

INTERPRETER

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A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 7 · 2013 · Pages 181-243

Passing Up The Heavenly Gift (Part One of Two)

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Offprint Series

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PASSING UP THE HEAVENLY GIFT (PART ONE OF TWO)

Gregory L. Smith

Review of Denver C. Snuffer, Jr., *Passing the Heavenly Gift*, Salt Lake City: Mill Creek Press, 2011. 510 pp., no index. \$25.97.

The Basic Thesis

...the Latter-day Saint church was predicted to fail, and in all likelihood has failed to secure the fullness of the priesthood (Denver Snuffer¹).

Denver C. Snuffer, Jr. claims to have had a vision of the resurrected Jesus Christ.² A convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he is the author of eight books (509). The thesis of the most recent—*Passing the Heavenly Gift*—is summarized by his book’s cover photo: a snuffed out candle, smoke curling upward, with a dim ember persisting at the tip of the wick.

1 Denver C. Snuffer, Jr., *Passing the Heavenly Gift* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Mill Creek Press, 2011), 447. All future citations to this work will be in the form of page numbers in parentheses. I will refer to the book as *PTHG* for brevity.

2 “The Lord does still personally appear to mankind. I am a witness to that fact. He first appeared to me February 13, 2003. I have written a book about the topic.... That book does not contain any details about the Lord’s ministry to me, but affirms it took place” (452). See also Denver Snuffer, “Current Events,” from the desk of Denver Snuffer (blog), 26 August 2013, <http://denversnuffer.blogspot.ca/2013/08/current-events.html>, and John Dehlin, “321-322: Denver Snuffer – A Progressive, Fundamentalist, Non-Polygamist Mormon Lawyer Who Claims to Have Seen Christ,” Mormon Stories Podcast, 12 February 2012 at <http://mormonstories.org/321-322-denver-snuffer-a-progressive-fundamentalist-non-polygamist-mormon-who-claims-to-have-seen-christ/>.

Snuffer claims that Joseph Smith was an inspired prophet, but Joseph's commands and revelations were not heeded adequately. As a result, Joseph was betrayed by Church members and murdered prior to the completion of the Nauvoo Temple (104). This made it impossible, in Snuffer's view, for Joseph to pass on all the necessary ordinances and doctrines, notwithstanding the endowment and other ordinances given to the Twelve prior to Joseph's death (105–110). Brigham Young, the Twelve, and their ecclesiastical heirs did not, therefore, perpetuate the fullness of Joseph's mission (87–89, 268, 272–276, 283). Some of their acts, and the changes that Snuffer believes they have made to Church doctrine, practice, or administration, were not sanctioned by God, and constitute the “passing of the heavenly gift” (287, 400). This loss was, in Snuffer's telling, predicted by Joseph Smith, and the time is now ripe for members of the Church to reclaim these blessings (315–317, 400–402, 447–499).

Prophecy and Historical Claims

If you can control people's ideas of the past, you control their ideas of the present and hence the future. (Hugh Nibley³)

Snuffer provides a reading of Joseph Smith's statements and the Book of Mormon's prophecies that accords with his opinions. One could—and perhaps should—contest these interpretations vigorously. As Hugh Nibley once noted, though, the uninspired interpretation of prophecy is a notoriously fickle and inexact science—and Snuffer would doubtless consider my

3 Hugh Nibley, “The Way of the Church,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Vol. 4 of *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*), edited by Todd Compton and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1987), 217.

interpretation as uninspired as I regard his.⁴ Since we disagree about which authorities might be appealed to—for I have a much higher regard for LDS prophets after Joseph Smith than he does—only divine revelation could settle the issue. Such divine endorsement or reproof is not, however, amenable to citation here.

Snuffer's claims rest, however, on a foundation of historical interpretation and reconstruction. He insists that his work was provoked because "among friends of mine there is an increasing unease with official accounts of the history of the church" (xii). "A great deal of what is regarded as 'well settled' [in Church history] is, upon close investigation, merely a series of inconsistent leaps of faith unwarranted by the record" (xiii). Snuffer tells "faithful Latter-day Saint" readers that they therefore "will need to be open-minded" (xiii). Open-mindedness is a virtue, and yet, as many wits have warned, we should not be so open-minded that our brains fall out.⁵

Snuffer is somewhat dismissive of previous efforts to recount Latter-day Saint history. "History does not belong to the historians. Their techniques only permit them to offer an interpretation of events. Your own opinion is as valid as theirs" (38). This is an excellent example of *PTHG*'s tendency to make statements that are absolutely true, and then couple them with a conclusion that is dubious. It is certainly true that all history is an interpretation; no historian is infallible, nor are only professional historians allowed to "do history." But it is absurd

4 "Nothing is easier than to identify one's own favorite political, economic, historical, and moral convictions with the gospel. That gives one a neat, convenient, but altogether too easy advantage over one's fellows.... This is simply insisting that our way is God's way and therefore, the only way. It is the height of impertinence." [Hugh Nibley, "Beyond Politics," *Mormon Studies Review* 23/1 (2011): 150.]

5 The earliest variant that I've found of this aphorism is Max Radin, "On Legal Scholarship," *The Yale Law Journal* (May 1937), as cited by Peter Olausson, factoids, http://www.faktoider.nu/openmind_eng.html.

to claim that any opinion is as valid as any other opinion. If I am firmly of the view that the Church was first organized in Japan in 1930, instead of New York in 1830, my opinion is simply wrong, however sincerely I hold it. Snuffer continues:

I am a lawyer, not an historian. This book is a view of the events as I have come to understand them. Any historian will offer only his editorial opinion dressed in an academic discipline to pretend it is more than mere opinion. But history written by the academics suffers from all the bias, blindness and foolishness of the one who writes (5).

He is certainly correct that authorial bias cannot but contaminate any work. Elsewhere, however, he seems to declare himself above or immune to such concerns. There is not much intellectual caution in his self-portrait:

Taking this scriptural framework, (not as an historian but as a believer in the prophetic insight about us) I then tracked through our history. I used a lot of primary sources, including journals and diaries of church leaders. What I found was that the events in our history could be viewed as an exact match for the prophetic warnings given us in scripture (Book of Mormon/D&C). *The result was not history, but truth.* If the book is true (and I am persuaded it is the most correct account of our dispensation written so far) then we need to awaken to our present peril and repent.⁶

Not only is Snuffer's work "truth" (rather than biased history), and not only is it the best account of our dispensation, but "I think I understand [Joseph Smith] as well as any person who has reviewed the written record about him" (40). But

6 Snuffer, "Current events," italics added.

even if this lofty self-portrait is true, if anyone's opinion about history is as valid as anyone else's, it is not clear why we ought to listen to Snuffer at all.

Snuffer claims that “the problem with *Passing the Heavenly Gift* has not been its accuracy. The issue raised in the notice I received from the stake president does not say the book is false, contains errors or makes mistakes in history.”⁷ His stake president may not have said it—priesthood leaders are generally not tasked with evaluating the accuracy of history—but I will. The book makes many false statements and conclusions, contains errors, and makes mistakes in history—and it is difficult to believe that some of those mistakes are made by oversight.

I therefore propose to first outline the various *historical* claims upon which Snuffer's reconstruction of the Restoration rests. I will then consider each point in detail—we will see that Snuffer's reconstruction is simply implausible or in error. It ignores documents that do not match the story he tells and it distorts or misrepresents some documents that he cites. He does not interact with previous scholarship in a responsible way. It certainly cannot pretend to pure “truth,” and often shades into frank error.

Summary of Snuffer's Historical Reconstruction

One searches in vain for a succinct summary of *PTHG*'s argument.⁸ The book wanders, repeats itself, and usually does not include the author's entire argument in a single place—it is scattered throughout. The claims do not always seem entirely

7 Snuffer, “Compliance (So Far As Possible).”

8 Snuffer's blog summarizes it in one sentence, however: “We are not now the same church restored by Joseph Smith.” See Denver Snuffer, “Contentment,” from the desk of Denver Snuffer (blog), 7 September 2013, <http://denversnuffer.blogspot.ca/2013/09/contentment.html>.

self-consistent. The following points, however, provide the framework for his interpretation of LDS scripture and history.

1. Priesthood conferred by ordination is just a potential (“many are called”) and not actual bestowal of power (“few are chosen”). To truly receive priesthood power, a type of divine theophany is necessary (36).
2. Oliver Cowdery gave a charge to the original twelve apostles requiring them to seek to behold the face of God. This charge was discontinued in the early 1900s because so few had a theophany-type experience (88–89).
3. Brigham Young, many other post-Joseph Smith leaders, and modern apostles sometimes explicitly deny having had theophany-type experiences, “parsing” [*sic*] their words carefully to give false impressions to their unwary listeners (61, 65, 87–88, 243).
4. Brigham Young was ordained an apostle by the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, not Joseph Smith, and so he did not receive priesthood keys or authority from Joseph Smith (87).
5. Brigham appealed to his ordination as an apostle as the ground for his right to lead the Church following Joseph’s death. Brigham could not have received all the necessary keys from Joseph (especially the sealing keys), since traditional LDS history dates their receipt to 1836, a year following Brigham’s ordination to the apostleship (87–89, 105–110). Furthermore, Joseph did not ordain the apostles (see point #4) and so could not have given his keys to Brigham and the Twelve.
6. Joseph Smith did not receive the ultimate sealing powers in 1836 from Elijah in the Kirtland temple, but instead had received them by 1829 in association with the receipt of the revelations that later became D&C 132. This 1829 receipt of authority met the criteria outlined in point #1 above (75, 327).

7. Despite the apostles' claims, the necessary authority from Joseph could only be fully transmitted in a temple—since Joseph died before the temple was finished, it was impossible for them to receive everything God wanted them to receive (268, 272–276, 283).

8. The Saints sinned in Missouri, and Joseph Smith had to offer God his life in order to get them another chance (98–101, 104, 285, 404).

9. God commanded the Saints to build the Nauvoo temple, but warned them of dire punishment if they did not do so with enough speed or zeal. The Saints' sufferings subsequent to Joseph's death are evidence that God was punishing them for not building the temple quickly enough, as he had warned them he would (197, 202–206, 268–270).

10. There were no divine, Pentecostal-type experiences in the Nauvoo temple as there were in the Kirtland temple. This demonstrates that God did not fully accept the temple because of the Saints' delay in building it (381).

Snuffer's Conclusion: The apostles' lack of full authority, and God's displeasure with the Church subsequent to Joseph's death, means that since Joseph the leaders have been misguided. They have introduced inappropriate innovations in practice or doctrine. Mormonism has lost some vital truths which members, independent of the institutional Church and its leadership, can reclaim if they are faithful.

Undergirding everything is Snuffer's claim to have seen Jesus Christ, and to therefore have his "calling and election made sure." A large portion of his critique focuses on the supposed absence of this blessing among post-Joseph Smith leaders of the Church. Furthermore, Snuffer has portrayed himself as an expert on the topic in books and elsewhere.⁹

9 *The Second Comforter: Conversing with the Lord Through the Veil* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Mill Creek Press, 2006). On Snuffer's public claims about

The books I have written do not ever touch upon Calling and Election, nor discuss the Second Anointing. But they will tell you what is required to go and learn from the Lord about these things directly. If you want answers about that, then follow the same path as the ancients did, as Joseph Smith did, and as Abraham did. I'm only interested in helping you understand the path.... Most people who spend time writing about second anointings and calling and election don't know what they're talking about. The best treatment of that subject is something which ought to come from the Lord directly. Or an angel assigned by Him to minister to the person who has prepared.

The challenge is preparation. I'm all about that. That is what I write to explain and what I encourage all to do.¹⁰

These doctrines and the experiences that go with them are among the things that Snuffer sees the post-Joseph Smith Church as minimizing and rejecting, in part because of what Joseph could not pass on and in part because of the failings or inadequacy of subsequent leaders. Because Snuffer claims

having seen Christ, see note 2 herein. Snuffer says (51 n. 46) that the results of the Second Comforter are discussed in his book *Beloved Enos* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Mill Creek, 2009). The introduction of the Father by Christ is “not appropriate to set out except through symbols and allegory,” and Snuffer claims to have done so in his *Ten Parables* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Mill Creek, 2008). Snuffer's grandiose characterization of his work (see note 6 and subsequent main text herein) is not absent from these books' promotional material either: “This commentary sheds light on Enos in a way which has not been provided by any previous writer. It will reveal to the reader some of the deepest and most profound messages of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (*Beloved Enos*). *Ten Parables* tells us that “this collection of parables weave together symbols to illustrate profound truths. While meaningful in a single read, you will discover layers of meaning with careful review.”

10 Denver Snuffer, “Clarification” and follow-up comment, *from the desk of Denver Snuffer* (blog), 2 May 2010, <http://denversnuffer.blogspot.ca/2010/05/clarification.html>.

experience and expertise in a matter about which he says the modern leaders are either ignorant or inappropriately silent, this forms the implicit basis for his effort to steady the historical and ecclesiastical ark. “The culminating ordinances of Joseph Smith’s restoration... [is that w]e are to be prepared in all things to receive” direct revelation from God.¹¹ “The real thing is when a person actually obtains an audience with Jesus Christ, returns to His presence, and gains the knowledge by which they are saved. This was the topic I first wrote about, and has *remained the underlying theme of everything I have written*” (53, italics added).

In a sense, Snuffer is more right than he knows when he claims to be a lawyer, not a historian. He is also absolutely correct when he says that he has not provided us with history. What we have, rather than the unadulterated “truth” he claims to provide, is simply a type of legal brief. In this case, however, the lawyer does not address—or even mention—evidence that does not support his client’s case. And so, we must proceed to cross-examine his presentation.

Claim #1: Power in the Priesthood Requires Theophany

Writes Snuffer:

Any person who has priesthood conferred upon him will need to go into God’s presence, and receive it through the veil for power in their priesthood. That is, for any person who has priesthood conferred upon them, they will not gain power in the priesthood until they come to God from whom this power comes through the veil. Not as a mere ceremony delivered by the church, but through contact directly with God. It is

11 Snuffer’s text is more explicit, but since it quotes language from the LDS temple ceremony, I have elected not to reproduce it.

the voice of God, through the veil, which activates the dormant power conferred by ordination (36).

Snuffer here falls prey to all-or-nothing thinking: If one does not have the fullness, then Snuffer declares that one does not have anything at all: “They will not gain power in the priesthood until they come to God....through contact directly with God.”

Power versus Authority of the Priesthood

Snuffer quotes President Packer:

We have done very well at distributing the *authority* of the priesthood. We have priesthood authority planted nearly everywhere. We have quorums of elders and high priests worldwide. But distributing the *authority* of the priesthood has raced, I think, ahead of distributing the *power* of the priesthood. The priesthood does not have the strength that it should have and will not have until the *power* of the priesthood is firmly fixed in the families as it should be.¹²

Snuffer couples such remarks with a repeated appeal to D&C 121:36, which rightly notes that “the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.” Snuffer takes this vital observation, however, and then concludes, “The power of the priesthood comes only one way, and, as the revelation to Joseph Smith states, men do not have any right to either confer it, or prevent it from being conferred” (28). This, however, is a distortion of what the text says: it speaks of conferring the priesthood, but it says nothing about having priesthood power without ordination. Surely whether power comes is dependent upon God’s will—in that

12 Boyd K. Packer, “The Power of the Priesthood,” General Conference, April 2010; cited by Snuffer on p. 27.

Snuffer is correct—but this does not mean that ordination is of no real importance.

In addition to the all-or-nothing view of power that we see above, part of the confusion arises because Snuffer falls victim to the *fallacy of equivocation*. This logical error involves a word or expression that has more than one meaning. The fallacy occurs when differences in meaning are blurred or ignored. Snuffer does so repeatedly with the term “authority.” President Packer speaks of distributing the authority of the priesthood (i.e., the legal right to carry out priesthood ordinances). He also speaks of how those with *authority* do not always measure up and receive *power*. So far so good, and he and Snuffer agree that power is contingent upon God’s approbation, not mere ordination. (That is, it seems to me, President Packer’s point.)¹³

Snuffer, however, draws repeatedly on D&C 121:37, which warns that “when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness,” then “Amen to the *priesthood* or the *authority* of that man” (D&C 121:37, emphasis added). Snuffer concludes (sometimes implicitly) that this use of the term *authority* means the “legal right to carry out priesthood ordinances.” If this is so, then he sees a grave problem—since we cannot know that a priesthood holder is worthy, if real priesthood power and authority are contingent, then ordinances performed by priesthood authority must be of relatively little importance: otherwise, members would forever be at risk of receiving ordinances that are null and void because “Amen” has been said to the authority of the man performing them (319–324, 336).

This is, however, only a problem because of Snuffer’s fallacy of equivocation around *authority*. In D&C 121, the scripture is

13 Compare with his earlier discussion in Boyd K. Packer, “The Aaronic Priesthood,” General Conference, October 1981.

not speaking about the right to perform ordinances. Instead, the “power” and “authority” to which it refers is power and authority over other people. The scripture is concerned with those who “aspire to the honors of men,” because they will interpret their ordination as a right “to exercise unrighteous dominion,” but “no power or influence can” be exercised on anyone by virtue of priesthood office. This says nothing about the right or authority to provide necessary ordinances—it is a simple declaration that any authority over a person that one presumes to have based upon priesthood ceases to exist. The only “dominion” that one gets now or in the future because of priesthood comes “without compulsory means” (D&C 121:35–46).

To distinguish these two uses of the term “authority,” I will refer to the right to officiate in priesthood ordinances as “right of legal administration” or “being a legal administrator.” As we will soon see, Joseph used such expressions and indicated that such rights were absolutely essential.¹⁴ It is in this sense that President Packer uses the term “authority”—we have not done well in distributing the right to have *authority or dominion* over people (because such a right does not exist), but have rather done well in creating many *legal administrators*. Whether those legal administrators receive any power in their own lives is, of course, entirely up to them—just as whether recipients of the ordinances receive any power or benefit is dependent upon their personal righteousness.¹⁵

14 See note 25 herein.

15 See note 22 herein.

Authority Not Vital for Ordinances?

Snuffer insists elsewhere, with some justification, that

The ceremonies and ordinances of the church all point to [God]. They are not the end of the search but instead teach you how to conduct the search. If all you receive are ordinances, you have nothing of real value. They are dead without a living, personal connection with God. God alone can and will save you (55).

This is certainly true. Yet, Snuffer seems determined to always deny the importance of the Church's role as the sole authorized source of the necessary ordinances.¹⁶ "God wants you to know Him," Snuffer tells us, "You can know Him. You do not need another person to speak to Him for you. You should speak to Him directly" (55). This is all true—but Snuffer ignores another theme that is equally prominent in Joseph Smith's revelations and thought: an authorized representative is also necessary to perform vital and non-negotiable ordinances. This is something that *cannot* be done by oneself—the priesthood officer must play a role. But Snuffer says, "Since the language of the baptismal covenant was given by revelation, it has been approved by the Lord. Using the language for the ceremony authorizes the covenant to be performed" (421). "If the Holy Ghost will visit you even without an authoritative ordinance," Snuffer declares, "then the responsibility to live so as to invite the Spirit is all you need to have that same companionship the ordinance could confer" (460, compare 33). This view contradicts Joseph Smith:

There is a difference between the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before he was baptized, which was the convincing

16 Snuffer concedes that "baptism continues to be essential to salvation for any soul" (421), but doesn't believe a legal administrator is necessary (418, 421).

power of God unto him of the truth of the Gospel, but he could not receive the gift of the Holy Ghost until after he was baptized. Had he not taken this sign or ordinance upon him, the Holy Ghost which convinced him of the truth of God, would have left him.¹⁷

“Even if you give the most optimistic assessment of the restoration and current condition of the church,” declares *PTHG*, “it can do nothing for the individual Latter-day Saint. We must all find salvation for ourselves” (305). Yet, in contrast, D&C 121:19 regards being “severed from the ordinances of the Lord’s house” a grave consequence—suggesting that they offer something which cannot be had (despite Snuffer’s insistence) outside of the Church. Less than two months before his death, Joseph would declare: “I advise all to go on to perfection and search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness—a man can do nothing for himself unless God direct him in the right way, and *the Priesthood is reserved for that purpose*.”¹⁸

As an example of this neglect of priesthood authority, in an extensive list of what Joseph Smith accomplished, *PTHG* says that Joseph restored “Understanding of Aaronic...Priesthood [and]....of Melchizedek Priesthood....[and] [k]nowledge of a third order of priesthood referred to as Patriarchal Priesthood” (58) but completely omits Joseph’s role as *restorer* of that priesthood authority. The omission is telling, given that the author regards priesthood ultimately as something that comes

17 Joseph Smith, cited in “For the Times and Seasons. SABBATH SCENE IN NAUVOO; March 20th 1842,” *Times and Seasons* 3/12 (15 April 1842): 752; see Joseph Smith, Jr, *Manuscript History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Documentary History)*. 7 vols. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1978, 4:555. Hereafter cited as *Manuscript History of the Church*.

18 Thomas Bullock report, discourse of 14 May 1844; cited in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1980), 365, emphasis added. (This work cited as *WJS* hereafter.)

only from God direct to each individual, and unnecessary for ordinances. *PTHG* later downplays the ordinances:

Rather than trust ordinances which may have become invalid, blessings which may have been unauthorized, and messages which may have become tainted, I will seek for Christ and His presence. I want to know my standing before Him, not whether a man has recommended me (344).

We again see an example of *PTHG* taking a true statement and drawing a false conclusion. The necessity of Christ's approval is certainly paramount—but, *PTHG* then claims (contrary to Joseph Smith and the scriptures he gave) that one can seek Christ's approval and acceptance without the necessity of ordinances performed by authorized administrators, promising the reader that “the required priestly authority is still available through the veil” (468). Yet, Joseph taught that there were now authorized mortal administrators upon the earth, and said that any claim to ordination by divine messengers was evidence of either lying or deception:

The angel told... Cornelius that he must send for Peter to learn how to be saved: Peter could baptize, and angels could not, so long as there were legal officers in the flesh holding the keys of the kingdom, or the authority of the priesthood. There is one evidence still further on this point, and that is that Jesus himself when he appeared to Paul on his way to Damascus, did not inform him how he could be saved. He had set in the church firstly Apostles, and secondly prophets for the work of the ministry... and as the grand rule of heaven was that nothing should ever be done on earth without revealing the secret to his servants the prophets.... [S]o Paul could not learn so much from the

Lord relative to his duty in the common salvation of man, as he could from one of Christ's ambassadors called with the same heavenly calling of the Lord, and endowed with the same power from on high—so that what they loosed on earth, should be loosed in heaven; and what they bound on earth should be bound in heaven.¹⁹

Orson Pratt reported Joseph's attitude toward one who claimed angelic ordination:

One Francis G. Bishop, an Elder in our church, was very anxious to be ordained a High Priest, but he was not considered a proper candidate to fill the office at that time; and his urgent solicitations to be promoted to the High Priesthood, confirmed the Saints in the opinion that he wanted a high station without meriting it, or without being called by the Spirit of God to that work. He was sent forth into the world to preach in capacity and calling of an Elder; but he was not long out before he declared himself to be a High Priest—and that he was ordained from heaven. This made much stir in the branches of the church and also in the world. But when the news of his proceedings reached the prophet Joseph, he called Bishop home forthwith. He was introduced into the school of the prophets, and there closely questioned upon his course. He said he was ordained by an angel to the High Priesthood; yet, on a more close examination, he crossed his own testimony and statements—became confused, and blushed with

19 Joseph Smith, "Baptism," *Times and Seasons* 3/21 (1 September 1842): 905. Snuffer tries elsewhere to defuse these statements as they apply to the sealing power (300), but here we apply them to matters such as baptism and confirmation.

shame and guilt—he fell down upon his knees and confessed that he had lied in the name of the Lord—begged to be forgiven and cried aloud for mercy. We all forgave him, but we could not give him our confidence, for he had destroyed it.... Brother Joseph observed to [Bro.] Bishop that he knew that he had lied before he confessed it; that his declarations were not only false in themselves, but they involved a false principle. An angel, said Joseph, may administer the word of the Lord unto men, and bring intelligence to them from heaven upon various subjects; but no true angel from God will ever come to ordain any man, because they have once been sent to establish the priesthood by ordaining me thereunto; and the priesthood being once established on earth, with power to ordain others, no heavenly messenger will ever come to interfere with that power by ordaining any more.... [Joseph tells the story of Cornelius as above.] *You may therefore know, from this time forward, that if any man comes to you professing to be ordained by an angel, he is either a liar or has been imposed upon in consequence of transgression by an angel of the devil, for this priesthood shall never be taken away from this church.*²⁰

Thus, Snuffer's view cannot—despite his strenuous efforts—be squared with Joseph Smith's approach, nor that of later prophets and apostles. The Doctrine and Covenants insists upon the ordinances as vital, and as a good gauge for judging the religious pretensions of others:

20 Orson Hyde, "Although Dead, Yet He Speaketh: Joseph Smith's testimony concerning being ordained by angels, delivered in the school of the prophets, in Kirtland, Ohio, in the Winter of 1832–3," *Millennial Star* 8/9 (20 November 1846): 138–139, emphasis added.

Wherefore he that prayeth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me *if he obey mine ordinances*. He that speaketh, whose spirit is contrite, whose language is meek and edifieth, the same is of God *if he obey mine ordinances* (D&C 52:15–16, emphasis added).

To those who sought to be right with God without rebaptism by authority, the Lord said:

Wherefore, although a man should be baptized an hundred times it availeth him nothing, for you cannot enter in at the strait gate by the law of Moses, neither by your dead works. For it is because of your dead works that I have caused this last covenant and this church to be built up unto me, even as in days of old. Wherefore, enter ye in at the gate, as I have commanded, and seek not to counsel your God (D&C 22:2–4).

And Joseph Smith insisted that John the Baptist's legitimate Aaronic priesthood required even Jesus to submit to him:

There was a legal administrator, and those that were baptized were subjects for a king; and also the laws and oracles of God were there; therefore the kingdom of God was there; for no man could have better authority to administer than John; and our Savior submitted to that authority Himself, by being baptized by John; therefore the kingdom of God was set up on the earth, even in the days of John.²¹

Snuffer concedes that “it would be good to have an authorized minister to perform the ordinance,” but insists that “it does not matter whether there is an officiator with authority

21 *Manuscript History of the Church*, 5:258; this entry is based on Wilford Woodruff's diary for 22 January 1843, also reproduced in *WJS*, 156–158.

from God on the earth or not” (418). He justifies this distortion of Joseph’s teaching by claiming:

The language of Section 20 [of the Doctrine and Covenants] is not contingent upon authority. Rather, it is the faith of one receiving baptism which determines the ordinance’s validity. The church offices described in Section 20 are not dependent on priesthood authority. Nor is authority given to the church dependent upon a man. The direction to organize the church is all that was required (418).

It is certainly true that faith is necessary for the baptismal ordinance to be valid—without faith, even with a legal administrator, Heber C. Kimball said, one might as well give all the ordinances to “a bag of sand,” “if you do not live up to your profession and practice your religion... except through faith and obedience.”²²

However, *PTHG* again draws a false inference from a true statement. If an authorized minister is not necessary, why did John the Baptist ordain Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery prior to their baptism (D&C 13:1) and then promise that this authority “would never be taken again from the earth”? The same D&C 20 to which he appeals declares that “an Apostle is an Elder & it is his calling to Baptize & to ordain other Elders, Priests, Teachers & Deacons...The Priests duty is to... baptize...& ordain other Priests, Teaches & Deacons,” while “neither the Teachers nor the Deacons have authority to

22 Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses* 3:124 (6 October 1855). Kimball would agree with Snuffer’s uncontroversial claim that “if all you receive are ordinances, you have nothing of real value. They are dead without a living, personal connection with God. God alone can and will save you” (55). No Latter-day Saint apostle or informed member has ever presumed otherwise.

baptize,”²³ which makes it clear that not every member (or even every priesthood holder) may baptize.

Joseph Smith’s revelations also taught that “they who are of the High Priesthood, whose names are not found written in the book of the law, or that are found to have apostatized, or to have been cut off from the church, as well as the lesser priesthood, or the members, in that day shall not find an inheritance among the Saints of the Most High” (D&C 85:11). “Wo unto them,” declares the Lord elsewhere to Joseph, “who are cut off from my church, for the same are overcome of the world” (D&C 50:8). Snuffer’s doctrines contradict Joseph Smith’s. Contrary to *PTHG*, both the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 11:35, 36) and the Doctrine and Covenants seem to condemn his approach: “They who will not hear the voice of the Lord, neither the voice of his servants, neither give heed to the words of the prophets and apostles, shall be cut off from among the people; For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant” (D&C 1:14–15).

If Snuffer is correct, why did Joseph teach that there was “no salvation between the two lids of the bible without a legal administrator”?²⁴ Why does the Book of Mormon place such great emphasis on the necessity of valid priesthood authority for baptism and other ordinances (Mosiah 21:33, Moroni 2–5), including a concerted effort by the resurrected Christ to make this perfectly clear (3 Nephi 11:21–28)? Christ did so precisely so no one would dispute—as Snuffer is doing—over the proper form or requirements for baptism. Joseph Smith taught:

Whenever men can find out the will of God & find an Administrator legally authorized from God there is the Kingdom of God but *whare these are not, the*

23 Dean Jessee (editor), *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books*, The Joseph Smith Papers, Facsimile ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Church Historian’s Press, 2009), 85; see D&C 20:38–60.

24 *Joseph Smith Diary* (23 July 1843); cited in *WJS*, 235.

*Kingdom of God is not[.] All the ordinances Systems, & Administrations on the earth is of no use to the Children of men unless they are ordained & authorized of God for nothing will save a man but a legal Administrator for none others will be acknowledge either by God or Angels.*²⁵

Snuffer's reading is idiosyncratic and smacks of desperation. This muddled thinking leads Snuffer to compare the LDS "dilemma" to that faced by the Catholics during the Donatist heresy (321). He quotes Daniel C. Peterson²⁶ and notes that "the winning side in the dispute decided priestly authority was not dependent on the officiator's worthiness" (319). He concludes that this would mean that "Catholics could not have forfeited priesthood" in the Great Apostasy since "wickedness, error, and foolishness would never be a reason to remove their authority" (320). (In all these cases, "authority" is being used in my sense of *legal administration*.)

But Snuffer is mistaken—if one is authorized to perform an ordinance by those holding the keys, then one may act as a legal administrator. But once the keys have been lost—with, for example, the passing of the apostles—then even a legal administrator has no right or authority to call new leaders, pass on priesthood authority, and so on.²⁷ A legal administrator

25 Wilford Woodruff *Journal* (22 January 1843), cited in WJS, 158.

26 Daniel C. Peterson, "Authority in the Book of Mosiah," *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 149–185. Snuffer claims that Peterson "even cites to [sic] the Catholic precedent to justify Mormon claims!" (322, citing Peterson's footnote 40). This is false, as can be seen from the section cited by Snuffer. Peterson merely draws an analogy between the two traditions, where both faced the same issue and came to the same conclusion "for good reason" (322), because the alternative is utter chaos and uncertainty about which ordinances are valid or legal. Peterson has confirmed to me that I have read him correctly.

27 It is also dubious to suggest that the Catholic Church ever held divine authority, from the perspective of LDS doctrine. The formation of Catholicism post-dated the passing of the apostles and their keys. See Noel B. Reynolds (editor), *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on*

cannot create more legal administrators without the approval of those who hold the keys, nor can he perform essential ordinances without that same approval—and so the authority comes to a halt because such administration would not be legal. The legal administrator is not constrained only by death as Snuffer claims (320) because no one can grant him the right to use his authority in a *legal* way without keys.²⁸ But Snuffer is determined to reject the idea of apostolic stewardship and guidance based upon the keys, so he sees a dilemma where there is none.²⁹ Yet he accuses *others* of shoddy reasoning because “the result you want to avoid absolutely CANNOT be true” (322, emphasis in original). His treatment of these concepts is unintentional evidence for this proposition, applied to his own reasoning.

Perhaps the most deadly argument against Snuffer’s reading is simply that Joseph Smith didn’t embrace the conclusions to which *PTHG*’s confusion leads. I am aware of no evidence—and Snuffer cites none—to suggest that Joseph Smith or the early Mormons ever repeated ordinances that were performed by priesthood holders who subsequently proved to be unworthy. Given the apostasies and dissident groups which formed throughout Joseph’s prophetic career, considerable attention ought to have been given to this matter *if* Snuffer’s conclusion is the proper one. But the early Mormons seem to have agreed with Peterson—one’s status as a lawful administrator was not

the Christian Apostasy (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2005), particularly Reynolds’ introductory essay. *PTHG*’s command of early Christian history seems as muddled as its version of LDS history.

28 Snuffer shortchanges the LDS view: “It does not matter how wicked or evil a man is who holds the priesthood power, the keys of the church will guarantee it cannot be lost” (336). In fact, the LDS claim is that one can remain a legal administrator of essential ordinances despite sin if one is authorized by those who hold the keys. Ultimately those key holders are the apostles, who despite their weaknesses the Saints do not concede to be “wicked or evil” or deprived of that authority.

29 For further discussion, see Part Two, Conclusion.

contingent on righteousness, though one's personal status before God certainly was, as was the true power or authority to influence others that one could wield in his behalf.

Necessity of Theophany?

With respect to the sealing power, Snuffer cites a long list of prophets in an effort to demonstrate that “this kind of covenant is established between God and man in the first person; never through another” (85). The prophets mentioned include Nephi, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He then concludes that “Brigham Young’s [claim] that Joseph Smith had the capacity to confer such power independent of the Lord’s direct involvement is a marvelous, even unprecedented claim” (87). No Latter-day Saint would dispute the idea that the sealing power must come from God, and that he is personally involved. It is not clear, though, why another prophet cannot be involved in the transfer of that authority or power (which transfer God would, of course, have to ratify and endorse). However, Snuffer insists that Joseph cannot have transferred it to Brigham.

PTHG also makes a link between having one’s calling and election made sure and the sealing power:

Nephi [the son of Helaman] received his calling and election. Calling and election is connected with holding the sealing power.... Sealing power is always connected to calling and election.... Only through that personal contact with heaven were their calling and election, sealing power and covenant established (81, 85, 86).

It is not entirely clear to me exactly what *PTHG* is arguing—do all who have their calling and election made sure receive the sealing power? Are a sure election and the sealing power interchangeable terms? These readings of *PTHG* seem unlikely given that “there is never but one on the earth at a time on

whom this power and the keys of this priesthood [sealing] are conferred” (D&C 132:7). I think he means that having one’s calling and election made sure is a necessary prerequisite to receiving the sealing power, or that they must at least happen at the same time.

In any case, we should not be surprised that many prophets granted the sealing power had a theophany experience—those in scripture are often the founding prophet of a dispensation or for a specific group of people. A theophany is their only option, since no legal administrator is to be found.

In scripture receiving one’s calling and election does not require that one see God or Christ personally. Alma the Elder, for example, was one of the wicked priests consecrated by King Noah (Mosiah 17:2). Converted by Abinadi’s preaching, he escaped the king’s court and taught while in hiding (Mosiah 18). He eventually led a group of believers to Zarahemla (Mosiah 23–24), where King Mosiah made him the supreme head of the Nephite Christian church, giving him “power to ordain priests and teachers over every church” (Mosiah 25:19, 26:8). Later, when troubled by a matter of internal dissention, Alma received a revelation:

And it came to pass that after he had poured out his whole soul to God, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying: Blessed art thou, Alma, and blessed are they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon. Thou art blessed because of thy exceeding faith in the words alone of my servant Abinadi.... Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep (Mosiah 26:14–15, 20).

Alma is the head of the church. He here has his calling and election made sure—he is promised eternal life. Yet, God

explicitly points out that Alma has believed simply because of Abinadi's words. Until now, he has had no theophany, seen no angels, nor seen the face of God. Even now, he only hears God's words. Enos likewise hears a voice, but reports no vision (Enos 1:5, 10).

The death knell for *PTHG*'s claim that mortals cannot be involved in the transfer of the highest priesthood power occurred on 27 August 1843 when Joseph spoke of Abraham's receipt of "a blessing under the hands of Melchisedek even the last law or a fulness of the law or preisthood which constituted him a king and preist after the order of Melchisedek or an endless life."³⁰ This is significant for two reasons—(1) it defines precisely how Joseph saw the "fullness of the priesthood," the last and final power that could be given on earth: he spoke of it in the same terms used to describe the higher temple ordinances; and (2) Joseph declares that *Abraham received it by ordination under the hands of another mortal*.³¹ The Prophet offers this as a paradigmatic example—for who can be a greater disciple than Abraham?—something that Snuffer declares to be impossible. If Joseph is an authority, then Snuffer's thesis is false.

Could Brigham Young Qualify to Claim Sealing Power?

Despite this, Brigham Young also meets Snuffer's criteria for receiving the sealing power: "by the calling of [God's] own voice" (314, citing JST-Gen. 14:29). Orson Hyde described a heavenly manifestation given to all the Twelve. It has close affinities with Alma's account:

In the month of February, 1848, the Twelve Apostles met at Hyde Park, Pottawattamie County, Iowa, where a small Branch of the Church was established.... We

³⁰ James Burgess Notebook, discourse of 27 August 1843, cited in *WJS*, 245–246.

³¹ The mortal Melchizedek is also one whom Snuffer agrees held the sealing power—see 295–296.

were in prayer and council, communing together; and what took place on that occasion? The voice of God came from on high, and spake to the Council. Every latent feeling was aroused, and every heart melted. What did it say unto us? “Let my servant Brigham step forth and receive the full power of the presiding Priesthood in my Church and kingdom.” This was the voice of the Almighty unto us at Council Bluffs, before I removed to what was called Kanesville. It has been said by some that Brigham was appointed by the people, and not by the voice of God. I do not know that this testimony has often, if ever, been given to the masses of the people before; but I am one that was present, and there are others here that were also present on that occasion, and did hear and feel the voice from heaven, and we were filled with the power of God. This is my testimony; these are my declarations unto the Saints—unto the members of the kingdom of God in the last days, and to all people.

We said nothing about the matter in those times, but kept it still.³²

Of note is the reluctance of the Twelve to talk too freely about a divine manifestation. Hyde went on to describe the earth shaking, which led non-members to believe there had been an earthquake. Brigham confirmed the account, adding:

Brother Hyde, in his remarks, spoke about the voice of God at a certain time. I could tell many incidents relating to that circumstance, which he did not take time to relate. We were in his house, which was some ten or twelve feet square. The houses in the neighbourhood

32 Orson Hyde, in *Journal of Discourses* 8:233–34 (7 October 1860).

shook, or, if they did not, the people thought they did, for they ran together and inquired whether there had been an earthquake. We told them that the voice of God had reached the earth—that they need not be afraid; it was the power of God. This and other events have transpired to satisfy the people—you, and all who belong to the Church and kingdom of God upon the earth.³³

Snuffer claims that “this higher priesthood... comes from God’s own voice declaring it to the man” (295). Well, in addition to ordination by Joseph, here we have the voice of God declaring before all the Twelve that Brigham should have “the full power of the presiding priesthood.”

Snuffer also quotes Brigham Young denying that he can “commune in person with the Father and the Son at my will and pleasure” (90) and not having been “able to talk with some Being of a higher sphere than this” (91). Snuffer interprets this to mean that Brigham denied having “any being, angelic or otherwise, from a higher sphere speak to him” (90). This presumes too much. Brigham reported a vision of and instructions from the martyred Joseph Smith at least twice—Joseph himself would thus be acting in an angelic role, though Brigham apparently did not regard him as being of “a higher sphere.”³⁴ Brigham likewise reported visions on several occasions.³⁵ Brigham may not, then, be ruling out all such contacts as absolutely as Snuffer believes—denying that one can speak with the Godhead at one’s “will and pleasure” is not the same as denying one has ever been spoken to by them at

33 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* 8:197 (7 October 1860).

34 *Manuscript History of the Church* 7:435–436 (17 August 1845); *Manuscript History of Brigham Young* (23 February 1847), 528–530; reprinted in *Juvenile Instructor* (15 September 1883): 283–284.

35 *Journal of Discourses* 1:132–133 (6 April 1853); 3:208–209, 212 (17 February 1856); 12:153 (12 January 1868); 18:241, 243–245 (23 June 1874).

Theirs: “I hold myself in readiness that he can wield me at his will and pleasure” (90).

Brigham also said that he received revelation on Church organization as soon as he was back in Nauvoo following Joseph’s death:

When I met Sidney Rigdon, east of the temple in Nauvoo, I knew then what I now know concerning the organization of the Church, though I had told no man of it. I revealed it to no living being, until the pioneers to this valley were returning to Winter Quarters. Brother Wilford Woodruff [p.198] was the first man I ever spoke to about it. Said he—“It is right; I believe it, and think a great deal of it, for it is from the Lord; the Church must be organized.” It then went to others, and from them to others; but it was no news to me, for I understood it then as I understand it now.³⁶

We also have Joseph Smith’s witness of Brigham’s worthiness to enjoy the divine presence. Heber C. Kimball reported Joseph’s anxiety for the Twelve on their mission to England:

He saw the Twelve going forth, and they appeared to be in a far distant land. After some time they unexpectedly met together, apparently in great tribulation, their clothes all ragged, and their knees and feet sore. They formed into a circle, and all stood with their eyes fixed upon the ground. The Savior appeared and stood in their midst and wept over them, and wanted to show Himself to them, but they did not discover Him.³⁷

Snuffer might conclude from this section that he is correct—that the Lord would have unveiled himself to the Twelve, but

36 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* 8:197.

37 Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1988), 93–94.

they failed to be ready because they did not realize they were in his presence. Yet this was not Joseph's conclusion, as the vision continued:

He (Joseph) saw until they had accomplished their work, and arrived at the gate of the celestial city; there Father Adam stood and opened the gate to them, and as they entered he embraced them one by one and kissed them. He then led them to the throne of God, and then the Savior embraced each one of them in the presence of God. He saw that they all had beautiful heads of hair and all looked alike. The impression this vision left on Brother Joseph's mind was of so acute a nature, that he never could refrain from weeping while rehearsing it.³⁸

Brigham would report that Joseph had told him that his and the apostles' "calling and election" had been made sure:

Before Joseph's death he had a revelation concerning myself and others, which signified that we had passed the ordeal, and that we should never apostatize from the faith of the holy gospel; "and", said Joseph, "if there is any danger of your doing this, the Lord will take you to Himself forthwith, for you cannot stray from the truth." When men and women have traveled to a certain point in their labors in this life, God sets a seal upon them that they never can forsake their God or His kingdom; for rather than they should do this, He will at once take them to Himself.³⁹

38 Whitney, 94. See note 42 herein regarding the identity of these apostles.

39 Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* 12:103 (17 November 1867); cited in Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question," (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1981), 138. (Note that this section of the thesis includes a reference to the Joseph Smith III blessing, now known to be a Hofmann forgery.)

In like manner, Heber C. Kimball's diary of 6 April 1839 noted:

The following words came to my mind, and the Spirit said unto me, "write," which I did by taking a piece of paper and writing on my knee as follows:... "Verily I say unto my servant Heber, thou art my son, in whom I am well pleased; for thou art careful to hearken to my words, and not transgress my law, nor rebel against my servant Joseph Smith, for thou hast a respect to the words of mine anointed, even from the least to the greatest of them; therefore thy name is written in heaven, no more to be blotted out for ever, because of these things."⁴⁰

Heber too could have this privilege, despite also saying "I know this. I know it by revelation by the Spirit of God, for in this way my Heavenly Father communes with me, and maketh known unto me his mind and will. I have never seen him in person, but when I see my brethren I see his image, and I discover the attributes of God in them."⁴¹ This ought to call into question Snuffer's tidy conclusion:

Those who fall short of [receiving the Holy Spirit of promise], and *do not receive this witness from Christ in mortality* but receive it afterwards, will be Heirs of the Terrestrial Kingdom. These good but deluded souls trusted in men, rather than in Christ (432, emphasis added).

40 Heber C. Kimball, *Journal*, Library-Archives, the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; cited in *WJS*, 17–18 n. 6.

41 Heber C. Kimball, "Men Ought to Practise What They Teach, etc.," *Journal of Discourses* 11:82 (19 February 1865).

Alma, Heber, Brigham, and the Twelve could claim God's power and authority—all had heard the voice of God. Callings and elections could be made sure without a dramatic vision.⁴² Might it not be sign-seeking for Brigham to insist upon a theophany when Joseph had already given him a revelation regarding his status? “Blessed are they,” said the risen Lord, “that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:27). Snuffer ought not to ignore these historical and scriptural witnesses, or the implications of the promise which described the ways in which God would unveil himself:

Sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be *in his own time, and in his own way*, and according to his own will (D&C 88:68, emphasis added).

Claims #2 and #3: Brigham Young and Subsequent Apostles Were Not Personal Witnesses of Christ

The first apostles were charged by Oliver Cowdery with the “necessary” duty of their being able to “bear testimony... that you have seen the face of God.... Never cease striving until you

42 It is of note that the members of the Twelve who were in England, and thus were the subject of Joseph's vision regarding their salvation, did not experience any apostasy: Heber C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, Parley P. Pratt, Willard Richards, George A. Smith, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Brigham Young. Two quorum members who did not attend the mission as commanded would apostatize after Joseph's death (John E. Page and William B. Smith), while the third went west to Utah (Orson Hyde). One spot in the quorum was vacant at the time. [James B. Allen and Malcolm R. Thorpe, “The Mission of the Twelve to England, 1840–41: Mormon Apostles and the Working Classes,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 15/4 (Summer 1975): 502–503.] All eight of the English missionaries plus Hyde would also receive the full temple ordinances from Joseph at Nauvoo, including the second anointing—see claim #7 herein. Page would receive nothing, and William Smith only the endowment (Ehat, 194).

have seen God face to face,” for “your ordination is not full and complete till God has laid His hand upon you” (89).⁴³

In Snuffer’s view, the apostles and their successors failed in this charge, which “was rarely realized, and that failing gave rise to feelings of inadequacy among Apostles who were never able to obtain such a blessing” (243). (Snuffer relies here upon D. Michael Quinn’s *Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*⁴⁴ for documentation, and his account suffers from some of the same flaws.⁴⁵) As a result, claims Snuffer:

The first phase of Mormonism was dominated by visions, angels, and direct involvement by God. Those experiences are still celebrated and taught. However, they are only used as a legitimizing credential for a demystified church. The current phase of Mormonism is missing the direct appearance or involvement of God, angels, and visions. There is a disconnect between the miraculous events upon which Mormonism is based, and current church events (47).

All of this is part of Snuffer’s view that “Mormonism has become increasingly less mystic, less miraculous, and even less tolerant of ‘gifts’ of the Spirit. Although it retains an emphasis on personal revelation, there is no continuing expectation of new scripture, new commandments, or Divine visitation” (45). Snuffer ignores all the documents that prove otherwise, including Elder Bruce R. McConkie’s extensive discussion

43 *Manuscript History of the Church*, 2:195–196. I have omitted PTHG’s boldface emphasis to the original.

44 D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1997. Hereafter cited as *Extensions of Power*.

45 The misleading claims and citations in the opening pages of Quinn’s mammoth work are reviewed in Duane Boyce, “A Betrayal of Trust (Review of: *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, by D. Michael Quinn),” *FARMS Review of Books* 9/2 (1997): 147–163. For another example of Quinn’s shoddy work and dishonest footnotes, see *Extensions of Power*, 363 cited in Part Two, Conclusion.

of apostolic witness, where he not only quotes Cowdery with approval, but indicates that both the present-day Twelve and all Church members have the same privilege and duty.⁴⁶

Snuffer's claims are simply false—and I do not mean false in the sense that I have a differing interpretation or reading of the history. They are false because there is evidence that directly contradicts them, which we will now examine.

Modern examples—New Scripture

Snuffer provides no evidence that new scripture is not anticipated—though he does reject the authority of the apostles and prophets who could provide such scripture. Elder Neal A. Maxwell told an assembled Book of Mormon symposium:

The day will come, brothers and sisters, when we will have other books of scripture which will emerge to accompany the Holy Bible and the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. Presently you and I carry our scriptures around in a “quad”; the day will come when you’ll need a little red wagon.⁴⁷

Elsewhere, Elder Maxwell promised that “many more scriptural writings will yet come to us,” mentioning those of Enoch, John, the ten tribes, and the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon.⁴⁸ If new scripture is not anticipated, why would an apostle say this to a roomful of scripture scholars? Snuffer's claim is false.

46 Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1978), 592–595.

47 Neal A. Maxwell, “The Children of Christ” in *The Book of Mormon: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ* eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1991), 1.

48 Neal A. Maxwell, *Wonderful Flood of Light* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1990), 15.

Modern Examples—Angels

Revelation continues with us today. The promptings of the Spirit, the dreams, and the visions and the visitations, and the ministering of angels all are with us now. And the still, small voice of the Holy Ghost “is a lamp unto [our] feet, and a light unto [our] path.” (Ps. 119:105.) Of that I bear witness. —Elder Boyd K. Packer⁴⁹

Despite Snuffer’s claim (45, 47), the expectation and experience of angels is not lacking in the modern Church. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has spoken extensively about angels, quoting Moroni 7:35–37 on the persistence of angelic visions “as long as time shall last... or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved.”⁵⁰ In a 1982 BYU devotional address, he taught that “when we’ve tried, really tried, and waited for what seemed never to be ours, *then* ‘the angels came and ministered unto him.’ For that ministration in your life I pray in the name of Jesus Christ.” “Angels and ministers of grace to defend us?” he asked in 1993 general conference, “They are all about us, and their holy sovereign, the Father of us all, is divinely anxious to bless us this very moment.”⁵¹ “Our defense,” he told a CES audience in 2000, “is in prayer and faith, in study and fasting, in the gifts of the Spirit, the ministration of angels, the power of the priesthood.”⁵² In 1993, he taught the following:

49 Boyd K. Packer, “Revelation in a Changing World,” *Ensign* (November 1989): 16.

50 Jeffrey R. Holland, “For Times of Trouble,” Brigham Young University devotional (18 March 1980). See also Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Inconvenient Messiah,” BYU devotional address (15 February 1982).

51 Jeffrey R. Holland, “Look to God and Live,” *Ensign* (November 1993): 13

52 Jeffrey R. Holland, “Therefore, What?” CES Conference on the New Testament, Brigham Young University (8 August 2000), 1–2.

May I suggest to you that one of the things we need to teach our students, and one of the things which will become more important in their lives the longer they live, is the reality of angels, their work, and their ministry. Obviously I speak here not alone of the angel Moroni, but also of those more personal ministering angels who are with us and around us, empowered to help us, and who do exactly that....

I believe we need to speak of and believe in and bear testimony to the ministry of angels more than we sometimes do. They constitute one of God's great methods of witnessing through the veil, and no document in all this world teaches that principle so clearly and so powerfully and so often as does the Book of Mormon.⁵³

These are not the words of someone convinced angels are safely in the past, useful only for "legitimizing...a demystified church." Snuffer is simply wrong.

"When we keep the covenants made," by baptism and the sacrament, said Elder Dallin H. Oaks, "we are promised that we will always have His Spirit to be with us. The ministering of angels is one of the manifestations of that Spirit."⁵⁴ "Visions do happen," he said, "Voices are heard from beyond the veil. I know this."⁵⁵ "I feel compelled, on this 150th anniversary of the Church, to certify to you that I know that the day of miracles has not ceased. I know that angels minister unto men," said Boyd K.

53 Jeffrey R. Holland, "A Standard Unto My People," CES Symposium on the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young University, 9 August 1994, 10–11.

54 Dallin H. Oaks, "The Aaronic Priesthood and the Sacrament," General Conference, October 1998.

55 Dallin H. Oaks, "Teaching and Learning by the Spirit," *Ensign* (March 1997), 14.

Packer.⁵⁶ Elsewhere, he said, “The Lord reveals His will through dreams and visions, visitations, through angels, through His own voice, and through the voice of His servants.”⁵⁷

Modern Examples—the Necessity and Reality of Ongoing Revelation

Snuffer declares that “unless there is a constant stream of revelation coming to the latter-day gentiles then they do not have the gift they claim” (342). This is certainly true. But he then decides that this warning applies to the Church of Jesus Christ—and not to just some *members* of the Church, but to all those who are leaders as well. But how does he know this?

He is not privy to the councils of Church leaders. And to maintain this stance he must dismiss repeated testimony that such revelation guides the Church. Examples abound—Brigham Young: “Now, be sure to get the spirit of revelation, so that you can tell when you hear the true Shepherd’s voice, and know him from a false one; for if you are the elect, it would be a great pity to have you led astray to destruction”;⁵⁸ Joseph F. Smith: “Christ is the head of his Church and not man, and the connection can only be maintained upon the principle of

56 Boyd K. Packer, “A Tribute to the Rank and File of the Church,” *Ensign* (May 1980): 65. Snuffer also quotes Elder Packer’s talk “The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect”, 5th annual CES Religious Educator’s Symposium, 22 August 1981 (reproduced in *BYU Studies* 21/3 (Summer 1981): 259–278) as evidence that Packer advocates the view that “though He did not appear, speak or send angels, God was not absent” (256 n. 318). As demonstrated by the main text, Snuffer distorts Elder Packer’s views—he refers in the August 1981 talk to those to whom “the hand of the Lord may not be visible.” He does not deny that God speaks, appears, or sends angels, and in fact urges those who write history to be those who “believe that the successors to the Prophet Joseph Smith were and are prophets, seers, and revelators; that revelation from heaven directs the decisions, policies, and pronouncements that come from the headquarters of the Church” (p. 13 in online reprint).

57 Boyd K. Packer, “Personal Revelation: The Gift, the Test, and the Promise,” General Conference, October 1994.

58 Brigham Young, “Source of True Happiness—Prayer, Etc.,” *Journal of Discourses* 6:45 (15 November 1857).

direct and continuous revelation”;⁵⁹ Marion G. Romney: “The guidance of this Church comes, not alone from the written word, but also from continuous revelation, and the Lord gives that revelation to the Church through His chosen leaders and none else”;⁶⁰ Joseph Fielding Smith: “The remark is sometimes made by thoughtless and unobserving persons that the spirit of revelation is not guiding the Latter-day Saints now as in former times.... I say to you that there is revelation in the Church.... We have revelations that have been given, that have been written; some of them have been published; some of them have not”;⁶¹ James E. Faust: “I can testify that the process of continuous revelation comes to the Church very frequently. It comes daily”;⁶² and Gordon B. Hinckley:

There has been in the life of every [prophet and apostle I have known] an overpowering manifestation of the inspiration of God. Those who have been Presidents have been prophets in a very real way. I have intimately witnessed the spirit of revelation upon them.... Each Thursday, when we are at home, the First Presidency and the Twelve meet in the temple, in those sacred hallowed precincts, and we pray together and discuss certain matters together, and the spirit of revelation comes upon those present. I know. I have seen it.⁶³

On a fundamental level, Snuffer is engaged in a form of sign-seeking. He will not sustain the prophets—and induces

59 Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith*, edited by John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1919), 104–105.

60 Marion G. Romney, *Conference Report* (April 1942): 17–18.

61 Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1954–1956), 1:281–282.

62 James E. Faust, “Come Out of the Darkness into the Light,” CES Fireside for Young Adults (8 September 2002).

63 Gordon B. Hinckley, *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1997), 71, 555.

others to disregard them—because they will not satisfy his demand for the sensational. As Elder Oaks cautioned, “It is usually inappropriate to recite miraculous circumstances *to a general audience that includes people with very different levels of spiritual maturity*. To a general audience, miracles will be faith-reinforcing for some but an inappropriate sign for others.”⁶⁴

Snuffer also ignores the warning and witness given by President Kimball:

Expecting the spectacular, one may not be fully alerted to the constant flow of revealed communication. I say, in the deepest of humility, but also by the power and force of a burning testimony in my soul, that from the prophet of the Restoration to the prophet of our own year, the communication line is unbroken, the authority is continuous, and light, brilliant and penetrating, continues to shine. The sound of the voice of the Lord is a continuous melody and a thunderous appeal. For nearly a century and a half there has been no interruption.... Every faithful person may have the inspiration for his own limited kingdom. But the Lord definitely calls prophets today and reveals his secrets unto them as he did yesterday, he does today, and will do tomorrow: that is the way it is.⁶⁵

Elder Packer’s observation should be taken to heart: “There has come, these last several years, a succession of announcements that *show our day to be a day of intense revelation, equaled, perhaps, only in those days of beginning*, 150 years ago. But then, as now, the world did not believe.”⁶⁶

64 Dallin H. Oaks, “Miracles,” CES Fireside in Calgary, Canada, 7 May 2000, 3, italics added. Reprinted in “Miracles,” *Ensign* (June 2001).

65 Spencer W. Kimball, “Revelation: The Word of the Lord to His Prophets,” General Conference, April 1977.

66 Packer, “A Tribute to the Rank and File of the Church,” italics added.

Modern Examples—Theophany or Divine Visitation

I approach this section with some trepidation. Such matters are sacred, and Snuffer strikes me as far too glib in his criticism of leaders who do not measure up to his views about how apostles ought to undertake their witness. I have taken as my guide the statement of President Packer:

I made a rule for myself a number of years ago with reference to this subject [of keeping spiritual experiences sacred]. When someone relates a spiritual experience to me, personally or in a small, intimate group, I make it a rigid rule not to talk about it thereafter. I assume that it was told to me in a moment of trust and confidence, and therefore I never talk about it. If, however, on some future occasion I hear that individual talk about it in public in a large gathering, or where a number of people are present, then I know that it has been stated publicly and I can feel free under the right circumstances to relate it. But I know many, many sacred and important things that have been related to me by others that I will not discuss unless I am privileged to do so under the rule stated above. I know that others of the Brethren have the same feeling.⁶⁷

I will, then, confine myself to published reports, though I am aware of other less-public accounts. A year after his call to the apostleship, Elder Packer said:

Occasionally during the past year I have been asked a question. Usually it comes as a curious, almost an idle, question about the qualifications to stand as a witness for Christ. The question they ask is, “Have you seen Him?”

67 Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1975), 326.

That is a question that I have never asked of another. I have not asked that question of my brethren in the Quorum, thinking that it would be so sacred and so personal that one would have to have some special inspiration, indeed, some authorization, even to ask it.

There are some things just too sacred to discuss.⁶⁸

Elder Packer later expanded on these ideas, writing:

Though I have not asked that question of others, I have heard them answer it—but not when they were asked. I have heard one of my Brethren declare, “I know, from experiences too sacred to relate, that Jesus is the Christ.” I have heard another testify, “I know that God lives, I know that the Lord lives, and more than that, I know the Lord.” I repeat: they have answered this question not when they were asked, but under the prompting of the Spirit, on sacred occasions, when “the Spirit beareth record.” (D&C 1:39.)

There are some things just too sacred to discuss: not secret, but sacred; not to be discussed, but to be harbored and protected and regarded with the deepest of reverence.⁶⁹

Elsewhere, Elder Packer warned, “Do not mistake our reverent hesitation to speak glibly or too frequently of Him to mean that we do not know Him. Our brethren of Judah knew Him in ancient times, our brethren of Ephraim also. He is no stranger to His Saints, to His prophets and Apostles now.”⁷⁰

68 Boyd K. Packer, ““The Spirit Beareth Record,”” General Conference, April 1971.

69 Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently*, 86–87.

70 Boyd K. Packer, “Scriptures,” General Conference, October 1982; reproduced in Boyd K. Packer, *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* (Salt Lake City, Utah:

And, he gave clear insight into the nature and burden of the modern apostleship:

We do not talk of those sacred interviews that qualify the servants of the Lord to bear a special witness of Him, for we have been commanded not to do so. But we are free, indeed, we are obliged, to bear that special witness.... I am a witness to the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father; that He has a body of flesh and bone; that He knows those who are His servants here and that He is known of them. I know that He directs this Church now, as He established it then, through a prophet of God. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.⁷¹

Elder Packer referred again to such instructions: “I bear witness that the Lord lives, that Jesus is the Christ. This I know. I know that He lives. I know that He directs this Church. *Sometimes I wish that there were the authorization to say more, say it plainer, but that is the way we say it*—the same as a Primary child would say it, that He lives, that we know.”⁷² Elder Oaks made similar observations:

Why don’t our talks in general conference and local meetings say more about the miracles we have seen? Most of the miracles we experience are not to be shared. Consistent with the teachings of the scriptures, we hold them sacred and share them only when the Spirit prompts us to do so...In bearing testimonies and in our public addresses we rarely mention our

Bookcraft, 1991), 11.

71 Packer, “Tribute to the Rank and File,” 65, italics added.

72 Boyd K. Packer, Address at Ricks College Faculty and Staff Dinner, 24 August 1988; cited in Boyd K. Packer, “I Have That Witness,” in *Mine Errand from the Lord*, compiled by Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 2008), chapter 28.

most miraculous experiences, and we rarely rely on signs that the gospel is true. We usually just affirm our testimony of the truthfulness of the restored gospel and give few details on how we obtained it.⁷³

Marion G. Romney likewise observed, “I don’t know just how to answer people when they ask the question, ‘Have you seen the Lord?’ I think that the witness that I have and the witness that each of us [apostles] has, and the details of how it came, are too sacred to tell. I have never told anybody some of the experiences I have had, not even my wife. I know that God lives. I not only know that he lives, but I know him.”⁷⁴

For those with ears to hear, the message is clear. The apostles speak and testify as they do by divine instruction. Who is Snuffer to gainsay them? Would he have them disobey God to satisfy standards which he has imposed?

Despite the cautions and commandments referred to by Elders Oaks and Packer, sacred manifestations have been reported throughout the post-Joseph Smith period of the Church. I include a selection below.

Wilford Woodruff

- President W[ilford] Woodruff told some of the Saints that our Saviour had appeared unto him in the East Room in the Holy of Holies, & told him that He had accepted of the [Salt Lake] Temple & of the dedication services, & that the Lord forgave us His Saints who had assisted in any manner towards the erection and completion of the Temple—that our sins were forgiven us by the Lord Jesus Christ.... Pres[iden]t Woodruff said the House had been full of revelation, more so than he had ever witnessed at

⁷³ Oaks, “Miracles,” 3.

⁷⁴ Marion G. Romney, cited in F. Burton Howard, *Marion G. Romney: His Life and Faith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1988), 222.

any dedication of the previous Temples and he had been present at all of them from Kirtland to this present one.⁷⁵

- I feel at liberty to reveal to this assembly this morning what has been revealed to me since we were here yesterday morning. If the veil could be taken from our eyes and we could see into the spirit world, we would see that Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and John Taylor had gathered together every spirit that ever dwelt in the flesh in this Church since its organization. We would also see the faithful apostles and elders of the Nephites who dwelt in the flesh in the days of Jesus Christ. In that assembly we would also see Isaiah and every prophet and apostle that ever prophesied of the great work of God. In the midst of these spirits we would see the Son of God, the Savior, who presides and guides and controls the preparing of the kingdom of God on the earth and in heaven.⁷⁶

We note that President Woodruff emphasized that he “felt at liberty” to disclose some of what he had seen by divine manifestation. Were he not at a temple dedication, he might well have been more reticent. Snuffer, by contrast, claims that “it was as if the church labored under Divine disapproval. It was as if the Lord’s ire was on display [given] nature’s reaction to the Salt Lake Temple dedication” (206). Snuffer does not accept Woodruff’s witness of divine approval, so he seeks to appeal to the weather for insight into the divine mind.⁷⁷

75 Wilford Woodruff, in *Collected Discourses Delivered by: President Wilford Woodruff, His Two Counselors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, edited by Brian H. Stuy, 5 vol. (BHS Publishing, 1987–1992), 5:225.; citing John Lee Jones biography (no date) and Minutes of Salt Lake Temple dedication on 6–24 April 1893, 16th session, 13 April 1893.

76 Woodruff in Stuy, *Collected Discourses* 3:274; citing third dedicatory session and Archibald Bennett, *Saviors on Mount Zion*, 142–143.

77 “To many who witnessed it,” noted Brian Stuy, “the raging storm stood as a manifestation of the anger and fury of Satan and his angels.... This event took on added significance when sea gulls were sighted hovering over the Temple.... Thus the symbols of the Gulls and the Gales became a powerful indicator to the

- I know what the will of God is concerning this people, and if they will take the counsel we give them, all will be well with them.... Speaking of the administration of angels. I never asked the Lord in my life to send me an angel or to show me any miracle.... I have had the administration of angels in my day and time, though I never prayed for an angel. I have had, in several instances, the administration of holy messengers....The room was filled with light. A messenger came to me. We had a long conversation. He laid before me as if in a panorama, the signs of the last days, and told me what was coming to pass. I saw the sun turned to darkness, the moon to blood, the stars fall from heaven. I saw the resurrection day. I saw armies of men in the first resurrection, clothed with the robes of the Holy Priesthood. I saw the second resurrection. I saw a great many signs that were presented before me, by this personage; and among the rest, there were seven lions, as of burning brass, set in the heavens. He says, "That is one of the signs that will appear in the heavens before the coming of the Son of Man. It is a sign of the various dispensations.".... Now, I have had all these testimonies,

observant Saints that the Lord was indeed pleased with the labor of His people, but that the adversary was angry with the completion of the Temple" [Brian H. Stuy, "Come, Let Us Go Up to the Mountain of the Lord': The Salt Lake Temple Dedication," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31/3 (1998): 107–108]. One participant wrote, "It is claimed that Heber C. Kimball once predicted that when the Salt Lake Temple should be dedicated the power of Satan should be loosed and the strongest wind storm ever witnessed in Utah should be felt on that occasion. In pursuance and fulfillment of this prediction, a strong breeze began blowing upon our entering the grounds at 9 a.m. and increased to a hurricane of great violence at the precise time the dedicatory prayer was being offered by Pres. Wilford Woodruff" [John Franklin Tolton, *Autobiography*, 6 April 1893; cited in Stuy, 108.

The *Deseret News* was also grateful for the wind's effects, noting that it dried up some of the early spring melt that threatened to cause flooding ["'It's An Ill Wind,' Etc.," *Deseret News* (7 April 1893): 7]. Snuffer does not consider the contemporaneous reaction before seeking to divine God's opinions.

and they are true. But with all these, I have never had any testimony since I have been in the flesh, that has been greater than the testimony of the Holy Ghost. That is the strongest testimony that can be given to me or to any man in the flesh. Now, every man has a right to that, and when he obtains it, it is a living witness to him.... I know what awaits this nation. I know what awaits the Latter-day Saints. Many things have been shown to me by vision and by revelation.⁷⁸

George Q. Cannon

- I know that Jesus lives; for I have seen Him.⁷⁹
- I would not dare to tell all that the Lord has shown unto me.⁸⁰
- I have been greatly favored of the Lord. My mind has been rapt in vision and have saw the beauties and Glory of God. I have saw and conversed with the Savior face to face. God will bestow this upon you.⁸¹

Lorenzo Snow

Lorenzo Snow's granddaughter related his witness:

One evening while I was visiting grandpa Snow in his room in the Salt Lake Temple, I remained until the door keepers had gone and the night-watchmen had not yet come in, so grand-pa said he would take me to the main front entrance and let me out that way. He got his bunch of keys from his dresser. After we left his

78 Wilford Woodruff, "Administration of Angels," (3 March 1889); in Stuy, *Collected Discourses* 1:216–218.

79 George Q. Cannon, "Supporting Church Leaders," (6 October 1896), reported in *The Deseret Weekly* 53 (31 October 1896): 610; reproduced in Stuy, *Collected Discourses* 5:225.

80 Cannon, in Stuy, *Collected Discourses*, 3:277, citing twenty-first session of dedication, 15 April 1893.

81 Cannon, in Stuy, *Collected Discourses*, 3:285, citing Francis Asbury Hammond, Journal, 20 April 1893.

room and while we were still in the large corridor leading into the celestial room, I was walking several steps ahead of grand-pa when he stopped me and said: "Wait a moment, Allie, I want to tell you something. It was right here that the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to me at the time of the death of President Woodruff. He instructed me to go right ahead and reorganize the First Presidency of the Church at once and not wait as had been done after the death of the previous presidents, and that I was to succeed President Woodruff."

Then grand-pa came a step nearer and held out his left hand and said; "He stood right here, about three feet above the floor. It looked as though He stood on a plate of solid gold."

Grand-pa told me what a glorious personage the Savior is and described His hands, feet, countenance and beautiful white robes, all of which were of such a glory of whiteness and brightness that he could hardly gaze upon Him.

Then he came another step nearer and put his right hand on my head and said: "Now, grand-daughter, I want you to remember that this is the testimony of your grand-father, that he told you with his own lips that he actually saw the Savior, here in the Temple, and talked with Him face to face."⁸²

82 LeRoi C. Snow, "An Experience of My Father's," *Improvement Era* 33/11 (September 1933): 677.

Joseph F. Smith

His vision of Christ and the redemption of the dead (D&C 138) is well-known to every member. “There is no reason why we should not have the ministration of angels if we were worthy.”⁸³

George Albert Smith

Recalling a time of great sickness, President Smith said:

I became so weak as to be scarcely able to move. It was a slow and exhausting effort for me even to turn over in bed. One day, under these conditions, I lost consciousness of my surroundings and thought I had passed to the Other Side.... I saw a man coming towards me. I became aware that he was a very large man, and I hurried my steps to reach him, because I recognized him as my grandfather.

When Grandfather came within a few feet of me, he stopped. His stopping was an invitation for me to stop. Then—and this I would like the boys and girls and young people never to forget—he looked at me very earnestly and said:

“I would like to know what you have done with my name.”

Everything I had ever done passed before me as though it were a flying picture on a screen—everything I had done. Quickly this vivid retrospect came down to the very time I was standing there. My whole life had passed before me. I smiled and looked at my grandfather and said:

83 Joseph F. Smith in Stuy, *Collected Discourses* 3:380, citing fifteenth session of Salt Lake Temple dedication (12 April 1893).

“I have never done anything with your name of which you need be ashamed.”

He stepped forward and took me in his arms, and as he did so, I became conscious again of my earthly surroundings. My pillow was as wet as though water had been poured on it—wet with tears of gratitude that I could answer unashamed.⁸⁴

David O. McKay

Brethren, I know as I know I am looking into your faces that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true and that he is my Savior, as real as he was when Thomas said, with bowed head, “My Lord my God!”⁸⁵

As David O. McKay approached Samoa in 1921, he reported:

I then fell asleep, and beheld in vision something infinitely sublime. In the distance I beheld a beautiful white city. Though far away, yet I seemed to realize that trees with luscious fruit, shrubbery with gorgeously-tinted leaves, and flowers in perfect bloom abounded everywhere. The clear sky above seemed to reflect these beautiful shades of color. I then saw a great concourse of people approaching the city. Each one wore a white flowing robe, and a white headdress. Instantly my attention seemed centered upon their Leader, and though I could see only the profile of his features and his body, I recognized him at once as my Savior! The tint and radiance of his countenance were glorious to

84 George Albert Smith and Preston Nibley, *Sharing the Gospel with Others* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1948), 111–112; also available in Leon R. Hartshorn, *Classic Stories from the Lives of Our Prophets* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1971), 239.

85 David O. McKay, Conference Report (April 1949): 182.

behold! There was a peace about him which seemed sublime — it was divine!

The city, I understood, was his. It was the City Eternal; and the people following him were to abide there in peace and eternal happiness.

But who were they?

As if the Savior read my thoughts, he answered by pointing to a semicircle that then appeared above them, and on which were written in gold the words:

“These Are They Who Have Overcome The World — Who Have Truly Been Born Again!”

When I awoke, it was breaking day over Apia harbor.⁸⁶

Harold B. Lee

I know that this is the Lord’s work. I know that Jesus Christ lives, and that he is closer to this Church and appears more often in holy places than any of us realize, excepting those to whom he makes personal appearance.⁸⁷

Elsewhere he said:

⁸⁶ David O. McKay world tour diary, 10 May 1921; cited in Clare Middlemiss and David O. McKay, *Cherished Experiences from the Writings of President David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1955), 102; also available in Hartshorn, 286–287.

⁸⁷ Harold B. Lee, “Everlasting Covenant,” MIA conference address, 29 June 1969, 9–10; cited in *Living Prophets for a Living Church* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1973), 119; also in *Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, 11 and portion in *Ye Are the Light of the World* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1974), 10.

I shall never forget my feelings of loneliness the Saturday night after I was told by the President of the Church that I was to be sustained the next day as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. That was a sleepless night....

And then one of the Brethren, who arranged for Sunday evening radio programs, said, "Now you know that after having been ordained, you are a special witness to the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. We want you to give the Easter talk next Sunday night."

The assignment was to bear testimony of the mission of the Lord concerning His resurrection, His life, and His ministry, so I went to a room in the Church Office Building where I could be alone, and I read the Gospels, particularly those that had to do with the closing days and weeks and months of the life of Jesus. And as I read, I realized that I was having a new experience.

It wasn't any longer just a story; it seemed as though I was actually seeing the events about which I was reading, and when I gave my talk and closed with my testimony, I said, "I am now the least of all my brethren and want to witness to you that I know, as I have never known before this call came, that Jesus is the Savior of this world. He lives and He died for us." Why did I know? Because there had come a witness, that special kind of a witness, that may have been the more sure word of prophecy that one must have if he is to be a special witness.⁸⁸

88 Harold B. Lee, Joint Nottingham and Leicester Conference Nottingham Stake, England, 2 September 1973; cited in "Speaking for Himself—President Lee's Stories," *Ensign* (February 1974): 18; also in Hartshorn, 337.

President Lee also addressed the very charge which Snuffer raises—that an apostle must be a personal witness of Christ’s resurrection:

May I bear my own testimony. Some years ago two missionaries came to me with what seemed to them to be a very difficult question. A young Methodist minister had laughed at them when they had said that apostles were necessary today in order for the true church to be upon the earth. They said that the minister said, “Do you realize that when the apostles met to choose one to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Judas, they said it had to be one who companied with them and had been a witness of all things pertaining to the mission and resurrection of the Lord? How can you say you have apostles, if that be the measure of an apostle?”

And so these young men said, “What shall we answer?”

I said to them, “Go back and ask your minister friend two questions. First, how did the Apostle Paul gain what was necessary to be called an apostle? He didn’t know the Lord, had no personal acquaintance. He hadn’t accompanied the apostles. He hadn’t been a witness of the ministry nor of the resurrection of the Lord. How did he gain his testimony sufficient to be an apostle? And the second question you ask him is, How does he know that all who are today apostles have not likewise received that witness?”

I bear witness to you that those who hold the apostolic calling may, and do, know of the reality of the mission of the Lord. To know is to be born and quickened in the inner man.⁸⁹

89 Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1974), 64–65.

Spencer W. Kimball

Said President Kimball:

“I know that God lives. I know that Jesus Christ lives,” said... my predecessor, “for I have seen him.” I bear this testimony to you brethren in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.⁹⁰

Brethren and Sisters, we come now to the close of this great conference. You have heard from most of the Brethren, as I have said and their testimonies have been inspiring. What they have told you is true. It has come from their hearts. They have this same testimony, and they know it is true. They are true servants sent to you from our Heavenly Father. I pray that you will be listening, that you will be remembering, that you will take these many truths with you to your homes and in your lives and to your families. Brethren and Sisters, I want to add to these testimonies of these prophets my testimony that I know that He lives. And I know that we may see him, and that we may be with him, and that we may enjoy his presence always if we will live the commandments of the Lord and do the things which we have been commanded by him to do and reminded by the Brethren to do.⁹¹

90 Spencer W. Kimball, “Strengthening the Family—the Basic Unit of the Church,” General Conference, April 1978. President Kimball attributed this quote to John Taylor. The actual quote is from George Q. Cannon (see note 78). See discussion in Dennis C. Davis, Letter to the editor, *Sunstone* 15:5/8 (November 1991).

91 Spencer W. Kimball, “The Cause is Just and Worthy,” *Ensign* (May 1974): 119.

Ezra Taft Benson

As one of those called as special witnesses, I add my testimony to those of fellow Apostles: He lives! He lives with resurrected body. There is no truth or fact of which I am more assured, or know better by personal experience, than the truth of the literal resurrection of our Lord.⁹²

PTHG simply does not fairly or accurately characterize the record on this point. It ignores explicit discussion and explanation of the issue, and remains silent about many exceptions to its claims. We will conclude by considering the case of Heber J. Grant, upon whom *PTHG* expends considerable ink.

Heber J. Grant

Snuffer treats President Grant as a prototype of the new type of Church leader (245–264). *PTHG* claims that “spiritual manifestations were effectively eliminated from the church president’s office in the third phase, as demonstrated by President Grant’s diary” (256)—as we will see (and as even readers of Snuffer’s book can see if they are alert) the diaries do nothing of the sort. The record shows that Grant did not have many of the types of experience which Snuffer has declared to be vital—but there are reasons for this observation that are unique to Grant, including a personal request he made to God. Despite *PTHG*’s claim, Grant was very clear that he believed in, sought, and received “spiritual manifestations.”⁹³

92 Ezra Taft Benson, “Five Marks of the Divinity of Jesus Christ,” University of Utah fireside, 9 December 1979. Published in *New Era* 10 (December 1980): 48 and *Ensign* (December 2001).

93 For example, Grant once prayed to be able to speak beyond his natural ability in order to help his brother develop a testimony of the Church. When Grant sat down, President George Q. Cannon was urged to conclude. He declined, but when pressed rose and said, “There are times when the Lord Almighty inspires some speaker by the revelations of His Spirit, and he is so abundantly blessed by the inspiration of the living God that it is a mistake for anybody else to speak

A key bit of Snuffer's evidence is Grant's supposed admission that he did not know of anyone who had seen Christ since Joseph Smith. Snuffer bemoans the fate of members who learn this, only to "lose faith in the church" (65):

[Grant's 1926 letter reads:] "I know of no instance where the Lord has appeared to an individual since His appearance to the Prophet Joseph Smith." It is the gap between the misconception held by many Latter-day Saints of Christ's regular appearances to church leaders, and the reality of His absence that creates distress (65).⁹⁴

Since this reading matches Snuffer's thesis, he apparently does not challenge it. But, just one page earlier, Snuffer has cited Heber J. Grant from fifteen years later:

I have never prayed to see the Savior, I know of men—Apostles—who have seen the Savior more than once. I have prayed to the Lord for the inspiration of his Spirit to guide me, and I have told him that I have seen so many men fall because of some great manifestation to them, they felt their importance, their greatness (64).⁹⁵

following him, and one of those occasions has been today, and I desire that this meeting be dismissed without further remarks." The subject of Grant's address was "a testimony of my knowledge that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, and to the wonderful and marvelous labors of the Prophet Joseph Smith, bearing witness to the knowledge God had given me that Joseph was in very deed a prophet of the true and living God." [Heber J. Grant, *Conference Report* (October 1922): 188–190.]

94 The citation is from Heber J. Grant to Mrs. Claud Peery, 13 April 1926, in First Presidency letterbooks, Vol. 72; Snuffer cites it from Quinn, *Extensions of Power*, 4. A typescript copy is also reported in the Lester Bush papers, University of Utah archives.

95 Snuffer cites from *The Diaries of Heber J. Grant, 1880–1945*, abridged (Salt Lake City, Utah: Privately Published, 2010), 468, entry for 4 October 1942. See also Snuffer, 256 for repeat citation.

President Grant's 1926 letter says he knows of no one that has seen "the Lord"—and Snuffer reads this as a reference to Christ. Yet, this 1942 statement says that he has seen "so many men fall," because of pride in spiritual manifestations, and he knows of apostles who have had a Christ theophany more than once. If we put aside the possibility of Grant lying in one or both instances, there remain two options—either he has suddenly learned of such events in the intervening years, or his letter in 1926 refers to something else.⁹⁶ I suspect that it refers to the Father, rather than to Christ as Snuffer mistakes it—Grant says he has prayed to "the Lord," and it seems unlikely that he was praying to Jesus, since LDS practice has always been to pray to the Father.⁹⁷

And if apostles did not seek out and have such theophanies, why would Grant feel it necessary to explicitly pray to God and ask not to receive one, and also explain why he had done so? This evidence does not match *PTHG*'s picture of a leadership disinterested in heavenly gifts.

Grant described his sense of inadequacy on being called as an apostle:

There are two spirits striving with us always, one telling us to continue our labor for good, and one telling us that with the faults and failings of our nature we are unworthy. I can truthfully say that from October, 1882, until February, 1883, that spirit followed me day and night, telling me that I was unworthy to be an apostle of the Church, and that I ought to resign. When I

⁹⁶ Grant also knew of Lorenzo Snow's theophany; see Snow, "An Experience of My Father's," 677.

⁹⁷ John Taylor also showed some ambiguity in his use of the title "Lord": "The Lord appeared unto Joseph Smith, both the Father and the Son" (*Journal of Discourses* 21:65). Joseph Fielding Smith wrote that "it is well for those who address the congregations of the people to use these holy names [of Deity] sparingly when other expressions will suffice. The term Lord whether applied to the Father or the Son is permissible" (*Doctrines of Salvation* 3:121).

would testify of my knowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Redeemer of mankind, it seemed as though a voice would say to me: “You lie! You lie! You have never seen Him.”⁹⁸

It is troubling to see *PTHG* adopt and repeat the evil spirit’s message. A year later, Grant described the same events:

I was a very unhappy man from October until February. For the next four months whenever I would bear my testimony of the divinity of the Savior, there seemed to be a voice that would say: “You lie, because you have never seen Him.” One of the brethren had made the remark that unless a man had seen the Lamb of God—that was his expression—he was not fit to be an apostle. This feeling that I have mentioned would follow me. I would wake up in the night with the impression: “You do not know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, because you have never seen Him,” and the same feeling would come to me when I would preach and bear testimony. It worried me from October until the following February.⁹⁹

PTHG cites another entry in Grant’s diary from 1890 that touches the same themes:

Heber J. Grant. Stated that he had never had an inspired dreaming his life and that although he had always desired to see his father in dream or vision that he had never been allowed to enjoy this great privilege. He had at all times been afraid to ask for any great

98 Heber J. Grant, “Opening Conference Message,” General Conference Address, 4 April 1941; reproduced in *Improvement Era* 44/5 (May 1941): 267 and *Conference Report* (April 1941): 4–5. Also in G. Homer Durham (editor), *Gospel Standards: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Heber J. Grant* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1941), 194.

99 Heber J. Grant, *Conference Report* (October 1842): 26.

spiritual manifestation as he would then be under greater obligations and he had feared that he might become unfaithful as others had done who had been blessed with great manifestations. . . . I have always felt that I am greatly deficient in spiritual gifts.¹⁰⁰

However, less than a year later, Grant would, in a private meeting with his fellow apostles, describe how his mind was put at ease:

When I was called to the apostleship I felt so unworthy that I desired to decline the honor. Even after my ordination this feeling continued until about three months later while on a mission with Brigham Young Jr. in Arizona. I was one day riding alone and thinking of my unworthiness, when the Spirit impressed me just as though a voice had spoken, “You were not worthy but the Prophet Joseph to whom you will belong in the next world, and your father, have interceded for you that you might be called, and now it remains for you to prove yourself worthy.”¹⁰¹

It is perhaps significant that Grant’s call to the apostleship happened while he was young and, by his own report of what the Spirit told him, unready. His maturation and further preparation would happen *during* the apostleship, rather than prior to it.

100 *Diaries of Heber J. Grant, 1880–1945*, 115; cited by PTHG, 246–247.

101 Heber J. Grant, quoted in Abraham H. Cannon Journals, L. Tom Perry Special Collections Department, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, entry for 2 April 1891; reproduced in Dennis J. Horne (editor), *The Journals of Abraham H. Cannon* (Clearfield, Utah: Gnolaum Books, 2004), 179. In the same meeting, Grant also spoke of a spiritual manifestation concerning his deceased brother: “When my brother George accidentally shot and killed himself I felt very sad, because he was a most faithful Latter-day Saint. I brooded over his death until the Spirit impressed me that my father desired his services on the other side. I then felt easy.” Again, where is the Church leader disinterested in spiritual manifestations? Only in PTHG’s fanciful reconstruction.

Snuffer also tells of how Grant's mother reported that some believed her son "filled with pride" and that he ought to be relieved of his apostleship (250). It is worth asking—as Snuffer does not—whether Grant's protestations of inadequacy, his sense that he was weak in spiritual gifts compared to others, and his acute awareness of the dangers of pride were actually evidence of a deep humility. Snuffer notes that "recording criticism from his own mother proves that record is an authentic and candid source. He is not trying to hide himself in its pages," (250) but misses the obvious corollary—if Grant is indeed authentic, candid, and not trying to hide himself, that too is excellent evidence of his deep humility. And so, his protestations of spiritual weakness and inadequacy must be read in that light. Many early members described revelations in which Grant's role as an apostle was foretold,¹⁰² but Grant tended to focus instead on his weakness and downplay the possibility of holding high office.¹⁰³ "I think I am safe in saying," he wrote, "that about half of the Latter-day Saints if not two-thirds of them were simply dumbfounded when I was chosen to be a member of the Apostles."¹⁰⁴ Soon after his call, he wrote another friend:

102 Many of those who knew him believed he was destined to the apostleship. These included: Edwin D. Woolley, Heber C. Kimball, Eliza R. Snow, Zina D. Young, his mother Rachel R. Grant, Charles Savage, Anthony W. Ivins, and Richard W. Young. See Ronald W. Walker, "Young Heber J. Grant's Years of Passage," *Brigham Young University Studies* 24/2 (Spring 1984): 131–132, 149 (reprinted in *BYUS* 43/1 (2004): 41–60) and "Young Heber J. Grant and His Call to the Apostleship," *Brigham Young University Studies* 43/1 (2004): 167 (reprint of *BYU Studies* 18/1 (1977): 121–126).

103 "Heber often brushed these [claims about his future] off as being the illusory yearnings of a widow for her only son." [Francis M. Gibbons, *Dynamic Disciples, Prophets of God: Life Stories of the Presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1996), 155.

104 Heber J. Grant to Willard Young, 1 February 1892, Grant Letterpress Copybook 12:240, LDS Church Archives; cited in Ronald W. Walker, "Young Heber J. Grant: Entrepreneur Extraordinary," *Brigham Young University Studies* 43/1 (2004): 111 n. 41.

You know the true sentiments of my heart on this subject... I did not, nor do I now, feel that my knowledge, ability, or testimony are of such a character as to entitle me [168] to the position of an Apostle, The Lord knows what is for the best and I have always trusted in Him for aid and assistance in the past and shall continue to do so in the future.¹⁰⁵

When reassured of his capacities by a friend, Grant responded with a long list of his inadequacies, concluding that only God could help him qualify.¹⁰⁶ As a young stake president, Grant was given a blessing by the patriarch who said “I saw

105 Heber J. Grant to Anthony W. Ivins, 22 October 1882, Grant Letterpress Copybook 5:7–10, LDS Church Archives; cited in Walker, “Call to the Apostleship,” 168–169. Again, the disinterest or suspicion of spiritual manifestations is simply not in evidence.

106 “With reference to my new calling and my abilities to magnify the same, I must say that I consider my position much in advance of my knowledge—I regret very much that I have not a better knowledge of grammar, as I murder the ‘Queens English’ most fearfully—my orthography is perfectly Emense to say the least—I have not a good memory, or if I have it has been so badly neglected that I have not found it out that it is good, My information on subjects relating to the advancement of a community am[oun]ts to nothing, I know little or nothing of History—and were it not that I have from 15 to 25 yrs. in which to study to overtake such men as Lyman, Jos. F. Smith and others, and knowing that I have the right to call upon our Heavenly Father for assistance I assure you that I should feel almost like backing out—A knowledge, of grammer and orthography is necessary for a public speaker and one that has more or less writing to do,—I naturally dislike both of these studies and have not much faith in becoming proficient in either—Your inventory of my abilities is ‘way up.’ I should like to have you get someone to accept of your ideas but think it would be a difficult task, I may have a little common sense—In fact I know that I have, I also know that my first ideas, impressions, or quickness to see a point which ever you see fit to call it, is not bad, but this really am[oun]ts to but very little when you are looking for a substantial leading man. Reasoning powers and depth of thought are the qualities that count—There is one thing that sustains me, however, & that is the fact that all powers, of mind or body, come from God and that He is perfectly able & willing to qualify me for His work provided I am faithful in doing my part—This I hope to be able to do faithfully.” – Heber J. Grant to Richard W Young, 16 November 1882, Grant Letterpress Copybook 5:62–63; cited in Walker, “Call to the Apostleship,” 172–173.

something I dared not mention.’ President Grant said later it was made known to him at that moment he eventually would become the President of the Church. He never divulged this to anyone until it became a fact.”¹⁰⁷

Snuffer grants to Joseph Smith the right to have an expanded and increased understanding of his First Vision experience: “Often, Prophets do not understand what God shows them the instant it is revealed. Sometimes unlocking the vision takes time and care, together with careful, solemn, ponderous thought, before they are understood” (15). This is true. Unfortunately, Snuffer denies Grant the same privilege, since he ignores or omits a reference to Grant’s later description of his revelatory experience regarding his suitability as an apostle. In Grant’s later account, his visionary experience included the Savior—but the manifestation simply does not take the precise form that Snuffer has decided it must:

I seemed to see, and I seemed to hear, what to me is one of the most real things in all my life. I seemed to hear the words that were spoken. I listened to the discussion with a great deal of interest.... In this council the Savior was present, my father was there, and the Prophet Joseph Smith was there.... No man could have been more unhappy than I was from October, 1882, until February, 1883, but from that day I have never been bothered, night or day, with the idea that I was not worthy to stand as an apostle.... I have had joy in... proclaiming my absolute knowledge that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, the redeemer of the world....

107 Gibbons, 158.

I do not make this statement because of any desire to magnify myself.¹⁰⁸

In his telling a year later, he reiterated:

I had this feeling that I ought not to testify any more about the Savior and that, really, I was not fit to be an apostle. It seemed overwhelming to me that I should be one. There was a spirit that said: “If you have not seen the Savior, why don’t you resign your position?”

As I rode along alone, I seemed to see a council in heaven. The Savior was there; the Prophet Joseph was there; my father and others that I knew were there....

I can truthfully say that from February, 1883, until today I have never had any of that trouble, and I Can bear my testimony that I know that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior of the world and that Joseph Smith is a l prophet of the living God; and the evil one does not try to persuade me that I do not know what I am talking about. I have never had one slight impression to the contrary. I have just had real, genuine joy and satisfaction in proclaiming the gospel and bearing my testimony of the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the divine calling of Joseph Smith, the prophet.¹⁰⁹

This experience was sufficient to silence Grant’s self-doubts and the evil voices who questioned his suitability for the apostleship: we see once again his acute awareness of the perils of pride, and an anxious concern that others not misunderstand his intent. He did not have a “personal,” (i.e., one on one) vision,

108 Grant, “Opening Conference Message,” 315; also in *Gospel Standards*, 195–196 and *Conference Report* (April 1941): 4–5.

109 Grant, *Conference Report* (October 1942): 26.

but his experience sufficed. It is unfortunate that it does not satisfy Snuffer, who later tells us that Grant “would resist any effort to pursue a spiritual manifestation the remainder of his life” (247). This claim is plainly false, as the historical record shows—Snuffer is not giving us good history, and he is certainly not giving us unvarnished “truth.”

For example, Grant described how, in response to his prayer, “the voice of the Lord from heaven” reassured his young daughter that “in the death of your Mamma the will of the Lord shall be done.”¹¹⁰ Grant also reported a visionary dream in which his deceased wife came to claim his son’s spirit during a mortal illness. This initially troubled him, but upon entering his son’s sickroom, he felt the presence of his late wife. His living wife was in the same room and identified the deceased wife’s presence without Grant having said anything. Contrary to Snuffer’s distortion of the record, spiritual manifestations were sought by Grant, and were “a sweet, peaceful, and heavenly influence in my home, as great as I have ever experienced in my life.”¹¹¹

PTHG says that by Grant’s day, “knowledge of Jesus Christ was not only unnecessary, it was viewed by the church president as both negative, and potentially something leading to pride and fall from grace” (64). This reading is absurd—Grant is instead worried about his own proclivity to pride, and asks God to spare him that risk, even if it requires that he not have a personal visitation as he knows many others have. He does not see such a witness as a negative, or a knowledge of Christ as unnecessary—that is pure editorializing by *PTHG*, and directly contradicts Grant’s own testimony. Grant does acknowledge the risk of pride—though given that Snuffer lays claim to such theophanies only to now attempt to marginalize and correct

110 Heber J. Grant, “In the Hour of Parting,” *Improvement Era* 43/6 (June 1940): 363.

111 Grant, “In the Hour of Parting,” 383.

the apostles, pride is apparently not a merely theoretical concern. The members of the Church whose testimonies worry Snuffer need not be concerned regarding President Grant, save if they rely on Snuffer's dubious interpretation, and ignore all the other evidence.

In this paper, I speak only for myself and not for any person or group. I'm grateful for discussions, references, and advance readings from Russell Anderson, Connor Boyack, Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, Cassandra Hedelius, Bryce Haymond, Dennis Horne, Ted Jones, Daniel C. Peterson, Stephen O. Smoot, and S. Hales Swift. Special thanks are due Matthew Roper of the Laura F. Willis Center for Book of Mormon Studies at Brigham Young University for pointing me to several primary sources. Any errors remain my own.

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