

The Intellectual Life of Mormonism

Reason, Faith, & Science Among the Latter-day Saints

PHIL 2010 | Fall, 2016 (draft #2)

Instructor | Brian D. Birch

Office Location | Tanner Humanities Center, TBA

Office Hours | T/TH 5:00-6:00 p.m. (or by appointment)

Contact Information | brian.birch@uvu.edu | 801.230.7168 (cell)

Course Description

This course explores the development and contemporary landscape of Mormon intellectual engagement. It examines key episodes in Latter-day Saint history that shaped the development of policies, practices, and movements related to the study of Mormonism. The course also addresses distinctive features of the tradition that have served to regulate and constrain forms of academic activity within the ranks of the LDS Church. Finally, the course will situate Mormon ideas and practices relative to perennial questions related to reason, faith, science, and revelation.

Key Themes

- The dynamics of faith and reason in Mormon thought
- Science, religion, and Mormon cosmology
- Revelation and authoritative discourse
- The role of theology and apologetics
- The mainstreaming of Mormon Studies

Course Requirements & Grading

- Students are required to complete the assigned readings and actively participate in class discussion.
- Students are required to complete a midterm and final examination consisting of essay questions taken from the readings, lectures, and class discussion.
- Students are required to submit a term paper of 3000-3500 words. All paper topics must be selected in consultation with the instructor. A précis and preliminary list of sources is required for submission by **October 20th**.
- Each student is required to prepare a 10-12 minute classroom presentation on their paper topic.
- Students are expected to post on the Canvas discussion board at least once per week (200-250 words) related to the topic currently under discussion.

Schedule & Readings

1. Introduction

- Introduction to content and scope of the course
- Overview of the Mormon tradition

2. The Nineteenth Century Context: Perspicuity, Common Sense, & Revelation

Topics

- Backdrop: The place of theology in American Christianity
- Scottish Common Sense thought
- The Mormon appeal to revelation
- The thought of Parley & Orson Pratt

Readings

- E. Brooks Holifield, "Restoration" and "Evidential Christianity" from *Theology in America* (Yale University Press, 2005)
- Parley Pratt, excerpts from *Key to the Science of Theology* (Deseret Book Co., 1978, reprint of 1855 edition)
- Orson Pratt, "Man is the Offspring of God..." in *The Essential Orson Pratt* (Signature Books, 1991)
- Catherine Brekus, "Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency" *Journal of Mormon History* 27:2 (Spring, 2011)
- Richard T. Hughes, "Two Restoration Traditions: Mormons and Churches of Christ in the Nineteenth Century" (*Journal of Mormon History* 19:1, Spring, 1993)
- Leigh Eric Schmidt, "Mormons, Freethinkers, and the Limits of Toleration" in *From the Outside Looking In: Essays on Mormon History, Theology, and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

3. The Early Twentieth Century: Roberts, Smith, Talmage, and Widtsoe

Topics

- Backdrop: The Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy
- James Talmage and the stabilization of Mormon theology
- Joseph Fielding Smith and question of anti-intellectualism
- The speculative theology of John Widtsoe
- B.H. Roberts and the regulation of authoritative discourse

Readings

- George Marsden, "The Protestant Crisis and the Rise of Fundamentalism, 1870-1930" from *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990)
- John Widtsoe, "The Meaning of Theology" and "How Knowledge is Gained" in *Rational Theology* (Signature Books, 1998, reprint of 1915 edition).
- Joseph Fielding Smith, "Conflict Between Science and Religion" (1&2) and "Fundamental Doctrines of the Church" in *Man: His Origin and Destiny* (Deseret Book Co., 1954).

- Matthew Bowman, “James Talmage, B.H. Roberts, and Confessional History in a Secular Age” in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy* (Oxford University Press, 2014)
- Molly Worthen, “Errand from the Wilderness” from *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford University Press, 2014)
- Philip Barlow, “The Mormon Response to Higher Criticism” from *Mormons and the Bible*, updated edition (Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Richard Sherlock, “‘We Can See No Advantage of a Continuation of the Discussion’: The Roberts/Smith/Talmage Affair” (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 13:3, Fall, 1980)

4. From the “Chicago Experiment” to the “Charted Course”

Topics

- Joseph Merrill and the Chicago Divinity School pipeline
- J. Reuben Clark and the retrenchment of LDS education
- Joseph Fielding Smith vs. Heber Snell on biblical studies

Readings

- J. Reuben Clark, “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994, revised and reprinted version of the 1938 edition)
- Casey Paul Griffiths, “The Chicago Experiment: Finding the Voice and Charting the Course of Religious Education” *BYU Studies* 49:4 (2010)
- Sterling McMurrin & Jackson Newell, “Teacher of Religion” from *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Signature Books, 1996)
- Richard Sherlock, “Faith and History: The Snell Controversy” (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12:1, 1979)

5. Institutional Contexts: Brigham Young University, University of Utah, and Stanford

Topics

- The Chamberlain brothers and the BYU purge
- Hugh Nibley and the origins of contemporary Mormon apologetics
- Lowell Bennion, Sterling McMurrin and the liberal voice in Mormonism
- The origins of *Dialogue* and *Sunstone*

Readings

- Devery Anderson, “A History of Dialogue, Part One: The Early Years, 1965-1971” (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32:2, Summer, 1999)
- Claudia Bushman, “The Intellectual Activities of Recent Years” in *Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-day Saints in Modern America* (Praeger, 2006)
- Brian Birch, “The ‘Old Orthodoxy’: Sterling McMurrin and the Development of Mormon Thought” in *Faith, Reason, Conscience, and Conflict: The Paths of Lowell Bennion, Sterling McMurrin, and Obert Tanner* (University of Utah Press, forthcoming)
- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “The Pink Dialogue and Beyond” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14:4 (Winter, 1981)
- Eugene England, “On Finding Truth and God: From Hope to Knowledge to Skepticism to Faith” in *A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars* (Cannon Press, 1986)

- Lowell Bennion & Chauncy Riddle, “The Liberal and Conservative Voice in Mormonism” (transcript from 1962 debate)
- Sterling McMurrin, “Religion and the Denial of History” in *Reason, Religion, and Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (University of Utah Press, 1982)
- Hugh Nibley, “Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic in *The Ancient State* (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1981)
- Hugh Nibley, Letter to Sterling McMurrin (August 23, 1967)

6. “New Mormon” vs. “Faithful” Histories

Topics

- Backdrop: Methodological and epistemological issues in historical scholarship
- The rise and fall of Leonard Arrington as LDS Church Historian
- The politics of the New Mormon History

Readings

- Leonard Arrington, “Writing Latter-day Saint History: Philosophy and Testimony” in *Adventures of a Church Historian* (University of Illinois Press, 1998)
- Thomas Alexander, “Historiography and the New Mormon History: A Historian’s Perspective (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19: 3 (Fall, 1986)
- Richard Bushman, “Faithful History” in *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays* (Columbia University Press, 2007)
- Jan Shipp, “Richard Lyman Bushman, The Story of Joseph Smith and Mormonism, and the New Mormon History” *Journal of American History* 94:2 (September, 2007)
- Richard Bushman, “What’s New in Mormon History: A Response to Jan Shipp” *Journal of American History* 94:2 (September, 2007)
- Gregory Prince, “Faith and Doubt as Partners in Mormon History” *Leonard Arrington Mormon History Lecture Series* (Utah State University Press, 2014).
- Edwin Gaustad, “History and Theology: The Mormon Connection” in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Signature Books, 1992)
- Boyd Packer, “The Mantle is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect” *BYU Studies* 21:3 (1981)
- Louis Midgley, “The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter with Secular Modernity” in *By Study and Also by Faith*. Vol. 2 (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990)
- David Bohn, “Unfounded Claims, Impossible Expectations: A Critique of the New Mormon History” in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Signature Books, 1992)

7. Revelation, Authoritative Discourse, and Boundary Maintenance

Topics

- Backdrop: Authoritative discourse in religious communities
- The “September Six” episode
- Revelation theology and its implications for Mormon Studies
- The dynamics of LDS Seminaries and Institutes
- The role of the “Gospel Topics” essays in contemporary LDS discourse

Readings

- Terryl Givens, "The Iron Rod and the Liahona: Authority and Radical Freedom from *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Dallin Oaks, "Alternate Voices" (*Ensign*, May, 1989)
- Margaret Toscano, "Is There a Place for Heavenly Mother in Mormon Theology: An Investigation into Discourses of Power" in *Discourses on Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities* (Greg Kofford Books, 2007)
- Armand Mauss, "Mormon Fundamentalism: The Institutional Matrix" from *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (University of Illinois Press, 1994)
- Lavina Fielding Anderson, "The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership: A Contemporary Chronology" (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26:1, Spring, 1993)
- Grant Underwood, "Revelation, Text, and Revision: Insight from the Book of Commandments and Revelations" *BYU Studies* 48:3 (2009)
- Brian Birch, "'What power shall stay the heavens?' Continuing Revelation and Doctrinal Authority Among the Latter-day Saints" in *The Expanded Canon: Perspectives on Mormonism and Sacred Texts* (Maxwell Institute for Latter-day Saint Scholarship, forthcoming)
- David Holland, "Revelation and the Open Canon in Mormonism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism* (Oxford University Press, 2015)

8. Reason, Faith, and Theology

Topics

- Backdrop: Faith and reason in philosophy of religion
- Systematic vs. narrative theologies
- The discourse of Mormon atheology
- Fideism and the domestication of reason

Readings

- Kathleen Flake, "Translating Time: The Nature and Function of Joseph Smith's Narrative Canon" *Journal of Religion* 87:4 (October, 1987)
- James Faulconer, "Why a Mormon Won't Drink Coffee But May Have a Coke: The Atheological Character of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (*Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 2:2, Fall, 2006)
- Sterling McMurrin, *Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology* (University of Utah Press, 1959)
- Terryl L. Givens & Fiona Givens, from *The Crucible of Doubt: Reflections on the Quest for Faith* (Deseret Book Company, 2014)
- Philip Barlow, "Mind and Spirit in Mormon Thought" in *The Oxford Companion to Mormonism* (Oxford University Press, 2015)
- Dallin Oaks, "Reason and Revelation" from *The Lord's Way* (Deseret Book Co., 1991)
- Brian Birch, "Faith Seeking Understanding: Mormon Atheology and the Question of Fideism" in *Mormonism at the Crossroads of Philosophy and Theology* (Kofford Books, 2012)
- Stephen Davis, "Philosophical Theology for Mormons: Some Suggestions from an Outsider" *Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 3: 1&2 (Spring & Fall, 2007)
- Richley Crapo, "Grass Roots Deviance from Official Doctrine: A Latter-day Saint (Mormon) Folk Beliefs" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26:4 (1987)

9. Mormon Studies and Apologetics

Topics

- Backdrop: Apologetic discourse the Christian theological tradition
- Mormon apologetics and the secular academy
- The institutionalization of Mormon Studies
- The Joseph Smith Papers Project

Readings

- Stephen Taysom, "Mormon Studies and Method: The Rigors of the Academic Study of Religion and the Maturity of Mormon Studies" (*Mormon Studies Review*, vol. 1, 2014)
- Spencer Fluhman, "Friendship: An Editor's Introduction" (*Mormon Studies Review*, vol. 1, 2014)
- LDS Newsroom Commentaries, "'Mormon Studies' and the Value of Education" and "A Mormon Worldview" (2007 & 2008)
- Julie Smith, "Apologetics" (Paper presented at the Faith, Reason, the Critical Study of Mormon Apologetics panel, November 6th, 2015)
- Brian Birch, "In Defense of Methodological Pluralism: Theology, Apologetics, and the Critical Study of Mormonism" (*Mormon Studies Review*, vol. 1, 2014)
- Ralph Hancock, "Keeping Faith in Provo: Warning of the Dangers of Secularism for Brigham Young University" (*First Things*, March, 2014)
- Daniel Peterson, "The Role of Apologetics in Mormon Studies" (*Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 2, 2012)

10. Contemporary Applications

Topics

- Selected areas of contemporary study

Readings

- Rosemary Radford Reuther & Camille Williams, "A Dialogue on Feminist Theology" in *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* (Mercer University Press, 2007)
- Paul Reeve, "Black, White, and Mormon: One Drop" in *Religion of A Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford University Press, 2015)
- Kristine Haglund, "Arrested Development: Mormon Independent Publishing in the Age of the Blog" *Juvenile Instructor*, April 9, 2009.
- Charles Cohen, "The Construction of the Mormon People" in *From the Outside Looking In: Essays on Mormon History, Theology, and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2015)
- Patrick Mason, "Faith and Trust in a Secular Age" from *Planted: Belief and Faith in an Age of Doubt* (Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2015)