A Defense of the Authority of Church Doctrine

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Authority is a key concept in Mormonism. If one were to ask most Mormons what makes their religion different from ordinary Christianity, many—perhaps most—would respond that Mormons believe in continuing revelation, modern prophets, additional scripture, and the restoration of priesthood powers. All of these stock elements in Mormonism involve claims of one sort or another to special authority. Given the central place that the concept of authority occupies in Mormonism, there has been surprisingly little disciplined reflection about the concept among Mormon intellectuals and scholars.[1] This chapter seeks to begin filling this gap by asking a fairly simple question: "Can the authority of Church doctrine be justified?" My conclusion is that, given a fairly weak[2] set of assumptions, a number of arguments justify the authority of Church doctrine over believing Latter-day Saints.

In exploring these arguments I hope to illuminate some of the issues with which Mormon thinkers must grapple if they are to make sense of the important concept of authority in their theology. My project in this paper, however, is limited. I do not purport to be talking about all aspects of authority within Mormonism. In particular, I am not addressing the personal authority of the leaders of the Church per se, nor am I am trying to grapple with the idea of priesthood. Rather, this chapter is concerned with a particular kind of authority—namely, the authority of Church doctrine. Finally, I do not seek to justify the authority of Church doctrine to religious skeptics. My goal is not to convert the unconverted but rather to show that many of the intuitions and implicit assumptions of ordinary Latter-day Saints with regard to the authority of Church doctrine can be

made explicit and justified by arguments resting on premises that are widely shared among Mormons.

Mormons regularly invoke the idea of Church doctrine to differentiate between those teachings and practices that have some claim on them and those teachings and practices that are merely opinions or suggestions. For example, Heber might claim that evolution is a false and evil teaching. Brigham then responds by saying, "That is just your opinion. That is not Church doctrine." Likewise, Brigham might suggest that the Word of Wisdom, properly understood, requires abstention from all meat. Heber then responds by saying, "That is just your interpretation. That is not Church doctrine." The clear implication in both exchanges is that, were the opinion or practice in question Church doctrine, it would have a claim on Heber or Brigham that it does not otherwise have.

I have presented arguments elsewhere about the problem of identifying what is or is not Church doctrine.[3] Rather than restating those arguments here, I will simply restate my conclusions. Mormons lack a clear rule that allows them to identify what is or is not Church doctrine. The various possibilities—teachings that have been formally added to the standard works, statements that have been formally accepted in general conference, statements that have been made by prophets and apostles in the appropriate context, etc.—all turn out to be over- or under-inclusive when examined in detail. To be sure, all of these proposed rules are useful in orienting us toward Church doctrine, even if they are not foolproof methods for identifying it. Nevertheless, we do have unambiguous cases of Church doctrine. It is clearly Church doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Savior of humankind and that Mormons should not drink coffee or alcohol. Rather than relying on a rule of recognition for identifying Church doctrine, Mormons rely on a hermeneutic approach. We determine what is or is not Church doctrine by offering interpretations—stories, if you will—that seek to make sense of clear instances of Church doctrine against the backdrop of Mormon scriptures, teachings, history, and practices. In offering this interpretation, we seek to present Mormon texts, practices, and history in the best possible light, not for any apologetic purpose but rather because, in seeking what is normative, we reject interpretations that we would regard as normatively less attractive. This does not mean that Church doctrine is simply a matter of what we think is best. It is not. It is a matter of charitably interpreting Mormon practices, texts, and experience.

Because this is a complicated and inherently normative task, the

precise contours of Church doctrine are always contestable. This characterization needn't imply that there are no right answers to the question of whether something is Church doctrine. It simply means that we are unlikely to arrive at a formula that will allow us to definitively answer the question in every circumstance. Rather than relying on an intellectual formula, the Church seems to cope with the potential problems of doctrinal disagreements ethically and institutionally. Ethically, we are told not to contend in anger about points of doctrine. Institutionally, the practical difficulties of doctrinal disagreement can be resolved by the fiat of whoever has the stewardship for a particular institutional setting. Thus, doctrinal discussions in a ward Sunday School class are "managed" by an ethic of being charitable to one another in our disagreement and by the bishop's ability to direct teachers to teach in a particular way or release them from their callings. Neither of these coping mechanisms, however, requires that we have a formula for incontestably laying to rest what is or is not Church doctrine in every case.

Given this understanding of Church doctrine (and it is the understanding that I will assume for the rest of this article), can its authority be justified? Ultimately, I believe that the answer is yes, but to understand why, we must first have a clearer notion of what we mean by authority.

On the Nature of Authority

Ultimately authority is a form of reason giving. The manifest successes of philosophical modernism and philosophical liberalism, both of which rest to a greater or lesser extent on overt hostility to the notion of authority, however, can make it difficult to recognize this fact. Indeed, for some people authority seems like the antithesis of reason giving. The oddity of authority as a form of reason giving comes from the fact that authority offers a peculiar kind of reason. Consider the following dialogue.

> Heber: I think that drinking wine should be fine for everyone. Alcohol needn't be destructive if it's consumed in moderation, and science has shown that modest amounts of wine are good for your heart.
> Brigham: True enough and I suppose that makes sense. However, as a matter of Church doctrine, Mormons must abstain from alcohol. Therefore, Mormons ought not to drink wine.

Heber offers two reasons for his conclusion, namely that moderate alcohol consumption isn't destructive and can actually help one's heart. Brigham denies his conclusion, but he doesn't deny Heber's reasons. In-

deed, he concedes that they are true. Rather, he offers Church doctrine as a reason for reaching the opposite conclusion. Yet on its face, Church doctrine does not consist of a denial of the truth of Heber's reasons. Rather the way that Brigham invokes Church doctrine suggests that Heber's reasons simply don't matter. The authority of Church doctrine excludes them.

In his classic work on the concept of authority, Oxford philosopher Joseph Raz focused on this exclusionary quality of authoritative reasons. When one offers authority as a reason, he argued, it interacts with other reasons in a special way. It simply excludes them. For this reason, Raz spoke of authority as an "exclusionary" reason. He wrote: "There is a sense in which if one accepts the legitimacy of an authority one is committed to following it blindly. One can be very watchful that it shall not overstep its authority and be sensitive to the presence of non-excluded considerations. But barring these possibilities, one is to follow the authority regardless of one's view of the merits of the case (that is blindly). One may form a view on the merits but so long as one follows the authority this is an academic exercise of no practical importance."[4]

Hence, the denial of authority consists not in disagreement with it, but rather in the denial that an authority has the ability to exclude other reasons. Likewise, to accept an authority involves more than simply agreeing with it. Paradoxically, one can agree with everything that an authority claims and nevertheless deny that it is an authority. At the same time, one can disagree with everything that an authority says and yet still accept it as authoritative.

The example of the law illustrates how authority operates as a reason. It may be that one follows the law only because one regards it as embodying desirable policies. One is punctiliously obedient to its demands, but only because one happens to agree with them. In such a case, one does not grant to it authority. In contrast, one might believe that, as a substantive matter, the policies embodied by the law are misguided. Yet if one regards the law as authoritative, then this disagreement becomes, as Raz says, "an academic exercise of no practical importance." One follows the law because it provides an exclusionary reason for acting.

We can identify Church doctrine as a species of authority precisely because it purports to be an exclusionary reason. This fact provides us with a structure for our arguments about its possible authority. In order to show that the authority of Church doctrine is justified, we need to have ar-

guments for why it should act as an exclusionary reason. This, in turn, means that we cannot justify the authority of Church doctrine solely by reference to its substantive content. For example, one cannot defend the authority of the Word of Wisdom by marshalling arguments for its beneficial health effects. Indeed, if it were possible to compile an exhaustive catalog of every Church doctrine and then one by one offer arguments in support of their substantive content, one would not have demonstrated the authority of Church doctrine. In a sense, each of these arguments would consist of a rejection of the question of authority, and all that their success would produce would be accidental agreement with Church doctrine. Put in concrete terms, a person who abstains from tobacco because he or she believes that it is harmful does not thereby accept the authority of the Word of Wisdom.

The key question for the authority of Church doctrine thus comes in justifying its claims in those cases where we are otherwise disposed to reject its substantive conclusions. The question is vital for both practical and philosophical reasons. Practically, it is of importance because it is precisely in those cases that Church doctrine is potentially the most valuable. To the extent that Church doctrine simply tracks my substantive beliefs there is a sense in which it is not really all that practically important to me. Furthermore, if I am willing to grant legitimacy to the claims of Church doctrine only in those cases where I already substantively agree with it, there is a sense in which it lacks any power to teach or change me. It is precisely those instances where I find myself in disagreement with the substantive content of Church doctrine that it has the real possibility of altering or changing my beliefs and behaviors.

Philosophically, the point at which we disagree with the substantive content of Church doctrine is key because this is precisely the point at which we are confronted with the question of its authority. Accordingly, any argument for the authority of Church doctrine must meet a simple test. It must justify the claim of Church doctrine over Latter-day Saints in precisely those cases where they are otherwise disposed to believe or act differently. Such an argument must therefore be independent of the substantive content of Church doctrine in any particular instances. Only by being substance-neutral can the argument provide an exclusionary reason. For example, suppose that one believes that—all things being equal—women should have absolutely symmetrical institutional authority with men. An argument for the authority of Church doctrine would jus-

tify the denial of the priesthood to women without reference to why the practice is substantively desirable.

There are at least three such arguments for the authority of Church doctrine that meet this criterion of substantive neutrality: the argument from covenant, the argument from epistemic advantage, and the argument from community participation.

The Argument from Covenant

The first basis for the authority of Church doctrine is covenant. Promises, like authority, provide exclusionary reasons for acting. Consider another dialogue between Heber and Brigham.

> Brigham: We should go to Emma's birthday party. She has been very kind to us, and I think that if we went it would make her happy.
> Heber: I agree. Unfortunately, I have already promised to attend Eliza's birthday party, which is at the same time.

The structure of the reasons in this dialogue should be familiar. Brigham has offered reasons for acting that Heber accepts in the abstract. Yet his abstract agreement has become "an academic exercise of no practical importance." The reason is that Brigham's reasons have been excluded from Heber's consideration by the force of Heber's promise. Promises, however, have other qualities beyond the exclusionary nature of the reasons that they offer. Most prominently, they seem to have the ability to transform wholly unrequired action into an obligation. Even assuming that Heber has no other relationship to Eliza, his promise is sufficient to create an obligation to attend her party.

Some theorists of promising have found this bootstrap quality of promising unacceptable, proposing theories of promise-keeping that link the obligation to keep a promise to the promise's substantive content. For example, medieval jurists argued that, in making a promise, we are always seeking some end. The obligation to keep a promise is linked to the end that the promise-maker is pursuing. Hence, for example, a promise that has the goal to further the torture of innocent babies does not create an obligation. On the other hand, a promise whose end is the expression of some virtue, such as generosity or kindness, does create an obligation.[5]

Other theorists have embraced promissory bootstrapping. In particular, writers in the tradition of liberal political philosophy have argued that the force of a promise is an extension of a commitment to personal freedom, allowing people the liberty of, in effect, creating their own moral

universe.[6] Indeed, promise-making has proved so attractive a normative basis for liberal thinkers that those in the social contract tradition have sought to show that virtually *all* political obligations—and perhaps social obligations as well—can be founded on the power of promises.[7]

Both of these approaches, however, see promises as providing exclusionary reasons.[8] It is true that the teleological theories of promise-making offered by medieval jurists did not see the obligations of promises as independent of their ends. This doesn't mean, however, that they believed that promissory obligations lacked the ability to trump other reasons. Rather, in effect they claimed that to promise for an unworthy end constituted a kind of failure, analogous to the person who attempts to make a promise but because of some misadventure does not do so. The wicked-ended promise attempts to create obligations but fails to do so. On the other hand, a morally successful promise does, in this view, create ordinary promissory obligations. The liberal theory of promising, of course, is premised on acceptance of the exclusionary nature of promises. It simply disagrees with the older, medieval theory about the conditions necessary to create a morally successful promise.

At numerous points in their religious lives, Mormons make covenants, which, at least in part, take the form of promises. Provided that we can legitimately interpret those covenants as containing a promise to accept the normative claims of Church doctrine, then they provide an argument that meets the conditions set forth above for a successful theory of Church doctrine's authority. A promise explains why Church doctrine requires us to reject otherwise compelling reasons and does so independent of the particular content of Church doctrine—although, in the teleological view of promising, the underlying end for which one enters covenants does matter.

We are therefore presented with two questions. First, do Mormon covenants contain a promise to accept Church doctrine? Second, do Mormons in fact successfully make such promises? The first question goes to the meaning of the covenants that Mormons make. The second goes to conditions under which they enter their covenants.

There are three main contexts in which Mormons make covenants: baptism, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and the temple. A fourth possibility is when Mormons sustain their leaders in ward, stake, and general conferences. The first and most obvious objection is to point out that nowhere in any of these rituals do words to the effect "I promise to submit

to Church doctrine" explicitly appear. Despite its initial plausibility, how-ever, this objection is considerably less powerful than it appears. Its prob-lem lies in the fact that the meaning of our linguistic acts frequently—in-deed, almost always—exceeds our explicit statements. There are at least two important ways in which this happens. First, there may simply be a well-established but implicit understanding of certain actions. Second, linguistic action will include some assumptions that are necessary for it to be successful, even if these assumptions are not necessarily a part of our social understanding.

Consider two separate situations. In the first situation, Heber, Brigham, Eliza, and Emma are sitting around. Heber suspects that one of them has earlier received a plane ticket to New York in the mail, but he does not know which one it was. He asks, "Are any of you going to New York?" Brigham replies, "Yes. I will go to New York next week." In the sec-ond situation, Heber asks Eliza if she will go to New York and find his lost friend. He extends his hand to Eliza and asks, "Will you go to New York next week for me?" She shakes hands with him and responds, "Yes. I will go to New York next week." Both Brigham and Eliza uttered precisely the same words, yet their actions have quite different meanings. Brigham has merely made a statement that predicts his future actions. Eliza, in con-trast, has made a commitment that includes going to New York and find-ing Heber's lost friend. We can infer this latter meaning not only from the context in which it was given—Heber's concern for his friend and his man-ifest desire to extract a commitment from Eliza—but also from the fact that they shook on it, a ritual with a well-understood meaning of commitment. In other words, the unstated meaning is implicitly understood on the basis of context and social convention.

The second way in which the meaning of some linguistic act can ex-ceed its explicit words has to do with the necessary assumptions involved in what we say. It is a matter of content that is logically necessary for some linguistic act to have the meaning (explicit and implicit) that it does. Legal philosopher Lon Fuller gave the analogy of an absent-minded professor who walks out of his office door. The professor doesn't explicitly assume that the floor outside his office door will be there, yet the floor's existence is a necessary assumption of his actions.[9] When Brigham says, with com-plete earnestness, that he is going to New York City, his statement carries a host of assumptions. For example, it assumes that New York City has not been utterly destroyed by a gigantic, rampaging ape, even though the ab-

sence of rampaging apes is not part of our implicit understanding of Brigham's statement. Rather, it is a logical necessity for the statement to be true. Brigham can't go to New York City if New York City no longer exists. Hence, in understanding the meaning of linguistic acts, we must also look to the implicit understanding of the meaning in the context in which the linguistic acts are used and to the assumptions that are logically necessary for both our explicit and implicit understandings, in addition to the literal meaning of the words.

In understanding whether baptism involves a promise to follow Church doctrine, we must first establish the social meaning of baptism, since promises are fundamentally social acts. While the scriptures do not explicitly state that at baptism one promises to be bound by Church doctrine, what they do say about baptism, coupled with common teachings within the Church, seems sufficient to support an implicit understanding of such a promise. Restoration scriptures contain several prominent discussions of baptism. In the Book of Mormon, Nephi teaches that Christ's baptism was necessary to show an example to all. In explaining the meaning of baptism, Nephi states that it shows a willingness to keep commandments (2 Ne. 9:14). Later, Alma the Elder teaches that baptism is a covenant to serve God and keep his commandments (Mosiah 18:8–10). Finally, Moroni notes that baptism causes one to be numbered among the Church and notes that one loses this status by an act of the Church itself (Moro. 6:4, 7). Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants also provides a summary of the procedure and meaning of baptism. Pointedly, the passage on baptism begins with a colophon stating "Duties of the members of the Church after they are baptized" (D&C 20:68), implying that baptism creates obligations for Church members.

Church publications also support the idea that baptism contains an implicit promise to follow Church doctrine. For example, the Church's *True to the Faith* booklet, a brief compendium of Church teachings, states: "When you are baptized, you enter into a covenant with God. You promise to take upon yourself the name of Jesus Christ, keep His commandments, and serve Him to the end. . . . When you take upon yourself the name of Jesus Christ, you see yourself as His. You put Him and His work first in your life."[10]

More pointedly, in *Preach My Gospel,* the manual that provides the basis for instructing prospective converts, baptism is explained as bringing with it an obligation to keep a host of commandments commonly associ-

ated with Church doctrine including following the prophet and obeying the laws of chastity, tithing, the fast, and conforming to the provisions of the Word of Wisdom.[11] In citing these sources, I am not offering them as authorities on the meaning of baptism, but as evidence of a particular social understanding—namely, that when one is baptized, one promises to be bound by Church doctrine.[12]

One can make a second kind of argument that baptism involves a covenant to follow Church doctrine. Rather than arguing that baptism involves an unstated but well-understood promise to follow Church doctrine, one can argue that the presence of such a promise is a necessary assumption of what is in fact baptism's well-understood meaning. I take it to be uncontroversial that baptism creates obligations. A person who is baptized is now a member of the Church and as such has a host of obligations that he or she did not previously have. The question thus becomes how one accounts for the fact that these obligations, which did not exist before, are now thought to exist. Put another way, because baptism is unquestionably seen as a gateway to certain kinds of obligations, as an analytic matter it necessarily involves something that creates these obligations. This "something" is a necessary assumption of the act of baptism in the same way that the floor is a necessary assumption of the absent-minded professor who steps out of his office, regardless of what the professor thinks or understands. Promise-making seems like a particularly good candidate for this obligation-creating something. What we need is a concept that allows us to explain why something that was previously unobjectionable or non-obligatory—such as the moderate consumption of wine or fasting on the first Sunday of the month—now becomes forbidden or obligatory. The concept of promise would fill this role perfectly, precisely because one of the things that promises do is to make obligatory what was previously not obligatory.

There is, however, a very powerful conceptual competitor to promise: divine command. In this view, the obligations associated with baptism do not exist because of any kind of promise on the part of the person being baptized, but rather because God commands them. The divine command argument can take one of two forms. Under the strong divine command argument, all of the obligations associated with baptism are actually universal and the unbaptized are either sinning in ignorance or willfully disregarding divine demands. This position, however, is ultimately untenable. For example, for the obligations associated with baptism to be uni-

versal it would have to be the case that the moderate consumption of wine is wrong for all people. Not only is there no support for such a proposition in the text of the Word of Wisdom, which is explicitly directed to Church members (D&C 89:1), but it seems to be rejected by other scriptures indicating that the responsible consumption of alcohol is unobjectionable. Most prominent, of course, are Jesus's apparently positive attitude toward wine, witnessed by the miracle at the feast of Cana (John 2:1–11) and the accounts of his drinking wine with his apostles (Matt. 26:26–29). Hence, even if one thinks that some of the obligations commonly associated with baptism are universalizable, it is difficult to believe that all of them are.

Under the weak version of the divine command argument, the obligations associated with baptism are not necessarily universal—it really was just fine to drink wine before becoming a Mormon—but nevertheless find their basis, not in promises, but in divine commands. In this view, some of God's commands, rather than taking the form of "thou shalt . . . ," take the form of "Mormons shalt . . . " or "those who have been baptized shalt . . ." For certain behaviors, this argument seems entirely adequate; but if applied to all of the uniquely Mormon obligations associated with baptism, it runs into two problems. First, in many instances our understanding of what is or is not a divine command is decisively mediated by Church doctrine. The Word of Wisdom and temple work provide two striking examples. One can plausibly argue that the text of the Word of Wisdom endorses the drinking of beers and ales. Verse 17 commends the use of "barley for all useful animals, and for mild drinks" (D&C 89:17). In historical context, one might claim, "mild drinks" are opposed to "hard drinks." The distinction being drawn was between beers or ales and higher alcohol-content beverages such as whiskey or bourbon. Yet any Latter-day Saint who invokes verse 17 to justify drinking beer will be met with the objection that, whatever its merits, this interpretation of verse 17 is not Church doctrine.

Likewise, Latter-day Saints view themselves as having an obligation to perform temple ordinances in behalf of the dead. Yet there are no scriptural passages commanding that vicarious sealings and endowments be performed. Only baptism for the dead makes an appearance in the scriptures (D&C 128). The obligation to perform vicarious sealings and endowments is derived by expansively interpreting scriptural passages in light of later historical practice and consistent teachings within the Church. In other words, we discover the obligation to perform endow-

ments and sealings in behalf of the dead, not from any unmediated divine command or even from a clear sacred text, but from Church doctrine itself. Yet this process suggests that we have some sort of background obligation to follow Church doctrine that then makes it possible to identify particular obligations as divine commands. Put another way, the obligation to follow Church doctrine seems to be logically prior to any of the various interpretations that we use to discover particular divine commands.

Second, even if certain obligations might be plausibly—if problematically—traced back to a divine command, some of our obligations seem to have no basis other than Church doctrine itself. There are many aspects of Church government that fall into this category. For example, there does not seem to be a strong basis for thinking that there is a direct divine command that the president of a ward Sunday School should be a priesthood holder. Yet these are nevertheless practices that seem to be embedded in the structure of Church doctrine such that a bishop who called a woman to be a Sunday School president would plausibly be deemed to have violated an obligation to follow Church doctrine. In the absence of some reason for supposing that God has commanded in general terms that Mormons should follow Church doctrine, a promise to obey Church doctrine seems the better way of accounting for such obligations.[13]

To the extent that baptism involves a promise to follow Church doctrine, one might nevertheless object that, when one is baptized, one fails to make a binding promise. For example, the words "I promise to pay you $1,000 next Thursday" unambiguously purport to create an obligation. One could nevertheless say that these words fail to create any obligation. No one would claim, for instance, that saying these words in response to a threat to torture your only son creates a morally binding obligation. Likewise, if we were to trick an Esperanto speaker with no understanding of English into saying these words, assuring him—in Esperanto—that they actually mean, "I enjoy eating fresh oysters with my Diet Coke," no obligation to pay the $1,000 has been created.

There are, of course, many different ways in which one might fail to make a promise by being baptized. For example, presumably children baptized by over-zealous missionaries in a "swimming party" have not made any sort of a binding promise. Likewise, a person who is baptized in the mistaken belief that in so doing he is becoming a Zen Unitarian or joining the Priory of Zion has probably failed to make a promise to follow Church doctrine. Such idiosyncratic failures to promise, however, present no real

challenge to the authority of Church doctrine per se because they go only to the absence of obligation in particular cases. Of far greater concern are objections suggesting that there is some systemic failure in the practice of baptism itself that keeps it from creating obligations in most cases. It seems to me that there are two main such objections.

First, one could argue that, when a person is baptized, he or she doesn't really understand Church doctrine and therefore cannot intend to be bound by all of its strictures. It is a mistake, however, to think that the meaning and obligation of a promise is exhausted by our conscious intentions. Consider a promise to care for an ailing loved one. When one makes such a promise, it is entirely possible that one has no conscious understanding of the precise nature of the obligations that one has undertaken. The nature of the ailment, its progress, and the course of treatment may all be unknown. Yet one's promise is neither meaningless nor limitless. One has simply undertaken the specific—but unknown—obligations that flow from one's promise, an obligation undertaken with the understanding that it would have unforeseen requirements. If the arguments offered thus far are correct, persons being baptized should understand that they are becoming a member of the Church and committing to following Church doctrine. Like the promise to care for an ailing loved one, the specific obligations of the promise may be unknown; but they flow from a fairly straightforward and well-understood commitment.

The second systemic objection is that, because many Mormons are baptized as children at age eight, they lacked the capacity to make a promise so important as the promise associated with baptism. This objection could take at least two forms. First, one could argue that an eight-year-old cannot understand the obligations associated with baptism. Second, one could argue that, given the fact that most eight-year-olds likely received baptism at the instigation of adults whom they are practically unable to resist, any promise made at baptism is coerced. There are two responses to both arguments. First, one can simply deny that eight-year-olds lack freedom or understanding. In this view, while eight-year-olds lack sophisticated theological understanding, they nevertheless grasp that, by being baptized, they agree to be bound by Church doctrine. Likewise, eight-year-olds who are baptized to please adults nevertheless do so willingly. This line of argument, however, is somewhat less than compelling.

The second response is to reject the idea that the promises associated with baptism necessarily occur at the discrete moment of baptism. In

contract law, for example, it is possible to make a legally binding promise even if the discrete moment of promising cannot be located. Rather the promise can arise out of a course of dealing whose cumulative effect can be understood as giving rise to a legitimate and identifiable commitment. Participation in the Church, especially the ordinance of the sacrament, can likewise become a kind of cumulative promising. It is a commonplace of Mormon teachings that, when we partake of the sacrament, we renew our baptismal covenants. Hence, even a member of the Church baptized as a child without full freedom or understanding has an opportunity each week to make—or not make—the same promises that he or she may have failed to make at the time of baptism. Emerging from this process of repeated rituals comes a promise to follow Church doctrine that is both fully voluntary and sufficiently informed to create binding obligations.[14]

The Argument from Epistemic Advantage

Many Mormons, if asked to justify the authority of Church doctrine, would likely reply that Church doctrine has authority because it is given by God.[15] This claim is problematized by the fact that Church doctrine can be identified only by recourse to a complex set of interpretive arguments. We lack a clear rule that allows us to identify Church doctrine in all cases, let alone one that will vouchsafe to us the assurance that every aspect of Church doctrine is dictated directly by God. Church doctrine emerges from our interpretation of Mormon texts, practices, and history. Whatever the role of God in the production of these texts, practices, and history, they always and necessarily involve more than simply the divine mind, and accordingly they cannot be unproblematically identified with the literal word of God.

Nevertheless, despite these necessary concessions, we can still craft an argument for the authority of Church doctrine based on revelation from God. Ultimately, the objection to justifying the authority of Church doctrine on these grounds lies in its apparent fallibility. Even granting that God is infallible, so the objection goes, Church doctrine is always and necessarily mediated through fallible human beings. Given its fallibility, Church doctrine cannot operate as an authority. The argument for the fallibility of Church doctrine is, in my opinion, quite strong. The scriptures themselves declare that they contain errors. It is a fairly easy matter to locate statements by prophets that have proved to be mistaken. Church practices change, and some of these policies have been mistaken. To the

extent that Church doctrine consists of an interpretation of texts, history, and practices that are fallible, it will itself be fallible.

To be sure, the process of interpretation can exclude certain mistakes and errors from Church doctrine. For example, one can dismiss mistaken prophetic statements by insisting that they represent personal opinions rather than binding Church doctrine. But as long as humanity is involved in the production of the materials from which Church doctrine emerges, it will be fallible. Even when Church doctrine is identified according to the most charitable possible interpretation, it will no doubt contain errors, some of which we may be able to identify and many of which we cannot see. The final step of the argument is to claim that fallibility precludes authority. To be sure, one may still agree with much of Church doctrine and one may find it a useful source of ideas and insights, but it cannot function as an exclusionary reason on the basis of its connection to God for the simple reason that, notwithstanding any divine connection, it might be wrong.

The problem with this objection is that fallibility need not be fatal to authority. In other words, one can accept something as providing exclusionary reasons even while acknowledging that it may sometimes be mistaken. Suppose that, while granting that Church doctrine is fallible, one has two other beliefs. First, one believes that despite its errors, on average Church doctrine is likely to be more reliable than one's own conclusions in the absence of Church doctrine. Second, one believes that one cannot identify with any certainty when Church doctrine is likely to be mistaken, particularly in light of the fact that the interpretive process of discovering Church doctrine involves difficult normative choices. In other words, if, after looking at all of the evidence, one finds oneself in disagreement with Church doctrine, one cannot be certain whether it is oneself or Church doctrine that is mistaken. Under these conditions, the best way of maximizing the number of situations in which one arrives at correct conclusions is to follow Church doctrine in every case, including those cases where one believes it to be mistaken.[16]

To understand why, imagine that we are gambling on horse races. I can pick the right horse in about 60 percent of the cases. Sitting next to me is an experienced bookie who can pick the right horses in about 90 percent of the cases. I have two options. First, I could choose to follow the bookie only when I agree with his conclusions about which horse will win. If I do this, then I will pick the right horse about 60 percent of the time.

Second, I could choose to follow the bookie on every single race, even when the bookie and I disagree. This may mean that sometimes I will bet on a horse other than the one that I would have chosen on my own, and the horse that I would have chosen will win. However, so long as, on average, the bookie is right 90 percent of the time and I am right only 60 percent of the time, by following the bookie blindly I will increase my total payoff by 30 percent.

The bookie example demonstrates that even a fallible authority can act as an exclusionary reason. We don't need to believe that Church doctrine is infallible to follow it in cases where we would otherwise reach different conclusions. We only need to believe that it is, on average, more reliable than our independent conclusions. Suppose, however, that one believes that there are certain cases where we are particularly good at identifying errors in Church doctrine, such that, in cases of disagreement in this particular area, we can be more confident that our own conclusions are correct and Church doctrine is mistaken. This would not mean, however, that Church doctrine can no longer act as an authority. In other words, even if we can identify areas where Church doctrine is more likely to be mistaken, we can still be justified in following it blindly.

To understand why, return to the bookie example. Suppose that I notice that the bookie has a fondness for black horses. If a black horse is in the race, he seems to always bet on the black horse, and his bets on black horses are less reliably correct than his bets on other horses. Would it then follow that, when the bookie bets on a black horse, I should simply bet on the horse that I think will win? The answer is that it depends. So long as the bookie's bets on black horses are more likely to be correct than my own bets, then I am still better off following the bookie blindly, even when he indulges in his fondness for black horses. If, however, when it comes to black horses, my bets are more likely to be right than the bookie's bets, then I ought to follow my own conclusions *as to black horses.*

Ironically, however, the fact that I know that the bookie is less accurate when it comes to black horses means that I should be more rather than less willing to follow him blindly in other circumstances. To understand why, imagine that I am betting on 100 races. Ten of the races involve black horses. As to all of the races, I can pick the winners 60 percent of the time, and the bookie can pick the winners 90 percent of the time. However when it comes to black horses, the bookie picks the winning horse only 50 percent of the time, while I pick the winning horse in black-horse

races 60 percent of the time. What this means, however, is that, in the races where there is no black horse, the bookie will pick the correct horse slightly more than 94 percent of the time. The numbers here, of course, give an illusion of precision that does not exist. They do, however, usefully illustrate the relationship between different variables. If I believe that, on average, the bookie is more accurate than I am, this belief can be maintained only if I believe that the bookie is especially accurate in those cases that do not fall within the set where I know that I am more accurate, on average, than the bookie.

To return to Church doctrine, even if we believe that we can identify areas where it is more likely to be mistaken, we should still follow it blindly so long as we believe that, on average, it has an advantage over our own conclusions in that weakened area. Furthermore, to the extent that we have a rough sense of how much more reliable Church doctrine is, on average, than our own conclusions, the fact that we might be able to identify areas where the chances of mistakes are higher, strengthens rather than weakens the case for following Church doctrine in other areas. The argument against the authority of Church doctrine on the basis of fallibility ultimately makes a simple mistake. It assumes that to follow something in the face of one's own differing conclusions requires that it be perfect. This is wrong. To be justified in following something, one must only believe that it is more reliable than the alternatives. Comparative rather than absolute advantage is all that is required. Accordingly, to make an epistemic argument in favor of Church doctrine, one need only assume advantage not perfection.

Recall that ultimately we have no rule that allows us to identify Church doctrine simply and unproblematically. We cannot simply look it up. Rather, Church doctrine consists of the conclusions that emerge from our best efforts to charitably interpret Mormon texts, history, and practices. Because Church doctrine necessarily seems to exceed the text of the scriptures, it cannot be reduced to the charitable interpretation of scripture alone. Nevertheless, the scriptures provide a useful model for thinking about the epistemic advantage of Church doctrine. Mormons believe that the standard works contain the word of God and for that reason provide privileged access into the divine mind not available in other texts. Nevertheless, we do not believe that scriptural texts are inerrant. We believe that the Bible is the word of God "as far as it is translated correctly" (Eighth Article of Faith), a capacious concept that can include wholesale

changes and additions to the biblical text unconnected to any known bib-lical manuscript. We believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God despite the fact that the title page itself refers to the "errors of men" con-tained within its covers. We believe that the Doctrine and Covenants is the word of God even though it explicitly provides a description of revela-tion in which a prophet is a coauthor with God, rather than a divinely in-spired automaton (D&C 9). And so on. In short, the ability of the scrip-tures to reveal the mind of God is not a function of their infallibility. Rather they are revelatory because, despite the "errors of men," God was decisively involved in their creation in a way that gives them special theological advantages over other texts.

Church doctrine is like the scriptures. It does not consist of some sort of pure and wholly unmediated access to the mind of God. Neverthe-less, for believing Latter-day Saints, God is at work in the Church. This does not mean that he is not at work elsewhere. Nevertheless, for Mor-mons, he is decisively involved in the Church in ways that he is not in-volved elsewhere. This does not mean that the texts, practices, and history of Mormonism are infallible. Far from it. Yet they nevertheless instantiate the divine will, albeit in a form inevitably shaped and mediated by human beings. The unifying interpretation of these texts, history, and practices through which we discover Church doctrine therefore gathers together and seeks to capture the divinity in the restored church. It is this faith in the special involvement of God in Mormonism that provides to believing Latter-day Saints the basis for assuming the epistemic advantage of Church doctrine.

The Argument from Communal Participation

The final justification for the authority of Church doctrine is the ar-gument from communal participation. Stated in its simplest form, this ar-gument amounts to the claim that, for a practicing Mormon, the failure to follow Church doctrine is a kind of cheating. Consider a formalized game like chess. The game is made possible by certain rules. Indeed, in some sense, chess simply consists of moving pieces around a sixty-four-square board according to certain rules. If a person plays chess with another per-son, these rules become obligatory for the second player such that willful flouting of the rules is deemed to be morally objectionable. It is cheating.

There are two things worth noting about cheating at chess. First, the rules of chess become obligatory for a player by virtue of playing the

game. Prior to sitting down to the pieces, neither player pledges to follow the rules. Certainly, if one were to attempt to castle out of check, nudge a pawn forward when an opponent was not looking, or otherwise break the rules, it would be no defense to argue that one never promised to obey the rules. Nor does the obligation flow from any inherent evil in the act itself. Moving a knight from a black square to a black square is not inherently immoral. It becomes cheating—and therefore wrong—only when done by a person playing chess. It is participation itself in the game that makes the rules obligatory.

Second, the misdeed of cheating does not consist per se in harm to the other player. Suppose, for example, that I was to play chess against Gary Kasparov, widely regarded as the strongest chess player in history. Somehow, I manage to distract Kasparov momentarily and intentionally make an illegal move, say, pushing a pawn forward two squares on its second move. Notwithstanding my cheating, however, Kasparov is able to defeat me easily. The wrongfulness of my illegal move cannot consist of depriving Kasparov of his rightful victory. Indeed, given his massive preponderance of skill and ability, Kasparov's victory was not in the least doubt. Nevertheless, it was wrong for me to cheat by illegally moving my pawn.

These two features suggest some reasons for cheating's immorality. The rules of chess are what make chess possible. In philosophical terms, the rules of chess are constitutive to the practice of chess.[17] To flout the rules of chess while playing chess undermines the game itself. Notice, however, that disobeying the rules of chess undermines the game of chess only if one is playing chess. When one plays checkers, one moves pieces on a sixty-four-square board in ways that violate the rules of chess, but playing checkers does not undermine the practice of chess. There is also a personal aspect to the immorality of cheating. To play a game necessarily conveys a willingness to abide by the rules of the game. In a very real sense, to play a game simply *is* to follow the rules of the game, as it is the rules that make play possible. To cheat while playing, then, negates the very commitment inherent in play itself. One's actions become fundamentally incoherent. It is not that one lies, for it is possible to cheat without deceiving. The concept that best conveys this aspect of the misdeed of cheating is hypocrisy. To cheat while playing a game is to be a hypocrite.

To be a member of the Church is to participate in an inherently normative activity. The Church is more than simply a community defined by a particular history. Rather, it is an activity defined by certain constitu-

tive norms. For example, to receive baptism as a Mormon simply consists of the actions defined by the rules governing baptism. An act similar to Mormon baptism—for example, a Baptist baptism—is not a Mormon baptism for the fully sufficient reason that it fails to comply with the rules that define Mormon baptism. In this sense, to participate in the Church as a member is to play a kind of game. One may, of course, participate in Mormonism as simply a community, culture, and history. Such participation, however, is not ultimately normative. It views the structure of Mormon beliefs and practices as essentially a matter of historical accident and participation in that structure as an exercise in taste, nostalgia, or perhaps solidarity. A normative activity, in contrast, is one that is defined, not by memory, but by rules and norms. One may know the history of chess and participate in the community of chess players without playing chess. Likewise one may play chess without knowing anything of the history and community of chess players. The difference is participation in the activity defined by the norms of chess rather than simply by the history or community of chess players. The ecclesiastical structure, ordinance, and rituals of Mormon life are constituted by norms that find their source in Church doctrine. To participate in these aspects of Mormonism is normative. It is how we "play the game" of Mormonism.

Participation in the game creates an obligation to follow Church doctrine. Like the rules of chess, Church doctrine is what makes the Church as a normative practice possible. Willful flouting of Church doctrine by one who participates in "the game" is a form of cheating. It abuses the practice of Mormonism by undermining what makes Mormonism as a practice possible. Furthermore, any disclaimers aside, it is not possible to participate in the normative practices of Mormonism without conveying a willingness to submit to the norms that make the practice possible. To then flout those norms is hypocritical and, in that sense, is morally objectionable.

It might be objected at this point that, even if cheating is blameworthy, the obligation to follow the rules of the game one is playing cannot create exclusionary reasons. Consider this dialogue. Heber and Brigham are playing chess.

> Heber: Hey! That's an illegal move. A knight on a black square cannot move to another black square.
> Brigham: I know, but an odd chess-phobic millionaire has just pledged his entire fortune to keep innocent children who would otherwise

slowly starve to death from their terrible fate provided that I move my horsey to a black square.

>   Heber: But this is chess!

Brigham clearly has the better of this exchange. Whatever moral lapse is involved in Brigham's cheating clearly cannot justify allowing the children to starve. This example, however, seems to suggest that mere participation in an activity is insufficient to transform its norms into exclusionary reasons.

A further testing of our intuitions about cheating, however, suggests that we should not be too hasty in rejecting the exclusionary power of game playing. Imagine that Brigham and Heber are once more playing chess, but this time there is no pledge from a chess-phobic millionaire. Brigham makes an illegal move.

>   Heber: Hey! That's cheating!
>   Brigham: But by making this move, I choose to express my disapproval of allowing children to starve.
>   Heber: So what? We're playing chess right now. You can express your views on child starvation without cheating.

Heber clearly has the better of this exchange, just as Brigham had the better of the exchange in the preceding paragraph. Yet in both cases, Brigham's actions were motivated by a moral revulsion against starving children; and in both cases, Heber simply invoked chess as his reason for disapproving Brigham's action. The decisive difference lies in the significance of Brigham's action. In the first case, his action saved innocent lives, which is clearly more important than chess. In the second case, he merely made a statement in one way rather than another, an act that does not seem to be more important than chess (although it may be more important than lesser games such as checkers or Monopoly). Generalizing, there is a certain asymmetry involved in cheating for some goal beyond the game. The good accomplished by cheating must be reckoned in the particular, i.e., the actual children saved or the particular manner of merely making a statement. The evil of cheating, however, must be reckoned in terms of the value of the game itself rather than, say, the value of moving a pawn backward. This reckoning suggests a kind of limiting hierarchy in the reasons excluded by the requirement to avoid cheating. *Acts* that are less important than the *practice* are excluded, while *acts* that are more important than the *practice* are not. All other things being equal, Brigham would prefer to make a statement about child hunger by making an illegal

chess move. By playing chess, however, he has excluded this consideration because chess is more important than his desire to make a statement in an idiosyncratic way. However, the rules of chess do not exclude all reasons. Saving a starving child is not a reason for action excluded by the rules of chess.

If this analysis is correct, then participation in the Church can justify treating Church doctrine as an exclusionary reason. Consider the logic of this dialogue:

> Heber: I'm very hungry this morning, and last night I bought some strawberries that must be eaten soon or they'll rot. Let's eat them for breakfast.
> Brigham: That makes sense, but it's fast Sunday and the Church is more important than your strawberries.

Notice how Brigham's response deals with Heber's reasons. He does not try to argue that the act of fasting standing alone is more important than Heber's strawberries (although he might have). Rather, Brigham appeals to a doctrine of the Church—the law of the fast—to justify ignoring Heber's reason. He then defends this appeal to authority by pointing out that the Church is more important than Heber's strawberries. The implication is that Heber's failure to fast would either undermine the Church or reflect poorly on his character. Both of these implications, however, make sense only in the context of Heber's participation in the Church. The same argument could not be made to a Russian Orthodox priest for the simple reason that he is not playing the Mormonism "game." Furthermore by implicitly invoking the obligations created by Heber's participation, Brigham throws the value of the Church as a practice—rather than the discrete act of fasting—into the balance. This strategy, in effect, claims that Church doctrine excludes any consideration less important than the Church itself as a practice.

The Limits of Authority

At this point it is easy to misunderstand the import of the arguments that I have offered. In particular, it is tempting to suppose that claiming authority for Church doctrine is tantamount to claiming that the obligation to follow Church doctrines is absolute. This is a mistake. The argument from covenant, the argument from epistemic advantage, and the argument from community participation are all meant to provide plausible justifications for supposing that Church doctrine can provide an

exclusionary reason for action and belief. Yet to say that something is an exclusionary reason does not imply that its claims are absolute.

Once again the law provides a useful illustration. It is entirely coherent to believe that the law has authority—i.e., that it provides exclusionary reasons for action—without believing that the claims of the law are absolute. Consider the example of John Adams. An accomplished attorney with a deep respect and love for English law, he regarded the law as providing exclusionary reasons for action. That is, he believed that one had an obligation to obey the English law even if one regarded some of its particular commands to be misguided or unreasonable.[18] Nevertheless in the summer of 1776, Adams found himself willingly committing high treason by signing the Declaration of Independence, the ultimate repudiation of loyalty to English laws. For Adams, his decision to repudiate English law flowed from the nature of his commitment to the law itself. When the basis for that commitment—the implied contract between sovereign and subject—was dissolved, the law ceased to act as an exclusionary reason.

Sir Thomas More—at least as he is presented in Robert Bolt's play *A Man for All Seasons*—provides another example. In one memorable passage, More debates with his son-in-law, Roper, over whether or not he would give the Devil benefit of law. Roper insists that he would gladly tear up any law to get at the Devil.

> Roper: So now you'd give the Devil benefit of law!
> More: Yes. What would you do? Cut a great road through the law to get after the Devil?
> Roper: I'd cut down every law in England to do that!
> More: (*Roused and excited*) Oh? (*Advances on Roper*) And when the last law was down, and the Devil turned round on you—where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? (*He leaves him*) This country's planted thick with laws from coast to coast—man's laws, not God's—and if you cut them down—and you're just the man to do it—d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? (*Quietly*) Yes, I'd give the Devil benefit of law, for my own safety's sake.[19]

This exchange is ultimately about the authority of the law. Roper denies the authority, insisting that it has no claim when one is engaged in the pursuit of the Devil. More's response is a pragmatic argument for the law's authority. He has no brief for the Devil but insists that even "getting" him—an admirable goal—is excluded by the law. Later in the play, however, More finds himself confronted by a law—Henry VIII's assumption of supremacy over the Church of England—to which he cannot submit. In the

clash between his loyalty to the law and his loyalty to the Church of Rome, More found a reason that the law's authority could not exclude, and he went to the executioner for high treason.

Adams and More illustrate the ways in which the claims of authority are defeasible. Both acknowledged that the law excluded certain considerations, but neither took the authority of the law as absolute. They had quite different sorts of reasons, however, for limiting the law's authority. Adams found a limit in the foundation of the law's authority itself. When the basis for treating the law as an exclusionary reason failed, so did the authority of the law. In contrast, More's rejection of the law's authority came because of the claims of an even higher authority. Hence, the actions of the king in parliament could exclude some reasons, but even those acts could be excluded by the higher authority of the Pope as the successor of Saint Peter. Hence, on the scaffold, Bolt's More says, "I die the king's good servant, but God's first."[20] These examples suggest two ways in which authority may be limited without rejecting the idea that authority acts as an exclusionary reason. The reasoning that Adams and More went through did not involve a weighing of the claims of the law's authority against other reasons. Rather they offered reasons that either showed that authority no longer had the power to exclude other reasons or that one authority was excluded by a higher authority.

Both of these strategies may be used to limit the authority of Church doctrine. The three arguments offered above for the authority of Church doctrine—the argument from covenant, the argument from epistemic advantage, and the argument from communal participation—all rest on certain assumptions. When these assumptions fail, then the arguments can no longer justify treating Church doctrine as an exclusionary reason. (Because the arguments are essentially redundant, a complete rejection of the authority of Church doctrine would have to involve some sort of simultaneous failure of assumptions for all three arguments.) For example, the argument from epistemic advantage rests on two assumptions. First, Church doctrine is systematically more likely to be correct than our own conclusions. Second, we cannot identify areas where Church doctrine is likely to be less reliable than our own conclusions. However, when either of these assumptions fails for whatever reason, the argument from epistemic advantage can no longer justify treating Church doctrine as an exclusionary reason. Thus, if we are able to identify some area where we are justified in concluding that our own judgments are sys-

tematically superior to the teachings of Church doctrine, then the argument from epistemic advantage no longer holds. Such a failure of a basic assumption is analogous to John Adams's rejection of the English law's authority in the American Revolution.

Alternatively, one might believe that there are certain kinds of authority or other exclusionary reasons that could trump Church doctrine. For example, one might believe that personal loyalty to a presiding authority should trump Church doctrine so that one should be willing to follow directions from such an authority even when they contravene Church doctrine. Likewise, one might believe that there are certain moral injunctions that have a Kantian absoluteness that allows them to exclude the lesser authority of Church doctrine. Both of these examples share the notion that there is a class of exclusionary reasons that excludes the authority of Church doctrine. In that sense, they are analogous to More's rejection of the authority of the law when it conflicted with the authority of the Church.

Such examples do three things. First, they defend the concept of authority that I offer in this essay from the charge that it recognizes no limits. Such is not the case. Second, it shows that accepting limits on authority does not mean that the idea of authority as an exclusionary reason is mistaken. Exclusionary reasons can be defeasible without altering their basic conceptual structure. Third, it serves to discipline the analysis of arguments offered by anyone suggesting that one can accept the authority of Church doctrine while simultaneously refusing to follow it. Such claims are not *prima facie* contradictory, but they can be justified only by using a fairly limited set of arguments that will need to have a structure that acknowledges the basic legitimacy of authority as an exclusionary reason.

Conclusion

Church doctrine is a central but under-analyzed concept in Mormon discussions. We discover Church doctrine by offering the best possible interpretation of Mormon texts, practices, and history. Accordingly, Church doctrine is a necessarily interpretive concept and a contestable one at that. It is neither a perfect reflection of the mind of God nor a clear and complete set of theological and ethical propositions. Nevertheless, I conclude that covenants, divine involvement in the production of Church doctrine, and participation in the Church all justify treating Church doctrine as an authority. Furthermore, while I think that Mor-

mons are, in some sense, under an obligation to follow Church doctrine "blindly," I do not believe that this means that the claims of Church doctrine on Latter-day Saints are absolute or limitless. Arguments for ignoring Church doctrine in the context of continued allegiance to its basic authority, however, must take the conceptual structure of that authority seriously and, accordingly, will be limited by it.

Notes

1. To be sure, many good and eloquent things have been said by Mormon thinkers about the tensions between authority and the intellect. Indeed, there is something of a cottage industry among Mormon intellectuals in talking and thinking about their relationship with the authorities of the Church. For a particularly thoughtful example of the genre, see Armand Mauss, "Alternate Voices: The Calling and Its Implications," *Sunstone,* Issue 76 (April 1990): 7–10.

2. I use the term "weak" here in its logical sense of meaning assumptions that apparently contain very little content in relationship to the conclusions that they support. In contrast, "strong" assumptions virtually restate the conclusion that they are meant to support. An argument based on "strong" assumptions shows us very little beyond the initial premises themselves. In contrast, an argument based on "weak" assumptions shows us much more. My hope is that the assumptions on which the arguments in this article are based are "weak" enough for the arguments themselves to be independently illuminating.

3. See Nathan Oman, "Jurisprudence and the Problem of Church Doctrine," *Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology* (forthcoming); and Nathan Oman, "How Do You Know If Something is 'Church Doctrine'"? in a forthcoming anthology edited by James Faulconer.

4. Joseph Raz, *The Authority of Law: Essays on Law and Morality* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1979), 24–25. I take it that, in the quoted paragraph, Raz is using "practical" in its philosophical sense of "relating to action" rather than in its more general sense of "useful." Nothing about Raz's theory suggests that thinking about authority is useless.

5. For the most detailed modern discussion of the development of these ideas, see James Gordley, *The Philosophical Origins of Modern Contract Doctrine,* Clarendon Law Series (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1991).

6. See, for example, Charles Fried, *Contract As Promise: A Theory of Contractual Obligation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

7. See, for example, John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (1690), in

The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill, edited by Edwin A. Burtt (New York: Modern Library, 1959).

8. They do not, of course, necessarily use the terminology used here, which was developed by Joseph Raz in the 1970s.

9. Lon Fuller, *Cases and Materials on Contracts* (Minneapolis, Minn: West Publishing, 1947), 666. This is the first edition.

10. *True to the Faith* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 23.

11. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 75–81.

12. This does not mean, of course, that these sorts of sources cannot function as authorities about the true meaning of baptism. However, to the extent that we are interested in obligations arising from promises, what matters is how a concept is actually understood rather than how it should be understood.

13. Of course, this argument implicitly assumes the coherence of our pre-reflective understanding of the obligations associated with being a member of the Church. It may simply be the case that this pre-reflective understanding is mistaken and ought to be rejected. The problem becomes that there is a certain circularity involved in either affirming or rejecting the coherence of our pre-reflective beliefs. If we reject their coherence, then assuming a promise to follow Church doctrine at baptism is a philosophical deus ex machina, invoked gratuitously to save the coherence of what is incoherent. On the other hand, if one accepts the coherence of pre-reflective understanding, then rejecting the assumption of a promise to follow Church doctrine at baptism seems to rest on little more than the *a priori* rejection of any theory that renders such understandings coherent. I am skeptical of our ability to escape from this basic circularity. My own view is that the best we can hope for is a kind of reflective equilibrium in which we constantly measure our pre-reflective beliefs against our theories and vice versa, oscillating between them and adjusting each in light of the other until the two converge.

14. My argument here is wholly separate from the argument from community participation that I make below. Here the claim is not that participation in the rituals of the Church per se creates an obligation to follow Church doctrine. Rather it is a purely promissory argument. It rests on the inherently promissory meaning that we assign to the repeated taking of the sacrament. The argument from community participation, on the other hand, does not rest on any implicit promise.

15. I ignore here the question of why it is that we ought to obey God, taking this assumption as given. For a fuller philosophical treatment of the is-

sue in the context of Mormon theology, see Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Problems of Theism* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2006), chap. 3.

16. I am indebted to Professor Frank McIntyre of the Brigham Young University Economics Department for this argument. Although its presentation here is mine, the underlying insight is his.

17. See John Searle, "How to Derive an 'Ought' from an 'Is,'" *Philosophical Review,* 73, no. 1 (January 1964): 43, for a discussion of the distinction between constitutive and regulative rules.

18. See, e.g., Hiller Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), recounting John Adams's politically unpopular defense of the soldiers indicted for murder as a result of the Boston Massacre and explaining his attitude toward English law.

19. Robert Bolt, *A Man for All Seasons* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 66.

20. *A Man for All Seasons,* a video recording of the movie, adaptation by Paul Schofield, Columbia Pictures Associated (1966).