

Salt Lake Tribune Interview Mormon Land

Denver C. Snuffer, Jr.
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Dave Noyce: Thanks for joining us today on Mormon Land where we explore news in and about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I'm managing editor, Dave Noyce. I oversee the Salt Lake Tribune faith coverage. I'm joined again by senior religion reporter, Peggy Fletcher-Stack. Hi, Peggy.

Peggy Fletcher-Stack: Hi Dave.

Dave: We remind our listeners about a new way to support Mormon Land. Just go to patreon.com where, with a small donation, you can access transcripts to our podcasts, our complete newsletter, and other gifts. Again, that's patreon.com/Mormonland. Now for today's show.

Some members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believe that their church has become staid, legalistic, and bureaucratic. They yearn for more of the mystical encounters espoused by church founder, Joseph Smith, and his early followers. In 2006, Utah Attorney Denver Snuffer published *The Second Comforter: Conversing with the Lord through the Veil*. It became an overnight sensation with those Latter-day Saints who wanted more spiritual experiences. That book and the volumes that followed attracted the attention of church authorities, and in 2013, Snuffer was excommunicated. Hundreds of other members joined him at gatherings and in small groups, and thus was born the "remnant movement," which today touts 1000s of adherents. Denver Snuffer joins us today in studio to discuss the movement, its past, present, and future. Welcome.

Denver Snuffer: Oh, thanks.

Dave: Glad to have you with us. So Denver, tell us a little bit more about the birth of this movement and why you've ventured down this spiritual path.

Denver: My departure from the LDS Church was not voluntary; I would have remained a member had they permitted me to remain so. They just thought that, apparently, the things that I was saying/the things I was writing were incompatible with their desire to claim the authority to rule and reign and control in a way that invades even what a person thinks. And so they kicked me out, although I was willing to remain.

And shortly after that, I began a series—it was a year long; it was exactly 365 days long... I began a series of ten lectures throughout the (what we call) the Mormon corridor in Boise and Idaho Falls and down into Farmington; we went into Colorado; we went into Nevada, into Arizona, delivering a series of ten lectures. And at the end of the lecture series, the tenth lecture, we invited people to be re-baptized, which was a USUAL event in the life of early Mormons; it's an UNUSUAL event today.

There's no church; there's no organization. It's simply an act of following a command by Christ to be baptized. And so, people have been re-baptized, have remained Latter-day

Saints, they have remained Methodists, they've remained affiliated with whatever group they want to be a member of in an organizational sense. But rebaptism itself is a signal of faith and repentance and acceptance of Christ (as opposed to joining an institution—there is no institution). But there are a lot of people who believe similarly...

Dave: So, are most the people that are in the remnant Latter-day Saints, though?

Denver: I would say, right now, the majority is clearly former and perhaps disaffected Latter-day Saints. But that hasn't been the only group that there's been an outreach to. I've done a series of lectures or presentations—Los Angeles, Dallas, Atlanta—approaching Christians, in many respects because of the aggressiveness of the LDS Church's missionary program. They get there first, and they get there early. And then Christians form their opinion of Joseph Smith based upon the narrative story told by the LDS institution and its missionaries.

One of the books that I wrote, which is aimed primarily at a Christian audience, is *A Man Without Doubt* (and I brought a copy of that, which I'm gonna leave with you folks today). *A Man Without Doubt*, it focuses on the Christian nature of Joseph Smith's life. It takes the three longest compositions by Joseph Smith, and it gives you a historical setting so you can understand the context out of which the document was composed, and then the composition itself. I call it the three greatest failures in Joseph Smith's ministry or life—and then his response in dealing with the failure.

The first one was the effort to get the higher priesthood conferred upon people (that happened at Morley's farm). And the history of what happened after that is a disaster. The people upon whom he conferred that authority universally fell away, apostas[ized], became enemies; one of them wrote a series of nine letters denouncing Joseph that got published in the newspaper. And in response to that failure, Joseph went to work trying to get people to understand faith more—and Lectures on Faith came out of that experience.

He got confined to the Liberty Jail, and he spent approximately half a year (just under six months) there. And in the Liberty Jail, he composed the "letter from Liberty Jail." The LDS version of that appears as Doctrine and Covenants sections 121, 122, and 123. The entire letter is in this book. And that arrest came as a result of betrayal by members of the organization of the church. He was dealing with a mass apostasy, an ex-communication of the three witnesses/of members of the Quorum of the Twelve in the 1838 timeframe. And he wrote the Joseph Smith History—because John Whitmer (the brother of David Whitmer, who was also excommunicated) took the history—he was the church historian—and there was no history. So, the Joseph Smith History that he wrote is in response to the problems that resulted at Far West. And all of the history that leads up to those documents is in this book as an introduction.

And the suggestion to a Christian audience is that maybe you ought to take another look at Joseph. If you understand the context and then you see the way in which he responds to these crises, to these betrayals, to these insider friends turning their backs on him, then you'll understand the man a little bit better. And that's *A Man Without Doubt*—primarily for a Christian audience, but Latter-day Saints will probably get a lot out of it, too.

Dave: So, Denver, you just talked about... First of all, why is it called "remnant"? What's...? Is that something that began organically or as a...

Denver: Yeah, it began organically, and I don't know that there is a name quite yet, although that's kind of the settled term that people call it.

Dave: And is there any kind of structure? Are there leaders? I mean, you've sort of hinted at this, like, are you a leader or...?

Denver: Well, the answer is that there's no real structure. There are fellowships that get formed. And then they can grow; they can split; they can reorganize themselves. The only organizational governance that exists are: men hold the priesthood—but a man cannot exercise priesthood authority outside of his own family unless he has seven women sign a certificate vouching for him as a worthy man who is to be trusted in exercising authority. It requires the seven women to sustain him before he can use priesthood authority outside of his own family. If someone were going to baptize someone, for example, and they're not a member of their family, they would need to have a sustaining vote by seven women.

The other governing principle is that if a man becomes or is viewed as having fallen into some kind of transgression that makes him untrustworthy, then the right to exercise that priestly authority outside of the family gets revoked by a council of 12 women who have to reach a unanimous decision. And if the 12 women reach a unanimous decision to revoke the priestly authority, then his certificate is taken from him. And he can't exercise priest[ly] authority outside of the family that he belongs to.

Peggy: Who issues those initial "licenses" (or whatever)?

Denver: Yeah, the sustaining certificate—it's issued within, generally, within fellowships. The requirement is that the women who signed need to be acquainted with the man's daily walk, and those are the words that get used: "acquainted with his daily walk," meaning you can't get a stranger to sustain you; you need someone who essentially knows what kind of person you are and feels like you can be trustworthy.

If the man is married, one of the seven must be his wife. If his wife will not sustain him to exercise priestly authority outside the home, then it doesn't matter if seven other women will. She has to agree to it. So, while men exercise priestly authority, women do all of the controlling, vouching, and removing—and priestly authority has been revoked by women several times within the movement.

Peggy: Okay, so that's sort of the structure. Do you have basic tenets? Is there an Articles of Faith? Are there 13 Articles of Faith? Are there 20 Articles of Faith? Are there...?

Denver: There aren't... There aren't particular Articles of Faith. But we do have our own canon of Scripture, and I've brought for you a set of the Scriptures that I'm gonna leave with you.

Peggy: Okay.

Denver: If you are interested in how best to understand the differences (the major differences), then you can look in what's called the third volume (called the Teachings and Commandments). And there's three sections in the Teachings and Commandments—sections 156, 157, and 158—that will really give you the anchor/the bedrock for what the differences are. And then there's another one that I wrote down (which is 166) that I think helps explain why the LDS Church has gone into a period of radical doctrinal-shifting since 2014—and that's 166. But I'll leave that with you.

Dave: Okay.

Denver: Three volumes, and they're yours to...

Peggy: So, what's your... Again, I guess we'll call this a "movement." What's the view of Joseph Smith versus Brigham Young?

Denver: Joseph is unquestionably accepted as someone that had a mission from and accomplished a work on behalf of God. Joseph Smith's revelations, largely, are accepted—slightly different form than what you have in the LDS Church and more of them than what you have in the Doctrine and Covenants—and are canonized in what's called the Teachings and Commandments (the T&C). Joseph also had revelations that were not canonized, and they appear in the T&C. And the entirety of the letter from the Liberty Jail is included in the T&C, as opposed to excerpts from it.

Joseph was and is recognized as someone that began a work that will eventually culminate in wrapping things up and the return of Christ. But when Joseph died, Emma Smith made the comment that "without Joseph, there is no church." And I think that largely proved to be the case.

Things took a turn with Brigham Young. I personally think that we still owe a debt of gratitude to Brigham Young, no matter what, because... One of the comments I've made about him is that he figured out (unlike Joseph), he figured out how to monetize Mormonism. Joseph ~~was~~ had a pending petition for bankruptcy when he died, and Brigham Young became the first multi-millionaire west of the Mississippi—because Brigham knew how to monetize Mormonism. THAT you can say is a bad thing, but it's also a good thing, in the sense that I don't think that the Book of Mormon would have been preserved, the teachings of Joseph would have been preserved, Mormonism itself would not have been preserved if it had not been for Brigham Young.

I don't think (just like HE said), I don't think he was a prophet in the same sense of as Joseph Smith. He did not claim to be; he claimed to be a Yankee guesser and someone that could be trusted to preserve things. And he did. And we owe a debt of gratitude—despite all his excesses—we owe a debt of gratitude to the man, and I'm grateful for what he preserved because the Mormon missionaries that came and persuaded me to convert to Mormonism in 1973 were as a direct result of the successes that Brigham Young brought to Mormonism.

I don't think he preserved it intact. I don't think that... For example, there's ample proof to satisfy anyone that's willing to look at it that Brigham Young introduced polygamy, certainly practiced it in a form that differed from what was going on while Joseph Smith was alive.

And I don't think polygamy was or is a moral practice. Brigham Young endorsed it, he defended it, he practiced it, and he produced offspring with a lot of women. And Joseph Smith, whatever your view may be of that, had children/he fathered children with Emma Smith alone. And I think that single problem defines, I believe, the difference between the two men (as many other things do, but it's one of the more vocal ones). And we don't believe in or practice plural marriage.

Dave: What's your view of Russell Nelson, the current LDS Church President?

Denver: He's the fellow who came to my stake and released the prior stake president (who had put me on the stake High Council) and called the new stake president who would ultimately excommunicate me. And it was Russell Nelson who handed my membership records to his newly-called stake president and told him that the committee had decided that this man needed to be dealt with. And so, Russell Nelson—I assume on behalf of the Strengthening Members Committee (he said "committee"; he didn't define which one)—was the one that had me kicked out. So...

Dave: How did...? What...? How did you get crosswise with the church? I mean, what is it that they did not approve of (even if you disagree, of course)?

Denver: Yeah, I could see in the LDS telling-of-their-history that there were many things that were either inadequately or even falsely portrayed and that there were gaps that really needed to be filled in. One of the people that was affected by the lack of candor in Mormon history by the institution was a son of mine who was a returned missionary. He had gone on an LDS mission, and in the process of time, he had fallen away, left the church, and was not interested in it any longer. So I took the problems with Mormon history, and I wrote a book (*Passing the Heavenly Gift*) that was intended to acknowledge—candidly—some of the problems with Mormon history and then to suggest, in spite of that, it's possible still to preserve faith. But I discussed candidly that a number of the claims that are made institutionally are on either thin ice or underwater. And that book—which was designed to allow people to preserve their faith in the Restoration—was viewed by people who had NOT come to some crossroads or crisis because of the lack of institutional candor. People that weren't aware of these problems, reading the book, were horrified that I'm talking about these kinds of things.

One of the passages that was, in particular, highlighted by President Nelson and the stake president in discussions with me involved Heber J. Grant. Heber J. Grant recorded—in a letter that he wrote to a woman—that he was unaware of anyone who had had any contact with the Lord since Joseph Smith's death. He also recorded (in his journal) comments that his mother made to him about how he was more interested in money than he was in spiritual things, and he acknowledged in his diary that he had never had an inspired "dreaming" or any kind of spiritual experience. And those ~~are~~ appear in the book, and I'm quoting from Heber J. Grant's own diary. Well, I was accused of denigrating a church president by quoting from the church president's diary. And my response was that if he's being denigrated, it was by his mother—or himself—because he was quoting HER in his diary, and he was WRITING in his diary. And so, if there be objections to what was in the

book that was denigrating, it's really candor on the part of Heber J. Grant. There's a lot of that kind of stuff in the book.

Peggy: Weren't you also...? Didn't you talk about your own conversation with Deity?

Denver: Only to mention the fact that it had happened.

Peggy: Okay.

Denver: It was not... The book, *The Second Comforter* literally has nine words in it about me and that experience. And so, yes—but there's another backstory to that...

I don't know; I'm talking a lot. Do you... Is that what you want?

Dave: What's that...? What was the experience? And you know, what did you write about it, to make these nine words (or whatever)?

Denver: When I have had any kind of an encounter with the Lord, I have written down what happened contemporaneous with the event. I recorded it in my journals (I have about 13 volumes of journals now), and when they're made public, the only thing that I ever make public is a direct quote from the journal. I didn't make anything public in *The Second Comforter* book other than the fact that it had occurred. Subsequently, I did make public some of the events involving the Lord—events dealing with the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane—were taken and made part of a chapter in a book, *Come, Let Us Adore Him*. That excerpt has been taken out of the chapter and put into the Teachings and Commandments, so you can read it in there.

Peggy: How many kinds of face or one-on-one experiences have you had with the Lord?

Denver: In terms of number?

Peggy: Yeah.

Denver: I don't have a count really. I...

Peggy: But quite a few?

Denver: Yeah, I tend to make a lot of mistakes.

Dave: Are we talking visions, personal encounters...?

Denver: Yes...

Dave: Which?

Denver: Personal encounters...

Dave: Okay.

Denver: ...and visionary encounters. But here's... This is my general observation. If you talk a lot about that kind of thing, it attracts the attention of a certain kind of personality. That

kind of personality is quick—QUICK—to be impressed and become enthusiastic. But they're shallow, and they don't stay around. And they create a lot of problems in their going.

To the extent that it is possible for me to take something I've been instructed by the Lord to cover, I do it by using Scripture—existing Scripture. It is only in the extremity that there isn't something that I can use that I will resort to talking about something that is heretofore uncovered by existing Scripture. I don't like the idea of sensationalism, because it attracts the wrong kind of person. I also don't like to ever retell a story using more and new and different words—because I've seen what's happened with the (between 9 and 13) versions that Joseph made to the First Vision encounter and how people say, "Oh, he must have been making it up because he left something out here, and he added something there. Therefore, it must not be true." So, when I do make something public, I go back to the journal, I quote directly from the journal, and so what you've got in (to the extent that it has been canonized) are excerpts (literally) from my journal, word for word, with what got recorded contemporaneous with the event itself. And I try to limit it all to that, and to tell it one time consistently, and to leave it at that.

But sensationalism... It doesn't accomplish what you think it would accomplish. The truth that persuades people is not a fantastic story about an encounter with God. The truth that persuades people are things that appeal to the integrity of your heart and the kindness, the goodness, the decency within you that aligns with something truer and higher and better. You know when you are doing right and pleasing God because you've just done something to help or bless the life of someone else. When someone relies upon fantastic stories to attract attention, very often they're trying to raise money or get a claim or get power or authority over people.

Dave: So, you talked about a canon.

Denver: Yes.

Dave: Just so our listeners... Is your canon...? And just briefly is it, like, do you use the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants? All? More? It sounds like things have been added, of course. Pearl of Great Price? What's your canon?

Denver: The front matter(s) in all three volumes of the canonized Scriptures explain themselves. But to summarize what went on: Joseph Smith, in a number of revelations that appear in the Doctrine and Covenants of the LDS Church, refers to the "fullness of the Scriptures." He had a very specific objective in mind when he talked about the fullness of the Scriptures—it was to have the King James Version of the Bible with inspired revisions and commentary published as a new version of the Bible—and then put together with the New Testament and the Book of Mormon in a single volume. The Old Testament would be published separately. And then they would include the Doctrine and Covenants, which began with the Lectures on Faith (one of the three works that I talk about in that *A Man Without Doubt*).

What the canonized Scriptures consist of are the Joseph Smith version of the Old Testament in one volume, which includes what would appear as the book of Moses in the LDS Pearl of Great Price—that was always intended to be part of Genesis, so it appears in the book of

Genesis, in the fashion it was originally prepared by Joseph in the Inspired Version. It is the Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament in the second volume, together with the Book of Mormon. And then the third volume is a Teachings and Commandments that include things that have been left behind by Joseph, by Hyrum Smith, and then some of the things that I have done. And in the third volume, there's also a Glossary of Terms. That Glossary of Terms, I think, is one of the best theological educations that you could get right now if you want to know about Mormonism and the Restoration—and it's quite extensive. It's probably, you know, 40% of the third volume (are the Glossary of Terms).

Peggy: So, do you have missionaries?

Denver: Well, not in the sense that someone's called and sent out on a mission...

Dave: No name tags and all the...

Denver: None of that stuff. But yeah, there are a lot of people out there missionary-ing. And one of the... As I mentioned, *A Man Without Doubt* was written to try and redefine Joseph to a Christian audience. A new book that just came out (which I'll leave with you also) is titled *The Testimony of Jesus: Past, Present, and Promise*, which is also specifically addressed to Christians.

I'll be at a conference in Kentucky in next March. And the hope is that Mormonism can be re-envisioned by the Christian audience as something that is not necessarily The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, with name tags and white shirts and knocking on doors and "What do you know about the Mormons? Would you like to know more?" This book deals with the history of Christianity, the history of Protestantism, and the history of the Restoration in a way that I hope helps Christians relook at things. Much of what the Christian world has today, no matter what denomination you go to, would have been considered heretical and non-Christian for the first thousand years of Christianity. And so, Evangelicals that are even later in time than the Protestant fathers think they have a hope in Christ based upon their interpretation of New Testament passages. What this book suggests is that maybe we ought to allow Christ the prerogative, if He chooses to do so, to speak again and redefine what it meant and means to be a follower of Christ. And so that book is for a Christian audience. And I'll leave that with you. There should be plenty of fodder in what I'm giving you for a good article.

Peggy: Do you have... For communion or the sacrament, do you use wine as the...?

Denver: Yeah.

Peggy: So, it's wine. Do you have other regular rituals? Do you have any temple rituals?

Denver: None at this point, but we are raising funds to build a temple and expect to do so. We don't have a command to build a temple at this point. But we do have a statement to us from the Lord that He always commands us (His people in any generation) to build a temple to Him.

Joseph Smith had begun a process of restoring something that included temple ordinances, but they never got completed. They weren't regularized into print until about 1877 by Brigham Young. All of the early church presidents—Brigham Young, John Taylor, even Wilford Woodruff—all of the early presidents said that the temple rites were not correct, they were not complete, and that they expected a resurrected Joseph Smith to come and to put it all in order. That's been dropped, and the assertion today is that they've got everything, it's all intact, it's exactly as it needs to be, and that nothing's missing.

We anticipate that much (like many other things that were left incomplete when Joseph left us/was martyred) that the temple will be something far more expansive than what the LDS Church has perpetuated.

Dave: Do the remnant followers—people who go to these fellowships—do they tithe? Do they make donations? Do... I mean, is it a...

Denver: Yes, but it's a little different than the LDS practice. The tithe obligation is not based upon your gross income; it's based upon your excess. If you don't have anything left over after you've taken care of feeding, housing, transporting, and educating, and taking care of medical bills, then you don't have tithe. But if you have something left over after that, then that 10% is donated in a fellowship.

But the donations aren't aggregated into some central fund. The fellowship itself usually includes people who have needs. If someone needs help with food, or shelter, or transportation, medical bills, or education, then the tithe that got collected in the fellowship is then distributed within the fellowship to the people with the needs. It doesn't go to pay anyone. It goes to help take care of people.

And that requires—if you're going to be someone that helps in the movement—that requires that whatever you do you donate. I don't get paid anything. No one gets compensated for anything. Conferences—they get organized, get paid for (the expenses) by the conference organizers; if people want to donate to help defray some of the costs, they do that. But no one is making a living, and we don't have a professional clergy. And we don't... No one's compensated by any kind of a fund. The money gets used to help people who have needs.

Peggy: So, how did you fare during COVID? Did you have mask requirements? Did you have vaccination expectations?

Denver: There was... Everyone was left to their own choice. There were conferences held. I don't think I saw many people wearing masks, although there were one or two. No one said, "What are you doing that for?" that I know of. If they wore masks, that was fine. If they didn't, that was fine too. The majority... Visually, it looked to me like the majority both did not wear a mask and didn't bother staying six feet apart. And in terms of vaccinations, that was left to everyone to choose for themselves. I have family members who have been vaccinated; I have family members who have not. I think everyone in my family has had COVID at one time or another. But everyone decides for themselves based upon the best information they have.

Dave: As we start to wrap up Denver, a question: Is there one true way... Do you folks believe there's one true way back to God?

Denver: Well, I think the purpose of this Creation is to be added upon, and I don't care where you go or what you do (and I believe this is in the Book of Mormon—every nation has some pointed allotment of truth) everywhere you look, you are going to be added upon. Even if you live a short, wretched life, you're still being added upon by the experience that you get down here.

In the hierarchy of eternity, there is a Being who has exemplified the highest, the best, the truest, the most pure form of what it means to live fully human and fully godlike, and that's Jesus Christ—who came here and lived as a sacrifice and as a pure soul who was intending on elevating others. We believe that He rescues this Creation by the life that He lived and the power that was given to Him at the outset of the Creation, and then His stewardship over it allowed Him to bring us back out of the grave eventually.

But Joseph Smith said in the Lectures on Faith (that used to be in your Doctrine and Covenants and that are in the Teachings and Commandments), Joseph Smith said that the prototype of the saved man is Jesus Christ. And if you will be saved, you must be precisely what Christ is or else not be saved.

Christ attained to the resurrection, meaning the grave could not hold Him. You will be resurrected—and you will be resurrected and I will be resurrected because Christ is redeeming this Creation. But at some point, in some cycle of being "added upon" in the distant future, you must become precisely what Christ is or else not be saved.

And so, I don't know about you, but I'm a long way away from something like that. I'm down here trying to improve upon myself in the time that I'm given, and to try and bless and benefit the lives of any others, and to certainly not be a hindrance to anyone if I can avoid being so. But I don't think that I am at all approaching "attaining to the resurrection of the dead" or being like the prototype of the saved man, which is Christ.

And by the way, there's a talk (that's now a paper that you can read) called "Our Divine Parents," which explains the prototype of the saved woman. And you might want to take a look at that if you're interested in looking at the difference between the role of the male and the role of the female—because the male is incomplete, and the female is incomplete. But it's the union of the male and the female, which becomes the image of God—they together (and only together) can become the completed image of the Heavenly Parents. And the paper, "Our Divine Parents," attempts to explain in a little more detail.

But yeah, I think everyone down here is gonna be improved by the experience that they get here, no matter how miserable. But eventually, we're all gonna have to progress and grow and become like the prototype of the saved man.

Dave: Well, Denver Snuffer, thanks for joining us today.

Denver: Yeah.

Dave: Be well and stay safe, k?

Denver: It was far less painful than I thought it would be. And let me put a plug in that the Salt Lake Tribune is now a nonprofit organization...

Dave: It's true.

Denver: ...and you mentioned, just briefly at the beginning, what you're up to. Anyone that wants to support the Salt Lake Tribune, generally, or this program can get a tax deduction under 501(c)(3), and if you do it before the end of the year, it'll help you with this year's taxes.

Dave: That's absolutely true. Thank you for that promo. And thanks to Peggy Fletcher-Stack...

Peggy: Always a pleasure.

Dave: ...and our producer, Chris Samuels. We remind our listeners that they can keep up on all of the happenings in and about the church by subscribing to the Salt Lake Tribune's free Mormon Land newsletter. Just go to SLTrib.com to sign up, and we'll talk again next time on Mormon Land.