

## **Section Two; Mormon Ethnographies.**

### **Chapter five . Mormon intercessions; the interpretation of death.**

*Ruth said; ' I know I have the chance to be with Angus in eternity, if I keep on following the iron rod.... I will be with Angus for all eternity and the few extra years of this mortal existence that I was begging for here, will seem pretty insignificant from that perspective.'*

#### **1. Missing Angus.**

A Sunday in early May in upstate New York. It's the first Sunday of the month; the Sunday set aside for fast offerings and testimony in Sacrament Service. It's the final hour – my favourite hour- of the three regular Sunday meetings; Relief Society, the meeting of the adult women of the ward. We sit in the usual pleasant meeting room, with the spring light filtering in through the window behind us, but facing the front and whoever is going to lead the lesson that day. There is a new appointment to the Relief Society Presidency; Ruth, a long-time convert to the church with two adult daughters and their families also in the ward, has been set apart as a counselor. Ruth is an articulate, thoughtful person with a sense of humour and considered opinions; she is also a widow, having lost her husband Angus, whom she deeply loved, six years earlier.

The meeting is a little smaller than usual; one or two women are away, and one or two are unwell that day. Ruth has to ask for volunteers to offer the opening and closing prayers, choose the opening and closing hymns, and play the piano. Clara offers the first prayer, in a simple and typical form; 'Our dear Father in Heaven, We thank Thee for the sisterhood of this meeting. We ask thy blessing on those absent sisters who are sick; that they may be well, and for those on vacation; that they may be protected. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.' We sing our hymn from the church hymn book; those who have grown up in the church, and the musically talented, provide

the harmonies. I notice that both Ruth's daughters are here (although one usually teaches the children's class at this time), and both are holding copies of the church magazine *Ensign*, open at marked articles. The two sisters are quite dissimilar in looks and personality; one has only recently moved back to the area, but each is a very faithful member who has served callings, and whose husbands have served callings, in key positions over the years.

Ruth begins to talk to us; 'Well,' she says, 'I had very little notice of this, and I didn't realize I'd have to take lessons.... it's been twenty years since I taught anyone, and the last time was Primary!' <sup>i</sup> Linda Thomas calls out; would it help if we all sat on the floor? 'No, it would not!' says Ruth. People smile, but they also wonder what is coming next. Fast and Testimony days <sup>ii</sup> can sometimes be quite emotional. There's a sense that we are not about to receive a standard cut-and-paste lesson <sup>iii</sup>.

'Well,' says Ruth, 'I was given a choice of topics, and I had just read this wonderful article in June's *Ensign* by Dallin H. Oaks <sup>1</sup> about miracles. And I picked this topic, which is sort of personal to me. Many of you may think I'm a pretty light-hearted sort of person, laughing and joking all the time, and it's pretty difficult for me to express my real emotions sometimes. So, I've asked my daughters to come here, and *they* haven't even heard everything I'm going to say. So I get to tell them in this public forum, and I don't have to get them alone and tell them face-to-face.

How many of you believe in miracles? (most people put up their hands). I have to tell you, that on (and here she named a precise day, six years before including the day of the week and the time of the evening) my husband, Angus, passed away from three kinds of cancer. And from that time until last Thursday, when I was preparing this talk, a little corner of me was not just sad, but also bitter and resentful. Because I had asked God for what would be just

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<sup>1</sup> The article referred to appears to be [http://www.lds.org/ensign/2001/06/miracles?lang=eng&query=miracles+june+\(name%3a"Dallin+H.+Oaks"\)](http://www.lds.org/ensign/2001/06/miracles?lang=eng&query=miracles+june+(name%3a%Dallin+H.+Oaks))

only a little miracle for him, but a great big miracle for me, which was to give Angus, this *good* man, a few more years of life. And I was angry with God when I didn't get it.

Everyone in the room listened attentively; the atmosphere was sympathetic, with a slight element of tension, as though some people had drawn a breath in when Ruth named her bitterness, and had not yet let it go.

Ruth had passed around different Scripture extracts for people to read out, which is a standard teaching practice for LDS lessons. The first extract was Doctrine and Covenants<sup>iv</sup>, 42; 48;

- 48 And again, it shall come to pass that he that hath faith in me to be healed, and is not appointed unto death, shall be healed.

This, said Ruth, was the text on which she had been basing her hopes for a miraculous cure for her husband before he died, knowing that she had faith in the power of the priesthood of the church to bring this about. It had suddenly struck her just last week, she said, as she revisited the verse in preparation for this lesson, that when she had prayed so hard for Angus to be saved, 'I guess I just hadn't been paying attention to the whole thing; I guess it must have been Angus's appointed time to die.'

What Ruth wanted to tell us today, she said, was that a different kind of miracle had taken place; that she had finally been healed of her anger that she didn't get the miracle she prayed for, and had acknowledged that God gives us what we need although he does not – and cannot- always give us what we want, at the time that we want it. 'There are all kinds of natural and biological laws.... God works according to laws.'

Next, Ruth asked her older daughter to read a section from the *Ensign* article, which recounts a dramatic miracle wrought by a missionary in Tonga, who had felt impelled by the Holy Spirit to pray for the restoration to life of a child, four hours after she had been terribly injured and died in a road traffic accident; the child had recovered next morning and was 'completely normal.' Joyce, Ruth's older daughter, was wiping away tears as she finished the extract, and so were several in the audience. Joyce said to her mother; 'You ambushed

me! This story was bad enough – by which I mean, good enough, - without the context it's in.'

Ruth went on to ask Joyce to read another story from a different edition of *Ensign*, in this case about the miraculous protection of temples. She added; 'Changing bodies and protecting temples are miracles, but the greatest miracle is changing the heart of the spirit sons and daughters of God.' She recalled the 'wonderful blessing' which had been given to her husband by their then bishop of the ward, before Angus died. The bishop had talked about their being two kinds of faith; your own faith, and the faith of others. At one point, he had said (under inspiration); 'Angus, at this point the time has arrived when you have to have your own faith; you can no longer rely on the faith of others.' Even when she heard this, Ruth said, she didn't understand or accept what was coming.

Ruth went on to draw on the *Ensign* pieces, and thus on the church authorities who wrote them, both to acknowledge the ubiquity of miracles in the church, and to recognise that we often didn't hear of them, because Latter-day Saints are enjoined not to boast, and told to protect sacred things from ridicule which has sometimes been heaped on them by the world. Such things, she said, we are told to speak of with care, and by the constraint of the Spirit. ( D and C: 63; 63-4) But such concerns may be brought, in particular, to the temple<sup>v</sup>, where Latter-day Saints will often look for the special comfort which may be found in holy places.

Ruth had been hoping, she continued, ever since Angus's death, that she would have a spiritual experience in the temple, 'as so many of you say you have had,' and that she would feel Angus's presence there. She had been disappointed, and ths had added to her bitterness and resentment.

'Angus, ' she said, ' was an extraordinary man. I have never known anyone like him. He would always tell me that he didn't need the church, and he didn't need people really, either; but people needed him. He would go into a room, and people would flock to him and gather round him; people, kids, dogs, all liked him. It was just the sort of personality he had. He never would talk about the church, never talked about God. When the children joined the

church, he wouldn't come, unless they were giving a talk, and then he would come along to hear it. But the girls realized, and they would ask to be given talks so their dad would come along,.. and after a while he figured out what they were doing, and he said he didn't think he'd be coming every time. He would say; 'These are such good people, Ruthie, but I don't *need* this.'

This was his reaction one time when Esther, who sometimes received inspiration and felt impressed to do something, whether or not it made her feel comfortable. And on this occasion, she felt impelled to come to the house and sit with Angus and tell him that he was loved <sup>2</sup>. After she'd left, that's what he said (but gently, not angrily) - 'I don't *need* this, Ruthie.' Esther and Ruth both smiled wryly at the memory, in mutual understanding.

Ruth then began to speak again about the very last days of her husband's life, and Joyce joined in the recollections. Angus had once caught her weeping, she said, and had told her; 'You know; I know that I brought this on myself.' Joyce said; my father had many opportunities to give up smoking in this life, and he had never done it. And just as my mother hated to see him suffering because of his failure of will power in that regard, no doubt Heavenly Father felt great pain at seeing Angus suffer because he couldn't give up smoking. But Heavenly Father is constrained by various natural laws, and one of them is the law of free agency; he had to leave her father his free agency, and her father chose not to give up smoking. And he also did not join the church, although he had many opportunities to do that as well.

But... right at the end of his life, certain things had happened. Firstly, one of his sons-in-law had dreamt of Angus's mother, whom he had never met. She appeared in his dream as a young woman, and said; you've all had Angus long enough; it's time for me to have him back now. And so Joyce found a picture of Angus's mother as a beautiful young woman and put the picture by his bed so he could see it. They told him; 'Dad, it may be that your Mom will be the one to meet you at the veil.' They wanted him to see the picture, because

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<sup>2</sup> Latter-day Saints often begin lessons to both children and adults with the repeated statement that every person is loved by God- and thus should conduct themselves with care, as a person of value to the divine.

they knew Angus's mother would appear as a young person, and they thought perhaps he would be confused, and not immediately recognise her.

Just before the end, Angus had a dream. He told his wife; 'I dreamed I was at the very top of a high mountain, up in the clouds, and I could see all my family and friends at the bottom of the mountain, calling for me to come down, but it was too steep. I couldn't climb down, and I was afraid. Then the hand of God appeared, and it lifted me down from the mountain.' He also told her, 'Ruthie, you are the only woman I have ever loved, and I know that I am going ahead to prepare a place for you, and you and I will walk together hand in hand through Eternity.' And he told her that she could do all the LDS vicarious rituals for him; 'do whatever you want to do, Ruthie.' She was incredibly surprised, because Angus never, ever spoke about God. And she also heard in his words a clear echo of her own patriarchal blessing, which promised that her husband would convert to the church, and that she would walk hand in hand with him, through eternity. It was the exact same phrase, and she had never told Angus, or shown him, what was in that blessing. And she added that her older daughter had read to Angus from the Book of Mormon while he was in his final illness 'and I think he knew that what we were doing was right.'

Ruth wondered now, she said, whether Angus's refusal to exercise faith had perhaps clouded her ability to sense his presence after he died, even in the temple – or especially there. And she was hoping, she said, that perhaps now that her anger was lifted from her heart, she might be able to feel something of what other people had felt in the temple, and maybe even ( she said, longingly) 'to get a little hint of Angus there.'

By this time, everyone was very moved, and many people were surreptitiously wiping away tears as they listened. Robin, Ruth's younger daughter, stood up holding her copy of *Ensign* and talked about Plato's famous analogy of the people who live in a cave and only know life from shadows on the wall. She said, 'We do not know everything. I often get the feeling that we are like that, and that there is much that we do not yet understand.... And that in the end, it will come out right, and everything will be as it is meant to be.' She and her sister had both said, in several different ways, what a good man their

father was, and how much they loved him. Ruth's younger daughter Robin added; 'I know I will be with my father in eternity.' And Ruth said, 'I know I have the chance to be with Angus in eternity, if I keep on following the iron rod... and the few extra years of this moral existence that I was begging for here, will seem pretty insignificant from that perspective.'

Esther then got up and said to everyone; 'You don't know the end of that story' (about having to visit Angus). The message was meant to be for Ruth, and not just for Angus.' She said she really had felt very hesitant to go, knowing that Angus wouldn't necessarily welcome it, but had felt that she must, and Kenneth had come with her because she was so uncomfortable with the obligation. But the end of the message she had to pass on was, she said, in a low voice and wiping away tears as she spoke to Ruth, 'I saw Angus, dressed all in white. He was such a good man. I'm so sorry you were angry, and I'm so glad you're not angry any more.' Ruth brushed away tears herself as she said this, and then, trying to laugh at herself, said; 'Well, this is ridiculous!' But no-one else was really trying to hold back their tears, and several other women rose to speak about moments of great loss, and the need not to be angry with God for taking back the soul of a loved one. Several people spoke who hadn't known Angus personally, with great sympathy for Ruth. One woman stood up near the end of the meeting, and said, she wanted to say something about being disappointed when one went to the temple. She had put off taking out her ordinances, she said, for many years after she was baptised, but last year she had finally gone to the temple. But things had proceeded in order during the ceremony, and she had felt nothing. The only thing she had noticed, was a smell of fresh fish, which she thought was strange. She put it down to the temple being newly decorated, but when she asked the friend who had gone with her, the friend couldn't smell anything at all. It was only when the ritual was finished, and she was getting into her car to go home, that it had struck her; her father had been a passionate fisherman. It was what he liked to do best in the world, and she suddenly realized that what she had smelled had been the smell of her father, and that he had been there with her in the temple, all the time 'and' she said, laughing a little, 'I hadn't even noticed.' So, in the temple, look out for subtle little things, that only you might notice or understand. Well, said, Ruth, when I

smell smoke in the temple, then I'll know it's Angus! Everyone laughed, but Esther said, comfortingly; I think he might have given that up, by now, Ruthie.

We sang the closing hymn ('How gentle God's commands! How kind his precepts are!'), and the final prayer thanked Heavenly Father for the spirit found at the meeting today, and thanked all the sisters for their dedication.

## 2. A Graveside blessing

It's Spring, 2001 – May, in fact, but Spring comes late and sudden in upstate New York. Later in the day, when I take my one-year son to the playground by the lake, he still needs a jacket as the wind comes off the water surprisingly chill. This morning, I've come up to one of the town's old nineteenth-century cemeteries. The cemetery, known for the view it affords, occupies a steep hillside looking out over that same bright blue lake, surrounded by the newly greened trees clustering along the shore. I've come to see a LDS graveside blessing of a lady I didn't know, Josephine L- who has died in the local rest home, at an age just shy of 103.

I haven't been here before, and I park the car on the steep road and locate the entrance gate with some difficulty. Just as I find the gate, I also see Leah from the ward church, parking a van. She said good morning, and we walked down to the graveside plot together, where a number of people were gathering, adults and children; some from the church and some unfamiliar. Leah said; 'You know, this isn't at all a Mormon service; in fact, the family is slightly hostile. I asked them to tell me when she was dying, so that I could be with her, and they lied to me... I got there fifteen minutes after she had passed away. *But she was still lingering*, and I have to tell you it was an amazing, spiritual experience... more like a birth. I had never been present at a death before.'

A little disconcerted by the fact that Leah considered the blessing service not properly Mormon, I listened carefully to the address given by the deceased



lady's nephew. He spoke affectionately of his aunt, as a pioneer woman in her virtues, always baking and focussed on family and home, but also partial to unusual kinds of game, and equal to holding her own with any group of male hunters. Widowed early, she had enjoyed a long second marriage, but had never had any children of her own. The nephew noted that Aunt Josephine had joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and thanked them politely for everything they had done for her, and for visiting her in the nursing home.

Apart from a mention of 'hunters' coffee'<sup>vi</sup>, I could see nothing in this address which would be opposed to Mormon tastes – Latter-day Saints include to this day strong farming women handy with a knife and capable with animals, with land in the Utah canyons - but Martha, although absolute cordiality to all the relatives to whom she introduced herself, was seemingly not completely mollified. Admittedly the address was personal, while a LDS-only funeral oration would usually have focussed more on the spiritual qualities of the deceased and the spiritual consolations of the living. But she said; I have just been explaining to our friend that he cannot attend *our* funeral; - a slightly cryptic remark, which I took to be a reference to the post-mortem temple work that Josephine's LDS friends would want to offer for her and her immediate family, and which – in the absence of surviving spouse or children, whose permission would normally need to be secured, - they were probably entitled to offer with little delay.

Meanwhile, the service was taking a more 'Mormon' turn- with the acquiescence of the deceased's family, who certainly all stayed to watch the graveside blessing, without any sign of demur. Kenneth Johns, Esther's husband, stepped forward. The deceased lady's nephew had already pointed out that we were in an area of family graves of his aunt's natal family, and that in the surrounding plots were the remains of her parents, siblings, and other relatives. To the left of a large stone bearing the names of a number of family members, there was a small opening large enough to take a box of cremated ashes. Kenneth Johns asked people to move closer, and explained that 'in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints we like to put a blessing on the grave in order to protect it, so that it will remain protected until the day of the resurrection, and this blessing takes the form of a prayer.' He then crossed his

arms and bowed his head in the characteristic Mormon posture for prayer, and gave the dedication in a gentle but powerful voice as follows;

' Dear Father in Heaven, by the power of the Melchiseck priesthood vested in me, I dedicate and consecrate this resting place for the remains of the body of Josephine-- (full name). We pray that this ground will be hallowed and protected until the time of the Resurrection of the dead. We ask thee to comfort and guide Josephine's family in their time of grief. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.'

Kenneth then remarked that it had been pointed out to him that Josephine's husband's grave had never received a dedication, and that he would like to take a few minutes to perform one now. Again Kenneth spoke a dedicatory prayer, consecrating the ground to protect the remains of Josephine's husband until the end of time should come, and the resurrection of the dead. Again, he invoked the authority of the Melchisedeck priesthood, and spoke out her husband's full name, including his middle name, with great clarity of articulation and seriousness, as if he was taking a sacred roll call. As I listened, I felt my spine tingle with a sense of the momentous claim that was being made by these apparently simple and relatively familiar prayers. Guidance for giving the dedicatory prayer (and other prayers and blessings) is laid out in the Church manuals, and Kenneth had observed the model closely ( Family Guidebook, 2006 Priesthood Ordinances and Blessings [lds.org/manual/family-guidebook](https://www.lds.org/manual/family-guidebook)), but he spoke with an intensity and dignity that clearly conveyed that the blessing was neither formula nor metaphor for him as he spoke it, but efficacious truth. Every particle of a person's mortal being will be required at the Resurrection, and by the blessing of the grave, it is promised that every particle, every atom of the body will be protected and available when the time comes. Thus, at a Mormon graveside blessing, even a 'hybrid' occasion such as this, one looks at the grave, and one sees – not worms, or ashes to ashes, dust to dust, or even the sleep of the just- but the coming Resurrection, brought forward suddenly for a moment into the now.

Latter-day Saints are traditionally advised to bury, rather than to cremate, their dead; if possible, an observant LDS person should be buried in their full temple clothing, in which, presumably, they will rise to greet the Lord when

the time comes, and be recognisable as those who have taken out their covenants. Leah indeed remarked on this, saying that she had 'learnt something new' in seeing an LDS interment of a cremation, but she seemed quite untroubled by it, and simply added that it was much more convenient in terms of space. Presumably, in this case at least, it had been judged that all the required matter could be recovered from the cremated ashes when the time came for Josephine to rise in her restored and perfected body.

As we walked away from the burial plot, I told Leah that a much-loved aunt of mine, who had died in an accident in India, had been given a Hindu cremation by the Indian authorities before her ashes were brought home to be interred in England. There had been concern that my aunt, initially unidentified, should be given all the funerary rites a person might need. 'Except the Mormon ones,' said Leah, smiling, 'but we'll get to her. We are indefatigable, and relentless.'

### 3. The Mormon 'conquest of death.'

Mormon funerals, as people in the LDS church will readily tell you, have their own particular hallmark style and are meant to be exemplary of Mormon faith. That spine-tingling Mormon priesthood blessing to protect the dead in their graves and fortell their Resurrection, speaks of the radical capacities of Mormon priesthood ritual by which, theoretically at least, a faithful Mormon priesthood holder prayerfully inspired by the Holy Spirit may mediate the same powers by which Christ in his lifetime raised Lazarus from the tomb. This sort of idea did not only seem striking to me as an outside observer; faithful Mormon men of my acquaintance would muse on moments in their lives when they had felt called upon to exercise particular healing or other powerful blessings, in tones both reverent and excited; fascinated by the expansion of human capacity through the restoration of its connection with a material divinity.

These same radical capacities also reconfigure the place of death in a different way, as mortal kinship is eternalised across space and time through Mormon temple ritual. The sense of a vertiginous 'falling into kinship' that I described in

the opening of this book<sup>vii</sup> - when time and space re-arrange themselves in the experience of the person, so that both stretch out before and beyond this mortal existence in the form of an endlessly linked sequence of human generations- follows from understanding that in Mormon doctrine we recover the knowledge that we are, literally (physically), the children of God, and in Mormon ritual we recover the capacity to return to our own space of belonging in God's eternally extending genealogies. Moreover, it will be recalled that since to Mormon ways of thinking 'there is nothing immaterial', these eternities will perfect rather than supercede our present mortal embodiment, and our immortality will include the parenting of new generations to come.

For those whose mortal families have an established history in the church, and especially those who spend their lives in Utah, this knowledge implies and requires a particular kind of comportment around death. The awesome certainty of Mormon resurrection is to be reflected in a steadiness in the face of earthly death, and the Saints' trust in the temple rituals which 'seal' upon them (make permanent across death) their kinship with God and with each other should enable the moderation of grief by joy and anticipation at, *most certainly*, being reunited in the future with departed friends and, above all, departed family. In so far as Mormonism historically claimed to have 'solved' the intense Protestant anxiety about separation at death which characterised the nineteenth-century American milieu ( Samuel Morris Brown, 2012) members of the Mormon church must (whether they are aware of that particular history or not) show their reliance on that triumph both so that non-Mormons may observe the difference, and so that within the church fellow-members may not judge one lacking in a time of trial.

In fact, of course, Latter-day Saints are not automata and even those from the most impeccable church pedigree often wrestle with far more contradictory experiences of grief than this; indeed, it is probably more accurate to say that many contemporary Mormons try to acknowledge their grief and progress with it towards a place of faithful acceptance ( a form of sacrificial work), than that they suppress feelings of grief.<sup>viii</sup> Nevertheless, there remains a powerful valuation of an attitude of resignation and relative serenity among the bereaved, and of the ethos of Mormon funerals (especially, funeral meals) as cheerful gatherings

of consolation from neighbours and kin, where friends remember the departed with love and look to the reunion to come.

One illustration of the ideal tone of a Utah Mormon funeral – although not one I personally witnessed - can be provided from the complete folder of records detailing the ceremonies for the father of a ward member in upstate New York, who had grown up in Utah, and whose mother and other members of his family, I was later fortunate enough to meet out West. His friend's father died in the summer of 1996, before I began this research, so I rely on the account his son gave, and on the batch of family records which he kindly lent me.

In this case the deceased, Fielding L-----, was born into the church in a family with long pedigree there. His father was set apart as a patriarch when he was a child, and gave Fielding his patriarchal blessing <sup>ix</sup>himself; to his surprise, Fielding himself was called as a patriarch by President Hinckley many years later – a distinction which he had not expected, and a quite daunting responsibility. As he had explained his feelings, while most Church callings require a lot of preparation and work, there are many kinds of assistance on which people can call, including published materials which give guidance both on Scripture and on policy, and the experience of others in the ward and Stake. The calling of a patriarch, however, is one which requires the person to place themselves in readiness to receive direct inspiration, perhaps twice or three times a week in a large Stake, and to express that inspiration to each individual so as to provide them with a source of divine guidance and reassurance they can consult throughout their lives. Other than prayer and fasting – which Fielding conscientiously carried out – and long experience in the church and with ward members, there is no safety net for the patriarch. Besides this and other church callings, Fielding had a distinguished scientific career, and had married a devout, attractive and educated young woman from a highly observant Mormon family in Canada. Together they had raised their (five) children within the church, and all had married<sup>x</sup> and raised their own children as good Latter-day Saints. A few weeks before his death of cancer in his eighties, Fielding had been able to attend Sunday sacrament meeting and bear his testimony to others in his ward, speaking of the many direct assurances he and others had received, of the reality of the spirit world and the life to come. He had not particularly wanted to die – he was still enjoying life-, but he prepared for death with religious faith, and died peacefully after a period of leavetaking

with all his extended family who lived elsewhere, and with others of his family and his wife always with him. His children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and Canadian in-laws as well as friends and members of the ward, were all present at his funeral and at the graveside dedication for his interment. People spoke of their love for him, and his grandchildren spoke both of his care for their spiritual well-being – his reminders that they should always, always remember to pray – and his encouragement for them, sense of fun, dedication to teaching them fishing and chess, his partiality for practical jokes and stories about teasing his school teachers when he was a boy. Everyone acknowledged his stalwart and lifelong service to the church.

When his widow stood by his graveside, she spoke as a faithful and hopeful Latter-day Saint should on losing her faithful husband;

' I want to say thank you. Thank you, God, for sending us the choice spirits to bless mine and Fielding's love. He was mighty proud of all of you. He was proud of his family heritage - heritage and the – family. And we tried hard to make a family worthy to be together in the Celestial Kingdom when our time came. And today it seems that you have all proved worthy. Thank you for that. Thank you for all the participation you've done, and the sacrifices you've made to come and be here. Remember this as a kind of milestone to make you think of where you're going. And I hope that it will make you think. Many times, Theron has gone on ahead of me for employment, because we knew we had to do it for the betterment of the family, and we were committed to do that. He's gone on ahead of me now, and you kids will have to keep me on the straight and narrow to find my way there. But he's always provided a new home for us, new goals, new commitments. And I ask you to all make that commitment within you that when the time comes when I'm put here or ... others are put here, that you'll feel that much closer to our Father in Heaven. God be with all of you. Fielding says thank you. I say thank you; for all our family I say, remember who you are. Amen.'

#### 4. 'There's got to be more'.

Since the upstate New York ward which I was visiting was composed of roughly half first-generation converts, not everyone had access to the kind of familial social capital which enabled my friend's mother to make this very proper and very heartfelt Mormon graveside speech. For many of those whose parents or extended family had not joined the church with them, the currency of proper feeling was less readily accessible and the forms of faithful action required more improvisation.

Let us return to the situation of Ruth and her daughters, on the loss of Angus who had never joined the church they loved, and consider some of the technical aspects of the position in which they found themselves. The intimate exchange of thoughts and sharing of feelings which marked this meeting I described at the opening of this chapter, had followed directly after a Gospel Doctrine lesson (shared between adult women and men) in which, in the course of that year's study which was of Doctrine and Covenants, a major point of LDS doctrine had been reiterated for the class. This point being, that good men who refuse baptism into the LDS church during this mortal life, will be restricted to the Terrestrial Kingdom, or the second rank of Mormon heaven, in the life to come.

Not everyone who was present at Relief Society had been in that particular Gospel Doctrine class, (as some people were serving callings elsewhere), but the point is very familiar to all those in the church. The standard LDS study guide 'Preparing for exaltation' gives the following definitions;

##### Who Will Inherit Terrestrial Glory? ([D&C 76:71-80](#))

Those who:

- a. Reject the gospel in this life but receive it in the spirit world ([D&C 76:71-74](#)).
- b. Are honorable but are blinded by the craftiness of men ([D&C 76:75](#)).
- c. Are not valiant in the testimony of Jesus ([D&C 76:79](#)).

##### How Can We Inherit Celestial Glory? ([D&C 76:50-70](#))

We must:

- a. Receive the testimony of Jesus ([D&C 76:51](#)).

- b. Be baptized by one with priesthood authority ([D&C 76:51](#)).
- c. Keep the commandments ([D&C 76:52](#)).
- d. Receive the gift of the Holy Ghost ([D&C 76:52–53](#)).
- e. Overcome the world by faith ([D&C 76:53](#)).
- f. Be made perfect through the Atonement of Jesus Christ ([D&C 76:69](#)).

**Who Else Will Inherit Celestial Glory? ([D&C 137:7–10](#))**

Those who:

- g. Die without a knowledge of the gospel but “would have received it with all their hearts” ([D&C 137:7–9](#)).

And those who:

- h. “Die before they arrive at the years of accountability” ([D&C 137:10](#)). <http://www.lds.org/manual/preparing-for-exaltation-teachers-manual/lesson-8-the-three-kingdoms-of-glory?lang=eng>

This list, like much else in LDS official teaching manuals, looks both clear and complete, and yet cannot possibly begin to cover the range of humanly complex situations which members of the church daily live out.<sup>3</sup> The fact that this is the case is acknowledged in the text of this chapter, which (as at some other points in teaching manuals) both notes that the teacher may be asked questions to which he or she does not know the answer, and counsels the teacher to ‘avoid speculation’ in the classroom and to seek authoritative guidance on specific queries instead. It may be, the text notes, that the answers to some of the questions people may wish to ask, have not yet been revealed.

In LDS teaching, the ‘Terrestrial kingdom’ - the second rank of the life resurrected – and even the Telestial kingdom, the third rank beneath it, which contains liars, adulterers and those who deny Jesus- are not bad places to be, or at least, not compared to the terrors of Hell as imagined in traditional Roman Catholic or Protestant doctrine. Each of these realms is thought of as infinitely more glorious than mortal life; they are not places of torment. In that sense, as Latter-day Saints often point out, their religion is much more compassionate than faiths which would condemn many people to damnation. But only in the Celestial Kingdom, whose glory is as the sun to the moon and stars of the other realms, offers the full realisation of human potential understood as the opportunity for

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, the total body of LDS Scripture and its interpretation is much more wide-ranging, and the teaching manuals only provide an accessible starting point for questions which many people pursue further through their own study.



further progression, the real sense of having returned home to God, and the permanent and indissoluble togetherness of kin for which Latter-day Saints strive.

For those who are born and grow up in the church, especially in Utah, and whose entire family networks are LDS, these laws can and do generate deeply painful conflicts in some circumstances ( see on ---). But they can also, absent any crisis in the immediate family, be thought of with a certain degree of calm acceptance. Thus, a friend who spent many patient hours discussing LDS teaching with me, would illustrate this principle of the three kingdoms with reference to a particularly 'ornery' relative of his, a difficult aunt who had died in Utah in a state of inactivity and somewhat at odds with church teachings. His expectation, related without a sense of tragedy, was that she would probably be in the Terrestrial Kingdom, and that if other members of his family were (as he hoped) established in the Celestial, they would be able to go and visit her in her lower sphere, but not vice versa. The difficult relative would not be cast into the hands of demons or even consigned to a more abstract place of despair and loneliness, - but she would be stuck, along with many other people, in her somewhat more limited sphere because of the choices she had made in her lifetime. She wouldn't be with the rest of the family; but they would go on paying her occasional visits, during the eternities, just as they had done in life. When he described this scenario, I had the impression (perhaps quite misleading, as I never knew the story from the aunt's viewpoint) that everyone would be reasonably happy with this arrangement, and that possibly the aunt would be seeing quite as much of her relations that way as she would welcome.

This relatively benign form of imperfect post-mortem kinship, however, was unlikely to be what first generation converts would imagine in relation to the death of their own close family members who had not joined the church. Instead, it seemed to me to be almost universal among convert members to look for an interpretation of church teaching which made space for the possibility that the unconverted beloved would, like Ruth's husband Angus, nevertheless be reunited with them in the highest eternities. Thus, while all Angus's family, and his LDS friends, knew that he had declined to be converted for most of his life, they were keenly focussed on the signs which argued that he had, in fact, taken responsibility for his own failings, that he had been open, if only implicitly, to his family's offerings of the LDS Scriptural truths, and that he had perhaps sought

and received the mercy of Heavenly Father as a result, as suggested by his dream and that of his son-in-law.

According to standard teaching, most of those who die without having accepted the LDS gospel, when they had that opportunity, are destined for an immediate period of post-mortal testing. Mormon doctrine holds that immediately after death the body and the spirit<sup>4</sup> of a person are temporarily separated, pending resurrection. During this period, the souls of the good and faithful go to rest in Paradise<sup>xi</sup>, while the souls of those who have failed to respond to the Gospel are constrained, in a state sometimes called 'spirit prison.' During this time, LDS spirits can continue missionary work, teaching and testifying of the truth to the gospel to other spirits who did not heed them in mortal life. This post-mortem missionary work, if accepted, allows people to be released from spirit prison, and they can then chose to accept rituals of baptism and other necessary rituals carried out vicariously for them, by the living. Eventually, all these spirits will receive a form of resurrected eternal life, in one of the three Kingdoms. Still, in theory, if a person has refused membership of the church while they were alive, they cannot attain the Celestial Kingdom even after this work has been completed. <http://www.lds.org/manual/preparing-for-exaltation-teachers-manual/lesson-7-what-happens-after-death?lang=eng>

But Esther's vision of Angus in white (the colour of temple clothing, and the colour of clothing associated with the portrayal of the resurrected in the Celestial Kingdom), and Ruth's miracle, in which Angus repeated the words of promise that they would be together given in her patriarchal blessing, suggest that this possibility is somehow still held open for him. Nevertheless, Ruth had not yet had the assurance she was really longing for; a personal sense of Angus's presence, especially of his presence in the temple. The matter therefore remained suspended in a state of hopeful equivocation.

I was sometimes surprised by the explicit ways in which first-generation convert women would reason about the possibility that their loved ones who had not joined the church, would nevertheless be able to attain the Celestial Kingdom.

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<sup>4</sup> The spirit is itself a refined form a matter, and is not immaterial.

Phyllis, whose mother had also led a religiously devoted life and struggled with considerable hardship, both emotional and financial, was very clear on what she thought about this problem. She knew, she said, that her mother lived her life in reliance on Jesus Christ. Although her mother had suffered serious ill health, and was having to work with no job security at an age when many people (including Phyllis's in-laws) were comfortably retired and enjoying travel and their grandchildren, she found strength through prayer and through faith in Christ, a strength and faithfulness which Phyllis could not set aside. She names other examples of outstandingly good people she has known; a Roman Catholic colleague in the girl scouts; 'What an exemplary woman, trying to raise her family to be moral, honest, god-fearing people. I really admired her, you know?'; people in the local ward, public figures such as Mother Theresa of Calcutta. Like Linda, who says simply and spontaneously, 'The Gospel to me is everything', Phyllis is a deeply faithful woman, devoted to her church callings, and devoted to the culture of the church; 'You know, in almost all things I really think the church is right on. You know, the principles that we practice, I really think are right on. But I don't feel that we are the only ones who have the exclusive corner, that we are the only ones who will ever make it to heaven. I just don't believe that.... How can I say she (the Catholic colleague) is not going to make it? I can't say that. And I don't think God would say that, either. That just doesn't strike me.'

This issue had also been central at the time of her decision to be baptised;

'We had a really good bishop, who really loved us youth, and he really bent over backwards for us, and uh, when it came time to be baptised, then I had to reevaluate this question again, and of course, one of the things I really wrestled with was of course, my family is mostly non-member. At this point, there were 6 of us, 3 in, 3 out, - but both my parents. And I somehow felt like, well this is all lovely and good, if I go to heaven, but my mother's not there and my father's not there; this doesn't seem right. And I still, I still don't totally feel that the only people who are ever going to make it to the highest point of heaven are members of the church. Like I was telling Dave (her husband), if Mother Theresa doesn't make it, there is *not a chance* that I am going to make it! (laughs) So, I am convinced that there is more, um, there's got to be more. (F: some things we don't yet know?) I feel that that is true. And so I wrestled greatly with that one,

and my bishop spent hours with me, talking to me about it, and finally I felt comfortable with it and was baptised.

F: what did he say about it, when he was talking to you?

P: Well, I don't remember exactly, but I think it was the same thing ; that there's got to be more. And maybe that's the difference, you know, growing up outside of the church.

In an earlier chapter on conversion, I discussed the story of Linda, born into a devout Mexican Catholic family, who became passionately devoted to the teachings of Mormonism as a young woman, almost broke her mother's heart, and spent many decades seeking reconciliation and forgiveness from her. Linda's mother died as she had lived, an observant Roman Catholic. Oddly enough, says Linda, she nevertheless received what she felt was a special spiritual gift at the time of her mother's death. She had travelled to Mexico to be with her when her mother became critically ill, and although her mother had always feared hospitals, she had agreed to be admitted so that she could hold on and see her daughter again. During these days of grace, she was able to tell Linda how much she loved her, and Linda was able to say everything that she had wanted to tell her mother. At the time of her mother's death, Linda heard a voice, saying; 'You are on holy ground; this is a person who has done her best all the days of her life.' And she felt that 'something very powerful and very comforting was happening'. Which was strange, she said, since her mother had always been such a staunch Catholic. But that's how it happened.

## 5. The Funeral of Connie Roan.

"Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies."

It's late October, just after my first arrival in upstate New York, and I'm in the middle of a funeral service which, slightly unexpectedly to me, has become a Scriptural pastoral in praise of the deceased;

<sup>2</sup> The heart of her husband doth safely <sup>a</sup>trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

<sup>3</sup> She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

<sup>4</sup> She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her <sup>a</sup>hands.

- 5 She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.
6. She <sup>a</sup>[riseth](#) also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.
7. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

We are not in the ward meeting house, where funeral services might usually be held, but at a smart, unexceptionable funeral home in the village of D----; plate glass doors, a flowered carpet, striped sofas in a discreet lobby, and then a main room, quite full of people, with a coffin up at the front near the reserved family seats with its lid open for relatives and friends to pay their last respects. There's a row of floral tributes near to the coffin, and people are greeting the chief mourners as they come in. The village of D---- lies outside the main town, out in the country; in agricultural land. Out here, the houses are more visibly split between country-wealthy and country-poor than in the town center. There are still New York family farmers hanging on, making a living from dairy and potatoes, although only yesterday a retired professor from the agricultural college told me that since the 1980s, dairy farmers have to milk three times a day in order to stay competitive. We pass at least one farm with a herd of black and white cows crowding together in a muddy yard, next to a silo. During the service that follows, some of the speakers, friends of the couple, discussed the changes that the nearby township of C---- had seen in farming, from the time when the couple were young, the cows were hand-milked, and only a few of the roads were paved.

Someone, possibly the funeral director by his clothing, stands up and tells us what the order of service will be. Bishop R---<sup>xii</sup> will say a few words, then we will have an opening prayer; the T----burg choir will sing a hymn, there will be a eulogy by Leah Maxwell, a second hymn, an address by Joseph Maxwell (Leah's husband) and a closing hymn. It is Leah who has suggested I attend; she is not only officiating, but is, it turns out, an old friend of the lady who has passed away, Mrs. Constance Roan.

11. She stretcheth out her hand to the <sup>a</sup>[poor](#); yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
12. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household *are* clothed with scarlet...
  
17. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of <sup>a</sup>[kindness](#).
18. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of <sup>a</sup>[idleness](#).

19. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband *also*, and he praiseth her.
20. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.
21. Favour is deceitful, and <sup>a</sup>[beauty](#) is vain: *but* a woman *that* <sup>b</sup>[feareth](#) the LORD, she shall be praised.
22. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Jo Maxwell concludes his reading from Proverbs, and begins his funerary address.

The familiar words of the Old Testament on the virtuous woman are probably carefully chosen to be welcome and familiar to a congregation which is not composed only of Latter-day Saints. The reading is also, I know from the eulogy that Leah has given (before a slightly uncertain rendering by the local choir of the favourite Mormon hymn 'How Great Thou Art'), a particularly fitting compliment to the deceased and her family. Leah described Connie as a truly beautiful woman; 'When I first met her, I said to her; do you know how beautiful you are? You look like the movie star Gale Storm!<sup>5</sup>' And Connie just laughed with her shoulders shaking. She was wonderful. Her beauty was not only skin deep. She was honest, forthright, trustworthy, absolute in her commitment to the church.' Born one of nine children, Connie had gone to work early to help her family. Her mother had died when Connie was only ten, but she always bore in mind her mother's ambition for her to be 'a good girl', and had won the love and respect of her employers. She also won the true love at first sight of Tom Roan, older than Connie by some years, and a local farmer. Connie's life, said Leah, reminded her of the Old Testament story of Rebecca and Isaac; like Rebecca, Connie had not hesitated to marry an older man, and had become the comfort of her husband's life. She skillfully turned the old farmhouse into a haven of rest and peacefulness for Tom through her labours; she papered walls, painted, polished floors, and made curtains. Tom and Connie had three daughters during the 1940s.

Then, in 1962, Connie joined the church, having encountered it through her oldest daughter Teresa, who had become a convert. Tom was reluctant, but

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<sup>5</sup> A very successful actress and singer of romantic popular songs in the 1950s, known for her glamorous (but not immodest) brunette good looks.

Connie convinced him to give her permission to be baptised, by saying that this way Teresa would have some company at church. At this time, Connie had been suffering from medical complications attributed to early menopause, and she asked for an LDS priesthood blessing, and when the blessing was given, it was that she should have a son. In 1965 she had a handsome, vigorous baby boy, and then another son a few years later; 'so she did not have just one son, but two; it was a miracle!' Through the years that followed, Connie had faithfully brought her children into the church's meetings every week, even though it meant a long trip from outside of town as well as the Sunday attendance. In her last years Connie had suffered from an ailment causing pain and confusion, but her mind had cleared for a moment at a chapel service recently, when she heard the beginning of Psalm 120, and she declared; 'I know that Psalm' and stood up and recited it. Leah ended by asking us all to recite the Psalm together; 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures...'

The final major address was given by Jo Maxwell, and it was the most directly theological element of the service. He began;

'It is at times like these when we contemplate our associations with dear family members and friends that we ponder the significance of our lives on earth and wonder what comes hereafter and whether these associations may be renewed in the future.'

And, among other observations<sup>6</sup> he continued by referring to the Premortal existence, (the first estate) and the mortal existence (the second estate) from an LDS viewpoint. All those of us who are here in this world, have already passed an initial test, and taken responsibility for our own free agency and for our obedience to God in this life; 'our choices and desires here will determine our living conditions in eternity.'<sup>7</sup> But, 'what is the next step, after death?'

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<sup>6</sup> For further discussion, see on chapter -

<sup>7</sup> 'What does it mean to keep an estate? Abraham 3. 26' in Pearl of Great Price students' manual; Institute. <http://www.lds.org/manual/the-pearl-of-great-price-student-manual/the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng>

Quoting the prophet Alma in the Book of Mormon, Jo Maxwell explained that there would be a sojourn after death in the spirit world, where spirits (understood as still a form of matter, but separated from the body until resurrection) would, if the deceased were righteous, await the resurrection in paradise, 'a state of rest, a state of peace.' (Alma, 40) 'As Connie Roan passed to the other side she recognized and now associates with her dear mother Lucille, her sisters Kathleen and Isabel, her brother Mike, and other loved ones who went ahead. I look forward to greeting Connie in the Spirit World in years to come. We shall all interact there much as we do here, but on a higher plane.'

Jo Maxwell then referred to the LDS teaching that all those who have not accepted the Gospel in mortal life, will have an opportunity to hear and accept it in the spirit world, and to have their temple ordinances completed for them vicariously by the living, before continuing with a passage which I need to quote at length;

'Connie Roan was raised a Christian, and after her daughter Teresa joined the church, convinced her reluctant husband Tom to let her join also, so her daughter would have some company. Connie learned of the temple ordinances which bind families together eternally, but out of respect for Tom, did not herself go to the temple. Her daughters can now do these ordinances for her vicariously, and if Tom chooses not to go to the temple himself before he leaves this life, his family will provide him another chance, after he gets to the other side, to accept a sealing of his marriage which will bind him to his wife and children for all eternity. The spirit world is the great place where family reunions take place, and families can be joined together for eternity, preserving loving associations formed here on earth. ... So Connie's spirit now has a temporary home in paradise, a beautiful, peaceful place where she enjoys the association of family and friends who have preceded her there; father, mother, siblings, and these associations can continue after the resurrection and through eternity if vicarious temple ordinances are accepted...A modern prophet said: "That same sociality which exists among us



here will exist among us there, only there it will be coupled with eternal glory.”  
(Joseph Smith, Teachings- )

Like my friend with the difficult aunt, the two principle speakers at the funeral, Leah and Jo Maxwell, were both brought up in Mormon families with a long history in the church, and had lived (and would later live again) in Utah and in other areas where LDS culture is particularly devout, well established and sophisticated. They were highly conscious of the importance of following the guidance, ritual processes and mores of the church. Leah would have considered anything less than an LDS temple wedding for each one of their (eight) children, not just to fall short of the ideal, but to be an occasion of shame, pain and sorrow affecting the whole family. <sup>xiii</sup> This is partly because temple marriage (like serving a mission) is understood as an indication that a young person has kept to the highest moral standards – and thus, that their parents, especially their mother, have brought them up properly. However, there also appears to be an underlying sense – recognised by many commentators – that anything but a life lived according to the ideal LDS standards, is a kind of ‘second best’ and in some way generative of less religious ‘merit’ ( Davies, *Mormon Culture of Salvation*).

One gloss on this, often cited in LDS conversation, is that any delay in carrying out temple rituals essential for salvation, including temple marriage, carries a risk with it. For example, there is the Mormon urban myth of the young couple married in a registry office, and intending to have their marriage later solemnised in a Mormon temple, who are killed in a road traffic accident before they can carry out the second part of their intention. ( reference – see blog ) They are then dependent on the living, to carry out vicarious rituals for them, risking unforeseen interruptions (although in most observant LDS families there would in reality usually be no shortage of people to do this vicarious work.) In the end, it should come to the same thing, but the prospect of the delay itself is deeply troubling, for reasons that are not absolutely clearly specified.

This idea connects to a focus on the Latter-day Saints as a body of the ‘elect’ ( Givens, *Paradox*) living according to unambiguous divinely-sanctioned rules, which is certainly one strand in the inheritance of Mormon thinking, but as, as Armand Mauss has pointed out in another context ( Mauss, - *Abraham’s children*) difficult to reconcile with a programme of continuous expansion of the church by

conversion, on the one hand, and a promise that the ultimate blessings of the LDS religion are equally and justly available to all, on the other. Although in daily life, this difficulty is often accommodated by emphasising the idea of progression, and thinking of some Mormons as exemplary or as 'further along' (as described in the introduction) and others as aspiring to their standards, this obviously cannot cover the problem of eternal destinations. Doctrinally, those who had converted (and therefore perhaps were not married in the temple originally, but were later sealed or sealed postmortem) would have the same chance of exaltation as those who were born in the church, baptised at eight and married in the temple at twenty. But in that case, it becomes a little unclear, what it means to say that the hyper-orthodox pattern of those born in the church is superior (except perhaps in terms of simple social status).

Logically, there only seem to be two answers to this; either, the perceived relation of 'more' and 'less' advanced positions in this life will somehow inflect the Celestial Kingdom<sup>8</sup>, or else it will not, in which case it must be concluded that God intends (or even contracts with) different people to follow different mortal life paths, and sets standards for them accordingly.

There is certainly some historical basis for the former approach, in nineteenth-century teachings which formerly suggested that, for instance, the unmarried would be in a supportive role to the married in the Celestial Kingdom. Even today, the salvational 'placing' of the unmarried remains somewhat unclear and can be a source of anxiety within the church.<sup>9</sup> Since Mormon teaching is replete with ideas about prophets as inspired leaders, and the notion of a spiritually gifted elite, is I think in some ways intuitively accepted, if not always explicitly stated, by many Latter-day Saints. However, the idea that some people are

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<sup>8</sup> Actually, I think the idea for born Mormons is that it will, that the premortal and the postmortal existences can be viewed as infinitely ranked, or 'organized' within the different kingdoms as well as between them,,,, see *Top The Life Before* – so this is pDaveably in the mind of the Ballantynes, but I am not sure wether it would make complete sense to someone like Dave Samuelson who has a convert wife. Individuals may be exceptions to the indicators of merit by life situation which occur in the mortal life and thus perhaps beyond it.

<sup>9</sup> Within the context of historical polygamy – find references to the idea of servants of the exalted couple - and possibly also comparable to the idea of ranked intelligences premortally, which is found explained in the Institute Manual to the Book of Abraham, for example. (lds.org – Abraham, 3)

exceptionally spiritually gifted, is one thing; the idea that the spiritually gifted are found (or exclusively found) among the most longstanding families within the church is, at least, more contestable and less obvious to those with convert history. As a counterweight to the identification of moral qualities with long history in the church, people frequently invoke in discussion or in popular religious literature, the caveat that *particular exceptional individuals* may have agreed premortally with God to be born into humble families, testing circumstances and to tackle particular moments of challenge and peril in mortal history. So a compromise position which many Mormons might generally accept, is that *on the whole* God has sent exceptional individuals to be born into Mormon earthly families in order to help carry out the crucial work of the church in saving mankind, but that *sometimes* this is not the case. The relationship between a person's family, church standing, and spiritual qualities therefore remains open to interpretation in different ways, depending on the perspectives of observer and observed.

However, the idea that the different mortal placing and experience of different Latter-day Saints might itself be part of divine thinking, and indeed of premortal agreements made between individuals and Heavenly Father, seems to lend itself almost inevitably to a reinforcement of the often-quoted Mormon teaching that that the 'rules' of Mormonism, at least as currently revealed, cannot be all there is to know, and that more will be known in the next life. It is difficult, however, to police the boundary of that thought while also retaining a tight hold on Mormonism's core proposition that it holds *the singular truth*, restored and revealed to Joseph Smith, and that moral relativism is contrary to the extraordinary gift of living, present-day revelation. One might well pass from the observation that a convert sister has suffered great hardship in her life, and born it with great courage, before she joined the church, to the speculation that there are people who have not wanted to join the church, of inestimable merit and religious courage.

In everyday conversation, Latter-day Saints of kindly disposition (of whom there are very many) tend to focus on the pleasant prospect that all good people are, essentially, Mormons in the making. William Wordsworth, Mother Theresa, Gandhi; these people and many others are greatly admired and their company in the Celestial Kingdom is keenly anticipated. I suppose it is possible to imagine

that Mother Theresa just remained a Roman Catholic because she never had the opportunity to become a Latter-day Saint during her lifetime, although some of my friends had clearly wondered about this very question, as Phyllis's comments, quoted above, demonstrated. The thought remains; if the Mormon missionaries call on Mother Theresa in the spirit world, and she *still* doesn't want to be a Mormon, what are we going to do then? For some people this thought isn't a problem; the truth of Mormon teaching will be so apparent, that every good heart will turn towards it. For others, this doesn't seem quite so clear. And, as both Phyllis and Linda explicitly pointed out, the question raised also applies to those we most intimately love, to our mothers, devout and Christian perhaps, but not within the fold of the LDS church.

Mormon rituals can be and are performed vicariously for the dead, and, if the deceased accepts the gospel posthumously, having never had the opportunity to hear it in this life, he or she can receive all the blessings available to the living, and enter the Celestial Kingdom. However, like Ruth's husband Angus, Connie's husband Tom has certainly had the opportunity to accept the teachings of the Mormon church in this life, not to mention having had the example before him of a devout, loyal and loving Mormon wife and daughter. I do not know Mr. Roan personally, but on the face of it it seemed very unlikely that he would suddenly choose to join the LDS church, and I certainly have not heard that he has done so to date. In which case, it is difficult to see how, under the published rules on 'Preparing for Exaltation' he would qualify for the Celestial Kingdom, or what it would mean to know that he was 'bound to his wife and children' forever.

So for Connie, the vicarious performance of temple ritual by her children, could be understood as 'just as good' - and she had, of course, been baptised with the permission of her husband. Yet, so far as I know, these vicarious rituals could not be completed until her husband had either joined the church while living, or else had vicarious baptism and other rituals performed on his behalf by his children, after his eventual death. This is because one the rituals is sealing to a husband (in lieu of original temple marriage) and another is the sealing of children to parents, which by church guidelines, should be done to *both* parents, and not to a single parent. These rituals can be performed, of course, without the certainty that a deceased person who is party to them, has accepted them; that is, they could be performed, and be effective, for Connie and her children, even if

her husband, after his death, did not accept the vicarious rituals or the church. But they could not 'bypass' Connie's husband, either living or dead, and make a family unit of faithful mother and children which had not included him in the ritual work in some way. Thus, while Connie's husband lived and did not wish to convert, he would, from one point of view, be keeping his wife waiting for her progression towards the highest resurrection, as he had kept her waiting for full integration into the church during her lifetime. The further question would arise, of his own status in the hereafter and its impact on that of his wife. Should Tom not convert during his mortal life, but after it, he would theoretically be placed in the position described in the section above, of the 'secondary' believer who would end in the Terrestrial Kingdom. Thus, Connie, however virtuous and faithful, would not have her husband with her in the Celestial Kingdom, and at least on the face of it, therefore could not be among those couples who, at the highest level of Mormon progression, would be able, like God, to continue to bring forth and raise children in the eternities beyond the mortal life.<sup>10</sup>

Whether or not this dilemma was in the mind of Connie's LDS friends as they wrote her funeral eulogy and address, is difficult for me to say. Nothing in the actual text of either address, indicated a pessimistic view of her prospects in the hereafter, and perhaps, indeed, they simply wished to suspend judgement – except in so far as the address made it plain that Tom's conversion would be, from the LDS viewpoint, the preferable outcome. In the end, however, by saying that vicarious rituals could seal Tom to his wife and children for eternity, but not what would happen thereafter, the options were left poised in a way which was not readily apparent to the casual hearer.

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<sup>10</sup> Find and insert reference on family as the unite of salvation from DD -what exactly does he say?

## 6. Mormon Intercessions.

Mormon religious practice is not supposed to be improvised by ordinary members of the church; it is not supposed to require improvisation. Except in some, quite restricted settings in which a certain measure of what one might term 'appropriate freedom' is approved (such as the content of personal testimonies spoken at Fast and Testimony meetings, or responses to personal Scripture reading) Latter-day Saints are assumed to have their religious needs met by the restored and extraordinary truth of their church's teachings and rituals. In the recent decades of 'neo-orthodoxy' (White, REF) this focus on the sufficiency of restored truth and the authority of the priesthood has been welded to a demand for the display of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy from a church leadership which many loyal and faithful Latter-day Saints have found, at least occasionally, to be stifling, overly bureaucratic or uncharitable.

As outlined in Chapter (two and three), these institutional characteristics run in parallel with a tradition of attention to personal inspiration, personal vision and autodidactic enquiry into the endless horizon of human-divine knowledge which is, for many Latter-day Saints, a living aspect of the joy they take in their faith as much as is their faith in the presence of a Living Prophet who leads the church. These facets of Latter-day Saint experience (both derived from truthful inspiration in separate spheres) are not supposed to come into conflict with each other but in practice they do, and Latter-day Saints, as Givens ( REF) has noted, often carry many doubts and questions with them which they may rarely feel it proper to express publically.

In the cases of Ruth's husband Angus and of Connie Roan discussed above, we see a particular aspect of the way that the situation of first-generation Mormon converts may highlight such potential 'sticking points' both for the converts themselves and for those around them. This is particularly the case where, as in my fieldwork situation, the converts are all themselves American citizens of long standing, and have converted from other well-established Christian churches. The relative ignorance of new converts may invite either kindly or condescending comment from longstanding Mormons in any setting, while situations in which

Mormon converts are derived en masse from ethnically different backgrounds newer to the United States have, as Ong has observed (REF) a particular dynamic of both greater cultural latitude and a hypergamous class differentiation. Established first-generation families such as those people I knew, who have often inter-married with families with a longer history in the church, are in a somewhat different structural position. Although they may still sometimes feel at a disadvantage, their situation also invites implicit comparison with that of the early converts to the church in the time of Joseph Smith, who gathered with him in this same part of upstate New York in the 1830s. As I suggested in Chapter Three, it is possible to think of this Eastern Mormonism as a space of Mormon 'spirituality' where the dedication of those who have joined the faith in their own lifetimes is part of that quality.

The situation of both Ruth and Connie, moreover, belongs to a particular category of Mormon potential anomaly which is not just about conversion, but also about gender politics within the church. Deeply buried inside the exchanges I have recorded is a recognition – implied but never explicitly formulated - of an historically-inherited problem in Mormon rulings on the ritual binding of kinship. The prophet Joseph Smith placed intense emphasis on the marital couple, in which each is necessary to each other's salvation, but also vested the astonishing powers of the restored priesthood primarily in men. As noted in earlier chapters, the exact degree and nature of this division of sacred powers has been the topic of an extensive debate within the church inaugurated by Mormon feminist scholars whose contribution, however, has on the whole not been welcomed by church leadership. One aspect of Joseph Smith's strong leaning towards male priesthood, moreover, was the understanding that a woman must be married to a worthy priesthood holder in order to take her place in the Celestial Kingdom. If a husband was not fully worthy, it was thought that this might jeopardise the women's chances of attaining the highest levels of salvation. One solution formerly available in the mid-nineteenth century to Mormon leaders was on occasion to make either a formal/ ritual or an actual 're-assignment' of a woman to a different and more worthy 'priesthood holder', thus protecting her prospects. Generally speaking, such technical solutions (often accomplished through polygamy) are not available to church members today. But, as with the question of devout mothers, the question of worthy wives with possibly less-worthy

husbands remains especially troubling for Mormons who are, almost without exception, very highly attuned to questions of fairness in salvational matters. But the question remains largely devoid of an explicit answer from church leadership, except the answer that more will be known in the next world, and that no-one will be made to suffer for sins that were not their own. This general response, although fair enough in its way, fails to engage with the well-known LDS attention to the detail of things, and widespread preference for a 'literalist' forms of explanation ( REF).

How Ruth could fail to suffer in the Celestial Kingdom if Angus is not there with her (even by his own fault), I take to be the question to which her thoughts and those of her daughters were tending in the episode described here . Mormon heaven is deeply continuous with mortal life, although also extraordinarily surpassing it, and to imagine heaven as a place where deep human attachments no longer matter is not a Mormon thought at all ( McDannell and Lang REF).

Some years after first beginning to think about Ruth's Relief Society meeting and Connie Roan's funeral, I have come to the view that what I was then observing was, therefore, a form of 'Mormon intercession'; - albeit intercession is most certainly not a Mormon term, and is not supposed to exist at all within Mormon doctrine.<sup>xiv</sup> There is no intention of departing from orthodox teaching or practice on behalf of any of the people involved; rather, they summoned the resources of Mormon doctrine - the open-ended idea of 'more knowledge to come'; the traditional power of Mormon visions- to make a 'Mormon event' which nevertheless did not fit the classic Utah mould. As in the early days of the Church,<sup>xv</sup> faithful Latter-day Saints in the Relief Society meeting were open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit which inspired them *together*, making a spiritual conversation between women's thoughts and visions so that each amplified the other.

The funeral of Connie Roan was designed and presided over by two 'Utah' Saints who both hold to the strictest expectations of the church on the one hand, but also knew and valued for Connie on the other. While the use of texts and imagery from the Old Testament (rather than from the Mormon Scriptures) was no doubt a helpful way to engage Connie's non-Mormon family as well as her Mormon congregation, the choice of these particular texts from Proverbs which



dwell on the qualities of the Bible's 'virtuous woman', and the amplification of the theme in Leah's talk which identified Connie with Biblical Rebecca, can also be read as a kind of intercession, in that it builds a sense of Connie as an exemplary woman whose claims *should not be refused* by the just God of Mormonism. Jo Maxwell's talk, which 'placed' Connie in the 'sociability' of the spirit world - rather than anticipating the Celestial Kingdom, in relation to which the question of the presence of absence of Connie's relatives and husband would figure most unavoidably - was perfectly doctrinally correct, tender to the feelings of the assembled mourners, and yet creatively evasive in comparison with the plain-speaking hope of Fielding's widow as she gave thanks for her family of observant 'choice spirits' and anticipated attaining heaven with them.

As it happens, Leah Maxwell is one of the women in my ward who had first hoped for change from Mormon feminism, and then renounced it when the church made its disfavour clear. The space for claiming a greater stake in 'priesthood' felt largely closed for most faithful Mormon women at this place and time – and some had never felt, anyway, that this was the most relevant issue. But in these events, perhaps, we see a register of Mormon women's collective faith practice emerging, in a different and less explicitly prohibited space. Their allies were, above all, drawn from the liminal spaces where 'the veil' is thin between the living and the dead. The authority of the deathbed scene and of messengers from beyond the veil has always been fundamental, emotionally powerful and welcome in Mormonism (Brown REF)<sup>xvi</sup>; in this instance, the dead, perhaps, found ways to cross boundaries where doors were firmly barred to the living.

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<sup>i</sup> Mormon Sunday School for little children (under the age of eight) which focuses especially on learning LDS children's songs, simple moral teachings and scripture stories and, for the older ones, understanding what it means to be baptised.

<sup>ii</sup> Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints generally skip two meals on one Sunday a month and donate the money saved for charitable works through the church. This means that the three-hour long services are attended on an empty stomach. On such Sundays, members of the congregation may speak (for instance, during the Sacrament service) under the influence of the Holy Spirit, either at the prior invitation of the minister presiding, or following their own prompting.

<sup>iii</sup> The leadership of the LDS Church is especially concerned about the need to avoid heterodoxy or – given the largescale missionary expansion of the church overseas- syncretism. The church has pursued a programme ('correlation') designed to ensure that all members worldwide study the same Mormon scriptures in rotation over a sequence of annual cycles. Detailed guidance on both teaching and learning is given in the Church's published and online study materials and manuals.

<sup>iv</sup> Doctrine and Covenants ( or D and C) is one of the standard books of LDS Scripture , bound together with the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price. It contains records, mainly contemporary, of the sayings of the original prophet and founder of the church Joseph Smith Junior, where these have been accorded the status of revelation. Some of these statements were dictated by Joseph Smith after dreams or visions; others were speeches such as orations given at funerals, in which the prophet developed key points of his teaching.

<sup>v</sup> The Mormon temple, locus of Mormon saving ritual, is not to be confused with the ordinary ward meeting-houses, where sacrament and other meetings are held each Sunday. The ward meeting houses are open to visitors; entry to Mormon temples after dedication is restricted to tithe-paying members of the church in good standing. See Cannell ( 2007) on variable attitudes to temple worship among Latter-day Saints.

<sup>vi</sup> Which might perhaps sometimes contain a tot of spirits – but coffee is forbideen to Latter-day Saints in any event.

<sup>vii</sup> See 'General Authority' above; see also Cannell, (2005).

<sup>viii</sup> See on chapter – for additional discussion

<sup>ix</sup> Patriarchal blessings are given to LDS young men and women during late adolescence, and provide an inspired guide for the individual's life. They are imparted by the Stake Patriarch, who holds a special regional calling within the church, and must work under and cultivate the influence of the Holy Spirit. See also chapter - and DD – Brown -

<sup>x</sup> Except one brother who, although an observant member of the church, had not married at all at the time of writing.

<sup>xi</sup> A transitory space in Mormon teaching, despite its name's mainstream associations; - spirits dwell here only until they are resurrected and attain one of the three Kingdoms.

<sup>xii</sup> That is, the Mormon 'bishop' of our local ward- equivalent to a local minister.

<sup>xiii</sup> A highly intelligent and educated woman, I am quite sure that Leah was conscious of the possibility that one could take a different view on this question. However, she seemed equally committed to living up to the highest standards and having her family do so, even if this might be at some emotional cost to herself.

<sup>xiv</sup> Except in so far as all Mormon ritual for the dead is a generalised intercession by the living - but as Davies has pointed out, the level of ritual efficacy expected is so powerful, that it places the living nearer to the salvific role of Christ, than to the human petitioner on behalf of the deceased.

<sup>xv</sup> For example, at Nauvoo, where a kind of Mormon Pentecost occurred over several months.

<sup>xvi</sup> Joseph Smith often made key doctrinal and visionary innovations in the course of funeral addresses.