

Raphael, *St. Paul Preaching in Athens*. Glue distemper on many sheets of paper glued together, 12'10" x 14'5". From 1515 to 1516, Pope Leo X commissioned Raffaello Sanzio (1483–1520) to paint a set of cartoons as patterns for tapestries that would hang below Michelangelo's famous ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. Seven of the cartoons, including this one, survived and are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The Four Discourses of Mormonism

Joseph M. Spencer

I would like to begin, as well as to end, with a deceptively simple question: What does it mean to be Mormon?¹ A whole series of events and developments motivate this question for me—from the explosion of academic interest in Mormon studies to the emergent internationalization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, from the fact that fully half the Church’s members are converts to the rise of what Internet-savvy Latter-day Saints call the “bloggernacle.” Such events and developments point to the possibility (perhaps the necessity) of leaving behind any definition of “Mormonness” that makes it a question only of belonging—at best to a particular culture or ethnic group,² at worst to “a victimized post-modern minority.”³ In the place of *belonging*, I would substitute *believing*: if Mormonness is not a question of cultural heritage or ethnicity, it is, I would argue, a question of faith or faithfulness.

In order, then, to ask about what it is to be Mormon, it is necessary to ask what ultimately amounts to a philosophical question: *What is (Mormon) faith?* This question will occupy most of my attention in this paper. My approach to this question in what follows will be twofold. In the first part, I explore the implications of a recent philosophical interpretation of the writings of Saint Paul, namely, that of the French philosopher Alain Badiou. My intention, in this analysis of Badiou’s reading of Paul, is only to uncover the basic contours of faith as such. However, as I argue, the notion of faith Badiou outlines in his reading of Paul, for all its obvious merits, needs ultimately, if it is to be translated into fully Mormon terms, to be concretized by the complex history of Mormonism. Hence, in the second part of what follows, I will work out a more intricate understanding of what specifically *Mormon* faith is by

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Hoping to promote discussions focused on LDS scripture and European philosophy, Robert Couch and I launched an email list called LDS-Herm (short for LDS Hermeneutics) in 2006. “The Four Discourses of Mormonism” is one of many projects—some collective, some individual—that have precipitated out of the discussions on that list. The particular conversation to which I originally responded with the first draft of this essay began with a question from Adam Miller: “If one were to attempt to forge a new kind of writing that is appropriate to careful and explicitly faithful thinking about Mormonism, a kind of writing that could grip both scholar and interested lay person alike, what would it look like?” Though I never ask that original question explicitly in my paper as it now stands, it is both what called the paper into existence in the first place and what justifies its existence for me now.



But in many ways, this paper has been with me in an unwritten form since my undergraduate years at BYU, when I first encountered the writings of Hugh Nibley. Though my academic interests are ultimately quite distant from Nibley’s (I flirt with ancient studies in something like the way Nibley flirted with philosophy), I felt from the first reading that he had accomplished something crucial in his writings, something that most Latter-day Saint writers were somehow unable to achieve. I remember walking around the streets south of campus one hot summer afternoon—if I remember right, I was mostly trying to avoid working on a paper on Aristotle—talking with my wife, Karen, about how Nibley alone seemed to have avoided the trap of falling into either academic or devotional self-satisfaction. While the years since that walk have given me opportunity to read enough to see that Nibley was and is not alone in his approach, I have only grown in my conviction that the nature of fidelity is too often obscured.

I should mention that I presented a first draft of this paper at the annual meetings of the Association of Mormon Scholars held in 2008 at Southern Virginia University, and a rather different draft at the annual meetings of the Association for Mormon Letters held in 2009 at Utah Valley University. My thanks go to both of these organizations.

offering a perhaps unique reading of the history of the Restoration. In the end, I hope at the very least to have outlined a notion of faith that not only makes sense in light of Mormon history, but also that can make sense of Mormon history itself—as well as of what it means to be Mormon. In doing so, I will introduce four different “Mormon discourses,” or modes of organizing knowledge and experience, that will help to make particular sense of some of the ways in which faith is compromised.

Alain Badiou on the Writings of Paul

Alain Badiou, unquestionably one of the most important philosophers working in France today, undertook what he himself described as a “strange enterprise.”⁴ As an atheist, Badiou would seem to be the last person to take up a philosophical reading of the epistles of Saint Paul—at least in an approving fashion. Actually, though, he is only one of a number of nonreligious and non-Christian European thinkers who have quite productively turned their attention to the ancient Apostle.⁵ And at least one Latter-day Saint, writing strictly as a philosopher to a non-Mormon audience, has attempted a reading of Saint Paul in the name of “travers[ing] both theism and atheism for the sake of grace.”⁶ So it is that Badiou announces on the very first page of his study that he writes neither “to bear witness to any sort of faith” nor to defend some kind of “antifaith.”⁷ His interest is, strictly speaking, in the productivity of what Paul has to say, regardless of the question of religious commitments.

But why all this confessedly nonreligious reading of Paul’s epistles? For Badiou, at least, the motivation lies in his identification of the Apostle as “a poet-thinker of the *event*,” as a thinker who established the “paradoxical connection” that “provides the foundation for the possibility of a *universal* teaching within history itself.”⁸ Thus, though Badiou regards as “a fable” the central event to which Paul dedicated himself (that is, Christ’s Resurrection),⁹ he finds Paul’s thought to be the most rigorous exposition available of the manner in which an event, named and harnessed by its faithful subject, opens the way to a universalism without totalitarianism: A truth, discovered in the course of an event and then announced without compulsion, can be “offered to all, or addressed to everyone, without a condition of belonging being able to limit this offer, or this address.”¹⁰ And it is the need for the construction of just such a universalism *without totalitarianism*—after the mingled advances and atrocities of the twentieth century—that makes Paul unmistakably, in Badiou’s phrasing, “our contemporary.”¹¹

But the believing Christian—and therefore Latter-day Saint—might immediately object to Badiou’s usurpation of sorts: What right has he to

read Paul while ignoring the reality of the Resurrection of Christ? But there is reason, I think, not to be too hasty about dismissing Badiou out of hand for the simple reason that he is not a believer. Though Badiou himself admits that he does not believe that the Resurrection event took place, he does *not* attempt, in his careful reading of Paul, to subtract that element from Paul's thinking. Indeed, in order to follow most closely the kind of universalism that the preaching of the event opens up, Badiou allows Paul—and, along with him, the Christian or Latter-day Saint reader—his faith in the Resurrection. Taking as his task the work of outlining the *structure* of Paul's thought, Badiou is not particularly interested, in his reading, about the *content*. It is of course the believers' prerogative to take Badiou's immensely productive analysis of the structure of Paul's thought and return to their own commitment to the content of the New Testament announcement.¹²

These preliminaries aside, what can be said in order to clarify what Badiou means by Paul's universalism without totalitarianism, and what does it have to do with faith?

In what I regard as the most insightful part of his analysis, Badiou works out what he calls Paul's “theory of discourses.”¹³ Badiou begins here by pointing out that the Apostle to the Gentiles, rather than understanding his preaching to be addressed to “an absolutely open multitude of peoples and customs” or to “all the human subsets of the [Roman] empire,” sees the world in terms only of the Jew and the Greek, “as if, with these two referents, the multiple of the *ethnē* [Gentiles, nations] had been exhausted so far as the Christian revelation and its universal destination is concerned.”¹⁴ But this reduction of so many “peoples and customs” to the simple dyad of Jews-and-Greeks is strategic for Paul, according to Badiou: “They refer to what Paul considers to be the two coherent intellectual figures of the world he inhabits, or what could be called *regimes of discourse*.”¹⁵ Paul is thus “in fact presenting us with a schema of [two] discourses.” And this schema is organized in order to “position a *third* discourse, [Paul's] own, in such a way as to render its complete originality apparent.”¹⁶

In its basic contours, then, the “theory of discourses” Badiou finds in Paul is a schema of three discourses, two (the Jewish and Greek discourses) forming a tight circle with which the third (Christian or apostolic discourse) breaks. But what is the circle of the first two discourses, and how does the third break with it?

Greek discourse, as Badiou nicely summarizes it, is the discourse “of the [Stoic] wise man,” wisdom in Stoicism being a question of “appropriating the fixed order of the world,” making Greek discourse “cosmic,” a question of “deploying the [human] subject within the reason of a natural *totality*.”¹⁷

In other words, Hellenistic thought had, in the time of Paul, constructed a kind of universalism, but one that was accomplished only through a totalization of the universe, through a belief that the world could be reduced to a knowable order to which one should ascetically adjust. (This discourse, in the time of Paul, would of course have been as much the discourse of many of the Romans as of the Greeks: Stoicism had become, by the first century of the common era, almost the official worldview of the Roman aristocracy.)

Of course, Paul was not the first to recognize that the totalizing universalism of Stoic thought was problematic. Rabbinic Judaism, for example, took exception to the Greek vision. Indeed, it announced that the “Jewish nation” was “*constitutively exceptional*” due, as Badiou says, to “the prophetic sign, the miracle, election,” and so forth.¹⁸ Thus, while “Greek discourse base[d] itself on the cosmic order so as to adjust itself to it,” constitutively “Jewish discourse base[d] itself on the *exception* to this order so as to turn divine transcendence into a *sign*.¹⁹ Over against the Hellenic notion of totalizing universalism, first-century Judaism presented itself as a particularity, as a “point of incoherence” in the framed “cosmic totality” of which the Stoic spoke.²⁰

But if Judaism took exception to Stoic totalizing universalism, why is Paul as much at odds with the Jew as he is with the Greek? Badiou explains: “Paul’s profound idea is that *Jewish discourse and Greek discourse are the two aspects of the same figure of mastery*. . . . In the eyes of Paul the Jew, the weakness of Jewish discourse is that its logic of the exceptional sign is only valid for the Greek cosmic totality.”²¹ In other words, because Jewish discourse positioned itself rhetorically as an exception to Greek discourse, it was unavoidably dependent on the Greek understanding of the world. Constituting itself as the point of incoherence in the Stoic cosmos, Judaism constituted itself a part—albeit an *incoherent* part—of that same cosmic schema. The result is, as Badiou says, that “the two discourses share the presupposition that the key to salvation is given to us within the universe, whether it be through direct mastery of the totality (Greek wisdom), or through mastery of literal tradition and the deciphering of signs (Jewish ritualism and prophetism).”²² In sum, for Badiou’s Paul, “whether the cosmic totality be envisaged *as such* or whether it be deciphered on the basis of the sign’s exception, [it] institutes in every case a theory of salvation tied to mastery (*to a law*), along with the grave additional inconvenience that the mastery of the wise man and that of the [Jewish] prophet, necessarily unaware of their identity, divide humanity in two,” thereby dispelling any genuine universality.²³ Universalism without totalization is therefore compromised both by the Jewish commitment to the Law of Moses (after the

event of the Resurrection had disannulled its discriminatory power) and by the Greek commitment to the Law of the Cosmos (effectively the law of *death*, as the writings of the Stoics—in direct continuity with Socrates and Plato—make quite clear, and so a law that is, like the Mosaic Law, disannulled by the event of the Resurrection).

Another way of describing the problem associated with the Greek and Jewish discourses is their shared pretension to knowledge: the Stoic notion of wisdom is grounded in the presupposition that there is a knowable cosmic order, and the Jewish notion of exception presupposes that the transcendent bestowal of a sign allows one to know the will of God. Thus, if, as Paul says, “the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:22), they are joined by their conviction that *knowledge is power*, and so that *faith is weak*. But it was precisely this privileging of knowledge over faith that Paul sought to overturn.

And so Paul’s *third* discourse—the Christian or apostolic discourse—begins with the Resurrection of Christ, a “pure event” that, because its having happened is *neither* “falsifiable” *nor* “demonstrable,” amounted to the “opening of an epoch” that worked out the “transformation of the relations between the possible and the impossible.”²⁴ Ignoring, rather than posing as the exception to, the Stoic’s constitutive law of *death*, the event of the Resurrection does not fit—even as a point of incoherence—within the Greek’s cosmic totality. And, as Badiou says, because “the interest of Christ’s Resurrection does not lie in itself, as it would in the case of a particular, or miraculous, fact [the sign],” the Resurrection as event “is measurable *only in accordance with the universal multiplicity whose possibility it prescribes*.”²⁵ Effectively indifferent to the differences by which the Greek and the Jew maintain their distinct (but intertwined) identities, the event of the Resurrection ignores what the Stoic law of the cosmos and the Jewish Law of Moses prescribe. Regardless of what the laws had (and have still!) to say, the Resurrection *just happened*.

The apostolic or Christian discourse, then, is the discourse of naming the possibilities revealed by this unapologetic happening: “His discourse is one of pure fidelity to the possibility opened by the event.”²⁶ Given to “pure fidelity”—in a word, to *faith*—Christians say with Paul that “whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away” (1 Corinthians 13:8) as they give themselves without reserve to a set of truths (the happening of the event as well as the possibilities unveiled by that happening), the truth of which truths they cannot prove. But it is precisely because the faithful subjects cannot prove the truth of what they believe that their preaching is genuinely universal: subtracted from knowledge as construed by the Greek and the Jew, the unprovable truth to which one must declare fidelity

is effectively an *impartial* truth, both in the sense that it refuses to be *particular* to any established culture or human subset, and in the sense that it does not itself form a *part* of the totality that is formed by the intertwined thought of the Greeks and the Jews.

Open to all and yet indifferent to the difference that structures the Greek/Jewish totality, truths unveiled in pure events open up the possibility of a universalism *without* totalitarianism.

Faith, then, for Badiou's Paul is a question of one's fidelity or one's faithful subjection to a genuinely universal truth revealed in a *past* event, such as in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Rather than being a kind of obscure and usually stubborn commitment to something one *hopes* will or can take place in the *future*,²⁷ in Badiou's view, faith is a question of declaring unapologetically that something happened, and that such a happening marks the dawn of a hitherto unknown truth.

But if this notion of faith seems to be relatively straightforward, it should be noted that the faithful are not without temptation. Indeed, as Badiou goes on to work out at some length, once an event has summoned the faithful to fidelity, their vigilance is also summoned against three crucial temptations: disbelief, despair, and uncharitableness.²⁸ Not only do they face the task of *keeping the faith*, but they must also *consistently hope* that the truths they have glimpsed in the course of an event can, if faithfully preached, effect a genuine change in the world as it is presently constituted; and they must demonstrate *universal charity* by refusing, in their preaching, to render the impartial truth of the event partial by announcing that truth only to particular human subsets. If they despair and so become convinced that the truth has no real purchase on the world, their faith or fidelity inevitably suffers. And, equally, if they refuse to uphold the actual universality of the universal truth revealed in the event by deciding that it is only for this or that people, they have effectively compromised their faith. Faith, hope, and charity.

Each of the three temptations that threaten fidelity is tied to a derelict discourse that breaks with the universality of Christian or apostolic discourse. The temptation to turn from Christian discourse back to Jewish discourse is the temptation of disbelief: individuals demand a sign before they will believe, and so they compromise the unprovability of the event.

The Universality of Christian Discourse

Greek/Stoic discourse
(discourse of wisdom)
Jewish discourse
(discourse of signs)

Two figures of the
same totality

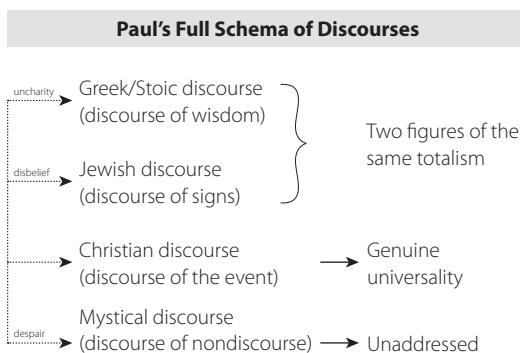
Christian discourse
(discourse of the event) → Genuine
universality

The temptation to turn from Christian discourse back to Greek discourse is the temptation of uncharitableness: in taking up a commitment to the totality that can only register the Jews, for example, as a point of incoherence in the system, they compromise the universality of the event's implications. And the temptation to turn from Christian discourse to a fourth discourse is the temptation of despair. What is this fourth discourse?

As Badiou points out, Paul "delineates, as if in shadowy outline, a fourth possible discourse, besides the Greek (wisdom), the Jew (signs), and the Christian (evental declaration)."²⁹ This fourth discourse, which Badiou names *mystical* discourse, "is the discourse of the ineffable, the discourse of nondiscourse. It is the subject as silent and mystical intimacy, inhabited by 'things that cannot be told' [*arrhēta rhēmata*], which would better be translated as 'unutterable utterances' (*dires indiçibles*), only experienced by the subject who has been visited by miracle."³⁰ The quintessential New Testament experience of this fourth discourse is glossolalia, speaking in tongues—but all *charismata*, all miraculous, mystical, or revelatory gifts of the Spirit, would certainly fall within it as well. For Paul, miracles and the gift of tongues are very real, and so he unquestionably justifies their existence. But, as Badiou says, Paul is emphatic that this "fourth discourse (miraculous, or mystical) must remain *unaddressed*. . . . He refuses to let addressed discourse, which is that of the declaration of faith, justify itself through an unaddressed discourse, whose substance consists in unutterable utterances."³¹ If the faithful do make an appeal to the miraculous in their preaching, they "relapse inevitably into the second discourse, that of the sign, the Jewish discourse. For . . . what is a miracle if not a sign of the transcendence of the True?"³²

In short, the fourth discourse is the discourse of the signs that *follow* faith. But people of faith, once they have experienced the gifts of the Spirit, are unfortunately tempted to make of these signs—that-follow-faith-for-oneself into signs—that-inspire-faith-for-others, to compromise the

work of faithful preaching by attempting to prove the truth of the event by a miraculous show of power. But such individuals give in to this temptation only because they become genuinely desperate in their preaching, because they begin to *despair* in light of the unavoidable



weakness of the unprovable. Doubting that the truth can do its own work and thus genuinely change the world through its being preached in faith, they cease to hope and only so compromise the event's weak but universal power, "relapsing into the logic of signs and profs."³³

Thus for Badiou, to sum up, genuine faith is "a discourse without proof, without miracles, without convincing signs," a "language of the naked event, which alone captures thought."³⁴ In a word, faith is what it is precisely because it is *evental*. The constitutive anchor of genuine faith is always the event, the happening that proceeds without regard to the totalizing laws, scientific as much as political, imposed on the world in the name of knowledge.

Faith, then. But what of *Mormon* faith? How does the faith articulated by Badiou's analysis of Paul map onto the Mormon experience, and how might Badiou's careful reading help to articulate the notion of faith embodied in Mormon history?

The Complex of Mormon Faith: The Four Discourses of Mormonism

At the very least, there are strong parallels between Badiou's exposition of Pauline faith and the notion of faith in Mormonism. Indeed, when Badiou says, concerning the evental nature of faith, that "there invariably comes a moment when what matters is to declare in one's own name that what took place took place, and to do so because what one envisages with regard to the actual possibilities of a situation requires it,"³⁵ the Latter-day Saint is immediately reminded of Joseph Smith's history recorded in the Pearl of Great Price, where the Prophet dares to compare himself to Paul:

I have thought since, that I felt much like Paul, when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise. So it was with me.
(JS-History 1:24–25)

The passage is striking not only because of Joseph's subjective fidelity to an event that is ultimately "without proof or visibility,"³⁶ but because Joseph only inscribed it *eventually*, at that moment that, as Badiou says, "invariably comes . . . when what matters is to declare . . . that what took place took place . . . because what one envisages with regard to the actual possibilities

of a situation *requires it*.”³⁷ As Joseph himself put it, “I have been induced to write this history, to . . . put all inquirers after truth in possession of the facts . . . [and] I shall present the various events in relation to this Church, in truth and righteousness” (Joseph Smith—History 1:1–2).

Moreover, as Jon Duncan notes in his study of discourses in early Mormonism, Joseph Smith employed a “prophetic discourse” that subtracted itself from the play of the two dominant discourses in nineteenth-century America: “Speaking for God, the Mormon prophet could be anti-democratic or anti-republican”; if Joseph “could speak with a republican tongue,” he just as well “could act in a democratic fashion.”³⁸ That is, because Joseph Smith’s prophetic discourse was neither constitutively liberal nor constitutively conservative, it seems to have operated with a kind of indifference to the difference between these two prevalent political discourses. Neither conservative nor liberal, early Mormon discourse as embodied in the Prophet Joseph Smith can be viewed as an always-third discourse, prepared at once to speak from within the situation of its present and yet always otherwise than the two political discourses that seem to situate that present as such.³⁹

Of course, enemies of early Mormonism had a name for this tertiary position: fanaticism. By far the most consistent complaint about the Mormons during their stays in New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois was that they were deluded enough to believe in absurd spiritual gifts, uniquely bestowed miraculous powers, and the like. In Badiou’s terms, Latter-day Saints were seen from the very beginning, not as having taken up a third, essentially universal, discourse, but as having taken up a *fourth*, essentially mystical, discourse of the miraculous, the mysterious, and the unutterable. But Joseph Smith, just as much as Paul, was concerned about the danger of compromising the genuine universality of the discourse of faith by appealing to the miraculous or the mystical. He warned concerning the gift of tongues, for example: “You may speak in tongues for your own

comfort but I lay this down for a rule that if any thing is taught by the gift of tongues, it is not to be received for doctrine.”⁴⁰ Or again, he said concerning visions and the like: “When you see a vision &c pray for the interpretation if you get not this, shut it up.—There must be certainty in this matter.”⁴¹ It must therefore be admitted that, although Joseph

A First Comparison with Mormonism

Republican discourse	Greek/Stoic discourse
Democratic discourse	Jewish discourse
Mormon discourse	Christian discourse
Fanatical discourse	Mystical discourse

Smith's enemies consistently claimed that Mormonism could subtract itself from the play of the two dominant political discourses of the nineteenth century only through a retreat into mysticism, Joseph Smith himself was careful to instruct the Saints not to make such miraculous displays a part of their faith.

Taking these details together, then, it seems at the very least that Mormonism complements Pauline faith as Badiou reconstructs it, that Mormon discourse is indeed an evental discourse.⁴² And what would seem, then, to make Mormon discourse unique among other possible evental discourses—ranging from religious convictions like Christianity to revolutionary political movements like Marxism—is the specific event or events to which it declares fidelity. Inasmuch as Mormonism is called into its very existence by the series of revelatory events that mark its beginnings, its uniqueness among evental discourses is a question of the consequences it draws in its faithfully pursuing the implications of those events. And so, at the very least, it would seem that to be Mormon would be simply to act in fidelity to the founding events of Mormonism—the angelic visitations, the bestowal of lost keys, the translation and transcription of unknown or new scripture, and so on.⁴³

However, it seems to me that fidelity to founding events is not, in the end, so simple with Mormonism. While this fidelity might have been simple before about 1835, it has never been so since. With the remainder of this paper, I will suggest a complex of *four* intertwined discourses of Mormonism, all rooted in the event but not all, strictly speaking, evental. To some extent, my argument is that once evental discourse genuinely emerges as a third-but-not-fourth discourse in a situation already polarized—so far, so Badiouian—it has the power to *redeem* the other three discourses that make up a situation, to reorient or even to recode these other discourses so that they become a part of a somewhat complex quadrangle of discourses that are, all taken together, unquestionably faithful, hopeful, and charitable. If with this idea of redeemed discourses I can be accused of breaking with Paul's and Badiou's *neither/nor* ("neither Jew nor Greek," says Paul in Galatians 3:28), let me respond by saying that I do so by taking up Nephi's and Joseph Smith's *both/and* ("both Jew and Gentile," says Nephi in 2 Nephi 26:33). And perhaps it is uniquely Mormon to see the event, not so much as calling for this world to *pass away* (as, perhaps, in 1 Corinthians 7:31), but rather as opening up the possibility of *redeeming* the world that the faithful intend to inherit (as, perhaps, in D&C 88:18–20).

At any rate, I will lay out the four discourses of Mormonism through a review of the early history of the Restoration.

Before 1835	
Addressed ←	Eventual discourse
Unaddressed ←	Fundamentalist discourse

er. And paired with their *addressed* eventual discourse was, as the historical record shows,⁴⁵ an *unaddressed* discourse essentially parallel to Paul's mystical or unutterable discourse, which I will here call fundamentalist discourse.⁴⁶ It thus appears that Mormonism was, up until about the publication of the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, divided between two discourses: one addressed, offering to *any* (who had ears to hear) a scriptural hermeneutic grounded in fidelity to the founding events of the Restoration; and one unaddressed, that of tongues and prophecies, as well as rods and stones.

Changes, however, began to come starting in 1833, though these changes only came to full fruition, I would argue, in 1835. Precipitating the changes was the wholesale ejection of the Latter-day Saints from Jackson County after native Missourians became alarmed by what they perceived to be the Mormons' attitude toward slavery. In response to the crisis, as Richard L. Bushman helpfully summarizes, "The conflict in Missouri changed Joseph's politics dramatically. For the first time, government figured in his thought as an active agent. . . . From then on, Joseph was never far removed from politics."⁴⁷ When a revelation came in December of 1833 in response to the violence the Missourians had used to force the Saints out of Jackson County, it spoke openly of the inspiration behind the United States Constitution and enjoined the Saints to seek redress from the government.⁴⁸

More important, perhaps, was the revelation that came in the following February, calling for the organization of Zion's camp (D&C 103). Marching with between one and two hundred men, Joseph Smith led the "armies of Israel" to what his companions believed was to be a battle for the redemption of Zion. When in June of 1834, while camped only a short distance from Missourians who were quite as prepared to fight as the armed Saints, Joseph Smith received a revelation that the Saints were to "wait for a little season for the redemption of Zion" (D&C 105:9). In addition to eventual and fundamentalist discourse, a third, essentially *political*, Mormon discourse was effectively constructed, and that by *revealed commandment*. The vital passage from the revelation runs as follows:

And let all my people who dwell in the regions round about be very faithful, and prayerful, and humble before me, and reveal not the things

Before 1835, Mormon discourse was, it seems to me, relatively Pauline (in Badiou's sense). The Saints, in their fidelity to at least the event of Moroni's appearance to Joseph Smith,⁴⁴ took up a discursive position that was neither Catholic nor Protestant, neither religiously conservative nor religiously liberal.

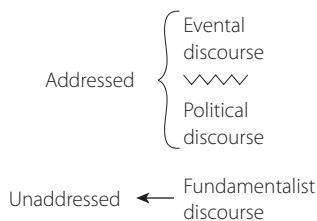
which I have revealed unto them, until it is wisdom in me that they should be revealed. Talk not of judgments, neither boast of faith nor of mighty works, but carefully gather together, as much in one region as can be, consistently with the feelings of the people; And behold, I will give unto you favor and grace in their eyes, that you may rest in peace and safety, while you are saying unto the people: Execute judgment and justice for us according to law, and redress us of our wrongs. Now, behold, I say unto you, my friends, in this way you may find favor in the eyes of the people, until the army of Israel becomes very great. (D&C 105:23–26)

The revelation commanded the Saints, as it were, to bracket both evental and fundamentalist discourse when speaking with their neighbors. Peace and settlement, it seems, are impossible when one preaches to the locals with unsettling fidelity to the founding events of Mormonism.

But what must not be missed here is that this political discourse, even as it seems to have involved a kind of willful discursive suspension of belief, was given to the Saints precisely in order to ensure that their evental fidelity was *not* compromised. That is, it seems at least in part to have been intended to keep the Saints from allowing their militant fidelity to translate into military action—something that would not only have compromised the faith itself, but that would likely have led to the annihilation of the Saints.

The importance of this adjustment to Mormonism in 1834 for making sense of the difficulties the Saints faced from 1834 to 1838 cannot be overstated. One of the effects of the revelation of June 1834 was that *addressed* Mormon discourse was effectively split in two, and though the revelation, wisely followed, might have reduced the threat of external conflict, the sudden implicit contradiction between two public faces of Mormonism immediately led to serious internal conflict. Some members of the Church detected in the introduction of an alternative discourse a kind of concession to American ideologies. Others, quite comfortable with the public acceptability of a political Mormon discourse, seem to have begun to harbor hope that the Church might be rid once and for all of what they regarded as its embarrassing earlier fanaticism. Because its addressed discourse had suddenly become divided, it became possible for the Saints to divide themselves into two rival camps, those committed to evental-and-fundamentalist discourse alone, and those committed to political discourse alone. And of course it was not long before Saints began apostatizing in the name of one or the other of these rival camps. David Whitmer and

From 1835



Oliver Cowdery, for example, both left the Church in 1838, though each for different reasons: Whitmer claimed, in so many words, that the Church had effectively abandoned evental and fundamentalist concerns, while Cowdery loudly announced that the Church was compromising his right to political discourse.

Of course, in the end, both rival positions make the same mistake: both renege on their commitment to *faith*. The appeal to Christian primitivism alone reduces Mormonism to a kind of fundamentalism, while the appeal to American political concerns alone reduces Mormonism to a kind of ecumenism.

But what is it about the introduction of the political into Mormon discourse that profoundly unsettles it? The answer, it seems to me, is that political discourse effectively de-universalizes Mormonism by giving it a particularist voice. That is, while the introduction of political discourse gave the Church a place in the world as a church, it could only do so by making a self-contradictory move: political discourse can only affirm the truth of the Church by denying its uniqueness, by making it one of so many churches rather than a genuinely universal movement. Political discourse effectively historicizes the founding events of Mormonism, instead of allowing all of history to be rewritten in light of those events. Political discourse might, for this reason, just as validly be given the title of apologetic discourse. While evental discourse offers a testimony that is unapologetically faithful to the *event*, the apologist can only testify to the truth of the *church*, of the historiopolitical entity that is the ecclesiastical unit.

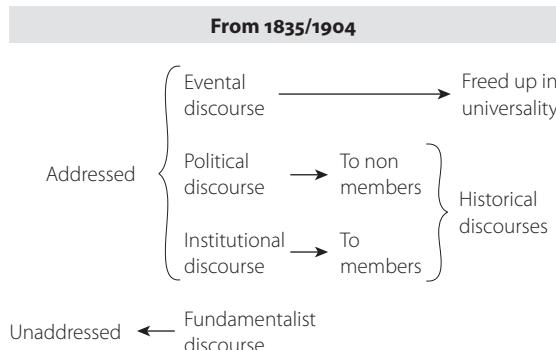
Might it then be suggested that tension arises between evental and political discourse only when Latter-day Saints fail to distinguish between history and the event? A rivalry takes the place of the complementarity of these two addressed discourses of Mormonism precisely when one decides that only history or only the event deserves attention. But what could secure the difference between history and the event?

Here it is necessary to identify a fourth Mormon discourse, an *institutional* discourse. One could argue that it began to emerge as early as 1829 or 1830, when plans were first made—by revelation—to establish an ecclesiastical organization, but it seems to me that it did not really fully emerge until 1835, when it was confirmed by the official publication of the Doctrine and Covenants, the organization of the priesthood quorums, and the preparation of the Kirtland Temple and its ordinances. Even then, it did not have the full stabilizing effect that it could or should have had: it would not really be until 1904—when the so-called “Second Manifesto” was issued and the “modernization” of Mormonism was completed—that the institutionalization of the Church would fully stabilize it.⁴⁹

But how does the addition of institutional discourse—the discourse of policies and counsel, the discourse of official declarations and First Presidency statements, the discourse of correlated manuals and highly structured auxiliary organizations—secure the distinction between history and the event? It seems to me that it does so by taking up a very particular relationship with political discourse. Inasmuch as political Mormon discourse is the discourse of member-to-nonmember, institutional Mormon discourse is clearly the discourse of member-to-member. And once these are paired, historical Mormon discourse is totalized: When member-to-nonmember discourse is coupled with member-to-member discourse, it would appear that everyone has been addressed, and nothing else remains to be said. And this in turn allows for the subtraction of the event from history and eventual discourse from historical Mormon discourse, effectively handing the event over to eventual discourse alone. In essence, the stable coupling of political and institutional Mormon discourses allows eventual Mormon discourse to be addressed without respect to the addressee's relationship to (membership in) the Church and so restores to it (as a discourse that entirely ignores the member/nonmember difference) its universality.

Mormonism thus seems to be a complex of four structurally distinct but intertwined discourses. Where any one of these is privileged, faith is compromised: a privileging of the miraculous leads to fundamentalism; a privileging of the eventual leads to fideism; a privileging of the political leads to historicism; and a privileging of the institutional leads to Pharisaism. But where all four of these discourses are balanced and held in their inspired and, indeed, revealed positions, Mormonism proceeds faithfully with regard to, hopefully in light of, and charitably by its confidence in the founding events of the Restoration.

Here I come back, briefly, to the idea that the eventual discourse, within the Mormon experience, seems to redeem the other three discourses—to, as I said before, reorient or even recode these other discourses so that they become parts of a somewhat complex quadrangle of discourses that are, all taken together, unquestionably faithful, hopeful, and charitable. It is not difficult to see how the Mormon political discourse functions as a kind of



redeemed Greek discourse, presuming with the latter that there are faithful reasons, at times, to speak the language of a fully intelligible cosmos, to presume a common historicopolitical ground in order to keep the peace. And it is not difficult to see how the Mormon institutional discourse functions as a kind of redeemed Jewish discourse, taking the Church as unique, as privileged, or even as made up of the chosen or at least foreordained, but all this without pretending to prove the truth of the Church to outsiders by appeal to miracles or signs. And it is still easier to see how the Mormon fundamentalist discourse functions as a kind of redeemed mystical discourse—talk of revelations, miracles, and signs that have followed faith—though such talk remains always private. To embrace evental discourse without reserve, it seems, is to keep all of Mormonism’s discourses in their proper places, keeping political discourse quite distinct from institutional discourse, evental discourse from fundamentalist discourse, and so on.

Interestingly, one might well argue that the same redemption of discourses is at work in the writings of Paul himself, not only in Mormonism.⁵⁰ Indeed, this would be a good way of making sense of the literature

Badiou’s Paul and Four Mormon Discourses



that seeks systematically to uncover a strong Greek—and even Stoic—element in Paul’s writings,⁵¹ of the still more extensive (and increasingly popular) literature that seeks systematically to uncover Paul’s essential Jewishness,⁵² and of the somewhat dated but still important literature that seeks systematically to uncover Paul’s involvement

in mysticism.⁵³ It may be that Paul himself embraced a quadrangle of redeemed discourses, and that when he described himself as being “made all things to all men, that [he] might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22), he meant to point out precisely that every “fallen” discourse could be redeemed if it were oriented by the anchor of evental discourse. If this is right, it is something Badiou himself apparently misses.

Conclusion

I would like to come back to my original question: What does it mean to be Mormon? The strictly theoretical shape of an answer to this question

has, I think, become clear through this analysis. Recognizing that fidelity can be compromised as much by the temptation to fideism as by the temptations to Pharisaism, to ecumenism, and to fundamentalism, the faithful Mormon would be, in my reading, someone who is (1) faithfully dedicated to the unique events from which Mormonism takes its bearings, (2) consistently—but privately—exercised by the gifts of the Spirit, (3) always prepared to strike an apologetic figure when necessary to avoid compromising the force of the truth, and (4) vigilantly aware of the crucial importance of the institutional Church for the furtherance of the work. It is, perhaps, a delicate balance, one that is to be maintained through the rigorous embrace of faith, hope, and charity.

How each Latter-day Saint will weave together these three “theological virtues” in the tapestry of her or his own life, of course, remains a question *always* to be answered.

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1. It may potentially be a problem for my account here that by “Mormon” I have reference only to Mormonism as it revolves around The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, headquartered in Salt Lake City. There are, of course, other Mormonisms, and whether and how my argument bears on them is a question I do not intend to raise here.

2. See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West* (New York: Norton, 2000), 235–55.

3. Terry Eagleton, *The Gatekeeper: A Memoir* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2001), 148.

4. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1.

5. Other studies often coupled with Badiou’s are Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); and Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

6. Adam Miller, *Badiou, Marion and St Paul: Immanent Grace* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 151.

7. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 1.

8. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 2, 5, emphases added.

9. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 4.

10. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 14.

11. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 4–15. For more on Badiou’s understanding of the philosophical task set for the twenty-first century by the twentieth century, see Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2007).

12. It is worth pointing out as well that Badiou’s book has been recognized by scholars working in the field of Pauline studies. At a conference organized by John Caputo at Syracuse University in 2005, several eminent Paul scholars—including, most notably, E. P. Sanders and Dale Martin—were invited to respond to Badiou’s work. Though they did offer a few important criticisms, the respondents agreed that Badiou’s work presents a responsible and productive, if nonetheless philosophical, reading of Paul’s texts. See John D. Caputo and Linda Martín Alcoff, *St. Paul among the Philosophers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

13. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 40–54.

14. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 40, emphasis in original.

15. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 41, emphasis added.

16. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 41, emphasis added.

17. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 41, emphasis added. Stoicism was, of course, the dominant philosophy of the Hellenized world in which Christianity was born.

18. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 41, emphasis added.

19. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 41–42, emphases added.

20. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 42.

21. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 42, emphasis added.

22. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 42.

23. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 42, emphasis added.

24. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 45.

25. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 45, emphasis added.

26. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 45.

27. Latter-day Saints often talk about faith as if it were a question of the *future*, of committing oneself to the idea that this or that thing *will* happen. I suspect that this misunderstanding is rooted in a poor reading of Alma 32:21, where Alma explains that “if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.” It should be noted that Alma does not, as is often said, here provide a “definition” of faith. Rather, he explains that faith is never uncoupled from hope (just as it is never uncoupled from charity) without ceasing to be faith (not “faith is hope” but “if one *has* faith, one [*also*] *hopes*”). For Alma, faith, as a relation to the *past*, is inevitably tied to hope, the corresponding relationship of the faithful person to the *future*. As both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon also make clear, faith and hope are not without charity, which is a question of the faithful, hopeful person’s relationship to the *present*.

28. Note that Badiou, in another of his books, works out an entirely secular interpretation of these three temptations as the three definitions of evil for an ethics of truth. See Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (New York: Verso, 2001).

29. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 51.

30. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 51.

31. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 52, emphasis in original.

32. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 53, emphasis in original.

33. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 53. In 1 Corinthians 1:21, for instance, Paul speaks of the “foolishness of preaching.”

34. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 53. Badiou stigmatizes Blaise Pascal (in the *Pensées*) as the embodiment of such a relapse. See Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 47–54.

35. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 44.

36. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 45.

37. Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 44, emphasis added.

38. Jon M. Duncan, “Multiple Discourses in Early Mormon Religion” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1998), 47.

39. Thus what, for example, in Nauvoo from the outside inevitably appeared as so many “political vacillations,” as so many “switching[s] from the Democrats to the Whigs and back again,” might be said in the end to have actually been merely the surface manifestations of Mormonism’s commitment to an event—or a whole series of events—that they believed had universal implications, regardless of political bipartisanship. See Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 508.

40. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 119.

41. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 12.

42. It is of (likely no more than) passing interest that in their introduction to Badiou’s *Infinite Thought*, Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens say, regarding Badiou’s understanding of subjectivity, “[Badiou’s thought] has a dangerous ring, and one could be forgiven for comparing it at first glance to Mormon doctrine.” Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, trans. Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens (New York: Continuum, 2003), 7.

43. Adam Miller has spoken—and, importantly, in connection with Badiou—of the “uniquely Mormon event” (which he identifies, along with Badiou and Paul, as the Resurrection of Jesus Christ). He also states that Mormonism is “an entirely unique inflection of the event of Christ’s love into the profoundly new figure of the family.” I remain (after many conversations and much reflection) unsure about how my own conception of this event or these events maps onto his. See Adam Miller, “The Gospel as an Earthen Vessel,” *Element: A Journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 1 (Fall 2005): 56–58.

44. Little, if anything, seems to have been said before 1835 among the Latter-day Saints generally concerning the First Vision and the visits of John the Baptist and Peter, James, and John. Before the happening of those events became public knowledge—and before they became veritable evental cornerstones of the Restoration—it seems that the event on which Mormon fidelity was based was what might be called the “Book of Mormon event.” On the importance of this event for early Mormonism, see Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 51–55; James B. Allen, “The Significance of Joseph Smith’s ‘First Vision’ in Mormon Thought,” *Dialogue* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1966): 29–45.

45. The most revealing record on this point is perhaps Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983).

46. I choose the name “fundamentalist” discourse in part because it is precisely fundamentalism that results from the isolation or misappropriation of this discourse.

47. Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 226.

48. This is now section 101 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

49. The framework of the four discourses of Mormonism actually calls for a rereading of both nineteenth-century Utah Mormonism and the transition Mormonism made in the first decades of the twentieth century. Such a study, however, would have to be undertaken at greater length and, so, elsewhere.

50. Indeed, one might even call for an explicitly Mormon reading of Paul. Lamentably, studies of Paul are few and far between in the Latter-day Saint tradition. In the vein of my own philosophically/theologically inflected interests are James E. Faulconer, *Romans 1: Notes and Reflections* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), a volume that is soon to be succeeded by a revised and greatly expanded version entitled *Romans 1, 5–8: Notes and Reflections on the Life of Holiness*, at press with the Maxwell Institute in 2011; and Miller, *Badiou, Marion and St Paul*. More representatively LDS approaches to Paul can be found in Sidney B. Sperry, *Paul's Life and Letters* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955); Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983); Paul Y. Hoskisson, ed., *The Apostle Paul: His Life and His Testimony: The 23rd Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994); and, with a more heavily doctrinal orientation, Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973). In addition to these standard LDS approaches to Paul, more recent studies from LDS New Testament scholars deserve particular mention: Thomas A. Wayment, *From Persecutor to Apostle: A Biography of Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006); and Richard Nietzel Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006).

51. See, most notably, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000). See also relevant studies of Paul's relationship with Roman politics, for example: Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press, 2000).

52. See Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977); W. D. Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); and, more recently, N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) and James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2005).

53. The definitive study is Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998).