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Abstract Introduction to the current issue. For the first time, the *Review* features an article critical of the truth-claims of the restored gospel and of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Editor's Introduction: The *Review* Crosses a Divide of Its Own

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This special issue breaks dramatic new ground for the *FARMS Review of Books*. For one thing, it deals much more with philosophical matters than the *Review* has typically done before (and more than we anticipate doing again for some time in the future, fascinating though such questions are and despite the fact that they are of particular personal interest to the editor). Much more obviously, though, and for the first time, this issue features an article overtly critical of the truth-claims of the restored gospel and of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Why have we done this? Certainly not because either the editor or the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies is wavering in the slightest degree in commitment to the truth of the gospel. Neither I nor my associates, to the best of my knowledge, have any doubt about the historical authenticity of the events narrated in ancient and modern scripture and in accounts of the restoration, nor about God's role in them. More than with any previous issue, our standard disclaimer needs to be kept in mind that the contents of the *Review* are not necessarily those of its editor nor of the Foundation that publishes it.

However, the appearance of Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson's *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* seems to us, as well as to others, to offer a very significant opportunity to begin a new chapter in the often troubled relationship between Latter-day Saints and their conservative Protestant brothers and sisters[1]—perhaps even ultimately

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[1] See Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997).

with other Christians beyond the evangelical wing of modern Western Protestantism. We want to further the conversation, to encourage it, and to participate in it.[2] We think it has much to offer—to both sides.

Paul Owen and Carl Mosser's response to the Blomberg/Robinson book (published here) has, as I have noted, very much an evangelical perspective. It is critical of claims and positions associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But it is critical in an informed way and largely fair and serious in its approach. It represents something that has been all too rare in Latter-day Saint experience: a critique that is worthy of serious consideration.

In his introduction to *How Wide the Divide?* Professor Robinson alludes to what he sees as "the LDS stereotype of Evangelicals as people who lie about us."[3] I don't know how widespread such a stereotype might be, though surely any such overgeneralization is harmful and destructive of healthy relationships. But, unfortunately, the stereotype is not without foundation in fact. I offer two particularly brazen (but not entirely atypical) examples of this:

Consider the claim made by Reachout Trust, an "anti-cult" ministry in the United Kingdom, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that Joseph Smith plays a role in the salvation of humankind as important as that of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.[4] Dozens of lengthy, heavily documented, well-reasoned communications with informed Latter-day Saints—some of which offered explicit denials from authoritative Mormon sources of the very notion that Reachout Trust imputes

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2 I am personally pleased that Professors Blomberg and Robinson have continued their dialogue, at least as recently as the publication in Matthew R. Connelly, Stephen E. Robinson, Craig L. Blomberg, and the *BYU Studies* staff, "Sizing Up the Divide: Reviews and Replies," *BYU Studies* 38/3 (1999): 163–90. (This multi-author essay, by the way, offers a good bibliographical guide to other printed and electronic reviews of *How Wide the Divide?*) Eugene England's insightful review essay, also very recently published in the same venue, offers a great deal to those who are seriously interested in this kind of exchange. See Eugene England, "The Good News—and the Bad," review of *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*, by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *BYU Studies* 38/3 (1999): 191–201.

3 Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 20.

4 See www.reachouttrust.org/morm.htm.

to us—failed to convince the group's leaders to drop the accusation, let alone to publish a retraction or correction.[5] The claim was still present on Reachout Trust's web site as late as 17 October 1999. Now, though, it is followed by the admission that "Many Mormons will disagree"—as if that vitally salient fact were wholly immaterial and as if Reachout Trust had ever actually located a believing Latter-day Saint who *didn't* disagree.

Consider, too, the case of a group in Mesa, Arizona, calling itself "Concerned Christians." In its newsletter at the beginning of 1999, Concerned Christians alleged that the manual currently used in the Relief Society and priesthood quorum classes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints declares that neither the church nor Brigham Young ever practiced plural marriage. This, said the newsletter, was just another specimen of the deceptiveness of Mormonism and its leaders. But the accusation made by Concerned Christians can easily be tested—the manual is widely available—and is demonstrably untrue. Nonetheless, over the course of correspondence extending from 4 January 1999 to 25 February 1999, Jim Robertson and Mike Burns of Concerned Christians simply refused either to justify their false accusation or to retract it.[6]

I simply cannot see any way to view either case as anything other than a prime specimen of unembarrassed, the-end-justifies-all-means dishonesty.

After many years of lamenting the low (indeed, often abysmal) quality of most critical writing against the church and its teachings, it seemed appropriate for the *Review* to call attention to (and even, in a way, to celebrate) a critical analysis that proceeds in the way such critical analyses should—that is, charitably, without name-calling, straw-man caricaturizing, accusations of bad faith, and distortion. And we are honoring Owen and Mosser's

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5 The complete and unedited correspondence is posted at shields-research.org/rot.htm.

6 Once again, the full, unedited correspondence is available on the web for interested parties to read: See Daniel Peterson's exchanges with Mike Burns and Jim Robertson (4–14 January 1999) at shields-research.org/CC02.htm. Danel Bachman's correspondence with Mike Burns (4–8 January 1999) is available at shields-research.org/CC01.htm. R. Scott Lloyd's later (and extremely telling) exchange with Jim Robertson can be found at shields-research.org/CC03.htm.

seriousness in the best way that we know—that is, by responding in kind, seriously, honestly, respectfully, and as rigorously as we can. Honest concern for truth (as distinguished from propaganda and posturing) deserves no less.

The Owen and Mosser essay responds directly to *How Wide the Divide?* So, too, does Blake Ostler's essay, which follows immediately upon theirs. It does not seek to counter or comment on their arguments (although, inevitably, much of what it has to say is relevant to their critique). The same holds true for the essay by William Hamblin and myself, which approaches the Blomberg/Robinson exchange from a rather different angle. Thereafter, though, the essays written by Daniel Graham and James Siebach, by David Paulsen and Dennis Potter, and by Roger Cook, as well as my own afterword, reply directly to Owen and Mosser. I hope that we have thereby continued the conversation in a dignified and worthy way.

I am deeply grateful to the authors of the various essays, and to those—Shirley Ricks, as usual, chief among them—who have made the appearance of this special issue possible: Josi J. Brewer, Rebecca S. Call, Wendy H. Christian, Alison V. P. Coutts, Melissa E. Garcia, Paula W. Hicken, Marc-Charles Ingerson, and Daniel B. McKinlay. Michelle R. Munsey and Margaret Thorne researched the entries for the bibliography.