

THE PRAYER CIRCLE IN THE MORMON TEMPLE[®]

Also known as the "True Order of Prayer"

February 4, 2010

Numerous articles can be found on the Internet describing the entire Mormon temple ceremony. This article will not do that, although references will be made to the general endowment ceremony. It will mainly focus on the Prayer Circle, which is not often discussed. This is a smaller ritual that occurs at the latter part of the endowment ceremony prior to the candidate going through the veil of the temple to enter the Celestial room. This ritual is also known as "The True Order of Prayer." The focus of this article will be to show that Mormon theology is based on Gnosticism, not Biblical Christianity.

On another note, I've posted two additional stories at my link, *Faith Promoting Stories*, and this brings up something new I would like to introduce—an invitation to submit stories to this site.

If any of you have a story about yourself or someone in your family, where something of a faith-promoting nature happened to you or them—or else a fictional story that you have written and feel is inspirational, send it to me. If it is accepted, there will be no payment (sorry), but you will retain the copyright. It will be put under the link, *Faith Promoting Stories*. I reserve the right to say no to some, and although they may be well written, might not fit into the categories listed below. Here are the guidelines:

- Must not promote a particular religion or church.
- A story that will inspire readers, regardless of their denomination.
- Can be true or fictitious, but I need to know which. For fictitious example, see "Passages of the Heart."
- Can be about God's help in a time of need, or God revealing something one needs to know. For example, see "God's Love Surprise."
- Can be about the power to overcome something previously thought impossible. For example, see "Reflections in Counterpoint."
- Can be a story comparable to those featured in the magazine, *Guideposts*.
- Word count: 1,000 words. Maximum allowance, 1,300.
- Email your story to me by clicking on the "contact me" link, or at info@janishutchinson.com. In the subject line, put "Story Submission" and paste your story into the body of the email. No attachments. Single spacing works better when pasting into an email, but be sure to indent the beginning of each paragraph.

THE PRAYER CIRCLE IN THE MORMON TEMPLE

This article will cover:

1. How Joseph Smith came up with the Prayer Circle: Four primary sources.
2. What goes on in the circle: The secret signs and passwords.
3. Prayer circles in antiquity.
4. Were there circle rituals in early Christianity?
5. Did the New Testament Christians pray like Mormons do in their prayer circle?
6. Who were the Gnostics?
7. A look at Gnostic documents quoted by LDS writers to validate the temple prayer circle.
8. Gnostic, apocryphal and hermetic texts used by Mormons to support the endowment ceremony.
9. Joseph Smith's unique doctrines and fascination with the Jewish Kabbalah and Corpus Hermeticum.

10. Should Christian prayer circles in today's churches be rejected in view of the circles described in Gnostic and apocryphal texts?

How Joseph Smith came up with the prayer circle.

The Mormon prayer circle, also known as the "True Order of Prayer, is a part of the temple endowment ceremony that was established by Joseph Smith, and is a sacred ordinance performed around an altar. Secret signs and passwords accompany this ordinance. Smith claimed it was given to him by revelation and was a "more potent means of receiving blessings and revelation from God." (1) He stated that a person had to learn how to approach God in the proper manner if he expected a reply, suggesting that all other forms of prayer were ineffective. (2)

Joseph's prayer circle, formed May 26, 1843, allowed only those male participants who were involved in plural marriage. He called them the "Anointed Quorum." The circles at that time could be performed inside or outside the temple. Later, women (*usually their wives*) were gradually included. But, former LDS historian, D. Michael Quinn states that after 1846 women could no longer participate in the circle when held outside the temple. (3)

Did Joseph Smith receive the idea of the prayer circle by revelation as claimed? No. Then, where did he get it?

From four primary sources:

- **Freemasonry**: A fraternal organization consisting of temple ordinances against the backdrop of the building of King Solomon's Temple. It conveys a system of morality veiled in allegory, illustrated by symbols, secret passwords, and death penalties if participants reveal them. The Mason's prayer circle was acquired from their knowledge of the Jewish Kabbalah, and includes the teaching that "Man is a god in the making" who will receive the "triple crown of godhood." (44). Parts of the Kabbalah were adopted into their third degree, the Royal Arch, and for some of their higher levels. Joseph was initiated into Freemasonry in 1842, so borrowed it from them and passed it off to his followers as revelation.
- **Kabbalah and Zohar** (*Zohar is part of the Kabbalah*). The mystical esoteric tradition of Judaism that claims to have the original knowledge Adam received from God and involves a very complex set of metaphorical concepts. Scholars actually date it to within a few generations after the fall of the Second Temple in the second century CE. (46) (*hereinafter, BC and AD will be used.*) By the close of the 15th through the 18th centuries, magic, astrology, alchemy, numerology and Hermeticism. (*see endnote 47*) were integrated into it. It was used by spiritualists, psychologists (*Jung*) occultists and theosophists (*Madame Blavatsky*), and also included the concepts of preexistence, eternal nature of matter and three heavens, familiar LDS teachings. (*For who wrote the Zohar, see endnote 43*)
- **Gnosticism**: A religious, mystical group that practiced temple rituals, prayer circles, secret signs and passwords. They tried to infiltrate the New Testament church (*more, later*). The early church fathers declared their documents heretical.
- **Apocryphal documents**: Documents falsely attributed to Biblical or other significant characters, which were considered heretical and never made it into the official canon because of textual or doctrinal issues. (*In using the term apocryphal, this article will not be referring to the Deuterocanonical apocrypha which is in the Roman Catholic Bible, e.g., the books of Tobias, Judith, Baruch, First and Second Esdras, etc.*)

There are other sources that Joseph Smith borrowed from, that will not be included in this article. For example, there were the Anabaptists who practiced polygamy, had a sociology similar to Brigham Young's United Order, and a Melchizedek priesthood; also the Rosicrucianists, the Zionitic Brotherhood in Pennsylvania with their

hierarchy of priesthoods, and others. (*For a list of all, plus books in print at the time of Joseph. Smith, see p. 107ff in The Mormon Missionaries by Janis Hutchinson*).

After Joseph's death in 1844, the prayer circle was continued in the Nauvoo temple. When Brigham Young led the saints west, he carried the practice forward where it was performed in the Lion House, the Salt Lake Endowment House and Gardo House. Having no outsiders to persecute them or easily find out their secrets, prayer circles were allowed to be practiced outside these buildings, in local stakes and wards. In those settings, participants dressed in their temple robes, gave the secret signs that supposedly enabled them to "pierce the veil and receive the ministrations of heaven," and prayed their requests. (5) The purpose of these circles was to receive the Lord's will on new callings and decisions in wards and stakes.(4)

Members at this time could also have prayer circles in their homes. This was encouraged by the First Presidency, but only if the homes were dedicated by the priesthood and had an altar. Wilford Woodruff records that President Young said that these home altars would be the same as the altar in the temple.(7) He also specified the dimensions for these altars:

The altar is 2 ½ feet long x 2 ½ feet high x (one) foot wide rising from a platform about 8 or 9 inches high and extending out on all sides about a foot forming a convenient place to kneel upon. The top of the altar and the platform for kneeling upon are covered with cushions of scarlet damask cloth; the sides of the upright part or body of the altar are covered with white linen.(6)

Years later, on May 3, 1978, a letter from the First Presidency discontinued them.(8) From then on, the membership could only participate in the prayer circle when in the temple. Upper rooms in the ward chapels or stake buildings that had been used for this purpose were covered over, or else used as storage rooms.

Today, the only prayer circles held apart from the temple ceremony are the weekly meetings of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, and the monthly meetings of the General Authorities that takes place in a conference room in the Salt Lake temple.(9)

What goes on in the temple prayer circle?

Before the prayer circle and endowment ceremony takes place, there is the Washing and Anointing ordinance held in the basement of the temple. There, men have their body parts washed and anointed with water and oil preparatory to becoming kings and priests to God. The women go through the same procedure preparatory to becoming queens and priestesses to their husbands. (*Women are not made queens and priestesses to God, because their husband will eventually be their god.*). The parts anointed are: the head (*brain/intellect*), ears, eyes, nose, lips, neck, shoulders, breast, vitals and bowels, arms, hands, loins, legs and feet They also receive a new name. After that, they go upstairs in their white temple clothing for the general endowment session, where they proceed from room to room (*Creation, Garden, Telestial, Terrestrial and Celestial rooms*) and receive secret tokens, names, signs and vows of death penalties. (*See Newsletter Archives for "The Mormon Temple Ceremony."*)

At the latter part of the endowment ceremony, the prayer circle takes place in the Terrestrial room. All participants in the room are seated in theater-like seats, men on one side, women on the other. The officiator plays the role of Peter (*he appears earlier in the temple ceremony drama with James and John; there are also actors for Eloheim, Jehovah, Michael, Adam, Eve and Lucifer*). In more recent times, the actors are presented in a film rather than live. The procedure is as follows:

Peter says: "We will now teach you the true order of prayer." He invites the "witness couple" to come to the head of the altar (*a couple that represent Adam and Eve*). However, all those in attendance also represent Adam and Eve as they progress through the general endowment. Others are then invited into the circle--specifically, those receiving their endowment for the first time, and those who are about to be married. (*Marriages occur*

after they pass through the veil into the Celestial room.) A few other husband and wives also come, and all form a circle around the altar.

Peter then says: “John will instruct and lead the circle. The man in the role of John takes over and cautions everyone that only the best of feelings should exist in the circle, and if anyone has an unkind feeling towards someone in the circle, they are invited to withdraw so “the spirit of the Lord may be unrestrained.” These are practically the same words as found in the prayer circle described in the apocryphal seventh-century A.D. Syriac translation of, “*The Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ as delivered orally by him to us the Apostles after his Resurrection following his death.*” (10)

The first on the agenda is for all circle participants to make all the secret signs, tokens and passwords of the priesthood that they have learned thus far. Peter leads them in this:

“We will begin by making the sign of the *First Token of the Aaronic Priesthood*. This is done by bringing the right arm to the square, the palm of the hand to the front, the fingers close together, and the thumb extended. This is the sign. The name of this token is the new name received in the temple today.”

Participants are to think in their mind, this name (or the new name of the dead person they are going through for). The next sign they give, represents the method God may use to take their lives if they ever reveal this secret. The hand is raised, and the right thumb is placed under the left ear, palm down, drawing the thumb quickly across the throat to the right ear, indicting that one’s throat may be slit. Prior to 1931, the verbiage was:

I will never reveal the First Token of the Aaronic Priesthood, with its accompanying name, sign and penalty. Rather than do so, we agree that our throats will be cut from ear to ear and our tongues torn out by the roots.(12) (*See below for the modern changes*)

John continues:

“We will now make the sign of the *Second Token of the Aaronic Priesthood*.” *Instructions are given to make the secret sign with their hands and think of the name of the token, which is the participant’s (or the dead person’s) first given name. Then, the execution of the penalty if it is ever revealed is demonstrated by drawing the right hand quickly across the breast. The verbiage prior to 1931 was:*

I will never reveal the Second Token of the Aaronic Priesthood, with its accompanying name, sign and penalty. Rather than do so, we agree to have our breasts cut open and our hearts and vitals torn from our bodies and given to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.(13) *These same penalties are also in the Masonic ceremony.*

Changes to the above First and Second tokens of the Aaronic Priesthood:

1984: Rather than verbalizing the graphic death penalties, they were only required to say: “I will never reveal the First (and second) token of the Aaronic priesthood. Rather than do so, I would suffer my life to be taken,” while making the physical gesture of how it may be accomplished.

1990: All mention of penalties completely removed, including the gesture.

“We will now make the sign of the *First Token of the Melchizedek Priesthood or Sign of the Nail*.” *The sign is given, plus the secret name of the token. The execution of the penalty is demonstrated by placing the right thumb over the left hip and drawing it quickly across the body. Prior to 1931, the verbiage was:*

I will never reveal the First Token of the Melchizedek Priesthood or Sign of the Nail with its accompanying name, sign and penalty. Rather than do so, we agree that our bodies be cut asunder in the midst and all our bowels gush out.

Changes to the First token of the Melchizedek Priesthood

1984: Rather than verbalizing the graphic death penalty, they were only required to say:

“I will never reveal, etc. . . . Rather than do so, I would suffer my life to be taken,” while making the physical gesture of how this may be accomplished.

1990: All mention of penalties completely removed, including gesture.

“We will now make the sign of the *Second Token of the Melchizedek Priesthood, the Patriarchal Grip, or Sure Sign of the Nail*. This is done by raising both hands high above the head, and while lowering the hands repeating three times the words: “Pay, Hale, Hale.” *Participants raise and lower their hands and arms and repeat the sentence three times*. No penalty is given for this token.

Changes to the Second token of the Melchizedek Priesthood

1984: It changed to “Pay, Lay Ale;” supposedly, both versions being the Adamic language.

1990: Only English words used, “O God, hear the words of my mouth.”

All the signs and tokens of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood, including the wording and gestures of how God may take their life if revealed, is practically verbatim with the Masonic ceremony. A side-by-side comparison between the Mormon ceremony and the Masons can be found in Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s, Mormonism: Shadow or Reality? p. 486ff, 1972 edition; also in their later editions.

John presents a small white cloth pouch and sets it upon the altar, then says:

“We have here a list of names of persons who are sick or otherwise afflicted, whom we are requested to remember in our prayer. We will place this list upon the altar, and request the faith of those present in behalf of these persons.”

There is nothing wrong with praying over a list of names, and the concept of having a list of names on the altar was taken from ancient accounts. Called a “Diptych” (means “folded double”) it was a type of loose-leaf notebook or folded parchment placed on the altar during prayer in the early church containing names of persons the people in the circle wished to remember. Originally, top Roman officials carried around diptychs, and when bishops became important figures in city politics, high government officials would present them with one as a flattering gift. Later, these notebooks, or leaves of parchment, were placed on the altar during Mass.

“The sisters in the room will please veil their faces.” (*Includes women in the audience as well as those in the circle*). “Each brother in the circle will take the sister at his left by the right hand in the Patriarchal Grip. Each of you bring your left arm to the square and rest it upon the shoulder or arm of the person at your left.” (*The hand grip, arm to the square, signs, passwords and the temple clothing is officially what constitutes the “true order of prayer.”*)

John kneels at the altar and offers a prayer. Speaking a few sentences at a time, the individuals in the circle repeat them. After the prayer, the women in the circle and in the audience are told to unveil their faces, and those in the circle return to their seats.

Today, women are no longer required to veil their faces during the prayer circle. However, they still wear the bonnet with the attached veil, but the veil is off the face. The veil indicates submission of women to men in the Priesthood.

At this point, the remainder of the endowment ceremony continues with participants going through the veil and learning for the first time the “name” of the Second Token of the Melchizedek Priesthood (*they already know the sign and the handclasp*). Reception of the name is based on the five points of fellowship copied from the

Masonic ceremony—placing the inside of your right foot to inside of the right foot of the man on other side of veil), inside of your knee to his, your breast close to his, both your left hands on each other's backs, and mouth to each other's ear. They then enter the Celestial room where the sealing (or marriage) rooms are. Those not involved in any marriage ceremony, return to the basement and don their street clothes.

This concludes the endowment ceremony. (*Dan Brown, in the first chapter of his new book, The Lost Symbol, has a character being initiated in the Masonic rite and uses the same penalty oath described herein.*)

Mormons believe that the endowment ceremony, the prayer circle and all the secret priesthood signs were given to Adam, but deteriorated as it descended through the ages. LDS Scholar, Hugh Nibley, says,

[It] passed through alternate phases of apostasy and restoration which have left the world littered with the scattered fragments of the original structure, some more and some less recognizable, but all badly damaged and out of proper context.”(13)

Joseph Smith supposedly restored it in its pure and original form. Therefore, LDS scholars say that circle rituals practiced in antiquity validate their temple ceremony. They also believe their LDS ceremony was performed in King Solomon's Temple.

Joseph Smith, believing it was originally given to Adam, referred to it as the " Order of the Ancient of Days," (*History of the Church 5:1-2*). "Ancient of Days," he claimed, was a name assigned to Adam by God.(41)

Biblically, however, the "Ancient of Days" is Jehovah (*Dan. 7:9, 13, 22*). But Smith insisted it meant Adam because he believed Adam was God. He derived this from Gnostic and apocryphal documents. Further, that he was a resurrected man from a previous world who attained godhood along with many wives. He and his wives, in the usual manner, literally gave birth to the spirits of those destined to be born on earth. Adam/God then condescended to come down and become the earthly Adam, so he could also start off the human race physically. (*See endnote 53 for belief in Adam's three wives.*)

Did Joseph make all this up on his own? No. He acquired these unique doctrines from ancient texts. For example, the *Zohar* (*see endnote 45 for its contents*), a book in the Kabbalah, describes two Adams--Adam Kadmon, the cosmic being and the Biblical Adam, a mortal man who appears in the Garden of Eden with Eve.

The Mormon belief is that God's transfer to earth changed the spiritual fluid that ran through his veins, to human. As Adam, he later partook of the Tree of Life, which changed his blood from corruptible blood back to spiritual fluid, and he returned to heaven to assume his role as God the Father. This is referred to as the "Adam-God theory," more particularly taught by Brigham Young. It was included in the early "Lecture at the Veil" that occurs near the end of the endowment ceremony, but is no longer given.

Brigham's following declaration makes the Adam God concept clear:

Now hear it, O inhabitants of the earth, Jew and Gentile, Saint and sinner! When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives. ...He is our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do.” (*Journal of Discourses 1:50; Millennial Star 15:769. Underlining mine.*)

The temple drama today has changed, and now portrays Michael the Archangel, not God, coming into the garden as Adam, having been appointed to do so by the Eloheim (*council of gods*).

Now, let's look at prayer circles in antiquity, to see if they validate the Mormon kind of prayer circle.

Prayer circles in antiquity

In ancient times, primitive cultures did practice sacred prayer circles. Sachs and Langer note that “the magic circle,” was “the sacred realm,” where “great powers are loosed” and the “ordinary world is locked out.”(20) These ancient circles involved a ring (or round) dance around an altar, where they revolved in a circular motion to reflect the motion of the cosmos, giving particular attention to the zodiac.(19)

Cosmos: the orderly system of the universe.

Zodiac: the imaginary belt in the heavens that includes the moon and principal planets divided into twelve signs, each named after a mythological being.

It is interesting to note that the bas relief sculptures on the outside walls of the Salt Lake City temple also reflect the cosmos and Zodiac and form a kind of circle, or ring, around the sacred space located within the temple’s interior. For example, suns and stars can be found above the corner tower windows and the other lower sets of windows. According to Truman O. Angell, the temple architect, one meaning for the stars (there are others) is that they represent the Telesstial kingdom. There are also fifty moons which are in line with the top of the first row of oval windows, and represent the Terrestrial kingdom. Stones depicting Saturn are directly below the parapet on each side of the six towers, and represent the planet Kolob, where God dwells. Then, the Masonic, all-seeing eye (*or eye of Horus*) is above the window of the east central tower. These etchings of stars, moon and sun are significant, as they represent the three levels of heaven. The lowest (*the Telesstial Kingdom*) is comparable to the glory of the stars; the middle (*Terrestrial Kingdom*) is comparable to the moon, and the highest (*Celestial Kingdom*) is comparable to the glory of the sun. All portraying the cosmos and Zodiac.

The following periods in antiquity evidencing prayer circles:

Neolithic (9,000-4500 BC. *Dates vary depending on cultural development*) According to Susan Sticklor of Brooklyn College, author of “Primitive and Sacred Dance,” worshipers sculpted a magic circle to delineate sacred space where a certain deity might be invoked, or to sacralize and protect an encircled cult object which had powers they wanted to absorb.(16)

Native Americans. They practiced it when secret rites purified and prepared initiates, after which there was a ceremonial search for a center pole for them to worship and dance around.(17)

Mesopotamia: The Assurbanipal text disclosed to scholars and anthropologists that participants performed a round dance around the idol of their god. They also made signs of the zodiac and displayed creation motifs. This was particularly extensive in the area of ancient Sumer and Babylonia. Lord Ragland, after studying the rituals of the world, theorized that the original worship dances were a dramatization of the creation of the world. (*The drama in the Mormon endowment ceremony also portrays the creation.*) (18)

Ancient Egypt: Their prayer circles were similar to the Mesopotamians, displaying creation motifs with rhythms following the course of the planets. Plato said the Egyptians did this to connect their ring dance with the cosmos.(19) Their dances were sacred and contained deeply symbolic and esoteric rituals revealed only to initiates. They were considered so secret that the Egyptian priests transmitted their rules and content only by word of mouth.(20)

Ancient Israel: Yes, they performed ring, or circle dances when praising God. An example is when the Israelites passed safely through the Red Sea and danced, which as Philo states, included “both men and women, together...forming one *choros* [ring dance]” who “sang of joyful thanks to God.”(22). According to Richard Karus, et al, the Hebrew word for *festival*, or *chag*, originally meant a ring dance around a sacred altar.(23) However, the Israelites did not use secret words or employ pagan rituals.

However, when the Israelites, under Moses, rebelled and danced around the Golden Calf, this was totally unacceptable to God.(22) Their dance around the calf is not surprising in view of their long years in Egypt and

absorption of the prevailing culture. God's rejection of their worshipping a calf would be expected in view of the fact that a cattle cult from prehistoric times had influenced Egypt (*also the Middle East*), producing the cow Goddess, Hathor, commonly depicted with head horns. She was also worshipped as a nighttime protector in desert regions, so it was natural that the desert-wandering Israelites would look to her and worship a calf. Later, God appropriately established the calf as a sin offering.

Masonry. In ancient times (as well as present), Masons also made a circle in their ceremony, and similar to Mormonism's prayer circle, all the Masonic signs received in their ritual were repeated in unison. (24)

Witchcraft. It should go without saying, that ancient witchcraft also incorporated prayer circles, and still use them today. Their circular space is marked by rituals performed according to the turning of the seasons, tides of the moon and personal needs. Linda Harvey of Mission America explains:

In *Feminism and Religion*, Rita Gross explains how it is more possible to openly practice witchcraft in the twentieth century than in previous times. She also outlines a little bit about how it is done. A small group, working in a circle, draws power together, which is called raising energy. Chanting, drumming and dancing can be part of the vent. Then when the energy is high enough, the power is "sent" to a destination.(27)

Medieval times. (5th through the 16th century) This period may not be considered "ancient," but was nevertheless, influenced by all the pagan cultures that preceded them. During this period, the prevalent superstition, animal sacrifice, magic circles, astrology, numerology, warding off ghosts, evil spirits and disease, including use of divining rods to find buried treasure, were incorporated into many apocryphal texts. Eventually, these superstitions, as well as the mystical teachings of the Pimander, Kabbalah and alchemy were transferred to New England through the immigrating communities of various European reformers. All these beliefs and practices played a heavy role in the cultural time period and locale of Joseph Smith. He borrowed from many of them.

These beliefs played a large part in Joseph Smith's life can be seen in the fact that a Jupiter talisman was found on his body displaying Hebrew characters; one phrase was in Latin. It was shaped like a silver dollar, made of silver or tin and carried the sign of the spirit of Jupiter. It enabled the bearer to call for assistance upon the spirit(s) assigned to that particular talisman. Jupiter was known to the Egyptians as Ammon; Zeus to the Greeks, and in the presence of his priest, Jupiter supposedly performed the ancient form of marriage for time and eternity. (52) Talismen could also be on parchment. Joseph's brother, Hyrum used one—a Masonic pouch with parchments displaying pentacles and pentagrams. He also had a dagger displaying the Seal of Mars and Masonic symbols.

Joseph and his family's engrossment in the occult dictated their practice of using magic circles for a living to find buried treasure, and involvement in soothsaying and use of the *Abracadabra* formula. ("*Abrac*" is a *Kabbalistic word placed upon amulets to work magic.*) His mother admitted to this:

Let not the reader suppose that . . . we stopped our labor and went at trying to win the faculty of Abrac, drawing magic circles, or soothsaying, to the neglect of all kinds of business. We never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation.(42) (*See endnote 42 for detail on how Abracadabra was used.*)

Therefore, in view of the above, do ancient prayer circles with their secret signs, passwords and involvement with the cosmos and Zodiac validate the LDS prayer Circle? *Definitely*. But, I wouldn't call that a plus.

Were there circle rituals in early Christianity?

Hugh Nibley, as well as other LDS writers, claim that Christians practiced circles—the same kind as performed in their Mormon temple. Hoping to prove this, Nibley refers to a group, the Therapeutae, who performed circle dances around an altar, and claims they were Christians who fled into the wilderness to avoid persecution and to live the contemplative life in poverty. He says Philo wrote about them “at the time of Christ.” But, he is in error. Philo wrote about them in *10 B.C.*, and they were not Christians.(51)

In 10 BC, Philo identifies them as philosophers living near Alexandria whom he personally knew of. They lived like hermits and had origins dating back farther than he could find out.(40) They performed ring dances, studied Old Testament scriptures, and had writings from their own tradition, however far back that went.

Mormon scholars only briefly quote Philo’s comment about the Therapeutae’s participation in ring dances. But, for the most part, they choose to quote heavily from the writings of 4th century Christian writer, Eusebius of Caesarea, who was unaware of the date that Philo wrote his commentary and mistakenly thought they were Christians because they lived a life similar to the first Christian monks. But, since the Therapeutae’s existence predates Christianity, Eusebius was declared wrong, and thus LDS writers are mistaken in calling them Christians.

LDS writers also enjoy quoting from Alexandrian documents during the time of Christ. Yet, the majority of Christians in Alexandria were those influenced by Gnostic doctrines, not those Jesus or his apostles taught.

Clement of Alexandria is a good example. He said that those who could not sing or dance would not be initiated into the “*temple mysteries.*”(26) New Testament Christians did not conduct temple mysteries. But, because of this Gnostic influence, Clement incorporated into Christian doctrine, Plato’s Gnostic-like “Theory of Forms,” as well as Greek philosophy, and gave value to “Gnosis” for those who had attained the deeper teaching of the Logos by way of a *mystical* source. (*Gnosis here, does not refer to an inner knowing or revelatory confirmation of Christian doctrines received via the Holy Ghost, but Gnostic theology about salvation and the Logos that conflicts with the Bible.*)

Unfortunately, there are some non-LDS scholars who still refer to the Gnostics as “Christian Gnostics.” That jars one’s sensibilities! They refer to them as such, simply because they incorporated Christian “terms” into their vocabulary. But, there is no such thing as a Christian Gnostic. For example, Gnostics did not believe that God incarnated into Jesus, nor that he suffered on the cross--the latter was just an illusion. Further, a demiurge, an imperfect God, performed creation. Their claim to be followers of Jesus consists of too many contradictions, including later documents that portray Jesus as conducting their secret rituals. Gnosticism was the most dangerous heresy to threaten the early church during the first three centuries, and the early Christian leaders officially rejected those beliefs and any documents that promoted it. Today’s writers who call them “Christian Gnostics” because they borrowed Christian terms, should rethink that description.

Who were the Gnostics?

Where did they come from? The first traces of Gnosticism arise centuries before Christianity, and are rooted in the ancient religions of Persia, Syria, Phoenicia and Babylonia. They influenced Plato and the Greek Platonic schools of philosophy. Later, they spread throughout the Roman Empire.

The word “Gnostic” comes from “gnosis,” to know. They believed they had secret knowledge that no one else was privy to. This knowledge was revealed to them, not only by a mystical source or through self-realization, but in secret rituals which they performed in sacred circles, with secret signs and passwords. Only they were privileged to receive this special knowledge; therefore, only they could be saved and redeemed. In view of this, they believed themselves superior to others, including Christians who had not joined with them. But, if a Christian did join, they became Gnostics--not followers of the teachings of Jesus or the apostles.

When Christianity spread, the Gnostics infiltrated the NT church and began incorporating Christian terms into their vocabulary, but with Gnostic meanings. (*Mormons do the same thing.*) For example, they borrowed the term “Christ in you,” but their definition was the “Christ principle,” meaning the divine spark of Christ (*not Jesus or the Holy Ghost*) that was already within everyone. In contrast, Paul taught that “Christ in you” is a gift when accepting Jesus, while Gnostics believed it was achieved through recognition of its inherent presence. Only those who recognized this through self-realization, called gnosis, or knowledge, could be redeemed.

At the time of Paul, the Gnostic’s use of Christian terms may have led some Christians to join them. It caused great upset in the church, particularly at Corinth. One highly respected Biblical scholar said that the Gnostics were the “Christ party” causing so much division there. This would explain the Corinthian’s spiritual and behavioral problems, since Gnosticism taught that matter is evil and one’s spirit is good, so it makes no difference what evil you do in the body, because your spirit is saved. Gnostics such as Marcion, Simon Magus, Saturninus, Cerinthus, Basilides, Carpocrates, Valentius, Theodotus, and Artemas were always trying to recruit new members.

They also taught that Jesus really didn’t incarnate into a human body--he only appeared so. Similarly, his suffering on the cross was only an illusion. They describe the spirit of man (*as also found in the Kabbalah that Joseph Smith borrowed from*), as containing a divine substance, but is asleep and can’t remember its divinity, so must be awakened (*compare the Mormon story of preexistence*). This awakening, or liberation, can only come through knowledge received in their secret temple ritual. (*The same objective of learning one’s divine origin is claimed for the Mormon temple ceremony.*)

In view of the above, Gnostics were certainly not Biblical Christians, as LDS writers claim.

Now, back to prayer circles.

Admittedly, the New Testament (NT) period of Christians, particularly Christian Jews, may have continued to dance a ring dance in their general praise of God, as this was their Israelite tradition. This poses no problem. Neither did it for the early church fathers. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis mentioned this, and Basilus, Bishop of Caesarea suggested that is how the angels dance around God, and that we here on earth should dance “a heavenly dance.”(25) But, no mention is made that the Cosmos and Zodiac were incorporated, or that secret signs, passwords or death penalties were used in their circles. Had they incorporated such things, they would have been denounced as Gnostics.

LDS writers further insist that they can validate their temple prayer circle, secret signs and passwords from *Christian* documents. An example is John A. Tvedtness, who writes:

A number of early Jewish and Christian documents deal with elements [signs, passwords, etc] found in modern LDS temples. As such, they are confirmation of the antiquity of our temple rites.(28)

But, these Jewish and so-called Christian documents he refers to are actually Gnostic and apocryphal texts which are replete with secret ritual mysteries and circles. They are not *Christian* documents, but documents that were rejected by the church and never accepted into any official canon because they contained heresies.

Did the New Testament Christians pray like Mormons do in their prayer circle?

New Testament Christians could have used many forms of prayer as follows, all of which are valid:

- Standing; sitting; kneeling; prostrate on the floor; eyes opened or closed.
- The “Oran” posture: standing with arms raised. (*Traditionally, a priestly gesture. King Solomon prayed with his hands spread out towards heaven, but knelt. (I Kings 8:22, 54; 2 Chron. 6:13.)*)

- Hands crossed over the chest. (*A humble plea*)
- A head-only bow.
- The “Poyasny” (*little bow; literally belt-bow*), or the Zemnov Poklon (“*great bow, literally ground bow*.)
- Hands clasped like a Norman church steeple, or with fingers interlocked
- Kneeling with hands clasped. (*Originates from the Commendation ceremony*)
- Praying toward the temple.

Plus, they may have even gathered in a circle. But, they did not use secret passwords, signs, incorporate the Zodiac, nor have ritualistic prayer groups exclusive from other Christians as the Gnostics did. Despite Joseph Smith’s revelation of the “True Order of Prayer,” Christian prayers, whether done kneeling or standing, were effective and powerful. James 5:16 says, “*The prayers of a righteous man availeth much.*” James doesn’t add . . . *if one performs it in a ritual with secret signs and passwords.*

NT Christians who remained true to Jesus and the apostles’ teachings and were not drawn into Gnosticism, did not practice a *Mormon-type* prayer circle. This is the most revealing truth against Mormon scholars who deliberately mislead readers by stating that prayer circles used by “early Christians” were similar to what they now practice in their temple. To prove their point, they quote from Gnostic documents that were condemned (even burned) by the early church fathers, specifically by St. Irenaeus, St. Justin Martyr, Origen, St. Hippolytus and others.

A look at Gnostic documents quoted by LDS writers to validate their prayer circle.

Again, in the writings of Tvedtnes, he quotes from both Gnostic and apocryphal documents, e.g. the second-century A.D. “*Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*,” the medieval “*First and Second Enoch*,” the “*Midrash Alpha Beta di Rabbi Akiba*,” “*Acts of Thomas*,” the Mandaean document, “*Diwan Masbuta d Hibil Ziwa*” (scroll of the Baptism of Hibil Ziwa) and the psuedoepigraphic, “*Joseph And Aseneth*,” and refers to them as “Christian” documents. Also, in his article, “Early Christian and Jewish Rituals Related to Temple Practices:”

Let me note that I have, to date, found fifteen early Christian documents that speak of baptism for the dead, along with several Mandaean and Jewish texts.(28)

First, Christians during the New Testament period did not practice baptism for the dead. *However, the Gnostics did.* Paul, who according to Biblical scholars was not as familiar with the Gnostics at first as he became later on, at least recognized early on that they practiced baptism for the dead and did not believe in the resurrection. This made no sense to him, which prompted him to say to the Corinthians:

What shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead? (I Cor. 15:29 KJV.)

Joseph Smith had access to some of these Gnostic documents. But, which specific ones may not be possible to identify without extensive research into the actual publication dates. However, since the “*Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*” reached its final form in the second century A.D. and was printed and introduced into the West in the 13th century by Church of England’s Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, it was available to Smith. It is also well known, from Joseph Smith’s admissions in his diary, that he had the Kabbalah, Zohar and the Pimander.

Gnostic documents were not included in the canon because:

- (1) Their authorship could not be traced to an apostle.
- (2) They taught heresies, and

(3) In the church's earliest record of scriptures read at masses, no Gnostic writings ever appeared as having been acceptable to read.

Smith, however, didn't hesitate to borrow from whatever apocryphal texts he had access to. That he did this was not so well known in the early period of his church as later, when Gnostic documents became more available. When BYU scholars discovered the striking similarities to their own beliefs, they began promoting the study of Gnosticism.(29) In Utah, there was also a prominent Mormon who traveled and presented lectures on the "marvelous similarities between Gnosticism and Mormonism," which he said proved Mormonism true. But, Gnosticism doesn't prove Mormonism is true. It only proves that Mormon theology is Gnostic—and if Gnostic, not Christian. (*This statement refers only to the theology, not individual Mormons.*)

While LDS writers continue to quote from Gnostic and apocryphal texts, they are still unable to quote *anything* from the Bible or from a valid Christian document to reinforce their claim that NT Christians practiced a secret ceremony comparable to their temple prayer circle.

What do texts actually say about Gnostic and apocryphal prayer circles?

In the apocryphal and Gnostic "*Acts of John*," participants in the circle are told to "make as it were a ring, holding one another's hands, and [Jesus] standing in the midst" leads the prayer.(48) In other documents, apocryphal texts require the participants to "prepare by washing or reconciling themselves, or to receive secret words and signs, or to dress in special clothing; some suggest a ritual ring dance."(30)

In the fifth book of the apocryphal Midrash, "*Alpha Beta di Rabbi Akiba*," Jesus is again portrayed as conducting the ceremony and tells his disciples that in the circle he will give them the following mysteries "with their accompanying" seals, ciphers and manners of invocation." (*A similar phrase. . . "with their accompanying name, sign and penalty". . . is used consistently throughout the endowment ceremony.*)

The following are the names of the Gnostic mysteries that involve seals, ciphers and invocations:

- The mystery of the twelve æons of the rulers
- The mystery of the thirteenth aeon
- The mystery of the baptism of those of The Midst
- The baptism of those of the Right
- The great mystery of the Treasury of the Light (*highest Gnostic heaven*)
- The mysteries and all the gnoses, in order that ye may be called 'children of the fulness, perfected in all the gnoses and all the mysteries.
- The mystery of the nine guardians of the three gates of the light-treasure and the way of their invocation.

In the above text, Jesus stands at the altar and gives the apostles and women who surround him the *secret signs* pertaining to these mysteries. All are dressed in white linen garments. (*Pistis Sophia* 138) Then Jesus orders the disciples to set out an offering of wine, water and bread, which he stands before and prays. The disciples stand behind him, "*making signs with their hands.*" (*Pistis Sophia*, 142) In the Coptic document, "*2 Jeu*," 45-47, Jesus once again follows the *Pistis Sophia*'s procedure at the altar, and in verses 48-50 tells his disciples and those present, that these seals, ciphers and invocations of the mysteries must be kept secret. (31)

Secrecy always accompanies cultic worship. In the apocryphal "*First Book of Enoch*," 71:3 (*see endnote 49*), Michael catches up Enoch and tells him all the "secrets of mercy" and "secrets of righteousness." These Gnostic references to secrets validate to Mormons the idea that God approves of their own ritualistic secrets.

The "*Book of the Gnoses of the Invisible God*," explains that the purpose of these mysterious and secret passwords are so that after death one can pass by the guardians of heaven's various gates. It reads as follows:

These mysteries are to be guarded with utmost secrecy, and revealed to none who are unworthy, to be revealed to the worthy alone. Neither to father nor mother, to sister nor brother, nor to any relative, neither for meat nor drink, neither for woman or gold or silver, nor anything in this world. . . . so that the disciples may pass through their spaces [of the three gates of the light-treasure].(31)

Similarly, Mormon signs and passwords are also meant to allow one to pass the angels. Brigham Young stated:

Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, *passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens,* pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell.(32)

Some Gnostic and apocryphal documents that mention secret passwords and gate guardians are:

Contra Celsum 6:24-38 (Orphian Gnosticism)
 3 Enoch 18:3-4
 Chronicles of Jerahmeel 18:1, 20:1-2
 Hekalot Rabbati 22:1
 Pistis Sophia 32 and 86
 Apocalypse of Elijah 1:7-11
 Second Treatise of the Great Seth
 Gospel of Philip
 1 Jeu, chapters 33-40
 The Apocalypse of Paul (v. 23)
 Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah 10:24-25, 27, 29, 31.
 (*Quotes from the above list can be found at the site in endnote 50.*)

The actual signs and passwords referred to in the Pista Sophia and other documents were not always included in their documents for obvious reasons. Therefore, Smith, in order to include some in his temple ritual, borrowed from the Masonic ceremony. Having risen to the Sublime Degree, and after setting up his own Masonic lodge and elevating himself to Master Mason, he was very familiar with them.

Gnostic, apocryphal and hermetic texts used by Mormons to support the endowment ceremony.

- **Corpus Hermeticum.** Consisting of sixteen books, it contains revelations from the Greek god, Hermes Trismegistus to an ancient Egyptian prophet supposedly older than Moses. Its metaphysical teachings were perpetuated by the Hermetic Magi. "*The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus,*" states that the three parts of the wisdom of the whole universe, are: alchemy (*divine magic*); astrology (*operation of the moon*) and theurgy (*operation of the stars*) (47).
- **The Pimander** (*a book within the Corpus Hermeticum, nicknamed the Egyptian Genesis.*) A syncretism of philosophical, theosophical, astrological, magical and alchemical teachings from Egyptian, Jewish, Greek, Gnostic and Christian thought, and likely assembled during the second and third centuries A.D. It introduced the idea of creation ex deo (*creation out of God*) instead of the biblical ex-nihilo (*creation out of nothing*). It also states that the beginning of matter, the universe, even the beginning of God Himself, came out of primal divine intelligence (intelligent matter) which was co-eternal with God. The Pimander also portrays Adam giving up his divinity to 'mate with matter,' and voluntarily "falling" in the Garden of Eden (*a stumble upward*) so the purpose of creation could be realized. (*All Mormon doctrines.*)

- **Alchemy**. Its main teaching (*although there are others*) was that base metals could be changed into gold. Its mystical application was that this same principle of transmutation could divinize human beings. (*Compare LDS concept that men can become Gods. Also, The Mormon Missionaries, p 105ff for complete coverage.*)
- **Books by Emmanuel Swedenborg and Jacob Boehme**. Both men were mystics, influenced by other esoteric writers, and considered heretics by the church. They taught three heavens comparable to the sun, moon and stars and a celestial kingdom. Swedenborg also taught a new covenant of eternal marriage, all of which are familiar to Mormons. (*See Chapter six and endnotes in, The Mormon Missionaries.*)

The Washing and Anointing Ordinance. Apocryphal texts, comparable to the Mormon ritual, require participants to prepare by washing or reconciling themselves. The medieval Jewish text attributed to Jewish Rabbi Akiba in the second century A.D. mentions Gabriel and Michael washing and anointing participants with oil and clothing them in special garments. In the *Acts of Thomas* 5, the top of a person's head is anointed, his nostrils, his ears, his teeth, and the area around his heart.(35)

The five catechetical lectures delivered by fourth century bishop, St. Cyril, in lectures 19:10-11, makes a reference to rituals where participants strip naked and are anointed with oil from the top of the head to the feet, then clothed in special white clothing preparatory to their becoming a priest and king. In the Mormon ceremony, participants are also naked (*prior to 2005*) except for a cloth shield that partially covers them. The men are anointed to become a priest and king to God; the women, to become priestess and queen to their husbands (*not to God, because their husbands will become their God*). The parts of the body that are anointed with water and oil are: head (*brain/intellect*), ears, eyes, nose, lips, neck, shoulders, breast, vitals and bowels, arms, hands, loins, legs and feet.

Other texts that LDS writers pull to support their washing and anointing ordinance are the “initatory washing, anointing and investiture” found in the ordination of Levi, in the “*Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.” Smith also copied other apocryphal procedures to use in the general endowment ceremony. Those familiar with the Mormon temple ceremony will relate to the following:

And I saw seven men in white clothing, who were saying to me, ‘Arise, put on the vestments of the priesthood, the crown of righteousness, the oracle of understanding, the robe of truth, the breastplate of faith, the miter for the head, and the apron for prophetic power.’ (34)

The remainder of the quote refers to a holy vestment, an ephod made of linen and a girdle, reminding one of the LDS temple robe and the sash that is tied around the waist.

Secret names and handclasps. We read the following in the Mandaean text, “*Diwan Masbuta d Hibil Ziwa*:”

And the kings (spirits) took kusta (*seals, handclasps and secret names*) with him and (each) conferred on him some of his own glory. They gave him seven coverings and sealed him with a first seal; its name, a secret name, was graven thereon. Then (they sealed him with) a second seal, “the-seal-Maksiel” was graven thereon. (Then) a third; its name was “Zarziel-that-guardeth-him” and a secret name was engraven thereon. The fourth seal, “Great-Light” was graven thereon, a secret name. (the 5th and 7th seal follow in like manner.) (36)

Secret handclasps can also be found in the “*Apocalypse of James*” (v. 4); also “*Joseph and Aseneth*,” the Ethiopian, “*Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan*,” the “*Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*,” the “*Acts of Thomas*,” also in Masonry.

Joseph Smith's unique doctrines and fascination with the Jewish Kabbalah and Corpus Hermeticum.

Joseph had access to the *Kabbalah*, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Pimander*, *Alchemic teachings* and books such as those authored by mystics Jacob Boehme and Emmanuel Swedenborg. Fascinated, he drew heavily upon all of them for his doctrines and unbiblical view of God, especially the Jewish Kabbalah.

Joseph admits in his diary that in 1844 he studied the Kabbalah with a Jewish convert to Mormonism, Alexander Neibauer, who was born near Prussia and educated in the Law of Moses to become a Rabbi, but chose to be a dentist instead. He had an extensive library on the Kabbalah and published a treatise in an LDS periodical on the *Zohar*, a famous text within the Kabbalah. From his writings we read:

Had the honor of instruction [sic] the Prophet Joseph Smith until he went [to Carthage] in the German (and Hebrew) from which text he Preached (sic) several times to large Congregations.”(37)

Smith also studied under Joshua Seixas, a Jewish Hebrew scholar who was brought to Kirtland to teach Hebrew in Smith's school for the Elders. (*Seixas didn't convert to Mormonism.*) The class met in the upper room of the temple. Joseph, along with Oliver Cowdrey, also met with both Neibauer and Seixas privately to gain information on various Hebrew and religious subjects.(38)

The Kabbalah heavily influenced Smith's account of the creation. The text suggests a pantheistic concept of God, in which everything in the world is literally compounded from eternal matter, God himself coming out of it, as well as man and the entire universe. This is similar to Smith's doctrine of the eternal nature of matter and intelligence. The Kabbalah also suggests a polytheistic universe consisting of greater and lesser gods who preside over various worlds. Smith also incorporated this. He also borrowed from the *Corpus Hermeticum* and *Pimander* where it portrays Adam willingly partaking of the fruit so that the purpose of the universe could be realized.

Also included in Neibauer's library was the *Yalqut Khadash*, a seventeenth-century Kabbalistic text which interestingly contained information “on the mystical and salvific intention of sexual union between male and female” (*Owens, “Joseph Smith and Kabbalah,” 191*).

Of course, the text's reference to sexual activity is only a metaphor to portray the divine principles and substances in heaven that came together to create the world. These Kabbalistic, divine substances were the ten emanations of the *Sefirot*. Two out of those ten emanations are *Tiferet* (the beauty emanation), and *Malkhut* (the Shekkinah, considered feminine), and are referred to as the male/female principles in heaven. The *Zohar* also mentions a holy seed, in which the divine substance (*reshit*) “sow[s] the holy seed (*zera*) in order to beget offspring for the benefit of the world.”(46) Smith, however, literalized the whole metaphor and said it was the literal sperm of God, and portrayed him copulating with many wives in heaven. He deduced from all this that Godhood could not be achieved without sexual partners; therefore, his definition of salvation (exaltation) had to require temple marriage as a prerequisite for Godhood. He also felt the need to physically duplicate this activity in his life through the practice of polygamy and offered this special salvation opportunity to church members. (*Some Kabbalists practiced polygamy.*)

But, nowhere in the Bible did God or Jesus ever say it was necessary for salvation, or that the more wives one had would earn one a higher salvation. In fact, Jesus said there is no marriage or giving in marriage in heaven. (*Luke 20:34-35; Mark 12:25*) Mormons, who marry in the temple, expecting to procreate in the next life and create future worlds, fail to see that the physical ritual of their eternal marriage is only a metaphor.

Joseph, excited about the esoteric information he was acquiring, began inserting Kabbalistic teachings into his sermons, such as God was once a man . . . he was the Savior (*a Jesus Christ*) in a previous world under a different Father God . . . there are multiple gods . . . and men may become Gods themselves.

One of the apocryphal documents that states God was once a man, is the Armenian text entitled, “*Concerning the Creation of Adam and the Incarnation of Christ our God*” (14-3):

When Adam departed and was walking around in the garden, the serpent spoke to Eve and said, "Why do you taste of all the trees, but from this one tree which is beautiful in appearance you do not taste?" Eve said, "Because God said, 'When you eat of that tree, you shall die.'" But the serpent said, "God has deceived you, for formerly God was man like you. When he ate of that fruit, he attained this great glory. That is why he told you not to eat, lest eating [it] you would become equal to God." When she heard the advice of the serpent, she wanted to become divine. She promptly picked and ate of the fruit. (*The rest of this quote can be found at the reference cited in endnote 33.*)

Smith's first public declaration of all these unbiblical concepts began with his famous King Follett sermon. But, instead of citing his sources, he claimed them to be revelation to him from Jesus Christ:

This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know that it is good; and when I tell you of these things which were given me by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more. (Joseph Smith's King Follet Sermon as printed in *History of the Church*, Vol. 6, p. 302-317; cited at UTLM.org. Underlining mine.)

Thus, through Smith's familiarity with the Kabbalah and other Gnostic and apocryphal documents, he derived not only his unbiblical doctrines, but his temple ceremony and prayer circle.

Should Christian prayer circles in today's churches be rejected in view of the circles described in Gnostic and apocryphal texts?

The answer is, no. There is nothing wrong with a circle, *per se*, and it is not unusual for individuals in churches to join hands in a circle to offer up prayer. Often, the only reason a circle is produced is because once hands are joined (for the sake of unity), there is one person at the end of either end of the line who has one hand that isn't holding on to anyone else's. Instinctively, the one at the end will walk forward and reach for the other person's hand. Thus, a circle is formed. But prayer circles are not mandatory.

Now, if Christians believed that the inside of their prayer circle was “sacred space,” and made some kind of secret ceremony out of it by offering up incantations, secret words, secret signs, put an object in the middle of the circle to be worshiped, moved around in a ring dance to represent the Zodiac and movement of the cosmos, or excluded other Christians from the circle, then this would totally dismiss it as a true Christian prayer circle. Any prayer circle like this should be rejected.

The following is what makes today's Christian prayer circles valid:

- (1) A circle is not viewed as mandatory.
- (2) When a circle is used and hands are held, it is simply for the sake of unity
- (3) It is not a secretive ritual.
- (4) No special clothing must be worn
- (5) There is no physical object placed in the center of the circle to be worshipped or absorbed.
- (6) There are no secret signs, passwords or death penalties that must be invoked or sworn to in order to assure God's response.
- (7) There is no dance required.*
- (8) They do not move around in a circle to represent the Zodiac or movement of the cosmos.
- (9) Every Christian is welcome in the circle. No one is excluded.

*Messianic churches often perform Jewish dances in a circle, but there is nothing secretive about it and are perfectly valid.

Summary

- Mormons believe their entire temple ceremony was originally given to Adam and practiced in all Old Testament temples, including King Solomon's. After the ritual disintegrated through time, the pure and original form was supposedly restored to Joseph Smith.
- Joseph Smith claimed that only his "True Order of Prayer" as performed in the Mormon temple circle, along with its secret signs and passwords, is the only effective way to communicate with God and receive answers.
- Smith acquired the prayer circle and all rituals pertaining to his temple ceremony, including signs, passwords and death penalties, from Gnostic and apocryphal documents as well as Freemasonry, all of which were declared heretical by the early church.
- Ancient prayer circles included occult signs of the Zodiac and similarly the physical structure of the LDS temple displays bas relief sculptures of the cosmos and Zodiac that include suns, stars, moon, Saturn and the Masonic (or *Horus*) all-seeing eye, square, compass and clasped hands. Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum also carried occult emblems on them in the form of magic talismans.
- The primary apocryphal documents from which Joseph Smith derived his unique doctrines as well as his temple ceremony were the following:
 - The Kabbalah.
 - The Zohar.
 - Gnosticism.
 - Apocryphal texts.
 - The Corpus Hermeticum.
 - The Pimander.
 - Alchemy
 - Books by Jacob Boehme and Emmanuel Swedenborg and other early mystics.
 - Masonry
- Smith deceptively passed off his Gnostic doctrines and temple ceremony as revelation from heaven to him.
- LDS writers persist in validating their prayer circle and secret rituals by quoting from Gnostic and apocryphal documents and calling them Christian. They are unable to quote *anything* from the Bible to validate their unbiblical doctrines or temple rituals.

Conclusion

Every religion inevitably comes up with a set of rituals, passing them down to each succeeding generation, claiming they descended from the very beginning of time. The Aborigines claim theirs were handed down from father to son and "received from the spirit world at the time of creation."(39) The more mystical and secretive they can be made, the more power can be rendered over people.

Gnosticism also composed their own rituals, although probably a syncretism of older religions, and during the Christian period focused on their documents portraying Jesus as conducting their mystery rituals. We know this from the many texts that have survived. But, there is no such thing as Christian Gnosticism—their beliefs and practices are in direct opposition to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

Unfortunately, the fascination with ancient documents generates the feeling that they must be genuine and more apt to be of God; whereas they are the result of either a single individual, an occult group's creation, or syncretism of other pagan religions mixed with Christian concepts, with redactions made by later writers.

Joseph Smith was fascinated with texts he came in contact with, and believed they were God-breathed. I can understand how excited he must have felt, so in this respect I do have a kind of sympathy for him. But, what I don't have sympathy for, is his deliberate deception in declaring to his church that he received them by revelation from heaven, and ignoring the fact that the early church, closer to those documents in time, had rendered them heretical. Further, neither do I have sympathy with LDS scholars who deceptively state that their temple rituals today were given to Adam and practiced by early Christians, when they were actually practiced by Gnostics and other heretical groups that were condemned by the early defenders of the faith.

Occult circles may have been practiced in antiquity and may be presently practiced in the Mormon temple, but they have no place in genuine Christianity.

*Gnostic documents do not prove Mormonism is true.
It only proves Mormonism is Gnostic.*

Until next time.
Janis

ENDNOTES

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42. Wesley P. Walters, "From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr." Cited in Tanner, Magic, 20. "...a phrase from the Babylonian Talmud pointed out the phrase "Rava created a man" (Rabha bara gabhra). In Hebrew the second word is the first word reversed, the third word is the same as the second, except a *gimmel* precedes it. Its numerical value is 612, one less than the number of bones and blood vessels in the human body. This suggests that the man is slightly less than human (a man without a soul). The phrase is quite similar to the familiar Hebrew phrase *abra k'adabra* (translated, "I will create as I speak")." (The Beliefnet Guide to Kabbalah by Arthur Goldwag [Three Leaves Press. Doubleday/NY June 2005]).
Word history from Wikipedia.com: "Abracadabra," says the magician, unaware that at one time the thing to do with the word was wear it, not say it. . . was a magic word, the letters of which were arranged in an inverted pyramid and worn as an amulet around the neck to protect the wearer against disease or trouble. One fewer letter appeared in each line of the pyramid, until only *a* remained to form the vertex of the triangle. [If verbalized], as the letters disappeared, so supposedly did the disease or trouble. While magicians still use *abracadabra* in their performances, the word itself has acquired another sense, "foolish or unintelligible talk." The

first known mention of the word *abracadabra* was in the 2nd century AD in a poem called *De Medicina Praecepta* by Serenus Sammonicus, physician to the Roman emperor Caracalla, who prescribed that the sufferer from the disease wear an amulet containing the word written in the form of a triangle:

A - B - R - A - C - A - D - A - B - R - A
 A - B - R - A - C - A - D - A - B - R
 A - B - R - A - C - A - D - A - B
 A - B - R - A - C - A - D - A
 A - B - R - A - C - A - D
 A - B - R - A - C - A
 A - B - R - A - C
 A - B - R - A
 A - B - R
 A - B
 A

43. The Zohar, part of the Kabbalah, was claimed to have been an ancient document written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the second century A.D. and supposedly fell into the hands of Rabbi Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon. But, in actuality, de Leon wrote it, or at least parts of it. His widow said that her husband told her, "If I told people that I am the author, they would pay no attention nor spend a farthing on the book, for they would say that these are but the workings of my own imagination. But now that they hear that I am copying from the book Zohar which Simeon ben Yohai wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they are paying a high price for it as you know." Scholars today strongly believe that de Leon wrote a large amount of it, but not all. Nevertheless, within a few centuries it became the most important book in the canon of Jewish religious texts after the Tanakh and the Talmud. Down through the centuries, series of Kabbalistic Torah leaders edited, changed and added to it.
44. Manly P. Hall, *Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, 92, 54-55
45. The Zohar, or The Book of Splendor, is a compilation of Midrash (biblical commentary), sermons, homilies, visionary passages, and dialogues and treatises on creation, emanation, the Sefirot, and the four worlds.
46. The Beliefnet Guide to Kabbalah by Arthur Goldwag [(Three Leaves Press. Doubleday/NY June 2005. 19, 123)
47. Hermeticism or the Western Hermetic Tradition is a set of philosophical and religious beliefs^[1] based primarily upon the Hellenistic Egyptian pseudepigraphical writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus who is the representation of the congruence of the Egyptian god Thoth and the Greek Hermes. It was particularly influential during the Renaissance period. In Late Antiquity, Hermetism^[8] emerged in parallel with Gnosticism, Neoplatonism and early Christianity, "characterized by a resistance to the dominance of either pure rationality or doctrinal faith". In 1945 AD, Hermetic writings were among those found near Nag Hammadi, in the form of one of the conversations between Hermes and Asclepius from the Corpus Hermeticum, and a text about the Hermetic mystery schools.
48. Knowledgegerush nyclopedia, http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/Prayer_Circle. He references: Acts of John: From "The Apocryphal New Testament," M.R. James -Translation and Notes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, p. 253.
49. This First Book of Enoch is the oldest of the three books of Enoch; was discovered in 1773 and published in 1821. It is believed by some to have been written in mid-second century B.C. However, Books two and three were written in the first and second century A.D. All available to Joseph Smith.)

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51. “The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” by Hugh W. Nibley. Cited at <http://mi.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=59>.
52. See Mervin B. Hogan, ed., *Mormon Miscellaneous* (Nauvoo: New Nauvoo Neighborhood Press, 1, no. 1, Oct. 1975), 15. The Masonic Order also endorsed the magic Table of Jupiter.
53. Mainline Mormons believe he only brought Eve to the garden. Many Fundamentalists, however, believe the Rosicrucianist myth that Adam had three wives, Lillith, Eve and Sarah. Since, in Mormon theology, “Adam” is a title, so also was “Eve.” Therefore, there was Eve/Eve, Sarah/Eve, and Lillith/Eve. Eve, produced the white race, Sarah, the yellow, and Lillith the black.

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