



Stephen E. Robinson's *Believing Christ*¹⁴ and Robert L. Millet's popular *Christ Centered Living* are both good examples of LDS explorations of grace. For Millet, grace is considered within what he calls a cultural dilemma of unlimited potential on the one hand, and a life of struggle on the other.¹⁵ The extensive activism of early Mormons was conducive to their being "saviours in Zion" and yielding to what some have seen as a "'high demand' religion."¹⁶ The more passive elements of religiosity or spirituality tended to take second-place to activity, though perhaps these are found, for example, in that spirituality related to patriarchal blessings within LDS life.

As a final LDS image, and perhaps the best for my purposes, I take James C. Christensen's *Christ in Gethsemane*. This depicts Jesus kneeling in a bent form with his right hand to his head, face downcast. Behind him stands the presence of an angelic being. However, in this picture, the symbolism speaks of Jesus as one who is not alone; he is not the only agent and actor in the drama. It is tempting to interpret this angelic figure as symbolizing divine grace upholding the strained individual, and to contrast the scene with the lone figure in Anderson's "Gethsemane," where Christ copes alone. Be that as it may, a reproduction of this picture is included in Robert Millet's *Christ Centered Living*, whose text addresses the issue of salvation by saying, "my good works are necessary, but they are not sufficient."¹⁷ Then, in striking terms he adds, "I cannot work myself into celestial glory, and I cannot guarantee myself a place among the sanctified through my own unaided efforts. . . . It is not by my own merits that I will ever make it. Rather it is by and through the merits of Christ." One wonders to what extent the background angel is an angel of grace appearing in a changing discourse of atonement and exaltation. More speculatively and rhetorically, one also wonders whether the grammar of discourse of a supernatural presence attending to someone in spiritual crisis in a garden echoes the cultural image of Joseph Smith and his divine visitors in the woodland of his youth.

Certainly other images of Gethsemane, especially from the wider Catholic cultural background, would not so easily carry the import of the ones briefly mentioned so far. However, as intimated at the outset of this paper, there are relatively few such paintings when compared with crucifixion scenes.

From the later fifteenth century come two distinctive Garden scenes, one by Giovanni Bellini and one by his brother-in law Andrea Mantegna.

¹⁴Stephen, E. Robinson, *Believing Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992).

¹⁵Robert, R. Millet, *Christ Centered Living* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 112.

¹⁶Malise Ruthven, *The Divine Supermarket: Travels in Search of the Soul of America* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1985), 115.

¹⁷Millet, *Christ Centered Living*, 116.

In each, Christ faces away from the viewer and looks towards angelic beings who stand mid-air before him, though at a considerable distance away. These beings hold the symbolic cup in Bellini's picture and the cross in Mantegna's. Certainly the disciples lie around sleeping, and in the distance the arresting party, with Judas, draws near. In the early seventeenth century, El Greco painted Christ on the Mount of Olives. Christ is alert, the disciples fast asleep in a cocooned world all their own. The angel is before him holding the cup, and Christ faces the viewer. There is resignation, but no pain. From the mid-seventeenth century comes José Antolinez's "The Agony in the Garden" of 1665, in which the angel stands much closer and before Christ, holding that same chalice of destiny.¹⁸ A modern Agony comes from Eric Gill of the early twentieth century. Gill depicts the angel behind a recumbent Christ; once more the chalice is held, once more the disciples sleep. James Christensen's Christ in Gethsemane is, in many respects, more immediate and personal than these others. There is no symbolic chalice; the choice is internal. And there are no sleeping disciples.

While more could be said, these brief observations suffice to alert us to the evolution of the Passion of Christ and the differing routes it has taken in various Christian traditions. Yet there remains a final point, almost a postscript, but a crucial one for this paper as well as for my volume on *The Mormon Culture of Salvation*. Flowing from an earlier volume entitled *Death, Ritual and Belief*,¹⁹ it concerns the broad issue of death conquest, a vision which lay at the heart of Joseph Smith's venture in faith, and was integral to the ritual the church inherited from him and would go on to develop in the subsequent temples that would typify LDS culture. This death conquest, amongst Latter-day Saints, was already so achieved in Christ that death itself is hardly portrayed at all. Apparently, LDS culture is so given to death transcendence that death itself almost becomes invisible. This complex issue, involving as it does the cultural integration of much LDS thought and practice with wider U.S. life, may help "frame" the pictures of Gethsemane and explain the relative absence of crucifixion art in LDS iconography.

CONCLUSION

Much more could be said about the parallel relationships between Calvary and Gethsemane in relation to the sacrament service and the temple, but that belongs elsewhere. Enough has been said to show that theological preferences are deeply implicated, not only in the internal symbolic dynamics of a tradition, but also in its bounding distinctions from other traditions involved in similar themes of salvation.

¹⁸In The Bowes Museum, County Durham, England.

¹⁹Douglas J. Davies, *Death Ritual and Belief*, 2nd rev. ed. (1997, London: Cassell, 2002).