Organizing (Eternal) Identity and Identification: An Upward Glance into Religious Institutions

Casey M. Stratton
West Virginia University, cms00014@mix.wvu.edu

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Organizing (Eternal) Identity and Identification: 
An Upward Glance into Religious Institutions

Casey M. Stratton

Dissertation submitted
to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in
Communication Studies

Matthew M. Martin, Ph.D., Chair
Sharon B. Hayes, Ph.D.
Katie K. Kang, Ph.D.
Christine E. Kunkle, Ph.D.

Department of Communication Studies

Morgantown, West Virginia
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ABSTRACT

Organizing (Eternal) Identity and Identification:
An Upward Glance into Religious Institutions

Casey M. Stratton

This dissertation disrupts at least two religious spaces: First, scholars religiously adhering to (social) scientific norms, and second, people identifying with religious organizations (i.e., churches). First, we begin constructing a theoretical lens using poststructural ideas offered by Foucault, Derrida, and Bakhtin to read and disrupt (religious) discourse. Second, we complicate organizational identification as a concept, deeming it fixed and fluid—a paradox within religious discourses that endorse Truth and Perfection. Here, we draw from the communication constitutes organization (CCO) approach. Third, we further curate the lens by applying poststructuralism, identification, and CCO in a specific context: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Church). Doing so enables Restorationism—a fixed-fluid theoretical technique for scrutinizing identification paradoxes in religious spaces. Fourth, we try Restorationism on 89 addresses to reveal contradictions of organizational identification within The Church, followed by discussions of the (dis)organizing effect of language, including Scripture, on identity. Throughout the dissertation, we challenge (social) scientific norms—faithful to postmodernism—through performance techniques, including poetry, courtroom scenes, images, metaphors, and embodied discussions. Doing so, along with speculations on (religious organizational) identification, rouses at least three questions, including (1) who am I; (2) where did I come from; and (3) where am I going?
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There are many to thank for this journey—spirits of the past, present, and future. Yet, acknowledging all is impossible: Conversations constitute me, and every (un)pleasurable moment refines me, allowing me to become. Therefore, I thank all who have crossed my path, both seen and unseen. Perhaps my texts will resurrect your voice one day, helping me remember every interaction that defined my journey through oppositions of truth and error. That said, there are some key players I wish to thank.

First, my Heavenly Parents and Savior, Jesus Christ. I dedicate this work as a consecrated effort to bring myself and others closer to understanding the meaning of unity and love. I am thankful for the inspiration, the whisperings, the confidence, and the trying times that allowed me opportunities to exercise my faith. I seek forgiveness—opportunities to learn—for my errors are plentiful.

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Fourth, those I call my family, including my parents, in-laws, brothers, sisters, nieces, grandpas, grandmas, and so on. Thank you for sacrificing time for us to leave home and discover new worlds. We are indebted to your past, present, and future efforts
to love and sacrifice for the better of this world. Each of you holds a special place in my heart, impossible to contain in a few short words on two pages.

Next, I am grateful to my dissertation committee—all a God-send. Dr. Martin, you are the epitome of an autonomy-supportive facilitator and advisor—You have incredible wisdom that I admire, most often found in expressions of curiosity. I appreciate your patience and care throughout my academic journey as I have sampled different methodologies, concocted hypothetical project plans, and ultimately created a dissertation far from what I originally planned.

Dr. Hayes, our qualitative research methods class was life-changing. Your facilitation of the course broke my academic prisons, allowing me to question and push methodological boundaries. With you, I learned the value of artistic, postmodern approaches, permitting the voice of our data to speak on its own instead of controlling it. Since our time in class, I continually model your teaching behaviors to allow curiosity.

Dr. Kang, you are my mentor, challenging me to think deeper, engage in practical reasoning, and break theoretical boundaries. Your friendship and concern for my professional development are heartwarming. Thank you for tailoring our organizational communication classes to examine nontraditional spaces (e.g., religion).

Dr. Kunkle, I regret not working with you sooner in my Ph.D. journey—Your enthusiasm for learning and caring for others is contagious. Thanks for adding much-needed reminders throughout the dissertation, especially valuing all epistemological perspectives. Most importantly, you brought light in dark places, more than you know.

And to all my readers. Thank you for taking a journey.
PREFACE: EXPERIENCING THE JOURNEY

This dissertation presents a journey. However, there is no end—only the beginnings of new thoughts centered on the eternal self. Here lies a fundamental premise for all assertions in this thematic wrestle: A person continually becomes, identifying oneself through language systems that escape the confines of conclusions, allowing an eternity of change and creation (Derrida, 1976; Hirschkop, 2021).

In other words, the theoretical speculations offered in this dissertation guarantee turbulence, much to the chagrin of readers seeking stability of self and ideas. You and I will change, to some degree, when interacting with the text the first, second, and subsequent times as we grapple with three fundamental questions: (1) Who am I; (2) where do I come from; and (3) where am I going?

Though I strategically craft ideas to offer productive disruptions, my audience and text will transact unanticipated, nail-biting meanings beyond my original (narrow) intentions (Rosenblatt, 1978). I forsake my control over the text, inviting imminent alternative ideas that foster new questions, allowing us each to exist eternally, choosing between truth and error amidst our creations. I damn our progress if I assume perfect, authoritarian control over the meaning of the words (Bakhtin, 1990).

Though I cannot (and should not) completely control our creationary capabilities, some regulation is necessary to start our journey on the "same" page to avoid floundering in unfocused directions—no matter the potential productivity in doing so. As such, I offer five primers below to help us better grasp the soul of my words to not walk on them (Freire, 1985). I curated these primers, and the dissertation, with several audiences in mind, as detailed in Table 1 below. Therein, I describe the audience and suggest ways the
dissertation offers productive disruptions for each type of reader. Following Table 1, I outline the primers in no specific order, which I encourage all readers to review to start our journey on a (somewhat) similar footing.

**Table 1: Dissertation Audiences**

*The audiences considered when writing this dissertation and selecting ideas.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Thought experiences that will productively disrupt</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Objectivists | Favor an objective reality, with existing truth ready for discovery, not influenced by subjective perspectives | • Postmodernism (Poststructuralism) (Ch. 1)  
• Poststructural Voices (Ch. 2)  
• CCO and Organizational Identification (Ch. 3)  
• “Method” of Restorationism (Ch. 5)  
• Restorationism on Trial (Ch. 6)  
• Discussions (Ch. 7) |
| Interpretivists | Endorse subjective realities, socially constructed, with multiple (divergent) perspectives | • Fixed "realities" of identity (Ch. 1-4)  
• “Method” of Restorationism (Ch. 5)  
• Restorationism on Trial (Ch. 6)  
• Discussions (Ch. 7) |
| Atheists | Disbelieve or lack belief in the existence of God or gods | • Postmodernism (Poststructuralism) (Ch. 1)  
• Poststructural Voices (Ch. 2)  
• Context—The Philosophical Playground (Ch. 4)  
• Restorationism on Trial (Ch. 6)  
• Discussions (Ch. 7) |
| Agnostics | Consider that we can know nothing of God or gods beyond material proof | • Postmodernism (Poststructuralism) (Ch. 1)  
• Poststructural Voices (Ch. 2)  
• Context—The Philosophical Playground (Ch. 4)  
• Restorationism on Trial (Ch. 6)  
• Discussions (Ch. 7) |
| Believers | Believe in the existence of God or gods.  
*Note: For scope, this dissertation focuses on Christian denominations* | • Postmodernism (Poststructuralism) (Ch. 1)  
• Poststructural Voices (Ch. 2)  
• Context—The Philosophical Playground (Ch. 4)  
• The Thought Experiment (Ch. 6)  
• Discussions (Ch. 7) |
| Activists | Desire change, disrupting the norm for improvement and growth | • Postmodernism (Poststructuralism)  
• Poststructural Voices (Ch. 2)  
• CCO and Organizational Identification (Ch. 3)  
• Discussions (Ch. 7) |
Primer #1: Avoidance of Closure

This dissertation commits to a poststructural mentality (discussed in chapter one), entailing an avid, unrelenting effort to avoid closure of meaning. In line with this goal, thus far, in this preface, we reviewed the fundamental idea that a soul is dead when stabilized. Namely, when we conclude obstinately, our stubborn assertions disinvite new, curious changes. Our growth and eternal existence depend on novel questions, constructing new realities, and disrupting our comfortability. Stagnancy in thought is death to the soul: We forsake the journey of becoming something higher and holier. Thus, I offer no absolute conclusions but instead speculations.

Avoiding closure does not mean skirting a responsibility to find good, better, and “best” ideas. On the contrary, when we reach a tentative conclusion, we embrace it while humbly acknowledging imperfection in knowledge. We eagerly await a new creation that supports, refutes, and transforms our previous notions. By doing so, we allow worlds without end, constituted by our communication, opening possibilities that constrain, enable, empower, and disempower—through which we grow. As a result, we develop more omniscience instead of burying our heads in limited perspectives.

Such an initiative for continual refinement (hopefully) represents a shared initiative among all humankind, even when we forge our paths differently. However, vying for continual discovery does require careful consideration of our language that might contradict the quest to disrupt productively. For example, though a researcher might tentatively embrace their findings, their communication about the data, procedures, and rationale might stylistically employ a tone of certainty that feels absolute. Moreover, the aesthetic choices (e.g., words, syntax) might create an unnegotiable reality for the
reader, who, when challenging the thoughts, must circumvent the authority the text holds. Therefore, I make a concerted effort, perhaps ad nauseam, to stylistically demonstrate room for thoughtful negotiation. By doing so, I foster uncertainty and elicit permissible questioning. As a warning, such an objection to closure might require a cognitive workout. The postmodern (poststructural) flair might engender dissonance for those conditioned to (necessary) social-scientific norms.

**Primer #2: Continuums of Density**

Throughout our journey, I will contradict ideas to provoke paradox (explained in chapter two). I often describe two binary poles that, through their opposition, create a meaningful structure. For example, to know the meaning of cold, we must experience heat. Likewise, to appreciate good, we must comprehend evil. Each element represents opposing ideas; however, we should not view these as discrete entities. These oppositions fashion continuums, with gradations stimulating eternal meanings. In this sense, hot and cold create a spectrum of temperatures categorized by different words, from warm to frigid and lukewarm to piping hot.

Moreover, there is no black-and-white difference between an objectivist and an interpretivist. Each scholarly stance is gray in its own right, some a little darker and others lighter. For simplicity, I will not (and cannot) elaborate on all the possible nuances between oppositions (e.g., good and evil). After all, ceaseless subtleties are waiting for arousal from the volition of my readers. Thus, I offer a dialectical foundation for play, expecting my audience to assume density for simplistic descriptions. Though I might spend significant time on one pole (e.g., postmodernism), we should not judge the worth of the opposing stance (e.g., postpositivism) by a lack of attention. Each view is vital.
Primer #3: Multi-leveled Thinking

We will investigate micro-to-macro relationships and vice versa. For example, we will speculate on the relationships between humans (micro) and God (metaphysical), societal discourse, or beliefs (macro) on personal identity (micro), among others. When approaching these interactions, we must presume complexity. For example, a human's relationship with a Divine Being, though perhaps directly connected (\( D_d \)), is likewise influenced by other meso, macro, and institutional levels (\( D \) and d), embedded within socio-historical contexts and eternal time, as illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Hypothetical Multiple Levels and Layers of Analysis

Figure Key: \( D \) = “Big D” Discourse | d = “little d” discourse | \( D_d \) = Devotions
To exhaustively articulate every possible relationship between levels and layers is futile: Comprehending infinite possibilities requires claiming godly omniscience or the ability to look down through all layers and across time. That said, we can thoughtfully experiment from different standpoints, no matter the ongoing (dis)organizing shifts that cyclically occur due to (1) the "big D" discourses (D) that press down on all levels (e.g., cultural norms); (2) the "little d" discourses (d) that constitute all levels; and (3) the circumventing devotions (D_d) that disrupts hopes for objective, empirical discovery.² This dissertation will consider multiple levels and layers; however, I expect audiences to fill in the ignored areas they find most pertinent and intriguing with their speculations.

**Primer #4: Perceptions of Reality**

When experiencing the journey, my purposeful prose might paint convergent and divergent illustrations in readers' minds. No matter how we classify ourselves (e.g., Christian, scholar), we will not find perfect communion of thought. My writing is a personal, subjective perception, no matter the moments of authoritative style. For example, I develop several propositions summarizing the belief system of a religious denomination; however, these assertions cannot divorce from my biased perspective: I do not act as an authority, though my speculations might wield power.

I invite you to review the subjectivity statement in chapter five for those interested in my personal views that inform this dissertation. Sufficient for a primer, I am an enthusiastic Christian and an epistemological chameleon who prefers interpretive research. Additionally, I thrive on productive disruptions to catalyze our learning.

**Primer #5: Artistic Irruptions**

I offer irruptions throughout the dissertation to resist conventional (academic)
structures and reasoning (e.g., hypothetico-deductive mentality). Written irruptions will "disrupt the linear and topical flow often associated with traditional scientific reporting…[providing] provocative extensions to the discussed topics. [They serve] as examples of uncertainty and "unthinkable" energy" (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, p. xviii).

Other artistic tactics, including poetry, performance, and illustrations, will pierce conventions, ejaculating creativity to form something new within the tired bodies of knowledge disciplined to behave in determined ways (Foucault, 1980).

These artistic disruptions are not pejorative rebellions. Instead, they exist to avoid hypocrisy for a dissertation that employs postmodernism (poststructuralism) (see chapter one for more detail). Additionally, they respond to metatheoretical, qualitative calls to avoid (scientific) choices that might limit new thoughts (Ellingson & Sotorin, 2020; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). I invite us to (artistically) create something new that expands our understanding of who we are, where we came from, and where we are going.

The end(less) awaits those at the door—
Knock, knock,
who's there?
(Un)changeable me
Preface Footnotes

1. Though we might not perfectly fit within one or several of these audience categories, they, at minimum, illuminate a working description and the dissertation chapters I consider productively disrupting for each group. Categories are negotiable. Writing with a "single" audience in mind is an unrealistic task: Even those who identify with the "same" labels (e.g., researcher, practitioner, believer) still operate in divergent worlds, uncapturable due to our human autonomy. In every moment, we choose to be something, transacting with texts that enable and constrain ourselves and others. I try to keep the labels in Table 1 generic to include as many readers as possible. I write for and specifically cite studies from Organizational Communication scholars, researchers from the Mormon Studies discipline, and those (un)affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

2. Unless otherwise specified in this dissertation, discourse assumes communication. "Big D" discourses are macro-level conversations, "little d" discourses are micro dialogues, and devotions are communication episodes between a Divine Being and believers. Each type (D, d, Dd) exists because of communication or (perceived, subjective) messages transacted by (non)material source(s) to receiver(s).
PRELUDE: A GENERIC OVERVIEW OF OUR JOURNEY

Using a fictional madman character, Nietzsche (1882/2001) famously declared, “Where is God? I’ll tell you! We have killed him—you and I! We are all his murderers. Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? —Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him” (pp. 119–120). Nietzsche’s statement responded to the Enlightenment era—when modern science and philosophy relegated God to the background and universal, observable law to the foreground. Discovering objective Nature—rather than God—became the precedent, trading faith for certainty. God’s death offered freedom from traditional systems of (religious) meaning that disempowered humanity through guilt, shame, and fixation with the metaphysical future (e.g., an alternative world such as heaven or hell) rather than living in the present through continual becoming (Nietzsche, 1954). In short, science became God.

Until postmodernism.

Objective truth, reason, and logic became subjective, decomposable, and negotiable realities (Rosenau, 1992). Here we might reinvoke the madman’s voice:

Where is God-Science? I’ll tell you! We have killed them—you and I! We are all their murderers…Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? Gods-Sciences, too, decompose! God-science is dead! God-science remains dead! And we have killed them.¹

Constituting postmodernity, the madman mutters away with carnival playfulness, absurdity, and chaos (Grbich, 2013). Metaphorically, the previously deceased Divine (i.e., God or Nature) is exhumed, deconstructed, and cremated, tossed into the fragmented wind. Blown away, society continues finding meaning and defining the self in a continual
age of uncertainty (Makidon, 2004). Therein, humankind is “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Holy Bible, King James Version, Ephesians 4:14).

Though postmodernism (poststructuralism) defies certainty and objective knowledge, hope is not lost—salvation may flourish. Learning requires struggling through faith, not the mere deposit of information from God to humans. Faith requires doubt, as they are binary opposites engaged in productive dialectical tension (Derrida, 2002). As a motivating influence for learning, humankind discovers eternal realms through the paradoxical relationship. Thus, continual struggling between faith and doubt allows for choosing and becoming (Givens & Givens, 2012). In other words, one cannot become anything without some form of opposition offered by a world of uncertainties.

The productivity offered by postmodernism (poststructuralism) might cause dissonance, especially for those viewing the Sacred (e.g., God, religious text) as purely stable (Rutledge, 1996). As an example of connotative stability, a Bible verse reads: “Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Holy Bible, King James Version, Hebrews 13:8). In this sense, eternal life fossilizes as a fixed, stable phenomenon, possessing a definitive finish line toward one objective whole. An opposing, postmodern lens might view eternal life as unending or ceaselessly choosing through productive tensions (e.g., good and evil, light and darkness) (Berry, 2004; Derrida, 2002).

In reconciling dissonance, God might transcend these dialectics through Perfect Organizing, a hypothetical perfected method for managing (i.e., choosing through) ongoing tensions. In communion with the Perfect Organizer, we might continually become through social constructions (i.e., communication constituting organizing worlds
without end) (see The Pearl of Great Price, 1851, Moses 1:3).

In other words, it is not about adopting an either-or mentality to religious principles nor placing a single pole above another—We embrace both ideas. Good and evil. Light and darkness. Virtue and vice. One cannot exist without the other (Derrida, 1976). Obtaining the Glory of God—the ability to perfectly transcend eternal tensions—requires opposition in all things:

For there must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, my firstborn in the wilderness, righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; wherefore, if it should be one body, it must needs remain as dead, having no life, neither death nor corruption nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility…and if these things are not, there is no God. And if there is no God, we are not.

(The Book of Mormon, 1830/1981, 2 Ne. 2: 11-13)

Yet, we are. Phenomenologically, we yearn to answer the age-old questions: Who am I, and where am I going (i.e., becoming)? To make sense of self, an upward glance into religious institutions might illuminate the paradoxes of organizing (eternal) identity and identification. Constituted by communication, the self stands at a crossroads requiring accepting, rejecting, or managing dialectical tensions—augmented by discourses claiming absolute Truth (Foucault, 1994b). Through mired contradictions, transcendent ideas may emerge to form new understandings about knowledge, power, and discipline (Foucault, 1980; L. Putnam, 2013).
Prelude Footnotes

1. (Nietzsche, 2001, pp. 119–120). The edits to this quote employ Heidegger’s and Derrida’s use of sous rature (i.e., erasure), which allows the old, inadequate text to remain alongside its newer form. We will see this method used throughout our dissertation journey.

2. Akin to modernist ontology and objectivist epistemology (explained in chapter one).
INTRODUCTION

This introduction outlines a roadmap for readers predisposed to clear direction, precision, and certainty. I acknowledge the importance of offering clarity for our journey; however, I do not want simple explanations to negate the complexity we (should) experience. The ideas we will grapple with are philosophical, theological, and (un)settling for some, with insufficient pages to resolve fundamental tensions. Our overarching goal is to productively disrupt our inclinations toward certainty, particularly in religious spaces, not to demise religion but to enhance it. By doing so, we invite opportunities to (spiritually) grow as we ceaselessly reorient our focus and, in turn, our identity. To do so, we require complexity.

Chapter one challenges us to ask how we know what we know (i.e., epistemology) about the nature of being (i.e., ontology). We start our journey by ironically removing our fixed footing: We fall by questioning science, religion, and self via the help of postmodernism and poststructuralism. In other words, we will examine how seemingly stable realities and identities are more fluid (i.e., changing) when constituted by our communication. When we admit we are fallen, an ascent to higher forms of being is possible. We might overcome zeniths or personal plateaus when realizing more knowledge and opportunities to grow eternally await those willing to deconstruct, question, and proceed with productive doubt (faith) amidst pending uncertainties. While we will not exhaustively review centuries of philosophy, our brief sampling will provide sufficient awareness of a fundamental tension examined in our journey: Fixed versus fluid, made possible by religious discourse parading as absolute and non-negotiable.

1

2
Chapter two further illuminates the postmodern, poststructural stances presented in chapter one by first reviewing some ideas offered by Michel Foucault. Specifically, we will conceptualize discourse, power/knowledge, and discipline. Then, to illustrate these concepts, we will examine Christian identities in tension with other identities, showing how individuals resist, accept, and manage multiple selves.

Second, we will complicate identity management by playing with some ideas captured by Jacques Derrida. Specifically, we will examine the use of binary opposites as structuring mechanisms of our linguistic (subjective) existence: We do not live on the same page but within convergent and divergent realities, requiring continual interpretation between opposing choices.

For example, our review of Foucauldian notions of discipline, power, and identity might (predominantly) appear confining. Some Christians, for instance, may feel restrained (disciplined) by religion, determined by an almighty God (power) who fashions identity. Here, an analysis of opposites reveals that discipline and power have pejorative and positive organizing effects on identity, dependent upon our perception: We always possess autonomy, choosing to see ideas as controlling and freeing. For example, contrary to our previous speculation, some Christians might embrace the discipline of Christ’s doctrine to receive the power of God. Thus Christian discourse (communication) acts not as a deterministic (controlling) function but, for some, a mechanism for determining (choosing) for oneself to become something new.³

Synthesizing Foucauldian and Derridean notions illuminate opportunities for choice: We negotiate who we are within discourse (communication) that controls and empowers us based on our subjective interpretations (e.g., reality as excessively
controlling or endlessly opportunistic). That said, we operate in what we currently know. Thus, Chapter two will also illuminate Derrida’s notion of deconstruction as a mechanism of questioning existence to expose new possibilities of thought. When deconstructing ideas stabilized by binary opposites, we discover limitations to our existence: We operate in linguistic spheres bearing histories of meaning and signs. Here, Mikhail Bakhtin adds another complementary voice to Foucault and Derrida, creating a complex concoction of poststructural (postmodern) thought that challenges us to reassess who we are, what we believe, and the ways we organize existence.

In chapter three, we take the Foucauldian, Derridian, and Bakhtinian (abstract) assumptions and make them more tangible. While we might believe we negotiate in abstract institutions or bodies of knowledge, these discourses do not exist a priori: We collectively fashion them, organize them, destroy them, and so on. In other words, we make sense of our “shared” realities via organizations, communicating norms in and out of existence with people who share similar goals. To this end, we will focus on how communication constitutes organizations (CCO) to describe how we work for and against discourse. The CCO theoretical framework offers insight into how our interactions at multiple levels (e.g., relationships, groups, organizations) operate within institutional discourses or large bodies of knowledge that regulate our understanding.

Organizations afford identification, defining the self amidst texts (e.g., dialogue, norms) that structure who we are, are not, and can be. Chapter three will additionally describe organizational identification as a process of becoming amidst organizations as discursive structures. In other words, our ability to become anything is contingent upon communication, organized by people and groups forming a composite image. Throughout
the chapter, we will briefly review examples demonstrating CCO and organizational identification concepts to establish the general premise that organizations exist in communication, constraining and enabling expressions of identity.

In chapter four, we will apply the abstract notions of poststructural (postmodern) thinkers and the theoretical assumptions of CCO and organizational identification to religious spaces. To do so, we will first abductively examine the history of Christianity with the previously reviewed philosophies (i.e., Foucault, Derrida, Bakhtin, CCO, organizational identification). Here, we will augment paradoxes of identification crises for believers converted to faith-based organizations (churches) that parade as discrete entities proclaiming absolute truth, despite similarities across (divergent) sects. Namely, we will conceptualize churches as fuzzy and porous instead of perfectly separate faith-based organizations, extending ideas from chapter three.

All ideas presented heretofore will culminate into perplexing religious identification paradoxes experienced within a single context: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Church). Namely, all our abstract ideas applied to The Church take on a tangible, focused form, offering a model for investigating other religious organizations. Indeed, we can (and should) apply our theoretical speculations to other faith-based institutions, as we will likely find similar identification paradoxes in churches constituted by fixed and fluid discourse.

Despite the opportunity to examine other organizations, the remainder of chapter four will argue why The Church is an ideal candidate for bizarre paradoxes of fixed and fluid religious (organizational) identification. Our goal will be to curate a theoretical lens called Restorationism, structured by two opposing tensions: Restoring (a fluid stance) and
Restoration (a fixed posture). First, to construct Restorationism, we will review the Church's history centered around an event called the Restoration. Herein, we will review contrary moments of fixed versus fluid discourse. Second, we will examine the organization’s fundamental beliefs, offering theoretical propositions that we will thirdly investigate from fixed and fluid stances. Doing so will abductively represent (potential) divergent realities experienced by members of The Church, thus offering a foundation for our journey.

In Chapter five, we will plan how to play with Restorationism to illuminate religious (organizational) identification paradoxes. We will review how to think with poststructuralism and use Restorationism as methodic binoculars to engender thought experiments, which we will apply to data. Together, we will experiment upon the words of Prophets from The Church, who, in conference sessions, offer speeches that become Scripture. Noteworthy, we will revisit CCO assumptions (chapter three) when arguing the salience of the conference addresses as data. Doing so will prime us for the complexity required to expose paradoxes. Additionally, I offer a subjectivity statement.

Chapter six represents the climax of our journey as we apply the philosophical notions constructed in chapters one through four and use our plan (method) from chapter five (i.e., Restorationism) to expose religious (organizational) identification paradoxes. Specifically, we will play with speeches about The Church as a (perfect) organization, wandering (and wondering) through contradictory texts that (dis)organize identity. Seemingly “single” readings will manifest multiple realities, crystalized through Restorationism. This chapter is a courtroom scene, placing the text on trial.

Chapter seven will debrief our journey, offering additional speculations about
other (religious) organizational spaces and their paradoxical impacts on identification. Finally, we will hear discussions from various groups of thoughts from organizational communication scholars, believers and nonbelievers, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Figure 2 shows an impression of our journey. Notice that with each chapter, our philosophical ideas take on a more tangible (less abstract or blurry) form, significantly so when we apply them to the context of The Church of Jesus Christ. Also, notice Figure 1 (from the preface), embedded, as a representation of complex, multi-level thinking. Though I illumined the journey for clarity, I invite you to break away from the directions I offer. Instead, (true to postmodern mentality) make the experience your own, embracing the paths, challenging the climbs, and irrupting my thoughts to create something new.

*Figure 2: An Impression of Our Dissertation Journey*
Introduction Footnotes

1. In other words, colloquially, the sky is not the limit because there is no limit to eternally becoming. There is no pinnacle to reach and find rest (as we currently understand it); otherwise, we damn eternal becoming.

2. Chapter two will clarify this assumption. Briefly, discourse organizes the self, (dis)empowering with knowledge based on subjective, human lenses (Foucault, 1980). In other words, we each draw on different frames of reference to conceptualize the self, with identity schemas on a continuum from absurdly fluid to absolutely fixed. These two binary poles (i.e., stable and unstable), acting as life perspectives, reveal possibilities and contentions. Dialectics in mind, hypothetically, the more the claims of absolute fixity, the greater the burden of refuting fluidity. Such is the case with religion. Identifying with religious organizations becomes problematic when truth claims are (adamantly) final and non-negotiable. For example, if communicated as the infallible Word of God, the Holy Bible might structure a contained (controlled) reality that solidifies faith and silences doubt, no matter productive questioning. For some, the Holy Text disciplines the soul to conformity, fostering fervent resistance in those who interpret the scriptures differently (McKim, 1996; Schmeichen, 1980). Alternatively, some religious institutions may encourage personal revelation, allowing bricolage to construct personal identification without regulated, rigid bounds communicated by authoritarians. Thus, a believer accepts, resists, or manages the discourse organized by religious institutions and organizations structuring truth (as explained in chapter three).
3. While we might conceptualize religion in stark opposites (i.e., constraining and enabling), remember, as mentioned in the preface, dialectical thinking assumes continuous nuances structured by the binary poles. In other words, (non)believers will classify religion in various ways (e.g., incessantly confining, somewhat suffocating, neutralizing, fairly empowering, and inarguably freeing, among other classifications). Therefore, we assume opposites as imbricated.

4. We will specifically use the Montréal School Approach to CCO.

5. Here, we draw from scholarship in the Mormon Studies academic discipline, which boasts 14 journals, 18 book publishers, and 12 university programs (with four affiliated with a religious college). The field does not only examine the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but the entire religious epistemology that also informs offshoot organizations (e.g., Community of Christ, Apostolic United Brethren, Fundamentalist) (T. Givens & Barlow, 2015; “Mormon Studies,” 2022). Viewpoints and practices of each organization vary (see “Mormon Fundamentalism,” 2022), often creating organizational stigma issues.

6. Akin to the traditional “methods” section of a dissertation.

7. Indeed, our lens of Restorationism might become distorted when divorced from the organizational context. We aim not to curate a generalizable theory or method, though we might try to examine our thoughts in other (religious) organizational contexts. Adopting a poststructural mindset negates generalizations. Here, Koro-Ljungberg (2016) reminded us: Methodologies are choices, often onto-epistemological and theoretical, and cannot be divorced from the values, beliefs, backgrounds, bodies, and affects of the research or the research context” (p. 79)
CHAPTER 1: POSTMODERNISM (POSTSTRUCTURALISM)

Overview

This chapter briefly outlines significant distinctions between modern and postmodern (poststructural) paradigms, illuminating a generic fixed-fluid tension pertinent to our journey. We aim to question our fixed footings or those ideas with which we maintain steady grips despite the potential to climb higher, specifically with religion and science. Mainly, we will review dominant philosophical narratives, including how God, faith, and belief fall victim to modern (scientific) and postmodern stances. As a result, our identities become unstable.

When reviewing the dominant presumptions centered on science, religion, and identity conflicts, we should not assume they are absolute adversaries. On the contrary, each might productively work together, as accomplished, for example, by believers who embrace sciences to inform their understanding of spirituality. Of more importance, we seek to problematize how modern and postmodern thought patterns influence other aspects of existence, including our constitutions of Divine Beings. In other words, our conceptualizations of Omniscient Sources, and other spiritual ideas with whom we identify, might bear traces of (modern and postmodern) reasoning that limit our ability to discover more profound truth and damn our process of becoming.¹

Irruption #1

In the beginning, God demonstrated order from chaos—The elements of the earth were formless, and God brought division: Light from darkness, sea from dry land, plants
from animals, and male from female (The Holy Bible, King James Version, Genesis 1).
"For God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (The Holy Bible, King James Version, 1 Cor. 14:33). The Fall of Adam and Eve created disarray, confusion, and pain, damaging the inherent order of God's creation. Jesus, the Savior, "removes the chaos of sin and restores spiritual order...Followers of Christ desire order, not chaos. Those who promote chaos will no longer be allowed to disseminate disarray" (What Does the Bible Say about Order vs. Chaos? n.d.). Following this logic, postmodernism is damned, and positivism is salvation. Yet, the latter killed God (Nietzsche, 2001).

(Post) Modernism and (Post) Structuralism

As a paradigm of thought, postmodernism seeks to disrupt the attitudes and beliefs of modern science, which hides its "true" anarchic state by a façade of stability (Feyerabend, 1987). Obtaining certainty is the goal of modernism, or enlightenment thinking, which focuses on human reason via empirical discovery. Teachings by René Descartes (1596-1650) and John Locke (1632-1704) emphasized humankind's ability to reach the Truth without relying on God's revelation dictated by Catholicism. Faith in the metaphysical (i.e., the unknown spiritual) remained; however, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) emphasized reliance on the senses for Knowledge. Thus began the search for the categorical imperative or the universal Law about the right human action (Kant, 1900).

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Auguste Comte (1798-1857) fostered the era of positivism, a fascination with rational arguments that uncover Natural Law. Positivism bears traces of positive religion or the belief that revealed truth is not arrived at by reason but rather is a given a priori. In other words, the scientific community embraces the
mentality that pure reason can uncover preexisting, ahistorical truth that is a given rather than socially constructed. By adopting a uniform scientific method, humans forsake their fallibilities to measure, observe, and find a universe preexisting with logical laws and verifiable propositions. An objective, quantifiable world with precise measures offers salvation from fallacious, unempirical thought (Crotty, 1998). The enlightenment aimed to ensure positivism, coming out of an age of darkness—where humankind relied on the light (truth) offered by faith in God via religion. As a result, God died, and science thrived (Nietzsche, 2001).

The order of all operations captured by positivism offered certainty and direction. The optimistic "faith" in progress sought to remediate the fallen nature of humankind—a task, per Christian thought, belonged to Jesus, the Son of God (Ward, 1998). The new religion of science far surpassed the confines of laboratories and academic debates. The power consciously and subconsciously inserted itself into all facets of life, creating a preoccupation with ordering everything via well-defined definitions, boundaries, and patterns (Foucault, 1994b).

For example, scientific writing contains the nuance of positivist thought, aiming to increase objectivity toward incremental discovery, with a precise language style and hypothetico-deductive templates (e.g., introduction, literature review, research gaps, method, results, discussion) (American Psychological Association, 2020). In turn, science squeezed into contained, formal linguistic systems discourages induction, creative thought, and counterinduction that spawns new possibilities (Feyerabend, 1987; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). The author and reader of academic works become distant observers disembodied through third-person prose and standardized through exact language with
few misinterpretations. As a result, as fashioned by scientific communication, identities are locked within discourse fashioned by rigid and "objective" rules (Foucault, 1994b).

Akin to modernist scientific prose, the Holy Bible may generate an absolute Truth effect, requiring intense exegesis to unearth untainted, objective, Godly ideas. Subjectivities controlled, traditional hermeneutic scholars digging for fundamental meanings of biblical texts promotes precision (Crotty, 1998). From this stance, the (religious) self conforms to "precise" interpretations of messianic commands, only to experience dissonance when a divergent explanation illustrates a doctrine differently. Damnation (i.e., a lack of progress) ensues as personal interpretations of religious texts require circumventing preexisting, hypothetico-deductive religious ideals (Givens & Givens, 2020).

As hallmarks of modernism, standardization, order, and precision require faith in a science (or, in a religious sense, the Holy Bible) that promises to control noise to reduce error. Postmodernism rouses the faculties of human autonomy, recognizing that choice affords subjective interpretation against grand narratives of conformity (Heise, 2004; Sheehan, 2004). The postmodern sphere emphasizes the transitional, non-finite essence of existence within multiple realities constituted and organized by communication. In other words, the paradigm maintains suspicion of authoritarians that believe and promulgate total order, standardized identities, and ignorance of the actual anarchism of Nature. Postmodernism is the antithesis of modernism, creating binary, opposing poles (Crotty, 1998). Herein, religion might find itself in a paradox.

The metaphysical (heavenly) existence, shaped by religious thought and communication, often alludes to an authoritarian Supreme Being (e.g., God, Allah) who
embodies order and completion—an idea damned by modernism and postmodernism. Regarding modernism, scientists seek to capture the objective laws of God, conceptualizing Him as observably mechanistic with precise causal relationships (Martin, 2011). God, now completely discoverable with appropriate measurement, dissolves into Natural Science. The Supreme disappears in the clamor of scientific discourse focused on verifiable, observable truth (e.g., Nietzsche's death of God movement).²

Regarding postmodernism, philosophers likewise crucify God by challenging grand narratives of completion (e.g., Heaven or hell), centrist moral laws, and order (Connor, 2004). Beginnings (e.g., God creating the earth) and ends (e.g., Final Judgment) meet suspicion, as the time points are too rigid (Sheehan, 2004). For modern science, embodied by "infallible" beings, postmodernity strips the authority, begging the question of who, if any, is in charge but the (scientific) discourse at hand. Thus, God is dead twice over, challenged by a critical agenda that attributes notions of the Supreme to social constructions (Bouma-Prediger & Westphal, 1999).³ The postmodern position disillusions spiritual traditions, stirring concern in religious, ethical, and theological communities (King, 1998). In other words, postmodernism catalyzes secularization. Societies reflexively organize their knowledge instead of relying on traditional, grand (religious) narratives (Giddens, 1990).

**Irruption #2**

But no sooner have they been adumbrated than all these groupings dissolve again, for the field of identity that sustains them, however limited it may be, is still too
wide not to be unstable; and so, the sick mind continues to infinity, creating
groups then dispersing them again, heaping up diverse similarities, destroying
those that seem clearest, splitting up things that are identical, superimposing
different criteria, frenziedly beginning all over again, becoming more and more
disturbed, and teetering finally on the brink of anxiety (Foucault, 1994b, p. xviii).

That said, postmodernism is not solely a pejorative phenomenon. Postmodernism,
as a "chameleon," takes many forms for churchgoers: Monster and savior; enemy and
friend; poison and cure; demon and fresh wind (Smith, 2006, p. 15). A paradox,
postmodernism misunderstood can resurrect knowledge and destroy power, depending on
its interpretation and use—often applied by scrutinizing language.

Poststructuralism

From a structuralist stance, signs (e.g., words, symbols) have specific meanings,
part of an encompassing system of signifiers and signified. In other words, classifying a
word (e.g., God) is contingent upon other (un)relatable words (e.g., Evil, Glory). An idea
is only definable and existent when observing the surrounding words and phrases that
signify what the concept is and is not. In this case, societies construct realities via
consensus, agreeing on the meaning of words and ideas and stabilizing them, creating a
structure (Hawkes, 2003).

Poststructuralism espouses some notions of postmodernism, such as focusing on
grand structures that limit meaning. By deconstructing the discursively-created reality,
silenced nuances claim voice, power structures become unsettled, and certainty gives way
to disruption for further progress—even with seemingly rigid religious ideals (Carrette,
Here, deconstruction efforts are not about dismantling tradition nor reconstructing realities from ground zero. Instead, deconstruction aims to preserve tradition without closing off possibilities for discovery. Deconstruction seeks to "disturb [the structure] by way of exploring what systematically drops through its grid and, by so disturbing it, open it up" (Derrida, 1997, p. 77).

That said, poststructuralist views (e.g., Derrida) assume that nothing has a starting point, nor is there an end. This premise complicates some dominant religious notions of "home," beginnings, or ends, such as creation, Edenic conditions, and final resting places (e.g., Heaven or Hell). In short, identities are nomadic without a home (i.e., a starting or end point) (Bouma-Prediger & Westphal, 1999).

**Irruption #3**

The modern and postmodern world seems haunted by the absence of God, and yet in some curious way this absence can, at the same time, become transparent for a new kind of presence...Theological and spiritual possibilities [are] revealed by...examining their influence on our understanding of self, nature, and God, the construction of personal and social identities, [and] the reinterpretation of religious traditions and spiritual practice (King, 1998, p. 7).

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**Opportunities for Transcendence in Religious Paradoxes**

Poststructuralism could also be an enemy and a saving grace for religion or spirituality, depending on the religious dogmas accepted or rejected by believers (see
Carrette, 2010 for a review). In other words, poststructuralist thought, fluid and infinite, complement certain theologies better than others, depending on their fundamental spiritual premises. For example, Buddhism vies for the emptiness of self, transcending temporal discursive structures to reach nirvana—beyond eternal cycles of death (i.e., endings) and rebirth (i.e., beginnings). In turn, stability of self, through emptiness, is manageable in an unstable, poststructural world, where the grip of discursive power releases by mindful control (Batchelor, 1998). A contradictory tension of (fixed or fluid) self transcends to something holier: Nothing. The organizing effect of poststructuralism becomes irrelevant.  

Bahá’í theology might transcend limitations of (fixed or fluid) epistemes by accepting objectivism and subjectivism. First, as unreachable, God orders the universe and knows the essence of all phenomena (i.e., objectivism). Second, subjective humans can never reach the Absolute, instead constructing reality from divergent perspectives (i.e., subjectivism). The diversity of proactively-unbiased thought fosters collective social construction through unifying communication (i.e., consultation), creating a more precise understanding of truth and progress despite never reaching the full Glory of God (Karlberg & Smith, 2009). In other words, God is Objectivism at its finest, having ordered all things under one, stable Law. The human, limited and finite, might never know the True Essence of things, yet still must persist in their subjective, divergent thoughts to better attune knowledge throughout the eternities (Karlberg, 2020). Again, a confounding tension of (fluid versus fixed) self transcends to something higher: Everything. The organizing effect of poststructuralism embraced becomes inescapable.  

Streams of Christianity may be less tolerant of poststructuralist ideals, including
epistemic assumptions about the nature of words as infinite and transient. For example, presbyterian denominations adopt creeds from the Westminster Confession of Faith, including the infallibility of the Holy Bible, the nature of God as the embodiment of absolute certainty, and the predetermined destiny of humankind, among others. Within these doctrines, poststructuralism might meet condemnation.

Per the Confession, the Holy Bible dons finality, where “nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men” (Burges, 1646, p. 5). Here, the word “added” requires ontological clarification. First, “addition” could mean physical appendages (e.g., supplemental, published scriptures) that continue the biblical story. The Confession denounces such additions, labeling them as corrupt, as demonstrated in a final verse of the Holy Bible: “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book” (Holy Bible, King James Version, Revelation 22:18).

Presuming that language organizes identity and daily living, the Holy Bible might insinuate a sense of certainty due to the sin of material, scriptural embellishments. Yet, subjective individuals construct (add) new understanding, responding to changing times. Though not materially extending the Bible, readers constitute new (scriptural-based) worldviews, circumventing an authoritarian, standardized Truth reality that only “God” embodies. Per the confession, ameliorating conflicting interpretations (i.e., subjective worlds) requires biblical exegesis with His Spirit, or an “inward illumination” that aligns to the “general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed” (Burges, 1646, p. 5). In other words, the Holy Bible allows for subjective realities so long as each experience stems from and adheres to an objective source: God. In these cases, contradictory
tensions managed by an individual transcend to something “holier”: Standardization. The organizing effect of poststructuralism becomes blasphemous.\textsuperscript{6}

The Oxford dictionary defines a denomination as a recognized, autonomous branch of The Christian Church. Herein lies a fundamental tension between control versus autonomy. The Holy Bible, as an authoritarian text, insinuates a promise of unity and organization (congregation). However, choice in biblical exegesis promotes disunity and disorder among religious communities that use the “same” Text. A Christian may then use a qualifier (e.g., Adventist, Methodist, Lutheran) to augment difference, despite all denominations being one body in Christ (Holy Bible, King James Version, Romans 12:5).\textsuperscript{7,8}

\section*{Chapter Summary}

Our first chapter briefly discussed some differences between modern and postmodern epistemologies. Table 2 below summarizes our ideas and potential implications for (Christian) identity and being. Our next chapter elaborates on poststructuralist thought by reviewing the assumptions of Foucault, Derrida, and Bakhtin. Specifically, we will examine how discourse (communication) disciplines us, facilitates power/knowledge, and centers around binary opposites posed for deconstruction to illuminate (inescapable) traces of historical-societal meanings.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Some Fundamental Differences between (Post) Modern Thought}
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
Modernist Stance & Postmodernist Stance & Postmodern Effects on Identity and Being \\
\hline
Fixed (stable, certain) & Fluid (unstable, uncertain) & The self is continually changing (becoming) \\
Truth predetermined & Truth constructed & The self determines the future, not predestined \\
Grand Narrative & Negotiable stories & The self writes a story of their own \\
Controlled (Authority) & Free & The self does need to appease authoritarians \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
There is No End

by W. W. Phelps (Deseret News, 1856) (Phelps, 1856, p. 290)

(Now a hymn in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints called “If you could hie to Kolob”)

If you could hie to Kolob,  There is no end to matter;
    In th’twinkling of an eye—  There is no end to space;
And then continue onward,  There is no end to spirit;
    With that same speed to fly;  There is no end to race.

D’ye think that you could ever,  There is no end to virtue;
    Through all eternity,  There is no end to might;
Find out the generation  There is no end to wisdom;
    Where Gods began to be?  There is no end to light.

Or see the grand beginning,  There is no end to union;
    Where space did not extend  There is no end to youth;
Or view the last creation,  There is no end to priesthood;
    Where Gods and matter end?  There is no end to truth.

Me thinks the spirit whispers—  There is no end to glory;
    “No man has found ‘pure space,’  There is no end to love;
Nor seen the outside curtains  There is no end to being—
    Where nothing has a place.  Grim death sleeps not above.

The works of God continue,  There is no end to matter;
    And worlds and lives abound;  There is no end to space;
Improvement and progression  There is no end to spirit;
    Have one eternal round.  There is no end to race.

There is no end to virtue;
There is no end to might;
There is no end to wisdom;
There is no end to light.

There is no end to union;
There is no end to youth;
There is no end to priesthood;
There is no end to truth.

There is no end to glory;
There is no end to love;
There is no end to being—
Grim death sleeps not above.
Chapter 1 Footnotes

1. Not to say that specific forms of reasoning are unproductive. For example, embracing positivist scientific stances creates a confident foundation for building truth. We slow our progress, however, when we rely on single thought patterns (epistemologies) for too long.

2. See the Prelude to this dissertation for more information.

3. Not to say that modernism and postmodernism completely kill God or religion. On the contrary, and to reiterate, we might find God in both traditions.

4. A soul transcends above all things (nirvana)—even those created by language—becoming extinguished like a candle, not to be reborn or die again. Thus, they become nothing (Swanson, 1993).

5. For a soul can never reach the Glory of God. "To whatever heights the mind of most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own concepts and the product of their own thoughts" (Baha'u'llah, 1939, p. 317). Therefore, the soul is continually in poststructuralism (Schultze, 2005). Regarding the Bahá'í stance on postmodernism: "The tension between modern and postmodern ideas can be seen as a part of what is more commonly understood by Bahá'ís as the breakdown of the old world order" (Lample, 2009, p. 163).

6. Poststructuralism might not coincide well with finite ideas (e.g., predestination, beginnings, ends) (see Burges, 1646).

7. In short, Christianity remains divided, despite singularity in upholding the Holy
Bible. I acknowledge these claims regarding Christian denominations do not capture idiosyncratic beliefs that might support and reject poststructural commitments to various degrees. Nevertheless, though divided, differences can offer productive inquiry. On the other hand, poststructuralism might exacerbate divisions, leading followers to question and abandon truth despite promises of certainty.

8. In 1972, around the underpinnings of Derridean and Foucauldian epistemologies, 90% of U.S. adults claimed Christianity as their religious identity. By 2017, Christian adults decreased to 63%, with a 27% rise in those unaffiliated with religion. Pew Research also predicts that U.S. adults claiming Christianity will fall below 50% by 2070 (Nadeem, 2022). Though correlation does not (necessarily) imply causation, the decline could be reminiscent of a society steeped in poststructuralist thought. As such, scrutinizing Christianity with a poststructural lens might offer incites for Christian denominations struggling to retain membership.
CHAPTER 2: POSTSTRUCTURAL VOICES

Overview

This chapter illuminates poststructural (postmodern) epistemologies. We rely on the voices of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Mikhail Bakhtin to concoct a complex theoretical framework for observing religion and identity. We should remember that opposing modernist thought patterns (e.g., positivism, postpositivism, empiricism) solicit stability, certainty, and a priori reasoning. Postmodernists (and poststructuralists) thrive in critique, exposing limits to thoughts and ways of being (Crotty, 1998). Figure 3 below includes an illustration of the opposing meta-theoretical mindsets.

Figure 3

Power, Knowledge, Discipline: A Foucauldian Lens for Identity and Religion

This section examines Michel Foucault's popular ideas centered on discourse, power, knowledge, discipline, and other notions relevant to poststructuralism. Capturing the complete influence of Foucauldian thought is not the aim, if even possible. Despite his death in 1984, his works continue to (dis)organize philosophical thought, as scholars coproduce, with Foucault, through inductive creativity rather than deductive specification (Raffnsøe et al., 2019). In this sense, there are no black-or-white (i.e., simplistic) interpretations of Foucauldian philosophy. Suggesting so would relegate Foucauldian
knowledge to a simple mechanism of power, where an authoritarian scholar, disciplined in biased perspectives, controls the scientific discourse (e.g., this is the only way to see Foucault). Such a stance would create hypocrisy: For poststructural views of knowledge and power escape confinement to single bodies (e.g., a scholar, an academic community). In other words, writing about, drawing from, and using Foucauldian notions assumes that no True interpretation or classification of ideas exists, although the language used may paint this façade (Foucault, 1994b). To this end, the Foucauldian assumptions outlined below draw from his multiple poststructural works without assuming that explanations are definitive or exhaustive.¹

**Review of Foucauldian Ideas**

Knowledge is contingent upon relations of power. Pieces of knowledge (i.e., ideas) shift in composition and value from irrefutable to malleable and priceless to worthless, among others. The worth of knowledge depends on the actor who constructs reality differently when interacting with others. Molding knowledge can thus be an active and passive process, where people, as constructors of truth, exercise their power to create through daily communication (i.e., little d discourse). Of course, constructing knowledge depends on available material and discursive resources. Regarding the latter, truth constructors operate in bodies of knowledge (i.e., big D Discourse), where cultural practices, institutional thinking, and traditions enable and constrain possibilities. Thus, all perspectives are subjective, contingent upon the knowledge at hand, and ever-changing based on their social connections.

In other words, the ability to create knowledge or truth is a powerful commodity. That said, a single person does not "possess" power, as if a deposited lump of money or
under a particular status (e.g., juridical, hierarchical). Instead, power—especially to generate, uphold, or change knowledge—is a relational process constituted by communication. Within one community, truth provides powerful organizing effects; however, that same knowledge might be feeble in other groups that draw from different Discourses. These realities organized by (divergent and convergent) communication magnify subjectivity: The self is not a stable entity but is in continual tension within multiple discursive realms. The term identity, in this sense, might assume a more transient label; that is, identification, or the process of continually becoming.

Again, becoming occurs within powerful paradigms of thought (i.e., Discourse) that value specific ideas over others. The discursive self is continually negotiating paradoxical realities, where one context offers familiar stability of self, whereas another environment evokes disorder. The only certainty offered is instability. Language is the culprit.

Irruption #5

Language…is a fragmented nature…It is a secret that carries within itself, though near the surface, the decipherable signs of what it is trying to say. It is at the same time a buried revelation and a revelation that is gradually being restored to ever greater clarity. In its original form, when it was given…by God himself, language was an absolute certain and transparent sign for things…This transparency was destroyed at Babel as a punishment (Foucault, 1994b, pp. 35–36)

An individual operates in Discourse, often standardized and normalized via
congregated thought. Within congregations, a person experiences discipline. Similarities expose deviance, fostering concertive control. In other words, in contexts where individuals are similar, divergent thoughts can punish when going against the group’s dominant norms. Thus, the knowledge at hand offers power to those who conform. Conversely, those resisting the regulative discourse might experience disempowerment.

Because we operate in multiple, simultaneous discourses, accepting or rejecting identity categorizations are not necessarily either-or choices. Instead, we manage our identities, congregating and segregating to different degrees, using various management tactics. We exist in and through the surrounding communication (Larson & Gill, 2017).

*Irruption #6*

Though God still employs signs to speak to us through nature, He is making use of our knowledge, and of the relations that are set up between our impressions, in order to establish in our minds a relation of signification…Because we are not pure intelligences, [we] no longer have the time or the permission to attain to ourselves and by the unaided strength of our own minds. (Foucault, 1994b, p. 59)

**Foucauldian Applications to Religious Contexts: (Christian) Identification Tensions**

Balancing identification in multiple discursive places (i.e., multiple identities as fashioned by contending discourse) may often result in sacrificing one identity for another at the expense of relational contentions. For example, Kassler and Hinderaker (2022) captured narratives of LGBTQIA+ individuals who, when forsaking heterosexual, Christian Discourse, met dissent and abandoned their religious identity due to
homophobic discourse. Other gay Christians attempted to balance competing identities by reimagining the Doctrine in different communities (e.g., LGBTQIA+ Christian conferences, online spaces) and via alternative texts (e.g., testimonials, self-help books).

These conclusions corroborate research on contradictions between Christian identities and competing "other" identities, as detailed in Table 3. Although Table 3 below categorizes tensions (e.g., Christians and LGBTQIA+, gendered self, race), these 88 studies do not inclusively reside within the qualitative boundaries set. Each represented identity might find a home in multiple categories, shifting depending on the interpretation. Ordering becomes futile (Foucault, 1994b).

The prevailing theme throughout these studies is the significant tension experienced by the Christian, postmodern self, escaping the confines of (modernist) standardization. In most cases, affiliation with Christianity, no matter the denomination, requires negotiating stable religious traditions with fluid daily living. In other words, remarkably obvious, Christianity does not entirely define each believer, as "other" identities occur (e.g., man, woman, Latino, mother, father, liberal). To this end, most studies chose seemingly bounded identities (e.g., gay, black, feminist, conservative), assumed an intersectional stance (see Crenshaw, 1989), and held the identities in tension with Christianity to create binary poles (i.e., "Christian" versus "other").

Managing binary tensions (e.g., Christian-Other) generally centered around three options, including either-or (i.e., choose one over the other), both-and (i.e., embrace both, no matter opposition), or transcendence (i.e., creative ways to overcome binary poles) (Putnam et al., 2016). Strategies to manage the Christian-Other contradictions in the studies demonstrated frequent use of either-or and both-and options.
### Table 3: Fundamental Tensions between Christian and Other Identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Tensions</th>
<th>Christian Affiliations</th>
<th>Identification Struggles</th>
<th>Management Tactics</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christianity &amp;</td>
<td>Catholicism</td>
<td>Gay identities within orthodoxy, constituted by homophobic discourse, resulting in conflict, fear, mental health issues, and stressors</td>
<td>Abandoning beliefs; apologizing to LGB community; compartmentalizing sexuality; conforming to or dissenting doctrine; delegitimizing from family; destabilizing binary opposites; destigmatizing; reimagining discourse; supporting online; integrating, liberating, embattling, disillusioning; tolerating, welcoming communities;</td>
<td>(Chávez, 2004; Clare-Young, 2021; Cooper &amp; Pease, 2009; Crawford, 2018; Crowell et al., 2015; Dahl &amp; Galliher, 2012; Dehlin et al., 2015; García et al., 2008; Grigoriou, 2010; Hamblin &amp; Gross, 2013; Kassler &amp; Hinderaker, 2022; Mahaffy, 1996; Pitt, 2010; Radojcic, 2016; Rowe, 2007; Scott &amp; Petersen, 2018; Sumerau &amp; Cragun, 2014; Y. Taylor &amp; Snowdon, 2014; Terry, 2015; Wedow et al., 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQIA+ Self</td>
<td>The Church of England</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fundamentalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LDS*</td>
<td>Gay, Christian identities, intersectional (e.g., color)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presbyterianism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General Christianity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *LDS = The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

<p>| Christianity &amp;   | LDS                     | Personal faith crises between the naïve self and awoken self, caused by interacting with problematic church behavior, discourse inside (e.g., leader behaviors) and outside (e.g., online) the organization, and changing (postmodern) societies | Challenging doctrine; concealing doubt; converting to something new; detaching from institutions; exiting (disaffiliating) church; ignoring dissonance, normalizing status quo; questioning the truth | (Avance, 2013; Bennet–Carpenter et al., 2013; Coopman &amp; Meidlinger, 2000; Gull, 2022; Hinderaker, 2015; Hinderaker &amp; O’Connor, 2015; Inglis, 2007; Lockett et al., 2022; Scharp &amp; Beck, 2017; Walker &amp; Fitzgerald, 2022; Worwood et al., 2020) |
| &quot;Awoken&quot; Self    | Catholicism            |                                                                                         |                                                                                     |                                                                          |
|                   | Evangelicalism         |                                                                                         |                                                                                     |                                                                          |
|                   | Pentecostal Protestantism |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                          |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Tensions</th>
<th>Christian Affiliations</th>
<th>Identification Struggles</th>
<th>Management Tactics</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christianity &amp; Gendered Self</td>
<td>Catholicism Christianity (General) Church of England Evangelicalism LDS</td>
<td>Dissonance with gendered (cultural) norms and church policies, including discourse on traditional masculinity and femininity, motherhood, and inequitable opportunities (e.g., woman holding no priesthood)</td>
<td>Advocating for equality; challenging patriarchy; defying gendered norms; emphasizing motherhood; focusing on masculinity; hiding defiance; highlighting endurance; reaffirming gender; retranslating doctrine; self-subordination; separating doctrine from subsequent culture;</td>
<td>(Chen, 2014; Feller, 2016; Gull, 2022; Hinderaker, 2017; Hoyt &amp; Patterson, 2011; Jensen &amp; Hammerback, 1985; Johns, 2008; Marks &amp; Dollahite, 2001; Pauly, 2018b, 2018a; Ross &amp; Finnigan, 2014; Sani &amp; Reicher, 2000; Scott &amp; Petersen, 2018; Sterk, 1989; Sumerau &amp; Cragun, 2014; Sutton et al., 2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity &amp; Public vs. Private Self</td>
<td>Catholicism Chinese Christianity Christianity (General)</td>
<td>Maintaining the privacy of religious identity in spaces (e.g., society, social media) not engaged in religious discourse</td>
<td>Hiding, integrating, negotiating public versus private; polarizing (us v. them); selecting, self-disclosing (online); separating, transcending</td>
<td>(Ban, 2017; Bobkowski &amp; Pearce, 2011; Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2020a, 2020b; Feller, 2018; Kołodziejska, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Tensions</td>
<td>Christian Affiliations</td>
<td>Identification Struggles</td>
<td>Management Tactics</td>
<td>Citations</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity &amp; Cultural, Ethnic, or Racial Self</td>
<td>Catholicism</td>
<td>Racial, ethnic, or cultural identities in contention with dominant religious identities (e.g., White Christians, Global religions in conflict with local communities, marginalization in dominant religious communities, immigration challenges)</td>
<td>Augmenting race (e.g., blackness); counter-hegemonizing; decolonizing, deculturating; negotiating with cultural norms; performing multiple identities; reinforcing ethnicism; resisting sociopolitical order of whiteness; strategizing stance; vying for whiteness;</td>
<td>(Barreto, 2019; Callahan, 2010, 2011; Calvillo &amp; Bailey, 2015; Choi &amp; Berhó, 2016; Draper, 2018; Gordon, 2005; Ježek, 2011; Lockett et al., 2022; Lu et al., 2012; Manalang, 2018; Moshin &amp; Crosby, 2018; Stout, 2004; Vila &amp; Avery-Natale, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese Catholicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christianity (General) Greek Catholicism LDS Orthodox Church Protestantism United Church of Christ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity &amp; Organizational Self</td>
<td>Baptist Catholicism LDS Mars Hill Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA)</td>
<td>Tensions with competing roles held within the religious organization, including power differentials, &quot;business&quot; leaders, temporal roles (e.g., missionaries, newcomers)</td>
<td>Aggressively communicating; buffering, connection, restructuring; code (discourse) jumping; compartmentalizing and trumping; deidentifying from roles; forcing commitment; questioning dedication; reidentifying with new roles; resisting inappropriate leadership; uncoupled identification</td>
<td>(Ault, 2018; Chory et al., 2020; Garner &amp; Peterson, 2018; Hinderaker, 2020; McNamee, 2011; McNamee &amp; Gould, 2019; Silva &amp; Sias, 2010; Taylor et al., 2015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1 Cont.: Fundamental Tensions between Christians and Other Identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Tensions</th>
<th>Christian Affiliations</th>
<th>Identification Struggles</th>
<th>Management Tactics</th>
<th>Citations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christianity &amp; Political Self</td>
<td>Catholicism</td>
<td>Political and governmental expectations or commitments, creating discord with the religious self (e.g., adhering to new laws, engaging in war)</td>
<td>Downplaying stigma; negotiating prophetic rhetoric; neutralizing religion; refashioning religious identity for political purposes; managing conservativism and liberalism</td>
<td>(Cheney, 1991; Crosby, 2011; Hoyt &amp; Patterson, 2011; Lunceford, 2012; Mehlntretter, 2009; Peterson, 1990; Powell, 2012; Salek, 2014; Starks, 2009, 2013; Van Dyke, 2013; White &amp; White, 2005; Zubrzycki, 2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity &amp; Other (General)</td>
<td>Christianity (General) Non-denominational</td>
<td>Tensions experienced with additional identities, including age, mental illness, multiple religions, stigmatized workers, unmarried, work identity</td>
<td>Associating to heal; building online communities; belonging to increase self-worth; performing multiple identities; reforming rhetoric of mental illness; shedding stigmatized identities</td>
<td>(Krause, 2012; Mayer &amp; Richardson, 2010; McEwan &amp; McPhillips, 2017; Stone, 2018; Zahedi, 2018; Ziemer, 2019)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For example, exit narratives (e.g., Avance, 2013; Gull, 2022; Hinderaker, 2015; Hinderaker & O'Connor, 2015; Scharp & Beck, 2017; Worwood et al., 2020) illustrated breaking points of contending identities (e.g., anti-patriarchy feminists), antithetical to traditional Christian norms. Once broken from an either-or stance, escaping the Church identity provided more peace than remaining in discursive environments that preach harmony. Other believers attempted to manage conflicting identities (e.g., Gay and Catholic), despite existing in contentious discourse (e.g., Wedow et al., 2017).

The research identified several Christian identity management strategies; however, the studies mainly rely on an intersectional stance, predisposed to comparing two or more "stable" identities at crossroads. Doing so presents an issue from a poststructuralist lens. Here, an identity (e.g., transgender, believer, feminist) escapes the confines of bounded labels: An identity is constituted by the communication in a single moment, fashioned by powerful voices operating in discourses of "truth" (i.e., knowledge) (Foucault, 1980).

In theory, a Christian's identity becomes more noticeable when interacting with a group of atheists expressing opinions and becomes less visible when fellow Christians begin dominating the conversation. In turn, the identity is not stable or fixed when ontologically decomposed. Naming an identity with precision, or covering all possibilities within tangential moments of communication, would require an exhaustive list of each situation where a proposition about identity can hold (Foucault, 1994b).³ As detailed in the next section, the ability to organize identity within multiple discourses becomes even more problematic when each participant operates in realities constructed with binary opposites and endless possibilities.
Deconstructing Religious Discourse, Power, and Identity: A Derridean Approach

This section examines Jacques Derrida's ideas centered on deconstruction, another pillar in poststructuralist thought. Akin to Foucauldian philosophy, a thorough review of Derrida is futile, for even Jacques opposes closure or finality (Derrida, 1976). Thus, a perfect review is unattainable; however, describing relevant Derridean notions is somewhat achievable. The following descriptions synthesize deconstruction from various works (Derrida, 1976, 1977, 1992, 1997, 2002); though, no perfect articulation exists for a notion not considered a "theory…philosophy…school… method…discourse…act…nor practice" (Malabou & Derrida, 2004, p. 225).

First, Derrida maintained that language manifests all reality; that is, nothing exists outside interpretation: *Everything* and everybody offers a reading, including, but not limited to, actual texts, people, and institutions. As such, Derrida refuted the modernist notion that an objective, pure reality void of biased interpretations exists (e.g., stripping away biases will yield a word's True meaning). This enlightenment stance assumes that objects present a True meaning to an observer without the aid of a translator. Namely, a thing (e.g., a rock) discloses inherent properties (e.g., density, porosity, permeability, strength) to manifest its identity or purpose without human intervention. Essentially, the object speaks without humans giving it a voice.

Yet, the material object cannot escape the human-made language structures that do give voice to each property. For example, to know the weight of a rock (an objective characteristic, pending the reliability of the scale and the metric system employed), a scientist must also know the meaning of weight (as opposed to height and other characteristics). Thus, even if things did send a message about their "objective"
characteristics, the scientist still receives the meaning through biased, subjective lenses constituted by language and reality schemas (i.e., bodies of knowledge of discourse).

Subjectivity shapes and redefines the meaning of words, creating contexts where certain words act differently (e.g., the strength of a rock versus that of an argument). Thus, a single sentence (though possessing the same 156 letters and 26 words arranged to communicate a message) organizes understanding differently due to the subjective interpreter. Hence the colloquial phrase: We are never on the same page. Items do not offer pure information: We construct meaning in a continual state of (dis)organization.

Since all readings are interpretations of eternal experiences, instability of identity is guaranteed; however, traditions do not require abandonment nor devaluing of all subjectivities. Though the self could and will experience continual identification crises, conventional texts can still be true (i.e., faithful) to good, better, or best interpretations agreed upon by communities. To this end, orthodoxy can remain so long as its upholders find value and reap satisfaction from endorsement.

Deconstruction, as a space for questioning, serves as a constructive force by opening opportunities for silenced or hidden understandings; though, some community members might act as "interpretive police" to maintain a privileged stance (Derrida, 1977, pp. 144–145). Here, Foucauldian and Derridean notions coincide when conformed (biased) knowledge generates truth effects: Something is True because we continue to believe or express faith in the idea (Foucault, 1980). Likewise, a community could forsake conviction in texts, beliefs, or institutional thoughts, some turning deconstruction into a weapon against conservatism. The choice to see deconstruction as positive, negative, constructive, and destructive depends upon the values of the community, which
enact the powers of creation to serve varying interests. To this end, deconstruction "is what happens, what is happening today in what they call society, politics, diplomacy, economics, historical reality, and so on" (Malabou & Derrida, 2004, p. 225).

Derridean and Foucauldian mentalities rely on social relationships communicating truth in and out of existence. Poststructuralist thought is communicative at best, continually (dis)organizing based on available and lionized knowledge. We socially (de)construct by spanning boundaries in aporia, where a signifier possesses multiple (contradictory) interpretations. Thus, a body of knowledge (discourse) does not have a uniform power/knowledge complex: There are present, conspicuous versions of truths (i.e., faithful conclusions ready for refinement) and hidden possibilities waiting for arousal via deconstruction. The current (observable) knowledge and the absent (unobservable, yet waiting to be revealed) bits of intelligence wield disabling and enabling power. Their (dis)organizing effect on identity relies on subjective autonomy: We choose what to believe in (based on available knowledge) and how much so.

Revealing new possibilities does not rely on a single method: Deconstruction does not follow an empirical checklist, where a critic reaches a destination after traversing a certain number of miles. Suggesting so is antithetical to poststructuralism. That said, some techniques expose nuances more so than others.

For example, Derrida employed sous rature, or "under erasure." Using this technique, an investigator criticizes a word, crosses it out, and leaves the (inaccurate) crossed-out trace next to the new idea. Doing so reminds readers of the inadequacy of language constituting truth by maintaining the old juxtaposed to the new (Spivak, 1976).
Irruption #7

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me (Holy Bible, King James Version, Mark 8:34)

I would that ye should repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God (The Book of Mormon, 1830, Alma 39:9)

Derrida also posited that all things (e.g., words) have an opposite, and by identifying contraries, a relationship (i.e., structure) in tension can break to reveal new meaning. The opposing terms usually contain hierarchical oppositions, where one idea is praiseworthy and the other word undesirable. For example, God (good) and Devil (evil) represent a fundamental (good versus evil) structure that organizes the self. However, hierarchical oppositions are not absolutes since words in tension rely on each for existence. As such, a human cannot know happiness without suffering, for joy defined contains traces of anti-happiness or suffering. Hope is not solely a positive phenomenon, for it requires misery.

This dialectical lens of viewing the world provides eternal realms since all signs, signifiers, and signified are linked in never-ending, creationary processes. By identifying a binary structure, deconstruction aims to span the boundaries of thought, illuminating moments where an obsession with categorical labels organizes simplistic understanding and modes of living. Creating something new requires transcendence or breaking the staunch, contentious relationship between two terms to expose new identification
schemas. A creator cultivates ambiguity, avoids absolute statements, and allows multiple interpretations to escape the grasp of limiting binary structures. To this end, the creationary capability of deconstruction complements the Foucauldian critique of our maddening obsession to categorize, label, and fix truths despite uncertainty and change (see Foucault, 1994b).

That said, the hierarchical oppositions identified as good or bad are contingent upon the Discourses in which they reside. For example, an unequal balance between a man-woman binary structure depends on the society: Some cultures will uphold the male ideal, whereas others might endorse the feminine. Namely, a system may exist; however, the binaries do not take on an unnegotiable form, as people will value them differently.

Even a single word contains traces of hierarchical opposition, requiring a person to choose how to manage or abandon potential conflict. For example, the term discipline connotes negativity and positivity. Regarding the former, Foucault's review of disciplinary mechanisms for prisons provides a grim view where discipline takes the form of punishment (see Foucault, 1978). On the other hand, discipline could also hold positive traces: By loving others, we become disciples, that is, disciplined in Christ's way (see The Holy Bible, King James Version, John 13:34-35). In other words, through obedience to commandments, one becomes disciplined to receive more power from God. Here, power is not hegemonic but rather freeing.

That said, scholars might unduly focus on power as a function of deterministic discipline and constraint instead of willingly subjecting oneself to dominant discourse, especially to maintain love instead of escaping fear (Dixon, 2007). In other words, choosing discipline by discourse might, paradoxically, provide greater control to unite
rather than divide (Smith, 2006). If power resides in and through social interactions, and knowledge is contingent upon power relations, the ability to reveal grander truth may require congregation rather than segregation.

---

**Irruption #8**

And to bring about his eternal purposes…it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter. Wherefore, the Lord God gave unto man that he should act for himself. Wherefore, man could not act for himself save it should be that he was enticed by the one or the other (The Book of Mormon, 1831, 2 Nephi 2: 15-16)

---

**Bakhtinian Utterances: Traces, Heteroglossia, and Language Becoming**

This section briefly highlights some of Mikail Bakhtin's philosophy that crystallizes poststructural thought. Bakhtinian ideas are challenging to conceptualize clearly, which is not surprising considering their dedication to continuance instead of permanence (Haye & Larrain, 2011). The representation of thought below stems from multiple works, though each idea bears traces and utterances of past, present, and future ideas weaved by dialogue, impossible to separate discretely.⁶

The complex and transient nature of language represents a fundamental position of Bakhtin. Contrary to structuralist notions that assume language contains objective, neutral structures void of social appropriation, Bakhtinian philosophy focuses on the humanness of language. No matter how united we might feel by our dialects, we do not
live in a single, objectified world.\textsuperscript{7}

On the contrary, we exist in heteroglossia (разноречие or "different-speech-ness"), where each unit of discourse (utterance) is unique and contextual.\textsuperscript{8} To live in a world constituted by "different-speech-ness" engenders an existence where we never exist in absolute linguistic unity: Each expression we communicate is an indiscernible drop in an eternal ocean of meaning constituted by curators of the past, artists of the present, and fashioners of the future. (In)visible traces of otherness serve a salvific function: Our distinctions save us from collapsing into emptiness.

Said differently, the self does not exist in a vacuum or a predetermined, unchanging existence. Heteroglossia affords eternal becoming, avoiding damnation for the soul because differences offer choice. A world of homogenous beings, standardized through precise language, and controlled by an authoritarian author, would forsake necessary opportunities to choose between at least two options (e.g., suitable and wrong, better and best, light and darkness). In short, our eternal existence depends on the gift of (linguistic) difference and change, avoiding black holes.

\textit{Irruption \#9}

Black Hole / ,blak \textasciitilde h\textperiodcentered l/  

General: A place of confinement as punishment.  

Military: The punishment cell or ‘lock-up’ in a barracks; the guardroom.  

Astronomy: A region of space having a gravitational field so intense that no matter or radiation can escape.
Informal: A place where items unaccountably disappear without a trace; a place from which communication with the rest of the world is impossible.

(“Black Hole, n.,” n.d.)

Though heteroglossia engenders endless opportunities to become—in personal realities—we do not operate in complete chaos. Bakhtin reminded us that relatively stable (language) structures inform our existence. Discourses, similar to Foucauldian notions, act as living systems that (powerfully) shape identities: We share comparable perceptions of ideas that organize our realities, despite utterances modifying the (ongoing) conversation.

Social interaction is fundamental to discourse (i.e., relatively stable bodies of utterances). Namely, though we each exist in subjective realms, meaning cannot exist without coauthorship: We organize our realities through communication with others. In other (Foucauldian) words, to operate in (big-D) Discourse, we acknowledge that it derives from and exists due to (little-d) discourse. To exist requires the “other,” from whom we define our identities. We cannot explain who we are without referencing categories conceptualized and reified by others. Thus, our ontological existence is always dependent on at least one other autonomous being who can, like ourselves, choose to construct meaning in response to another.

**Irruption #10**

The human body is a social organization of teeming histological communities,
each of which is in turn composed of individual cells, all interacting with each other in a constantly interrelating community of “languages,” a heteroglossia of electrochemical impulses and hormonal “dialects” and enzymatic “patois.” In the same way that all these subsystems interreact with each other, the integrated system that they all constitute in their entirety socially interacts with other persons.” (K. Clark & Holquist, 1984, pp. 66–67)

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**Chapter Summary**

We cannot know or be anything save it be through language, which is not objectively structured or pre-existent (a priori): We would cease to exist without communication, made sense by the signs and signifiers we co-construct, in the past, present, and (anticipated) future. Every utterance (or unit of discourse) is unrepeatable (unfixed), socio-historical, and embodied by autonomous beings, constituting each other in social relationships. Together, we construct relatively stable discourses (or speech genres) that fashion our existence, curating (subjective, biased) knowledge that wields power for possibilities of eternally becoming. Due to our autonomy, we make existence possible as we reject, accept, and manage our knowledge and identities “structured” by binary, hierarchal opposites. In short, to eternally exist, we require the complexity of language, never on the same page but instead authoring our (personal) existences, exposed by deconstructing who we are, where we come from, and where we are going.
**Irruption #11: A Summary Haiku**

We are different

Communication matters

Life isn’t simple

---

A poststructural stance, voiced by Foucault, Derrida, and Bahktin, promotes disorganization. We are nomads, lost in existences concocted with language (games), unsteady foundations, and impending uncertainties. Perhaps we favor organizing to escape our (inescapably productive) chaos. To this end, per chance, we rivet ourselves to people who, in organizations, communicate “tangible” realities: Something, anything, that offers certainty in definition, boundaries that promote safety, and “shared” meaning. Abstract, poststructural philosophy described, the next chapter provides a theoretical framework for how organizations, as collective actants finding rest amidst uncertainty, exist in and through communication.
Chapter 2 Footnotes

1. (Foucault, 1978, 1980, 1994a, 1994b, 2010). Though separate works, each piece forms an amalgamation of poststructural thought. I decompose Foucauldian thoughts, recomposing something new, prepared for scrutinizing and refashioning by fellow scholars. I cite the works here to not muddy the text: While we might trace the Foucauldian to specific moments (i.e., citations), I strategically weave together the texts to demonstrate the inseparable nature of knowledge. For Foucault, the past, present, and future inform each other. I work in tandem with Foucault, acknowledging that my summary of his work might generate truth effects for those who read Foucault differently.

2. Studies only include those linked to the discipline of communication for brevity. Articles mined in Spring 2022 used 15 databases (e.g., Communication, Academic Search Complete) with the following Boolean phrase: (identity OR self) AND (identification OR testimony OR assimilation OR recognition) AND (church OR chapel OR mosque OR parish OR sanctuary OR shrine OR synagogue OR temple OR abbey OR basilica OR bethel OR cathedral OR chancel OR chantry OR fold OR minster OR mission OR oratory OR tabernacle OR sacellum) AND (Religio*). I limited the search to 50 dominant Communication Journals (e.g., Management Communication Quarterly, Communication Monographs) and dissertations. In addition, I only examined articles labeled as empirical studies (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, field). Finally, I reviewed 463 abstracts, triaging to identify studies mainly focused on Christianity (to narrow scope) and identity.
3. The fluid self does not exist in a vacuum: It morphs within multiple discourses organized by others (Scott et al., 1998). Organizations (e.g., churches) perform an ordering function where members operating with incomplete knowledge communicate what a member should and should not be. We will discuss this more in chapters three and four.

4. Derrida himself admitted that deconstruction ideas could not be stated in a nutshell (see Derrida, 1997). Thus, the word "somewhat" is strategic.

5. In other words, the newly revealed idea only has meaning when considering its past reading. For example, "God [Science] is dead, and we have killed [them]" (Nietzsche, 2001, pp. 119–120). Here, understanding how poststructuralism (postmodernism) killed Science requires first knowing God as the previous victim (see the Prelude of this dissertation).

6. Like Foucauldian and Derridean philosophy, attempting to identify discrete moments of Bakhtin's philosophy contradicts the philosophy: An utterance (including thought) cannot be pinned and scrutinized like a (well-preserved) butterfly. Instead, we learn more from the creature when observing its flight, shifting with the wind, and illuminating with light. For references, we draw from several sources summarizing and translating Bakhtinian thought (Bakhtin, 1981, 1990; Clark & Holquist, 1984; Felch & Contino, 2001; Haye & Larrain, 2011; Hirschkop, 2021; Morris, 1994).

7. “Bakhtin had attempted to think about language in a new way: not as a formal system that speakers learned and used to transmit bits of information (as the reigning structuralist model suggested), but as something that the speaker could
twist and slant, expressing an attitude to the words used and to the person one was addressing. Language was something always ‘depending on the concrete relationship which the user maintains here and how with his utterances” (Hirschkop, 2021, p. 1).

8. “Every word smells of the context and contexts in which it lived its socially intensified life; all words and forms are filled with intentions” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293).

9. Bahktin called these relatively stable structures “speech genres.” These linguistic principles or templates are more or less accepted as the norm (e.g., saying hello and goodbye in conversations) (Morris, 1994).

CHAPTER 3: CCO AND ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Overview

As discussed in previous chapters, identities are contingent upon communication at the moment: The definition of self, no matter our attempts at stabilization, relies on discourse or bodies of (available) knowledge upheld by social interaction. We continually become something new because of our autonomy—choices to communicate ideas in and out of our purview. Likely, we gravitate toward those with (similar) motivations for certainty, direction, and a sense of belonging. To this end, abstractly, organizations serve as rhetorically-structured homes promising stability despite ontological fluidity.

This chapter examines organizations’ role in identification (i.e., the continual act of becoming with surrounding discourse). First, we will briefly conceptualize organizations (e.g., churches, denominations, faith-based organizations) as transient targets according to the aforementioned poststructural stances, subscribing to the communication constitutes organization (CCO) theoretical framework.¹ After examining the lens, we will discuss the implications of (organizational) identification. Here, we will briefly review traditional (modernist) notions of organizational identity contrasted with communicative approaches and research, highlighting the complexity of identification and (dis)organizing processes.

Communication Constitutes (Religious) Organization: The Montréal School

The communication constitutes organization (CCO) episteme offers an interpretive lens for how organizations originate, produce, and reproduce in society. All CCO epistemological stances (e.g., McPhee’s structurationist, Montréal school, Luhmannian systems) adopt a social constructionist approach: That is, organizations exist
in and through communication, and as such, continually change despite relatively stable structures (Brummans et al., 2013; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). To this end, CCO complements poststructural mentalities, promoting organizations’ ephemeral ontological existences in competing discourses. Additionally, these approaches acknowledge the permeability of organizational boundaries, where societal discourses are not found “outside” the organization but instead weaved into the identities of members who (re)produce the organization daily through communication (Cheney et al., 2013).

The Montréal School of CCO (MSCCO) offers an inductive, discursive approach to theorizing organization, drawing heavily from poststructuralism (e.g., Derrida, Foucault, Bakhtin) among other postmodern (e.g., Latour, Ricoeur) and pragmatist thinkers (e.g., Dewey, Mead). As such, the Montréal School will serve as a chosen theoretical framework due to its fundamental roots in poststructuralism. Additionally, MSCCO offers deep complexity, assuming organizations represent stitched multiverses or scaled-up forms of multiple universes of space, time, matter, energy, and other constants. Thus, its ontological complexity contrasts with (religious) discourses parading as permanent and absolute (Brummans et al., 2013).

MSCCO offers four translations for navigating the discursive complexity of organizations. The researcher chooses which frame (translation) best addresses their question, using them separately or simultaneously. Reasoned by the investigator, the translations afford induction and deduction. In other words, the frames inform how an organization originates (i.e., bottom-up) and fashions individual interactions (i.e., top-down).
Translation #1: Organizations as a Network of Practices and Conversations

First, conversations and networks of practices constitute an organization. Orienting to a common goal, organizational members make sense of their purpose through interaction, creating and sustaining comrade networks webbed in shared commitments. These interactants create realities specific to the discourse and local to the actors; though, these worldviews are never objective but subjective, requiring negotiation of meaning. To this end, the translation fits well with Foucauldian, Derridean, and Bakhtinian ideas: No subjects will find True meaning, despite operating in bodies of discourse fashioned by knowledge and power relations. Notwithstanding subjectivity, people organize through transactional relationships and negotiate rules, producing knowledge schemas and contested sites of power while interacting with (non)human agents.

The first translation offers an edge of complexity: Though we might assume an organization appears as a stable body, a labyrinth of change flows with people orienting their foci toward “shared” goals (eventually realized in the latter translations). Metaphorically, when watching a human body, we only see the observable, macro, outward movements (e.g., the curling of a fist, the frowning of lips). We do not see the neurons communicating and organizing to catalyze bodily action: Hence the case with organizations, where the macro activities (described in the upcoming translations) demand the spotlight despite the micro-interactions livening the system.

As pictured below in Figure 4, an organization is a complex phenomenon constituted by interpersonal (micro) interactions, group (meso) exchanges, and organizational (macro) connections, all influenced by institutional (macro) discourse.
Notice the intricacies in each level, represented by maze-like twists and turns: These daily acts of communication (i.e., little d discourse) counteract organizational rigor mortis. They are the neurons for every level of analysis.

Figure 4: Conversations as Neurons for All Organizational Levels (Translation #1)

Translation #2: Organization as Collective Experience

Second, although the daily exchanges create localized bodies of knowledge ripe with power tensions, these idiosyncratic practices might amalgamate to form collective actants. Verbal interactions become tangible in text, shaping a shared identity: The individuals become (more or less) one voice. Inversely, the communal texts organize micro-interactions. Figure 5 illustrates the organization as a collective experience (remember that translation #1 is still in operation).

Translation #3: Organization as Authoring

The third translation takes the collective voice and text and makes it more abstract via decontextualization: An overarching organization forms, speaking on behalf of all members and networks involved. Though micro-interactions continue (i.e., translation 1)
and (divergent) collective voices speak and organize (i.e., translation 2), the organizational identity objectifies the members. It creates a standardized façade, where all behaviors and identities presumably fit the textualized mold. Though fluid, the authored organization parades as stable and generalizable, as shown in Figure 6 below.

*Figure 5: Organization as a Collective Experience (Translation #2)*

*Figure 6: Organization as Authoring (Translation #3)*
Translation #4: Organizations as Representation and Presentification

The fourth translation scales the organization to a single actor, interacting with other organizations. In other words, despite the organization found in negotiated interactions (i.e., translation 1), localized bodies of discourse (i.e., translation 2), and various authored texts (i.e., translation 3), the unit of analysis becomes singular (i.e., an entity). The organization represents and presents itself to other macro actors (i.e., organizations) and their members, with the aid of authoritative voices (e.g., leaders, texts, artifacts) acting on behalf of the larger (abstract) body. Here, materialized discourse (e.g., official texts and mission statements) creates stability, structuring all interactions. Individuals evoke the organization’s authority to wield power within micro-interactions. Thus, an organization acts as an embodied Discourse (filled with multiple other discourses) that presents knowledge manifested in power relations among micro actors.

Figure 7 below illustrates translation #4.

Figure 7: Organizations as Representation and Presentification (Translation #4)
Summary of Translations

The four translations illuminate communicative moments in organizational life (e.g., micro-to-micro interactions, micro-to-macro, macro-to-micro). Each frame enables power to flow through discursive acts, built on localized and decontextualized knowledge amidst actors who negotiate different meanings despite interacting in the “same” organization. The organization exposes itself through daily conversation (i.e., “little d” discourse), textualized material, and presentations of organizational identity (i.e., “big D” discourses, fashioning possibilities of becoming).

Capturing and pinning down a “True” essence of an organization is futile, as subjective interpretations and autonomy afford ongoing (dis)organizing despite controlled efforts (e.g., strategic leaders, authoritative texts). Namely, ignoring the neuronic volatility of daily communication within organizations unrealistically pegs the organization as an objective artifact for study. The organization might appear relatively stable from a distant macro-level; however, upon closer examination, the organization is kaleidoscopically multifaceted.

To this end, there is no perfect methodology for describing and documenting a fluid (uncontained, ever-changing) organization. However, researchers can strive to lean more toward poststructural thought to illuminate complexity. For example, instead of assuming that organizations (e.g., religious denominations) directly interact with individuals (e.g., congregants), scholars can remember the meso-level processes that fashion collective experiences (translation #2) for an otherwise latent organization (translation #4).

For example, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination remained ambiguous until
concretized by believers at the group level. Though documents and other texts articulated an organizational “identity,” the members of the local congregations constructed a unique understanding of the Adventist life (Silva & Sias, 2010). Thus, a global religion is not homogenous across all communities: Each gathering place will shape the “same” organization differently, despite the macro vocalizations of the “unified” organization.

Still, some research paints (religious) organizations as seemingly “objective” while teasing out subjective experiences: A stance that only somewhat embraces a poststructuralist lens. For example, Ault (2018) described experiences of missionaries divesting from their “worldly” identities to become the “mastered” version of a religious preacher within a specific denomination. The “perfect” form assumed a finality or a finished, perfected identity that the institution’s missionaries reached, despite different growth experiences. Yet, missions occur across the globe, where local circumstances and leaders define what constitutes a “good” missionary, regardless of all volunteers using the “same” handbook authored by the organization. Thus, a “perfect” form is not absolute but relative. Likewise, according to Ault (2018), upon completing their mission, missionaries upheld the institution’s structure by perpetuating norms and rules, painting the organization as homogenous, despite its global nature. Such a conceptualization is too standardized.

As another example of modernist-leaning thought, Hinderaker (2015) deemed some religious institutions as totalistic, with life-encroaching demands. Such a categorical label might shadow fragmented experiences. In other words, a church might not seem despotic if praised by local congregations, families, or other social circles. For other members, apathy toward religious doctrine in friend circles might hold a church as
peripheral rather than totalistic. As such, an organization cannot bare an all-encompassing label without meeting dissonance experienced by (non)members. Some will agree and disagree with the (dis)empowering conceptualization.

Therefore, a church is not totalistic in that all believers agree upon the “same” essence of the organization. On the contrary, exit narratives demonstrate diverse reasons for leaving a church, including clergy issues, doctrinal doubts, and personal inadequacies (Hinderaker & O’Connor, 2015). For these ex-members, the dominant ontological essence of the church differed: The organization as the people, the faith as the principles espoused, and the church as a personal disciplinary measuring stick (or a combination of all three, among other descriptions). In this case, an objective, “True” entity is a façade: The institution amalgamates different experiences.

The Montréal School approach to CCO offers opportunities to zoom in and out on an organization through its translations: The texts (i.e., the people, discourse, actions) take on different meanings when translated differently. Scholars might examine the organization from several translations to avoid simplistic conceptualizations, scaling up and down between the macro, meso, and micro levels, all embedded within institutions.

As an example, we might first examine an organization (e.g., a worldwide church) from the fourth translation, observing its metacommunication with other macro actors (e.g., similar denominations) within institutions (e.g., Christianity). Then, the organizational representations and presentifications would trickle to meso-level interactions (e.g., congregations making sense of the Discourse) (translation #2), catalyzing conversations at micro-levels (e.g., individuals and families) (translation #1). Conceptually, the process is also inverse (i.e., bottom-up, with micro to meso to macro);
however, we should not assume that organizations function linearly, with causal mechanisms triggering conversations at isolated levels within specific times. When adopting a poststructural stance, unraveling unending utterances obscures simplistic classification efforts. To limit a façade of certainty and stability, researchers might showcase and dabble in paradoxical relationships to arouse complex thinking and attune organizing (management) skills (L. L. Putnam et al., 2016).

**Irruption #12**

From members, I hear testimonies abroad; that claim a True Church—seems more like a fraud

Of what do they speak, testifying so strong? The people? Beliefs? We have it all wrong.

A church may be true, faithful, that is, despite uncertainty we still are His.

To whom or what do we self-define? The people? Beliefs? No, ‘tis more divine.

Eternal it is, grander, unique! All it depends on what we speak.
Organizational Identification

Thus far, we conceptualized organizations as discursive, fluid structures, no matter research conclusions or practical applications that constitute stable façades. From a poststructural (postmodern) stance, an organization is not a compartmentalized phenomenon with discrete, causal variables ready for linear-path models. Namely, when drawing from notions like utterances (Bakhtin), relationally situated, discursive power (Foucault), and dialectical oppositions (Derrida), a business, church, and so on is not an object for an experiment but a subject for paradox.

Said differently, an organization constituted by communication is not a museal, taxidermized artifact: It is a performing player taking direction from the theoretical script(s) imposed. As directors, researchers stage the actant’s performance, showcasing, in various combinations, the macro, micro, meso, institutional, past, present, future, fixed, and so on. The audience might receive a forthright (dry) performance dependent on the directive for depth: Here, the organization performs as (logically) expected. The audience predicts the movements well attuned to the familiar scripts and genres—and their connection felt with the actant is consonant and secure.

On the contrary, a director might permit improvisation, allowing actions to emerge in surprising ways and opposites engaging in contradictory, harmonious acts. Though we forsake a reliable show, we enable the (dis)organization to perform paradoxically, rousing disparate reactions for the players and their audience. For some, the show is grotesque and inadmissible to particular identities. For others, the serendipities solicit fruitful dissonance, shaping new self-directions.

There are, then, for those performing in and observing an organization, multiple
possibilities for identifying: Our definition of self depends upon our description of an organization.

To this end, for brevity, we might conceptualize an organization in three ways which, in turn, influence our identification with the actant—whether we directly interact with the organization (e.g., a member) or observe from the wings (e.g., a nonmember). First, we might see the organization as stable; second, as a (somewhat steady) moving target; and third, as a transient poltergeist. Figure 8 illustrates these three conceptualizations reviewed in this section.

**Figure 8: Organizations as Targets for Identification: Stable, Moving, and Transient**

Identification with “Stable” Organizations

An organization may appear unchanging or unmovable, making identification an easy shot. For example, many scholars presume that an organization contains an identity, like a commodity, that remains “central, distinctive, and enduring” (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 265). Researchers’ generalizable claims treat organizations as abstract meta-characters within these theoretical positions. No matter how unique, organizations must fit within a categorical schema bounded by specific yet generalizable claims (e.g., all religious organizations (the generic) focus on ethics (the nuance), unlike corporations (a different, generic meta-character)).

For example, there might be similarities across for-profit, non-profit, and religious
organizations, among others, regarding core (identity) missions (e.g., vying for innovation, serving communities, and following commandments). In these cases, sweeping generalizations ensue, fostering standard identities within the genres, including strategic leaders, workers, volunteers, believers, etc. To “be” a strategic leader, one must possess a vision for growth, and to “be” a believer, one must agree that divine principles exist, worthy of following. These general identities, fashioned by categorically generic organizations, are easy to conceptualize (e.g., someone is a believer if they acknowledge the presence of God) and are likely to endure—pending violent disruptions of meaning.

Beyond highly-generic categories, we might draw from institutions that illuminate how an organization or person ought to behave, structured by enduring, transcendent beliefs (Lammers & Barbour, 2006). For example, the American judicial system requires trials and proving evidence. Such an institution structures behaviors: A skilled lawyer will use rhetorical tactics to convict, bail, and advocate successfully. As another example, being a Christian requires, for instance, accepting the salvific role of Christ and following His teachings. Thus, a person can be a believer (a highly-generic identity), subscribing to Christianity (an institutional identity).

Further, institutions under generalized umbrellas (e.g., Christianity) might manage identities with further distinctions. For instance, as argued by Weber (1905), to “be” a Calvinist might mean a relentless occupation with proving worth, despite foreordination, and to “be” a Methodist requires systematic modes of behavior. From here, affiliations define, organizations categorize, and so on, with various levels of analysis delineating boundaries that are sufficiently generalizable with palatable theoretical scope.

To add complexity, we add in the personal and the social, requiring a constant
negotiation where we make attributes and judgments about our (multiple) identities (see Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In turn, the self incessantly categorizes, momentarily appearing stable, because of “well-defined” conceptualizations that might permit multiple, fixed categories. To remain stable as an organization and self, we require precision in definition, identifying pieces to the puzzled self that have relationships with clear-cut corners and bounded edges when organized correctly (Foucault, 1994b).

To this end, the possibilities of becoming are limited to an a priori picture that assumes the pieces of identity are unchanging, readily linked to sweeping antecedents (e.g., psychological traits) and consequents (e.g., attachment, organizational commitment). As a result, the completed image presents certain truths that appear steady but, when inspected, offer vague conclusions. In this condition, it is (presumably) easy to target a clarity of self, stabilized by concepts donning “validity,” “reliability,” and “generalizability.”

Communication as a change agent rouses conceptualizations of rigor-mortised organizations, allowing opportunities to view identity more fluidly. For example, organizational rhetorical tactics can shape identification processes (Cheney, 1983); however, observing the constitutive role of communication necessitates capturing data across time points to demonstrate a process of becoming (Cheney et al., 2013). In other words, we might still approach communication—a fluid phenomenon—from a static perspective when not acknowledging movement across time.
Identification with Moving Organizations

As argued, organizations are far from stable and not homogenous, standardized (categorized) containers. They move (change) across time. When spliced open, the corporal organization showcases diverse systems functioning (un)harmoniously to move the organization forward (or backward). These systems are relatively stable structures that constrain and enable expressions. For example, the heart of an organization (e.g., its vital mission) might exert pressure to slow or quicken communication, serving as a livelihood of the body. Within these organizations, identification becomes a process over time instead of a product (e.g., Bullis & Bach, 1989).

For example, Scott et al. (1998) conceptualized organizational identification from a structuration theoretical lens (see Giddens, 1984). First, their theory assumes that structures restrict and facilitate behaviors. These might include resources and rules that
set the pace of daily affairs. These arrangements do not escape the influence of organization members: People create and sustain them, creating a cyclical process (i.e., a duality of structure).^9

Second, structures are regional, offering local settings for interactions despite operating for the whole body. In this vein, the organization becomes more palpable—Identification becomes easier, bypassing vague conceptualizations: Local insight beats general perceptions. For example, conversion to a religious denomination is, more so, identification with a particular congregation that provides the heartbeat for unity. In other words, the regional assemblies constitute what is and is not the will of the Lord, not solely contained in the upper echelons of the priesthood or (strategic) organizational authority. Here, multiple identities may exist among compatible regions.

Third, those interactions (communication) in the regional settings create situated actions where moments of identification are not homogenous but depend on various factors, including public and private information, size, position, and tenure. For instance, the magnitude of Christian identification relies on its position toward the body of the church. If far from the heart, the person might appear blue. If new, the constituent might concentrate on absorbing (spiritual) energy compared to those with longer tenure. In short, the relatively-stable structures constrain and enable expressions, creating a process of identification or becoming (Scott et al., 1998, p. 304).

**Irruption #14**

Reflection question: How might we compare an organization to a body?
Identification with Transient Organizations

On the contrary, subjective beings are nomadic, simultaneously found in the past, present, and future language structures constructed by (available) knowledge: Regions might appear conflated, synonymous, or altogether indiscernible. Considering moments of extreme heteroglossia, (rhetorical) structures might appear sincerely secure and absurdly fluid: The “same” utterance is not objective—for every communication act moves differently, causing paranormal disturbances beyond empirical observations. The structures, constituted by language, are tossed, their soundness cracking, flickering with quick movements while casting shadows of what was, is, and might be.

Irruption #15
Though possibly “static,” the self gets lost in the paradoxical discourse (e.g., Tracy, 2005)—broadcasted to biased receivers, often tuned to one direction that limits perspective. In these cases, the unchanneled organizations with fuzzy boundaries promote disorganized identification: An identity continually becomes uncertain with no finality or end. Here, alternative conceptualizations of organizations might intensify such identification paradoxes (Cheney, 2014; Del Fa & Vásquez, 2019).

For example, organizations might be visible and invisible; that is, some choose to perform ostentatiously, while others remain: (1) hidden appropriately (e.g., shelters for victims, counter-terrorism units); (2) inappropriately (e.g., hate groups); and (3) ambiguously (e.g., anonymous organizations). To this end, identification is further complicated and fragmented across multiple levels (i.e., the individual, group, and organization) (Scott & Kang, 2018).

For a church, congregants might simultaneously identify with the “same” church in different spaces across time and mediums. For instance, believers might relate to a church constituted by social media (fleeting) hashtags and memes, sacred online spaces called bloggernacles, and exclusive virtual communities anonymously questioning beliefs (Brubaker et al., 2017; Church & Feller, 2020; Feller, 2016; Greenhalgh et al., 2019; Hinderaker, 2017). The brick, mortar, steeple, and pews no longer serve as a shelter from the world's storms: There is no demarcation between being in the world but not of the world (Griffin, 2014).
Irruption #16

And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. (The Holy Bible, King James Version, John 17: 11, 15)

Chapter Summary

Organizations organize identities and vice versa. They are not stable, contained, or enduring, though some consider them so. On the contrary, they are changing, oppositional, uncontained, and endless so long as communication (dis)organizes. They hide, perform, and fool, responding to the people who constitute them on absurdly fluid to absolutely fixed continuums. Becoming depends on our constitutions, some saving and others damning. Organizations and identities exist in paradoxes, made possible by poststructuralism. In all, to “be” anything, no matter our confident aplomb, falls victim to our communication.

In this state, religious organizations might meet condemnation. Those believing in “real structures, with real consequences” (Mumby, 2004, p. 252) might find themselves in a precarious position. Though religious rhetors' micro-interactions, meso-conversations, and macro-presentations might promise certainty, confidence, and stability, their salvific potential might fall short in a poststructural world. Caught at the cross (roads), Christians may experience identification crises amidst (simultaneous) damning and saving discourse.
Thus, stated formally as a reflection question for our journey:

**RQ 1:** What identification paradoxes ensue when religious organizations promulgate certainty despite uncertainty engendered by subjective constituents?

**Transition to Context**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Church) offers a unique philosophical playground for experiencing religious identification paradoxes. Before illuminating the context, chapter four begins with a review of the CCO approach, applied to the history of Christianity in preparation for the claims offered by The Church.

**Chapter 3 Footnotes**

1. Specifically, we will review the Montréal school approach (see Brummans et al., 2013).
2. Problematized further in chapter 4.
3. See Brummans et al. (2013) for a review of the Montréal School approach to CCO. In the sections below, I briefly review an otherwise complex theoretical framework.
4. Of course, these are not three discrete classifications. There are many possible ways to conceptualize organizational identification. See Cheney et al. (2013) for an alternative way of conceptualizing identity (identification) research programs.
5. With more than 50,000 articles inspired by this original conceptualization (Knorr & Hein-Pensel, 2022)

6. Akin to traditional roles on the stage, including hero, villain, lover, etc. The hero always saves, the villain complicates, and the lover fawns.

7. Ashforth and Mael (1989) also suggested that identification entails a psychological process where the individual conforms to the group’s direction, goals, and motivations: They become more at one with the people at varying intensities.

8. This stable stance on identity and identification, focusing on a product instead of a process, represents a significant portion of management and organizational behavior (modernist) research (Cheney et al., 2013).

9. Akin to the co-existence of Big D and little d discourses discussed in previous chapters.

10. Modernist values. As an example, Scott et al. (1998) stated: “We see each of these characteristics as operationalizable [and] qualitative techniques…could provide even clearer indications of what identity or identities are relevant in a given situation, thus helping to indicate [the] degree of overlap” (p. 318).
CHAPTER 4: CONTEXT—THE PHILOSOPHICAL PLAYGROUND

Overview

In our first three chapters, we (1) reviewed epistemological orientations (modernism, poststructuralism); (2) touched the spirits of Foucault, Derrida, and Bakhtin; and (3) and reified the process of becoming (identification) by theoretically assuming that communication constitutes (dis)organization. Doing so opened our reflection question (RQ1) for our journey, now about to take on a more tangible form.

This chapter will first apply the CCO theoretical framework to Christian history to show application and prepare for some proclamations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Church) that arguably fosters identification paradoxes. Second, we will start curating a theoretical (methodological) lens, later extended in chapter five, called Restorationism. To do so, we will build from the material of The Church centered around an event called the Restoration, showcasing moments of fixed and fluid discourse. Third, we will examine some fundamental beliefs of The Church, presenting theoretical propositions that we will direct to perform in a fluid and fixed manner. Here, the staging will abductively show (possible) divergent identification experiences of church members as a pretrial—or in preparation for our thought experiment in chapter six.

CCO in Christianity

The four translations conceptualized by the Montréal School of CCO illuminate the development of Christianity. But, of course, the presentation in this section is hardly historically exhaustive and portrays an inductive, linear-like review of an institution instead of weaving translations to show complexity. Here, I remind all readers to revisit the primers offered in our preface to author intricacy in this chapter, where I have not.
Translation #1

During Christ’s ministry and after His Resurrection, His apostles interacted with Jesus and each other to make sense of His Gospel. From Him, they received the charge to carry the Gospel to the world, representing a shared commitment to a single object: Truth, or Jesus Christ as the Redeemer.

His disciples’ understanding of the Truth, or Jesus Christ, was not uniform: Each disciple treated the Truth differently. For example, Peter believed enough to walk on water, disowned Christ due to fear, united the Jews and Gentiles, and returned to fishing, despite witnessing resuscitation, transfiguration, and sacrifice.¹ John preached, loved, and wrote.² Judas betrayed.³ Despite Christ being the Way, Truth, and Life (see John 14:6), His disciples did not experience him objectively the same: Each saw and constituted Him differently.

Beyond their intimate relationship with Truth, the Gospel of Jesus Christ did not retain a perfect form: Primarily, imperfect disciples orally disseminated His teachings. Spreading the Word required continual organizing efforts by disciples (e.g., Paul, Peter, John, James, Jude) via epistles (e.g., Romans, Galatians, Ephesians), instructing the saints on how to become more perfectly obedient and unified in the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31). In other words, each epistle represented a particular body of knowledge fashioned to organize the religious identification of (wayward) members in specific regions. The Gospel then, though confessing Perfection, did not teach an absolute, objective mode of being. The discourse depended on the availability of spoken and written communication, fashioned by disciples privy to the intimate knowledge afforded by Christ and His Holy Spirit.⁴
Translation #2

The centuries following Christ’s ministry demonstrate shifts from multiple networks of Christian practices to the formation of a textualized, collective identity. Though scholars disagree on exact dates, the New Testament books took form between 45-85 A.D. allowing for several years of oral traditions to continue. In other words, scribes did not engage in a daily journal reporting on their communication and organizing efforts: They relied on memory and (present) discourse to uphold the Truth. Writings offered some organization; however, they competed with bold Christian speakers rejecting the works. For example, in about 140 A.D., Marcion, a Christian leader, disseminated his version of Christian teachings, which did not include the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John and parts of Luke. The schism and alternative churches catalyzed by Marcion created a call for unity, inciting Orthodox Christians to work toward canonizing a New Testament (Chadwick, 1993).

The New Testament experienced negotiations amongst competing voices before its canonization. Leaders confiscated and destroyed scriptures (e.g., Diocletian), theologians gained prominence with their scriptural interpretations (e.g., Lucian of Antioch), and councils decided on the canons (e.g., Council of Carthage). Translations ensued (e.g., Jerome’s Latin Bible becoming the standard for the medieval Church) and were written in verse (e.g., Caedom the monk). Between 871 to 1455, the Bible experienced several translations and revisions, and the 1516 Greek Erasmus New Testament created the foundation for the King James Version of the Bible.

By 1538, the public received an English-published version of the Bible, leading to the authorized King James Version between 1607 to 1611. A collective Christian identity
formed throughout the canonization efforts, translating many voices into authoritarian texts (Chadwick, 1993), namely, the Old and New Testaments. The Bible promised unity—A collective actor instilling a composite identity called Christianity.

**Translation #3**

While canonizing the Bible, Christian creeds clarified language and doctrinal misunderstanding. Namely, though the Bible may have possessed “objective” words, the creeds decontextualized the practices and reconstituted them in new spaces fashioned by those in religious power. For example, Greek translations offered room for the negotiation of meaning. Debating on the nature of the Godhead, the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) scrutinized the etymology of a scripture verse, deciding between two close but divergent meanings: Homoiousios, or three separate beings possessing similar material, and homoousios, or one being serving three purposes. The choice to settle on the latter (homoousios) constituted a Trinity, erasing notions of three distinct personages (i.e., God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Ghost). The Athanasian Creed further solidified that Christ, the Father, and the Spirit were the same person, despite contradictory biblical verses about ontological separation (e.g., Acts 7:56) (Givens & Givens, 2020; Oaks, 1995).

Many believers relied on theologians (e.g., Augustine) to interpret and fashion the religious Doctrine (i.e., Discourse) for the masses, contending against alternative views. For example, British theologian Pelagius defended the notion of autonomy and human sanctity, and Origen of Alexandria proclaimed a premortal existence with God—Both condemned for their heretical views. Prominent and revered theologian Saint Augustine, shaped by Greek philosophy, posited God as shapeless, disembodied, and immune to

The power to inductively shape religious discourse proved difficult, especially since the masses did not have access to Holy Scripture until the invention of the printing press in the mid-1400s. That said, illiteracy exacerbated the opportunity to criticize and shape Christian discourse. Here, the Middle Ages represented a time of “darkness,” with the Catholic Church instituting popes ruling as kings, fashioning Truth. Believers and even objects (e.g., sacred relics), standardized and generalized, were no longer local to communities of practice (Oakley, 1988).

Translation #4

The Protestant Reformation represented a resistance against a standardized, collective actor with hegemonic influence: The Catholic Church. Martin Luther gave voice to contradictory doctrinal views in 1517. Specifically, the 95 theses challenged the Church’s role as an intermediary between people and God. In other words, the Catholic Church constituted a single actor, representing its congregants to other macro actors (i.e., God). Organizational members purchased certificates of pardon for their sins directly from the Church, forgiving and punishing rather than an individual personally reconciling with Christ as the intermediary (Talmage, 1909). 

Translations Continued

Parts of the Protestant Reformation reinvigorated the notion that individual actors
could have a personal relationship with God instead of relying on an institution (e.g., the Catholic Church) to speak on behalf of the collective. Thus, believers engaged in antithetical conversations, reconstituting the meaning of faith, salvation, and other life-altering Doctrine (Discourses) (Translation #1). Disorder in views necessitates ordering; thus, verbal ideas, once again, became textualized (translation #2).⁷

For example, the Augsburg Confession (1530), drafted by the Lutheran Church, reemphasized humans’ depravity and lack of agency. The Protestant revision of the Book of Common Prayer (1552), used by Anglican church services, removed prayers for the dead. Anglicans, Puritans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Methodists embraced (some in parts) the Westminster Confession (1648). The Confession taught the centrality of Scripture as God’s voice, including the notion that God ceases to reveal new ideas; therefore, Scripture maintains a state of finality. Additionally, per the Text, God predestines some to eternal life, and others foreordained to everlasting death, orchestrating an entire plan and removing opportunities for change or becoming something different (Givens & Givens, 2020).

What once was a series of negotiations and networked practices to deconstruct Truth in opposition to the Catholic hegemony (translation #1) became collective actors via Confessions and Creeds (translation #2), that is the Protestant communication (the “right” way) about Catholic communication (the “wrong” behavior). Like the formation of the great Church, these local practices become objectified in codes of conduct, representing different sects and denominations from Calvinism to Lutheran and Presbyterian to Methodist (translation #3). While each shared a protestant identity, divergent behaviors constituted by (in)tangible texts instilled unity around certain
principles over others. Each sect presented and represented Truth on behalf of its members, only to be challenged and negotiated through continual offshoots constituted by day-to-day conversations.

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**Irruption #17**

After our removal to Manchester [New York, early 1800s], there was…an unusual excitement [about] religion. It commenced with the Methodists but soon became general among all the sects in that region of the country…Great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, “Lo, here!” and others, “Lo, there!” Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist…When the converts began to file off, some to one party and some to another, it was seen that the seemingly good feelings of both priests and converts were more pretended than real; for a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued…

(The Pearl of Great Price, 1851, Joseph Smith History 1: 5-6)

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**Curating Restorationism: Fixed and Fluid Moments of The Church**

This section starts formulating a theoretical (and methodological) lens called Restorationism—a unique vision for (religious) inquiry. Then, in chapter five, we expand the lens, applying it via our thought experiment in chapter six. Following a brief primer on Restorationism that provides philosophical rationale and direction, we will focus on a
particular religious context: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Church). Herein, a brief history of the Church will augment an event known as the Restoration. Afterward, a review of doctrine stemming from the Restoration will illuminate the epistemological ideas of Restorationism. 

**Philosophical Primer for Restorationism**

Upfront, while we conceptualize Restorationism, it is essential to remember that it is a lens of paradox: Through the theoretical view, people might experience fixed *and* fluid realities, in turn promoting identification crises. The lens is phenomenological—We focus on the consciousness of those, including ourselves, interpreting (authoring, experiencing) their life through texts, even when, empirically speaking, their stories might appear bizarre or those texts seem “objective.” We aim to expose the paradox to uncover potential (dis)organizing effects on identification, whether saving or damning.

In other words, we allow subjectivity to reign, providing space for those living in the lens to experience dissonance between fixed and fluid discourse, shifting based on the interpretation of the “same” text. We embrace the fixed-fluid paradox by searching for possibilities that texts can simultaneously organize (fix) and disorganize (unfix) identity. In short, we *try* the text that constitutes fixed-fluid realities.

**Restorationism as Cross-Examination**

Herein lies a helpful metaphor, which, along with other analogies used later, helps describe the essence of Restorationism. The lens represents a cross-examination. We place the text on trial to expose its character—constituted by its actions that (dis)organize identity. The text takes a stand to testify, and we play several roles: We interrogate the text, judge the case, and (attempt to) decide on the fate of the text, despite impending
For example, we approach the text, assuming it is guilty of fixing identity. Under the harsh light of our interrogation, the text’s trepidations insinuate blame. Exposed, we leave the witness, allowing silence to muse over the proceedings—until we approach the witness as a new character. Now we presume the text is not guilty. Through our questioning, its actions indicate fluidity: The text does not fix identity but instead permits continual identification.

Through our questioning, the text’s testimony is contradictory. On the one hand, the actions appear guilty as charged: Its utterances do organize fixed identities. In opposition, we see the text’s disorganizing communication: It engenders fluidity. Paradoxes manifest where, based on our opposing efforts to deconstruct the narrative, at least two divergent realities appear, requiring judgment. We continue to examine, amend, appeal, and arrest, eventually requiring higher Supreme powers to aid in discovery.

**Faith in God as a Peculiar Case**

The scene above captures some essence of Derridean deconstruction: We question the text, revealing moments of stabilization, then counteracted by emergences of uncertainty. Yet, we cannot conflate deconstruction, or other poststructural stances, with Restorationism. A fundamental difference is an assertion that God, as a metaphysical (empirically unobservable) being, *does* exist despite (traditionally) conflicting modern and postmodern views. In other words, we approach texts with bias, believing in the reality of God—requiring ways to collaborate with imminent oppositions offered by poststructuralism.

Restorationism is uncertain certainty: We embrace the (productive) doubts
(dis)organized by communication while maintaining confidence in God’s presence. In other words, we deconstruct religious discourse (i.e., use poststructural tactics) to restore (i.e., to put into existence) a more certain relationship with God. For this reason, we began chapter four by illuminating how Christianity experienced irruptions of meaning, eventually organized into bodies of knowledge (i.e., discourse).

In other words, we now have an opportunity to scrutinize how religious communication constitutes organization; that is, how people, groups, organizations, and institutions ventriloquize the voice of God for better and for worse. Through Restorationism, a believer navigates paradoxes created by Discourse (D) and discourse (d), aiming to strengthen one’s devotion (D_d) to God, as pictured in Figure 9 below.

**Figure 9: Using Restorationism to Strengthen D_d**

![Diagram showing the relationship between Metaphysical, Institutional, Macro, Meso, and Micro levels of discourse and restorationism.](image)

These ventriloquisms parade as utterances both cacophonically changing and stubbornly stable. For example, we observe a religious organization as an actor with frozen lips and moving hands, puppeteering ideas that entertain some audiences and
alienate others—depending on their orientation to truths as fixed versus fluid. Such a spectacle is likely more prominent in religious rhetoric, which traditionally dons absolutism (e.g., right or wrong, heaven or hell) and stresses obedience, sacrifice, and consecration. In these discursive spaces, conversion processes (i.e., identification) become highly rational, with happiness, safety, and existence on the line (Stark & Bainbridge, 1985). Of importance, we presume that pious declarations promote austere boundaries.

Yet, not all religious ventriloquisms may appear objectively deterministic. Depending on interpretation, the same utterance might open new possibilities: It can plead guilty to fixing a truth (or identity) or admit no such doing. Hence, based on our use of Restorationism (as a cross-examination mechanism), the ventriloquisms reveal potential cases for judgment: We become something different (e.g., imprisoned or free) based on how we examine the text.

**The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Church) as a Case Study**

Each religious case on trial, using Restorationism, will reveal different paradoxes and identification crises. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints offers a provocative scene, mainly due to doctrine that permits poststructuralist thought, namely: (1) eternal pre-existence; (2) ongoing post-existence; (3) absolute human agency; and (4) the eventual progression of humankind to reach the state of Godhood. At the same time, the Latter-day Saint discourse (D and d) promotes persistent fixity, making it an ideal candidate for experiencing Restorationism.

Noteworthy, Restorationism as a fixed-fluid questioning technique contains utterances from The Church. Namely, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
relies on an event—the Restoration (described in the next section)—as a foundation for all beliefs. Therefore, it would be remiss not to acknowledge how Church doctrine and history inform Restorationism. Of course, we might try to divorce Restorationism from the context of the Church, applying it to other spiritual discourses; however, doing so might lead to a mistrial. After all, not all religious denominations embrace (Restoration) beliefs that amplify fixed-fluid provocations.11

Thus, we will not attempt to untangle Restorationism from The Church but, instead, build on the lens using the material of The Church. To this end, the following section will review the history of the Church, showing moments of fixed and fluid discourse—as a warrant to proceed. We will also examine fundamental Church claims (beliefs), which we will assess from fixed and fluid stances, offering a pretrial to our thought experiment in chapter six.

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_Irruption #18_
History of The Church: A Warrant to Proceed

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (The Church) represents a global community of 16,805,400 members, 188 languages, 31,315 congregations, and 54,539 missionaries (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2022). Beginning as a six-member Church in New York in the 1830s, the religion (i.e., epistemological movement) continues to disrupt “traditional” Christian beliefs and norms, earning the classification of a “deviant” faith by sociologists (see Stark & Bainbridge, 1985). However, deviance is not necessarily pejorative here: The Church embraces, refutes, and clarifies Christian practices and beliefs. In other words, the organization’s purpose, as voiced by the founder, Joseph Smith, is to avoid closure of meaning: For if closed, eternal (ongoing) existence damns. Regarding Joseph’s epistemology, he demonstrated “exploring the limits, challenging conventional categories, and dynamic engagement with the boundaries—all in the interest of productive provocation” (Givens, 2007, p. 28).

The religious (epistemological) movement began with Joseph Smith, caught between sectarian discourses claiming absolute Truth despite contradictory views. Amongst the discursive power struggles, Joseph desired to know which church to join; that is, which body of knowledge best constituted the will of God. Turning to the Holy Bible, Joseph read a verse (see James 1:5) that instructs believers to ask God for knowledge, who will grant wisdom liberally and without scorn. In other words, Joseph learned that God would provide insight beyond the Text (i.e., the Bible) and conflicting discourses structured by preachers and congregants. Prayer offered an opportunity to transcend the tensions.

Upon praying, Joseph received a vision wherein God the Father and Jesus the Son
appeared as two Personages. God and Christ taught that the Christian organizations at Joseph’s time contained errors communicated by “abominable” creeds and fallible people. The Christian discourses sounded absolute in truth yet denied the power of godliness (see The Pearl of Great Price, 1851, Joseph Smith History, 1:19). In other words, Christian sects generated truth effects by claiming divine knowledge while wielding ungodly power via discourse (Foucault, 1980).

Joseph began the process of the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that is, deconstructing or questioning texts, ideas, and discourse to reveal God’s mind. The Restoration effort rests on the premise that Christianity experienced a Great Apostasy or falling away from Jesus Christ’s original teachings. Due to uninspired, unethical decisions steeped in hegemony, the original Church constituted by Christ, his disciples, and the beliefs embraced became corrupt. In turn, God revoked the priesthood authority to perform saving ordinances (e.g., baptism) in His name.12

Joseph assumed the role of a Prophet in the latter days, or the final dispensation of time before Christ’s second coming. Through Joseph the Prophet, God restored priesthood keys for administering saving ordinances, reorganized the Archaic (New Testament) Church structure, including prophets and apostles, and revealed additional truths centered on drawing believers closer to Jesus Christ. Of significance to the “restored” religion, the Book of Mormon, archeologically found and translated by Joseph Smith, taught believers how to access power through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and teaching. In short, a new form of Christianity with notions centered on personal revelation and communion with God, angelic visitations, miracles, and refutations of flawed religious understanding came to fruition and met persecution.
The Restoration doctrine illuminated erasures as it deconstructed Christian traditions and discourse. For some, the movement promised harmony, and for others, discord: The religious and societal dialogue at hand complemented and punished. At the zenith of ridicule and persecution, the Latter-day saints removed themselves from the contentious and violent discourse, pioneering a mass exodus across America to the Utah valley following the death of Joseph Smith. There, sequestered from the world, the restored organization could expand under the guidance of Prophets and apostles with the reestablished priesthood authority. Growth of the Church met continual challenges internally, with members apostatizing, and externally with wary onlookers. Now a global phenomenon, expansion continues despite a rough start.13

Yet just because the Church found refuge in the desert wilderness of Utah did not make them immune to the discourse embodied by their converts from other religious denominations and secular spaces. Here, ideas contrary to the notion of Restoration (i.e., continual disruption of convictions to reveal grander truth) emboldened a culture of certainty and determinism (Givens, 2007). Religious discourse may have enshrined the organization and doctrine as symbols of Perfection.

For example, one of the first apostles of the Church, Parley P. Pratt, converted from the Campbellites. This religious movement endorsed restoring the practices and True form of the New Testament Church instituted by Christ. Upon reading the Book of Mormon, he joined the Church and became a thought leader. He authored a widely circulated book entitled A Voice of Warning used as a proselytizing tool with the Book of Mormon for over a century, though Joseph Smith voiced concerns about the text (Givens & Grow, 2011).
The book offered an overview of the Church’s faith and doctrine, constructing an argument, with scriptural evidence and biblical examples, on why the final dispensation of time required a restoration of all things. Table 4 includes statements from Pratt’s book that embody objectivism and suggest a True order of all things (Pratt, 1842).

**Table 4: Statements from “A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People by Pratt**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context of the Statement</th>
<th>Statement (emphases added)</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The difficulty of proving arguments with Scripture</td>
<td>It is highly necessary in the first place to lay down some <em>certain, definite, infallible</em> rule of interpretation; without which, the mind is lost in uncertainty and doubt, ever learning…</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upon trusting Scripture as a True and certain source</td>
<td>If there was any doubt or uncertainty on our minds in the understanding of the same, then could we derive <em>comfort or hope</em> from the things written…</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deciding whether to trust Scripture as Revelation or the fault of</td>
<td>But to say Revelation is deficient would be to charge God foolishly; God forbid. The fault must be in man…<em>The things of God knoweth no man</em>, except by the Spirit of God</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing the lost and disorganized kingdom of God</td>
<td>The kingdom…is something to be organized in the last days by the God of Heaven himself, <em>without the aid of human institutions</em>, or the precepts of men.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining the meaning of restoration</td>
<td>All things have undergone a change and are to be again restored to their <em>primitive order</em> in which they first <em>existed</em>…We can discover the true state in which it then <em>existed</em>…</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pratt wrote with authority, using words demonstrating conviction (e.g., certain, definite, infallible), thus, embracing a positivist mentality: The Will of God manifests itself through analytic and synthetic statements, reasoned with Scripture. Comfort and hope, instead of uncertainty and doubt, find a home in a language crafted by inspired beings, removed from human institutions or adulterated precepts. Transcending
transgression to speak with True Authority relies on Revelation from God, no matter the unreachable depths. The quest for humankind is to restore all things, including Knowledge, Truth, and Creation, to their pre-existent state: There is a primitive order that needs discovery.

Such an objective, rhetorical style contradicts teachings offered by Pratt (1841) in a Latter-day Saint periodical. Within the statement, Pratt critiqued the “corrupt” Catholic Church, praising the Protestant Reformation while claiming protestant sects carried bad fruit stemming from the (Catholic) tree. In turn, the Church required “newness:” “New tree, new fruits, a new covenant, and spirit...[rolling] on till we have a new heaven and a new earth” (p. 238). A quest for newness might contradict a restoration of oldness or a primitive order. Thus, the saints within the same generation embodied two potentially conflicting discourses: The Restoration of the old and restoring the new. That said, the “newness” could also have indicated knowledge new at the time but primitive.

Rhetoric about the restoration of the old likewise increased in popularity with the publication of *The Great Apostasy*. In this book, Talmage (1909) detailed the re-establishment of Christ’s original Church, focusing on restored power, authority, and God’s graces, using scripture and secular historical moments for evidence. Later, Talmage (1918) coined the term “restored church” in a worldwide conference session for members, catalyzing a phrase adopted into Latter-day Saint vocabulary. Restoration, starting with returning all things to a primitive order, became associated with the Church as an organization: Christ, a “Perfect” leader, restored (in the past tense) His Church for Salvation, pulling it out from imperfect, fallible institutions.

Such claims of certainty and “trueness” still occupy Latter-day Saint discourse.
For example, in a book titled *The Blueprint of Christ's Church*, past Church Sunday School president Tad R. Callister (2015) stated about The Church of Jesus Christ: “This is the only church to match Christ’s original blueprint in all *material* aspects” (p. 20, emphasis added). Callister detailed fundamental aspects of an original Church blueprint designed by Christ, as described in Table 5.

**Table 5: The Blueprint of Christ’s (Original) Church (Callister, 2015, p. 10)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorization Scheme</th>
<th>Blueprint components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The organization</td>
<td>Apostles and prophets as leaders; other officers (e.g., Bishops, deacons, elders, evangelists, pastors, seventies); lay ministry chosen given priesthood authority; Church bearing Christ’s name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The teachings</td>
<td>God and Christ with glorified bodies of bone and flesh, each as two separate persons; Gospel preached to the dead; multiple heavens (i.e., degrees of glory); eternal marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The ordinances</td>
<td>Infants not needing baptism; essentiality of baptism by immersion; baptism performed for the dead; reception of the Holy Ghost via laying on of hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The fruits</td>
<td>Healthy lifestyle; high moral standards; happy families; miracles and gifts of the spirit; angels and visions; missionary work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The link to heaven</td>
<td>Revelation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The categorization and sequence of Callister’s blueprint require speculation. Argumentatively, the foundational components classified as “organizational” bares similarities to an organizational chart. Prophets serve as visionary leaders, and respective officers (e.g., bishops) oversee the salvific work branded with Christ’s name. From such a modernist conceptualization, the bureaucratic organization of the Church is indeed “restored” and “true” to the original New Testament structure. However, from a poststructural stance, organizations constituted by communication lose the stability
assumed by hierarchical charts: The organization is not a compilation of discrete units transacting messages upward, downward, and laterally in Christ’s name. Instead, it is found in ephemeral moments of communication by subjective beings interpreting the phenomenon differently (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983).

The blueprint starts from an objective, observable stance (e.g., hierarchical positions), becoming more latent or empirically unobservable. For example, happy families, gifts of the spirit, high standards, and revelation possess subjective connotations. Each lay member might conceptualize happiness diversely, uphold higher moral standards than others, and receive personal guidance from God. The church becomes blurrier. To this end, other faith-based organizations likely “contain” elements of the True church; however, they do not possess each component of Christ’s blueprint. As noted, “while most churches have some truths and render much good, there is only one church that has the full truth and power to act for God” (Callister, 2015, p. ix). Yet, conceptualizing the Church of Jesus Christ as an organized container, filled to the top with truth, denies the opportunity for transformation: The cup full of Knowledge shapes discourse in powerful, confining ways (Foucault, 1980).

The doctrine of Christ’s Restored Church presumably would structure dialogue centered on apostatized “other” churches, the divine authority held by one organization, and the salvific ramifications of (not) belonging. Namely, with the organization presenting and representing their identity (i.e., the MScco perspective), (non)members experience constraint and empowerment, identifying with a Church rhetorically constructed as a now-stabilized, Resurrected Perfection.

Theoretically, the Restoration, originally a (pre) postmodern mechanism, fell
victim to a culture of positivism, including the constitution of the Church as an organization. To this end, there is at least one fundamental rift, among many, in the Church: There is a mismatch between the culture, as communicated and lived by the saints, and the doctrine, as taught from the time of the Restoration (Mason, 2020). As a result, Saints might cease proactively questioning and discovering new truths when finding rest in certainty or a form already rhetorized as True.

With complexity in mind, scholarship scrutinizing experiences in, and doctrine of, the Church could also acknowledge a fluid ontology: A “Perfect” (i.e., finished) organization, with perfected (i.e., complete or closed) principles, does not and will not exist, but instead, the Church is pervious, ever-changing, and fallible so long as (imperfect) people constitute it. The doctrine embraced by the Church supports this notion of continual, eternal progress (i.e., fluidity), although cultural circles shaped by fixed discourses might suggest otherwise.

**Fundamental Claims**

Having reviewed one conceptualization of the Church (Callister’s Blueprint), the following paragraphs capture a different caricature of the Church that might permit more fluidity. Each proposition below constructs a theoretical, epistemic lens taught by Church doctrine, though not necessarily embodied nor understood by all. The claims are not Perfect. Though the notions stem from Church teachings, their retelling demonstrates subjectivity: These expositions should not act as definitive claims representing the Church, for they are deconstructions (i.e., interpretations) of text.  

For some members, these claims might appear avant-garde, and others attuned to uncovering deeper meanings might embrace the ideas. Additionally, the ordering does
not represent a hierarchy: Each holds equal prominence.

**Proposition #1: The Need for a Restoration.**

Overall, the restoration story is a fundamental premise to all principles espoused by the Church. Due to a Great Apostasy, Christianity experienced dissolution from refined “Godly” understanding, creating contradictions and tensions amongst sects. Restoration affords transcendence, questioning how discourses adulterate “pure” knowledge of how to return to God’s presence through Jesus Christ. As such, some ideas offered by the Church, restored through revelation, occupy a niche in Christian discourse. As suggested by contemporary Church leaders, the Restoration is an ongoing process where God reveals truths for the present day (Curtis, 2020; Nelson, 2018; Uchtdorf, 2014, 2021). In other words:

Proposition 1: A Church experiences apostasy, which affords ongoing restoration.

**Proposition #2: Prophetic Authority.**

To best communicate and institute His will, Christ endowed His apostles with sacred keys (i.e., priesthood authority) to administer ordinances in His name. These ordinances (e.g., baptism, sacrament) represent symbolic and salvific functions, teaching how to follow Christ and enabling access to holier blessings and knowledge. For example, ordinances like baptism require entering a covenant with God, where both God and child promise to stay faithful, serve others, and sacrifice vain desires. When enacting the covenant, harmony, and charity, or the pure love of Christ, persists. Those holding the priesthood keys institute the ordinances in His stead; that is, they act on His behalf, making the intangible (spiritual) tangible (embodied). Due to the sacredness of these ordinances, the priesthood keys are not widely dispersed, and God removed them from
the earth during a Great Apostasy. Joseph Smith and others received these keys during the Restoration, reinstating their use for the salvation of God’s children.

Beyond holding all the priesthood keys necessary to institute ordinances and passing the spiritual keys to others, the Prophet acts as a spokesperson for the Lord. Within the office of a Prophet, the Lord reveals His will for His Church, or organization of believers, in consultation with 12 apostles and other Church leaders (e.g., Women’s Presidency, called the Relief Society). As a spokesperson for the organization, the Prophet communicates direction and anticipates the future. The primary role of a Church leader is to testify of Christ’s mission; that is, Jesus is the Healer of the world and assistant for God’s children to gain eternal life. Put another way:

Proposition 2: A Prophet embodies the will of Jesus Christ by professing salvific, collaborative doctrine and instituting redemptive ordinances through (restored) priesthood keys.

Proposition #3: Intimate Relationship with the Godhead.

Trinitarian doctrine gives way to something more personal: An individual’s relationship with first, God, second, Jesus Christ the Son, and third, the Holy Spirit. Regarding God, Restoration doctrine asserts that Heavenly Mother also exists and serves in tandem with the Father, whose sole purpose is to bring about humanity’s happiness via eternal life. God made humankind in their image: They possess physical, perfected bodies and experience all emotions as parent figures like Their children. Heavenly Parents assist humanity in their mortal journey wherein they experience pain, suffering, and affliction, meant to offer growth opportunities. Jesus Christ, as the Healer, atones and supports God’s children, acting as a brother figure who demonstrates how to transcend all
tensions, having descended below all strife through suffering. The Holy Spirit, as a separate entity without a body, dwells within people to testify of truth, gifting peace as humans experience life’s contradictions.

Each member of the Godhead intimately instructs their Heavenly Family. While Prophets, apostles, and leaders offer localized guidance, these offices should never displace the personal, communicative relationship a child can have with their Heavenly Parents, Brother, and the Holy Spirit. Life requires personal revelation and Prophetic authority to navigate changing circumstances. As such:

Proposition 3: The Heavenly Family (i.e., God the Father, God the Mother, Jesus the Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Humankind) learns together through collective and individual means, navigating constant change amongst happiness and suffering.

**Proposition #4: Divine (Eternal) Potential as a Human Family.**

Each member of the Human Family is a god-in-embryo or can become like God (i.e., Heavenly Father and Mother) with eternal posterity and life. In this sense, the purpose of God, enabled through Jesus Christ, is to offer opportunities for becoming through learning experiences. Mortal life represents a time to gain a body necessary for experiencing all emotions, turning abstract ideas into material (i.e., embodied). Christ overcame death, offering the Resurrection (i.e., the opportunity to live again) beyond the confines of mortality. With perfected bodies, a gift to all, no matter their position toward Jesus Christ, all can continue to live.

Heavenly Father, Mother, and Jesus Christ embody (ongoing) Perfection, each having experienced the lessons of mortality, thus, offering a facilitative learning experience for those inclined to progress. Their goal is to bring all to their Glory, which is
unending, wherewith They continue to constitute worlds without end. As such, sacred ordinances, performed in Holy locations (e.g., temples representing the Home of God), offer opportunities for the living and those passed on to make and keep sacred covenants centered on loving each other. A sealing occurs when true to one another, in the form of maintaining peace via commandments. Structured by family units (e.g., father, mother, children), humanity progresses together into eternity rather than in solace. A network of sociality offers opportunities for continual creation, discovery, and choosing between contradictions of happiness and sadness. Written differently:

   Proposition 4: Mortal life is a step in an eternal journey, where gods-in-embryo assume bodies to learn, become resurrected and perfected through Christ, and eventually receive the Glory of God within eternal families.

   Proposition #5: The Integral Role of Agency.

   Fundamental to all existence is the ability to choose. No time in the past, present, or future will God remove agency. Without it, growth amongst contradictions becomes obsolete. All humankind lived in a pre-existent state before coming to earth to receive bodies. God allowed their children to co-construct a plan of happiness with Them, wherein all consulted on creating a space to learn through joy and strife. Lucifer (Satan) moved to save all humankind without requiring affliction. In other words, by removing agency, all would deterministically receive salvation; however, doing so would disrupt the opportunity for growth amidst binary opposites (e.g., Good and evil, light and darkness, health and sickness). In short, Satan wished to spare all from learning. Rejected, the Devil and his followers opposed the Plan others supported, losing their ability to receive a body for their eternal progression. In short, Satan embraces notions of
control and determinism, whereas God engenders free will.

Because God will not remove agency, humankind will suffer times of devastation. Humanity must unite in consultation with the Godhead, who can provide insight into the best moves, contingent upon the current circumstances. Omniscience affords opportunities to gauge the actions of others, whether benevolent or malicious. Thus, to navigate the complexities of good and evil, humanity must ask God, who will offer guidance. That said, knowledge is not transferrable like a bank deposit: Gods’ facilitation methods require patience, even when instruction seems contradictory. For structure in a contentious world, commandments offer (somewhat) structured poles that assist humans in discerning between the informed and the misinformed. Not forcing a decision upon any, people might gravitate toward decisions that harm rather than heal. Jesus Christ, choosing to experience all through suffering the helpful and hurtful, offers solace, binding wounds that result from human agency.

Because the doctrine of agency is central, the Godhead likewise chooses to remain consistent, engendering opportunities to exercise faith, despite changing times. Upon reuniting with Them, as a Family, humans can choose to progress and learn according to higher laws. Catalyzed by Adam and Eve’s inspired decision to partake of the fruit, happiness requires misery; otherwise, growth is obsolete. In short:

Proposition 5: The ability to choose (i.e., agency) is central to all learning, despite contradictions of happiness and sorrow, with the latter finding peace in Christ’s sacrifice.

Summary of Propositions.

In summary, though not relegated to the doctrinal premises outlined above, the
Church promotes an epistemology centered on eternally becoming: Gods’ children, embryotic agents, organize through the vehicle of a church, structured by salvific, restored priesthood ordinances that instruct them how to become like God. Despite apostasy, members collectively coordinate to uncover truths manifest in Christ’s Gospel, led by Prophets during their mortal life, to continually create worlds without end.

Such a reading badgers certainty: Faith in God does not mean reducing uncertainty but instead managing uncertainty through times of doubt and knowledge. Uncertainty is guaranteed if worlds without end are co-constructed within structures of binary opposites or opposing choices of Light and Darkness that require choosing. To this end, the Godhead represents the epitome of perfect organizing: They instruct how to manage disorder fueled by creationary communication.

**Pretrial of Restorationism**

Having reviewed some fundamental claims of The Church, we will now cast each proposition within opposing fixed-fluid frames. We do so to demonstrate how a single text (e.g., a religious belief) testifies differently in cross-examinations, preparing us for our thought experiment (trial) in chapter six. Each proposition illuminates a divergent story, contingent upon our theoretical orientation (i.e., fixed or fluid) and operationalized through questioning. Presumably, and of great consequence, each opposing stance would constitute very different realities and, in turn, identification (conversion) experiences.

As shown in Table 6 below, we will call our frames (1) Restored and (2) Restoring. *Restored* assumes a fixed mindset, where we see phenomena as stable and our existence as determined (controlled). On the contrary, *Restoring* supposes a fluid mentality, where ideas are negotiable and reality in states of becoming (determining).
Beyond showcasing The Church’s beliefs from a fixed and fluid stance, Table 6 also includes empirical evidence to illuminate the frames. Specifically, the scholarship reviewed conforms to a Restored view (as opposed to a fluid epistemology). Thus, we will balance the evidence and conclusions scholars offered from a Restoring standpoint with abductive reasoning.\textsuperscript{16,17,18}
Table 6: Cross-Examination of Restored versus Restoring

As proposed in the previous section, the five propositions below represent subjective summations of the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. First, we outline the original propositions and then cast them into two frames to show how a “single” text acts differently based on our reading. We call frame #1 *Restored*—a fixed or determined mentality. In opposition, we call frame #2 *Restoring*—a fluid or determining position. Next, we list the reimagined propositions and ideas to support the viewpoints. Under the Restored pole, we use empirical research examples. For the Restoring side, we include abductive thoughts to balance the views.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restorationism Pole #1: Restored (Fixed or Determined)</th>
<th>Restorationism Pole #2: Restoring (Fluid or Determining)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original Proposition #1: A church experiences apostasy which affords restoration:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reimagined Proposition #1 (Restored)—</td>
<td>Reimagined Proposition #1 (Restoring)—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A church assumes a Perfect form if led by Perfection (i.e., God) and extracted from apostatized institutions and human error through Restoration. When restored, the structure creates order and certainty for all.</td>
<td>A church imperfectly organizes understanding, despite arrangements donning certainty. Humans constitute the church, enabling and constraining via discourse. A church is a method of inquiry, navigating uncertainties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research example from a restored stance—</td>
<td>Research example reimagined from a restoring stance—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| “The Church’s missionary program seeks to increase [this] congruence among missionaries’ multiple identities through controlling both the context (regionalization)...and activities (situated action)...thus, nearly all missionaries adopt a uniform...identity...creating...commitment to organizational goals” (Ault, 2018, p. 55). | Despite appearing within a “local” and “situated” context, programs, contexts, and activities are not uniform. The “situation” is in one’s mind. Organizational goals are subjective, and uniformity of identity is impossible: A worldwide Church cannot possess a Perfect, controlled structure, no matter the strategized efforts. A single context cannot be generalized to an entire Church.
### Table 6 Cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restored</th>
<th>Restoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original Proposition #2: A prophet embodies the will of Jesus Christ by</td>
<td>Proposition #2 (Restored)—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professing salvific, collaborative doctrine and instituting redemptive</td>
<td>A church leader (e.g., Prophet) speaks for the Perfect Lord, dictating His</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ordinances through restored priesthood keys.</td>
<td>will and receiving revelation for the congregation to live by via their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposition #2 (Restored)—</td>
<td>title or authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A church leader (e.g., Prophet) speaks for the Perfect Lord, dictating</td>
<td>Proposition #2 (Restoring)—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His will and receiving revelation for the congregation to live by via</td>
<td>A church leader (e.g., Prophet) communicates with the Perfect Lord in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their title or authority.</td>
<td>collaboration with others to understand His will for daily living, sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposition #2 (Restoring)—</td>
<td>the keys of knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A church leader (e.g., Prophet) communicates with the Perfect Lord in</td>
<td><strong>Research Example from a Restored Stance</strong>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collaboration with others to understand His will for daily living, sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the keys of knowledge.</td>
<td>“Practices in the Church...are rigidly controlled by central church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Example from a Restored Stance</strong>—</td>
<td>authorities, and the doctrine that dictates male-only priesthood ordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Practices in the Church...are rigidly controlled by central church</td>
<td>is considered divine, changeably only by presidential revelation. Given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authorities, and the doctrine that dictates male-only priesthood ordination</td>
<td>these constraints, dissenters...have little probability of achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is considered divine, changeably only by presidential revelation. Given</td>
<td>organizational change”(Hinderaker, 2017, p. 160).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>these constraints, dissenters...have little probability of achieving</td>
<td><strong>Research Example Reimagined from a Restoring Stance</strong>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizational change”(Hinderaker, 2017, p. 160).</td>
<td>Leaders do not solely contain the power of an organization by holding</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>authority or position. Power (and knowledge) spreads throughout the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>organization, whether or not the officers collaborate with others for</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>solutions. By shaping local discourses to promote (gender) equality, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“dissenters” deconstruct and produce new, local forms of organizing,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>despite a centralized authority.</td>
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</table>
Table 6 Cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restored</th>
<th>Restoring</th>
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</table>
| Original Proposition #3: The Heavenly Family (i.e., God the Father, God the Mother, Jesus the Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Humankind) learns together through collective and individual means, navigating constant change amongst happiness and suffering. | Proposition #3 (Restored)—

God Omniscient has all the answers, including perfect solutions for navigating mortality. God dictates the lessons, and we experience the consequences. |
| Proposition #3 (Restoring)—                                                                 |

God Omniscient perfectly facilitates individual and collective inquiry, allowing growth and change through dialectical relationships created via social construction. |

Research Example Reimagined from a Restoring Stance—

“Mormon doctrine dictates official Mormon teachings about the purpose of life…Cultural practices, on the other hand, are often separated as social norms, traditions, and attitudes embedded within particular groups of Mormons…She is seeking to uphold and continue existing Mormon doctrine including male-only priesthood ordination—a tradition she sees as doctrinally, not culturally based” (Feller, 2016, pp. 161, 162) |

Research Example Reimagined from a Restoring Stance—

Though doctrine might dictate, a believer and church leader might pray for clarification or perfecting of truth. Dictation might facilitate closure. Cultural practices and “dictated” doctrine are not separate entities: Should someone contend with aspects of a culture, they must also compete with (relatively stable) structures or doctrine (i.e., Discourse).
Table 6 Cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restored</th>
<th>Restoring</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original Proposition #4</strong>: Mortal life is a step in an eternal journey, where gods-in-embryo assume bodies to learn, become resurrected and perfected through Christ, and eventually receive the Glory of God within eternal families.</td>
<td><strong>Proposition #4 (Restored)</strong>—Mortal life includes a series of tests with correct answers: A higher score affords closer proximity to God until we receive rest through perfection and resurrection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proposition #4 (Restored)</strong>—Mortal life includes a series of tests with correct answers: A higher score affords closer proximity to God until we receive rest through perfection and resurrection.</td>
<td><strong>Proposition #4 (Restoring)</strong>—Mortal life offers (eternal) opportunities to choose between dialectical tensions of good and evil. Managing these choices helps us reach Godhood, a state of ongoing perfection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Example Reimagined from a Restoring Stance</strong>—As stated in the methodology section: “By referencing “heterodox” Mormonism, I emphasize that Mormonism is an orthodox faith that valorizes “correct belief” (and by implication, condemns incorrect belief) and that there are certain beliefs and practices that are expected of a faithful Mormon within the belief community that is the Church…” (Avance, 2013, p. 17).</td>
<td><strong>Research Example Reimagined from a Restoring Stance</strong>—A “correct” belief assumes an either-or, right-or-wrong solution: One condemning, the other saving. To live up to such expectations might create black-or-white communities. Some options, as referenced in the teachings about Adam and Eve’s consumption of the fruit, are good, better, and best. A continuum of good and evil exists within contingent circumstances, creating paradoxes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Table 6 Cont.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Restored</th>
<th>Restoring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original Proposition #5:</strong> The ability to choose (i.e., agency) is central to all learning, despite contradictions of happiness and sorrow, with the latter finding peace in Christ’s sacrifice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proposition #5 (Restored)—</strong></td>
<td>Learning brings sorrow because of others’ choices. Christ heals this sorrow, providing peace. Happiness is our quest.</td>
<td>Happiness cannot exist without sorrow as it is continually in tension due to choices. Christ heals through learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empirical example from studies on the Church:</strong></td>
<td>“While all faith communities might be considered totalistic to a degree, certain faith cultures foster a more totalistic membership than others…the cultural practices and doctrinal teachings of Mormonism are for more institutionalized than other faith[s]” (Hinderaker, 2015, p. 94). The author highlighted that members experienced significant organizational stress and relief once removed from the church.</td>
<td><em>Research Example Reimagined from a Restoring Stance</em>—A totalistic organization, with “encroaching” practices and rituals, would likely fashion (moral) decisions; however, members can interpret and enact their understanding of the organization differently. It is, therefore, not totalistic as an entity. Happiness could not exist without the sorrow felt by the organization; thus, the member never fully exits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, we applied the communication constitutes organization (CCO) framework to Christian history, examining the shifting meaning of beliefs constructed by religious leaders and congregants. By doing so, we challenged notions of “perfect” (infallible) doctrines, untouched by human interpretations, setting the scene for The Church’s doctrine of Restoration. We experienced moments of fixed and fluid discourse, reviewing the history of The Church and its fundamental beliefs. Finally, we cross-examined the propositions of The Church from two competing lenses: Restored and Restoring, demonstrating how we can move the text to testify from two divergent angles. These efforts offered a pretrial of Restorationism—a questioning technique that rouses fixed-fluid paradoxes in religious spaces.

The next chapter further operationalizes our dialectical lens (i.e., Restored and Restoring) by providing a methodology (plan) for trial. Mainly, we will review the epistemological commitments of poststructuralism in preparation for our thought experiment.

Chapter 4 Footnotes


2. That is, writing the Gospel of John and being involved in Christ’s ministry (see Luke 9:54; Mark 10:35-40; Galatians 2:9).

3. See Matthew 26: 14-16; Matthew 27: 3-4

4. See Galatians Chapter 1 for a review of Paul laboring among those losing faith due to deception.
5. Although Christian denominations employ the “same” Bible, a radically different understanding of the Godhead might shape religious identification: For one, an individual might simultaneously identify as a child of God, a brother or sister of Christ, and a recipient of the Holy Spirit. For another, believing in Trinity, the self is a believer in one entity, materially inseparable. To this end, a person’s relationship with God (He) or God (Them) depends upon the knowledge at hand: A believer operating in discourse that promotes or denies the Trinity might experience Godly power differently.

6. From our preface, we conceptualized a human’s relationship with a Divine Being might be directly connected (D_d) while being influenced by other meso, macro, and institutional levels (D_d and d), embedded within socio-historical contexts and eternal time. In this historical case, we might imaginatively delete the D_d and d to showcase the macro influence (D) of the Catholic Church.

7. Relating to our previous footnote, perhaps here we resurrect D_d and d.

8. To remain “true” to its religious dogma, this synthesis of fundamental premises and history only uses sources from The Church of Jesus of Latter-day Saints (The Church) instead of secondary sources (e.g., academic reviews). The following texts from The Church (available on ChurchofJesusChrist.org) will inform the summary: The Doctrine and Covenants, The Pearl of Great Price, The Book of Mormon, The Living Christ, The Family Proclamation, The Restoration Proclamation, and Preach My Gospel. Each text constitutes Holy Scripture or divine documents, in conjunction with the Holy Bible, used for hearing the voice of the Lord and organizing individual and institutional decisions. Members of The
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints adopt these texts, while others (e.g., Community of Christ) may not fully embrace them. Likewise, I acknowledge that this review cannot escape my subjective interpretation of the doctrine, especially being a dedicated member of The Church. See my subjectivity statement in chapter five for additional insight.

9. By text, we mean a word, phrase, sentence, speech, or any other utterance (unit of discourse) that (dis)organizes identity.


11. “Methodologies are choices, often onto-epistemological and theoretical, and cannot be divorced from the values, beliefs, backgrounds, bodies, and affects of the researcher or the research context” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016, p. 79).

12. Namely, evoking God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost via sacred rituals required a form of godliness not “controlled [but] handled only upon the principles of righteousness.” God revokes that Authority when “we undertake to cover our sins, or gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion on the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness” (Doctrine and Covenants, 1835, 121:36-37).

13. See the volumes of Saints published by The Church for a comprehensive history.

14. (Pre) postmodern is a purposeful label: Though postmodernity and poststructuralism do not claim a starting date, the Restoration occurred in the early 1800s—well before Foucault, Derrida, and even structuralist thinkers (e.g., Ferdinand de Saussure) of the late 1800s and early 1900s. As a pure conjecture,
the trajectory of the Church might not have had immunity to the scientific
discourses engendering certainty. Positivism as a philosophy stems from Francis
Bacon (1561-1626), Auguste Comte (1798-1857), and the Vienna Circle (the
early 1900s), among others (Crotty, 1998).

15. For additional insight, see my subjectivity statement in chapter two.

16. The opposites must exist to inform one another; thus, Derrida maintained
deconstruction efforts do not entail eradicating or ignoring a pole: Doing so would
negate the meaning of the entire system (Derrida, 1997; Malabou & Derrida,
2004). In other words, deleting one side cancels the second; thus, hypothetically, a
believer might only choose to augment one side more than the other, placing their
choice above the other opposite. Doing so flips the epistemic kaleidoscope,
organizing different understandings and discursive acts. Theoretically, when
reality feels stabilized, a binary pole (whether fixed or fluid) bears too much
weight. To this end, Derrida advocated for dissemination or opening a snag,
releasing hidden traces, and resisting the temptation to mend or fix the tare in the
knowledge structure (Derrida, 1972).

17. We do so to not advocate for one perspective above the other (i.e., either-or
approaches)—providing a fair trial. Necessary for consideration, Restored (pole
#1) and Restoring (pole #2) inform each other: One gives stability and the other
mercy for change. Should we gravitate more toward one position within the push-pull
dialect, the other side will likely cause pressure or dissonance. Generally, few
studies are performed on the Church from a poststructural mindset. Thus, the
ideas presented in the Restoring Column of Table 6 are abductive.
18. Of course, true to a poststructural stance, there is no "perfect" way of articulating a kaleidoscope: Each shift in time will shift the language and the meaning. Thus, curated from abduction, we might problematize the representation.
CHAPTER 5: "METHOD" OF RESTORATIONISM

Overview

Poststructuralism escapes absolute forms: There is no "correct" thought process or "right" method of inquiry. Suggesting so would position a methodological pattern above another, favoring some knowledge while ignoring other techniques. Moreover, classifying a reasoning pattern (a method) carries a bundle of assumptions about how a researcher should operate; thus, it is difficult for an inquirer to escape the grasp of methodic discipline. So, how does an investigator write a "method" section without reifying past, narrow procedures or employing authoritarian language that closes instead of opens? How can we best clarify Restorationism as a perspective without solidifying it?

Chapter five takes on this difficult task: Describing a methodology without a (precise and replicable) methodology (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). To begin, we will review the premises of poststructural inquiry. Second, we will examine my subjectivity statement, as I, the author, am imbricated in the thought experiment. Third, we will further conceptualize Restorationism as a thought experiment, using binoculars as a metaphor and extending our cross-examination analogy in preparation for the trial of our text (in the next chapter).

A Review of Poststructural Inquiry: The Spirit of Restorationism

This section reviews fundamental premises, or commitments, to poststructural thinking. It rationalizes using methodic ambiguity instead of replicable clarity, frustrating those inclined to certainty. That said, these obligations are not to escape responsibility: On the contrary, poststructuralism affords careful consideration of how (fixed) words possess catastrophic and creative organizing effects.
If anything, a writer must employ greater precision, meticulously avoiding the reification of words and phrases that carry modernist baggage. The following propositions are not exhaustive but share enough insight into poststructural thinking in preparation for using Restorationism. Likewise, they do not represent discrete ideas claimed by single thinkers: They are a concoction of Foucauldian, Derridean, and Bakhtinian philosophies, among other postmodern thinkers (Brummans et al., 2013; Grbich, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg, 2016).

Poststructuralism Proposition #1: Structure as Closure

We must actively acknowledge structures and refuse to endorse them wholly. Otherwise, we stabilize knowledge and discipline our understanding. Both repercussions might sound positive; however, they risk closing or not revealing hidden opportunities. Thus, we make decisions, in a moment, about what to pursue while reflexively considering our role in creating and sustaining power. Structures shape our realities; therefore, we must cautiously choose which words, methods, and ideas to endorse, choosing to resist and accept. To open possibilities, we must be comfortable doubting what fashions our understanding. Thus, in interaction with our data, we allow multiple meanings from divergent perspectives to expose erasures.

Resisting structure means we do not follow methodological checklists where a discernable beginning (e.g., a mess of interview data) finds closure (e.g., abstract codes that organize the data into generalizable claims). In other words, we would not espouse modernist qualitative methods of inquiry (e.g., Grounded Theory) that construct packaged conceptions. On the contrary, deconstruction resists packaging.

To this end, deconstructing a text is not a "method or stage-by-stage approach"
but more so a "natural unraveling which the text invites by presenting [opportunities] within its own structure" (Grbich, 2013, p. 178). If there was a logic to embrace, we might start with structures constituted by binary opposites (e.g., fixed versus fluid), identify a likely hierarchy, and ruminate over the paradoxes upheld in tension. Such is the case with Good and Evil, with Good being higher, yet each must exist to inform the other. From here, speculations about their relationship and organizing effects might ensue for creative possibilities (Derrida, 1976, 1997).

**Poststructuralism Proposition #2: Subjectivity as Inescapable**

When documenting a methodology journey, we cannot assume that the words typed or written remain stable or singular in interpretation. Just as researchers avoid closure by investigating divergent meanings, the reader likewise takes the thoughts and creates their own journey, thus, "adulterating" what the researcher meant to describe. In other words, the writer-researcher can never control their audiences' interpretations, no matter the efforts of language precision or negotiation of meaning. The author may articulate their worldview, but the reader will always see it differently. The likelihood of objectivity is impossible. Thus, instead of obsessing over well-defined statements or propositions, the researcher-performer might purposely remain ambiguous to encourage the emergence of possibilities.

**Poststructuralism Proposition #3: Reliability as Impossible, Validity as Reasonable**

Because reality shifts via language, the biased researcher and subjective reader will never fashion a True form that yields repeatable results: Vying for reliability in studies is impossible, if not blasphemous. Reliability reifies structures, closing the mind to the inescapable unreliability of postmodern existence. Likewise, we may not define
validity as (objectively) true but instead phenomenologically plausible or worthy of scrutiny because an agent constitutes that reality. Thus, the audience must work to empathize with the research, working with plausibility instead of refuting it. The researcher should present an argumentative journey (i.e., claims, evidence, and reasoning) for the reader without falling victim to or overusing comfortable "scientific" patterns or methods. If uniformity to style (e.g., APA) forsakes creationary opportunities for the researcher and audience, then dissent tactics are productive (e.g., irruptions). In sum, researchers define validity with the communities they serve as co-investigators.

**Poststructuralism Proposition #4: Theory, Method, and Context as Married**

Because validity depends on researchers and their communities, data—and methods—cannot divorce from their context. From a poststructuralist lens, there is no generalizable world "above" or distinct from the situation. In other words, researchers might assume a body of knowledge (e.g., a theory) and methods are discrete phenomena packaged for application in multiple settings. On the contrary, findings do not "transcend" to abstract spheres but remain tethered to their socially-constructed spaces.

To this end, we might try to generalize Restorationism across all religious contexts that promote fixed and fluid discourse; however, we lose its potency and story by divorcing it from the Latter-day Saint context and the researcher (myself) who creates it. Therefore, we accept that my conceptualizations and thoughts inform Restorationism, acting as a fundamental piece to the story I tell in this dissertation. However, we can and should co-construct new ways of seeing fixed-fluid, religious discourse. I now offer my subjectivity statement to show my weaving interactions within and throughout our journey. After all, the thought experiment is my brainchild: I try the ideas, directing the
text to testify differently to prove the guilt and innocence of fixed-fluid discourse that carry actionable (real) offenses.

**Subjectivity Statement: Embodying the Spirit of Restorationism**

I am more than an instrument. I do not engage with research and reality like a microscope or telescope, zooming out and in on data. My findings are not separate bits of intelligence, possessing no trace of myself as an imperfect human. If studied, every word, label, or categorization attempt I make bleeds with my past, present, and future: My data and I are inseparable. To believe in my data means having faith in my reasoning. To trust my findings requires acknowledgment of my positions. To use my speculations obligates my soul, something indiscernible to me but known by God. Thus, no matter my efforts to credit my name, a Perfect understanding of me and my relation to research is impossible:

Today, I will deconstruct yesterday. Tomorrow, I will repurpose today. Yesterday I constructed tomorrow. I draft my subjectivity statement but know that you will spoil me. My identity will change, (re)positioning to fleeting moments communicated in action. Yet, there are somewhat stable pillars to my identity, two of which I now review.

**Pillar #1: Religion**

I actively identify as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My over 30-year attachment to the organization is evident in various roles, from a two-year proselytizing mission in Bulgaria to leadership roles in local communities. Most immediate and extended family endorse the Church's beliefs from their pioneer heritage. The fundamental doctrine taught by the Church (as outlined in chapter one) acted as a focal point in my childhood home, continues to inform my marriage, and serves as a guide for raising my children.
Beyond my involvement in the organization, I believe I am a child of Heavenly Parents. Though difficult to prove empirically, I have felt and do experience Their presence. I choose to acknowledge miracles, moments unexplainable by rational, logical thought. To feel close to God means believing and choosing to see from a unique epistemological lens (i.e., religion). With this perspective, life (data) changes, questions unfold, and possibilities emerge: Even amidst (post)modern discourse that kills or doubts God.

I am not perfect, nor is anyone else I know. We can express gratitude for all our mistakes as they challenge our growth. We become stronger through tensions (e.g., helpful versus harmful) vying for the former. Unbeknown to my finite mind, I believe Jesus Christ experiences all things on our behalf, enabling an atonement: The ability to become at one with God. Through His suffering and resurrection, I believe He heals and instructs. He facilitates all learning, guiding us through choices between ongoing continuums. I believe He teaches us with the aid of people, including Prophets, Apostles, and other religious leaders. They are imperfect but offer inspired insight from life experiences and their respective callings.

When we become at one with God, through Christ, we better understand the character of God. I do not claim to know the fullness of my Heavenly Parents. That said, I believe they are complete: Not in the sense that they are obsolete or dead (i.e., stable or stagnant), but Perfect in their ability to (continually) choose between opposites. In sum, I am far from an atheist or agnostic. Yet, I do not know the Church to be True.

To testify to a congregation that "I know the Church is True" (a colloquial phrase in The Church) requires positioning the organization as a Perfect, Complete entity:
Unless we problematize and clarify "true," which is a fundamental goal of this
dissertation. Yet, members repeat this stance, constructing truth effects that dissonate
with problems that arrive within and against the Church. Personally motivating, I see too
many friends depart from (a standardized) God because of organizations constituted by
members making mistakes to learn in life's journey. To this, I question: To whom or with
what are we identifying? Asking such a question requires deconstruction, illuminating the
bodies of discourse that objectify an idea, whether it be a Church, God, or a truth.

Embracing poststructuralism requires discomfort, something I have grown to
enjoy. When I plateau in my spirituality, I pull a thread. Yet, growing up, the discourse
around me felt so definitive and disciplining for those, including me, with questions.
Embracing doubt, instead of silencing, requires acceptance that I can ask God anything.
In short, though my religious life is not circumscribable to a few paragraphs, I believe in
God and the principles I espouse. However, belief does not mean I cannot doubt, for,
through my uncertainty, I become.

**Pillar #2: Epistemological Commitments**

I embrace poststructuralism due to my exposure to various other epistemes,
including its opposite, objectivism. My course experience includes quantitative research
methods, communication measurement, and advanced general linear modeling. Some
classes endorsed objectivism (e.g., strategic management), whereas others espoused
postmodernism (e.g., organizational communication). Sociology, communication, and
philosophy classes offered samplings of postpositive and interpretivist research. I use
various research strategies to answer my questions (e.g., quantitative methods, grounded
theory, and performance studies). My education journey acts as a buffet, where I continue
sampling from my past to (un)satisfy my present: The smorgasbord of thoughts only exists from positioning contrasting epistemes. To believe in postmodernism requires intimacy with modernism. To endorse objectivism requires ignoring interpretivism. For me, postmodernism and poststructuralism offer room for creativity. Perhaps I am tuned in to discourse actively proclaiming truth via research, for I find holes through my questions. I criticize to discover.

Critical thinking in religious spaces is sensitive when operating in dialogues of certainty. When evoking the foundations of my (contemporary) religion, I find permission to ask, seek, and knock to discover something better. I reorient myself to discourse that allows openness, resisting communication that closes. To this end, the Church, "perfect" or infallible, offers growth: A journey that often requires (futile) explanation.

**Using Restorationism as Cross-Examination**

As a review, Restorationism, as a lens, contains two opposing stances: *Restored* (fixed) and *Restoring* (fluid). When pressed to testify in dialectical tension, a text reveals different stories, likely influencing identification (conversion) with The Church. The religious discourse makes the opposites possible, organized by absolutist proclamations and changing organizational livelihood: The congregant becomes lost in the paradoxical communication that promises certainty but acts differently.

**Conceptualizing Restorationism as Binoculars, Thought Experiment, and Trial**

Explained differently, we might metaphorically describe Restorationism as a pair of binoculars. There are two eyepieces, one called fixed (Restored) and the other called fluid (Restoring). Together, they make abstract (far-away) thoughts appear prominent.
Namely, the Discourse ($D$, $d$, and $D_d$) seem more apparent: What we might lose in theoretical speculation or subconscious enactment becomes practically relevant for its organizing functions.

We do not simply peer into two holes. To enlarge the object, a series of prisms and lenses work to turn an image upside-down: A paradox, that is, something irregular in thought, occurs. When light passes through the prisms, the image (i.e., paradox) becomes right-side up, enlarged by the lenses, and brought to our eyes. Then, we each see the object differently. The prisms represent "methods," and the lens, epistemes. These include the theoretical frameworks reviewed in the previous chapters (i.e., Foucault, Derrida, Bakhtin, CCO, and the Latter-day Saint epistemology).

Restorationism is not a linear (A to Z) experience. In other words, when scrutinizing a word or phrase in this study, I will not start with prism A and end with Z. I might begin with M, jump to T, and conclude with A to find paradoxes of language. Namely, when I call the text to testify, questioning from both stances, I will not follow a predetermined script but allow a natural transaction with my data.

Focusing and refocusing to obtain a (fleeting) "clear" image represents a thought experiment. Each spin of the focusing wheel represents an attempt to clarify the (moving) data through questions. To keep the image in focus, constructed with prisms and lenses, we anticipate the next move: We ask, how might this data act in situation A, B, or C, or when interacting with another bit of information, complementary or contradictory? Here, we abductively consider the different levels of analysis (i.e., micro, meso, macro, institutional).

As our goal, we imagine possible realities to keep ahead, manipulating our
instrument to remain focused despite impending uncertainty. We prophetically organize and
communicate our hypotheses before the discourse makes its move. When the data
surprises, we quickly readjust our focus to capture the organizing effects of
communication. Because our data will move, constituted by actants, we cannot document
a stable procedure (e.g., focus to the right a few degrees if the data acts this way). There
is no way to train the eye but through experience.

At a minimum, we have theoretically constructed binoculars to offer a starting point. The binoculars' basic (post)structure assumes a coherent form for application; however, we must not assume perfection. Derrida and Foucault, for example, prove useful, but they, too, deconstruct. The prisms and lenses deteriorate, and new ideas arrive. Therefore, we solely experiment with the words or have faith in their ability to create new possibilities instead of reaching predictable, stable conclusions.

The thought experiment to anticipate opportunities will demonstrate abductive reasoning: Focusing, turning, squinting, blinking, reflecting, and distorting. In all, placing the data on trial, we question it, judge its actions, and anticipate how the emergent testimonies will inform our next question and ways to rule our (religious) lives. In all, taking a stand, we place our hands (on our bibles) and swear to tell the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth—so help me, God.3

(Alive) Data to Try

The primary data (or discourse) tried for this thought experiment comes from
global General Conference addresses from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These speeches, translated into over 93 languages, offer insightful paradoxes for several reasons. First, these texts hold authority in The Church: Leaders and members
endorse them as Scripture or extensions to fundamental texts (e.g., The Holy Bible, The Book of Mormon). They are, in essence, the voice of the Lord for the present time, communicated through the organizational leaders (e.g., Prophets, Apostles).4

Here, the organization connects to the metaphysical (God), with leaders (as fallible, discursive beings) proclaiming "infallible" truths (as Scripture). Namely, the conference addresses become the ("Absolute") Discourse, determining actions of the saints, despite members also having a direct connection with God (conceptualized earlier as Da). Thus, paradoxes irrupt: Downward Discourse determines (in fixed and fluid ways), and believers circumvent the Discourse with their devotions to God.

Further, these proclamations are not linear: If we assume communication constitutes organizations at various levels (i.e., micro, meso, macro, institutional), then the leaders' declarations are not direct revelations from the metaphysical but instead, a compilation of communicative acts across time. In other words, the Discourse (Scriptural speeches) are not solitary, discrete pieces of data direct from God but utterances of past, present, and future (little d) discourse: The texts represent compiled discursive moments experienced by leaders across multiple levels. Thus, we require complexity when cross-examining the texts.

Second, the General Conference addresses are not brief summations of relevant doctrine to adhere to: A conference session lasts 10 hours (5 sessions) over a single weekend, twice a year, with multiple speakers per session addressing various topics with personal stories. With sessions dating back to the 1850s, the array of thought offers opportunities for diverse interpretations, no matter the strategic efforts to control the "top-down" messages. In this case, the congregants decide what to feast: They consume the
relevant Scripture (conference addresses), subjectively digest the absolutes, excrete the irrelevant, and retain what their souls need most. The feasting, while collective as an organization, is personal. Thus, members' devotions ($D_d$) become highly personal, despite the proclamations toward the whole body.

Third, though a member receives insight from God ($D_d$) or a (broadcasted, televised) leader ($D$), these messages are not linear transmissions from source to a receiver. Instead, these messages pass through additional filters, constituting the meaning, making it local, specific, and distinctive. For example, after conferences, members study the texts in groups, families, and congregations, interpreting and applying them to their local needs. Thus, the message is subjective (from the member's stance) and biased (from their participation in dialogic circles). The nature of the text is poststructural, despite the communication within and without the conference texts that might constitute it objectively.

For example, if we consider the texts as Prophetic and Scripture, they bear the utterances of Holy Bible rhetoric (e.g., infallible, absolute) as showcased in our section on Christian history. Assuming these texts as fixed, we might experience contradictions among the speeches over several years. Running a genealogical record (a Foucauldian stance), we capture how and when texts deviate, communicating uncertainty despite claiming fixity. That is, hypothetically, if the speeches are True (i.e., absolute, unchanging), we should not see discrepancies but internal consistency.

To this end, we place the Discourse (General Conference addresses) on trial: We use Restorationism to demonstrate moments where the Text might parade as fixed and fluid, organizing divergent realities. In simple terms, we are analyzing the content of the
addresses (the "objective" text) and anticipating its subjective (abductive, hypothetical) organizing effects on different levels of analysis (i.e., micro, meso, macro, institutional).

We do so to embrace a poststructural (postmodern) mindset. We might, for example, employ interviews to capture data, "proving" the phenomenon exists. However, we are not proving to conclude but trying to anticipate and open nuances: We engage in prophecy, predicting the future through abductive reasoning. We illuminate the hypotheticals, speculate on the illustrations, and then, if desired, "prove" the phenomena through other methods. In short, we trust the data's testimonies, no matter if (reasonably) concocted by a single author—To assume that some methods are more "valid" contradict the spirit of postmodernism, seeking to question our understanding of Truth. We settle on my speculations, met by your continual renegotiations.

**Discovery of Data for the Trial**

From a poststructural mindset, the addresses we examine offer unending possibilities. We might start from multiple directions, affording eternal journeys by each word uttered in a General Conference speech, totaling 25,132,616 words across 11,103 addresses from 1851 to 2022. Opportunities to try evidence are ungraspable for the finite mind. We will narrow the scope of our case in two ways.

First, our investigation in chapter four showcased evidence of the Church promulgating fixed (certain) discourse, particularly about the organization's identity. In turn, we approve the motion to forward our case, scrutinizing the organizing effects of the Church's utterances on (non)member identification. Second, we will limit our search to conference talks between 1970 and 2022. While we might have numerous arguments for and against the 52-year sample, our reasons are primarily pragmatic. For one, the
speeches during this timeframe are available to all for review online on the Church’s website, whereas the other addresses are more difficult to download for analysis. Limiting our sample to this timeframe provides 3,871 speeches for discovery.

Though we will only observe addresses since the 1970s, capturing the context of how the organization shapes its identity over time is nonetheless inciteful. To this end, I used an online corpus created for General Conference addresses hosted by Brigham Young University (lds-general-conference.org). The website allows keyword searches to identify trends, permitting the opportunity to triage the data—in our case, to find speeches focused on organizational identity. Table 7 below shows the triaging process.

To this end, I searched the corpus for the following phrases: True church, restored church, complete church (and organization), perfect church (and organization), organized church, organized religion, Lord’s church (and organization), divine church (and organization), Christ’s church (and organization), and “Church of Jesus Christ.” I also relied on collocates for restored and church with a distance of nine words on each side. That is, the search captured any instances of “church” and “restored” within nine terms of each other. Thus, we would include a phrase like “The church—miraculously governed through God and His prophets and apostles—restored through Joseph” since it includes nine or fewer words between the search terms. Table 7 contains the direct phrase "restored church," only for reference since the collocates column counts the phrase.

For context, I also searched for (true, restored, complete, perfect, Lord's) gospel, often used in tandem with "restored church" in conference talks. I also included (1) living members on record at the beginning of the decade (e.g., 1850, 1860, 1990) and (2) the total of full-time missionaries at the start of each decade.
### Table 7: Triaging the Data for Discovery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Conference Addresses</th>
<th>Categories of Utterances (Phrases) “Fixed” (Restored, Complete, Perfect) in Spirit as opposed to “Fluid” (Restoring)</th>
<th>Subtotals &amp; Other Utterances</th>
<th>Data for Context (# = Start of Decade)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“True Church”¹ “Restored Church”≠ “Restored Church”≠ Complete / Perfect (C, O) Organized (C, R) Lord’s+ (C, O) “Church of Jesus Christ”</td>
<td>Total (1) Gospel ** Total (2)</td>
<td>Living Members (8yrs+) Missionaries (Full-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850s</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>16 4 (0) 3 0 116 62</td>
<td>201 6 207</td>
<td>51,839 50 (1850)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860s</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>11 5 (0) 2 0 133 64</td>
<td>215 3 218</td>
<td>61,082 96 (1860)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1870s</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>32 8 (0) 26 1 306 135</td>
<td>508 16 524</td>
<td>91,130 46 (1870)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880s</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>12 15 (0) 7 2 350 146</td>
<td>532 18 550</td>
<td>133,628 219</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890s</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>24 12 (0) 6 0 423 232</td>
<td>697 11 708</td>
<td>188,263 283</td>
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<tr>
<td>1900s</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>16 9 (0) 14 1 608 396</td>
<td>1,044 27 1,071</td>
<td>283,765 796</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910s</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>19 14 (2) 16 2 818 540</td>
<td>1,409 49 1,458</td>
<td>398,478 933</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>24 29 (7) 8 3 824 542</td>
<td>1,430 69 1,499</td>
<td>525,987 889</td>
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<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>738</td>
<td>11 19 (4) 5 4 550 367</td>
<td>956 68 1,024</td>
<td>670,017 896</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>32 39 (21) 2 5 592 422</td>
<td>1,092 106 1,198</td>
<td>862,664 1,194</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>53 63 (35) 1 3 607 468</td>
<td>1,195 140 1,335</td>
<td>1,111,314 3,015</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>68 88 (35) 3 8 670 489</td>
<td>1,326 143 1,469</td>
<td>1,693,180 4,706</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>94 97 (30) 0 6 654 486</td>
<td>1,337 110 1,447</td>
<td>2,930,810 7,590</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>34 55 (29) 0 0 384 283</td>
<td>756 73 829</td>
<td>4,639,822 16,600</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>33 62 (30) 0 4 450 319</td>
<td>868 93 961</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>743</td>
<td>60 104 (43) 2 1 476 367</td>
<td>1,010 199 1,209</td>
<td>11,068,861 34,503</td>
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<td>2010s</td>
<td>728</td>
<td>44 134 (74) 2 5 459 361</td>
<td>1,005 185 1,190</td>
<td>14,131,467 30,563</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020-22</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>6 69 (50) 0 0 202 162</td>
<td>439 0 439</td>
<td>16,663,663 51,819</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>11,103</td>
<td>589 826 (360) 97 45 8,622 5,841</td>
<td>16,020 1,316 17,336</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Triage #1</th>
<th>N = 5,415</th>
<th>Triage #2</th>
<th>N = 812</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Notes:**
- **C** = Church
- **O** = Organization
- **R** = Religion
- ≠ “Exact phrase used
- ≠ Collocates of Restored; Church
- + = Lord’s; God’s; Divine; Christ’s;
- **Gospel** = True, Restored, complete, perfect, Lord’s
- Total (1) = w/out Gospel
- Total (2) = w/ Gospel
- (#) = For reference only
- Members = Baptized, 8yrs+
- Missionaries = 18 months- 2yr service
As shown in Table 7, our first triage includes 3,871 speeches (between 1970 and 2022) with 5,415 utterances (words, phrases) that communicate organizational identity. The second triage removes the language about the Lord’s church or organization and the name of the Church (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), limiting the scope to 812 utterances to examine.\footnote{7}

For a visual snapshot of the language trends across the decades, Figure 10 below showcases the use of “True Church,” “Restored Church,” the collocates (9±) of “Restored” and “Church,” and the use of “Mormon Church.” The chart shows a steady beat of utterances about a “true church” and increased references to the restored church, especially in the last 20 years.\footnote{8}

\textbf{Figure 10: Utterances of Organizational Identity in General Conference Addresses}

Having identified 812 utterances (phrases, groupings of words) for analysis, I counted their appearance within a single speech. For example, Eyring (2008) offered a
talk entitled “The True and Living Church,” which included 13 searched utterances (e.g., true church). In turn, I prioritized the addresses with a higher frequency of relevant phrases and briefly reviewed the content of the entire speech. In most cases, I excluded a talk when an utterance felt irrelevant. In total, I narrowed the sample to 89 speeches for discovery, which included 311 pages of single-spaced (12-point) font (about 180,000 words), worth 1380 minutes (23 hours) of recorded video. Table 8, following the chapter summary and footnotes, includes the final data for analysis with the speaker’s last name, year and month of address, title, and duration (in minutes).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter reemphasized poststructural commitments, reviewed my subjectivity statement, reexamined Restorationism, and caricatured our data (General Conference addresses). Finally, we are ready to place our data (89 speeches) on the stand to testify with our cross-examination techniques. Through it, we reveal paradoxes offered by poststructural thinking amidst "objective" Discourse, nonetheless filtered through multiple layers.

**Chapter 5 Footnotes**

1. In many ways, readers might find most of the information presented in the chapter repetitive, aside from discussing our data for this project. We review the theoretical stances (e.g., poststructuralism) because they ultimately inform—what we traditionally would call—our methodology. The theory and "method" are entangled. Thus, if anything, much of this chapter is a review for readers.
2. Throughout the chapter, we avoid closure by actively using present and future language tense. There are moments when I use the past tense: When doing so, we should not assume the ideas or data is dead or finished but instead alive. After all, you, my reader, will construct personal journeys from the material I present (Ellingson & Sotorin, 2020).

3. Up to this point, we utilized judicial jargon to illustrate how we interact with the text: This is purposeful, as our final chapters will report the thought experiment as if the text is on trial.

4. In a past conference address, the Prophet (the organizational leader), Russel M. Nelson (2021), declared: "I invite you to listen for three things during this conference: pure truth, the pure doctrine of Christ, and pure revelation. Contrary to the doubts of some, there really is such a thing as right and wrong. There really is absolute truth—eternal truth...I can assure you what you hear today and tomorrow constitutes pure truth." The statement endorses absoluteness of ideas; however, the listener requires personal revelation from the Spirit to interpret what is and is not the absolute truth.

5. For scope, I did not focus on these utterances about the gospel during the triaging, though they appear several times in the talks used for analysis. Members often conflate the "gospel" with the "church."

6. Members of the Church are at least eight years of age, baptized, and confirmed by one with priesthood authority. Missionaries are "full-time" when they (generally) serve for at least 18 months (for women) and two years (for men). The missionaries, families, and local congregations pay for these voluntary (unpaid)
positions. Notably, there is a positive correlation between the number of full-time serving missionaries and member totals.

7. We will address in the trial the general implications of an organizational title bearing the name of Jesus Christ, a perfected being.

8. During the trial, we will hear testimonies against the use of the “Mormon Church” and the request to use the proper name: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Likewise, our trial problematizes words like restored and true. The graphic demonstrates the importance of scrutinizing these words, especially with the uptick in their use during the last few decades.

9. Of course, every utterance paired with another word is guilty by association. We could argue for including every word, though we will not do so for scope. Frequently, speakers address a topic and then complete their speech with a few sentence testimony about, for example, the restored church.
<table>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>And Always Remember Him (11:08)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hunter</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Of the World or of the Kingdom? (17:04)</td>
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<td>Benson</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>Watchman, Warn the Wicked (20:36)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Petersen</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>Salvation Comes through the Church (18:23)</td>
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<td>Brockbank</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>Hearken unto the Voice of God (12:23)</td>
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<td>McConkie</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Once or Twice in a Thousand Years (18:45)</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Haight</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>He Is the Son of God (15:40)</td>
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<td>Kimball</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>A Program for Man (8:23)</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Stapley</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>What Constitutes the True Church (17:06)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kimball</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>Revelation: The Word of the Lord to His Prophets (21:10)</td>
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<td>Petersen</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>Signs of the True Church (17:02)</td>
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<td>Haight</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Joseph Smith the Prophet (16:30)</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Kikuchi</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Send Missionaries from Every Nation (12:39)</td>
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<td>Tuttle</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Therefore I was Taught (10:28)</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>Packer</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>The Only True Church (20:03)</td>
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<td>Haight</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Apr</td>
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<td>Teach Us Tolerance and Love (17:05)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>McMullin</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>Ye May Know (12:29)</td>
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<td>Callister</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Oct</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>Hinckley</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<td>Eyring</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Rise to Your Call (15:26)</td>
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<td>Wirthlin</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>Follow Me (16:11)</td>
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<td>Apr</td>
<td>Our Most Distinguishing Feature (14:30)</td>
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<td>Coleman</td>
<td>2007</td>
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<td>Mom, Are We Christians? (9:36)</td>
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<td>Falabella</td>
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<td>Godoy</td>
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<td>Oct</td>
<td>Testimony as a Process (10:06)</td>
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Table 8 continued

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<td>Nelson</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>Bednar</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>The Powers of Heaven (16:21)</td>
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<td>Uchtdorf</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Come, Join with Us (17:54)</td>
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<td>Bednar</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Apr</td>
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<td>Oaks</td>
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<td>Truth and the Plan (15:49)</td>
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<td>Soares</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>One in Christ (14:36)</td>
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<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Bednar</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Gather Together in One All Things in Christ (15:45)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>Uchtdorf</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Your Great Adventure (17:48)</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>Oaks</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>The Great Plan (15:54)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>First Presidency</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>The Restoration of the Fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (9:24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Bednar</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>Let This House Be Built unto My Name (16:06)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Oaks</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>The Need for a Church (15:42)</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>Aburto</td>
<td>2022</td>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>We Are The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (9:48)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Oaks</td>
<td>2022</td>
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<td>Divine Love in the Father’s Plan (14:34)</td>
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<td>87</td>
<td>Stevenson</td>
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<td>Nourishing and Bearing Your Testimony (13:02)</td>
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<td>2022</td>
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<td>Do What Mattereth Most (10:33)</td>
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CHAPTER 6: RESTORATIONISM ON TRIAL

Introduction

In the following scenes, *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* takes the stand to testify, ventriloquized by various witnesses. In other words, the testimonies though authored by different church leaders, act in "unison" as the mind and will of God or the Organization.

There are four main characters in these scenes, each represented by symbols. First is the Church (C), a paradoxical organization constituted by various texts. Each text (89 conference addresses) testifies on behalf of the organization, authored by organization leaders (e.g., prophets, apostles, presidents, and counselors).

The number next to the "C" (Church) represents the testimonial evidence provided in the discovery (see Chapter 5). Though a "unified" macro actor, C relies on its leaders (1-89) to communicate on behalf of the organizational body.

Second, Prosecutor (P) will scrutinize the textual utterances of organizational identity (C), assuming guilt in fixing the identification of its members.

Third, Defendant (D) will likewise examine the expressions of organizational identity (C), assuming innocence in fixing the identification of its members.

Fourth, the court (X) represents you, me, and all others reviewing and shaping the proceedings as we judge the evidence or navigate the contradictory testimonies offered by C, cross-examined by P and D.

Other characters (e.g., the Clerk, Bailiff) will briefly appear to facilitate the trial.

Opening Statements

The scene is deafeningly silent.
P, D, and C mentally rehearse their acts, preparing for impending paradoxes engendered by the cross-examinations and judgments of X. They know improvisation is imminent: X will direct the performance differently, altogether impossible to transcribe, for the scene is endless—the transcriber sweats.

The setting is not uniform: X constitutes its own courtroom. Their sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and texts create strings that puppet the transcriber's fingers. The transcription is unreliable, but a record is there to (dis)organize future realities.

CLERK: All arise.

Each scene member (C, P, D, X) rises, nods to the authority, and finds a comfortable position.

X: Today, we try The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Counsel, introduce yourself for the record.

P: The prosecutor.

D: The defendant.

X: Let's proceed. P your opening statement, please.

P: Restored…True…Perfect…Complete…Divine…God…Jesus Christ. These are the utterances C uses to constitute their Organization. I aim to expose these declarative words' organizing and disorganizing effects on church members. They fix. Stabilize—damn it! I charge the Church with reckless endangerment. Such communication creates identification crises for those trapped in rhetorical pandemonium: The C's declarative, unyielding statements and realities that speak otherwise. I bring at least 6,075 charges against the Church, outlining a 172-year
record of unyielding proclamations of organizational identity. Though I cannot review every utterance, we will see the Church guilty as charged.

X. Defendant, your opening statement, please.

D: Thank you, your honor. Restored… True… Perfect… Complete… Divine… These utterances on record do indeed constitute the organization; however, I will demonstrate how these words enable identification. Furthermore, I will expose how P fails to examine the nuances of these words that allow autonomy and growth. To this end, I will showcase how these utterances evoke perfect imperfection, organizing possibilities, more salvific than damning. We will see the Church as innocent, a child prepared for eternity.

X: Thank you. Witness, take the stand.

BAILIFF: Please raise your right hand.

C raises their right arm to the square.

BAILIFF: Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

C: I…

P: Objection! Prejudicial!

D: Your honor, on what grounds?!

P: On the grounds that the Church claims God's authority. Do they not have a partisan advantage if they act as God's voice? How can we objectively trust anything that is said if every utterance claims divine authority?

D: Your honor, if we assume that logic, we endorse that truth can be whole—or finished, with a definitive end and meaning. Doing so seriously diminishes our chance for a
fair trial. My fundamental premises assume infinity of meaning.

X: Objection sustained. For simplicity, I ask that we refrain from overusing our objections in this courtroom. I will allow only when necessary—Bailiff, take a seat—We can avoid swearing. Witness, state your name for the record.

**Scene 1: Perfect Imperfection**

C: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

X: P, please proceed.

P: What's in a name? Well, in this case, Jesus Christ. Something, apparently, unnegotiable. Please read the deposed statements from 2011:

C57: Because the full name of the Church is so important, I echo the revelations from the scriptures, the First Presidency's instructions in letters of 1982 and 2001, and the words of other Apostles who have encouraged the members of the Church to uphold and teach the world that the Church is known by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the name by which the Lord will call us at the last day. It is the name by which His Church will be distinguished from all others.

P: And in 2018. Please read the words from your Prophet, addressing the significant efforts to use Jesus Christ in your name instead of "Mormon."

C72: It is not a name change, it is not rebranding [and] it is not cosmetic...Instead, it is a correction. It is the command of the Lord...The name of the Church is not negotiable...If we allow [Mormon] nicknames...He [Christ] is offended.

P: And in 2021, after the command to use the correct name of the Church.

C83: More than one thousand products that had the name "Mormon" or "LDS" attached to them have been renamed. Faithful Latter-day Saints have adjusted their
websites, podcasts, and Twitter accounts.

**P:** Thus, let it be known on record that the name of the Mormon Church—I apologize,

The Church of Jesus Christ—is non-negotiable.

**D:** Objection! Relevance? What does this have to do with the argument?

**P:** The strategic use of the name of a Perfect Being is highly relevant for understanding 
the charges against the Church, your honor.

**X:** Objection overruled.

**P:** In 2020, you authored a proclamation to the world. In it, how did you describe the 
Church's relationship with Jesus Christ?

**C80:** This Church is anchored in the perfect life of its chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ, and 
His infinite Atonement and Literal Resurrection.

**P:** Thank you. Let it please the court to dissect this statement. To assist, I draw directly 
from the 1828 Webster Dictionary, used during the Restoration of the Church. I 
do so to capture the baggage of utterances that have likely pervaded the 
organizational discourse.

**D:** Objection! Speculation.

**X:** Counsel, the entire proceeding is speculative if we are—to quote your previous 
assertion—to assume an infinity of meaning. Objection overruled—proceed.

**P:** Thank you. We start with the word anchored as a verb, which means to fix, fasten on 
in a stable condition. Second, perfect, an adjective meaning finished and 
complete. Third, stone—prefixed to some words to qualify their signification, 
such as stone-dead or perfectly dead—likewise, the composition of the rock, a 
substance of firmness. Fourth, Jesus Christ, a prominent character known for
Perfection, and mentioned over 35,000 times in General Conference proceedings.

And finally, the Resurrection—a state of bodily, Godly perfection.

Please remind the court of your statement in 1977 about truth, God, and the identity of the Church.

C19: We know that all truth does emanate from God and is therefore unchangeable, consistent, and unified. Consequently, not all Christian churches with their dissimilar teachings can provide a fulness of truth…There can only be one Lord, one acceptable faith, one baptism, and one true church.

P: And finally, your statement from 1994 regarding the body of Christ and the Church.

C38: This church, the great institutional body of Christ, is a marvelous work and wonder.

P: Thank you. To summarize: We cannot remove Christ's name from the Church, as it is a fundamental way to recognize the one, True Church. Christ epitomizes perfection: Something finished, complete—an anchor that fixes, stone-like, embodies, and communicates truth, which is unchangeable, consistent, and unified. The Church is the body of Christ, resurrected in a Perfect form.

To belong to the Church, believers must accept baptism, taking upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ—according to Mosiah 5:8–11 in the Book of Mormon. In turn, they become a part of the body of Christ: Something perfected and complete, unchanging, or according to Hebrews 13:8, "The same yesterday, today, and forever."

Is it surprising that identification with the Church becomes problematic when change occurs, such as a re-emphasis on a name, though built on a chief of stone?

How do we reconcile the shift?
For example, I find this 2012 statement about proudly using Mormon as an identification strategy confusing—when we received the testimony (C57) a year earlier from an Apostle of the Lord. Please share the message with the court.

C59: I'm a Mormon. I know it. I live it. I love it.

P: Sounds problematic for a Church speaking on behalf of Jesus Christ who takes offense from such a nickname. I will finish, for now, by reminding the court that each General Conference address ends with "in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen."
Thus, we associate all conference words with a Perfect Word and seal the testimony with "amen"—a verb meaning to confirm or verify, a noun for truth, firmness, and confidence, and an adjective donning firmness and stability, per the 1828 dictionary.
I rest my case.

A momentary break, as X collects their thoughts.

D: My primary source of contention is the narrow purview of explaining these words. Please, once again, recite your statement in the Restoration proclamation.

C80: This Church is anchored in the perfect life of its chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ, and His infinite Atonement and Literal Resurrection.

D: Thank you. Like my opponent, I will also utilize the 1828 dictionary to dissect the testimony. But I first begin with the notion of a Church, seeking to problematize it. Please read the following statements from 1971, 1973, 1979, 2000, 2005, 2019, 2021, and 2022. After each testimony, I will provide a summary statement for each testimonial evidence.

C1: There comes back to us more clearly than ever before the application of the words of
the Master [Christ] as he closed his Sermon on the Mount, that only that person or
that church (meaning a congregation of individuals, of course) which will stand
through these testing years, will be that which is founded upon the rock.

D: The Church as a congregation of individuals using a rock for steadiness…

C2: Paul tells us that his church is built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets,
with Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

D: The Church built on people with Christ as a leader…

C8: Not only did he provide that salvation should come through his regularly constituted
church, but he set up safeguards to protect its members from being tossed to and
fro…

D: The Church is regularly constituted, that is, changing with communication, structured
by safeguards…

C26: The Lord organized the family unit in the beginning. He intended that the home be
the center of learning…whether the family lives within or without the boundaries
of an organized unit of the Church.

D: The Church is supplementary to the original organization: The family…

C43: Unlike the inanimate stone, the true Church of Jesus Christ is filled with life.

D: A Church is not a stone but a living entity…

C48: Just as a building is constructed one brick at a time, the Savior's true Church is built
one conversion, one testimony, and one baptism at a time.

D: A Church is built across time and constituted by individual experiences…

C78: We should not expect the Church as an organization to teach or tell us everything
we need to know and do to become devoted disciples and endure valiantly to the
end…Rather it is our personal responsibility…Our homes are the ultimate setting for learning, living, and becoming…

D: Becoming (identification) is not solely regulated by a macro-organization but its appendages: Personal and familial experience…

C82: When I say "churches," I include synagogues, mosques, and other religious organizations…In church, we are taught how to apply religious principles…

D: Abstractly, a church is not confined to a single definition apart from a situation to practice ideas…

C85: The Church is more than the buildings and the ecclesiastical structure; the church is us, the members. We are the Church of Jesus Christ, with Christ at the head and the Prophet as His mouthpiece…The body [of Christ's Church] is not one member, but many…

D: To synthesize the statements, a church is a congregation of individuals who regularly constitute the organization, one behavior at a time, applying religious principles, most notably in intimate spaces such as families. A church is people. In turn, we identify with the people who communicate on behalf of the organization at various levels: The organization is not an objective, transcendent entity devoid of daily living, believing, and sharing thoughts in congregate—or like-minded beliefs.

Now, please share why the Church does not adopt the traditional Christian cross as a symbol with the court—

C88: "The lives of our people must [be]…the symbol of our [faith]." These considerations…bring me to what may be the most important of all scriptural
references to the cross. It has nothing to do with pendants and jewelry, with steeples or signposts. It has to do, rather, with the rock-ribbed integrity and stiff moral backbone that Christians should bring to the call Jesus has given…

**D:** Indeed, this might paint a problematic notion for a Church presumably embodying "Perfection" or "Completion." I will now ask C to reveal its statements that demonstrate the imperfection of its members. Please review your statements made in 2013 and 2016.

**C62:** There have been some things said and done that could cause people to question…To be perfectly frank, there have been times when members or leaders in the Church have simply made mistakes. There may have been things said or done that were not in harmony with our values, principles, or doctrine…I suppose the Church would be perfect only if it were run by perfect beings. God is perfect…He works through us—His imperfect children—and imperfect people make mistakes.

**C68:** None of us can achieve perfection in this life…We can become increasingly worthy and spotless as we are cleansed by the blood of the lamb.

**D:** Thus, we see the Church—a congregation of imperfect people—can never reach a state of perfection *without* an anchor. In other words, a steadier source, in this case, Jesus Christ, allows movement of the organizational ship whilst still tethered (or staying true) to principles declared by Christ—Principles that remain consistent.

Now, regarding the statement under scrutiny: This Church is anchored in the perfect life of its chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ, and His infinite Atonement and
Literal Resurrection—

Using the dictionary of 1828, we discover different nuances of the same words used by my opponent—

Anchor provides a place of safety—especially amidst the shifting winds

Perfect insinuates a completely skilled, fully informed state—where, in this case, Jesus Christ chooses to maintain a steady (reliable) state of being amongst impending uncertainty constituted by imperfect (undeveloped) people—

Chief describes a principal person for a family or congregation, one who is first in affection, most dear and familiar—

Jesus, according to the Church's bible dictionary, is the Greek form of the name Joshua (Jeshua), meaning "God is help."

Resurrection is the act of making the dead rise again for eternal life—

From all we can see, the statement is much more than a fixed, unchanging, unnegotiable utterance. Instead, it symbolizes living, imperfect congregations constrained and enabled by principles that help maintain steadiness, refining or perfecting the ability to become skilled at managing oppositions—all given by a Leader who exists to help…

P: Objection! Counsel is testifying…

D: To rest the case, I invite our review of another statement—Please proceed.

C62: The Church is designed to nourish the imperfect, the struggling, and the exhausted.

It is filled with people who desire with all their hearts to keep the commandments, even if they haven't mastered them yet.

D: Thank you.
X: Allow us to take a brief recess to collect our thoughts.

Scene 2: Restored Restoring

_Returning from recess, X motions for P to begin._

P: Interesting speculations—People with the agency to constitute their church in imperfect utterances. Such ideas contradict notions of the restored church and restored Gospel. I seek to problematize the word "restored" collocated with "church" and the "gospel" over 1000 times in these "Divine" Proclamations. To set my argument, I once again evoke Webster in 1828 to define "restored" for us: It is to return something lost, such as a person or thing, to a former place—to re-establish after interruption.

C, please take the stand and read the following statements from 1975, 1976, 1979, and 2002. Then, like my colleague, I will commentate for clarity.

C14: Lucifer [Satan or the Devil], our common enemy, fought the promised restoration as he now fights the accomplished restoration.

P: In other words, the Restoration was foretold (promised)—demonstrating a perplexing paradox when we say we have the agency to reconstitute the church. In other words, we should speculate how prophecies about future events determine or control our ability to choose. Likewise, we see from the statement that the Restoration is accomplished: Past tense, for completing or finishing. Continue—

C47: Recall the new star that announced the birth at Bethlehem. It was in its precise orbit long before it so shone. We are likewise placed in human orbits to illuminate. Divine correlation functions not only in the cosmos but on this planet too. Afterall, the Book of Mormon plates were not buried in Belgium, only to have
Joseph Smith born centuries later in distant Bombay…

P: Such a statement certainly damns the promise of determining our own existences—if we are all part of a grand orbit. Proceed—

C16: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was restored in 1830 after numerous revelations from the divine source; and this is the kingdom, set up by the God of heaven, that would never be destroyed or superseded, and the stone cut out of the mountain without hands…

P: Notice the past tense used in this testimony—"was restored" after numerous revelations, making 1830 a crucial moment in the history of the Church. As suggested in the pretrial, these revelations included Joseph Smith's First Vision of God the Father and Jesus the Son. Please proceed with reading the following statement to support this assertion—

C28: Jesus Christ appeared with His Father and restored the same organization he established during his ministry through Joseph Smith.

P: At this point, we must question what "same" entails—We might adopt the logic of my defendant: The organization as a congregation of individual people, families, and other living souls. However, these bodies have an expiration date: They physically are not restored, save through a resurrection performed by Jesus Christ—not yet promised until His Second Grand Coming.

To this end, we might require more generalities: An organization with people and families as generalized units of analysis: Not the exact people, families, congregations, and so on restored to their previous state. If this is the correct logic, we must argue how other churches—with people, families, and
congregations—differ from the Restored Church.

D: Objection! Argumentative.

X: Objection sustained. Though if we are to draw reasonable speculations, we should allow opportunities to expand our thoughts through tentative conclusions and arguments. Please continue—

P: Thank you. Here, we might talk more generally about fundamental restored ideas constituting a Church as a discursive phenomenon—Objective bits of knowledge, unchanging, as echoed in a previous deposition and supported by this testimony for C to review—

C55: In many ways, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is like a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. When Joseph Smith came on the scene, perhaps 100 pieces were in place. Then Joseph Smith came along and put many of the other 900 pieces in place…There will always be the sure and solid doctrines of the Restoration to cling to, which will provide the rock foundation…Through Joseph Smith have been restored all the powers, keys, teachings, and ordinances necessary for salvation and exaltation…It is not to be found in any other church.

P: Aside from the utterances of sure, solid, rock, and restored, let us take issue with the metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle—Per this statement, there are quantifiable pieces to a large picture, with clear boundaries, and presumably an image to fit these ideas together.

The image evokes a sense of determinism: There are ends and beginnings, much to the opposing party's chagrin. To rest, please restate the following testimony about our mortal existence before coming to this earth—
C79: In the council in heaven, all the spirit children of God were introduced to the
Father's plan, including its mortal consequences and trials, its heavenly helps, and
its glorious destiny. We saw the end from the beginning…

P: Beginnings and ends. Thank you. I rest my case.

A quick interruption—

D: Objection! Improper characterization of evidence—Allow me to scrutinize the same
address…

X: Objection sustained.

D: Will you please continue the testimony where we left off?

C79: All of the myriads of mortals who have been born on this earth chose the Father's
plan and fought for it in the heavenly contest that followed…In ways that have
not been revealed, our actions in the spirit world have influenced our
circumstances in mortality.

D: Thank you. Let the record show that we chose the plan, thus negating extreme
determinism or lack of autonomy. Likewise, note that we have yet to receive
knowledge via revelation about our premortal choices—and perhaps the meaning
of beginnings and ends.

Here I pivot.

Thus, the restoration is not over—some truths are unknown. Please review the

C38: I have seen another miracle. That miracle is you, the great faithful but often
unheralded body of the Church who play your part in the ongoing saga of the
Restoration. In a real sense, the wonder and beauty of this historic day would not, could not be complete without you.

D: The ongoing saga represents continuance, not completion. Complete, per Webster's 1828 dictionary, insinuates accomplishing, fulfilling, and performing—not necessarily finishing. Continue—

C64: Sometimes we think of the Restoration of the Gospel as something that is complete, already behind us—Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon, he received the priesthood keys, [and] the Church was organized. In reality, the Restoration is an ongoing process; we are living in it right now. It includes "all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal," and the "many great and important things" that "He will yet reveal."

C84: The Restoration is an ongoing process, not an event, and will continue until the Lord comes again.

D: Clearly, the Restoration is not finished. Thank you—

Momentary pause—

P: Your honor—What then of the 256 moments in conference addresses that use the phrase "restored church" clearly in the past tense? If restoring the Gospel and the Church of Jesus Christ is ongoing, why use language insinuating completion? Please review this statement provided in 2013, initially reported by Joseph Smith in 1831 in a revelation from God—

C63: Wherever we are in this world, however we review these [General Conference] proceedings, I testify that we are gathered in His conference. I also testify that we will hear His word, for He said, "Whether by mine own voice or by the voice of
my servants, it is the same.

P: Thus, all this evidence presented today is as if directly from the mouth of the Lord—a Perfect being. If so, the purposeful use of "restored," along with its connotative baggage, must be intentional—Why do we find contradictory statements in the trial today if the Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever? To verify, please review your report in 1974—

C12: Let us remember too that the Lord God does not change. He is the same yesterday—even if it be 3,600 years ago—today, and forever.

P: An unchanging God, yet changing circumstances communicated by the voice of the servants; that is His voice. Those identifying with the Church, constituted by these conference addresses representing the Lord's voice, must choose to which seemingly contradictory statements or discourse they belong.

D: Objection! Argumentative.

X: Objection ______________.

P: Let me rest my assertions by reviewing one more statement from 1972—

C3: I bear my testimony that the true Church of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth by the Savior and other heavenly beings to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Membership in this church and living in accordance with the revealed teachings therein is the only way back to God. This church marks out the pathway that mankind must follow to attain eternal life…

P: Restored, revealed, and therein—representing a contained finality, with a marked pathway back to God with the teachings we must follow. I rest.


\[X\text{ collects their thoughts—}\]

\textbf{D:} First, let it be on record that the New Testament church, restored in these latter days, was not complete or finished with Christ—Please recite your testimony from 1973—

\textbf{C8:} When the Savior established his church during his mortal ministry, and as it was further developed by the twelve apostles of that day…

\textit{Interruption—}

\textbf{D:} …Thank you. From the New Testament, we understand that the 12 apostles continued organizing the Church amongst apostasy. Please continue your testimony—

\textbf{C8:} A new apostasy developed during the Lord's ministry. As early as the events recorded in the sixth chapter of John, this falling away took place…Subsequently, during the administration of the Twelve, serious apostasy developed again. As a result, nearly all the epistles of the New Testament were written to combat it.

\textbf{D:} To then assume that the Church is complete, or perfect, even in a restored format, is to deny the evidence offered by the New Testament that it experienced continual struggles with doubts and imperfections.

If anything, a Church brought back from the New Testament time would be one plagued with imperfections requiring healing—

\textbf{P:} Objection! Irrelevant.

\textbf{D:} The speculation of spiritual sickness is pertinent to challenge the word "restored."

\textbf{X:} Objection overruled—Proceed…

\textbf{D:} Allow us to draw again from Webster—Restored can also mean healing, curing, or recovering from a disease. In this sense, we assume a different connotation of
restored—not as a perfect finality, but of one associated with overcoming sickness—in the past, present, and future. And in this case, the apostatizing of the New Testament Church.

In other words, we do not bruise our heel and never hurt it again: It is continually bruised and restored to functioning. Restored, then, is not a one-time event but a moment where it is continuously restored, or for simplicity, restoring.

I invite the witness to share their statement in 1972 again—

C3: I bear my testimony that the true Church of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth by the Savior and other heavenly beings to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Membership in this church and living in accordance with the revealed teachings therein is the only way back to God. This church marks out the pathway that mankind must follow to attain eternal life…

D: Thank you. We have failed to illuminate what is meant by revealed teachings.

Defendant presents a large folder.

D: The docket includes the following testimonies: C19, C20, C21, C23, C24, C30, C34, C37, C45, C47, C48, C50, C55, C65, and C73. A common thread in these statements is that revelation is foundational to the restored church—one of these revealed teachings.

Please read the following regarding the importance of the Restoration—

C20: Of all things, that for which we should be most grateful today is that the heavens are indeed open and that the restored church of Jesus Christ is founded upon the rock of revelation. Continuous revelation is indeed the very lifeblood of the Gospel of the living Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
D: And this testimony from 1981—

C30: [The First Vision of Joseph Smith of God the Father and the Son] occurred in 1820. Since then, the heavens have remained open.

D: And another from 2007—

C50: The knowledge of God and His physical separateness from His Son and the Holy Ghost was lost after the death of Christ and His Apostles. Confusion and false doctrines about the Godhead were fashioned out of the Nicene Creed and Constantinople councils, where men declared that instead of three separate beings, the Godhead was three persons in one God, or the Trinity…The First Vision… is a stunning awakening to understand the nature of God…and the Son…[as well as] the reality of additional scripture and revelation…

D: To synthesize, a revealed truth from the Restoration event was that God still shows His will today, despite the accepted belief that revelation ceased with the apostles and the translation of the Holy Bible. We have a case of restored restoring—The restored confidence (past tense) that God continues to reveal new things…We might consider that every argument, theory, or belief system depends on primary warrants; otherwise, the entire system of thinking fails. Regarding these restored warrants—including the reality of continual revelation—please recite your statement proclaimed in 2021—

C84: If you and I are to withstand the forthcoming perils and pressures, it is imperative that we each have a firm spiritual foundation…Ponder these [two] truths: (1) The Restoration is a process, not an event, and will continue until the Lord comes again; and (2) the ongoing Restoration needs ongoing revelation.
D: Restored restoring—the past, finished act of deconstructing myths that silence the opportunity to discover and become more—is a fundamental premise for all beliefs in the Church of Jesus Christ. Thus, we allow past actions to work with future communication without contradiction. I rest my case.

X: Allow us to take another brief recess to collect our thoughts.

Scene 3: True Living

P: The evidence provided thus far is compelling. We will not, however, ignore the damning statements that insinuate completion and stability: Testimonies that likely have profound organizing impacts for those more attuned to decreasing their uncertainty—I invite the witness to share a statement from 1979.

C24: The Church of Christ is re-established with doctrine, ordinances, and authority as commissioned by the Savior when he was on earth…Uncertainty is removed, the Savior’s Church and work restored. The doctrine of the restored Gospel is comprehensive and complete.

P: Or as so often uttered—

C25: This Church is true.

P: Found multiple times throughout this evidence—

C27: You will be given opportunities, such as through the inspired messages of this conference, to find the one and only true Church of Jesus Christ, and you will recognize that Church.

C30: The true church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has been organized under the direction of Jesus Christ Himself.

C33: Others may insist that this is not the true church. That is their privilege…We do not
invent the doctrine of the only true church. It came from the Lord.

**P:** We have then statements on record that profess the [perfect, restored] true Church: We once again have a non-negotiable baggage of utterances that allude to objective, correct, or incorrect mentalities. Or, as already witnessed:

**C19:** We know that all truth does emanate from God and is therefore unchangeable, consistent, and unified.

*P dismisses C.*

**P:** I call a special witness—Instead of citing his testimony, let us hear from the lips of the expert. I resurrect the voice of Noah Webster and ask him to take the stand to speak on his own behalf…

**BAILIFF:** Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

**NOAH WEBSTER:** Yes—a word that expresses affirmation or consent. Truth—conformity to fact or reality; exact accordance with what is, has been, or shall be. God—the Supreme Being.

**P:** Thank you. Thus we see that truth equates to fact and…

**D:** Objection! Incomplete! I ask Webster to swear again.

**X:** I do not follow…but I will allow it. Bailiff?

**BAILIFF:** Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you, God?

**NOAH WEBSTER:** Yes—a word that expresses affirmation or consent. Truth—honesty, virtue, and sincerity—innumerable truths with which we are not acquainted. God—any person or thing exalted too much in estimation or deified
and honored as the chief good.

Pregnant pause.

X: Prosecution?

P: We may excuse Noah Webster. Allow me to proceed with my previous witness—

C takes a stand.

C33: They claim one church is not really better than another, just different. Eventually

the paths will converge. One is, therefore, quite as safe in any church as in any

other. While this seems to be very generous, it just cannot be true…Suppose

schools were operated on that same philosophy, with each discipline a separate

path leading to the same diploma. No matter whether you study or not, pass the

tests or not, all would be given the same diploma—the one of their choice…

P: Please continue—

C33: If we stand without shame, without hesitancy, without embarrassment, without

reservation to bear witness that the Gospel has been restored…that the truth is

available for all mankind, the Lord's Spirit will be with us…

P: And this statement about the Lord's Spirit—

C45: To have the Holy Ghost as your companion, you must be worthy.

P: We have here a problematic situation for members: Possession of the Spirit requires

worthiness. Likewise, the Spirit will be present when members boldly proclaim

the truth of the restored Gospel. Can we not assume that some members might not

feel worthy if they cannot unabashedly testify of the true church?

We may likewise take issue with the term fulness—

C82: Despite the good works that can be accomplished without a church, the fulness of
doctrine and its saving and exalting ordinances are available only in the restored Church.

**P:** On behalf of Webster, fullness implies completeness or the state of a thing in which nothing is wanted; perfection…satiety. The fullness of the Gospel restored—or restoring—appears contradictory: Why require continuous revelation if we have reached perfect saturation?

I rest with the reminder that True dons correctness and stability, afforded by a gospel, embraced by the church, with satiation.

*Momentary pause—D releases C from the stand.*

**D:** I invite Noah Webster to testify again—Are the words "true" and "fullness" unrelenting? Do they allow no room for continuous revelation and infinite meaning, as alluded to with restored restoring? Please share—

**NOAH WEBSTER:** True—Faithful; steady in adhering to friends, to promises…loyal.

Fullness—the state of abounding or being in great plenty.

**D:** Thank you—for staying true to your words.

**P:** Objection—Counsel is testifying!

**X:** For you as well. Objection overruled.

*C takes a stand.*

**D:** At least 118 times, starting in the 1860s in General Conference, you call yourself the true and living church. An example, please, from 2008—

**C53:** The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is both true and living. The Lord spoke to those through whom He restored the Church in the latter days. He said of them that they might "have power to lay the foundation of the church, and to
bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth…speaking unto the church collectively and not individually—"

D: In this statement, you cited a revelation given to Joseph Smith from God in 1831. Allow me to take liberties in interpretation for the court.

"True" per Webster in 1828, might allude to faithful, especially amongst continual change afforded by living, imperfect people who constitute the body of Christ—consequently brought back from the dead per the Resurrection story. Through Jesus Christ, all are living—and remain in that spiritual state—so long as they stay true (faithful) to His commands. Therefore, it is requisite for the church to collectively, not individually, congregate their thoughts to bring it—themselves, the church—out of darkness: To vie for happiness together afforded by a gospel, with fullness, or a state of abounding plenty.

P: Objection! Argumentative—

D: Then allow the Church to speak on its own accord. Please—

C53: We have seen a demonstration that this is the true and living church.

D: Thank you.

P: Objection! Vague!

Scene 4: Congregated Segregation

D: Allow me to pivot—with the premise that true is faithful, living is continually becoming, and fullness means bountiful.

P: Objection! Hearsay—Have we established that this is indeed the stance of the church?

X: Counsel?
D: Indeed, we have—We problematized the composition of a church: It is not a macro-entity where all believe with exactness—despite efforts to congregate thoughts. In other words, we have an issue of congregated segregation: Some in the church might see it as true (correct or incorrect) and true (faithful)—To assume that every member constitutes the organization with absolute exactitude is faulty. For example, please share the following statement from 1971, initially spoken by the Lord in 1833—

C1: "For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language, through those who are ordained unto this power…." We are witnessing a great expansion of the work of the Church throughout the world.

D: Here we have a witness that the Gospel is, or will be, accessible to all those throughout the world, heard in one's tongue: We might assume that language is an objective phenomenon, that is, for example, that we speak English real good all the time because we know it perfectly. It is not well to assume so—Every individual, influenced by their families, communities, and societies, speaks different dialects. Yet, we muster a cohesive message despite varied use of language.

In this case, every word spoken by the church, constituted by individuals, families, marriages, congregations, regions, countries, and so on, will hear and speak the Gospel differently despite the appearance of unanimity. To this end, the Church and Gospel indeed possess a fullness.

X: I will allow it.
P: Objection! Inflammatory—and an improper characterization of evidence!

X: Proceed—

P: Let it be on the record that such a complex view of language contradicts the testimony of the Lord—spoken by His church—in 1973. Please share—

C8: The language of the Lord is simple and easily understood.

P: Such speculation that language is multifaceted is problematic: The church warned members against subjective interpretations—"Every man walked in his own way, and the image of his own God, whose image is in the likeness of the world."
stated in 1831.

X: Counsel?

D: Indeed, such a statement presents a paradox—By speaking an imperfect, or subjective, language, we sin—Perhaps we fall short of the Glory of God. Yet, in this state of sin, does not Jesus Christ act as a mediator? Please restate your testimony from 2017—

C70: As children of God, we are imperfect people trying to learn a perfect language. Just as a mother is compassionate with her little children, our Heavenly Father is patient with our imperfections and mistakes. He treasures and understands our feeblest utterances, mumbled in sincerity as if they were fine poetry…Heavenly Father will bless our efforts as we strive to embrace His language, even until we become fluent in this higher level of communication, which always was our mother tongue.

D: And this statement in 1996—

C40: Before reacting, before closing your mind, before finding fault because of a word—
please listen carefully to this inspired insight. I quote [from a prophet of the church, David O. McKay]: "Words do not convey meanings; they call them forth.' I speak out of the context of my experience, and you listen out of the context of yours, and that is why communication is difficult."

**X:** Proceed—

**D:** Please review the following scriptures spoken to the Church by the Lord: D&C 59:9 and D&C 20:75—

**C:** And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day...It is expedient that the Church meets together often to partake of bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus...

**P:** Objection—relevance?

**D:** To establish that unspotted might insinuate the effort to remove impurities of language and its disorganizing effects to reach a more united organization or congregation.

**X:** Objection overruled.

**D:** Thank you—I invite us to hear the testimony from 1973, which cited the scriptures from the Doctrine and Covenants about becoming unspotted and consuming the sacrament. Let us pay attention to the arrangement of the text. Witness, please—

**C5:** The sacrament is a sacred and solemn service...We should listen attentively as the prayers are given...we pledge to take upon ourselves the name of the Lord Jesus...and always remember him. Of what do we think when we remember Jesus Christ, the Savior?...Do we recall that Jesus was the Creator of this world and the chief executive in carrying out the wishes of the Father? John the Beloved, who
referred to the Savior as "the Word," gives this testimony: "In the beginning was
the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

D: May it please the court to submit evidence not found in discovery?

P: Objection—Beyond the scope!

D: This evidence derives from a history officially published by the church about two of
their prophets—Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

X: I will allow it.

D: Please recite the following story—From Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus
Christ in the Latter Days, Volume 1, Chapter 15—

C: Following the meal, Joseph held a small meeting and invited Brigham to pray. As he
bowed his head, Brigham felt the Spirit move him to speak in an unknown
language. The people in the room were startled. Over the last year, they had seen
many people mimic the gifts of the Spirit with wild behavior. What Brigham did
was different. "Brethren, I shall never oppose anything that comes from the
Lord," Joseph said, sensing their discomfort. "That tongue is from God." Joseph
then spoke in the same language, declaring that it was the language Adam had
spoken in the Garden of Eden and encouraging the Saints to seek the gift of
tongues, as Paul had done in the New Testament, for the benefit of the children of
God.

D: From this entry, there is an insinuation that a pure language— that of God— exists—
and the saints must seek after a perfect tongue: A unity of words despite the
potential for new language creations…

*Pause.*
D: …and because our communication will engender worlds without end, we are continually restoring—or healing—that Perfect method of communication that God masters: Omniscience. We, therefore, take upon ourselves the name of the Mediator to become unspotted from the linguistic errors of each passing day that disorganizes our lives…Restoring…

P: Objection! Counsel is testifying. And is unintelligible—

X: I will sustain the first objection—Counsel, I ask that you stick to testimonies offered by the Church.

D: In that case, let us consider statements about the Book of Mormon offered by the Church in 1974—Proceed with these two testimonies—The first discussing the Holy Bible.

C12: When printing became common, and men learned to read the word, even with its errors, they were shocked to discover how far the practices of the church had departed from the principles in the word. Their protests were vigorous and determined.

D: Thus, we see the disorganizing effects a Holy Text might have on identification. Now, a statement about the Book of Mormon—

C11: With certainty, the Book of Mormon is a pure and holy record, having been recorded by prophets under the guidance of our Heavenly Father, having been hid up for hundreds of years unto the Lord, having been revealed and translated by the power of God in the latter day. It is an undefiled record, undisturbed by the wisdom of man…

P: Objection! Relevance? My opponent argued that all language contains flaws—and for
this case, does this not include the language of the Book of Mormon authors?

D: Indeed; however, I attempt to argue a peculiar case for the Book of Mormon.

X: Objection overruled—for the curiosity of the court. Proceed—

D: Thank you. Allow the church to provide a character witness for Joseph Smith, the seer, and translator of the Book of Mormon—given in 2017. I ask we chunk the testimony, as it is long, so we have time to reflect. Please—

C69: Critics must explain how Joseph Smith, a 23-year-old farm boy with limited education, created a book with hundreds of unique names and places, as well as detailed stories and events. Accordingly, many critics propose that he was a creative genius who relied upon numerous books and other local resources to create the historical content of the Book of Mormon.

Pause

C69: But contrary to their assertion, there is not a solitary witness who claims to have seen Joseph with any of these alleged resources before the translation began…So how did Joseph perform this remarkable feat of dictating a 500-plus page book without any notes…writing a single draft in approximately 65 working days…[This is] simply counter to the realities of life.

X: Please get to the point—

D: Purity of language, which offers coherent structuring of an organization and identification, is achievable through divine assistance despite seemingly impossible circumstances. The Book of Mormon is a fundamental Restoration keystone (C6)—a premise for the existence of the Church and an example of perfecting language, both in translation and content.
The messages in the Book of Mormon mainly testify of Jesus Christ—the Word—who fulfills the infinite atonement—the act of suffering for iniquities (C79). Said differently, at one moment, we engage with the mediating Word, taking upon His name and commands to congregate in greater unity—vying for one faith, one Church, and one Gospel—despite individual, group, family, and other constitutions that segregate ideas.

Thus, the only opportunity to transcend the paradox of congregated segregation is through Jesus Christ, who…

P: Objection! Testifying.

X: Objection sustained. Counsel, please do not let me charge you with contempt of court—

P: And may it please the court to complicate this speculation. My opponent speaks of the impossibility, save through Jesus Christ, of being on the same page—Due to the eternal layers of differences across individuals, groups, families, societies, and cultures. Yet, the Church offers statements contrary to this notion—Please recite the following from 1996—

C40: Though our backgrounds are different, we are all children of the same Heavenly Father. He has provided a way to bridge our differences, a way each of us may know. This way is through the power and sure witness of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead, sent forth by God to reveal all needful things. He teaches and testifies with divine power and clarity…His message is conveyed with absolute certainty.

P: Thank you. Thus, we find ourselves where we started: Notions of absolute certainty,
sure witnesses, and revealed knowledge. I rest my case.

X: Counselor?

D: Please review your statement from 2010—

C56: The personal line [that is, direct communication from God via the Holy Ghost] is of paramount importance in personal decisions and in the governance of the family.

D: And you continued discussing the second necessary priesthood line, or the communication through living prophets, apostles, and other inspired leaders from God. Continue—

C56: Some members or former members of our church fail to recognize the importance of the priesthood line. They underestimate the importance of the Church and its leaders, and its programs. Relying entirely on the personal line, they go their own way, purporting to define doctrine and to direct competing organizations contrary to the teachings of prophet-leaders.

D: Thank you. Thus, no matter the personal, direct connection with God, we must also rely on indirect contact as filtered through various levels: Organizations within organizations, not so clear but fuzzy and imperfect. That is, a compilation of perfect imperfection that affords restored restoring and true living, against the demands of congregated segregation.

X: Allow us a recess.

**Chapter Summary**

There is no end—

to trying thoughts

for what appears organized,
firm, stable, disappears
with clamors of contradictions—
donning hauntings of the past
and spirits of the future—
what appears holy complete is ghostly.

We rely on true sources,
those fixing, certain,
crucifying our identities
with nails in sure places. +

Do we accept?
Holy, fixed bodies?
Or awakening the dead—
For eternal living? o

Jesus Christ o.

+ Isaiah 22:23

 o Luke 18
Chapter 6 Footnotes

1. Allow me to address the potential shock experienced with this untraditional “results” section. A qualitative researcher might employ various writing styles—with consequences for what we can learn. In this case, I adopt a poststructural writing style with “purposeful incompleteness and uncertainty…to reinforce the flux of human nature (Miles et al., 2020, p. 319). To this end, this chapter will feel incomplete and sporadic and may require several readings. However, there is no definitive conclusion—We might revisit the chapter multiple times, allowing our thoughts to wonder and wander. Suppose we were to classify the method writing styles in this chapter—much to the chagrin of poststructural thinkers. In that case, we might label them with the categories Grbich (2013) offered, including pastiche, layers, juxtaposition, fiction, drama, (audience) interactive, and irony.

2. Similar to translation #4 of the communication constitutes organization (CCO) approach: Leaders, in this case, general conference speakers, act on behalf of the larger abstract body, representing and presenting itself to other macro actors. Of course, this also assumes the imbrication of the other three translations (see chapter 3 for a review of the CCO framework).

3. Herein, we will find paradoxes: The "single voice" will yield contradictory testimonies, illuminated by Restorationism: A focus on fixed versus fluid mentality (see the previous chapters for this conceptualization).

4. Instead of citing the last names of each speaker, we will classify the evidence via the numbers provided in Table 8 in the discovery (see Chapter 5). Though each (imperfect) speaker bares utterances of their past, present, and future, we abstract
them: They become the voice of the (perfect) Lord for His Church. The scenes presented in this chapter directly cite 52 speeches—though all added to the paradoxes presented during analysis.

5. Thus, the prosecutor adopts the Restored stance of Restorationism (see chapters 4 and 5).

6. Thus, the defendant employs the Restoring pole of Restorationism (see chapters 4 and 5).
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSIONS

The door is open. Outside the trial space, thoughts congregate for recess, discussing the proceedings—The discussions are pure conjecture, "off" the record, yet they inform impending judgments, questions, and assumptions when trying ideas.¹

There is a clamor of voices—some more prominent, stating the obvious, and others mere whispers or unheard opportunities.² Thoughts congregate in familiar groups, predisposed to discussing comfortable ideas in their language registers—

In these scenes, there are three discernable groups of thought—Those not informed by the discursive groups wonder and wander in silence. They speak to themselves.³⁴

First, thoughts embodying the field of organizational communication gather (congregation #1). They challenge, extend, and speculate on the theoretical assumptions and methodological tactics. They focus less on the religious context and more on communication's (dis)organizing effects on identification within fixed spaces.

Second, thoughts discussing the trial from a general Christian religious standpoint assemble (congregation #2)—They converse about what the speculations mean for believers and nonbelievers alike. Generally, they consider the role of poststructuralism in religion and science.

Third, some thoughts collect to address the trial from a Latter-day Saint perspective.

We wander around each group, in whatever order, visiting their thoughts, waiting to restart the trial.
LAURA ELLINGSON: This experience is fascinating—"social science researchers [often] conduct and represent research as though knowledge were produced without unruly bodies involved." I love this embodiment. We "can do embodiment in all aspects of research [including writing]!"

CASEY M. STRATTON: I feel alive in my words.

SARAH TRACY: Metaphors, analogies, images… "the theorizing process greatly benefits from intuition and logical creativity. The data itself will not provide the explanation, so [we] write freely, daydream, take a long bath….”

CASEY M. STRATTON: True. We bathed in several metaphors throughout these proceedings for theorizing: Cross-examinations, labyrinths, rocks, poltergeists, and binoculars, among others…

JOEP CORNELISSEN & MARIO KAFOUROS: And, voiced by others, "metaphors energize the study of organizations and keep thought moving rather than fixed." I wonder how these organizational metaphors will remain alive—

REVIEWER #2: Or we kill them. I will not be ashamed to deem this all absurd—This entire proceeding is against our scientific norms—Pictures, poetry, and performing "results?" Not to mention this extremely unconventional discussion section. If we are to maintain the integrity of the academic institution, are we not charged to uphold quality, clarity, and incremental progression? Where were the theory, the research question, and the method? How are we to repeat this?

Eyes roll.

CASEY M. STRATTON: You are damned. Please start again with this dissertation.
Congregation #2—Discussion #1

VOICE #1: The arguments are compelling—but how can we objectively verify their existence? I have my doubts.

VOICE #2: That is the key! We do not know with certainty but only believe. Faith requires doubt; otherwise, it becomes knowledge—

VOICE #1: …and are we not vying for knowledge?

REVIEWER #2: Exactly what I have been saying. We need to maintain quality control.

FOUCAULT: …What is knowledge?

Congregation #3—Discussion #1

TERYL GIVENS: We see here the "possibility of epistemological certainty even as [they, including Joseph Smith] elaborated a theology of audacious scope and a program for eternal learning [uncertainty]…creating a field of tension particularly apt…to characterize Mormon thought…".

BROTHER STRATTON: In other words, certain uncertainty. A paradox. For example, we "know" fundamental doctrine, restored in the past tense, such as how God speaks through revelation. Or God has a body of perfect flesh and bones—

JOSEPH SMITH: "[Indeed], it is the first principle of the gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another…"

BROTHER STRATTON: With that fundamental, restored principle, we learn to apply it to different, changing circumstances. We assert that God speaks—a fixed truth—yet how he speaks will vary despite common patterns—unfixed.

RICHARD G. SCOTT: Yes, "principles are packaged truth, packaged for application to
a wide variety of circumstances. A true principle makes changing circumstances clear even under the most confusing and compelling circumstances."

BROTHER STRATTON: So we can have unchangeable and changeable ideas in the Church: The steadfast represent fundamental points of doctrine, especially those restored (e.g., God has a body of flesh and bones).

Congregants nod.

BROTHER STRATTON: We take those fixed arguments—those stable premises—and create various personal applications for our lives. Then, when restoring, we refine our understanding of these foundational ideas and find creative ways to organize our changing experiences.

FOUCAULT: But who is speaking what, and how do we delineate the fixed from the unfixed—Are they, and should they be, simplistic?

Congregation #1—Discussion #2

DENNIS MUMBY: "There is room…to be more theoretically adventurous. We have tended to stick to a narrow group of tried-and-tested theories and theorists (Giddens, Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, etc.), mostly overlooking ways to expand…key issues such as power, discourse, and identity."

DERRIDA: My thoughts are not theory. Nor method. Nor can they be tried. They are inescapable; thus, they are not narrow. If conceptualizable, they are the epitome of adventure…

DENNIS MUMBY: Fair. If anything, we captured the "ongoing challenge…to develop frameworks and engage in empirical work that explores…ways in which organization processes intersect with social actors' efforts to create a sense of
ontological security…"

CASEY M. STRATTON: An active effort to demonstrate how some people feel extreme experiences of certainty, despite ongoing disorganizing communication: Something felt in religious, discursive spaces. Identification crises are absurd.

GEORGE CHENEY (ET AL.): Perhaps this answers the theoretical call for connecting identification "upward to broader institutional and cultural formations" along with longitudinal analyses—going beyond the simplistic to rouse paradox.

CRAIG SCOTT (ET AL.): I wonder Corman and Cheney…Our theoretical speculations in 1998 did not consider religious institutions to narrow the scope…

QUENTIN SCHULTZE: Thus, inviting us to take a challenge—To consider the God problem in (organizational) communication studies—or the organizing effects of the unobservable...

CRAIG SCOTT & KATIE KANG: I wonder where the invisibility of spiritual, organizing phenomena, like God, fits into invisible organizations. Does it? In what category could we consider these ideas? Or do we create a new classification scheme?

FOUCAULT: The order of things…inescapable, habitual…

Congregation #2—Discussion #2

BELIEVER #1: I am confused. I thought that there were beginnings and ends. But I felt we were saying those do not exist in the entire proceeding. So there is no time?

BELIEVER #2: I am unsure how to interpret the scripture that Jesus Christ is the beginning and end—Alpha and Omega. Are they the same thing?

ALAN GOODBOY & MATTHEW MARTIN: Alpha and Omega are not the same.
REVIEWER #2: All unreliable.

Congregation #3—Discussion #2

PATRICK MASON: These proceedings demonstrate how "views about the natural world and science…and Protestant [fundamentalism]" shape religious thinking—

FIONA & TERRYL GIVENS: Requiring us to constitute a new religious vocabulary—

BROTHER STRATTON: Or engage in language deconstruction to identify our spiritual wounds and restore—or heal—a purer relationship with the divine and the principles we espouse.

FIONA & TERRYL GIVENS (2): A task we can undertake with our Savior—a title that "we could with equal linguistic justification call him Jesus Christ…Healer of the World—"

BROTHER STRATTON: Him being the Word enables the task.

PATRICK MASON: "Perhaps we have focused so much on the primitivist elements of the Restoration—those aspects that hark back to an early age—that we overlooked some of its prophetic power for today."

BROTHER STRATTON: Not a resurrection of the dead but a resurrection for the living—Becoming whole through keys held by Jesus Christ.

CASEY M. STRATTON: Keys for mapping the terrain—Identifying the linguistic nuances and their (dis)organizing effect on identification or becoming…

BROTHER CASEY M. STRATTON: Ultimately relying on the Atonement (At-one-moment) of Jesus Christ to organize life in three ways: (1) Suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane—bleeding out of impure language that wound our existence; (2) The Crucifixion—fixing sure and certain truths that promote
certainty and death if we forget about (3) the Resurrection—or the overcoming of death through eternal living. Thus, Jesus Christ is the paradox of solution.

GIVENS: How artistic. Instead of an obsession with certainty, we allow paradox for creative endeavors. We engage in an "endless quest for perfect knowledge."

**Congregation #1—Discussion #3**

STUDENT: I am used to uncomplicated work with precise descriptions and conclusions.

LINDA PUTNAM: "The mode of reasoning in integrating multiple methods is iterative and dialectical as [we] move back and forth across data sets." We allow change.

MIRKA KORO-LJUNGBERG & SHARON HAYES: It is not a mechanical task. It is a process of creating, constructing, and continuous reflection…all tangled with epistemological commitments—

CASEY M. STRATTON: As such, every decision in these proceedings considered poststructuralism and postmodernism, perhaps ad nauseam—Too much clarity might engender taxidermy: The data and experience appears life-like but are motionless. Of course, we see imperfect efforts to epitomize these epistemological commitments—if we can ever characterize them.

REVIEWER #2: So, why try?

BAKHTIN: О, избавь нас от глупости!

**Congregation #2—Discussion #3**

BELIEVER #1: Oh, that man is speaking in tongues!

BELIEVER #2: A sign of a true believer with the Spirit of God!

DERRIDA: Well, do we not all speak in tongues? Everything is a text. It is inescapable.

JAMES SMITH: "If everything is an interpretation, then even the gospel is only an
interpretation and not objectively true."

NONBELIEVER: That is precisely why I do not believe anymore.

DERRIDA: One can never be precise—

FOUCAULT: But one can enshrine knowledge for controlling effects—

VOICE #1: Pray, help us.

Congregation #3—Discussion #3

JANA RIESS: "If I were to offer a prognostication, it would be that in the next few years at least, the polarization I am seeing with Mormonism will continue, in which those who remain in the LDS Church will be ardent believers but those who don't fit in...will pull up stakes and leave."

AMORETTE HINDERAKER: Because the Church is a totalistic organization with rigid power structures, making "dissent and hope of change difficult or impossible."

BROTHER CASEY M. STRATTON: I problematize that notion of a totalistic organization. The conceptualization is too simplistic. Nor are there two groups of "in" and "out." The church is a congregated segregation—Some members resist what appears controlling, while others embrace what feels freeing. Thoughts will assemble amongst discursive circles, engendering paradox among groups within the organization—We cannot assume the Church is a single character—We constitute it at innumerable levels. The Church embodies perfect imperfection—a structure that allows agency that will empower and hurt, affording growth through oppositions. Becoming requires contradictions; otherwise, we fix.

ROBERT D. HALES: "They might use their free agency, come to their own conclusions
and commitments, follow him…"

**REVIEWER #2:** I certainly have my conclusions.

**Congregation #1—Discussion #4**

**LARS CHRISTENSEN & GEORGE CHENEY:** This is a provocative case of organizational transparency—or the requests for organizations to communicate clearly for their audiences. We expect organizations to shed light on matters. Transparency is "light in the literal and metaphoric sense," challenging us to "uncover the true essence of the organization and its "naturally" associated symbolic expressions."

**CASEY M. STRATTON:** Allow me to apply—Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, Perfect, and True…and entangled in the name of the Church. By virtue, *this* organization and other religious institutions might require unprecedented levels of transparency compared to other bodies, as it bares utterances of Truth and Perfection. And light.

**LARS CHRISTENSEN & GEORGE CHENEY:** Regarding these utterances, "the more crystallized those accounts or representations, the more definitive they appear…"

**CASEY M. STRATTON:** Thus engendering severe identification crises or dissonance for those who expect organizational transparency…

**LARS CHRISTENSEN & GEORGE CHENEY:** Problematic with rival doctrines and behaviors, thus requiring strategic ambiguity.

**CASEY M. STRATTON:** Yes! So, to maintain cohesion, the organization will author highly general propositions that remain true for diverse applications in competing
and complementary discourses—by individuals, groups, families, etc. That is, the multiple levels of analysis constitute transparency differently.

DEBORAH SILVA & PATRICIA SIAS: Allowing buffering for those who do not identify with all utterances of the organization—including those groups who might enshrine or crystallize singular meanings.

JORDAN SOLIZ & CHRISTINE KUNKLE: Not to mention the dynamic role families play in an intergroup context—all under organizational and institutional umbrellas. Indeed, shared family religious identities complicate the matter.

CASEY M. STRATTON: Especially for an organization such as the Church of Jesus Christ, which serves only second to the family. No matter the efforts of transparency or claims of light, the organization communicates in generalities to maintain a Perfect or True image while allowing for imperfection and continual disorganizing.

STUDENT: Example, please?

CASEY M. STRATTON: The Church is True and Living. Here is a proposition we might apply with various lenses and experiences. For example, the defendant problematized the essence of a church—including leaders, texts, people, structures, buildings, and so on. The Church becomes more transparent and opaque based on how we view the organizational ontology.

PAUL: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

Congregation #2—Discussion #4

BELIEVER #1: Oh, Paul! I have always wondered what that scripture means—
Confusion remains.

STUDENT: Retracing, we have general Christian truths that we might apply to various situations. The organization will adopt these truths, such as "love thy neighbor," but allows the members to constitute multiple definitions of love—even those that might promote chaos. Is this not pandemonium?

SATAN: I like that—

PAUL: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

NOAH WEBSTER: Darkness—ignorance, the empire of Satan. Reprove—to censure. Censure—to judge. Judge—to form an opinion. Opinion—forming a proposition, statement, or theory supported by a degree of evidence that renders it probable.

JAMES SMITH: In other words, take Derrida and Foucault to church and deconstruct…

BELIEVER #2: To illuminate the impending darkness of imperfection. Those devils in the details.

Congregation #3—Discussion 4

BROTHER STRATTON: It seems we are in a continuing state of apostasy, balanced by an ongoing need for restoration, allowed by a continuous atonement—all mediated by language or the Word.

FIONA GIVENS AND TERRYL GIVENS: "Language is one of the most subtle yet critically important ways in which erroneous understandings, harmful assumptions, and self-defeating paradigms and labels insinuate themselves into our habits of thought and therefore action." We mediate beliefs through language.

BROTHER STRATTON: Is it too absurd to speculate that perhaps the gift of tongues
assumes the ability to identify moments of apostatizing and restoring—or burning away the worldly impurities to reach a purer language?

A loud interruption—

**BELIEVER #3:** Let's extend "what would Jesus do" to include "what would Jesus say!"

**BROTHER STRATTON:** …and when baptized, we take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ, offering a cleansing from iniquity—in this case, linguistic errors that disorganize True Orders, Signs, and so on. We covenant for exact obedience, sacrifice worldly utterances, and consecrate efforts for refinement—parting the Word to discover a celestial understanding of perfect organizational communication.

**CONGREGANTS:** We need more time to reflect on these ideas.

**Congregation #1: Discussion #5**

**REVIEWER #2:** I feel we have not yet addressed my concerns.

*Audible mumbles.*

**CASEY M. STRATTON:** This dissertation embraces alternative organizing. George?

**GEORGE CHENEY:** "Alternative organizations are understood in opposition to the familiar, traditional, mainstream, predominant, or hegemonic institutional arrangements…The adjective is also suggestive of organizational practices that are novel, creative, untried, or untested, and perhaps radically different from those to which a group or part of society is accustomed."

**CASEY M. STRATTON:** We are addressing something metatheoretical—We as scholars exist in academic institutions or organizations that fix us to certain ways of behaving in standardized forms. To describe and use postmodernism and
poststructuralism in conventional, scientific ways is not true—or faithful to the epistemological commitments. So instead, I engage in alternative organizing of our understanding, using courtrooms, poetry, pictures, dialogues, and so on to allow the democratization of the text—I permit all to author their conclusions, remaining ambiguous to circumvent closure—our damnation.

*Discussions fall quiet to tune in.*

**CASEY M. STRATTON:** We are all responsible for taking these proceedings, chewing on them, digesting what we can, and excreting what we find useless. We have an endless feast of thoughts that will not satiate. With every roll of our tongues, every word tastes unique—despite the intent of flavorful representations. We praise, spit, gag, and swallow morsels of truth. Our (discursive) bodies hunger and thirst after righteousness—goodness, exactness, honor—within religious spaces, whether constituted by faithfulness in God or religiosity to science.

*Some congregants leave.*

**CASEY M. STRATTON:** In the recesses of our minds, we will discuss, criticize, and create—every position is right and wrong, held fast as iron rods, some more straight and narrow.

*More congregants depart. There is a feeling of abandonment.*

**BROTHER CASEY M. STRATTON:** Will ye also go away?

**BAILIFF:** The trial begins.

**Chapter 7 Footnotes**

1. For clarity, in this chapter, we are actively trying to break the norms of academic
discussion sections—true faithful to postmodernism. Traditionally, the journey appears linear: We review discrete steps, including the theoretical framework, research question or hypothesis, methods, and results. Then in the discussion section, we forward a review of the results, along with ideas for future studies, and confess our limitations. We then conclude—yet are we not in a recess? The data continues to live, examinations try, and new directions abound. To this end, perhaps much to the chagrin of academic norms, I will allow the discussion section to serve its purpose: Discuss until we try the data again.

2. The thoughts I allow to discuss in these scenes are subjective interpretations, despite trying to ventriloquize the voices of scholars and other characters: They speak on their behalf, imagined in my mind. The table, after these footnotes, provides the citation of the idea in the order they appear in the dialogue. Some characters do not have sources—these are my creations for abductive purposes. Statements in quotations represent verbatim ideas written by others.

3. I invite all who do not fit within one of the three groups to congregate with those who best speak your language—With others, discuss speculations the dissertation offers and form different coalitions.

4. There is no end to possible speculations. Each reader should challenge, extend, and support the voices in these discussions—never filling the (research) gaps for a bottomless rift.
### Table 9: Citations for Chapter 7
This table includes the three main discussion threads (congregations #1-3), their discussions, and the voices heard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congregation #1: Organizational Communication</th>
<th>Congregation #2: Believers and Nonbelievers</th>
<th>Congregation #3: The Church of Jesus Christ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion #1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Tracy, 2020, p. 295)</td>
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<td>(J. Smith, 1844, p. 614)</td>
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<td>(Cornelissen &amp; Kafouros, 2008, p. 2)</td>
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<td>(Scott, 1993 October)</td>
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<td>(Foucault, 1980)</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion #2</strong></td>
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<td>(Malabou &amp; Derrida, 2004)</td>
<td>(Goodboy &amp; Martin, 2020)</td>
<td>(Givens &amp; Givens, 2020)</td>
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<td>(Mumby, 2013, p. 119)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Givens &amp; Givens, 2017, p. 40)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Cheney et al., 2013, p. 710)</td>
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<td>(Mason, 2020, p. 27)</td>
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<td>(C. R. Scott et al., 1998)</td>
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<td>(Givens, 2007)</td>
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<td>(Schultze, 2005)</td>
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<td>(C. R. Scott &amp; Kang, 2018)</td>
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<td>(Foucault, 1994b)</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion #3</strong></td>
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<td>(Foucault, 1980)</td>
<td>(Hales, 1979 April)</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion #4</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Christensen &amp; Cheney, 2015, p. 77)</td>
<td>Paul (The Holy Bible, Ephesians 5:11)</td>
<td>(Givens &amp; Givens, 2017, p. 4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Christensen &amp; Cheney, 2015, p. 78)</td>
<td>Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary</td>
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<td>(Silva &amp; Sias, 2010)</td>
<td>(Smith, 2006)</td>
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<td>Paul (The Holy Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:12)</td>
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<td>(Soliz &amp; Rittenour (Kunkle), 2012)</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion #5</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Cheney, 2014)</td>
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CONCLUSION

Uncertain.
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