

# WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

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In the winter semester of 1899–1900 at the University of Berlin, Adolf von Harnack delivered public lectures on the topic “The Essence of Christianity.” They were translated for the English-speaking world under the title “What Is Christianity?”<sup>1</sup> In the course of his lectures, Harnack succinctly answered the question, albeit inadequately: “In the combination of these ideas—God the Father, Providence, the position of men as God’s children, the infinite value of the human soul—the whole gospel is expressed.”<sup>2</sup> And it was Harnack’s conviction that this was the gospel as Jesus proclaimed it—a gospel that “has to do with the Father only and not with the Son,” because

no one had ever yet known the Father in the way Jesus knew Him, and to this knowledge of Him he draws other men’s attention, and thereby does “the many” an incomparable service. He leads them to God, not only by what he says, but still more by what he is and does, and ultimately by what he suffers.<sup>3</sup>

Such was the concern of this historian of dogma—to get at the kernel of the Christian faith that lies underneath all the incrustations of “Christian”

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husk that come and go. But Harnack admitted that the kernel can exist among us in no other way, since it is necessary for the gospel to be relevant to contemporary culture:

The Gospel did not come into the world as a statutory religion, and therefore none of the forms in which it assumed intellectual and social expression—not even the earliest—can be regarded as possessing a classical and permanent character. . . . Not only can it so exist—it must do so, if it is to be the religion of the living and is itself to live. As a Gospel it has only *one* aim—the finding of the living God, the finding of Him by every individual as *his* God, and as the source of strength and joy and peace. How this aim is progressively realized through the centuries—whether with the co-efficients of Hebraism or Hellenism, of the shunning of the world or of civilization, of Gnosticism or of Agnosticism, of ecclesiastical institution or of perfectly free union, or by *whatever other kinds of bark the core may be protected, the sap allowed to rise*—is a matter that is of secondary moment, that is exposed to change, that belongs to the centuries, that comes with them and with them perishes.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, for Harnack the greatest transformation of the new religion occurred in the second century with the beginning of the Hellenization of Christianity—the “work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel.”<sup>5</sup> In that respect, Mormonism and other primitivist movements in the nineteenth century share something in common with Harnack, reacting against the transformation of a living faith into a creed to be believed (though Mormonism would not reject some of the accoutrements that Harnack goes on to list as corrupting transformations of Christianity).

One representative of the Latter-day Saints, Tad R. Callister, resonates with Harnack’s approach—albeit with different concerns—arguing in *The Inevitable Apostasy and the Promised Restoration* that with the death of the Apostles a “different church evolved—one without revelation and without priesthood authority,” and one in institutional, doctrinal, and moral decay that confused truth and error as it assimilated “the gospel of Christ with the philosophies of me, . . . an appealing composite of New Testament

Christianity, Jewish traditions, Greek philosophy, Graeco-Roman paganism, and the mystery religions.’”<sup>6</sup>

This does not mean that the kernel was entirely lost amidst the chaff. To use a different analogy, protesters and reformers throughout Christian history kept alive the flame that flickered and dimmed.<sup>7</sup> It is not just the likes of Harnack and Callister, who, with their different agendas, argue that somewhere along the way the essence of Christianity was compromised. Anders Nygren made a similar case in *Agape and Eros*, claiming that Christianity was distorted by Augustine’s Platonism (for instance) such that he substituted *caritas* for *agape*.<sup>8</sup> Thanks be to God that Martin Luther came to the rescue in and for this Lutheran scholar’s account of the matter! Then again, Rudolf Bultmann argued that the kernel of Christianity had to be uncovered even under the casings of scripture.<sup>9</sup> (It is interesting that Harnack, Nygren, and Bultmann were all *Lutheran* theologians.)

Before continuing, we must insist with patristics historian Robert Louis Wilken that the “notion that the development of early Christian thought represented a hellenization of Christianity has outlived its usefulness. The time has come to bid a fond farewell to the ideas of Adolf von Harnack.” Wilken argues that it is more accurate to speak of the “Christianization of Hellenism” because Christian thought was generated “from within, from the person of Christ, the Bible, Christian worship, the life of the church. . . . Christian thinking, while working within patterns of thought and conceptions rooted in Greco-Roman culture, transformed them so profoundly that in the end something quite new came into being.”<sup>10</sup>

Still, Harnack’s question remains: What *is* Christianity? What is the *essence* of Christianity?<sup>11</sup> And, as Craig Blomberg states, it is complicated by the fact that “no formal definition of the term [Christian] ever appears in the Bible.”<sup>12</sup> To be clear, we are not asking (in the present context), “Is Mormonism Christian?” nor “Are Mormons Christian?”<sup>13</sup> That line of inquiry cannot be answered until the prior question is answered.

Indeed, it was the question that Joseph Smith asked, surrounded as he was by the answers of a plethora of denominations which he concluded were all wrong and whose creeds were an abomination before God.<sup>14</sup> His question was answered by an appeal for further divine revelation. But there

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are other ways to go about exploring for an answer—rooting for the kernel, as it were.

One approach is to take seriously the development of doctrine, assuming that the mature tree is a faithful representation of the acorn. That was the project of John Henry Newman, who *did* assume that “a true development retains the *essential idea* of the subject from which it has proceeded” (while “a corruption loses it”) and asked, “What then is the true idea of Christianity?”<sup>15</sup> Newman found it in the Church of Rome, to which he converted in 1845 (the year after Joseph Smith was shot in Carthage Jail). For Newman, Christianity is simply defined by the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church as a faithful development of the “original.”

But now we have already landed in a morass, since the definition of Christianity, according to Harnack and representatives of the Mormon Church, denies faithful development and insists on a return to the apostolic beginning, while Wilken and Newman would have no problem identifying true Christianity as a contemporary reality that faithfully developed from the apostolic beginning. A host of folks would get in line behind one or the other—even among evangelicals—but they would be lines that seem never to merge, no matter how far down the horizon one looks.

There are some who *try* to get in both lines. A good example would be the evangelical New Testament scholar Scot McKnight.<sup>16</sup> In one essay McKnight rightly cautions us to have epistemic humility, admitting that our “gospel truth” is “only a partial grasp of the ultimate truth.” As he puts it, “the Story” is made up of many wiki-stories in the Bible, and we tend to make one of these wiki-stories a “church tradition” among the many other church traditions. But we need this variety because not even Jesus’ story can tell the whole Story. Interpretive retellings of the Story never come to a final unrevisable shape. What we do is figure out a plot that *adequately* but *not definitively* holds all the wiki-stories together.

In a second essay that largely holds together with the approach of the first, McKnight makes the case that atonement theories have become the lens through which the Bible is read, so that atonement theories drive the meaning of the gospel. Instead, the gospel that Peter and Paul preached, as recorded in Acts, was not shaped by an atonement theory, even though doctrines such as double imputation, justification, and propitiation are entailments of the

gospel. Instead, the gospel sermons in Acts preach how the Old Testament story came to its fulfillment in the story of Jesus—how Israel’s story found its conclusive chapter in Jesus’ story, without explaining *how* the death of Jesus accomplished anything: “Peter’s and Paul’s sermons focus on Jesus and run everything through the lens of Israel’s story.” So the apostolic gospel drove to the conclusion that “the exalted one, Jesus, is the *Messiah of Israel and Lord of all*.”<sup>17</sup> What we are to do in response to the apostolic gospel is repent and believe and be baptized to enter into this lordship story.

It is at the end of this essay, however, that one wonders if McKnight has tried to sneak into the other line with Harnack and Mormons, though he would have significant differences with either one’s understanding of the apostolic faith. That is, while McKnight is correct to chastise Christians (largely, evangelical types) for reducing the gospel that the apostles preached to a “plan of salvation” seen through the lens of an atonement theory, and while he rightly allows for *development* of doctrines that are entailed in the gospeling of the New Testament—doctrines such as the various atonement theories—he concludes with a statement that doesn’t seem to have the tone of epistemic humility nor the status of a wiki-story or a church tradition. Instead, it sounds like the apostolic original to which we need to return, regardless of developments:

In short, Israel’s story longs for a kingdom where God is King and where Israel is God’s people in that kingdom. This, I submit to you, is *exactly* who Jesus is—Governor of heaven and earth—and *exactly* what Jesus preached: the kingdom of God. And this is what Paul was preaching in Acts 28. Personal salvation is what happens to people who enter into that story. The gospel is to tell that story aloud and point people to Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Lord.<sup>18</sup>

Given the impasse (if one really can *not* have it both ways or be in *both* lines), it would be helpful to suggest other paradigms.

It seems to me that there are two ways to establish the identity of Christianity. One way would be to draw boundaries consisting of non-negotiables within which a communion that claims to be Christian would need to remain. Think of it as a Christian corral within which groups graze at different locations depending on which part of the

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pasture fits their particular tastes, all the while remaining within the fenced boundaries.

The problem here is that not everyone will agree on the type or number of fences that surround the faithful. I would think that most self-identifying evangelicals would put up at least four boundaries or nonnegotiables: (1) God is the ultimate source of all that exists, made neither out of preexistent matter nor out of God's being but by the Word of God (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 11:3); (2) Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human, with implications for insistence on the doctrine of the incarnation (Jesus is fully human: John 1:14 and 1 John 1:1–3) and, for insistence, on the doctrine of the trinity (Jesus is fully divine by nature and eternally so: John 1:1, 5:18, 10:30, 14:9; Acts 20:28; Romans 9:5); (3) it is *only* through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we are saved (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4; Colossians 1:22–23); and (4) the Bible is *the* (that is, only) unique, reliable, authoritative, inspired witness to Jesus Christ (as illumined by the Holy Spirit; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). My Latter-day Saint friends might want to add another fence (such as the priesthood), reject the first as stated, refine the trinitarian implication of the second, and alter the fourth to include other scriptures. And let's face it: there are some evangelicals who would want to add another fence or two (or more!). So perhaps the paradigm of boundaries may not be as helpful as another model for getting at the essence of Christianity.

What might serve us better is to envision a center from which would radiate tethers that could be extended. (How far the tether stretches would be debated.) This would be something like Harnack's kernel *along with his insistence* that it *must* exist in specific forms of intellectual and social expression. If we could agree on the center, then what radiates from it would allow for various expressions due to chronology, geography, ethnicity, and so on. The tethers might be something like McKnight's church traditions that are *interpretations* of the faith, trying to hold together the wiki-stories that refer to the Story (the center?).

The advantage of this paradigm is that it realizes there is no generic Christianity. There are only particular Christianities. That is, there is Anglican Christianity, Baptist Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholic Christianity, and so on. We could even be more particular: I am

a white, male, suburban, Anglican Christian. Yet I have in common the Christian center with a black, female, urban, nondenominational Christian. We are not going to agree on a lot because all Christianity is enculturated, but there will be that essence—that center—which will tie us to the same faith.

Could Mormonism be tethered to this same center? That is similar to the question “Is Mormonism Christian?” *except* that we have not yet answered the prior question “What is Christianity?” or “What *is* the center?” But it seems to me that when we get the answer that I will propose, Mormonism *could* be so tethered *if* it includes the admission that it is just one particular expression of Christianity—specifically an American-bred form of Christianity<sup>19</sup> that does not necessarily include the fulness of Christian truth. Of course, Roman Catholics—and some Baptists!—would have to make the same admission of a degree of impoverishment. And for these iterations of Christianity that is going to be a difficult, if not impossible, admission to make. In the case of Mormonism, it is precisely Smith’s discovery of the gold plates that promised revelation of the *fulness* of the everlasting gospel.<sup>20</sup>

This second paradigm does not solve all of our problems, but it might move us closer if we slightly change the metaphor from radiating tethers to a web, and here I have in mind what Quine describes as a “web of belief.”<sup>21</sup> In this case a web is spun from the center out. The entire web consists of an internal logic (so this gets associated with a coherentist epistemology), but nesting in its center is, for example, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is possible that this conviction could be undone; something *could* count against belief in Jesus’ resurrection, but that scenario is not only not expected, it is considered highly improbable, because ejecting that belief would necessitate a paradigm shift (to use the language of Thomas Kuhn) or conversion and the construction of a new web (a new religious orientation). That is, it would be equivalent to a rejection of Christianity.

But, with the center in place, how the web is constructed from the center out tolerates variations such that the resultant web is a *particular* web. And, given that this is a metaphor, various particular webs can have the same center. (Of course, two webs cannot share a common center in *real* life, so we have to keep in mind that this *is* a metaphor.)

So what *is* the center? It is Jesus, obviously. But more must be said. It is Jesus as the only completely faithful Israelite who came to address Israel's problem. (In this sense McKnight's summary is spot-on; he especially appeals to Acts 10:23–43.) In other words, the center cannot tolerate the Marcionite heresy that rejects the Old Testament. The biblical story is *one* Story that minimally requires the Hebrew Bible as well as the New Testament.<sup>22</sup> (Even among Orthodox, Roman, and Protestant Christians there are variations in the canon, so “minimal” is not just taking into account Mormons.)

Israel's problem had to do with covenantal obligations and consequences, especially spelled out in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Though her covenantal relationship with Yahweh positioned her to be the conduit of blessing to all nations (Genesis 12, 15, 22), she did not keep her end of the bargain, so she was sent into exile. The faithful Israelite, Jesus, a descendent of Abraham and David, is the Anointed One (the King, the Messiah), who, by his obedience and his death, fulfills the covenant God made with Israel and, by his resurrection victory over death that establishes his lordship (Philippians 2), makes possible the repentant believer's participation in the restored covenant and God's new (renewed) creation. These believers include both Jews and Gentiles (who now participate in Israel's inheritance) as, for instance, Paul lays out in Ephesians 1–3.<sup>23</sup>

The question remains whether adjustments need to be made to the web of evangelical and Mormon expressions of Christianity.

Both N. T. Wright and Scot McKnight—among many others—insist that the evangelical web isn't the best construction radiating out of the center. In fact, McKnight insists that evangelicals<sup>24</sup> have turned the gospel into the “plan of salvation”—turned a story into a doctrine.<sup>25</sup> He is not accusing such folks of denying the center as we have articulated it above, but he *is* insisting that they've moved the center into other locations on the web and placed at the web's center what should have been spun out on the edges—doctrines such as double imputation and justification.

N. T. Wright has a similar complaint and might be paraphrased as accusing evangelicals of putting too much emphasis on “receiving Jesus into my life” rather than *being* received into *Jesus'* life and righteousness. Said differently, Wright's concern is that Paul has been misread: we are



not saved by faith *in* Christ, but by the faith *of* Christ—the only faithful Israelite whose status (not moral virtue) God now declares we share as members of God’s true family.<sup>26</sup> (We should mention that Wright *would* agree with Harnack on one point: Greek philosophy—specifically of the Platonic sort—has distorted Christianity by making salvation an escape from this world rather than a restoration of this world.)<sup>27</sup>

What about the Mormon web? On the one hand, the web of Mormon beliefs resembles much of what is in the evangelical web. Bob Millet sums it up well:

In short, the gospel is the good news that Christ came to earth, lived and taught and suffered and died and rose again, all to the end that those who believe and obey might be delivered from death and sin unto eternal life. This good news Latter-day Saints have in common with Christians throughout the world.<sup>28</sup>

Mormon teaching also insists on a single Story, including a Jesus who was made known from the time of the Old Testament patriarchs.<sup>29</sup> Though Mormons hold to a doctrine of dispensationalism<sup>30</sup> much like some in Evangelicalism, there is a sense in which they maintain a continuity of the Abrahamic covenant. While Mormonism is a new stage of Israel’s history, it participates in the “new and everlasting covenant.” Of course, to really be one of the covenant people requires obedience and continued faithfulness to the Mediator of that covenant—Jesus Christ. Furthermore,

The crowning tie to Israel comes only by the worthy reception of the blessings of the temple, through being endowed and sealed in family units. . . . “The fulfillment, the consummation of these blessings comes as those who have entered the waters of baptism perfect their lives to the point that they may enter the holy temple. Receiving an endowment there seals members of the Church to the Abrahamic covenant.”<sup>31</sup>

So there is a degree of correspondence to what we have identified as the center of Christianity. What seems to be missing is the notion that Jesus is Savior precisely because he is the Israelite who fulfilled the covenant (even taking upon himself the punishment required because the covenant has

been broken—being sent into exile on the cross, as it were), so that, now, in N. T. Wright’s words, we are saved by *his* faith—taken up into his righteousness, not as a moral exchange or fiction, but as a declaration of our status as people who have been immersed into his life and now live by the power of his resurrection.

Millet *does* note that Mormonism teaches Jesus is the “Holy One of Israel” who kept the law of God.<sup>32</sup> With this, it may not take too much of a leap to develop what we have articulated as the center, but in the Latter-day Saint theological literature I have read I have yet to come across an understanding of Jesus that highlights his association with the history of Israel in such a way that salvation is based on Jesus as the *solution to Israel’s problem* (as McKnight puts it at one point).<sup>33</sup>

In fact, Mormon theology may share a theological emphasis with evangelicals in that, as Millet discusses Christ’s work, double imputation is *the* theory when atonement is discussed so that in *that* sense we are redeemed “because of the righteousness of the Redeemer.”

The means by which the Savior justifies us is wondrous indeed. It entails what might be called “the great exchange.” [Martin Luther used this language] . . . The point [in Philippians 3:8–9] is vital: justification comes by faith, by trusting in *Christ’s righteousness*, in His merits, mercy, and grace. . . . Paul teaches a profound truth—that as we come unto Christ by the covenant of faith, our Lord’s righteousness becomes our righteousness. He justifies us in the sense that he *imputes*—meaning, he reckons to our account—his goodness and takes our sin. This is the great exchange.<sup>34</sup>

It may not take much of a modification of the web’s strands to adjust Mormon theology so that the center is recast, but it also may not be possible given its teaching on the unique relationship that Latter-day Saints have with ancient Israel. Hopefully, more can be discussed and developed along the lines that have been suggested.

Given what we have identified as the essence of Christianity, perhaps the right question to ask after answering “What is Christianity?” is not “Are Mormons Christian?” or even “Are evangelicals Christian?” but instead, “To what extent have Mormons or evangelicals constructed the Christian web

poorly, misplacing the center—its essence—in the process?” And then we may need to listen to the voices of weavers who will help us reconstruct the web.

## NOTES

1. See Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978). This is a reprint of the Harper Torchbook edition that was published in 1957.
2. Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 68.
3. Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 144.
4. Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 191; last emphasis added. Would Harnack have added evangelicalism and Mormonism to the list of “barks” that come and go?
5. See Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, Lecture XI.
6. Tad R. Callister, *The Inevitable Apostasy and the Promised Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 47. Callister is quoting LDS historian Milton V. Backman Jr. He specifically appeals to Harnack’s argument on p. 32.
7. This is Boyd K. Packer’s metaphor as cited in Robert L. Millet, “Apostasy, Great,” in *LDS Beliefs: A Doctrinal Reference*, ed. Robert L. Millet, Camille Fronk Olson, Andrew C. Skinner, and Brent L. Top (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 48–49.
8. See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953).
9. See Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958).
10. Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), xvi–xvii.
11. We certainly do not want to answer it with Ludwig Feuerbach who argued that Christian “theology had long since become anthropology,” referring to “Man” in a loud voice when it said “God.” But he did help to expose the misguided thinking of nineteenth-century liberal theologians (making use of Luther in the process!), as Karl Barth argued in an introductory essay. See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).
12. Craig Blomberg, “Is Mormonism Christian?,” in *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 317.

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13. This question has been asked by several: Craig Blomberg, “Mormonism,” 315–32; Bruce D. Porter and Gerald McDermott, “Is Mormonism Christian?,” in *First Things*, October 2008, 35–41; and Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christian?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991).
14. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 40.
15. John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, ed. J. M. Cameron (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1974), 241.
16. The following discussion draws from two essays of McKnight’s in *Church in the Present Tense*, ed. Kevin Corcoran (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011): “Scripture in the Emerging Movement,” 105–22, and “Atonement and Gospel,” 123–39.
17. McKnight, “Atonement,” 134–35.
18. McKnight, “Atonement,” 139; emphasis added.
19. See Andrew C. Skinner, “America,” in *LDS Beliefs*, 31–35.
20. Bushman, *Smith*, 44.
21. See W. V. Quine and J. S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1978).
22. N. T. Wright puts it well: “Trying to understand Jesus without understanding what that story [i.e., Israel’s] was, how it worked, and what it meant is like trying to understand why someone is hitting a ball with a stick without knowing what baseball, or indeed cricket, is all about.” *Simply Christian* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010), 71.
23. N. T. Wright summarizes the faith this way: “Christianity is all about the belief that the living God, in fulfillment of his promises and as the climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished all this—the finding, the saving, the giving of new life—in Jesus. He has done it. With Jesus, God’s rescue operation has been put into effect once and for all.” *Simply Christian*, 92.
24. I assume evangelicals are his primary “target,” since he dialogues with those who would identify themselves as evangelicals in the essays to which I have referred.
25. McKnight, “Atonement,” 137–38.
26. This is the case Wright makes in *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009). I am not suggesting that McKnight would entirely agree with Wright’s interpretation of Paul and it has been debated among evangelicals (for example, see Mark Husbands and Daniel Treier, *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004)). But Wright makes some of the same criticisms, such as that justification

- has been overemphasized and theologically misread back into the Bible; and Wright and McKnight both place emphasis on the centrality of the covenant and the Story.
27. See N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian*, 114–15; and N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008).
  28. Robert L. Millet, *The Mormon Faith: A New Look at Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 49.
  29. “If all this [i.e., that Adam & Eve were Christians, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel were Christian prophets] seems odd, anachronistic in the sense that there could obviously be no Christianity until the coming to earth of the Christ, Latter-day Saints believe otherwise. They believe and teach that among the plain and precious truths lost from the holy records that became the Bible is the knowledge of Christ’s eternal gospel, the message that a gospel or plan of salvation was had from the dawn of time.” Millet, *Mormon Faith*, 44. This is something that “traditional” Christians have taught for centuries—let alone Paul in Ephesians 1—in that they have identified Genesis 3:15 as the Protoevangelium—the first announcement of the gospel. In a similar vein, John Calvin insisted that the church existed in its “childhood” as far back as the Patriarchs; see John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.2.2.
  30. See Robert L. Millet, *Mormon Faith*, 44: Latter-day Saints believe in dispensations—periods during which God revealed himself and his plan of salvation—often in response to periods of apostasy. Also, see Millet, *The Vision of Mormonism* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2007), 34–35; *A Different Jesus? The Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 88–89. Similarly, see Andrew C. Skinner’s article “Israel” in *LDS Beliefs*, 328.
  31. Millet, *Mormon Faith*, 122–23. This discussion begins on p. 114 and continues to p. 125: Israel includes more than the Jews; it is increased by the number of people joining the Church and therefore coming into the covenant—Abraham’s descendants. Compare Andrew Skinner’s comment in his article on Israel in *LDS Beliefs*, 328: “There are natural-born descendants of Israel, and there are those who are adopted into the house of Israel through accepting Jesus Christ and participating in the ordinances of salvation administered by the house of Israel through the true Church.” What is troubling about Skinner’s comment is that he supports it with Galatians 3:14–29, where Paul is not really speaking about “accepting Jesus

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Christ” as much as he is talking about being accepted into Christ. The distinction is important, as we have argued above.

32. Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 74, 76. Elsewhere Millet likes to identify Jesus as Change Agent, Benefactor, Example, Mediator, and Intercessor. See Millet, *Vision*, 49; and *What Happened to the Cross? Distinctive LDS Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 115.
33. McKnight works from sermons in Acts (2, 3, 4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17), arguing that none of these explains how Jesus’ death saves us but only that the story of Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel’s story—its conclusive chapter. See “Atonement,” 131–33.
34. Millet, *Mormon Faith*, 71–72; see also Millet, *Vision*, 54; Millet, “Atonement,” in *LDS Beliefs*, 56–59.