

Cutting Down the Tree of Life to Build a Wooden Bridge Sunstone 2014

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Denver C. Snuffer, Jr.

Cathleen Gilbert (Moderator): Welcome to session 351 where we will hear a paper presented by Denver Snuffer entitled “Cutting Down the Tree of Life to Build a Wooden Bridge”. Sounds like an interesting topic for all of us. There will be a response by Dan Wotherspoon after that.

First of all, I’ve been asked to, in addition to welcoming you to this symposium, I wanted to remind you that this session will be recorded, so if you can please silence your cell phones. Also, I’ve been asked to invite you to attend, if you’re interested in the book sales, because that helps support the symposium, as well. This symposium session will be presentation of a paper by Denver, a response by Dan Wotherspoon, and if there is time at the end, which we anticipate there will be, there will be question and answer also. Let me get started so we have time for our speakers, and introduce them briefly.

Denver Snuffer is a practicing attorney who practices with the law firm of Nelson, Snuffer, Dahle, and Poulsen in Sandy, Utah. He’s active in the Utah State Bar and has co-hosted two radio programs for a total of eight years. In his spare time he has written and published fourteen books, most of them very lengthy. He is the father of nine children and resides in Sandy, Utah.

Dan Wotherspoon has a PhD in Religion from Claremont Graduate University, with an emphasis in philosophy of religion and theology. He is a freelance writer, editor, and podcaster. He’s the host of the Mormon Matters podcast, the former editor of *Sunstone* magazine, and the Executive Director of Sunstone Education Foundation from 2001 to 2008. He is currently co-authoring a biography of Eugene England. He is the father of two children and resides in Bountiful, Utah.

We will first hear from Denver Snuffer and then immediately thereafter we will hear from Dan Wotherspoon. Thank you.

Denver Snuffer: Saturday afternoon. This is a paper that has some 160 footnotes. I’m not going to read any of the footnotes, and I’m not going to read all of the paper. I’m going to give you an excerpt from the paper today and then this evening when I return home from here, I’ll put the entire paper up for anyone that wants it as a downloadable online through my blog.

There are four topics that are discussed in the paper. They are plural wives, ordination of black African men, pressure to ordain women, and same-sex marriage.

The history of changing LDS doctrine, past, present and the likely future, are illustrated using these four subjects to show doctrinal changes required to build a necessary bridge between LDS Mormonism and the American public.

Religion moves through two stages. In the first, God reveals Himself to man. This is called “restoration.” It restores man to communion with God as it was once in the Garden of Eden. In the second, man attempts to worship God according to His latest visit. This stage is always characterized by scarcity and inadequacy.

Audience Comment: You need to talk into the microphone.

Denver Snuffer: I can hear myself fine. [audience laughter]

This second part is called “apostasy,” because apostasy always follows restoration.

Institutions cannot control God. As faith in God is institutionalized, it becomes part of this world and necessarily influenced by cultural, social, legal and economic pressure. Those forces erode faith. Religious institutions are where the ideal comes into conflict with the less-than-ideal. LDS Mormonism illustrates this dynamic. Through compromises of its ideals we see the pattern unfolding in our own lifetime.

Joseph Smith bridged the gulf between man and God and entered God’s presence again. Some few of us, myself included, believe his claim. I regard him the equal of Abraham, Moses and Isaiah. But the various denominations claiming Joseph Smith as their founder again suffer scarcity and struggle to cope with God’s silence.

With time, all religious bodies confront the complex challenge of holding onto God’s word. The ever-changing present causes cracks. Churches try to patch cracks. This leads to fractures, then it leads to defections. Former believers either lose faith in the religion altogether, or faith in the church. Without a restoration’s abundance, pragmatic choices first become policy, then doctrine. God’s silence does not curtail doctrine, but often compels it.

After nearly a millennium-and-a-half, there was a great gulf between God’s last revelation and Catholic doctrines. When Gutenberg’s 1439 press and an increasingly literate population made it impossible for the Roman hierarchy to control information, Catholicism fractured. The Internet is to LDS Mormonism what Gutenberg’s press was to Catholicism. It is no longer possible for an institution to control the narrative.

Catholicism attempted to regain control in two ways: First, the “Dogs of God” (that’s the nickname that was given to the Dominicans) were unleashed to confront heresy and suppress dissent. After two-and-a-half centuries of pursuing this ill-advised course, the failure was recognized even in Rome. Pope Paul III reversed course and he launched the Counter-Reformation. A new order called the Society of Jesus (that is the Jesuits) was established at the Council of Trent to focus on needed reform. The LDS Church is following this pattern. Their first approach is to suppress dissent. The correlation infrastructure of

the LDS Church has been put into place to protect doctrine and practice. An LDS group of “Dominicans,” the Strengthening the Members Committee, has been empowered to find and then remove perceived threats. Ironically, as will become apparent as we get into this paper, the original targets of the Strengthening the Members Committee were fundamentalist groups advocating the practice of plural marriage. At one time this practice was the hallmark of orthodoxy for the LDS Church. The juxtaposition of advocacy first, followed by prohibition of plural marriages, illustrates a passage. Brash confidence in God’s restoration makes the organization brave. Then faced with opposition, a quiet and distant God no longer fortifies the church. They appease the worldly forces of government and economics. From heaven’s silence men conjure “doctrines” they attribute to God. Plural marriage bespeaks this larger dynamic.

Because LDS Mormonism has “correlated”, a great deal of what it once was has been trimmed away. History and doctrine have been forgotten or rejected. By reworking history, the LDS Church has managed to brand even those who believe in Joseph Smith, and accept the same scriptures, as nevertheless “apostate” if they also challenge the newly correlated part-truths. Within LDS Mormonism a short memory is necessary to accept the history and the doctrine now taught. Long memories get its members into trouble.

For LDS Mormonism, the Internet is a bastion of unsettling or unwanted information. Some of it is inaccurate. But the more effective challenges come from on-line sources telling the truth. When a false narrative is perpetuated by the institution and then confronted by truth, it is the institution ultimately that loses. At the moment, to deal with this the LDS Church uses “search engine optimization”, meaning the LDS Church pays money to have their site come up first on search engine results. This directs traffic to church approved sources. LDS websites recount history designed to soothe the troubled Saints but it is not effective. All an inquirer need do is press through the first page or so of LDS Church website referrals to locate independent sources.

On their website, “mormonchurch.org” the church states: plural wives “was not mandatory and [is] not required for salvation[.]” This is both true (artfully using the term “salvation”) and false. It is true that plural wives are not necessary for salvation according to LDS Mormonism. But, then again, neither is faith in Christ, repentance, baptism or a good life. All are “saved” in Mormon theology, other than the sons of Perdition. Therefore, this LDS Church on-line assertion is true enough. But the LDS Church once claimed, as a matter of doctrine, plural wives was an absolute requirement for exaltation. A reader lacking familiarity with LDS vocabulary will get the wrong impression. To those who are familiar with the vocabulary, this appears to be purposeful.

Multiple wives doctrine was so secretive during Joseph Smith’s life that his wife could deny it was actually practiced. It was not until 1852 that the LDS Church publicly advocated belief in this form of marriage. The announcement caused national outrage. Abraham Lincoln’s upstart Republican Party denounced it as one of the “twin relics of barbarism,” the other being slavery. Beginning with the Morrill Act signed by President Lincoln in 1862, the full weight of national ire was brought to bear against the LDS Church. The dispute lasted

three decades before the church surrendered. The final victory was achieved through the draconian measures imposed on the institution by the Edmunds-Tucker Act. The act dis-incorporated the LDS Church and the Perpetual Emigrating Fund Company, giving their assets to the public school. It mandated an oath denouncing polygamy to be taken before anyone could vote, sit on a jury, or serve as a public official. It removed local judges (who were LDS) and replaced them with federally appointed judges (certain to be anti-polygamy). The act rearranged family law. It required marriage licenses, it disinherited illegitimate children, it abrogated the spousal privilege that prevented wives from testifying against their husbands in polygamy prosecution cases.

Although the LDS Church fought these laws through appeals to the US Supreme Court, they lost the fight. Faced with the dire prospect of remaining an outlaw organization, the church relented. The struggle and surrender inform LDS Church conduct in ways that remain a part of the institutional psyche.

We begin the story five years after Joseph Smith's death, when the doctrine of taking plural wives was first made public. Wisely, Joseph deliberately limited the practice and kept it secret. Personally, I believe that plural wives should never have been publicly adopted and preached. It was never essential to "exaltation." Much of the content when it was preached publicly was based on advice Brigham Young received from a US Senator. To win protection under the First Amendment, it was necessary to portray plural wives as essential to the religion. But it was portrayed as salvific as part of a strategy to win in the courts. When the LDS Church lost the fight, they were faced with the conundrum of undoing an oversold doctrine.

President Brigham Young asserted the practice was constitutionally protected if it was a fundamental part of Latter-day Saint religion. When he presided, he made plural wives essential to the Church. He was encouraged in this view by an unnamed US Senator. The unidentified Senator was likely Stephen A. Douglas who had been elected to the United States Senate in 1846. They made it public in 1852. Mormon leaders defended the right to practice plural marriage as constitutional, [and] delivered sermons for three decades to define the practice as a fundamental part of their religious beliefs. Young continually asserted it was both "wholesome" and constitutionally protected.

When Orson Pratt gave the first talk announcing it publicly, the place he went first was constitutionality. He said, "If it can be proven to a demonstration, that Latter-day Saints have actually embraced, as a part and portion of their religion, the doctrine of plurality of wives, it is constitutional. Should there ever be laws enacted by this government to restrict them from the free exercise of this part of their religion, such laws must be unconstitutional." That's the first sermon in the sequence.

The month before this Brigham Young made a similar comment: "There is not a single constitution of any single state, much less the constitution of the Federal Government, that hinders a man from having two wives; and I defy all the lawyers of the United States to prove to the contrary." It would take three decades but they did.

President Young frequently declared this practice was essential. He claimed his sermons were “as good Scripture as is couched in this Bible.” Taking him at his word, the following quotes show what the LDS Church believed during its second phase following Joseph Smith’s death.

“Now if any of you will deny the plurality of wives, and continue to do so, I promise that you will be damned[.]”

“The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy.”

Young preached it was monogamy that was a great evil, imposed by the Romans. Romans were a band of robbers who imposed monogamy to further the Empire’s lust for prostitution. But polygamy was, according to Young, the only religion practiced in heaven. The Romans imposed monogamy in order to produce an excess of unmarried women, and according to Young this was responsible for prostitution and whoredom throughout the Christian world.

Young warned women that they risked servitude in eternity if they objected to their husbands taking plural wives in this life. They would serve those who lived polygamy in this life, who would be elevated to godhood.

Even speaking against plural wives could imperil your eternal reward: “Those who spoke against a Plurality of wives & in there [sic] feelings will not receive it will never inherit the Celestial Kingdom of God, for it has always been practiced there and always will be.”

Plurality of wives was obligatory, not optional. If you rejected it, you were damned. Young absolutely rejected the idea of surrendering to the government. Doing so would be surrender to the devil. Polygamy was God’s command and could not be disobeyed. Surrender to man’s law was impossible because only God’s law could save.

Young called out the hypocrisy of the society condemning the Saints. LDS women were wives and mothers. Congress was against that but tolerated adultery and illegitimacy. This doctrine was essential for the faithful to practice. Mormonism held forth the promise that man could become like God. But becoming gods in the afterlife demanded polygamy in the here and now. The only men who would qualify as “sons of God” were those whose quiver was filled with children produced by multiple women bearing offspring for him.

Brigham Young died August 29, 1877 and was succeeded by John Taylor. When Taylor took over LDS Church history was more the product of Brigham Young than Joseph Smith. Smith led the church for 14 years, Young for 33. The doctrine of plural wives had become public and essential under Young. The doctrine of plurality of wives had become carved in stone. As the Church’s president, Taylor was just as emphatic about plural wives to qualify for exaltation. He had a full quiver of nine wives who bore him thirty-four children. Taylor preached it was apostasy to oppose polygamy.

Facing Federal prosecution under anti-polygamy legislation, Taylor spent the years of his presidency in hiding. He wrote a revelation on September 27, 1886 confirming to his mind the necessity of complying with the practice of plural wives. The revelation does not mention “plural wives” but refers instead to “the New and Everlasting Covenant” which he and Mormon fundamentalists, regard necessarily to include plural wives. He died in exile, firmly defending the practice, and preaching it must be continued.

Taylor was succeeded by Wilford Woodruff, likewise a full-quivered polygamist, having seven wives (or more, because our history leaves some of that open) and fathering thirty-three children. He was equally adamant about the indispensable practice of plural wives. Mormons would practice it “come life or come death” he declared. Like Taylor before him, Woodruff wrote a revelation confirming polygamy was not to be abandoned. The document was read to the Twelve on December 19, 1889. First Presidency Secretary John Nuttall recorded in his diary: “As I wrote at his dictation, I felt better all the time and when I completed I felt as light and joyous as it is possible to feel, for I was satisfied that Prest. Woodruff had received the word of the Lord.”

Despite heaven urging them to continue, both society and the US Government were pulling in the opposite direction. Legal setbacks continued to accumulate. *Reynolds v. United States* upheld the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act making it a federal crime to practice plural marriage. The polygamist Church leadership was guilty of a federal crime. *Davis v. Beason* upheld the Idaho test oath designed to disqualify Mormons from jury duty and public office. *The Late Corporation of the Mormon Church v. United States* upheld Federal seizure of LDS Church property. It was expected the government would take possession of all LDS Temples.

When The Late Corporation of the Mormon Church decision was announced on May 19, 1890, a member of the Twelve Apostles recorded the internal reaction: “By the provisions of the Edmunds-Tucker Act, the property of the Church was ordered escheated for the use of the [public] schools. In pursuance of this provision some \$750,000 worth of church property was seized and placed in the hands of a receiver.”

Events unfolded quickly once the church lost its property. US Secretary of State, James G. Blaine prepared a document on June 12th for Church leaders to sign renouncing plural marriage. There is only one existing document referring to a pre-Manifesto policy change. It was prepared two months before the Manifesto. Abraham H. Cannon’s diary records on July 10th (he was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve at the time): “The resolution of the First Presidency of June 30/90 in regard to plural marriages was read. It is to the effect that none shall be permitted to occur even in Mexico unless the contracting parties, or at least the female, has resolved to remain in that country.”

The church’s worst fears were confirmed August 26th when the former Federal receiver, Frank Dyer related the US would soon attempt “to confiscate the Logan, Manti and St. George temples on the grounds that they are not used for public worship.” Keep those dates in mind now.

Woodruff got the revelation on December 1889. The decision was in May of 1890, and on September 24th Wilford Woodruff issued the press release now called the "Manifesto" in which he denied plural marriages were taking place. The LDS Church would continue to practice plural marriages until a second "Manifesto" issued by President Joseph F. Smith in 1904. Plural marriages came into the LDS Church in secret before it became public. Likewise, it remained in secret after the 1890 Manifesto, ultimately dying sometime after 1904. It is now denounced and those who practice it are excommunicated.

The LDS Church was finally motivated by popular disapproval and federal legislation to abandon plural wives. In a sacrament meeting, the First Presidency the Twelve, on April 2, 1891, President Woodruff defended the Manifesto by claiming he had been "inspired" by God to issue the document, but polygamy would yet be restored in the Church.

Resistance to the popular will and Federal legislation had proven impossible. The LDS Church would not have survived as a legal enterprise if their members could not vote, serve on juries, hold public office, and if their temples were taken, their property escheated to the government, and their officials jailed. There was no other choice if the Church wanted to remain a corporate entity, possessing property, and practicing their religion. Polygamy had to go or LDS Mormonism would be obliterated. The Church chose to keep its corporate status and property. It wanted to continue as it had developed. Today likewise the LDS Church wants to retain its tax preference, and it owns much more property than in 1890. A recent acquisition of property in Florida resulted in one newspaper headline: "Mormon Church purchases 2% of the state of Florida for half a million dollars."

The likelihood of the LDS Church ever becoming embroiled in a similar battle of wills with the US government is improbable. As it did in the past, the church will find some way to bridge the gulf between its teachings and governmental ire. It has much more at stake today than the estimated \$750,000 taken at the time of Edmunds-Tucker Act. It would lose perhaps more than that weekly if the Church's tax-exempt status were now revoked. Today the LDS Church must be more nimble regarding public opinion than ever before because today it has more at risk than ever before.

So we turn to the next subject, which is ordination of black Africans. Another abandoned LDS doctrine involves the status of black Africans. While welcomed as members, blacks were denied ordination. Brigham Young began, and other leaders echoed, teachings relegating black Africans to doctrinally inferior status.

Slavery in America began centuries before the United States. From the late 1400's African slaves were transported to the Americas. By the end of the 19th Century there had been five times as many Africans brought to the Americas than Europeans. African slavery was a fact of life in the English colonies before the American Revolution. Once the US was independent, it had an economic infrastructure in which African slavery was a fact of life.

Before considering or condemning the LDS Church's teachings, the larger social, legal and economic setting should be remembered. Context is everything.

In 1856 the Republican Party was formed, in part to oppose the spread of slavery into the property that was acquired through the Mexican-American war. In 1857 the US Supreme Court issued the Dred Scott decision. The ruling established that blacks free or slave, had no citizenship rights and therefore no standing to sue in Federal courts.

On January 16, 1852, Young explained to the Utah Territorial Legislature Africans were the “seed of Cain” and could not hold priesthood. He described them as black, uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable, wild, and unintelligent members of the human family. (He did acknowledge them as members of the human family.) “[A]ny man having one drop of the seed of [Cain] .in him cannot hold the priesthood and if no other Prophet ever spake it before I will say it now in the name of Jesus Christ I know it is true and others know it.”

The curse was not just to protect the right to priesthood; it was also to prevent intermarriage. Said Young, “If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so.”

The nation fought the Civil War but slavery was only concluded by the adoption of the 13th Amendment in 1865. To make the 13th Amendment a restriction on State conduct, the 14th Amendment was likewise adopted. The 14th Amendment says:

"No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States; ...nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

The post-Civil War constitutional amendments were only the beginning of the process to establish equality for former slaves and their descendants. Segregation in post-Civil War America was legal, having been approved by the Supreme Court.

Although Brigham Young’s comments about interracial marriage seem offensive in 2014, the United States had widespread laws making such marriages illegal. They were referred to as “Anti-Miscegenation” statutes. It was not until 1948 that California became the first state to strike down such a statute. And it took the United States Supreme Court until 1967 to finally decide that in all states of the Union interracial marriage could not be prohibited because that was unconstitutional, 1967.

The civil rights movement, the NAACP, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, and the Civil Rights Act, all required to change the status of descendants of former slaves in the American culture.

While the civil rights movement was gaining momentum, LDS Church leaders remained committed to preserve their racial teachings. Apostle Mark E. Peterson defended the

Church's position at a BYU audience of Institute and Seminary teachers in 1954 at BYU. He said: "No person having the least particle of negro blood can hold the priesthood. It does not matter if they are one-sixth negro or one-hundred and sixth, the curse of no Priesthood is the same. If an individual who is entitled to the priesthood marries a negro, the Lord has decreed that only spirits who are not eligible for the priesthood will come to that marriage as children."

The question was so well settled that when LDS Church leader Bruce R. McConkie assembled an encyclopedic summary of Mormon beliefs titled *Mormon Doctrine*, he could state with authority under the entry "Negro" this: "The negroes are not equal with other races where the receipt of certain spiritual blessings are concerned, particularly the priesthood and the temple blessings that flow therefrom, but this inequality is not of man's origin. It is the Lord's doing, is based on his eternal laws of justice, and grows out of the lack of spiritual valiance of those concerned in their first estate."

The clear legal trends, however, were against discrimination. Institutional racial discrimination had been targeted by the civil rights organizations for years. As would be expected, the LDS Church came to the attention of the NAACP. Efforts were made to negotiate for change. In 1963 the NAACP leadership attempted to meet with LDS Church leaders but the Church refused. A meeting took place two years later in 1965. The LDS Church agreed in that meeting to support civil rights legislation pending in the Utah legislature. They agreed to publish an editorial in the *Deseret News*. The Church failed to keep the agreement. First Presidency member N. Eldon Tanner explained, "We have decided to remain silent."

By March of 1965, the NAACP took more public means to pressure the LDS Church. They organized an anti-discrimination march in Salt Lake City to protest the Church's policies. The next year the NAACP issued a statement criticizing the Church, complaining it "maintained a rigid and continuous segregation stand" and has made "no effort to counteract the widespread discriminatory practices in education, in housing, in employment, and other areas of life." It's a really well lawyered statement because if you are discriminating in education, housing, unemployment, and other areas that are constitutionally prohibited from accomplishing, that attacks you indirectly rather than going at your religious beliefs directly. Brilliant piece of lawyering there.

Although the institution was hesitating, its membership was increasingly willing to see more racial equality. The culture was changing, and change began to exert pressure inside the LDS Church.

In addition to the Church itself, Brigham Young University offered a visible target for protests. The University of Texas at El Paso was confronted with a protest by their track team. "After the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, black members of the track team approached their coach and expressed their desire not to compete against Brigham Young University. When the coach disregarded their complaint, the athletes boycotted the meet." And that resulted in newspaper headlines. In 1969 members of the University of Wyoming

football team intended to protest during a BYU football game by wearing black armbands. The protest was aborted when the university suspended the players. That resulted in litigation that went up through the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. Stanford University suspended all athletic relations with BYU in November 1969. Legal pressure on this issue was reminiscent of earlier conflicts with the Federal government.

There were rumors the LDS Church faced a threat to remove its tax-exempt status. These rumors were denied by an LDS spokesman. However, the issue of racial discrimination was before the US courts for years prior to the LDS policy change. Bob Jones University had a policy against interracial marriage. In order to enforce that policy, if you were a black student they would admit you only if you were married. The Bob Jones University case was ultimately decided by the US Supreme Court permitting the IRS to revoke tax-exempt status because of racial discrimination. A direct threat by the US government would not have been necessary in the circumstances. The threat of taxation can ultimately destroy any institution, including the LDS Church. Chief Justice John Marshall coined the truism: "The power to tax involves the power to destroy."

Faced with the obvious national trend against institutional racism, and with the memory of its past conflict with the US, the LDS Church changed its teaching June 8, 1978. Prior to this, efforts to make the change were unsuccessful because Church leaders were unable to get approval from God. President Spencer W. Kimball turned the problem around. He wanted the change. He pondered it for months. He had a growing conviction that it would be a good thing to accomplish. He consulted carefully with the Twelve, he took their comments and he sought their advice. When the day came to decide the matter, he did not pray to have Divine approval, instead he presumed it to be time for changing the Church's policy and asked to be clearly told not to proceed if the Lord objected. Hearing no objection from the Twelve, his counselors, or heaven, the change was adopted. It was implemented in 1978 and announced in Official Declaration 2, now part of the Doctrine & Covenants.

It is obvious the LDS Church could not admit forfeiting priesthood because African Americans are now ordained. It is equally obvious this change is incompatible with prior teaching. To bridge this gulf, the Church issued a press release titled *Race and the Church: All Are Alike Unto God*. The contradiction is accounted for by "the absence of direct revelation" to guide the earlier Church leaders. The return of scarcity is blamed. "The origins of priesthood availability are not entirely clear. Some explanations with respect to this matter were made in the absence of direct revelation and references to these explanations are sometimes cited in publications. These previous personal statements do not represent Church doctrine." This is the process. Scarcity forces the institution to substitute man's doctrinal innovations for God's voice. Restoration ends and apostasy begins.

In addition to now denigrating earlier prophets, seers and revelators for not having revelation to guide them, the LDS Church also unequivocally condemned them in a lengthy editorial on their lds.org website: "None of these explanations is accepted today as the official doctrine of the Church. ... Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the

past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form." They attribute their earlier missteps to US history, including legalized slavery, when the LDS Church began.

Those are two things from the past. Now there are issues upon us at the moment. Homosexuality is a big issue with some of the people in this room, about whom I care a great deal. It's an issue. It's a personal issue.

Latter-day Saint history has surprisingly few teachings addressing homosexuality. It is a topic of only recent importance. There is a timeline published on the website "No More Strangers: LGBT Mormon Forum", which retells many of the events. The issue did not emerge into direct and regular discussion until the 1950's.

Under traditional LDS doctrine recently articulated, homosexuality is sinful, requiring repentance. In Spencer W. Kimball's book *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, he wrote: "the seriousness of the sin of homosexuality is equal to or greater than that of fornication or adultery; and that the Lord's Church will as readily take action to disfellowship or excommunicate the unrepentant practicing homosexual as it will the unrepentant fornicator or adulterer."

In a chapter titled *Crime Against Nature*, Spencer Kimball called it "unnatural and wrong." He elaborated: "All such deviations from normal, proper heterosexual relationships..." (Boy, that reminds me of some of the Church Handbook of Instruction stuff and admonitions from the Church Office Building to make Stake Presidents and Bishops less inquisitive.) "All such deviations from normal, proper heterosexual relationships..." (And I suppose part of the definition of that would depend upon the gymnastic ability and the yoga practices of the couple involved.) "...are not merely unnatural but wrong in the sight of God. Like adultery, incest and bestiality they carried the death penalty under the Mosaic law." You know, as Latter-day Saints, sex is one of those subjects about which I think you're all gripping right now. *My goodness! What's he going to say?* Well, I'll keep that to myself.

A grim milestone was set in 1965 when five young Mormons, all homosexuals, all counseled by Spencer W. Kimball for homosexual sin; and all of them committed suicide. All of them were in their early 20's. Three had recently returned from missionary service. All had been BYU students. The year that these five suicides took place... Let me read you from Ernest Wilkinson's devotional talk that he delivered in that same year: "Nor do we intend to admit to our campus any homosexuals. If any of you has this tendency and have not completely abandoned it, may I suggest that you leave the University immediately after this assembly ...we do not want others on this campus to be contaminated by your presence."

In the United States there is a tidal wave of legal activity on homosexual rights, right now underway. Since 2003 every state has either legalized same-sex marriage or adopted laws prohibiting it.

In Utah an amendment was put on the November 2004 ballot. It passed with approximately 66% of the vote favoring the amendment to Article I, §29, adding the following language to the Utah constitution: "Marriage consists only of the legal union between a man and a woman. No other domestic union, however denominated, may be recognized as a marriage or given the same or substantially equivalent effect." This provision took effect in January 1, 2005. It was declared unconstitutional in December 2013 by the US District Court here in Utah. Last month the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed that decision.

Proposition 8 in California faced the same state electoral vote in November of 2008. The ballot fight was aided by the LDS Church providing both vocal support, and assisting with door-to-door campaign efforts. Before the vote was taken, church leaders David A. Bednar, Russell [Ballard], and Quentin Cook (of the Twelve) and Whitney Clayton (of the Seventy) broadcast video into California urging Church members to be involved in supporting Proposition 8. When the vote was counted, the LDS effort had proven decisive and Proposition 8 passed. A post Proposition 8 statement from the LDS Church made this announcement: "The Church expresses deep appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the many Latter-day Saints and others who supported the coalitions in efforts regarding these amendments."

LDS opposition to Proposition 8 resulted in an organized effort to revoke the LDS Church's tax exempt status. A website was established to instruct those willing to protest on how to approach removing the 501c3 status of the church. The protest focused on the Internal Revenue Code provision which limited favorable tax treatment to institutions "organized and operated exclusively for religious" purposes and in which "no part of the earnings" and "no substantial part of the activities involves carrying on propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation."

The LDS Church has been publicly softening its position on homosexuality since winning the Proposition 8 battle. The Boy Scouts change to accept homosexuals was immediately approved by the LDS Church as a visible mea culpa. This is also true of others involved with Proposition 8. An LDS writer has advocated same-sex temple marriage in a popular Mormon journal.

The Deseret News national web issued an article on Friday saying that the IRS is now investigating political activity by churches.

The LDS Church is necessarily attentive to legal trends. Its existence was once hanging by the thinnest of threads because of laws targeting it. Lawyers are consistently among the highest leadership of the LDS Church. The legal, economic, [and] social environment in which LDS Mormonism has evolved cannot be divorced from its evolving doctrine, because many changes were adaptations to this environment.

So we turn to women.

When Joseph Smith was alive, women had limited property rights. When they married their property became the property of their husbands under the common law doctrine. It was not until beginning in the 1840's that some states first began to modify the common law in order to protect women's property from their husbands and their husbands' creditors.

Women's right to vote in the US began in 1869 in Wyoming. They were allowed to serve on juries in Wyoming beginning in that year. In 1893 Colorado let women vote. In 1896 Idaho and Utah did likewise. Keep this in mind because you live in a fundamentally different world than the world in which Mormonism began. The National Organization for Women was created in 1966 to pursue equal rights for women.

The ACLU announces on its website "Forty years ago, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) board of directors determined that women's rights should be the organization's highest priority. They created the ACLU Women's Rights Project and named Ruth Bader Ginsburg as the first director. She is now on the United States Supreme Court, and the Women's Rights Project (WRP) has won many landmark court decisions, and achieved significant legislative successes. They have shifted public awareness and understanding of women's equality issues."

The right to have contraception was determined in the Griswold case written by Justice William O. Douglas, who wrote that the right was found in the "penumbras" and "emanations" of other rights that are enumerated. A penumbra is that hazy place between the lamp that is shining in the darkness beyond; it's just the gray area in between. That's where you find these rights.

The innovation would produce another dramatic penumbral decision in Justice Blackman's landmark abortion ruling eight years later. In the newly found constitutional "penumbra" Justice Harry Blackmun found the right to privacy also gave women the right to an abortion. Writing for a 7-2 majority in *Roe v. Wade*, he said: "The right to privacy, whether it be founded in the Fourteenth Amendment's concept of personal liberty and restrictions upon state action, as we feel it is, or, as the district court determined, in the Ninth Amendment's reservation of rights to the people, is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy." At the time of the decision all states limited abortion, and the majority prohibited abortion altogether. The dissenting opinion of Justices Byron White and William Rehnquist lamented the majority exercised improvident and extravagant judicial power to fashion a new constitutional right.

Whether it was improvident or not, the culture of the United States has been shaped by *Roe v. Wade* from 1973 to the present. At present it is estimated over 56 million Americans do not live today, having been aborted. That holocaust was designed to target an unwanted population, and it has worked as intended.

In 1986 the US Supreme Court found that sexual harassment is a form of illegal job discrimination. In 1999 the Supreme Court ruled there were punitive damages available for sex discrimination. In 2009 President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay

Restoration Act. In 2013 Defense Secretary Leon Panetta lifted the ban on women serving in combat roles, reversing a 1994 rule.

All these larger national events affected views of Latter-day Saints. From imposing short haircuts on missionaries and BYU students, warning about “hippies” and drug use, advocating large families and not artificially limiting births, to denouncing rock and roll music, the LDS Church has been reactionary, trying to slow cultural changes. Whether viewed as progress or decay, LDS leaders have fought it.

The Ordain Women organization maintains a website in which Mormons are given a place to advocate change in LDS Church policy. They hope to end “gender inequality” by “calling attention to the need for the ordination of Mormon women to the priesthood.” The public has responded with numerous profiles pleading for change to LDS doctrine. The Church responded through the Deseret News in an article March 17, 2014 titled *LDS Church: Aims of ‘Ordain Women’ Detract from Dialogue*. But the following month in General Conference, Apostle Dallin H. Oaks gave a talk titled: *The Keys and Authority of the Priesthood* in which he said, “The Lord has directed that only men will be ordained to offices in the priesthood.” But he added this: “We are not accustomed to speaking of women having the authority of the priesthood in their Church callings, but what other authority can it be? When a woman—young or old—is set apart to preach the gospel as a full-time missionary, she is given priesthood authority to perform a priesthood function. ...Whoever functions in an office or calling received from one who holds priesthood keys exercises priesthood authority in performing her or his assigned duties.”

And so according to Oaks, women can use the authority of the priesthood, though not necessarily ordained. Extending this reasoning to its logical conclusion, women will one day be able to baptize with “authority” borrowed from a male key-holder. If institutional discrimination on the basis of sex ever threatens the LDS Church’s tax-exempt status, this seminal General Conference talk by a former Justice on the Utah Supreme Court can be the basis to permit the first female Bishop to serve, using authority borrowed from a male key-holder. In fact, under this paradigm, you really only need one guy and everyone can function.

In conclusion, LDS Mormonism claims Joseph Smith as its founder. Joseph thought his restoration one day would revolutionize the world. It was a “stone cut out of the mountain without hands” that would roll forth and grind to dust all other institutions. Brigham Young thought one of the necessary obstacles needing grinding was the US Government. However, LDS Church's history is filled with the contrary process: The US culture has been grinding away at LDS Mormonism’s peculiar doctrines, and pushing it to conform with national cultural changes. It is not difficult to foresee how the present legal and social environment will influence future position changes on women’s rights and more open acceptance of homosexuality. We should all expect that the Church is going to do this.

There are two possibilities to account for the LDS Church’s history of compromise on their doctrine. The first possibility is these teachings, although once proclaimed to be

fundamental, even necessary to obtain exaltation in the afterlife, were falsely portrayed in the first place. The Book of Mormon seems to support this view. That is, if you read what Christ announces as His doctrine. In that statement Christ makes no mention of plural wives, priesthood, priesthood bans, or homosexuality. And Christ's admonition ends with "whoso shall declare more or less than this and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil."

Well, if this is so, then contrary to LDS past claims, no soul was ever damned by refusing to accept the doctrine of plural wives. Nor was God going to take away all priesthood from the church as soon as the church attempted to ordain black African descendants. Nor has Almighty banned women from the priesthood. Nor is homosexuality a serious moral offense before God. God's silence led the LDS Church to oversell these teachings and therefore they were, and are, free to "correct" them.

The other possibility is they got the doctrine right before, and by accommodating American legal and cultural demands the LDS Mormonism has been cutting down the Tree of Life to build a wooden bridge. If this is the case, then popular will, Federal legislation, and the US Supreme Court will have more to say in the future about LDS Mormon doctrine than the Church's "prophets, seers and revelators," just as they have exerted the primary influence after Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. Thank you.

[55:00] Dan Wotherspoon: Denver's paper has presented a history of past doctrinal changes along with what he sees as potential changes currently trending within Mormonism. I don't have much to argue with in terms of his presentation of the historical moments or the leader quotations he cites. I do, however, have great difficulty with the historical narrative that he has told them within, the selection of things to share or not share, and even more with his framing of his story. *History... "his" "story"*. Certainly it's a story of many people here. The world is "going to hell in a handbasket," trending the wrong way. Go back to the source. I challenge that story here.

His is a story that ultimately culminates in a huge false dichotomy, one that he sets up in the very title as well as the final lines of his paper. Either the teachings at the heart of these four areas he touched [and] toured us through were falsely portrayed in the first place, or they are true revelations that Mormonism once got right but just now has compromised on, sold out for a mess of pottage. According to his tale our tradition has and is cutting down the Tree of Life. Forget its fruit, he seems to say. We want its lumber. We want to put it to use towards a doomed project accommodating to a fallen world. In presenting his tale and his dichotomy he excludes the huge middle, with wonderful other possible framings for this history of change. Two choices are fine in the court of law, where those involved must decide guilt or innocence. Deductive logic can be helpful at times. But the coherence of a case falls apart when there are substantive challenges to the premises one builds from. In my response today I offer an alternative vision that I believe challenges his foundation, and in doing so offer a far more satisfying and capable way of framing the same ground that he has covered.

First however: where he and I agree. For anyone who has heard my podcasts for even six or seven episodes, or has engaged with me in conversation for a long time, you've probably heard me talk about a favorite metaphor and a framing for the power and the fire that is at the base of any revelation that kind of starts a church or that activates us in our hearts. It's from the Franciscan Father, David Steindl-Rast. He talks about God's revelation being like; when you receive that you're in the midst of the churning volcano. It's active, it's going, it's full, it is chaos. But as it erupts and as it flows over the sides we start to see it begin to cool. It is molten lava that is running down the sides but clearly you can still see the fire within it. You can see its origins. By the time it gets down to the bottom and a bit of time after the eruption, what it is? It's simply cooled rock, very, very difficult to see what is there.

Stephen Carter, the current editor of Sunstone, also helped to personalize this with me a few years ago, and he talks about our personal spiritual experiences. When we have them, when we are in those modes of wonderful enlightenment, almost out of body, we're soaring with open hearts, and everything is coming to us all at once; we have that experience. But guess what, soon we begin to say, *I don't know what to make of this*, and we begin to start to tell a story about that experience. Maybe we're going to share it with our friend. *"Man, you just can't believe that I'm so expanded here, and I can't even convey it to you, but it was kind of like this..."* And you begin to tell a story. You begin tell a part, and you begin to tell a part, and then pretty soon Fast and Testimony meeting rolls around and you get up to tell that thing, and by then you've nailed it down to just one or two lessons from that story. So from the fire, from the expansiveness, and things like this, we begin to quiet, to tame, to cool that story, and then from that point on, unless we do—I think Denver and I both agree, and I would hope most of us here are clear—unless we continually go back and mine it for something new, we're going to forever only interact with that story by those two or three things that we had decided to tell in Fast and Testimony meeting. For the next twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, that will be the moment of our experience instead of going back again and again to do that.

Where he and I absolutely agree is when you get institutions involved with their own needs and with their own ends that they must serve, absolutely, it's inferior to our direct experience with God, with our direct hearing from the divine source. So we're one hundred percent in agreement with that. As I wrote down here, and believe I've shared with him in an email: "I really wish that you simply would have asserted this, instead of this long history in these four areas Simply assert institutions get in our way. They screw up that thing. There's another layer between us and God, and this need to do it, because if we could then attempt to simply assert it we could have gotten to the more interesting things."

How does God actually work with us in our lives? That's what I hope that perhaps my conversation will prompt as you guys come up here. Certainly there are layers of his paper that I'm not addressing here at all. (Now back to text, sorry.)

I am far less certain than Denver that our societal trends, including and even especially the four areas that he discussed today, are the result of a large scale failure to hear God's voice, to feel God's Spirit. As Francis Bacon once observed, "God has two books; the book of his

Word (scripture) and the book of his Works (nature).” We must read them both. Societies are comprised of individuals, and God works with individuals. Individuals interact with information from science and observations from nature and their own encounters with it, and with other people, and with what is new and is challenging, and they weigh it out and we weight it out in many deeply spiritual ways. God not only works and teaches us through direct wowie-zowie revelation to either ourselves or His designated prophets. The pronouncements of scripture and ancient prophets are not things that we can fully, and for all time, base our understandings of God and God’s working upon.

As Adam Miller wrote recently, “God works with whatever small knowledge of the world we’ve already got. He speaks to people in their weakness and after the manner of their language *“that they might come to an understanding.”* You’ll recognize that from D&C 1. Our sacred texts witness God’s willingness to suffer this weakness. They tell of a mix of stories from many different times and places that illustrate what happens when the strength of God’s polyphonic voice gets funneled into the weakness of our mono channel ears. Miller speaks of the importance of not trying to harmonize scripture to pretend that the voices there do not agree with others. Scripture, he says, is best to meet rough, as uncut, for it is in this form that they bear witness to real revelations given to real people, because they also bear witness to the host of real weaknesses that can help socket God’s world into their worlds.

Are plural marriages, withholding of priesthood from those of certain races and sexes, and full honor of relationship status to those via biology [and] are same sex attracted, really things that we want to hang our hats on as eternal? Are they Tree of Life stuff? I thought Tree of Life stuff was the love of God, was never to exclude. Is the Tree of Life stuff only communicated in face to face direct revelations from God, to us, to our prophets? Can it also be even more reliably available to us in our ongoing and ever unfolding experiences of love? In our relationship with family and friends, in meeting someone and coming to know them such that their divinity and absolute worth and blessedness reveal themselves to us in the ways that we had previously never imagined?

Revelations of God in such form are Denver’s excluded middle. We are presented with new information, new persons, and experiences. We do fresh dives into the holy fire, and we yield to its burnings. Of course, not everyone does this in a disciplined way or with full consciousness of what they are doing, and they certainly do not do it at the same time or at the same speed. But I read the ultimate story of life in Mormonism—contrary to Denver’s narrative—as one of advance, of ascension, not fall; of expansion, a widening of moral concern, of growth into greater relationship with all of God’s creation, and especially each other. As described by the philosopher Hegel’s powerful framing: “At each and every moment we have active theses and antithesis, antitheses at play.” Denver’s examples—he actually left out some things of hippy culture and free love and illustrating the types of excess that we learned from... Basically the things that so many people, when they present the “going to hell in a handbasket thing,” is excesses and things to avoid. You could call them the antitheses, antithesis, or whatever you’d like to do. But my assertion is that they are

among our most powerful teachers. They are essential as well, that we bounce off when the new idea comes out there, we bounce off the rough parts.

...When the Church talks about John Dehlin's website and Kate Kelly as leading people away from the Church, to me, the bloggernacle with its free-for-all is absolutely saving the folks, especially in those voices that are so negative, so strong, so unfed-up here. They teach us what we don't want to be. How we don't want to be in that pain any more, just as much as they influence people out, I think. (I've of course botched where I'm at so hopefully this will pick up with some kind of transition.)

Although it is halting and frustrating at times, with painful lessons [and] with many growing pains, I trust us. I trust our human hearts. I trust that we're all susceptible to the influence of the spirit as we find ourselves faced with new questions and experiences. I trust that we are, as Paul urged, "proving all things," and though it's ultimately haltingly and with frustrating setbacks, whether it is sexual or other forms of excess, or ugly inspired pronouncements from those who shouldn't be prophets, we are holding fast to that which is good. What we are seeing in both church and society is a dialectic of creative advance that is far from a compromise of ideals.

It is many ancients, and we in our day have come to taste the fruit of the Tree of Life. We must understand it is a tree that never stops growing. Each taste can and should be fresh, far more delightful than each past bite because our senses are now better honed. And as the creative advance of the divine is showing us, even more wonderfully, it is a tree that has ever growing new varieties of delightful fruits. Many here testify of the envelopment of spirit as we meet and honor and love persons in depth, persons of all races and sexes, and who, in our encounter with them, bring all of their experiences. In the hugeness of their hearts and the fierceness of their efforts to understand the fullness of sexual identity, along with every other aspect of what it means to be a divine being in human bodies, our gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and intersexed brothers and sisters serve us as teachers and prophets. From then we understand even more of creation's richness, diversity, and goodness as we strive to love more deeply in our relationships with our husbands and wives, whether same or opposite sex as us; God is made manifest. Our hearts swell as we meet women whose gifts of hard won wisdom and leadership have been allowed to flourish. We soar with the angels as we receive the ministry of black men and the blessings from their priesthood hands, and in sitting and learning at their feet. Soon we will know this, and even more sweetness and fullness of joy with our sisters, as well.

"And the angel said unto [Nephi] ...Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all [other] things. And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul." (1 Nephi 11:21-23). Two verses later it is compared to a fountain of the living waters. I testify that it is one that is shedding itself abroad in the hearts of all of us as we meet and ponder the meaning of all that God is showing us, the stirrings and one-on-one changes of heart and mind in these same four areas that Denver bemoans as compromise of revelations, as sure as any received

by Abraham, Isaiah, or Joseph Smith. We, individuals, society, Mormonism, are on the journey that is anything but a fall. Thanks.

Question & Answer Session

[1:09:30] We do have times for questions so I get to make up the rules, and I also get to amend them if I decide they weren't the best rules in the beginning. What we will do, those of you that are interested in asking a question, if you'd like to line up over here by this wall, this will be on deck in the chair. There's the microphone, and I will call on the first one. They will be able to ask at the microphone the question. It can be asked of one or both of them. I'd like to ask Denver Snuffer and Dan Wotherspoon to keep their responses to two minutes. I know that's concise but it seems like we might have more than one or two questions, and that would be helpful. You look like you're ready to ask the first question. I'll let you go ahead.

Question: Dan, thank you for focusing on the fruit of the Tree of Life. I was looking for that in Denver's remarks, but let me ask this question of Denver. My take away is that you stated that the LDS Church has changed fundamental doctrine, is changing, and will continue to change because of submission to social and governmental pressure for fear of losing tax status. Is that a correct take away?

Denver Snuffer: The definition of fundamental doctrine is not something that I applied to the Church; it's what the Church has advocated on its own. I'm contrasting what the Church said at one time was fundamental doctrine, with what it has done to abrogate, denounce, renounce and even condemn unequivocally out of their own mouth, a prior practice. The motivation for accomplishing that transition was the focus of the paper. I'm not trying to make a moral judgment. I'm trying to understand the events against the backdrop of why the events took place. Not when they said were they right or wrong, but when they said it, and they said it with the "In the name of Jesus Christ" comment. Brigham Young I read, and I read that on purpose because he was stating, "I'm telling you this as my status as a prophet of God. I'm telling you this in the name of Jesus Christ, and I'm telling you this will never change," and it's changed. Now the Church, after making the changes, turned around and said, "We unequivocally condemn that." That's the purpose of the paper. The purpose of the paper is also to highlight the fact that institutionally, this is the problem. The problem is that truth and love and purity do exist, but it exists primarily in a form that is not institutional.

According to the scriptures, one of the criticisms that were made about the paper was, "this is false dichotomy". According to the scriptures there are only two ways, "there are save but two Churches only." And one church, if it's going to subject itself to institutional control, vagaries of the law, the pressure of the tax code, everything else; that church will necessarily become sullied and soiled, tossed and pulled, and ultimately wind up contradicting itself. There is another church. And I agree that that church can remain pure,

unsullied, untouched, untaxed, unregulated. That purity can exist in your heart. That purity can be found between you and God. I think any institution is going to suffer the exactly same history.

Question: My question is, if the fruit of the Tree of Life is not available to homosexuals and to women once they are embraced within the Church, what will they find instead?

Comment: I don't agree with that, that they're denied. They should be denied.

Denver Snuffer: The problem addressed in the paper, and the turf on which I feel very comfortable discussing, is the problem of Church doctrine, the legal pressure, fundamental positions being taken as if they were out of God's mouth itself, and then contradicted later to illustrate the problem of the institution. I don't think that I can, or ever should, have looked for institutional approval for my relationship with God. There was a time I did. There was a time I cared a great deal about that. But the institution has rendered that now an impossibility because I can't serve within the Church. That hasn't done a thing to deter my conviction, my relationship, [and] my fidelity to God. Likewise, I think in every individual's life, this world is a terrible place and this world is a wonderful place. It is precisely wonderful because it is so terrible. It doesn't matter what circumstances you find yourself in, everything down here is going to pull away at you. Eventually everything is going to wear out, break down. There are going to be disappointments, there is going to be challenges, there is going to be disagreements and arguments. The comfort that you find, like Joseph Smith in Liberty jail: "Peace my son, this is only going to be for a small moment, and if you endure it well you're going to be rewarded on high." I don't think that an institution can embrace with love, everyone, because some of us hate some others of us, and the institution would like to love us all. And those who get control get to use the bully pulpit for their purposes, and those that don't have it get to resent it.

I don't think, ultimately, that the fix will be institutional. I think it will be personal, and I think it will be individual, and I think there will be a gathering, and that gathering will be called Zion, and it will happen because the prophecies foretell it. But I don't think it's going to be after the fashion of something that can regulate or take control of, because anytime you manage to get control you wind up in politics and economics.

Dan Wotherspoon: In his fear of institutions, again, I argue, I asserted the same sort of thing. But I don't want to lose the fact that it's important that we work these things out in community with each other. So the fact that we have an institution that provides the buildings, that provides some of the structures in which we meet and interact with each other and learn from each other, to me, shouldn't be outweighed simply by this. But again, I think both of us would be in agreement that, no matter what is said there, it's you and your relationship with God. It's you and the fire, yourself, that has to be able to drive it, to not be just simply interacting with it so far down the mountain to where it's cooled, that you can hardly even tell it's there. So I just wanted to shout out that I do think it's important to work out. Whatever God... The primary actors in the world are not institutions. The primary actors in the world are people, and we're complex, and we go forward and we go

backwards, and we halt and we run fast, and we stumble. When I see an institution changing the way the Mormon Church is, even though it's frustrating, they are not changing anywhere nearer the directions I want, and when they say stupid things that just make me want to go crazy, I still see it as an advance, because we as people are advancing. We are meeting each other, we are learning from each other, we're engaging sciences, we are understanding what's going on, and this is sure revelation. This is sure revelation simply unfolding in just a messier way. So again, I want to get us together as often as possible.

Question: I think we can learn a lot from the community process, and discussing all that, but that's not revelation. My question is, usually the best we can do to personal revelation, whether it is lay members or leaders, is a yes or no, magic eight ball kind of a thing. And I'm not denigrating that, I'll take whatever I can get, but how do we move from that, to actually getting a complete sentence out of the Lord? [laughter and applause]

Denver Snuffer: You go ahead.

Dan Wotherspoon: I don't think it's possible. I don't think the Lord speaks in sentences. Seriously, every powerful spiritual experience I've had has been so overwhelming, so much bigger, so much beyond any kind of language. It's the downhill, it's the explaining it to you, to my friend, to my congregation or something, is where we put the words on it. And that's why it's so important to go back and constantly do the dive. I honor Isaiah. I honor Abraham. In fact, you left out a few references to some of the prophets that you really admire. I admire them because they're examples to us of Joseph Smith, of going straight to the Lord, of having that face-to-face relationship the way Adam, in Genesis describes, had with God in the Garden. I'm with that process, but I'm with all the time. Just as I don't accept the cosmology of a flat earth, sitting on waters below and a firmament held up by the pillars of heaven, I don't accept Abraham's pronouncements on cosmology. I don't feel the need to honor everything that they say. I honor their interaction with God, and I try to look at that as a model for my own life. And even in an institutional setting, to all remember this, we have to go straight to the source.

Denver Snuffer: You know, I was raised by a Baptist mother and got Bible verses read at me every morning before I went to school throughout childhood. When Mormon missionaries came and told me about the Joseph Smith story, and when Mormon missionaries assured me that Joseph saw God, and that, if you follow James 1:5 and you ask God, He will give you an answer, and if you will pray about the Book of Mormon, God will make it known to you whether it's true or not, I accepted that. I was young still, I was still a teenager, but I accepted that as literal. I accepted that as possible. I had faith that that could happen. I'm not a theologian. I do believe God not only talks in sentences, but can make Himself known to man. Literally! I believe all that. I believe that God did appear to Joseph. I believe that He did appear to Isaiah. Having that understanding, I did not think there was anything unusual when an angel appeared to me, because an angel did appear to me. I thought that was the normal, usual, every day way that Mormon religion was practiced. Sitting in a ward as a young teenager, looking out at all these experienced Mormons, listening to the General Authorities, I thought they all were talking to God in the temple

every Thursday. I thought this was common, ordinary. It took a long time. I presumed that was what everyone walked around with. It took a long time before I mentioned anything about any of the experience that I had had, before I realized that's not usual, that's not normal, and that's not customary. And so, I'm trying to make it usual, I'm trying to make it customary, I'm trying to say, Yes God is real! Because if I have seen Him, I think you can see Him, and ought to. I think everyone should make the fiery ascent to God's presence. I think it should not be limited to an occasional "here," or an occasional "there." I think we should have an abundance of witnesses. And the prophecy that Moroni spoke to Joseph Smith, that the time is going to come when no one needs to say to anyone else, "Know ye the Lord, for they shall all know Him," needs to be fulfilled. It is lying dormant. [applause]

Dan Wotherspoon: I agree with that principle that, go to yourself. You're going to go with your symbol system; you are going to go with your expectations. A Buddhist will never go and have the experience with the angel, with Jesus, and things like that. What Denver is having is not the same experience as what Hershel had, what Mohammed had, ... and things like this. And so when we talk about whether God speaks in sentences, what language does He speak in? He speaks in the systems of ours that open up to this sort of level of presence. But it is not... A deep dive through one symbol system is wonderful and it's pretty hard to get out of it, but I think we need to stay aware that there are so many other people diving and meeting God, meeting the divine and so many other different ways. I honor Denver's experience, but I can't limit God to the symbol system that simply we hold in Mormonism or wider. I'm with Mormonism's expansive views that simply say truth in God is working everywhere.

Denver Snuffer: This much I know: The angel said, "On the first day, of the third month, in nine years, your ministry will begin, and so you must prepare." Those are the words! I can quote them still. He spoke in a sentence.

Question: The more these situations are going on, I feel so strongly, more and more, I just keep getting that this is all about unity, and it's an opportunity for us. And if unity is about "agreeing" then frankly God did a terrible job. So the more I am seeing all of this, what I keep going to is, the quest for Zion seems to me the quest for open heartedness, and charity, and unity. And so in my family and my community, when I see one side that says an actively gay person will never come into the presence of God, or a gay person will go to hell. And then on the other side, I see a person who is an active Mormon, or a person who doesn't approve of homosexuality, is an awful person, is a hater, and I see those two things. I see Christians say Mormons are going to hell. It seems to me that we more dig our feet in and say, *I'm right, and I'm trying to push this agenda in my discussion...we are working away from God, and away from Zion.* More and more I think that if we can say, *This is where I am, and because of my experiences, which are such and such, this is what I believe, and let me hear where you are, and what you believe, and let's talk and consider,* I think that's great. Even though I disagree with you and I may think you're wrong, I trust God to lead you to what is right, and I trust the atonement of Christ, which is my theology, to take care of whatever you've got wrong, just like I trust that for me. I think and I believe that truth exists, but I

think when we all know all truth, we'll all agree. And in the meantime we are trying to find our way there. So my question is, first of all, is that possible? I mean, do you agree?

Denver Snuffer: I agree very much. In the first book I wrote I said, "Religion was intended to be applied internally only."

Question: Yes, thank you. My other question is, my theology, what I find in the scriptures on the issue of our day of homosexuality, is that I believe that homosexuals are a gift to us, to teach us great things. I think we need to learn charity. I also believe that God does have a standard, but I want to know if those two things can coexist. Can people hear me say, I truly love you, I'm thankful for you, I embrace you, I accept you, but this is my theology and morality? Can we be in this place where we can love each other with our differences instead of seeking agreement? Can we seek unity without seeking agreement?

Denver Snuffer: I grew up in a little town in Idaho. Homosexuality in the 1960s was almost a nonexistent issue. However, there was a restaurant in Mountain Home, Idaho that was owned by a gay man and his boyfriend; they lived together. Everyone knew that they were "funny." They were comfortable living in a community that was full of a bunch of retired military and active duty military people in Idaho in the 1960s, where I suppose they were just as Republican there and then as they are in Idaho now. It was known. It was not talked about. There might be a passing reference; that was it. I worked in those guys' restaurant. It was one of my first jobs. I washed dishes in a restaurant owned by a gay fellow and his live-in lover. It was no big deal. There was no politics involved; there was no agitating on the issue.

One of my law school classmates is here. He wound up on a drive to Idaho with a fellow who announced that he was gay and attracted to the man. It was one of those awkward moments. [laughter] When he came back we kind of chuckled about that. But the fact of the matter is that both he and I had business relationships with that fellow. It was essentially a nonevent. It was strange. It was a "*thanks, but no.*" I think we ought to be ginger about the way in which we deal with one another's weaknesses and problems. I think we ought to be firm in what we believe, and apply it rigorously internally, and then have compassion on every idiot you are going to meet— because we are all idiots, myself included. I agree with you.

Dan Wotherspoon: I agree with you too, but I don't think those answers are very fast at all. I am completely willing to live intention with that. Where you pushed a little bit too far, to me, is: "I love you. I love you but these are my standards, or this is that." To me, I'm willing to simply say, *I'm going to hear you, I'm going to be with you, I'm going to see your life, as much as you will show to me, without trying to have a resolution.* When I talked about the Hegelian dialectic, it's a process, and I'm completely fine for it taking forever in my own heart, or a long time.

Cathleen Gilbert (Moderator): We are out of time. Thank you to Denver Snuffer and Dan Wotherspoon.

[end recording: Cutting Down the Tree of Life]

[transcript: Kiyoko Ball v1.1]