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MORMONISM AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

SETH R. PAYNE[†]

INTRODUCTION

From its beginning, a key part of Mormonism's general appeal was its accessibility; its ability to make abstract conceptions of divinity tangible, systematic, and readily understood.¹ Joseph Smith Jr., Mormonism's founder and first prophet, rejected the creeds of wider Christendom as "teach[ing] for doctrines the commandments of men [while] having a form of godliness, but . . . deny[ing] the power thereof."² Throughout his prophetic career, Joseph Smith consistently *eternalized* temporal concepts as his emerging theology transformed early Mormonism from a mostly-Protestant form of Christianity into what Jan Shipps has called a new "full-scale religious tradition[]."³

Perhaps the most poignant and most significant example of this process can be seen in Joseph Smith's evolving conception of God.⁴ While it would be difficult to argue that Smith ever held

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¹ RICHARD LYMAN BUSHMAN & JED WOODWORTH, *JOSEPH SMITH: ROUGH STONE* ROLLING 107–08 (2005).

² 1 JOSEPH SMITH, *HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS* 6 (1951).

³ JAN SHIPPS, *MORMONISM: THE STORY OF A NEW RELIGIOUS TRADITION* 50 (1985).

⁴ The best example of this transition can be seen in the *Lectures on Faith* published as part of Church Canon in 1835. Within the lectures, Jesus is described as being "in the bosom of the Father." See JOSEPH SMITH, *Lecture Fifth*, in *THE DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, CONTAINING THE REVELATIONS* 50, 50 (1876).

strict Trinitarian views, it is clear that in Smith's first prophetic act—the purported translation of the Book of Mormon by dictation to a scribe between 1827 and 1830—that Smith's views were, at the very least, modalistic.⁵ By 1838, however, Smith had completely rejected both Trinitarianism and modalism and began to teach the complete and distinct separation of members of the Godhead. In 1843, Smith taught that “[t]he Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit.”⁶ In essence, Smith had stated that man is of the same species as God; that God the Father was quite literally, an exalted man.

In this Article, I briefly examine the implications of this teaching on modern Mormonism's conception of God and gender, two ideas which, within Mormonism's systematic theology, are inexorably intertwined. Given this context, I then explore how this conception has led directly to modern Mormonism's moral opposition to homosexuality generally, and its subsequent political opposition to same-sex marriage specifically. I also argue that the modern Mormon dogmas used to justify this political and moral opposition may in fact represent a significant departure from the original teachings of Joseph Smith.

I. THE MORMON CONCEPTION OF GOD

I begin by outlining the modern Mormon conception of God as taught throughout the Church today.

Mormonism completely, absolutely, and explicitly rejects the creeds of wider Christendom.⁷ It maintains that at a very early point, the Church experienced a “Great Apostasy” wherein the “fulness of the gospel,” which had been taught by Jesus and

⁵ See THE BOOK OF MORMON, *Mosiah* 15:2–5; Dan Vogel, *The Earliest Mormon Concept of God*, in LINE UPON LINE: ESSAYS ON MORMON DOCTRINE 17, 21–22 (Gary James Bergera ed., 1989).

⁶ See THE BOOK OF MORMON, *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 130:22 [hereinafter *Doctrine & Covenants*].

⁷ In particular, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* earned the ire of Mormonism with its conception of a God as having no “body, parts, or passions.” WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY, *THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH* 5 (Forgotten Books 2007) (1646). Indeed, this portion of the Confession was openly criticized in Mormon Temple Ceremonies as late as 1990, when such references were removed. See JERALD TANNER & SANDRA TANNER, *EVOLUTION OF THE MORMON TEMPLE CEREMONY: 1842–1990* 80 (1990).

perpetuated by the Apostles, became lost, and through Joseph Smith, a “restitution of all things” was brought about.⁸ Part of this restoration was knowledge of the true nature of God.

In Mormon theology, man is quite literally of the same species as God or, in other words, God is exalted and eternal man. He possesses a body of flesh and bones that is not ancillary to his eternal nature, but rather, is essential to it. Thus, God is a sexual being—quite literally the father of humankind—and as such, has a female counterpart: an exalted and eternal woman.⁹

Indeed, it is God’s ability to procreate that is a key part of what makes him God. God is the father of spirit children,¹⁰ which, as part of providing an opportunity for growth, experience, development, and exaltation, he sent to Earth to obtain physical bodies and to be tested in their willingness to emulate God and the perfect example of God’s Son, Jesus Christ.¹¹

God’s children represent an eternal expansion, therefore, of God’s glory.¹²

⁸ THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, *GOSPEL PRINCIPLES* 92, 96 (2009) [hereinafter *GOSPEL PRINCIPLES*].

⁹ See John Heeren et al., *The Mormon Concept of Mother in Heaven: A Sociological Account of Its Origins and Development*, 23 *J. FOR SCI. STUDY RELIGION* 396, 396 (1984); Linda P. Wilcox, *The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven*, in *LINE UPON LINE: ESSAYS ON MORMON DOCTRINE*, *supra* note 5, at 103, 103. The concept of a Mother in Heaven has been used by some—within more liberal Mormon circles—to promote a Mormon feminist theology. For example, Janice Allred argues that the Holy Ghost is, in fact, the Mother in Heaven and advocated prayer to Her; a position which would, in part, eventually lead to her excommunication. JANICE ALLRED, *Jesus Our Mother: The Quest for Feminine Identity*, in *GOD THE MOTHER AND OTHER THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS* 20, 30 (1997). Paul and Margaret Toscano offered up similar ideas that also contributed to their excommunication. See MARGARET TOSCANO & PAUL TOSCANO, *STRANGERS IN PARADOX: EXPLORATIONS IN MORMON THEOLOGY* 48, 54 (1990).

¹⁰ See Elder Gary J. Coleman, Member of the Quorum of the Seventy, *Are You Still Here?*, Address Before the 170th Annual General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (May 2000), available at <http://www.lds.org/ensign/2000/05/are-you-still-here?lang=eng>; *GOSPEL PRINCIPLES*, *supra* note 8, at 9.

¹¹ Another unique doctrine in Mormonism is that of a mortal pre-existence. Humankind existed as spirit children of God before the creation of the Earth and consciously chose to embrace a temporal experience. See *GOSPEL PRINCIPLES*, *supra* note 8, at 10.

¹² See Orson Pratt, *The Pre-existence of Man*, 1 *THE SEER* 33, 37 (1853), available at <http://archive.org/stream/OrsonPratt/TheSeer#page/n35/mode/2up>.

II. ORIGINS OF THE CONCEPTION

The origins of this radical reconceptualization of God's nature can be found in Joseph Smith's earliest prophetic work, the Book of Mormon,¹³ although it took at least eight years for the conception to be solidified and stabilized, and an additional three to four years for the conception to be explicitly preached. The Book of Mormon does not openly reject Trinitarianism but seems to embrace a type of modalism wherein Jesus Christ is both Father and Son.¹⁴ Significantly, both the Holy Spirit and a pre-mortal Jesus Christ make anthropomorphic appearances to Book of Mormon prophets.¹⁵

By 1838, Joseph Smith began to disseminate a finalized story of his First Vision wherein both God the Father and Jesus Christ—as separate beings—visited the teenage Joseph in response to a prayer of inquiry.¹⁶ Yet, it was not until five years later, in 1843, that Smith began to preach openly about the separate distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as well as the physical nature of God's being.

The development of this conception cannot be separated from Joseph Smith's emerging views on marriage. Beginning in 1831, Smith showed a keen interest in the Patriarchs of the Hebrew Bible and felt compelled to “do the works of Abraham,” thus becoming an extension of the Abrahamic covenant. A key aspect of “do[ing] the works of Abraham” was the adoption and practice of plural marriage.¹⁷ Possibly as early as 1833,¹⁸ Smith began to marry other women in addition to his first wife, Emma. Throughout the 1830s, Joseph Smith adopted this practice very

¹³ THE BOOK OF MORMON.

¹⁴ See THE BOOK OF MORMON, *Mosiah* 15:1–5.

¹⁵ See THE BOOK OF MORMON, 1 *Nephi* 11:11 (describing the Holy Ghost); THE BOOK OF MORMON, *Ether* 3:6–8 (describing pre-mortal Jesus Christ).

¹⁶ It is important to note that Joseph's account of the First Vision changed over time. The first known account dates to 1832 and only makes mention of Jesus appearing. Other accounts include only the appearance of an angel. The canonized 1838 account is the only written account that describes the appearance of both Father and Son as separate beings. For a full treatment on this subject, see D. Michael Quinn, *Joseph Smith's Experience of a Methodist "Camp-Meeting" in 1820*, DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT (2006), <http://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/QuinnPaperless.pdf>.

¹⁷ See *Doctrine & Covenants* 132:32.

¹⁸ While this 1833 dating is possible, it is much more likely that Smith began the practice sometime in 1835 and certainly no later than 1836. See TODD COMPTON, *IN SACRED LONELINESS: THE PLURAL WIVES OF JOSEPH SMITH* 35 (1997); RICHARD S. VAN WAGONER, *MORMON POLYGAMY: A HISTORY* 6–7 (3d ed. 1992).

slowly, but by the time of his murder in 1844, Joseph Smith had married at least 27 women as part of what came to be known as the “new and everlasting covenant.”¹⁹ The Mormon practice of plural marriage was never acknowledged during the life of Joseph Smith and was only made public in 1852, once the Latter-day Saints, under the leadership of Brigham Young, felt isolated and independent enough within the confines of the Great Basin of Utah to make the details of this practice known.

In 1844, Joseph Smith delivered two sermons that form the basis on which the modern Mormon conception of God is constructed. These sermons have come to be known as the *King Follett Discourse* and the *Sermon at the Grove*.²⁰

The *Sermon at the Grove* is an exposition on the plurality of Gods. Within the sermon, Joseph Smith utilizes the Hebrew Bible’s use of the word Elohim to argue for a form of henotheism. Smith proclaims: “The heads of the Gods appointed one God for us; and when you take [that] view of the subject, its [sic] sets one free to see all the beauty, holiness and perfection of the Gods.”²¹ Smith reasons, based on a problematic King James translation of Revelation Chapter 1 that:

If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that He [God the Father] had a Father also. Where was there ever a son without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son? Whenever did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor? . . . Hence if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that *He* [God the Father] had a Father also?²²

¹⁹ Researcher Brian Hales posits three theological motivations for Smith’s adoption of plural marriage. First, the “restoration of all things” as they had been during the time of the Patriarchs. This includes the practice of plural marriage. Second, was to prepare homes and families to receive the spirits God would send to gain bodies and temporal experience in preparation for Christ’s Second Coming. Third, the acceptance of eternal—including plural—marriage was requisite for exaltation or bestowal of God’s greatest blessing. See generally 3 BRIAN C. HALES & DON BRADLEY, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: Theology* (2013).

²⁰ For the complete text of these sermons, see TEACHINGS OF THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH 342, 369–70 (Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr. ed., 1976).

²¹ *Id.* at 372.

²² *Id.* at 373.

Thus, Smith puts forth the notion of an eternal chain of Gods; each with a progenitor as well as an heir, or heirs. In the *King Follett Discourse*,²³ Smith expands on this assertion:

God himself was once [a man] as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. . . . I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.²⁴

Smith explains further:

These are incomprehensible ideas to some, but they are simple. It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the Character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did.²⁵

Smith then teaches his audience:

Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.²⁶

Some mothers in Smith's audience were evidently concerned about the eternal welfare of their children who had died before having an opportunity to accept the ordinances enabling eternal progression. To these mothers, Smith said:

²³ Smith knew the importance of this sermon and thus appointed no less than three scribes to take notes. It is from these four accounts that we have an amalgamated version today. See Van Hale, *The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse*, 18 BYU STUD. 209 (1978); Donald Q. Cannon, *The King Follett Discourse: Joseph Smith's Greatest Sermon in Historical Perspective*, 18 BYU STUD. 179 (1978); Stan Larson, *The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text*, 18 BYU STUD. 193 (1978).

²⁴ TEACHINGS OF THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH, *supra* note 19, at 345.

²⁵ *Id.* at 345–46.

²⁶ *Id.* at 346–47.

Mothers, you shall have your children; for they shall have eternal life; for their debt is paid . . . [b]ut as the child dies, so shall it rise from the dead, and be forever living in the learning of God. It will never grow: it will still be the child, in the same precise form as it appeared before it died out of its mother's arms, but possessing all the intelligence of a God.

Further: "Eternity is full of thrones, upon which dwell thousands of children reigning on thrones of glory, with not one cubit added to their stature."²⁷

Significantly, this passage regarding exalted children has been edited out of mainstream²⁸ church publications due to the fact that Smith's teaching here—that children would forever remain in a state of physical arrested development—contradicts some of his other teachings on the physical development of children in the hereafter. Yet, it is essential to note that Smith spoke here of individuals—in this case children—becoming Gods and "reigning on thrones of glory."²⁹ Also, Stan Larson, in his exhaustive amalgamation of this Sermon's text, retains this significant passage.³⁰

Shortly after giving this sermon, Joseph Smith was murdered in Carthage, Illinois, yet this idea of eternal progression remains central to Mormon theology to this day.

²⁷ Joseph Smith, *A Discourse by President Joseph Smith, Delivered at the Conference Held Near the Temple in Nauvoo* (Apr. 6, 1844), in 6 J. OF DISCOURSES 1 (1859) [hereinafter *A Discourse by President Joseph Smith*], available at <http://journalofdiscourses.com/6/1>.

²⁸ I use the term "mainstream" here to refer to texts prepared and published with general Church membership in mind. The unaltered version can be found in *History of the Church* with a long footnote describing why the text is invalid. See 6 SMITH, *supra* note 2, at 302–17. Also, *BYU Studies* has published an amalgamated text that includes the original text. Some critics of Mormonism are keen to point out when the Church makes significant alterations to original texts in an attempt to show the Church is engaged in a conspiracy of sorts to hide information from the general membership. Such is not the case here as the original, unaltered text can be found in several Church-related publications. See, e.g., Larson, *supra* note 22.

²⁹ *A Discourse by President Joseph Smith*, *supra* note 26.

³⁰ Larson, *supra* note 22, at 206–07.

III. EXPANSION OF THE CONCEPTION

The death of Joseph Smith began a chain of events that led to the expulsion of the Mormons from Illinois and their eventual settlement in the Great Basin of Utah.³¹ This isolation within the Rocky Mountains allowed the Mormons to openly practice plural marriage and, in 1852, publicly announce the practice to the world. Plural marriage had been taught secretly by Joseph Smith in Illinois to a relatively small number of his closest associates, and Smith taught that the practice of what he termed celestial marriage was essential in order for men and women to become exalted and become Gods.³² None of the scant records we have of Joseph Smith's private teachings explicitly link sexuality and procreation with the potential for Godhood. Rather, Smith employed terms such as "eternal increase" and "a continuation of the seeds"³³ to describe the exaltation of man and wife—or wives.

This all changed once the Mormons reached Utah under the leadership of Brigham Young. In an attempt to explain the necessity of plural marriage, Brigham Young and Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt, began to explicitly link "eternal increase" and exaltation with sexual procreation and, in the process, they also began to describe God in more explicit sexual terms.³⁴ Both

³¹ Early Mormonism produced many splinter groups, many of which still exist today. See SCATTERING OF THE SAINTS: SCHISM WITHIN MORMONISM 5–9, (Newell G. Bringham & John C. Hamer eds., 2007).

³² As has been alluded to above, Smith contradicts himself on this point. As the conception of celestial marriage was forming, Smith performed several *second anointings* for single men. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 131:1–4. These second anointings guaranteed that these men would become a King and Priest to God in the hereafter. See JOSEPH SMITH'S QUORUM OF THE ANOINTED, 1842-1845: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY xxviii (Devery S. Anderson & Gary James Bergera, eds., 2005). Second anointings were generally performed on couples and many were performed before the doctrine of eternal marriage was taught by Smith.

³³ A careful reading of *Doctrine and Covenants* 132 (the revelation on celestial and plural marriage) shows that couples who enter into the "new and everlasting covenant" would see a continuation of the seeds forever; not a continuation of their seeds. This is a significant semantic difference that can potentially change the way these verses are interpreted in regards to sexuality. In context, "the seeds" refers to the seed of Abraham, reinforcing the idea that celestial marriage makes a couple partakers of the Abrahamic covenant. See *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:19.

³⁴ Most notably, both Young and Pratt taught that God the Father literally impregnated Mary, the mother of Jesus. See Brigham Young, *Salvation: A Discourse by President Brigham Young, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City (Jan. 16, 1853)*, in 1 J. OF DISCOURSES 1 (1854), available at <http://journalofdiscourses.com/1/1/>; Brigham Young, *Universal Salvation: Remarks by President Brigham Young, Made in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City (Apr. 6, 1860)*, in 8 J.

Young and Pratt argued that a greater posterity, made possible through plural marriage and similar adoptive sealings, equated to a greater glory in Godhood.³⁵

The Mormon Church faced increasing pressure from the federal government because of plural marriage and, in 1890, eventually disavowed the practice under the leadership of Wilford Woodruff in order to avoid the seizure of all Church property and, further, arrests of those in Church leadership. Under Woodruff's leadership, Mormon theology moved away from plural marriage being central to exaltation toward monogamous eternal marriage being normative. Yet, sexuality was, in essence, still what made exaltation possible. A man and wife married in eternity would have the ability to procreate, create new worlds, and ever-increase their eternal glory through posterity.³⁶

IV. MODERN OPPOSITION TO HOMOSEXUALITY

In 1995, the leadership of the Mormon Church issued what has come to be known as the Family Proclamation.³⁷ In this proclamation, the Church declares, “[g]ender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose[]” and notes that “[e]ach [individual] is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents.”³⁸

Further:

By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners.³⁹

OF DISCOURSES 34 (1861), available at <http://journalofdiscourses.com/8/7/>; THE SEER, *supra* note 12, at 37.

³⁵ Gordon Irving, *The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830-1900*, 14 BYU STUD. 291 (1974).

³⁶ GOSPEL PRINCIPLES, *supra* note 8, ch. 47.

³⁷ *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, <http://www.lds.org/topics/family-proclamation> (last visited Apr. 3, 2013).

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

This proclamation reiterated the Church's strong views on gender roles—both earthly and eternal.⁴⁰

Homosexuality is anathema to Mormon theological conceptions. Two men, or two women, because of their very eternal nature, are unable, as a couple, to reach their full potential as exalted beings capable of becoming Gods, creating worlds, and producing eternal offspring.

Therefore, in my view, modern Mormonism opposes homosexuality for several reasons. First, homosexuality stands in opposition to Mormonism's view of God's plan for the union of male and female; second, the Church feels a responsibility to protect morality in the public square; and third, the Church may fear government encroachment on its ability to restrict celestial marriages to heterosexual couples.

V. THE POSSIBILITY OF CHANGE

Within the Mormon theological framework, however, there is always the possibility of change. Mormonism proudly boasts of "continuing revelation," which may, as God sees fit, expand current understandings or discard previously held notions or practices. Thus, it is entirely possible that the Mormon Church could become more amenable to the idea of same-sex marriage in some form depending on a number of cultural and religious factors. Perhaps the most influential factor would be for modern Mormonism to reevaluate Joseph Smith's original teachings on the nature of human sexuality and potential for Godhood sans the later extrapolations of Brigham Young and Orson Pratt.

That Joseph Smith taught that God is an exalted human being is beyond question, as is the fact that Smith taught that some sort of relationship between the sexes—as it relates to creating familial ties—is essential to Godhood. However, I contend that this relationship was not meant to convey explicit sexuality, but rather, it was intended to represent familial relationships to bring both individuals and families into the wider Abrahamic covenant so central to Joseph Smith's eschatological ideas.

⁴⁰ The modern Church has been very proactive in regard to other political gender issues; particularly the Equal Rights Amendment. See D. MICHAEL QUINN, *THE MORMON HIERARCHY: EXTENSIONS OF POWER* 374 (1997).

Joseph Smith viewed himself as a modern Abraham and felt it was his calling to “do the works of Abraham,” in part by restoring the practice of plural marriage. Both Richard Bushman and Todd Compton argue that many of these plural marriages were dynastic in nature; binding Joseph Smith with other influential Mormon families.⁴¹ Joseph Smith, unlike later Mormon polygamists, actively practiced polyandry. Also, we know of no offspring that resulted from Joseph Smith’s plural marriages.⁴² Thus, Joseph Smith’s own practice of plural marriage is more understandable in the context of familial dynastic relationships than in the context of sexual offspring enabling both glory and Godhood.

Also, before the administration of Wilford Woodruff—and especially in the early days of celestial marriage—it was a common practice to seal one man to another in an eternal father-

⁴¹ COMPTON, *supra* note 18, at 10; BUSHMAN & WOODWORTH, *supra* note 1, at 439–50.

⁴² This point is of incredible significance since we know that Joseph Smith and his first wife, Emma, had absolutely no trouble conceiving children. If the production of offspring were the primary goal of celestial marriage—as later argued by both Pratt and Young—we should expect that Joseph Smith’s polygamous and polyandrous unions would have produced offspring. Of course, Joseph Smith was also very secretive in his practice of plural marriage and thus preventing pregnancy—especially with those wives not concurrently married to other men—would be sensible. However, there are several cases where Joseph Smith could easily have impregnated one of his polyandrous wives without raising any suspicion. So, this leaves us with several possible scenarios: 1) Joseph Smith did not have sexual relations with his plural wives; 2) Joseph Smith did have sexual relations with some of his plural wives but prevented pregnancy; or 3) Joseph Smith had sexual relations with his plural wives, those relations produced offspring, but those offspring are hidden to both history and DNA science to this point. Given both the context of Smith’s teachings and the manner in which he practiced plural marriage, scenario number two seems to be the most likely; again, underscoring the fact that Joseph’s primary concern was not temporal offspring. Of course, it is quite possible that Joseph expected to produce offspring with his wives in the eternities and not on earth. However, there is only one reference to Joseph Smith teaching anything like this and it comes from a very late source. See Michael De Groote, *DNA Solves a Joseph Smith Mystery*, DESERET NEWS (July 9, 2011, 11:42 PM), <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700150651/DNA-solves-a-Joseph-Smithmystery.html?pg=all>. Pratt’s autobiography was likely heavily influenced by theological developments in Utah. See GEORGE D. SMITH, *NAUVOO POLYGAMY* xvii (2d ed. 2011); Carrie A. Moore, *DNA Tests Rule Out 2 as Smith Descendants*, DESERET MORNING NEWS, Nov. 10, 2007. It should also be noted that Parley P. Pratt dates Smith’s reference to eternal offspring to 1840, which makes the accuracy of this recollection even more suspect given that the full development of Smith’s conception of God was not presented to others within Smith’s inner circle until nearly 3 years later; although it is clear that Smith shared the details of polygamy with some as early as 1840.

son relationship, thus forming a non-sexual family tie. Such sealings were known as adoption and support the eschatological notion of familial dynastic relationships.⁴³

It seems evident that Joseph Smith intended all to become part of the Abrahamic covenant, and the reconstitution of plural marriage and celestial marriage were the means to this end. When Joseph Smith spoke of “eternal increase,” it is very likely that he was not speaking of an increase in procreated offspring. Rather, “doing the works of Abraham” by entering the “new and everlasting covenant of marriage,” qualified individuals to take part in the larger Abrahamic covenant, thus enabling them to receive an eternal increase of God’s glory and kingdoms—to become Kings and Priests, Queens and Priestesses unto God.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

The interpretation I present here of Joseph Smith’s original teachings is a radical departure from modern Mormon notions of sexuality as it relates to the eternal potential of humankind. Also, it is not without problems. However, its key strength is that it is based entirely upon the extant words of Joseph Smith regarding human exaltation and also on the notes and journals of his immediate contemporaries. In other words, I have given primacy to contemporary, rather than late, sources.

As social orthodoxy moves towards greater acceptance of same-sex relationships, the modern Mormon Church is likely to make some accommodations in response. It would be fruitless to speculate on what these accommodations may be. However, modern Mormonism has been keen to downplay, and even disavow some of the teachings of Brigham Young when such teachings have proven problematic.⁴⁵ It seems to me, then, that

⁴³ Irving, *supra* note 34, at 4–5.

⁴⁴ JOSEPH SMITH’S QUORUM OF THE ANOINTED, 1842-1845: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY, *supra* note 31.

⁴⁵ Brigham Young taught that humans of African descent possessed the “Curse of Cain” and thus, could not hold the Priesthood. This policy was reversed based on a revelation received by Church President Spencer Kimball in 1978. See Armand L. Mauss, *The Fading of the Pharaohs’ Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban Against Blacks in the Mormon Church*, 14 DIALOGUE: J. OF MORMON THOUGHT 10 (1981); see generally ARMAND L. MAUSS, ALL ABRAHAM’S CHILDREN: CHANGING MORMON CONCEPTIONS OF RACE AND LINEAGE (2003).

Brigham Young's explicit sexualization of God, and its resulting dogma, may be a teaching yet to be discarded. Teryl Givens has noted that Mormonism is a religion of paradox.⁴⁶

Paradoxically, modern Mormonism may need to look back in an effort move forward.

⁴⁶ TERYL L. GIVENS, *PEOPLE OF PARADOX: A HISTORY OF MORMON CULTURE* xiv (2007).