Evolution of the Mormon Temple Ceremony
1840–1990

By Jerald and Sandra Tanner
Evolution of the Mormon Temple Ceremony
1842–1990

By Jerald and Sandra Tanner

1990
(Updated in 2005)

Utah Lighthouse Ministry
1358 S. West Temple
Salt Lake City, UT 84115
www.utlm.org
USER LICENSING AGREEMENT

This digital book is in Adobe’s PDF format. Purchasing grants one user license for the digital book. The digital book may not be resold, altered, copied for another person, or hosted on any server without the express written permission of Utah Lighthouse Ministry. The purchaser is free to copy the digital book to any device for their own personal and non-commercial use only.

© 2014 Utah Lighthouse Ministry, Inc.
All rights reserved.
In the pages which follow the reader will find two verbatim transcripts of the highly-secret Mormon temple ritual known as the “endowment ceremony.” Both were transcribed from tape recordings made by member of the Mormon Church who did not approve of the secrecy surrounding the ceremony. The first was transcribed from two tapes made in 1984 (see Appendix A). The second, found in Appendix B, was transcribed from a tape recording made in 1990. As we will demonstrate, major changes were made in the 1990 version. We have marked these changes on the printing of the 1984 version so that the reader can see the drastic alterations that were made to arrive at the 1990 version of the ritual (see Appendix A). While we had printed a transcript of the 1969 version of the temple ceremony in our book, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* we had to rely upon the recollections of a Mormon who had been through the temple about 120 times. Others members of the Mormon Church confirmed that this version of the ritual was extremely accurate. Nevertheless, it is obvious that human memory cannot be compared to an actual tape recording. For years we were aware of the fact that Mormons who had become disillusioned with the church were recording the temple ceremony. Although many copies of these tapes were widely circulated, we felt uneasy about using them for publication.

One of the main reasons for holding back was that we were concerned that people would confuse the use of such a recording with something we had taken a strong stand against—i.e. recording private conversations with hidden tape-recorders or recording telephone conversations without permission and using these recordings for publication. While a few states do have laws against making such a recording over the telephone, in most cases this is not illegal if one party involved in the conversation consents to the recording. Nevertheless, we felt that such recordings would only cause distrust and unnecessary dissension because the person who makes a secret recording of a conversation with someone else really has an unfair advantage over that person. For example, we could spend a great deal of time studying a certain subject and then call people we wished to discredit on the telephone and ask them to discuss that issue. If they had not studied that subject for several years, they might become confused and make some very foolish statements which we could publish. In addition, they might make some remarks concerning other people which they would not want published to the world. They, of course, would view this secret taping as very unfair and might feel justified in doing exactly the same thing to us.

Unfortunately, those who make secret tape recordings of conversations seldom furnish their victims with copies of the tapes. Since these people have no record of what was actually said, they are at the mercy of those who made the recordings. Statements could be misused or taken out of context and they would have no recourse except to demand complete copies of the tapes through legal action. For these reasons we do not approve of the practice of making recordings of conversations of individuals who do not know they are being taped. On the other hand, if we were giving a speech at a church or in some other building, and someone were to
record our statements we would have no objection.

The temple ceremony is actually a type of religious play in which the participants take part in the ritual. As far as we know, the Mormon leaders have never attempted to copyright the ceremony. If they were to do so, they would have to file a copy of it with the Library of Congress, and this, of course, would completely defeat all their efforts to keep the ritual secret. Ironically, it has been claimed that the copyright on the temple ceremony is held by an ex-Mormon named Chuck Sackett. It is true that Mr. Sackett did print the ceremony in 1982 in *What's Going On In There?* and actually put a copyright notice on his booklet. This copyright, however, could only apply to Mr. Sackett’s own comments, not to the actual ceremony because Mr. Sackett was not the author of that work. Although the Mormon leaders wish to keep the ceremony from the public, all of the evidence shows that it is in the public domain.

In any case, a few months after the Mormon Church altered its endowment ritual in 1990, we were visited by a man who had at one time been involved in temple work. He had, however, come to doubt the authenticity of Mormonism and said he was now attending another church. He informed us that he had been in contact with a Mormon who had made a tape recording of the new version of the temple ceremony and was going to allow him to make a transcription of the endowment ritual from that tape. He said that he would send us a copy as soon as it was completed.

In a letter dated July 31, 1990, we read the following:

Enclosed are the copies of the “old” [1984] and “new” [1990] temple Endowment rituals I mentioned I would send. . . . You are, of course, at liberty to reprint any or all of this material as you see fit. . . . The advantage to reprinting the “Old” Endowment as well as the 1990 version will be to allow your readers to compare the drastic changes themselves. In fact, to appreciate the changes really requires a copy of both rituals. . . . You are at liberty to print any and all of this material (including portion[s] of this letter or material derived therefrom), but please do not mention my name to anyone . . . in connection with this matter.

In another letter, dated August 1, 1990, we learned more concerning the Mormon who had made the tape recording:

I have learned that it was recorded . . . in the early part of July. Although I am not at liberty to tell you the name of the person who made the recording, I can tell you that he is an active, though unbelieving, member . . . who claims to have visited your bookstore, and says you would recognize him. He claims that he visits the temple almost monthly with his wife or with members of his Elder’s Quorum. Having known him since my BYU days . . . I know he served a mission for the Church, and was married in the temple . . . as I said before, you are at liberty to reprint or quote anything I have told you . . .

The man who transcribed the tapes of the 1984 and 1990 versions of the temple ceremony for us indicated that he did not want his name revealed because it would cause him serious problems with members of his Mormon family who are very devout in their faith.

We have carefully compared his transcripts with copies of the tapes and found them to be very accurate. In addition, our conversations with a number of Mormons concerning the recent changes made in the ceremony verify that the tape of the 1990 version is what it claims to be—a tape of the actual Mormon endowment ceremony made inside the temple itself.
Evolution of the Temple Ceremony

From the time the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith introduced the temple ceremony into the church in 1842, it has been a source of controversy between Mormons and their critics. Because the ritual is kept secret, many false impressions and charges of gross immorality have been extensively circulated. On February 18, 1846, the Warsaw Signal, an anti-Mormon newspaper published in Warsaw, Illinois, charged that those who participated in the ritual were “in a state of nudity” throughout the ceremony. In response to this article, a woman who had been through the ritual and had lost faith in Mormonism wrote a letter to the editor in which she charged that the ceremony had been misrepresented. Although she was extremely upset with the Mormon leaders, her account of what went on inside the temple in Nauvoo seems to be reliable. Since it is the earliest exposé we have found concerning the Mormon ritual, we have reprinted it in its entirety:

Mr. SHARP:—Dear Sir:—I discover by your paper, in what you have published in regard to the Mormon endowments, given of late in the temple, that you have been wrongly informed at least, so far as actual experience has taught me in the orgies of the afternoon, in that (as I have been taught to believe) most holy building. In revealing what I am about to do, I have no lashing of conscience; notwithstanding I took upon myself, during the laughable farce, several oaths and obligations of a serious character, not to reveal the secrets of the priesthood—had they been given me by any thing other than assumed authority, and vile, corrupt, licentious libertines, taking upon themselves the livery of Heaven, and essaying to represent the character of our God and Savior—knowing these characters as I did previously to be the most debased wretches upon earth, the whole farce appeared to me to be nothing less than fearful blasphemy.

I went into this pretended holy operation, in company with 14 others, all sisters in the Mormon church, and with most of whom I was well acquainted. They were, in the main, women of good character, and appeared sincere in their respective devotions. We were first received past the Guard into a private room on the north side of the Temple—this was the room of preparation of purification—We were divested of all our apparel and in a state of perfect nudity we were washed from head to foot with sweet oil scented (I think) with lavender. We were then clothed in white robes. All this was done by sisters in the church—none others were present—it is false to say that men and women are admitted together in an indecent manner. We were then conducted into a room called the Garden of Eden; here we found several of our brethren robed in white also, and apparently in a soporific state. We were presented before them and a voice from the Lord awoke them from sleep. After a considerable ceremony, which I do not recollect much of, we were left by the Lord and soon a very dandy-like fellow appeared with a black cap on; that had a long tail attached to it; he appeared very familiar—and by his very insinuating and friendly manner induced some of our sisters to eat of the “forbidden fruit.” Soon after the voice of the Lord appeared again in the garden; we all appeared frightened, and both men and women huddled together into the corner of the room, as if in the act of hiding. The fellow in the black cap presents himself before the Lord and engages in a controversy, boasting of what he had done. The Lord pronounces a curse upon him—he gets down upon his belly and crawls off. At this period of the holy ceremony, I could not suppress my risible passions; for this fellow acted his part well—undoubtedly his part being the part of a Devil—was the most natural. We were then presented with aprons, which we put on about this time, a sword was shook at us through the partition of the room, which was to guard the Tree of Life. After considerable ceremony, which I do not recollect, we were passed into another room, which was dark and was dreary. This was called the Terrestrial Kingdom; immediately the dandy in the black cap made his appearance; at first he appeared very sly—peeping about, and when he found the Lord was not present, he became very familiar and persuasive. Said he, “here we are, all together, and all good fellows well met. Some Methodists, some Presbyterians, some Baptists, some Quakers, some
Mormons, and some Strangites, &c. &c. Come let us drink together[.]” In this way he tempted us, and we partook with him. After a considerable parade and ceremony, we passed into another room, or Celestial Kingdom. Here I saw some of the Twelve, and particularly Brigham Young, with a white crown upon his head, and as I have since been told, representing God himself. We passed this room without much ceremony into another. I have forgotten what it represented; not much of interest transpired here, & we were conducted back and put in possession of our clothing—all save sister _______; she had a very fine alpacca dress stolen during our absence, and has never been able to recover it.

In the different apartments of this singular farce, we took upon ourselves oaths and obligations not to reveal the secrets of the priesthood. I do not consider them binding; as I have had ample and repeated opportunity to prove the administrators of these obligations corrupt as the Devil in Hell. In one place I was presented with a new name, which I was not to reveal to any living creature, save the man to whom I should be sealed for eternity. By this name I am to be called in eternity, or after the resurrection. This name was _______; and from all that I can gather, all the females had the same name given them, but we are not allowed to reveal it to each other, under no less penalty than to have our throats cut from ear to ear, our hearts torn out, &c., &c. I have forgotten a part of the penalties. In one place something was spoken to me which I do not recollect—the meaning was “marrow in the bone;” the token was a firm hold of the hand, pressing the finger nails firmly into the wrist of the right hand. I have since been told by a brother, that there was a mystical meaning in this, that will hereafter be revealed to me.

Now, sir, this is the substance of the Mormon endowment—and the Mormon who says it is not true, is a liar, and the truth is not in him! I have been a member of this farce of Priestcraft for the last six years; the first four years I suspected nothing but what I was in the right of all holy things. The last two years I have been doubtful, seeing the abandoned conduct of the priests; but I toileted, expecting something would be revealed in the endowments of the Temple that would strengthen my faith, and qualify me for heavenly purposes. For this I have toileted by night and by day; for this I have worked my fingers to the quick, to gain something from my scanty allowance, to assist in the completion of that building, the motto of which was to be “HOLINESS TO THE LORD;” and illumined by the Shekina[h] of heaven. Imagine then my disappointment in the blasphemous farce I saw acted before me, and by men who have at repeated trials, attempted to seduce me into the lowest degradation and ruin. But, thanks to my Heavenly Protector! I have been enabled to withstand the shock, and hope and trust I shall outlive the disgrace of once being associated with such a set of heartless scoundrels. I hope, sir, for the good of community, you will give my “revelation” a place in your columns, for in the presence of high heaven, I pronounce every word of it truth, and nothing but truth.

Yours,       EMELINE.

(Warsaw Signal, April 15, 1846, page 2)

Since the time of Joseph Smith, the first prophet of the church, Mormon leaders have always strictly warned church members not to reveal what goes on in the temple. Ironically, however, one of the highest leaders of the church, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, unwittingly caused President Brigham Young a great deal of concern when he leaked some of the secrets. In 1853, Apostle Orson Pratt apparently felt that he was doing the church a service by publishing an innocuous part of the marriage ceremony—a portion which did not contain any of the signs, key-words or penalties. Brigham Young, however, was very disturbed about the matter and stated: “I have prayed fervently when Orson published the sealing ordinance that it might be forgotten” (Statement by Brigham Young, as cited by Gary James Bergera in Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, Summer 1980, p. 27). Brigham Young’s prayer that the “sealing ordinance,” which Apostle Pratt printed in The Seer, pages 31-32, might be forgotten was not answered. Pratt’s book was later reprinted and is still available today.

Although faithful Mormons have written many articles and books on temples, they have been very careful not to tell what actually goes on in the endowment ritual. One of the most revealing and concise statements, however, comes from comments President Brigham Young made in 1877. These comments were recorded in the diary of L. John Nuttall:

When we got our washings and anointings under the hands of the Prophet Joseph at Nauvoo, we had only one room to work in, with the exception of a little side room or office where we were washed and anointed, had our garment placed upon us and received our new name; and after he had performed these ceremonies, he gave the key-words, signs, tokens, and penalties. Then after, we went into the large room . . . Joseph Smith divided up the room the best he could, hung the veil, marked it, gave us our instructions as we passed along from one department to another, giving us signs, tokens, penalties, with the key-words pertaining to those signs. (Statement of Brigham Young, recorded in the diary of L. John Nuttall, February 7, 1877, as cited in God, Man and the Universe, by Hyrum L. Andrus, 1968, p. 334, footnote 11)
The reader will notice that President Young mentioned washings, anointings, garments, the new name, the key-words, signs, tokens and penalties. He also stated that there was a “veil” with certain marks on it.

It is interesting to note that although Mormon writer Hyrum L. Andrus apparently felt that he was furnishing some important information when he printed Brigham Young’s comments about the temple ceremony, he must have had some second thoughts about publishing this information. A Mormon scholar has pointed out to us that after we printed this statement in the *Salt Lake City Messenger*, he tried to check the quotation in his copy of the “4th [1973] printing” of Hyrum Andrus’ book. He was surprised to learn, however, that the important material concerning the temple ceremony had been deleted. He also pointed out that in the book, *Principles of Perfection*, “4th Printing, 1977,” Hyrum Andrus used the quotation from Brigham Young. Unfortunately, however, all the material concerning washings, anointings, garments, the new name, the key-words, sign, tokens, penalties and the veil had been entirely omitted through the use of ellipses signs. Although we do not know whether Hyrum Andrus was pressured by church leaders into removing the material from his books or did it of his own accord, the fact that it was deleted seems to show how sensitive Mormon writers have to be when dealing with the temple ritual.

There is a rather detailed report concerning the structure of the attic story of the Nauvoo temple which reveals some very important information about the endowment ceremony itself. Although it was actually penned by William Clayton, it appears in the highly restricted journal of Heber C. Kimball. In his own diary, William Clayton wrote: “I spent the forenoon writing the history of these proceedings in Br Kimball’s Journal also give a description of the upper room” (William Clayton’s Diary,” December 11, 1845, as printed in *Clayton’s Secret Writings Uncovered*, page 81).

Davis Bitton, who served as Assistant Church Historian under Leonard Arrington, gave this information concerning Kimball’s journal: “5. ‘The Journal of Heber C. Kimball.’ Restricted volume. . . . Much of this volume concerned with temple ceremonies, including names of those who received ordinances in the Nauvoo Temple” (Guide to Mormon Diaries & Autobiographies, BYU Press, 1977, page 194). Because this journal contains sensitive information concerning the Nauvoo temple ritual and also the names of those who took part in it, it is labeled: “Very Confidential.”

Fortunately, we were able to obtain a copy of this journal which had been suppressed for almost a century and a half and photographically printed it in 1982. Since the handwriting is difficult to read and most of the material is regarding the people who went through the endowment ceremony, we did not attempt to make of transcript of the contents. H. Michael Marquardt, however, felt that some of the material concerning the temple was so important that he made his own transcription. The following is taken from Mr. Marquardt’s copy (we have emphasized some portions that may be of interest to the reader):

Thursday Decr. 11th 1845

I will now give a description of the way the attic Story is finished. The main room is 88 feet 2 inches long and 28 feet 9 inches wide. It is arched over, and the arch is divided into six spaces by crop beams to support the roof. There are 6 Small rooms on each side [of] the main room about 14 feet square each. . . .

The main room is divided into apartments for the ceremonies of the endowment. Beginning from the door at the West end is an alley about 5 feet wide extending in [to?] about 3 feet beyond the first Beam of the arch. On each side of the alley is a small room partitioned off[f] where they [the?] saints receive the first part of the ceremony or where the man is created and a help mate given to him. From these rooms to the third partition in the arch is planted the garden, which is nicely decorated and set off with shrubs and Trees in pots & Boxes to represent the Garden of Eden. In this apartment is also an alter. Here the man and woman are placed & commandments given to them in addition to what is given in the creation. Here also after the man & women [woman?] has eaten the forbidden fruit is given to them a charge at the alter. And the first and second tokens of the Aaronic Priesthood. They are then thrust out into a room which is dark being the one on the north side between the fourth & fifth division of the arch which represents the terrestrial kingdom or the world. opposite to this is another apartment of the same size representing the terrestrial [terrestrial] kingdom and between these two is an alley about 4 feet wide. In the celestial Kingdom, after the man has proved himself faithful he receives the first signs & tokens of the Melchizedek priesthood and an additional charge. Here also he vouches for the conduct of his companion. They are then left to prove themselves faithful after which they are admitted into the terrestrial Kingdom, where at the alter they receive an additional charge and the second token of the Melchizedek Priesthood and also the key word on the five points of fellowship.

There are words given with every token and the new name is given in the preparation room when they receive their washing and anointing.
After received [receiving?] all the tokens and words and signs they are led to the vail where they give each to Eloheem through the vail and are then admitted into the Celestial Room.

The Celestial room occupies the remain[der] of the main room . . . This is adorned with a number of splendid mirrors, paintings and portraits. On the East wall are the following [portraits] viz. in the center Pres. B. Young and next to the left H. C. Kimball[,] Orson Hyde. To the right, Willard Richards, John Taylor and George A. Smith . . .

In the centre and body of the Celestial Room are two splendid tables and four splendid sofas. Also a small table opposite the large window on the East end of the room on which stands the Celestial and terrestrial globes.

All the rooms are nicely carpeted and has a very splendid and comfortable appearance. There are a number of handsome chairs in it. (A photographic reproduction of this material is found in Heber C. Kimball’s Journal, November 21, 1845 to January 7, 1846, December 11, 1845, sheets 28-29)

Those who have never been Mormons have a very difficult time understanding why members of the LDS Church are so reluctant to discuss these matters. The following letter to the editor of the Salt Lake Tribune, June 28, 1990, might throw some light on the subject.

Patti Mortenson wrote:

I have subscribed to The Tribune for many years and have occasionally been offended by its articles. But none compare to the article about the changes in the LDS Temple endowment. I was shocked because such as article was ever allowed to be printed.

I am LDS and I feel there are certain sacred things in every religion that should not be discussed, let alone printed.

As I read the article, I felt betrayed and violated. I couldn’t believe The Tribune would not employ one sensitive person that would strike it from print . . . . A non-Mormon is not interested in such information, and a Mormon is offended by it.

As I read articles of murder and rape, I sympathize for the unfortunate victims and hope that the perpetrator will be caught and punished.

Feeling like a violated victim after reading in a public newspaper ideas I hold sacred, all I could do is write a letter. Even though I know who the violator is, I cannot and will not seek restitution.

Although we have many objections to the temple endowment ceremony, we do not agree with those who publicly ridicule the Mormons by referring to their temple garments as “funny undies” or use other flippant expressions when speaking of things which the Mormons consider sacred. While we are going to deal with some sensitive issues in this book, we will endeavor to discuss them on a serious level.

**Temple Ritual Altered!**

In response to Fawn M. Brodie’s book, No Man Knows My History, the noted Mormon apologist Hugh Nibley declared: “Yet of all churches in the world only this one has not found it necessary to readjust any part of its doctrine in the last hundred years. . . . How does Brodie explain the fact that the doctrine which she claims was the haphazard growth of complete opportunism remains the most stable on earth?” (No Ma’am That’s Not History, 1946, pp. 46-47).

Although most Mormons have always placed a great deal of weight in Dr. Nibley’s arguments, recent developments within the church itself will undoubtedly cause many to wonder about his claims concerning doctrinal stability. The New York Times gave this startling report in an article which begins on the first page of the issue dated May 3, 1990:

The Mormon Church has changed some of its most sacred rituals, eliminating parts of the largely secret ceremonies that have been viewed as offensive to women and to members of some other faiths.

Last month the church . . . quietly dropped from its temple rituals a vow in which women pledged obedience to their husbands . . . and a portrayal of non-Mormon clergy as hirelings of Satan.

Church officials have confirmed that changes went into effect in mid-April, but the ceremonies are considered to be too sacred, they say, for them to comment further. . . . More specific information on the changes has been provided to the news media by Mormons participating in the rituals at the church’s 43 temples around the world and by former Mormons who are critical of the rituals. A number of Mormons who would not discuss details of the rituals verified that these reports were “pretty factual” or “not inaccurate.” . . .

“Because the temple ceremony is sacred to us, we don’t speak about it except in the most general terms,” said Beverly Campbell, the East Coast director for public communications for the Church . . . she said “the ceremony itself needs to meet the needs of the people.” The revised ritual is “more in keeping with the sensitivities we have as a society,” she added.

Lavina Fielding Anderson, who will soon become an editor of the Journal of Mormon History, said she “greeted the changes with a great deal of joy,” and added, “The temple ceremony in the past has given me a message that could be interpreted as subservient and exclusionary.”
End of sample pages.
Purchase the full PDF of this book here:

http://www.utlm.org/booklist/digitalbooks.htm