Chasing Consecration: Mormons and Modernity

by

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# Table of Contents

Preface: ii

**I. Mormonism as a Response to the ‘Disintegrating Forces’ of Modernity**  
- Mormon Ontology Responds to Durkheimian Modernity 16  
- Mormon Ontology Responds to Elaine’s Modernity 29  
- Mormon Ontology Responds to Weber’s Modernity 41  
- The Celestial Law of Consecration 49

**II. A History of Consecration** 58  
- From New York To Zion—With Rigdon, by Way of Kirtland 61  
- Consecration and Zion-Building, phase 1: Ohio & Missouri 1831-8 65  
- Part A: Ideal Zion 65  
- Part B: Historical Zion 71  
- Consecration Today 102

**III. “What is the Law of Consecration?”** 106  
- Blogging Consecration 110  
- The Consecration Debate 117  
- Issue 1: Are the Mormon people living the Law of Consecration today? 119  
- Issue 2: What does the Ideal Celestial Society look like? 148  
- Issue 3: How may Saints move from the present day reality to the ideal, celestial way of living? 156

**IV. The LDS Church Welfare Program and the Law of Consecration Today** 168  
- A. Mormonism and Modernity 168  
- B. The Mormon Welfare System 181  
- C. The Bishop’s Storehouse—An Example of Mormon Communalism in the 21st Century 184  
- Conclusion: 195  
- Bibliography 198
Preface:

Before I had any developed understanding of Mormons, their religion or their history, I followed the national media coverage of an emerging scandal involving the court-imposed reformation of the United Effort Plan Trust (UEP), the financial wing of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS) in 2006. As the media (and the FLDS lawyers) described the situation, the UEP had been set up for the specific purpose of allowing the FLDS members to practice something called Joseph Smith’s “Law of Consecration”: FLDS members would legally deed all of their property to the UEP, and allow “God” (represented by the central FLDS priesthood, led by their Prophet-President) to redistribute his people’s assets and provide for the “just wants and needs” of all. As the attorneys representing the FLDS asserted in a recent petition of appeal:

The UEP Trust was [originally] intended and designed to enable Petitioner Association members to organize their communal life around one of the central tenets of their religion - the Law of Consecration and Stewardship, also known as the Holy United Order. Thus the Declaration of Trust of the UEP Trust states that the Trust was created and exists solely "to preserve and advance the religious doctrines and goals of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (the "FLDS Church"), and that the Trust is to be administered "consistent with its religious purpose to provide for [FLDS] Church members according to their wants and their needs, insofar as their wants and needs are just (Doctrine and Covenants, Section 82: 17 -21). " It expressly provides that in the event of
termination, Trust assets are to become the `property of the Corporation of the President of the FLDS Church.¹

What I found most fascinating about the UEP Trust litigations, which as of April 12, 2010 were still unresolved, were the claims made by FLDS members and their representatives that the court’s reformation of an economic plan violated their religious liberty. They argued that, within the FLDS religion (and thus within the terms of the original trust) just wants and needs were not universal socioeconomic standards of living (as the Utah State Court defined them in the 2006 reformed trust), but elements of one’s spiritual situation that may only be discerned through the power of the Holy Spirit. This power, they believe, is only available to a bishop within the eternal priesthood allegedly restored by Joseph Smith.

Legal theorist Erik Anderson has argued, in support of the FLDS, that by removing the references to just wants and needs as a concept in Mormon scripture which had appeared in the pre-2006 Trust (including the lines quoted in the appeal above), and inserting new, objective definitions of the terms—writing “just wants and needs concern primarily housing, with the goal of securing residencies for Trust participants… education including scholarships, occupational training and economic development…[as well as] food, clothing, [and] medical needs”²—and appointing a non-FLDS lawyer to replace the FLDS prophet as chief fiduciary, the state-courts “fundamentally secularized” what had clearly been a “religious trust.” "Not only has

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‘preserving and advancing’ [the] ‘religious doctrines and goals [of the FLDS church]’”—the specific purposes delineated in the pre-2006 UEP Trust—
“disappeared [in the 2006 trust], but the beneficiaries “needs” and “just wants” are to be determined with, at most, “non binding ecclesiastical input into the meaning of those terms.” Anderson’s conclusion as an American legal-theorist is that the Utah court definitely violated the establishment clause—and probably also the freedom of exercise clause—of the First Amendment.

While I found Anderson’s arguments persuasive, it was not the legal—or, even the moral—controversies of the situation that piqued my interest. The UEP Trust litigation fascinated me because of the jarring juxtapositions of what social theorists call pre-modern elements alongside the modern. The UEP Trust Litigation is most interesting to me because it raises the question of what influences religion may have on economic life within a society which has codified the binary opposition between secular and religious through the legal separation of church and state.

When I began my research, I directed my attention towards understanding the summary objection raised by the FLDS: the claim that they were now unable to observe “one of the central tenets of their religion - the Law of Consecration and Stewardship.” Despite maintaining ongoing communications with the attorneys for


4 Clark, Stephen C. MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF PETITION FOR EXTRAORDINARY WRIT. Filed with the Utah Court of Appeals, Trial Court No. 053900848, October 20, 2009. Obtained through personal communications with the author. Also available at
the FLDS and combing histories of their community, I was unable to locate any material to provide me with a precise account of what the *Law of Consecration* actually meant. The attorneys for the FLDS were unable to suggest any official FLDS sources explaining the term, and warned me that any attempt to locate FLDS literature or FLDS members that would speak to the nature of this doctrine would prove impossible. Instead, attorneys from two separate firms representing the FLDS membership in the UEP Trust litigations, told me the best I could do was to read the book *Building the City of God* (© 1976) by Arrington, Fox and May.5

*Building the City of God* is an economic-historical account of (to quote the book’s sub-title) *Community and Cooperation Among the Mormons* in the nineteenth-century written by active LDS members. It seemed to me a strange source for deriving the doctrines of twentieth-century fundamentalists. This wholly demythologized account made a methodological principle of discussing Mormon socioeconomic practices—“community and cooperation”—in terms of material-history and American-history and actively avoided any serious discussion of the theological context—the Celestial Law of Consecration—and the imperatives from which those practices emerged. Moreover, Arrington et al. only deign to discuss the LDS church, and say that the Law of Consecration “died” in 1890. They do not acknowledge the rise or even existence of Mormon “fundamentalist” sects, like the FLDS, committed to maintaining the twin principles of plural marriage and the communalistic system identified as the Law of Consecration.


I did locate some FLDS community-histories, but these were all written by ex-FLDS who had since joined the mainstream LDS church. Very rarely did these histories diverge from their overt, polemical focus on the horrors of polygamy. When they did discuss the “Law of Consecration,” the writers tended to assume their (presumably LDS) readership already knew the meaning of this term.6

Frustrated, I moved on to LDS confessional writings on the meaning and definition of the Law of Consecration. I knew that the term went back to the teachings of Joseph Smith and thus represented part of a doctrinal inheritance shared by both LDS and FLDS. I assumed the Law remained elusive due to the communal secrecy of the Mormon fundamentalists who maintained it, and the obscurity it must have lapsed into among LDS Mormons, who according to the historians abandoned the practice. Immersed in these writings, I encountered a passionate debate among twentieth-century LDS intellectuals about the meaning and significance of the term. I quickly realized that the Law of Consecration was not an obscure or defunct element of LDS Mormonism, but rather an integral part of the Mormon faith, and one that was also the subject of intense controversy. The more familiar I became with these Mormon writings, the more I realized that the debate about Consecration is only intelligible when read in the context of Mormon ontology. To have any real understanding of what Mormons are talking about when they talk about Consecration, one must see that such discussion goes way beyond debating (any) one theological doctrine, and becomes a matter of resolving the tensions and potential contradictions inherent in the belief system revealed to Joseph Smith.

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The primary purpose of this paper is to make this debate intelligible to the reader, and to establish its significance. I argue in this paper that the concept of the Law of Consecration as a Celestial Law is the nexus of the most distinctive elements of current Mormon socioeconomic practices and ideals.

In Chapter I, I synthesize scholarly accounts of the Mormon religious tradition. I summarize the dialectical approach found in Durkheim, Elaide and Weber and show how the Mormon concept of Celestial Law does not accord with this approach to understanding how individuals enter into modernity. I propose that the Law of Consecration epitomizes the hybrid nature Mormonism presents when it is viewed from the perspective of these narratives of modernity. As both a law that has economic significance and a Celestial Law that has spiritual significance, it is the loci of what theorists view as opposing forces and is key to understanding the Mormon encounter with modernity.

In Chapter II, I trace the historical and scriptural basis for the Law of Consecration as an institution of 19th century Mormonism. I emphasize in this chapter the extent to which historians agree that the Law of Consecration as embodied in the economic structures initiated by Joseph Smith in the 1830s was neither wholly communalistic nor capitalistic.

In Chapter III, I show how LDS Mormons in recent decades have debated the meaning and significance of the Law of Consecration. I first look at a bitter, snowballing debate among LDS bloggers about how to define the Law of Consecration. I identify three “schools” of opinion expressed on this blog: proactive-communalists, pro-capitalists, and the LDS party line. In order to demonstrate my
argument that the debate over the Law of Consecration emerges (via the doctrine of Celestial Law) from the deepest grounds of Mormon ontology itself, I demonstrate that the three positions communicated in this spontaneous blog debate are a precise replication of the debate among late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century LDS academics and church leaders about the meaning and significance of the Law of Consecration. The inherent subjectivity of historiography and scriptural exegesis allows enough doctrinal wiggle-room for each of the three schools to confidently present their definitions of Consecration as universal truth, even as those definitions come to communicate very different evaluations of capitalist economies and the current LDS systems of tithing and welfare institutions.

Finally, in Chapter IV, I end my paper with my account of the current LDS tithing and welfare program. Leaving the debate over whether or not this program is or is not the Celestial Law of Consecration predicted by Mormon ontology, I observed the program in action and interviewed participants. There is no denying that the historical precedents and doctrinal underpinnings that make the Law of Consecration an inextricable element of Mormon socioeconomic idealism have influenced the program.

*Note about references:* I have chosen to follow the standard of quoting Biblical texts—even those from the Mormon scriptural canon—with in-text citations.
Mormonism as a Response to the ‘Disintegrating Forces’ of Modernity

When members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Mormons) receive their temple-endowments—a ritual whose concepts are explained in the course of this chapter—they encounter “the Law of Consecration” as the last of seven covenants that must be made, and subsequently kept, in order to receive the most glorious form of afterlife available to human beings. These covenants are referred to as Celestial Laws. Apparently, temple-initiates must ritually affirm the following proposition:

You and each of you covenant and promise before God, angels, and these witnesses at this altar, that you do accept the Law of Consecration as contained in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, in that you do consecrate yourselves, your time, talents, and everything with which the Lord has blessed you, or with which he may bless you, to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
Saints, for the building up of the Kingdom of God on the earth and for the establishment of Zion.¹

The *Doctrines and Covenants* (D&C) is the Mormon scriptural text containing all of the canonical revelations Mormons believe were received by Joseph Smith as specific instructions to the Church from Jesus. However, the D&C text nowhere provides the explicit definition of the “Law of Consecration” that is given at the ceremony. The ritual covenant appears to require no more than the internalization of an abstract loyalty. This presentation of the Law of Consecration typifies the extent to which a believer in Joseph Smith’s gospel may talk about the “Law of Consecration as contained in the D & C” by imposing knowledge obtained from other texts and epistemological sources of the Mormon “gospel.”

Defined as a concept, the gospel Joseph Smith preached and bequeathed his successors encompasses more than a new scriptural tradition. It is an elusive term. Despite the ubiquitous appearance of the word *gospel* in the scriptures produced by Joseph Smith (where Adam, Moses, and the American Indians all receive the *gospel of Jesus Christ*, and overtly refer to it in their speeches), the official LDS Bible Dictionary has no entry for the word. *The Guide to Scriptures*, another official LDS

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¹ The three Missionaries with whom I met to write this paper all affirmed the that they made such a promise when they received their endowments.


Intimations of th temple ceremony may also be found in Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May, *BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Cooperation Among the Mormons*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 362
publication defines *Gospel* as” God’s plan of salvation, made possible through the atonement of Jesus Christ.” *The Guide to Scriptures* entry continues to explain:

> The gospel includes the eternal truths or laws, covenants, and ordinances needed for mankind to enter back into the presence of God. God restored the fullness [sic] of the gospel to the earth in the nineteenth century through the Prophet Joseph Smith.²

This definition, provided by the *Guide to Scriptures* is useful for introducing a series of terms to be discussed throughout this essay, the most important of which, for the purposes of this discussion, is the phrase “eternal truths.” In Mormon ontology,³ as will be discussed below, the gospel can only ever be *restored*. It is not revealed from beyond the monophysitcal universe; rather, its substance is said to accord with the “eternal truths” and natural laws of that universe. Celestial Laws, which include Consecration, Marriage, and Obedience, are classified in this context as the eternal, natural truths by which our species (identified by Joseph Smith as the species of *intelligence*) may evolve to Godhood.

However, the *Guide to Scriptures* definition of *Gospel* is less instructive than that contained in the unofficial, but pro-LDS *Historical Dictionary of Mormonism*. The *Historical Dictionary* entry for *Gospel* includes the note: “As Mormons use this

³Throughout my paper, I have chosen to phrase my discussion in terms of *Mormon ontology* in deliberate avoidance of discussing *Mormon religiosity, faith and/or praxis*. This is partly because these methodological avenues have been explored by academic studies of Mormons and Mormonism since the 1950s. However, my decision to take up this terminology comes more from a desire to achieve objectivity than any impulsive towards innovation. *Religiosity, faith and praxis*, are individualistic concepts developed by Western theorists of religion and society to differentiate their own “modern” consciousness from the pre/early-Modern (Protestant) religion of their recent ancestors, and to explain the origins of this difference according to a rational, disenchantment dialectic. As I show in this paper, the worldview implied by Mormon ontology exists outside of the categories implied by these dialectical narratives of modernity.
word, it almost always refers to the *restored* gospel, or the *fullness* of the gospel, as taught in the scriptures and by the prophets from Joseph Smith to the present.”

The key thing to note is that the substance of the “restored Gospel” may be found both in written scriptures, as well as teachings and revelations that occur in the course of recent history.

While Mormon ontology encompasses a spectrum of opinion on the proper calculation of the principles of the “restored gospel,” there is still general agreement on which factors enter the equation. Bushman writes,

> Killed at the age of thirty-eight after fourteen years as the head of the Church, Smith left his followers the Book of Mormon, a book of his own revelations called the Doctrine and Covenants, an organization led by Apostles, and a conviction that Mormons possessed the restored gospel of Christ.  

A corollary to the “conviction” Bushman lists as the fourth element of the doctrinal inheritance from Smith is the belief that the other three elements harmoniously preach the same gospel. These other three principles each represent distinct epistemological sources by which a Mormon may try to understand the *substance* of the gospel and the fullness Joseph Smith is said to have restored to it. The additional scriptures now found in the *Pearl of Great Price* and the JST bible, as well as the contemporary historical records left by Smith and those close to him, should be appended to Bushman’s list. Furthermore, “an open canon, represented by the Book of Mormon and a prophet in their midst, plus the historical experience of the early Latter-day

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Saints,”—the elements Jan Shipps, the premier non-Mormon scholar of Mormon religion/history, identifies in the introduction to her book *Mormonism: the Making of a Religious Tradition* as those which distinguish Mormonism from ”all other existing religious traditions”—are other epistemological sources for understanding what Smith accomplished.⁶

Combining the ideas of Bushman and Shipps in the above paragraph, I say that the doctrinal inheritance of Joseph Smith—the religious ontology of Mormonism, or, as Mormons would call it, “the restored gospel”—may be calculated as the sum of four primary factors: recovery of ancient scripture (The *Book of Mormon*, Joseph Smith’s emendations to the bible, and the *Book of Abraham*), the canonical record of the direct communications from Jesus Christ to the prophet of his Church (the *D&C*), the attempts by early Mormons to act on and implement what was revealed to them (*Church History as Gospel*), and, finally, the “organization led by Apostles.” It is important to understand that, due to the alleged “presence of the Holy Spirit” within this theoretical “organization,” it is on par with scripture for being an epistemological source for knowing and understanding the fullness of the gospel as allegedly restored by Joseph Smith.

This last point is essential for understanding Mormon ontology, especially when it comes time to talk about the Law of Consecration: Smith did not just claim to have restored Holy Scripture; he also claimed to have restored holy organizations. Reading the D&C, one encounters an almost arbitrary variation in the chapter headings, as some revelations are attributed to “the Seer Joseph Smith,” while others

refer to Smith as “the Prophet,” “the President” or any of these terms in combination. Smith always claimed to be a Seer, but his claims to be the Prophet of Jesus Christ, and the President of the “Melchizedek” or “Adamic” priesthood were developed in the years after the Book of Mormon was produced. Smith claimed, as a restored gospel principle, that this priesthood could only be passed on from worthy adult male to worthy adult male “by the laying on of hands,” and that he had personally received the “keys” to this divine priesthood from a series of Biblical characters, such as Moses, John the Baptist and the Apostle Peter. The D&C includes “witnessed” accounts of how these personages appeared in their celestial-corporeal forms at the Mormon temple in Kirtland, Ohio in the mid 1830s and by the laying on of hands, they “committed the keys to their dispensations” to Smith.

In seeking to talk about the Mormon Law of Consecration, it is necessary to understand three doctrines about this high-priesthood: 1) the most exalted forms of eternal life are only available to human beings on earth through the ministrations of this priesthood, 2) the Holy Spirit is said to literally reside in the organization as a whole, conferring powers of “discernment” to Mormon church officials, and 3) the living Prophet-President of this Priesthood not only has discerning powers through the Holy Spirit, but is also believed to operate in direct consultation with Jesus Christ himself. In this essay, I will refer to these three interrelated points generally as the priesthood principle. The priesthood principle has allowed subsequent Mormon Prophet-Presidents to oversee great changes in Mormon ideals and practice, while presenting an air of continuity. However, the other epistemological elements from

7 The corporeality of celestial beings is a key tenet of Smith’s ontology, explained below.
which Mormon ontology is built up— the ancient and ongoing scriptures and the
historical accounts of Latter-day Saint history—have not been thrown out. Bushman
notes that Smith “remains a vivid presence in the Mormon religious imagination to
this day, his writings and thought shaping Mormon religious life as definitively as
ever.”8 Ancient scripture, D&C revelations, the historical example of earlier
generations of Mormons, and the current practices of the church (under the
supposedly inspired guidance of the Prophet-President) may be used, in various
combinations, to explain the substance of any gospel principle, including the Law of
Consecration.

It is significant that the scripture, historical example, and overall worldview
introduced by Smith function to undermine the specific material, spiritual, and
existential crises that some of the chief social theorists have associated with the
transition to modernity. Mormon ontology—indeed, the specific elements that prop
up the concept of the Law of Consecration— saves adherents from the spiritual and
material symptoms of Durkheimian anomie in a manner that, at its essence, is
precisely opposite to the teleological necessary “organic solidarity” described by
Durkheim; it protects adherents from the Terror of History described by Elaide
without abandoning historicism; finally, it allows for a recapitulation of morality and
meaning with natural science, getting adherents out of the existential iron-cage
described by Weber.

None of this is put forth to defend the actual existence of these classic,
objectively observable modernities. Rather, my purpose in this chapter is to

demonstrate the kind of sociological (pre-) cognizance with which the ontology of Mormonism responds to certain forces generally associated with the “modernization” of the West. Perhaps, as Bushman and others have suggested, Mormonism’s “communalist inclinations” have actually contributed to its survival amid the “secularizing forces of modernity.” Even if they have become nothing more than a deadweight of tradition, holding back the success of Mormonism in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries from an even greater expansion of membership that could have been, and even if there was never such a time as modernity, I would still argue that, when viewed in totality, the teachings of Joseph Smith exhibit a kind of sociological genius through what amounts to an almost cognizant reaction to modernizing forces. 9 The sum of these reactions, Celestial Law, epitomizes how Mormons’ retention of myth and meaning in the presence of the forces of rationalization and socioeconomic modernization has allowed them to avert the existential crises said to be provoked by modernity. After framing the mechanism of this avoidance in terms of each of the three thinkers’ definition of modernity, I go on to show how the status of the Law of Consecration as a Celestial Law has defined Mormons’ responses to the economic or material crises of modernity.

**Mormon Ontology Responds to Durkheimian Modernity**

9 To draw a comparison from the mythology of my subject, modernity may be like Mormon Satan. Mormon ontology says that Satan, unlike Jesus, Jehovah, and human beings on earth, is a spirit creature without any corporeal body of flesh. Joseph Smith, in his first vision, described experiencing the reality of Satan’s presence on earth before beholding the more powerful reality of the corporeal Father and Son. (cf. Pearl of Great Price, History ch. 1) So too, my argument that Mormon ontology appears to provide a purposeful response to the “modernizing processes” described by these traditional social theorists, makes no claims about the existence of modernity as bounded or definable epoch.
Mormonism contains elements which comprehend and respond to the trials that accompany the process of modernization as defined in Durkheimian thought, but without applying the solution Durkheim claims is teleologically necessary. Durkheim looks at the complexity of the division of labor in society as the “absolute value” for objectively determining the level of “civilization” and “social evolution.” At the start of his teleological account of social development, when division of labor is close to absolute zero (as in the case of “primitive” tribes), “collective consciousness corresponds in its integrity to our [human beings] total consciousness at every point.”

Traditional forms of meaning creation come from the *solidarity of sameness*, also called *mechanical solidarity*,—“mechanical forces and instinctive forces such as affinity of blood, attachment to the same soil, the cult of the ancestors, a commonality of habits, etc.”

“The division of labor cannot be pushed too far without being a source of disintegration,” Durkheim declares. As the division of labor increases—to use Durkheim’s terms, as civilization develops—collective consciousness must erode, because human difference becomes increasingly undeniably real. “The greater mobility of social units,” in industrializing societies, epitomized by the emigration of workers from their rural, ancestral homesteads with the rise of large towns and cities, “effects a weakening of all traditions,” by literally displacing people from traditional social institutions and forms of meaning creation.

11 Ibid. 84
12 Ibid. 219
13 Ibid. 294
14 Ibid. 234-5
This leads to the increasing ineffectiveness of mechanical solidarity and traditional forms of meaning creation. “In the same way cancer and tuberculosis increase the diversity of the organic tissues without it being possible to see in this a fresh specialization of the biological functions,” a rise in the division of labor erodes the applicable relevance of traditional forms of solidarity, leading to a kind of social disease which Durkheim calls *anomie*.

Durkheim gives three primary examples of modern anomie. The first is “industrial or commercial crises and… bankruptcies.”\(^\text{15}\) As the “scale of industry” increases with the division of labor, the lack of coordination between social “organs” (firms and industries) will be felt more harshly by more people. These are external, sociomaterial conditions imposed upon the individual. This type of anomie is essentially a revised version of Marx’s concept of material alienation. As shall be explored later on in this chapter, the Law of Consecration lays an imperative on the Mormon people, especially the central preisthoods, to combat this material alienation/anomie head-on. For the moment, my focus is on the elements in Mormon ontology which allow it to avert the existential crises of modernity.

The second type of anomie identified by Durkheim presents this type of existential crises. This type manifests itself in the feelings of the individual—whether laborer, scientist, or bureaucrat)—who, as a result of the increasing division of labor, becomes increasingly “isolated” and “specialized” in the scope of his labor, field or task. The individual loses his connection and solidarity to the collective, having “no longer any idea at all of what that common task [accomplished by the division of

\(^{15}\) Ibid. 292

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labor as a whole] consists.”\textsuperscript{16} As this type of anomie is existential, Durkheim asserts that it requires an existential solution. Outside forces like professional societies, and even government itself, he argues, may succeed in combating the individual experience of anomie, but only to the extent that they are able to inculcate new feelings of solidarity within the individual.\textsuperscript{17} Finally, the third form of anomie arises when the social coordination and the inculcation of feelings of solidarity in difference is forced or imposed upon one from above.

Durkheim is optimistic that the erosion of social solidarity, unlike collective consciousness, may be countered by the development of an “organic solidarity,” which creates a new kind of “solidarity of difference” to replace the age-old values expressed in the collective consciousness and retained by feelings of “mechanical solidarity,” or solidarity of sameness. In modern society, writes Durkheim, “complex representations” of unity will prove to be “of no avail against the vivid, concrete impressions that are aroused at every moment in each of us by his professional activity.”\textsuperscript{18} However, I would argue that Mormonism has retained mechanisms to pull off this kind of “complex representation” and thereby responds to anomie with a kind of neo-mechanical solidarity.

Smith preached a worldview wherein the existential manifestations of anomie would be directly acknowledged and repaired. Bushman writes that “Mormons insist that the[ir] ‘wacky’ beliefs pull them together as a people and give them the strength

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 294
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. 297
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. 298
Mormonism provides a kind of solidarity that effectively combats Durkheimian anomie. Their divine cosmology allows them to repair the distance from their biological ancestors and their celestial father. However, this solidarity is at odds with the governmental and professional organizations Durkheim argued were the (teleologically, inevitable) solutions to the problem of anomie.

Joseph Smith had reason to be acutely aware of the increasing existential gap between generations. He was born in Topsfield, MA to a family of Puritan-descendents, but he spent most of his young life in upstate New York where his father moved to make his fortune. The Smiths were not just dislocated from their ancestors and living family in New England—they were displaced from the Puritan-turned-Congregationalist church in which both of Smith’s parents had been raised. In New York, his family members dispersed to attended different churches. The account Smith gave of his first vision, now canonized as scripture by Mormons in the *Pearl of Great Price*, begins with Smith describing the confusion wrought on him by the religious sectarianism that was then sweeping through upstate New York and splitting up his own family household, which contained Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians. Smith describes the personal anguish he felt over the “this war of

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words and tumult of opinions,” and of the “extreme difficulties caused by the parties of religionists.”

These biographical factors appear to have influenced Smith to gird Mormon ontology with a strong aversion to social disunity. With Durkheimian cognizance, Smith’s ontology proclaimed that all traditional social and religious institutions around him had lost their meaning. He proclaimed, much like Durkheim, that the institutions of marriage, family and kinship networks had become totally null and void. However, rather than move on to new, “organic” solidarities and institutions, Smith utilized his doctrine of Celestial Laws to rehabilitate and “restore” that which Durkheim asserted was doomed to irreparable decay.

Smith’s *Book of Mormon* told a story where the divine models for society, the Celestial Laws communicated by the Mormon gospel, repeatedly entered and exited the earth through a cyclical pattern of Revelation, temporary obedience, and long term decay. The Christian Church, he said, ceased to exist in the Old World with the death of the first Apostles. The existential displacement between a Mormon and his ancestor Adam is much less then the displacement that exists between him and his more recent, non-Mormon forbears. Mormons believe that Adam was given the gospel in its fullness, was baptized (Moses 6:65) and that by his baptism and observance of commandments, Adam advanced to being “after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from eternity to all eternity.” (Moses 6:67) In this sacred narrative, *Adam does not go to hell to wait for Jesus, but rather, he becomes a God!* Adam’s fall is not a curse, in the Mormon account.

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gospel principles are revealed to him, “Adam blessed God and was filled…saying:
Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened,
and in this life I shall have joy and again in the flesh shall I see God.” (Moses 5:10).
Unlike in traditional Christian theology, the Fall brings man closer—not further—to becoming himself divine.

According to Mormon ontology, Adam and Eve were “filled” and experienced “the joy of our redemption” within life. This doctrine predates both Moses and Abraham. In a very early revelation dated to July 1830, Smith describes how Jesus appeared and explained to him that the angel “Michael,” was the same being as “Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, and the ancient of days.” (D&C 26:11)

One of Smith’s primary claims to legitimacy was that he had received the “keys” to the “priesthood of Melchizedek” from resurrected beings who traced their priesthood keys back to Adam, through Melchizedek, by laying on of hands. Jerald Johenson summarizes this doctrine by quoting Smith as saying “Christ is the Great High Priest; Adam next” and giving the following explanation: “Adam is the head and the keys were first given to him and by him to others. He will have to give an account of his priesthood stewardship, and we to him.”22 This doctrine is extremely significant.

First, defining Adam’s relationship to his progeny as a “stewardship” is an assertion of Smith’s belief, further discussed below, that biological parentage is a temporal illusion, at least whenever the act of procreation occurs beyond the ministrations of the Mormon priesthood. The essence of the human being as a literal spirit-child of the Celestial Father is simply asserted to be more real than the illusory connections

between an earth-parent and his or her child. God has merely leased out the responsibility for raising his children as a “stewardship.” Second, these stewardship obligations are multi-directional, and span generations, with grandparents being responsible for the social and spiritual welfare of their grand-children, and vice versa. Indeed, as expressed in Johansen’s summary of Smith’s doctrine, kinship responsibilities extend as far back as Adam, who will be held accountable in some way for the actions and welfare of each and every human being. Finally, one should observe that, while Mormon ontology asserts that “salvation” is only obtainable through Christ, the “keys of exaltation” are said to belong to Adam-who-is-Michael.

No matter what their ancestral history, Mormons are assured that the Adamic priesthood and the fullness of the gospel were both absent from earth for 1400 years (after the supposed fall of the Book of Mormon civilizations in America), and thus all of their recent ancestors were cut off from the kind of exaltation which Mormons believe Adam achieved, and which is now possible again, through Joseph Smith’s recovery of Adam’s “keys.”

Bushman describes the vicarious work Mormons conduct for the dead as a practice introduced by Smith to be a form of “cross-generational bonding.” Smith taught that “every child and every parent, every wife and every husband, must be bound to one another, forming a great chain stretching back through time.”

Pointing out that Joseph Smith “did not take his plural wives into his home…and he spent little time with them,” Bushman concludes that, in introducing polygamy, Smith

24 Ibid.
“seems to have been motivated by a passion to be bound to people more than to indulge in his sexual desires. In the same period, orphans and other children were sealed to him as their father.”

The need for this bonding is a symptom of Durkheimian anomie; however temple “sealing” uses the rhetoric of Celestial Parentage to rehabilitate traditional social forms (i.e. the family) rather than create the new solidarities of difference Durkheim foretold.

Just as Mormon ontology collapses the distance between oneself and one’s human ancestors like Adam, it also collapses the difference between earthly ancestry and celestial ancestry. Adam becomes a god because he uses his chance on earth to learn to be like God. “Behold,” God tells Adam in Enoch’s account, “thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may become all my sons.” (Moses 6:68) Smith once taught, “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!”

The Plan of Salvation preached by Smith promises all human beings the chance for similar exaltation. This idea is expressed most simply in the couplet “As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.”

(Lorenzo Snow) Taking up this subject, Hugh Nibley writes that, in the “restored Gospel” given to the Mormons, God

25 Ibid. 88
26 The divinity achieved by Adam collapses the distance between man and God. It is interesting to note that Brigham Young went one step further and preached that Adam is Elohim and Christ is Jehovah. Since “the Ancient of Days” figure from Daniel is understood in Christian metaphysics to refer to God the Father, it may be that Young was in fact articulating views intimated by Smith himself. The “Adam-God” doctrine is now officially considered a heresy worthy of excommunication from the LDS church. I mention the doctrine here only to show how, under Brigham Young, Mormon ontology fully collapsed the distance between God and Man. Moreover, while the standard Mormon view that God was a man on an earth like planet leads to a universe that is linear and millennial in the short term but cyclical and without beginning in the long term, the Adam-God universe is fully cyclical and self-contained.
27 Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 2002, page 357 @ the lds.org Gospel Library
Promises all those who believe in him [will] in time [be able] to do the work that he does and yet greater works. And what does God do? He creates: “Millions of earths like this… (Moses 7:30). There is no end to his creations, and he wants us to go with him, be where he is, and do what he does.\textsuperscript{28}

“We humans,” Bushman writes, “exist in the same ontological realm as the creator of heaven and earth. We are even of the same species.”\textsuperscript{29} This extends to the interrelated notions of Celestial Marriage and Celestial procreation.

Celestial Marriage is a concept Mormons heavily downplayed during the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, probably because the only scriptures they possessed describing the institution and its significance are intertwined with polygamy. However, since the late seventies, the church has given its unique ontological understanding of human gender and the marriage institution renewed emphasis. In the words of the LDS Church First Presidency in their 1995 public statement titled “The Family : A Proclamation to the World”: “All human beings—male and female...—[are] each a beloved son or daughter of heavenly parents”—that is, Elohim, the Celestial Father, and one of his unnamed, generally undisguised, spirit-wives.

Though Elohim’s spirit-wives, or “Mrs. Gods,” as some anti-Mormon writers have termed them, make no appearance in the scriptures, revelations and teachings of the Mormon canon, there is no doubt of their existence by functional necessity within Smith’s doctrines on the need for celestial marriage. In the revelation introducing Celestial (and polygamous) Marriage, God tells Smith that human beings, including

\textsuperscript{28} Nibley, Hugh. “But What Kind of Work?.” in Approaching Zion. Salt Lake City Utah ;Provo Utah: Deseret Book Co. Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989. 270
faithful members of the Mormon church, who are not sealed in an LDS temple
“cannot be enlarged, but remained separately and singly, without exaltation, in their
saved condition\(^\text{30}\), to all eternity and from henceforth are not Gods.” (D&C 132: 268)
Church President Brigham Young taught: “He created man, as we create our
children; for there is no other process of creation in heaven, on the earth, in the
earth, or under the earth, or in all the eternities, that is, that were, or that ever will be.”\(^\text{31}\) The church leaders who authored “The Family: A Proclamation to the World”
jump from mentioning the “celestial parents” to the derivative statement “Gender is
an essential characteristic of individual pre-mortal, mortal, and eternal identity and
purpose.”\(^\text{32}\) One of the main requirements for a family-head to win Celestial
Exaltation for his family is to be bonded with a woman in “celestial marriage.”\(^\text{33}\)
Indeed, Mormons who have had children through a civil marriage, and anyone who
converts to the faith after they have had children, must “adopt” their biological

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\(^{30}\) That is, the salvation through Christ which Mormons believe will be achieved in the world to come by practically all human beings ever.
\(^{33}\) In the past year, the media tended to spin the LDS church’s role in the passing of Proposition 8 in California as a matter of what I would call the priesthood principle. I have similarly observed countless Wesleyan students from California and beyond blame the outlawing of gay marriage on Mormons’ blind obedience to their President-Prophet. However, there was nothing doctrinally original in the priesthood’s rallying calls to defend “natural marriage.” Smith produced an infamous revelation where Christ explained to him that heterosexual and polygynous marriage were celestial laws observed by Elohim, himself, and all other celestial beings. Gender is an ontological fact of spirit-nature for Mormons.
children through special temple “sealing” rituals, so that they may remain connected “through eternities.”

Summarizing Smith’s clearly annunciated doctrine, Bushman writes that he maintained God “lived on an earth and was taught and advanced under the tutelage of a preceding God.” Through this “collapse of sacred distance,” Joseph Smith “made heaven and earth shake hands.” In the Book of Moses, writes Bushman, “the entire universe came down to helping humanity find eternal life.” Thus, Smith’s ontology collapsed the distance between the (temple-worthy) Latter-day Saint and his East Coast and/or Old World ancestors, while claiming to have removed nearly all existential and temporal distance from humanity’s universal patriarch, Adam-who-is-Michael, the Ancient of Days, and from humanity’s universal spirit-father, Elohim who is God.

Mormonism actively responds to Durkheimian anomie with a purposefulness that is simply not comprehended in Durkheim’s theories of modernity. However the

34 “Sealing” by the way, is the same term used in the ritual covenants of Celestial Marriage.
35 Bushman writes how Mormon singles feel a burdensome pressure to be married (celestially). Ontologically, this is the same pressure fundamentalist feel to marry three wives, the only difference being in the definition of what kind of marriage is celestial/eternal. Bushman notes that LDS “singles are constantly assured that they will be married eventually; if they stick it out here right will be done in the next life.” Bushman writes how Mormon singles feel a burdensome pressure to be married (celestially). Ontologically, this is the same pressure fundamentalist feel to marry three wives, the only difference being in the definition of what kind of marriage is celestial/eternal. Bushman notes that LDS “singles are constantly assured that they will be married eventually; if they stick it out here right will be done in the next life.” Similar encouragements are given to infertile couples within celestial marriages that they will have spirit children in the next world. Indeed, in temples, dead Mormon singles may be sealed posthumously to each other to help their eternal souls advance towards celestial being and Godhood. These imperatives to live the celestial covenants on earth, by proxy or in life, convey some thing of the imperative to live the Law of Consecration and Stewardship; “verily, verily, I say unto you except ye abide by my law ye cannot attain this [highest] glory.” (D&C 132:21)
solidarity it infuses would be better termed “neo-mechanical” than “organic.”

Celestial society—called “Zion” or “the Celestial Kingdom—is rooted in kinship networks and ruled by a heavenly aristocracy; a kind of Durkheimian segmentary society in the sky. 38 Mormonism, through impulses inextricably connected to the Law of Consecration, responds to the increasing “division” in society with an impulse towards “unity in all things.”

Durkheim asserts that “property is merely the extension of the idea of a person to things. Thus, where collective personality is the sole existing one, property itself can be more collective.” 39 “Communism,” writes Durkheim, “is the necessary product of [a mechanical] social cohesion.” 40 As, within his teleological history, this kind of social cohesion becomes increasingly impossible due to the rising complexities in the division of labor, Durkheim says such communism will eventually be rooted out by the course of history itself. However, through the concepts of Celestial Beings, Parents, Society and Law, Mormon ontology communicates imperatives to maintain communal welfare. These imperatives are all tied up in, and epitomized by, the Law of Consecration as the primary Mormon impulse towards economic communalism, which itself comes out of a deeply-rooted, ontological understanding of human beings as capable of becoming “celestial” in this life. As long as the Celestial Law of Consecration is identified like marriage, with a social institution, the apparent absence of that institution will pose a problem for adherents to Mormon ontology.

38 If this “in the sky” terminology strikes the reader as inappropriately pejorative, they should pay close attention to the discussion of Kolob in the section on Max Weber below.
40 Ibid.
Mormon Ontology Responds to Elaine’s Modernity

Elaide recognized the power of religion to (re)shape society, though I think he exaggerated its influence. Eliade claims that religion—the experience of the “sacred”—is an irreducible element of human nature. “Human life becomes meaningful,” he writes “by imitating the paradigmatic models revealed by supernatural beings.” Whether or not this is absolutely true, “paradigmatic models revealed by supernatural beings” define, not just all intra-Mormon discussions about the nature and significance of the Law of Consecration, but the essence of Mormon ontology itself. Within this worldview, the temple covenant to keep the Celestial Laws represents a promise to act like God in order to become a God.

My approach to the Law of Consecration refuses to presume, as Eliade would have me do, that there is an objectively determinable “scale of values which [a given religious] mythology implicitly or explicitly proclaims.” The term Law of Consecration can only be defined according to a subjective navigation of different ontologically-determined values, which fit the general outline of the four points of gospel restoration I described above. The third chapter of this thesis is devoted entirely to showing how such subjective navigations arise in a debate about the meaning and significance of this term among Mormons.

The most obvious problem in applying Eliade to the Mormons is the fact that their worldview most closely resembles those “types” of religious consciousness

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42 Ibid. 75
Eliade terms “primitive” and “archaic,” even though the Mormonism’s origins are Western, early-Modern and (post-)Christian. Joseph Smith and most early church leaders were descended from Puritans; many thousands of Britons and Scandinavians came to America in the nineteenth century as his followers with the mindset that they were participating in the latter-day gathering of Israel. As with Durkheim, before I can venture to say anything meaningful by applying Eliade to the Mormons, I should note how their history runs directly counter to the historical teleology implied by Eliade’s neat taxonomy of dividing human beings into three primary types: primitive, archaic and modern.

This taxonomy defines human individuals and societies according to the degree to which humans are conscious of the existence of historical time. The primitive, writes Eliade, “acknowledges no act that has not been previously posited and lived by someone else, some being who was not a man. What he does has been done before. His life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others.”

Eliade’s primitive “lives in a continual present.” Reality, for these people, is said to exist in the timeless world of “celestial archetypes” and human beings only enter into contact with reality through the repetition of these archetypes. “Primitive” peoples may experience history “biologically,” but will utterly disassociate this experience from their conceptions of reality. Rooted in an ontology of cyclical time the primitive is able to “content himself with tolerating [time] simply as a dimension of

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43 Ibid. 5
45 Ibid. 4-6
46 Ibid. 74-5
47 Ibid. 86-9
his existence, but without ‘interiorizing’ it, without transforming it into consciousness.”

Within the primitive ontology, writes Eliade, the existence of “history” is annulled by the passage of time itself, whereby the universe perpetually regenerates itself through the “cyclical recurrence of what has been before, in a word, eternal return.”

“Archaic” peoples, such as the “Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Iranians,” are characterized by Eliade according to their increased awareness of the passage of linear time and its apparent deviation from the celestial order. The political-cultural pragmatism of record-keeping heralds the transition to historical consciousness. Forced to visualize an empirical universe increasingly filled with “events that derive from no archetype,” Archaic culture transmutes the primitive’s belief that such deviations from celestial reality are unreal into a belief that they are sins. Having become alienated from the primitive assuredness that the universe is self-regenerating, archaic man will use ritual to “free himself from the recollection of sin, i.e. of a succession of personal events that, taken together, constitute history.”

Among these people, ritual

Behavior is governed by belief in an absolute reality opposed to the profane world of “unrealities”; … the latter does not constitute a “world” properly speaking; it is the “unreal” par excellence, the uncreated, the nonexistent: the void.”

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48 Ibid. 91
49 Ibid. 88-9
50 Ibid. 74-5
51 Ibid. 75
52 Ibid. 74-5
53 Ibid. 200
Eliade claims that the Israelite prophets “discovered a one-way time” by describing a God who “is no longer an Oriental divinity, creator of archetypal gestures, but a personality who ceaselessly intervenes in history, who reveals his will through events.”

Judeo-Christian religion “attempts to ‘save historical events by regarding them as active presences of Yahweh,” that is, as “theophanies.”

Christian ontology took this historicism, and its corollary acknowledgement of history and biography and “introduced a new category into religious experience: the category of faith.”

Christian faith, writes Eliade, “means absolute emancipation from any kind of natural ‘law’ and hence the highest freedom that man can imagine.”

However, this freedom, and history in general, is, according to Eliade, only tenable in the presence of Christian millennialism, which is able to justify the moment in terms of the end. “Only by presupposing the existence of God” may historical, or modern man obtain “freedom… autonomy in a universe governed by laws” as well as the “certainty that historical tragedies have transhistorical meaning.”

Ultimately, however, historical consciousness, such as was awakened by Hebrew understandings of history as theophany and Judeo-Christian millennialism, must, according to Eliade, disintegrate under the pressure of trying to find significance in a meaningless sign (history). “The historical moment,” Eliade writes, “despite the possibilities of escape it offers contemporaries, can never be anything but tragic, pathetic, unjust, chaotic, as any moment that heralds the final catastrophe must
be.”  Eliade bases his teleological assertions off the presumed fact that history is chaos—it signifies nothing.

Halfway through writing this chapter I came across a review published last fall by Richard Lyman Bushman in *The Mormon Review* (of which he is Editor-in-Chief), where Bushman, a leading historian of Mormonism (and a Mormon), offers his personal views on how the *Myth of the Eternal Return* has affected his understanding of his own religion.  Bushman proudly uses Eliade to compare LDS Mormonism to “the religions from a distant past or a primitive present.” To defend this position, he claims that Eliade does not use the term pejoratively: “Eliade obviously admired the mythic force of the archaic worldview, and I quite happily identified with that stratum of thought despite the labels.”

Contrary to the evolutionists, Joseph Smith gave Adam the full gospel and made Enoch a giant prophet and society builder. If anything, the early patriarchs more likely had it right than sophisticated modern thinkers whose religion has been tainted by apostasy.

The fact that Mormon ontology actively comprehends *history* and *the past* (if only to celebrate it) betrays a cognition Eliade ascribes only to Christian millenialists and moderns. When their history is read as “Western” or “Judeo-Christian,” Mormon religion simply defies the unilateral universalism implied by Eliade’s model. It is

59 Ibid. 130
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
both time-conscious and millennial (in the short term) even as it is ahistoric and cyclical (in the long term).  

The Mormon *Book of Abraham* presents a revised version of the traditional creation account in Genesis, where creation is done by a heavenly “counsel” of “Gods” who are the Father’s literal “spirit children.” Here, the traditional “And God” is consistently rendered as “And they (The Gods)” or, more often, as simply “the Gods.” When it comes to the sixth day, and the creation of man, it is written, “And the Gods took counsel among themselves and said: Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness.” (*Abraham* 4:26) These Gods are said to be the pre-mortal, incorporeal souls of all human beings that will live on earth. The Mormon account of creation says that every human soul (“the gods”) participated in creation, precisely so that they *could* have access to their Celestial Father’s Godly immortality, by gaining a body of the flesh and being placed into a situation where they could have free will.

The Mormon myth is summarized in what Mormons call “the plan of salvation,” a term which is sometimes interchanged with the *Restored Gospel*—the former of which is the message of the latter. The *Historical Dictionary of Mormonism* notes that the Plan of Salvation “consists of three acts” first of which is “the preexistence, or pre-mortal stage, during which humans existed as spirit children

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64 With Brigham Young’s Adam-God doctrine—where Adam(=Ancient of Days=Elohim) re/creates the world at the end of time once he has become God through the sacrifice of his spirit-child, Jesus(=Son of Man=Jehovah)—the Mormon ontological myth became purely cyclical. It is not at all clear if Young’s doctrine was held by Smith at any point in his life. However, the official LDS church now characterizes the doctrine as a heresy worthy of excommunication.  

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of God. “The official, LDS Guide to Scriptures notes “All men and women lived with God as his spirit children before coming to the earth as mortal beings. This is sometimes called the first estate (Abr. 3: 26).”

God tells Moses that he creates “worlds without number,” “and there is no end to my works, neither to my words.” (Moses 1:38) Just as he raises material chaos into order, God declares to Moses, “behold this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass an immortality and eternal life of man.” (Moses 1:39) This is effected according to his plan of salvation, which remains constant for all time.

Thus, God talks openly about Jesus and the crucifixion with Moses, Aaron and Enoch (Book of Moses), as well as to Abraham and Melchizedek (Book of Abraham), just as the Hebrew prophets in the Book of Mormon, preach about Jesus’ saving death hundreds of years before his birth. In the new history, the most important characters in the three testaments know, not only about Jesus, but about Joseph Smith too. (Moses 1:41)

Both Abraham and Moses record a debate among the divine beings over the “plan” of salvation. In Abraham, one reads

> And the Lord said, whom shall I send, and one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. And another answered and said: Here am I send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first. (Abr. 3:27)

In this version, Satan and Jesus appear as anonymous spirit-children. Satan is an anonymous spirit distinguished by his egotism and jealousy: “And the second was

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angry and kept not his first estate, and at that day, many followed after him.” (Abr. 3:27) However, the content of Satan’s alternative plan is obtained in the book of Moses. In Moses, Satan appears before God, right after the creation, as mankind is still in the garden, and proposes “behold, here I am, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that not a soul shall be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor.” (Moses 4:1) Satan’s plan for universal salvation “sought to destroy the agency of man, which I the Lord God had given him.” (Moses 4:3)

Mormon ontology generally harmonizes the two accounts into a single story where God’s declaration, “behold this is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man,” (Moses 1:39), is interpreted according to Jesus’s proposition that earth should serve as mankind’s proving ground (Abr. 3:26) which is, in turn, contrasted with Satan’s proposition to “redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost… wherefore give me thine honor.” (Moses 4:1)

When Mormons receive their temple endowments, they, as do participants in the “primitive” initiation ceremonies described by Eliade, “learn what happened in principio, but ultimately discovers that he was already there, that somehow he participated in these glorious events.”67 However, the particularities of the Mormon myth do not fit Eliade’s categories. Eliade says primitive myths will posit one of two “primordialities”: “(1) the primordium represented by the celestial Great Father and by the celestial immortality that is inaccessible to ordinary human beings; (2) the fabulous epoch of the ancestors, when life in general and human life in particular was

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brought about.⁶⁸ Within the Mormon myth, the two types collapse into a third and separate type of myth. There, the celestial Great Father is literally the ancestor of every human being (Brigham Young went so far as to assert that God the Father was actually Adam, further cementing this idea of celestial parentage.)

Mormons, writes Bushman, “are less concerned with the burden of original sin, which they believe Christ has totally overcome for everyone, then whether they can meet the test they were sent to earth to face. Having taken a chance on freedom away from God’s presence and with their memories of heaven blanked out, will they choose the right?”⁶⁹ Elder Johnson, a nineteen year old LDS missionary serving in Middletown, wears a simple metal ring bearing the monogram CTR to remind him of his earthly mission. He tells me “almost everyone” he knows his age back in Utah has a CTR ring. “Earth is a time to choose good while embodied in the flesh, which is considered a necessity for attaining the highest joy…a time to bind themselves to God and Christ through covenants that make them part of the grand alliance of beings who have found their way to godhood.”⁷⁰ Our universe, (some say galaxy) according to Mormon ontology, falls under the “order” of Elohim’s celestial family, and if a Mormon couple (alive or dead) is sealed in a temple marriage, their family-unit is said to also be celestial, and has the potential to create and govern other cosmic “orders,” once this earth has ended.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 86-7
⁷⁰ Ibid. 78
If, as Eliade claimed, “Christian thought tended to transcend, once and for all, the old themes of eternal repetition,”71 Mormon ontology represents a significant move “back” towards the mythical universe of “eternal repetition” while retaining elements of Christian messianism. Mormon messianism, like certain “primitive types” identified by Eliade, “demonstrates that entire collectivities have been brought to seek paradise.”72 In this sense, one must appreciate how Joseph Smith’s emendations to the traditional Genesis account make it *almost* possible, to use Eliade’s words, “to live in a dawning and perfect world, such as it had been before it had been consumed by Time and vilified by History.”73 Smith delivered a Gospel which he claimed had been lost since the flood.

Among modern man, Eliade writes, “the acceptance of man’s historicity helped us to get rid of the last remnants of angelism and idealism. We now take seriously the fact that man belongs to this world, that he is not a spirit imprisoned in matter.”74 However, Mormon ontology simultaneously grounds the faithful in history as well as physical reality, while restoring “angelism and idealism” to the fore, by denying their otherworldliness. The appearance of God(s), angels and otherworldly beings to the Prophets of the Church, especially Joseph Smith, are fundamental to the truth-claims of the Mormon religious tradition.

Faced with the “Terror of History,” Eliade claims, “man is left free to choose between two positions: “(1) to oppose the history that is being made by the very small

73 Ibid. 111
74 Ibid. 51
minority (and in this he is free to choose between suicide and deportation); (2) to take refuge in a subhuman existence or flight.”\textsuperscript{75} However, Mormonism remains historical without becoming nihilistic. It offers a third path.

The Mormon path seems remarkably similar to a possible alternative between Christianity and the Terror which Eliade briefly raises and dismisses before the end of his conclusion to \textit{Myth of the Eternal Return}. “We could imagine,” he writes, “a final attempt: to save history and establish an ontology of history, events would be regarded as a series of ‘situations’ by virtue of which the human spirit should attain knowledge of levels of reality otherwise inaccessible to it.”\textsuperscript{76} Bushman, recalls how, upon reading this passage, he was “reminded of the words to our own prophet, when he was ensnared in the terrors of history: “all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good’” (D&C 122:7).\textsuperscript{77} The Mormon plan of salvation, Bushman continues, offers man a “story [that] makes human history a school for learning.”\textsuperscript{78}

However, this is not a full reinvestment of history with meaning. Mormons do not look at history with the same expectations Eliade ascribes to Christian millennialists. As Bushman has pointed out elsewhere, “when bad things happen, Latter-day Saints are not likely to blame God.” Their inclination is not to regard biography as theophany. This comes out of their theological ontology, by which, as Bushman continues, “they realize that they and everyone else in the world are

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 157  
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. 159  
\textsuperscript{77} Bushman, Richard Lyman. “Eliade’s Return.” \textit{The Mormon Review} 1, no. 3 (September 6, 2009). http://timesandseasons.org/mormonreview/wordpress/?p=76  
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
radically free to do both good and evil, and bad things will result from human wickedness.”\textsuperscript{79} In the Mormon myth, the whole reason human beings came down to Earth in the first place was so that they could get bodies and have freewill (since without these items, progression to Godhood is physically impossible). Freewill means no theodicy problem. Mormons, known for their genealogical work may look history in the eye and emerge unscathed. Bushman wants readers of his Oxford-published \textit{A Very Short Introduction to Mormonism} to think of baptism of the dead as exemplifying “the Mormons’ desire to reconcile two conflicting impulses, the wish to be inclusive and the belief in the necessity of sacral priesthood.”\textsuperscript{80} Thus, baptizing Holocaust victims is a way Mormons, and, indeed, the LDS church itself, attempt to literally overcome the terror of history.

Eliade describes “Modern man’s longing for a total and definitive renewal, for a renavatio capable of radically changing his existence.”\textsuperscript{81} However, Mormons may be said have access to all three of the primitive types of initiation described by Eliade. Ritual baptism at the age of 8 years old is a “puberty rite” where “the candidate passes beyond the ‘natural’ mode of being… and gains access to the cultural mode; that is, he is introduced to spiritual values.”\textsuperscript{82} For Mormons, baptism is a sign of Christ’s saving sacrifice, which makes it possible for one to be exalted. “Exaltation” itself, however, requires a different rite: the temple endowment. Temple endowments conform very much to Eliade’s description of a “rite of entrance to a secret society.”

\textsuperscript{80}Ibid. 61
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid. 113
It is “a religious process through which the initiate becomes another, patterned on the model revealed by the gods or mythical ancestors. In other words, one becomes a real man to the extent that one resembles a superhuman being.”83 Indeed, in the Mormon temple, even dead men and women are made to be real in this manner. Mormons are instructed to act “celestial” so that they may receive “celestial exaltation” and become godlike. Finally, beliefs regarding the literal presence of the Holy Spirit in the church, initiates Mormons into a kind of Shamanic tradition.84

Returning to his review of Eliade, Bushman’s final note approaches the position of this paper. “We [Mormons] have embedded in our culture a doctrine of knowledge that “enables “ordinary Mormons day by day…to deal with the terrors he [Eliade] thought were the greatest challenge to human understanding.”85 Here, I think Bushman has misdiagnosed Eliade’s terms, and thus missed the social-theoretical cognizance of Mormon ontology of the mechanism. Eliade’s Terror of History was born out of problems of theodicy; problems which Mormonism avoids by emphasizing the “reality” of a human being’s sovereign freewill and of the presence of Satan in the world.

**Mormon Ontology Responds to Weber’s Modernity**

Weber’s theories lack the explicit teleological paradigms that characterize Durkheim and Eliade. In their introduction to the anthology From Max Weber:

83 Ibid. 115
84 Ibid.
Essays in Sociology, Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills point out that Weber’s “skeptical aversion to any ‘philosophical’ element in empirical science precluded any explicit constructions of historical time in terms of ‘cycles’ or ‘unilinear’ evolution.”86 In this way, Weberian thought tries to be historic while comprehending Eliade’s terror of history.

Nevertheless, though Weberian thought is creative, particularly in describing the (Protestant) origins of occidental modernity, he does not suggest that the existential trap posed by modernity is an accident. Just as Eliade’s history-conscious modern will inevitably come to witness the terrible meaninglessness inherent to history as datum, Weber asserts that empirical reality itself, the entire scope of “natural science,” has this same moral meaninglessness inherent to its datum.

“Scientific progress,” he writes “is a fraction, the most important fraction, of the process of intellectualization which we have been undergoing for thousands of years and which nowadays is judged in an extremely negative way.”87 Refusing to make this negative judgment himself does not keep Weber from describing scientific progress according to a definite scale. This objectively observable “scientific progress” is, as far as Weber is concerned, synonymous with the “process of disenchantment.”88

With Weber, as with Durkheim and Eliade, one encounters the insistence that modernity is most effectively measured in terms of individual “consciousness.”

88 Ibid. 139
Weber writes that “all scientific work presupposes that the rules of logic and method are valid; these are the general orientation to the world.”

Weber establishes this point by emphasizing that scientific progress does not manifest itself culturally with a corresponding increase in general knowledge. The common man, he points out, barely understands how the “streetcar” works, and the new “scientific” political economy is to him a mystery; whereas “the savage knows incomparably more about his tools.”

Rather than Weberian modern consciousness is determined not according to the actual availability of knowledge itself, but by the “belief that if one but wished one could learn [anything] at any time. Hence, it means that principally there are mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather, that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation.” The terms in which Weber here understands modernity will be significant when contrasted with the worldviews possible through Mormon ontology. Science can help us “master life technically,” writes Weber, but “it leaves quite aside, or assumes for its purposes, whether we should and do wish to master life technically and whether it ultimately makes sense to do so.”

Weber very clearly expresses his opinion that scientific progress and technical mastery necessarily banish mystery from the world. “If the “natural sciences lead to anything,” writes Weber, “they are apt to make the belief that there is such a thing as the ‘meaning’ of the universe die out at its very roots.” Indeed as Weber writes in “Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions,”

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89 Ibid. 143
90 Ibid 139
91 Ibid 139
92 Ibid 144
93 Ibid. 142
The tension between religion and intellectual knowledge definitely comes fore wherever rational, empirical knowledge has constantly worked through to the disenchantment of the world and its transformation into a causal mechanism. For then science encounters the claims of the ethical postulate that the world is God-Ordained, and hence, somehow meaningfully and ethically oriented, cosmos.  

Mormon ontology denies that there is this dichotomy between the mystical and the empirical, and thus prevents, in its way, Weberian disenchantment. "The learned men who are preaching salvation say that God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing, and the reason is that they are unlearned," Joseph Smith preached on Sunday, April 7th, 1844. His topic was how the traditional text of Genesis had been corrupted by some "man, a Jew without any authority" to the point of conveying a false ontology.

I know more than all the world put together, and if the Holy Ghost in me comprehends more than all the world, I will associate with it. What does bara' [create] mean? It means to organize, same as you would organize a ship. God himself had materials to organize the world out of—chaos, which is element and in which dwells all the glory, that nothing can destroy. They never can have an ending; they coexist eternally.

The Mormon God more closely approximates the platonic demiurge than the unmoved mover of creation ex-nihilo theology. God’s work is to raise perfection and order from the preexisting chaotic elements. In doing his work, God follows the natural laws of the preexisting universe. “The pure principles of element” Smith

95 “Joseph Smith’s Commentary on the Bible - Genesis Ch. 1-4”, hosted at http://jst.byu.edu/jstBC-Genesis1-4.php
taught in that same sermon, “are principles that never can be destroyed; they may be organized and reorganized, but not destroyed.”\textsuperscript{96} The development of this perspective can be traced back through the scriptures Smith produced.

Smith’s doctrines on the materiality of spirit are sometimes referred to by Mormon thinkers as \textit{Cosmism}, and reject the traditional (Western, Christian) distinctions between physical and metaphysical. In a revelation maintained in Mormon scripture, Jesus informs Smith that “There is no such thing as immaterial matter.” Rather, he reveals, “all spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes.” (D&C 131:7) In a word, Mormon ontology insists on the existence of what this paper will henceforth refer to as a \textit{monophysical totality}, in light of which the mere notion of \textit{metaphysical} substance—never mind beings—becomes nonsensical. “It is all physical,” writes the (unofficial, but widely read) LDS theologian Hugh Nibley, “There are universes we know nothing about; there is matter of a nature that we cannot perceive at all. It’s all real—what’s on the other side of black holes, or wherever it may be.”\textsuperscript{97} According to Smith’s teachings and revelations, God—and everything else that is “real”—has a literal, material place in this monophysical totality.

The doctrine/idea of Cosmism appears throughout Smith’s scriptural publications. In one of the D&C revelations, Jesus informs Smith that “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s.” (D&C 140:22) Indeed, in the \textit{Book of Abraham} (from the \textit{Pearl of Great Price},) God’s throne is described

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Nibley, Hugh. “Three Degrees of Righteousness,” in \textit{Approaching Zion}. Salt Lake City Utah ;Provo Utah: Deseret Book Co. Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989. 335
according to its literal, physical proximity to a specific star/planet. In that text, God shows Abraham all of the stars and planets that belong to his “order.” God repeatedly refers to one particular celestial object, called “Kolob,”—described in different verses as either a “star” or a “planet”—as being “the greatest of all the Kokaubeam\(^{98}\) that thou hast seen, because it is nearest unto me.” (Abraham 3:16)

The text seems to imply that God is himself a resident of Kolob, as he works according to the Kolob-calander. “One revolution [of Kolob] was a day unto the Lord, after his manner of reckoning, it being one thousand [earth years.]” (Abraham 3:4) “Set nigh unto the throne of God,” Kolob is described as possessing the power “to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest.” (Abraham 3:3)

The references to God’s limited “order” in these quotes from Abraham are extremely significant. They carry the implication that the monophysical totality contains more than (this) God’s dominion. Indeed, Mormon cosmism sees the monophysical totality extending back infinitely, with countless “orders” and “worlds” ruled by countless celestial beings. God, the Father (of human beings on earth), was once a man on another world, but by following the commandments, living righteously and attaining wisdom, he advanced and evolved towards celestial being.

By collapsing the distance between mystical and physical, Smith’s ontology paved way for a very unique way of remaining religious in the modern world, and for maintaining meaning in an empiric universe.\(^{99}\)

\(^{98}\) A pseudo-transliteration of the Hebrew word for stars.

\(^{99}\) When I visited the Bishop’s Storehouse of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Worcester, MA to observe current LDS welfare institutions, I sat down with the two missionaries (full-
Weber concludes “Science as a Vocation” by declaring that

The fate of our times is characterized by the rationalization and the intellectualization and, above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world.’ … To the person who cannot bear the fate of the times like a man, one must say: may he return silently, without the usual publicity build up of renegades, but simply and plainly. The arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately for him.100

The rise of Mormonism as a religious tradition should not be dismissed as a Weberian return to the “old” churches. Instead, the Mormon solution to modernity much more closely approximates a model Weber raises and dismisses just before reaching his conclusion. Weber acknowledges that the meaninglessness of empirical reality leaves the human being paralyzed and unable to answer Tolstoy’s question: “what shall we do, and how shall we arrange our lives?”101 The terms in which Weber rephrases the modern existential dilemma evoked by Tolstoy are particularly relevant to the Mormon tradition. He says the question can be reframed as “Which of the warring gods should we serve? Or should we serve perhaps an entirely different God, and

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101 Ibid. 153
who is he?” These are precisely the terms in which Joseph Smith cast his first vision:

The teachers of religion of different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently so as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible… I retired to the woods…to inquire of the Lord to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join.

Weber writes that the solution to these kinds of questions, an exit from the existential iron cage imposed by science and modernity, can be provided only by “a prophet.” Then he pronounces that neither the Church nor the Academy is able to produce such a thing, and dismisses this potential solution.

There are over 14 million people in the world who believe that Joseph Smith was such a prophet and received answers to these questions. Jan Shipps writes that “restoration claims, when they are accepted wholeheartedly banish confusion and make possible the passage from chaos to cosmos, settling with unassailable authority the tumultuous questions which at once generated and reflected the chaos.” Shipps makes this claim in order to contextualize Smith’s movement within the general trends of nineteenth century Christian restoration movements. A connection that she does not make, is the fact that the Mormon God/Father incarnates this principle of restoration. Smith’s specific answer to the questions collapsed the epistemological dichotomy of empirical versus mystical, which Weber said defined the existential crisis of modernity.

102 Ibid. 153
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid. 70
The Celestial Law of Consecration

The example of Mormonism shows how many of the teleological assumptions of these three classic accounts of modernity are not universal: Joseph Smith’s alleged “restoration of the gospel” does not provide the kind of “organic solidarity” described by Durkheim; nor is it the post-secular return to the sacred intimated by Eliade. One cannot characterize the rise of Mormonism as a kind of Weberian return to the churches without neglecting to note how the distinctive elements of Mormon ontology set it apart from the pre-modern churches Weber describes. Nevertheless, freed from their teleological implications, these understandings of “modernity” provide a terminological vantage point from which one may describe how Joseph Smith’s religious ontology instills a worldview that is uniquely situated to prevent the existential crises of modernity.

To summarize, Mormon ontology teaches that (a) the revealed principles of the restored gospel are “eternal verities,” inextricable from a universe, which is imagined (b) to be a monophysical totality of being, that is (c) populated by a hierarchy of physically-finite but constantly evolving spirit-beings. The concept of Celestial Law emerges as the culmination of these three principles, in that they identify precisely which natural, physical laws govern the evolution of spirit-beings. This evolution is a process of becoming through repetition of celestial archetypes.
*Celestial Law* may describe both the ethics and behavior of Celestial Beings, or the social institutions of the “Celestial Kingdom” type society in which such beings are said to live. Celestial Law thus equates these descriptions of Godliness into explicit instructions for becoming Godly.

Celestial Law allows society, economy, history and physical “reality” to remain enchanted worlds. If modernity is the world of disenchanted, rational individualism, then Mormons do not live in it—although they clearly do live alongside and in interaction with the institutions, forces and processes associated with *modernization*. The core tenets of Mormon ontology from which Celestial Law as a concept derives, allow Mormons to live in the presence of those forces without being consumed by the existential crises they are said to provoke.

My paper focuses on one of the Celestial Laws, the Law of Consecration, and describes it as the primary means by which Mormon ontology deals with the *economic, material* crises of modernity, as laid out by Marx and Durkheim. Unlike other Celestial Laws—such as the *Law of Obedience*, which is clearly an ethic to be internalized by the individual, or the *Law of Celestial Marriage*, which is clearly an interpersonal social institution—the *Law of Consecration* in Mormon discourse presents a hybrid of individualistic ethics and communal institutions. However, the particularities of this hybrid-imperative have not been hammered out among even the LDS, who, as discussed in Chapter III, debate among themselves whether the definition of Consecration as a Celestial Law should be oriented to the individual or to the community. This ambiguity of emphasis emerges from the already subjective epistemological bases for Mormon doctrine. In short, Mormon ontology declares that
knowledge of the gospel and its principles may be obtained through a set of multiple sources whose congruity, presumed as a matter of faith, is not immediately apparent.

In 1916, LDS Prophet-President Joseph Fielding Smith declared that knowledge of God and the gospel “cannot be gained outside any way separate from the only true and legitimate church of Jesus Christ.” Moreover,

Knowledge necessary to salvation and eternal life increases as the Latter-day Saints come to know God and Jesus Christ more fully and intimately in the church through obedience to gospel truths…through submission to the priesthood leadership… and through participation in the ordinances…revealed in greater plainness in this dispensation than perhaps any former dispensation since the world was formed.106

Jan Shipps interprets Fielding Smith’s 1916 sermon as serving to deemphasize the too recent and glaring break 20th century Mormonism had made with its nineteenth century polygamist past and practice by being “Coached in a manner that makes it applicable in all times and in divers places, Joseph F. Smith’s sermon called up the sacred past and brought it forward to vindicate the present.” 107 For the present purpose of discussing the “Law of Consecration,” one may note how the above quotation provides three sources of “knowledge”: obedience to gospel truths, submission to priesthood leadership, and participation in ordinances. These three principles define the controversy around the Law of Consecration, in that, much like polygamy, it is an issue where gospel truth derived from sacred scripture and history

appear to mandate different ordinances than those currently provided by the LDS priesthood leadership.

One may note that the ontological underpinnings of Celestial Law as a general concept, specifically, the elements identified in this chapter as diverting Mormonism from the classical narratives of modernity, all come to play in the attempt to define the Law of Consecration. The eternal nature of family and kinship obligations leads to a belief that welfare should be administered through, or with respect to the integrity of these traditional support groups. Further, by collapsing the spiritual-physical dichotomy, May writes, “Joseph Smith was laying open the way for a preoccupation with the physical and material conditions of human life unusual among Christian religions.” Cosmism, “the naturalistic element in Mormon theology, has led the Saints historically to see saving the human body to be as much as a religious obligation as the saving of the soul.”

The concept of Consecration as a Celestial Law means that Mormons should not find any difference between the “Law of Consecration as contained in the D&C” and the Law as contained in other places. In its essence as an eternal verity of the gospel and a natural law of the mono-physical universe, Consecration must—at least from the point of view of Mormon ontology—have been part of each of the “dispensations”—which the Mormons’ sacred history define as the different periods when the gospel principles and institutions were made accessible to human beings on earth.

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109 Ibid.
The scriptures Smith’s produced do appear to present a rather consistent abhorrence of poverty in connection with gospel principles. There is, for example, the “righteous King Benjamin,” who, according to the Book of Mormon chronology, was a Hebraic monarch on the American continent who lived some centuries before the coming of Christ. Before his death, King Benjamin summons all of his people to the temple he has built at the heart of his civilization to give a Deuteronomy-esque speech reflecting on his reign. If you look up “Consecration, Law of” in the Index of Mormon scripture, you will be directed to King Benjamin’s speech. Typifying the model of prophetic consciousness as it appears in Mormon scriptures, King Benjamin speaks explicitly about the coming of Jesus, and, although he has bound his people to observe the Law of Moses, King Benjamin tells them that their salvation depends on Christ. (Mosiah 3) Most importantly, however, King Benjamin leaves his people with commandments to make them worthy of receiving Christ’s salvation. This includes the commandment to “succor those what stand in need of your succor; you will administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the begger putteth his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish.” (Mosiah 4:16) Benjamin sees this commandment as a requisite for salvation:

for the sake of retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God, I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and administering their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.” (Mosiah 4:26)

As I mentioned, official LDS literature generally associates this text with the Law of Consecration. Certainly, the conceptual underpinnings of Celestial Law are presented
throughout Benjamin’s speech. His imperatives to abolish poverty appear in parallel to his foreknowledge of Jesus, and he maintains that following this imperative is necessary “for retaining a remission of your sins.” Moreover, Benjamin’s emphasis that the Saints must provide welfare “both spiritually and temporally” epitomizes the hybrid approach with which Mormon ontology conceptualizes the welfare problem.

Later on in the Book of Mormon, the remnant of King Benjamin’s kingdom of Saints is defeated in battle and driven from their lands by heathen Lamanites (Hebraic Americans who rejected the gospel). According to the prophet who provides an account of this event, “the great slaughter which was among them, would not have happened had it not been for their wickedness…[specifically,] because of their oppression to the poor.” (Helaman 4:11-12)

When the resurrected Jesus finally appears in America, he commands the Nephites, saying, “I would that ye should become perfect, even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect.” (3 Nephi 12:48) He also orders them to “bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house.” (3 Nephi 24:10) The descriptions of King Benjamin’s reign are remarkably similar to the descriptions of the situation in the Americas in the years immediately preceding the appearance of the resurrected Jesus. Just as the book of Mosiah begins by reporting that “there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who belonged to King Benjamin” (Mosiah 1:1), 4 Nephi opens by reporting that in the years immediately preceding after the ministry of the resurrected Jesus in America: “It came to pass in the thirty and sixth year, the people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no
contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly with one another.” (4 Nephi 1:2) Indeed, the Book of Mormon’s mythic Church of Christ is described as having succeeded in the abolition of poverty. “And they had all things in common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift.” (4 Nephi 1:3)

Smith’s revised version of Genesis 1-5 which is now identified as the Book of Moses presents a description of “the first dispensation,” when the gospel and priesthood was present on earth. The high point of this new text occurs with the prophet Enoch, who a leader “of the people of God,” using his power to bring about miraculous military victories for the people. (Moses 7:13, 16-17) “And the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them…And it came to pass in his days, that he [Enoch] built a city that was called the City of Holiness, even ZION.” (Moses 7:18-9) For many Mormon thinkers, this couplet of verses are the single-most important texts of scripture for defining the Law of Consecration. The key word, for these thinkers, is because. Everything following the because is treated as the legitimating criteria for a society to earn the name Zion. In a society worthy of the name Zion, everyone will be united by a singularity of purpose, everyone will be righteous, and no one will be poor. These verses are tightly related to another verse “And Enoch and his people walked with God, and he dwelt in the midst of Zion; and it came to pass that Zion was not, for God received it up unto his own bosom; and from thence went forth the saying: ZION IS FLED.” (Moses 7:69) By virtue of being a Zion society, Enoch’s city became a place where God could dwell.
“Surely, Zion shall dwell in safety forever,” Enoch observes as he converses with God. “But the Lord said unto Enoch, Zion I have blessed, but the residue of the people I have cursed. And it came to pass that the Lord showed Enoch all the inhabitants of the earth; and he beheld, and lo, Zion, in process of time, was taken up to heaven. And the Lord Said unto Enoch, behold mine abode forever.” (Moses 7:20-21)

The central priesthood, and the restored scriptures, are not the only sources for defining the Law of Consecration within the framework of Mormon ontology. "Studying Church history," the LDS Church Historian Leonard Arrington once preached to conference of LDS historians, "is like studying the scriptures--it gives us a society against which to compare or contrast our own."\(^{110}\) Comparing oneself, or, in Arrington's words, one's society to "other [contemporary, non-Mormon] religious or social cultures... is not the same as looking at people who have lived with the restored gospel." Rather, Arrington continued, "the Jews" (who he refers to in the past tense), the "Nephites," the "Lamanites," and "our Latter-day Saint ancestors," are the truer touchstones. Drawing emphasis by a rhetoric of repetition, he points out that each of one of these groups was "a covenant people, and they made mistakes."\(^{111}\)

Contemporary Mormons, Arrington writes, "have the advantage of being a covenant people who follow these cultures, and we can learn from the way they


\(^{111}\) Ibid.
honored their covenants and from their failures. This will keep us in perspective and remind us to be humble about our own achievements." ¹¹²

The next chapter reviews the parallel development of the D&C scriptures related to the Law of Consecration and the historical attempts to implement the Celestial Laws conveyed by those scriptures. This account is fundamental for understanding the ontological debate about the meaning and significance of Consecration as a celestial Law.

¹¹² ibid.
A History of Consecration

The communalist settlement of the Mormon lands (which include Utah as well as parts of Colorado and Arizona) led by Brigham Young contrasts significantly with the mythic individualism of “the wild west.” The archetypal symbol of the mythical American West is the lone cowboy; the Mormons in nineteenth century Utah branded their flags, monuments and food goods with the symbol of the beehive (and the slogan holiness unto the Lord). The original name for the Mormon lands was “the State of Deseret,” a word presented by the Book of Mormon as an ancient “Adamic” word for honeybee. The colonization enterprise was saturated with the spirit of “Restoration”; Mormons fully believed their project was “Building the City of God,” the latter-day Zion Enoch describes before his ascension in the Book of Moses.

“Brigham Young’s Dream,” writes Arrington, et. al. “had been to establish Deseret as a self-sufficient agricultural and industrial commonwealth, largely independent of outside economic activity.”¹ Deseret may have been Young’s dream, but the beehive symbolized the unity idealized by Joseph Smith and incorporated the doctrines that passed through him, including the concept of Celestial Laws, particularly the Law of Consecration. Like the bee in the hive, the individual Mormon was devoted, not only to individual advancement, but to the success of the communal enterprise.

¹ Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Cooperation Among the Mormons. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 337-8
Joseph Smith was not a utopianist, but he came of age in an area that was rife with utopian and communalist factions. In the first half of the nineteenth-century, religious communalists like Shakers and Cambellites were making their presence known throughout the region of New York. Emerson wrote Carlyle in 1840: “We are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform. Not a reading man but has a draft of a New Community in his waistcoat pocket.”\(^2\) Everyone longing for some kind of gospel restoration expected a return to some kind of Christian communalism.

In the Book of Acts there is an account of the Apostles sharing their wealth in common, including the deaths of Annanias and Sephora who were punished by God for their dishonesty in reporting to the apostles the profit they had acquired through haggling in one single economic transaction. The *Book of Mormon* (c.1830) has a few passages with parallel descriptions of gospel societies living “as one” “without contention” and “without poor among them.” As far as D&C theology, the Mormon canon records that Jesus told Joseph Smith:

It must needs be that there be an organization of my people, in regulating and establishing the affairs of the storehouse for the poor of the people, both in the place and in the land of Zion… **That you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yae, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things.** For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things. **For if you will that I give you a place in the celestial world, you must prepare yourselves, by doing the things which I have commanded and required of you.** (D&C 78:3, 5-6: “given through Joseph the Prophet at Hiram, Ohio, March 1832”)

\(^2\) Ibid. 3
It is clear, however, from the recorded history of Smith’s pronouncements that before the conversion of a man named Sidney Rigdon, restoration of gospel economics was not on Smith’s immediate agenda. Mormons might say that God was keeping his “cards close,” a useful argument to have for resolving the principles of ongoing revelation. Even if the utopian expectation was there—and apparently it was pulsating throughout the North East United States at this time—on the day of the incorporation of their “Church of Christ,” Smith’s small founding band of Latter-day Saints, had barely any more of a basis for conceptualizing the precise institutions of a “gospel economy” than Martin Luther did when he came to the Bible. The doctrinal revolutions that became the “restored gospel” of Mormonism began some months later, with the development of a concept Mormons call Zion.

In his book Great Basin Kingdom, the Harvard educated, LDS historian Leonard Arrington writes that there were five phases to the sect’s early experiences. These are I. Jackson County, Missouri, II. Kirtland, Ohio, III. Far-West, Missouri, IV.}

3 More than fifty years after the publication of Great Basin Kingdom, no other work has surpassed Arrington’s. As I immersed myself in the history and literature of Mormondom, every thinker I encountered—from the writings of celebrated LDS theologian Hugh Nibley to my correspondence with attorneys for the polygamist Fundamentalist Church of Latter-day Saints and personal conversations with the leading non-Mormon scholar of Mormonism, Jan Shipps—directed me to this text. Building the City of God (1976) –a collaborative work by Leonard Arrington and Dean May, who developed a much older manuscript by Feramoz Fox—surpasses Great Basin Kingdom in its focus on the pre-Utah, Joseph Smith period, and is the go-to text for understanding the history of 19th century Mormon Communalism. Though Arrington, Fox and May were all faithful members of the LDS, Building the City of God and Great Basin Kingdom are considered the most reliable texts on the subject, accepted by Mormon and non-Mormon scholars.

4 Arrington, Leonard. Great Basin Kingdom: an economic history of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900. New ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005. 6 These five phases are somewhat chronologically misleading: Kirtland, Ohio predates the establishment of Jackson County as the “Latter-day Zion,” and the community at Far-West was more of short-lived rallying point for refuges fleeing Kirtland and Jackson County than a distinct “phase.” Smith moved his headquarters there in 1838, and a mass exodus (brought on by the Governor’s official order to “expel” or “exterminate” the Mormon population of Missouri) was completed in 1839.
Nauvoo, Illinois, and V. “Exodus to the West.” (This final “phase” was led by Brigham Young.) During each of these phases Smith announced new revelations that had been given him. These revelations are contained in the Mormon *Doctrines and Covenants* (D&C).

**From New York To Zion—With Rigdon, by Way of Kirtland**

There seem to have been three specific reasons, historically speaking for the Law of Consecration. The first was the desire to establish an alternative to a specific communal society with which several of his early converts had close ties. —*Building the City of God*

Sidney Rigdon had preached Christian communalism before he had heard of Joseph Smith. He led a movement called “The Family” dedicated to establishing its own vision of primitive Christian communalism, a concept that was in vogue at the time. Two months after his conversion by Smith, Rigdon was Smith’s primary scribe. Having completed the *Book of Mormon*, Smith now set to the task of “translating” the Christian Bible—which actually amounted to dictating “inspired” emendations of the King James Version as they came to him. As the story goes, Smith dictated to Rigdon Jesus’ instructions for textual emendation. Suffice to say, Rigdon and Smith

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5By listing Jackson County (“Zion”) before Kirtland, the full chronology of events that led Smith—there is distorted, primarily because the “specific communal society” Arrington references is skipped over by narrative ellipses. Physically, and biographically speaking, Smith sojourned in Kirtland before ever laying eyes on Jackson County. Indeed, the first revelations generally understood by Mormons as presenting any “doctrine of gathering” were Jesus’ purported orders that Smith and his scribe Sidney Rigdon cease their emendation (“translation”) of the bible and go gather with the rest of the Saints, to Ohio. (D&C 37) Most of the laws for building up Zion were given at Kirtland, including D&C 42’s “Law of Consecration.” Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. *BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Cooperation Among the Mormons*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 19.
produced a remarkably different version of *Genesis* chapters 1-5. Many of the fundamental “gospel principles” appear first in this text (and not in the *Book of Mormon*, or any D&C revelations published before Rigdon’s conversion\(^6\)). The Enoch revelation told of an antediluvian city, whose people earned the title “of Zion” because they were of “one heart and mind and there was no poor among them.” The story also said that these people preached and lived the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ—the gospel the Saints said had just been literally restored to their hands. Enoch’s Zion presented certain ideals like spiritual and material unity, achieved—not through some metaphysical communion of souls in Christ, but in a physical community of human beings, a city of geographical location.

Again, there is a solid case for saying that Smith always idealized “unity” and that similar ideals may be found in the *Book of Mormon* and other pre-Rigdon accounts of his life and the revelations he received. However, the fact remains that less than six months after Rigdon’s conversion, the concept of Zion expanded tremendously, and with this development, the socioeconomic ideals of Mormonism solidified.

Rigdon’s “the Family” had practiced “common stock” communalism, and was, according to some accounts, so extreme in its interpretations of Christian practice that individuals could not claim ownership over even such personal possessions as clothing. “The Family,” led by Rigdon, had been located at two

\(^6\) Although they do appear in a couple D&C texts which were published c.1840 but which Smith claimed represented revelations he had received many years previous to the publication.
centers, Mentor and Kirtland, Ohio. When Rigdon converted to Mormonism, most of his Kirtland congregation followed suit. This mass-conversion made Kirtland a major Mormon population center almost instantly. Rigdon immediately left to join Smith at Fayette, New York, but within less than half a year, he returned with Smith, and together they moved to immediately establish Kirtland as the new church headquarters.

The Enoch revelations now contained in the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, were “received” in December 1830, barely two months after Rigdon had converted, along with his followers, with Rigdon acting as the scribe. According to authorities at BYU, “chronologically, [the Enoch revelation] came after section 35 of the Doctrine and Covenants and before section 37.” Soon after, 37 D&C revelations came to Smith during the year of 1831, at least 22 of which dealt with economics. These revelations are closely related to the Enoch text in more ways than mere subject matter and chronological proximity. They employ many of the same phrases, and even reference Enoch by name. Most simply put, in the words of the pro-LDS scholars at BYU: “This information about Enoch contains many items of history and doctrine of

Also cf. Building the City of God, 19
particular interest to Latter-day Saints, because it deals with the work of the Lord in which we are engaged in our day – the establishment of latter-day Zion. “10

The Enoch revelation marks the start of a very rapid process by which Saints gained their current basis for using the word Zion as a socio-material imperative. D&C 37 begins with Jesus telling Joseph (and Sidney Rigdon) “It is not expedient that you should translate anymore.” Instead, he tells Smith (and Rigdon) to go to Ohio. “And again, a commandment which I give unto the church, that it is expedient to me that they should assemble together at the Ohio.” (D&C 37:1, 3) The heading included with today’s edition of D&C 37 notes that “this is the first commandment concerning a gathering in this dispensation.” Given the explicit connection between the production of the Enoch account and these first commandments to “gather,” one is able to glimpse Smith’s drive to achieve, for himself and for his people, the still vaguely defined, but heavily emphasized “oneness” that is idealized in so much of his literature.

So Rigdon and Smith stopped “translating” (having barely gone further than the fifth chapter of Genesis) and went to join Rigdon’s people in Ohio. Shortly after their arrival, they “received” D&C 38 which develops upon all the ideas of the short chapter proceeding it. In this text, Jesus identifies himself as “the same which have taken the Zion of Enoch into mine own bosom” (D&C 38:4) affirms the principle of unity-- “I say unto you, be one; and if ye are not one, ye are not mine. (D&C 38: 27) and orders the Saints to “go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law.”

The people of Enoch’s City of Zion, by Smith’s account, were defined by their oneness of “heart and mind,” they gathered at a geographic location, followed God’s law (and abolished poverty), and God dwelt among them. The references to Enoch, and the commandment to “be one” in D&C 38 suggest that the coming law prophesized in D&C 38:32 will be instructions for achieving the oneness “called Zion.”

This does not come in the next revelation, but D&C 39 is significant because the speaker (Jesus) declares “he that receiveth these things”—which appears to contextually refer to baptism into Smith’s new Church—“receiveth me; and they shall be gathered unto me in time and in eternity.” (D&C 39:22) The language clearly evokes the recently published descriptions of Enoch and his people who “were gathered up into the bosom of the Father.” Enoch’s City of Zion, a concept not yet half a year old, was the center focus of all of this series of revelations.

Consecration and Zion-Building, phase 1: Ohio & Missouri

1831-8

Part A: Ideal Zion

When Arrington refers to “the Law of Consecration and Stewardship,” he specifically means the socioeconomic system of property redistribution in D&C 42. The current heading to D&C 42 suggests the text is a “fulfillment” of the promise that
Once Smith joined up with the people in Ohio, “there I will give unto you my law.” (D&C 38:32), but rather than refer to this section as “The Law of the Church”—a nineteenth-century tradition which has continued, at least in unofficial Mormon primary and secondary sources down unto this day—the current heading says “The Prophet specifies this revelation as ‘embracing the law of the church.’” The vagueness carried by the word *embracing* conveys something of the controversy among Mormons about how to interpret the substance of the proceeding text. It conveys a variety of principles relating to baptism, missionary work, the Ten Commandments, and more. (D&C 42:1-29) Among these basic principles appear sudden instructions on economic organization, that, while only vaguely outlined, present a system of absolute and continuous redistribution of wealth by the discretion of priesthood holders (“bishops”).

Most Mormon historians have inherited Joseph Smith’s insistence that his system was distinct—neither Jacksonian capitalism, nor “common-stock” communism, but a unique combination of both. According to Smith’s revelation, Jesus apparently demanded that members of his church must “remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support that which thou hast to impart, with a covenant and deed that cannot be broken.” (D&C 42:30). He goes on to clarify that he is not talking about charity given between people, but rather demanding the individual sacrifice all his possessions to the Church of Christ\(^\text{11}\): “for inasmuch as ye impart of your substance unto the poor, ye will do it into me [Jesus], and they shall be laid before the bishop of my church.” (D&C 42:31) The church then has complete

\(^{11}\) The original name of Smith’s church, which he later changed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
and total ownership of the property, but the bishop is under covenant to provide the former owner with a “stewardship… sufficient for himself and family.” (D&C 42:32) All of this may be said to be communalistic.

However, the long-term operation of the economic system presented by D&C 42 relied on a capitalistic work-ethic. In Joseph Smith’s text, Jesus’ expresses his expectation that stewards would/should be entrepreneurs, taking what they needed for their subsistence and using their stewardship to produce a surplus “residue.” This surplus would be calculated and claimed by the bishop, who would use them for the various causes Jesus identified as his own. These causes included buying land and building property “for the public benefit of the church… and the building up of the New Jerusalem which is hereafter to be revealed,” as well as creating and managing a bishop-run “storehouse, to administer to the poor and needy.” (D&C 42: 33-37) The system also relied on a heavily enchanted element: the bishop would use his powers of discernment to calculate people’s just “wants,” both in taking residues from stewards, and in administering portions of that residue to the poor and needy.

The best description I have read of the D&C 42 system is given by Building the City of God co-author Dean May, albeit within a confessional (unofficial, pro-LDS) publication:

[Stewardships] could not be transferred to heirs or others at will. Saints were under sacred obligation to magnify their stewardship during the coming year, exercising their free will in entrepreneurial endeavors, doing the best they could to raise corn or make saddles. At the end of the year they were to have a meeting with the bishop which we have called a stewardship interview. There the bishop might say, “all right, Brother Lee, how did you do with your saddleshop?” And Brother Lee might answer, “I did splendidly and
have a good surplus. My wife and I were thinking of building an addition to our house. And I’m ordering a new saddle-making machine from Saint Louis.” The bishop might then response, “Now Brother Lee, not so fast.” They would then try to differentiate between and evaluate the wants and needs of the Lee family. Does the community really need a saddle-making machine? Is there justification for the addition to the house? At the end of the discussion Lee would be asked to consecrate voluntarily to the Lord’s storehouse everything above his just needs and wants. 12

May has his own interpretations about the significance of the Law of Consecration as a Celestial Law of the universe, but this presentation gives a vivid and accurate account of the economic system implied by the text of D&C 42.

Despite the fact that LDS doctrine generally holds that whatever is implied by the term Law of Consecration is a “Celestial Law” necessary for human beings to evolve to a higher state of being, Arrington et al. put forth a number of reasons explaining the “logic” of the D&C 42 system. “The redistribution of wealth was designed to place all family heads on equal economic footing, considering their respective family obligations, circumstances, needs, and ‘just wants.” 13 The factoring in of these considerations into the Mormon notion of “equality” was the biggest departure from Rigdon’s Family and most other contemporary communalist utopias. “The system aimed at equality in consumption but not in the capital controlled or managed by individuals.” 14 Such sharing of clothes and personal items was referred to as “the common-stock principle.” This practice had torn apart “The Family” at Kirtland, and by all accounts Smith was appalled by the practice.

12 May, Dean L. “The Economics of Zion.” Sunstone, no. 4 (August 1990). 19
13 Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Cooperation Among the Mormons. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 16
14 Ibid.
Later on, as Mormon doctrine developed, the significance of the nuclear family unit received a lot more attention. Even today, LDS Mormons continue to believe that, to quote Jan Shipps, “the unit of salvation” (through Christ) “is the individual,” but the “unit of exaltation” (towards godhood and celestial being) “is the family.” Mormons believe that the heavenly Father, Jesus, and all celestial beings do not just have corporeal bodies of “flesh and bones,” but also wives and families, and that they engage in the Law of Consecration (which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, can mean a lot of things).

More problematic for LDS hermeneutics, perhaps, is the charge made by Arrington et al. that the text of the revelation has changed over time. “The original revelation read ‘he that sinneth and repenteth not shall be cast out, and shall not receive again that which he hath consecrated to me.’ This implies that stewardship was a life-lease subject to revocation by the Bishop.” In a footnote, Arrington et al. refer to the D&C 42 text as it has appeared since 1835 (and remains to this day.) The verse now reads: “and it shall come to pass, that he that sinneth and repenteth not shall be cast out of the church and shall not receive again that which he has consecrated unto the poor and the needy of my church.” (D&C 42:37) The new text “seems to imply that an apostate could retain his stewardship but had no right to

16 The overturning of Proposition 8 in California exemplifies the extent to which Mormons believe that male-led family units are part of celestial law. I mention all of this because the assertion by Arrington, et al. that the D&C 42 focus on family units was a pragmatic reaction to the failing practices of Rigdon’s “Family” simply sidesteps the job of explaining the revelation in terms of the “eternal verities” of the Mormon gospel.
17 Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Coooperation Among the Mormons. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 18
request the return of any consecrations.”

D&C 51:5-6 published in 1835 (but allegedly dating back to Thompson, Ohio, May 1831) reiterates this idea that stewardships should be given in the form of legal deed, thus leaving an apostate-steward with “claim on that portion that is deeded to him.” (D&C 51:5) That which Arrington et al. heavily imply was a retrospective emendation to church policy made in 1835 complicates the already hard to define tension between the communalist and individualist elements characterizing the D&C 42 system. This creates a latent cause for disagreement over how stewardship were defined under this system in its perfected ideal (depending on whether one’s theological-historiography lends more credence to older publications or the more traditional text)

One of the many factors that makes pinpointing the “Law of Consecration” down to an objective definition so difficult is the Mormons (and, if one buys into the self-identification claims made by the D&C speaker, their Gods’) apparently ambiguous usage of the word Zion. This ancient Hebrew word already had an ambiguous definition: the word can refer to one of the mountains next to God’s throne on Mount Moriah (and often to Mount Moriah itself), to the entire Jerusalem polis, and, more abstractly, as a metaphor for the Chosen People or the World to Come. The Historical Dictionary of Mormonism lists 5 meanings, the last four of which are geographic: 1) the pure at heart 2) Jackson County (now Independence), Missouri, 3) All of North and South America, 4) the Great Salt Lake Valley (also called “The Great Basin,” as in The Great Basin Kingdom, Utah or Deseret) and 5) Any place in any country where the Saints of God live and worship, especially in

\[8\) Ibid. n.430-431
stakes.” 19  All but definition 4 can be traced back to the teachings of Smith.  (And from a position within the limits of Mormon ontology, definition 4 can be reasonably derived from definition 5).

In describing the Mormon doctrine/practice of Consecration from 1831-1838, one must deal with the confusing fact that Zion was simultaneously an ideal—spelled out in the Enoch revelation—and the name of a city (in the location that is now called “Independence,” Missouri), whose purpose was to achieve that ideal. When the D&С speaker speaks of Zion and the imperative of “building up Zion” it is frequently unclear if the text is talking about, to quote the title of an (unofficial) LDS doctrinal work which attempts to sort out these issues, Enoch’s Zion, Joseph’s Zion [or] Future Zion. 20 Recourse to history as hermeneutic is necessary to resolve the differences between the three categories. However, the hermeneutic history is complicated by a sparse record. The extent and methods of which the D&C 42 system was actually practiced by Mormons during the 1830s cannot be established.

**Part B: Historical Zion**

But what did the early Saints actually do with their money?  “During the first few months after the annunciation of the Law of Consecration and Stewardship” – Arrington et al. here use this term to refer to the D&C 42 system, which other Mormon thinkers take to be a problematic assertion—“an attempt was made by some

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of the Latter-day Saints in [Thompson, near Kirtland] Ohio to comply with its provisions.”\textsuperscript{21} With some short-lived success, these “consecrations were importuned to apply on the purchase of their farming lands.” However, “before this group was completely organized…one or two of the wealthier members backed out and successfully sued in the civil courts for return of their consecrations.”\textsuperscript{22} The effect was so devastating that the whole Thompson, Ohio experiment dissolved.

“Nevertheless,” writes Arrington et al. beginning their pattern of evaluating consecration according to its functional achievements—“the introduction of the system, even for that brief period, did facilitate the removal of the poor from New York to Ohio, and from Ohio to Missouri.”\textsuperscript{23}

How should Mormons remember Thompson, Ohio? In D&C 54, Joseph Smith purported to relate Jesus’ own take on the subject, but thinkers such as will be discussed in the next chapter have read the text in radically different ways. It will suffice here to merely outline the ambiguous message this text sends to one seeking to understand the implications of “the law of consecration.” Further demonstrating the interrelatedness of D&C scripture with Mormon history, D&C 54 in current editions is introduced as coming in response to the situation of the Thompson, Ohio society.

“Members of the Church in the branch of Thompson, Ohio were divided on questions having to do with the consecration of properties. Selfishness and greed were manifest, and Leman Copley had broken his covenant to consecrate his large farm as

\textsuperscript{21} Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. \textit{BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Coooperation Among the Mormons}. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 21
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
a place of inheritance for the saints arriving from Colesville, New York.” 24 The name and location of this revelation are deemed essential by the central LDS “official” edition of the D&C. This revelation may or may not contain the suggestion that the Thompsonville order should be broken up. Here the speaker introduces himself as Jesus, (D&C 54:1) and then proceeds to instruct Thompson branch president Newel Knight to “stand fast in the office whereunto I have appointed you.” (D&C 54:2). This seems to imply that he should continue to take consecrations, give out stewardships and administer the residue to the poor. The next verses seem to retract this idea, however: “And if your brethren desire to escape their enemies, let then repent of all their sins and become truly humble and contrite. And as the covenant which they made unto me has been broken even so it has become void and of none effect.” (D&C 54:3-4) Appearing to contradict the order to “continue” in verse 2, this verse seems to say that the oaths of consecration and stewardship taken by the Thompson, Ohio saints, and thus, that their obligation to live in that place under that system, have been annulled.

Switching tones, verse 5 curses “him by whom this offence cometh, for it had been better for him that he had been drowned in the depth of the sea.” (D&C54:5) According to the the current introduction, this is specifically a curse upon Leman Copley, but other thinkers, discussed in the next chapter, have said this curse applies to all who take the oath to consecrate but do not live it in their day. Thinkers like Hugh Nibley and Ogden Kraut go so far as threatening every temple-endowed Mormon by saying this curse will be on their heads until they “start living the law of

24 D&C Section 54 introduction, 2007
consecration.” Further encouraging the reading that D&C 54 is not an annulment, is
verse 6, “But blessed are they who have kept the covenant and observed the
commandment, for they shall obtain mercy.” (D&C 54:6) Verses 7-10, which
complete this very short section, switch to the second person. It is not clear at all
from the text of the revelation itself if the “you” is directed to the Ohio Mormons
generally or the Thompson branch. It is an open question whether this verse qualifies
as a suspension of the D&C 42 system in Ohio. The final verses of this revelation tell
the Saints to go to Missouri, where, they are instructed, “seek ye a living like unto
men…and be patient in tribulation until I come.” Living “like unto men” appears to
contrast with the “celestial living” that is living by the system Arrington et al.
interchangeably call “United Order or the Law of Consecration and Stewardship.”
However, the idea of tiered levels of exaltation, and the full narrative of the “plan of
salvation” had not yet been worked out, so this contrast may be overemphasized. The
point is that, practical instructions aside, D&C 54 allows for multiple readings leading
to very different ontological understandings of the nature of Consecration and
Stewardship, how Saints are supposed to live, and what applies when.

One cannot get a real history of consecration through the D&C text. Section
54 epitomizes this ambiguity (was D&C 42 no longer applicable in Ohio?), but the
same applies to a series of texts relating to the themes of consecration and Zion. In
D&C 48 (Kirtland, Ohio, March 1831) orders are given to the Saints at Ohio to
distribute their surplus land to pilgrims from the East attempting to fulfill the D&C 38
commandment to gather at Kirtland. This implies an ideal a lot like Consecration, but
its relationship to D&C 42 is not textually obvious. (If they were living the DC
 system, why would they need additional instructions to divide up their land?) “And inasmuch as you have lands, ye shall impart to the eastern brethren.” (D&C 48:2) However, the same revelation cautions the Saints that once immigration from the east was completed, they would have to move to yet another, place, “not yet to be revealed” which shall become “the city” (a clear reference to “the city” identified in D&C 45 as “Zion,” “The New Jerusalem.”) Thus, it is not very hard to see why some people insist that the D&C 42 system of Consecration and Stewardship was appropriate only as a functional solution to historically contextualized problems, as will be explored in the next chapter.

Jackson County, which became known as the “City of Zion” was the “second attempt” in the words of Arrington et al. by Saints to live according to the D&C system of consecration. (Thompson, Ohio being the first.) In D&C 45 (Kirtland, Ohio, March 7, 1831) The Saints are told that they will soon be called “to gather,” like ancient peoples before them (as described in the newly beefed up Mormon scriptural canon) “with one heart and one mind.” (D&C 45:65) “The glory of God shall be there, and the terror of the Lord shall be there, in as much as the wicked will not come unto it, and it shall be called Zion.” (D&C 45:66) Subsequent revelations, including D&C 54, discussed above, identified the coming Zion with Missouri. In D&C 54 The speaker commands: “wherefore, go to now and flee the land, lest your enemies come upon you… take your journey unto the regions westward unto the land of Missouri, unto the borders of the Lamanites.” (verses 7-8) Missouri is depicted in comparison to the “old” Jerusalem: sitting on the borderline between East and West, between “Lamanite” (Native American / Jew) and “Gentile” (European/ Roman).
In D&C 57 (“Zion, Jackson County, Missouri, July 1831”) God describes the entire “land of Missouri” as “the land I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the Saints…the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion.” (D&C 57:1) However, he specifies, “Behold, the place which is now called Independence is the center place; and a spot for a temple…” Thus began the building up of the social experiment Mormon’s remember as the building of “Joseph’s Zion.”

D&C 57 comments that “it is wisdom that land should be purchased by the Saints, and also every tract lying westward [of Independence, Missouri], even unto the line running directly between Jew and Gentile.” (D&C 57:4 “Edward Partridge” is appointed to serve the functions of a D&C 42 style bishop “and divide unto the saints their inheritance.” (D&C 57:6-7)

Though it dwindles in restrospective-comparison to the populations sustained at Nauvoo in later years, hundreds of Mormons headed that early call to emigrate and participate in the building up of the new Zion. One year after D&C 57 was pronounced, Arrington et al. report “between 300 and 400 converts had arrived at Independence, Missouri, almost all of whom were located upon their inheritances.”

A year later there were 700 Mormons out of a population of 1,200.

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25 For my purposes at least, in this chapter, and the purposes of Arrington et al., inheritance is a term equivalent to stewardship. It appears to come out of the Old Testament concept of the 12 tribes division of the land of Israel into regions of tribal “inheritances.” The concepts of “celestial inheritance,” developed in later years (or, as Mormons would say, revealed at later stages of Smith’s life) would be introduced. However, these doctrinal developments were “post-Zion.”

Arrington et al. report that Edward Partridge “took the attitude that inheritances ought to be tentative, entitling each settler with right of use only, with lease subject to cancellation on the order of the bishop.”27 Saying that this was Partridge’s interpretation seems to contradict the notion, generally maintained in the rest of this section of Arrington’s book, that D&C 42 style Consecration and Stewardship mandated exactly such a system. Though a seemingly minor line, it highlights the ambiguity that comes with the task of using history to pinpoint the definition of the Law of Consecration (and Stewardship)28 and the socioeconomic message of the “restored gospel.” Is D&C 57 describing the same system as D&C 42? Or is it describing a different system to train the Saints towards living that system? Or, is the Celestial Law simply a matter of achieving the end goal of abolishing poverty, regardless of the system, and thus the cosmic Law of Consecration would have been fulfilled under both?

Anyway, it is a fact that people did come to Edward Partridge to consecrate their possessions and that he, in turn, would grant them stewardships, inheritances in Zion. Building the City of God contains an appendix with the copies of the six extant printed-form documents attesting to the fact of these transactions. (Appendix 1) Their general form is described by Arrington et al. “One-half of a large, folded sheet contained a deed of gift, granting the bishop of the church an itemized schedule of property ‘for the purpose of purchasing lands, and building up the New Jerusalem,

27 Ibid. 23
28 If one looks back to the temple-covenants discussed in Chapter I, he or she shall see that they only refer to the “Law of Consecration,” as if this might be something separate from the Law of Consecration and Stewardship. Such distinction is not made in the D&C.
even Zion, and for relieving the wants of the poor and needy.”\textsuperscript{29} The fact that it was a “deed of gift” is significant. Arrington et al. extrapolate: “In Mormon terminology, this probably would have been called a deed of consecration, but church leaders, in drawing up the documents, apparently sought to substitute the language of secular civil law for the usages in Joseph Smith’s revelations.”\textsuperscript{30} Of the six extant deeds of consecration, the least valuable belonged to James Lee who donated $34.50 in “saddlers tools,” “saddlers stock,” a “washbowl” and some “extra clothing.” The largest consecration was given by George W. Pitkin, whose furniture was worth more than all James Lee could claim (or, at least, was willing to consecrate—the extent to which these people may also have had other property can only be guessed at), totaled to $307.87, according to the evaluation agreed upon by himself and the bishop. That-which-might-otherwise-be-called-a “consecration deed” would be signed and witnessed.

At this point, according to Arrington,

once the deed of gift was properly signed and witnessed, the granter stood destitute before the bishop and the church. What the bishop accepted as a gift, however, he gave back in the same transaction as a ‘loan’ together with a ‘lease’ of real property. Mormons would probably have called this document, printed on the other half of the form, a deed of stewardship agreement. In civil law, it would be described simply a lease-and-loan agreement…\textsuperscript{31}

Were the Mormons in Zion living the system of consecration and stewardship? The documents provided by Arrington et al. testify that people were at

\textsuperscript{29} Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. \textit{BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Coooperation Among the Mormons}. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 23
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid. 24
the very least going through the legal motions of deeding to the Church all they possessed. However, one element of the D&C 42 system (especially when it is interpreted in relation to the Enoch Revelation) appears to be missing. Arrington et al. report:

In the four cases where deeds of consecration and stewardship have survived, the steward was ‘loaned’ by the bishop precisely the same scheduled possessions that he had given to the bishop, *nothing being withheld for the Lord’s storehouse, a practice that obviously could not have been followed in all cases.*  

Arrington et al. conveniently avoid arguing this “obvious” point, but suffice to say that this is not so clear to all Mormon thinkers. For those who devote more energy to the definition of “consecration and stewardship” as an ontological category, these practices also suggest the interpretation that the saints were *not* living out Consecration and Stewardship in Zion. Or, alternatively, that there were different ways of living out the principles of Consecration and Stewardship.

Acknowledging the apparent endorsements Jesus’ gives to capitalistic productivity in D&C 42, the surviving stewardship documents charged the steward with a “responsibility for improving the stewardship.” According to the terms of the surviving documents, he was to handle his stewardship freely, “as to him shall seem meet and proper,” but he had to pay taxes, and promise to “I shall make or accumulate more than is needful for the support and comfort of myself and my family.”

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
Smith made a point of downplaying any understanding of Consecration and Stewardship as his own creation. When church leaders asked for his advice on how to better implement the Law if the Lord, Smith replied (on April 21, 1833) “I have nothing further to say on the subject than to recommend that you make yourselves acquainted with the commandments of the Lord, and the laws of the state, and govern yourselves accordingly.” However, Arrington et al. follow up this quote with another quotation from a “special letter to Bishop Partridge” where he gave the explicit commandment that stewardships should be given “in deed” and that an apostate steward should only lose that which he had donated for communal/church purposes. This would accord with the version of the revelation that became D&C 42 as it has appeared since 1835. As Arrington et al. put it: “Thus, it became clear that the official church position had become one of requiring that a deed with no strings attached be made out at the time each inheritance was given out.” Because the work of Building the City of God is to trace the development of—to quote its subtitle—community & cooperation among the Mormons, not to ontologically define “Consecration and Stewardship” within Mormon religious thought. However, the clear suggestion that revelations were edited to reflect changes in church policy is a fact that necessarily enters into that ontological debate, as shall be discussed in the next chapter.

Certainly, Bishop Partridge’s policies did change throughout his tenure as Bishop of Zion. “After October 12, 1832,” write Arrington et al. “Bishop Partridge had a new form printed for receiving consecrations and granting stewardships [only!]

34 Ibid. 25
35 Ibid. 26
one copy of which…remains in the Church Archives.”\textsuperscript{36} The gift/consecration side of the form was unchanged. However, “the lease loan agreement was altered considerably, but in a matter sufficiently ambiguous to leave room for at least two sharply divergent interpretations:

The clause outlining the steward’s right to the property should he leave the church was given new emphasis by being moved from the fourth to the first sentence of a long paragraph setting forth conditions and qualifications of the agreement. Here the words “leased and loaned” were omitted from a phrase in the earlier document in which the steward had promised to “forfeit all claim to the above described lease and loaned property.” Moreover, while the steward had earlier agreed “to give back the leased, and also pay an equivalent for the loaned,” he now promised “to quit the said leased premises, and also to pay an equivalent for the loaned.”\textsuperscript{37}

Arrington et al. define the “first” but to them, less plausible, “interpretation” as seeing this change as a consequence of Smith’s 1833 instructions in the “special letter” to Partridge. By recognizing the stewards claim to ownership, but denying his right to possession of the property, this interpretation suggest that the new form was a vehicle for keeping the lands of Zion homogonously Mormon. The “alternative,” “more plausible” explanation, however is that the new form predates the 1833 letter, and thus reflects Partridge’s own innovation. Under this interpretation, “the document is more intelligible if read as an attempt on the part of the bishop to fortify his original position—that title to lands and other property should, according to the Law of Consecration and Stewardship”—again, for Arrington et al. this is

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. 26-7
synonymous with the original version of D&C 42—“remain with the Church when a member apostatized or was excommunicated.”

To what extent did the practices of Zion in Missouri reflect the ideologies of Smith? This question cannot be answered. Apparently, public statements were issued after the 1833 letter to Partridge, declaring that family heads (stewards) would receive “a warranty deed securing himself and his heirs, his inheritance in fee simply forever.”³⁸ However, write Arrington et al. “it is doubtful that this new policy was completely carried out because of the developing friction between Mormons and non-Mormons in Missouri.”³⁹ To make a similar point, Joseph Smith wrote another letter in June 1833 telling Partridge that if he could not—through the interview process—come to agree with the steward/consecrants about what was necessary for his “just wants and needs,” he must submit the decision “before a council of twelve High Preists, the Bishop not being one of the council, but he is to lay his case before them.”⁴⁰ However, as noted by Arrington et al. “these instructions, like those pertaining to the granting of a deed, came too late to be applied in the Jackson County experiment.”⁴¹

There are a series of revelations in the D&C which mandate the formation of a “United Order” or “United Firm” made up by the “Central Council” of church leaders for the administration of church affairs in Zion and Kirtland. As will be shown in the next chapter, there is an ambiguous relationship between United Order and the Law of Consecration and Stewardship. Arrington explains the firm as “a joint stewardship

³⁸ Ibid. 30  
³⁹ Ibid. 30  
⁴⁰ Ibid 30-31, quoting the instructions of Joseph Smith  
⁴¹ Ibid. 31
of the members of the [central] council with the responsibility of holding property in trust, assisting the poor and supervising the establishment of merchandising stores in Ohio and Missouri.”

Defining the “United Order” as a “joint-stewardship,” the United Order revelations are almost dismissively included by Arrington et al. within the broader structure of consecration and stewardship.

D&C 104 marks the beginning of the end of the “Missouri phase.” “In as much as some of my servants have not kept the commandment [to establish and be a United Order], but have broken the covenant through covetousness, and with feigned words, I have cursed them with a grievous curse.” (D&C 104:4) Unlike Arrington et al. (who tend to blame the failing of the Zion “experiment” on the oppression and expulsion of Mormons from their lands in Zion) the D&C speaker blames the Mormons themselves. Apparently reaffirming the importance of D&C 42, the speaker proclaims “it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine. But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor should be exalted, in that the rich are made low.” (D&C 104:15-6) D&C 104 also expands the concept of Zion even as it heralds the end of the Jackson County “experiment.” The saints of Kirtland are told “you shall no longer be bound as a united order to your brethren of Zion.” (D&C 104:47) Instead, the speaker says that “after you are organized you shall be called the United Order of the Stake of Zion, the city of Kirtland. And your brethren, after they are organized shall be called the United Order of the City of Zion.” (D&C

42 Ibid. 31
The distinction between a *stake of Zion* and the *City of Zion* universalizes the possibility for Zionness.

D&C 105 appears to rescind the distributive institutions of D&C 42

In consequence of the transgressions of my people, it is expedient in me that mine elders should wait for a little season for the redemption of Zion— That they themselves may be prepared, and that my people may be taught more perfectly, and have experience, and know more perfectly concerning their, and the things which I require at their hands… (D&C 105:9-10)

C&S is rescinded until the Saints can be perfected as a people and become worthy of practicing it. However, its status as a celestial law is affirmed from the beginning of the revelation text. The D&C speaker appears to identify himself as Jesus and declares to Joseph Smith that the Saints:

are full of all manner of evil, and do not impart of their substance, as becometh Saints, to the poor and afflicted among them; and are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom. And Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the celestial kingdom; otherwise, I cannot receive her into myself. (D&C 105:3-5)

Later on, the D&C speaker, declares “let those commandments which I have given concerning Zion and her law be executed and fulfilled, after her redemption.”(D&C 105:34) This seems to imply that C&S will only be required after the Mormon Millenium, but this idea is countered but the next verses: “There has been a day of calling,” the declares the speaker of the text, apparently referring to the time when all church members were “called” to practice the C&S system described in D&C 42, “but the time has come for a day of choosing; and let those be chosen that are worthy. And it shall be manifest unto my servant, by the voice of the Spirit, those that are chosen; and they shall be sanctified; and inasmuch as they follow the counsel which
they receive, they shall have power after many days to accomplish all things pertaining to Zion.” (D&C 105:35-7) Thus, it seems that certain individual Saints will be chosen, to live C&S pre-millennially. Whether the “servant” doing the choosing refers to the Prophet-President is not clear, and as we shall see, is a major point of contention among LDS historians/theologians who take up C&S as their topic.

With the fall of Zion, Kirtland became the center of Church operations. Here, the enterprises coordinated by the United Order of Kirtland all “proved to be failures from a financial point of view, because they could not be operated on a strictly profit-making basis in that religious community.”43 The first Mormon Temple was built at Kirtland, and Arrington has called this “the most important cooperative endeavor of the Mormons in Kirtland.”44 It was under construction from 1933-1936, “a kind of public works enterprise which encouraged consecrations from the wealthy and at the same time provided employment for the needy.”45

Post-Zion Kirtland was also the site at which Saints came to acquire their beliefs about the purpose of temples—indeed, the purpose of life. The next chapter explores how these beliefs create an ontological necessity for coming up with an absolute definition to the “Law of Consecration and Stewardship.” D&C 107, or “the Revelation on the priesthood, (Kirtland, Ohio, March 28th, 1835) establishes many doctrinal concepts that would be fleshed out by the translation (production) of the Book of Abraham. These lay out the differences between the Melchizedek (or, more precisely, Adamic) priesthood, which governs the church, and the Aaronic priesthood, which is held by

44 Ibid. 13
45 Ibid.
the lay bishopric. D&C 110 purports to be a shared revelation to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the inner sanctum of the Kirtland temple. This is one of the very few revelations where Jehovah himself appears and speaks (since the D&C speaker almost always self-identifies as Jesus). The official summary provided in the current edition of the D&C summarizes this vision well enough. “1-10 the Lord Jehovah appears in glory and accepts the Kirtland temple as his house; 11-12 Moses and Elias each appear and commit [to Smith] their keys and dispensations; 13-14 Elijah returns and commits the keys of his dispensation as promised by Malachi.” (Heading, D&C 110)

It is through the Mormon priesthood’s claims to possess these keys to salvation (over the dead and living) that the ritual of Temple Endowments is justified.

Another interesting development of doctrinal ambiguity is the organization on January 2, 1837 of the “Kirtland Safety Society anti-banking company, with Sidney Rigdon, secretary, and Joseph Smith, treasurer.” According to Arrington, they called it an “anti-banking company” because they were in so much debt that they could not issue anything with real world value. “The bank proceeded to issue its notes in the form of church obligations, and general, if artificial, prosperity was stimulated in Kirtland.”

By Arrington’s abridged account in Great Basin Kingdom it was the failure of the anti-bank in November of that year (with the panic of 1837) that led Joseph Smith to leave Kirtland. As in Zion, Missouri, Mormons in Kirtland saw their property become worthless. Many left and sued Smith. Smith left Kirtland “in the dead of night,” bound for “the new Zion of the Mormons, Far West, Missouri.

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid. 14
Part C: Far West Transition

“The Saints [at Far West] were instructed to operate under the law of consecration and stewardship, with each person being required to consecrate all his surplus property, and with each family given in return a stewardship with deeds and fee simple.” However, Arrington continues, “a new proviso was added: In place of church members contributing their surplus incomes each year”—by meeting with the bishop, as mandated in D&C 42 to determine all that was surplus over their “just needs and wants”—“they were asked to pay ‘one tenth of all their interests annually. The consecrations were to be used in buying land, paying church debts, and supporting the priesthood in their manifold enterprises of a spiritual and temporal nature.”

Here, Arrington is summarizing the principles of D&C 119. D&C 119 makes little sense in context of the laws laid out in D&C 42. The text begins with Jesus ordering that those who come to Zion shall “tithe” all of their surplus property to the bishop—as opposed to giving up all of their property in exchange for a revocable stewardship—and that “those who have thus tithed shall pay one-tenth of all of their interest annually.” (D&C 119: 1, 3) However, nothing in the revelation text so much as references the previous laws.

The heading for the most recent version of the D&C 119 notes:

The Lord had previously given to the Church the law of consecration and stewardship of property, which

48 It may be worth noting that this phrase is capitalized in Building the City of God but not in Great Basin Kingdom
members (chiefly the leading elders) entered into by a covenant that was to be everlasting. Because of failure on the part of many to abide by this covenant, the Lord withdrew it for a time, and gave instead the law of tithing to the whole Church. The Prophet asked the Lord how much of their property he required for sacred purposes. The answer was this revelation.

While the canonicity of such headings appears to be ambiguous (LDS historians/theologians writing on the subject appear to freely disagree with this one on a number of points), it illustrates the extent to which history must be brought in to achieve coherent understanding of the text.

Building the City of God differs from Great Basin Kingdom in its move to define tithing as an “inferior” replacement of the real Law of Consecration and Stewardship with D&C 119 which constitutes “a ‘lesser-law’ version of the Law of Consecration and Stewardship.” However, even in this text, Arrington et al. are willing to grant that “In principle, it [D&C 119] was not greatly different from the so-called celestial law of 1831 [D&C 42].” Arrington et al. proceed to evaluate the new system based on its effects., “While the gesture of placing all his property on the altar was not required in the later law, the principle of stewardship was still retained, at least as a religious principle.” Ten percent can be seen “As a more precise definition of the “residue” or surplus income that resulted in the same transferrable of annual savings to the church for community investment purposes that was to have been effected under the Law of Consecration and Stewardship [D&C 42].”

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50 Ibid. 34
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid. 34-5
“Because of the unsettled nature of the economic affairs of the Latter-day Saints at the time, it is difficult to determine to what extent the members complied with the Far West revelation.”

What is known, however, is that many individual Mormons banded together to form four cooperative enterprises known as “United Firms” in the fields of agriculture, shopkeeping, mechanics, and laborer. “The four corporations, together with the modified Law of consecration...were to implement the four goals of the Law of Consecration and Stewardship: economic equality, socialization of surplus incomes, partial freedom of enterprise, and group economic self-sufficiency.”

But within less than two years, the Mormons were fleeing Far West, (having been officially expelled from the entire state of Missouri). The new church headquarters, built up at Commerce (renamed Nauvoo), Illinois would be the last holy polis led by Smith’s prophetic guidance.

**Part d: Nauvoo, Illinois**

“It seems strange to many students of Mormonism,” write Arrington et al. “that in seven years of comparative freedom and isolation there [at Nauvoo]—years marked by growth and worldly influence-no attempt was made to restore ‘the Lord’s plan’ [D&C 42] Indeed, Arrington quotes from a body of material attributed to Smith where he positively discourages Saints from living the Law of Consecration and Stewardship. According to the official *History of the Church* produced by Smith’s authorization, he told church members in Iowa that “the Law of consecration could

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53 Ibid. 35
54 Ibid.
not be kept here and that it is the will of the Lord that we should desist from trying to keep it…he assumed the whole responsibility of not keeping it until proposed by himself.”  

Moreover, in his journal entry for September 24, 1843 Smith wrote “I preached on the stand about one hour on the 2nd chapter of Acts”—where the primitive church lives communally—“designing to show the folly of common stock. In Nauvoo, everyone is steward over his own.”

Had Smith’s opinions changed? Arrington et al. say his refrain from implementing C&S was circumstantial. “The church had to make far larger investments in land in Nauvoo than it had ever been called upon to do before, and its resources, financial or otherwise were relatively fewer…from the standpoint of economics, the Law of Consecration and Stewardship was simply not feasible.”  

Notably, (and understandably, given his “disciplined” approach) Arrington et al. do not bother with explaining this decision in terms of Mormon ontology. Souls (alive and already dead) were offered celestial exaltation at the Nauvoo temple, and, as Mormons do down to today, these endowment ceremonies required participants to covenant themselves to keep “the law of consecration as defined in the Doctrines and Covenants.”

After 1841 tithing became the official policy of the church, “adopted as a substitute more suited to financial necessity and the weaknesses of human nature.” Arrington’s evaluation of the law, while not dipping into its ontological implications for LDS millenialists and exaltation-seekers, is very negative. “This law, which has

55 Ibid. 37
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid. 38
been retained by the church to this day, contained no device for the reform of property institutions or for achieving a more equitable distribution of wealth and income.”

Continuing, he writes, “the stewardship phase of the ‘Lord’s Law’ [D&C 42] lapsed into an informal, voluntary, less-than-universal arrangement in which the faithful were urged to regard their property rights, however legal, as something less than absolute, and as subject to a measure of control by the priesthood.”

To explain Joseph Smith’s apparent neglect of celestial principles at Nauvoo, Arrington et al. suggest that he concluded after the Missouri failures that expansion and growth of his following and the building of an autonomous, powerful political base were his most pressing necessities…he sought to forestall any economic experimentation that might draw talent and energies away from his drive for rapid expansion of “the Lord’s Kingdom.” In counseling the faithful not to enter into communal economic ventures of their own, he placed himself in opposition to the principles that had recently held so high a place in his millennial vision. It would be wrong to conclude from this, however, that he had given up on the Law of Consecration and Stewardship forever. He frequently couched his remonstrances against the communalistic stirrings of the Nauvoo Saints in terms that permitted possible future renewal of the system. Brigham Young, who probably knew Joseph’s mind as well as anyone, quite obviously hoped to effect within his lifetime a return to the ideal economic system announced in 1831. [D&C 42]

The real story, Arrington tells, was that Joseph Smith decided that the “building of an autonomous, powerful, political base,” was more important than living the Lord’s Law, and therefore he temporarily “sought to forestall any economic

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59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
experimentation that might draw talent and energies away from his drive for rapid expansion of the ‘Lord’s Kingdom.’” The Law of Tithing, in Arrington’s view, was a temporary solution for achieving this most important goal.

Consecration under Brigham Young

The refusal of the United States courts to assist in Mormons recovery of lost properties in Zion (now Independence) Missouri, and Kirtland Ohio, the state-imposed exile of the Mormons from those lands, and the martyrdom of Joseph Smith, all inclined Brigham Young, Joseph Smith’s successor as the prophet-president of the LDS church, to keep his predecessors goals of political and economic self-sufficiency firmly in place. Bushman summarizes the historical consensus that “Joseph Smith’s vision of Zion guided Brigham Young’s plans” for the Mormon people:

Young was willing to go beyond standard American capitalism to experiment with economic institutions more in keeping with Joseph Smith’s Zion. He formed cooperatives and communal economic united orders. When he organized a department store to compete with non-Mormon merchants, Young called it Zion’s Cooperative Mercantile Institution and inscribed the same words over its door that appeared on the temple: “Holiness to the Lord.” His aim was to sacralize every part of life.”

This aim comes out of the basic principles of Mormon ontology. However, Jan Shipps, emphasizes how the very experience of emigrating to the Great Basin marked the entry into Eliaden illo tempore:

61 Ibid. 40.
The real extent of the Exodus-like character of the Saints journey over the Mississippi river is only fully disclosed when it is remembered that an icebridge over the Mississippi river facilitated the Mormon departure from Nauvoo... The fact that many Saints walked across the river without getting their feet wet is enough to serve as a means of separating the Mormon trek from all other pioneer companies who left for the west.  

Shipps is traditional in her use of Eliadan archetypes to explain Mormon history. I think these archetypes lead her to exaggerate the differences between the Mormon religious consciousness before the arrival of the Saints to the great Basin in 1847 and then again with the Manifesto ending polygamy in 1890. She says that between 1847 and 1890 Mormons experienced the Sacred *in illo tempore*, as they “worshipped” through the acts of worship-through-colonization they called *Building the Kingdom*. However, I think Arrington gets the closest to plausible historical reality when he writes that “The building of the Kingdom was partly a process of turning disasters into windfalls, and partly a matter of hewing to the goals of the early church”; that is, it was partly spurred on by such external influences as the arid climate and the volatile, ever-expanding U.S. economy that lent practicality to cooperation, as well a set of theological principles appearing to lend eternal relevance to Smith’s old Law of Consecration.

Brigham Young said and did a lot of things in his life, but only once did he deliver a “revelation” perceived by his church as canonical enough to include in the *Doctrines and Covenants*: D&C 136. This text, dated January 14, 1847 set a

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precedent for the continuation of Mormon communalism and the principles of Consecration and Stewardship. Jan Shipp’s describes this as a passage that took Mormonism from the fringes of Christian restorationism, to a full-blown reliving of biblical Hebrew experience “in illo tempore.” The refuge Saints are identified in this revelation as “The Camp of Israel.” D&C 136 instructs the Saints that they must, like the Hebrew tribes of old, move in companies “organized with captains of hundreds, captains of fifties, and captains of tens.” (D&C 136:3) As in the texts of Exodus, the D&C speaker identifies himself as “the Lord your God, even the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.” (D&C 136:21) The next verse supports Shipps position the most, “I am he who led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; and my arm is stretched out in the last days, to save my people Israel.” (D&C 136:22) The connection between Hebraic Israel and Latter-day Israel is explicit.

However, historian of consecration (or a Mormon yearning for Zion) will note how this text does more to connect the Mormon emigrants with the newer (or rather, more recently “restored”) principles of the gospel, those dealing with Zion and the Law of Consecration. The migrant companies must form “a covenant and promise to keep all the commandments and statutes of the Lord our God.” (D&C 136:2) There is no verse stating “you must observe the law of consecration,” but the implicit connection to D&C 42 is unmistakable. The company covenant to observe the Law generally apparently puts an obligation on “each company to bear an equal proportion, according to the dividend of their property, in taking the poor, the widows, the fatherless and the families of those who have gone into the army, that the
cries of the widow and the fatherless come not up into the ears of the Lord against this people.” (D&C 136:8) The end effect of this system parallels D&C 42 style consecration by placing the obligation of caring for the LDS poor upon the LDS corporate body itself. This connection is enforced by the many references to “Zion” apparently meaning Jackson, Missouri in the text. The speaker promises “Zion shall be redeemed in mine own due time,” but before this can happen “my people must be tried in all things, they must be prepared to receive the glory that I have for them, even the glory of Zion; and he that will not bear my chastisement is not worthy of my kingdom.” (D&C 136: 18, 31)

The history of the Brigham Young presidency and of his attempts to get the Saints to live the Law of Consecration as he understood and articulated it, are well documented in other sources. (Building the City of God, and Great Basin Kingdom remain the authoritative texts). From their arrival into the Great Basin in the 1840s, Mormon bishops continued to exert their temporal responsibilities, becoming “watermasters, fence supervisors, and bridge builders” for their pioneer communities. Indeed, Saints settled as wards lead by a bishop, and each settlement or ward contained a tithing office, often called a bishop’s storehouse. As one authority writes, “as late as the 1880s, a family could obtain land free in some areas by applying to the bishop and working on the cooperative irrigation canal. Moreover, as in the Mormon “exodus,” the central church continued the function of

65 Ibid., 51
67 Ibid. 60
coordinating welfare for all its people. Tithing to the central church continued, (as it has to this day) and was the source of food for many hundreds of saints.\textsuperscript{68}

The Law of Consecration was not forgotten either, although Mormons contest whether or not it was revived. In 1856 Brigham Young, in the wake of a national agricultural crises, led a movement asking church members to sign deeds of Consecration, giving over all of their property to the church.\textsuperscript{69} According to one account, “forty percent of the heads of Utah’s seven-thousand families signed formal deeds of transfer, including personal and real property.”\textsuperscript{70} For reasons that are not entirely clear, the church never made any move to act on these apparently real conveyances of property. However, this movement must testify to the continuing legitimacy with which contemporary Mormons thought of the society described by Joseph Smith in D&C 42 and 51.

In the last years of the 1860s, with the arrival of the railroad, Brigham Young led another movement to, in his words “save our means for other purposes than to enrich outsiders.”\textsuperscript{71} This movement’s most major accomplishment was the establishment of Zion’s Cooperative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI) in 1868. The cooperative purchased local (Mormon) produce and goods and redistributed them to eligible members by selling them at a “fair” price to members at local cooperative branch-stores. The cooperative, at its origins, only allowed fully tithed members (or

\textsuperscript{68} Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. \textit{BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Cooperation Among the Mormons}. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 57

\textsuperscript{69} see Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. \textit{BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Cooperation Among the Mormons}. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 63-78

\textsuperscript{70} Mangum, Garth. \textit{The Mormons' War on Poverty: a History of LDS Welfare, 1830-1990}. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993. 69

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
those who paid back skipped tithes) to join.\textsuperscript{72} The decision-making process of the institution was not cooperative, in the usual sense, because as in a modern corporation, members voted according to the number of shares they had acquired. Its intent was to keep Mormon money for the profit of the Mormon people, and to shelter the Mormon consumer from the forces of supply and demand. I find it significant that many church leaders endorsed the cooperative movement as “a step towards the Law of Consecration and Stewardship revealed by Joseph Smith.”\textsuperscript{73} ZCMI survived well into the twentieth century, though its operation became gradually more privatized and dissociated with Church direction. However, Brigham Young himself maintained that “this cooperative movement is only a stepping stone to what is called the Order of Enoch, but which is in reality the order of Heaven.”\textsuperscript{74}

The Law of Consecration was at the fore of Brigham Young’s “United Order” movement in the 1870s. Within the terminology of the time, when the D&C was read without introduction-headings or manuals, there would be no meaningful distinction between the terms Law of Consecration and the United Order (of Enoch). Brigham Young used the celestial brand name to rally his people into an integrated system of welfare distribution. Arrington et al. point to a variety of causes—the increased political persecution of Mormons by the federal government exemplified by Young’s 1871 arrest for cohabitation, the sudden number of bills in Congress being raised to allow further persecutions, as well as the “disruption of Mormon village life... caused

\textsuperscript{72} Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. \textit{BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Cooperation Among the Mormons}. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.136
by the mining industry” and the railroad—as the circumstantial motivations to the “why then?” question.\(^7^5\)

As with Joseph Smith, it is not my place in this paper to question Brigham Young’s psyche. However, the flourishing of experimental communities, called United Orders, can be traced back to sermon delivered by Brigham Young in at a church conference in 1872 that described his ideal vision of celestial society on earth. In this sermon, Young identified the Order of Enoch as “the only plan on the face of the earth for the people to gain real liberty” in any real political and philosophic sense and to “be exalted in the kingdom of heaven.” \(^7^6\)

Suppose we should examine a city in a stake of Zion conducted after the order of Enoch! … How should we live? I will tell you how I would arrange for a little family, say about a thousand persons. I would build houses expressly for their convenience in cooking, washing and every department of their domestic arrangements. Instead of having every woman getting up in the morning and fussing around a cookstove or over the fire, cooking a little food for two or three or half a dozen persons, or a dozen, as the case may be, she would have nothing to do but to go to her work. Let me have my arrangement here, a hall in which I can seat five hundred persons to eat; and I have my cooking apparatus—ranges and ovens—all prepared. And suppose we had a hall a hundred feet long with our cooking room attached to this hall; and there is a person at the farther end of the table and he should telegraph that he wanted a warm beefsteak; and this is conveyed to him by a little railway, perhaps under the table, and he or she may take her beefsteak. “What do you want to take with it?” “A cup of tea, a cup of coffee, a cup of milk, piece of toast,” or something or other, no matter what they call for, it is conveyed to them and they take it, and we can seat five hundred at once, and serve them

\(^{75}\) Ibid. 137
\(^{76}\) “The Order of Enoch,” Discourse by President Brigham Young, delivered at the 42nd Semi-Annual Conference, Salt Lake City, October 9, 1872. Text at http://scriptures.byu.edu/.
all in a very few minutes. And when they have all eaten, the dishes are piled together, slipped under the table, and run back to the ones who wash them. We could have a few Chinamen to do that if we did not want to do it ourselves. Under such a system the women could go to work making their bonnets, hats, and clothing, or in the factories. I have not time to map it out before you as I wish to…. What will we do through the day? Each one go to his work. Here are the herdsmen—here are those who look after the sheep—here are those who make the butter and the cheese, all at their work by themselves. Some for the canyon, perhaps, or for the plow or harvest, no difference what, each and every class is organized, and all labor and perform their part.

Will we have the cows in the city? No. Will we have the pig pens in the city? No. Will we have any of our outhouses in the city? No. We will have our railways to convey the food to the pig pens, and somebody to take care of them. A society like this would never have to buy anything; they would make and raise all they would eat, drink and wear, and always have something to sell and bring money, to help to increase their comfort and independence. … Half the labor necessary to make a people moderately comfortable now, would make them independently rich under such a system. Now we toil and work and labor, and some of us are so anxious that we are sure to start after a load of wood on Saturday so as to occupy Sunday in getting home. This would be stopped in our community, and when Sunday morning came every child would be required to go to the school room, and parents to go to meeting or Sunday school;77

Young’s descriptions of a modern society patterned after the celestial laws go far beyond the principles articulated in Smith’s original revelations, marked for example by the influence industrialization has had upon his imagination. Nothing in Smith’s revolutions speak to complicated division of labor or mechanics. Mormons may debate whether Brigham Young was here conveying eternal truths as a prophet, or conveying his opinions as a human being. (This is not like his sermons imploring

77 Ibid.
Mormons to acknowledge that the Heavenly Father, Elohim, etc. is the same being that was Adam in the Garden of Eden. Later LDS presidents have officially declared that the “Adam-God” doctrine is a heresy worthy of excommunication. In all my research, I have not encountered any official church statement on how Saints should read and understand Young’s sermons on economics. However, what matters to me in this paper is that Brigham Young appears to have had a clear vision of how to apply the Law of Consecration to industrial modernity, and that this vision bears the unmistakable influence of Mormon religious ontology.

Moreover, thousands of Saints all over Mormon Country responded to this vision by joining the program and entering into United Order communities. These communities varied in their economic structures and institutions, but all major type, write Arrington et al. “contemplated the pooling together of labor as well as capital and would realize the economies theoretically possible by pooling or joint use of capital and by the division or classification of labor.”78 The first United Order was founded in Saint George, UT in 1874, under the personal direction of Brigham Young himself (though he did not himself join this or any other United Orders.) This communal model was closer to the ZCMI institution and the other cooperatives founded half a decade previous, however it sought to protect labor, as well as commerce, from the fluctuations of the non-Mormon American (and local) market. Members consecrated productive property, but retained personal possessions and money. Communal dividends were given based on the size of the original “consecration.” There was no equivalent to D&C 42 style stewardship granting.

78 Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Cooperation Among the Mormons. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 146
Rather, the “St. George type United Order” pursued “equality” through a tiered system of wages standardized “fairly” among (but not between) labor classes.

The “Brigham City” model was even closer to the cooperative model—communities that adopted this type did not ask members to consecrate property or labor, but rather the people would use communal funds to operate a number of manufacturing or agricultural enterprises. These types of orders tended to arise in rural, but established communities where the earlier formed cooperatives were stills operating successfully. Arrington et al. write that “in purely economic terms these may have been the most successful types of United Order.”

The Salt Lake City United Order sets the precedent for the third type of model. Arrington et al. note that this model “was similar in many respects to the twentieth-century welfare plan. A single cooperative enterprise was organized in each ward… chosen for its possible contribution to territorial self-sufficiency.” This tended to be taken up in urban localities.

The most famous United Order, Orderville, Utah, is said to have been the most communalistic. Their way of life most closely approximated the ideals of Brigham Young, although one may note that their communalism extended into aspects of property that Joseph Smith thought were inviolate. Settlers consecrated all of their property to the order. They did not receive back stewardships, because all enterprise and property was operated communally, and no one received wages because the community was expected to provide for everyone’s needs. Members shared equally of their common products, and rose, prayed and ate at the signal of the

79 Ibid. 205, 268-9
community bugler. This type tended to prop up in other more recently founded settlements in the arid lands of southern Utah. “In fact,” write Arrington, et al. “the most idealistic of the United Order towns were those founded during the peak period of Order activity.”

Most of the United Orders founded in the 1870s went bankrupt their first year. However, of those that did survive through the tumultuous first years of adjustment, many continued into the 1880s. As with the first United Order, Arrington et al. maintain that these successful United Orders only disintegrated as a result of the anti-polygamy raids conducted by the federal government during this decade. Most of the surviving United Orders were led by prominent members of their community, who were polygamous. Most orders lost both their leaders and their assets due to federal confiscation. A few of the cooperative orders survived into the twentieth-century as private corporations.

Consecration Today

Both Building the City of God and Great Basin Kingdom spend the great bulk of their pages on the attempts by Brigham Young to get saints ready for Consecration and Stewardship again. A meaningful difference may be observed in their interpretation of the cessation of communalist experimentation. At the conclusion of his monumental economic history Great Basin Kingdom, Leonard Arrington asserts that: “the remarkable thing about Mormon economic policy over the century is not that it varied to meet changing circumstances and conditions, which it did, but that it
held fast as long as it did to the original program.” In this context, “the original program” he describes ends in 1890, when the LDS church renounced polygamy, disbanded its official political party, and ceased its attempts to organize the faithful into a (church) centralized communalist economy; thus assuring Mormon conformity to mainstream domestic institutions, to participate in mainstream American politics and to earn their fortunes within the mainstream American economy.

In the later, collaborative work entitled Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation Among The Mormons, Arrington has moved his focus from the programs themselves to the two moral principles described in the book’s subtitle. Here, Arrington et al. connect the “Law of Consecration and Stewardship initiated by the Prophet himself in Ohio and Missouri in 1831,” and the “cooperative movements [launched under the direction of Brigham Young] in 1869 and its transformation into the United Order of the 1870s,” with the “Welfare Plan, begun in 1836 as a response to the Great Depression,” within an unbroken chain of Mormon communalism and cooperation.81 In each case, they write, “the move towards cooperation was called forth by a set of circumstances similar in the anxieties they raised to those which prompted Joseph Smith to question existing religions in his own day. The desire of church leaders to maintain authority over the people—to preserve unity and harmony in the face of disintegrating forces from the outside—promoted renewed efforts to make the people one in all things.”82

Perhaps. Arrington’s status as a Mormon historian is great, but not without controversy (among his fellow LDS). He was a Harvard graduate whose

81 Ibid. 360
82 Ibid. 36, 76
“naturalistic” approach to Mormon history is said to have paved the way for tolerant, secular studies of Mormonism and Mormon history. The two books mentioned above remain the most authoritative accounts of nineteenth-century Mormon economic history. However, I question whether or not Arrington’s method has here caused him to overlook and thus misrepresent the interaction between the circumstantial problems in these cases and the particular “moves” or solutions employed. Despite the monumental accomplishments Arrington made for the field of Mormon history, his purposive disregard of the presence and/or influence of supernatural datum (even upon individual actors) may actually render his history less-than-accurate. To put my argument in Arrington’s words: The desire of church leaders to make the people one in all things may come—not from a repeating pattern of circumstances, but from ideals grounded in some of the most essential elements of Mormon religious ontology.

Moreover, because Church leaders have inherited ideals not of their own making, it may be more likely that the disintegrating forces from outside only threaten church leader’s authority indirectly, by highlighting the discontinuities between ontologically determined religious ideals and current church practice. One must acknowledge that the basic principles of Mormon ontology themselves lend to an aversion of all things without order and integration. Poverty among Mormons is a “disintegrating force” according to the subjective standards of Mormon ontology. So too, both the church’s motivation to “take care of their own,” and the particular methods and institutions by which they accomplish this goal have always born the stamp of their ontology.
The difference between the two texts is significant. *Great Basin Kingdom* ends mourning the cessation of a continuous program traced back to Joseph Smith. Arrington makes blunt statements like “The temporal Kingdom for all practical purposes was slain [in 1890] – slain by the dragon of Edmunds-Tucker.”

(Edmunds-Tucker is the Supreme Court decision that declared that the first amendment does not render anti-polygamy legislation unconstitutional). Indeed, Arrington in these text appears to approach fundamentalist rhetoric when he refers to 1890 as “the great capitulation.” However, in *Building the Kingdom of God*, Arrington (now writing with other scholars) appears to celebrate the continuation of certain Mormon *principles* down through the present day.

I point out this difference, because the next chapter looks at Mormons who are not concerned—precisely—with finding out the historical reality of what Mormons did with their money in the 1800s, but rather with defining the term *Law of Consecration and Stewardship* as a Celestial Law so they may know what they must do to become exalted. The principles of Mormon ontology appear to dictate that a Celestial Law is an “eternal verity” of the monophysical universe. However, as the next chapter shows, defining the essence of the Law of C&S is a *system or program* leads to a very different evaluation of current church practices than emerges when one defines it as a *set of principles*.

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84 Ibid. 409
“What is the Law of Consecration?”

The LDS no longer preaches the doctrine of “gathering” its members to Jackson County, Missouri, or Utah, or even the Americas in general. As an international organization, the LDS priesthood longer provides members with homesteads or occupational stewardships or the chance to live under a socioeconomic alternative to capitalism. The course of history has seen the LDS church shed many of its distinctive institutional functions. However, it continues to define its practices in terms of the “restored gospel” Smith bequeathed his followers—the (“restored”) Bible including the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price, the vast majority of the Doctrines and Covenants; the eternal verities contained in that canon; and the historical precedent of the LDS forefathers.

As was discussed in Chapter I, the gospel, in Mormon theological-history, was given to Adam who lived by it and experienced salvation in this life. It reveals God’s plan of salvation, and eternal principles by which human beings may advance on a hierarchy of being. Most importantly, the gospel preaches that the highest level of
individual advancement can only be achieved in the supportive atmosphere of a “Celestial,” or “Zion” society. The Law of Consecration and Stewardship is one such eternal verity: it is an inextricable axiom of Mormon ontology that is at the same time marked by an immense variability of definition. This law is defined as a “Celestial Law,” meaning that fulfilling it is necessary to receive the highest form of salvation, to enter the celestial kingdom, and merit the opportunity to “share the work of the Father,” which marks the goal of anyone who has internalized the fundamental messages of Smiths ontology. Even today, LDS Saints are required “to accept the Law of Consecration as contained in the Doctrine and Covenants” as the last of seven covenants ritually accepted in order to receive their Temple Ordinances.

Given the primacy of the Law of Consecration within Mormon discourse, it seems remarkable that there could be so much disagreement about its definition. This Chapter will survey Mormon thought about the Law of Consecration and determine what, if any, firm conclusions can be reached about it.

Mormons generally believe that the Law of Consecration—whatever it was—was practiced by Enoch and his City of Zion in ancient times, and it was by this and other practices that they were made “celestial” and “gathered up to God.” According the scripture unearthed by Joseph Smith and considered sacred by all his followers, Enoch’s people were called “ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.” (Moses 7:18) The succinct words of this short verse convey the ultimate paradox that leads to the debate over the Law of Consecration.: being “of one heart and mind” refers to the internal, mental-spiritual dispositions of individuals, while the observed lack of poverty
provides an external, birds-eye-view of Zion society, presenting an imperative to
establish and take part in a distinct social institution. Mormons debate whether the
communal criterion (abolition of poverty) or the individual criterion (being
transformed into righteous, possibly celestial beings) is the first step towards
achieving a Zion society.

As was discussed in Chapter II, the Law of Consecration is associated with a
“divinely authorized or sanctioned”\(^1\) socio-politico-economic system which was
instituted under the direction of Joseph Smith in Kirtland, Ohio as early as 1831, and
then again (in a slightly modified form) in Jackson County, Missouri (which
Mormons refer to as “the Holy Lands” or “Zion.”) The socioeconomic system
described in D&C 42 was introduced for the building of the New Zion (in Jackson
County, Missouri) and Mormons are generally in agreement that the revelation of this
system sheds light on the Law of Consecration. But they don’t agree on how much
light. The system—or at least the settlements in Ohio and Missouri where church
leaders tried their best to implement it in the 1830s—fell apart. Any discussion of the
long-term operation of this system is necessarily hypothetical. Then there are
scriptures like D&C 105, which appears to rescind the D&C 42 system, and D&C
119, which appears to replace it.

Attempts to give precise definition to the Law of Consecration are
complicated by three mutually-interactive tensions within Mormonism: 1) the
substance of the gospel as eternal, ahistoric truth, 2) the reception of gospel as events
in history, and 3) the understanding that gospel principles (or systems) can vary in

\(^1\) Davies, J Kenneth. “Mormonism and the Socio-Economic Order.” International Journal of Economics
13, no. 3 (1986): 64-79. 66
their applicability to any given place or time depending on the state of human nature at that place and time. These tensions result in an observable continuum of opinion among Mormons about the meaning of the Law of Consecration and the immediate, as well as long-term, implications of their solemn ritual-covenants to observe it.

The Mormon party-line emphasizes this third element by describing how the Law of Consecration has “degrees of fullness.” I have not been able to figure out precisely where and when this doctrine came about, however it is clearly expressed in the current heading to D&C 119 which explains that “because of the failure on the part of many to live [“the law of consecration and stewardship of property”], the Lord withdrew it for a time, and gave instead the law of tithing to the whole church.”

This position holds that in any true Zion society, where the full Law—the Celestial Law—is fulfilled, all individuals will be united in “heart and mind,” there will be “no poor among them,” and something like the D&C 42 system will function instead of our society’s institutions of property and money.” However, the party line refuses to specify whether the two Enochic criterion will make the D&C 42 system possible or if living the D&C 42 system is itself what makes both individual and society “Zionlike.” Instead it focuses on those aspects of consecration which remain relevant today, namely the individual’s willingness to dedicate his or her surplus “time, energy and talents” to church institutions.

Two very different objections to the party line may be made from within the position of Mormon ontology, both of which insist that the first element discussed

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above—the substance of celestial laws as eternal verities akin to natural law—means that to discuss the Law of Consecration in terms of “degrees of fullness” is an ontological absurdity. Since the Law of Consecration is a Celestial Law, they say, it must have one precise definition. The school of thought I have identified as “proactive communalists” emphasizes the social criterion (abolition of poverty), and says that the only way for a people/society to become a “Zion” is for them to practice the D&C 42 system. They define the Celestial Law of Consecration as the D&C 42 system, and assert that until Mormons live under that system, they cannot fulfill their temple covenants to Consecrate, and thus probably cannot obtain celestial exaltation.

The other school of thought I have identified as “pro-capitalist.” These writers focus on the individual criterion (becoming righteous) and say that full social unity and the abolition of property can only be achieved as the sum-result of universal righteousness among society’s members. They say that the Law of Consecration is not a social system, but a set of principles that individuals must cultivate and internalize in order to achieve the righteousness needed to be a citizen in Zion.

**Blogging Consecration**

To observe this debate among ordinary Mormons, one need only go on the World Wide Web. Searching for “Law of Consecration” on Google brought me to a post on an unofficial LDS blog *By Common Consent, A Mormon Blog* dated April 2009, and titled “Consecration: it’s not just a spiritual law,” by a blogger identified as
Natalie B.³ Natalie B. began her post with a quotation from Mormon Scripture: “But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin” (D&C 49:20).” Building off this quote, she opens her post with the statement that “Mormons, it seems to me, are uneasy with the Law of Consecration. Although it is something that we covenant to live it is also something we struggle to understand.” ⁴

Natalie B.’s position is that Mormons are uneasy because they are afraid to admit to themselves the full implications of their covenant. “When Mormons discuss the law of consecration,” she writes, “within minutes we are typically discussing how the law of consecration is not just a temporal law but a spiritual one.” Natalie B. agrees that the law of consecration is spiritual in the sense that real financial sacrifices are required to thrive. But I am concerned that we shift our attention to the spiritual side of the law because this helps us rationalize our real failures to grapple with the temporal side of this commandment.⁵

Pious rhetoric, she claims, has encouraged Mormons simply to “substitute spiritual things that we can do for people (pray for them, use our talents) for the financial sacrifices the law demands,” she writes. Saints are “side-stepping a commandment that asks for real financial sacrifice before we can reap the spiritual benefits that can only come when we temporally care for each other.”

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⁴ In identifying this paradox, Natalie B. comes very close to the point of view of this paper. However, this paper argues that—even if some Mormon individuals are at this moment sitting about worrying about the Law of Consecration—the real “uneasiness” is not to be found in the hearts of individual Mormons, but in the ambiguities inherent to Mormon ontology itself.
“The message of scriptures is far stronger than simply let us give of our time, talents and be generous,” writes Natalie. “Over and over, the scriptures tell us that it is not right before God to have poor among us.” The law of consecration, Natalie writes, encompasses a “commandment to voluntarily redistribute our wealth” through the church but that because Saints find the law “both difficult and challenging to many of our treasured ideologies, we tend to rationalize it away and to ignore it” through a rhetoric of “spiritual consecration.”

Natalie B. makes clear in her post that she is no communist. “Capitalism has proved our historically most successful system for lifting people out of poverty,” she writes as a disclaimer. However, “a belief in capitalism should not be incompatible with figuring out how we can use both capitalism and the wealth it produces to aid those who are poor.” Living under capitalism is not sufficient for Saints to fulfill their obligations to consecrate. “Given that we are in a financial crisis in which many people are suffering,” along with (what she treats as) the self-evident fact that “substituting spiritual activities for real financial sacrifice is not, on its own, fulfilling the law we covenanted to keep,” Natalie B. concludes her post with an innocent request for readers to submit “Your ideas on how we can get serious about living the law of consecration today – and on what that law means if it is more than a spiritual law – are most welcome.”

By May 10th, the post had generated 87 responses, and was closed for comments.6 The administrator’s decision to close the post may have to do with the increasingly antagonistic tone of the comments, as recurrent posters soon resorted to

leftist and rightist truisms, insult calling, and questioning attacks on each other’s religiosity. Three distinct positions may be observed in these posts:

The majority of the responses are from proactive-communalists, who take the position that Natalie B. is correct to claim that C&S entails a centrally-managed redistribution of wealth by the LDS church, and a few follow through by suggesting steps and policies the Church should take. Many concur with one poster’s suggestion that there should be a “major increase in fast offerings for those who presently have a surplus, where ‘surplus’ means ‘more than what one needs for reasonable sustenance.’” Many of these posters critique the present Mormon “work ethic,” such as SteveP. who attacks another poster’s recourse to the “give a man a fish…” approach to (avoiding) charity: “I don’t think it’s ours to argue about who deserves help and who doesn’t… We are responsible to help as we can. People sit around clutching their fishes while people starve because they only want to teach people how to fish. We fish hoarders are in deep trouble.” The next poster, Ardis Parshall, develops SteveP’s point further to argue, along with Natalie B. that true consecration may only through the central mechanism of the Church. “Pride takes a lot of forms,” Ardis writes. “One is the notion that I can somehow give a gift and yet remain in control of what I have given.” However, Ardis continues, “The Lord calls us to leave our gifts at the altar… Stop worrying about the recipient’s motivations or his work ethic. That is the bishop’s call, not mine, not yours.” Another poster, Carrie, writes how, at a recent Sunday school lesson on C&S, most people made comments to the

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7 Ibid. Response 2.
8 Ibid. Response 10.
9 Ibid. Response 11.
effect of “Well, it’s a great law, but we can’t live it until we’re a celestial people.”

Like Natalie B. Carrie expresses her “disappointment” upon hearing these comments:

“I’m thinking that we will never become a celestial people until we are living it?”

Carrie’s comment effectively conveys what is at stake to Mormons in the consecration debate: the possibility that the church and its members are not doing what they are supposed to. This idea is countered by others who say that fundamental changes in human nature—“becoming a celestial people”—must necessarily precede the “reimplementation” of the Law of Consecration in its “full” form. These posters come the closest to parroting the official LDS party-line on Consecration. Thus, Starfoxy, writes that the Church is currently preaching the importance of specific, preparatory “pre-consecration lifestyle changes that lots of us still need to make. Get out of debt, save money, and live within your means.” Starfoxy implies that this preparatory work is appropriate for its time: “If I haven’t developed the skill or temperament to live simply, produce more than I use, and be happy with what I have, than I am in no place to start living the law of consecration.” Starfoxy and other, like-minded posters assert that Natalie B. has correctly defined the Law of Consecration, but missed the fact that God does not currently require Saints to observe the “fullness” of the law as he did in the early days of the church, because he (temporarily) rescinded the institutional requirements of the Law of Consecration, having replaced it with the Law of Tithing, the Welfare Program, and other contemporary church systems for financial redistribution. This point of view accords with the current heading to D&C 119.

10 Ibid. Response 15.
11 Ibid. Response 16.
The third group of opinions in the responses to Natalie B.’s posts, like the first group, object to the party-liners’ talk of degrees of fullness. They are pro-capitalists, characterized by the point of view that the Law of Consecration is not a system, but a set of principles. They emphasize how the Church currently fulfills the obligations placed up it by those principles through its system of Tithing and Welfare programs. However, most of the obligations implied by Consecration, they say, are not upon the international LDS church as an institution, but rather apply to individuals and their level of “righteousness.” This opinion does not begin to emerge until the 18th blog post, when Bluedevil writes: “Just a reminder people. Those of us that have covenanted to live the Law of Consecration can and should be doing that. // Living in the United Order is a totally different thing and we are not currently commanded or asked to live that. // There is a biiiiiiig difference between the two.” ¹² This post sets into motion the biggest controversy in the responses: whether or not the economic redistributive system Natalie B. identifies as the substance of the law of consecration may be, in fact, an element of a separate way of life, termed the United Order.

In one of the final posted responses, JWL writes that:

The United Order is a subset of the Law of Consecration which contemplates an extended society and economy operating under the Law of Consecration. Today we are not asked to use the United Order as the method of practicing the Law of Consecration, but every endowed member has agreed to live the Law of Consecration here and now. ¹³

Thus, the problem, JWL writes, is how to consecrate “means as well as heart and mind… in our contemporary world where we do not have the benefit of living in a

¹² Ibid. Response 18
¹³ Ibid. Response 85
society and economy organized under the United Order?” JWL does not propose to offer a developed solution, but he suggests that “Particularly enlightening for us today are the efforts to implement a United Order form of consecration in 1870s Utah, where the economy was on its way to becoming the industrialized corporate economy we live in today.” Another poster who initially posted scathing rebuttals of this position comes around to admitting that after doing “some digging of my own as well…I have to agree it does appear that the separation of the law of consecration from the united order is a sort of post hoc explanation for our not living the order now.”

Posters of all three categories defend their position with confident references to official LDS scripture, publications, etc. Moreover, people from all sides accuse the others of having never received their temple-endowments (since then they would know that/how Mormons still covenant themselves to the C&S). These charged, emotional reactions indicate the severity with which temple-endowed Mormons react to the charge that they are failing to live the Law of Consecration. Natalie B., interestingly enough, never connected her question to the doctrines regarding celestial law, or the possibility that temple-endowed Mormons living today will be precluded from Godhood. Rather, these issues emerged out of what appears to have been a genuine disagreement among web-surfing Mormons about what the Law of Consecration actually is.

14 Ibid. Response 85
15 Ibid. Response 57
The Consecration Debate

The blog post as a whole parallels a much larger debate among 20th and 21st century LDS historians/economists/theologians who also attempted to define the Law of Consecration and its significance to the modern Mormon. It is remarkable that virtually none of these bloggers quotes from this literature, (mainly limiting their citations to scripture and official church publications). I argue that this problem stems from a confusion that is inherent in Mormon ontology itself.

The following sections map out the basics of the Consecration debate among Mormon writers of the twentieth-century with a focus on three central issues: 1) Are the Mormon people living the Law of Consecration today? 2) What does the ideal celestial society look like? 3) How can Saints move from present day reality to the ideal, celestial way of living?

The three main thinkers in the proactivist-communalist camp are: Hugh Nibley, Dean May and Ogden Kraut. Hugh Nibley is probably the most famous 20th

16 The one exception to this rule is quoted in full below:
Steve L Says: April 27, 2009 at 9:22 pm Hi, I’m curious if any of the history wonks out there have some words of wisdom on the claim that “the Lord withdrew [the Law of Consecration] for a time” (as quoted by #31 in heading to D&C 119). Where did this claim come from? It is extremely common in the church and yet seems to contradict any open teaching on consecration I’ve read, i.e. it always seems to refer to some unspecified place where the Lord told the saints they no longer needed to live it (it sure isn’t in section 119), not to mention a contradiction with the teachings of Brigham Young on the subject (which I’m mainly familiar with from Nibley’s “Approaching Zion” and “Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints”). Where does this originate?
Note: No one on the post answered Steve’s question, although others posted to say they were wondering the same thing. Indeed, after posing this question to local Missionaries, and making repeated postings on “askamormon.com” I have yet to find any clear answer in any official Church publications about the “official reasoning” behind the notion. Both the Missionaries and the people at askamormon.com told me the question was out of their league. As I noted above, this heading was not included in editions to the D&C prior to 1981. However, I have obtained no explanation of the context in which it was written.
century Mormon thinker—at least among the Mormons themselves. Writers from all three of the schools of thought discussed in this essay quote extensively from Nibley’s confessional writings on the Law of Consecration, but he is squarely in the proactive-communalist school. When pro-capitalists and party-liners quote him on the Law of Consecration, they do so incorrectly.

Dean May was a Mormon historian who co-authored *Building the City of God* and a few shorter pieces on Mormon history cited in Chapter II. This chapter draws on his non-historical, confessional article published in 1990 in the unofficial LDS magazine *Sunstone* titled “The Economics of Zion.” This article was written in direct response to the two books representing the “pro-capitalist” school of Mormon intellectuals that will be discussed later. In this article, May does the distinctly religious or confessional task of proposing to fellow Mormons a particular ontological definition of the Law of Consecration—and asserts that Mormons must work to end capitalism, not live within it.

Ogden Kraut was once an active member of the LDS priesthood (he had the respected position of being an “area 70” within the Church hierarchy during the 1940s). However, he was excommunicated in 1972 for “teaching and promoting the living of plural marriage in our day.” Quite a few Mormon fundamentalist websites have popped up dedicated to Kraut and his confessional writings. While Kraut was a dissident Mormon, he did not join any polygamist sects and counted himself as part of the LDS people. Kraut’s writings are used in this essay to represent the extreme

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17 Nibley was the only author from this chapter who was cited by the posters responding to Natalie B, and the only Mormon writer with whom the missionaries I met were familiar.
proactive communalism that may result from a scripture-based “independent” Mormonism that is willing to question the leadership in Salt Lake.

The two texts that represent the pro-capitalist position most succinctly are *Joseph Smith’s United Order: a Non-Communalistic Interpretation* by Kent Huff (1988) and *Joseph Smith & the Law of Consecration* by Lyndon Cook (1991). Huff and Cook are not as famous among Mormons as the three proactive-communalists. However, their assertion that the Law of Consecration, as a Celestial Law, is merely a set of principles presents a well-documented navigation of Mormon ontology. Their primary arguments with the proactive-communalists are over subjective matters of historiography and scriptural exegesis.

The third school of thought discussed in this paper is substantiated by various statements by church leaders and official LDS publications. These ideas will be elaborated with recourse to an unofficial publication, the book *Enoch’s Zion, Joseph’s Zion, and Future Zion* (2003) by Jerald Johansen, by personal communications with Mr. Johansen, and by various statements made by the Middletown Elders (local missionaries) all of which are effectively consistent with the current party line on church activity and consecration. Generally, these thinkers share the ideal of the proactive communalists, but by discussing the Law’s “rescinded fullness” their overall message is much closer to that of the pro-capitalists.

**Issue 1: Are the Mormon people living the Law of Consecration today?**
A. The Proactivist-Communalist Answer: No. To observe this Law, Mormons must leave behind the non-Mormon socioeconomic institutions “of Babylon” (capitalism, specifically) and live under the socioeconomic institutions “of Zion.”

Proactive-communalists maintain that the Law of Consecration and Stewardship as nothing less than the well defined, socioeconomic system “of Zion” the establishment of which has been required of all consecrated peoples in possession of the gospel and the priesthood. Because that system is a “celestial law,” they argue, it logically ensues that Enoch’s City of Zion followed the D&C 42 system, and that Saints must return to living that system in order to fulfill the official church mission of building the New Zion.

The doctrinal status of the Law of Consecration as a Celestial Law or eternal verity means, for these thinkers, that it cannot have “degrees of fullness” nor ever be rescinded. “You must not consider [the law of consecration] as a mere heritage,” writes Hugh Nibley, “something for the ancients, nothing but a venerable tradition; it is given explicitly to ‘those living right now and right here’ (Cf. Deuteronomy 5:3).” It was always to apply to the present, and it will never be rescinded. It is a standing law.”

Evoking the narrative-theology implied by the book of Moses, Nibley declares that consecration is the “one law given to the human race, the law by which the sons and daughters of God are supposed to live in this world…. All are capable of observing it, otherwise it would not be required of them.” Every other gospel

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19 Ibid. 422
principle, Nibley asserts, are but component-segments of entire Zion society that the Law of Consecration represents.

“The essence of the law of consecration,” writes Nibley, “is charity, without which, as Paul and Moroni tell us, all other laws and observances become null and void.”20 However, Nibley believes that the Law itself is more than its essence. Nibley quotes Brigham Young as teaching that:

No revelation that was ever given is more easy of comprehension than that on the law of consecration. The Lord spoke to Joseph, instructing him to counsel the people to consecrate their possessions, and deed them over to the Church in a covenant that cannot be broken.21

The purpose of consecration Nibley notes, is to implement a social order—“to save his people as a people, to unite them and make them of one heart and one mind independent of any power on earth.”22 “The express purpose of the law of consecration,” he writes, “is the building up of Zion; it is God’s plan, and his alone for doing that. We do not wait until Zion is here to observe it, rather it is the means of bringing us nearer to Zion.”23

Kraut—who quotes Nibley heavily to support his views—makes a similar point. Indeed, Kraut writes, “The Prophet [Joseph Smith] implies that if this people do not establish a Zion, then God will find someone else who will. The work of gathering Israel must continue, in spite of the efforts of those who try to keep them

22 ibid. 468
23 Nibley, Hugh. “Breakthroughs I would Like to See.” In Approaching Zion. Salt Lake City Utah ;Provo Utah: Deseret Book Co. Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989. 390
scattered around the world, or mixed with those who are not Israel.” For Kraut, the Church’s legitimacy is to be measured by its adherence to consecration.

Kraut’s open condemnation of current LDs practice may sound like it comes from his position as a “fundamentalist” or “independent.” However, Hugh Nibley expresses the same idea when he says that the Law of Consecration is “Our Glory, Our Condemnation.” Nibley describes his position as an extension of basic Mormon ontology: “If there is anything that sets the gospel of Jesus Christ apart from all other religions of the world,” Hugh Nibley once said in reference to LDS religion, “it’s the literal, matter-of-fact view it takes of realities in this life and beyond this life, the view resting on the experience of very real and vivid contacts between men upon earth and beings from the higher spheres.” This illustrates the extent to which the consecration debate is an ontological debate.

Nibley’s warning about the misuse of Mormon historiography to distract from the eternal truths characterizes a position taken by most of the thinkers in this section. Nibley, Kraut and May all place the “history” of the Joseph Smith period against the backdrop of a much larger history of Zion and Zion-building derived from LDS scriptures. “Adam was to prepare the earth to resume its paradisiacal glory as soon as possible,” Nibley declared. Indeed, “gifts…brought down from another world by special messengers sent to instruct Adam in things he could never have discovered or made for himself, worlds without end…these gifts enable Adam to return to his

26 Ibid. 11

122
former blessedness in the shortest possible time.” 27 In fact, “Adam was well on his way back,” 28 when Satan appeared and tried to entice him with the institutions of money and property. As it happened, “Adam turns him down, refusing to sell for money the gifts God has given him, for they are sacred.” 29

What makes a Zion? Enoch is treated by Mormons as the best teacher to this point. Kraut writes that “because of the conditions that are upon us, it is necessary to understand the principles and doctrines that brought Enoch and his city into the presence of God.” 30 The primary condition, according to Kraut, was that “both temporal and spiritual things were brought in common harmony. This has often been called ‘the Order of Enoch’, or the ‘United Order,’ as was so designated by the Lord Himself.” 31 Kraut supports this idea by quoting a commandment from D&C 104, where the leaders of Kirtland are told that their United Order should function separately from the Order in Zion (Jackson County, MI) The verse is: “After you are organized, you shall be called a United Order of the Stake of Zion, the City of Shinehah <Kirtland>. And your brethren, after they are organized, shall be called the United Order of the City of Zion.” (D&C 104:48) 32 As with Enoch’s city, Kraut writes, it remains that “organization,” creating spiritual and temporal unity, makes a place worthy of the appellation “Stake of Zion.” Kraut does not differentiate between

28 Ibid. 127
29 Ibid. 127
31 Ibid.
32 Cf. Ibid.
the Law of Consecration and United Order—for him the Law of Consecration entails joining a United Order

Kraut writes of the D&C 42 system, and the Order that God asked the Saints to implement in Kirtland: “The Saints understood that this was not meant to be an experiment or a temporary program. It was the law of heaven! This was a commandment from God—an eternal law!” Kraut’s description of United Order is not radically different from Arrington’s, or even Cook and Huff’s. “Thus, in the principles of the United Order, everyone would share real estate, facilities, and capital gain; but each would be appointed stewards over certain projects. Also, each person would have his own clothes, toothbrushes, and personal items. ‘Everything’ was not shared in common.”

“Every step in the direction of increasing one’s personal holdings is a step away from Zion,” writes Nibley, summarizing the basic principles of a speech by Brigham Young. Nibley draws heavily on Book of Mormon stories and speeches by Brigham Young to discuss the “work ethic” of Zion in contrast to the work ethic of “capitalism” or “Babylon.” “In Zion you labor, to be sure, but not for money, and not for yourself, which is the exact opposite of our present version of the work ethic,” writes Nibley, quoting Brigham Young as having said that “The non-producer must live on the products of those who labor. There is no other way.”

33 Ibid. 58
34 Ibid. 59
36 Ibid.
The proactive-communalists condemn current church practices for failing to get Saints living as they aught to, and, in the case of the temple-endowed, as they have personally covenanted to do. They circumvent the failure of the attempts to live D&C 42 in Ohio and Missouri by emphasizing the role non-Mormon oppression played in crushing those experiments. Over and over they emphasize that tithing is not Consecration.

How do these writers condemn LDS church practices when D&C 105, as discussed in Chapter II appears to rescind the D&C 42 system of living, and D&C 119 appears to introduce tithing as the replacement for that system?

Nibley declares “that ‘God revoked that ‘united order’ by which alone Zion could exist on the earth (D&C 104:52-3),” because “in their desire for wealth, the Saints had tried to embrace both Babylon and Zion by smooth doubletalk.”37 Latter-day Saints, Nibley writes, have found it necessary to “circumvent the inconvenient barriers of scripture and conscience by the use of the tried and true art of rhetoric”38 by introducing the false term respectability. Through words like respectability, freedom, and work-ethic, contemporary Mormons are able to bridge the concepts of goodness and richness “which is nothing less then Babylon masquerading as Zion.”39 To add color to this point Nibley continues with a comparative example “Any social

38 An “art” which, as Nibley reminds his reader is described in the Book of Moses as among the arts taught Cain by Satan.
worker or observer knows that no one can be more straitlaced, puritanical and exquisitely respectable than a harlot."

Kraut’s explanation for D&C 105 and the apparent revocation of the Law of Consecration is done by recourse to historical context. In Nauvoo, he claims, Joseph Smith was “under stress” from the constant “disorganization and conflict among the Saints, apostates and half-apostates.” Smith also knew, Kraut writes, (giving no proof, and thus apparently relying on the assumption that Smith was privy to knowledge of future events), that the Saints would be at Nauvoo “only temporarily” and it was only in this context that he declared “Nauvoo would not be able to live the United Order.” It is worth noting that Kraut actively separates his discussion of the cessation of the Law of Consecration from his discussion of D&C 119 and the introduction of tithing. He jumps immediately from the decision to forgo Consecration in Nauvoo to January 1847, when Brigham Young received the revelation that commanded Saints migrating to Utah to form companies based on the eternal commandments of united order. (D&C 136) He describes how “many years later, some of the apostles and Saints thought that the Law of United Order”—again, note that Kraut does not distinguish C&S from UO—“had been suspended, replaced or revoked.” Kraut describes one occasion when Apostle Orson Pratt gave a sermon in which he expressed the opinion that God had revoked the commandments for United Order. “When he finished his sermon, Brigham Young arose and said

40 Ibid. 47
42 Ibid.
43 Cf. Ibid. 84
44 Ibid.
[before the congregation] that ‘the Lord Almighty had not the least objection in
the world to our entering the order of Enoch. I will not stand between the people
and all harm in this.’”\textsuperscript{45} Kraut’s conclusion: “The Lord never prevented any man
from living the Gospel when he was worthy.”\textsuperscript{46}

If Consecration was not really revoked, as the proactive-communalists say it
was not, than how can they explain the current introduction to D&C 119, which
codifies the idea, apparent already in the text itself, that tithing is introduced as a
“temporary replacement” for the Law of Consecration, that is D&C 42? May
emphasizes the label “lesser law” is meant to be more pejorative than most Saints
realize. “In effect, the Lord is saying: "since you are unwilling to consecrate
generously, I am going to tell you what a surplus is, get it?“\textsuperscript{47} May contrasts tithing
with Consecration, saying it lacks the "flexibility and voluntary willingness to place
no limit what belongs to the Lord [which] is the essence of consecration.”\textsuperscript{48} Without
these elements, tithing cannot be a sufficient means for achieving the full law of
consecration.

In practice, writes Nibley, tithing is no different than “giving through a
foundation,” and Mormons must recognize that this kind of giving is “not a device to
implement the law of consecration, but a contrivance to evade it.”\textsuperscript{49} Although Nibley
recognizes tithing as “an eternal law,” (an ontological complication left unconsidered
in May’s essay) he emphasizes that it is “a very different thing” from the Law of

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. 84. From Journal of Discourses 16:8, bold text applied by Kraut
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid,
\textsuperscript{47} May, Dean L. “The Eonmics of Zion.” Sunstone 14, no. 4 (August 1990): 20
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid. 20
\textsuperscript{49} Nibley, Hugh. “Law of Consecration.” In Approaching Zion. Salt Lake City Utah ;Provo Utah: Deseret
Book Co. Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989. 447
Consecration and “once we start making concessions and explanations the whole thing becomes a farce.”\textsuperscript{50} Nibley takes pains to distinguish Consecration and Tithing as separate, complementary laws of the celestial kingdom. “The law of consecration demands everything that you have, but at the same time it fills your every physical need; and it is from that sustaining income, from that substance, that you pay your tithes.”\textsuperscript{51} Under the law of consecration, Nibley writes, tithing becomes a “genuine sacrifice,” however, without that law, it becomes nothing but “a mere token offering skimmed off from a net increase that you will never miss.”\textsuperscript{52}

Kraut affirms and expands Nibley’s position. He shows that in the Book of Abraham and at multiple times in the Book of Mormon and in the D&C, tithing and consecration existed side by side.\textsuperscript{53} Responding directly to the LDS party-line that tithing is a “lesser law”, Kraut says flat out that “there is no scripture to substantiate that theory.”\textsuperscript{54} He also denounces those who say that tithing is a preparatory law, a “stepping stone to lead people into the United Order and consecration.” This position is an apostasy for Kraut, because, if the law was preporational “then the Lord would have given tithing to Mormons before He gave them consecration.”\textsuperscript{55}

People living in a Family-type United Order, exemplified by Orderville, UT in the 1870s and 1880s—which Kraut defines as the “true United Order”—are absolved of their individual obligation to tithe so long as the Bishop pays “to Church

\textsuperscript{50} Nibley, Hugh. ““How Firm a Foundation and What Makes it So.”” In Approaching Zion. Salt Lake City Utah ;Provo Utah: Deseret Book Co. Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989. 169
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. 447
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. 145
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
headquarters a tithe from the surplus of the Order.” Kraut argues, “tithing is a fair law only when it is drawn proportionately from the surplus of the order or community.” He supports this point by quoting from Building the City of God to show that this was how Orderville, UT paid its tithes in Brigham Young’s day. Kraut interprets D&C 42:34-6, the verses containing Jesus’ instructions for handling the “residue…kept in my storehouse,” as delineating the appropriate use of tithes: “The Lord indicates that tithing provides for the poor, Church headquarters, the publication of books and pamphlets, the missionary system, temples, church buildings and other things which He may designate.” (Kraut 148, 151) However, the primary justification he gives is the necessity of fulfilling one’s dual obligations to God and to neighbor: “United Order is for the benefit of the Saints, but the tithing belongs to the Lord.” “The income tax is an unconstitutional and abominable program, because it is enforced on people”—unlike a United Order founded on its members free decision to live the law of consecration—“but, nevertheless, it is more fair and just than our individual tithing system” because, “at least in some instances, the wealth taken from the rich is given to the poor.” By contrast, “the tithing system that we have in the Church today could never open any windows of heaven, the reason being that the rich man who pays tithing might be living next door to a poor widow who is also paying tithing—and that inequality is an evil which the Lord cannot condone.” “Under our

56 Ibid. 150
57 Ibid. 151
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid. 148, 151
60 Ibid. 152
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid. 149
present system of economics and tithing, all men are unequal in their possessions, and therefore unapproved by the Lord. Only when men live the United Order and then collectively pay a tithe of their surplus to the Lord, can the windows of heaven be opened.” (Kraut 149)

B. The Pro-Capitalist Answer: Yes, Mormons can live the Law of Consecration today because the Law is a variable set of principles, most of which hinge on individual “righteousness.”

The proponents of this position feel the same ontological need as the proactive-communalists to define the eternal substance of the Law of Consecration in its status as a Celestial Law. They too find the idea of “degrees of fullness” to be doctrinally repugnant. However, while the proactive communalists rely primarily on scriptural authority, the pro-capitalists focus much more on the history of the church under Joseph Smith. Huff and Cook barely mention Enoch’s Zion or the Nephites after Christ, instead they use historical context to argue that most of the communitarian practices of the LDS church did not reflect eternal, or celestial, practices fundamental to the true nature of the Law of Consecration.

Just as Nibley approaches the rhetoric of the fundamentalist Mormon literalists in discussing Consecration, Huff and Cook espouse positions that have become the party-line for the less radical and more ecumenically inclined Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), renamed in 2003 as the Community of Christ.

63 This is not a typo. While the Salt Lake based LDS church uses the phrase “Latter-day” for its name, the RLDS church always insisted on using the term “Latter Day,” before changing their name to the Community of Christ in 2003.
teaching consecration at RLDS Sunday school, entitled *Stewardship Concepts and Practices* (1992).\(^6^4\) Obliquely referring to LDS historians like Dean May and Hugh Nibley, this RLDS document condemns “present day members of Restoration churches\(^6^5\) [who] often assume that Joseph Smith attempted a reactivation” of the New Testament practice of “all things in common.”\(^6^6\) This is precisely what Kraut, Nibley and May argue, that the D&C 42 economic system of Consecration and Stewardship sheds light on the true economic arrangements of the early Christian church, as described in *Acts*.

Defining Consecration and Stewardship as a set of principles, Mormon pro-capitalists do not retrospectively impose the D&C 42 system onto their visions of consecration past and future. Instead they emphasize that “there is no predetermined detailed formula for righteous economic and social action defined in the scriptures or elsewhere in the gospel.”\(^6^7\) There is no divinely revealed economic system. Rather, “Gospel principles tell us in general terms how we should do our duty and relate to others, but do not provide the details.”\(^6^8\)

Huff defines *consecration* as an action motivated by principles—such as making “tithes and other ordinary offerings to the church to support its building and


\(^6^5\) “Restoration Churches” is kind of codeword LDS and RLDS confessional writers use to refer to each other and other Mormon groups outside their church. Disciplined scholars should use the phrase “Mormon” in place of this term, but official church publications will avoid any broad usage of the term, which reflects their claim that the only true Mormons are those who belong to their church. Indeed, the LDS church in recent years made an abortive legal effort to register the word *Mormon* as a trademark.


\(^6^8\) Ibid.
other programs and to help the poor.”\textsuperscript{69} Indeed, Huff finds a way of converting the social imperative set in place by Enoch’s precedent for abolishing poverty into a matter of individual ethics, thereby removing the need to engage in any talk about obligations being placed upon the church itself. The Law of Consecration, in its status as a celestial law, he asserts, is no more than a personal decision to “contribute to the poor as much as you feel you can or ought, according to your circumstances.”\textsuperscript{70} It means awakening your conscience to the basic principle that, “to the extent that the poor are in need and to the extent you have some to spare, a gift is appropriate.”\textsuperscript{71} Reflecting the ontological nature of his discussion, he goes on to assert, “This is the same law that was given to the Nephites in the Book of Mormon, and the same law and standard that applies today.”\textsuperscript{72}

According to Huff, “the scriptures often use the word "consecrate" as the equivalent of the word "dedicate."\textsuperscript{73} So too, Smith and “the early saints simply lumped all donations together and called them consecrations.”\textsuperscript{74} Consecration is not a precise celestial verb, and Mormon theologians must recognize that “in the parlance of the time, the words ‘contribute,’ ‘donate,’ and ‘consecrate,’ …were all used interchangeably and had the same meaning.”\textsuperscript{75} Responding to the proactive-communalists, Huff writes, that in early Mormon literature, “the word ‘consecrate’

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid. 35  
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid. 341  
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. 342  
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. 332  
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid. 335  
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 337
did not imply a long term absorption of self and property into a centralized bureaucracy. It simply meant the spontaneous donation of means to a good cause.”

Huff cannot step so far out of Mormon doctrine as to deny the basic principle that the Earth is the Lord’s and “whatsoever man possesses in it, he holds as a stewardship merely.” However, he clarifies, “what does not necessarily follow is that a man's economic activities must be under the control of another man before he can be said to be in compliance with the stewardship idea.” “Being a steward in relationship to God,” Huff continues “is quite a different thing from being required to be an essentially propertyless employee of a mortal.” To demonstrate this point he refers to “The United States Constitution and related and supporting scriptures such as D&C 134 [that] set definite limits to the reach of men's righteous authority over one another, whether in or out of the church.” One of the most basic proofs Huff and other pro-capitalists utilize is the fact that the attempt to live D&C 42 in Thompson, Ohio ended when U.S. courts declared deeds of Consecration to be unconstitutional.

Like Huff, Cook defines consecration generally as "the act of setting apart or devoting one's self and his possessions for sacred purposes. In this sense,” he continues, consecration "became a fundamental law of the Church in 1831 and was

76 Ibid.
77 Ibid. 35
78 Ibid
79 Joseph Smith presented revelation texts identifying the United States constitution as a sacred scripture inspired by Jesus: “I have suffered [‘the constitution of the people’] to be established… for the rights and protection of all flesh, according to just and holy principles; That every man may act in doctrine and principle pertaining to futurity, according to the moral agency which I have given unto him, that every man may be accountable for his own sins in the day of judgment.” (D&C 101:77-8)
The only things that were "initiated and rescinded were specific economic programs, outlined by the Mormon leader and his associates, intended to encourage contemporary Saints to fulfill their consecration responsibilities." Here, as in the rest of his book, Cook's word-choice is didactic- at most, Joseph Smith only "outlined" the principles for the Lord’s economic programs. According to Cook, the specific communitarian programs practiced by Mormons during Smith’s tenure as Prophet-President are human creations, attempts to cultivate abstract moral principles into the Mormon individual.

As with the proactive-communalists, the pro-capitalists find a way to support their position on the ontological definition of Consecration as a Celestial Law with recourse to the historic failure of the Saints in old Zion, Missouri to follow the D&C 42 lifestyle. In Cook’s theological-historiography it is not non-Mormon oppression, nor the apostasy of wealthy former Saints who reneged on their "former" consecrations (and the subsequent refusal of U.S. courts to recognize the Church's deeds of consecration) that cause the 1831 "version" of the Law of Consecration to "fail." The 1831 law of C&S failed, according to Cook, because it employed certain naive, socialistic elements that made the achievement of its essential principles impossible. First, it failed because its denial of the private ownership of property a) went against the moral and legal principals of property rights in American society, thus dooming it to judicial discrimination and b) "threatened the incentive motives" of members who were thereby prompted to "withhold possessions from consecration or

82 Ibid. 4
pursue private investment outside the system."  

Cook notes that most entering members were by and large poor before they entered the consecration system. Redistribution of property thus resulted in a leveling down rather than a leveling up of the stewards' living standard.... Clearly, the stewards consumed more than they produced, and new technologies to enhance productivity were either too expensive or totally unavailable on the frontier."  

Cook describes Smith as inventing a new system for implementing the Law of Consecration and Stewardship. Cook looks at the fact, established by Arrington et al. that the text of D&C 42 was changed over time. In the original version (what Cook calls the “1931 version of consecration and stewardship” stewards had no titled property after the act of consecration. However, under the new “1833 law of consecration and stewardship,” stewardship was now established by the conferral of a legal deed with full property rights. Thus, in Cook's history, "although the 1833 law of consecration was not rigidly enforced in Missouri during the mid-1830s, there were members who willing[sic] came forward and consecrated their property to the bishop.”  

The ever evolving law of consecration (described by Cook) took on a fundamentally different form it had ceased to be a law and became a standard. The nature of stewardships was changed accordingly. "Because it was understood that all of a member's personal possessions constituted a stewardship, there was no longer any need for the bishop to explicitly designate or 'appoints' stewardships, except in

83 Ibid. 21
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid. 36
the case of the poor, who might need to draw from the surplus. Section 42 was modified to reflect the change in the [bishop's] responsibilities."^{86}

Then, Cook says, D&C 105 came and rescinded D&C 42. Cook quotes the verse "Let those commandments which I have given concerning Zion [Jackson County] and her law not be executed and fulfilled after her redemption," to which he attaches the following interpretation: "(i.e. not until the Saints were again in possession of their Jackson County lands)."^{87} Ignoring the parts about the pre-Millennial process of perfection, Cook states categorically that D&C 42 will not be implemented until after the Second-Coming and the LDS reclamation of Jackson County as their homeland. Fundamental changes in human nature brought on by the messianic age will have to occur before that kind of communitarian lifestyle can be possible. Even then, D&C 42 will come primarily to fulfill a prophecy, not because it is the only way of living the celestial law of consecration.

Huff goes much further than Cook by denying that D&C 42 or any other part of the gospel should be labeled as “communalist” outright. “I examined the history of the Joseph Smith period in detail. In that search, instead of finding evidence of communalistic doctrines being taught and practiced, I found evidence of very practical, non-doctrinaire, and individualistic solutions to the problems of the day.”^{88} It is true, he notes, “A portion of section 42 discusses care of the poor and in doing so employs the term ‘consecration.'” However, he continues, “the "consecration" aspect is only about ten percent of the entire revelation and can hardly

^{86} Ibid.
^{87} Ibid
be said to be more important than all the other important doctrines defined and stressed there. "Beyond providing appropriate meeting places, and similar facilities so that the church may perform its ecclesiastical functions adequately, the only required economic function, whether centralized or not, is care of the poor." Individual systems or programs of “economic organization” may be said to conform to the Law of The Church when they are able to achieve these “goals” appropriately.

This understanding of Consecration as a set of principles leads the pro-capitalists to a very positive evaluation of tithing as an improved, and perfected system for implementing the Law of Consecration and Stewardship. Indeed, they emphasize how tithing, as a morph of Consecration, is actually superior to the D&C 42 morph for its ability to conform to the “celestial” principles in a way that accounts for “human nature” in our time.

“Tithing is a "higher" law because under it the members are asked to make a long term commitment of support and to have faith in their leaders concerning projects about which the members know very little. Under the pre-1838 program or so-called "consecration," only one-time or short term commitments had to be made, and only to specific visible projects.” (Huff 314) According to Huff, the “headnotes” for D&C 119 did not use the terminology “of displacing a "higher" law with a "lesser" until the 1981 edition, and that these terms were absent from the 1968 edition and all the editions previous. “This addition,” he notes, “appears to be counter to the facts of the Joseph Smith era.”

89 Ibid. 325.
90 Ibid. 352
91 Ibid 316
impossibility of any regular collection of tithing. Where there were no banks, no storehouses, etc., the only choice is to ask for things as they are needed, and call the contribution tithing. There was only the general rule of gathering to Zion and caring for the poor. All the rest was left to on-the-spot creativity.”⁹² Moreover, Huff argues that “Joseph did not feel the saints had given him the power and choice of directing funds as he saw fit. He felt he could only request that they change the designated object or beneficiary of their gifts.”⁹³

In contrast to the earlier "consecration," the later "tithing" system was on the way to becoming a regularized and dependable system which produced more revenue and could support a more extensive program. There was a clarification of the law rather than a replacement. Organization, procedure, and expectations all changed to higher levels. These structural changes made it a more consistent and evenly applied system.⁹⁴

Thus, Huff sees tithing as a step towards, and not away from Zion.

So does Cook, who emphasizes that time and again Joseph Smith, "explained that the Saints must be willing to consecrate and sacrifice all--possessions, reputation, and time--in order to secure their exultation."⁹⁵ Tithing as a temple covenant, Cook writes, "was the last, and perhaps most lofty, phase of consecration outlined by Joseph Smith. It elevated the concept of consecration from the agrarianism and legalism of Western Missouri to the free-agency and deep spiritual commitment of a mature, endowed steward."⁹⁶ There is an implicit denunciation of Brigham Young’s

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⁹² Ibid. 299.
⁹³ Ibid. 303
⁹⁴ Ibid. 313-14
⁹⁶ Ibid. 92.
experiments in United Order, which were characterized by precisely the same "agrarianism and legalism" that Cook would have us believe Smith evolved beyond. Cook's conclusion: "It is obvious that Joseph Smith came to realize that freedom of economic activity was vital to the success of any consecration program, and that, regardless of the nature of the covenants of consecration, agency in determining how that consecration was accomplished had to be an individual matter."97

Huff quotes numerous references to “consecration” in primary source documents over two years after the introduction of D&C 119 in 1838. Indeed, “Joseph [Smith] and the members of the high council seem to have assumed that the people in the Nauvoo and Montrose area were already living the law of consecration.”98 These sources, according to Huff, prove that “sections 119 and 120 had only the effect of modifying the existing procedure for collecting and administering tithing …not a major doctrinal change, but merely a practical adjustment to conditions of the moment.”99

Cook states categorically that "'tithing' as it is used in section 119, did not simply connote ten-percent, but a contribution or an offering of one's possessions or time." For a while 2% tithing was requested, he notes.100 Indeed, Cook never once refers to tithing as a "lesser law" (unlike so many of the other scholars who write about United Order). "There is no evidence," he states bluntly, "that Mormon leaders or members perceived the economic plan in section 119 to be an 'inferior law' of

97 Ibid. 93
99 Ibid.
Church economics."¹⁰¹ For Cook, tithing did not replace the law of consecration, rather it was the "new law of consecration...[quoting the revelation text] 'to be a standing law unto the Church forever.'"¹⁰²

Cook's anecdotes lend force to his overall theory of United Order and the Law of Consecration. Cook tells his readers how, "The Prophet Joseph Smith, writing from his cell in Liberty Jail" in 1838 "encouraged the exiled Saints to love and assist each other and to be willing to make sacrifices to the less fortunate. This he explained, was the true law of consecration."¹⁰³ (My emphasis) Cook than quotes Smith, "For a man to consecrate...is nothing more nor less than to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the widow and the fatherless, the sick and the afflicted, and do all he can to administer to their relief in their afflictions, and for him and his house to serve the Lord."¹⁰⁴ Huff picks up on this point as well, writing that

Joseph's statement that ‘in Nauvoo everyone is steward over his own’ is interesting because he is equating the situation in Nauvoo with the correct operation of stewardship principles. And in Nauvoo, from all the other records and comments available to us, everyone purchased and used his own land in the normal way. None of these forms and procedures came from any unique church plan such as a ‘united order.’¹⁰⁵

Cook describes how, in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith attempted to supplement the general call for voluntary (tithed) contributions, in order to achieve "a more perfect program
of sacrifice and consecration.” This was brought about by the creation of a "sacred ritual" conducted in temples that placed individual Saints

under explicit covenants of obedience... known as the ancient order of the priesthood, or temple endowment. As it related to economics, an impressive, explicit covenant of consecration became an integral part of the higher order of the Melchizedek Priesthood. For those chosen to participate in this sacred ceremony, the covenant of consecration became a vital part of the process by which they could become joint heirs with Christ in receiving the powers, knowledge, and glory of the Father.106

Nibley, Kraut and May all see the covenant as an imperative to get out of capitalism and get into the Law of Consecration. Pro-capitalists like Cook, however, see tithing as a reformed system of consecration, made more perfect by the imperatives placed on the temple-endowed Mormon to “gift” generously.

C. The LDS Party-Line Answer: Tithing and Individual generosity is all that is required to be worthy of the Celestial Kingdom at this point in human history. The full Law of Consecration is something like the propertyless centralized, redistributive system socioeconomic system of D&C 42 but it is not currently required.

The following is the definition of Consecration given by the LDS Guide To Scriptures, an official publication included in LDS Bibles:

Consecrate, Law of Consecration. See also Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven; United Order: “To dedicate, to make holy, or to become righteous. The law of consecration is a divine principle whereby men and women voluntarily dedicate their time, talents, and material wealth to the establishment and building up of God’s kingdom.”107

This principles-based definition is close to pro-capitalists position. Really, all it does is reiterate the terms of the ritual-temple covenant. However, by situating these individualistic principles in terms of their participation in a social-goal—achieving a Zion society on earth and ushering in the millennium—this approach is set apart from the position of the overt pro-capitalists. “The law of consecration,” writes Jerald Johansen, “was a step in preparing for Zion, for it is upon this law that the City of Zion was to be built.”108 The employment of the past tense is significant. Interpreting D&C 85, Johansen concludes: “If people do not want to follow God’s laws—to be part of the law of consecration in 1832, they were to be excommunicated and have their names, including their ‘geneologies,’ taken from the records of the church.”109 This implies that the law of consecration in 1832 was a contextualized implementation of gospel principles and is no longer in full effect. When Johansen discusses D&C 42, he deemphasizes the materialistic aspects of the system. Referring to Joseph Smith as “An Enoch For Our Day,” Johansen says that D&C 42 contained “the basic fundamental principles of the city of Enoch or the New Jerusalem… Particularly these fundamental principles were given: ‘thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support.”110 While he does give a short description of the D&C 42 system, Johansen focuses primarily on what “fundamental principles” and “aspects of a Zion people” can be gleaned from the D&C 42 generally. The clear implication is that the system of property

109 Ibid. 104
110 Ibid. 37
redistribution itself is not among these universal elements. He pays more attention to the line “that my covenant people may be gathered in one that day when I shall come to my temple” (D&C 42:36) than the verses explaining the functioning aspects of the D&C 42 system of Consecration and Stewardship. This verse teaches, according to Johansen that “one of the major purposes for gathering the people”—and thus for the D&C 42 system—is to build a temple. One of the major purposes of the temple is for the salvation of the people.”111 This comment distinguishes the Mormon partyline as neither fully pro-capitalist or communalist—it is more pro-temple, and pro-the-current-work-of-the-official-church-today than it is any kind of ontological speculation about the celestial economy.

Johansen titles his commentary on D&C 119 “The Law of Tithing, a Preparatory Law for the Establishment of Zion.” This summarizes the idea that the law of tithing was a temporary replacement for the D&C 42, Zionic way of life, as clarified subsequent revelations. He quotes Apostle Orsen F. Whitney who stated, in 1931, “selfishness within, and persecution from without, prevented a perfect achievement [of practicing the law of consecration]. So the Lord withdrew the Law of Consecration, and gave to his people a lesser law, one easier to live, but pointing forward, like the other, to something grand and glorious in the future.”112 Like the pro-capitalists, the party-line blames the Saints for the failure of consecration—but it retains doctrinal ambiguity over whether this failure was inevitable and it does not draw any of the universal principles about human nature and economics which the pro-capitalists do. Like the proactive-communalists, it emphasizes the inferiority of

111 Ibid. 38  
112 Ibid. 195,
tithing, “looking forward” to a time when the higher law will be practiced. However, the party line never approaches the pessimism communicated by the communalists in asserting that current church practices are literally at odds with the economic gospel of eternities, or that it is impossible to build up Zion under the practice of tithing. Johanson finds a very unique way to contextualize this temporary recall of divine law: asserting that it was given for the purpose of enabling the disorganized Saints at Far West, Missouri to quickly “build a temple there.”113 As long as Mormons have access to temples and to the endowment ceremonies conducted within, the LDS party line asserts that Zion is being built up. Johansen does eventually cite Approaching Zion, where “Brother Nibley asserts his view that Saints will see Zion114 when they stop seeking after Babylon.”115 However, Johansen does not engage Nibley’s point of view other than to say that it is a “sober warning.”116

Like the pro-capitalists, the LDS party-line maintains that the LDSs Saints may fulfill their covenants of consecration through their involvement in the church, at least to the extent God requires at this time. In his article “Consecrate Thy Performance,” Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, writes:

> We tend to think of consecration only as yielding up, when divinely directed, our material possessions. But ultimate consecration is the yielding up of oneself to God. Heart, soul, and mind were the encompassing words of Christ in describing the first commandment, which is constantly, not periodically, operative (see Matthew 22:37). If kept, then our performances will, in

113 Ibid. 196  
114 A more faithful summary of Nibley’s view would have inserted the word only between see and Zion.  
115 Ibid. 272  
116 Ibid. 272
turn, be fully consecrated for the lasting welfare of our souls (see 2 Nephi 32:9).”

Not only does this definition implicitly disassociate the Law of Consecration from D&C 42, but it goes as far as abstracting the concept down to the basic (single) principle of submitting to God’s will. At one point, Maxwell appears to be addressing the ideas of Nibley, May and other proactive communalists when he refers to the “conscientious among us” who, he says, “experience discontent because of progression mixed with procrastination.” When the Law of Consecration as a concept goes from being an “encouragement” to a “condemnation”—casting uncertainty on one’s eternal fate and, more importantly, the work of the LDS church—Maxwell believes that both the Law and the Lord are misrepresented. “In pondering and pursuing consecration, understandably we tremble inwardly at what may be required, he writes. “Yet the Lord has said consolingly, ‘My grace is sufficient for you’ (D&C 17:8).” Maxwell’s description of current church practice as “progression mixed with procrastination” combines elements both the pro-capitalist and the pro-active communalists would find objectionable; asserting that “progression” towards Zion continues in spite of the curses lad out by proactive communalists but by also challenging the complacent “procrastination” of the pro-capitalists.

The Mormon missionaries with whom I met as part of my research for this project, were incredulous when I told them of the LDS “historians” and “economists”

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I had been reading, who propose (along with Natalie B.) that the Mormons are currently failing to live the Law of Consecration in the correct manner commanded by God. “It sounds to me like these people are trying to second-guess the prophet,” Elder Johnson remarked, going on to say that such speculation was probably no different than “rejecting the prophet.” “That is how the apostasies always happen,” Johnson said, conveying a point of view that essentially summarizes the cyclical narrative history bequeathed by Smith’s “restoration” of the three Testaments.

“So, to quote Isaiah, ‘overly wise men’ become so egotistical that they put their own wisdom before the truth—but what is true is true. Historians are just historians, they practice the ‘wisdom of men,’ and must depend on less authoritative sources than revelation.” Since the president is the ultimate authority for revelation, for anyone to suggest that the Saints in 2009 need to form experimental communities, Elder Johnson declared, “is wicked because it undermines the established church.

When God commands it, I’ll do it, but when man commands it and says ‘let’s form a little community,’ then I am less likely to follow it. It is presumptuous for a historian or anyone no matter how many doctorate degrees they have to say…”

Here, Johnson trailed off for a while, as if in thought, before stating “Listen, if that was something we needed to do, God would reveal it to the Prophet.” Indeed, as his partner, Elder Braginton suddenly chimed in, “that stance seems really harsh to me, obviously everyone is imperfect and we’re not living the perfect law, but as long as people tithe, have faith, and repent, they are doing enough. Ya, we’re not living celestial laws because we’re not celestial yet, so the key message is repent and have faith in Christ.” Perhaps reflecting his point of view of as a young missionary, he
pointed out that “the church is growing fast, you cannot expect the church to ask new converts to live the law of consecration.”

Concluding a chapter on Enoch’s revelation, Johansen writes: “The gathering of ‘mine elect from the four quarters of the earth was (and continues to be) the converts who hear the gospel in many parts of the world and came to America to assist in the building of an Holy City.” However, Enoch’s Zion was greater than the Zion in Missouri. “As stakes of Zion are established, temples are being built to serve the Lord and to assist people to become a Zion people.” Now that the fifth definition of Zion has come to fore, and Saints understand that a *ward* anchored to a *temple* is all they need to “gather” and build up (a) Zion. “Zion has expanded to its meaning given to Enoch: ‘and the Lord called his people ZION, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them.’” Johanson, and the party-line he represents, look at Enoch and just tell the Saints to just keep on doing what they already are: “our desire ought to be to ‘dwell in righteousness’ and be of one heart and one mind and have no poor among us’ no matter where we are on this earth. We need to remember that the center of Zion is the temple; every home should be a preparatory experience for entering the House of the Lord.”

In a personal interview, Johansen insisted that Nibley’s condemnation of the Church for failing to live the Law of Consecration was merely wit and sarcasm.

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120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
When asked to define “the full law of consecration a celestial law,” Johansen avoided the question. Instead he responded by saying

there is a saying in the church ‘follow the prophet.’ The current leadership has more authority than previous prophets and even scripture itself. As far as I know, they did not reinstate the full Law of Consecration at the last Conference, so it is obviously not required right now for our salvation. You would understand this better if you were baptized and could experience the presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church.

**Issue 2: What does the Ideal Celestial Society look like?**

**A. The Proactive Communalists Answer: There is neither poverty nor property in Zion.**

Proactive communalists believe that the socioeconomic system of Zion is characterized by the abolition of private property (*consecration*) and redistribution of wealth as a temporary *stewardship* accorded to each family head based on their “just wants and needs,” as determined by the inspired guidance of bishops or priesthood-holders to the effect of abolishing poverty.

Dean May writes,

> Whether by genius or inspiration (his followers would stress the latter), Smith used scriptural precedents, his own teachings and historical experience to alter for his followers widely held American assumptions about freedom, individualism, the nature of authority, property rights, distinctions between the secular and the
religious, the obligations of the individual to society and the nature and role of the family in society.  

The ultimate lesson of Zion economics, May maintains, is that the “individual is important but finds his or her greatest fulfillment in learning to control selfish impulses so he or she might act in concert and harmony with others.”

“If I as an individual,” writes Nibley, “offer all I have to the bishop, and ask him to meet all my needs in return, he must consult a higher authority before he can accept; the plan is so designed that we must all be in it together.” By working intimately with each steward, and according to the Holy Spirit, the bishop is able to unite his ward spiritually and temporally, so that they may be called “of God.” May describes his own vision of how, under the law of consecration, a steward (“Brother Lee”) and bishop would meet and together to "try to differentiate between and evaluate the wants and the needs of the Lee family.” The Bishop would guide the steward in reevaluating his stewardship in terms of the community. “Does the community really need another saddle-making machine? Is there justification for the addition to the house? After the discussion Lee would be asked to consecrate voluntarily to the Lord's storehouse everything above his just needs and wants.”

May writes that this intimately regulated, but also consensual "system would tend to

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123 May, Dean L. “One Heart and Mind, Communal Life and Values among the Mormons.” In America's Communal Utopias, edited by Donald Pitzer, 135-158. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997 153
124 Ibid.
126 May, Dean L. “The Economics of Zion.” Sunstone 14, no. 4 (August 1990): 19
diminish extremes of wealth, but not redistribute to the point of absolute equality.”

He also notes that "The success of Consecration and Stewardship depended greatly upon freedom of entrepreneurial activity. Apparently, no one was looking over Brother Lee's shoulder throughout the year..." 

If this is the lifestyle implied by consecration, than it is obvious that Saints no longer practice the law. “Well here we have it,” writes Nibley: “the world we have made and are making is not the world God meant us to have, and the world he made for us in the beginning is the world we must have. With our present practical knowledge”—that is scripture, history, and the rest of the body of thought I have termed in this essay “Mormon ontology”—“we could devise a perfectly practical order of things in which there would be no need for doctors, lawyers, insurance men, dentists, auto mechanics, beauticians, generals, real estate men, prostitutes, garbage men, and used car salesmen.”

“Nature around us, such of it has remained, admonishes reality. Paradise is the proper environment of Zion.” These paradigms present a “clear-cut proposition that recent developments of world history, if nothing else, admonish us we can no longer refuse to ignore.”

B. The Pro- Capitalists Answer: Property is essential to Zion. The ideal is not so far from our reality.

127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
Mormon pro-capitalists maintain that C&S principles, if anything, actually support individual property rights. Historic episodes of communalism, they say must be understood in historical context and not extrapolated into precise indications of the cosmic verities.

In his introduction, Cook states categorically that "the Mormon practice of consecration during Joseph Smith's lifetime was a clear response to the economic needs of a rapidly growing church and its poor members, as well as an attempt to conform to the economic ideal of having 'all things in common' mentioned in the New Testament."\textsuperscript{132}In this statement, Cook denigrates the particular systems instituted by Joseph Smith as arising only out of historical context and the unrestored Gospel of the corrupted, incomplete "gentile" (non-Mormon) New Testament.

As he discusses the history of these practices, Cook avoids presenting any of the experiments as purely communitarian. "The 1831 economic system of the Mormons," he writes "was actually a hybrid combining individualism and collectivism; it contained elements of communitarianism as well as capitalism."\textsuperscript{133}

However, Cook makes a perceivable effort to distance what he sees as the essential principles of C&S from these 19th century counterparts, mostly by playing up the uniquely capitalist elements of the D&C 42 "1831 system." By Cook's telling, the 1831 system "encouraged many features of individualism and personal economic initiative" and therefore embodied many "capitalist" elements.\textsuperscript{134} The nuanced conception of stewardship "clearly distinguished the Mormon law of

\textsuperscript{132}Cook, Lyndon W. Joseph Smith & the Law of Consecration. Keepsake Paperbacks, 1991. 4
\textsuperscript{133}Ibid. 4
\textsuperscript{134}Ibid. 8
consecration...from other communitarian systems," including, he points out, Sidney Rigdon's "The Family." Stewardship, by Cook's description, 1) "placed responsibility for action in the hands of the steward, and was likely intended to encourage initiative," 2) there would be no undisciplined garment sharing, 3) community dwellings were unacceptable, 4) "there was to be a 'yearly' accounting between bishop and the steward, 5) annual consecration of all surplus back to bishop. All of these facts conform to Arrington’s (and May’s) history.

However, Cook evaluates all of these facts very differently from Arrington by arguing that the D&C 42 system was more “capitalist” than communalist in spirit. Cook admits that the "Yearly consecration of surplus profits naturally threatened the profit motive," but proceeds to argue that there was a system of "incentives" in place that kept the system within the spirit of capitalism. Despite the fact, undisputed by Cook, that the bishop had the final say in the (re)distribution of consecrated wealth/property, there was a clear standard for consensus. "The fact that the stewards could negotiate with the bishop over what was necessary for his 'support' and 'comfort' was to provide sufficient incentive...to eradicate existing poverty, but raise the living standard across the board, thus providing the incentives for surplus production."

Huff, however, is outspoken in his denial that that early “Mormon communalism” ever really existed. “Mormon economic cooperation in the Joseph Smith period is all directly associated with the actual migration operations of the saints.” However, “There never was any general involvement of a large number of

135 Ibid. 10-11
saints in a structured communalistic society. The concept of individual ownership and management of property was given full sway for all church members, modified only by the practical needs of the gathering process.” (Huff 5) “Except for really unusual cases, there was to be no communalistic merging of properties or debts, even for the important function of missionary work.”

Thus, Huff reads D&C 42 as establishing that:

The normal mode of economic interaction between the saints is buying and selling, not gifts or "consecrations." Verse 54 states that "Thou shalt not take thy brother's garment; thou shalt pay for that which thou shalt receive of thy brother." This verse makes it clear that normal business rules are to govern transactions between saints.(Huff 351-2) This is a far cry from the point of view shared by Nibley, May, and Kraut, that monetary transactions are part of the socioeconomic plan of Satan.

The pro-capitalists maintain that abolishment of private property will not occur before the return of Christ, if ever. “Every era has its own social, technological, economic and political setting,” Huff writes, and that the church program will vary accordingly. The shape of future programs will depend on the future needs and environment.” However, Huff denies that the millennial programs will be centrally planned. A utopia in the spirit of Smith’s restored gospel, he says, would, in fact, function like a perfect capitalist market:

In it each person would know and understand all the facts and circumstances of the time and situation, would be motivated by the same righteous goals, and thus would tend to reach similar conclusions about the

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137 Ibid. 366
proper course to take in the future. Only minimal coordination, "a word to the wise," would be necessary. this equal understanding and spontaneous cooperation would make possible the fully enlightened unity that is expected of celestial beings. (Huff 366)

C. The LDS Party-Line Answer: The ideal remains D&C 42, but this ideal is not to be confused with Communism or Socialism.

In terms of the full Law of Consecration or United Order, Elder Romney writes, “To enter the United Order, when it was being tried, one consecrated all his possessions to the Church by a "covenant and a deed which" could not "be broken." (D&C 42:30.) That is, he completely divested himself of all of his property by conveying it to the Church.”138 This account of “full consecration” is no different, ultimately, from the ideals espoused by the proactive communalists.

According to the LDS party-line, C&S was an economic system with communalist elements that will be practiced again. Elder Romney of the Quorum of Twelve is quoted by Arrington et al. and Dean May to support their ideas that Saints should expect (or try to) live communally now. However, Romney’s speech “Socialism and the United Order Compared,” contained in the LDS Conference Report of April 1966 and reproduced to this day on the LDS website, definitely expresses ideas that might be considered typical of the LDS party line on consecration. Romney writes, “The United Order, the Lord's program for eliminating the inequalities among men, is based upon the underlying concept that the earth and

all things therein belong to the Lord and that men hold earthly possessions as stewards accountable to God.”

By contrast,

I have yet to see or hear of its [Socialism] freeing the hearts of men of selfishness and greed or of its bringing peace, plenty, or freedom. These things it will never bring, nor will it do away with idleness and promote "industry, thrift and self-respect," for it is founded, in theory and in practice, on force, the principle of the evil one.”

Twentieth-Century Church leaders like Marion Romney argued that capitalism was a lesser evil than Communism. On many blog debates among Mormons about taxes, redistribution, and the nature of “United Order” and/or the “Law of Consecration” the United States Constitution is evoked as a sacred proof-text to throw against proactive-communalists. There are a few times in the D&C where God speaks of his role in designing the Constitution: “And that law of the land which is constitutional, supporting that principle of freedom in maintaining rights and privileges, belongs to all mankind, and is justifiable before me.” (D&C 98:5) The sacredness of the Constitution is employed to defend the institutions of private-property and profit. Elder Romney expressed these views simply enough:

in preparation for the restoration of the gospel, he[God] himself established the Constitution of the United States, and he has plainly told us why he established it. I hope I can get this point over to you. He said he established the Constitution to preserve to men their free agency, because the whole gospel of Jesus Christ presupposes man's untrammeled exercise of free agency... The Lord so valued our agency that he designed and dictated "the laws and constitution" required to guarantee it.”

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139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
Compared to socialism, Romney writes, “The cornerstone of the United Order is belief in God” and “the voluntary free-will actions of men, evidenced by a consecration of all their property to the Church of God.”¹ᵏviar₂ By contrast “Socialism,” writes Romney “wholly materialistic, is founded in the wisdom of men and not of God” and it violates free agency.

**Issue 3: How may Saints move from the present day reality to the ideal, celestial way of living?**

**A. The Proactive Communalists Answer:** The Saints are currently failing to observe their covenants of consecration, because these covenants require a communal effort, but if they put their minds and energies to it, they could do it.

Of the three thinkers in this school, May is the least critical of current church institutions. He recognizes the value of what the Church is doing. He describes his personal experience volunteering for the church "on a canning assignment": "Sweaty and tired, splattered with tomatoes and peaches, I was feeling the same warm feeling inside that I had felt in the temple before. I was participating in a temporal economic task, but it had been made holy because it was being conducted in a manner consistent with the economy of Zion."¹⁴³ He recognizes that the Church is training Saints: "The sacrifice of tithes, fast offerings, and mission donations, as well as the sacrifice of time to welfare assignments, service projects, and fulfilling of Church

¹ᵏviar₂ Ibid.
¹⁴³ May, Dean L. “The Economics of Zion.” *Sunstone* 14, no. 4 (August 1990): 22
stewardships—all teach us the communal principles essential to Zion. They are part of the basic training core the Saints have been engaged in now for nearly 160 years. But this training in the principles of Zion is a far cry from living life by Zion’s economic system.

May quotes "the testament and promise of President Marion Romney, who in 1973 said of the Church welfare program: "From the very beginning I felt the program would eventually move into the Law of Consecration and that this is a trial pattern. Until I can pay my tithing and make liberal contributions of money and labor...I will not be prepared to go into the United Order, which will require me to consecrate everything I have and thereafter give all my surplus for the benefit of the kingdom. I think United Order will be the last principle of the gospel we will learn to live and that doing so will bring in the new millennium." 145

Nibley takes a much harder stance. “God has commanded his people to give up that way of life,” he writes regarding business competitive enterprise and the other institutions of Babylon, “to come out of the world and follow his special instructions. The main purpose of the Doctrines and Covenants, you will find, is to implement the law of consecration."146 This “main purpose” remains unfulfilled, and Nibley blames the Saints themselves for failing their most essential task. “From the days of Joseph

144 Ibid.
145 Ibid. Quoting an oral interview available at the Church Archives. This quotation is interesting, because it makes far more definitive claims on the relationship between the welfare program and the Law of Consecration than those Romney made in his Statement.
to the present,” Nibley writes, “there has been one insuperable obstacle to the plan, and that is the invincible reluctance of most of the Brethren” to follow it.\textsuperscript{147}

The Law of Consecration, Nibley writes, is like “a clause in the will stating that if the heir neglects any of the franchises, he will forfeit them all. What am I doing with genealogy, temple work, Sunday School, priesthood, home teaching, scripture study, and all of my meetings?” One may be tempted, Nibley preaches, to simply give up on trying to live each and every one of these elements of Mormon religious life, and to say

I simply cannot do them all; I cannot begin to do justice to them. Why not? Because I am, as my grandfather used to say, too taken up with the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, by which he meant business.” This line of thinking is a fallacy, writes Nibley. “Don’t you know that if you lived by the law of consecration you would have time enough for all of it?”\textsuperscript{148}

“The law of consecration,” Nibley declares, is the” foundation of Zion” and the “consummation of the laws of obedience and sacrifice… the threshold of the celestial kingdom, the last and hardest requirement made of men in this life.”\textsuperscript{149} Though much harder to keep than the rules of chastity and sobriety\textsuperscript{150}, for these temptations subside with advancing age, while desire for security and status of wealth only increases and grows throughout the years. Yet none may escape the law of consecration, none are exempt from it (D&C 42 70-73, 70:10); none may outlive it for it is a ‘permanent and everlasting law’ (D&C 78:4; 72:3)...there is no escaping it (D&C 78:10-11). It cannot be put off until more favorable

\begin{footnotes}
\item[147] Nibley, Hugh. "Law of Consecration." In \textit{Approaching Zion}. Salt Lake City Utah;Provo Utah: Deseret Book Co. Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989. 469
\item[149] Ibid. 168
\item[150] Some of the other Celestial Laws.
\end{footnotes}
circumstances offer (D&C 70:16); it was given to the Saints because the time was ripe for them. One cannot move into it gradually to ease the shock (D&C 42:78), or even grudgingly (D&C 70:14).151

“Well don’t you think that this idealistic immaterialism of yours is quite unrealistic?” Nibley asks himself. “Indeed,” he answers, “it is for non-Latter-day Saints; it is simply laughable in the present world.” Mormons however have the “firm foundation” of the restored gospel, an ontological ground that takes them beyond the cold empiricism of science and the arts of men. “Remember,” Nibley continues,

what we regard as real and what the rest of the world regards as real are by no means the same thing. For us the great reality is the visitation of heavenly beings to the world. Nothing could be further from reality or distract one’s mind further from the cold, factual, workaday realities of life than an angel with gold plates or a gold book. The Latter-day Saints will tell you a story that to them is perfectly real, whatever the world may think about it.”152

Nibley writes that the single “breakthrough” he would most like to see in the future development of the church is “the observation by Latter-day Saints of the law of consecration.”153 “I would like to see this happen in the first place,” he writes, “because I have covenanted to keep it, and I would like to be able to do so.”154 However, his longing for the celestial order is more than about fulfilling his own obligations. “Another reason for the acceptance of the law of consecration without delay is that such a treasure should no longer lie unclaimed. The Lord has been good

154 Ibid. 383
enough to give us the answer to a question that no mortal has been able to decide for himself, namely, what one should be doing in one brief spell on earth.”\textsuperscript{155}

Humans are not on earth to exploit the world, declares Nibley, rather despite the misleading sophistry of Babylon and Satan, human individuals never “possess” anything, but rather are only ever stewards of God’s gifts. Nibley writes, “The things of this world have got to be administered; they must be taken care of, they are to be considered. We must keep all things clean, and in order. That’s required of us. That is the test by which we are being proven.”\textsuperscript{156} Rather than wait for the celestial order to come down, Nibley writes, Saints must act “‘with an eye single to his glory’ (Mormon 8:15) Keep first your eye on the star”—that is, Zion economics, the Law of Consecration, and the rest of the “principles of the gospel that have been given to us,”—“then on all the other considerations of the ship. You will have all sorts of problems on the ship, but unless you steer by the star, forget the ship. Sink it. You won’t go anywhere.”\textsuperscript{157}

Kraut’s conclusion is similar:

In this dispensation, men must learn to live as Enoch lived. By the same principles they must accomplish all that he did—yea, even more. Enoch established the United Order in a city; this people must establish it among all nations… Enoch had the opposition of the world; but this people must purge unrighteousness from the world, making it a suitable place for Enoch and his city to return. Enoch received visitations from the Lord; but this people must prepare the New Jerusalem for Him to dwell for a Millennium. Enoch raised his

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid. 336
\textsuperscript{157} Nibley, Hugh.”Three Degrees of Righteousness.” in Approaching Zion. Salt Lake City Utah;Provo Utah: Deseret Book Co. Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989. 336
city into a Terrestrial Order; but this people must translate the whole earth into that glory."

B. The Pro-capitalist Answer: *Nothing prevents an LDS Mormon from living Consecration Today*

Mormon pro-capitalists assert that Church institutions still fulfill the principles of C&S and thus Consecration continues. Huff writes:

> During the Joseph Smith era, the term consecration did not imply any socialistic mechanism or behavior, but referred only to contributions of the sort commonly made within the church today... the Law of Consecration, has been in effect since the beginning of the church in this dispensation, and that those who tie the practice of the law or doctrine of consecration to a particular social or economic organization simply do not understand the law."

Cook's theological-historiography is explicit. Neither D&C 42 or any of the specific programs attempted by Joseph Smith during his life, Cook emphasizes, should be viewed as the Celestial Law of Consecration, “thus it need not be imagined that Latter-day Saints cannot truly live the law of consecration nor truly please God in their economic lives unless or until they reinstitute some particular aspect or phase of early Mormon consecration.” The rhetoric of “truly living” is an implicit attack at the communal expectations shared by the proactive-communalists and the party-line.

Similarly, Huff writes that in Joseph Smith’s time, it was “clear that the term consecration had the same operational meaning then as the word donation has in the church today - free will offerings. There is no enforcing mechanism or doctrine, just

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Similarly, “Consecrations are equivalent to donations. Tithing is a donation. So by definition, if tithing continues, donations continue, and therefore consecration continues. The two terms "tithing" and "consecrations" are not inconsistent or mutually exclusive but rather are part of the same program.”

“Consecrations are equivalent to donations. Tithing is a donation. So by definition, if tithing continues, donations continue, and therefore consecration continues. The two terms "tithing" and "consecrations" are not inconsistent or mutually exclusive but rather are part of the same program.”

C. The LDS Party-Line Answer: This is unclear, but if our salvation depended at this point on living the full law, God would inform the Prophet.

Now we have a world where people are confused. If you don’t believe it, go and watch the news. We can get direction all along our way. If we heed the prophets—follow what they say.

*Chorus:* Follow the prophet, follow the prophet, follow the prophet; don’t go astray. Follow the prophet, follow the prophet, follow the prophet; he knows the way. –LDS *Childrens Songbook*

The party-liners, like the proactive-communalists, acknowledge that there is a gap between current and future/idealistic church institutions, however they also maintain that these the current practices have been introduced under the direct leadership of God. They explain this gap through the rhetoric of the “full” and

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162 Ibid. 314
163 Ibid. 315
“lesser” manifestations of Consecration, and by asserting that the contemporary practices endorsed by the LDS priesthood originate in direct communications between Jesus Christ and the Prophet-President of his Church.

Rather than provide a ready explanation to the gap between ideals and practice (the proactive-communalists have an explanation, while the pro-capitalists deny the existence of the gap) the Mormon party-line is agnostic about whether Consecration will enable the millennium or vice versa. Johansen refers to a (non-revelatory) statement by Joseph Smith that Zion (Jackson County, Missouri) will not be redeemed until “the kingdoms of the world” acknowledge the Mormon gospel, and that this recognition will not occur “until our Redeemer comes to take his place as King of Kings”—that is, until the Millenium of Jesus’ reign on earth. However, he admits to the reader that this is mere conjecture, and tells the reader that the most important idea to remember is that “without the leadership of the priesthood, Zion cannot be established.”

“*When will Zion be established?*” asks Johansen at the conclusion of his book. His answer appears to relieve the Saints of the burdensome charge laid upon them by such thinkers as Nibley and Kraut that economic change must come before (and, indeed, ushers in) Christ’s millennial reign. “With all the efforts of Joseph Smith and subsequent prophets down through our Church history—it may well be that Zion will be established sometime during the Millennium.”

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166 Ibid. 279
Both the “proactive communalists” and the “pro-capitalists” object to the “party-line” notion of degrees of fullness out of an impulse to lend precise ontological definition to the “celestial laws.” Many Mormons—espousing the “party-line”—have told me that my project is futile, because I am merely cataloguing attempts to use book knowledge—the devious craft of “overly wise men”—to define concepts that require “knowledge gained from the spirit” to understand. The “literal presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Jerald Johansen told me, was an inexpressible fact necessary to understand Consecration or anything else Mormon. “You cannot really understand consecration, until you have received the gifts of the holy-spirit made possible by your future baptism into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

Perhaps. As an ethic, “follow the prophet” is a traditional element of “Joseph Smith Mormonism.” However, while a firmly rooted institutional means of maintaining legitimacy in the wake of practical changes, “follow the prophet” has never subsumed the other elements of Joseph Smith Mormonism for the LDS. As I pointed out to Mr. Johansen, the introductions to the Book of Mormon have, since their first publication under Smith’s direction, assured readers that if they inquire earnestly about the status of the document in their prayers, they will receive the testimony of the Holy Spirit. If knowledge of the Holy Spirit is first obtained from scripture, I inquired, than cannot scripture be used to challenge church practices? Johansen hesitated a noticeable moment before saying that the “inquirer’s” testimony about Book of Mormon was just a “temporary” experience of spiritual truth, which could not be compared to truths obtained by “baptism into the church.”
Nevertheless, despite my position as a scholar outside the tradition, I may write with confidence that Johansen’s insistence that Nibley’s writings on consecration are nothing more than “sobering,” “satiric,” and “witty” “reflections,” is simply an inaccurate reading of the text. As this chapter has demonstrated, Nibley does, in fact, condemn church practices in a way that calls into question the possibility for contemporary Mormons’ to achieve full exaltation, and he implicitly conveys the possibility that the LDS church as an institution may fail its millennial mission.

The chapter on “Mormon Ontology” functioned first and foremost to allow the unacquainted reader to obtain the background knowledge necessary to contextualize the “consecration debate” presented in this chapter. A corollary accomplishment of this function was to defend the present chapter’s method of laying out three different “schools” of Mormon thought. Having defined Mormonism as the religious tradition established on the legitimacy of the concept and content of the “restored gospel” preached by Joseph Smith, it does not necessarily follow that the tradition, so defined, renders the prophet in Salt Lake infallible. “Follow the prophet” is not necessarily the essence of Mormonism. As I pointed out to Mr. Johansen, Mormon missionaries (still) ask those who will listen to pray for a testimony about the legitimacy of the Book of Mormon, not the legitimacy of the LDS priesthood. Receiving a divine “testimony” about the Book of Mormon’s truth marks one’s inward conversion to the faith. This testimony is supposed to lead the individual to membership in the LDS church, marked by the outward performance of baptism.
However, it is significant that, at least within the conversion experience, scriptural legitimacy precedes, and in fact, becomes the grounds for, institutional legitimacy.

The principles and beliefs bolstering the LDS presidency, such as the restoration of the ancient priesthods by the literal laying on of hands, are far from being the most significant aspects of the Smith’s restored gospel. Most importantly, the principal of “eternal verities” clashes with the priesthood principle whenever the institutional practices endorsed by the priesthood move away from practices formerly associated with “celestial laws,” such as the LDS church abandoning the centralized Mormon economic system, renouncing polygamy, and ordaining black men to the priesthood. With each of these moves, some members of the LDS faith have left the church to become “fundamentalists.” Yet members of the so-called fundamentalist groups, independents like Kraut, and such active and respected members of the LDS church as Dean May and Hugh Nibley all affirm the priesthood principle. Great pains are taken to show that changes in church practice were not justified by revelation. Dissenters as diverse as Kraut and Huff are united by a shared objection, grounded in traditional Mormon principles—that a celestial law cannot possibly have degrees of fullness.

As the Chapter IV emphasizes, the LDS church has not escaped traditional understandings of consecration.
The LDS Church Welfare Program and the Law of Consecration Today

A. Mormonism and Modernity

In September 1890, the leaders of the Mormon Church brought about an enormous rupture with the Mormon historical past. Prophet-President Wilford Woodruff issued a public “Manifesto” which culminated in the statement: “my advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting marriage forbidden by the law of the land.” The text has since become codified and included as an addendum to the Doctrines and Covenants. However the place of the document within the D&C is as ambiguous as its general message: it is not listed as a numbered section, nor does it overtly refer to any revelations. Woodruff merely “advises” the Saints to follow the law. Indeed, the key line of this text is:

In as much as laws have been enacted by Congress forbidding plural marriages, which laws have been pronounced constitutional in the courts of last resort, I hereby declare my intention to submit to those laws and to use my influence with the members of the Church over which I preside to have them do likewise. (D&C Official Declaration 1)
This appears to present a derived logic rather than an experience of revelation: the constitution is sacred, the courts have pronounced polygamy unconstitutional, and we therefore must stop.

According to Jan Shipps, until that pronouncement, Mormons lived out of historical time, in “the sacred omnipresent.” 1 Jan Shipps uses an essentially Eliadan “history of religions” paradigm to describe the early history of the Mormon enterprise. “The ‘coming forth of the book of Mormon,’” she writes, “effected a break in the very fabric of history” that left early Mormons “suspended between an unusable past and an uncertain future.” 2 Smith took his followers out of the burgeoning enlightenment and gave them a new history which, as Shipps writes, now “pictured the world being plunged into darkness as a result [of a ‘Great Apostasy’], a darkness lasting 1,500 years.” 3 The conversion and perfection of the Latter-day Saint—the process Shipps refers to as saintmaking—was a two-part process in Joseph Smith’s day, encompassing: conversion, the acceptance of the restored gospel obtained through the restored scriptures and covenants, and obedience, “the call to follow the prophet… pledging obedience to modern revelation and priesthood behavior.” 4

In Shipps history of Mormon religiousity, the Mormons are said to have left this “primordial state” not through a “conscious ritual re-creation of events, but rather

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid. 2
through experiential ‘living through’ of sacred events in a new age.’’

This was the period of kingdom-building under Brigham Young, when the obedience factor—the priesthood principle—had “enjoined Saints to gather (migrate) to the Great Basin, where, as they gradually adjusted to their new circumstances, they became naturalized citizens of the kingdom.”

During this period, Shipps says Saints experienced the sacred in illo tempore, in a time when the most “expressive worship signs were irrigation canals, or neatly built and nicely decorated houses, or good crops of sugar beets.”

But with President Woodrow Woodruff’s Manifesto, this all ended. “The cessation of plural marriage [in 1890] was such a disconfirming event that it thrust Saints into the modern age,” writes Shipps. As with Eliade, this entrance is marked by a transformation in Mormon’s religious consciousness of time. “Interpreted in a phenomenological context,” Shipps writes, “the very ambiguity of the historical accounts reflects an ambiguity that infects society as the natural and inevitable consequence of passage out of sacred into profane, linear, historical time.”

However, just because Mormons may look at history, as shown in the last chapter, to understand the principles of their gospel, it does not mean that they have fully entered the “profane time” of Eliadan modernity. I think that Shipps’ adherence

9 Ibid. 126
to Eliade’s paradigm causes her to describe this “exit” in too totalizing a matter. The break of 1890 did not suddenly remove the unique Mormon approach to time presented in Smith’s ontology. Even if the Law of Consecration must be derived from histories and scriptures that have been “infected with ambiguity,” history remains sacred and consultable for Mormons. The Mormon theological-historians featured in the last chapter, regardless of their understanding of Consecration, all accomplish the Eliadan miracle of looking at history and finding gospel. The “infection” does not occur at the level of the shared ontology, but rather through subjective navigations of that ontology.

It is true, that post-1890 Mormonism has been clearly influenced by the rationalizing and individualist trends predicted by the classic modernity narrative. No longer advocating the gathering (read: gerrymandering) of the Saints to a sovereign territory, Shipps reports, the “heretofore corporate responsibility for maintaining LDS identity that had been assumed by the central church leadership was transferred successfully to the general membership.”\(^{10}\) A general move from religious communalism to religious individualism, in line with both Durkheimian and Eliadan notions of modernity, has resulted in a transfer of boundary maintenance responsibility to individuals, especially through close adherence to the Word of Wisdom, tithing in a manner that makes it seem a bit like paying taxes, and careful compliance with the clearly articulated behavioral code…\(^{11}\)

The transvaluation of the Word of Wisdom—an 1833 revelation from the D&C prohibiting tobacco, alcohol and hot drinks— from advice to ethic to obligation, runs

\(^{10}\) Ibid. 116-7  
\(^{11}\) Ibid. 128
in parallel to the decline of the Law of Consecration. According to Bushman, it was not until the 1920s that the Word of Wisdom became obligatory for temple-entry.\textsuperscript{12}

After 1890, “the Church gave up its plans for constructing a complete culture and society,” writes Bushman. “But the ideals could never be stamped out.”\textsuperscript{13} Mormonism remains, as Jan Shipps has written, “a form of corporate Christianity.”\textsuperscript{14}

Again, I think that Shipps’ loyalty to the Eliadan history of religions mode of sorting religious traditions into categories leads her to give undue emphasis on the \textit{Christianity} aspect. However, she does outline this “\textit{corporate}” element in a rather useful way. Despite the increasing emphasis placed on the individual as the “unit of salvation” through Christ in the past couple decades, Mormon ontology still maintains that this salvation is contingent on obtaining the special “knowledge of Christ” which can only be obtained within the corporate structure of the LDS Church and by the administrations of its central priesthoods.\textsuperscript{15}

Besides, individual \textit{salvation} through Christ is but a base achievement in Mormon ontology, which directs adherent’s attention to the greater rewards of \textit{exaltation}. As Shipps has cleverly put it, the “unit of exaltation” in Mormonism ever remains the “the family.”\textsuperscript{16} In a later work, Jan Shipps claims that Mormonism’s belief in “gender differentiation for time and eternity” is its most significant doctrinal

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. 102
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. 148-9
divergence from traditional Christianity. Despite instructing missionaries to put more “stress on the importance of Jesus in the ‘Plan of Salvation’” as well as the ever-increasing similarities between modern Mormonism and the larger host culture, “the continuing emphasis that all Saints place on the eternal nature of families composed of fathers, mothers, and children who never lose their identities provides a basis for understanding Mormonism as an ongoing community of peculiar people.”

Shipps would come very close to my own understanding of the situation, if she would only bring the concept of Celestial Laws into her discussion of eternal (or, Celestial) marriage. To label “the continuing emphasis that all Saints place on the eternal nature of families” as a distinguishing element of the Mormons’ “peculiar” form of Christianity is to miss the point.

In their sociological study, “Dealing with Social Change: The Mormon Church’s Response to Change in Women’s roles, Laurence R. Iannaccone and Carrie A. Miles put forth and defend what they call a “rational-choice model of church behavior.” This choice involves a trade-off between intransigence, which puts a church increasingly at odds with the prevailing culture and risks alienating both current members and potential converts,” and accommodation, which “undermines its
claims to transcendent truth and divine authority.”

They provide a quantitative analysis tracing the evolution of church doctrine on family roles as expressed in official LDS publications in response to a socioeconomic environment where adherence to these roles as traditionally understood (with the wife staying at home) became increasingly costly. This history exhibits a short-run resistance to accelerated social change overlaid with a pattern of long-run accommodation.”

Working mothers are no longer taboo among Mormons. While the “Mormon church has become more accepting of non-traditional sex roles…the church’s statements about women have evolved in such a way that the traditional ideal is reaffirmed even as new roles and behaviors are accommodated.”

As with Consecration, deviation from the traditional, or “Celestial” sex-roles, require a complex representational justification. Thus, late twentieth-century developments in Mormon doctrine conjured up the possibility “for wives to work without violating church doctrine,” so long as they “receive their husbands approval, know their children will not be neglected, and have prayed and received personal approval from God.”

The working Mormon mother is now an ontological possibility, just as the capitalist Mormon has become, however, in both cases “exceptions to the rule are always justified in terms of it.”

The Mormon mother cannot escape the traditional ideals—

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20 Ibid. 265
21 Ibid. 281
22 Ibid. 280-281
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
“Only her husband, children, and God can release a woman from her obligations to them.”

The ability of LDS Mormonism to “exercise flexibility in practice while maintaining purity of doctrines,” Iannaccone and Miles conclude, enables it to “skirt the twin dangers of intransigence and loss of distinctiveness.” This observation is derived empirically from the fact that youth membership rates dropped during the initial “short-term” period of overt reaction to social change, but began to increase again once the doctrinal loopholes detailed above had become established in LDS discourse. I think Iannaccone and Miles discuss the “ideals” of Mormon ontology too abstractly, and that, had they grounded their discussion of Mormon projections of “the ideal life situation for an adult woman” with an explanation of the ontologically derived concepts of Celestial Law, they could have opened up their conclusion to a broader understanding of Mormonism’s relationship to the changing social order. When it comes to Consecration, this flexibility is achieved—within the LDS party-line—through the doctrine of “degrees of fullness.”

During the decline of American liberal Protestantism in the last century, Iannaccone and Miles write, citing a variety of then recently published studies, “almost all churches that retained distance from the culture by encouraging distinctive life-style and beliefs grew; those more immersed in the culture and only vaguely identifiable in terms of their own features suffered declines.” Within their rational-choice model of church behavior, one may understand “the rapid growth of not only

25 Ibid. 280-281
26 Ibid. 282
27 Ibid. 280
28 Ibid. 266
Mormonism but also conservative Protestant denominations [as] a consequence of being sufficiently (but not overly) unlike society at large.”

I have found this outline of Mormonism’s tenuous existence within and parallel to modernity to provide the most appropriate terminological basis for discussing Mormonism as an example of an ontology or religious identity, whose existence appears to contradict the classic modernity narrative, even as they also appear to actively comprehend and respond to the particularities of the very modernity they contradict.

Bushman describes the RLDS, now known as the Community of Christ, as the most modern or rationalized version of Smith’s inheritance. “In comparison to the Utah-based [LDS] church, the Community of Christ plays down Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the miraculous origins.” They also ordain woman, and have since their founding denied that Joseph Smith was a polygamist. “From the modern perspective,” Bushman says, the RLDS “is the ‘sensible version of Mormonism, resembling in many respects a liberal Protestant denomination.”

By contrast, Bushman describes Mormon fundamentalist groups as having “held on to extremes. They did not give up plural marriage at the end of the nineteenth century, and some still follow communal economic practices in the manner of the early Mormons. They seem to live up to the fanatic, anti-modern image of isolated Mormonism.”

Bushman claims that LDS Mormonism is the dialectical synthesis of these two

29 Ibid. 282
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
extremes of “the traditional and the progressive.” Members of the LDS Church have “blended into modern society, all the while keeping the Church’s miraculous origins at the center of belief.” Thus, Bushman describes how LDS Mormonism “presents the perplexing contradiction of a miracle-based religion founded in the age of the printing press surviving the onslaught of modern skepticism.”

Susan Harding provides some terminological assistance for describing the tenuous relationship between Mormonism and modernity in her essay “The Born Again Telescandals.” She discusses how “after the scopes trial in 1925,” Orthodox Protestants, or “fundamentalists… accepted and internalized the classic modernity narrative, “the story which equates modernity with secularity,” made the (what Eliade would call, archaic) value judgment that secular was profane and decided to opt out of the whole thing entirely. Much like Bushman reading Eliade, the fundamentalist Protestants proudly accepted their designation as “unfit for ‘modernity’ and for ‘modern’ political discourse.” However, Harding describes how “in 1979, fundamentalists broke the ultimate barrier and plunged en masse into the major political arena.” The rise of evangelical movements, mega-churches, Rev. Jerry Falwell, all mark according to Harding, “a rupture in the history of fundamentalism as

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid. 15
35 Ibid. 15.
37 Ibid.
it was constructed by the modernity narrative.”

In many ways, this break parallels the so-called Mormon entrance to modernity, between 1890 and 1936. Just as Mormons began to disperse from Utah and enter the middle-class with the turn of the last century, American Protestant Fundamentalists in the 1970s began to move out of the Bible belt, “as militant Bible believers began to colonize middle and upper echelons of mainstream political, economic, social and cultural institutions.”

Like the televangelist discussed by Harding, the presence of Mormonism in modernity is “utterly unexpected and unintelligible in terms of the story of modernity.” “Far from being pre-modern relics, atavisms of an earlier age, televangelists are a late capitalist crossbreed intertwining symbolic production, consumption, and social reproductions,” and so too with the Mormons. The modernization of the pre-modern other that is/was the Protestant fundamentalist, undermines the modernity narrative, and robs the “modern” the “pre-modern” and even “modernity” itself of all meaningful definition. As Harding continues, “they [the celebrity ‘fundamentalists’] are harbingers of an emerging political economic order in which the stakes are as much collective identities, cultural ideas and symbols, as they are profits, markets, political power, and lost souls.”

In this new order:

Religious mingles with secular, churches become businesses… preachers call themselves CEOs and run for President… creationists call themselves scientists and scientists discover the ineffable. If something is

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39 Ibid. 540
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid. 554
ending, perhaps it is the world in which the things forming these zany amalgamations were kept apart, separated, in their place, properly ordered and moving progressively to some end.  

The most significant difference between the modern-fundamentalists discussed by Harding, and the Mormons is that the Mormons’ transition to modernity, begun in 1890, marked a significant move away from such amalgamations. The alternative socioeconomic orders achieved and attempted in the Great Basin Kingdom sprang from an ontology, which, as discussed in the first chapter, declared such amalgamations were necessary for the achievement of the Celestial Kingdom on earth. In Deseret of yore, unlike the pre-1970s Bible-belt, politics, economics, labor, and social theory were all seen as falling under the sphere of religion. This came out of the belief that life on earth should be ordered according to Celestial Laws. The cessation of overt and direct attempts by the centralized LDS church to immediately establish a society based on those Laws in 1890 allowed the Mormons to enter “modern society,” but—in contrast to Harding’s televangelists—this was not an entrance to modernity, per say. While Harding describes televangelism as a subversion of modernity from within—a set of institutions and beliefs that are thoroughly modern and anti-modern at the same time—the precedents and imperatives established by Celestial Law, are neither modern, pre-modern or even necessarily a hybrid, allow Mormons to live in modern society while remaining outside of modernity itself.

42 Ibid. 555
Smith responded to the forces of his time—which we might call the forces of early-modernization—with a new livable ontology that laid a precedent for establishing a new social order. That ontology amounted to a web of allegedly holistic doctrines obtained by what I have classified as four legitimate epistemologies: the restored scriptures, the record of canonical revelations, the individual’s encounter with the Holy Spirit either in the book of Mormon or in the corporate body of the (LDS) Church, and the inspired guidance of the central priesthood. The most explicit doctrines of that livable ontology continue to give imperative to the precedent for establishing that new social order. The doctrine of Celestial Laws—more than any of the individual Celestial Laws themselves, including Celestial Marriage—distinguishes Mormon ontology and, as discussed in the first chapter, uniquely situates it to erode the existential crises that are traditionally associated with the transition to modernity.

The precedents and imperatives laid out by Celestial Law are best characterized as off-modern, a term coined by Svetlana Boym and developed by Sumathi Ramaswamy in her book *Lost Land of Lemuria*. The off-modern, writes Ramaswamy, “is ostensibly modern, but not wholly in it, or even of it… [the off-modern] takes a detour away from deterministic narratives” of Modernity, to “explore ‘sideshows, and back alleys, rather than the straight road of progress.”\(^\text{43}\) Elohim’s Celestial Kingdom on Kolob and Enoch’s City of Zion are best conceived as “off-modern place worlds,” constructed by “labors of loss” initiated by Joseph Smith. Like the fictitious continent of Lemuria, their “off-modern and eccentric presence has

always been contradictory, embattled, subaltern, even scandalous.\textsuperscript{44} Each of the
“schools” presented in the previous chapter engage in further “labors of loss” that
reinforce and clarify the/ir vision of these lost-worlds. The utilization of history—an
allegedly disenchanted, modern discipline— as a tool for discerning the content of
Celestial Law within these place-making endeavors, re-enchants history in a way
Weber and Eliade deemed impossible. To borrow Ramaswamy’s brilliant
terminology, Joseph Smith’s “restored” account of Enoch’s City reconstructed “an
\textit{ante}-diluvian past in a post-Enlightenment age that is so vigorously \textit{anti-}diluvial.”\textsuperscript{45}

Dick Hebdige writes that “one of the ways socialism has been renewed in the
past has been by actively engaging with those forces which have set out to consign it
to the ‘rubbish heap of history.’”\textsuperscript{46} So too, Mormonism’s success may be seen in
terms of its direct engagement with modernity. One of the most conspicuous
examples of Mormonism’s direct engagement with modernity in conjunction with its
engagement with both its historical past and ontological principles is the Church
Welfare Program initiated in 1936 as a response to the Great Depression.

\begin{center}
B. The Mormon Welfare System
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The history of this program is well accounted for in the \textit{The Mormons War on
Poverty} by Garth Magnum and Bruce Blumell. Describing the origins of the Welfare
Program, they write “it was perhaps inevitable, given the doctrinal and historical
values of the LDS Church, that it would eventually seek a way of caring for its poor

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. 17
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. 150
\textsuperscript{46} Dirks, Nicholas. “After The Masses.” In \textit{Culture/Power/History : a Reader in Contemporary Social
that was independent of federal or state relief efforts.”

47 The doctrinal emphasis on oneness in all things, and the historical examples of how the Church and its members attempted to achieve this oneness—key elements of Mormon ontology tangled up with the “Law of Consecration”—definitely influenced the response the church took to the Great Depression. Bushman writes in his *Very Short Introduction to Mormonism*, that “in the twentieth-century, the consecration principle took the form of a welfare program begun during the great depression to provide work and sustenance for poor church members.”

The Law of Consecration is thus associated with both an economic program (of contestable form) and certain basic principles. The raw semantic object Mormons encounter through their religious ontology as the “Law of Consecration” encompasses both program and principles. Thus, the extent to which the current program is influenced by the principles is significant. The pro-capitalists essentially see no contradiction between the institutions of economic modernity and those of Zion and the Celestial Order. They imagine a Mormonism that is completely simpatico with liberal individualism and capitalism. However, the church institutions they affirm—the tithing and welfare program—continue to be influenced by Consecration ideals in ways that make it subversive to the capitalist system. “Out of that initial Zion [in Missouri] came many of Mormonism’s fundamental features,” Bushman maintains, consecration of property, a story of persecutions, and the charge to gather Israel. None of these exists now in


its original form... But even in their transformed state, those impulses still tie Mormons to one another. The society Joseph Smith set out to create survived intense opposition in the nineteenth century and adapted to rapid change and global expansion in the twentieth...they still believe that someday a full-blown Zion will arise in which the people of God will constitute a righteous society.  

Although there have been some changes to the Church Welfare program since 1936, these differences are negligible for the present discussion. As part of the Welfare Program,  

the church now owns farms, canning plants, and manufacturing facilities where the poor work producing the goods they need to subsist. By managing the production of goods, the church can offer jobs to the poor as well as food and clothing, the aim being to make them self-sufficient.

The biggest difference between this system and the systems administered in Missouri and Ohio during the early 1830s, is that homesteads and occupational stewardships are no longer provided.  

The influence of Consecration on the Welfare program goes beyond the provision of goods and labor—the “temporal salvation” Joseph Smith charged his church to provide. Key principles and terminological terms of the current welfare program are taken straight out of D&C 42. (Even though proactive communalists rail against this terminology as an ontologically ridiculous misnomer), the distribution of goods and labor is still done through an institution called the Bishops Storehouse. Claimants still have a right to claim their just wants and needs, and the evaluation of

49 Ibid. 48
50 Ibid. 40
those terms is left up to the supposedly “inspired” subjective determination of the
claimants’ local bishop.

C. The Bishop’s Storehouse—An Example of Mormon
Communalism in the 21st Century

Having spent a year reading about the “Bishop’s Storehouse” as an element of
the Celestial Law of Consecration described in D&C 42, determined along a nexus of
historiography and scripture—when I first walked into a real 2010 “Bishop’s
Storehouse,” I was half expecting a rustic 19th century general store, or an institution
be speckled with sacred symbolism, as a Mormon temple is. The small, cramped
three-room Bishop’s Storehouse in Worcester, MA—has an unimposing façade and a
barren concrete interior. It seems out of place with the history and theology of
Consecration.

Upon entry to the storehouse, claimants find themselves in a small waiting
area set off by a counter. It looks almost like the waiting area at the front of a large
supermarket (except for the fact that this building is so small). However, the counter
has no cash register, and the people sitting at it (all LDS volunteers) must meet with
claimants before they are allowed to enter and gather their goods. Instead of
exchanging money, claimants arrive with a note from the bishop of an LDS ward.

There is no bishop at the Bishop’s Storehouse, so no one here has authority to
make up notes on the spot. An LDS bishop is a layleader (with a separate
occupation), who serves as the priesthood holder charged with leading a local ward or
congregation. The storehouse provides for all the LDS wards within New England.
No one may receive any of the free goods inside if they do not have a bishop’s note
on arrival. This “note” is actually an inventory form, a copy of which is faxed in ahead of time by local ward bishops. The rigidity with which the LDS Welfare program relies on local bishops to determine the needs of recently impoverished members reflects a continuation of D&C 42 principles—“just wants and needs” are determined through the “inspired” guidance of the local church leader, the bishop.

Dean May wrote that the “official church programs have been designed to assist members of the Mormon faith” and that “official church philanthropy of the Good Samaritan variety has clearly taken a back seat to the ‘we take care of our own’ philosophy.”51 In the years since May wrote this, there has been an increase in humanitarian aid given and conducted by the Church. Still, even if this humanitarian aid ever actually surpassed the aid given to church members or as part of overt proselytizing missions—which it has not—the LDS welfare institution will continue to distinguish between these two types of aid. Since 1936, the program has maintained rigid distinctions, clearly delineated to both the Bishops and the storehouse volunteers, between aid that may be provided to non-members, and the aid that LDS Mormons may claim.

The Welfare program has two primary sources of funds, the annual tithing required of temple-endowed Mormons, and the bi-monthly fast offerings the church asks its members to contribute. *Humanitarian* (non-Mormon) *Aid cannot be given out of these sources of funding*. This distinction reflects the continued application of D&C 42 standards to tithing. Following an understanding that tithing funds are the

equivalent of the “residue” discussed in D&C 42 (albeit within a “lesser” system), the 
LDS Welfare program insures that tithing funds are only used according to the usages 
which D&C 42 said the “residue” was for.

Bushman writes that “Fully engaged Mormons today (probably a quarter to a 
third of the membership) contribute 10 percent of their income to the church. Tithe 
paying is a requirement for entrance into Mormon temples.” Every Sunday in LDS 
wards throughout the world, the local bishop collects tithe donations. He forwards 
these donations on to Salt Lake City (even if his ward is in another country, thus 
subjecting the tithing funds to decrease with export and import taxes) and keeps track 
of each member’s donations electronically. At the end of the year (December 31st or 
January 1st), the bishop meets with every member of his ward who claims to tithe— 
the temple endowed and those who seek to become so—and reviews their financial 
statements with them to determine if the church has indeed received 10% of their 
income. As with the D&C 42 “stewardship meetings,” tithing meetings rely on the 
bishop to ultimately use his “power of discretion” through the holy spirit to determine 
if a full tithe has been made.

The central LDS priesthood in Salt Lake, UT creates a tithe-budget to use the 
money for the purposes the Lord (in the D&C) identified as “his own”: building 
temples, funding missions, publishing church literature, and the temporal salvation of 
“his people. (D&C 42: 32-36, also cf. D&C 51, D&C 119, D&C 120) Part of this 
funding is redistributed back to LDS bishops to use in their ward, other funding goes

2008. 39
to church-owned farms and production facilities, including thrift-stores and bishop’s storehouses.

If a bishop determines that a member of his ward has not fully tithed, he or she will lose their right to enter the Temple. However, according to the missionaries in charge of the Worcester storehouse, even a Mormon who has been excommunicated by the LDS central authority—so long as he or she has not actively joined another church—is still invited to participate in Ward activities and has the right to ask the Ward bishop for temporal assistance. This reflects a continuation of Smith’s and Young’s beliefs that the Mormons were a real people just as much as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was a religion. A bad, but baptized “Jack Mormon”—as less observant or “inactive” members of the church are called—may “drink coffee or engage in homosexual sex” and still remain part of “this people.” In both cases, the Church—like its members—is officially instructed to “love the sinner but hate the sin.” Coffee-drinkers and practicing homosexuals cannot enter a temple, (or even receive the sacrament on Sunday), but they can get aid LDS only give to “their own.”

The bishop does not just dole out money. According to the WELFARE SERVICES FACT SHEET—2009, produced by the central LDS church in Salt Lake City, “the responsibility for each person’s spiritual and temporal well-being rests first upon himself, second upon his family, and third upon the church.” The central role

53 The two examples the missionaries in charge of directing the Worcester storehouse raised to illustrate this point to me.

54 I received a copy of this pamphlet from the Worcestore Storehouse missionaries. However, it is available online at: http://www.providentliving.org/welfare/pdf/WelfareFactSheet.pdf
of the family in Smith’s doctrine continues to play a key role in church welfare policy. When a would-be-claimant sits down with the bishops to discern his or her wants and needs, the bishop will fill out a “Needs and Resources Analysis” form, standard issue from the central Church in Salt Lake. One of the first items is a section entitled “Assistance from Family Members.”55 The bishop will require the would-be-claimant to list all of his or her living relatives, and supplement this list with the vast genealogical databases accessible from Salt Lake. The bishop then personally contacts the family of the would-be-claimant and sternly reminded them that kinship obligations are celestial. A bishop may call an elderly person’s children, no matter where they are in the world, and instruct them in their obligations to pay for their parent’s rent that month if he or she cannot afford it.

Economists like Tucker Carlson tend to talk about this reliance on family networks as a successful model that should be exemplary for other welfare programs. However, whether or not this is an empirically pragmatic solution, these economists miss the fundamental point that this reliance on the family has its epistemological justification in the doctrine of Celestial Law. The paradigmatic society of the Celestial Kingdom is a segmentary society (to use Durkheim’s terms) based on kinship networks, not something easily imitated by the government or any public welfare service.

After the bishop has discerned for himself that the claimant and his kin are unable to provide for the family’s needs, he will follow church-endorsed guidelines to administer welfare to the family. Here, the doctrine that the Holy Spirit grants the
bishop “powers of discernment” over his congregants—the distributive mechanism of the old 1830s economic law of D&C 42—has not just survived in the current system of Tithing and Welfare. Economists like Tucker Carlson have estimated that it is one of the primary mechanisms of its success. This discernment, like the reliance on family, has pragmatic accomplishments, even as it is understood, by those involved, to be an enchanted or mythologized process. The bishop does not act on his supposed powers to discern human need by going into the woods, or an LDS temple to meditate and receive instruction. The process is much more rationalized. First, he will sit down and make a financial balance sheet of the family’s income and expenditures, based off of a standardized form issued from Salt Lake.\(^{56}\) The bishop will instruct the family as to which expenditures are extraneous, and access to welfare will be contingent on whether or not they follow his instructions. Since Joseph Smith’s day, the Church has maintained an unpaid clergy. Thus, Carlson points out that because “bishops usually have full-time jobs apart from the Church to support themselves,” which means that, discernment or not, they tend to be people well suited to “help applicants make good financial choices.”\(^{57}\) Thus, “individuals who are poor money managers are taught thrift by their bishop.”\(^{58}\)

Most of the packaged goods at the Worcester storehouse are manufactured by a church-owned company called “Deseret Industries.” These items all bear the prominent logo of a beehive—the symbol which branded Mormon-produced goods from non-Mormon goods during period of cooperative production lead by Brigham

\(^{56}\) Ibid.  
\(^{57}\) Ibid.  
\(^{58}\) Ibid.
Young. At the storehouse, I observed this beehive brand on an innumerable variety of items: Deseret pasta, Deseret dish-soap, Deseret tomato sauce, Deseret frozen meat, Deseret canned beans, Deseret flour, Deseret detergent, Deseret clothing and blankets, Deseret pancake mix (and Deseret pancake syrup). I could go on. All of these products were produced by and for Mormons.

Deseret Industries, or any of the other Church owned labor and production facilities function by virtue of the individualistic principles of Consecration—out of donations of “time, labor and talents.” In his article “Holy Doler: the Secular Lessons of Mormon Charity,” Tucker Carlson points out that the Church’s policy of investing in farms, production facilities, “cannaries and storehouses...staffed entirely by volunteers” allows it to “produce and distribute these goods at a vastly reduced cost.” The Worcester storehouse missionaries told me that “only a small fraction of local [Boston area] Mormons volunteer” at the storehouse. Still, the volunteers are brought by the imperative to fulfill their obligations of Consecration.

As part of an expanding effort to do more “humanitarian” aid in the past decade and a half, Bishops now have the power to give up to $1000 of “humanitarian aid” to non-Mormon members of their community. However these funds are drawn from accounts that do not originate in tithing money. They come from separate church-sponsored philanthropies. The missionaries running the Worcester storehouse showed me the two separate forms that bishops use for member-aid and humanitarian-aid respectively. The humanitarian-aid form is most distinguished because all of the goods originally purchased or manufactured through tithing

59 Ibid. 25-31
funds—including all the goods with the Deseret beehive symbol on their package—are labeled as NOT APPROVED.

Handouts, by the way, are not the only way in which temporal salvation is administered out at the storehouse. Mormons have been advised by church leaders since the early twentieth century that the Lord wills them to have a stock of provisions to last them a year. The storehouse sells members wholesale wheat and sugar, and has a not-for-profit but fee-charging Cannery where LDS members receive basic instruction from the storehouse missionaries on how to evaluate what and which goods they should can to have fulfill the commandments for Family Home Storage. Many pamphlets are available to Mormons at the storehouse to explain the importance of fulfilling this commandment. Moreover, the storehouse has rentable storage facilities (fee-based, but not-for-profit) available to church members who lack the physical space to keep a full year’s supply of canned goods in their house.

Providing canning and storage opportunities, the missionaries in charge of the storehouse assured me, is just as much part of the temporal salvation of church members as are the handouts to the poor. For this reason, they are considered to belong to the purview of a bishop’s storehouse. More importantly, people who are currently receiving Church welfare, are expected to work—if they are able—at these facilities in return.

The official church publications, available at the Worcester storehouse are all printed from http://www.providentliving.org the welfare program’s official website. All of these publications justify family home storage as a buffer against natural disasters or unexpected financial troubles. However, Arrington et al. had a different
interpretation, writing that “the continuing advice of church leaders that Mormon families be prepared to sustain themselves for one year is taken by many as an intimation that prophetic visions of worldwide calamity have been received.”

Arrington wrote this back in the 70s, and it may be that the now long held practice of having enough canned goods to last a year is probably interpreted by many as good, practical advice whose pragmatism—as the storehouse missionaries emphasized to me—was made clear to families laid off in the most recent financial crisis. However, Arrington et al. extrapolate their position to talk about the latent possibility for a future return to the something like the economic experiments lead by Joseph Smith and Brigham Young under the brand “Law of Consecration” or “United Order.”

If a future national catastrophe were to threaten, it is possible to imagine that Mormon prophets, as in the past, might issue a call for the Saints to pool their resources and cooperate to ensure group survival…the ordered hierarchal structure of the Mormon lay priesthood organization could turn itself quickly to the task of building upon the economic superstructure of the Welfare Plan and undertaking direction of economic as well as religious and political affairs among the Saints.”

The tithing system of today may not be enforced, but the clear denial of celestial exaltation to all who do not partake in it does seem to be a kind of coercion. This system does function to provide a kind of LDS redistribution of wealth, especially as more and more tithing money is sent out of the United States to support impoverished LDS Mormons in the Third World.

60 Arrington, Leonard J., Feramoz Fox, and Dean L. May. BUILDING THE CITY OF GOD: Community & Cooperation Among the Mormons. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1976. 58
Dean May, who contributed to the book quoted above, draws a slightly different conclusion, which is more in line with the position of this paper:

It may be that a growing stress on charitable giving and outward philanthropies and reliance on governmental and secular welfare programs will eventually supersede the traditional internal system of welfare. Yet because the forces that created the traditional system are deep and persistent in the Mormon consciousness and are intimately interwoven with Mormons’ very identity as a “peculiar people,” it would seem more likely that the great bulk of Church philanthropic endeavor will continue to be carried out primarily within the Mormon system. The vision of Enoch’s City of Zion…will probably continue to set the agenda for church philanthropies. ⁶²

Even if Tithing is or isn’t Consecration, the influence of the latter—considered as an abstract object of variable, but not totally relative, definition—is unmistakable. The impulses to administer temporal salvation has not gone away with the increasing emphasis on spiritual salvation that scholars like Jan Shipps argue set apart post 1890 Mormonism from its predecessor. Signing the storehouse form letter may seem a far cry from the power to issue land-leases and occupational stewardships, but the current system of tithing and welfare continues to charge the LDS bishop with both the temporal and spiritual well being of his ward or congregation.

Proactive communalists tend to see Zion’s economic system as the center or essence of Zion, while party-liners like Johansen emphasize that the temple and its ordinances are the center of Zion building. Moving beyond this debate I think it is

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significant that, according to the official LDS sponsored websites, the number of bishop’s storehouses worldwide (141)\textsuperscript{63} is greater than the number of temples currently constructed (130)\textsuperscript{64}. Storehouses may not look or function like they used to, but whatever trends towards individualism LDS religion has followed, it does seem that temporal salvation has not gone away. A series of imperatives placed upon the Mormon Church and the Mormon people, all caught up in the theological historiography of the Law of Consecration, continue to preclude such a move.

\textsuperscript{63} http://providentliving.org/welfare/pdf/WelfareFactSheet.pdf
\textsuperscript{64} http://www.lds.org/temples/chronological/0,11206,1900-1,00.html
Conclusion:

Joseph Smith described a universe where collective-type consciousness and kinship networks remain meaningful in spite of the increasing division of labor in society; where the chaotic amorality of space and time does not erode, but rather appears to actively confirm the creation myth of Mormon ontology, which is not at all what Durkheim, Eliade and Weber postulate happens in modernity.

Celestial Law allows society, economy, history and physical “reality” to remain enchanted worlds. If modernity is the world of disenchanted, rational individualism, then Mormons do not live in it—although they clearly do live alongside and in interaction with the institutions, forces and processes associated with modernization. The core tenets of Mormon ontology from which Celestial Law as a concept derives, allow Mormons to live in the presence of those forces without being consumed by the existential crises they are said to provoke. The ontological definition of the Law of Consecration as a Celestial Law has been the primary precedent and imperative through which the Mormon Church(es) have historically dealt with the material crises of modernity.

Mormon debates over the meaning and significance of the Law of Consecration are inextricable from the conceptual framework of a shared ontology that is fundamentally subversive to any full transition to modernity. An outside observer must recognize that even if the Law of Consecration cannot be defined objectively among Mormons, it does not follow that the term is therefore totally
relative or meaningless within the context of their tradition. Within this context, the Law of Consecration always presents a hybrid of individualistic (“modern”) moral principles and communalistic socioeconomic institutions (such as are generally associated with pre-modern solidarity or consciousness). The Law of Consecration epitomizes the “off-modern,” hybrid nature that appears to characterize Mormon religious ontology in general; at least when compared to the models and categories developed in the classic Western modernity narratives.

The hybrid combination of communal oneness and individual self-sufficiency manifest in the 2010 LDS welfare and tithing programs is not the same arrangement Joseph Smith instructed his followers to observe in the early 1830s, but it epitomizes the sideways relationship between Mormons and modernity. The Mormon religious tradition has definitely experienced the influence of “modernizing” forces, even though their ontology, when internalized, conveys a distinct worldview from within which the existential crises marking the transition from pre-modern to modern consciousness are generally avoided. The LDS responses to the material crises of modernity have continued to bear the unmistakable influence of the Law of Consecration, even though a precise definition of this Law remains elusive.

The influencing presence of the Law of Consecration within twenty-first century Mormon practice is manifest in the institutional peculiarities of a welfare system that imposes a rationalistic, bureaucratic solution to real, individual life crises (thus, appearing to respond to “modern” problems with a “modern” solution) but continues to make official pronouncements asserting the Celestial and enchanted
origins of the system as something revealed to Joseph Smith, and/or his successors, through personal communications with Jesus.
Bibilography
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