within the Doctrine and Covenants (and, by extension, to scripture in general), the Savior said: “These words are not of men nor of man, but of me; wherefore, you shall testify they are of me and not of man; for it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you, and by my power you can read them one to another; and save it were by my power you could not have them; wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words” (D&C 18:34–36). Similarly, in a revelation recorded some three and one half years later, that same Lord declared: “Behold, that which you hear is as the voice of one crying in the wilderness—in the wilderness because you cannot see him—my voice, because my voice is Spirit; my Spirit is truth; truth abideth and hath no end; and if it be in you it shall abound” (D&C 88:66). It was while pondering the scriptures that some of the most important revelations of all time came to the Lord’s anointed servants (see, for example, D&C 76:15–19; 138:6–11). To be sure, scripture study is a steadying and spiritually invigorating sacrament.

Yet these two activities are also similar to our formal ordinances through the individual ways in which we ritualize their experience. While the priesthood is not required in the performance of either one, we often ritualize these activities by creating environments in which the Spirit may be present. The fact that we best experience and recognize the whisperings of the Spirit and the revelation it provides in a quiet setting suggests that our mental and physical states are as important to these sacraments as they are in the formal, priesthood ones. Through our decisions to read in quiet periods of the day or bow our heads and kneel when we pray, it is as if we intuitively recognize the value of ritual in attaining communion with God—that they are necessary to receiving real revelation.

Sacramental Living

While as a boy I was surrounded with persons of different religious persuasions than my own, I seldom if ever attended their churches, though I did go for a week to a Vacation Bible School. And on one occasion I attended a Catholic mass with one of my buddies. It was different from anything I had ever encountered, and so I really didn't know what to make of it. When I got home I spoke with my dad. I asked him why the Roman Catholic worship experience was so very different from what one would find in a Mormon sacrament meeting. Dad responded quickly: "Well, son, Catholic services are filled with ritual. We don't have ritual in our church." I am certain that my father, who at that point had only been active in the Church for a few years, would have a different kind of conversation with me now, especially because within a short time he would be endowed in the Salt Lake Temple, and then sealed to his wife and children. In other words, he would be initiated into a different kind of ritual than that experienced by my Catholic friends, but ritual nonetheless.

Truman Madsen once warned "against a certain hostility that I find in myself and assume may be in some of you. It arises not because we have correctly read the Restoration but because we have misread the Apostasy. We see remnants of ritual; we see them elaborated or embellished and also abandoned or reduced to things that are mystical or hollow or merely aesthetic. All of this we call 'pagan ceremony.' Thus, on guard against distortions, we are on edge about ordinances themselves. But *when ordinances have been renewed, when their beauty has been revived, when their appropriateness and significance have been reestablished, they are not pagan and they are not empty.*"²⁴ Indeed, once dead works have had the spirit of life breathed into them through the gift of the Holy Ghost, the ordinances of the priesthood, and those sacraments that connect us with the Infinite, they become symbols of our Savior's sacrifice, physical channels by which we receive divine power, and signposts for us to navigate our way through treacherous waters. They extend life and light and love.

Jesus felt the spirit of life go out of him when the hemorrhaging woman touched his garment (see Luke 8:46). That sanctified and saving spirit of life, that divine power, linked with the woman's simple faith,

changed her forever, both physically and spiritually. In a similar manner, when we strive to focus on and center our lives in gospel covenants, through the salvific ordinances, those ordinances of comfort, and our personal sacraments, the spirit of life, the very powers of God, come to us. To put it another way, our rituals lift us, liberate us, and provide an elevated perspective on life here and life hereafter that will never allow us to be the same, but instead become experiences by which we come closer to becoming the sons and daughters of God we are meant to be.

Notes

1. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:303.
2. Madsen, *The Highest in Us* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), 33–34.
3. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 1123, 1131.
4. Holland, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 193–94.
5. Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 145, 146.
6. *Times and Seasons*, September 1, 1842, 904.
7. *History of the Church*, 4:208.
8. *History of the Church*, 5:423.
9. *History of the Church*, 4:554–55.
10. Madsen, *The Highest in Us*, 35.
11. *History of the Church*, 5:499.
12. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 290; see also 239.
13. *History of the Church*, 4:207.
14. *History of the Church*, 6:251.
15. See Russell M. Nelson. “Salvation and Exaltation,” *Ensign*, May 2008.
16. See David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1946, in Alan P. Johnson, *The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 230–32.
17. Ballard, “The Sacramental Covenant,” sermon delivered at the MIA annual conference, Sunday, 1 June 1919, published in *Improvement Era*, October 1919, in Johnson, *The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper*, 198.
18. Elder Bruce R. McConkie has suggested that this sublime sacramental service will be a part of the Council at Adam-ondi-Ahman held just prior to the Savior’s coming in glory (see McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982], 586–88).

19. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 589; emphasis added; see also McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 494.
20. These rites may be differentiated from salvific rites in that they are iterative, meaning they are repeated. All of the salvific rites are only performed once for an individual (barring excommunication). Even though one may perform the rite again, as in the temple endowment, it is on behalf of another individual, thus the rite is only performed once per individual. Ordinances of comfort, on the other hand, are repeated whenever necessary. It is possible this reflects two different, but complementary, approaches to our ritual. The first is a recognition that while the salvific ordinances are performed by mortals, they are to be understood as if God himself had done them, thus they are ultimately divine actions and reflect God's actions on our behalf to help us return to him. The second approach is ordinances that are performed by mortals for mortals. These would reflect the power of mortals to bless each other. One may picture these two approaches as vertical and horizontal relationships. The vertical reflects our movement toward the divine, a communion that requires God's active involvement. The horizontal reflects our enhanced ability to engage in communion with one another here in mortality.
21. John Stott, *Authentic Christianity from the Writings of John Stott*, ed. Timothy Dudley-Smith (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 226.
22. See Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 13.
23. Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperSan Francisco/Zondervan, 1997), 723–24; emphasis added.
24. Madsen, *The Highest in Us*, 36.