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Aspects of an Early Christian Initiation Ritual

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Joseph Smith and other leaders of the early Church were convinced that the temple endowment was an authentic restoration of ancient Christian and Jewish initiation ceremonies, a concept which is still generally held among most Latter-day Saints.¹ In recent decades Latter-day Saint scholars, foremost among whom has been Hugh Nibley, have pointed to numerous interesting parallels between some aspects of the Latter-day Saint temple endowment and different forms of ancient Near Eastern initiation rituals.²

But the fact that similarities may exist between ancient and Latter-day Saint ideas and ritual motifs³ does not answer the more significant question concerning the precise nature of interdependence between the texts or ritual systems manifesting the parallels. Generally speaking, there are five possible explanations for these parallels. The first three could be called naturalistic:

1. The parallels are either coincidental or on closer examination prove to be based on false comparisons and strained interpretations.

2. Whatever valid parallels may exist are due to the fact that human beings frequently express their religious and social solidarity by ritual acts. Latter-day Saint and ancient rituals may be broadly similar but are fundamentally distinct in all significant details. Existing parallels are general and universal rather than specific and historical.

3. Joseph Smith invented the Latter-day Saint endowment based on readily available early nineteenth-century sources such as the Bible as well as Masonic or magical practices and rituals. Some of these nineteenth-century sources may be tenuously linked back to more ancient ritual traditions, which could account for some of the apparent resemblances.

These three naturalistic explanations are by no means mutually exclusive. Some combination or variation of them is generally accepted by most non-Mormons as well as a small portion of Latter-day Saints.

The other two possible explanations are supernaturalistic:

1. The Latter-day Saint endowment represents an inspired restoration of authentic ancient revealed initiation rituals. The parallels between ancient and modern rituals exist because the ancient rituals are either themselves revealed or are counterfeit copies and corruptions of revealed rituals. Some variation of this explanation is accepted by most practicing Latter-day Saints who have considered the matter. This is the position which I personally believe best accounts for all of the available evidence.

2. Joseph Smith received the endowment from a supernatural source other than God, such as the devil. Some evangelical Christians and other groups might accept some variation of this proposition.⁴

Given that some level of parallels exists between ancient and Latter-day Saint ritual motifs, the question now becomes, which of these five explanations, or combination and variation thereof, best accounts for the parallels? It is impossible to deal adequately with all the ramifications of this question in the short space available here. I will therefore limit myself to a discussion of only one aspect of the broader historical problem: a possible method of transmission and transformation of some late first- and early second-century Christian secret rituals into Gnostic writ-

ings and rituals.⁵ Specifically I will examine some of the evidence for the following seven propositions:

1. Jesus himself established a secret, graded initiation ritual.

2. This ritual system was transmitted through Peter to Mark the Evangelist, who brought the ritual system to Alexandria in Egypt sometime shortly after ca. A.D. 65.

3. These rituals were secretly practiced by at least some branches of "orthodox" Alexandrian Christianity until at least the late second century A.D.

4. During the early second century A.D., Carpocrates, an early Gnostic Christian, gained access to at least part of this ritual system through an apostate elder at Alexandria.

5. Carpocrates and other Gnostics transformed and transmitted various modified forms of these ideas and rituals to some of the branches of Gnostic Christianity.

6. Possible manifestations of this transformed ritual system can be found in various early Christian writings by or about the Gnostics.

7. The parallels between the Latter-day Saint temple endowment and some Gnostic rituals and writings can be seen as reflections of parallels with the original rituals established by Jesus.

Let me now briefly examine the evidence for each of these seven propositions.

1. *Jesus himself established a secret, graded initiation ritual.* Did some early Christians believe that Jesus during his lifetime established secret, graded rituals of salvation? The answer to this question is most certainly yes.⁶ The early Christian eucharist (or sacrament) is the clearest example of this. Although today the eucharistic rituals of most branches of Christianity are public rites, the opposite was true in the first through the third centuries A.D. As the Catholic scholar Jean Daniélou writes, "It might seem astonishing that there is nothing like [the early descriptions

of baptism] to be found in relation to the Eucharist, but the reason is that the discipline of the *arcana*, or secrecy, forbade the revelation of the Mysteries. The only teaching given on this subject, therefore, could not be preserved for use in writing."⁷ The idea that the eucharist and other sacraments should be secret rituals is expressed in numerous early Christian writings. For example, the *Apostolic Constitutions* advises that "the doors be watched [during the eucharist], lest any unbelieving or uninitiated person enter."⁸ Thus, according to nearly all branches of earliest Christianity, Jesus instituted a ritual of salvation, known as the eucharist (or sacrament), which was to be performed in secret.

Was the eucharist the only secret ritual established by Jesus? Here the evidence is much more controversial, but a wide range of documents discovered and studied in the last few decades clearly shows that many branches of earliest Christianity maintained that Jesus did indeed institute other secret rituals, known variously as the "Mystery of Redemption," the "Great Mysteries," or the "Mystery of the Kingdom of God."

One of the most interesting of these new documents was discovered several decades ago by Professor Morton Smith.⁹ The document is a fragment of a letter of Clement of Alexandria who lived from about A.D. 150-213 and who is generally considered an "orthodox" Christian. In this letter Clement quotes a fascinating passage from a previously unknown work he calls the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. Although nothing is known for certain about the date, authorship, or provenance of this *Secret Gospel of Mark*, the following is a summary of the current evidence and scholarly hypotheses:

Author: Clement claims the document was written by Mark the Evangelist. Most modern scholars feel that the document is an early second-century pseudepigraphic gospel.¹⁰

Date: For the *Secret Gospel of Mark* to have been quoted by Clement, it must have been in existence by at least A.D. 150. Morton Smith provides convincing evidence that it probably dates to the late first or early second century, an hypothesis that is generally accepted today.¹¹ If it was actually written by Mark, it could not have been written much later than about A.D. 80. It is important to note that many scholars believe that they can establish that the canonical Gospel of Mark was literarily dependent on, and therefore written after, the *Secret Gospel of Mark*.¹² Hans-Martin Schenke believes that "this apocryphal version of Mark from Alexandria would by no means have been an enlargement of our Second Gospel; rather, our Gospel [of Mark] would have been a purified abridgement of the Alexandrian apocryphon," and may represent an old tradition which "reflect[s] a historical event."¹³ John Crossan agrees that the *Secret Gospel of Mark* "is independent of [the Gospels of] John . . . [and] of Mark. . . . Dependence, in fact, is in the opposite direction, from Secret Mark to John and Mark."¹⁴ In other words, there is good evidence that the material in the *Secret Gospel of Mark* represents Christian ideas from the first century A.D.

Provenance: Clement says that the document was written in Egypt, which location is generally accepted today as accurate.

In summary, the *Secret Gospel of Mark* is an Egyptian Christian document of uncertain authorship, written sometime in the late first or early second centuries A.D.

The following passage is part of the only extant fragment from the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, which tells the story of what happened to Lazarus after he was raised from the dead by Jesus:

And they [Jesus and the Apostles] come into Bethany, and a certain woman, whose brother had died, was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, "Son of David, have mercy on

me." But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near, Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over [his] naked [body]. And he [the young man] remained with him [Jesus] that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God.¹⁵

This passage provides us a very clear description of Jesus performing a secret initiation ritual called the "Mystery of the Kingdom of God." From the passage we can isolate four ritual motifs which were part of this "Mystery of the Kingdom of God" according to the *Secret Gospel of Mark*:

A. There was a period of six days of preparation, with the initiation taking place on the seventh day. This waiting period may be coincidental, but in its ancient setting probably represents a period of some type of ritual purification.¹⁶

B. The "Mystery of the Kingdom of God" begins with the young man (who is called Lazarus in John's version of the story) wearing a "linen cloth over his naked body," which again in its ancient context clearly implies an initiatory ritual.¹⁷

C. Instruction in the "Mystery of the Kingdom of God" lasts all night. In other words, participation in the full ritual requires many hours.

D. The "Mystery of the Kingdom of God" is something which was taught and established by Jesus himself.

2. *This ritual system was transmitted through Peter to Mark the Evangelist, who brought the ritual system to Alexandria in Egypt sometime shortly after ca. A.D. 65, and, 3. These rituals were secretly practiced by at least some branches of "orthodox" Alexandrian Christianity until at least the late second century A.D.* The newly discovered letter of Clement also provides us a literary history of the *Secret Gospel of Mark* as understood by Clement's branch of Christianity in Alexandria.

As for Mark, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote [an account of] the Lord's doings, not, however, declaring all [of them], nor yet hinting at the secret [ones], but selecting those he thought most useful for increasing the faith of those who were being instructed. But when Peter died as a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former book the things suitable to whatever makes for progress toward knowledge [*gnosis*]. [Thus] he composed a more spiritual Gospel for the use of those who were being perfected. Nevertheless, he yet did not divulge the things not to be uttered, nor did he write down the "Hierophantic Teaching of the Lord," but to the stories already written [in canonical Mark] he added yet others and, moreover, brought in certain sayings of which he knew the interpretation would, as a mystagogue, lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven [veils]. . . . (When he died) he left his composition to the church in Alexandria, where it even yet is most carefully guarded, being read only to those who are being initiated into the "Great Mysteries."¹⁸

This fascinating passage implies the following:

A. Clement believed that Jesus taught secret teachings which were not recorded in the New Testament.¹⁹

B. There existed a document in Alexandria which was not made available to ordinary Christians, but only to a select group whom Clement describes as those seeking the

true knowledge and those who were being perfected. This book is known today as the *Secret Gospel of Mark*.

C. In addition to the written teachings in Mark's *Secret Gospel*, there were other secret oral teachings known to Clement as the "Hierophantic Teaching of the Lord."

D. These most secret oral teachings were only for "those who are being initiated into the Great Mysteries," which were somehow related to an "innermost sanctuary . . . hidden by seven [veils]."

Thus, if Clement's report is accurate, by at least A.D. 180 in Egypt there existed among the Alexandrian branch of Christianity a set of highly sacred and secret teachings known as "the Hierophantic Teaching of the Lord" and secret initiation rituals known as "the Great Mysteries." The Hierophantic Teaching and the Great Mysteries are *not* based on the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, nor are they contained in any other document in Clement's possession. Clement specifically states that these are "things not to be uttered," and Mark did not write them down. The Hierophantic Teaching and Great Mysteries must therefore have been transmitted by a secret oral tradition. In fact, the importance of maintaining the secrecy of these teachings was so great that Clement insists in his letter that "one must (never) concede that the *Secret Gospel* is by Mark, but should even deny it on oath."²⁰ Even before the discovery of the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, there was good evidence that Clement of Alexandria viewed initiation into the mysteries of God as a fundamental part of Christianity. As described by G. Bornkamm, Clement saw

the truths of the Christian religion as mysteries. Led by Christ the Mystagogue (*Stromata* IV, 162, 3ff.) the Gnostic [in this sense, simply "knower"] receives initiation and perfection (*Protrepticon* XII, 120, 1) by going through the stages from the little mysteries (e.g., the doctrine of creation) to the great mysteries, in which the mystical ini-

tiation takes place (*Stromata* IV, 3, 1; *Protrepticon* XII). The supreme mysteries, to be protected against profanation, must be passed on only in veiled form (*Stromata* V, 57, 2).²¹

The discovery of this new letter by Clement has now clearly shown that Clement did not see these mysteries in an allegorical sense as has often been previously assumed, but had in mind actual secret initiation *rituals* which he believed to have been instituted by Christ himself.

Schenke also sees the importance of this new evidence of early secret Christian initiation rituals:

How may it be explained that in Alexandria the Secret Gospel gained such great importance and functioned as a ritual text used in the initiation of the Perfect? Indeed, the rite connected with the Secret Gospel of Mark is so strange that many scholars refuse to acknowledge it as real. . . . The rite must have been something that was never introduced to [Alexandria] but rather something that was simply there. Applied to the Secret Gospel of Mark, this would mean that it never came to Alexandria, but was there all along. It is the very own gospel of orthodox Christianity in Alexandria and is linked in a fundamental way to the origin of that [branch of] Christianity.²²

4. During the early second century A.D., Carpocrates, an early Gnostic Christian, gained access to at least part of this ritual system through an apostate elder at Alexandria, and, 5. Carpocrates and other Gnostics transmitted modified forms of these ideas and rituals to some branches of Gnostic Christianity. Again from the newly discovered letter of Clement we learn that the Carpocratian Gnostic branch of early Christianity²³ acquired knowledge of some of the Hierophantic Teaching and Great Mysteries. Clement claims that:

Carpocrates [one of the original Gnostic teachers who flourished ca. A.D. 117-138] . . . using deceitful arts,

so enslaved a certain elder of the church in Alexandria that he [Carpocrates] got from him [the elder] a copy of the secret Gospel which he both interpreted according to his blasphemous and carnal doctrine and, moreover, polluted, mixing with the spotless and holy words utterly shameless lies. From this mixture is drawn off the teaching of the Carpocratians.²⁴

If Clement's statement is accurate, it implies that:

A. The *Secret Gospel of Mark* must have been extant for some years before about A.D. 125, when Carpocrates got a copy of it.

B. An unnamed Alexandrian elder defected to Carpocrates, giving him a copy of the *Secret Gospel of Mark* and perhaps orally transmitting parts of the Hierophantic Teaching and the Great Mysteries.

C. Before the recent discovery of Clement's letter it had usually been maintained by modern scholars that the theologians of Alexandrian Christianity were influenced by Gnostic and Hellenistic concepts.²⁵ The new letter of Clement shows that the Great Mysteries and Hierophantic Teaching were not copied by the Alexandrians from the Gnostics or Greek Pagans, but, as maintained by Schenke, were part of the earliest ideas and practices of Alexandrian Christianity.²⁶

D. The ideas and rituals of at least some branches of Gnostic Christianity can thus in part be seen as variations and modifications of the secret teachings and rituals of the early Alexandrian Christians.

6. *Possible manifestations of this transformed ritual system can be found in various early Christian writings by or about the Gnostics.* Is it possible to determine any details of the Hierophantic Teaching or the Great Mysteries? Clement refused to discuss the subject openly, although there are many interesting allusions to such matters in his surviving writings, as we have seen.²⁷ However, explicit discussions of purported secret doctrines and rituals have survived in the

teachings of the Gnostics, which, according to Clement, were derived at least in part from Carpocrates' access to the secret teachings of the Alexandrian Christians.

Modern scholars are now beginning to recognize that, in addition to the esoteric doctrines of the Gnostics, there also existed a body of esoteric ritual, which receives frequent allusions in Gnostic writings.²⁸ Indeed, J. J. Buckley maintains that the Nag Hammadi *Gospel of Philip* is essentially a preparatory manual for a secret initiation ritual.²⁹

The ritual background to the *Gospel of Philip* is quite explicit. For example, we learn that "The Lord [did] all things by means of a mystery (or ritual): baptism, chrism (or anointing), eucharist, ransom (or redemption), and bridal chamber."³⁰ According to the *Gospel of Philip*, these rituals thus form the essence of Christ's teachings. The Great Mysteries are also allegorically equated with the temple in Jerusalem. "The holy building (or the temple of Jerusalem) is baptism, the holy of the holy is ransom (or redemption), the holy of holies is the bridal chamber."³¹

7. *The parallels between the Latter-day Saint temple endowment and some Gnostic rituals and writings can be seen as possible reflections of parallels with the original rituals established by Jesus.* It is precisely in the Gnostic writings that we find some of the most fascinating parallels to some ritual motifs in the Latter-day Saint temple endowment. Among the many doctrines and ritual motifs mentioned in Gnostic writings which parallel Latter-day Saint temple endowment ritual motifs, we note only the following twelve general aspects here:³²

A. *The secret tradition originates with Jesus.* Irenaeus reports: "Jesus, [the Gnostics] say, spoke in a mystery to his disciples and apostles privately, and charged them to hand these things on to the worthy and those who assented."³³

B. *The secret initiatory rituals are the center of Christ's gospel.* The *Gospel of Philip* says: "The Lord [did] all things

by means of a mystery (*ritual*): baptism, chrism (*anointing*), eucharist, ransom (*redemption*), and bridal chamber."³⁴

C. *Rituals of baptism and anointing with oil.* "The chrism (*or anointing*) is superior to baptism, for it is from the word 'chrism' that we have been called 'Christians,' certainly not because of the word 'baptism.' And it is because of the chrism that 'the Christ' has his name. For the father anointed the son, and the son anointed the apostles, and the apostles anointed us. He who has been anointed possesses everything. He possesses the resurrection, the light, the cross, the holy spirit. The father gave him this in the bridal chamber; he merely accepted (the gift). The father was in the son and the son in the father. This is [the] kingdom of heaven."³⁵

D. *Ritual prayer circles* (described at length by Hugh Nibley).³⁶

E. *Use of ritual clothing.* "The (demonic) powers do not see those who are clothed in the perfect light, and consequently are not able to detain them. One will clothe himself in this light sacramentally in the union."³⁷

F. *Handclasps as tokens of recognition.* Epiphanius explains: "The hand is held out, in greeting, of course, and a tickling stroke is made in the palm of the hand, so as to indicate secretly that the visitor is of the same religion as they."³⁸

G. *Knowledge of the sacred name of God is necessary for exaltation.* "One single name is not uttered in the world, the name which the Father gave to the Son, the name above all things: the name of the Father. For the Son would not become Father unless he wears the name of the Father. Those who have this name know it, but they do not speak it. But those who do not have it do not know it."³⁹

H. *Preexistence of mankind.* "[The Gnostics claim that] I derive my being from him who was pre-existent, and I go again to that which is my own, whence I came forth."⁴⁰

I. *Sacred marriage is necessary to complete the ordinance.*

“If anyone becomes a son of the bridal chamber, he will receive the light. If anyone does not receive it while he is here, he will not be able to receive it in the other place.”⁴¹ “Those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated.”⁴² “Some of [the Gnostics] prepare a bridal chamber and perform a mystic rite, with certain invocations, for those who are being consecrated, and they claim that what they are effecting is a spiritual marriage, after the image of the conjunctions above.”⁴³

J. *The initiation rituals symbolize a heavenly ascent.* Origen provides a detailed description of such an ascent, which is too long for full quotation here.⁴⁴

K. *A veil separates the initiate from God.* “Therefore the perfect things have opened to us [through the veil], together with the hidden things of truth. The holies of the holies were revealed, and the bridal chamber invited us in.”⁴⁵

L. *Mankind can become like God.* “You saw the spirit, you became spirit. You saw Christ, you became Christ. You saw [the father, you] shall become father.”⁴⁶

I believe we can make the following conclusions based on the evidence of Clement’s letter and the fragment of the *Secret Gospel of Mark*. Clement’s early branch of Christianity in Alexandria believed that there existed three levels of Christian knowledge: First, the canonical gospels, which were intended to bring new converts to Christianity. Second, a secret written tradition, exemplified by the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, which was only to be read by advanced Christians seeking higher, more esoteric, knowledge. Third, an even more secret oral tradition known as the “Hierophantic Teaching,” and rituals, known as the “Great Mysteries,” or “Mystery of the Kingdom of God.” The “Mystery of the Kingdom of God” included secret teachings and some type of ritual initiation ceremony which lasted all night. The known elements of this initiation ceremony were being clothed in a ritual linen cloth or robe,

and the use of seven veils (or perhaps doctrines, doors, angels, etc.) hiding an innermost sanctuary. At some time around A.D. 125, Carpocrates acquired knowledge of some or all of these secret teachings and rituals from an apostate elder in Alexandria. A part of Carpocratian Gnostic teachings was thus derived from a modified form of the secret Alexandrian Christian teachings and rituals. Gnostic writings and rituals, which manifest many parallels to Latter-day Saint temple ritual motifs, may in part represent a Gnosticized version of the Hierophantic Teaching and the Great Mystery mentioned by Clement.

Thus by means of the newly discovered letter of Clement of Alexandria, it is possible to reconstruct a detailed outline of the origin, nature, transmission, and transformation of an early Christian secret initiation ritual system, purportedly established by Jesus himself.

Notes

1. For a selection of statements see Jeff Keller, "Mormonism and Masonry," *Seventh East Press*, 28 September 1982, 9-14; and Reed C. Durham, "Is There No Help for the Widow's Son," a presentation given at the 1974 Mormon History Association Annual Meeting at Nauvoo, Illinois, 20 April 1974, typescript.

2. This is a major theme running through much of Nibley's work. See especially Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975). Although I do not agree with all of his interpretations, Eugene Seaich, *Ancient Texts and Mormonism* (Murray, UT: Sounds of Zion, 1983), presents further interesting parallels. Additional sources could be further multiplied.

3. In order to better analyze the possible relationships between ancient and restored rituals I will be using the term *ritual motif*, by which I mean a discrete symbolic action, image, or phrase used in the context of a larger ritual system. For example, the Latter-day Saint sacrament can be described as a ritual system composed of the following ritual motifs: All participants must be in a state of spiritual purity; ritual preparation of the bread and water by priesthood bearers; formulaic prayer over the bread and water; ritual distribution of the sacrament; and communal partaking of the food. In a similar sense, the Latter-day Saint temple ceremony can be

described as a complex ritual system composed of dozens, if not hundreds, of discrete ritual motifs. As a general rule, the greater the number of parallel ritual motifs, the greater the likelihood of some type of historical interdependence between two ritual systems.

4. Ed Decker and Dave Hunt, *The Godmakers* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1984) give an interpretation of the Latter-day Saint endowment based on this theory.

5. For a collection of the writings of the Gnostics, with excellent discussions, notes, and bibliographies, see Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987).

6. For a general background to secret doctrines and rituals in Judaism and early Christianity, see Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 197-202.

7. Jean Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 9.

8. *Apostolic Constitutions* II, 57. See also Justin Martyr, *Apologia* 66; Tertullian, *Apologia* 7; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, passim; John Chrysostom, *Homilia in Matthaicum* 23; Ambrose, *De his Qui Mysteriis Initiantur*, ch. 1; and Theodoret, *Quaestio in Numeros*. Related sources could be further multiplied, see A. Haddan, "Disciplina Arcani," in W. Smith and S. Cheetham, eds., *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, 2 vols. (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprints, 1968), 1:564-66, for numerous additional references.

9. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 1-85, discusses the discovery of the manuscript and evidence for its authenticity.

10. It should be noted that most of these same scholars maintain that the four canonical gospels are also pseudepigraphic. For summary discussions of the current state of analysis see Morton Smith, "Clement of Alexandria and Secret Mark: The Score at the End of the First Decade," *Harvard Theological Review* 75/4 (1982): 449-61, who gives a complete bibliography up to 1982. Also V. P. Furnish, "Mark, Secret Gospel of," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 573. See especially F. F. Bruce's brief lecture, *The Secret Gospel of Mark* (London: Athlone Press, 1974); and R. Brown, "The Relation of 'The Secret Gospel of Mark' to the Fourth Gospel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 466-85.

11. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 88-97; Furnish, "Mark, Secret Gospel of."

12. This was, of course, Morton Smith's original hypothesis. The

best discussion of the arguments and evidence is in Helmut Koester, "History and Development of Mark's Gospel (From Mark to Secret Mark and 'Canonical' Mark)," in Bruce Corley, ed., *Colloquy on New Testament Studies: A Time for Reappraisal and Fresh Approaches* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 35-57.

13. Hans-Martin Schenke, "The Mystery of the Gospel of Mark," *The Second Century* 4/2 (1984): 73, 69.

14. John D. Crossan, *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (Minneapolis, MN: Winston, 1985), 110.

15. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 447 (2:23-3:10).

16. On similar periods of six days of spiritual preparation before initiation in early Christianity, see *ibid.*, 175.

17. *Ibid.*, 175-78, discusses the overwhelming evidence for this.

18. *Ibid.*, 446-47 (1:15-2:3).

19. *Ibid.*, 81-82, presents additional evidence that this was Clement's opinion.

20. *Ibid.*, 447 (2:12).

21. G. Bornkamm, "Mysterion," in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:825.

22. Schenke, "The Mystery of the Gospel of Mark," 75. Here I must insert the aside that although many modern biblical scholars may find the rituals described in Clement's letter as being "so strange [that they] refuse to acknowledge [them] as real," they not only make sense but indeed are to be expected in light of the Latter-day Saint concept of the importance of the temple endowment.

23. For a discussion of the extant sources on Carpocrates and the Carpocratians see Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, 269-78.

24. *Ibid.*, 446-47 (2:5-11).

25. Bornkamm, "Mysterion," 4:825.

26. Schenke, "The Mystery of the Gospel of Mark," 75; see n. 22 above.

27. Clement makes frequent references to teachings which he cannot put in writing: *Stromata* VI, 15; VII, 9; he specifically states that he had an oral esoteric doctrine transmitted from several of the Apostles (see also *Stromata* I, 1; VI, 17), which is also stated by Clement's disciple Origen, *Contra Celsum* I, 7.

28. For several dozen references to rituals in the Gnostic writings, see the index of Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 475 ("Baptism"), 478 ("Chrism"), 477 ("Bridal Chamber"), 505-6 ("Sacraments"), 507 ("Seals").

29. J. J. Buckley, "A Cult-Mystery in the Gospel of Philip," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99/4 (1980): 569-81.

30. *Gospel of Philip* (Nag Hammadi Codex 2, document 3, folio 67, lines 27-30; hereafter designated as 67:27-30); all references and quotations are from the translation of Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, unless otherwise noted (my comments in *italics* and brackets like these {}). Another useful translation is Wesley W. Isenberg, in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 139-60.

31. *Gospel of Philip* 69:22-25.

32. I am currently preparing a paper which fully discusses the many ritual motifs in Gnostic writings. Many Latter-day Saints will find some variation of such concepts and rituals not only understandable and acceptable, but even an essential part of early Christianity. However, I should emphasize that I am not here implying that Gnosticism is an early form of Mormonism. Many fundamental ideas of the Gnostics are quite different from those of Latter-day Saints.

33. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 25, 5. Hippolytus, *Refutatio Haeresium* VII, 20, 1: "Matthew communicated to them [the Basileides Gnostics] secret discourses, which, being specially instructed, he heard from the Saviour." See also *Gospel of Thomas* 32:10 [380]; *Apocryphon of John* 1:1 [28]; *Thomas the Contender* 138:1 [403]; *1 Jeu* 1:1; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III, 3, 1.

34. *Gospel of Philip* 67:28-30. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* XII, 118-23: "Then thou shalt have the vision of my God and shalt be initiated in those holy mysteries, and shalt taste the joys that are hidden away in heaven, preserved for me, 'which neither ear hath heard nor have they entered into the heart' of any man. . . . I will show thee the Word, and the Word's mysteries. . . . O truly sacred mysteries! O pure light! In the blaze of the torches I have a vision of heaven and of God. I become holy by initiation. The Lord reveals the mysteries; He marks the worshiper with His seal, gives light to guide his way, and commends him, when he has believed, to the Father's care, where he is guarded for ages to come. These are the levels of my mysteries. If thou wilt, be thyself also initiated, and thou shalt dance with angels around the unbegotten and imperishable and only true God. . . . I desire to conform you to the archetype, that you may become even as I am. I will anoint you with the ointment of faith, whereby you cast away corruption; and I will display unveiled the figure of righteousness, whereby you ascend to God. . . . And to say and believe that when

he has been made by Christ Jesus 'just and holy with understanding,' he also becomes in the same degree already like to God. So the prophet openly reveals this gracious favor when he says, 'I said, ye are gods, and ye are all sons of the Most High.' Now we, I say, we are they whom God has adopted"; *Gospel of Philip* 69:25-29: The relation of the five mysteries: "[Baptism] possesses resurrection [and] ransom; ransom is in the bridal chamber. [The] bridal chamber is within what is superior to [. . .]"; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 13, 1: "They practice magic arts and incantations, love potions and love feasts, familiar spirits and dream inducers"; *Pistis Sophia*, chaps. 97, 103, 133, 135.

35. *Gospel of Philip* 74:12-24 (Isenberg tr.). Baptism or washing: *Gospel of Philip* 64:22-32; 72:29-73:1; 75:21-24; 77:7-15; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 21, 3. Anointing with oil: *Gospel of Philip* 67:19-27 (Isenberg tr.): "Not only must those who produce the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit do so, but (those who) have produced them for you. If one does not acquire them, the name ('Christian') will also be taken from him. But one receives the unction of the [. . .] of the power of the cross. This power the apostles called 'the right and the left.' For this person is no longer a Christian but a Christ"; *Gospel of Philip* 73:15-19: "The tree of life is in the middle of the garden. However, it is from the olive tree that we get the chrism, and from the chrism, the resurrection"; *Gospel of Philip* 85:27: "All those who are in it (*the holy of holies*) will [receive the chrism]"; *Gospel of Philip* 57:27-28; 67:19-26; 69:4-14; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 21, 3-5.

36. Hugh Nibley, "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, vol. 4, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), 45-99. See also *2 Jeu* 42; *Sophia Christia*, P. Berolinensis 8502, 77-78; and *Pistis Sophia* 136.

37. Nibley, "Sacred Vestments," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1985; *Gospel of Philip* 70:5-9; 76:22-32 ("putting on the perfect light"); 75:23-24; *2 Jeu* 47; Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 486 ("Garment").

38. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Against Heresies* XXVI, 4, 2. For an excellent discussion of this topic, see Todd Compton, "The Whole Token: Mystery Symbolism in Classical Recognition Drama," *Epoche* 13 (1985): 1-81; cf. also Compton, "The Handclasp and Embrace as Tokens of Recognition," in this volume. See also *1 Jeu* 33; *2 Jeu* 47; *Galatians* 2:9; *Gospel of Nicodemus* 2:7.

39. *1 Jeu* 33. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 21, 3: "Others employ Hebrew words in order to baffle even more those who are being

consecrated"; and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 21, 3: "Others refer to the redemption as follows: 'The name which is hidden from every deity'." See also *Gospel of Philip* 53:24-54:13; 56:4-15; 62:7-17; 67:19-26; 76:6-17.

40. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 21, 5. *Gospel of Philip* 64:10-12 (Isenberg tr.): "The Lord said, 'Blessed is he who is before he came into being. For he who is, has been and shall be.' "

41. *Gospel of Philip* 85:32-86:18 (Isenberg tr.).

42. *Gospel of Philip* 70:19-20 (Isenberg tr.).

43. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 21, 3; see also *Gospel of Philip* 64:31-33 (Isenberg tr.): "Great is the mystery of marriage! For [without] it the world would [not exist]"; *Gospel of Philip* 65:7-12 (Isenberg tr.): "And none shall be able to escape (*the demonic powers*), since they detain him if he does not receive a male power or a female power, the bridegroom and the bride. — One receives them from the mirrored bridal chamber"; *Gospel of Philip* 69:35-70:1 (Isenberg tr.): "(Before) [. . . the] veil was rent [. . .] (*we had no other*) bridal chamber except the image . . . (*of the bridal chamber which is*) above"; *Gospel of Philip* 70:9-20 (Isenberg tr.): "If the woman had not separated from the man, she should not die with the man. His separation became the beginning of death. Because of this Christ came to repair the separation which was from the beginning and again unite the two, and to give life to those who died as a result of the separation and unite them. But the woman is united to her husband in the bridal chamber. Indeed those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated"; *Gospel of Philip* 74:18-23: The anointing is given in the bridal chamber.

Gospel of Philip 82:5 (Isenberg tr.): "How much more is the undefiled marriage a true mystery!"; *Gospel of Philip* 85:10-20 (Isenberg tr.): Bridal chamber is beyond a veil. "But it (*the veil*) was rent from top to bottom. Those above opened to us the things below, in order that we may go in to the secret of the truth. . . . We shall go in there by means of lowly types and forms of weakness. . . . Therefore the perfect things have opened to us, together with the hidden things of truth. The holies of the holies were revealed, and the bridal chamber invited us in"; *Gospel of Philip* 85:32-86:18 (Isenberg tr.): "Every one who will [enter] the bridal chamber will kindle the [light], for [. . .] (*it burns*) just as in the marriages which are [. . .] (*observed, though they*) happen at night. That fire [. . .] (*burns*) only at night and is put out. But the mysteries of that marriage are perfected rather in the day and the light. Neither that day nor its light ever sets. If anyone becomes a son of the bridal

chamber, he will receive the light. If anyone does not receive it while he is here, he will not be able to receive it in the other place. He who will receive that light will not be seen, nor can he be detained. And none shall be able to torment a person like this even while he dwells in the world. And again when he leaves the world he has already received the truth in the images. The world has become the eternal realm (aeon), for the eternal realm is fullness for him. This is the way it is: it is revealed to him alone, not hidden in the darkness and the night, but hidden in a perfect day and a holy light"; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 21, 3: "Some of them prepare a bridal chamber and perform a mystic rite, with certain invocations, for those who are being consecrated, and they claim that what they are effecting is a spiritual marriage, after the image of the conjunctions above"; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 13, 6: "And immediately she carries them upwards, conducts them into the bride-chamber"; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 13, 3: "Adorn thyself as a bride who expects her bridegroom, that thou mayest be what I am, and I what thou art." See also *Gospel of Philip* 67:3-5; 68:23-26; 69:1-4; 82:23-26; 84:20-23.

44. Origen, *Contra Celsum* VI, 30-33; cf. Henry Chadwick, ed., *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 345-49, who has some excellent notes on this subject, referencing many other parallels. See also Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I, 21, 5; I, 13, 6.

45. 2 *Jeu* 47. See also *Gospel of Philip* 84:23-85:20.

46. *Gospel of Philip* 61:29-31 (Isenberg tr.); cf. Keith E. Norman, "Deification, the Content of Athanasian Soterology," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1980. *Gospel of Philip* 61:29-35: "You saw the Spirit, you became spirit. You saw Christ, you became Christ. You saw [the Father, you] shall become Father. So [in this place] you see everything and [do] not [see] yourself, but [in that place] you do see yourself – and what you see you shall [become]"; *Gospel of Philip* 75:25-76:5 (Isenberg tr.): "A horse sires a horse, a man begets man, a god brings forth a god. . . . Christians, [. . .] these [. . .] (people) are referred to as 'the chosen people of [. . .] (the living God)' and 'the true man' and 'the son of man' and 'the seed of the son of man.' This true race is renowned in the world . . . that the sons of the bridal chamber dwell"; *Gospel of Philip* 81:14-24 (Isenberg tr.): "There is the son of man and there is the son of the son of man. The lord is the son of man and the son of the son of man is he who creates through the son of man. The son of man received from God the capacity to create. He also has the ability to beget. He who has received the ability to create is a creature. He who has received the ability to beget is an offspring." See also *Gospel of Philip* 57:28-58:10; 67:30-32.