

Catholics and Latter-day Saints: A History and a Coming Together

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Abstract: In comparison with many areas of Christian ecumenism, communication between Catholics and Latter-day Saints is rare. This essay examines the relational history of Catholics and Latter-day Saints in the United States to identify interaction barriers and challenges and advance dialogue. Each church's traditional stance on and historical approach to interfaith dialogue is explained, and principles facilitating ethical discussion are identified. This historical and theological knowledge is then applied in contemporary practice. A panel of six experts, three from each tradition, was convened to discuss their faith and its bearing on relationships between Catholics and Latter-day Saints. An analysis of the themes discussed points toward potential for improved inter-church relations. Within a context of genuine interest, mutual tolerance and appreciation, and openness to developing personal friendships, theological similarities and differences can be engaged together in faith.

Keywords: ecumenism; interchurch dialogue; interfaith ethics; Christian relating; religious communication

Invocation

If it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a "Mormon," I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholics, or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves. . . . It is a love of liberty which inspires my soul—civil and religious liberty to the whole of the human race.
—Joseph Smith (2007, 345)

Introduction

Despite Joseph Smith's passionate argument, pledging his life to demonstrate each Christian's shared responsibility for universal religious liberty, today it can seem like the differences between the Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are too numerous and daunting for the two groups to hold a successful dialogue (Anderson 2012).¹ Since 1847, when Brigham Young and the Latter-day Saint pioneers settled in the Salt Lake Valley, the two groups have held a relationship of one type or another—at some times negative and other times more friendly and ethical (Rodd and Thatcher 2016). Unfortunately, misunderstandings have made it difficult for official and mainstream dialogue between Catholics and Latter-day Saints to take place on a large scale.

In the following pages, this essay summarizes the history between Catholics and Latter-day Saints, identifies reasons that dialogue may have failed or succeeded in the past, brings forward both churches' stance on interfaith dialogue and how to approach it, and discusses how future ethical conversations can be facilitated. This research then informs a public conversation between Catholics and Latter-day Saints looking to come together and build community. A panel of six experts, three from each tradition, was convened to address their faith and interfaith experiences. Analysis of the event, in light of history, demonstrates potential for improved relationships, and conclusions identify ways to move forward and continue dialogue.

History: Catholics and Latter-day Saints in the US²

Understanding the history of communication between Latter-day Saints and Catholics is necessary to plan and create a successful dialogue. Gary Topping (2018) discusses the history of Latter-day Saint and Catholic relations in Utah from the second half of the nineteenth century to 2017, when Oscar A. Solis was installed as the bishop over the Diocese of Salt Lake City. Due to Utah being home to a large percentage of Latter-day Saints, including prominent church leaders, it is almost impossible to live in Utah and not have relations with the Latter-day Saints Church.

The "first permanent Catholic presence" in Utah was established by Father Edward Kelly (Topping 2018, 63). When Kelly ran into trouble gaining land to

¹ This research was conducted by Ellen Paul as her honors thesis project in communication at Seton Hall University. Jon Radwan, PhD, served as thesis director and Anthony Sciglitano, PhD, provided theological expertise. We thank Seton Hall's Institute for Communication and Religion for media production support.

² This account of the history between Catholics and Latter-day Saints focuses primarily on relations between the two churches in the United States. However, the Catholic Church already had a strong global presence when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was formed and began to send missionaries worldwide. Despite our focus on the United States, it should be noted that Catholic and Latter-day Saint interactions happen on an international scale and the potential for dialogue exists globally.

build a parish, he reached out directly to Young, who not only granted Kelly the land but also offered a \$500 donation if he also built a school. This example of early, if not the first, direct interaction between Catholic and Latter-day Saint leadership shows the start of a positive friendship, with potential for growing together and fostering faith. While this occasion between Kelly and Young was an ethical start to Catholic and Latter-day Saint relations, Latter-day Saint perceptions of and rhetoric toward Catholics was not always positive and vice versa, especially throughout the nineteenth century.

Mainstream American Press: Catholics and Latter-day Saints in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century was an age of both political turmoil and widespread religious “awakening” in the US. To frame Catholic and Latter-day Saint dialogue, historical perceptions of both faiths need to be taken into consideration. In mainstream Protestant American media of the 1800s, both churches were seen as religious minorities that promoted “un-American values,” as Matthew Grow (2004) explores in his essay “The Whore of Babylon and the Abomination of Abominations: Nineteenth Century Catholic and Mormon Mutual Perceptions and Religious Identity.” Both faith groups were heavily critiqued for their strong hierarchal leadership and large immigrant populations. In addition to being compared to one another, Catholics and Latter-day Saints were also linked to “other unpopular ethnic or religious groups,” such as African Americans, Chinese immigrants, and Native Americans (141). Political cartoons negatively depicting Catholic and Latter-day Saints indicate the nation’s view. For example, Figure 1 captures common anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon sentiments. Illustrated by Thomas Nast, an influential nineteenth-century cartoonist who also popularized the image of Uncle Sam we now know, this image depicts both religions as “foreign reptiles,” with a Catholic bishop turned on his side to portray an alligator and the Tabernacle building in Salt Lake City portrayed as a snapping turtle.



Figure 1. “Religious liberty is guaranteed—but can we allow foreign reptiles to crawl all over us?” (Nast n.d.)

Catholics on Latter-day Saints: Nineteenth Century

Knowing how both churches were portrayed by the mainstream protestant American public, often grouped together in a negative light, is important as we analyze their communication with one another. Due to the comparisons commonly made between Catholics and Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth century, Catholic writers would often aim to separate themselves from the newly formed church in their criticisms of Mormonism and would claim that Latter-day Saints should be the targets for the attacks aimed at Catholics (Grow 2004). In the 1840s, an Italian cleric named Father Samuel Mazzuchelli visited Nauvoo, Illinois, and began writing on Mormonism. Grow (2004) describes Mazzuchelli's view of the Latter-day Saints Church as "Protestantism run amok, the extreme culmination of Protestant sectarianism," a view that set portrayed Catholicism as the way to "provide protection from such fanaticism" (149).

A second Catholic author who added to the rhetoric against Mormons was a Belgian Jesuit missionary, Pierre-Jean De Smet (Grow 2004). De Smet (1905) at times defended Mormonism and is said to have praised Latter-day Saints for settling in Utah and adding a "new star to the grand and beautiful American constellation" (1406). However, De Smet's view of Latter-day Saints shifted, and his praise turned to criticism. Using similar language to that used against Catholics at the time, De Smet argued that Latter-day Saints held a "political system that is inadmissible in a republic, and a religious system still less admissible, which is the 'abomination of abominations'" (1407-8). A third major Catholic critic of Mormonism was Orestes Brownson, a Congregationalist-turned-Catholic, whose brother, in turn, converted to Mormonism, both in the 1840s. Brownson (1854), in his autobiography, *The Spirit-Rapper: An Autobiography*, refers to Mormonism as Satan's supernatural work: "That there was a superhuman power employed in founding the Mormon church, cannot easily be doubted by any scientific and philosophic mind that has investigated the subject; and just as little can a sober man doubt that the power employed was not Divine, and that Mormonism is literally the Synagogue of Satan" (167).

Latter-day Saints on Catholics: 1830s-1960s

Many early Latter-day Saints were just as critical of the Catholic tradition as Catholics were toward them. Latter-day Saint rhetoric around Catholics was primarily negative, although interactions between individuals were typically more positive, as noted previously with Young and Kelly's new school. In Latter-day Saint doctrine, after Christ and the twelve apostles died, the proper "priesthood authority" that Christ had established on earth dissipated, and "error crept into Church teachings" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.). Grow (2004) expands on this teaching and explains that "the narrative of Mormon sacred history . . . reinforced the anti-Catholic tendencies of early Mormons" (143). Harsh language was often directed toward the Catholic Church in the early days of the Latter-day Saints Church. Grow (2004) cites two prominent early Latter-day Saints, Benjamin Winchester and Oliver Cowdery, who criticized

Catholics. In 1834, Cowdery identified the Catholic Church with the “Whore of Babylon,” and in 1843, Winchester reused the metaphor (Grow 2004, 144). Curiously, Cowdery also stood by the Catholic Church on occasion, calling the burning of a Catholic convent a “disgraceful, shameful religious persecution” (qtd. in Grow 2004, 153). Another prominent founding member of the church, Eliza R. Snow, referred to the Catholic Church as the “Mother of Harlots” in the 1870s when she doubted she would have any success converting Catholics to her own faith (G. Smith 1875).

While prominent in the early days of the Church, this strong negative rhetoric towards the Catholic Church began to dissipate and was even condemned by Latter-day Saint church leaders in the twentieth century. Likely one of the last times a prominent Latter-day Saint leader referred to the Catholic Church in this manner was in 1958, when Bruce R. McConkie, a Latter-day Saint General Authority, published his book *Mormon Doctrine* (Prince and Topping 2005). McConkie’s book was “filled with erroneous statements,” despite its title claiming the book to be doctrine, and was criticized strongly by McConkie’s Latter-day Saint peers (Prince and Topping 2005, 160).

Mark E. Peterson, a senior apostle at the time, submitted a report on *Mormon Doctrine* describing over one thousand errors (Prince and Topping 2005, 161). Despite ethical failures, the book still went on to be published, including McConkie’s (1958) reference to the Catholic Church as the “Church of the Devil” (108). McConkie specifically criticized several practices of the Catholic Church, including priestly celibacy and the doctrine of transubstantiation (730). When Duane Hunt, bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City at the time, heard about the book and how his faith was illustrated, he went directly to President David O. McKay to voice his concerns. McKay instructed McConkie to change problematic lines and also requested that the book not put out a second edition a year later (Prince and Topping 2005, 162). The book was pulled from the market in 1960, two years after its publication, but contra McKay, a second edition was published in 1996 with “approximately 480 changes” (Adams 2012, 65). Likely due to its encyclopedic format, making it easy to access and reference, the book became very popular among Latter-day Saints and was quoted frequently by both lay members and church-published books and manuals, despite numerous errors (Adams 2012, 59–60). While *Mormon Doctrine* plays an important but difficult part in the history of Catholics and Latter-day Saints, there is a message to take from it as we move forward to create a positive dialogue: the personal relationship between Bishop Hunt and President McKay. Hunt had the foresight and felt comfortable enough to approach McKay directly about McConkie’s book, McKay listened and responded quickly, and over time McKay and Hunt grew to be respected friends. At Bishop Hunt’s passing, McKay published a formal statement in the local newspapers, writing, “We are deeply grieved at the sudden passing of this eminent and devoted leader” (qtd. in Prince and Topping 2005, 163).

Twenty-first-century Efforts

Relations between the two churches have started to improve in recent years. New York City's Cardinal Timothy Dolan has been a pioneer of Catholic and Latter-day Saint relations. In 2011, Dolan offered the benediction at Mitt Romney's acceptance of the Republican presidential nomination, after a Latter-day Saint offered the invocation (Kaleem 2012). In 2016, at an event focusing on religious freedom, Dolan was honored with the Visionary Leadership Award by the New York Latter-day Saint Professional Association (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2016).

Most significantly, in 2019, for the first time in history, pope and prophet met as Pope Francis and President Russell M. Nelson held a meeting to discuss religious rights and traditional family values. The two leaders exchanged gifts: Francis offered a copy of his exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, and Nelson gave Francis a statue of Christ and a copy of "Family: A Proclamation of the World," a Latter-day Saint Church statement canonized in 1995 (Boorstein 2019).

Challenges for Dialogue: One True Church?

One of the greatest challenges for Catholics and Latter-day Saints to overcome, and likely a reason that more dialogue has not been achieved, involves each church declaring itself the one true church on earth. The key foundational story to the formation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is Smith's "First Vision," in which the personages of God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared before him after he prayed "to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join" (J. Smith 2013, 49). Smith's prayer was answered that he should join none and that all are "wrong" in the Lord's sight (49). More declarations of Latter-day Saint authority can be seen in descriptions of its priesthood. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (2013a) standard work, *Doctrine and Covenants*, it is recorded that Smith and Cowdrey were visited by an apparition of John the Baptist, who "confer[ed] the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance" (Sec. 13).

This vision is significant. For Latter-day Saint doctrine it means that this Church alone, as the one with the true keys of the priesthood, holds the proper authority to perform baptisms in the name of Christ. The line of authority linking biblical times to the nineteenth century now also extends to the Prophet and other offices of the church. The modern-day Prophet of the church is defined as having the same leadership role as ancient prophets, such as Moses (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2013b). The Latter-day Saints' *Study Manual* chapter on prophets and their authority describes the power prophets hold as the same power that Peter was given by Christ when he said, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on the earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19, KJV).

In a similar manner, the Catholic Church holds the view that it is Christ's one true church on earth today. The same biblical passage quoted by Latter-day Saints (Matthew 16:19) is referenced, and the pope is seen as the successor of Peter, holding the keys given to him by Christ. Pope Paul VI's (1964) *Lumen Gentium*, which translates to "Light of the Nations," explains that "the body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head" (sec. 22). Further, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993) declares the Catholic Church as "the sole Church of Christ, which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic" (sec. 811). The word "catholic," here, is not to reference the common name of the church but is defined as "universal" or "in keeping with the whole" (sec. 830).

Formal Statements on Dialogue

It is important to note that both the Catholic Church and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have made recent statements encouraging interfaith dialogue and work with members of other traditions. Both traditions make dialogue central to their ethic. For Catholics, the Second Vatican Council produced two documents relevant to interfaith communication: the 1965 *Nostra Aetate*, Latin for "In Our Time," focuses on interreligious dialogue between the Catholic Church and non-Christian faiths, while the 1964 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, meaning "Restoration of Unity," focuses on ecumenical communication between the Catholic Church and other Christians. However, as Donald Westbrook (2012) aptly points out, Mormon-Catholic communication "is neither ecumenical nor interreligious" but "occupies a . . . liminal space between the two categories" (38). By *Unitatis Redintegratio's* definition, ecumenical efforts focus on unity between trinitarian churches (Second Vatican Council 1964, sec. 1). However, the Latter-day Saints Church and other Christian sects, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, hold fundamentally different theological beliefs from the Catholic Church. *Unitatis Redintegratio* outlines differences only between Catholics and Orthodox and Protestant Christians. There are many more doctrinal differences between Latter-day Saints and Catholics than between Catholics and either of these groups, so Latter-day Saints should not be haphazardly lumped together with the Orthodox and Protestants. To some unfamiliar with the Latter-day Saints tradition, it may seem natural to group it with Protestantism, and as mentioned previously, nineteenth-century Catholics who spoke out against Latter-day Saints labeled them as fanatic Protestants. However, the Latter-day Saints tradition is explicitly not one of protest but of restoration and does not come from Martin Luther's critical tradition.

Alternatively, approaching relations between Catholics and Latter-day Saints from an interreligious standpoint does not fare well either: this now implies that Mormons are a non-Christian group, which ignores shared reverence for the Bible and belief in Jesus Christ as the savior of man. Dismissing Latter-day Saints' self-identification as fellow Christians is a clear dialogic error. This pseudo-binary of "ecumenical" and "interreligious" within inter-Christian relations makes it

more difficult to define communication between Catholics and Latter-day Saints but does not mean that dialogue should not be attempted.

Latter-day Saints do not fit squarely into the scope of either *Unitatis Redintegratio* or *Nostra Aetate*, but messages from both documents can aid in facilitating a conversation between the two churches. In *Unitatis Redintegratio*, when holding ecumenical dialogue, it is recommended for members of different Christian groups, or “communions,” to explain “the teaching of his Communion in greater depth and bring[] out its distinctive features,” which allows for gaining a “truer knowledge and more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both Communions” (Second Vatican Council 1964, sec. 4). Listening and truly trying to learn about and understand other traditions is the best way to gain an appreciation and respect for those traditions and the people who practice them. In *Nostra Aetate*, inter-religious dialogue is to be approached with “prudence and love” as well as a recognition and preservation of the “good things, spiritual and moral” found among other faiths (Paul VI 1965, sec. 2). *Nostra Aetate* also advocates for active partnership between faiths, calling for faiths to grow together as one global human family.

Likewise, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has made positive statements encouraging interfaith communication and relationships. In 1978, under the direction of President Spencer Kimball, the First Presidency released a “Statement of the First Presidency Regarding God’s Love for All Mankind.” Parts of this statement read, “The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals” (1). Nelson (1993), while serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve prior to being appointed president of the Church, made a statement at the Parliament of the World’s Religions. While part of his speech outlines the basic practices and beliefs of Latter-day Saints for those who might have been less familiar, he also made a call for joining with other faiths “in support of worthy causes and humanitarian projects” (108) and spoke to advance interfaith relationships that allowed for both “maintain[ing] the integrity of our religious institutions” and “preserv[ing] tolerance of each other’s sacred beliefs” (103). In this way contemporary Latter-day Saint leaders teach that religious communication can and should be approached with tolerance and understanding.

Dialogue in Practice: Principles for Coming Together

Engaged scholarship connects research with practice. Bringing the challenging history of Catholic and Latter-day Saints toward a fruitful future requires careful attention to pro-dialogue ethical principles. In “Mormon/Catholic Dialogue: Thinking About Ways Forward,” Matthew Schmalz (2016) presents three principles to keep in mind when practicing interfaith communication. The first principle he presents is “critical self-awareness,” which he defines as “an awareness, simply, that we are similar to those we find different” (141). This principle is central for discussing and sharing faiths, focusing on similarities rather

than the differences that divide. Schmalz's second principle is that of "interpretative charity," which he explains as understanding that someone who disagrees with you has "good reason for believing what she or he believes, and that she or he believes it sincerely" (144). The final principle Schmalz offers is "a willingness to tarry" and be present with one another (145). As we go about creating new dialogue, the goals should go beyond merely presenting our own religion to others; a higher goal involves forging meaningful and lasting relationships as we learn about traditions that differ from our own.

Planning "Catholics and Latter-day Saints: A Dialogue"

With historical knowledge and sound relational principles in place, a key next step for planning this dialogue event was finding experts interested in interfaith dialogue between Catholics and Latter-day Saints. The first potential panelist contacted was Mathew Schmalz, a professor of religion at College of the Holy Cross and author of the article cited above, "Mormon/Catholic Dialogue: Thinking About Ways Forward." Schmalz confirmed his interest and desire to participate in the panel and recommended reaching out to both Father Daniel Dwyer, a professor of history at Siena College, and Mauro Properzi, a professor of religion at Brigham Young University (BYU).³ Both Dwyer and Properzi were interested in the panel and joined the roster. Properzi then recommended Hanna Seariac, a graduate student at BYU who offered a unique perspective due to her upbringing in the Catholic church and conversion to the Latter-day Saint tradition as a young adult.⁴ Next, Brother Corey Chivers, a member of the Scotch Plains Stake in New Jersey, had been a part of the Summit New Jersey Interfaith Council and quickly agreed to join the panel.⁵ Monsignor John Radano was the final guest and third Catholic panelist secured, splitting the panel evenly between the two churches. Radano came highly recommended due to his extensive experience with ecumenical communication, including three decades of distinguished service with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Bolen, Jenson, and Geernaert 2017).

About a month before the virtual panel was held, with support from Seton Hall's public relations team and Institute for Communication and Religion, we began advance advertising the event to the public to gain an audience. Early steps included creating an event page for registration, including a field for registrants to propose questions; writing an article and introduction to the event; and distributing promotional posts across social media and internal communication channels, such as email lists and newsletters within the Seton Hall community (Rainbolt 2021).

While working with a team worked well overall and helped distribute the work, there were some hiccups and errors. For example, on the original event page

³ For more on these scholars, see Dwyer (2006) and Properzi (2015).

⁴ To learn more about Hannah Seariac, see <https://www.deseret.com/authors/hanna-seariac/>.

⁵ To learn more about Corey Chivers, see <https://www.weil.com/people/corey-chivers>.

the time of the event was listed as 4:30, rather than the actual time of 4:00. Another error was a typo in a social media caption. Happily, both mistakes were caught quickly and able to be corrected.

Roughly a week before the panel the six panelists were emailed audience questions submitted through the registration portal, as well as the historical background from the first half of this essay. Sharing the history between the two churches ensured all panelists had base knowledge of the history, since the panelists came from a range of different backgrounds and experience with Catholic/Latter-day Saint relations. In total, seven questions were sent to the panel guests prior to the event. These questions were:

1. What drove your interest in communication between the two faiths?
2. How can Catholics and Latter-day Saints facilitate positive dialogues in their everyday lives?
3. Both the Catholic Church and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints hold the core belief that they are Christ's one true church on the earth today. What is the best way to hold a dialogue with these clashing beliefs?
4. What national and international conditions suggest the need for more dialogue between Catholics and Latter-day Saints?
5. Both traditions have multiple sacraments/ordinances (beyond baptism and communion.) In your opinion, what does this suggest about God's grace and presence through your faith movement? Do more sacramental experiences equate greater awareness of God's movement?
6. What doctrine or practices do Latter-day Saints admire about Catholicism and vice versa?
7. What are some of the most important topics we should continue dialoguing about in order to build relationships?

In sending the panelists the questions beforehand, we had to consider how genuine dialogue and spontaneity might be sacrificed in the name of preparedness. As the event unfolded, the dialogue and conversation that emerged from the questions did not appear to diminish fresh and genuine interaction.

Praying, Meeting, Questioning, and Discussing

On November 17, 2021, all meeting technology worked well, and a full audio-video recording of the discussion including audience participation was produced (Seton Hall University 2021). Analyzing a dialogue event's flow and conversational dynamics is a key step in researching relational opportunities and challenges. We invited Radano, as our senior Catholic expert, to start the panel with an opening prayer, in which he quoted John 17:20–21: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father are in me and I am in you, may they

also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” He cited this scriptural passage on integral relating in and through faith as an “ecumenical classic in regard to the unity of Christians” (Seton Hall University 2021, 00:00:20).

After this prayer, Ellen Paul opened the event with some brief background information about the panel. Paul shared that the event was a part of her senior thesis and referenced her own conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While joining the church, and also learning about Catholicism at a Catholic university, she explained that the two Christianities “were a lot more similar than a lot of people would think,” and that this inspired a project on interactions between the two traditions (00:02:31). The panel was described as a “small step” in Latter-day Saint and Catholic relations, following the larger step taken when Pope Francis and President Nelson met in 2019 (00:02:44). This brief general event set-up was followed by an introduction to each of the six guests and their backgrounds as described above (00:03:17).

We then began with the first question about what sparked interest in Catholic and Latter-day Saint dialogue in the first place for each of the panelists (00:06:03). Dwyer answered first, explaining that his interest started when he found a Book of Mormon in his library, and later grew to making personal friends who were Latter-day Saints and would take him to the Hill Cumorah Pageant (00:06:24–00:08:04). This theme of personal connections as a driving force for dialogue became common throughout the discussion. Seariac also addressed this question, citing her background growing up Catholic and explaining how most of her family is still Catholic (00:10:20). She said that participating in dialogues was a way for her to “pay homage to the faith of [her] childhood while still respecting and honoring [her] own faith” (00:11:19). Similarly, Properzi tied his interest to his childhood: as a Latter-day Saint who grew up in Italy, connecting with Catholics created a way for him to stay connected with Italy after “experience[ing] some cultural distance with [his] home country” (00:12:16). Schmalz also cited a personal connection that drew him to have an interest in the dialogue, explaining his close friendship with a historian in the Latter-day Saint tradition (00:14:10). Radano addressed this question of interest in dialogue as well. He explained some of his prior ecumenical and interfaith work, remarking on how rare and exciting our conversation was. “One of the reasons I’m so happy to be part of this [current] group is so that I can learn something I’ve never had opportunities” to learn about before (00:09:40). Across more than three decades of professional Catholic ecumenism, this was his first opportunity to engage LDS colleagues in faith dialogue!

The next question presented to the guests was about how dialogue can be facilitated in the personal lives of both Latter-day Saints and Catholics (00:15:40). Seariac responded first, due to having lived as both a Catholic and a Latter-day Saint. Seariac explained that she felt “the most important thing is trying to understand each other and not making caricatures of the various beliefs” (00:16:00). She also spoke about realizing misconceptions she had about Latter-day Saints prior to her conversion were based on prejudices, and how to overcome that with humility and an openness to learning (00:16:41). Much like the first question, the panelists continued to make connections personal, describing the interfaith

relationships they have. Chivers spoke about a coworker in London and how he felt “the ability to relate to each other and in an everyday point of view terms of living your religion” (00:18:43). Similarly, Properzi spoke about his friendship with fellow panelist, Schmalz (00:19:17).

At this point, Radano suggested speaking on the question that concerns both churches declaring themselves as the “one true church” (00:20:40). Radano mentioned *Unitatis Redintegratio* (addressed above), a Vatican II document. The Catholic Church considers itself the “all-embracing means of salvation” but also affirms that “other Christians can be used by God for salvation” (00:20:56; 00:21:24). Radano also noted that as more dialogues occur, “how much we share with others” becomes more clear, and this mutuality is what we should focus on in interfaith dialogues (00:23:30). Dwyer also spoke on this topic, explaining that not recognizing another’s ritual ordinances (such as baptism) did not mean that members of the other faith were seen as bad people. Rather, “we’re saying we mean different things by the words” (00:24:38).

The panel was next presented with the question of the need for Catholic and Latter-day Saint dialogue on a national and international level (00:28:16). Radano spoke first, mentioning the charity work Latter-day Saints and Catholics have done together (00:28:47–00:30:51). Properzi spoke next on the LDS Church becoming an international church, noting that some members complain of church culture being “too American” (00:33:03). He cited attending a Catholic Mass in Japan and explained that there is “something to say about having been around for 2000 years . . . there’s a historical experience there that can teach you a lot” about the Catholic Church’s international reach (00:34:03). Dwyer responded that he has spoken with LDS friends about uniformity within a church and its tension with cultural differences (00:34:44). Similar to Radano’s emphasis on charity work, Schmalz shared that he felt there are “a lot of . . . social issues that have yet to be explored.” He cited King Benjamin’s sermon on equity and fairness from the Book of Mormon, which can be found in Mosiah 2–4 (00:37:54). Seariac seconded Schmalz’s thoughts and cited Matthew 25, in which Christ’s parable of the five talents instructs Christians to give to the poor (00:40:22).

The next question addressed the sacramental nature of both traditions (00:42:52). In the discussion following this question, Radano asked for clarification on LDS ordinances and if they lined up with the seven Catholic sacraments (00:51:17). Chivers explained the sacraments and clarified that, while there is no concrete number attached to Latter-day Saint ordinances, many of them hold similarities to Catholic practices, such as communion, baptism, and confirmation. Both traditions emphasize the importance of marriage (00:51:5–53:30). Seariac then joined in and discussed temple ordinances in the Latter-day Saint tradition, specifically ordinances done in proxy for the dead (00:55:09–00:56:39). This prompted more sincere questions from Radano, as Seariac went on to explain the LDS vision of heaven, which differs from Catholics’. Heaven is seen on three different levels, and there is a spiritual waiting period before this life. A connection to Catholic ideas about purgatory was made (00:57:37–00:58:53; 01:04:48–01:05:40). During this question and discussion, the panel got into theological differences more than at any other point in the event, and these theological differences needed

clarification. Radano was very gracious and humble in his curiosity, while Seariac and Chivers were patient and thorough in their explanations of their faith.

After this, an audience member raised a question. While originally there was no plan to take audience questions, this audience member had raised a (virtual) hand to ask her question, and event host Ellen Paul chose to allow the guest to ask her question due to her patience in raising her hand. Although there was a chance her unscreened question could have taken the panel in the wrong direction, Paul judged it was more likely the question would be respectful and curious. This guest said she was previously a high school teacher and admired the youth programs within the LDS Church, asking the panelists to speak on that (01:00:22). Chivers spoke on the seminary class offered to Latter-day Saint youth in high school, which is commonly held early in the morning before school (01:00:54). Chivers explains the value found in this, as the teenagers learn about sacrifice by getting up early to devote their time to deepening their faith (01:02:03). Dwyer addressed this question, as well, mentioning that his Catholic colleagues greatly admire the LDS missionary program (01:02:23). This audience question segued well into the penultimate question: what practices were admired in the other faith (01:06:22)? Properzi addressed this question first, explaining that he held a “holy envy” for Holy Week and the Catholic practices around the holiday of Easter (01:06:43). Chivers echoed this and noted his childhood best friend’s observance of Easter as a Catholic (01:07:36–01:09:11). Chivers also spoke on the communal aspects of Catholicism, specifically reciting prayer in unison, as something he admired. Likewise, Schmalz shared that he admired the community aspects of the LDS Church, remarking that Latter-day Saint theology is creating a “very interesting intellectual tradition” as far as “spirit and materiality” (01:10:15).

The closing question asked guests how ethical communication between Catholics and Latter-day Saints could continue in the future (01:13:54). Dwyer shared that while there may be a more formal dialogue to be had among theologians, there are also grassroots ways to come together as “common followers of Christ” (01:15:16). Seariac spoke on how there is a general decline in religiosity in the US and suggested finding ways “we can serve God and serve our neighbor together to break down . . . divisions and . . . polarization” (01:17:21). Radano mentioned again the charity and relief work both churches had been providing together and emphasized that this should continue (01:18:10).

Post-panel Follow-Up

After the panel, Ellen Paul and Emily Rainbolt, a graduate assistant working with Seton Hall’s Institute for Communication and Religion, wrote an article on the panel for Seton Hall’s internal news sources (Rainbolt 2021). Mary Richards, a reporter from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint’s news site, *Church News*, reached out from Salt Lake City and published an article discussing the background of the panel and Seton Hall’s interreligious dialogue efforts (Richards 2021).

Overall, the event was successful and hopefully will spark future dialogues between Catholics and Latter-day Saints. Primary themes discussed include shared charity and social work, living a life of religiosity in an ever-growing secularism and how close personal relationships and connections can shape and create interfaith dialogues. Ellen Paul submitted and presented an early draft of this paper to the Western States Communication Association's annual conference. Feedback was positive and audience encouragement led to the development of this article in collaboration with the Institute for Communication Director Dr. Jon Radwan.

Limitations

Several limits come from having a panel of only six guests. With any public panel or discussion event, it is impossible to include all viewpoints within limited time. While the panel did have some diversity, such as a female perspective from Seariac and a European background from Properzi, other perspectives are missing that would add to the conversation of interfaith dialogue, such as racial minorities or a female Catholic perspective. Another limitation may be that some of the panelists had worked together before and were close friends. While their previous experience in Catholic and Latter-day Saint dialogue made them knowledgeable participants, existing relationships may have created an uneven dynamic between panelists.

Another limitation comes from panelists having different levels of knowledge. While this can also be seen as diversity and a strength, as it allows knowledge to be shared to those who are new to the conversation, it also can create roadblocks or delays in some situations; for example, explaining certain Latter-day Saint practices in response to Radano's questions created a pause in the conversation.

In accounting for limitations, it is important to recognize our own research biases. Professor Radwan directed the project, and while his research area is religious communication, all of his degrees are in communication, not religion. We attempted to control for disciplinary bias by inviting Dr. Anthony Sciglitano, an associate professor of religion, to assist with thesis project direction, a partnership that worked very well. On Paul's part, while being a Latter-day Saint at a Catholic university allowed her a unique position between the two traditions, her personal faith choice creates a bias. Even as we try to maintain awareness, it likely still affects historical research as well as panel moderation. For instance, researching the Latter-day Saint perspective went more quickly due to preexisting familiarity. Regularly checking assumptions with knowledgeable others, in this case Professors Radwan and Sciglitano, is essential in managing personal limits and potential blind spots.

Conclusion: Future Research and Dialogue

This research and panel took a broad approach to both the history and the discussion of Latter-day Saint and Catholic relations, so a deeper dive into some of the theological similarities and differences between the two faiths is a good place for future research to grow. For example, during the panel the ordinances and sacraments of both faiths were discussed, but only briefly. A follow-up study could make room to discuss the ordinances of both faiths in a comparative manner and in greater detail, looking at both how they are practiced and performed and the meanings behind them. The historical approach could also be taken to deeper analyze the shared history of the two faiths as minority religions in America in the 1800s, which has affected both churches and how they exist today. Another topic that deserves more in-depth research is church leadership structures: how the roles of the pope and prophet are accepted and exercised. For a more modern approach, one could look at the socio-political positions that Pope Francis and Prophet Nelson have taken and how members of both faiths have reacted to stances on social topics such as vaccines or Black Lives Matter.

Along with research, room for further dialogue and cooperation between Latter-day Saints and Catholics exists in many realms. After the panel, both Radano and Properzi expressed interest in further dialogue in collaboration with Seton Hall's Institute of Communication and Religion. As Radano emphasized, charity and social work will always be needed, and future projects involving both traditions are a promising way to create ethical and authentic dialogue focusing on communities and people, beyond just history and doctrine. As a final conclusion, this research project demonstrates that dialogue between Latter-day Saints and Catholics on an everyday scale, working in faith and humility to forge friendships, could be the most meaningful way to advance this form of intergroup communication.

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