

Let the Living Rejoice and “Let the Dead
Sing Forth Anthems of Eternal Praise”:
Relevance of Joseph Smith’s Baptism for
the Dead Revelations in Haiti and in
Madagascar

Angel, Beehive and World Nectars: Homage to Armand L. Mauss

“What will happen to Mormonism; and particularly to its American complexion, as it is increasingly internationalized? To what extent is the historical Christian (specifically Roman Catholic) experience likely to be replicated by the Mormons? As Catholicism spread around the world, it brought its Roman ways along, but *in time each cultural setting made the religion less Roman and more local in its complexion*. This process has been described as ‘syncretism’ by anthropologists and deplored as ‘corruption’ or ‘apostasy’ by religious purists. Yet, if it is to be truly catholic (in either the specific or the general sense), *no religion can remain Roman. Nor can it remain American*. Each cultural setting must both adopt and adapt to a ‘world religion.’ ***For Mormonism, that means that the angel will have to contend with a somewhat different beehive (and differently flavored nectar) in each part of the world...***

To grow and prosper, however, ***the religion will have to resort to some degree and some forms of assimilation in each new culture***, just as it did in North American during the early twentieth century. Just as surely as Mormonism was Americanized until it became respectable in the United States, ***it will have to be Japanized, Francized, and Argentinized (and so on around the world)***. Only through that process can Mormonism ever ***reduce the cultural tension*** in those other cultures enough to acquire a critical mass of membership, to retain succeeding generations, and thus to acquire a normal demographic profile in each locale.”

Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (1994), 204-205 (My emphasis).

Death, Sociability Now and Beyond as “Nectars” Under the Lens of D&C 128

Quick Latter-day Saint theological context of D&C 128

➤ Preceded by

- Section 76 (1832)
- First recorded sermon on baptism for the dead, funeral of Seymour Brunson (Aug., 1840)
- First baptism for the dead (Sept., 1840)

➤ Followed by

- Section 128 (along with 127, of course)
- Sections 137 (1836) and 138 (1918)

D&C 76 = Expanded plan of Salvation; Inclusive Heaven

➤ Heaven – Terrestrial glory – compared to the moon:
72-77 Those who died without law; spirits of men [...] who rejected the testimony of Jesus in this world but accepted in the spirit world; **honorable men**.

Celestial
Kingdom

Terrestrial
Kingdom

Telestial
Kingdom

D&C 137 (Jan, 1836) – More inclusive salvation

5 I saw Father Adam and Abraham; and my father and my mother; my brother Alvin, that has long since slept;

6 And marveled how it was that he had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel the second time, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins.

7 Thus came the voice of the Lord unto me, saying: **All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God;**



Celestial
Kingdom

Terrestrial
Kingdom

Telestial
Kingdom

Death, Sociability Now and Beyond as “Nectars” Under the Lens of D&C 128

Quick historical context of D&C 128

➤ “Joseph’s very real circumstances are inspiring his thoughts about divine things; the temporal and the eternal are very much enmeshed. The temporal, to some extent, is giving shape to the eternal, even as the eternal Joseph is revealing is answering temporal problems” (Jordan Watkins, “Y Religion” podcast, 15 Feb., 2021).



- **What were those “very real circumstances” like in September 1842?**
“The Lord has revealed unto me that **my enemies, both in Missouri and this State, were again in the pursuit of me; and inasmuch as they pursue me without a cause, and have not the least shadow or coloring of justice or right** on their side in the getting up of their prosecutions against me; and inasmuch as **their pretensions are all founded in falsehood of the blackest dye**, I have thought it expedient and wisdom in me to leave the place for a short season, for my own **safety** and the **safety** of this people” (D&C 127:1).

= Some of those “circumstances” were “prosecutions” (= “persecutions”) that informed **concerns for “safety,”** i.e., they can culminate in death. He’s preoccupied with **DEATH.**

Death, Sociability Now and Beyond as “Nectars” Under the Lens of D&C 128

Tentative explication of Joseph’s preoccupation with death

- In 1842 or in 1844, Joseph does not seem to be preoccupied by fear of his own death and of his fate Beyond.
- Evidence in 1844: “I am going like a lamb to the slaughter; but I am calm as a summer’s morning; I have a conscience void of offense towards God, and towards all men. I SHALL DIE INNOCENT” (D&C 135:4). Not just calm or resigned to face the inevitable. *Resolute* (“I shall”); not afraid to die.
- Evidence in 1842: “as for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life; [...] deep water is what I am wont to swim in. It all has become a second nature to me; and I feel, like Paul, to glory in tribulation; for to this day has **the God of my fathers delivered me out of them all, and will deliver me from henceforth...** (D&C 127:2)
- Joseph concerned for safety but certain/resolute that death will not be in September 1842: “the God of my fathers [...] will deliver me from henceforth”
(Certainty about deliverance in 1842 becomes certainty about dying innocent in 1844.)

Death, Sociability Now and Beyond as “Nectars” Under the Lens of D&C 128

Tentative explication of Joseph’s preoccupation with death

- If Joseph is not so preoccupied with his own death, why is he about death at all?
 - Perhaps his preoccupation is that his premature death might affect the central reason for the Restoration, the eternal salvation of the Saints, of God’s children.
 - Hint of the above: immediately after expressing certainty about being delivered, Joseph revealed the word of the Lord to the Saints as follows:

“Let **the work of my temple** [...] **be continued** on and not cease; and let your diligence, and your perseverance, and patience, and your works **be redoubled**... And again, I give unto you a word in relation to the baptism for your dead” (D&C 127: 4-5).

- Joseph is concerned about death because is not selfish Epicurus who once declared:

“Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not” (Epicurus to Menoecus).

Death, Sociability Now and Beyond as “Nectars” Under the Lens of D&C 128

Tentative explication as to why death was something to Joseph

➤ Death was *something* to Joseph because:

- Even though we don't experience death *in the body*, as we experience illness, we experience it *as a body*; it disrupts sociability.

...death was first something to God and to Christ:

- “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).
- “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1: 39).
- If death was not something to God and to Christ, then why the atonement? Why provide for forgiveness of sins if humankind is to remain dead?

Death, Sociability Now and Beyond as “Nectars” Under the Lens of D&C 128

I.b Tentative explication as to why death was *something* to Joseph

- Epicurus was right in that death is indeed “the most awful of evils,” the one that seems able to frustrate God’s ultimate work and glory, and render the death of his Son useless.
- It is because death is such a threat that Christ not only had to die a sacrifice for our sins but also had to resurrect,
 - “And if Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death that the grave should have no victory, and that death should have no sting, there could have been no resurrection. But there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ” (Mosiah 16: 7-8).
 - In other words, not only is death not the end but Christ put an end to death; and as “King Emmanuel,” he “hath ordained, before the world was, **that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prison**” as Joseph declares in D&C 128:22)

Death, Sociability Now and Beyond as “Nectars” Under the Lens of D&C 128

II. D&C 128 and tentative explication as to why the living and the dead should rejoice

- In other words, not only is death not the end but Christ put an end to death; and as “King Emmanuel,” Joseph declares, he “hath ordained, before the world was, **that which would enable us to redeem them out of their prison**” (D&C 128:22).
- **What is Joseph referring to by “that”?**
 - Priesthood keys, especially the power to bind/seal/weld families, generations together: “the nature of this ordinance [i.e., baptism for the dead] consists in the of the priesthood, by the revelation of Jesus Christ, wherein it is granted that whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Death, Sociability Now and Beyond as “Nectars” Under the Lens of D&C 128

II. D&C 128 and tentative explication as to why the living and the dead should rejoice

- Sociability/togetherness that underpin baptism for the dead more obvious as Joseph explains that the soteriological “principles in relation to the dead” revealed to him “cannot be lightly passed over” because those principles and ordinances for the dead also pertain to salvation the salvation of those who are still alive:
 - “For their salvation is necessary and essential to our salvation, as Paul says concerning the fathers – that they without us cannot be made perfect – neither can we without our dead be made perfect” (v. 15)
 - The earth will be smitten with a curse unless there is a **welding link** of some kind or other between **the fathers and the children**” (v. 18).

Death, Sociability Now and Beyond as “Nectars” Under the Lens of D&C 128

II. D&C 128 and tentative explication as to why the living and the dead should rejoice

- Joseph mentions in the rest of Section 128 some of the knowledge, angelic visitations and priesthood keys that were restored to him before exulting “Let the dead speak forth anthems of eternal praise” (v. 22), let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud” (v. 23) (See Michael Hubbard MacKay, “Event or Process? How ‘the Chamber of Old Father Whitmer’ Helps Us Understand Priesthood Restoration,” *BYU Studies* 60, vol. 1 (2021)).
- While Joseph does not mention Elijah by name, but he is more than present in Section 128: he would have been among the host of angelic ministers since he is the one who restored the power to bind/seal/weld, or “the earth will be smitten with a curse,” (v. 18) a phrase generally associated with Elijah.
- More broadly, when speaking of the interconnectedness that must exist between “the fathers and the children,” Latter-day Saints speak of a “spirit of Elijah”

Spirit of Elijah: only Priesthood Keys?

Death in Buddhism: reincarnation

Death in Mexico: Dia de Los Muertos

Death in Haiti: All Saints' Day / Feast of the Dead and ritual of redemption

Death in Madagascar: [Return the Dead Ritual](#)