

Podcast 128: Gospel Tangents, Part 2

This is the second part of an interview Denver did this past summer with Rick Bennett for his Gospel Tangents podcast, which is presented here in its entirety in this series.

Rick Bennett: All right. So, I've got a bunch of questions that I want to ask. So, since you mentioned the Book of Mormon translation that you've done, you said that if you take out the punctuation, then it becomes less trinitarian.

Denver Snuffer: Yes.

Rick: Also, you mentioned—cuz I've read Lectures on Faith, and one of my understandings is Lectures on Faith is very trinitarian, and I feel like that's kind of why the LDS Church put that away. And so, I'm curious cuz you've re-canonicalized that. To me, the Lectures on Faith sounds very trinitarian. And the Book of Mormon, as we have it, does sound very trinitarian. So, it's interesting to me to hear you say, "Well, if you take out the punctuation..." I guess it would support more of a Nauvoo-style theology. Is that...

Denver: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. *I think so.*

Rick: So, how would you respond to that, I guess?

Denver: Well [flipping pages], let me see if I can find the language. The lecture that talks about who God is— See, one of my problems is that I just got this on the 25th, and this is the 28th.

Rick: Oh, so you haven't gotten...

Denver: I haven't gotten to Lectures on Faith to look at it just yet [looking up a scripture].

There's a definition given of who God is in Lectures on Faith. And it says that there is God the Father who is a personage of spirit, power, glory. And then, there's God the Son, and He's a personage. And then, there's the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost is the *mind* of the Father and the Son. And that is very Nauvoo-era, doctrinally correct. And that definition of God is one that he returns to. The Holy Ghost in the Lectures on Faith makes the personage of God two individuals. And then, in addition to the two individuals, the Holy Ghost is the mind of the two of them. Well, this is also in your Pearl of Great Price definition because it's in the Book of Moses; but it's in Genesis chapter 4 in these.

Therefore, it is given to abide in you: the Record of Heaven, the Comforter, the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, the truth of all things, that which quickens all things — which makes alive all things, that which knows all things, and [that which] has all power according to Wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment. [Genesis 4:9 RE]

That's in the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, Genesis 4 in The Old Covenants. That's the definition of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter that God, or that Christ says He will send (in the Book of John) to the disciples after He ascends. That Comforter is the Record of Heaven, the Comforter, the keys of the kingdom, the truth of all things, and so on—which is exactly what is the lecture-on-faith description of the Holy Ghost, which is the mind of the Father and the mind of the Son, the Record of Heaven, the truth of all things, that which quickeneth all things.

And so, you have two personages in Lectures on Faith. You have the Holy Ghost that is really a manifestation of *their* minds. You have in the Book of Moses the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis chapter 4, the Holy Ghost being the Record of Heaven, the truth of all things, the Comforter. You have the Holy Ghost *not* as a *personage*. You have the Holy Ghost as a kind of *vibrant force of truth* that is bestowed upon mankind generally. Then, we have from the Willard Richards pocket book that statement by Joseph that “The Father has a body of flesh and bones, the Son also, but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones but is a spirit; were it not so, it could not dwell within us.”

And there's an interesting article written about how that came about. That didn't stabilize. It went through multiple iterations and multiple expanding and contracting versions of what it was that is attributed to Joseph Smith before Brigham Young finally settled the dispute and reduced it to what is now in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants. That may or may not be a reliable definition of the Holy Ghost. Certainly, what we have in Lectures on Faith that Joseph vouched for the accuracy of, and what we have in the Genesis chapter 4, or Pearl of Great Price-Moses (there! I think it's Moses chapter 6) is a kind of different definition.

So, I don't think Joseph started out trinitarian, although when he reports what he learned from the First Vision (in his story that he wrote in 1838) is that he went home and, essentially, said, “I learned for myself that Presbyterianism isn't true.” And that was his response to his mother when she thought he looked rather haggard from what the encounter was. “Never mind. I'm well enough off. I've learned for myself that Presbyterianism isn't true.” And I think that was probably what Joseph got out of the First Vision on the day after the First Vision.

Anyway...

Rick: Okay. So, you're saying that Lectures on Faith is *not* trinitarian, essentially. Is that...

Denver: No, I don't think so.

Rick: You don't think it is.

Denver: Yeah. Yeah.

Rick: Okay. And so, you're saying that the Book of Mormon, if you take out that punctuation as Joseph originally wrote it, is not trinitarian, either.

Denver: Right. I'm saying you can repunctuate. The Book of Mormon in the LDS version is still John Gilbert's punctuation. Today. The LDS Church is living with John Gilbert's punctuation. We're not. And it's easy to repunctuate and to reach a different result.

I've given a talk on this, and there's stuff out there that will demonstrate what I'm talking about if you're interested or if someone listening's interested.

Rick: Yeah. Well, so, a couple other things I want to talk about since we're talking about your scriptures— And I guess I should mention I've read your book, *Passing the Heavenly Gift*. One of the things...

Denver: And you're willing to admit that? Do you still have a temple recommend?

Rick: [laughing] I do, actually.

But, yeah. So, we should probably talk about that one because that was a bit of a controversial book. And I do want to talk about the history of that. But the reason why I bring it up in the context of your scriptures is when I read it, one of the interesting things to me was your take on Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants. And from what I understand, you had said—and I've heard various things, so, maybe you can clear up this—but when you wrote in *Passing the Heavenly Gift*, you had mentioned it was really four revelations. And I like that interpretation. I don't know that I necessarily agree that that's historically accurate, but— So, I'm curious if you still stand behind what you've written, cuz I understand you've kind of evolved on your beliefs about polygamy. So, will you talk about that?

Denver: Like any interested and attentive Latter-day Saint, my understanding of the history of what happened in the early Church began using the B. H. Roberts material, the Joseph Smith History as gathered by B. H. Roberts.

I got baptized September 10th of 1973. There was a lady in our ward that ran a Seventies Mission Bookstore. I don't know if anyone in your audience is old enough to remember Seventies Mission bookstores...

Rick: So, Anne Wilde—I interviewed her, and she mentioned it.

Denver: Yeah, yeah. Anyway, it was on her porch. I bought and I read, you know, the *Autobiography of Parley Pratt*. I read all the biographies of Heber C. Kimball, John Taylor. I read the (what's it?) seven-volume set by B. H. Roberts. I read the multiple-volume set that was attributed to Joseph Smith that is the forerunner of *The Joseph Smith Papers* project. I read everything I could get my hands on in order to try and understand. I mean, if this is really the work of God—if God restored something, He's speaking again; and He hasn't done that since we close out the New Testament record. Now, He's speaking, and stuff is rolling forth that tells us the mind of God. Then, we ought to pay particular attention.

So, in the era that I came in, that 1973 time frame, you're really looking at leadership that consists of Joseph Fielding Smith's son-in-law, Bruce R. McConkie, who's the doctrinal go-to guy. You've got, you know, Marion Romney; he can stand his own. You've got Mark Peterson who thinks he's *all that* on doctrine. And, you know, you had— Well, N. Eldon Tanner was a money guy. But you've got men up there— Boyd K. Packer who ran CES at the time. You got men who have *really* strong opinions and, essentially, a consensus about what was and what was not history. And then, you wind up with Arrington, and Arrington winds up hiring D. Michael Quinn. And then, Arrington appears to go a little off the reservation, and D. Michael Quinn appears to go *way* off the reservation. And my initial reaction to what D. Michael Quinn did was to think, "What an awful turn of events that a man would ~~apostasy~~ [apostatize] and then turn around and trash the history of the Restoration in this wretched fashion." But it was Michael Quinn's work that got me looking for and trying to find original source material.

Michael Quinn donated a bunch of the material that he had to Yale University, and then, Signature Books had someone go back to Yale University; or maybe they went back on their own, and Signature was just the ones that would print it. And so, these diaries and these journals begin to roll out that is the source material from which Michael Quinn drew his conclusions cuz he had access to and made copies from the Church archives that weren't particularly open. Arrington made them open somewhat, but they weren't particularly open. So, Church history was written from a closed point of view, a controlled point of view. And Michael Quinn actually represents sort of opening the door and seeing behind the orthodox interpretation.

So, the materials that Michael Quinn made available became available. And this orthodox, traditional view of history which I understood well— I mean, I had studied it. I was a Fielding Smith-McConkie-Packer disciple; and to me, Michael Quinn's view was heretical. But as you begin to examine the source material from which Michael Quinn drew his conclusions, you begin to see that in some respects, he's not at all unfair. And in some ways, he's not just fair, but he's kindly. He's being sympathetic in his viewpoint. He got in a lot of trouble because what he wrote had a far different look and feel than the look and feel that you get from this other narrative.

So, *Passing the Heavenly Gift* was an attempt to take a whole nother bundle of source material that existed and was available, and I'd gone to the trouble of buying these small print— You know, 300 copies were all that were ever put in print. But Curt Bench over at Benchmark is one of the outlets that sells this stuff. So, I was able to access these diaries, these journals, and to look at it myself. And my attitude towards Michael Quinn changed considerably, and my view of what the Church was doing with their history changed considerably.

But of all the subjects that are out there, probably the most controversial, internationally known, dramatic topic of all is the plural marriage subject. I mean, I don't want to get really granular about it, but to me, it required over 40 years of research to reach a conclusion.

It wasn't a single view. I mean, if you're gonna read everything that is said by the advocates and the defenders of the plural marriage establishment through Joseph Smith, you have a library of material that you're gonna have to plow through. And if you're gonna to say, "Okay, what are the arguments, then, on the other side of the coin about the issue of plural marriage?"—because you've got Emma denying that Joseph ever practiced that. But you also have incidents in which Emma Smith was present in something that happened that William McClellan tries to sensationalize in his account, talking about his discussion with Emma about the very incident that you're talking about. And then, you've got Joseph's view of that, and you've got Oliver Cowdery's accusation, and the minutes of the High Council in Far West when Oliver Cowdery was disciplined for what he was saying about that same incident.

Rick: You're talking about Fanny Alger.

Denver: The Fanny Alger stuff. And you've got all of these points to triangulate from, you know. What are you to make of it? I can tell you that story and make Joseph Smith an adulterer and a plural marriage practitioner; or I can tell you that story, and I can make Joseph Smith absolutely chaste and that what happened there was not by any stretch a sexual liaison.

Fanny Alger would have nine children from a husband. Joseph Smith fathered eight children through Emma Smith. They were both at the peak of their fertility when the two of them had something going on, and yet there was no progeny; there was no child. In fact, there's no child born that was fathered by Joseph Smith other than the children that came through Emma Smith. So, if you're gonna turn Joseph Smith into something that is akin to the narrative told by the LDS Church, one of the questions that ought to enter into your balancing of what happened is the absence of any progeny when you've got a fertile man, and you've got fertile women who bore children to other men but never bore a child for Joseph Smith. What effect ought that have on your thinking and interpretation of the historical events? You got Emma Smith's denial that anything had gone on.

So, it's a long, arduous process to get through enough of the source material in order to form a fair opinion. And even after you form a fair opinion— And the one I had initially (in *Passing the Heavenly Gift*) reached was that if people are reliable— And one of the stories of the angel with the drawn sword comes from Eliza Snow; and Eliza Snow is someone for whom I had some respect. So, I'm gonna give credence to that because of her. And the story that she tells suggested that something happened in order to provoke Joseph to initially begin implementation of something that Joseph Smith was reluctant to implement.

Well, you go to the High Council minutes in Far West, and Joseph is acquitted, and Oliver Cowdery is convicted of slandering him. And everyone heard it. You go to the incident in Nauvoo when Joseph dictated a revelation in July of 1843. It was written down by William Clayton. Hyrum Smith took the revelation; it was read to the High Council of Nauvoo. The High Council minutes in Nauvoo talk about what was read to them, and they say it's an explanation of an ancient order of things, and it has nothing to do with some practice today.

How do you reconcile all of the different triangulation points?—because this, now, is a contemporary statement both in the High Council in Far West and the High Council in Nauvoo. These are contemporaneous things that suggest there's a problem with the narrative that Joseph is out there bedding women including, in the most outrageous form, bedding young teenagers. Well, to his credit, when he wrote *Rough Stone Rolling*, Bushman grapples with this issue. He comes down on the side of the historical storytelling, but he says that—and I'm paraphrasing, but this is pretty close—he says that Joseph Smith was not a nefario and that he didn't father children with other women, that his desire for sealing appears to be related to plentitude in the afterlife, plentitude in the afterlife.

Well, somewhere along the line, the idea of sealing and the idea of marriage become one and the same. And they overlap into “Well, if someone's sealed, then someone's married.” And it's not at all clear. If you go back— It's really hard for people to accept this idea.

Well, I had dinner with Michael Quinn, and I posed this...

Rick: Oh, that's interesting.

Denver: Yeah, I posed this to him over dinner. I said, “Okay, let's take June 27th, 1844, and let's say, ‘Right there—that's the *end* of the historical record.’”

Rick: That's the death of Joseph Smith.

Denver: Yes, that's the day Joseph is killed, and Hyrum.

“That's the end. You consider *nothing* that got written down or got introduced after June 27, 1844; and you are limited, *absolutely*, to the material that got its existence (put pen to paper) before that date. ‘Kay? What do you have? What do you have to support Joseph Smith practicing plural marriage with sexual relations with other women than Emma?’”

It was an interesting dinner. It was an interesting evening. We had an...

Rick: What did Quinn say?

Denver: ...interesting conversation.

Well, I don't know if I oughta quote him. I don't know if your listeners are going to be offended. But we got on that topic because he said that his reaction to my position on the plural marriage subject was bullshit. And I said, “Well, okay then, let's start with the proposition that we're gonna take June 27th, and we're only gonna go before.” And we went back and forth for a few minutes, and he said, “I see where you're coming from,” —because if you consider the source material that only was extant on that date...

Rick: So, you throw out all the Temple Lot case and everything cuz it's after June 27th.

Denver: Yeah, all of that stuff. All the affidavits got gathered. Look, the idea that you get to practice *plural wivery* is not made public until 1852 in a general conference talk in which Orson Pratt was assigned to introduce the topic by Brigham Young; and then, Brigham gets up. And then, you've got the assistant historian that had worked in Nauvoo (and who was working in Salt Lake under the leadership of Kimball) running the historian's office. And he says, in one of his diary entries, that the records that they brought with them from Nauvoo— The records were being altered to conform to the new regime.

Rick: You're talking about Heber Kimball?

Denver: No, he worked under Heber Kimball.

Rick: Oh.

Denver: His name will occur to me in a minute. But he wrote in his diary (who he's working under) that the records were now being altered in order to fit the new system of things, the new regimen. And so, you have to question if they're willing to go so far as to interlineate and alter original source material including William Clayton's own diary being altered.

One entry that you can see in *The Joseph Smith Papers* has this incredibly innocent statement that is about fidelity and monogamy, and it's turned into a statement about how only one man at a time has the authority to introduce the plural wife system, and that he, Joseph, was that guy—from interlineations. I've written about all this.

Anyway, the fact is that if you confine yourself to what existed at the time that Joseph was alive, you have a *very, very* difficult time saying that there is evidence Joseph did anything other than practice something called *sealing* that was designed to create plentitude in the afterlife. Joseph Smith, as Bushman described it, wanted large families to go into the eternities. In John Taylor's book, *The Government of God*, he asserts that the government of God in eternity is the family. So, if Joseph Smith is trying to restore on earth the family of God, the way in which you restore the family of God is to bind people together into some sealed family connection—doesn't matter that they're married to one another. If you seal them together, you seal people into a family relationship that can exist on into eternity.

So, Joseph doesn't use the word *adoption* in the context of *sealing* until October of 1843. In *The Joseph Smith Papers*, that's the earliest date I can find that—in his diaries—that the word adoption gets used.

Rick: Like as in the Law of Adoption.

Denver: Yeah, a very misunderstood concept, but Joseph practiced something that was adoption. But apparently, the introduction of that occurs in about the October 1843 time frame.

Until then, if you're talking sealing without defining what *sealing* meant, you weren't using the word *adoption*. You were using the word *marriage*, in people's projection of what the word meant, backward. If the sealing that took place was some form of familial tie that was designed to bind together as a family to Joseph, who had a connection that had been made to heaven, then what was being sealed was a family and not a sexual partner.

But beginning in that October 1843 time frame, there comes out something that results in adoption. Joseph will be dead within six months. Between the October mention and the time of his death six months later, there really isn't enough time in order to develop even an adequate historical record of what Joseph was doing with the idea of adoption in that time period. It gets mentioned. And then, what happens is that following his death, by the time you get to the 1845-November-to-February-1846 time period, there is *adoption practice* going on.

The language that we get in the word and the will of the Lord about captains of 50 and captains of 100— It's actually kind of *code* for public consumption. That was *adoption practice* going on in the Nauvoo era—so, set that aside for just a moment—*adoption* being the organization of the companies that were assigned and organized through temple ceremonies and adoption process, preliminary to the migration, the abandonment of the Nauvoo temple, the companies migrating out into the Salt Lake Valley. And they *practiced* something called *adoption*.

Then, as they migrate across, there are these conversations that enter into journals. One of the funniest to me is John D. Lee's journal where he's talking about someone asking John D. Lee to be sealed to him (adopted to him) because it's going to increase his kingdom, and John D. Lee saying, "Why would I be adopted to you? Why don't you be adopted to me so I get to be the boss in the afterlife in the government of God?"

Rick: It's all a great pyramid scheme, right?

Denver: Yeah, it's all just fabulously stupid because they're *aspiring*— If this stuff be truthful, holy, and sacred, they're *aspiring* to manipulate the afterlife by having introduced to them a concept that Joseph only had a six-month time period between introduction and death, and it doesn't get fleshed out. Then, you have to go to many, many years later when you have journal entries by Cannon and by Taylor and by Pratt, Hyde, and their conversations and the notes of meetings that they held where they say things like, "I never understood what Joseph Smith was doing with adoption." Cannon goes so far as to say, "I didn't believe it when he introduced it, and I don't believe it now." And so, the concept of adoption just drips into wreckage. And adoption as a concept related to sealing turns into mush, and it gets abandoned. It wound up being a fight.

But the idea of adoption had a profound effect on the history of the Church. Because Brigham Young led the first company. They come in; *this is the place*; they settle down; he has himself anointed a king and a priest in the log cabin that was built; and then, the king returns across the plains back to Winter Quarters. On his way back, he runs into the company that had John Taylor and Parley Pratt in it. John Taylor and Parley Pratt had some

kind of sealing-adoption organization put together for the companies they led in the migration. And when Brigham Young met them, they had reorganized the companies that they were in contrary to the way that Brigham Young had adopted folks together in the ceremonies in Nauvoo. So now, they were in *defiance* of the *priesthood* by what they'd done. Well, they were members of the Quorum of the Twelve. I mean, the vote that was taken on what? August 8th of 1844? was that the Quorum of the Twelve would take care of the Church, not Brigham Young. It was the Quorum! So, John Taylor and Parley Pratt didn't regard Brigham Young as having any right to rule and reign or dictate over them. They were doing what they thought best. After they saw how the company functioned, they realigned the adoptions as they were going west.

Well, Brigham Young fumed from there all the way back to Winter Quarters. And while we didn't have them before, the collected *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young*, which I think were put in print for the first time in 2011— you can look. I mean...

Rick: Yeah, that's a really expensive set.

Denver: Yeah, yeah. I bought one of those. They were meant for libraries, but I bought one. They are expensive, but they're comprehensive. You can read what happened.

When Sidney Rigdon was campaigning to be elected after the death of Joseph Smith, his speechifying in Nauvoo to try and solicit votes for him was bizarre. I mean, he seems deranged. Brigham Young spent several days trying to persuade Wilford Woodruff that he, Brigham Young, needed to be elected president. They *needed* a president. And Woodruff wouldn't relent. His position was it required a revelation to reorganize the First Presidency. And Brigham Young's position was it didn't require revelation. It just required a vote, that Joseph Smith got made president by a vote of the group; he did not get made president by a revelation.

Rick: Common consent.

Denver: Yeah, it was *just* an election; it was *just*— And that he could be elected the same way, and it would have exactly the same effect. No revelation required. And eventually, he wore down Wilford Woodruff. Woodruff got on board with that, and they assembled. They called a general conference, and they held a vote. In the process of holding the vote, Brigham Young did some speechifying. And I tell you, it reminds me of Sidney Rigdon in the August campaign in Nauvoo for the election. He's practically incoherent.

Now, to give him the benefit of the doubt, he'd kept Wilford Woodruff awake haranguing him, and he couldn't sleep if he was doing that. So, he's sleep-deprived at the time he's giving the talk. But one of the things that he says in the aftermath of being elected is that he could hardly wait to get back to Salt Lake to have Parley Pratt and John Taylor confess that they are not Brigham Young, meaning that now *he's* in authority, and he *alone* has the right to dictate what goes on. And that it is an act of apostasy against the priesthood to rebel against what the chief says cuz they apparently were not willing to relent when they came across the plains. So, having been elected as president in Winter Quarters, he goes back to

Salt Lake. And the rest of the Quorum of the Twelve, who were back in Salt Lake, have to choose between a fight, again, after relocating from Nauvoo over leadership or submitting to what Brigham was saying. And rather than split things up again, they relented. Brigham was elected, and he says he has the right to dictate.

Well, he still had not yet clarified that he intended to assert that he, and he alone, could seal—because Parley Pratt, even after that, sealed other women to him, including Lenore whose husband would ultimately murder Parley. And Brigham Young would later say that those women that Parley Pratt sealed to himself after Brigham was elected president, was adultery. And he went so far as to say that the murder of Parley Pratt was justified because it was adultery, and he essentially had it coming to him. Because once he was elected president, Brigham Young said, “I, and I alone, am the only guy who gets to do a sealing.”

Rick: So, he consolidated the sealing power because it was kind of distributed before that.

Denver: It was far and wide.

All of that history needs to be taken and put into the hopper if you’re trying to figure out what Joseph Smith was trying to do with sealing between the Fanny Alger moment and the moment at which Joseph is slain—because if he had absolutely no intention of creating sexual access to women by sealing, but he had, instead, the intention to put together in a form that would be recognized into eternity as a familial connection (as Bushman puts it, *familial plentitude*) then, we really have to put on a whole different lens if we're gonna try and interpret what went on.

So, I was grappling still in *Passing the Heavenly Gift* with the whole subject. I was trying to show appropriate deference to whatever the historical narrative was. I mean, I wrote that book as a member of the Church. I mean, I pulled every punch that I could pull in order *not* to be someone that's just a hostile critic. I believe if the LDS Church had adopted *Passing the Heavenly Gift* like they adopted *Rough Stone Rolling*, and they said, “Look, this is a very different way to look at the history of the Restoration. But you can look at it this way. And if you do, you can still be, you know, happy and associate with us.” I believe if they had done that, they would be facing today far less of a religious crisis than they are currently facing with the members of the Church.

I never left Mormonism. I never even left the LDS Church; the LDS Church gave *me* the boot. But, I mean, I was 100% home teacher, I was a tithe payer, I was a temple recommend holder.

Rick: You were on the High Council as I understand?

Denver: I was a...

Rick: You taught Missionary Prep, I think it was?

Denver: I did. I taught Gospel Doctrine. While all this nonsense was going on—the flap about the book—I was helping, at the request of the stake president, a returned missionary who had lost his testimony and was a student at BYU. And so, he said the only one he knew in the stake that could help the young man was me. And so, I had him come over to my house. In fact, I would go to interviews with the stake president preliminary to the issue of whether I'm going to be excommunicated or not, and on my way home from that, I would stop by and get this returned missionary in a faith crisis. He'd come to my house, and we'd spend time talking about what his issues were. The first issue, and the most troubling to him, was polygamy. So, we started with polygamy. And we spent weeks talking about that topic. Then, the next topic— I forget what it was, but we didn't— He had a list of concerns. By the time we got through the first two, he said, “Really, I don't think I've got any other concerns because what you said satisfies me that I'm looking in the wrong place for answers. There's more substantive material out there that answers.”

Rick: Could it be— cuz in your book, you basically said— This is really attractive to me. I'm going to tell you about it.

Denver: Yeah, yeah.

Rick: You separated the sealing from the polygamy.

Denver: Yeah.

Rick: And from what I understand with your new version of— I know you don't call it the Doctrine and Covenants.

Denver: Teachings and Commandments.

Rick: Teachings and Commandments.

Denver: Yeah.

Rick: You kind of excise the polygamy parts out of 132. Is that right?

Denver: I tried to fix 132. I actually went through it and tried to make it a consistent document. I said to myself, “Okay, knowing everything that I know about what went on in the Restoration, if I start with this document, can I fix it?” And I made a concerted effort. The dramatically contradictory stuff— I threw out the contradictions. And I tried to edit it.

Rick: You probably threw out the condemnation to Emma. Right?

Denver: Yeah, yeah.

Rick: I'm actually really glad to hear that..

Denver: Yeah.

Rick: ...because that bothers me.

Denver: I tried to fix it. And when I got all done with that, I thought, “Well, maybe *that* is— If they were interlineating— I mean, D&C 132 was hidden until...

Rick: 1852.

Denver: Yeah, when it was first announced in a general conference talk by Orson Pratt. Until then, it was hidden. What do they do with it in the interim?—because the only copy that we've got is in the handwriting of Joseph Kingsbury.

Rick: Well, Emma burned the one, right?

Denver: Yeah, well, Emma was allowed to burn the one. Everyone agreed to it.

Rick: So, well, going back to here, because...

Denver: But think about what the source is—Joseph Kingsbury. *Joseph Kingsbury*. It's not a clerk of Joseph Smith's in the historian's office; it's not a scribe of Joseph Smith. It's a *guy*...

Rick: So, you're saying it's a myth that Emma threw it in the fire.

Denver: No, I'm saying that the copy we have, the only extant copy we have, is in the handwriting of Joseph Kingsbury.

Rick: Mm-hmm.

Denver: Whatever it was that existed before that that he says he copied from what William Clayton wrote (and we've got Kingsbury's word for it), Kingsbury did not work as a scribe or someone that helped write history for Joseph Smith. When Kingsbury was called to testify in the Temple Lot case, he refused to swear to tell the truth about 132.

Rick: Hmm.

Denver: He would not swear that his testimony could be charged with perjury if it wasn't true. He just refused to take that oath.

Rick: So, he did not testify?

Denver: He testified.

Rick: But he refused to take that oath.

Denver: He refused to take the oath, but he testified, anyway. He said, “I'll affirm, but I will not swear to it.” And they want to know what the difference was. He says, “*Affirm* is just me

telling you what I understand. But if I swear to it, I can be charged with perjury." And he didn't want to do that.

Rick: And they let him testify, anyway?

Denver: Let him testify, anyway.

Rick: Well, I've never heard of that before. That's interesting.

Denver: Yeah, yeah.

Rick: Okay, so with *Passing the Heavenly Gift*, you are under the...

Denver: I was still under the effort to explore and try to understand.

Rick: And so, you believed that Joseph Smith did...

Denver: ...tried to make the Church's story work.

Rick: With polygamy.

Denver: Yes, tried...

Rick: That Joseph practiced polygamy.

Denver: Yeah, trying my best to make *that* story work.

Rick: But, you don't stand by that anymore.

Denver: Well, I finally reached a conclusion. Part of the reason I was able to reach a conclusion is *The Joseph Smith Papers* coming out and source material that didn't exist then existing now, and research that was done by a number of others that has also rolled out. I mean, I thought at the time *Passing the Heavenly Gift* was printed, I thought the evidence was really equivocal. It's *clear*...

Rick: Well, Michael Quinn still thinks it's pretty clear, right?

Denver: What's that?

Rick: Michael Quinn still thinks it's...

Denver: Well, Michael Quinn gives credence to the 1860 affidavits. I mean, he has a hard time envisioning the idea that a whole bunch of people would sign affidavits in Joseph F. Smith's affidavit book to support the lawsuit if they were swearing falsely. And those affidavits were used as evidence in the Temple Lot case. So, they were gathered with a specific purpose in mind.

Well, think about it now. In the 1860's, they're, for the first time, creating a record about what had happened two decades or more earlier. And Joseph is dead. But they've made public, and they have taught you. They've reassured you. They've testified from the pulpit to you since the 1852 time frame that *this* is a revelation that came through Joseph Smith. And you *know* your Church is true. And you *know* that that temple in Kirtland belongs to your group. And you *know*, because he's said it—you *know* Emma's apostate. Brigham Young called her a "wicked, wicked, wicked woman." "If Joseph Smith wants to be with Emma Smith, he's gonna have to go to hell to be with her because that's where that wicked, wicked, wicked woman is." They *know* all that because they've been told that in isolation here for a couple of decades. And Joseph's not around, and you've got a burning testimony of the Restoration. Are you going to sign an affidavit when you *know* it's true? When you *know*? I mean, the Church *leaders* are asking that you sign— a member of the Quorum of the Twelve! A future president of the Church, a member of the First Presidency is asking you to sign an affidavit. Are you going to sign the affidavit?

Rick: An affidavit that makes you look like an unvirtuous woman? Who in their right mind would do that?

Denver: It's not unvirtuous in the state of Deseret in 1860.

Rick: But the entire government is trying to take down the entire Church over this.

Denver: Doesn't matter. They won't succeed in doing that until 1890. In fact, it's those promiscuous *Romans* [speaking sarcastically] that introduced and enforced *monogamy* so they could get a supply of prostitutes. The virtuous, lovely, Christian community, including, according to Brigham Young, Jesus Christ Himself— *They* were all polygamists so that you didn't have to *have* prostitutes. But the wicked Romans— The Romans wanted monogamy because they needed an ample supply of prostitutes to keep themselves happy in their public baths and such. So, the *virtuous* women were the polygamous *wives* that bore children and lived in a familial relationship, not those monogamous fools that pretend to piety and produce prostitutes.

It's like Mark Twain commented in *Roughing It*. He said when he first thought of plural wives, he thought it was an exercise in licentiousness. But when he got a look at the poor, ungainly creatures that were being married, he said he felt inclined to take his hat off in reverence cuz he's standing in the presence of pure Christian charity. The man that would marry *one* of them was a Christian soul. But the man that would marry *ten* of them [laughing] has committed an act of Christian charity and virtue that's unthinkable in the modern world. But that's Mark Twain, and he's always tongue in cheek.

Rick: He's pretty funny.

Denver: But I gotta tell you. Have you seen the picture of Sarah Pratt in Volume 10 of *The Joseph Smith Papers*?

Rick: I have not.

Denver: It's worth the trouble. It's worth the trouble of looking at the picture of Sarah Pratt in Volume 10 of *The Joseph Smith Papers*.

I have a friend I went to law [laughing]— I'll leave his name out. I have a friend I went to law school with who's a descendant of the Pratts. His last name isn't Pratt; he's a descendant of the Pratts. Sarah Pratt looks like my law school buddy with long hair.

Rick: [chuckling]

Denver: Twain was right. It was an act of Christian charity.

Rick: [chuckling]

Denver: Boy, now we're way off.

Rick: All right, yeah.

Denver: We're way off base, and [chuckling]...

Rick: Yeah, let's— All right, so...

Denver: I do know some Pratts. They're probably all gonna be offended at this.

Rick: [chuckling]

Denver: Okay, you go look at the photo, and you decide for yourself.

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The foregoing was recorded on June 28, 2020, and is presented here with permission from Rick Bennett who conducted the interview.