Not Leaving and Going On to Perfection

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A Review of Samuel M. Brown's First Principles and Ordinances: The Fourth Article of Faith in Light of the Temple, *Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2014. 167 pp., index. $16.95.*

In his most recent book, *First Principles and Ordinances: The Fourth Article of Faith in Light of the Temple* (hereafter *First Principles*), Samuel M. Brown observes that "the Plan of Salvation [is] fundamentally about relationships."[1] This recognition drove the prophet Joseph Smith and early Church members to "forge communities [of saints] that could endure beyond the veil of death" (151). Today, the importance of the temple and its ordinances to family relationships, eternal in their design, are clear to most Latter-day Saints. However, our collective view of the meaning of the principles and ordinances that precede the temple — and lead us to it — is somewhat murkier. Brown demonstrates that what Latter-day Saints sometimes perfunctorily regard merely as "the first principles and ordinances of the gospel" (Articles of Faith 1:4) are — every bit as much as the temple itself is — about relationships. In fact, one cannot fully contextualize the temple and its ordinances unless one understands this aspect of the first principles and ordinances of the gospel.

The Relationship of Relationships to Perfection

One of the more gratifying aspects of reading Samuel Brown's excellent book has been its creating in me a deepening awareness of the enormous implications that the first principles and ordinances of the gospel have for our approach to individual relationships — especially marriage and family but also friendships and community. Before I review the content

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1   Samuel M. Brown, *First Principles and Ordinances: The Fourth Article of Faith in Light of the Temple* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2014), 151. Page numbers for quotations from Brown's book appear in parentheses following the quotation.

of *First Principles*, however, I wish to share an insight regarding the relationship of relationships — and not leaving them — that this book has suggested to me.

From the outset of my reading this book, Brown's loving and thorough (but not exhaustive) approach to the gospel's first principles and ordinances called to mind Hebrews 6:1–2, which states, "Therefore leaving [*aphentes*] the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection [*teleiotēta*]; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." The prophet Joseph Smith in his inspired revision of the text of the King James Version of the Bible (the Joseph Smith Translation, hereafter JST) changed the first part of 6:1 to read: "Therefore **not** leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ."[2]

The verb rendered "leaving" by the KJV translators, Greek *aphiēmi*, can have a much stronger sense: for example, "abandon." In fact, this word was used as a technical term for "divorce" (compare Hebrew *ʿāzab* = "forsake," "abandon," "divorce"). The emendation of "leaving" to "not leaving" reflects the prophet Joseph Smith's correct understanding that we — individually and collectively as a church — can never "abandon" or "divorce" the "principles" or "beginning" (*archēs*) of the doctrine of Christ, including the first principles and ordinances of the gospel and still "go on" or "advance" unto perfection any more than a building can leave its foundation and "go on" or "advance." If faith itself is, as Brown suggests, "a kind of marriage" (23), then it is not something that we can well divorce or abandon, but it "is an active relationship that requires attention, effort, and, as Alma notes, nourishment (Alma 32:37)" (24).

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2   In a later sermon dated October 15, 1843, the Prophet Joseph Smith declared: "The first principles of the Gospel, as I believe, are, faith, repentance, baptism for the remission of sins, with the promise of the Holy Ghost. Look at Heb. vi:1 contradictions—'therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection.' If a man leaves the principles of the doctrine of Christ, how can he be saved in the principles? This is a contradiction. I don't believe it. I will render it as it should be — 'Therefore not leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.'" *History of the Church*, 6:57–58; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 15, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 328. Hereafter cited as *TPJS*.

In other words, the journey to "perfection" is not merely one that *sets out from* the first principles and ordinances, but a journey that is attended *by them* — or really, a journey that attends unceasingly *to them*. Here it is worth noting that in the phrase "let us go on unto perfection," we find one of the most important "temple" terms in the New Testament: *teleiosis*. The adjectival form of this word, *teleios* — used by Jesus in Matthew — denotes "perfect"; "full-grown, mature, adult" and as pertaining to one who has received all the rites or ordinances, "initiated" — that is, "fully initiated."[3] Jesus himself uses this term to describe the perfection of God the Father to which his disciples were expected and even commanded to attain: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). After his resurrection, Jesus would use a similar term to describe the perfection or full ritual and experiential initiation to which he himself had attained: "Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (3 Nephi 12:48).

The word *teleios* together with its cognate forms serve as a *Leitwort* (a lead-word or guiding word)[4] throughout the Letter to the Hebrews.[5] Not only is this a key term in Hebrews 6:1 (as we have already seen), but just as importantly in Hebrews 11:40: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be **made perfect** [*teleiōthōsin*]. When Joseph Smith revisited this verse[6] later in life, after his harrowing experiences in Liberty Jail, he did so in the context of temple. The Prophet adapted Hebrews 11:39–40 as a basis for the vicarious ordinance of the temple:

> And now, my dearly beloved brethren and sisters, let me assure you that these are principles in relation to the dead and

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3   Cf. Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 995.

4   Martin Buber ("Leitwort Style in Pentateuch Narrative," in *Scripture and Translation* [ed. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig; trans. Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox; ISBL; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994] 114) coined the term *Leitwort* ("lead-word," or "guiding word") and defined it as follows: "By *Leitwort* I understand a word or word root that is meaningfully repeated within a text or a sequence of texts or complex of texts; those who attend to these repetitions will find a meaning of the text revealed or clarified, or at any rate made more emphatic. As noted, what is repeated need not be a single word but can be a word root; indeed the diversity of forms strengthens the overall dynamic effect."

5   See, e.g., Hebrews 2:10; 5:9, 14; 6:1; 7:11, 19, 28; 9:9, 11; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:2, 23.

6   Contrast the JST version of Hebrews 11:39–40.

the living that cannot be lightly passed over, as pertaining to our salvation. For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, as Paul says concerning the fathers — that **they without us cannot be <u>made perfect</u> — neither can we without our dead be <u>made perfect</u>**. (D&C 128:15)

This is why "not leaving" rather than "leaving" makes for a more felicitous and doctrinally correct rendering of Hebrews 6:1 — the impossibility of "perfection" *without*, or apart from, relationships. The Prophet recognized that "perfection" or "full initiation" and the rites that lead thereto were inseparable from relationships. Moreover, he recognized that the rites or ordinances that lead to perfection or full initiation into the kingdom of Heaven helped forge and made possible the sealing of family relationships. On this basis the Prophet then quoted 1 Corinthians 15:29 ("Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?") and Malachi 4:5–6. He then continued thus:

> I might have rendered a plainer translation[7] [of Malachi 4:5–6] to this, but it is sufficiently plain to suit my purpose as it stands. It is sufficient to know, in this case, that the earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a welding link of some kind or other between the fathers and the children, upon some subject or other — and behold what is that subject? It is the baptism for the dead. For we **without them** cannot be **made perfect**; neither can they **without** us be **made perfect**. Neither can they nor we be **made perfect without** those who have died in the gospel also; for it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times, which dispensation is now beginning to usher in, that a whole and complete and **perfect** union, and welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time. And not only this, but those things which never have been revealed from the foundation of the world, but have been kept hid from the wise and prudent, shall be revealed unto babes and sucklings in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times. (D&C 128:18)

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7   See especially D&C 2 and JS–H 1:36–39; cf. D&C 138:48.

Regarding the prophet Joseph Smith's use of Hebrews 11:40 in the context of laying the foundation of the temple (see D&C 128), Brown writes: "God is trying to save each of us as individuals, but he is simultaneously trying to save us into the heaven of family, to save us as interconnected groups of people who are connected to him and each other" (87).

From the beginning, the restored gospel has been about *not* leaving and yet advancing.

As the prophet Joseph Smith articulated it on another occasion, "if a man [or woman] leaves the principles of the doctrine of Christ, how can he [or she] be saved in the principles?"[8] This, of course, has pragmatic implications for all Latter-day Saints: if one leaves the first principles and ordinances or the Saints, how does one "go on" or advance unto "perfection"? What caused Lehi such "exceeding fear" when he received his dream/vision of the tree of life was the distance or gulf between him and his sons — the prospect of severed relationships within his family and among his posterity (see 1 Nephi 8:3–4, 35–38), this after partaking of the most sublime symbol of family and everlasting relationships, the fruit of the tree of life.

Nephi, reflecting on his and his father's shared vision of the tree of life, formulates the "not leaving, yet advancing" principle this way: "Wherefore, ye must press forward with a **steadfastness** in Christ, having a perfect brightness of **hope**, and a **love** of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life" (2 Nephi 31:20). In my reading of Nephi's words, "steadfastness in Christ" is reiterative faith in Christ and continual progressive repentance. The Hebrew word for *faith ʾĕmûnâ* derives from the root *ʾmn denotes "to be firm, trustworthy, safe";[9] that is, "steadfastness" or "reliability," not simply a one-time act of faith (see Habakkuk 2:4).

Nephi may have had additional lexical associations in mind that correlate the virtues of hope and charity to the first principles and ordinances. "Hope" — Hebrew *miqveh*[10] or *tiqvâ*[11] — corresponds to

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8   *History of the Church*, 6:58; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Oct. 15, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards; see also *TPJS*, 328.

9   HALOT, 63. Cf. all the * ʾmn entries, pp. 63–65.

10   See, e.g., Jeremiah 14:18; 17:13; Ezra 10:2; 1 Chronicles 29:15; cf. Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 626.

11   HALOT, 1782.

baptism, if we remember the *miqveh* "collecting place" or *miqvâ* the "collecting pool, reservoir" where ritual ablutions often took place and still take place, their possibly root(s) denoting to be "taut" (that is, be tight, controlled) and thus "await, hope" and "collect" (compare Genesis 1:9), "assemble," (that is, as in "holding together").[12] We might make an additional comparison here between the grave and the font—i.e., "**the place underneath** where the living are wont to **assemble**, to show forth the living and the dead" (D&C 128:13) described by the Prophet Joseph Smith—and Joseph F. Smith's description of the collecting place of paradise in the spirit world, "**and there were gathered together in one place** an innumerable company of the spirits of the just … [who] had departed the mortal life, firm in the **hope** of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ … [spirits who] were assembled **awaiting** the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death" (D&C 138:12-16; compare also "this vast multitude **waited** and conversed," v. 18). Moreover, to have "a love of God and of all men" — beyond a fulfillment of what Jesus later called the two great commandments — achieves a divine and interpersonal relationship ideal made possible only by the gift of the Holy Ghost (compare, 1 Nephi 11:22; Romans 5:5).

In any case, "pressing forward" in faith, hope, and charity is what Nephi meant when he exhorted Laman and Lemuel to "hold fast" to the rod of iron/word of God (see 1 Nephi 15:24), that is, the doctrine of Christ,[13] as the righteous faithful who had "pressed forward" and successfully partaken of the fruit of the tree of life had done (see 1 Nephi 8:30). Thus, at a time in which some Latter-day Saints have allowed themselves to be pulled away from the doctrine of Christ, having let go of the rod of iron, Brown's focus on relationships — how the first principles and ordinances of the gospel impact our relationships — is timely, relevant, appropriate, welcome, and one of the best possible approaches to truly living the gospel of Jesus Christ and applying its principles.

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12   HALOT, 1082. It is, moreover, possible that these proposed lexical associations are based on phonological similarity rather than an actual philological relationship.

13   Jared T. Parker, "The Doctrine of Christ in 2 Nephi 31–32 as an Approach to the Vision of the Tree of Life," in *The Things Which My Father Saw: Approaches to Lehi's Dream and Nephi's Vision* (2011 Sperry Symposium), ed. Daniel L. Belnap, Gaye Strathearn, and Stanley A. Johnson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 161–167.

An Autobiographical Introduction

Glimpses into Sam Brown's personal life (for example, his relationship with his father) and experiences constitute some of the best parts of book. He begins with a recollection of his encounter with church discipline as a youth. There is, of course, always risk in delving into one's past. Bringing up one's own or another's sins and transgressions frequently invites a spirit of negativity. I am grateful in this instance, however, for Brown's judicious candor in telling his personal story. He admits that during his late adolescence, he became "atheist and then agnostic" (9) and that his "life was not on a good path and [stood in need of] a course correction" (1). Subsequently, however, he "came to faith on the verge of adulthood through a process of repentance and intense spiritual experience" (9).

The prospect of church discipline (disfellowshipment) (1) as a young man might have set the author's life on an entirely different trajectory had he allowed it. Instead, he decided *not* to leave. Brown's reminiscence of his feelings and experiences the night previous to the Sunday that marked his return to full fellowship and his blessing of the sacrament with his friend Tyler, "who had prayed countless times" (2) on his behalf, are alone worth more than the price of this book. Words rarely do these kinds of experiences justice. Brown, however, succeeds here and elsewhere. It was this encounter (or reencounter) with the first principles and ordinances of the gospel that, according to the author, "launched [him] on a life of believing" (3).

On a very personal level, Brown's reminiscence of his youthful spiritual struggles and their resolution took me back to my own experiences as a spiritually struggling 15- to 18-year-old. Like Sam Brown, I was eventually able to resolve these struggles through the atonement of Jesus Christ. By returning to activity and thus to partaking of the sacrament, I returned to the first principles and ordinances of the gospel. I will never forget the personal revelation through the Holy Ghost that flowed into my life during that reformative — and formative — time, revelation that included one of the clearest and most unmistakable answers to prayer (regarding potential mission service) I have ever received.

Through it all, Sam Brown has become — and remains — a "practicing, believing, temple-going Latter-day Saint Christian who is sealed by temple ordinances to his family, … a scientist, a spouse, a parent, a child, a physician, a believer, a starry-eyed wonderer, and a sometimes melancholy remorseful human being who is struggling to make his way in a fallen world" (23). The richness of Brown's book

consists in his thoughtful use of all of these very personal perspectives. I suspect that every Latter-day Saint shares at least one, and most likely several, of these descriptions and perspectives and will thus find this book a rewarding read.

"Faith, Fidelity, Faithfulness"

As the first principle of the gospel, Brown, recommends faith in Jesus Christ "as a kind of marriage of our souls to the community of the saints has the same character as marriage itself." Thus, "when … vexed by a particular doctrine or cultural understanding, the practice of my faith is to acknowledge that tension or conflict or discomfort in my mind and then place it into the balance of my entire relationship with the church." In severe cases this of necessity will involve "actively supplement[ing] those negative experiences with many positive ones," just as "paying extra attention to pleasure and kindness will help maintain the health of [a stressed] relationship" (23). Brown's sage advice is similar to Elder Jeffrey R. Holland's recent counsel:

> When problems come and questions arise, do not start your quest for faith by saying how much you do not have, leading as it were with your "unbelief." That is like trying to stuff a turkey through the beak! Let me be clear on this point: I am not asking you to pretend to faith you do not have. I am asking you to be true to the faith you do have. Sometimes we act as if an honest declaration of doubt is a higher manifestation of moral courage than is an honest declaration of faith. It is not! … Be as candid about your questions as you need to be; life is full of them on one subject or another. But if you and your family want to be healed, don't let those questions stand in the way of faith working its miracle.[14]

We will have to exercise faith in Jesus Christ within our relationships within the Church, especially when those relationships become strained. Brown writes:

> There will be times in our practice of faith when we disagree with or find our fellow saints disagreeable. Those down times will come as inevitably as they do in any relationship. In faith, we can balance those negative experiences with

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14 Jeffrey R. Holland, "Lord, I Believe!" *Ensign*, May 2013, 94.

more positive experiences. At times we may feel ourselves frustrated by political disagreements with other saints, or we may struggle with stressful relationships within our ward, or we may have difficulty making sense of events in church history or particular LDS teachings. Those are times to reach for the things we have loved about God, the church, and the community of the saints. (25)

In the most difficult times, we must never lose sight of the "relationship" aspects of our faith in Jesus Christ and the relationship nature of faith. I suspect that is one reason why the promise to "always remember him" follows closely on our "witness[ing]" to the God, our Eternal Father (kinship terminology!) our "willing[ness] to take upon [us] the name of [his] Son" (D&C 20:77, 79; see also Moroni 4:3;.5:2) in the sacrament prayers. Our membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is first and foremost about our relationship with Jesus Christ and our family relationships but also about our relationships with our fellow Saints. Having faith in Jesus Christ is to be faithful in these relationships.

To those who murmur or gripe on any given Sunday, "Oh no! Not another lesson on faith!" I have been tempted to respond, "Until we have the faith to *literally* command the mountains, like the brother of Jared commanded mount Zerin in Ether 12:30, we have not begun to know enough about faith or how to exercise it." [15] The realization of this aspect of faith — what some might consider one of its more "theoretical" — is one that few men or women attain in this life, though men and women move metaphorical mountains constantly through faith. And yet, as Brown demonstrates, there are marvelous, practical aspects to faith that we seldom think about. He writes: "Faith is just as necessary to love ourselves as it is to love other people. In faith, we can imagine that we are worth saving, that we are divine beings with a glorious future" (38). Moreover, "Faith isn't about the specific outcomes of a life. Faith is about a relationship with Christ. Through faith in Christ we are able to imagine ourselves as Christ sees us" (39). These aspects of faith we can never *leave* if we have any hope of salvation. Rather, they beg our continual practice unto perfection. An unrelenting practice of this kind of faith — imagining ourselves as not only worth saving but divine by design as Christ surely sees us — leads unavoidably to repentance (compare Amulek's "faith unto repentance," Alma 34:15–17; see also Helaman 15:7).

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15   See also Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6; Jacob 4:6.

"Repentance, Atonement, Community"

Brown suggests that *repentance* is a word that "should embrace a cloud of meanings" (61). The Greek term *metanoia*, as he notes (and as is widely known), denotes a "changed mind" or a "change of mind" — in Book of Mormon language, a "mighty change of heart."[16] Repentance is a "change in the nonphysical elements of a person, a change in identity made possible by Jesus" (45). He additionally notes that our English word *repentance*, which comes to us by way of French (originally from Latin *paenitere*), denotes the "regret" or "sorrow" that should precede and precipitate the change implied in *metanoia*.

Such a change of mind — repentance — "takes place within the context of Christ's atonement" (47). That atonement "represents our hopes for a better world against the disappointing reality we actually live" (45). Understanding the nature of repentance and Christ's atonement can help us bridge the gap between the extreme forms of the doctrine of original sin and the notion that human beings have divine potential. We recognize that "we are a mixture of the human and the divine, consciousness existing in the productive tension between aspiration and accomplishment" (46). In fact, according to Brown, "in a very real sense, mortality is the adolescent phase of our immortal existence, a time for us to mature toward what we will one day become, … a time when we exert our independence, make mistakes, puzzle through our relationship with our parents and our ancestors, and create new relationships with people who are not our blood kin" (47).

Since communities are a nexus of relationships, repentance and forgiveness are necessarily "communal" experiences and undertakings. Brown observes that "our failings become most apparent in communities; in relationships our minor foibles become intolerable." Thus, "we cannot really live or sin or repent all by ourselves. These actions happen within communities of other people" (55). He cites examples of communal repentance like Yom Kippur (the "Day of Atonement") and Thanksgiving. For Latter-day Saints, the preparation for the Kirtland Temple dedication was such a time. He further suggests that President Gordon B. Hinckley led the Saints in an expression of communal repentance in April 2006 when he denounced racism of any form in the Church and mandated

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16 See Mosiah 5:2; Alma 5:12-14; cf. also Mosiah 5:7; Alma 5:7, 26; 19:33; Helaman 15:7.

its elimination (56).[17] To Brown's insights here, I would add that, like the holy festivals that occurred in the spring and autumn in ancient Israel — spring Pesach and the autumn trifecta of Sukkot (Feast of the Tabernacles), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and Rosh Hashanah (the New Year) — which were times of repentance and renewal, spring and fall general conference can and should always be times of renewal — times of personal as well as communal repentance and forgiveness. Like the ancient Israelite Sabbath, our sacrament meetings can be such experience for our ward families. All of us, collectively and individually, should be engaged in what Professor Hugh Nibley called "perpetual, progressive repentance."[18]

Brown's own view of repentance is deeply informed by experiences with his father and becoming reconciled to him through the Atonement. Like faith, true repentance involves "seeing with the eye of Christ" because such seeing "requires that we overcome the natural biases of our own eyes" (58). We come to recognize the "sinners and saints" paradox: that "we are all of us broken and all of us glorious." In other words, that "we are glorious, and we are fallen, we are imperfect mimics, and we are the image of Christ" (59). Faith helps us to see our divine potential as Saints, while repentance "grounded in relationships" helps us "imagine

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17   See Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Need for Greater Kindness," *Ensign*, May 2006, 58–61.

18   Hugh W. Nibley, *Approaching Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1989), 164. He states: "Do what Peter tells us to do: Have faith that there is more than you know; repent of all your present shallowness and silliness; wash off everything of this world in the waters of baptism, and be reborn, not in the self-congratulatory one-shot manner of pop religion, but to a course of action requiring perpetual, progressive repentance. Then 'ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost' and get the guidance you need (Acts 2:37-38). Q: Perpetual repentance? A. At least until you are full of grace and truth, which is nowhere within the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, 'an unexamined life is not worth living,' as Socrates said." Elsewhere (*Teachings of the Book of Mormon*, Volume 3, Lecture 66), Nibley stated: "Problem-solving ability is necessary for repentance. Intelligence is a process of progressive repentance. You repent of your mistakes you make. You repent of your stupidity, and you have to keep doing that all the time, because we don't get to first base. Otherwise, you'll never break through to anything. Remember, the great scientist when he finally sees the light almost invariably says, 'What a fool I've been. It has been staring me in the face all this time and I didn't see it.' The stars have been sending us the same hints for thousands of years, and we fail to respond to them. They are there all the time. It just depends on your being able or willing to see them" (online: http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1137&index=10).

the sinner as a close friend who happens to have made a mistake" while "not confus[ing] our distaste for sin with a right to judge another person" (54). Such repentance can help us mend broken relationships with broken people, since we recognize that we in our own way share that brokenness (we are all imperfect)[19] and that we and those with whom we must reconcile (such as a flawed parent) are "deeply and permanently loved by Christ." Thus, "through faith and repentance we move a few steps closer to a Zion society and the promise of a heaven on earth" (65).

"Ordinances: The Power of God Is Manifest"

Brown's third chapter "contains a transition between the principles of faith and repentance — remembering that [these principles] are actions as much as they are states of mind — and the ordinances of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost" (68). Here he insightfully observes that the "struggle" of many people to "understand the significance and meaning of ordinances … stems from unappreciated cultural changes that have separated us from our rich history of religious rituals" (68).

Ordinances often seem strange to people, especially those with a modern western mindset. However, the prophet Joseph Smith's use of the language of Obadiah 1:21 helps us to appreciate the "communal" nature of salvation as reflected in ordinances: "And saviours [Heb. *môšiʿîm*] shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's" (compare D&C 103:9–10).[20] Another potential translation for Hebrew *môšîaʿ* could be "rescuer." The Latter-day Saints are (or should be) "rescuers" — rescuers of others (perhaps especially of the *other*) and of each other.

As Brown put it, "ordinances force us to rely on others." In other words, one cannot perform an ordinance on oneself. Thus, "we are saviors on Mount Zion for one another" (86). As Latter-day Saints, performing ordinances in the name of the Lord and by his authority on one other binds us to each other, and performing ordinances for and on behalf of those who have preceded us in death transcends the veil and binds us to them in everlasting relationships.

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19   See especially Romans 3:23.

20   This concept is actual evident fairly early in the revelations given to the Prophet Joseph Smith: "For they were set to be a light unto the world, and to be the **saviors of men; And inasmuch as they are not the saviors of men, they are as salt that has lost its savor**, and is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men" (D&C 103:9-10). The wordplay on "saviors" and "savor" here is striking.

Far from being a theology of "salvation by works," ordinances immerse us (and keep us immersed) in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Ordinances are essential for our salvation not merely in and of themselves but as constant reminders that we cannot save ourselves. In this, ordinances always point to Christ" (86). Moreover, ordinances are "equalizers" in the building of society that is supposed to become "equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things" (D&C 78:5).[21]

Regarding the equalizing force or effect of ordinances, Brown observes, "There is no separate temple endowment for the titans of industry or the smartest or most righteous among us. In requiring that we all perform the same ordinances at some point in our lives, God sends the message that no one is better than anyone else where it matters — in our capacity to be exalted." He continues, "Jesus taught that message of essential equality when he explained why it was that he, the greatest prophet and the Messiah, had to condescend to be baptized by a lesser prophet like John the Baptist (see Matthew 3:13–15)" (85–86). Brown's insights thus help us better appreciate the depths of meaning in Nephi's angelic guide's question to the former in 1 Nephi 11:16 "knowest thou the condescension of God?" Christ "condescended" to be baptized;[22] moreover, he "descended below all things"[23] in order to exalt even "the least of these,"[24] his brothers and sisters.

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21   D&C 78:3-5: "For verily I say unto you, the time has come, and is now at hand; and behold, and lo, it must needs be that there be an organization of my people, in regulating and establishing the affairs of the storehouse for the poor of my people, both in this place and in the land of Zion — For a permanent and everlasting establishment and order unto my church, to advance the cause, which ye have espoused, to the salvation of man, and to the glory of your Father who is in heaven; That you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things. For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things; For if you will that I give unto you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves by doing the things which I have commanded you and required of you. And now, verily thus saith the Lord, it is expedient that all things be done unto my glory, by you who are joined together in this order."

22   In addition to 1 Nephi 11:16 and 26; Nephi and his brother Jacob use an expression rendered "condescension" in 2 Nephi 4:26; 9:53; and Jacob 4:7.

23   See D&C 88:6; 122:8.

24   See Matthew 25:40, 45; D&C 42:38; cf. D&C 88:47.

<center>**"Baptism and the Hosts of Heaven"**</center>

In this chapter, Brown offers a brief history of baptism in its Judaic context. He recalls the *tevilah* (or *ṭĕbîlâ*), from the root **ṭbl* ("dip," "immerse," "bathe") and the freshwater font called the *mikveh* in which full-immersion ritual ablutions took place. The pre-Christian Greek use of the verb *baptō*, whence the noun *baptism* derives, originally referred to the sinking (that is, full immersion) of ships (99).

As to the symbolism of baptism, Latter-day Saint children usually become familiar with the metaphor of "washing clean" first. Though this is a beautiful and useful metaphor, Brown, notes that this symbol is "very limited" (94) and, in fact, potentially limiting. Baptism as a metaphor of death and resurrection — of Christ's death and resurrection and of ours — is layered with rich symbolism. But perhaps most importantly, baptism is an adoption: Through baptism we are adopted — or reborn — as sons and daughters of Christ, we become members of Christ's family, the family of heaven. It reminds us that "a relationship — the relationship between us and Christ — is our salvation" (104).

Earlier in his book, Brown remarks how "in a way that few others understood, Joseph Smith taught that baptism was an ordinance for creating and sustaining relationships that could survive death" (8), that is, as adoption into the heavenly family. Indeed, Alma the Elder's covenant speech at the waters of Mormon (see Mosiah 18:8–10) reminds us that the baptismal covenant is about relationships:[25] our relationship with God ("come into the fold of God and be called his people," v. 8; "stand as witnesses of God," v. 9; "redeemed of God." v. 9; "enter[ing] into a covenant to serve him and keep his commandments," v. 10); and our relationships with each other (belonging to a "fold" with others, v. 8; being "willing to bear one another's burdens," v. 8; being "willing to mourn with those that mourn … and comfort those that stand in need of comfort," v. 9; being "numbered with those of the first resurrection," v. 9).

Insights gained from his study and practice of medicine are perhaps no better or more appropriately evident than in his description of the symbolism of the water into which we are baptized as a symbol of death and rebirth:

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25   Thanks to my student Erika Hill (personal communication) for reminding me of this important fact.

> Water carries with it the specter of death. On the other hand,
> life in the desert makes clear how fragile life is without water.
> Just a day or so without access to water, and we begin to die
> a miserable death. Water, like baptism, contains opposites.
> Water also mediates between the worlds of the living and
> the dead as we transition from life within our mothers to
> independent life in the outside world. We float in amniotic
> fluid, nourished through our navels by our mothers' blood
> and with a rush of water and maternal pain, we draw breath
> into our lungs, changing ourselves from something like fish
> to something like human beings. Water marks transitions
> and changes it status. Immersion in water carries with it these
> ancient images and associations with life and death, with
> birth and passage, drowning and the quenching of thirst.
> Baptism by immersion fruitfully engages the cloud of meaning
> surrounding water and other sacred liquids. (99–100)

In spite of the frequency of the ordinance of water baptism in the Church, these are symbols that we seldom if ever think about but should. And yet, there is still much more to water baptism than the symbols of the water.

Citing Romans 8:14–17, Brown suggests that "baptism contains the power to create the family of heaven." The prophet Joseph Smith understood this, as is evident in D&C 128:12–13, where in clarifying the meaning of baptism for the dead, he clarified the meaning of baptism for the living, that is, "baptism for the dead is the method by which we will form a chain of belonging in which we are bound together with those who have left mortality before us" (102–3). The heavenly family — the Church — existing on both sides of the veil, is thus linked together in relationships by eternal bonds through baptism and other vicarious ordinances. Nevertheless, water baptism is only the first baptism that is primarily concerned about relationships.

"The Gift of the Holy Ghost"

The Gift of the Holy Ghost and the ordinance of confirmation whereby this gift is bestowed are also fundamentally about relationships. As Brown suggests, "The Holy Ghost represents a kind of spiritual cement that binds us together — a cement made from us, our fellow saints, and the divine beings who care deeply about us" (111). Brown begins this chapter by recalling "the Mormon Pentecost of 1836" (110) in Kirtland

with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost and the attendant theophanies, visions, and blessings — many of them shared — that bound these early Saints together and prepared them for the European missions that would buttress the Church in the face of the Kirtland Banking Crisis and for generations thereafter. Brown here attempts to "expand our thinking" about the Holy Ghost in three specific ways: first, by showing how the Holy Ghost functions as "the spirit of God's church"; second, by exploring the Holy Ghost as a "window into the mystery of embodiment"; and third, by demonstrating the "strong communal implications" of our reception of the Holy Ghost through an ordinance (111).

Brown traces the history of the terminology that stands behind the title "Holy Ghost," *holy* with its "notion of something set apart," and *ghost* as "an image of breath or wind." Moreover, he notes that semantic range for both Greek *pneuma* and Hebrew *ruach* (or *rûaḥ*) that include "wind" or "breath" (111).[26] Brown further observes:

> For early Christians the word *pneuma* represented a way to express at least two key concepts. First is the close association between our breath and our lives. To live is to breathe, to breathe is to live. At the moment when we die, a moment our ancestors knew all too well, our breath dissipates as our chest stills. It is natural to connect breath and the spark of life, not least because breathing is the activity that distinguishes a sleeping body from a corpse. Second is the image of the wind, something powerful that is visible only by its effects. Pneuma subsequently carried with it a sense of invisible efficacy. Wind cannot be seen directly, but its awesome effects are easily witnessed; the same is true of the power or influence of God. When we breathe we draw into and expel from our bodies the wind that circulates around us. (112)

We might note in this vein that the Egyptian word *snsn*, sometimes rendered "breathings," rather denotes "fellowship."[27] Understanding the gift of the Holy Ghost as "interhuman connection, the Holy Ghost facilitates reaching across the boundaries that are imposed by embodiment." Thus, "in one way of thinking, the Holy Ghost also

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26 The wordplay on "wind"/"spirit" (*pneuma*) in Jesus's dialogue with Nicodemus is an illustrative example of the range of meaning of both Greek pneuma and Hebrew *rûaḥ*.

27 See John Gee, "Some Puzzles from the Joseph Smith Papyri," *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008): 135.

represents the spirit of Christ's church. We individual saints are the body of Christ, and a collective spirit that matches that collective body" (116). If the Holy Ghost is the symbol *par excellence* of the spirit/breath that gives life to Christ's church or body, the paramount symbol of the body — Christ's and ours — is the temple.

"Everything Speaks of the Temple"

Too frequently as Latter-day Saints, we forget that the first principles and ordinances are also "temple ordinances." The temple, in a very real way, puts the first principles and ordinances into the proper context. For example, it was revealed to the prophet Joseph Smith that "the baptismal font was instituted as a similitude of the grave" and as such "was commanded to be in a place underneath where the living are wont to assemble, to show forth the living and the dead, and that all things may have their likeness, and that they may accord one with another" (D&C 128:13). Confirmation, likewise, becomes a temple ordinance that prepares us for the endowment.

Brown observes an important parallel between baptism and the endowment of which Latter-day Saints ought to become cognizant: "In baptism we pass from life to death to new life with Christ, immersed in his water. In the temple we pass through the veil from life to death to new life with Christ, enfolded in divine love. In both baptism and endowment we offer up our tiny wills and fragile agency through covenants that allow our wills to merge with Christ's" (143).

Indeed, the temple constitutes "an entire method for understanding the gospel and our relationships to each other" (133). And yet, as Brown also notes, "The forms and symbols of the temple differ starkly from the ways we have tended to see the principles and ordinances of the gospel, so our prior understanding [after we receive the additional ordinances of the temple] may require revision." Brown admits to feeling, like David O. McKay and many other Latter-day Saints, "disoriented" on his "first encounter with the temple." He notes that "unfortunately, some people even find the temple so disconcerting that they withdraw from the fellowship of the saints." Since "go[ing] on unto perfection," according to JST Hebrews 6:1, requires "*not* leaving," much more must be done by the Latter-day Saints collectively and individually to solve this problem. In this vein, Brown recommends that "we as a community could better prepare people for the temple experience, but we as individuals could also stand to be more resilient" (132). We can, in fact, "improve our relationship with the temple" by recognizing that "the theology and

ordinances of the temple do at least three things. First, the temple liturgy consists of sacraments, ordinances, saving rituals. Second, the temple is a vessel for doctrine. Third, the temple clarifies our relationships with each other and with Christ" (133–34).

There are clear affinities between baptisms and confirmations and initiatory washing and anointings that require little elucidation. However, beyond baptism as "a pledge of adoption and permanent connection," washings offer, as anciently, "a way to prepare for specific types of encounters with the divine" (136). The anointings that follow the washings evoke royal[28] and priestly[29] anointing in ancient Israel and elsewhere.[30] Both washings and anointings have their antecedents in the Hebrew Bible and early Christian rites. Brown notes that what we refer to as the "endowment" grew from the earliest washings and anointings at Kirtland in the School of the Prophets and the "endowment of power" (that is, the reception of spiritual power) "into something even greater" with the building of the Kirtland temple and into something still greater at Nauvoo (136–38). Describing the Nauvoo endowment in general terms, Brown concludes that "endowment is and has always been a story about relationships. Relationships are the solution to death, the bedrock of the gospel" (138).

Nothing, of course, is more pertinent to relationships in the restored gospel and in temple worship than the temple sealing ordinance. In his sixth chapter, Brown offers a helpful overview of the ancient practice of using seals to mark cherished possessions as one's own,[31] a secular practice that serves as a useful type of an eternal reality ritualized in the temple (much of ancient "atonement" language is drawn from the language of commerce, and yet it describes aspects of transcendent, supernal, and eternal reality that is the atonement of Jesus Christ). A crucial point is that "the temple sealing acts as the seal of Christ — it marks us as belonging to him. His seal acts as a kind of birth certificate for us" (139). This, interestingly, is the fundamental point of King

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28   See, e.g., Judges 9:8, 15; 1 Samuel 2:10; 10:1; 15:1, 17; 35; 26:16; 2 Samuel 1:21; 2:4, 7; 3:39; 5:3; 17; 12:7; 19:10; 22:51; 1 Kings 1:39, 45; 5:1; 19:15–16; 2 Kings 9:3, 6; 11:12; 1 Chronicles 4:8; 11:3; 29:22; 2 Chronicles 23:11; Psalm 2:2; 18:50; Jacob 1:9.

29   See, e.g., Exodus 28:40-43; 30:30; 40:12-15; Leviticus 4:5, 16; 6:22; 7:35; 16:32; 21:10; Numbers 3:3; 35:25; 1 Chronicles 29:22.

30   Cf., e.g., Ether 6:22, 27; 9:4, 14; 10:10, 16; Isaiah 45:1.

31   On the ancient sealing practices, see John Gee, "Book of Mormon Word Usage: 'Seal You His,'" *Insights* 22/1 (2002): 4; idem, "On the Practice of Sealing in the Book of the Dead and the Coffin Texts," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 35 (2008): 105–22.

Benjamin's speech at the Zarahemla temple with its concluding remarks on "sealing" ("that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent may seal you his," Mosiah 5:15).[32]

Brown, in words that echo and articulate my own deep feelings of gratitude, acknowledges the debt that Latter-day Saints owe Hugh Nibley for calling our attention to the relational and representational nature of the temple to the cosmos:

> I'm grateful to Hugh Nibley for reminding us as Latter-day Saints that temples have long served as maps of the cosmos. This was true in ancient Mesopotamia, and it is true for us as Latter-day Saints. When we worship in the temple we are locating ourselves in the universe, in the interlocking networks of particles, people, and planets. The ancients understood those maps in terms of the concept of the great chain of being and the metaphysical law of correspondence. There were clues to the meaning of the universe in many little things … the human body, human society, scriptures, the temple. (145)

It is in this cosmic setting of the temple that, sitting together, "we pledge that we love each other as ourselves" (150); indeed, even to love each other as God the Father and his son Jesus Christ love us.[33] Moreover, in this setting, "we promise the universe that when we are asked we will see the royalty in each other. We promise God and Christ that we will carry their atonement — the limitless promise of divine reconciliation — from them to other human beings as secondary saviors on mount Zion" (150). Not only is our participation in this atoning work the meaning of the temple, in a very real sense this is the meaning of the entire gospel of Jesus Christ, including and perhaps especially its "first principles and ordinances."

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32   On which, see Matthew L. Bowen, "Becoming Sons and Daughters at God's Right Hand: King Benjamin's Rhetorical Wordplay on His Own Name," *Journal of Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* 21/2 (2012): 2–13. John Gee ("Seal You His," 4), in addition to noting King Benjamin's positive use of this idiom in Mosiah 5:15, calls our attention Amulek's negative use of this idiom in Alma 34:35, where he states that the devil can also "seal us his" ("he doth seal you his").

33   See John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." See also 1 John 4:10 and 1 Nephi 11:17-23.

Conclusion

Brown's stated aim for his book was to "allow the various facets of [his] personality and experience to inform each other in order to cultivate an attitude of wonder in the face of the familiar and deceptively simple principles of the fourth article of faith" (10). In this aim, I think he succeeds most brilliantly. Moreover, he succeeds in showing that the "simple principles" and ordinances of the gospel are endlessly rich in their meaning. For these reasons, and for all of the others cited throughout this review, I wholeheartedly recommend Sam Brown's *First Principles* as a study and a resource that will benefit every Latter-day Saint from those in their early teenage years to those of advanced years. I cannot imagine any young adult or adult in (or even out of) the Church that would not learn much from this book. It has forever changed my view of the relational nature of the gospel in all its facets.

If a mortal lifetime of studying the first principles and ordinances of the gospel will not yield an adequate (let alone "perfect") understanding of them, our work as Latter-day Saints is cut out for us not only here but hereafter. Brown's book certainly helps that cause. Recalling the language of JST Hebrews 6:3, eternal perfection is ever our goal ("And we will go on unto perfection if God permit"). However, we must do so not forsaking the Savior, the first principles and ordinances (JST Hebrews 6:1) of his gospel, the temple, or each other. Salvation, after all, consists of and in relationships. This is one truth (of many) that we should contemplate when we partake of the sacrament in remembrance of the Savior and his suffering.

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