5 Ten-and-a-Half Seconds of God's Silence: Mormon *Parrhesia* in the Time of Donald Trump

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In the Senate

I begin with a statement that Utah Republican Senator Mitt Romney made in Congress in February 2020.

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> **WASHINGTON** – U.S. Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT) today released the following statement regarding his vote on the article of impeachment:
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> After careful consideration of the respective counsels' arguments, I have concluded that President Trump is guilty of the charge made by the House of Representatives. President Trump attempted to corrupt the election by pressuring the Secretary of State of Georgia to falsify the election results in his state. President Trump incited the insurrection against Congress by using the power of his office to summon his supporters to Washington on January 6th and urging them to march on the Capitol during the counting of electoral votes. He did this despite the obvious and well known threats of violence that day. President Trump also violated his oath of office by failing to protect the Capitol, the Vice President, and others in the Capitol. Each and every one of these conclusions compels me to support conviction. (Romney 2020)

Romney was one of only seven Republicans in the Senate to vote to convict Donald Trump following the attack on the Capitol Building by Trump's supporters on 6 January 2021 (Broadwater 2021; Leibovich 2020); earlier, Romney was the *only* Republican senator to vote to convict Trump during his first impeachment. Romney stated that he considered the evidence showed that Trump had abused his power as president. Mitt Romney is, of course, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (often known as Mormons or

LDS), and was the first LDS candidate to run for the presidency of the United States in 2012. This, at least, is how his candidacy was often reported in the media, but it should be qualified: Romney was the first LDS presidential candidate to run *since* the first prophet of the LDS Church, Joseph Smith Jr., did so in 1844. So great was the animus against Latter-day Saints in mainstream Christian America in the nineteenth century, that Smith's candidacy ended in his assassination in the same year. Into the 1900s, America's Mormons were persecuted by the evolving federal government and wider Protestant public as unchristian, "barbarous," and unreliable citizens (Givens 2013). Their religious organization and kinship institutions were cast by their critics as theocratic and nepotistic, and were said to be in tension with the Constitution (Gordon 2002; McKinnon and Cannell 2013). In the 2020s, key LDS figures have, however, been found among those most committed to protect American constitutionalism. This is not really a novelty, or a result of simple assimilation, but expresses continuities in distinctive LDS religious understandings, as I will explain further below.

I have been interested for some time in the Mormon response to Trump and, in particular, the tendency of several LDS Republican public figures to speak out in bold criticism of Trump, against the rightwards trend of their party in both the US Congress and the US Senate during and after Trump's term of office from 2016 to 2020.[1] This is despite these politicians' unswerving Republican positions on issues that include the Second Amendment (the right to bear arms) and their conservative small-government preferences that include the demand for more local say in the use of public lands. Historically, the church of Latter-day Saints has not always been a majority-Republican church, but the Utah LDS have been the majority Republicans for the last twelve presidential voting cycles. Utah Republican senators have a generally highly reliable record on voting with their party and president and this loyalty did not just collapse under Trump; as Romney says, he voted with Trump "80% of the time" (Romney 2020).

Trump himself has been a divisive figure in Utah Mormonism. The vote for Trump in 2016 was the lowest majority won there by any Republican president (World Atlas 2019). Many Utah Mormons greatly disliked Trump's personal behaviour, and his often misogynistic, crude, or cruel ways of speaking. In an unprecedented move, the church-owned newspaper the *Deseret News* (2016), in an editorial, called on Donald Trump to resign his candidacy ahead of the presidential election. As the paper said then, "For eighty years, the *Deseret News* has not entered the troubled waters of presidential endorsement. We are

1 This chapter was written in 2022; events around Trump are, of course, still unfolding.

neutral in matters of partisan politics … [but] … character matters … [and] 'where the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn' (Proverbs, 29:2).'" Still, Utah's saints are mostly political conservatives and find it difficult not to vote for the Republican candidate; 45.5 per cent of the vote went to Trump and only 27.5 per cent to Democrats, with some Utah protest voters turning to independent candidates. Since 2016, Trump has gained a Republican right-wing following among some, mostly male, Utah Mormons, while continuing to provoke opposition among others in the church. Mitt Romney is one of those Mormon Republicans for whom that opposition came to a head around the 2020 election and around Trump's attempts to hold on to power despite having lost the vote to Joseph Biden.

For what reasons did Mitt Romney refuse to accommodate Donald Trump, rigorously condemn Trump's actions, and even vote to convict him? I suggest that we can consider the statements of Romney and other Mormon senators and public officers contradicting Trump as instances of *parrhesia*, in some of the key senses that concern the contributors to this volume, including as they relate to the last two lecture series of Michel Foucault in 1983 at the University of California, Berkeley and in 1984 at the Collège de France. One of the more condensed definitions of *parrhesia* Foucault offered was "verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth and risks his life because he recognizes truth telling as a duty to improve or help other people" (Foucault 2001, 19–20; see also Warren 2009, 8). This formulation perhaps at first seems exaggerated. Not every incidence of frank speech carries an *immediate* risk of death. In the American case with which we are concerned, though, the definition is sadly apt. Five people were killed and 138 injured during the assault on the Capitol on 6 January 2021. Other deaths have been said to be indirectly associated with these events, and very many more only avoided becoming casualties by a thin margin. Trump's statements targeting his critics and opponents have resulted in his followers sending multiple death threats, and visiting people's homes and places of work to bully and harass them publicly for their supposed misdeeds. Many people so targeted by Trump live in fear for their physical safely and that of their families. As well, Republican critics of Trump (whether or not LDS) often risk their careers, the approval of their peers, their reputation, and their incomes.

In this chapter, my first aim is to describe what I will call a "Mormon *parrhesia*." I understand Mormonism to be a constitutive, not an accidental, feature of opposition to Trump from LDS conservatives. More Republican Latter-day Saint voters than Republican Protestant Evangelicals are questioning Trump's actions (e.g., Burge 2020). Several Republican Latter-day Saint individuals, including Mitt Romney, also played a key part in resisting Trump's political trajectory and thwarting his attempt to hold on to power despite losing the 2020

election.[2] I will describe some of the specifically Mormon logics, resources, and dynamics that Mitt Romney and others have drawn on in opposing Trump. Since Mormon Republicans are, as noted, nevertheless split between critics and supporters of Trump – and some Mormons were among the crowds who breached the Capitol – I will trace some of the Mormon expressions on each side, including some widely divergent interpretations of the Book of Mormon hero of "liberty," Captain Moroni. By contrast, I will also sketch the consortium of Protestant Evangelical, Catholic, and other ultra-conservative religious constituencies prominently backing Trump,[3] which Katherine Stewart (2022) refers to as a new development in the America of "religious nationalism." I revisit Laidlaw's (2014) account of religious actors in his landmark argument for the criterion of "freedom" in the anthropology of ethics and suggest that Laidlaw's perspective on traditions of Christians "speaking freely" should be expanded. Our understanding of the religious dimensions of current US politics also needs to avoid oversimplifications. Drawing on the testimony of LDS Republican Speaker from Arizona Rusty Bowers at the January 6th Committee hearings, as well as on Mitt Romney's addresses in the Capitol, I describe particularly the importance of *free will* in Mormon understandings of duty and responsibilities to others.

The Context of Mormon *Parrhesia*: Religion and Politics in the Time of Donald Trump

Most people thinking about the points of convergence between American religion and the politics of Trump, his allies, and emulators would be likely to think first (or perhaps only) about conservative Christian politics, especially among white Protestant Evangelicals. It is to this powerful constituency that Trump apparently wanted to address himself when he posed to be photographed holding up a Bible, after the widely criticized forcible clearing of Black Lives Matter protesters from Lafayette Square in Washington, DC, on 1 June 2020.[4]

2 Among Democrats there are many principled bases for resistance to Trump's populist authoritarianism, including for members of Black Lives Matter and the NAACP, as reflected in Senator Bennie Thompson's role as chair of the January 6th Committee. The minority of Republican lawmakers who did not co-operate with Trump are not all LDS; others include Liz Cheney, Adam Kitzinger, and Mike Pence.

3 As K. Stewart (2022) notes, these are not always limited to Christian conservatives but sometimes also include conservative actors of other faiths.

4 For more about this widely reported event, see Mangan (2021). As many people pointed out, the church in the photograph is Episcopalian, and its clergy were outraged by the annexation of their buildings as a background by Trump (e.g., see Kuruvilla 2020).

Trump himself is not personally a typical conservative Evangelical; he was apparently brought up in churches influenced by Norman Vincent Peale and theologies of "positive thinking" (e.g., Brody and Lamb 2018). These churches are part of the broad range of complex prosperity theologies that have been importantly described by Kate Bowler (2014) and that also have many secularized derivatives, often emphasizing the power of prayer to manifest wealth or success as blessings from God. Trump, however, has keenly sought the support of Evangelicals and has seemed happy to accept their spiritual assistance. Televangelist Paula White-Cain, Trump's "spiritual advisor" during the 2020 election, seems to combine elements of both prosperity and Evangelical idioms. White-Cain was seen on widely shared video summoning "angels from Africa" to Trump's aid as the ballot was counted, speaking in tongues and chanting repeatedly, "I hear the sound of victory!" (Idowu 2020; see also Graeber 2020).

One of the most helpful accounts of the alliance between Trumpism and Evangelical churches has been given by Ben Howe who came to the conclusion that his own religious tradition was losing its way. In *The Immoral Majority: Why Evangelical Christians Chose Political Power over Christian Values* (2019), Howe explains that he himself was formerly attracted to the expression of right-wing outrage against liberal Americans, who he and others experienced as dehumanizing and belittling them. He gives an account of how, in his view, Evangelicals convinced themselves that the ends justified the means and began to pursue political power at the expense of their own guiding principles. Abandoning the standards to which their churches were centrally committed, Howe says – that is, standards of integrity in Christian character, charity (Christ-like loving kindness) towards others and the obligation of leading by example – they began to reason that Trump, though unworthy, was God's instrument in bringing about policy changes that would conform with Evangelical ideas of the good. Specifically, stories began to circulate that two people at least (a fireman and a businessman) had received direct prophetic messages that Donald Trump would play a part God intended for him. Trump himself apparently found the idea of divine prophesies of his victory both palatable and believable.

Howe (2019) rejects what he ironically calls "the new Good News," arguing that it will only alienate others, cause damage to the Evangelical churches, and increase the polarization of American politics. Howe, himself a parrhesiast, has received considerable opprobrium from Trump-supporting Christians as a consequence of his writing and remains in the minority of Evangelical opinion. Many influential Evangelical preachers have continued to argue that Trump is the instrument of God and that he is therefore destined for a second presidential victory in 2024. The appointment to the Supreme Court by Trump of enough ultra-conservative judges to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 is understood by many as sufficient proof of their interpretation and the rightness of their approach.

Josh Hawley, a Republican Senator from Missouri, is another figure who came into the wider public eye after 6 January; a photograph of him holding up a clenched fist in a salute to the gathering crowd of Trump supporters outside Congress on that day was widely circulated in the press. The same image was used for publicity (without copyright permission) by Hawley himself, who printed it onto mugs he sells from his campaign website.[5] Hawley, a Yale Law School graduate, said to have his own presidential ambitions, has a profile that combines right-wing conservatism with claims to be an authoritative interpreter of the meaning of Christianity *in toto*. Hawley bases his arguments on the view that most Americans are "heretics" of the kind identified in the fifth century BCE as Pelagianists. Pelagius (a British monk) argued that God had made human beings perfectible, doubted the doctrine of Original Sin (as defined by Augustine above all), and argued that human duty was to work towards self-perfection. The debates around Pelagianism are serious and complex for many Christians and I do not pretend to summarize them here; for the purposes of this chapter, the key point is that Hawley characterizes his opponents as overclaiming their entitlements of free choice, and of being both antinomian and heretical. Hawley's view of the matter is that he, Hawley, understands the reality of Christian teaching and God's will, and is able to point unambiguously to what this is; interestingly, God's will then turns out to coincide closely with Hawley's ultra-conservative political views.[6]

Hawley's position appears to have things in common with the tendency noted as "originalism," for example with respect to conservative judges' attitudes towards the Constitution. The conservative Catholic Supreme Court Judge Amy Coney Barrett, for example, is often seen as an originalist, in that she claims that only the text of the Constitution itself, dating from 1787, is binding, and that all subsequent legal interpretations and agreements with respect to the Constitution are not (Chemerinsky 2020).

Originalists tend to argue also that the meaning of the Constitution itself is self-evident, and that their own understanding of it is unarguable rather than interpretative. These forms of argument clearly extend the tendency described early on by Vincent Crapanzano (2000) as "literalism" in Evangelical religious and judicial contexts in America. For many commentators from different kinds of Christian traditions, having any such claim to *monopolize* the interpretation of God and to *enforce* this interpretation on others is fundamentally unchristian because in doing so they are failing in humility, indulging in inappropriate judgment, and abandoning the primary duty of love for others.

5 See "Shop the Team Hawley Store" at https://secure.winred.com/josh-hawley-committee/storefront/.

6 For a profile of Josh Hawley, see K. Stewart (2021). For Hawley's explanation of Pelagianism in the modern world, see Hawley (2019).

An important commentary on this situation has been offered by Katherine Stewart in her recent book *The Power Worshippers*: *Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*:

> The religious right has become more focused and powerful even as it is arguably less representative. It is not a social or cultural movement. It is a political movement, and its ultimate goal is power. It does not seek to add another voice to America's pluralistic democracy but to replace our foundational democratic principles and institutions with a state grounded on a particular version of Christianity, answering to what some adherents call a "biblical worldview" that also happens to serve the interests of its plutocratic funders and allied political leaders. (2022, 3)

Stewart describes the ways in which the movement is directed by coalitions of elite political and *financial* or lobbying interests. These are not, therefore, representative politics for any given constituency (including particular conservative churches),[7] but are likely to advance a kind of minority rule by a small in-group. As Stewart argues, it is these alliances in what she calls "religious nationalism" that have generated some of the crucial support for Donald Trump to date. The objections on grounds of character that at one time would have created difficulties for a politician such as Trump have been circumvented, especially by Evangelical arguments that Trump is God's (flawed) instrument.

Who Is Captain Moroni?

So far, I've suggested both that there is an important, and importantly, *Mormon* aspect to the Republican critique of Donald Trump and the authoritarian/populist politics in America. I've also noted that even so, the split in Republican and conservative politics between Trumpism and more traditional Republicanism has divided opinion within churches and denominations, as it has within minority-Evangelical critiques and also within Black-Evangelical critiques. Despite considerable scepticism from established Mormon leaders, Donald Trump has gained a substantial group of (mostly male) Mormon followers in Utah and other LDS homeland states since 2016.

We can trace some of these differences by comparing three interpretations of the Book of Mormon scriptural figure known as Captain Moroni in relation to Donald Trump that emerged among LDS actors. Specifically, former Republican Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona, a critic of Trump, identified himself with Moroni in one way; Republican Senator Mike Lee of Utah, a Trumpist, identified Donald Trump as Captain Moroni in another way; and Nathan Wayne

7 K. Stewart (2022) specifies that she is not speaking only of Evangelical Christians and that not all Evangelicals share these politics.

Entrekin, a Latter-day Saint from Arizona, attended the assault on the Capitol Building dressed *as* Captain Moroni; he was later charged, pleaded down, took a guilty plea and was sentenced on two counts: for knowingly entering a restricted building and for violent entry and disorderly conduct on the Capitol grounds.[8]

Captain Moroni is a figure described in the Book of Mormon (Book of Alma, 46), as a leader of the Nephites, who Mormons understand to be an ancient people of the Americas. Captain Moroni is understood in Mormon culture as a righteous defender of democracy and religious freedom against tyranny, who, in LDS commentary, is always noted as *not having sought power for himself.* He is one of the LDS gospel characters who can be "good to think about" but who can also be viewed in different ways. The story is often debated in Mormon popular sources and blogs,[9] and sometimes creates confusion, in part because it has several episodes. In one story, Captain Moroni rallies the Nephites and defeats the would-be tyrant Amalickiah, raising a Title of Liberty (a flag he made himself from cloth torn from his coat) on which is written, "In memory of our God, our religion, and freedom, and our peace, our wives, and our children." As one can observe, Captain Moroni is himself therefore a figure of Mormon *parrhesia*. Later, Captain Moroni battles against another group of "king-men" and calls for help from the judge and leader Pahoran; Pahoran seems to be a traitor as he first fails to answer the call; it later transpires he was loyal, but had been held captive by the same king-men.

Senator Mike Lee's use of this story can be most briefly explained, as Lee saw fit to urge audiences to vote for Trump in the run up to the 2020 election by painting Trump in Mormon heroic colours: "'To my Mormon friends – think of him as Captain Moroni,' Lee said to the crowd at one event, pointing to Trump at his right. 'He seeks not power but to pull it down; he seeks not the praise of the world or of the fake news'" (Bigelow 2021). Senator Jeff Flake's thoughts about Captain Moroni were along other lines. Flake made repeated criticisms of Trump during Trump's presidency. In a speech delivered on 17 January 2018, for example, Flake rebuked Trump for inviting the American public to view the press as "enemies of the people," frankly reminding the House of Representatives that the originator of that phrase was Joseph Stalin

8 For more details, see "Entrekin, Nathan Wayne," United States Attorney's Office, https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/defendants/entrekin-nathan-wayne. Additional documents – Statement of Offense, Entrekin Plea Agreement, and Criminal Complaint and Statement of Facts – can be accessed on this website. For additional commentary, see Kalmbacher (2021).

9 For a discussion that includes popular illustrations of Captain Moroni of the kind that presumably inspired Entrekin's Roman-style costume, see "Why Did Mormon See Captain Moroni as a Hero?" (2016).

of the Soviet Union. Flake's speech turned on making explicit the idea that all American liberty and civility rests on a mutually constraining sharing of truth between the president and the people:

> Mr. President, near the beginning of the document that made us free, our Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "We hold these truths to be self-evident ..." So, from our very beginnings, our freedom has been predicated on truth. The founders were visionary in this regard, understanding well that good faith and shared facts between the governed and the government would be the very basis of this ongoing idea of America.
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> As the distinguished former member of this body, Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, famously said: "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts." During the past year, I am alarmed to say that Senator Moynihan's proposition has likely been tested more severely than at any time in our history.
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> It is for that reason that I rise today, to talk about the truth, and its relationship to democracy. For without truth, and a principled fidelity to truth and to shared facts, Mr. President, our democracy will not last. (CNN 2018)

The reporter Zoe Chace (2018) shadowed Flake for four months for the National Public Radio program *This American Life*. Her original intention was to follow a Republican senator critical of Trump during a re-election campaign, but Flake decided not to stand again. This decision, however, gave him some unexpected leverage within his party, which became less confident about influencing his vote. Flake used this leverage to try to help take a step towards a bipartisan agreement on the so-called Dreamers' bill (the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, or DACA) to secure the path to citizenship of people who had been brought to America as children but who were lacking complete documentation for legal status.

The *This American Life* story mostly did not turn on Flake's Mormonism, but did provide one interesting insight. Chace remarks that Flake seems unusually positive, even after numerous discouraging events, possibly even a touch naive; he responds to her questions about his can-do persistence by referring to the character Captain Moroni in the Book of Mormon, whom Flake calls "a really good guy." What Flake takes from the story is this: Captain Moroni asks for support from the leader of the government, Pahoran, and gets no reply, so he sends him a letter of criticism, calling him to account. But it turns out Pahoran was really a good leader, who himself had been under siege and prevented from responding. Eventually, the two men reconcile. So, the message Flake takes away, which he says was a family motto, is that "Something like that tells you to bridle your passions, not assume the worst. Assume the best. Look for the good. Things usually work out." Chace comments, '"Look for the good'… It's his attitude towards everyone, even Trump, who Flake can't stand" (Chace 2018).

So Flake kept trying for DACA. Unfortunately, he was unsuccessful in working around Trump, and left office without the Dreamers' bill moving forward. Jana Riess (2021) wrote in the *Salt Lake Tribune* (the main non-church-owned paper in Utah) that the January 6th crisis made visible "the best and the worst of Mormonism." Among the best examples of Mormonism, she counted Mitt Romney, to whom we will return below; among the worst examples of Mormonism, she referred to several members of the church who had been won round to Trump's version of Republicanism and who were found to have taken part in the assault on the Capitol Building. A former missionary for the church was among those present inside the debating chamber on that day.

As noted above, it later emerged that another LDS attendee at the Capitol on 6 January was there dressed as Captain Moroni himself. Nathan Wayne Entrekin, a forty-eight-year-old Republican from Cottonwood, Arizona, was a conspicuous although not a violent figure, dressed in what seemed to be a Roman centurion's outfit from a commercial costume supplier. He carried a home-made flag tied to a pole, which he referred to as the Title of Liberty. The statement of facts supplied at Entrekin's trial included video footage he was apparently sending back to his mother. Several people in the crowd addressed him during the riot as "Caesar" or "Hail, Caesar!" Each time, Entrekin corrected them, explaining that he was not Caesar, but Captain Moroni, something he also told press reporters outside the Capitol. Entrekin told an interviewer, "I am Captain Moroni. I am the William Wallace of the Book of Mormon. In the Book of Alma … a freedom fighter named Captain Moroni fought for his freedom against kingmen. He was a freeman, the freemen movement" (Grossarth 2022).

Latter-day Saints are well-known for their historical pageants,[10] which display the church's vision of its prophetic mission in restoring lost teachings from the time of Christ through the mediation of ancestral peoples of the ancient Americas. Those who take part in these pageants connect with these sacred figures from the Mormon past, and sometimes also with deceased members of their own families who have participated in the same pageants before them (see also Jones 2018). Entrekin's costume may therefore have been more than just a publicity stunt.[11] His comments suggest that he identified Washington, DC, with the ancient site of Captain Moroni's defense of freedom, and that his thoughts had turned to a connection with the Nephites across the centuries. He is noted as exclaiming: "Captain Moroni! Same Fight, Same Place, different

10 I discuss the Hill Cumorah Pageant (and its recent discontinuation) in my unpublished manuscript "Book of Life."

11 As noted above, he also referenced William Wallace, who led the Scottish resistance against the medieval king Edward I, perhaps (based on his surname) because he has Scottish ancestry and thinks of this as part of his heritage.

time! 76BC. I'm here for Trump. Four more years, Donald Trump! Our rightful president!" (Kalmbacher 2021). Elsewhere, the accounts of Entrekin's comments also include some seemingly bitter statements on homelessness, and rather inchoate references to those who take people's money while leaving them without housing in a "free" nation (Kalmbacher 2021). Money is also mentioned in the Criminal Complaint.[12]

Possibly, Entrekin was referring to the default Republican accusation against Democrats that they raise taxes. In any case, the hinterland of economic anxiety this suggests would be typical of many of those who went to the Capitol. The social, economic, and health vulnerabilities among some of the rioters, as well as the terrible scale of the damage and pain they caused to others, have started to emerge in the stories of the now 840 or more people charged and convicted in relation to the January 6th crisis (see, e.g., Popli and Zorthian 2023); some of which are being been documented by journalists, including Andrea Bernstein and Ilya Marritz (2022) in their podcast series *Will Be Wild* (produced by Wondery). What has also become very clear from these accounts is the importance they have placed on the idea that it was the president of the United States who had called them to the Capitol and who had told them they were righting a historic wrong. The deposition interview of one convicted rioter, Danny Rodriguez, who used a Taser that injured Capitol policeman Michael Fanone during the attack, has been made public domain by the courts and has been reported widely. In a tearful statement that strikes most listeners as genuine, Rodriguez can be heard apparently struggling with disorientation about his own actions, saying at one point, "I thought I was a good guy" (see, for example, Keller 2021). Like so many of those who attended, he repeatedly said he understood the president of the United States had called him to be there, that it was his obligation to be there, to protect the Constitution.

FBI interviews reminded those deposed that even if the election results had been falsified, nobody was entitled to use violence as a means of redress, unless they were certain that someone had called them to arms who was authorized to do so. But as many people have pointed out, the American system is not designed to cope well with rogue presidents who lie, send their supporters into harm's way, and claim authorization where they have none. From the perspective of 2022, Captain Moroni in the Book of Mormon looks fortunate; he was able to tell the difference between tyranny and truth most of the time. When he erred, his mistake was to see treachery where there was in fact loyalty, not vice versa. As Chace (2018) noted, there is a marked strand of optimism in Mormon doctrine. Captain Moroni probably stands for most Mormons as a figure of

12 See United States District Court, Criminal Complaint, 3, https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/case-multi-defendant/file/1413181/download.

good judgment under difficulties, and Latter-day Saints believe that all faithful members of the church should look for the promptings of the Holy Spirit to guide them. But there are risks to thinking one is called to heroic acts.[13] It's obviously difficult to know who Captain Moroni is or whether you are standing in his shoes if you cannot identify the true or false leaders to whom he must relate.

Later in the chapter, I return to other crucial Mormon framings for *parrhesia* in relation to Mitt Romney and Rusty Bowers, but first I want to argue for a widening of our default theorizations of Christian ethical action.

"Freedom" and Free Will

One of the most widely read and productive anthropological texts on ethics is James Laidlaw's *On the Subject of Virtue* (2014). As is well-known, Laidlaw argues for a focus on "freedom," while others in the field, including Michael Lambek (2010), have taken a different approach via "ordinary ethics." Discussion by these and other authors has been extensive and wide-ranging. For the purposes of this chapter, I want to consider just one strand of Laidlaw's argument, which is the placement of Christianity in relation to the core value of freedom he selects.

Laidlaw's (1995) own studies of Jainism, on ritual and on other topics in the anthropology of religion, are of course well known. I find it interesting, therefore, that Laidlaw's (2014) landmark study of ethics seems to set up a certain tension around the relationship of "religion" and "freedom," such that the two implicitly pull away from each other. This tension resides partly in the selection of Laidlaw's leading examples. In the culminative arguments of the book, Laidlaw's key virtue of "freedom" is illustrated by reference to Foucault's essays (1997, 2011) on fifth-century Athenian (pre-Christian) male elite ethics and the care of the self; exploring " the way individuals might take themselves as the object of [voluntary] reflective action" (Laidlaw 2014, 111). One of his most important case studies for the discussion of the history and theology of Christianity, on the other hand, is Alasdair MacIntyre ([1981] 2006), for whom as Laidlaw (2014, 68) puts it, "modernity is a calamity for which a viable (indeed the only) remedy is to undo the Enlightenment, by returning to religious authority." By "religious authority" I assume both Laidlaw and MacIntyre mean hierarchical, clerically mediated interpretations of religious

13 The FBI noted in their case against Entrekin that Captain Moroni executed those Nephites who continued to follow Amalickiah the tyrant. This is in the text, although it is not what Mormons take from the story in any mainstream commentary to my knowledge, and apparently Entrekin did not mention this.

teachings. Laidlaw is not a great admirer of MacIntyre's approach to "tradition" in this sense, and prefers liberalism in which he locates the freedom of reflexive subjectivity.

The tension also emerges as a side-effect of Laidlaw's (2014) debates with Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind. Without entering into these, what interests me here is one of the resting-points of Laidlaw's critique, where rightly or wrongly he claims that Mahmood has accidentally borrowed (or perhaps "caught"?) an implausible fiction of the "traditional," obedient self from MacIntyre ([1981] 2006), and misdescribed Egyptian women's piety movements with it such that the reader cannot know whether or not they actually experience conflicts between different ethical goals in daily life. It is not wholly clear, on my reading, whether Laidlaw (2014, 166ff) thinks that, like Macintyre, the leaders of Egyptian pietism believe the problems of modernity need to be fixed by obedience, clerical hierarchy, and "tradition," but that remains possible.

A little earlier in the text, Laidlaw (2014) has already introduced the idea of how this is supposed to play out in daily life according to (his reading of) Mahmood, as a religious practice that aims at "bypass[ing] thinking" and that "inculcates habit" (borrowing the phrase from MacIntyre [1981] 2006) such that fear of Allah's judgment eventually induces or permits a cultivated automaticity in obedience to divine commands. According to Laidlaw (2014, 154), the ideal here is that "freedom is exercised towards its own future curtailment," and he remarks that the ideas "of a self-extinguishing moral will are not uniquely a feature of reformist Islam, but are common in ethicized 'world religions,' especially those traditions in which life in this world is negatively valued in relation to either an afterlife or a state of enlightened liberation from human existence." He lists a number of additional examples, including Rebecca Lester's (2005) ethnography of contemporary Mexican nuns, *Jesus in Our Wombs*. Laidlaw (2014) then goes on to explore a range of ethnographies that illustrate aspects of the conflict of values between religious ideals and lived practices of the good, including his own account of the contradiction between Jain asceticism (which ultimately leads towards the good of self-extinction) and the navigation of a good life for lay Jains for whom family and prosperity are also important.

What is missing is any substantive discussion of the kinds of religious ideal in salvational religion that *differ* from the MacIntyre model of the self in remedial obedience to "tradition." Laidlaw (2014) does not say these do not exist, but he also does not show us what they might be, and the effect is to make it seem as though "obedience" and asceticism were the most typical forms, standing in contrast to the reflective Athenian (or liberal) self. Yet the reality is much more varied, even in Christianity alone (see also Cannell 2017). Lester's (2005) ethnography, on my reading, centres *not* on a telos of fear and obedience but on the pursuit of a healing realization of a self that is dialogically constituted and sustained by the dynamic love of God.

Foucault himself, although stressing Christianity as the historical entry-point of self-mistrust and modes of confessional self-hood, also recognizes that obedience and fear have never been the totality of available modes of thought within Christian traditions. He acknowledges a parallel mode of trust in God not discussed by Laidlaw (2014). In this mode, Christians could speak freely of the goodness of God, confident in the ability of God to sustain them in his sight, despite any human displeasure or punishment visited on them by earthly power-holders.[14] For Foucault (1983, 337), "the parrhesiastic pole of confidence in God … not without difficulty, has subsisted in the margins against the great enterprise of anti-parrhesiastic suspicion that man is called upon to manifest and practice with regard to himself and others, through obedience to God, and in fear and trembling before this same God." Foucault situates this tradition primarily within what he calls "mysticism," but as Warren (2009) and other historians have pointed out, it is closely applicable to sociality, understanding of sacred presence, and language of nonconformist groups such as the Seekers and Quakers in seventeenth-century England. For Warren (2009, 9), Quaker reproofs to the established religion and monarchy for persecuting nonconformists exemplified "a parrhesiastic tradition of confident public speech emerging from the tradition of mysticism."[15]

Although with a different doctrine and institutional history than either Quakers or Catholics, Mormons also have a parrhesiastic modality of confidence and trust in God that enables the public challenge of overmighty power for the good of others. As I will show in the final section of this chapter, that tradition particularly expresses a version of Christian theologies of free will (of which there are many different traditions). This kind of Christian freedom converges with the parrhesiast rebuke to political oppression and demonstrates a reflective process of conscious choice for courage, and not automaticity.

Speaking Freely to Donald Trump

Let's go back to Senator Mitt Romney, with whom we began this chapter. As noted above, Romney was the *only* Republican senator who voted to convict Trump on Trump's *first* impeachment. The charges then concerned abuse of power relating to the pressure Trump had placed on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in an extempore phone call. In a speech to Congress on

14 This is originally the radical trust in God exemplified by Christian martyrs, who were willing to die for their faith (but did not kill or coerce others for it).

15 Matei Candea notes the importance of the Quakers in his introduction to this volume.

5 February 2020, explaining why he had voted to convict, Romney spoke extremely frankly:

> The grave question the Constitution tasks senators to answer is whether the President committed an act so extreme and egregious that it rises to the level of a "high crime and misdemeanor."
>
> Yes, he did.
>
> The President asked a foreign government to investigate his political rival.
>
> The President withheld vital military funds from that government to press it to do so.
>
> The President delayed funds for an American ally at war with Russian invaders.
>
> The President's purpose was personal and political.
>
> Accordingly, the President is guilty of an appalling abuse of the public trust.
>
> What he did was not "perfect" – No, it was a flagrant assault on our electoral rights, our national security interests, and our fundamental values. Corrupting an election to keep oneself in office is perhaps the most abusive and destructive violation of one's oath of office that I can imagine.

Romney rightly anticipated that many Republicans would vehemently condemn his speaking out:

> … and in some quarters, I will be vehemently denounced. I am sure to hear abuse from the President and his supporters. Does anyone seriously believe I would consent to these consequences other than from an inescapable conviction that my oath before God demanded it of me?

He emphasized that he understood it to be the inescapable duty of the Senate to provide an objective judgment on impeachment trials:

> The allegations made in the articles of impeachment are very serious. As a Senator-juror, I swore an oath, before God, to exercise "impartial justice." I am a profoundly religious person. I take an oath before God as enormously consequential. I knew from the outset that being tasked with judging the President, the leader of my own party, would be the most difficult decision I have ever faced. I was not wrong. (Romney 2020)

Indeed, there was considerable backlash against Romney, as he anticipated. He was censured by the Republican Party and divided Utah voters.[16] Those

16 One 2021 poll showed 50 per cent of Utah Republicans approving Romney's conduct and 46 per cent disapproving; his stand was approved of by most Democrats and Independents. See Romboy (2021).

who were supportive, recalled that Romney's father had been a critic of Richard Nixon, and they also compared Romney to Captain Moroni (Christensen 2021).

Mitt Romney is a wealthy and powerful man, who is well placed to survive these experiences, but clearly opposing Trump was not easy for him, nor for any Mormon Republican who did so. In the video of this speech, Romney appears as usual, somewhat wooden (to my eye) in delivery, conservatively suited, temperate in demeanour, with a habit of slightly clicking his teeth at intervals, which can make it more difficult to listen to him talking. His delivery in the recording differs slightly from the transcript in one important way when he says: "I am profoundly … religious. My faith is at the heart of who I am." And then follows a pause of complete silence, Romney looking down, without a word, at his notes for almost eleven seconds – which on a video recording feels like a long period of time. Despite his stiff and formal approach, it gradually dawns on the observers that Romney is fighting back tears. He succeeds and resumes his speech in exactly the same tone of voice as before. It is only the pause, and the shorter pause between "profoundly" and "religious" together with a bit of an uneven pitch on the phrase "who I am" that makes it clear one is not mistaken.

Some reporters noted that his speech had been "emotional," which is clearly true. For anyone familiar with LDS church services, though, I suggest there is a clear message here. It derives from the ways in which Latter-day Saints commonly register and acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit when they testify to their faith – a frequent practice during weekly Sunday services, especially on Fast and Testament Sundays, which occur on the first Sunday of each month. Tears are understood as a sign of the possible presence of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in both oneself and others; at the same time, LDS congregations acknowledge that one might just be emotionally overwhelmed or tired (see also Cannell 2005). Establishing whether or not one is receiving sacred guidance is therefore a matter for discernment; private reflection, prayer, and perhaps counsel with others, especially when making a consequential decision. Although Mormons not uncommonly receive visions, they usually expect the promptings of the Holy Spirit may come quietly and subtly; therefore, one should be thoughtful as well as receptive to occasions when, as they say, "the veil is thin" between this and other worlds.

This attitude to the sacred is connected with a crucial principle of Mormon doctrine, which is the centrality of human free will. In Mormon doctrine, for reasons I will not fully reprise here, humans can only ever attain earthly or post-mortal happiness by exercising responsibility. "Choose the right" is a Mormon catchphrase, and although Mormons can sometimes be socially conformist within a powerful church hierarchy, they are not always or necessarily so. In the end, *choosing* what is right to do as best one can, even when this

is confusing and hard, is crucial to Mormon understandings of humanity and God's purposes in the world. In strong contrast to the idea of automaticity, or unthinking obedience, as a mode of virtuous action necessitated by salvational religions, Mormons (and other Christians also) therefore emphasize the processual, risky, and unpredictable nature of acting according to one's conscience. The right decision is valuable – virtuous – only because it requires effort each and every time. It is always possible that one might fail in any number of ways; become confused and make an error, be overwhelmed by fear; or – worse – give way to pride, rage, greed, or ambition. Even when one is confident about what the right decision is, carrying it through still requires a form of emotional and ethical labour that is never done in advance.

What we see in the almost eleven seconds of silence on the Romney video is, in my understanding, not just Romney being troubled, but Romney connecting with the sources of sacred guidance in the light of which he has laboured to make a decision of conscience.

The emphasis on the sacredness of the oath of public office that Romney mentioned was common among all those (whether or not LDS) who did not defer to Trump on 6 January 2021. Still, this too has a special resonance for Mormons. First, an oath in LDS understandings is given great cultural weight, as something that the Heavenly Father (God) would literally see and hear one doing, as if one stood before him at that moment. Second, as the historian Matthew Bowman has argued, despite the earlier federal repression and sometimes stigmatization of Latter-day Saints, Mormon doctrine and history supports the notion that the first prophet, Joseph Smith Jr., understood the Constitution of America as divinely inspired (see Noyce and Stack 2022). Smith perhaps hoped throughout his life that eventually the federal government would, like Pahoran, reveal itself as a loyal friend despite appearances, and extend to Latter-day Saints a constitutional protection for freedom of religion, as their leaders thought they deserved. Given also that Latter-day Saints readily conceive of moving through time to speak with the holy dead and those unborn, the oath of public office, for Latter-day Saints, likely has resonances of being witnessed by many persons seen and unseen, including perhaps the church's first prophet and others of personal importance to the oath-taker, such as deceased parents and grandparents.

I describe this possibility (although we have no direct statements in the news coverage to date) to convey how important the *social* aspects of Mormon salvationalism are. For Latter-day Saints, the dead, especially dead relatives and members of the church, are always nearby and people think a great deal about how present, past, and future family and friends will be united and how they will socialize in the life to come. Equally, a person's obligations to and conduct towards others is the central terrain on which Latter-day Saints learn and practise to "choose the right." Like Mitt Romney, Speaker Rusty Bowers placed

great emphasis on his oath to serve the Constitution when giving testimony to the January 6th Committee hearings. Bowers spoke at the Day 8 Session on 21 July 2022. "It is a tenet of my faith," Bowers said at one point, "that the constitution is ... divinely inspired." Bowers, a strong conservative Republican, stated repeatedly that he was not willing to pretend to win an election by cheating. Recounting several phone calls from Donald Trump and his acting lawyer Rudy Giuliani, in which Bowers was pressured to appoint false electors and to say that Trump had won Arizona, Bowers also made careful reference to others around him to whom his actions mattered. He repeated more than once that he would not put his people or his district through a process of false election claims, in the absence of evidence or qualified legal counsel, because his oath was taken to serve his state and to uphold the law. He also mentioned his wife, "a very strong woman," who suggested they take one of Trump's calls jointly, presumably so that they could witness for each other what was being said. Giuliani reportedly urged Bowers repeatedly to accept that there had been hundreds or thousands of fake votes for Biden cast by illegal immigrants, and thousands cast in the names of dead people. Bowers's response was to ask Giuliani to send him the list of *names* involved. Giuliani promised to do so, but no name of any supposed fake voter was ever sent to Bowers (Associated Press 2022).

In this exchange, Bowers's language in referring to the supposed fake voters is notably less careless and harsh than that used by Rudy Giuliani. Giuliani jokes about "dead people" while Bowers refers to "deceased individuals" and asks for the names of each person. Giuliani may likely not have realized that neither immigrants nor the dead are throwaway categories of people for Latter-day Saints. Mormons identify themselves as a church of immigrants and a church with a global mission, and are less negative in their views of immigration than other Republican voters. The dead are a primary relational category for Mormons, since Mormon doctrine teaches that vicarious rituals and genealogy for the dead of the entire world must be completed before the end of the world. In order to pursue their religious obligations, the LDS church collects, organizes and makes available millions of genealogical records, as well as putting immense energy into the researching of Mormon history. Latter-day Saints are therefore unlikely to find it a matter of indifference to lie about or falsify important documents relating to the lives of either of those from across a national boundary or from across the boundary between life and death.

As part of his testimony to the committee, Speaker Bowers described the physical threats, intimidation and slanders to which he and his family and neighbours had been already subjected to for many months as a result of Trump's assertion that he had acted improperly, including the distress suffered by his severely sick daughter when mobs gathered around their house every Saturday with loudspeakers and, sometimes, with firearms. Following the delivery of

his powerful testimony to the January 6th Committee, Bowers (like Romney earlier) was formally censured by the Republican Party. Bowers reported that the environment manufactured around him was "so hostile" that it would be a miracle if he were to win the primary. Trump referred to him as a "terrible" person, and urged voters in Bowers's tenth district to vote for an alternative candidate in the GOP primary for a state Senate seat. Trump's candidate, David Farnsworth, won by a large margin following the ballot on 2 August, despite Bowers's seventeen years of service to his state (A. Smith 2022).

Conclusion

In advocating for the "American Renewal Project," Josh Hawley explained the political consequences of what (he claimed) as his view that Americans generally are guilty of Pelagian heresy: "'We are called to take that message into every sphere of life that we touch, including the political realm,' Mr. Hawley said. 'That is our charge. To take the lordship of Christ, that message, into the public realm, and to seek the obedience of the nations. Of our nation!'" (K. Stewart 2021). The American Renewal Project that Hawley pursues in part through alliance-making, profit-raising, and networks of influence is what K. Stewart (2021) describes as "religious nationalism." It is interesting to place Hawley's announcement alongside the Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley's commentary on Captain Moroni and his people, known in the Book of Mormon as the free-men: "Eschewing ambition, they were not desirous or envious of power and authority; they recognized that they were 'despised' by the more success-oriented King-men" (quoted in Welch 1985).

Religious parrhesiasts, as Warren (1985, 8) has argued for the Quakers, fulfil Foucault's description that they "recognise truth telling as a duty to improve or help other people" as well as themselves, and they also "remind … the church … of its duty to bring its members into a deeper, living union with God rather than simply provide a salvation machine which promises heavenly bliss if members follow the requisite steps" (6). I have argued here that Mormon Republicans are acting as parrhesiasts in a similar way, and also that although they may express "confidence" in God as Foucault and Warren both predict, they also must act as fallible human beings under the privilege and burden of free will, for whom *parrhesia* requires a constant labour of courage.

Nibley, like a number of his co-religionists, was familiar both with the teaching of the first prophet, Joseph Smith Jr., that warned against coercion of others as "unrighteous dominion" and also with the New Testament in which to my knowledge there is nothing that suggests that the Jesus of the gospels justified, countenanced, or sanctioned power-seeking, bullying, lying, fraud, the exploitation of the poor, or inciting or committing violence, even against those who mistreat you. It would seem that Josh Hawley has not recently read

the Sermon on the Mount; he is too busy claiming to be an authority on what fifth-century church fathers mean for our times. As Robert Orsi (2004, 1) has said, religion is not automatically either harmful or helpful to human thriving in its effects, but depends on the social relationships through which it flows. Egregious harm and violence has been committed and still is committed by religious hierarchies and institutions, and also, justified with respect to religious teachings. The LDS church itself has had numerous internal conflicts with its own members over the proper balance of power between a heteronormative male lay priesthood and other members, including Mormon women and LGBTQO members, and these are by no means resolved. This chapter has aimed to demonstrate, however, that in the currently bleak American scene, and among conservative political constituencies, a committed religious stance can and does generate multiple kinds of responses to political authoritarianism, not reducible to the Evangelical-Trump alliance, nor sufficiently described as religious "obedience."