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**Kurt Van Gorden. *Mormonism.***

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**Title**

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**Abstract** Review of *Mormonism* (1995), by Kurt Van Gorden.

**Kurt Van Gorden. *Mormonism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995. 94 pp. \$4.99.**

Reviewed by L. Ara Norwood

We know what to do with hypotheses. One does not argue them; one tests them. One finds out which hypotheses are worthy of serious consideration, and which are eliminated by the first test against observable experience.<sup>1</sup>

Peter F. Drucker

Kurt Van Gorden's *Mormonism* was reviewed last year in this journal by Daniel C. Peterson. After reading Peterson's review, Van Gorden (along with series editor<sup>2</sup> Alan W. Gomes, an associate professor at Biola University's Talbot School of Theology in La Mirada, California) cried foul. The claim was made that Peterson avoided the hard-hitting theological portions of the book—comprising fifty-six pages—that represented the bulk of the book. The implication was that the theological section of the book was irrefutable. In fact, although Peterson devoted the bulk of his review to historical issues relating to the Book of Mormon, he had already dealt with the theological issues in a broader context. This second review is prompted by the bitter reaction of Van Gorden as

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To the several friends and colleagues who assisted me in fine-tuning my thinking in matters of substance and style on earlier drafts, I give my thanks. In particular, I am grateful to A. J. C. Corro, T. L. Higham, K. D. Kelley, C. M. Parrish, and W. H. Robertson, for insightful comments and charitable corrections. However, I alone am responsible for any shortcomings this paper contains.

<sup>1</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1993), 471.

<sup>2</sup> *Mormonism* is one in a series of booklets that attempt to examine (and refute) such movements as Satanism, the Unification Church, neopagan groups, and UFO cults, to name a few. All are published by Zondervan and are presumably edited by Alan Gomes.

well as by the need to refute a number of falsehoods still being purveyed by him.

Inasmuch as this Zondervan publication represents a hypothesis on Mormonism, the claims of the book can be tested against observable experience, the historical record, known facts, and the like. I shall try to avoid rehashing anything already addressed by Peterson in his review (although in some instances this may be impossible). I will focus on the theological portions but I shall also respond to any additional sections of the book when I feel it necessary. In doing so, I will show why I find the publication unable to remain "worthy of serious consideration"; I will also demonstrate that its arguments are indeed "eliminated by the first test against observable experience."

For an anti-Mormon publication, however, its tone remains mostly low-key—refreshing, considering the normally hostile outlook Van Gardon seems to have for Mormons and Mormonism in general. It was encouraging to see that he was successful in suppressing such hostilities while writing the book.<sup>3</sup>

Another positive feature concerns the form. Even though this publication lacks an index, it is quite easy to locate information. This is enhanced by a two-tiered heading bar found at the top of most right-hand pages, containing primary section headings on the upper tier and subsection headings on the lower tier. Thus part 1 has a primary heading of "Introduction" with subheadings of "Historical Background," "Statistics & Activities," and "Structure & Government." Part 2, entitled "Theology," contains nine subsections or topic areas, including "Authority," "God," "Trinity," "Christ" (both his premortal life and his earthly life and exaltation), "Holy Spirit," "Man," "Salvation," "Church," and "End" (meaning "End Times"). The reader can easily identify the topics on any given page as they are highlighted in bold print. The remaining three sections comprise a brief sixteen pages and

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this resulted from editorial input, but it is hard to know for sure, since numerous unintentional errors in the volume were missed by the editors—talk of a "chocolate-covered seer stone," for instance (p. 10; this error was noted in an errata sheet). For examples of Mr. Van Gardon's ill-tempered spirit following Peterson's review, one need only scan any paragraph of the many letters Van Gardon wrote to either Peterson or myself during the spring and summer of 1996, copies of which are in my possession.

include witnessing tips, a bibliography, and a comparison chart of selected doctrines.

A book sporting this structure can be a two-edged sword; if done correctly and carefully, it can pack a great deal of good information in a functional format that intelligent people can refer to. On the other hand, if done poorly or carelessly, it can do little to assist the intended audience (in this case, evangelical Christians) to gain an accurate or adequate grasp of the issues involved. My overall assessment of this particular book is rather negative on matters of substance. It is so laced with problems and pitfalls that I feel sorry for the well-meaning evangelical apologist who relies on it in an encounter with an informed Latter-day Saint. The following paragraphs will explain the reason for this assessment.

It is not the myriad minor, petty problems that are so disturbing.<sup>4</sup> After all, while bogus and erroneous, they make little difference to the overall arguments presented. What is disturbing are the other more serious problems and errors, too numerous to present in total. I shall, however, present a few examples of the kind of poor writing that greatly weakens the objectives of the book, including examples of bald assertion, straw-man arguments, faulty logic, and flat-out error. Following this, I will offer some personal thoughts and reflections on the anti-Mormon paradigm.

## Because I Said So

One of the most obvious and glaring problems with the publication is the frequent use of bald assertion—making a substantial claim without any evidence or analysis—as if the reader is obligated to accept the argument presented simply because the author

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<sup>4</sup> Examples include calling the 1979 edition of the King James Bible the "1983 edition" (p. 23) or the 1981 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants the "1982" edition (*ibid.*); jumping from refutation number 2 to refutation number 4 with no number 3 to be found (pp. 26–7); dating President Spencer W. Kimball's new revelation on priesthood as 9 June 1978 (p. 16) when the letter from the First Presidency announcing the new policy (found in the Doctrine and Covenants) is dated 8 June 1978; citing the *ninth* chapter of the book of Moses when only eight chapters appear in that book (p. 32); calling the seven-volume *Documentary History of the Church* the six-volume "Documented" History (p. 86); citing the five-volume *Answers to Gospel Questions* as a three-volume set (*ibid.*).

assures the reader of its validity. Examples abound, but some of the more important ones include the following:

In arguing for a consistency within the New Testament message, Van Gorden simply says, "The Mormon scriptures soundly fail this test" (p. 30). My only thought was, "Care to elaborate?"

In discussing the incorporeality of God the Father, the author asserts, again without any evidence or analysis, "God does not have a spirit, as if it were a component of many other parts. He is pure spirit" (p. 39). No biblical or logical support was offered.

In attempting to refute the Mormon doctrine of a premortal existence of souls, the author offers his corrected interpretation of Job 1:6 and Job 38:7 (scriptures often used by Mormons since the passages refer to "sons of God" in a premortal sense). However, Van Gorden decides the issue once and for all with this: "It is speaking of finite, created beings who dwell in heaven" (p. 46). And we are supposed to scratch our heads and concede defeat.

In a similar vein, Van Gorden insists that Revelation 12:7-8, which reads, "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven" has "nothing to do with spirit-brothers or councils of gods, and its context rules out such an application" (p. 47). And that seems to settle the matter.<sup>5</sup>

In trying to refute Latter-day Saint understandings concerning the meaning behind the designation *Only Begotten*, the author cites the Greek word *monogenes* and then asserts, "The term emphasizes Christ's uniqueness; it has nothing to do with being begotten in the natural sense" (p. 50). But he provides no evidence to back up his claim. It would have enhanced the dialogue had the author given us some etymological data behind the Greek word in question beyond his mere allegation (cf. Genesis 22, in which God commands Abraham to sacrifice his "only son"—as a prototype of God's only Son).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The book only refers to Revelation 12:8. I included verse 7, as would most Mormons, because it adds contextual clarity to the issue. Cf. Isaiah 14:12-5 and Psalm 82.

<sup>6</sup> Robin M. Jensen, "The Binding or Sacrifice of Isaac: How Jews and Christians See Differently," *Bible Review* 9/5 (October 1993): 45, noting the tight parallels between Isaac and Jesus and citing especially Genesis 22; Romans

Additional examples of bald assertion without analysis could be found regarding the author's interpretations of Jeremiah 1:5 (p. 59); Romans 8:16-7 (p. 60); James 2:26 (p. 66); and 2 Thesalonians 2:3 (p. 74).

## Straw-Man Arguments

Perhaps if another format had been used, one that allowed for greater explanation in detailing a point, we wouldn't find the frequent firing of salvos at nonexistent Mormon ideologies. A very few examples follow:

In discussing church organization as found in Ephesians 4:11-3, the author claims the passage "presents an interesting problem for Mormons, because, though they quote it in support of their church structure, it actually refutes it, since apostles precede prophets" (p. 28). This simplistic thinking betrays the author's mind-set, namely that the term *prophet* is assumed to be a Mormon priesthood office reserved for members of the First Presidency. He couples that belief with the assumption that since the members of the First Presidency are not members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, they do not hold the office of apostle. Both assumptions disclose a misunderstanding of how Mormons view their priesthood offices. Although a full discussion of the issues involved is beyond the scope of this review, suffice it to say that the highest priesthood office in the Melchizedek Priesthood is *apostle*.<sup>7</sup> The term *prophet* is not the name of any office within the Melchizedek Priesthood. It is equally important to note that, contrary to the impression given in the book, the three members of the First Presidency in almost all instances have held the apostolic office and are, generally, apostles, though not current members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Grasping those reali-

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8:32; *Epistle of Barnabas* 7:3; Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (London: SPCK, 1950); Anthony J. Tambasco, *Theology of Atonement and Paul's Vision of Christianity* (Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Some may argue that the president of the church holds an "office" that is higher than the office of apostle, that being "the President of the High Priesthood" (D&C 107:64-5). Still, this individual is an apostle, the presiding and senior apostle.

ties would be the requisite starting point before any further intelligent discussion could be accomplished.

The author appears to believe that Mormons picture God the Father in precisely the same images as he is portrayed in paintings of the first vision. Hence he writes,

when Mormons paint pictures of the First Vision accounts of Joseph Smith with two human-gods<sup>8</sup> appearing in a light, these are no less images. Thus, both the Romans [in Romans 1:23] and the Mormons have exchanged God's heavenly likeness for an earthly likeness. Isaiah summed up the issue with the challenge, "To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?" (40:18). This rhetorical question has the built-in answer, "None." Nothing can adequately be compared to God. Adam is not a good comparison, nor is any figure of a man, painted or carved. (p. 39)

I agree with Van Gorden that our attempts to describe God will forever remain inadequate. Yet I am certain that if Joseph Smith, who saw the Father and the Son, were to look at the paintings that depict the first vision, he would know the differences between the painting and reality. I am equally certain that Joseph, like the rest of us who have given it any thought, would have no strong concerns about the differences inasmuch as the paintings are meant to capture an idea to the best of the artist's abilities. A painting is no more reality than a map is the territory. The paintings have value in that they serve to remind us that God is a loving, personal, tangible, corporeal father of glory and power. The paintings do not attempt to depict the precise degree of glory (nor could they) any more than they attempt to depict with precision the height, hair color, or style of garb. (Is the author prepared to

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<sup>8</sup> The loaded language of "two human-gods" is an invention of Van Gorden. I have never known any Mormon to use that terminology or to think of the Father and the Son in that manner. The term *human* has no association with the divine for the Mormon (although the reverse is not true). Likewise, the use of the term *gods* with a lowercase *g* has, to my knowledge, never been used to properly describe the Father or the Son. Van Gorden should have known better. (Sadly, I suspect he does.)



make the same claims against Michelangelo Buonarroti's famous painting of God found on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome?)

The author seeks to refute "the Mormon position" that God is a man. He does this by asserting, "God is not a man" (p. 39), and then by referencing Numbers 23:19 and Hosea 11:9. This entire discussion was unnecessary. Mormons do not believe that God is a man (i.e., a mortal human). Mormons believe God is deity, and thus Mormons fully believe and embrace the two Old Testament passages cited by the author.<sup>9</sup>

In summarizing the Mormon position on Christ's earthly life and exaltation, the author lists six points with the poor taste of a tabloid exposé (p. 47). Five of the six points focus on either the notion that Jesus was sired by the Father the way any normal human conception occurs, or that Jesus was married and had children. Evidently this is written, to the exclusion of all else that Mormons believe about Christ, to inflame the mind of the evangelical reader. Yet the notions concerning Jesus' being married and having children are not Mormon doctrines, regardless of whether they are true.<sup>10</sup> And even though the author likes to proclaim loud and long that Mormons believe the Father "sired Jesus as any man would through sexual intercourse with Mary" (p. 47), none of the Latter-day Saint sources he cites used the term *sexual intercourse*. In fact, if he were a bit more cautious, he would pay careful attention to the wording he quoted from Elder James E. Talmage, concerning a "higher manifestation" of natural law. What that means exactly, we cannot say with precision, but it does not mean what Van Gorden would like it to mean. Hence, I cau-

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps Van Gorden's reading of Moses 7:35 ("Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name") is the source of the problem (although he does not quote this passage here). Even so, the meaning behind the Old Testament passages in no way clashes with this passage from the Pearl of Great Price, surface readings aside.

<sup>10</sup> What would Van Gorden have against Jesus if he were married and had children? Is monastic celibacy holier than matrimony and child-rearing? Is Van Gorden aware of the Jewish requirements for the rabbinate? What might be implied by Jesus' being referred to as *rabbi* (see John 1:38; 3:2)? The issue is not resolvable at this point in time, and I remain undecided. If it turns out that Jesus was married and had children, that would be a nonissue for me. I wonder how many evangelicals could say the same.

tion the author to employ more discretion and sensitivity in the future when treading on sacred ground such as this (cf. Luke 1:35.)

In many instances, when the author is citing biblical verses to support a particular idea, he is doing nothing to invalidate Mormon doctrine. In other words, much of the time he is citing scripture to prove a point Mormons would agree with whole-heartedly. Examples would include the notion that the Holy Ghost is God (p. 53); that God blessed man and woman and commanded them to rule over the earth (p. 61); that James never prescribes works as the way of salvation (p. 66)<sup>11</sup>; that all who serve in the church derive their authority from Christ (p. 73); or that Jesus Christ will judge the nations and individuals (p. 78). Thus it seems clear that in many instances, our disagreements may stem more from our differing interpretations of the Bible rather than our assumed non-acceptance of it. Informed persons know that Latter-day Saint reservations about the Bible are minimal and involve translation or transmission issues, not overall acceptance of the Bible as a whole.

## Bad Logic

The publication also suffers from a number of positions that, when looked at through the lens of logic, make one blush. Here are some of the more notable examples of careless logic:

The Anthon episode is presented on page 9. Critics of the restored gospel have yet to learn that this works to their disadvantage every time it is used. Van Gorden attempts to appear fair and balanced by presenting the Latter-day Saint account of Martin Harris's visit to Professor Anthon, which tends to validate the Book of Mormon, and Professor Anthon's testimony, which tends to invalidate the Book of Mormon. Daniel Peterson's review right-

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<sup>11</sup> In a sense, it is probably tendentious to argue that "James *never* prescribes works as the way of salvation" (p. 66), since Martin Luther and others have attacked its canonical basis because of that very reading of it. The complexities ought to be taken account of, and a start into the controversy might be made by consulting Thorwald Lorenzen, "Faith without Works Does Not Count before God! James 2.14-26," *Expository Times* 89 (1978): 231-5; see also Martin Abegg, "Paul, 'Works of the Law,' and MMT," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20/6 (December 1994): 52-5, 82; cf. Hebrew *ma'ase ha-Tora* = NT Greek *ergon nomou* "works of the Law" (Romans 3:20, 28, Galatians 2:16, 3:2, 5, 10.

fully pointed out that Van Gorden was being as disingenuous as was Anthon, since Van Gorden withheld the important fact that Anthon told the story on another occasion in which he flatly and irrevocably contradicted himself.<sup>12</sup> Van Gorden, on pages 16 and 17 of a response entitled "An Open Letter and Review of FARMS Polemical Tactics and Daniel C. Peterson's Methodology,"<sup>13</sup> defends himself by making two basic points. The first is (1) since he (Van Gorden) gave both the Mormon point of view as found in the Pearl of Great Price and the Anthon version as found in a letter dated 17 February 1834, he did his job as a balanced and impartial reporter. The second point is (2) since, he asserts, contradictions in numerous Mormon issues exist, we had better hold our tongue about the Anthon contradictions. This is very poor logic. If Anthon contradicted himself, which he did, Van Gorden is remiss to evade discussion of the issue head-on. Mormon scholars are happy to discuss any supposed contradictions involving Mormon history or doctrine, but not in order that Van Gorden can avert his eyes from the clear problems with the Anthon story.

To leave no room for confusion on the matter, the Anthon statement in the 17 February 1834 letter (written to anti-Mormon E. D. Howe) reports, "He [Martin Harris] requested an opinion from me in writing, which, of course, I declined to give." Yet in a letter written later to T. W. Coit, Anthon reveals that Harris "requested me to give him my opinion in writing. . . . I did so without hesitation."<sup>14</sup> If such a blatant contradiction were located in a Latter-day Saint source, one could be certain that Van Gorden would make much of it. Then why not confront the contradiction when found in a non-LDS source?

When discussing Latter-day Saint missionary activities, the claim that "Proselytizing those within Christian denominations is their major thrust" (p. 16) is very misleading. Why would our major thrust be the conversion of church-going Protestants and

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel C. Peterson, review of *Mormonism*, by Kurt Van Gorden, *FARMS Review of Books* 8/1 (1996): 95-103.

<sup>13</sup> Kurt Van Gorden, "An Open Letter and Review of FARMS Polemical Tactics and Daniel C. Peterson's Methodology" (n.p., 31 May 1996, 16-7), hereafter "Open Letter."

<sup>14</sup> See *CHC* 1:103, 106; see also letters and story on pages 102-9.

Roman Catholics? We are just as interested in active religious people in all sects, denominations, and faiths, be they Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian or any other believer, or agnostic, or atheist.

The author makes a poorly reasoned statement concerning the Latter-day Saint belief in a continuation of prophets subsequent to Old Testament times: "In order for Mormons to prove that a succession of prophets would continue from the Old Testament to the New Testament, they must first demonstrate that the New Testament expected such a succession, and this cannot be done" (p. 26). This statement is erroneous for several reasons. First, the Mormon position is not concerned with a succession of prophets from the Old Testament to the New, but rather, with revelation coming from God to his prophets in these latter days. Second, even if Mormons were trying to prove that Old Testament prophets were to continue into the New Testament era, why would Mormons first have to demonstrate a New Testament *expectation*? Why could Mormons not simply show that the idea of prophets in the New Testament was not condemned? The booklet never addresses this question. Third, the New Testament itself describes the presence of prophets within its pages.<sup>15</sup> Van Gorden's claims that prophets did not continue after the time of Christ are faulty.

Again, in an effort to show that prophets are not needed and that the biblical canon is closed and complete, the author makes this claim: "The Bible is sufficient because it is the complete message necessary for salvation" (p. 28). Then, as evidence of that bold statement, the author writes, "Paul told the church at Rome that his message to them is complete (Rom. 15:14, 18-19)" (p. 29). Does Paul's letter to the Romans mean that no additional revelation or scripture was to be added to the canon? Using this logic, we could simply keep the epistle to the Romans and throw out the rest of the Bible, or at least everything that was written after

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<sup>15</sup> See Acts 13:1; 15:3; 21:10 for examples. Also, oft-quoted passages by evangelicals (such as Hebrews 1:1-3) say nothing explicit about the cessation of prophets, per se. The passage in Hebrews does confirm that God used the medium of prophets during the old covenant era, and that in the present time God has spoken directly through his Son Jesus Christ. Yet nowhere does the passage imply that God will, therefore, never send holy prophets again in the future. To claim otherwise is to read one's predilections into the text. Cf. Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; Matthew 21:11, 46; 13:57; John 1:21; 6:14; Acts 3:21-4; 7:37.

Romans.<sup>16</sup> But even were the Bible complete, history has shown that the Bible is misunderstood and misused by large numbers of people. One need only consider the hundreds of Protestant denominations in our midst, each with a variant dogma or creed, each having to choose between opposing salvific paradigms,<sup>17</sup> each having to embrace one of four eschatological systems,<sup>18</sup> each having to wade through the various views of hell.<sup>19</sup> All these opposing voices result from man-made interpretations of what Van Gorden claims is a sufficient Bible.

The book attacks the alleged contradictions in Mormon scriptures concerning polygyny.<sup>20</sup> The author claims that in Doctrine and Covenants 132 “God commanded polygamy for eternity” but that in Doctrine and Covenants Official Declaration 1, “God forbade the practice” (p. 27). First, as an aside, Doctrine and Covenants 132 does not claim that polygyny is to continue indefinitely; yet I would attribute this misunderstanding to a possible misinterpretation. The shoddy logic comes into view, however, when one realizes that just one page earlier, the author allows for God to change his mind on the issue of prophets continuing indefinitely: “God sometimes works in his people in certain ways and then ceases when his purpose is fulfilled” (p. 26). I wonder if the author can acknowledge his inconsistency, or if it escapes him.

### Flat-Out Error

One of the most surprising statements in the book comes not from the author but from the editor, Alan Gomes. In referring to Van Gorden, Gomes touts him as “highly qualified” to write such a book, and I agree: Van Gorden’s qualifications do allow him to produce just such a book. Van Gorden, however, is also said to be a “well-respected professional Christian apologist with consider-

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<sup>16</sup> This would extend to the remainder of Paul’s epistles and to many other parts of the New Testament.

<sup>17</sup> Calvinistic or Arminian.

<sup>18</sup> Dispensational premillennial, historic premillennial, postmillennial, or amillennial.

<sup>19</sup> See William Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Van Gorden uses the less accurate term *polygamy*. Polygyny refers to having more than one wife or female at a time.

able expertise" (p. 6) on Mormonism. I do not share this assessment at all. Here is why:

An authority with considerable expertise would not have written that Joseph Smith's "parents were inactive Protestants" (p. 7). Lucy could not possibly be pigeonholed in that category, and it is highly debatable as a valid claim for Joseph Smith's father.<sup>21</sup>

An authority with considerable expertise would not have written that the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon "received a special manifestation of the angel" (p. 10). Where this notion came from, the author will have to explain. The Testimony of Eight Witnesses printed in the front of every copy of the Book of Mormon makes it explicit that the witnesses saw the plates, but not the angel (which manifestation was reserved for the Three Witnesses).

An authority with considerable expertise would not have written, concerning the translation of the Book of Mormon, "The Urim and Thummim were not used" (p. 10). A true authority would know that the two individuals closest to the work of translation (Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery) claimed explicitly that the Urim and Thummim was used to translate the Book of Mormon.<sup>22</sup> The seer stone mentioned by David Whitmer and others may well have represented a component of these sacred devices, or the seer stone may have functioned independently.

An authority with considerable expertise would not have written "all eight witnesses left Mormonism to follow James Strang"

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<sup>21</sup> See the articles by A. Gary Anderson, "Smith, Joseph, Sr.," and Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Smith, Lucy Mack," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1348-9 and 3:1355-8 respectively. Van Gorden commented on the value of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* on at least two occasions. In his booklet, his very first footnote (p. 7) heaps the following praise: "[It] is a fresh and honest attempt by scholarly Mormons to openly discuss controversial Mormon history and beliefs." However, in a recent radio broadcast, Van Gorden referred to the same encyclopedia in these terms: "There's a lot of holes in [the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*] that it begins to look like Swiss cheese after a while." (This remark comes from his appearance as a guest of Van Hale's radio program, *Religion on the Line*, for 20 April 1997).

<sup>22</sup> HC 4:537; Joseph Smith—History 1:62; *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 14, records Oliver Cowdery's report: "Day after day, I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated with the Urim and Thummim."

(p. 10 n. 13). If the author can prove this statement to be factual, I will leave Mormonism and follow Strang. Without taking the time to refute this statement by analyzing each of the Eight Witnesses in turn, are we expected to believe that Joseph Smith Sr. was one of these? Smith Sr. the father of the Prophet Joseph Smith, died a faithful member while patriarch to the church, long before Strang attempted to gather followers. Is this expertise?<sup>23</sup>

An authority with considerable expertise would not have written that Mormons were racist toward and believed a divine curse was "placed on . . . American Indians" and thus, by implication, suggest that American Indians were banned from the priesthood (p. 15), the point of much of this section.<sup>24</sup>

An authority with considerable expertise would not have written that Mormon men who do not wear the sacred temple garments have no priesthood authority (p. 79). Worthy Mormon males are generally ordained to the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods before entering the holy temple where the sacred garments are first received. Both men and women wear these holy garments.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> While on the public radio program *Religion on the Line*, hosted by LDS writer Van Hale, 20 April 1997, Kurt Van Gorden was asked why his book claims that "all eight witnesses [to the Book of Mormon] left Mormonism to follow James Strang" (p 10). Van Gorden appeared very uncomfortable with the question, offering several vague or novel answers. His litany of excuses included the following: it was the editor's fault, it was the publisher's fault, it is unknown how it happened, it is not a big deal in the first place, or (my favorite one): "Actually, all eight witnesses spiritually did fall astray right to hell!" Ultimately, he claimed the text should have read "William Smith" rather than "all eight witnesses," but he has yet to come to grips with the stark reality: Kurt Van Gorden is responsible for the blunder, not the editor, not the publisher.

<sup>24</sup> Two additional comments to this effect are found on page 16 of his book, but Van Gorden noted their error in the errata sheet. The mention of the American Indians on page 15 is not on the errata sheet, perhaps because the priesthood issue is not explicitly laid out, although the notion of "the" curse (singular) for both blacks and American Indians is reported. Van Gorden places the blame of the overall error on the editors at Zondervan, who he claims inserted the notion of American Indians being denied the priesthood into the book without his permission and then failed to show Van Gorden the final edited draft of the manuscript before going to press. (See Van Gorden, "Open Letter," 8, 18).

<sup>25</sup> Van Gorden and others would do well to consult Hugh Nibley's "Sacred Vestments," in *Temple and Cosmos* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992). 91-138.

An authority with considerable expertise would not have written that Mormons believe “The original church fell away from the truth *after* three centuries” (p. 70, emphasis added). I know of no reputable scholarly Latter-day Saint sources that make this claim. In actuality, the body of Mormon literature on this topic maintains that the falling away of the early Christian church was essentially complete by the end of the first century.<sup>26</sup>

An authority with considerable expertise would not have made the claims Van Gorden made concerning the Utah War: “Although no shots were fired, several hundred U.S. army troops died of hardships caused by Mormons who plundered their cattle and food stock, leaving them without supplies during a severe winter” (p. 15.) Van Gorden gave no reference for this claim in the footnotes. However, when challenged on a radio broadcast, Van Gorden claimed this information came from Hubert Howe Bancroft’s book, *History of Utah*.<sup>27</sup> I have read Bancroft and find Van Gorden’s portrayal of this event seriously misleading. Bancroft never claims that several hundred U.S. army troops died of hardships caused by Mormons. Bancroft simply reports the following: “The Utah war cost several hundred lives.”<sup>28</sup> Bancroft notes that suffering was experienced by the Mormons as well.<sup>29</sup> While Mormons (as well as non-Mormons) strategically defended

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<sup>26</sup> Kent P. Jackson, *From Apostasy to Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 10, 19–30; Hugh W. Nibley, “The Passing of the Church” and “The Way of the Church,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 168–322; James L. Barker, *Apostasy from the Divine Church* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 126–31; B. H. Roberts, *The Falling Away* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1931), 1–51; James E. Talmage, *The Great Apostasy* (Independence: Zions, 1910), 34–40; Stephen E. Robinson, “Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13–14” in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 177–91.

<sup>27</sup> Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of Utah 1540–1886* (San Francisco: History Company, 1889), 512–42.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 538.

<sup>29</sup> “Thirty thousand of the Mormons . . . were already moving from the northern settlements. . . . By their side women and children, many of them so thinly clad that their garments barely concealed their nakedness, some being attired only in sacking, some with no covering but a remnant of rag-carpet, and some barefooted and bleeding, tramped through the deep snow, journeying they knew not wither [*sic*],” *ibid.*, 535.



their territory against the invading armies of the U.S. government by intercepting supply wagons and the like (a better alternative than shooting their fellow Americans), Bancroft never blames the loss of life during the Utah War on the Mormons. Bancroft points out that Brigham Young was very gracious to the opposing army, offering the commanding officer the choice of immediate withdrawal or remaining through the winter: "Should he desire, however, to remain until spring in the neighborhood of his present encampment, he must surrender his arms and ammunition to the Mormon quartermaster-general, in which case he would be supplied with provisions, and would not be molested."<sup>30</sup> How common is that kind of offer during wartime? Furthermore, Bancroft details the strategically poor choices the U.S. government imposed on its troops during this time of war, implying that these poor military choices were at least as responsible for any casualties that occurred as was any destruction of supplies by the Mormons.<sup>31</sup> In time of war, would Van Gorden have the Mormons become pacifists? It is clear to me that Van Gorden has either failed to read Bancroft's work carefully or is guilty of deliberate misrepresentation.

### Doctrinal Issues

I have struggled with how to review Van Gorden's section on theology. At first I considered taking each theological topic and

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 514.

<sup>31</sup> Bancroft writes, "Fortunately [these provisions] did not fall into the hands of the Mormons, though when unpacked it was found that they contained more of utterly useless supplies than of what was really needed. For an army of about 2,400 men, wintering in a region 7,000 feet above the sea-level, where at night the thermometer always sinks below zero, there had been provided 3,150 bedsacks—articles well suited for a pleasure camp in summer—and only 723 blankets; there were more than 1,500 pairs of epaulets and metallic scales, but only 938 coats and 676 great-coats; there were 307 cap covers, and only 190 caps; there were 1,190 military stocks; but though some of the men were already barefooted, and others had no covering for their feet except moccasins, there were only 823 pairs of boots and 600 pairs of stockings" (ibid., 522). "The Utah war was an ill-advised measure on the part of the United States government" (ibid., 538). "The Utah war . . . accomplished practically nothing, save that it exposed the president [Buchanan] and his cabinet to much well-deserved ridicule" (ibid., 538).

offering an exhaustive response. I dropped that in favor of a more focused treatment of only one doctrinal topic (it didn't matter which one, but I opted for the topic of scriptural authority) since I discovered that the same underlying structures and approaches were repeated throughout the theological section. In addition to addressing the topic of scriptural authority, I will walk the interested reader through a tour of some additional random but fascinating theological features that caught my eye.<sup>32</sup>

*Authority of scripture.* In discussing Latter-day Saint views on sources of authority, the author discusses open vs. closed canon, the standard works and the role of general authorities, and types of revelation (i.e., prophecy and visions, etc.).<sup>33</sup> Nowhere does Van Gorden discuss the Latter-day Saint belief in and acceptance of the Holy Bible (other than a cursory and passing mention that the Saints prefer the KJV, p. 23). Further, nowhere does the discussion focus on anything relevant regarding the Book of Mormon, other than a few obscure oddities that are only meant to poison the well (ibid.). The overall approach is to select a very few items that seem to the author to make a suitable target. The author is not promoting understanding; he is merely trying to set up a system of differences, hoping that the more differences he identifies (perceived or real), the greater the likelihood that evangelical readers will write off the restored gospel.

*A closed canon?* Although the booklet provides a fairly accurate statement of the Mormon belief in an open canon, the arguments used by the author to refute the position make an interesting case study. Actually, the booklet fails to respond to the Mormon position at all and instead places its focus on whether the

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<sup>32</sup> Although the author prides himself on the notion that his theological section is bulletproof, this proves to be a delusion. But first I want to reemphasize that both Kurt Van Gorden (Van Gorden, "Open Letter," pp. 9, 21) and series editor Alan Gomes (personal letter from Alan Gomes to Ara Norwood, dated 8 April 1996) have claimed that Peterson failed to address any of the theological sections of Van Gorden's booklet, presumably because Peterson either lacks the know-how or is intimidated. I find this absurd for reasons I will discuss momentarily.

<sup>33</sup> Although the author does not cover the topic of priesthood authority in this section, he does touch on the issue under the topic of "The Church" (pp. 70-5).

latter-day scriptures constitute a valid contribution to an open canon. Thus we read the following:

The argument for an open canon is not proof that Mormon revelation, or any other religious work, should be part of the Bible. . . . One could believe in an open canon and still reject Mormon revelation, based on its contradictions and inconsistencies with the Old and New Testaments (p. 25).

Thus the booklet fails to refute the Mormon position and instead addresses the different (albeit important) issue of whether the Latter-day Saint scriptures could constitute a valid contribution to an open canon.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the author, perhaps unwittingly, concedes the Latter-day Saint position—at least in theory.

In making the point that one could “reject Mormon revelation, based on its contradictions and inconsistencies with the Old and New Testaments,” the booklet seems to be engaging in circular reasoning, a frequent tactic in anti-Mormon literature. But to his credit, the author does come through with an attempt at making a point to back up this sweeping generalization. Yet even here the arguments presented in the booklet to validate this bold affirmation are deeply flawed. In addressing the question of whether the LDS scriptures could constitute a valid contribution to an open canon, the author rejects this possibility and cites three scriptural dyads that, in the thinking of the author, constitute evidence of disagreement between the Book of Mormon and the Bible.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that the language seems to equate “canon” with “Bible.” This is an equation not shared by Latter-day Saints. In other words, if the author were to grant canonical status to any of the Latter-day Saint scriptural records (even if only in theory) it seems he would demand that they become incorporated into the biblical record. In this arrangement the book of Alma, for example, would be an added book of the Holy Bible and not part of a separate canonized Book of Mormon.

<sup>35</sup> All three supposed contradictions have been addressed decisively by competent Latter-day Saint scholars in the past. For the issue of a possible clash between 2 Nephi 25:23 and the New Testament doctrine of grace without works (Ephesians 2:8–9) see Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 107, 125 n. 51. Concerning the supposed contradiction between Alma 7:10 and Matthew 2:1 on the birthplace of Jesus, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Chattanooga Cheapshot, or the Gall of Bitterness,” in *Re-*

We then get treated to this line of reasoning in a follow-up bit of argumentation:

It seems unreasonable and futile for Mormons to insist upon an open biblical canon. When Joseph Smith retranslated his Bible he never added any books to its canon. The footnote for the Song of Solomon (1:1) in the Mormon edition of the Bible says, "The JST manuscript states that 'the Songs of Solomon are not inspired writings.'" This makes Joseph Smith's revision of the Bible a 65-book Mormon collection, as opposed to the 66-book Protestant collection. He rejected one book and added no others, thus closing the biblical canon. To continue to argue for an open canon is self-defeating (p. 26).

Is this the best we can expect? What would he say of Martin Luther's attacks on the Epistle of James? Must we ask the obvious: Who said Mormons limit the idea of an open canon to the Bible? And what Latter-day Saint ever claimed Joseph Smith's inspired revision closed the biblical canon? The author is putting words into our mouths, or else he seems to feel that neither Joseph Smith's restoring plain and precious truths to an incomplete biblical canon, nor the coming forth of the other Latter-day scriptures (being extrabiblical) contributes anything to the question of an open canon. Certainly Joseph added the books of Abraham and Enoch to the biblical canon.<sup>36</sup>

The author also writes, "The apostles gave no method beyond their death for receiving inspired Scripture, so we must conclude that they were fully satisfied with and aware of the closure of canon" (p. 31). This is an incredibly revealing statement, for it divulges volumes about the bias and paradigm of the author. Even

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*view of Books on The Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 62-78. On the presumed Tower of Babel contradiction (Ether 1:35-6 vs. Genesis 11:7-9), see Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 172-4.

<sup>36</sup> LDS Pearl of Great Price. James H. Charlesworth discusses the lack of a settled scriptural canon within Christendom in his *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985), 1:xxi-xxiv. Cf. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

if one were to grant the position that the apostles did not articulate a method for the early church to receive scripture after their passing, how does one justify the conclusion that this meant they were fully aware of, let alone satisfied with, the closure of canon? The original apostles (excepting John, whom I discuss below) died before the New Testament ever went through a process of canonization.<sup>37</sup>

Another noteworthy bit of argumentation follows: "John, the last living apostle, was satisfied that what was written was sufficient. He noted in John 20:31 that much more could have been written, but it is unnecessary because what was written is sufficient" (p. 31). Our author is citing the last verse of the twentieth chapter in the Gospel of John as evidence that the canon is closed.<sup>38</sup> John 20 concludes with the episode involving Thomas's conversion to the doctrine of the resurrection. Verses 30 and 31 read as follows: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that

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<sup>37</sup> Protestant Bible scholar Milton Fisher admits that "divine inspiration" is the determining factor and "the key to canonicity" rather than the other way around. Fisher is also candid as to forces within the early Christian church that caused some well-meaning, but perhaps misguided, leaders to close the canon: "In a sense, the [heretical] movement of Montanus . . . was an impetus toward the recognition of a closed canon. . . . The pressure to deal with [the heresy of] Montanism, therefore, intensified the search for a basic authority." See Milton Fisher, "The Canon of the New Testament," in *The Origin of the Bible*, ed. Philip Wesley Comfort (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1992), 75. Van Gorden refers to another article from this volume on page 30 of his booklet. Additional information concerning the human forces that brought about a closed canon can be found by referring to Andrie B. Du Toit's article titled "Canon, New Testament," in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102-4. See also Harry Y. Gamble's scholarly work on the New Testament canon in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:852-61. Professor Gamble admits quite candidly that not everything that was authentic Christian scripture made it into the canon, and that while the canon was, by definition, closed, it was not complete (*ibid.*, 855). The best overall assessment of the canon and authority of scripture is by James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Not only have several scholars considered John to be the earliest Gospel (James Charlesworth and the late William F. Albright), but one would have expected Van Gorden to use Revelation 22:18 here as his equally flawed proof-text.

ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” John’s message is clear: while his gospel does not record all Christ’s miracles, those that are recorded are for the purpose of fostering faith in Christ so that we might one day be received into the kingdom of God.

How Van Gorden concluded from John’s statement that the canon is closed will have to be explained by him. But if Van Gorden insists the passage in question closed the canon, how does he explain the fact that John continued to record an entire chapter following this one? John 21 discusses several very important items, including a miracle performed by Jesus while his apostles are fishing, the “feed my sheep” dialogue with Peter, the Savior’s prophecy concerning Peter’s martyrdom, and a rather subtle passage concerning the translation of John.<sup>39</sup> If the answer is that the Gospel of John effectively closed the canon following John 21, then how does one explain the fact that John wrote his epistles following the completion of his Gospel? Even if some sort of answer were offered, however strained, the fact remains that neither John 20:31 nor any other passage of scripture indicates that the canon of scripture is to be closed. The idea of a closed canon is a paradigm that serves to cushion the blow to a religious system that has no ongoing revelation.

*Prophets and apostles unnecessary?* The booklet correctly sets forth the Mormon belief that, since God is consistent, revelation from God to his prophets is to continue as in former times. Then come the attempts at refutation. Some of the comebacks include the following:

“Jesus, as head of the church, is our only prophet, thus ending Old Testament prophets” (p. 26). The language used in this line of reasoning reveals much about the Protestant bias. I will attempt to show the consequences of that bias. I propose that the term “Old Testament prophet” is not limited to Moses and the sixteen holy men whose names appear on various Old Testament books

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<sup>39</sup> The passage concerning the translation of John (John 21:20–3) involves a doctrine understood by very few in the Christian world. It is, however, well-understood by Latter-day Saints, thanks to the prophetic utterings and scriptural translations of the Prophet Joseph Smith. See *HC* 4:207–12, 425; 3 Nephi 28:1–9, 12.

categorized as prophetic (i.e., Isaiah through Malachi). I propose that the term "Old Testament prophet" includes any person living from the time of Adam to the time of Christ who had a divine commission as a spokesman for the Lord.<sup>40</sup> To cite but one example, Nathan would be an Old Testament prophet even though no book of Nathan appears in the Old Testament canon. Yet, from the time of Moses to the end of the Old Testament era, all these prophets were under the old covenant, the lesser law, the law of Moses. Now I ask the critical question, What of those holy men who had a divine commission before Moses? What of Abraham, Enoch, Noah, and Jacob? These were also prophets. Yet they did not operate under the law of Moses. Therefore, I propose that the terms *prophet* and *law of Moses* are not synonymous and are not married to each other. Prophets are not exclusively Mosaic. Thus while it is true that Christ brought to an end the law of Moses, it is not true that Christ brought to an end the function of or the need for prophets. Prophets are simply an authoritative means by which our Heavenly Father communicates to his children in whatever era or under whatever law. Prophets do not represent a specific law or plan or system of salvation the way the old covenant and the new covenant do. The author's presentation would be greatly strengthened if these two distinctions were not muddled.

"The gift of prophecy that was exercised in the early church is not to be confused with the prophets of the Old Testament. Ephesians 4:8–11 distinguishes the 'gift of prophecy' from the prophets who were the foundation (Eph. 2:20)" (pp. 26–7). I do not find this line of reasoning persuasive. The author is intent on imposing a chasm between Old Testament prophets and the New Testament gift of prophecy. But he is also trying to use that to prove there can be no New Testament prophets after Christ. Yet he disadvantages himself by referencing Ephesians 2:20, which is not speaking about the gift of prophecy as a gift of the spirit, but, as Van Gorden rightfully points out, as prophets (along with apostles) constituting the foundation of the New Testament church organization. Does Van Gorden believe these foundational prophets are *Old Testament prophets*? If so, he will have an interesting time

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<sup>40</sup> Luke 11:50–1 makes it clear that prophets have been around "from the foundation of the world." In another context, both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ are explicitly termed prophets (see Matthew 11:9 and John 4:19).

trying to prove that. If not, then he is faced with a very serious quandary for which no easy resolution is apparent.

"God has provided heavenly guidance through means other than a prophet-leader. Jesus, as prophet, priest, and king of the church, sent the Holy Spirit to guide his people" (p. 27). Latter-day Saints wholeheartedly agree with the latter half of this statement. It is not only taught plainly in scripture (John 14-6), but we have experienced this supernal gift in our church. The author's statement implies that prophets were the sole means by which God communicated with mankind under the old covenant, and the Holy Spirit the sole means by which God provided guidance to mankind under the new covenant. If I am reading him correctly on this, and perhaps I am not, I would like to know how he harmonizes this view with 2 Peter 1:21, which, in describing conditions during the old covenant era, declares, "But holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

I would be impressed if Mr. Van Gorden could produce even one passage of scripture that proves unequivocally that the canon of scripture is to be closed or that there would never be any additional authentic prophets sent among the people after New Testament times. If he succeeded in doing so, he would be the first person in history to demonstrate what others have only ventured to prove.<sup>41</sup>

*Other items that caught my eye.* Although I have raised serious objections to the booklet's treatise on the authority of scripture, it is actually one of its stronger portions (comparatively speaking). Other theological topics covered by Van Gorden are generally less compelling, such as the following: In a discussion on "The Nature of God" (pp. 31-9), I found the author's portrayal of this Latter-day Saint doctrine somewhat disturbing. Of all the information the author could have presented about Latter-day Saint views of God, it appears he had only a polemical aim in mind by presenting six of the most extreme or speculative aspects of Mormon "belief." Much of his brief sketch of the Latter-day Saint view would be

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<sup>41</sup> Citing the usual litany of passages, such as 2 Timothy 3:16, Revelation 22:18, etc., will not do, because in each instance what we have is someone forcing his man-made doctrines onto a strained and inaccurate reading of the biblical text. The fact remains: no biblical passages—absolutely zero—prohibit latter-day prophets, revelation, or an open canon of scripture.



unintelligible to most Mormons inasmuch as his portrayal simply does not reflect normative LDS thought, even if some of the points turn out to be true. Further, the author seems to have left out the most fundamental aspects of the LDS view of the nature of God. For example, I would have to ask, do Mormons *believe in* the Almighty? Do they worship him in the name of the Son? Do Latter-day Saints believe that God the Father is omniscient? Do they believe he is omnipotent? The answer is affirmative in every case. Yet none of these points is mentioned by the author, presumably because they do not meet his goals of sensationalism. Yet such beliefs are core Latter-day Saint doctrines about God.

While cataloging the most common biblical passages Mormons use to support their beliefs about God's nature, the author alleges Mormons use John 8:17-8 (which reads, "The testimony of two men is true; I am one that bears witness of myself. And the Father which sent me testifies of me") for the alleged belief that God the Father (as the second witness) is a man (p. 33). But the charge that Mormons believe God is a man is dangerously misleading. The language is loaded with conjecture and misunderstanding. What does it mean, anyway, to believe that God the Father is a man? Does it mean that God is a mortal? Mormons don't believe that. Does it mean that God is human? Mormons don't believe that. Then what does it mean? Does it refer to gender? Does the author have a problem with that? What is wrong with the belief that when the Bible speaks of God as Father, as he and him, it is speaking literally?

Back to John 8:17-8 and its use by Mormons. I have never known members of my faith to use this scripture to defend the notion that God the Father is a man (whatever that may mean). But Mormons do use this passage to defend the view that the Father and Son are two separate personages. I would be interested in how the author (or any other believer in the doctrine of the Trinity) squares the implications of this biblical passage with his belief that the Father and the Son are one divine essence.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> I have had countless evangelicals, many of them very educated in the doctrines of their faith, answer the following question in this manner: If God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son of God were to grant you a theophany, and it was their will that you behold them in the flesh without perishing, how many people, or persons, or beings would you see: one or two? The Protestant answer,

A comment is in order regarding the author's interpretation of Genesis 5:1-4, which reads in part as follows: "And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth." Latter-day Saints often use this passage in conjunction with Genesis 1:26-7 ("And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, . . . So God created man in his own image") to demonstrate that God is a tangible, corporeal being. The author's interpretation is strikingly different: "[This passage] supports the Christian doctrine that all are born under Adam's sin (Rom. 5:12, 18). Seth inherited Adam's spiritual image, which was a fallen, sinful nature" (p. 36). The doctrine of original sin is something evangelicals have long hung their hats on. But the source of this doctrine rests with the erroneous scriptural interpretation of Romans 5:12 of one very influential man, as Professor Elaine Pagels details:

The Greek text reads, "Through one man [or 'because of one man,'] sin entered the world, and through sin, death; and thus death came upon all men, *in that* all sinned." John Chrysostom, like most Christians, took this to mean that Adam's sin brought death into the world, and death came upon all because "*all* sinned." But Augustine read the passage in Latin, and so either ignored or was unaware of the connotations of the Greek original; thus he misread the last phrase as referring to Adam. Augustine insisted that it meant that "death came upon all men, *in whom* all sinned"—that the sin of that "one man," Adam, brought upon humanity not only universal death, but also universal, and inevitable, sin. Augustine uses the passage to deny that human beings have free moral choice, which Jews and Christians had traditionally regarded as the birthright of humanity made "in God's image." Augustine declares, on the contrary, that the whole human race in-

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invariably, is "Only one." This flies in the face of the meaning of John 8:17-8. Trinitarian explanations using language that God is both one being and three persons bring to mind the paradox of the squared circle.

herited from Adam a nature irreversibly damaged by sin.<sup>43</sup>

Pagels goes on to point out the following:

For more than twelve years Augustine and Julian debated, shouting back and forth their respective views, until Augustine died. After considerable controversy, the church of the fifth century accepted his view of the matter and rejected Julian's, having concluded that Augustine, the future saint, read Scripture more accurately than the heretic Julian. Recently, however, several scholars have pointed out that Augustine often interprets scriptural passages by ignoring fine points—or even grammar—in the texts. Augustine attempts to rest his case concerning original sin, for example, upon the evidence of one prepositional phrase in Romans 5:12, insisting that Paul said that death came upon all humanity because of Adam, “*in whom* all sinned.” But Augustine misreads and mistranslates this phrase (which others translate “in that [i.e., because] all sinned”) and then proceeds to defend his errors *ad infinitum*, presumably because his own version makes intuitive sense of his own experience. . . . Augustine's argument has persuaded the majority of western Catholic and Protestant theologians to agree with him; . . . But, . . . when we actually compare Augustine's interpretation with those of theologians as diverse as Origen, John Chrysostom, and Pelagius, we can see that Augustine found in Romans . . . what others had not seen there.<sup>44</sup>

In trying to salvage the classical (Nicene) doctrine of the Trinity, Van Gorden seeks to counter Latter-day Saint belief that Stephen saw two separate and distinct personages, the Father and the Son (see Acts 7:55–6). Van Gorden writes, “Stephen saw one

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<sup>43</sup> Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), 109, emphasis in original. Pagels (not a Latter-day Saint) represents a large and informed segment of the scholarly community on this issue.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 143, emphasis in original.

body, identified as the resurrected body of Jesus" (p. 44). Further, the author maintains that God the Father "is not mentioned" in the passage. Let me now quote Acts 7:55-6: "But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heaven opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." Van Gorden is quite correct to insist that the opening part of the passage does not specifically mention the Father, but rather his glory. Yet Van Gorden's strong commitment to a doctrine (i.e., the Trinity) blinds him to the rest of the passage. Stephen is said to have seen Jesus standing on the right hand of what? God's glory? No, God himself. Mormons do not deny that Stephen saw the glory of God because the Bible text says he did. Yet, Mormons do not assume that the glory of God is synonymous with God's person. Mormons are not blinded to the rest of the passage by a defiant adherence to a doctrine that is more at home with Greek metaphysics than it is with plain Christian doctrine.<sup>45</sup>

Van Gorden's presentation of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was unnecessary (pp. 51-3). Mormons do not, as the author asserts, make any serious distinctions between the Holy Ghost and the Holy Spirit. We do make a distinction between the Holy Ghost/Spirit and a divine but impersonal influence we believe is mentioned in the New Testament (see John 1:4, 9). We have many names for this divine spirit, sometimes calling it "the Spirit," "the Light of Christ," "the Spirit of Truth," "the Holy Spirit" (which, admittedly, can be confusing to some),<sup>46</sup> etc. Concerning this Light of Christ, Van Gorden asserts that it "can be felt by Mormons universally" (p. 52). But here he is misinforming his readers, I assume unintentionally. Both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon make it clear that this divine influence affects

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<sup>45</sup> I would refer the reader to Robinson's *Are Mormons Christian?* 71-8, for further light on this subject. See also Craig Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 111-42. Blomberg gives one of the most compelling presentations I've ever encountered on behalf of the doctrine of the Trinity. Even so, I find Robinson's presentation more compelling still.

<sup>46</sup> A case in point would be found in John Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 76-8. I am indebted to Carl Mosser for reminding me of this reference.

everybody, not just Mormons: "For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil" (Moroni 7:16). Van Gorden's portrayal of Latter-day Saint doctrine that the "Holy Ghost descended in bodily shape *as a dove*" (p. 52, emphasis added) represents a misunderstanding on his part, since Mormons do not believe what he claims we believe. Joseph Smith is reported to have said the following:

The Holy Ghost is a personage, and is in the form of a personage. It does not confine itself to the form of the dove, but in sign of the dove. The Holy Ghost cannot be transformed into a dove.<sup>47</sup>

In an attempt to show that the Latter-day Saint doctrine of a premortal existence of souls is not scripturally based, the author cites I Corinthians 15:46: "That was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (p. 57). And I readily admit that a sophomoric reading would lead to such a conclusion. But Paul spends much of his sermon on the resurrection doing a compare-and-contrast of this earth life with the afterlife. Paul does not concern himself in this sermon with any issues related to the question of life before mortality. Paul's compare-and-contrast of this life vs. the life to come includes imagery involving "the flesh of men" vs. celestial (and other) bodies (I Corinthians 15:38-41); corruption vs. incorruption (I Corinthians 15:42); dishonor vs. glory (I Corinthians 15:43); weakness vs. power (vs. 43); a natural body vs. a spiritual body (I Corinthians 15:44). It is in this context of comparing the conditions of this earth life with the afterlife that Paul writes what he does in verse 46—essentially that it is not this earth life which is spiritual and heavenly, but the afterlife. Thus Van Gorden's use of I Corinthians 15:46 to discredit the Latter-day Saint doctrine of a premortal existence of souls has left the LDS doctrine unscathed because Paul is silent on the matter.

In discussing the doctrine of *apotheosis* (or deification), the author refers to a New Testament passage (Romans 8:16-7). This passage is often used by Latter-day Saints in support of their doc-

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<sup>47</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 276.

trine that man may become like God in some way. Van Gorden declares "this does not mean we will obtain a divine nature" (p. 60). But here the author paints himself into a theological corner inasmuch as 2 Peter 1:4 explicitly declares, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be *partakers of the divine nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Even if Van Gorden insists that what is true in 2 Peter 1:4 is not true in Romans 8:16-7, his unqualified declaration that we cannot or will not receive a divine nature presents a doctrinaire spirit that flies in the face of Peter's inspired counsel.

Van Gorden's treatment of the doctrine of baptism for the dead (pp. 66-8) is shallow. He attempts to refute the doctrine through logic and reason on the one hand and through scriptural interpretation on the other. In the former case, the author opines that some of the dead would likely exercise their agency and reject the ordinance work done for them. Since we mortals who serve as proxies for the deceased have no way of knowing who has accepted baptism and who has rejected it, "the act is a mere charade of what may or may not be true" (p. 67). The author is not making a sound argument here; Mormons are not concerned with who accepts the work. That is left in God's hands. It is no more a charade than is a Billy Graham rally, when neither Graham nor his staff can be certain of the impact of his sermons on the lives of his individual listeners. In the latter case, the implication is made that Paul's wording in 1 Corinthians 15:29 was not a reference to a Christian practice but rather to a pagan rite (p. 68). Why Paul would rely on the falsity of a pagan ritual to bolster his arguments for the truthfulness of the resurrection demands an answer. A further question concerns why qualified and competent biblical scholars allow for the possibility that baptism for the dead was, in fact, an early Christian rite that has been lost to modern Christendom.

The reader is encouraged to review Hugh Nibley's insightful and scholarly work on the subject, first published when Professor Nibley was about thirty-eight years old.<sup>48</sup> Nibley carefully docu-

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<sup>48</sup> Hugh W. Nibley, "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 100-67.

ments commentary on the doctrine from early Christian times through the Middle Ages and beyond. Yet Nibley deliberately leaves the LDS perspective out of the equation: "It has not been the purpose of this discussion to treat baptism for the dead as practiced by the Latter-day Saints."<sup>49</sup> I have to wonder if Van Gorden has ever taken the time to read Nibley's brilliant piece. Recognizing that most anti-Mormons will reject Nibley's work out of hand (without reading it) since he is a Mormon, I would turn Van Gorden's attention to the work of a non-Latter-day Saint scholar by the name of Krister Stendahl. Stendahl's article, "Baptism for the Dead, Ancient Sources," appears in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. In it, Stendahl makes the following claim that seems to challenge Van Gorden's thesis: "[Paul] refers to a practice of vicarious baptism, . . . Interpreters have puzzled over the fact that Paul seems to accept this practice. At least he does not see fit to condemn it as heretical, but Paul clearly refers to a distinct group *within the Church*."<sup>50</sup> James Barr sees the Christian practice in 1 Corinthians 15:29 as related to an earlier Jewish "practice of intercession and expiation for the dead" (2 Maccabees 12:38–45), and suggests that modern-day believers were wrong to have jettisoned the practice.<sup>51</sup>

In discussing the location of the atonement of Christ, the author claims, "The atonement was accomplished upon the cross (not the garden of Gethsamane [*sic*]), where Christ bore our sins (1 Peter 2:24)" (p. 70). It is true that 1 Peter 2:24 is a powerful and often overlooked passage to show the cross surely played a key role in the atonement of our Lord and Savior. Van Gorden is to be credited for referring to it. At the same time, he misses the even greater role that the Garden of Gethsemane played, perhaps because the Gethsemane passages are not as explicit as is the 1 Peter 2:24 passage. What follows are three passages from the Synoptic Gospels that highlight the Gethsemane episode. Spiritually sensitive readers should come away with some sense that Gethsemane played a key role as the *oil press* during the zenith of the atonement:

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>50</sup> Krister Stendahl, "Baptism for the Dead, Ancient Sources," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:97, emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*, 42 n. 19.

Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face. (Matthew 26:36–9)

And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray. And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy. And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground. (Mark 14:32–35)

And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed. Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:40–4)

These are among the most numinous passages in all of holy writ. These passages may not express explicitly that the atonement took place in the garden, but the spiritually inclined sense the still, small voice of truth bearing witness to the sacred ground that is Gethsemane.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> A number of prominent Latter-day Saint writers have indicated that the agonies of Gethsemane returned at one point during the Savior's crucifixion; thus the physical tortures of the cross were joined by the spiritual paroxysm of Gethsemane. See Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 232 n. 22; Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Arti-*



Advocating the idea of salvation by faith alone (without righteousness or works), the author cites a number of New Testament references (e.g. John 3:16; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9–10) that more or less indicate that faith or belief in Jesus Christ results in salvation or eternal life (p. 70). Mormons have absolutely no misgivings about these passages. Our concerns with this presentation would stem from its incomplete nature, which, as it stands, results in little more than proof-texting. In other words, the author is setting up a formulaic structure that looks like this: If man does X, God will grant him Y [Y equaling salvation or eternal life.] According to Van Gorden, the Bible teaches that X equals only one thing: belief (or faith) in Christ. Mormons do not deny that faith is one of the cells in X, perhaps even the most critical one. Still, Mormons see other biblical passages of scripture that contain the same formulaic structure (i.e., if man does X, God will grant him Y) except that Mormons find the Bible replete with additional requirements that go beyond faith in Christ. Here are some (paraphrased) examples:

We are saved by *hope* (Romans 8:24).

Be converted and *childlike* [humility] and you will enter the kingdom (Matthew 18:3).

This is life eternal: *to know the only true God* and Jesus (John 17:3).

Receive a *love of the truth*, that ye might be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

He that *believeth and is baptized* shall be saved (Mark 16:16).

What shall I do to have Eternal Life? *Keep the commandments* (Matthew 19:16–7).

Christ is the author of eternal salvation unto all that *obey* him (Hebrews 5:9).

Godly sorrow worketh *repentance* to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Ye are saved *if ye remember* what I have preached unto you (1 Corinthians 15:2).

He that *endureth unto the end* shall be saved (Matthew 10:22).

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*cles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), xiv, 109, 289; James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 660–1.

Finally, in what can only be described as deeply disappointing, the author saves his worst for the last and misrepresents Latter-day Saint doctrines concerning hell and the afterlife. On pages 76–7, the author demonstrates a lack of even a rudimentary grasp of the Mormon concept of hell, the afterlife, or the plan of salvation. He first makes the erroneous statement that all critics of Mormonism are the sons of perdition: “Those who fight against the Mormon church . . . will go to hell. Those who fight against Mormonism are the sons of perdition” (p. 76).<sup>53</sup> He then claims that Mormons believe these sons of perdition can repent and inherit the telestial kingdom—another false statement: “Those in hell still have opportunity to repent and can atone for their sins” (p. 76). His quoting of Bruce R. McConkie’s noncanonical book, *Mormon Doctrine*, to support this claim shows that he has misunderstood a basic text. He quotes McConkie as follows: “The wicked and ungodly will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire in hell until they finally obey Christ, repent of their sins, and gain forgiveness therefrom. Then they shall obtain the resurrection and an inheritance in the telestial and not the celestial kingdom.”<sup>54</sup> McConkie’s quoted comments were referring to disembodied spirits who had not yet been judged or resurrected. The wicked among these persons were not yet consigned to any final state but were in a state we call spirit prison, which can be properly termed *hell* only if used in an inclusive and temporary sense. But the McConkie quotation goes on to differentiate clearly between those soon-to-be telestial beings who are in the temporary, spirit-prison hell, and the actual sons of perdition who, following their resurrection, will go on to inherit a permanent hell by being cast into outer darkness. If Van Gorden had read McConkie more carefully

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<sup>53</sup> Although Kurt Van Gorden, with a touch of sarcasm, likes to pride himself on being included in this company, I must hasten to inform him that he doesn’t make the list. The Prophet Joseph Smith made it clear that the sons of perdition consist of people who completely turn from the truth *after* receiving the gospel and gaining from the Holy Ghost by revelation the absolute knowledge of the divinity of Christ, the restoration of the gospel, etc.—things one presumes Van Gorden has yet to experience. If he really wants to find company with the sons of perdition, he will have to first embrace the fullness of the gospel and enjoy its fruits for a season and then undergo a complete rebellion.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 816.

(even reading the very next sentence), he would have realized that McConkie is clear that these benighted souls [i.e., the sons of perdition] have no chance to work their way out of hell and into one of the kingdoms of glory. McConkie writes, "Those who have committed the unpardonable sin, however, will not be redeemed from the devil and instead, after their resurrection, will be cast out as sons of perdition to dwell with the devil and his angels in eternity."<sup>55</sup> McConkie goes on to cite the Prophet Joseph Smith, who explains, "After a man has sinned against the Holy Ghost, there is no repentance for him," and "You cannot save such persons; you cannot bring them to repentance."<sup>56</sup> So how did Van Gorden, the self-proclaimed expert on Mormon teachings, bungle our basic doctrines this badly? Is it willful deception on his part, or is it abject incompetence?

### In Defense of Peterson's Polemics

I turn my attention now to Daniel Peterson's review last year. Even though Peterson chose not to address the theological section of the booklet at that time, Van Gorden's claims that Peterson was incapable or afraid of doing so are silly. Peterson soundly refuted several of the allegations of this publication.<sup>57</sup> And Peterson is clearly capable of addressing and making mincemeat out of Van Gorden's theological barbs. In 1992 Peterson published a book (coauthored with Stephen D. Ricks) entitled *Offenders for a Word*.<sup>58</sup> In that volume of over 250 pages, Peterson and Ricks address some twenty-two commonly heard anti-Mormon argu-

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 816-7.

<sup>57</sup> Series editor Alan Gomes would not concede the obvious. Hence, he writes, "Imagine my surprise to discover that Dr. Peterson deals exclusively with historical minutiae. If this is the best critique your scholars can muster it gives me great cause for confidence in the solidity of Van Gorden's work. . . . Now, I am not suggesting that Peterson has undermined even Van Gorden's historical treatment. Indeed, much of Peterson's apologetic strikes me as untenable, at least at face value" (personal letter from Alan Gomes to Ara Norwood, dated 8 April 1996).

<sup>58</sup> Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992). Hereafter cited as *Offenders*.

ments, soundly putting them to rest in every instance. Many of these already addressed issues are resurrected in Van Gorden's little volume. In fact, with the sole exception of the issue Van Gorden labels "End Times" Peterson had already addressed and refuted at least some portion of each of the other theological doctrines raised in Van Gorden's booklet.<sup>59</sup> The following table serves as a useful cross-reference tool in this regard:

Van Gorden's Theological Topics/	Already Addressed by Peterson
Authority and Scripture	<i>Offenders</i> , 117–28
The Nature of God	<i>Offenders</i> , 69–72
The Trinity	<i>Offenders</i> , 62–9
Jesus and Lucifer as Spirit Brothers	<i>Offenders</i> , 149–51
The Virgin Birth	<i>Offenders</i> , 129–31
The Holy Spirit	<i>Offenders</i> , 92–5
Humanity	
Premortal Existence	<i>Offenders</i> , 96–8
Original Sin	<i>Offenders</i> , 133–7
Deification	<i>Offenders</i> , 75–92
Salvation	
By Grace	<i>Offenders</i> , 138–47
By Faith	<i>Offenders</i> , 148–9
Baptism for the Dead	<i>Offenders</i> , 108–17
The Church	<i>Offenders</i> , 101–7

What we have in this small sample of Peterson's writings (which comprises over 90 pages and more than 300 footnotes) is some compelling elucidation of the strength of the Mormon

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<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to note that the "End Times" section was the sole portion of the booklet that presented some Latter-day Saint theology that Van Gorden was either unable or unwilling to attack. Van Gorden correctly presents as LDS doctrine "Jesus Christ will return in a resurrected body" and "When Christ returns he will set up his millennial reign" (p. 76) without ever making any statements to the contrary. Thus series editor Alan Gomes's promise that "The group's teachings are then refuted point by point" (p. 6) is itself refuted by Van Gorden.

position on every doctrine covered, which at the same time demonstrates the anti-Mormon approach to be largely devoid of merit.

### Concluding Thoughts

Finally, let me conclude by sharing some observations about anti-Mormons. Anti-Mormons fail in their assessments of Mormonism because they invariably use a flawed method consisting of several components. Anti-Mormons as a rule examine Mormonism by holding it up to the rubric of Protestant Christianity. When the anti-Mormon sees the very real differences, points of commonality are ignored. Yet the most important question is never faced: "Which theology better represents the truth?" Instead, the question that preoccupies the mind of the anti-Mormon is, "Does Mormonism match up with my current understanding of Protestant Christianity? If not, I will brand Mormonism a heresy rather than reexamine my own faith." This, of course, is done at a subconscious level.

Anti-Mormons have a tendency to mock the differences they see between their own religious tradition and that of Latter-day Saints rather than attempt to understand the differences. This stems from an unhealthy arrogance that all spiritual truth known to man is housed in their heads. This prevents honest inquiry, but it also causes carelessness and sloppy, slipshod analysis. It leads to what one expert has termed the "intelligence trap."<sup>60</sup> This is the great difference between the exchanges of Stephen Robinson (a Latter-day Saint) and Craig Blomberg (a conservative Baptist) in their landmark book entitled *How Wide the Divide?*<sup>61</sup> Both men are deeply committed to their respective faiths, both have impeccable academic credentials, and both took the necessary time to acquaint themselves with their opponent's respective theology. Both demonstrated a mastery of openness and inquiry.

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<sup>60</sup> The *intelligence trap* refers to the tendency in some people to acquire some learning, to come under the illusion that their learning is so vast it cannot possibly be improved or expanded upon, and thus the inability to experience new or greater learning is squelched. See the discussion in Edward de Bono, *de Bono's Thinking Course* (New York: Facts On File, 1985), 4, 88, 104.

<sup>61</sup> Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

Both are able to communicate with respect, dignity, and maturity, while at the same time neither pulls any punches or whitewashes the seriousness of the differences.

One additional aspect of the flawed methodology worth mentioning concerns an imbalance many anti-Mormons suffer from. This imbalance involves fostering a spirit of *advocacy* at the expense of any posture of *inquiry*. Anti-Mormons *advocate* a position: "Mormonism is heresy" or "Mormonism is a cult." Anti-Mormons fail to balance this with any components of inquiry: "What do Mormons believe *and why*?" Anti-Mormons usually feel exempt from any need for inquiry since, in their mind, Mormonism teaches that God was once a man, or that God has body, or that there are three Gods, or that there are many Gods, and the list goes on and on. It makes no difference if the list contains true or false statements about Mormon beliefs. What matters is that a list is given. The "list," even if a list of only one item, is enough justification for an anti-Mormon to close off any inclinations of inquiry. Inquiry stops the moment even one Latter-day Saint notion appears to clash with any point of doctrine held by the anti-Mormon. In other words, if an anti-Mormon takes at face value the King James rendering of John 4:24 ("God is a Spirit"), and then finds out that Mormons believe God has a body of flesh and bones, the anti-Mormon may understand the *what* of Mormon doctrine on this point. However, they rarely, if ever, take the time to inquire into the *why* of Mormon theology. The result is a closed and clouded mind that gives birth to the twin devils of ignorance and rejection.

Anti-Mormons often deny they are anti-Mormon. They have an intrinsic sense that it is more noble to stand *for* something than stand *against* something. If one is only bent on attacking and demeaning another religious system, one risks that those who are persuaded to defect will not ever make the transition over to the new religion since the emphasis was on undermining the old religion. In one sense, Van Gorden is on target here. He vehemently denies he is an anti-Mormon and often makes that issue superior to all other issues.<sup>62</sup> I think he denounces the label so strongly

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<sup>62</sup> On 20 April 1997, as a guest on Van Hale's radio talk show, *Religion on the Line*, Van Gorden continually interrupted the program with long, drawn-out bickering about whether he should be referred to as an anti-Mormon, some-

because the label does carry with it a certain amount of shame. It is as disgraceful and ignominious to be an anti-Mormon as it is to be an anti-Semite or anti-Black. Yet, where Kurt Van Gorden is concerned, the label is apt. His vigorous denials, accompanied by his countercharge of "Christian bashing," betray his inability or unwillingness to acknowledge his true vocation in life. He is an anti-Mormon through and through.<sup>63</sup>

Ultimately, I find most anti-Mormons are motivated by a deep, intrinsic core of insecurity—an insecurity that fosters ill will toward the unknown. A new religion appears on the horizon that does not seem to square with their currently accepted religion. The new religion is perceived to be a threat, having the potential of upsetting the apple cart that has provided so much stability and structure to people, many of whom derive their primary source of security from their "church" or their "religious system." Such persons are vulnerable at their core; hence, they must appear invulnerable on the surface. This posture of invulnerability, being on the surface, becomes a learning disability of sorts. The anti-Mormon is unable to perceive the whole elephant, as it were. The anti-Mormon lacks the patience to fully understand that Mor-

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times spending as much as twenty minutes on issues like this. During this broadcast, two things became clear. First, Van Gorden did not really care to face serious scrutiny of his book by a Mormon (hence the constant interruptions and tangents). Second, Van Gorden believed he was immune to any criticism of errors in his book under the guise that he was aware of the errors already, and therefore Hale had no right to draw attention to them.

<sup>63</sup> Even the highly respected evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* refers to Van Gorden as an anti-Mormon in their 11 November 1996 issue on page 102. It is not difficult to understand the term *anti-Mormon*. Think of anti-Semitic as representing an ideology held by people who do not like Semitic ideology (mostly directed at Jews), or antipornography as an ideology held by people who do not like the ideology of pornography. Think of anti-Mormon as representative of an ideology held by people who do not like Mormon ideology. The prefix *anti-* means "against, in opposition to"; the word *Mormon* mainly refers to the ideology of Mormonism, its teachings, its doctrines, its values, or even its adherents. Adherents make a convenient target at which anti-Mormons direct their animosities. People may hold their anti-Mormon feelings deep inside and not act on them at all, or people may go to the opposite end of the spectrum and, like Kurt Van Gorden, make anti-Mormonism their primary vocation and their primary religion, being enemy-centered rather than Christ-centered. For a well-conceived presentation on this issue, see, generally, Stephen R. Covey, *The Divine Center* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982).

monism is not a heresy, but rather the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. The sad irony is that many critics of the restored gospel would joyfully embrace it as such if they took the time to perceive it for what it is.