Journal of the
Mormon Social Science Association

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Volume 1, 2022 • https://doi.org/10.54587/JMSSA.0107

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Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association (JMSSA) is a peer-reviewed academic journal sponsored by the Mormon Social Science Association. Founded in 1979, the MSSA is an interdisciplinary scholarly society promoting the study of social life within the Latter Day Saint movement. *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* publishes original research, synthetic reviews, and theoretical or methodological essays on topics relevant to the Latter Day Saint movement from a social science perspective.

Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association

Dunstan, Adam and Erica Hawvermale. "The Anthropology of Mormonism: An Emerging Field," *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* 1, no. 1: 177–207. https://doi.org/10.54587/JMSSA.0107

The Anthropology of Mormonism: An Emerging Field

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Abstract. Recent decades have seen the emergence of a nascent anthropology of Mormonism.[1] We demonstrate how anthropological work on Mormonism has crystallized around a set of themes with significant potential for both anthropology and Mormon social sciences: (1) religious authority, (2) ritual and the body, (3) physical engagement with Church history, (4) globalization, (5) gender and kinship, and (6) disbelief and heterodoxy. We argue that further progress can be achieved by focusing on the diverse individual experiences within Latter Day Saint groups.

Introduction: Why an Anthropology of Mormonism?

What could a more robust engagement with Mormonism bring to cultural anthropology? This question has always intrigued me (Dunstan) as both an anthropologist and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The question gained a new forcefulness, however, after a conversation I had in 2019 at an anthropology conference with Jon Bialecki, who researches LDS transhumanists.

Jon and I were discussing why there were not more cultural anthropologists doing work on the Latter Day Saint movement. By this we were referring

[1] Recently, Russell M. Nelson, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has emphasized using the full name of the church, or substituting phrases such as "the Church" or "the restored Church" (2018). This is also the preference of the authors, in support of using groups' preferred terminology. Generally, we have used the full name, or shortened iterations such as "the Church" for the institution and "Church members" or "Latter-day Saints" when referencing its members. However, we do also use the term "Mormon" several times in this essay, including the title, for two reasons. First, we acknowledge that at present it is more common in the academic literature to use the term Mormon/Mormonism (as reflected in this journal's title). Secondly, we needed a more general term for the entire movement, denominations, and theology inspired by Joseph Smith's teachings; we have used "Mormon"/"Mormonism" or "Latter Day Saint movement" (no hyphen, all capitals) for that purpose. Specific terms for other branches of this movement have also been utilized when relevant.

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to anthropologists who conduct ethnographic fieldwork, rather than those in other fields of anthropology doing work related to Mormonism, of which there are several examples, such as historical archaeology and preservation (Olsen 2004; Pykles 2010) and Mesoamerican archaeology (Sorenson 1985). Jon contrasted the situation in cultural anthropology with the extensive anthropology of Christianity, remarking that part of the problem could be that the subfield had not yet clarified how the study of Mormonism specifically could contribute to cultural anthropology as a whole.

"What's the warrant?" Jon asked me rhetorically.

This is a critical question. The anthropology of Christianity has examined Christianity not only in its own right, but as a lens to broader questions about human experiences of time (Robbins 2004), language (Handman 2014), and moralities (Keane 2002; Klaits 2010). There have also been generative discussions around specific Christian branches, such as Pentecostalism (Coleman, Hackett, and Robbins 2015; De Witte 2018). These scholarly communities have produced numerous books, volumes, courses, and conference panels explicitly devoted to engaging with these faiths through anthropology. This is generally lacking for Latter Day Saint Christian groups.

Thus, Bialecki's question about the "warrant" for an anthropology of Mormonism resonated with both of our authors, and we have discussed it many times since. We have perhaps a unique background in relation to this question. Both of us are cultural anthropologists who have done research with Latter-day Saints—Hawvermale on gender experiences and Dunstan on sacred sites. Furthermore, while Dunstan is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Hawvermale is not—a fact that has enriched our conversations on what the anthropology of Mormonism is, and what it could be.

The inaugural issue of the *Journal of the Mormon Social Science Association* seems like an appropriate forum in which to grapple with this question and offer some of our own thoughts. In our view, there is already an anthropology of Mormonism, albeit a nascent one in comparison to some of the other social sciences of the Latter Day Saint movement. Anthropologists in the past two decades have been writing ethnographies about Latter Day Saint groups and engaging important questions within anthropology about several topics: religious authority, ritual and the body, physicality and Church history, the global spread of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, gender and kinship ideologies, and disbelief and heterodoxy. These "centers of gravity" have promise to both anthropology and Mormon studies. At the same time,

we suggest that the field has sometimes focused much more heavily on the effects of institutional authority and hierarchy within the Church than the experience of individual Church members—meaning-receiving rather than meaning-making. This trend has started to reverse in recent ethnography, and we see this as an important move forward for cultural anthropology to fully showcase its contributions to the social sciences of Mormonism.

A Nascent yet Necessary Field

The anthropology of Mormonism is still nascent in two senses.

First, few cultural anthropologists have focused specifically on the Latter Day Saint movement, despite its relatively large and transnational presence. In fact, we are aware of fewer than 15 who have published within the past two decades (although of course there are others for whom Mormonism has come up as part of other research projects). Additionally, the past five annual meetings of the American Anthropology Association have included by our count approximately 14 papers on Mormonism, compared to many hundreds on Christianity more generally. Meanwhile, Anthrosource (a database of many of the prominent journals in our field) yields only four research articles with "Mormon" in the title, and none with "Latter-day Saint."

The anthropology of Mormonism is also nascent in the sense that the term "anthropology of Mormonism" is not yet a well-recognized descriptor either within anthropology or among other social scientists. For example, within anthropology there are not readers, special journal issues, or (with one exception to our knowledge) conference sessions devoted to Mormonism as one sees with regard to some other faith groups. To our knowledge, there are no consistently offered courses in the anthropology of Mormonism other than at Brigham Young University and a handful of other institutions in the region.

One might say that the lack of a clearly labeled "anthropology of Mormonism" is not problematic. One might whimsically wonder if it is simply resistance to yet *another* sub-sub-field of anthropology (one need only look at course offerings in anthropology departments across the US to recoil against the subfield industrial complex). More seriously, given that the Latter Day Saint movement is a relatively small (if highly unique) subset of larger Christianity, perhaps it does not merit its own identification since there is already a general anthropology of Christianity (Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006). However, we do have robust subfields of anthropology focusing on specific branches of Christianity such as Catholicism

(Norget, Napolitano, and Mayblin 2017), Eastern Orthodoxy (Hann and Goltz 2010), and Pentecostalism (Coleman, Robbins, and Hackett 2015). Anthropologies *of* phenomena generate spaces in which to discuss common findings and articulate these to the broader discipline—something which, at present, does not exist for the Latter Day Saint movement.

Other anthropologists have remarked on these trends. Fenella Cannell, one of the most prolific anthropologists of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, noted in 2005 "what an uncanny object Mormonism is … for the academic social sciences. It is represented as at once unworthy of serious interest and as a scandalous threat," at least within anthropology (Cannell 2005, 339). Over a decade later, Cannell remarked that there still existed a need to "*begin* to imagine the kinds of conversation that could take place between people involved in these two practices," of Mormonism and anthropology (Cannell 2017, 3, emphasis added). Similarly, prominent religious studies scholar Ann Taves notes that in Mormon Studies "history does dominate. But I think there is a growing presence of scholars from literature and sociology.… I've seen very little, though, from anthropologists" (Taves and Fluhman 2014, 15). Despite notable entries, then, the anthropological study of Mormonism seems to still be laying down its roots.

This relative paucity in cultural anthropology stands in contrast with the extensive work in other fields, such as folklore studies (Eliason and Mould 2013; Mould 2011), history (Bowman 2012; McDannell 2018; Park 2020; Shipps 1987), political science (Knoll 2015; Campbell et al. 2014), psychology (Koltko 1990; Merrill and Salazar 2010), sociology (Mauss 1994; Shepherd and Shepherd 1998; O'Brien 2020; Phillips 2020; Stark 1984), and religious studies (Givens 2015; Holbrook and Bowman 2016). In many of these fields there is of course an extensive set of scholarship discussing Latter-day Saint "culture" and related concepts both historically and at present (e.g., Head 2009; Quinn 2001), but little of it comes from cultural anthropologists, who would in theory have much to contribute to conversations about culture.

Anthropologists have theoretical and methodological traditions within their field that can enrich the excellent work being done on Mormonism and culture across the globe, in part because of anthropology's strong local focus through ethnography, coupled with a humanity-wide comparative approach. One of the hallmarks of cultural anthropology is the use of sustained ethnographic fieldwork—spending extensive time immersed in a community while conducting interviews and observations. This type of ethnographic fieldwork is well-poised to examine Latter Day Saint religious meaning and power as

these are lived out in the daily lives of specific communities—which may both complicate and complement work focused more heavily on scriptural texts or global organizations, by attending to the complexity of the local (similarly to what has been done for groups such as charismatic Christians in New Guinea, Robbins 2004). Other scholars have recognized this potential contribution. Taves calls for anthropologists to document "how Mormonism is translated across cultures … in actual practice" as well as "subtle differences in what it means to be LDS in various cultural contexts or for different ethnic subcultures within the United States" (Taves and Fluhman 2014, 15). Anthropologists' insights into local, lived Mormonism(s) can enrich the Mormon social sciences.

Contemporary events unfolding in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could benefit from such an anthropological approach. As we will see, the study of both those who remain in the Church and those who depart can be enriched by ethnography. We could also benefit from ethnographic work on how national politics are being rethought and discussed in wards both in the US and elsewhere, especially given the complex politics of faith generated in the midst of the Romney candidacy and the anti-Trump positioning of Mitt Romney, Jeff Flake, and Evan McMullin—this could be a sort of present-day complement to the historical work of Kathleen Flake (2004). Additionally, as the Church becomes comparatively stronger internationally, changes in Church policy and discourse could be an area in which anthropologists would be uniquely situated to comment, as I have in a recent paper on the Hill Cumorah Pageant and understandings of the "promised land" (Dunstan 2020).

The potential here is not only to Mormon social sciences, but also to cultural anthropology itself, as the faith raises compelling issues for the broader discipline. Cannell (2005), for example, argued that Church doctrine unsettles assumptions about Christian asceticism going back to Max Weber. Meanwhile, Lars Rodseth and Jennifer Olsen (2010) considered how certain beliefs of Mormonism (such as a lessened division between the Divine and humanity) run counter to how anthropologists tend to essentialize "Western" cosmology.

Early Beginnings and "Repugnant Others"

Given all this potential, the fact that the anthropology of Mormonism is not better developed is somewhat surprising. It is certainly not that anthropologists have not been writing about Mormonism for a long time. Indeed, the

inaugural volume of the flagship journal *American Anthropologist* contained an article "The Origin of the 'Book of Mormon'" (Pierce 1899), which argued that the Book of Mormon was a forgery that had led to the "menace to the world from Mormonism." (We might consider this to be a somewhat ill omen for the start of the anthropology of Mormonism.) Five decades later (1949–1955), culture theorist Clyde Kluckhohn led the Harvard Comparative Study of Values in Five Cultures in Ramah, New Mexico (Powers 1997). "Mormons" were one of the five cultures chosen for the study, which influenced sociologist Thomas O'Dea's *The Mormons* (1956) as well as anthropologist Evon Vogt's (1955) concept of Latter-day Saints as a "historically derived subcultural continuum." Such work tended to characterize Latter-day Saints as a subgroup of American society (Sorenson 1973)—a paradigm that now appears limiting as it does not recognize the intersectional identities of Latter-day Saints, especially in areas other than the US.

There were only a small handful of other studies in the later twentieth century in anthropology journals. For example, Topper (1979) drew on a psychological anthropology approach to study why Diné/Navajo families became involved in the Indian Placement Program, as well as the shock children experienced when moving between their Latter-day Saint foster families and Diné communities. Sociologist Armand Mauss also discussed the Placement Program—as well as shifts in Latter-day Saint ideas about indigenous peoples in the twentieth century—at length (2002). Baer (1996), in a somewhat idiosyncratic approach, applied the Marxist Asiatic modes of production concept to draw similarities between the Church and the German Democratic Republic. David Knowlton, in turn, has written several articles about the spread of the Church in Latin America, as well as how national politics have influenced local wards' discourses about authority in Bolivia (Knowlton 1992; 2007).

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then, anthropological works on Mormonism were rather scattered. Why this is the case lies beyond the scope of this essay, although it is our hope that future scholars will turn their attention to this important question. We would note, briefly, that Cannell (2005) has suggested there may be an implicit bias among some anthropologists seeing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a "repugnant other" due either to its perceived conservatism or its universal cosmology (in contrast to the local focus of anthropology). This might contrast with a social science that has often focused its attentions on groups that are marginalized in relation to power or globalizing forces. We sense Cannell may be right on this point, but would add another potential problem: that for anthropologists

situated in the US, this "American church" is not other *enough*. It is too domestic for a field that has historically prioritized research with far-off and "exotic" groups—a legacy that was still strong in the twentieth century.

Thus, although Mormonism has been written about by anthropologists almost from the start, it has not received much attention until the twenty-first century, where we are beginning to see the rise of a cultural anthropology of Mormonism, nascent though it may be. This growing, if disparate, field seems to have coalesced around certain key themes—the first of which is the influence of religious authority and Church hierarchy, to which we now turn.

Hierarchy, Religious Authority, and Control as Themes

Many anthropologists have emphasized the role of hierarchy in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Scholars have often assumed (implicitly or explicitly) that Church leadership directly shapes—even dictates—the experiences and decisions of wards and their members. This approach hearkens to the earliest work on the Church, which Perry Pierce (1899, 694) characterized as "a hierarchy of subtle brains equipped with the wealth of the entire community, reinforced with a million dupes, willing to accept with unquestioning obedience any dispensation formulated in terms of 'Thus saith the Lord.'"

Obviously, such phrasing would be unacceptable in the ethnographies of today, and it is probably a bit disingenuous of us to quote a scholar over a century past. However, well into the early 2000s, a strong emphasis on the influence of Church leadership continued to figure very prominently as a backdrop, and sometimes a central concern, against which anthropologists ask questions about the faith. The Church has been characterized by various anthropologists as a "corporate culture" (Van Beek 2005, 22), "unified by a comprehensive power structure" (Van Beek 2005, 9) which "require[s] acquiescence to Church hierarchy" (Knowlton 2007, 64). In other words, scholars have tended to view the Church through the lens of power and authority—primarily the power of men in formal leadership positions (Vega 2019). The Church has even been compared to a State government (Bialecki 2020a). Much of this work tends to emphasize a commonality of members' experience, due to the leadership structure.

That lens also structures other themes in the anthropology of Mormonism. Anthropologists have stressed how activities as diverse as, for example, historical re-enactments (Hartley-Moore 2020) and garments (Marshall and Marshall 2008) reinforce belief in the teachings of Church leaders. A piece

on Pioneer Day celebrations characterizes the Church's theology as "pass[ing] through strict hierarchical channels that maintain doctrinal uniformity even as Mormonism has spread across the globe" (Eliason 2002, 167). Such a characterization is not unusual when speaking of the Church. In fact, the Church structure is said by Hildi and Thomas Marshall to have significant power to produce "homogenous spiritual experience" through how it teaches Church members in temples and historic sites to attend to their feelings (Marshall and Marshall 2008).

The ubiquity of this theme, at least until recently, in the anthropology of Mormonism is perhaps not surprising, for several reasons. First, modern anthropology has been heavily influenced by poststructuralist and critical theory (especially of a Foucauldian vein), which tend to focus on power relationships within discourse, including religious discourse. Anthropology has a predisposition to think of religion either in terms of belief/worldview or "institutional and embodied discipline" (Bialecki 2020b, 612). Second, the discourse of the Church itself does certainly emphasize priesthood authority, sustaining those in leadership, and following the prophet. Organizational hierarchy then has been a somewhat natural place for ethnographers to focus their attention.

Yet, we would like to raise the concern that primarily focusing on the role of Church leaders may have become a "seductive analytic," to use Todd Sanders's phrase (2008). It may seem only natural to focus on this theme; perhaps too natural, inasmuch as it reflects stereotypes in broader society. The idea of "controlled Mormons" is a familiar theme in both popular and academic circles in the US. For example, 2012 and 2007 Pew Center studies found "cult" to be one of the most frequently mentioned words for Americans surveyed about Mormonism (Pew Center 2012, 2007). As Bianca Winward notes, "Often Mormons … are seen by society as cookie-cutter members of faith, as people who never question the commandments and policies of the Church" (Winward 2017, 41). We would suggest that such a discourse is not solely confined to popular culture but has perhaps played a role in a lack of ethnographic interest in the faith. Colleagues reacting to Cannell's decision to research American Latter-day Saints, for example, implied that "Surely … the Mormons were an utterly robotic and homogeneous bunch controlled by a central church system?" and thus found it odd to study them (Cannell 2005, 338).

While viewing the Church through a lens of hierarchy can be analytically productive in emphasizing certain social facts, it can occlude other voices and experiences, including the diverse, local ways in which meaning is forged and

negotiated alongside and within broader Church structures. Much like work in the anthropology of Islam on agency (e.g., Abu-Lughod 2002; Henkel 2005; Mahmood 2011), shifting attention to the plurality of Latter-day Saint experiences can highlight the ways in which the religion is defined and lived by real people at the ground level.

In the other themes we discuss, we will see some work that embodies this hierarchical focus, but also several recent ethnographies highlighting (to varying degrees) the role of individual Mormons as active participants in their own religiosity.

Ritual Bodies, Symbolic Bodies

Anthropologists have drawn attention to the body as a site of both religious discipline and symbolic meaning among Latter-day Saints. This work reflects the "embodiment paradigm" in anthropology, which attends to the culturally situated ways in which bodies are inhabited and experienced as both subjects and objects (Csordas 1998; Mascia-Lees 2011). It also shows heavy influences from post-structuralist work on the societal influence of bodies, such as that of Pierre Bourdieu, Judith Butler, and Michel Foucault. This embodied approach has been highly productive for understanding the Church. Indeed, part of the warrant for our subfield may be the potential that the faith's thoroughly physical and embodied theology has for enriching studies of religious bodies generally (Mitchell 2001; Cannell 2005).

Several anthropologists have focused attention on the embodied habitus of Latter-day Saints as a cultural project (Davies 2000). Most of this work has argued that religious ritual (especially temple ordinances) and historic reenactments shape and confirm belief in central Church teachings—the body as a site of discipline, in the Foucauldian sense. Drawing on fieldwork with British Catholics and Latter-day Saints, Hildi Mitchell and Jon Mitchell (2008) state that belief is produced *through* embodied, ritual practices. In the case of Latter-day Saints, they theorize, "coming to know" the truth of the Church is a process patterned on the bodily experience of temple ceremonies. They make note of how bodies are compared to temples and how entrance to temples is partially conditioned on worthiness standards related to bodies (i.e., abstention from alcohol and extramarital sex). They also note the impact of garments—including former members of the Church feeling naked without garments, since "such is the enduring hold of these embodied religious processes upon their subjectivity" (Mitchell and Mitchell 2008, 91).

Brooks, in turn, focuses less on how ritual instills belief and more on what happens when belief has been rejected—the ways in which "despite rejecting beliefs on a cognitive basis the effects of those beliefs can still linger in people's sense of embodied self" (2015, ii–iii). He quotes, for example, ex-Mormon women in Utah who feel that they "gave their bodies to the church" through pregnancies as young adults.

While most of this work focuses on how ritual affects bodies so as to produce belief, others have engaged with ritual in differing ways. Cannell (2007) argues that rather than producing unified belief, the lack of overt discussion about certain specifics of temple worship, and an emphasis on experiencing the Spirit in temples, has generated a space of "intellectual, spiritual, and emotional creativity" wherein diverse personal theological interpretations can grow (Cannell 2007, 129). In her consideration of garments, Colleen McDannell (1995) provides an exposition of the ways in which garment-wearing Church members "set boundaries between the sacred and the profane" and "imagine for themselves what garments are all about," experiencing "feelings which are varied and intense" (1995, 198–199). We welcome scholarship that, like Cannell's and McDannell's, emphasizes how sacred ceremonies and spaces can generate unique experiences that are not reducible solely to confirmation of claims regarding Church history.

Scholarship on Latter-day Saint bodily practices and symbolism is a hub of the emerging anthropology of Mormonism and contributes to broader questions of religious bodies. As noted by Cannell (2005), the tendency in Latter-day Saint theology to think of the spiritual in physical terms makes it productive for anthropologists' consideration of how the material world is regarded in Christianity. She argues that the Church challenges embedded assumptions many anthropologists tend to reproduce about world religions, and especially Christianity, as dualistic, transcendental, and anti-materialist (i.e., holding a view of the world as profane, thus requiring separation and transcendence). Cannell notes that the Latter-day Saints she interviewed in New York and Utah emphasized the earth eventually becoming reclaimed as part of the Celestial Kingdom and human activities—such as extended families—continuing in that Kingdom.

Despite a flowering of ethnographic work on Mormon bodies, several pathways of physicality remain underexplored. For example, within analytic terrain in which bodily dispositions are treated as isomorphic with belief, how are we to regard the diversity of ways in which individual Latter-day Saints

may experience their bodies due to age, race, neuroatypicality, disability, or other factors? A more general question, though, is about how we might broaden our understandings of the faith experience beyond how an institution instills belief via embodied rituals. For all its significance, the temple is a relatively infrequent part of most Latter-day Saints' lives given time and distance (even assuming they are all endowed temple-goers, which is not the case). As well, many Latter-day Saints, especially in locations beyond the United States, never visit one of the Church's historic sites but still experience faith in historic truth claims. We might examine more frequent embodied experiences, such as seemingly minor decisions about whether to wear colored clothes (for men) or pants (for women) to Church meetings in relation to gender ideologies. Or we could explore local understandings of the Word of Wisdom in relation to industrial foodways and shifting drug policies in various polities (Ferguson, Knoll, and Riess 2018). Other areas for exploration could include the partially embodied emotional labor of avoiding contention and expressing reverence, or the connections of ideas of "countenance" to spiritual status.

We could also, as ethnographers, more fully engage with the ways in which members of the various Latter Day Saint churches describe experiences with the Holy Spirit and how these do include, but are not exhausted by, the bodily aspects explored by many ethnographers thus far. Latter Day Saint theology generally holds that the Spirit is present in both the mind and in the heart (and manifests differently for different individuals). This is profitable ground from which to speak to broader conversations in anthropology about ontology and affect. Such work could profitably take inspiration from the close ethnographic attention psychological anthropologist Deborah Tannen (2012) paid to the psychological processes of "hearing God" among evangelical Christians, or Erin Stiles and Katryn Davis's (2019) work on encounters with disembodied spirits. Others have touched on these topics also; for example, Bennion's commentary on visions and personal revelation among polygamous women (Bennion 1998) or Howlett's discussion of interpretation of temple symbolism among the Community of Christ (Howlett 2010). We wonder if there is a way to bridge how scholars such as the Marshalls think of belief being generated by embodied discipline, with the complex and varied ways Latter-day Saints experience faith and testimony aside from sacred sites and ceremonies.

Gaining a more holistic ontology for understanding ritual and the body will inform other themes within the anthropology of Mormonism, such as how Latter-day Saints experience history.

Material Engagement with History

Related to the theme of ritual bodies are the material practices by which Latter-day Saints physically engage with Church history—a theme anthropologists have attended to primarily by examining re-enactments and historic/sacred sites, intersecting with work by other social scientists of Mormonism (Bell 2006; Laga 2010; Bennet 2007; Jackson and Henrie 2009; Hudman and Jackson 1992; Brown 2018). Hildi Mitchell, for example, looks at the way in which Latter-day Saints "participate actively in their theology and cosmology" by visiting historic sites (Mitchell 2004, 26). Her fieldwork with British Latter-day Saints visiting US historic sites such as Nauvoo frames the feelings indexed in LDS testimonies as "embodied and collective phenomena" (2004, 32). Like the Mitchells' collaborative work on temples, this work frames historic sites as producing belief through embodied experience. Elsewhere (2002), she argues that Latter-day Saints visit historic sites with a culturally shared model of what sacred experiences of the Holy Spirit are like, leading them to understand events on-site through this framework, generating "homogenous" interpretations. Somewhat in contrast, the authors of this article have been involved in research to explore the diversity of on-site experiences at historic sites in New York such as the Sacred Grove and Hill Cumorah.

Others have focused on historic reenactments, such as Trek, in which Church members wear period attire, pull handcarts, and recreate hardships experienced by early pioneers (Bielo 2017; Hartley-Moore 2020; Olsen and Hill 2018). James Bielo suggests that by helping to connect participants to ancestors, these activities help build testimonies. As Julie Hartley-Moore notes, "trek not only reenacts the tragedies, but also transforms them into an archetype of Mormon heritage and a model of faith, sacrifice, triumph, and religious identity" (2020, 119). The identity of the "Mormon pioneer" and the understanding of faith-as-preservation are cultivated through these embodied experiences—as is a shared cultural framework of sacrifice, perseverance, and hard work. Thus, much like the ritual bodies theme discussed above, this scholarship has tended to argue that bodily engagements with Church history can lead to a testimony of that history.

A potential drawback to this body of work is that it runs the risk of unintentionally oversimplifying the complex ways in which Church members experience sacred places as well as their own testimonies of history. Readers unfamiliar with the faith may come away thinking that faith in Church history

is primarily built at historic sites and temples, which would be an overly narrow understanding of Latter-day Saint doctrines about how faith is generated. Readers may not realize that even for those members who have access to such sites and experiences (which is by no means all), historical pilgrimages are typically relatively brief and intermittent portions of their lives. Much of Latter-day Saint meaning-making occurs in the more everyday lived experiences of members, such as scripture study and discussions at church where members report feeling the Spirit—another topic that could receive additional ethnographic study.

There could also be more sustained attention to the differences, as well as similarities, in Church members' understandings of temples, chapels, and historic sites—a question to which our authors are attending in recent research. Recently Dunstan has been engaging in research, for example, on how Church members experience and come to understand the Sacred Grove and Hill Cumorah, two of the earliest historic sites in the Latter Day Saint movement, in relation to holy places such as temples.

The other approach taken by anthropologists when studying historic sites is situated within literature that explores tourism as a sociocultural phenomenon. This approach focuses on the representation and management of historic sites (Hudman and Jackson 1992; Olsen and Timothy 2002; Olsen and Hill 2018; Olsen 2009). For example, Daniel Olsen and Brian Hill (2018) view the Mormon Trail historic site as "a memorial tool to promote Latter-day Saint religious identity" (242). Olsen takes a similar approach to his analysis of Temple Square as the "ideal for religious site management, where religious site managers have access to thousands of volunteers … experience no real monetary concerns, and are therefore free to manage their site in a manner consistent to their religious and ecclesiastical goals" (2009, 135). He notes that this is different from the challenges that many religious sites have, which often must balance an ecclesiastical mission and the preferences of secular visitors.

One approach that anthropological scholars have not yet taken with Latter Day Saint historical sites is an integration of the two approaches outlined here: exploring how site management (a fairly etic, or outsider, approach) affects individuals' experiences of sites (inherently emic). Anthropologists are uniquely positioned to enrich the growing literature around historical religious sites in this way. Drawing upon the tensions that Olsen (2009) commented on, anthropologists could also seek to understand the differences in experiences between Mormon and non-Mormon visitors, or for that matter

between members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and visitors and pilgrims from other groups within the Latter Day Saint movement, as in Howlett's work on the "dual pilgrimage" of Latter-day Saints and Community of Christ members at Kirtland (2014). As an increasingly globalized religion, it will also be important to understand both embodied and non-embodied experiences of non-American visitors to historical religious sites located in the US, and the shared cultural experiences/history they seek to reinforce.

Global Mormonism(s)

The internationalization of Mormonism—how the Latter Day Saint movement comes to manifest in specific places beyond its birthplace of the United States—is a field of study that has received some deal of attention from anthropologists, although it could benefit from further ethnographic fieldwork. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has always conceived itself as a globally proselytizing faith, and membership in the Church is now larger outside the United States than within (Petersen 2013). There has of course been extensive social science scholarship on global Mormonism, such as Hokulani Aikau's (2012) history of Hawai'ian/Latter-day Saint identity, among many others (e.g., Hanicles 2015; Hoyt 2019; Shepherd, Shepherd, and Cragun 2020). However, as noted by Taves (2014, 15), "I think there is much more that ethnographers could contribute. With the global spread of the LDS Church, I would love to see ethnographers looking at how Mormonism is translating across cultures, not just in terms of formal procedures but in actual practice."

Despite this potential, the majority of cultural anthropology on Latter-day Saints is still in the US. This may reflect, at least in part, the conceptualization of the faith as uniquely American, especially given its founding texts and eschatology of an American New Jerusalem. Yet this "American religion" is increasingly global in membership, resources, and leadership—with many Seventies, and two apostles, now from locations other than the United States, and the Church increasingly making moves seemingly aimed at greater international cohesion and less of an overt American focus (Dunstan 2020).

Some anthropologists, as such, have engaged the topic of internationalization, though typically in the form of cultural analysis rather than long-term ethnographic fieldwork in non-US locations. Sorenson (2000), for example, suggested that amid significant "boundaries of worldview and tongue," ritual had come to be a unifying language in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although his conclusion is based largely on general analysis of Church doctrines and observations in a Utah ward.

Other anthropologists have looked at these issues specifically with European Latter-day Saints, and tensions with broader social milieus in their nations. Dutch Anthropologist Walter Van Beek (1996, 2005) considers the dynamics of defining a faith identity among Dutch Church members, although some of his work is less based on formal fieldwork than his own experience as a former bishop. Continuing the hierarchy/control analytic of other anthropologists, Van Beek adopts the framework of colonizer/colonized to describe the relationship between the Utah-based institution and its units in other nations. He remarks that "the fact that lesson materials are made in the Domestic Church, to be translated afterwards, indicates that information flows only one way: from the center to the satellite Church, and not vice versa" (2005, 20). Van Beek also characterizes the missionary wing of the global church as "replete with corporate Americanisms" (22).

Van Beek has also argued that despite the "official ideology [that] the Church is ... an institution that should direct the lives of its members," its comparative lack of infrastructure in European contexts, and deviance from salient norms, tends to make this an impossible task for members. These findings to some degree echo sociologist Ellen Decoo's earlier consideration of the cultural context of low activity rates among European Church members (1996). These studies tend to portray the Church's structure as centralized, stratified, and not well attuned to local conditions in Europe. However, both Decoo's and Van Beek's analyses are blends of history and personal experiences rather than ethnographic research *per se*. They are contributing to Mormon Studies audiences, but we find ourselves needing more ethnographic data for this type of work to speak to broader cultural anthropology—including what this looks like beyond Europe. A broader approach may shed light on other situations in which local context enriches, engages, or negotiates with, rather than solely resisting, centralized Church doctrines and policies.

Anthropologist David Knowlton, in this vein, has produced several works related to the Church in Latin America. For example, he provides cultural commentary related to statistical analysis of Church growth in Latin America (1996) and has enriched the subfield through ethnographic writing on Bolivian Mormonism (2007). He examines how Bolivian national unrest and anti-corruption in the early 2000s, as well as local factionalism and ethnic and labor politics, led to members of a ward he spent time in refusing to sustain local leadership (and in turn being rebuked). This is a fairly unexpected turn of events within the Church where (Knowlton notes) *en masse* refusals to sustain in ward conferences are uncommon (2007, 49). Yet it is made sensible

in light of Bolivian politics in that time period and how these had played out and were interpreted in this specific ward by these specific families. Knowlton's work evinces what anthropology might bring to the table in studies of global Mormonism—a fine-grained analysis attuned to local struggles of power and meaning. As he notes,

> Even though the Church hopes to give form and content to its authority structure, neither form nor content is very meaningful without local context to interpret it. In this sense Mormonism is deeply syncretic; its attempted global universalism of the gospel depends inevitably on local understandings and practices to function. But to fully understand this syncretism, we need many more studies from places around the globe where local Mormonisms are being born (2007, 66).

We strongly agree with Knowlton on this last point: there has simply not been enough done by cultural anthropologists on local Mormonisms. While anthropologists have raised the issue, they have often left these questions to scholars from other disciplinary heritages in the (now quite large) field of global Mormonism. While acknowledging (and very grateful for) the robustness of global Mormonism studies in history and sociology, we hope to see additional attention in cultural anthropology.

There has also been nuanced ethnography in recent years taking on transnational, migrant members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—such as Elizabeth Bingham Thomas and Carolyn Smith-Morris's recent (2020) ethnography, which found that the family-like relationships in wards and other religious communities both structured and created value orientations in the lives of Latinx immigrants in Utah. Sujey Vega's (2019) work on Latina immigrants to the United States, in turn, suggests pressures to assimilate to "American" culture for full acceptance by other Latter-day Saints in ward communities, especially in contexts where leadership is typically white. In such an environment, distinct Latinx wards/branches fostered greater comfort with cultural self-expression. Brittany Romanello (2020) has also documented Latina Latter-day Saint immigrants who are creating networks of *hermandad* (sisterhood) to help them resist racialized and sexualized discrimination, as well as cultural pressures to assimilate into predominantly white culture in the US. These works, in different ways, deploy Mormonism to understand the intersections of kinship, kinship-like communities, and migration. The intersections of the Church with migrations into the US has also been considered by Aihwa Ong, who writes about how some Cambodian migrants participated

in the Church in part to negotiate a path within US socio-economic dynamics and opportunities (2003).

Some of this work has also considered how the distinctively American idea of plains-crossing pioneers has come to be reconfigured for both global and migrant audiences: for example, in July 24th Pioneer Day celebrations. Eric Eliason (2002, 167) contends that "unlike Mormon theology … Pioneer Day celebrations, as an aspect of Mormon folk culture, are free to adapt and respond to local conditions." As with Pioneer Day, the ideal of the "pioneer" itself has spread beyond solely a focus on Anglo-American history. Vega (2019) shares an experience during her fieldwork, where a Young Women's teacher in a Latinx ward remarked: "Irma, do you know the names of your *abuelos*? … That is your lineage, your history. Be proud of who you are and where you came from for you are the pioneers whose stories must be kept" (27). Vega captures a process of re-shaping immigration narratives into that of pioneers, taking a lived reality for some groups and representing it within the shared cultural historical model of the larger faith. In this, the Young Women embody pioneers through their immigrant families.

The field could benefit from more ethnography on internationalization of the faith. The still relatively small number of cultural anthropologists engaging it is a rather glaring omission. The disproportionate number of ethnographies done in North America may place undue emphasis on those areas close to Salt Lake City as the Church's center of gravity—precisely when anthropology may be most useful in exploring those communities far from it.

Gender and Kinship

Perhaps it is unsurprising, given the tendency of anthropology to study and explain cultural difference, that some of the earliest anthropological research on gender in the Latter Day Saint movement focused on fundamentalist, polygamous groups distinct from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, such as the Latter-day Church of Christ and the Apostolic United Brethren. Janet Bennion, through her work with fundamentalist groups, pioneered the study of gender within the anthropology of Mormonism. Her work characterized female networking in these communities as a way to promote female solidarity and create power through group-based support. Reminiscent of the hierarchy theme mentioned above, Bennion contextualizes these networks within a male-dominated society where patriarchy controls production, reproduction, finances, and spiritual salvation (Bennion 2004). The female net-

works that arise within this context provide women a means of negotiating these power dynamics to improve their situation and their community (Bennion 1998, 2004, 2008, 2011).

More recently we have seen the growth of anthropology looking at gender within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This work often expands upon, but also complicates, the understanding of gender negotiation within the Church outlined by sociologists such as John Mihelich and Debbie Storrs. They argued (2003) based on survey data with female college students in Utah that LDS women conceptualized their decisions to pursue higher education as supporting rather than contradicting the roles of women within LDS gender ideology. This, the authors said, represented an "embedded resistance" against dominant gender norms in Utah. Stiles (2014) illustrates the pressures on both Latter-day Saint women and other women living in northern Utah to marry young. As Stiles explains: "Many seemed to use a frame of pressure to draw a boundary between their own values and dominant norms and values that they viewed as problematic" (2014, 11). These pressures seemed to primarily come from the participants' families, but the women expressed concerns that the "Utah Mormon Culture" would similarly influence their daughters' decisions regarding marriage. Through this work Stiles demonstrates both pressure and control from the dominant cultural framework, but also an "us versus them" (Latter-day Saint and non-LDS) feeling of oppositional values that has been demonstrated through other anthropological research in the same geographic area (Hawvermale and George 2015; Hawvermale and Tauber 2016; Glass-Coffin 2016).

This friction between Latter-day Saints' culture and "non-LDS culture" in northern Utah, particularly in regard to gender roles, has been well documented (Temple et al. 2015; Dengah et al. 2016, 2019). Comparing and contrasting Latter-day Saints' salient understandings of gender roles (and their performance) to those of more general "American" gender roles, Henri Dengah and his team conclude, Latter-day Saint women living in northern Utah experience conflicting gender models—much like those reported by both Stiles (2014) and Mihelich and Storrs (2003). Because of the prevalence of both models, we (Hawvermale and co-authors) argued that Latter-day Saint women must navigate what it means to be "female" between these two sets of norms. Rejection or non-conformity to parts of either gender role, but particularly the dominant Latter-day Saint role, can lead to social correction resulting in stress and discomfort (Dengah et al. 2019). Although the core of this initial research

is cultural consensus theory, their later work situates gender within a broader dialogue of control and hierarchy within Latter-day Saint cultural expressions in that region.

Although much of this gender research is situated within the discussion of institutional control we mention earlier in this essay, this research also begins to consider the negotiation of "everyday life" for Latter-day Saints—a focus that has been profitable in regard to gender. It is not surprising that gender would be a bridging point within the anthropology of Mormonism between the themes of institutional control and lived experiences. Not only does gender involve performance on a daily level, it is theologically important to the plan of salvation as understood in the Church (Dengah, Hawvermale, and Temple 2015; Dengah et al. 2016, 2019; Winward 2017). Critical to this model of gender and identity is the role of parenting—of motherhood in particular, which is arguably central to Latter-day Saint female gender role conceptualizations. Within Latter-day Saint discourses, women are often presented as predisposed toward motherhood and nurturing. The performance of motherhood as an aspect of female gender plays a critical role in the extensive theology of families/kinship.

Latter-day Saint understandings of family have been studied extensively by social scientists and theologians (Bentley 2019; Heaton, Goodman, and Holman 1994; Black 2014, 2016; Davies 2000). This in part reflects the importance of family theologically (as well as socially) for Latter-day Saints. However, anthropologists have generally not been present in such discussions to the degree one might expect given their historic interest in kinship. A major exception to this, however, is the aforementioned Fenella Cannell, who (in addition to Bennion) has been most formative in developing this theme within the anthropology of Mormonism.

Cannell (2005) points out that because extended and embodied kinship ties are fundamental to the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints about the afterlife, their kinship system sets them apart from the way anthropologists have traditionally assumed other Christian groups to be. (Many anthropologists have explained Christian salvation as having an individualist tendency—although there are exceptions [Robbins 2003].) A more overt focus on eternal families in Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cosmology makes the theological significance of families harder to ignore—with exaltation being a collective and kinship-oriented affair (Cannell 2017c, 2019). Furthermore, Cannell notes, kinship within Latter-day Saint commu-

nities extends beyond blood and law symbolism, encompassing also (as an example) temple sealings to adopted children who are considered to have been foreordained to be kin. Cannell has also highlighted the complex and salvific significance of genealogy (2013b) and the vivid emotions and spiritual experiences attached to it (2005, 2019). Latter-day Saint kinship emerges in Cannell's work as a sacred, lived practice (2013b). This ethnographic work on kinship complements the work of other scholars on Latter-day Saint kinship, such as Terryl Givens's theological writings on divine kinship and kinship-oriented salvation (2017) or Mauss's work on the broadening of ideas of race and (covenant) lineages in the twentieth century (2003).

Given the importance of gender and kinship to Mormon theology, the work anthropologists have done thus far is both foundational and critical. However, most of that work is generally confined to heteronormative expressions of gender. One reason for this could be the Church's stance(s) on gender, gender expression, and sexuality. However, we have exceptions. Bennion (2011) explores queerness within fundamentalist communities—and specifically how being surrounded with women but also in a community with rigid gender norms both facilitates lesbian relationships while also precluding their open expression. Winward's recent thesis (2017) in turn explores how young (18- to 26-year-old) Latter-day Saints craft unique interpretations of Church policies regarding same-sex marriage, coming to accept these policies while offering divergent interpretations of their reasons or even whether these are core doctrines. Winward argues that ultimately, and contrary to some expectations, young adults' explanations show individuals engaging in both "reasoning and rationality" rather than solely deference to religious authority figures. Both examples suggest that there could be more anthropological exploration of LGBTQ+ issues within the Latter Day Saint movement. Individuals whose personal beliefs, values, or lived experiences differ significantly from the cultural model, so to speak, must negotiate meaning-making and interpretation of doctrine (Winward 2017). Greater attention could also be afforded to those who do *not* feel a need to resist or balance gender norms and who feel comfortable in present teachings about gender, exploring how and why this may vary for individuals in different spaces, times, and cultural contexts.

Disbelief and Heterodoxy

The individualized experience of meaning vis-à-vis the broader faith tradition has also begun to emerge in work specifically on Latter-day Saints who have

left their religion, sometimes identifying as "ex-Mormon." It has also been a theme in research with Latter-day Saints who remain in the faith, but in heterodox ways, such as Mormon transhumanism.

E. Marshall Brooks has written (2015, 2018) about a very specific group—ex-Mormons in Utah who do not join another church but instead become religiously unaffiliated. Brooks shares a variety of personal narratives from these formerly Latter-day Saint individuals about their diverse feelings since departing from the religion. Brooks highlights, for example, the complexity of married sexuality in the wake of having left the Church, or unintentionally feeling the sensations they once associated with the Spirit years later, among those individuals he interviewed. He characterizes the process as an ontological void, "disenchanted lives." As Brooks notes, many see their faith crisis as having been precipitated not by spiritual laxness but sincere studies of church history which went in unexpected directions—products of historical "excesses" left over from the centuries-long process of Church assimilation. Given the complexity of Brooks's portrayal of largely non-religious ex-Mormons in Utah, we find ourselves hoping for ethnographers who can present similarly vivid portrayals of those who are active and believing members of the Church, as well as of other Mormon traditions. Where is the E. Marshall Brooks for active Latter-day Saints who strongly identify with their faith—who can document the complexities of belief with the nuance Brooks does for disbelief? We are grateful then for work by the likes of Cannell, Stiles, McDannell, and Dengah et al., who engage with the experiences and negotiations of "active"—but certainly not homogenous—individuals. There is room for work that grapples with the individual in context of a structure, and specifically that recognizes that Church structure is neither monolithic nor pre-existent, but an assemblage in which diverse adherents contribute, interpret, and make meaning in rich and complicated ways. We are starting to see some of this work emerge in the past decade.

Bialecki (2020b, 2020c), for example, gives complex accounts of the ways in which some Latter-day Saint transhumanists continue to be able to stay actively identified with the faith by casting their faith in transhumanist terms. Doctrines about divine beings are reinterpreted through the transhumanist lens of futuristic predictions of human technological progress. For example, these transhumanists have often shifted from understanding God as an eternally existing divine Being toward an understanding of the divine, as well as theosis, as future-tense technological projects of a collective humanity.

This interpretation may be seen as quite heterodox from the perspective of the Church's doctrines, yet many maintain their Latter-day Saint identity—a far cry from the homogenous belief or experience some scholars have suggested for Latter-day Saints.

Several previously cited works also emphasize this heterogeneity of views, perhaps in less dramatic fashion. Winward (2017) highlights diverse interpretations of LGBTQ-related policies. Cannell (2017), meanwhile, suggests that the temple ceremonies that other scholars see as inducing collective, homogenous experience, in fact generate creative space for unique interpretations. Stiles (2014), in turn, discusses the complexity of individual experiences in Cache Valley, Utah, paying attention to nuances of degree of activity, something not all ethnographers have attended to. The categories of "fully active Church member" and "ex-Mormon" are not the only two forms of Latter-day Saint religiosity.

In short, we are starting to see an emergence of scholars who recognize that there is not one Mormonism, but many, experienced by different people in different ways. In part this diversity is based on positionality, but it also arises from the individuality of experience in a faith tradition that prioritizes and emphasizes individual spiritual experiences. We see this as a promising and necessary move forward if the anthropology of Mormonism is to fully engage with what the Latter Day Saint movement is—and how it might contribute to anthropology. If scholars can engage such heterogeneity, it may help carve a space for grappling with complex questions of how individuals experience epistemologies, commitment, and lived faith within centralized, allegedly domineering religions, and not solely the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Conclusions: Press Forward, (Anthropologists of Latter Day) Saints

The anthropology of Mormonism, as we have seen, not only is already emerging, but has developed several centers of gravity. These include hierarchy, authority, and control, the discipline and symbolism of bodies, and re-enactments of history in a faith where it is often said that "history is theology." Other areas of focus include the complexities of internationalization for a centralized "American church"; experiences of gender and kinship as a spiritual concept and practice; and the complexities of heterodoxy and disaffiliation. Each of these demonstrates a warrant for the cultural anthropology of Mormonism—a set of key themes in relation to broader issues in anthropology, as well as Mormon social sciences.

At the same time, there is room for further growth, including in the consideration of the lived experiences of individual Mormons in their diverse spaces. This is a focus that ethnographers seem poised to answer. However, a large portion of the work done thus far in the cultural anthropology of Mormonism has instead heavily emphasized centralized hierarchy through a lens of control: sometimes resisted, but usually incorporated. The Latter-day Saint body is often presented as how the Church institution inscribes itself onto bodies through ritual and symbolism. Historic sites and reenactments are depicted as places used to confirm the Church's official narratives. And Church leadership is portrayed as attempting to maintain local hierarchical control amid diversity across the globe. Meanwhile, some gender scholarship characterizes womanhood ideas as monolithically controlled.

This focus on hierarchy has highlighted certain aspects of lived Mormonism. However, at times one wonders in such work: as anthropologists, could we better see the individual Mormons involved in Mormonism? While of course anthropology looks at broader sociocultural trends and discourses, we are also very much concerned with individual agency—and especially our early anthropology of Mormonism did not always offer the compelling ethnographies of individual complexity that anthropology can in theory provide.

Some of the ethnography of the past decade, however, has begun to engage such complexity, and very profitably so. We see this, for example, with work on gender and the lived experience of "finding a balance" within gender roles and dealing with the "pressure" of culture in a variety of ways. We see this in recent work on transhumanists and ex-Mormons. We need to see this more elsewhere. We hope this journal presents a space for cultural anthropologists of Mormonism to envision themselves as a subfield, with all the thoughtful questioning and theorizing that requires.

We believe that shifting focus to include more of the individuals' meaning-making—while not losing sight of hierarchy and authority—will yield important insights. For example, while much of the present work on historic sites has focused on how they structure understanding of historic narratives, what else are we missing about Latter-day Saint experiences of holy and historic places? In what ways might attending to individual experiences of visitors complicate how we think about historic places, and especially Christian holy places? The somewhat unique emphasis of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on sacred natural sites (such as the Hill Cumorah) and ritualized temples presents rich ground for complicating understandings of Christian (sacred) place-making.

We are suggesting, in other words, along with some other recent ethnographers, that there is a great deal more going on here, anthropologically speaking, than discipline, control, and (maybe) resistance. In writing a story of a people (literally what ethnography is), we have more to say about how meaning is made in a faith predicated so much on individual spiritual witnesses and voluntary, lay labor. This then becomes an additional warrant for us as a field pressing forward: to fully consider the Mormon in Mormonism.

We also think there are other areas rich with possibility for anthropology, topics that have only scarcely been touched upon, if at all. One of these is sacred ecology. The authors have recently been engaged in a review of research on Latter-day Saint conceptualizations of ecology. Much of the social science literature on Latter-day Saint environmental thought works on this through a theological/scriptural lens, or through broad-scale surveying in Utah. Attending to Mormonism's natural sacred sites such as the Sacred Grove or Adam-ondi-Ahman offers a lens to consider the spiritual ecology (Sponsel 2007) of a Christian tradition that believes in theophanic places, animals with spirits, and that the world will ultimately be re-Celestialized—departures from some other Christian groups. There is also work to be done on lived experiences of the Holy Spirit in daily contexts such as testimony meetings, church services, and home study—as opposed to work on temples and historic sites where most Latter-day Saints only spend a small portion of their religious lives. Anthropologists might consider the various ways in which believers attend to the thoughts and feelings within their individual minds—and how this may yield insight for ontological conversations within anthropology.

There is clearly work to be done in considering what the Latter Day Saint movement looks like in other places and other times, diverse and culturally situated. This is a challenge that the cultural anthropology of Mormonism, thus far nascent, seems poised to answer, and clearly show (at last) its own warrant as a field.

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