

## SMPT Abstracts — Tenth Annual Meeting

October 31–November 2, 2013

Utah Valley University

*Abstracts received are listed in order of their appearance on the program.*

—*Thursday evening*—

### **Daniel W. Graham, “Works”**

One great theological controversy is whether humankind are saved by grace alone or by works. Where do Latter-day Saints stand with respect to this question?

Latter-day saints often appeal to 2 Ne. 25:23, “it is by grace we are saved, after all we can do.” They sometimes interpret this verse to mean that we do as much as we can for ourselves and God makes up the difference. This interpretation seems problematic on several grounds.

Several passages of scripture deal with “works meet for repentance.” They suggest that works play a key role in one place we might not expect to find them, namely in the doctrine of repentance itself. Some scriptures suggest that good works just are acts of repentance. On this model, faith and works are not two incompatible principles but two sides of the same coin. That is why we can combine divine grace and human obedience into a unified conception.

—*Friday morning*—

### **Dennis Potter, “Mormonism and the Problem of Heterodoxy”**

Religious disagreements can occur *between* or *within* religious traditions. Whereas much of the work in religious epistemology deals with the former, I propose to deal with the latter. I call this *the problem of heterodoxy*. In this paper, I explore the Mormon doctrines of the *restoration* and *continuing revelation* as the basis of a possible response to the problem of heterodoxy. I call this approach *restored epistemology*. I argue that while restored epistemology seems promising at first, it commits Mormons to an epistemic authoritarianism that is both morally repugnant and question begging.

### **Rico Martinez, “Disputing Holiness: John Taylor of Norwich (1694–1761) and Man’s State of Innocence”**

In the eighteenth century, John Taylor of Norwich rigorously assailed traditional ideas on man’s primitive holiness, imputed sin, and natural depravity. Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley and others, were forced to defend and clarify the doctrines of original sin against Taylor’s unrelenting attacks. This paper explores how the Book of Mormon’s various articulations of man’s primitive state and the nexus between Adam’s sin and his posterity might have sounded to those involved in this great debate. To what extent does the Book of Mormon presume

ideas associated with original sin and does it provide solutions to the theological problems raised by Taylor?

### **Janice Allred, “The Atonement According to Jesus”**

Although the atonement is the central doctrine of Christianity, it does not receive precise formulation in the New Testament. The Mormon scriptures contain much additional revelation about Christ, but they also do not provide a clear doctrine of the atonement. None of the major atonement theories developed by theologians answers all questions about the atonement and there are serious objections to some of the models. This paper will address the question, What has Jesus said about the atonement? By focusing on the words of Jesus I hope to shed new light on the nature, meaning, and scope of the atonement.

### **Brock M. Mason and Joseph M. Spencer, “The Redemption of the Bible: John 10:16 in Third Nephi”**

In 3 Nephi 15:11 - 16:4, the visiting Christ of the Book of Mormon presents to his New World hearers a complicated analysis of a brief passage from the Gospel of John, regarding the "other sheep" not of the Jerusalem fold. The analysis divides neatly into three sequences, which successively explore (1) the fact of the Bible's misinterpretation, (2) the reasons for the Bible's incomprehensibility, and (3) the possibilities for the Bible's creative reinterpretation. Moreover, these three sequences collectively focus on how communal at-one-ment is necessary to God's purposes, as well as on how the communal nature of the three persons of the Godhead is to be understood. The Book of Mormon thus stages a kind of redemption of the Bible—regarded as incomplete, insufficient, and appropriable—by drawing it into a broader and broadening framework for understanding the nature of the atonement as covenantal and communal.

### **Paul Owen, “Rethinking Penal Substitution”**

In this paper I will offer a critique of “penal substitutionary atonement.” PSA correctly recognizes that Christ’s death does compensate for human transgressions. It rightly points out that the world stands under divine wrath and the threat of punishment without the benefit of atonement. And it accurately notes that what Christ did suffer on the cross was what sinners deserve as their just penalty for sin. But PSA misunderstands the nature of atonement and blood sacrifice in the Levitical system (which Christian theology sees as background to the death of the Messiah). It misinterprets Isaiah 53 and the description of the death of the “Servant” as a “guilt offering.” And it fails to understand numerous NT texts which associate the suffering of Jesus on the cross with his whole incarnate experience as a mortal person.

### **Ben Spackman, “Exploring the Origins of Atonement Terminology”**

LDS atonement terminology draws heavily from scripture. While several prominent terms have converged to near synonymy in LDS usage, the Israelite roots of these terms diverged significantly. Three terms and their derives bear examination in particular.

First, *redeem*, with its deep connection to kinship and covenant, presents God as divine kinsman who purchases out of slavery.

Second, *save*, with its frequent martial contexts, presents God as warrior, who defeats personal, national, and cosmic enemies in battle.

Thirdly, *atone*, found heavily in priestly context, is not as well understood. Likely drawing on Akkadian analogs, atonement may present God as priestly, who both requires and provides purification on an individual and cosmological level, purging of cultic and moral impurity.

Do these concepts find purchase in LDS tradition and thought? What significance, if any, do they hold for LDS notions of atonement?

—*Friday afternoon*—

### **Ralph Hancock, “Virtue, Technology and Atonement: the Problem of the Horizon of Moral Agency”**

Can we find a way to talk about freedom that, on the one hand, avoids severing it from reason and from the (partly) intelligible world, and, on the other, is not dependent on a classical metaphysics that makes unreasonable claims on behalf of reason?

Latter-day Saint scriptures open up new possibilities in addressing fundamental questions surrounding human agency. Three distinctive features of the LDS approach to agency will be considered: agency as redeemed, agency as bodily and fruitful, and agency as ontological, that is, as a principle of reality itself.

### **Bruce Young, “Atonement in Shakespeare and Early Modern Anglican Theology: Their Relevance for Latter-day Saints”**

Because of its situation as a “middle way” between Protestantism and Catholicism, the Church of England has tended to be more inclusive and flexible in its theology of atonement than many other Protestants. Shakespeare shows similar inclusiveness and flexibility, drawing on various theories of atonement, including the cosmic battle and mousetrap theories and theories based on mystical participation, sacrifice, ransom, penal substitution, reconciliation, healing, and moral influence and transformation. These and other approaches appear in various plays, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, and *The Winter’s Tale*. The approaches to which Shakespeare seems most drawn—especially healing and moral influence and transformation—did not dominate in the period. Yet they speak to many in our time, including Latter-day Saints, and find support in LDS scripture. They also

hint at Shakespeare's theological leanings and are relevant to questions about God's character, human agency and potential, and ethical behavior.

### **John Christopher Thomas, "The Structure of the Book of Mormon"**

This presentation seeks to discover what a narrative analysis reveals about the structure of the Book of Mormon. The first part of the paper is devoted to a rationale for the study within the broader field of Book of Mormon studies. Part Two examines the readerly implications of the roles Mormon and Moroni within the narrative. The third part of the presentation gives attention to the role and function of the three primary chronological indicators found within the narrative. Short conclusion is offered.

### **Benjamin Huff, "Liberating the Captive: Freedom and the Logic of Atonement"**

Some passages of scripture seem to support the idea that we exercise free will in sinning, whereas others teach that sin is a kind of bondage, and that true freedom is found only in righteousness. In this paper, I explore the implications of this latter, somewhat neglected account of freedom, for our understanding of the atonement. First I explore what it might mean to say that sin is bondage, and that freedom is found only in righteousness. I then examine the sense of divine justice involved in this situation, where common notions of punishment cannot apply, since they presuppose a free choice to do wrong. Finally, I consider what the state is into which we are released through Christ's atonement, emphasizing freedom in the positive sense of a mind and heart that is prepared to live "after the manner of happiness" (2 Nephi 5:27).

### **Robert Couch, "Business, Ethics, and Mormonism: A Radical, Practical Critique"**

In *Approaching Zion*, Hugh Nibley offers a radical and trenchant critique of modern capitalist culture. At the other end of the spectrum, Mitt Romney represents the practical side of Mormonism—a Mormonism rooted in bourgeois virtues tightly linked with worldly success. Do these poles present a polarizing either/or decision, or is there a way to properly reconcile the tension underlying these theological extremes? Radical virtue ethics, especially as explored in recent business ethics literature, represents an approach that can preserve fidelity to both sides of this tension lying at the intersection of business, ethics, and Mormonism.

### **Julie Smith, "Narrative Atonement Theology in the Gospel of Mark"**

The Gospel of Mark develops a theology of the atonement not primarily through discourse but rather through narrative. The three reactions to Jesus' death—the rending of the temple veil, the exclamation of the centurion, and the activities of the women at the cross—are a key way that Mark constructs the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ. These three reactions show that Mark understands the atonement as breaking down the barriers between God and humans, allowing for increased human knowledge, and expanding the sphere of God's people.

Each of these three reactions becomes more textured when read in the light of the story of Jesus' baptism. Mark departs from most considerations of the atonement by privileging outcome over process.

—*Friday evening*—

### **Noel Reynolds, “The Gospel According to Mormon”**

Although scholarly investigation of the Book of Mormon has increased significantly over the last three decades, only a tiny portion of that effort has been focused on the theological or doctrinal content of this central volume of LDS scripture. This paper identifies three *inclusios* that promise definitions of the doctrine or gospel of Jesus Christ, in 2 Nephi 31, 3 Nephi 11, and 3 Nephi 27. It then proposes a cumulative methodology to explain how these definitions work. This approach reveals a consistently presented, six-part formula defining ‘the way’ by which mankind can qualify for eternal life. In this way the paper provides a starting point for scholarly examinations of the theological content of this increasingly influential religious text.

—*Saturday morning*—

### **Lynn D. Wardle, “Joseph Smith and the Restoration of the Atonement”**

The atonement of Jesus Christ – the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died as a vicarious sacrifice to bridge the gap between God and man by overcoming the physical Fall and suffering punishment for our sins – is a key doctrinal component of Christian faiths, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormons believe that "through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel." (Art. Faith 3). After reviewing the meaning of "atonement," this paper provides a brief history of the transformation of the doctrine of the atonement in Christian thought over two millennia, showing the need for a "restoration" of the true principles. Finally, it reviews some of the common and distinctive dimensions of what Joseph Smith taught about the atonement.

### **Gavin Jensen, “The Status Function Theory of the Atonement”**

We understand that the same sociality that exists on earth will exist in heaven—but many may not understand the structure of that sociality which will follow us into the kingdoms of glory. This paper engages in an analysis of society in terms of status functions—the socially recognized roles and social powers that constitute the interdependent relationships between all beings in the kingdom of God. This analysis of social reality sheds light on many questions relating to the Atonement such as: What constitutes God’s social power? How is the Atonement better understood within a social context? and Why was Christ’s suffering necessary?

### **J. Mark Olsen, “Broken Agency: Ability, Disability and Atonement”**

2 Nephi 2: 16 and 27 assert a robust notion of human agency. But it is clear that not all persons have agency in any strong sense. Intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses prevent some from acting fully on their own. It is normal to see the class of mentally disabled persons as a group in need of physiological healing, while the rest of us need the atonement in order to repent. This paper challenges this dichotomy. While there is a considerable degree of difference between the average agent and the intellectually disabled, I argue that this is not a difference in kind. The usual interpretation of Lehi’s pronouncement on agency is, roughly, Kantian: persons who can rationally reflect are full agents and are not hindered by empirical differences between them. However, I argue that differences in psychology and physiology make a difference on our ability to act, and therefore on our agency. We are not, therefore, as the Kantian picture claims, all equally capable of moral action, whether we are deeply disabled or not. That is, we are all in need of physical and psychological healing from the atonement.

### **David Banack, “Vicarious Atonement and Vicarious Grace in Christian and LDS Thought”**

Vicarious action is not limited to the Atonement. It is present in the idea of original sin, transmitted to humankind as descendants of Adam and Eve. It is present in scriptural accounts of blessings or curses that are passed to a clan or lineage or community because of the good or evil acts of a key progenitor. A jealous God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation. But not always. Why are some acts, but not others, given vicarious effect? Why is the punishment of an innocent third party thought to be praiseworthy as part of the Atonement but unjust in more familiar social and legal contexts? The legal doctrine of vicarious liability provides some insight into these difficult questions.

### **Cameron Oren Hunter, “The Problem of Predication: a Unique Strand of the Problem of Determinism for Mormonism, and the Final Resolution through the Atonement”**

In Mormon theology, there is emphasis on agency, as salvation and damnation are predicated upon choices in this life. However, unique is the teaching that the spirit present in this life results from choices made in the Pre-Earth life. So it seems the destinies of souls are predicated upon Earthly *and* Pre-Earth existence, as spirits entered the world with certain predispositions. The question then, is whether spirits inherited predilections from existence as intelligence, and further, what then is salvation ultimately predicated upon? Even if spirits were created free of tendency, what accounts for spirits becoming mighty or weak? Did spirits consciously choose this? Within this question is a unique strand of the problem of determinism, as agency seems to have little to do with eventual salvation or damnation. I propose a solution through the Atonement, based upon the differing capacities of each spirit, which provides some insight into this problem.

### **Taylor Petrey, “A Difference There: Mormon Theology and Sexual Difference”**

Mormon notions of divinization mean that to do theology in Mormonism is to engage in anthropology, the nature of what it means to be human. Because LDS understandings of God include divisions between male and female, sexual difference must be a crucial theological category in Mormon thought. This essay offers a critical evaluation of various Mormon theologies of gender and how they map onto broader theories of gender. I suggest some problems with contemporary discussions about difference and unity, and point to some resources in Mormonism to reframing sexual difference.

—*Saturday afternoon*—

### **Keith Lane, “Contention and Atonement: Unity and Difference with and without Contention”**

This paper will review the commands for unity and the warnings against contention given us by God and explore ways atonement works with respect to difference and contention (with attention, of course, to theological/philosophical contexts)—ways that anticipate disagreement while still holding strongly to a genuine, grounded unity. The command to avoid contention is designed to help in situations of disagreement. The very centrality of the need for atonement, and commands against contention already assume that we aren't fully one, that we are different in ways that we should not be different, and that we must strive to be one. The fact that differences must be overcome while maintaining individual agency, brings out the need for there not to be contention. Unity must be sought, but where unity is not yet found, at least there must be a full effort to avoid contention. Any genuine unity found will be built on the ground established in large measure by striving to see that there is no contention. The force of truth (truthfulness/truth to God and to each other) will be more important in these kinds of contexts than the force of reason (though these are not unrelated).

### **KC Kern, “Willing to Bear My Name: Nominal Appropriation, Atonement, and Salvation in Latter-day Saint Theology”**

In its teachings on the Atonement, the Book of Mormon states that Jesus Christ “takes upon” himself humanity’s sins, pains, sicknesses, and ultimately, death. Humanity is consequently commanded to “take upon” them the name of Christ. The Book of Mormon’s usage of the phrasal verb “take upon” in these contexts reveals a novel atonement theory—one that presents the condescension/incarnation of God and the redemption/sanctification of mankind as complementary facets of a unified salvific process. This theory offers important theological insight into the implications of appropriating the name of Christ, and into the significance of the corresponding appropriation of human nature encompassed in the incarnation, intercession, sacrifice, and resurrection of Christ. This distinct exposition of the

atonement has no apparent precedent in biblical or pre-1830 Christian writings, making it a uniquely Mormon contribution to Christian soteriology.

### **Charles Harrell, “The Infinite Atonement in Mormon Thought”**

The profoundly laden phrase “infinite atonement” is non-biblical and doesn’t appear to occur in any early Christian writings. It is generally attributed to St. Anselm who introduced it in his work *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man) written at the turn of the twelfth century. By the time of Joseph Smith the phrase had become commonplace in Protestant discourse as Trinitarians put it to service to bolster their belief in the divinity of Christ, a belief which was hotly contested by Unitarians. Coincidentally, “infinite atonement” appears several places in the Book of Mormon and has become a signature phrase in Mormonism when speaking of the transcendent nature and far reaching effects of Christ’s atonement. This paper traces the ever-expanding interpretation of the infinite atonement in LDS history and how this interpretation has impacted the development of Mormon theology.

### **James Faulconer, panel presentation: “The Atrophy of Law, the Breath of Grace”**

In *The Time That Remains*, Giorgio Agamben is interested in Paul’s thinking about the law. He argues that Paul’s fundamental question is *What are we to make of the law in light of the messianic revelation? How does that revelation abolish the law and yet also fulfill it?* Agamben’s answer is that this occurs in the tension between the performance of faith and the performative codification of law: The performance of faith is the response to the word of grace, a grace which breaks down the divisions that separate us (44). The performance of the law is the ground for obligation and human relation. There is no human life without obligation. Thus the need for the word of law. But there is also no human life without the word of grace that undermines that law. In fear of the lawlessness of grace, we tend toward law. But that fear and its tendency too often make us take leave of the realm of grace. Then, without the breath of grace, the word of law turns to stone and dies.

### **Joseph Spencer, panel presentation: “Are There Predicates in Zion?”**

Giorgio Agamben, in his *The Time That Remains*, argues that the Pauline “as not” (*hōs mē*) from 1 Corinthians 7:29–31, a formula that accompanies and captures what dawns with the messianic era, is meant to set concepts against themselves in such a way that they cease to function as concepts. Consequently, he argues that, for Paul, the “is” of predication—predicative being as such—becomes inoperative with the triumph of the Messiah. Thus in what Agamben calls “the coming community,” what Latter-day Saints would simply call “Zion,” there are no classes (where classes are understood to be definite extensions of determinate concepts). There are two questions a Latter-day Saint might raise in response to Agamben’s proposal regarding the possibilities of a fully redeemed community. First, one might wonder what happens to messianism when, as in the Book of Mormon, the relation between history and the messianic



event is effectively reversed. And, second, one might ask about Joseph Smith's own thinking about 1 Corinthians 7:29–31, on offer in his reworking of the text in the project of his "New Translation" of the Bible.

### **Adam Miller, panel presentation: "Time, Silence, Forgiveness: A Mormon Theory of History"**

It's often said that, for Mormons, history is theology. And historical questions—concrete, vibrant, fraught—dominate the field. But, for all our concern with history, our treatment of it has rarely been theological. We do the essential work of gathering facts and assembling histories but we have no *theory* of history. We lack potent accounts of what time and history are. And, as a result, we end working by default with a flat, secular account of time whose simplicity distorts our messianic stories. The temporal complexities of our religious histories get stretched over a secular grid that both tames and deforms them. History, as theology, grows opaque. Rather than forcing our religious stories to fit a secular model of time, our most urgent theological work should focus on generating theories of history and temporality that start from the revelations. On this score, Giorgio Agamben's *The Time That Remains* is important because it models a messianic approach to temporality that treats secular history not as time's horizon but as one moment in its polyvalent unfolding. It demonstrates how non-secular theories of temporality are embedded in our religious texts and it offers a working account of messianic history that provides a solid starting point for work that takes seriously the claim that, for Mormons, history is theology.

### **Blake Ostler, "What Becoming Mortal Empowered God to Do"**

It is common-place in Mormon thought that God was enabled by the mortal experiences of both the Father and the Son to do what they could not otherwise do. Hebrews states that Christ learned obedience from the things that he suffered as a mortal — which some translations render as "he learned trusting obedience from the things that he suffered just as we do." Alma 7 goes beyond the notion that Christ as a mortal learned obedience and states that Christ learned to succor his people as result of his sufferings. What is radical about this notion is that the atonement is generally viewed as an accomplishment of both human and divine natures. The notion that mortality is essential to enable God as God to do anything that could not otherwise be done is radical indeed in Christian thought.

The notion seems to be that experiential learning is essential to the divine status. Experiential knowledge is essential to divine reconciliation with mortals. The intuition underlying these commitments is that experiential knowledge can be gained only through immediate, first-person experiences that enable further progress into possibilities that would otherwise be impossible. I explore the underlying intuitions and their implications for our notions of divinity and the purpose of mortal life as we experience it. I place the discussion in the context of a complete Atonement theodicy.