FARMS REVIEW OF BOOKS

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"The Worst Herricy Man Can Preach"

"Peter Elias" (evidently an assumed name), owner-operator of "Mormonism Web Ministries," recently published an issue of his rather puckishly titled newsletter, *The Truth: A Christian Perspective on Mormonism*, in which he put Amasa Lyman forward as his prize example of typical Latter-day Saint teaching. (The newsletter’s apparently ironic slogan, repeated on the masthead of every issue, is “Trust the Truth.”) I wish to discuss this issue of *The Truth* here because I think it furnishes a particularly clear illustration of the methodology employed by some zealous critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As such, it also provides a good argument for why their books, lectures, pamphlets, cassette tapes, Web sites, tabloids, broadcasts, and seminars should not be taken at face value.

The theme of this particular issue of *The Truth* is "Mormonism: Insulting the Spirit of Grace?" Savvy readers can guess far in advance how Mr. Elias will answer his own question.

Under the rubric of "LDS," Mr. Elias has the following: “We may talk of men being redeemed by the efficacy of his [Christ’s] blood; but the truth is that that blood has no efficacy to wash away our sins. That must depend upon our own action.' LDS ‘Apostle’ Amasa M. Lyman, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 7, p. 299, 1859.”

He contrasts this with "The Truth": “For you know that it was not with perishable things . . . that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers [ie the Law—‘works’], but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Peter 1:18.”

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Mr. Elias subsequently strengthens his argument with two more quotations from Elder Lyman under the subheading of “Trampling on the Blood of Christ?” But this scarcely seems necessary. There appears to be a pretty stark contrast between what Elder Lyman said and what 1 Peter 1:18 says. This is particularly so when that biblical passage is spun by Peter Elias’s hyper-Protestant equation of an “empty way of life” with the Mosaic law—an equation that many observant Jews might understandably regard as demeaning and anti-Semitic—and, in turn, of the Mosaic law with “works” in general. It seems undeniably obvious that Latter-day Saint teaching, as represented by Elder Amasa Lyman of the Council of the Twelve, diverges dramatically from the doctrine of the New Testament. Case closed.

But is it? Can Amasa Lyman’s public musings on the redemptive power of the blood of Christ, or the lack thereof, legitimately be taken as illustrative of the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Let’s look at the historical background. I shall consult only materials that I have on the shelves of my personal library at home, deliberately excluding the Web and any database software. Nothing among these materials is particularly esoteric or difficult to obtain. They are certainly all within the reach of somebody as devoted to the study of Mormonism as Mr. Elias purports to be. An author who has found Amasa Lyman’s scattered nineteenth-century ruminations can also reasonably be expected to be aware of mainstream historiography on the Latter-day Saints and, most particularly, of the broad outlines of Amasa Lyman’s biography. What does the historical record tell us?

From 1855 to 1859 Lyman seems to have denied Christ’s special divinity and vicarious blood atonement in several conference sermons.

A renowned orator, he told the Saints that Christ “was, simply, a holy man. . . . There was nothing about Jesus but the Priesthood that he held and the Gospel that he proclaimed that was so very singular.”
To counter objections, Lyman argued, "'Well,' says one, "you do not think much of Jesus.' Yes I do. 'How much?' I think he was a good man." Lyman acknowledged that Jesus "died for the world," but added, "and what man that ever died for the truth that he died for, did not die for the world? . . . Have we found redemption through them? . . . We may talk of men being redeemed by the efficacy of [Christ's] blood; but the truth is that that blood had no efficacy to wash away our sins. That must depend upon our own action." 2

Now, it does admittedly seem a bit strange that Elder Lyman was able to get away with such teachings for so long. Plainly there were those who objected to his teaching. (We aren't told who they were.) Perhaps other General Authorities were unclear as to what he was really saying. Historian James Allen suggests of William Clayton—no General Authority, of course, but a prominent Latter-day Saint and the apostle's relative by marriage—that "he probably never fully understood Lyman's highly sophisticated theological speculations." 3 (I know personally of a case in which a person who had long since ceased to believe in basic Latter-day Saint doctrine managed for years to maintain an appearance of orthodoxy through the use of sophisticatedly redefined terminology. I do not believe that this person did so with any malicious intent to deceive, but the end result was much the same.) Perhaps the Twelve simply couldn't imagine that a fellow apostle would hold such opinions and assumed that they must be misunderstanding him. William Clayton's eventual reaction worked out somewhat along the same lines that the apostles' would: His prolonged refusal to accept the accusations against Elder Lyman was followed by profound feelings of shock, betrayal, disillusionment, and revulsion. 4 The Twelve had enjoyed long and close association with

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4. See ibid., 340–43.
Lyman, and their personal reactions might very understandably have been similar.

After all, the passage quoted can be taken, at least in part, in a relatively harmless sense: “We may talk of men being redeemed by the efficacy of [Christ’s] blood,” Lyman said, “but the truth is that that blood had no efficacy to wash away our sins. That must depend upon our own action.” From one very important perspective, this is manifestly true. Unless we accept Calvinist or determinist views of human redemption, Christ’s blood cannot redeem us if we refuse to accept its atoning power, and the choice to accept it or reject it is a free act on our part. The very next line in Elder Lyman’s sermon is “Can Jesus free us from sin while we go and sin again?” Most people would be at least inclined to answer no. So Elder Lyman’s declaration that Christ’s blood lacks redemptive efficacy in the absence of “our own action” is (on non-Calvinist principles) precisely right. Most Christians—even those beyond the Latter-day Saint community—would accept it in that sense.

But, as it turned out, the doctrine that Lyman held or came to hold was far more pernicious than that. In 1860, he was sent on a mission to Great Britain along with Elders Charles C. Rich and George Q. Cannon of the Twelve. He returned home in mid-May 1862, but not before delivering a notorious sermon at Dundee, Scotland, on 16 March of that year, in which he effectively denied the atonement of the Savior. B. H. Roberts remarks that “No satisfactory explanation appears why this matter was allowed to pass apparently unnoticed until the 21st of January, 1867.” But it was not until then


6. The original sermon may be found in Journal of Discourses, 7:296–308. The quoted passage is from page 299.

7. Elder Roberts may be incorrect in his statement that Lyman’s heresy “was allowed to pass apparently unnoticed until the 21st of January, 1867.” See Van Wagoner and Walker, A Book of Mormons, 165. “Finally charged [in 1862] with teaching false doctrine while in Scotland,” they write, “Lyman apologized to the First Presidency, and signed a letter asking the Saints for forgiveness.” Investigation of this issue is beyond the scope of the present introduction. I think it very probable, however, that Van Wagoner and Walker have mistakenly transferred Lyman’s 1867 retraction—see below—to 1862. Nothing else I have consulted mentions an 1862 apology.
that Elder Lyman was brought before the council of the twelve for his heresy.  

Actually, Elder Lyman's heterodox views began to attract the attention of other leaders of the church at least a month before the date given by B. H. Roberts. For example, an entry in Wilford Woodruff's journal for 26 December 1866 reads as follows:

The subject of A Sermon Preached by A Lyman and published in the Millennium Star April 5, 1862, in vol 24 was brought up & red & it was found to have done away with the Efficacy of the blood of Christ. Presidt B Young said he wished to know what the Twelve had to say about it For he had a god deal to say about it. When you do away with the blood of the Savior you do away with all the Gospel & plan of Salvation. If this doctrin as Preached by A Lyman . . . be preached & Published as the doctrins of the Church & not Contradicted by us it would not be long before there would be syms [schisms?] in the Church. This doctrin as Preached in this Sermon is fals doctrin. If we do not believe that it was necessary for Christ to Shed his Blood to save the world, whare is our Church? It is nothing. This does not Set well upon my feelings. It is grievous to me to have the Apostles teach fals doctrins. Now if the Twelve will sit down quietly & not Contradict Such doctrin are they justified? No they are not.  

Finally, Elder Lyman was summoned before the Council. The story is clearly told in B. H. Roberts's classic and widely available Comprehensive History of the Church, with which any really serious student of Latter-day Saint history should be familiar. However, I shall again go directly to the journal of Wilford Woodruff, a member of the Twelve at the time and the future fourth president of the church. On 21 January 1867, he wrote,

We held a meeting in the Evening as a Quorum of the 12 Apostles to Examine into the subject of Amasa Lyman's teaching fals doctrin & publishing it to the world. He had virtually done away with the Blood of Christ [saying] that the Blood of Christ was not necessary for the salvation of man. The Quorum of the twelve were horrified at the Idea that one of the Twelve Apostle should teach such a doctrin. After Amasa Lyman was intregated upon the subject & said these had been his sentiments W Woodruff made the first speech & all the Quorum followed and they spoke in vary Strong terms.

W. Woodruff said that he felt shocked at the Idea that one of the Twelve Apostles should get so far into the dark as to deny the Blood of Jesus Christ & say that it was not necessary for the salvation of man and teach this as a tru doctrin while it was in opposition to all the doctrin taught by Every Prophet & Apostle & Saint from the days of Adam until to day. The Bible, Book of Mormon & doctrines & Covenants have taught from beginning to End that Christ shed his Blood for the salvation of man & that there was no other name given under heaven whereby men can be saved, and I can tell brother Lyman that that doctrin will send him to perdition if he continues in it, & so it will any man, & such a doctrin would rend this Church & kingdom to peaces like an Earthquake. There never was nor never will be a saint on the Earth that believes that doctrin. It is the worst herryicy man can preach.

When the Twelve got through Speaking Amasa Lyman wept like a Child & asked forgiveness. We then all went into President Youngs office & Conversed with him. He felt as the Twelve did upon the subject ownly more so & required Brother Lyman to Publish his Confession & make it as public as he had his fals doctrin.11

Elder Woodruff was precisely right. The concept of Christ's redeeming blood runs throughout uniquely Latter-day Saint scripture just as it forms a dominant theme of the New Testament. As the prophet Helaman said to his sons Nephi and Lehi, “O remember, remember, my sons, that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ” (Helaman 5:9). “O then ye unbelieving,” cried the prophet Moroni, “turn ye unto the Lord; cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white, having been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, at that great and last day” (Mormon 9:6). And the second-to-last verse of the Book of Mormon promises the readers of that volume that “if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:33). There appears little purpose in multiplying such references, which could be done indefinitely. The point seems sufficiently made.

On the following day, 22 January 1867, Elder Woodruff recorded that

We met at Presidets Youngs office to hear Amasa Lyman Confession which he had written & it was not Satisfactory. Presidet Young talked vary plain upon the subject & told Brother Lyman that if he did not make a Confession that was satisfactory he Should write upon the subject himself. He said if it had [been] in Josephs day he would have Cut him off from the Church & it was a question whether the Lord would Justify us in retaining him in the Church or not.12

The 30 January 1867 issue of the Deseret News contained the following statement, published over the name of “A. M. Lyman”:

I have sinned a grievous sin in teaching a doctrine which makes the death and atonement of Jesus Christ of no force,
thus sapping the foundation of the Christian religion. The above mentioned doctrine is found in a discourse which I preached on the “Nature of the Mission of Jesus,” on the 16th of March, 1862, in Dundee, Scotland, and which was published in the Millennial Star, No. 14, volume xxiv. The above preaching was done without submitting it to, or seeking the counsel of those who bear the priesthood, with whom I am associated. In this I committed a great wrong, for which I most humbly crave and ask their forgiveness, as I do also of all the saints who have heard my teaching on this subject.\footnote{13}

It is possible, as I have suggested above, that Elder Lyman was able to maintain his status in the church for an unexpectedly long time while repeatedly denying the redemptive efficacy of Christ’s blood because, when expedient, he coupled a somewhat oblique way of expressing himself with statements to his associates and others that, wittingly or unwittingly, disguised or even misrepresented his real position. The statement cited immediately above may fall into that category. For it represented no real change of heart or conviction.

Later in that same year, “Accused again of teaching the same doctrine, Lyman was dropped from the Quorum of the Twelve, disfellowshipped, and advised by President Young to find activities employing his head and hands so ‘health of mind and body will attend you.’”\footnote{14}President Young seems to have felt that Amasa Lyman was, as we would term it today, mentally ill or emotionally unstable. Part of

\footnote{13}{Cited at Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church, 5:271 n. 34. It is striking, by the way, that either Elder Lyman or his leaders or both thought that “sapping the foundation of the Christian religion” is something that a Latter-day Saint is capable of, but also something that a Latter-day Saint should not do. Anti-Mormons frequently charge that Latter-day Saints have only recently claimed to be Christians. However, no theological stance of a Buddhist or other non-Christian can weaken the “foundations” of Christian teaching. Nor, from the perspective of a Buddhist or other non-Christian, would there be anything wrong with holding a view that conflicts with Christian foundations. That the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints thought Lyman’s views dangerous to “the foundation of the Christian religion” is rather persuasive evidence that they regarded themselves as Christians. Why else would they care?}

\footnote{14}{See Van Wagoner and Walker, A Book of Mormons, 165.}
Wilford Woodruff’s journal entry for 29 April 1867 reads as follows: “I met with Presidt Young and the Twelve in Council to take into Consideration the Case of Elder Amasa Lyman who had been preaching Heresy doing away with the Blood of Christ . . . We herd the Testimony against him and herd his own remarks. We finally voted to silence him from Preaching.” On the following day, the journal reads: “I met with the Twelve at Bishop Murdocks & the Subject of A. Lyman was again taken up and investigated and he was silenced from Preaching because he had done away with the blood of Christ in his teaching.”15

Charles Walker, an ordinary member of the church living in Washington County, wrote in his journal for 5 May 1867 of a conference in St. George attended by Brigham Young and several of the apostles. “The Church Authorities were presented,” he recorded. “Amasa Lyman was dropt from the Quorum of the Twelve for in­fide[li]ty.”16 Lyman’s expulsion from the ranks of the apostles was subsequently formalized between sessions of the general conference of the church in the new Salt Lake Tabernacle, on 6 October 1867.17

Joseph F. Smith was then called to fill the vacancy in the Quorum left by the apostasy of one of its members. Unfortunately, Amasa Lyman continued on his heretical course and was altogether expelled from the church in 1870. Charlie Walker, learning the news down in St. George on 1 June 1870, thought the excommunication worth noting in his journal:

I see by a notice in the Deseret News, that on the 12th of last month, Amasa Lyman formerly one of the twelve apostles has been cut off from the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints for apostacy. Strange—Strange. Once so high and now so low. May God preserve Me in the truth.  

When Lyman died in 1877, he was a practicing spiritualist and a vocal dissident from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It thus seems rather peculiar, to say the least of it, that Peter Elias has chosen Amasa Lyman as his star witness to the beliefs of Latter-day Saints on the very subject for which Lyman was excommunicated. With others, I have been leaving messages on Mormonism Web Ministries’ electronic message board since 5 May 2000, calling upon Mr. Elias either to explain or to retract his use of Amasa Lyman as a representative specimen of Latter-day Saint teaching on the blood of Christ. As of 1 August 2000, Peter Elias has not only failed either to justify or abandon this brazen misrepresentation of Mormon doctrine, but, in fact, he has not replied at all.

Sadly, though, given the track record of hard-core fundamentalist Protestant anti-Mormonism, Mr. Elias’s behavior isn’t surprising. These people are simply not reliable in representing Latter-day Saint beliefs to their vulnerable audiences. I’ve recently been listening to anti-Mormon cassette tapes while driving. When one is in a certain mood, such listening can be both entertaining and educational. For instance, from Sheila Garrigus’s “My Years as a Mormon,” a lecture given by a leader of “Ex-Mormons for Jesus” in an unidentified southern California church some years ago, I learned that one can be a devout Mormon without believing in Jesus, but that faith in Joseph

19. Van Wagoner and Walker, A Book of Mormons, 165–66. Martha Lyman Roper and Francis M. Lyman, his daughter and his son (who himself served as an apostle), reported dreams in which a repentant Amasa Lyman (who had died in 1877) appeared to them, begging for the restoration of his blessings and authority. The request was granted by President Joseph F. Smith in 1908. Leonard Arrington reports that Amasa Lyman “was posthumously reinstated in the Church, his fellow apostles believing that he was mentally incompetent at the time of his apostasy.” See Leonard J. Arrington, From Quaker to Latter-day Saint: Bishop Edwin D. Woolley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 444.


21. We had a similarly one-sided correspondence regarding another set of his grievous distortions a year previous to this one.

22. See, for example, correspondence with Concerned Christians of Mesa, Arizona, and the Reachout Trust in the United Kingdom, available for inspection at shields-research.org/CC02.htm, shields-research.org/CC01.htm, shields-research.org/CC03.htm, and shields-research.org/rot.htm.
Smith is mandatory. The Savior, Ms. Garrigus explained, is “not important” in Mormon theology. In fact, during her thirteen years as a Latter-day Saint, she never heard the name “Jesus Christ” in any Mormon meeting except as appended to prayers (which can only, by the way, be offered by males). And she didn’t own a Bible during that time, because Latter-day Saints are not encouraged to read the Bible. And, when her nonmember husband rather abruptly became a committed fundamentalist Protestant, Ms. Garrigus’s bishop explained her options to her: (1) She could divorce her husband. (2) She could remain in her marriage and at her death become a ministering angel to better Mormons than herself. (3) She could remain in her marriage but, at her death, be sealed to a faithful Mormon man as his plural wife. She initially chose the third option. So, with her bishop’s encouragement, she telephoned a Latter-day Saint man whom she had dated before her marriage, and he happily accepted her request to be his plural wife in the life to come.

From the question-and-answer session following Kurt Van Gordon’s lecture on “Mormonism” at Calvary Chapel in Chino Valley, California, on 1 June 2000, I learned of John F. Kennedy’s appearance in the St. George Temple. I also discovered that Latter-day Saints view the words creation and procreation as synonyms. Among other things, this explains the manner in which Mormon women in Utah typically introduce their families: “These,” they say, pointing to their kids, “are the children I created.” (I confess to never having heard that kind of language.) I also learned that Latter-day Saint men have the “option” of resurrecting their wives or not. Naturally, this puts Mormon women in a “precarious position.” For, if a wife doesn’t treat her husband well enough, he might be inclined to let her simply “lay in [her] grave and rot.” (I envision putting this principle to

23. A recording of Ms. Garrigus’s lecture was thoughtfully provided to me, along with other equally persuasive materials, by a group calling itself “Firefighters for Christ,” based in Foothill Ranch, California.

24. Alert reader Robert Durocher sent this important document to me. The tape is identified as CS0200 of Calvary Chapel’s “Cult Series,” which identifies itself, modestly enough, as “A Foundation for Living.”
immediate domestic use. No more steamed carrots! No more demands that I clean up the pile of books and papers beside my bed!) And I learned of a case where a woman’s father-in-law helped her at a certain point in the temple—and thus, without her agreement or prior knowledge, acquired her as a plural wife in the world to come (apparently nullifying the sealing ceremony that immediately followed).

To borrow the language of Brigham Young, the only ethical course for Peter Elias would be to publish his confession and to make it as public as he has his false characterization of Latter-day Saint doctrine. It is a course one might recommend to others, too.

This discussion of Peter Elias, Amasa Lyman, and the techniques of contemporary anti-Mormonism is more relevant than it may at first appear to the contents of the present issue of the Review. Much of this issue is devoted to an examination of the multiauthored Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism and the works of the late “Dr.” Walter Martin.

Editor’s Picks

But let’s talk of happier things. As I have been doing in recent numbers of the Review, it is now my pleasant duty to offer my own (unavoidably subjective) recommendations of some of the books that we consider here. My opinions derive, in several cases, from personal and direct acquaintance with the materials in question. In all instances, I have determined the rankings after reading the relevant reviews, and after further conversations either with the appropriate reviewers or with those who assist in the editing of the Review. As always, the final judgments, and the final blame for making them, are mine. And, as I have cautioned before, the number of asterisks a given work receives might have been different yesterday, or if I had enjoyed a better night’s rest. (The decision of whether or not to recommend a book at all is much more firmly based.) Nonetheless, and for whatever it is worth, this is how my rating system functions:
Now that the drum roll has died down, I offer my picks from the present issue of the Review:


** James E. Faulconer, *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions.*

** Edwin B. Fimrige and Richard C. Mangrum, *Zion in the Courts: A Legal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900.*

** Jay E. Jensen, *Treasure Up the Word.*


I am grateful to Shirley S. Ricks and Wendy H. Christian, Angela D. Clyde, Alison Coutts, Julie A. Dozier, Paula W. Hicken, Linda M. Sheffield, F. Laura Sommer, and Sandra A. Thorne for their indispensable assistance in preparing this issue of the FARMS Review of Books for the press, and to the reviewers for their devoted work. Scott Knudsen designed the cover and Carmen Cole and Mary Mahan the interior for this new generation of the FARMS Review of Books. Carmen has gone the extra mile so we can have footnotes rather than endnotes.
I must begin my review of this volume with a word of praise for its authors, James R. Harris and Dann W. Hone. They are among the most sincere and energetic defenders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the staunchest supporters of the Book of Mormon. I also share with them a belief in pre-Columbian contacts with the ancient Near East. However, I find this book a baffling and peculiarly unfulfilling effort at establishing an epigraphic link between the Yahweh worshipers of ancient southern Palestine and the writers of the petroglyphs of the American Southwest.

*The Name of God*, according to its authors, attempts to link the “alphabetic script used by peoples of the Negev (Israel) and ancients of the American Southwest by which both peoples expressed a commitment to a covenant relationship with the God of Israel” (p. xxii). In the first part of the book, Harris and Hone look at epigraphic inscriptions from the Negev in southern Palestine, which the authors wish to identify as “Old Negev” rather than the more traditional “Old Thamudic.” These “Old Negev” inscriptions, according to Harris and Hone, should not be rendered “as an Arabic language but translated
as Proto-Canaanite or Old Hebrew" (p. 29). In practice, however, there is heavy if not exclusive reliance on the Hebrew-English lexicon rather than attention to shades of meaning that only an examination of other ancient Semitic languages and dialects would provide, with the result that many of the renderings are forced. Much of this section may be puzzling to LDS readers, who would view Harris and Hone’s assertion as a semantic quibble best debated with scholars in the field of comparative Semitics or of ancient Canaanite dialects. In fact, the bibliography of the volume includes a reference to the text of a lecture in which Harris and Hone present their views on the “Dating and Ethnic Origins of the Old Negev Inscriptions” in a symposium held some years ago in Italy, though they do not discuss the results of their presentation.

The balance of the volume—all of which is peppered with grammatical and typographical infelicities that are ubiquitous, sometimes egregious, often distracting, and that desperately cry out for an editor—is devoted to showing how the “Old Negev” script and language migrated from the Old World to the New. According to Harris and Hone, since “Old Negev” writing “was not in use after the Babylonian Captivity (598–597 B.C.), the script and language it expressed must have come to America prior to the above events” (p. 94). For LDS readers this is a straightforward claim of transoceanic contact and an implicit, reasonably clear claim that it took place at the beginning of Book of Mormon history. Harris and Hone further claim that the “script, and language, accompanied by appropriate icons and symbols have been found in the Valley of Mexico and identified with Olmec-like cultures of the Gulf Coast and Valley” (p. 94). From there it was brought to the American Southwest. My main problem—and it is an insuperable one at that—is their use of a highly imaginative system of reading the “icons” and “ligatures” and their method of stringing signs together in order to create meaningful words. Harris and Hone’s reading of Red Rock Canyon petroglyph #3 (see p. 117) will suffice as an example of these difficulties. This petroglyph consists of what appears to be, reading from right to left, a stick figure of a man with a “head” that is dark and filled in, a tiny rectangular “flag” on a pole, and what looks like a shepherd’s
crook with a tail. By separating these signs into smaller symbols, Harris and Hone have transformed the signs into the "Old Negev" letters "ayin," "d," "h," and "y," "i," and "h." The first word may mean "to testify" or "congregation" in Hebrew (unlike Harris and Hone's "to go, pass by, pass away"); the second may mean "wailing, lamentation"; the combination of the two in Hebrew is very difficult to understand. On the Cobble Mountain petroglyph on the opposite page (see p. 118) is a sign described by the authors as an "ankh symbol," a sign of "life in the realm of the gods." While this may in fact be the importation of an ankh sign, it could also be a symbol with a very different meaning, or no meaning at all. We ought to be very cautious when assigning meanings to signs. Where five "letters" are described by the authors in the Cobble Mountain petroglyph, two other signs are left out. Why? Shouldn't they all be included, with their resulting meanings, come what may of the potential sense?

In their study of the petroglyphs of the American Southwest, Harris and Hone's method is a kind of procrustean bed, in which individual signs are selected, offending ligatures are shaved off, and other potentially problematical signs are ignored in the authors' effort to show a Hebrew link with the ancient peoples of the Southwest. And yet there may be a kernel of truth standing behind their efforts. I am persuaded by Brian Stubbs that there is a connection in phonology, morphology, and vocabulary between the Uto-Aztecan languages spoken by many Native Americans living in the American Southwest and the Semitic languages.¹ I am convinced that the name of deity in various Uto-Aztecan languages of the American Southwest contains an element that looks strikingly like the Hebrew Yahweh, "Lord"; cf. Cupeño (tema) Yawe, "(earth) god," Arizona Yaqui ya'ut, "leader; god" (we may compare the Hebrew Elohim, "judge; God" with the semantic interchange "leader; god").² I am further persuaded that a striking resemblance between the petroglyph signs of the American Southwest and the early Semitic alphabets

². Brian Stubbs, personal communication with author.
exists. Still, I have yet to be persuaded that the writers of the petro-
glyphs were full-fledged, bona fide speakers of Hebrew.

*The Name of God* is a tour de force of perspicacity and devotion
to a subject. Harris in particular has focused his attention and chan-
eled his energy for many years in studying this subject. Unfortu-
nately, this book is also an example of the triumph of the *idée fixe*,
where focused attention shades off into monomania and channeled
energy becomes a kind of fixation that brooks no alternative expla-
nation and dismisses those who would raise questions as academic or
religious obstructionists.
For years, when individuals have told me that they have translated the Anthon transcript, I have asked to see the result. To date, nobody has sent one to me. But in a recent book, Stan and Polly Johnson have tried to supply a translation and to argue that the Anthon transcript corresponds to Ether 6:3–13 in the present Book of Mormon.

The Johnsons' book can be divided into three sections. The first section (pp. ix–31), which seems to have been written by Polly Johnson, is a glowing testimonial to her husband's translation, a history of the project, and a naive, unsystematic examination of the Anthon transcript. The second section (pp. 33–66), which seems to have been written by Stan Johnson, is the guts of the "translation," a sign-by-sign interlinear translation of the Anthon transcript. The third section (pp. 69–107), also likely to have been written by Stan Johnson, provides the meaning of each symbol in the Anthon transcript and indicates how he translated each one. An incomplete bibliography and indexes round out the book.

The Good News

The Johnsons have done some things well. Their assumptions are clear: they assume (1) that all Native American writing systems descend from Egyptian writing via the Nephite "reformed Egyptian" (p. 31) and (2) that both Egyptian and Native American writing systems are logographic. If all Native American writing systems actually descended from the Nephite system (which is by no means evident), a comparison of those writing systems to look for root meanings would be a very good approach. The Johnsons also did well to provide a sign-by-sign translation and a catalog of signs with the reasoning behind their interpretation. Thus it is possible to follow their reasoning step-by-step. Anyone who wishes to produce a translation of the Anthon transcript should do the same.

The Bad News

Unfortunately, the few things that the Johnsons did well only accentuate their book's problems. Typographical and factual errors abound. For example, they claim that hieratic began in Egypt around 1900 B.C. (see p. 11). In fact, the earliest datable published Egyptian inscription is hieratic and is dated over a thousand years earlier. They also date demotic from 400 B.C. to A.D. 100. The earliest demotic inscription, however, is Louvre C 101, dated to the eighth year of Psammeticus I (657 B.C.). The last dated inscription, found at Philae, is dated to A.D. 457 and is roughly contemporary with the last dated hieroglyphic inscription. Certain handicaps and historical problems that plague the book preclude a favorable recommendation.

1. "Anthony W. Irwins" for "Anthony W. Irvins" (p. 9); "Linda Schelle" for "Linda Schele" (p. 9); "nightsun" for "night sun" (p. 71).
2. For example, the Johnsons claim on p. 9 that Linda Schele "is also an artist, and not a formally trained linguist." Dr. Schele was an artist and also earned a Ph.D. in linguistics at the University of Texas; see Michael D. Coe, Breaking the Maya Code (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 210.
Polly Johnson’s assertions to the contrary (see pp. ix, 7, 13–14, 33), I regret to report that Stan Johnson does not know Egyptian. Proof of this can be seen in the first two entries in his symbol reference (see p. 70); here the two “Egyptian” signs Johnson examined turn out to be parentheses from the dictionary Johnson was using. But this is only the beginning; mistakes in Egyptian abound in the pages of the symbol reference. Furthermore, every symbol attributed to Akkadian is incorrect.

The Johnsons claim that their translation is endorsed by Hugh Nibley (see p. xi and back cover). It is not. I have spoken with Dr. Nibley. He does not endorse their method, book, approach, translation, or conclusions. What many people fail to realize is that while Nibley often endorses the study of problems, he almost never endorses a particular treatment of an issue.

The biggest reason to be suspicious of this translation, however, is its contents as assumed by the Johnsons. They have not understood what the Anthon transcript is. As I have previously written:

Though the so-called Anthon transcript contains a mere seven lines of text, it contains about eighty different characters; however, since the sample size is small, one is not able to determine whether the script is syllabic (like Ethiopic) or logographic (like Egyptian or Mayan). The transcript was in the possession of Oliver Cowdery who gave it to David Whitmer; it then passed to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints with the rest of David Whitmer’s manuscripts. If this is the copy of the characters that was taken to Anthon, then it comes from the part of the Book of Mormon that was translated while Martin Harris was the scribe, and thus is from the missing 116 pages. If this were the case, we should expect it to be from Mormon’s abridgment of the Nephite record (see Words of Mormon 1:3–7;
D&C 10:30, 38–42). This would mean that it would be from the handwriting of Mormon (after ca. A.D. 362; see Mormon 3:8–11) and not from the small plates. We would then expect it to be a Semitic language written in an Egyptian script—a Semitic language that had been modified by time and cre­­olization with the American languages, and an Egyptian script that had been modified not only by being engraved on metal plates, but also changed along with the handwriting styles and modifications of the Nephites (see Mormon 9:32). This has then been copied by a nineteenth-century hand in pen and ink.7

If the so-called Anthon transcript is the actual piece of paper that Martin Harris took to Charles Anthon, it is safe to assume that the characters came from the text they were then translating (the 116 missing manuscript pages, which contained a record from the time of Lehi to the time of King Benjamin). Thus Ether should not be a logical source for the transcript’s contents.

A major obstacle faces those attempting a translation of the Anthon transcript—the corpus is not large enough to render decipherment feasible. The same, of course, is true of the writing on the Phaistos disk and the examples of the Isthmian or Mixtec scripts. There is still some debate about whether scholars have cracked some of the scripts that have a slightly larger corpus, like Linear A and Harrapan. Scripts that actually have been solved—such as hieroglyphic Hittite, Maya, cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs, hieratic, demotic, and Ugaritic—all have immense bodies of texts. I cannot re­call a single example of someone being able to decipher an unknown language written in an undeciphered script that was attested in only a single, small, monolingual document—and that holds true for the Johnsons.

Many Latter-day Saints eagerly anticipate a definitive book of scholarly external evidence that will "prove" that Jesus Christ came to the Americas in ancient times. In a roundabout way, this is what T. J. O’Brien has attempted to accomplish in *Fair Gods and Feathered Serpents*.

O’Brien begins by quickly running through the gamut of bearded, white foreigners who were known from “the Bering Straits in Alaska to Cape Horn in South America” (p. 13). Later in the book he briefly discusses many of these culture heroes individually but never examines them in any real detail except for Quetzalcoatl.

O’Brien contends that these fair, bearded visitors (each comparable to a generic Quetzalcoatl) were everywhere identified with the feathered serpent (see p. 14), yet of almost thirty individuals mentioned as fitting the category, only a few are clearly associated with the feathered serpent. O’Brien’s suggestion that the famous serpent mound in Ohio may have been dedicated to one of these culture heroes is one example of an assertion that clearly lacks support (see p. 111). Furthermore, the individuals listed on O’Brien’s chart identifying the “Bearded, White Mystery Man” (see p. 30) were most

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certainly not all bearded, white men; see, for example, Gukumatz in Guatemala.¹

Beginning with chapter 1, O’Brien makes numerous statements without giving sources for his information, although he does warn the reader in his introduction that he has no intention of covering “all available sources—there are too many” (p. 17). There are endnotes for each chapter; however, many of these are inadequate, and it is difficult to determine to which textual statements they refer.

Those who have not made an in-depth study of Mesoamerica will miss many of the inconsistencies that O’Brien presents in a very matter-of-fact, reader-friendly manner. The following example reveals his approach. Referring to Quetzalcoatl among the Aztecs, O’Brien claims that “no god was held in higher esteem” (p. 22). Then in the very next paragraph, O’Brien rightly informs us that the Aztecs replaced Quetzalcoatl with a tribal war god, whom he does not name. Huitzilopochtli, the god of war, was the god of prime importance to the Aztecs, not Quetzalcoatl. Matos Moctezuma refers to the Aztecs as “Huitzilopochtli’s people” and identifies Huitzilopochtli as their patron god.² The main temple in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, the Templo Mayor, was dedicated to Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc, the latter a god of rain and fertility. Quetzalcoatl was a borrowed god and was considered a lesser god among the Aztecs than among other Mesoamerican peoples. The temple dedicated to Quetzalcoatl at Tenochtitlan is clearly secondary to the Templo Mayor, where Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc reigned supreme.

O’Brien then reports portions of the myth of Quetzalcoatl, as he does throughout the book, but again source citations are scarce. He presents various aspects of the Quetzalcoatl legend without question, revealing yet another flaw in his presentation. When making a controversial statement or discussing a controversial topic, an author

¹. O’Brien lists Gukumatz on page 38 in a list of those who have fair complexions, beards, long robes, and sandals. There is no evidence that the Maya deity or the men called Gukumatz fit this description.

should either support his or her hypothesis by giving reliable sources or present a feasible argument to justify proposed claims.

Laymen as well as scholars must exercise extreme caution when interpreting the corpus of Quetzalcoatl (feathered serpent) mythology. Scholars have argued that Spanish priests made embellishments to most post-Conquest texts. Some of the Spanish input appears to be quite intrusive, while in other instances it is subtle. In either case, some have suggested that these interpolations were written with the prime objective of swaying natives to the Catholic way of thinking. Latter-day Saint scholars therefore have an even more arduous task as they attempt to equate the deity Quetzalcoatl with Jesus Christ, although some of the material regarding the legend of this god may be relevant to this supposition. The dilemma investigators face is the problem of sorting fact from fiction—authentic pre-Columbian native beliefs from Hispanicized misinterpretations of the same.

Unfortunately, no pre-Columbian texts refer to Quetzalcoatl. What we do have are a few native codices, which are picture books used to prompt well-established oral traditions. Strangely, O'Brien fails to mention the codices that contain illustrations of Quetzalcoatl. Other works of art with a possible relation to Quetzalcoatl include sculpture, murals, and pottery. For the Mesoamerican, certain motifs had meaning even on an international level. In other words, much Mesoamerican art was a cross-cultural, visual communicator of the religious beliefs of the times; however, in most cases we can only theorize as to the intended interpretations. Further, when different types of sources corroborate one another, we have a higher probability of deducing a more reliable interpretation, at least until a better one comes along. The Quiché Maya's *Popol Vuh*, for example, has

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4. The *Popol Vuh* is the sacred book of the Quiché Maya of highland Guatemala, believed to be derived from native oral traditions. It contains creation accounts, the history of their origin, and a chronology of their rulers. See, for example, Allen J. Christenson, *Popol Vuh: The Mythic Sections — Tales of First Beginnings from the Ancient K'iche'-Maya* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000).
many portions of its story confirmed in pre-Columbian narrative-style art painted on pottery. The many representations of Quetzalcoatl in art, however, still present a major complication because it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly who is portrayed. Could it be Quetzalcoatl the god; one of the lesser-known followers of Quetzalcoatl; Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, the renowned culture hero and ruler; or perhaps the latter dressed as the god Quetzalcoatl? Thus the dilemma.

One of the more controversial aspects of the Quetzalcoatl myth is his promise to return, which O’Brien mentions quite frequently. Some scholars contend that many of the accounts referring to this particular legend have a Spanish influence. A prime example of this scenario is in *Letters from Mexico,* where the Aztec king Motecuzoma (incorrectly spelled by O’Brien as Mutezuma in *Fair Gods*) supposedly speaks to the Spaniards, relating a tale of his people’s ancestral relationship with them. He asserts that the natives are descended from “foreigners who came from a very distant land” and that “a chieftain ... brought our people to this region.” According to this report, the foreign chieftain went back to his native country but then returned to Motecuzoma’s ancestors, by whom he was rejected; he departed again but promised to return. O’Brien accepts this story as an accurate historical account (see p. 26), but did Motecuzoma really believe the Spaniards were his long-lost relatives? This may very well be a tainted history promulgated to ensure a Spanish stronghold in the New World. By manipulating what may be, in part, a factual report, the Spaniards may have made the developing conquest look as though Motecuzoma was welcoming his lord home after a long separation.

Nonetheless, some who support the authenticity of various accounts speak of the “return” of Quetzalcoatl, and although it is true

7. See ibid., 467.
that the original legend has a late Spanish "spin," the "return" myth may still have been derived from an original and authentic belief among the natives. One of the primary advocates of this opinion is David Carrasco of Princeton University. Carrasco writes, "There are a number of references in the primary sources to the expected return of Quetzalcoatl. . . . These references strongly suggest that the belief in Quetzalcoatl's return was a pre-Columbian attitude and not, as some have suggested, invented by the Spaniards." O'Brien also refers to Carrasco's findings (see p. 41) but perhaps goes too far with his acceptance of most "return" myths.

Now, does it make any difference if the accounts refer to the return of Quetzalcoatl the god or Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl—the great culture hero? Indirectly, no. To the Mesoamerican community, the past, present, and future were all woven together. Rituals were often played out with the express purpose of including occurrences that took place in the past. A good example of this mentality is recorded in the Annals of Cuauhtitlan, which was originally written in the native tongue and which recorded the pre-Cortesian history of the Valley of Mexico. The Annals tell the life story of the culture hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl who, according to this account, lived from A.D. 817-95. At his death, Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl miraculously became a star, the Lord of the Dawn—he became what we call the planet Venus. It was at this time that he descended to the land of the dead. This is nothing but a repetition of what his god, Quetzalcoatl, is said to have done; thus the storytellers were able to bring the events of the past into the present. Quetzalcoatl the deity is clearly shown in the codices as the planet Venus and as the god who descended to the realm of the dead. It is true that we cannot know for certain that the story of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl's return also refers to the deity Quetzalcoatl, but there is a high probability that it did.

8. David Carrasco, Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 192. See page 192 and the following pages for Carrasco's argument and sources.
10. See ibid., 36.
Early in his discussion, O'Brien quickly moves from the Mexican myth of Quetzalcoatl's return to the Peruvian legends of the god Viracocha, who, he claims, is "hauntingly similar to the Aztec/Toltec Quetzalcoatl." He does not explain the ways in which the two are similar other than to say that Viracocha visited the natives, left, and promised to return (see p. 27). O'Brien mentions the name Viracocha numerous times throughout the book, but we see nothing even close to a well-rounded description of this god, and no real "feathered serpent" imagery is associated with him.

Dropping the chain of thought he began to establish in chapter 1, O'Brien commences in chapter 2 with the Conquest of Mexico and Peru, post-Conquest discoveries of ruins, and myths contained in post-Conquest documents. With regard to the latter, O'Brien writes, "As one might expect, many of these first writings include numerous references to the ancient bearded visitor. However, they so involve this culture hero with supernatural events that it is difficult to discern whether the tales are embellished history, legend or mythology" (p. 36). O'Brien does little to separate these three and much to muddy the already murky waters. His line of reasoning appears to be that since the legends of the bearded, white man are established in so many locales throughout the Americas, the myth in general must be accepted. But this is not methodologically sound scholarship.

Where is O'Brien going with all this? We do not find out until the end of the book because he never states his objective up front. In the meantime, O'Brien continues to flit from legend to legend of visitors throughout the Western Hemisphere, all supposedly white, bearded, and (questionably, we might add) associated with the feathered serpent. O'Brien admits that "material on other culture heroes of the Americas is often scant and difficult to find" (p. 44), yet he continues to promote each one as part of this stereotype.

A considerable portion of chapter 3 is dedicated to the Mexican culture hero Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. As O'Brien shows, the redundant post-Conquest stories of this leader are varied, telling us the good and the bad of this man who took upon himself the name of an earlier Quetzalcoatl (see pp. 46-57). O'Brien is to be congratulated for
doing so—he is one of the few LDS writers who have shown the less desirable side of Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. The drawback is that O’Brien combines all the legends of the culture hero Quetzalcoatl as if they represented one individual and then admits to a confusing array of Quetzalcoatl legends (see p. 51). It has recently been suggested that the various Quetzalcoatlsls were united in a single figure, combining “several historical episodes probably separated by centuries.”

Again, typical of his imprecise approach, O’Brien appears to be on the right track by trying to separate the Tula Quetzalcoatl from the Chichen Itza Kukulcan12 (see pp. 51–52), but then he writes of Quetzalcoatl and Kukulcan: “there is enough similarity to assume that the two culture heroes are indeed the same individual” (p. 55).

So, which is it?

O’Brien gives a reasonable explanation of bird and serpent symbolism in Mesoamerica (see pp. 53–54), which together constitute the feathered serpent. It is here that we discover one of the clues to O’Brien’s reasoning that all bearded, white visitors are to be identified with the feathered serpent. As O’Brien explains, these bearded culture heroes have attained a release from our earthbound sphere and are able to rise toward heaven. He follows Sejourné’s mystic line of thinking that it was Quetzalcoatl’s mission to “lift his people out of their carnal element and make them divine” (p. 54).13 The “carnal element” is associated with the serpent, who resides on earth, while heavenly pursuits are associated with birds, who take to the air. Obviously, in O’Brien’s eyes, the feathered serpent has become a paradigm for all bearded, white culture heroes.

The story behind the myth is almost unveiled in chapter 4—the culture heroes of Mesoamerica were all influenced by the original Quetzalcoatl (see p. 58). For a few this may be so, but once again O’Brien faces the same predicament he did in his discussion of

12. Both Quetzalcoatl and Kukulcan translate as “feathered serpent.”
Topology Quetzalcoatl: Do the legends refer to the culture hero or the deity? And which portions of the legends contain Spanish interpolations? Rather than refer to the god simply as Quetzalcoatl, O’Brien now chooses to use the name Ehecatl Quetzalcoatl, the wind aspect of Quetzalcoatl, who was popular in late times in the Valley of Mexico.

This chapter then moves on to a series of topics, most notably the sarcophagus lid of the Maya king Pacal, the great ruler of Palenque in Mexico (see p. 68). The author equates the serpent symbolism on this beautifully carved stone slab with the culture heroes Quetzalcoatl, Kukulcan, and Votan; however, Maya hieroglyphics at Palenque never mention these individuals nor do Mayanists consider this particular double-headed serpent a “feathered serpent.”

O’Brien then claims, without giving a source, that “Schele believes all this elaborate art provides a means for these theocratic rulers to prove they are divine descendants of Kukulcan” (p. 72). The reader needs to understand that what Linda Schele would have been referring to here is not Kukulcan, the bearded, white visitor as seen through the eyes of O’Brien, but to what is known as a “Vision Serpent.”14 As depicted in Maya art, deceased, deified rulers, as well as unborn future rulers, were metaphorically “conjured up” through the mouths of Vision Serpents via bloodletting rituals. The Maya were not considered literal descendants of Kukulcan, i.e., the “feathered serpent,” in the same way that O’Brien seems to insinuate.

Surprisingly, O’Brien mentions the remains of some two hundred individuals who were sacrificed in a dedicatory rite under the Temple of Quetzalcoatl at Teotihuacan, Mexico, circa A.D. 200 (see p. 75). John Carlson surmises that these people were sacrificed as eternal guardians to the tomb of a “great charismatic leader.”15 Instead of emphasizing the loathsome nature of this practice, O’Brien suggests that this “charismatic leader” may have been one of

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the bearded, white men. To quote O’Brien, “Did the mysterious visi-
tor make his first appearance at Teotihuacan?” (p. 75). What kind of
charismatic leader would justify killing two hundred people for his
burial? Certainly not the benevolent Quetzalcoatl. O’Brien suggests
that missionaries from Teotihuacan may have spread their beliefs of a
powerful god, and he speaks of Teotihuacan in glowing terms.

Chapter 5 is entitled “Bearded Visitors to South America.” Not
much new appears here, except that O’Brien suggests that the
feathered serpent motifs and the bearded, white visitor may have
come up from the south to Mesoamerica (see pp. 91–93, 96). A few
more details than usual are given in chapter 6 on the fair gods of
North America, but once again this chapter is lacking a great many
citations.

In search of the fair god in chapters 7 through 11, O’Brien leads
us to what he believes may be plausible candidates from various
cultures throughout the world. These chapters discuss possible early
voyages to the Americas, reflecting a phenomenon referred to as
diffusionism. Some of those mentioned, such as the Vikings (see
pp. 115–26), contribute nothing to the argument—they are too late.

Portions of O’Brien’s discussion in chapter 9 regarding “Pros-
ppects from the Pacific” are more logical than those he previously
mentions and are supported by several top scholars of our day (see
pp. 154–57). However, on the last page of this chapter (see p. 162),
his timeline illustration is misleading for the Maya. According to this
chart, the Maya civilization commenced with the site of Tikal, circa
800 B.C., followed by El Mirador at the time of Christ. On the con-
trary, El Mirador flourished and declined long before Tikal rose to
power around A.D. 300.16 In fact, Tikal emerged as the successor to
the earlier, dominant site of El Mirador, which actually dwarfs Tikal
in size.

16. Ron Dye brought this to my attention. See, for example, Ray T. Matheny, “An
Early Maya Metropolis Uncovered: El Mirador,” National Geographic, September 1987,
317–39; Michael D. Coe, The Maya (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 66; Linda
Schele and David A. Freidel, A Forest of Kings: The Untold Story of the Ancient Maya (New
York: Morrow, 1990), 144, 434.
O’Brien then goes on to pursue a Mediterranean connection in chapter 10, and he includes a very controversial collection of artifacts said to have come from a cave in southern Illinois in 1982 (see pp. 163–64, 172–74, 186, 199, 274). Russell Burrows, the self-proclaimed discoverer of this cave, says it is filled with wondrous, ancient relics containing scripts, portraits, and motifs of peoples from areas around the Mediterranean. The catch? These items cannot be authenticated, and Burrows refuses to divulge the location of the site. In a personal letter to me, Burrows claims there were some rolls of parchment in the cave.\(^ {17} \) If true, the parchment could be dated through carbon-14 testing or some other viable test; however, Burrows refuses to return to the cave in fear for his life. He claims he has been chased by gun-toting men who are out to get his treasure.\(^ {18} \) Burrows could have removed the parchment, copper spears, skeletons, or gold coins that he claims remain to this day in the cave; instead, he chose to bring out rocks—rocks carved with figures and strange writing, nothing that can be proven or dated.

O’Brien plows through the Romans and Greeks as possible voyagers to the Americas and then returns to the wonders of Burrows Cave. But wait. The real clincher is yet to come! O’Brien actually suggests that treasures from the tomb of Alexander the Great may be in the Burrows Cave (see pp. 171–73). An illustration of someone’s interpretation of this chamber in the cave, in which Egyptians carve the walls with hieroglyphics and others open the lid of a sarcophagus, is shown (see p. 172). Is this scholarship? O’Brien does write, “Still, fascinating as this may be, one can not yet assume anything” (p. 174). Then why relate such a bizarre tale at all? An adequate summary of opposing views is not presented regarding this controversial find.

The Brazilian artifact referred to as the Paraiba stone—which may contain a Phoenician script—has never been authenticated and in fact has mysteriously disappeared; nevertheless, it is included in O’Brien’s book (see pp. 180–81). O’Brien’s list next features the large

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stone Olmec heads. Scholars do not view these heads as having the Negroid characteristics O'Brien postulates (see p. 183). Those who have visited the Veracruz area where many of these heads have been found will have seen Indians with similar features. Far more convincing clay sculptures of the Negro race appear in the Jalapa Museum in Mexico. Some of the information O'Brien provides is dependable, but how can the layman be expected to differentiate between what is plausible and what is outrageous?

Moving on to some post-Conquest documents, such as the Title of the Lords of Totonicapán, the Annals of the Cakchiquels, and the Popol Vuh, O'Brien informs the reader that these accounts were written by indigenous Indians and describe their peoples' wanderings. He quotes from several of these sources; one in particular claims that the natives are descended from the ten tribes of Israel (see p. 189). Latter-day Saints, of course, believe that members of the house of Israel (not the ten tribes, per se) came to the Western Hemisphere, as is attested in the Book of Mormon. Therefore, we must use caution and remember that some scholars have noted that the use of such words as Israel, Abraham, and Jacob was most likely the result of Spanish influence in these post-Conquest texts. The corruption of the texts is never questioned by O'Brien.

The author then gives a short history of Israel (see pp. 191–96) and even leads us to the probable whereabouts of the lost ten tribes. This history sets "the stage for the search for the bearded, white traveler among the Israelites" (p. 193). O'Brien runs through a slipshod list of similarities between Hebrew and Mesoamerican practices, using dated sources such as Bancroft and Kingsborough (see pp. 196–208). Some of these points are dependable parallels; others are not. Again, the reader will never know because O'Brien does not use a scholarly,


analytical approach even though he briefly mentions the controversies surrounding some of these concepts or objects (see pp. 201–3). This list is but one more example of the confusion resulting from poorly developed methodology and organization.

Again citing the obsolete opinions of some authors, O’Brien mentions that Kingsborough saw representations of “Quetzalcoatl as a crucified person bearing the prints of nails in his hands and feet” (p. 222); however, when we look at Kingsborough’s illustrations (see p. 223), it is quite obvious these sacrificial victims are tied to scaffolding, not nailed to it, and there is nothing whatsoever in their accouterments to suggest they were considered Quetzalcoatl (i.e., Christ). The story of Quetzalcoatl’s visit to the underworld is only mentioned in passing (see pp. 224, 227, 263). Had this subject been developed in a scholarly manner, it would have proved to be one of the more salient features of Quetzalcoatl that may conceivably correspond to Jesus Christ, but the whole scenario is omitted.

In looking for more “ground support” to show that Christ and his followers were related to the bearded, white visitors to the Americas, O’Brien presses forward with a fanciful group of artifacts known collectively as the Michigan Plates, Michigan Relics, or the Soper Savage Collection (see pp. 232–34). Again, if their authenticity is in question, which is the case, why discuss them? O’Brien states that Dr. James E. Talmage “surprisingly, believed them to be forgeries” (p. 233). Why so? Dr. Talmage interviewed the discoverer’s stepdaughter, who stated that her stepfather fraudulently manufactured many of the relics.21 O’Brien also cites David Deal, who claims to be able to translate the Hebrew letters on the Michigan Relics. FARMS scholar John Tvedtnes, after examining Deal’s work and going into lengthy discussions via correspondence with Deal, is of the opinion that Deal does not have an adequate knowledge of Hebrew to make accurate translations of Hebrew texts.22

In chapter 13 O'Brien delves into Old World culture heroes in hopes that such studies will prove enlightening and perhaps bring closure to his great quest. He finds the ubiquitous symbols of culture heroes worldwide (see p. 236). There is no question that many traditions and motifs are universal, but what does this prove? Herein comes one of O'Brien's alternate theses, that of "types and shadows," although he does not use that terminology. O'Brien suggests that Christ's life is mirrored in the culture heroes not only of the Americas, but of the rest of the world (see p. 237). In addition to those already mentioned, he includes Marduk, Osiris, Tammuz, Dionysus, Sargon, and so on (see pp. 249-51). At this point, it is almost as though O'Brien is writing another book with another theme.

Chapter 14 once again returns us to New World myths, but it examines an isolationist's point of view. What if "New World culture heroes . . . originated not from bearded foreign visitors but from purely native sources" (p. 256)? O'Brien does a lot of wondering in this book. Almost all the data for chapter 14 is from modern sources, unlike the previous chapters, but before he finishes with this chapter, O'Brien returns to the now time-worn subjects of the Quetzalcoatl legend and diffusionist/isolationist approaches to the dilemma, which he perceives are part of the formula to be used in solving the issue of the "Fair God."

At last we reach chapter 15, the final chapter, which attempts to "weave" together all the information presented in this book (p. 271). Because the numerous culture heroes of the Americas seem to be everywhere present and appear throughout the centuries, O'Brien concludes, "it would seem that the mysterious visitor is more than a human being" (pp. 272, 276).

As anticipated, since this book comes to us from an LDS publisher and will be read by many Latter-day Saints, O'Brien equates the root of culture hero myths in the Americas with Jesus Christ (see pp. 274–83). Latter-day Saints believe that Christ visited others of the seed of Israel besides a select group of Nephites and Lamanites at Bountiful (see 3 Nephi 15:17 and 16:1), but is it logical to accept all
mysterious, bearded, white visitors to places throughout the Western Hemisphere as being one and the same with Jesus Christ?

Instead of ending the book on a positive note, O'Brien digresses, going back to subjects already discussed; this reflects a major problem of the book as it does not flow well from beginning to end.

O'Brien does make many attempts to be objective, but at times it is difficult to determine if he includes the information because it is factual or if he simply presents the data as information that is available to the researcher but not something the general reader would spend time investigating. In fact, this is not a book for the lay Latter-day Saint reader looking for "new" external proofs for the Book of Mormon. O'Brien seems to have an enormous amount of speculation in his theory in lieu of firm, supportive evidence for those things the reader is led to believe he is attempting to prove.

Although top-notch LDS Mesoamerican scholars such as John Sorenson have not "proven" the Book of Mormon, they have certainly presented a good case for the plausibility of the proposition that Book of Mormon peoples came from the Middle East and lived in a limited geographical area of Mesoamerica.23 O'Brien, on the other hand, lacks a sense of scientific methodology and thus incorporates a vast amount of questionable material in his book. In the end, this approach may do more harm than good. My objection to Fair Gods and Feathered Serpents concerns not so much the conclusions O'Brien reaches but the fact that he reaches them via poorly documented sources, inconsistencies, and unproven external evidences.

Introduction

Readers will be attracted to Images of Ancient America by its clear type, colorful layouts, and beautiful photographs and drawings. The haunting and sometimes grotesque artifacts of early cultures framed on the pages of the book convey the wonder of an ancient world. John L. Sorenson's commentary lays out, chapter by chapter, a remarkably full picture of the lives of ancient Mesoamericans, based on substantial research by himself and others. As the subtitle Visualizing Book of Mormon Life suggests, the book invites readers to visually question and explore the life of Mesoamerica as it probably was experienced by Book of Mormon peoples. From this volume, readers see vividly and realistically a world whose prophets speak from the dust.

This volume obviously represents more than a photo depiction of ancient artifacts. The book offers the fruits of a lifetime of thoughtful reading and writing by a scholar of sociocultural anthropology, an emeritus professor from Brigham Young University. Research Press goes to considerable expense to publish an impressively illustrated
and printed volume, obviously because both author and publisher judge this a very important effort.

In this book, Sorenson aspires to readjust the thinking of readers with contrasting attitudes toward the Book of Mormon. He addresses “two types of readers, who come to the book with contrasting assumptions. The first consists of those (generally not members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) who do not consider the Book of Mormon to be factual. The second are religious believers (‘Mormons’) who reverence that book as scripture but are not well acquainted with what is known about the ancient world” (p. 1). Such a pragmatic approach aims to clarify Book of Mormon claims through known facts and brings a “sense of realism” to readers of the book (p. 3). Sorenson applauds the growing shift in “attention from the apology/criticism conflict toward research that follows the canons of conventional scholarship as applied to the study of other ancient documents” (p. 2) and invites Mesoamericanist scholars to take seriously “unexpected information” they may find in “Mormon’s codex” (pp. 3–4).

In my response to Images of Ancient America, I will examine the structure of this volume, describe its distinctive contributions, and offer my impressions of Sorenson’s achievement.

**Structure and Sources**

**How Is the Book Divided?**

In the first part, which treats material topically, Sorenson reviews “The Land and the Peoples” and “Mesoamerican Civilization” in general. He underscores the variety of environments, cultures, ethnic groups, and languages to be found in this “diverse ancient scene” (p. 15). And he takes issue with theories too narrow or biased about the origins of these peoples. At a meeting of physical anthropologists in 1990, “the argument for a straightforward origin of Amerindians via the Bering Strait was said to have been ‘undone’ by certain archaeologists, linguists, and geneticists. One study reported at the meeting used the recently developed DNA technique to show ‘that
there were at least 11 major lineages [or biological lines in the Americas], possibly more” (p. 16).

Sorenson also speaks correctively to LDS readers concerning ethnic origins: “Throughout most if not all of Book of Mormon history, the terms Lamanite and Nephite signaled political and cultural affiliations, not biology. . . . Obviously, much more was going on and more peoples and cultures were involved in Book of Mormon history than modern readers usually detect when reading Mormon’s terse, one-sided account.” To support his corrective, he reminds us: “Given such uncertainties, it is well to remember Hugh Nibley’s caution, ‘There is not a word in the Book of Mormon to prevent the coming to this hemisphere of any number of people from any part of the world at any time’” (p. 17).

Essentially, Sorenson is amassing evidence to discount persistent wrong thinking. We might say that he wages war on authoritarian ignorance. In the section titled “A Gallery of Ancient Faces” (pp. 18–21), for instance, he points to faces on ancient statuary with noses and beards that could link Mesoamerican people to the Middle East. He argues this link in contradiction to anthropologists who show only statues carrying features that are Asian and Mongolian. “The faces shown here [with Israelitish features] are portraits of such individuals, although their very presence in Mexico and Central America is ignored or denied by conventional physical anthropologists” (p. 18). He counters static beliefs and invites consideration of broader evidence. With languages, too, he persists, “There is much to be learned yet. A few linguists have shown that a significant portion of Hebrew vocabulary and grammar is mixed into certain Mesoamerican languages. Studies on that interesting matter continue” (p. 25).

After the opening section on land, peoples, and civilization, Sorenson’s chapters encompass everything from daily living to war to religion. Each chapter explores various details of Mesoamerican life.

Sorenson divides the first part of this book from the second with the heading “Book of Mormon Peoples and History” (p. 188). There he explains another way to look at this civilization: “The first part of this book related information on Book of Mormon peoples and
cultures to their Mesoamerican setting, topic by topic. While that approach has value in being systematic, it leaves issues of history and geography in limbo. What follows will connect the Nephite story to the Mesoamerican scene in terms of the broader topics of times and places" (p. 188).

This part thus treats geographic sites and time lines. The first section, “Mormon’s Map in Relation to Mesoamerica” (p. 188), deals with place. Further sections explore what happened in specific sites from “Nephite History” to “The Nephites’ Fall,” “Nephites, Lamanites, and Successor Peoples,” and “The Jaredites.” Keeping these facts in mind, Sorenson explains formerly confusing allusions in the Book of Mormon, such as the use of the terms up and down to describe migrations (see pp. 194, 196) and the notion of limited population (see p. 194).

Following these two major parts, two appendixes review “How We Learn about the Past” through archaeology and complementary studies (pp. 218–23) and “Old World Connections with the New” (pp. 224–27). In his attempt to educate scholars, Sorenson reports that he worked with Martin H. Raish in documenting contacts with the New World prior to Columbus.1 Images of Ancient America describes voyages and immigrations in such a way as to counter notions commonly taught by archaeologists that all early inhabitants crossed a Bering Straits land bridge from Mongolia to Alaska. Yet the Book of Mormon migrations are only three among many: “One version of the Near Eastern theory is recounted in the Book of Mormon. It remains a question for future research to determine, however, what degree of influence the three Book of Mormon voyages had on Mesoamerican cultures, or whether other voyages, say by Polynesians or Chinese, had major, direct influence on New World areas” (p. 224).

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1. Endnote 218 of Images refers to John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish, Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1996). In a personal interview, 6 September 1998, John Sorenson affirmed that this 1,200-page, two-volume bibliography of transoceanic voyages “rubs some people’s noses in some things they ought to know.”
Even Nephi, son of Lehi, Sorenson argues, denied attempting to transplant Israelite culture: “Nephi was explicit in saying that he tried to weed out many Jewish notions in founding his new colony (see 2 Nephi 25:1–5), although a version of the law of Moses was followed.”

Sorenson concludes that “a huge body of writings” convinces him that sea voyages must be considered “despite the fact that a majority of scholars still refuse to examine the evidence seriously” (p. 224).

The final pages of the book provide endnotes, illustration credits, references, and scripture and subject indexes. Here, to my mind, lies a possible fault, and certainly an inconvenience. Sorenson provides endnotes and gives credit for illustrations to a wide range of sources. But his list of references covers mostly external scholars and does not cite his own articles and books nor all of the LDS scholars he refers to. One regrets this disappointing shortening because the blending of Mormon with secular scholarship in his commentary and endnotes makes a great contribution to our understanding.

Where Does He Obtain His Information?

Sorenson draws on the findings of academics ranging widely across research disciplines in depicting the Mesoamerican way of life. His sources range from codices written by the Spanish conquerors to the work of anthropologists like Michael Coe and H. B. Nicholson, geographer Paul Kirchoff, physical anthropologist Eusebio Davalos Hurtado, and analyst of clothing in the codices Patricia Rieff Anawalt. He refers to research by Book of Mormon specialists such as Hugh Nibley, Wells Jakeman, John Welch, Noel Reynolds, and Brian Stubbs. He also reports on his own extensive studies of ancient America, the results of which have appeared in books and articles across “nearly five decades” of scholarship (p. 1). His text and comprehensive endnotes tap those decades of research.

While describing the debates that occur within the field of anthropology, Sorenson pays tribute to the level of civilization found in Mesoamerica (see p. 26). He also commends the work of Mexican investigators who “probe . . . sources” hidden to the methods of
European-trained scholars and who are discovering that "the Meso-
americans also possessed immense bodies of systematized lore in
astronomy, mathematics, engineering, medicine, botany, literature,
art, philosophy, cosmology, and other fields of knowledge and crea-
tivity" (p. 30). "Impressive," he concludes. "Very useful," I would add,
thinking of how I teach students of early American literature to visu-
alize a realistic and varied civilization. I have used Images of Ancient
America in my classes to provide a needed corrective to the standard
stories of conquest of an ignorant native people by "civilized"
Europeans.

On another level, Sorenson visually substantiates his theories by
connecting the people to geography with precise photographs of
Guatemalan and southern Mexican terrain. And on still another level
he re-creates the thinking of the times through evidence from early
Spanish literary documents and hints drawn from monuments, arti-
facts, pictographs, and inscriptions. The resulting riches of informa-
tion could be overwhelming, but Sorenson so nicely catalogues them
that one feels able to dip back at will to refresh and deepen first
impressions.

**Contributions**

*Images of Ancient America* enriches Book of Mormon studies in
three important ways:

1. It illuminates the Book of Mormon as a genuine artifact of
an ancient culture. Sorenson describes a people and a time in Meso-
america by combining anthropological insights with the Book of
Mormon's religious text. He finds clues within the text to sites and
cities and sees evidence for patterns of living. He presents the cul-
tural context of the Book of Mormon peoples, seeing them realisti-
cally as participants in a society, shaped by traditions, subject to po-
itical forces, and constrained by geography and natural resources.

He reminds us along the way that members of the ruling classes,
the educated elite, wrote the Book of Mormon mainly for their own
spiritual purposes. Only unconsciously do the writers suggest some-
thing about the everyday pursuits and daily lives of the people. He
then matches ideas from the text with evidence turned up by archae-
ologists, whose artifacts and digs of ancient sites show details of the life of ordinary people only implied by Book of Mormon writers. Although he finds strong relationships between text and research, Sorenson is cautious and uses many qualifiers, not claiming that all information is compatible. In this he wants to warn believers away from enthusiastic invention beyond reasonable knowledge, and so he is careful to qualify his conclusions.

For the most part, anthropological findings help Book of Mormon readers and believers reach sound judgments. In turn, Sorenson believes, a close reading of the text could help researchers expand their understanding of Mesoamerican life. Images of Ancient America's first achievement, therefore, lies in creating a picture of ancient humanity that is illuminated by these two important sources.

2. Sorenson evaluates theories from an anthropological standpoint. Research methods in anthropology have changed and, consequently, findings have increased. Sorenson uses a clever contrast to illustrate this change: He begins this book with a photograph of Alfred Percival Maudslay, the early classic archaeologist who single-handedly masterminded a dig and analyzed its results (see p. 1). In contrast, he closes the book with an appendix on modern archaeology, describing the “sophisticated imaging equipment,” the “large team of researchers” (p. 218), and the many “complementary studies” (pp. 222–23) that interpret remains with a degree of sophistication and subtlety far beyond what Maudslay could have imagined.

Because he has so thoroughly assimilated material dealing with ancient America, Sorenson can present his views in an informative, yet almost conversational tone. Taking a stance for impartial veracity, he admits that much is not yet known and chides the overzealous among both Book of Mormon defenders and skeptics. He commends and cites the work of many contemporary scholars, both non-Mormon and Latter-day Saint. He himself paints a picture so detailed that it becomes convincing, if not irrefutable, particularly when broadly supported by contemporary research.

3. The format of the book, including added sidebars, enhances the reader's perusal of the text. After recounting known anthropological information under each topic, Sorenson dramatizes aspects of the
lives of Book of Mormon peoples with evidence from the Book of Mormon itself. In many of the sections, a sidebar entitled “Visualizing Book of Mormon Life” blends what is known about Mesoamerica with what is known from the scriptures. Sorenson provides context for Book of Mormon stories through geographic, cultural, and social information. The author’s commentary here is wide-ranging and generally focused on known facts, but it is sometimes chatty and usually lively. The attractive graphic design enhances the reader’s understanding. This multifaceted substantiation of the Book of Mormon world is the book’s greatest contribution.

To observe an example of Sorenson’s method, see the section entitled “Cities, Towns, and Villages” (p. 102). He explains that Mesoamerican cities were small and villages were seen as the “ideal pattern,” although some centers like Teotihuacan in central Mexico might have had a population exceeding 100,000. Sorenson reminds readers that in biblical terms cities meant “administrative centers over regions” and even “tiny posts for armed garrisons” (p. 102). Then in a sidebar, he reports:

The Book of Mormon distinguishes five levels of settlement size: great cities, cities, towns, villages, and small villages. Book of Mormon cities are often named, but their size clearly varied greatly. Perhaps on the small end of the scale was Helam, built by Alma’s people. It was designated a city almost from the moment it was settled—by fewer than five hundred people (see Mosiah 18:35; 23:20). Only four of the more than forty Nephite and Lamanite cities whose names are given in the record are termed “great cities,” although others, unnamed, were conceived as having the same rank (see Helaman 7:22; 3 Nephi 8:14). But we should be cautious about overestimating the actual population size of even the largest of those, for Mormon’s record also refers to Jerusalem in Palestine as a “great city” (1 Nephi 1:4) even though its population down to Lehi’s time may never have exceeded twenty-five thousand inhabitants (in Solomon’s fabled day it had only around three thousand). (p. 103)
Here Sorenson’s information about numbers and terms helps clarify proportions and set the scene. His method includes referring to specific scriptures. He also includes biblical data for comparative purposes, thus relating the ancient world to conditions in modern Mesoamerica. Through such explanations he introduces the reader to Book of Mormon peoples in a tangible, believable context.

In the section on cities, towns, and villages, Sorenson includes an aerial photograph of a contemporary Pacific Coast hamlet to illustrate modern housing clusters and a photograph of a mountain valley in the present-day Cunén area of Guatemala to illustrate how a “land” might be defined either as a territory like a valley with an “administrative center” or as an “economic entity” with wider boundaries (p. 102). He also adds a sketch of an archaeological site from late Olmec times and, more prominently, an artist’s re-creation of a magnificent city from 200 B.C.: El Mirador, in northern Guatemala. The site was excavated in the 1980s by BYU archaeologist Ray T. Matheny, but Sorenson declares in an endnote that it “has no identifiable connection with Book of Mormon lands” (p. 229 n. 74).

The diversity of these illustrations in style and time periods highlights a limitation inherent in this book—its lack of conclusive evidence. Clear and dramatic as the photographs and drawings are, they must be interpreted from a certain viewpoint in order to relate them to the Book of Mormon. And the interpretations given here depend on Sorenson’s personal skill and intuition, although he offers, where possible, documented scholarship.

In another example of his method, under “War and the Military,” Sorenson discusses weapons and armor in ancient times. Turning to what is known about this from the Book of Mormon, he says:

All the weapons employed in native Mesoamerica may be referred to in the Book of Mormon. Often the connections are obvious (for example, “spears,” Alma 17:7). Certain other names of weapons in that text (for example, “axe” and “sword”) leave us unclear in both the Nephite record, as in Spanish descriptions of native weapons that speak, vaguely, about the appearance and function of the mentioned weapons. Yet enough plausible matchups are apparent that
seeing Mesoamerican weapons gives us valuable clues to understand those of the Nephites. (p. 130)

On pages 130 and 131, *Images of Ancient America* shows museum specimens of an Aztec spear-thrower and sketches of weapons and a hunter. Sorenson cites five other passages from Alma about armor and clothing and ways of “casting over . . . arrows’ at the enemy” (p. 130). His endnote guides the reader to articles from Latter-day Saint scholars William J. Hamblin and A. Brent Merrill that specifically explore weaponry. Leaving the minute evidence to these individual works, Sorenson offers general explanations that link Mesoamerican life with the scriptural account in a logical but tempered way.

**Evaluations**

**Melding Two Worlds**

In this intriguing volume, John Sorenson sets himself a dangerous task, apt to be misunderstood by both critics and advocates of the Book of Mormon. While both want to compare the worlds of scholarship and religious faith, critics underscore differences; advocates find similarities. However, because Sorenson aims to successfully meld the worlds of scholarship and religious text in one volume, he attempts to upset stereotypes and advance understanding of an ancient religious world from two bases, as it has never been clarified and illustrated before.

Not every reader will approve Sorenson’s stepping back from making absolute connections. Groomed on early discoveries of impressive links between stela, pyramids, and Book of Mormon culture by Sidney Sperry, Milton R. Hunter, Paul Cheesman, Bruce Warren, Thomas Ferguson, and others, LDS readers may expect greater certitude in this volume. Instead Sorenson offers reasoned hypotheses and, where evidence is scanty and ties are vague, acknowledges the uncertainties. However, for the reader who presses ahead through the whole book, the sheer mass of evidence builds confidence in the story told by Book of Mormon narrators. Page by page, through
more than fifty topics, Sorenson's cautiously developed links build an exciting picture of a complete civilization. He is obviously not so much trying to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon by the anthropological detail as aiming to enrich its story by representing a complex, accurate view of ancient life. And for one segment of his Mormon audience, Sorenson proposes the book as a guide and corrective. "I particularly hope," he writes, "that artists, filmmakers, pageant producers, and writers who deal with the Book of Mormon will enrich and discipline their creative work by use of the information in this book" (p. 4).

Offering "Slant" Insights

Since tracing commonplaces of people’s lives occupies the sociocultural anthropologist, he must draw hints from and make connections with the physical evidence by looking at the texts slantwise. Sorenson thus hunts for suggestions from the Book of Mormon text and does not expect its authors to fully clarify and depict social conditions or cultural customs.

Arguments for geography take on new meaning in Images of Ancient America. Sorenson is known for his earlier book, An Ancient Setting for the Book of Mormon, in which he speaks effectively for the Guatemala highlands and southern Mexico as a setting for Nephite and Lamanite cities. Not until viewing the magnificent photographs included in Images of Ancient America, however, did I feel strongly that this richly varied land could convincingly hold the peoples and events of Book of Mormon history as other suggested lands could not.

I find Images of Ancient America to be a landmark book, providing a substantial bridge between research and religious communities in its scholarship, answering questions long posed by Book of

2. In poem 1129, "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant," Emily Dickinson suggests how the poet reveals subtle truths.

Mormon readers about the actual life of these peoples, and setting forth key verbal and visual arguments for a Mesoamerican setting for this narrative. Its page design and format help present those messages strongly, and readers should appreciate its value as a reference work. *Images of Ancient America* weighs in not only as a large book, but as one large in considerations worth heartfelt study.
"THEM SNEAKY EARLY CHRISTIANS"

Barry R. Bickmore

Introduction

When our neighbors approach the Latter-day Saint religion, they are often struck by the extent to which secrecy plays a part in our faith and practice. Indeed, Latter-day Saints themselves sometimes feel vaguely uncomfortable with what seems to be some sort of counterculture phenomenon. How could the religion some have called the quintessential American faith be so deeply involved with something that seems so . . . un-American? It must be remembered, however, that Mormonism claims primarily to be a restoration of primitive Christianity — not some peculiarly concentrated distillation of the American ethos. Indeed, upon turning to the available early Christian documents, Mormons and non-Mormons alike might be shocked by how many esoteric doctrines and rituals extensively permeated the ancient religion of Jesus’ followers.

1. For comparisons of Mormonism with early Christianity, see Barry R. Bickmore, Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity (Ben Lomond, Calif.: The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 1999); Hugh Nibley, Mormonism and Early Christianity (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987); Hugh Nibley, The World and the Prophets (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987).

Professor Guy G. Stroumsa, chairman of the Department of Comparative Religion at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has recently produced what may be the most comprehensive study to date on early Christian secrecy in his book *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*. This is an understudied phenomenon, however, so rather than presenting a synthetic treatment of the subject, Stroumsa opts for a series of smaller studies on various aspects of the problem. These he calls "forays—or *Vorarbeiten*—to check the terrain" (p. ix).

Stroumsa's book in its entirety will be of intense interest to many Latter-day Saints. However, in this review I will concentrate on showing LDS readers how "the terrain" of early Christian esotericism might be viewed through the lens of our unique perspective on Christian history, relying heavily (but not exclusively) on Professor Stroumsa's work. I trust that Latter-day Saints will find themselves looking upon familiar territory.

**Esotericism among the Early Christians and Latter-day Saints**

**The Background of Early Christian Esotericism**

Latter-day Saints have long recognized that a symptom of the apostasy from primitive Christianity was some degree of theological drift, exacerbated by the adoption of Greek philosophical tenets. On the other hand, traditional Christian scholarship has historically seen the genesis of Christian esotericism within the Greek mystery cults. The reasons for this emphasis are summarized by Stroumsa:

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2. For example, the Gentile Christians adopted first an essentially Middle Platonist view of the nature of God, and later a Neoplatonist view, in place of a more anthropomorphic theology espoused by the ancient Jews and the first Christians. For an excellent treatment of this subject, see the following book by a Cambridge professor of divinity: Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

3. For an excellent example of this tendency, see Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1895), 283–309.
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For Catholics, for whom secrecy is associated with heresy and perceived to be in opposition to the openness and the public nature of the tradition of the Great Church, the existence of such traditions is difficult to accept. For Protestants, the traditions of the Catholic Church, which is suspected of being tainted with esoteric doctrines, reflect a degeneration of the pristine *kerygma* [preaching] of Jesus and of his apostles. To both denominations, secret doctrines seem alien to the spirit of a religion which offers salvation to all human-kind through a simple act of faith. (pp. 1–2; cf. 29)

Stroumsa argues that a more objective approach to the documents demonstrates that the early Christians inherited their esoteric traditions directly from their Jewish background (see pp. 41–45). For instance, Joachim Jeremias notes that the “whole environment of primitive Christianity knows the element of the esoteric.” He cites in particular the Essenes, who apparently required that, at admission, a new member would swear terrible oaths never to reveal the secret teachings of the order to outsiders. John J. Gunther describes the sort of thing the Essenes kept secret.

In the Qumran writings there are many references to the mysteries or secrets (*raz*) which have been revealed. Some are recorded on heavenly tablets (Cave 4 fragments). The basic *raz* concerns the wonders of God: His grace, mercy, wisdom and truth. These attributes are expressed through the mysteries of the divine plan of history.

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4. Stroumsa extends this even to Gnosticism, which he says “should to a great extent be understood as an outburst of esotericism in early Christianity, mainly through Jewish-Christian traditions” (p. 133). “One could even say that Gnosticism is Jewish-Christianity run wild” (p. 106).


Gunther also quotes Pliny to show that the Essenes instructed their initiates in the mysteries “in accordance with an ancient method of inquiry . . . by means of symbols.”

Morton Smith mentions “a large body of secret traditions and practices” among the priests of the temple at Jerusalem and the Samaritan priests. Even the Pharisees had a body of secret doctrines which they were sworn to keep secret not only from outsiders, but from less reliable members of their own sect. Stroumsa cites R. P. C. Hanson to show that in two-thirds of the cases where the third-century Christian theologian Origen uses the word *paradosis* ("tradition," usually meaning an oral tradition not meant to be written down), “it denotes an ancient Jewish or rabbinic tradition” (p. 41).

An astute reader of the New Testament will also note that Jesus’ mortal ministry was permeated by esotericism. Consider, for instance, Jesus’ stated reason for preaching in parables, as cited by Stroumsa (pp. 160–61).

When He was alone, the Twelve and others who were round him questioned him about the parables. He replied: “To you the mystery of the kingdom of God has been given; but to those who are outside everything comes by way of parables, so that (as Scripture says) they may look and look, but see nothing; they may hear and hear, but understand nothing; otherwise they might turn to God and be forgiven. (Mark 4:10–12)"

Paul wrote that the apostles, the “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1), “speak wisdom among them that are perfect, yet not the wisdom of this world. . . . But we speak the wisdom

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7. Ibid., 296–97.
11. A fourth-century Mesopotamian Christian document divides members of the church into the “just” and the “perfect.” Stroumsa takes it for granted that “each category of believers receives a different type of teaching” (p. 31 n. 13; cf. p. 156).
of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Corinthians 2:6–7). Stroumsa notes that the precise nature and origin of Paul’s “spiritual” teachings “are still in need of clarification,” but he insists that both this text and the one from Mark “seem to allude to esoteric doctrines, to be shared only within a small and exclusive group of direct disciples, but to remain hidden from the majority” (p. 161). This is clearly the case with Paul’s comments to the Corinthians, who had been Christians for years. “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able” (1 Corinthians 3:2). Stroumsa continues,

Yet a long exegetical tradition, already in Patristic hermeneutics of the first centuries, and up to modern New Testament research, has attempted to explain away such verses or minimize their significance. Two main reasons are responsible for this fact. The first is related to the cultural weight of theological perceptions, while the other reflects the ignorance of Jewish sources on the part of many scholars. (p. 161)

Esoteric Doctrines

For Stroumsa, the earliest Christian esotericism had to do primarily with doctrine, and indeed, the higher teachings appear to have normally been protected through oral transmission or were left to be revealed to the individual. In addition, a large number of apocryphal (hidden) books, which generally saw only limited circulation, were extant. Papias (ca. A.D. 100) wrote that he inquired diligently about the oral teachings of the apostles: “For I imagined that what was to be got from books was not so profitable to me as what came from the living and abiding voice.”

Ignatius of Antioch (ca. A.D. 110) rebuked those who insisted on an early variant of sola scriptura,

"For the archives ought not to be preferred to the Spirit." As late as the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea could write, "Of the beliefs and practices whether generally accepted or publicly enjoined which are preserved in the Church some we possess derived from written teaching; others we have received delivered to us 'in a mystery' by the tradition of the Apostles." Against the pagan Celsus, who around the year A.D. 170 criticized the Christians as a secret society, Origen wrote,

In these circumstances, to speak of the Christian doctrine as a secret system, is altogether absurd. But that there should be certain doctrines, not made known to the multitude, which are (revealed) after the exoteric ones have been taught, is not a peculiarity of Christianity alone, but also of philosophic systems, in which certain truths are exoteric and others esoteric.

Latter-day Saint writings allude to a similar practice. Consider the following passages from the Book of Mormon prophet Alma and the apostle Joseph Fielding Smith:

And now Alma began to expound these things unto him, saying: It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command that they shall not impart only according to the portion of his word which he doth grant unto the children of men, according to the heed and diligence which they give unto him. And therefore, he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word, until it

13. Ignatius, Philadelphians 8, in ANF, 1:84. The Dead Sea Scrolls describe the attitude of the Essene Jews toward personal revelations in this way: "The counsels of the Spirit concerning the Mysteries are to be kept secret." 1QS 4:6, quoted in Gunther, St. Paul's Opponents, 293.


is given unto him to know the mysteries of God until he know them in full. And they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word until they know nothing concerning his mysteries. (Alma 12:9–11)

Some of [the revelations] were for the Church and not for the world, and therefore, are given only to the saints. But many revelations have been given to the Church since the death of Joseph Smith. Some of these have been published; some have not. It has been my privilege to read and handle a number of them that are still in the manuscript and have not as yet been given to the world for a wise purpose in the Lord. But they are on file and will be preserved.16

Likewise, LDS and early Christian writings express similar motivations for keeping doctrines secret. As the above quotations from the Book of Mormon and Elder Smith explain, some revelations are for the world, some for the Saints, and some for a select few. Similarly, the early Jewish Christian Clementine Recognitions says, “For the most sublime truths are best honoured by means of silence.”17 A related document, the Clementine Homilies, says that “it would be impious to state the hidden truths” to the wicked.18

Joseph Smith expressed concern that revealing everything would actually harm the Saints. “I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them.”19 And he told Brigham Young, “If I was to reveal to this people what the Lord has revealed to me, there is not a man or woman would stay with me.”20 Similarly, Ignatius told the Roman Christians, “I am able to write to you of heavenly things, but I fear lest I should do you an injury. Know me from myself. For I am cautious lest ye

17. Peter, in Clementine Recognitions 1.23, in ANF, 8:83.
should not be able to receive [such knowledge], and should be perplexed." The *Clementine Recognitions* advocated using a "certain circumlocution" (rather than direct explanations) to hide the holiest truths from the profane, who would weary God’s servants with their worldly arguments.

But if he set forth pure truth to those who do not desire to obtain salvation, he does injury to Him by whom he has been sent, and from whom he has received commandment not to throw the pearls of His words before swine and dogs, who, striving against them with arguments and sophisms, roll them in the rank of carnal understanding, and by their barkings and base answers break and weary the preachers of God’s word.

**Esoteric Rites**

The most well-known aspect of LDS esotericism is the ritual secrecy surrounding the temple, and in particular the endowment ceremony. Thus Latter-day Saints will naturally be interested in the ritual aspects of early Christian secrecy. Unfortunately, Stroumsa does not concentrate on this issue and in fact downplays the significance of secret rituals in earliest Christianity and Judaism (see pp. 151, 154), but he still confides, "In fact there is a manifest connection between ritual and doctrine" (p. 33).

The first thing we notice when we peruse the sources is that the early Christians were much more secretive about their rituals than even the Latter-day Saints. For instance, even baptism and the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper (Eucharist) were strictly forbidden to outsiders. J. G. Davies reports that prior to the turn of the third century, Christian writers give a number of references to baptism and the Eucharist but leave no detailed descriptions because "the observance of the *disciplina arcani* [secret discipline] inhibited full descriptions

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of these rites.”23 The Epistle to Diognetus (second century) warns, “You must not hope to learn the mystery of [the Christians’] peculiar mode of worshipping God from any mortal.”24 And Tertullian refuted charges of immorality in Christian meetings by saying that since no Christian would reveal what goes on there, strangers must be making the charges.25

Just as with the Latter-day Saints, some early Christians also had more advanced rituals, beyond baptism and the Eucharist, which were used as vehicles to teach the secret doctrines. Hippolytus of Rome (ca. A.D. 200) referred in veiled terms to such a rite, which he called “the white stone”:

But if there is any other matter which ought to be told, let the bishop impart it secretly to those who are communicated. He shall not tell this to any but the faithful and only after they have first been communicated. This is the white stone of which John said that there is a new name written upon it which no man knows except him who receives.26

Commenting on this passage, Hanson writes that it “is not clear what the matter delivered through this secret rule was. It obviously could not have had any reference to baptism and Eucharist.”27

In a recently discovered letter to one Theodore, Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 200) wrote of a Secret Gospel of Mark, an expanded version of the canonical Gospel, intended for “those who are being perfected . . . being read only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries.”28 What were the “great mysteries,” and what form did the initiation rite take? This question is a difficult one to answer, given the esoteric nature of the rites. However, certain comments in Clement’s writings may give us clues about some elements of the Alexandrian ritual.

27. Hanson, Tradition in the Early Church, 33.
Clement quotes the following passage from the *Secret Gospel of Mark*, which undoubtedly indicates that the ritual included a symbolic clothing in linen garments. "And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over [his] naked [body]. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God."  

In a passage in his *Stromata*, Clement represents the mysteries as being taught "only after certain purifications and previous instructions."  

Clement’s *Exhortation to the Heathen* contains the following passage in which the mysteries are said to be presented in the form of "dramas of truth" and the initiate is introduced by the hierophant (teacher of mysteries) into the presence of the Father:

Come, O madman, not leaning on the thyrsus, not crowned with ivy; throw away the mitre, throw away the fawn-skin; come to thy senses. I will show thee the Word, and the mysteries of the Word, expounding them after thine own fashion. This is the mountain beloved of God . . . consecrated to dramas of the truth,—a mount of sobriety, shaded with forests of purity . . .

O truly sacred mysteries! O stainless light! My way is lighted with torches, and I survey the heavens and God; I become holy whilst I am initiated. The Lord is the hierophant, and seals while illuminating him who is initiated, and presents to the Father him who believes, to be kept safe for ever. Such are the reveries of my mysteries. If it is thy wish, be thou also initiated; and thou shalt join the choir along with angels around the unbegotten and indestructible and the only true God, the Word of God, raising the hymn with us.  

E. Louis Backman sees the last sentence of the above passage as referring to a ritual ring dance, in which a hymn and prayer were offered around the altar in conjunction with a sort of dance.

Let me first emphasize that the closing words [of the hymn] must not be regarded as referring only to that which awaits in the future a person inducted into the Christian mysteries. These remarkable final words should also, perhaps mainly, be interpreted quite literally. If you are inducted into the Christian mysteries, then you must perform a ring-dance round the altar . . . not only with the other novitiate but also with the angels! For they are present and participate in the mystery.32

Backman33 cites a passage from the Stromata in which Clement reveals that the initiates raised their hands in prayer during the dance: "So also we raise the head and lift the hands to heaven, and set the feet in motion at the closing utterance of the prayer."34 Similar descriptions of the ring dance/prayer circle are found in the writings of Gregory Thaumaturgus (A.D. 210–60) and Basileios of Caesarea (A.D. 344–407), as well as in the Gnostic Acts of John.35 Gregory relates a curious legend about the rite: "Today (Christ's birthday) Adam is resurrected and performs a ring dance with the angels, raised up to heaven."36

Gregory's comment seems to indicate that the ring dance was somehow connected with the ascension of Adam to heaven, and hence we might infer that the "great mysteries" included the theme of ascension. Professor Stroumsa notes that Clement wrote that the secret tradition "began with the creation of the world, and only later became the subject of theology" (p. 42). He goes on, "At the end of a study of the 'secret traditions of the Apostles,' Jean Daniélou concluded that the secret doctrines attributed to the Apostles by the Apocrypha and the traditions of the presbyters referred primarily to

33. Backman, Religious Dances, 22.
the theme of the celestial voyage” (p. 43; cf. p. 156). Could the “drama of truth” have been used to present various doctrines relating to the creation, theology, and the journey from earth through the heavens?37

Certainly this reconstruction of the “great mysteries” of the church at Alexandria is tentative, incomplete, and in some respects speculative. However, this discussion should have been sufficient to establish some probability that this rite was in some ways quite similar to the modern LDS endowment, both in content and form. Several of these correspondences can be publicly mentioned. For instance, the first phase of the endowment rite consists of “washings” and “anointings” (D&C 124:37, 39), followed by a symbolic clothing in a white garment.38 The endowment includes instruction relating to the creation, theology, and ethics,39 and as a whole is meant to represent “the step-by-step ascent into the eternal presence.”40 Finally, it includes a symbolic “prayer circle,” which, along with the rest of the endowment “precedes the symbolic entrance into the celestial world and the presence of God.”41

37. Several apocryphal texts describe journeys through the heavenly spheres (usually three or seven among the Jews and Jewish Christians). A representative example of what was supposed to have gone on in these journeys appears in a Jewish Christian text called The Ascension of Isaiah:

And then many of the righteous will ascend with him, whose spirits do not receive their garments till the Lord Christ ascends and they ascend with him. Then indeed will they receive their garments and thrones and crowns when he shall have ascended into the seventh heaven. . . . And again I beheld when he descended into the second heaven, and again he gave the password there, for the doorkeepers demanded it and the Lord gave it. The Ascension of Isaiah, in The Other Bible, ed. Willis Barnstone (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 527, 529.


Let me give you the definition in brief. Your endowment is, to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell. (Brigham Young, in Journal of Discourses, 2:31)

Esotericism and Apostasy

In the LDS view, the loss of the original esoteric traditions and attitudes in Christianity was a symptom of the general apostasy. Thus Latter-day Saints will also be interested in why these traditions were lost and how this loss further catalyzed the theological drift that characterized the first Christian centuries.

The Gnostics and the Decline of Esotericism

For Stroumsa, in a concrete historical sense, the most important reason behind the decline of Christian esotericism was the struggle between Catholicism and Gnosticism.

Various Gnostic groups seem to have accepted and developed, sometimes in baroque fashion, early Jewish-Christian esoteric traditions. The appropriation of these traditions by the Gnostics made them suspect for "orthodox" Christian intellectuals. In their merciless fight against the Gnostics, the Church Fathers felt the need to reject these esoteric traditions, which had accompanied Christianity since its beginning, but which had become an embarrassing burden. Victory over Gnosticism thus meant the eradication of esotericism from Christian doctrine. (p. 157; cf. p. 106)

The Christian intellectuals gradually downplayed or denied the esotericism of the first centuries (see pp. 6, 39, 158) and transformed it into the mysticism of the Middle Ages. "'Mystery,' in its Christian garb, has now become something ineffable, which cannot be fully expressed by words, rather than something which must remain hidden. In other words, we witness here the end of ancient esotericism" (p. 168; cf. p. 62).

One factor that likely exacerbated the conflict was the lack of a central authority in second-century Christianity to replace the apostles of the first century. The Gnostic teachers claimed to possess the

42. Catholic scholar and apologist Michael Winter admits, "In the first place it appears, from the records which have survived, that of the thirteen bishops who ruled in Rome from the death of St. Peter until the end of the second century, only two of them exerted their authority
secret traditions passed down directly from the apostles. This claim opposed the authority of the local ecclesiastical hierarchies, and hence we can readily see why the Catholic intellectuals tended to downplay all esotericism as a result. It was not enough to appeal to some universally held version of the secret tradition taught by all the bishops, because, as Jean Daniérou has observed, in the late second century "the situation, so far as ideas about tradition were concerned, was ... extremely confused. The word ... was fashionable enough; but it meant something different to almost everyone who used it." As Catholic belief became standardized through the various councils, the secret tradition was internalized into the sort of ineffable mysticism that is difficult for heretics to exploit.

In contrast, why has the esoteric element within Mormonism remained relatively robust, despite cultural pressures? I believe the answer lies in the church’s maintaining a central spiritual authority, with explicitly stated power to define and control doctrine. The Latter-day Saints are heavily oriented toward personal revelation, which might tend toward fragmentation, except that the apostles have kept strict control over which teachings are to be official public doctrine. Consider the following comment by Brigham Young:

Here let me give you one lesson that may be profitable to many. If the Lord Almighty should reveal to a High Priest, or

outside the city in a manner which could be called papal." Michael M. Winter, Saint Peter and the Popes (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1960), 113. The two popes here referred to were Clement of Rome (ca. A.D. 96), who wrote a letter exhorting the Corinthians not to eject their priesthood officers, and Victor (ca. A.D. 190), who threatened to excommunicate the Asian churches for refusing to follow the Roman tradition of when to celebrate Easter. However, Clement claimed only the authority of the Holy Spirit in his letter (see 1 Clement 63, in ANF, 10:248), and the Asians paid no attention to Victor’s threats. Funk-Hemmer, Histoire de l’Eglise (Paris, 1904), 1:294, 194; translated in James L. Barker, The Divine Church: Down through Change, Apostasy Therefrom, and Restoration (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1951), 1:170. Winter goes on, “In the face of this strong probability of a popedom, the events of the first two centuries present an unexpected enigma. It must be admitted that the activities of the early bishops of Rome do not harmonize with this expectation.” Winter, Saint Peter and the Popes, 116. That is, it seems probable that if a central authority existed in the New Testament church (Peter), one should likewise have been in the post-apostolic church, so the fact that no one exerted or even claimed such authority during this period is baffling.

to any other than the head, things that are, or that have been and will be, and show to him the destiny of this people twenty-five years from now, or a new doctrine that will in five, ten, or twenty years hence become the doctrine of this Church and kingdom, but which has not yet been revealed to this people, and reveal it to him by the same Spirit, the same messenger, the same voice, and the same power that gave revelations to Joseph when he was living, it would be a blessing to that High Priest, or individual; but he must rarely divulge it to a second person on the face of the earth, until God reveals it through the proper source to become the property of the people at large. Therefore when you hear Elders, High Priests, Seventies, or the Twelve, (though you cannot catch any of the Twelve there, but you may the High Priests, Seventies, and Elders) say that God does not reveal through the President of the Church that which they know, and tell wonderful things, you may generally set it down as a God’s truth that the revelation they have had, is from the devil, and not from God. If they had received from the proper source, the same power that revealed to them would have shown them that they must keep the things revealed in their own bosoms, and they seldom would have a desire to disclose them to the second person. That is a general rule, but will it apply in every case, and to the people called the kingdom of God at all times? No, not in the strictest sense, but the Spirit which reveals will impart the proper discretion.44

For this reason it has proven extraordinarily difficult for Mormon schismatics and heretics to gain a significant following. As Rodney Stark recently observed, most of the LDS break-offs are either already defunct or “barely exist, consisting only of several families who maintain a postal box and who have filed articles of incorporation to gain tax exempt status.”45

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Esotericism and Elitism

Professor Stroumsa does not see the Catholic/Gnostic power struggle as a complete explanation for the disappearance of early Christian esotericism. He writes:

There is also a deeper intellectual cause of the phenomenon: the very ethos of Christianity is inherently refractory to esoteric doctrines. There is one single salvation, offered to all and sundry, on the condition that one believe in Christ's salvific sacrifice. In this context, the undeniable esoteric elements in the earliest stages of Christianity were an anomaly, condemned to disappear within a short time. (pp. 157–58; cf. p. 146)

Here he looks beyond the mark. His opinion may indeed represent a valid conclusion within the framework of a Christianity stripped of its Semitic core and crammed into the mold of Greek philosophy and culture. However, in its original Jewish form, the inner logic of Christianity would not have precluded secret traditions.

First, as Stroumsa recognizes, the Jews placed much more emphasis than their cultural neighbors upon concrete religious knowledge.

In effect the Christians inherited a conception of religion from the Jews which was unique in the ancient world, for knowing, the very process of learning the truth, was an integral part of the religiosity itself. Whereas in Greece intellectual reflection upon religion is the task of philosophers, only Jews and Christians developed the idea of religious thought, theological reflection at the core of the religion. In the words of Arnaldo Momigliano, among the Greeks, the more one knows, the less one believes. Among the Jews, the more one knows, the more religious one is. (p. 33)

And despite the modern liberal ideal of free access to any and all knowledge, the fact is that some of it can be terribly misused by those who neglect to gain the proper background. A physics professor once told me that the teaching of science is like a series of lies, each one
“more true” than the last. Indeed, one simply cannot properly understand quantum mechanics without a solid background in Newtonian mechanics, and one cannot fathom the import and limitations of such a theory without some understanding of what a scientific theory is. However, one can produce a smarmy New Age metaphysical philosophy based on the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle and E=mc², as a trip to the local bookstore will abundantly show.

Those instructed in the mysteries swore never to cast their pearls before swine, not because of any sense of elitism, but out of a sense for the holy and a concern for the welfare and future development of unbelievers and new converts. God “wills all men to be saved,” but Jesus described the journey to salvation as a “strait and narrow path,” and the early Christians recognized that a path must be traveled one step at a time.

Stroumsa cites Augustine’s Sermons on the Gospel of John, chapters 96–98, as the longest and most important discussion of the dangers of esotericism in Patristic literature (see pp. 132–46). Augustine, of course, cited the misuse the heretics made of their secret traditions and correctly pointed out that the esoteric should not contradict the exoteric. But for Augustine, the “milk and the meat” were simply different levels of understanding applied to the very same public preaching. Consequently, “there seems to be no necessity for any matter of doctrine being retained in silence as secrets, and concealed from infant believers, as things to be spoken apart to those who are older, or possessed of a riper understanding.”

To me, however, Augustine’s pious reflections represent nothing more than the sort of elitism Stroumsa sees as antithetical to the fundamental Christian message. “Whatever there is in the word of God that cannot, when taken literally, be referred either to purity of life or soundness of doctrine, you must set down as figurative.” In this way Augustine justified his rampant allegorizing of scripture to make it conform to his Neoplatonic presuppositions. His take on the doctrine of the Trinity is most illustrative. “What three? human language labors altogether under great poverty of speech. The answer, however,

is given, three ‘persons,’ not that it might be [completely] spoken, but that it might not be left [wholly] unspoken.” Here we find no concrete knowledge about God, no deeper understanding from our theological virtuoso. Rather, we observe a logically absurd statement upon which mystics may ponder—an admittedly meaningless set of words, to which all Christians must assent or be cut off. This is elitism, to force assent to statements the spiritual authorities proscribe, but which no ordinary person can possibly understand.

Another aspect of esotericism that cannot be neglected is covenant-keeping. For the Hebrews, a fundamental aspect of religiosity was the kind of integrity that forbade one to break a vow (see Ecclesiastes 5:5). Hugh Nibley explains this principle in relation to the LDS temple rite:

Even though everyone may discover what goes on in the temple, and many have already revealed it, the important thing is that I do not reveal these things; they must remain sacred to me. I must preserve a zone of sanctity which cannot be violated whether or not anyone else in the room has the remotest idea what the situation really is. . . . No matter what happens, it will, then, always remain secret: only I know exactly the weight and force of the covenants I have made—I and the Lord with whom I have made them—unless I choose to reveal them. If I do not, then they are secret and sacred no matter what others may say or do. Anyone who would reveal these things has not understood them, and therefore that person has not given them away. You cannot reveal what you do not know.

In this context, secret traditions take on an added meaning. They become a test of integrity and motivation. Will the initiate keep sacred things to herself, even in the face of lies and derision? Or does she have so little regard for God’s holy truth that she would cast her

pearls before swine in order to win some petty argument? Demonstrated integrity builds faith and cultivates confidence before God.

Finally, while the earliest Christians primarily taught “one single salvation, offered to all and sundry,” they recognized that some would not fully reach that goal. This understanding manifested itself in the belief in multiple heavens, usually three (see 2 Corinthians 12:1–4) or seven. An integral part of climbing the rungs of Jacob’s Ladder was gaining spiritual knowledge, and this necessarily occurred by degrees. For instance, commenting on the comparison of the heavenly bodies with resurrected bodies in 1 Corinthians 15:40–42, Origen wrote:

Our understanding of the passage indeed is, that the Apostle, wishing to describe the great difference among those who rise again in glory, i.e., of the saints, borrowed a comparison from the heavenly bodies, saying, “One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, another the glory of the stars.”

Clement of Alexandria gave this interpretation of one of Jesus’ statements: “Conformably, therefore, there are various abodes, according to the worth of those who have believed. . . . These chosen abodes, which are three, are indicated by the numbers in the Gospel—the thirty, the sixty, the hundred.”

Clearly, esotericism can be understood as an integral and practical aspect of the Christian message, when understood in the proper context.

“Plain and Precious Things” Lost

It is an article of faith for Latter-day Saints that many “plain and precious” parts of the gospel were lost to Christianity because of the apostasy, including “many covenants of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:26–32). This brings up important questions. What sorts of doctrines

and practices were lost when the esoteric traditions were rejected, and would any of these also be familiar to Mormons? In this section we will briefly examine a few early Jewish Christian doctrines, known to be more or less part of the secret tradition, which also happen to be distinctively LDS.

Commenting on several passages in Hebrews 5–10, Stroumsa writes that “Paul knows that the secrets of the divine nature belong to the Arkan diseniplin, of which it undoubtedly forms the center” (p. 70). As an example, he cites a passage from the Jewish Christian Clementine Homilies (17:10:1), which speaks of “the mystery of the Hebdomas,” which “deals with the physical—but incorporeal—aspect of God, his ‘most beautiful form’” (p. 76). Indeed, the theology of the Homilies is explicitly anthropomorphic. “And Simon said: ‘I should like to know, Peter, if you really believe that the shape of man has been moulded after the shape of God.’ And Peter said: ‘I am really quite certain, Simon, that this is the case. . . . It is the shape of the just God.’”53 This belief appears to have been common, especially among the Jews and Jewish Christians. As Origen testified, “The Jews indeed, but also some of our people, supposed that God should be understood as a man, that is, adorned with human members and human appearance. But the philosophers despise these stories as fabulous and formed in the likeness of poetic fictions.”54 Note that he appealed not to Christian tradition, but to the philosophers, to make his point.

The doctrine of premortal existence of the soul seems also to have been part of the secret tradition. In the Clementine Recognitions, Peter tells Clement, “after all these things He made man, on whose account He had prepared all things, whose internal species is older, and for whose sake all things were made.”55 And yet, when confronted by the heretic Simon Magus about the same question, Peter responded quite differently. “You seem to me not to know what a father and a God is: but I could tell you both whence souls are, and when

55. Clementine Recognitions 1.28, in ANF, 8:85.
and how they were made; but it is not permitted to me now to disclose these things to you, who are in such error in respect of the knowledge of God." Similarly, R. G. Hammerton-Kelly traces the concept of preexistence in the Bible and finds that it is everywhere presupposed in Paul’s writings but nowhere made explicit. “Although Paul would never have used the term ‘pre-existence’, the concept which it describes is constitutive of his whole soteriological scheme.”

The Recognitions also allude to an esoteric tradition regarding salvation for the dead:

When he had thus spoken, I answered: “If those shall enjoy the kingdom of Christ, whom his coming shall find righteous, shall then those be wholly deprived of the kingdom who have died before His coming?” Then Peter says: “You compel me, O Clement, to touch upon things that are unspeakable. But so far as it is allowed to declare them, I shall not shrink from doing so . . . for not only shall they [the righteous dead] escape the pains of hell, but shall also remain incorruptible, and shall be the first to see God the Father, and shall obtain the rank of honour among the first in the presence of God.”

What about the practice of “baptism for the dead,” alluded to by Paul (see 1 Corinthians 15:29) and adopted by the Latter-day Saints (see D&C 127–28)? In another passage, Peter intimated that the unbaptized righteous would obtain some reward in the present life but that future rewards were reserved for those who preserve righteousness through baptism. “But so well pleasing . . . is chastity to God, that it confers some grace in the present life even upon those who are in error; for future blessedness is laid up for those only who preserve chastity and righteousness by the grace of baptism.”

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56. Ibid., 2.60, in ANF, 8:114.
58. Clementine Recognitions 1.52, in ANF, 8:91.
59. Peter, in Clementine Recognitions 7.38, in ANF, 8:165.
Conclusions

Latter-day Saints will find *Hidden Wisdom* to be readable, useful, and fascinating, given our religious understanding of Christian history. Further study of the secret traditions of the early Christians may well provide an important key to our understanding of the dynamics of the apostasy from the pure Christian faith, both in terms of what was lost and how it was lost. Latter-day Saint scholars and others who wish to examine the historical underpinnings of our faith cannot afford to overlook an important study such as this.
A NEW WAY TO READ THE EPISTLES

Frank F. Judd Jr.

Over the past thirty years, John W. Welch has published an enormous amount of material dealing with the Book of Mormon, LDS Church history, and biblical studies. His latest book, An Epistle from the New Testament Apostles, is a creative way of presenting the epistles of the New Testament. In the preface, he asks readers to imagine what it might be like to receive a letter from the church leaders who lived right after the resurrection of Jesus Christ (p. ix). He answers this inquiry by rearranging all the epistles of the New Testament into one single epistle: an epistle from the New Testament apostles. This includes all the epistles of Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude. The book is arranged topically and includes the following features in the text itself: Old Testament references, the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), alternate translations, and variant readings. I will review each of these features in turn.

First, Welch has arranged the New Testament epistles according to primary and secondary topics. Primary topics include introductions, biographical and personal statements, God and Christ's atonement, faith and obedience to divine law, salvation's history and future, leadership instructions, church policies and practices, domestic

guidance, Christian living, and closing personal remarks. Reading all the introductions and closing personal remarks of these epistles can get very redundant. On the other hand, the topical arrangement of the bodies of these epistles is very enlightening. It is convenient and instructive to have all the scriptures about a particular topic together in one place. For example, one learns that Paul was the only one among these New Testament authors to discuss the sacrament of the Lord’s supper (pp. 111–12). The biographical and personal statements are important because they represent the precious few accounts we have about the actual lives of these early church leaders (pp. 9–32). As Welch points out in the preface, readers can learn from this topical arrangement that “most of the teachings of the Articles of Faith can be found in the letters of the New Testament” (p. xv). One does sacrifice a holistic reading of an epistle when passages are taken out of context and rearranged to allow a comparison of their theological teachings. But if readers are looking for a particular topic or a scriptural quotation from the New Testament epistles for a talk or a lesson, this format is helpful.

Second, this book encloses Old Testament citations in quotation marks and also includes the actual references in brackets following each quotation. This is especially helpful because the New Testament portion of our current LDS edition of the King James Version (KJV) does not enclose these passages in quotation marks, which sometimes makes them difficult to recognize. Nor does the LDS edition always include Old Testament references in the footnotes. Enclosing Old Testament citations in quotation marks allows readers to spot them quickly and to know immediately which Old Testament passage the author is quoting. One discovers that Paul, for example, was heavily dependent on the Old Testament for much of his teaching.¹ Having these references readily available gives the reader a sense of how important the Old Testament was to these early Christian leaders.

¹ See, for example, Romans 3:9–20 (p. 42); 10:5–13 (p. 56); and Galatians 3:10–14 (p. 62), just to name a few.
A third important feature of this book is its inclusion of the JST. Welch crosses out the affected KJV words or phrases and inserts the JST in the text, enclosed by braces. By presenting the JST in this way, he gives a sense of the editorial work involved as the Prophet Joseph Smith and his scribes worked on that project. Welch might have indicated, however, that although this book presents a letter from the actual authors of the New Testament epistles, it is not certain that the JST changes always involve restoration of the original text of the Bible. Robert J. Matthews, former dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University, has proposed that JST changes could be more than simple restorations of original text. Other possibilities include: (1) the restoration of actual events that were never originally recorded, (2) commentary on the text by the Prophet Joseph Smith, including likening the scriptures to the Latter-day Saints, and (3) correction of the text where it happened to be wrong, even though it was original. If, as Matthews has postulated, portions of the JST fall into any of these other three categories, then those particular JST segments would technically not be part of the original text.

Further, as Matthews has also noted, it is beyond our ability, without additional revelation on the subject, to know specifically what portions of the JST fall into which of the above categories. All of this means, of course, that while the JST is true, inspired, and profitable for study, reflection, and interpretation, the mere presence of a JST change for a particular passage does not necessarily render the corresponding biblical passage wrong. Including the JST in braces, while simultaneously crossing out the affected KJV words, can send the message to the average reader that the JST changes automatically signal that a particular biblical passage is not the original reading and that we can therefore just cross it out, as it were.

3. Ibid.
It is not impossible to read through the cross-outs, naturally. But trying to read through this book’s eight-hundred-plus cross-outs sometimes interrupts the flow of the text and makes it difficult to read. Further, a number of these JST changes turn out to be quite small, such as pronoun changes from which to who. In my view, it would be more beneficial to present just those JST changes that affect the biblical text substantially and then include them in footnotes. The LDS edition of the Bible presents the JST in this way. This approach allows the reader to see clearly the complete reading of the biblical text, as well as selections from the JST.

The fourth important feature of this book is the inclusion of alternate translations of difficult words, which are found in the text between forward slashes. Because the English language has changed so much over the past four hundred years, readers of the KJV are sometimes confronted with words that have either changed in meaning or have become almost obsolete. A classic example is the word let. Today the word often means the same as the word permit. But in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 KJV the word let means “prevent”—the opposite sense of how let is used today. This book presents readers with more accurate modern translations of Greek terms, though Welch has regrettably omitted the phrase letteth will let from his reproduction of 2 Thessalonians 2:7 (p. 85). Approximately 765 alternate translations in this book help readers understand difficult words in the KJV. Since many readers might not take the time to look up such words in a dictionary when studying the KJV, Welch has saved time and energy for them by providing alternate translations next to those words.

Another helpful feature of this book is the inclusion of variant readings. Before the invention of the printing press in the sixteenth century, copies of the New Testament were made by hand. It was inevitable that scribes would make mistakes. Most of these changes were certainly unintentional, though some changes seem to have been made deliberately. Although most of the variant readings do

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5. According to the author's editorial symbols, the phrase letteth will let should be included in the text and crossed out, because it is part of the KJV reading but is replaced by the JST. Next to this phrase the word prevent could be included between forward slashes as an alternate translation.
not substantially affect the meaning of the biblical text, some are significant. As Welch acknowledges in his preface, “most of these variants involve differences in spelling, word order, or grammar that make little difference in meaning.” He further explains that “on some occasions, however, it is interesting to look behind the English translation to see these variants.” He has included about eighty of these variant readings in his book, which he inserts in the text between back slashes. In the preface, Welch states that “words found in the back slashes are found in some, but not all, of the earliest manuscripts” (p. xviii).

However, a fundamental problem arises. In his attempt to keep things as simple as possible for readers, Welch uses a system of editorial symbols that is too simplistic to convey the complexities of many of the variants in the Greek manuscripts. The result is a number of factual errors with respect to some of the variant readings. A few other difficulties remain. As mentioned, Welch includes back slashes around a word or phrase to indicate that it is not present in all ancient manuscripts (p. xviii). In most cases the word or phrase in back

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6. It is not readily apparent to me exactly why Welch chose to include certain variant readings while excluding so many others. It would have been helpful if Welch could have included a footnote for each variant reading or maybe even an appendix. He could then briefly explain to his readers why he felt that, out of so many possible choices, each particular variant reading was interesting enough, either to himself or to a Latter-day Saint audience in general, to include in his book. This would have made this particular feature of the book a much more useful study tool.

7. For example, see 1 Thessalonians 1:1 (p. 2): “from \\God our\\ Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Although there are a number of variants of this phrase, no manuscripts omit either “God our” or “Jesus Christ.” See Kurt Aland et al., eds., The Greek New Testament, 2nd ed. (New York: American Bible Society, 1968), 704 n. 1.

Another example appears in Romans 15:29 (p. 16): “of the gospel of Christ” (tou euangeliou tou Christou). Some manuscripts do not have the words tou euangelion tou. The first two words are translated as “of the gospel” and the second tou is the definite article for Christou. However, the word Christou is still translated as “of Christ,” even without the definite article tou. In the book, therefore, “of the gospel of Christ” should be “of the gospel of Christ.”

8. A number of minor points lend confusion. For example, in 1 Thessalonians 2:15 (p. 12), “their \own\” should be “\their own\,” which is the translation of the variant reading idious. Many manuscripts simply have the definite article “the” (tous) instead of “their own.” To avoid confusion, Welch could insert both readings (i.e., \the, their own\). In
slashes is the actual KJV reading, indicating that this KJV reading does not necessarily have good manuscript support. However, in some cases the word or phrase enclosed in back slashes is not the KJV reading, but is a variant reading from other manuscripts. This can lead to confusion. Readers must consult their KJV to know if the reading in question is actually in the KJV or not.

In those cases when the word or phrase in back slashes is a variant reading from other manuscripts and is not contained in the KJV, a further difficulty surfaces. Sometimes the variant reading is a replacement of the existing KJV reading, while in other cases the variant reading is an addition to the KJV reading. On occasion, it is difficult to tell if the variant reading is an addition or a replacement. There are no special editorial symbols to let the reader know which is which. This does not make the book as convenient as it might have been.

Another difficulty arises when Welch provides more than one variant reading between back slashes. Most of the time when this occurs, the first reading is the KJV reading. But other times the sec-

2 Corinthians 1:12 (p. 14), "(or holiness)," the word or is not part of the variant reading (hagiotetia). In this case, Welch's inconsistency is the cause of confusion because in Philippians 3:12 (p. 26) "(or had already been justified)," the word or (e) is indeed part of the variant reading. In 1 Corinthians 15:47 (p. 90), "(is the Lord)" should be "(the Lord)," which is the translation of the variant reading ho kurios. The verb is (crossed-out in the book because the JST does not utilize it) is implied, not written, in the Greek and is not therefore part of the variant reading.

9. For example,"you" is a replacement for the previous word "us" (p. 6), "(or holiness)" is a replacement for the previous word "simplicity" (p. 14; see previous footnote concerning this variant), "(let us do)" is a replacement for the previous phrase "will we do" (p. 145).

10. The following variant readings are additions to the KJV reading: "(of Jesus Christ our Lord)" (p. 1), "(or had already been justified)" (p. 26), "(high)" (p. 51), "(being sterile)" (p. 60), "(through your good work)" (p. 134).

11. For example, see Romans 13:5 (p. 156): "(ye must needs be subject \to distress or compulsion)" and 1 Peter 5:11 (p. 191): "(To him be glory \power\ and dominion for ever and ever.)" In actuality, both of these phrases have many additional variants besides the ones that Welch includes. Compare with Aland, Greek New Testament, 566 n. 2, and 803 nn. 5–6.

12. A comma usually separates the variant readings when more than one is included between back slashes (i.e., Hebrews 2:9 [p. 39]: "(by the grace of God, apart from God\)").
ond reading is the KJV reading. Again, this inconsistency is confusing. Readers must compare the book with their KJV to know which reading comes from the KJV. This diminishes the usefulness of this particular study aid.

I found another minor difficulty with some of the variant readings included in this book. Sometimes a particular word or phrase occurs twice in a KJV verse. In such instances of duplication, sometimes variant readings exist for one of the occurrences and not for the other occurrence. Occasionally, Welch has mistakenly placed a variant reading after the wrong occurrence. These editorial difficulties, although occurring several times, are relatively minor.

However, I do have a deeper concern about Welch’s use of variant readings. As he states in the preface, variants were inserted without distinguishing between strong and weak manuscript readings (p. xviii). In my view, this procedure is not the best methodology. This book is primarily concerned with the actual words of the original authors—the apostles of the New Testament—and not some later scribe. All variant readings were not created equal. It seems to me that unless a case can be made that a particular variant reading is actually more likely to be authentic than the KJV reading, it probably should not be included in this book.

I was disappointed to find that one of the most famous textual variants of the New Testament was passed over in silence. First John 5:7b, the so-called “Johannine Comma,” is the only place in the New

An exception to this is 1 Corinthians 10:28 (p. 119): “\(\text{for the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.}\)” A reader who is not familiar with this particular passage might not know that the reading between the back slashes is in fact one variant, and not two different variants.

13. The KJV reading is the second reading in the following examples: “\(\text{beloved, sanctified}\)” (p. 4), “\(\text{Christ, God}\)” (p. 71), “\(\text{struggle, suffer reproach}\)” (p. 101), “\(\text{be, submit yourselves}\)” (p. 127).

14. See, for example, 1 Corinthians 7:14 (p. 123): the variant readings “\(\text{husband, brother}\)” should be placed with the second occurrence of “\(\text{husband}\)” and not the first. In 2 John 1:9 (p. 141), back slashes should be placed around the second occurrence of the phrase “of Christ” rather than the first. See also 1 John 5:20 (p. 182): the variant readings “\(\text{the true God, the true one}\)” should be placed next to the phrase “\(\text{him that is true}\).” There also seems to be a similar, but more complex, problem with 1 Peter 4:1 (p. 115): “\(\text{suffered in the flesh}\).” Compare with Aland, Greek New Testament, 799 n. 1.
Testament that explicitly teaches something like the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity: "the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one." This phrase is not found in any Latin manuscripts before about the fourth century, and no Greek manuscripts before the sixteenth century.\(^\text{15}\) Welch has not placed back slashes around this phrase in his book, so the average reader will not even know that it is in question (see p. 40). I was surprised by this omission, especially in light of this verse’s doctrinal significance to a Latter-day Saint audience.

I have one final note on the various insertions in this book. The concern to inform Latter-day Saints about Old Testament quotations, the JST, alternate translations, and important variant readings for the New Testament epistles is certainly laudable. The trick is finding the best way to present those features in a reader-friendly text. The handy bookmark that is provided with this book gives a chart of all the editorial symbols. This is a nice addition to the book and is very helpful, saving readers from having to memorize the editorial symbols or continually check the chart in the preface.

But I wonder if there might be a better way to present the text so it would be more reader-friendly. As it stands now, there are thousands of editorial changes and insertions in the text. In my view, a greater dose of selectivity for inclusion of changes coupled with the use of footnotes or marginal notes would make the scriptural text much easier to read. I realize that decisions about what to include are very subjective for any editor. But for this book I would prefer more selectivity than simply including a JST reading because it exists or a variant reading because “it is interesting” (p. xviii).

This book brings together and builds on study aids included in other publications. For example, the current LDS edition of the Bible contains the KJV in the text, with many Old Testament references, JST excerpts, and alternate translations in the footnotes. Steven and Julie Hite have published the entire Joseph Smith Translation of the New Testament with the affected KJV words and phrases crossed-out and the JST inserted in the text in bold. A study edition of a modern translation of the Bible (such as the New International Version or the New Revised Standard Version) contains a readable modern translation in the text, encloses Old Testament citations in quotation marks, and places Old Testament references, alternate translations, important variant readings, and helpful study notes in the footnotes. Both the LDS edition of the KJV and study editions of modern translations are easier to read than this book because of their greater selectivity and lack of disruptive editorial symbols in the scriptural text.

Welch claims that this thematic approach has the following advantages. First, it “allows you as a reader to wrap your arms around the complete scope of these letters, grasping their meaning more comprehensively” (p. x). Second, “readers can discover the profound consistency of doctrine presented in these New Testament epistles” by studying them this way (p. x). Third, it “discloses and clarifies the particular meaning of each individual section” because “each block of text in these New Testament letters speaks more distinctly when it is relocated thematically in the divine plan and order” (p. x). Fourth, it “saves time” because it “allows you to go directly to the subjects that are most interesting to you” (p. x). Finally, it “encourages you to read the words of the actual letters” (p. xi).


17. This book is also very pricey for its size. The LDS edition of the Bible and study editions of modern translations can each currently be purchased in paperback for less than the twenty-dollar price of this book.
There is no question that a topical arrangement is a useful study aid. But will students really gain more than they lose by taking passages out of their original context and rearranging them by topic rather than by studying each passage in context of that particular epistle as a whole and then making comparisons with other scriptural books? I think it is still an open question whether this thematic approach allows readers of the New Testament epistles to grasp their meaning more comprehensively or makes the passages speak more distinctly, as Welch asserts. However, I agree that this approach saves time if one is interested in a particular topic or theme from the New Testament epistles. Gathering together passages with similar themes can also show "consistency of doctrine," inasmuch as the epistles sometimes address the same types of topics. In the end, this thematic approach is a unique way to study the New Testament epistles, which has merit specifically for those who desire a topical study of these documents.
THE RETURN OF ASHTORETH TO THE GROVES AND HIGH PLACES: FEMINIST IDEOLOGY, THE POLITICS OF VICTIMIZATION, AND THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

Gary F. Novak

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. (Psalm 137:1)

Liberal relativism has its roots in the ... tradition of tolerance ...; but in itself it is a seminary of intolerance.

Leo Strauss1

We are then in the position of beings who are sane and sober when engaged in trivial business and who gamble like madmen when confronted with serious issues—retail sanity and wholesale madness.

Leo Strauss2

With the decline in influence of more traditional revisionist LDS histories, we are now witnessing the rise of more factional and radical attempts at adjusting the restored gospel to the trends and fashions of secular ideologies. God the Mother and Other Theological


2. Ibid., 4.
Essays is a collection of Janice Allred’s essays, most of them talks delivered at the Sunstone Symposium since the early 1980s. The title is something of a misnomer, since the book has no essay titled “God the Mother.” “God the Mother” is not even the theme that ties these essays together. However, “Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother” is both Janice Allred’s best-known essay and the essay to which the title is meant to draw attention. As a whole—and this is especially true of the more recent essays—the topics reflect Allred’s trendy feminist biases, often follow the lead of Paul and Margaret Toscano, or express Allred’s hostility toward church leaders. However that may be, one may say that the Toscanos tend to be more radical in their theology and more explicit in their criticism of the church.

Janice Allred’s name is not, I suspect, exactly a household word among the Saints. To the degree that she is known, she is known for making trouble for the church, publicizing her disciplinary councils.3


and expressing her opinions on what she calls “God the Mother,” “Mother in Heaven,” “the Mother,” or sometimes, more simply, “the Goddess.” I suspect that in most wards, and perhaps even in Utah, Janice Allred is practically unknown. To the extent that she is known, she is or wants to be noted also—judging from the number of times that I see it mentioned—as a mother of nine.

The book does reflect some recurring themes. Allred likes to talk about what she labels “unconditional love,” ecclesiastical or spiritual control or abuse, authoritarianism, “honoring subjectivity,” forgiveness, grace, justification, and sanctification. Her interpretations of Mormon scripture are often decidedly Protestant and are informed by an uncritically accepted and occasionally unacknowledged feminism.

The Dialogues of Janice Allred: A Guide for the Perplexed

Janice Allred has provided an interesting and detailed account of her excommunication in Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance: Volume 2, 1996. Based on notes Allred took after each session with her bishop, her accounts seethe with hostility toward her leaders. She is confident that the disciplinary councils were attempts to coerce her not to publish or talk, that her bishop was lying to her on more or less trivial matters, and that she was in no need of repentance. Allred seems to realize, however, that her opinions on the Godhead and praying to Mother in Heaven indeed placed her outside the community of Saints; in her words, she was “heretical.” Throughout her accounts, she cannot understand that she may need to repent of or change some of her opinions to remain in the church. It is always the leaders who are at fault, who should repent of the evil they visit upon

6. For example, when I lived in Arizona only two sisters seem to have known Janice Merrill Allred. Having grown up in Mesa, these sisters were apparently childhood friends of the Merrill sisters, Janice and Margaret.

7. This is mentioned on the back of God the Mother and in Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, 117, 132, 281, 283. I am not sure what being a mother of nine has to do with anything, and I am not sure why a mother of nine cannot hold heretical opinions. After all, Janice Allred’s disciplinary councils had nothing to do with her being a mother and everything to do with her published opinions.

8. Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, 124.
her, and who are coercive, abusive, lying, and attempting to punish. She seems incapable of understanding how her bishop may not have appreciated her attempts to publicize her excommunication.

Although it would be tempting to go through "White Bird Flying" in some detail, I will provide only enough details to sketch Allred’s hostility toward the church and church leaders. Allred cannot understand how her bishop came across a copy of "God the Mother" unless it was given to him from someone in Salt Lake. That may or may not have been the case (and if so, so what?), but her essays have been collected on the Internet—free to anyone and everyone—for years. At the time, very nearly every move Allred made was chronicled, published, and debated on the Mormon-L e-mail list. Oddly, although she is willing to make public speeches at the Sunstone Symposium and publish them in Dialogue, she was unwilling to make her public teachings available to her bishop.

According to Allred, it is not her intention to judge other people. "I have," she says, "no desire to hurt, belittle or denigrate" the people who find their way into the story of her excommunication. She is sharing her story, she says, so that she can persuade others to "envision and work for a more loving, open and tolerant Church community." She is, on the other hand, confident that those who judged her "were polite and correct on the surface; but underneath, where they lived, they were as crude and violent as a military weapon." She accuses her bishop of lying and setting traps and of emotional rape, violence, hypocrisy, and various abuses of ecclesiastical or spiritual authority. At the same time, she protests that she is not judging her bishop.

Allred is confident that no one can or ought to judge her because "no one can believe anything by an act of will" and hence "it is futile
as well as wrong to coerce belief." I would agree that belief cannot be coerced. Allred’s statement, however, can be read to say that she is not responsible for what she believes because she happens to believe it. And her protestation that she believes what she believes does nothing to explain or modify her heretical teachings on the Godhead. In spite of her claim that “every person has the right to teach false ideas as well as true ones,” simply possessing that “right” in one community (let us call it the community of citizens) does not guarantee her place within the boundaries of another community.

How to Read Janice Allred: A Handbook for Beginners

The rhetoric, agenda, and polemics of God the Mother should not be ignored. Many of the most controversial items are settled by sheer assertion. Allred writes “I believe,” “I think,” or some equivalent phrase and then proceeds to opine, often settling by assertion what she wishes to demonstrate. “I believe that she [God the Mother] is the Holy Ghost” (p. 30), Allred asserts without providing an argument. “I believe that God the Mother is equal to God the Father” (p. 43). “I believe that a serious acceptance of the existence of God the Mother requires us Mormons to re-examine and reinterpret our doctrine of the Godhead” (p. 44). “I believe that the other personage who appeared to Joseph Smith in the first vision was the Mother” (p. 67). “I believe that this being who bears witness of Jesus Christ is his Beloved, the Woman of Holiness, who is now the Holy Ghost” (p. 67). “The essence of the doctrine of original sin, which I believe we must accept if we affirm the universal need for redemption, is that as human beings we must sin” (p. 135). “I do not believe that the structure of the church of Jesus Christ will be exactly the same in all times, places and cultures” (p. 242). “I believe that God wants and expects us to work with him and each other to create our own systems that embody the principles of his gospel” (p. 242). “I believe that the time has come when we, inspired by a vision of equality and filled

15. Ibid.
with love for each other, must look for another way of being together, pleading with God to help us find it" (p. 242). "The LDS church today is not democratic and I believe it falls short in recognizing and protecting basic human freedoms in its own structure" (p. 258). "I believe that equating priesthood with governing or decision-making power is a mistake" (p. 261).

*God the Mother* is also a book that cries out for documentation. It contains only occasional footnotes. "Feminists have argued persuasively," claims Allred, "that gender is socially and psychologically constructed within a culture" (p. 21). Which feminists and in what publications? "The first wave of feminists emphasized the similarities between men and women" (p. 23). Again, which feminists and in what publications? Is there a classification scheme for feminism that is categorized by various "waves"? We are not told. "Statements by prophets and churchmen about the role of women can be shown to be heavily influenced by culture" (p. 23). Which prophets, which churchmen? Did the prophet or churchman in question have a concept of culture? Did he accept modern historicist notions of cultural conditioning or did he know nothing of them? "Freedom depends on the existence of natural law" (p. 202). According to whom? Is it possible to conceive of freedom without "natural law"? By "natural law" Allred does not mean natural right, but rather something like the laws of physics or at least that some phenomena are predictable (see p. 202). Is freedom really dependent on "natural law"? Who besides Allred makes the argument? "Some people," writes Allred, "have objected to the idea that God's love is unconditional, maintaining that unconditional love is meaningless" (p. 207). Again, Allred does not indicate who these people are, and hence readers are unable to check sources, the soundness of Allred's understanding of the arguments, or her ability to accurately represent this or that position.

Allred's arguments often rely on an unexamined, unreflective commitment to feminism and popular psychology. Hence we read that feminists have *argued* this or that, or that feminists have *demonstrated* this or that, or that feminists have *shown* this or that. Allred does not distinguish between varieties of feminism, nor does she distinguish between feminist thinkers. In a similar fashion Allred bor-
rows language from popular psychology. Hence we read about “the self,” “selfhood,” “mother selfhood,” “dependency,” “subjectivity,” “respecting diversity,” “equality,” “roles,” and “self-esteem,” to mention a few of the more obvious. Not a single one of these concepts, understood in terms of modern, popular psychology, is particularly at home in the world of the scriptures. Indeed, each one of these is foreign to the world of Bible and Book of Mormon prophets. Discerning readers may wonder if they are being fed a diet of scripture mingled with the philosophies of men (or, at least in this case, a woman).

*God the Mother* is a book that should be read with scriptures in hand. Allred is often interested in “reinterpreting” language found in the scriptures. As I will show, she does not always accurately quote the scriptures, and she is often careless about the context of the language she quotes.

*God the Mother* displays many “Toscanoisms”—beliefs or teachings peculiar to the Toscano circle of influence. Aside from her peculiar teachings about the Godhead and Mother in Heaven and about the condition of the church and how the church ought to be structured, Allred says, “I myself have been called to be a member of the LDS Church” (p. xiv). Readers already familiar with the writings of Paul or Margaret Toscano will recognize this sort of thing. This peculiar use of language functions as a kind of code language that indicates, among other things, that people are called to their religious beliefs, no matter what they are.

Prophets and Theologians

Janice Allred understands what she does as constructive theology. She distinguishes her kind of theology from three other types: orthodox, scholarly, and philosophical. Constructive theology is the good theology, the better theology, or at least the newest, most comprehensive, or least problematic theology. Although Allred is

careful not to fault anyone who may subscribe to some other kind of theology, it is clear that orthodox theology is the least desirable kind of theology. According to Allred, orthodox theology or orthodox theologians assume “that there is a body of doctrine . . . found in the scriptures” and their task is “to extract this doctrine and present it in propositional form” (p. viii). Orthodox theology, from Allred’s point of view, is defective because it is nonspeculative; that is, because it cannot or will not “significantly change what they [proponents of orthodox theology] regard as doctrine” (p. ix). Apparently a theology that can change doctrine is superior to or more useful than one that cannot change doctrine. At least part of the proper task of theology, it would seem, is to change doctrine.

Scholarly theology also, whatever its virtues, is involved in mere cataloging, evaluation, and documentation. Because its approach is “historical or sociological” (p. ix) and hence not speculative and capable of change, it is, in Allred’s view, flawed.

Philosophical theology may or may not suggest a “solution to or a new way of thinking about” theological questions (p. ix). To the degree that it is incomplete and to be faulted, philosophical theology suffers because it “may assume . . . Mormon insights are true without attempting to support them philosophically” (p. ix).

Constructive theology—the better or more adequate theology—is Allred’s own “new” theology. Allred’s claim for her own theology is that it is a new approach, an innovation or novel contribution, to theology. Although she calls her theology “new,” she is quick to claim that her kind of theology is the way theology has always been done (p. ix). It is “the beginning of theology” and one would therefore expect it to go back to the roots of theology (p. ix). But Allred does not discuss the beginnings of theology, and she does not attempt to recover what may have been lost or forgotten at the roots of theology. She does not go back to Plato, who apparently coined the word theology. The origins of theology, in fact, have their roots in the second book of Plato’s Republic.18 In the well-ordered city constructed in speech (but not in deed), theology turns out to be a way for the city

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(polis) to control or silence the poets—those who are touched with the divine madness or who are inspired. Theology (theos + logos—words about God, a giving of accounts about God, or the science or explanation of God) is a way of controlling those in the mantic or prophetic tradition. Prophets and poets are dangerous to the city because they cannot be trusted to say the things that favor the health of and benefit the city. That is, they may tell stories about the injustice of the gods that are not proper or useful for young people to hear.

A striking example of how unpredictable and uncontrolled prophets present a danger to the city or regime is found in Amos:

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent this message to King Jeroboam of Israel: "Amos is conspiring against you within the House of Israel. The country cannot endure the things he is saying. For Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall be exiled from its soil.'"

Amaziah also said to Amos, "Seer, off with you to the land of Judah! Earn your living there, and do your prophesying there. But don't ever prophesy again at Bethel; for it is a king's sanctuary and a royal palace." Amos answered Amaziah: "I am not a prophet," and I am not a prophet's disciple. I am a cattle breeder and a tender of sycamore figs. But the Lord took me away from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.' And so, hear the word of the Lord. You say I must not prophesy about the House of Israel or preach about the House of Isaac; but this, I swear, is what the Lord said: Your wife shall play the harlot in the town, your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided up with a measuring line. And you yourself shall die on unclean soil; for Israel shall be exiled from its soil." (Amos 7:10–17)²⁰


19. That is, Amos is not hired to be a prophet at the royal court.

Thus Allred's new constructive theology—with its roots in classical theology—may or may not be in fundamental conflict with the prophetic tradition and the community that embraces that tradition. Is Allred interested in silencing the prophets? Does she find it necessary to "reinterpret" their language? Does she attempt to explain away the often uncomfortable and disquieting messages of the prophets? Allred fails to indicate that theology always turns out to be man's words about God and never the word of God for man. Theology is not the work of prophets. Theology, it would seem, turns out to be a way of controlling the speech or teachings of the prophets.

Allred carefully avoids criticizing anyone by name. She does not discuss Louis Midgley's useful article on theology in the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, even as a point of departure. Neither does she examine Hugh Nibley's essays on the corrosive influence of theology in The World and the Prophets nor his essays on the sophic and the mantic in The Ancient State.

She Came In through the Bathroom Window

Of course it is Allred's speculations about "the Goddess" or Mother in Heaven that contributed to her excommunication and that make this book a curiosity. She announces her intentions to "reinterpret the Mormon concept of the Godhead" (p. 43). That reinterpretation is founded on her radical feminist theology rather than on a real or imagined inadequacy in some specific understanding of scripture. Her reinterpretation of scripture is therefore based on the conviction that our understanding of scripture is somehow inadequate and, in a fundamental sense, has always been inadequate. Although she may have modified her views since the publication of this book, Allred is careful to point out that "an official reinterpretation of LDS doctrine . . . rests solely with the leaders of the church."

Her reinterpretation is based, she says, on three convictions, although she does not provide reasons for those convictions in this essay.

I believe that God the Mother is equal to God the Father in divinity, power, and perfection. I believe that God, both Father and Mother, are deeply involved in our mortality and immortality. I also believe that God the Father has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. (p. 43)

It comes as no surprise that Mother in Heaven turns out to be none other than the Holy Ghost (see p. 56) since Allred had declared that belief in essays published years before the appearance of "God the Mother." Identifying Mother in Heaven with the Holy Ghost seems to be common among those under the influence of the Toscanos. Allred is, however, somewhat coy in referring to the Holy Ghost with the more traditional "he" in the early part of her essay (see p. 44).

22. In an e-mail message sent to several LDS mailing lists on 16 August 1998, Allred released a document titled "Revelation and Prophecy Received on July 21, 1998 by Janice Allred." In the "Revelation," Allred commands members of the church to "think not that it [the marvelous work that is about to come forth among 'the children of women'] will come from your leaders for they sit upon their thrones of power." According to the "Revelation," church leaders are guilty of sacrificing "the little ones" (I would guess this includes Janice Allred and perhaps others of the like-minded Toscano circle) "to their idols: the idols of pride, of worldly power, and reputation." Why? "And they do it that they might get gain." I am unsure exactly what gain any leader of the church has received for excommunicating Allred. Be that as it may, "the key has been taken from them and given to a woman who will complete the work of the patriarchs and prophets." Among other things, the "Revelation" would seem to be Allred's announcement that she is now authorized to give revelation to the church and that she will reveal God the Mother (or at least that is how I interpret the language "that which was hidden from the foundation of the world is about to come forth").

23. "Jesus Our Mother: The Quest for Feminine Identity," for example, was first published in 1989, some three years before the initial publication of "Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother." See Toscano and Toscano, Strangers in Paradox, 54, and M. Toscano, "Put On Your Strength," 430–31. Margaret Toscano seems to be more radical in her feminism than is her sister Janice Allred. She calls, for example, for a "transformation of the entire Mormon priesthood system" (ibid., 424) and even suggests a female parallel to the regular
There is a method to Allred's madness. She wants to change or redefine (or “reinterpret”) the Godhead so that it does not contain three individuals, but two: one male and one female.\(^{25}\) The first portion of Allred’s “reinterpretation” involves her effort to identify God the Father and Jesus Christ as one and the same person.\(^{26}\) She seems to have achieved a sort of modified version of an old heresy, modalism, in which God reveals himself in different modes.\(^{27}\) She notes that “‘God’ is the generic term for deity, the Supreme Being, the translation for the word El or Elohim in the Bible” (actually, only in the Old Testament) and that the “personal name for God in the Bible is YHWH” (p. 45). She further claims that the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants follow this pattern. One might pick at nits

order of the priesthood. She suggests the name "Miriamic priesthood" as a counterpart to the Aaronic priesthood. She is understandably reticent to give up the name "Melchizedek" for the higher priesthood. But even Toscano does not care for her own suggestion that the "female counterpart" to an elder might be a "crone." "Not many Mormon women," she says, "would wish to be ordained 'crones'" (ibid., 422).

25. This is not to say that Allred is not open to various other interpretations of the Godhead. Besides some of the hints provided by her sister, M. Toscano, “Put On Your Strength,” 427–33, Allred writes, “I would argue that this interpretation would also require us to recognize God as Mother, Daughter, and Holy Ghost” (p. 58), thus suggesting another female trinity; however, she moves on to her own interpretation following this sentence.

26. On this subject, compare Hamblin, “Return of Simon and Helena,” 309–12. Hamblin refers to several key scriptures and statements by Joseph Smith that clearly identify the Father and the Son as separate individuals—distinct and separate persons—each with his own body. Allred may be responding to one of Hamblin’s arguments by claiming that it was Mother in Heaven who introduced Christ as “My Beloved Son” during the first vision. She insists that Joseph Smith “never used the masculine pronoun to refer to this personage” (p. 67). Allred is able to make this claim because of the lack of detail in the published text regarding the identity of the speaking personage. However, she does not consider other accounts of the first vision in which Joseph Smith provided a description of both personages. For example, “I . . . saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness,” in The Papers of Joseph Smith, Volume 1: Autobiographical and Historical Writings, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 448–49; see also 391. I am somewhat inclined to suggest—even though I recognize the problems associated with an argument from lack of evidence—that if Joseph had seen a woman introducing Christ, it would have been worthy of mention.

27. See Louis Midgley’s discussion of modalism in his review of Walter Martin in this volume, pages 411–12. The ancient version of modalism involved God’s revealing himself variously as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
with Allred for borrowing from Greek philosophy to identify the God of the Bible as "the Supreme Being," a term found nowhere in scripture. Neither does she indicate that in the Bible "El" or "Elohim" can just as easily refer to the gods of the neighboring heathen nations as to the God of Abraham. She muddles her discussion by claiming that titles like "Messiah," "Savior," or "Holy One" are names, a confusion that permeates the essay (p. 46).

Allred is at her best when she identifies ambiguous language in or selectively quotes from scripture. She is not careful in selecting her material. For example, when claiming that "in many verses the Son is called the Father, implying that the Father and the Son are the same person" (p. 48), she cites 2 Nephi 19:6, nothing other than a direct quotation of the famous passage from Isaiah 9:6. Since her method was to examine "all the references to deity in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants," one might have expected her to filter biblical quotations from her speculations. When she cites Amulek's encounter with Zeezrom, she quotes from 3 Nephi 12:48, a passage that is a gloss on Matthew 5:48, and goes so far as to base part of her argument on the insertion of a hypothetical, "more natural" and because it is what Jesus would have or should have said if he was attempting to distinguish between himself and his Father in heaven (p. 48). Allred then adds an additional comma to the scripture and bases that portion of her argument on that comma. According to Allred, the Book of Mormon passage reads, "should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in Heaven, is perfect." The actual scripture reads, "should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect." Without the additional comma, Allred's proof text does not favor her interpretation because there is no appositive phrase (see pp. 48–49).


29. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."
Allred refers to Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 but, for obvious reasons, does not quote it:

The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.

Allred attempts to rationalize and explain away the scripture, first claiming, contrary to Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 itself and many other passages, that “our bodies can only be inhabited by our own spirits.” She then makes the remarkable claim that “if the Father dwelt in the Son, ‘the Father’ must mean the spirit body of God and the Son and the Father must constitute one eternal being” (p. 52). In this way she once again attempts to make the Father and the Son one person.

Although I am confident that most Latter-day Saints will find Allred’s attempt to unify the Father and the Son unconvincing, it does play a polemical function in her essay. Allred does not want merely to identify a Mother in Heaven but to identify and deify her and ultimately place her in the Godhead. “I believe,” Allred says at the beginning of her essay, “that God the Mother is equal to God the Father in divinity, power, and perfection” (p. 43). And with this opinion firmly in place, Allred must find a way of justifying her assertions.

It is easy for Allred to identify Mother in Heaven with the Holy Ghost since she did not include the Holy Ghost in her modalism. Having made it possible to make the Godhead a sort of divine couple, Allred proceeds to speculate that “perhaps, then, the Holy Ghost is the name of the Mother which refers to her work among us in mortality” (p. 56). But then again, perhaps not. And other problems

30. I am not confident that the scriptural “dwell” is equivalent to Allred’s “inhabit.”
31. In the absence of further light and knowledge on the subject from the prophets, I freely confess my ignorance of the “divinity, power, and perfection” of Mother in Heaven. Attentive readers will no doubt notice Allred’s shifting terminology from the mundane “Mother in Heaven” to the more powerful “God the Mother” or “the Goddess.”
32. Anyone who has read Strangers in Paradox will easily recognize Allred’s discussion of the exiled, wandering Mother.
must be dealt with. Someone might suspect that Mother in Heaven already has a body. Allred solves this dilemma by suggesting that a resurrected person may have “the power to separate his body and spirit if he so desires” (p. 56). Allred suggests that if Jesus had the power to lay down his life and then take it again, then John 5:26 and 10:17–18\textsuperscript{33} “could refer not only to his power to lay down a mortal body and take it again as an immortal body, but also to his power to lay down an immortal body and take on a mortal body” (p. 56). Although I know of no one with firsthand knowledge on the subject, by my count that makes two bodies. How many spiritless immortal bodies are left lying around?

In any case, “if it was possible for the Lord to lay down his immortal body to take on mortal flesh,” Allred continues, “then surely it is also possible for the Mother to lay down her immortal body to become the Holy Ghost” (p. 57). It is again unclear whether such a disembodied Mother in Heaven would simply take her immortal body again or get a mortal body to lay down and take again. I suspect that, if pressed on the issue, Allred would select the option that offers the most parallels to Jesus.

Finally, Allred is not simply content to speculate about Mother in Heaven. The last portion of her essay expresses her longings and hopes for her revelation. Allred looks forward to the prophet (or prophetess, as it turns out) of Mother in Heaven. She believes that she is able to see hints and dark references to Mother in Heaven in many scriptures. Hence she sees suggestive language in scriptures concerning marriages, feasts, Zion, and wilderness (see pp. 61–68). She portrays Mother in Heaven as a sort of redeemer who “exiled herself voluntarily to be with us. . . . she also took our sins on herself” (p. 62).\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{33} “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself,” and “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”

\textsuperscript{34} Although Allred cites the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 7:1, the verse is drawn from Isaiah 50:1. Parallels can be found in Toscano and Toscano, Strangers in Paradox, 54.
Allred clearly expects that the time for revealing Mother in Heaven is near. We should, she says, "expect that some people will receive visions or voices or feelings which manifest her presence and her mission" (p. 63). She then recounts a remarkable story as told by her husband. When returning from a trip to Denver, he read *Strangers in Paradox* to Janice while she drove. Finally, he reported,

I couldn't control my voice; I couldn't go on. I wept for a while and then said, "I am very touched by this." Janice said, "It's more than that. It's revelation." I said, "She is here with us. She is in the back seat with us"... I realized that she was not in the back seat. She was around me and before me. With tear fogged [sic] eyes I saw her fill the horizon in front of me. I couldn't go on reading. Tears were on my cheeks... I began wondering if I could remain on earth. I was being expanded and it was joyful—and it hurt!...

"I've given my heart to the Mother. She was here and I wasn't sure that I would go on living." (p. 64)35

Having made Mother in Heaven "equal to God the Father in power, might, and dominion" (p. 55), Allred addresses the question of whether "we should worship the Mother" (p. 65). According to Allred, that question "depends on whether we know her and know who she is" (p. 65). It would be incorrect and improper to worship something or someone that is unknown. Hence, "once she has been revealed to us and we see and understand that she is also God, then we also, in the most fundamental way, worship her" (p. 65). Once known, it would seem that worship is unavoidable. Unsurprisingly, Allred is also of the opinion that no one can forbid worship of Mother in Heaven. Can Mother in Heaven be prayed to? Again, Allred's affirmative answer should surprise no one.36

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35. I have excerpted from Allred's much longer version. "Expanding our views" or "being expanded" weaves its way throughout *Strangers in Paradox*. See, for example, p. 55, which occurs on the page following the materials that David Allred was reading in the car.
36. Given Allred's explicit teaching in "God the Mother," her less-than-forthright
In the space of twenty-seven pages, Allred has managed to jettison (reinterpret) the traditional Latter-day Saint concept of the Godhead; introduce two new deities, one based on the old modalist heresy and the other an expansion and enlargement of a traditional Latter-day Saint belief; introduce a new Godhead; provide her new deity with tasks to perform and sins to take upon herself; propose a way of worshiping this deity; and, finally, even create some mythology for this new deity.37 She thereby manages to separate herself from many of the core beliefs and teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.38

You Say You Want a Revolution?

Janice Allred knew before she was excommunicated that her theology of God the Mother and her reinterpretation of the Godhead would likely be viewed as heretical.39 If she was not interested in restructuring and reinventing the church according to her own whims and fancy before her excommunication, the essays that she wrote during and after her excommunication—roughly the last four essays in God the Mother—certainly leave nothing to doubt. What does Allred say about prophets and how the church must be reconstituted?

answers to her bishop are somewhat surprising. "I told him that I had given a paper on God the Mother but had not advocated praying to her. I did not, however, tell him that I had given ideas that could be used to justify praying to her." Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, 123. "Should we," asks Allred, "pray to the Mother? Although we are not commanded to pray to her, we are commanded to pray with her... And when we pray, we invoke her presence. And our prayers are answered through her. Understanding this, we certainly may address her directly in our prayers" (p. 67). I have excised the scriptures Allred quotes to support her position.

37. See, for example, Allred’s gloss on the Sermon on the Mount (p. 68).

38. Allred seems reluctant to draw upon ancient goddess cults for her new deity, although she mentions "ancient forms of Goddess worship" at least once (p. 65). Allred’s attempts at reinterpreting scripture and creating a theology of God the Mother provide a stark contrast to Daniel C. Peterson’s careful unpacking of the Book of Mormon and ancient Canaanite Asherah cults. See Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23," in Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 191–243. It is perhaps a sign of the times in which we live that Peterson must include a disclaimer and warning about "theological or ecclesiological innovation" (ibid., 218).

39. See Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, 124.
It turns out that prophets—or at least their statements regarding "the role of women"—are "heavily influenced by culture" (p. 23). Curiously, the very next sentence begins, "revelations from God disrupt the status quo" (p. 23); that is, they are not merely part of the culture or of the cultural milieu but stand over against it. Who, I wonder, delivers revelations from God if not prophets? Can Allred have it both ways? Is the feminism Allred relies on heavily influenced by culture? Is the popular psychology on which Allred relies heavily influenced by culture? Is it acceptable for Allred's preconceptions and background assumptions to be heavily influenced by culture—or perhaps, more accurately, trendy and popular intellectual fads—and not acceptable for prophets to be influenced by culture? Now it seems perfectly obvious that prophets speak in the medium of their day—they would hardly be intelligible otherwise—and they often address the issues of the day—they would hardly have a relevant message otherwise. But which prophet, I wonder, is or has been heavily influenced by feminism, trendy psychology, Continental philosophy, or theology? Would a prophet still be a prophet when preaching secular ideologies or do all of these elements of our culture stand in stark opposition to prophets, to prophetic messages from the heavens, and to the restored gospel?

It is obvious, however, that Allred must make modern prophets appear to be nothing other than men influenced—heavily influenced—by their cultural conditioning and eager to maintain the established status quo and power structure. Hence they participate in the authoritarian, orthodox, undemocratic, hierarchical church that oppresses and excommunicates honest truth seekers like Janice Allred. Hence we are told that the Sunday School and priesthood and Relief Society lessons "are dominated by the orthodox notion of truth and have a conventional, noncritical content" (p. 14). "Control is, in fact, the hidden agenda of orthodoxy" (p. 16) and persecuted

40. I imagine that a modern prophetic warning against Baal worship might raise some eyebrows.

41. One can find this message throughout God the Mother, but see especially "Him Ye Shall Hear," 219–49, and "Equality and Diversity," 250–68.
heretics are "compelled to lie about their beliefs" (p. 16) if they desire to stay in the church. Orthodoxy is, then, "an inherently divisive and oppressive principle" (p. 16). Allred's solution is a church in which "all members are of equal value, where the truth of every member is listened to and valued, where it is recognized that all members receive revelation" (p. 19). Allred longs for a church in which anything goes. Theology is one of the good things that seems, in Allred's view, to supply the charm or cure for orthodoxy (see p. 15). And it is her own theological speculations that Allred wishes to impose on the church.

But it gets worse. "The present model we have of church government," Allred informs us, "is authoritarian" or "thoroughly authoritarian" (p. 200). Hence it is "intrinsically sexist," elitist, compulsive, violent, coercive, abusive, exploitive, and manipulative (see pp. 200, 203, 231, 258, and passim). Indeed, according to Allred, "authoritarianism is incompatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ" (pp. 200–201). And to make matters even worse, "authoritarian religions that demand unconditional obedience to human authorities or claim that any of their utterances are infallible encourage idolatry" (p. 101). Church leaders become mindless, sightless bureaucrats, "legalistic in their prescriptions and fundamentalist in their conception of truth" (p. 205).42

The church, it seems, has gone horribly astray. Allred suggests that it is already in a state of apostasy and that it has introduced novel doctrines to entrench the evils of orthodoxy, authoritarianism, and apostasy. The key evil that Allred wants to "refute" turns out to be the old cultural Mormon chestnut that "the prophet is infallible on matters of doctrine" or that the members of the First Presidency are "infallible in their statements and decisions" (p. 221). However,

42. Shocking as it may seem, the prophets have warned the Saints against the unconditional obedience Allred abhors. Hugh Nibley does a nice job laying out the teaching in "Educating the Saints," and "Criticizing the Brethren," in Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 306–45, and 407–48, and "Zeal without Knowledge," in Approaching Zion (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 63–84.
Allred’s best quotation from President Hunter says exactly the opposite of what she wants it to say (see p. 221). Allred wants it to say that “the prophet is infallible on matters of doctrine,” but President Hunter was careful to qualify his statement: when “we feel that the answer is scriptural and scripturally placed[,] then we take a strong stand” (p. 221). And would we not expect a prophet to take a strong stand? Are prophets noted for their soft, wishy-washy stand on the issues they address? Does not Allred herself take a strong stand on her interpretations of scripture?

“Although many church presidents and general authorities have said that the Lord will not permit the prophet to lead the church astray,” Allred informs us, “none of them has ever claimed to have received a revelation from the Lord saying this” (p. 234). Allred here seems to be searching for the kind of certainty she condemns as self-deceptive in other places (see p. 7). Be that as it may, she seems to have conveniently forgotten President’s Woodruff’s statements following Official Declaration—1 in the Doctrine and Covenants:

The Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as President of this Church to lead you astray. It is not in the programme. It is not in the mind of God. If I were to attempt that, the Lord would remove me out of my place, and so He will any other man who attempts to lead the children of men astray from the oracles of God and from their duty. (D&C, p. 292)

That statement seems fairly straightforward. Allred, however, covers her tracks by insisting that even if such a revelation did exist, “it would have to be examined critically and confirmed by the Holy Spirit” (p. 234). She may believe that she has a monopoly—or at least the theological monopoly—on the Holy Spirit (= Holy Ghost = Mother in Heaven), but one suspects that Allred is attempting to have her cake and eat it too.

43. It is difficult to imagine Moses, Nathan, Isaiah, Amos, Elijah, Nephi, Mormon, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or even Gordon B. Hinckley not taking “a strong stand.” Indeed, I suspect, after reading Allred’s own “Revelation,” that she herself would grant and expect prophets to take a strong stand.
There are several scriptures in the Doctrine and Covenants that seem to lend support to President’s Woodruff’s statement by indicating that the gospel has been restored for the last time.

For behold, the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard. (D&C 33:3)

Wherefore lay to with your might and call faithful laborers into my vineyard, that it may be pruned for the last time. (D&C 39:17)

Wherefore, labor ye, labor ye in my vineyard for the last time—for the last time call upon the inhabitants of the earth. (D&C 43:28)

Therefore, tarry ye, and labor diligently, that you may be perfected in your ministry to go forth among the Gentiles for the last time, as many as the mouth of the Lord shall name, to bind up the law and seal up the testimony, and to prepare the saints for the hour of judgment which is to come. (D&C 88:84)

For the preparation wherewith I design to prepare mine apostles to prune my vineyard for the last time, that I may bring to pass my strange act, that I may pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. (D&C 95:4)

For unto you, the Twelve, and those, the First Presidency, who are appointed with you to be your counselors and your leaders, is the power of this priesthood given, for the last days and for the last time, in the which is the dispensation of the fulness of times. (D&C 112:30)

I certainly do not want to argue that apostasy is not possible and that we can relax in carnal security and think that all is well in Zion.44 Certainly the Book of Mormon warns against this very thing.

44. There certainly is reason to believe that the Saints have at various times fallen into forgetfulness about the Book of Mormon and have been in grave danger of apostasy.
However, I do want to suggest that Allred's argument is specious in several respects. The core of her position concerning the apostasy of the church is rather transparently self-serving. Allred's arguments for democratizing church organization, interpreting scripture, and valuing diversity seem to be a way of insuring that heretics like herself are not excommunicated and that they have the opportunity to form or reform the church after their own image.

"An honest study of the church throughout time in the scriptures and historical texts," Allred preaches—apparently because a dishonest study would reveal exactly the opposite—"makes it clear that the church of God always goes astray" (p. 244). Hence "a church that believes it cannot go astray gives good evidence that it already has" (p. 244). So, for Allred, the church is either astray or in apostasy, and it is no wonder, given the list of sins that she lays at the feet of the church or at least at the feet of the leaders of the church.

All You Need Is Love

So how does Allred think that the church, or at least the gospel of Jesus Christ, can be saved? What must be done to reconstitute, reform, or revolutionize the church to bring it from its state of apostasy (or, if apostasy is too strong a word, to bring it back from the paths in which it has strayed)? "The LDS church today is not democratic," says Allred, "and I believe it falls short in recognizing and protecting basic human freedoms in its own structure" (p. 258). She does not address the question of whether the church in any dispensation has been democratic. So what could or should be done to make the church more democratic?

It begins, apparently, with the individual. Allred lays out "four principles which individuals can follow to promote equality" (p. 258):


45. Allred does not begin to answer the historical question of who in the past has led the church astray. Was it apostles or theologians? For an examination of these sorts of questions, see Nibley, The World and the Prophets, 26–52.
• “The person with greater power, knowledge, talents, possessions, or any other resource should use that resource to benefit the other person(s).” Hence “power should not be used to control, abuse, or exploit others but to empower them, and gifts should be shared” (p. 258).

• “We must honor everyone’s gifts” (p. 258). Not surprisingly, this would also mean that we must honor Allred’s gifts—whatever they are—and be “willing to be changed by her” (p. 260).

• “We must change roles to promote equality” (p. 260). And what roles does Allred mention? None other than nursery worker and president of the church (although it is clear that Allred does not suggest that nursery workers ought to be “president for a day”). Janice Allred was, at one time, a nursery worker.

• “We must honor the agency of every person” (p. 265). A thoughtful reader may wonder whether free agency or human agency is part of the fundamental human condition and hence whether it can or cannot be honored or, for that matter, dishonored. For Allred, honoring agency means that we are to “recognize and try to understand her in her subjectivity” (p. 265). That is, attempting to change another person—rather than understand him or her—is a bad thing (see p. 266).

If this list is not specific enough, Allred has a few explicit suggestions and corrections for the church. “I believe,” she opines, “that equating priesthood with governing or decision-making power is a mistake” (p. 261). Why? Because “the individual is the locus of decision-making power” (p. 261). “I do not believe,” Allred again expresses, “that the structure of the church of Jesus Christ will be exactly the same in all times” because “the church is embedded in different cultures” (p. 242). Hence because the church structure can be different in different times and places, it can be remade along the lines suggested by Allred. “I believe,” says Allred, “that God wants and expects
us to work with him and each other to create our own systems that embody the principles of his gospel” (p. 242). She does not say why. “I believe that the time has come when we, inspired by a vision of equality and filled with love for each other, must look for another way of being together” (p. 242). Allred’s “new way of being together”—without the evils of an antidemocratic, authoritarian hierarchy—would clearly make room for, and perhaps even honor, dissenters like her.

What exactly would change? Priesthood bearers “cannot obligate others or exercise compulsion” (p. 217). One consequence of this would seem to be that Allred, or others like or unlike her, would not face disciplinary action for heretical teachings. While God may or may not speak to “ecclesiastical leaders,” “they do not have the authority to issue their own commandments” (p. 212). Hence, no one would be able to ask Allred to cease publishing her heretical opinions and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. On a more positive note, “we ought to be open to receiving the truths of God from all our fellow saints” because “anyone who speaks the deepest truths of her heart is speaking with the voice of God” (p. 212). Again, I suspect Allred is commanding the church to accept her teachings on God the Mother. “I envision,” says Allred, “the church of Christ as an organization that can be represented by a group of interlocking rings of various sizes all connected to one great ring” (p. 241). Although Allred suggests that this ring would be a way of implementing equality, she does not provide details on how it would work, nor does she provide an example of some kind of organization in which such a plan has been implemented.

In at least one essay, Allred seems to suggest that the church ought not to be reformed or is perhaps past reformation. She suggests that all that is necessary for the gospel to continue upon the earth is for some priesthood holders to remain faithful (see p. 245). Hence she talks about “invisible or spiritual churches” (p. 245) and suggests that false prophets and false Christs will deceive many. After quoting Doctrine and Covenants 64:38–39, she claims, “this can only mean
that some who have been appointed to be or claim to be apostles and prophets will be shown to be false apostles and prophets" (p. 247).  

The gospel according to Janice Allred is the gospel of unconditional love. She does not address the question of why the words *unconditional* and *love* do not appear together anywhere in scripture, nor does she distinguish between different types of love mentioned in the New Testament (*agape* and *philia*). The "grace of God," declares Allred, "is his unconditional love for us which is manifest in the Atonement" (p. 207). What, precisely, is unconditional love and what does it mean? "Unconditional love is," for Allred, "the foundation for, the condition of, particular love. God loves us in all our particularities because his love does not depend on our possessing certain qualities or meeting some standard of excellence" (p. 207). While Allred insists that it would be a "misconception" to think that unconditional love does not require us to change (I would either add or correct, "require the sinner to repent") (p. 207), she reverses her stance on the next page. "Because God’s love for us is unconditional," remarks Allred, "it does not demand that we change" (p. 208). Hence to use *compulsion*—a key word Allred uses to describe her own excommunication—to control someone would be wrong.

Indeed, it is unconditional love that seems to be the defining concept in Janice Allred’s gospel. Those in a condition of grace are those who know, understand, and accept God’s unconditional love (see pp. 207, 157). Unconditional love is linked positively to good things like self-esteem (see pp. 115, 121, 125), forgiveness (see p. 194), and living in grace (see p. 213). Through unconditional love "each person [is made] equal to God himself" (p. 214), “no human being is more important than any other,” and, rather obviously, authoritarianism is morally wrong (p. 214). Indeed, “human equality is based on God’s unconditional love for us” because “we are all equally valuable to God” (p. 240). According to Allred, “certainly Jesus has said

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*46.* Unfortunately, more than one case exists in which this scripture has been fulfilled rather precisely in the history of the church.
and demonstrated that he esteems each of us equally and that his love for each of us is unconditional, and he has told us that if we do not follow him in esteeming each other equally, in loving each other unconditionally, we are not his church” (p. 257). That is a large order and, expectedly, Allred does not offer any support for her opinion. Where, I wonder, do we find language about esteem and unconditional love as conditions for membership (if that is indeed what Allred means) in the church?

The Magical Mystery Tour

There are many, many other problems with this book, and it simply is not possible to address every issue in a review. Very briefly, let me point out a few of them.

Allred quotes Doctrine and Covenants 85:7–8 concerning a man who, steadying the ark of God, would die (see p. 249). She seems to allude to 2 Samuel 6:6–7. She then proceeds to discuss both Noah’s ark and the ark of the covenant, apparently unaware that different Hebrew words are translated as “ark” (šārôn and tēbā respectively). Allred is also careful to quote selectively to remove the scripture from its historical context. I have italicized the materials she excised and included verse 9 for context:

And it shall come to pass that I, the Lord God, will send one mighty and strong, holding the scepter of power in his hand, clothed with light for a covering, whose mouth shall utter words, eternal words; while his bowels shall be a fountain of truth, to set in order the house of God, and to arrange by lot the inheritances of the saints whose names are found, and the names of their fathers, and of their children, enrolled in the book of the law of God;

While that man, who was called of God and appointed, that putteth forth his hand to steady the ark of God, shall fall by the shaft of death, *like as a tree that is smitten by the vivid shaft of lightning.*

And all they who are not found written in the book of remembrance shall find none inheritance in that day, but they shall be cut asunder, and their portion shall be appointed them among unbelievers, where are wailing and gnashing of teeth. (D&C 85:7-9)

The reference to inheritances might make this revelation applicable to the Saints living in Missouri in 1832 when the letter was written. Indeed, the entire section is about record keeping, consecration, and what to do about those who do not receive their inheritances by consecration.

Allred quotes 3 Nephi 16:10 with an editorial insertion, “and shall reject the fullness of my gospel [i.e., the Holy Ghost]” (p. 246). The Book of Mormon nowhere indicates that the fullness of the gospel is the Holy Ghost. Since for Allred the Holy Ghost is the disembodied Mother in Heaven, it is perhaps understandable why she would insert these words.

Allred announces that “the Fall established individual identity” (p. 236) as if that is exactly what the scripture teaches and what the Saints have always believed.

On page 256 Allred informs us that “freedom is the principle which unites equality and diversity.” On page 265 that statement is transformed to “free agency . . . unites equality and diversity.” Are freedom and free agency the same thing or are they different things?

I also have grave doubts about Allred’s attempts to reduce the gospel of Jesus Christ to unconditional love, sentimentality, values, and toleration. Her “principle of polarity” seems more a nod to fashionable popular psychology than to the scriptures she cites in its support (see pp. 20–41). Nor am I comfortable with her introduction of popular psychological notions of “the self,” “self-esteem,” and “subjectivity.” Her thoroughgoing relativism, her philosophical or theological
notions like “transcendent” or “immanent revelation” (p. 225), and her introduction of a Cartesian mind-body dualism48 to “our spirits” (p. 72) also do not fit into the restored gospel.

Allred’s essays do not represent mainstream Latter-day Saint teachings or beliefs. This is not exactly a secret. We have good reason to believe that Allred knows this as well, especially since many of the essays are explicit attempts at changing the church’s structure or its fundamental beliefs. For Allred, it is not merely that today’s church has lost something or lapsed into forgetfulness on this or that issue; it is that the church from the beginning has been wrong in its fundamental organization, beliefs, and teachings. I will leave it to readers to decide whether Janice Allred or Gordon B. Hinckley is God’s prophet. In William J. Hamblin’s words: “For me, the choice is quite simple and clear.”49

48. Philosopher René Descartes held that since the body and the senses are easily deceived, the only way to achieve certainty is through the mind thinking thoughts. Hence his famous maxim: “I think; therefore I am.” Allred has transformed Descartes’s famous mind-body dualism to a “spirit-body dualism.” Both the Cartesian mind-body dualism and Allred’s spirit-body dualism are foreign to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"An Awful Tale of Blood": Theocracy, Intervention, and the Forgotten Kingdom

Eric A. Eliason

The Scope and Goals of Forgotten Kingdom

David Bigler’s Forgotten Kingdom identifies a largely overlooked yet potentially hot historical topic—“the most singular form of government ever to exist in North America” (p. 15). With clear organization and engaging prose, Forgotten Kingdom sets out to tell the little-remembered story of the federal campaign against Deseret theocracy as a background to help general readers, and non-LDS newcomers to Utah in particular, understand “the state and how it became the way it is” (p. 18). Bigler interprets the history of this effort using as his analytical framework Americans’ common self-congratulatory/self-depreciating conception of their own history. According to Bigler, the “Americanization of Utah” was undertaken by people whose imprudent excesses had good intentions. Their endeavor to make Utah a better place succeeded “almost in spite of itself” (p. 16). However, despite the suggestion of Bigler’s subtitle, Forgotten Kingdom offers more to a reader interested in a laudatory account of the exercise of federal power in Utah than it does to a reader looking for an in-depth investigation of LDS theocracy.

While Bigler’s conversational style, occasional mention of admirable actions by certain individual Mormons, and nods to Brigham Young’s leadership genius make the book read like congenial local history, its focus and interpretive methods pass a strong critical judgment on the Mormon experience. Forgotten Kingdom portrays the tiny “Mormon Kingdom” as an illegal conspiratorial pseudogovernment in need of reconstruction into proper American ways by the firm hand of benevolent federal intervention (see p. 364). Following the lead of nineteenth-century commentators and twentieth-century scholars such as Thomas Alexander and Leo Lyman, Bigler’s approach of conceptualizing the period of 1847–96 as that of a theocracy in conflict with federal reformers is not without merit.\(^1\) However, Bigler’s thesis that the “Americanization of Utah” was a step ahead for “individual freedom and self-rule” is perplexing in the light of Mormons’ great loss of religious freedom, civil rights, and self-determination during the era this book covers. These losses established legal precedents used to restrict the civil rights of others as well.\(^2\) Fully understood, it is difficult to imagine how the tragic nineteenth-century federal campaign against Latter-day Saints has in any way advanced American liberties or civil government.

**Issues of Interpretation**

Bigler claims that previous historians, presumably LDS ones, have been “too close to the events [of Utah history] to treat them without bias” (p. 16). If this is the case, Bigler does not correct bias so much as invert it. Below, I focus on five of several possible key examples where Forgotten Kingdom’s assertions apply a seemingly inequitble bias or go contrary to established understandings of well-scrutinized historical patterns. In every instance, Bigler’s interpretive choices paint an unfavorable portrait of Latter-day Saints.

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Impartiality in Interpretation

*Forgotten Kingdom* seems to display a problematic interpretive bias in the opposing ways in which it interprets specific similar historical events. In cases where Mormon actions might seem questionable, the worst possible interpretations are often given and Mormons are condemned. In cases where the actions of federal officials might seem questionable, the best possible motives are often assumed and Bigler provides friendly justification. Below are a few examples.

First, even though Mormons were struggling pioneers with few resources who did not request the services of a federal survey expedition, Bigler condemns what he considers the less-than-enthusiastic manner in which Mormons brought to justice the Native Americans who massacred Lt. John Gunnison and his survey team (see pp. 82–84, 89–92). Bigler is dismissive of Mormon attempts to work with Native American understandings of justice—an effort he calls a “charade” (p. 90). Yet Bigler excuses Colonel Patrick Edward Connor’s total inaction while Black Hawk was on the warpath against vulnerable Mormon settlers in southern Utah even though the main purpose of the army in the West was to protect settlers (see p. 240). Bigler speculates (without criticism) on Connor’s motives as follows: “Connor no doubt took some satisfaction in refusing to risk the lives of his soldiers to defend inhabitants he believed had refused to support his own command. Besides, he had another campaign in mind. . . . This new crusade was aimed at the heart of the Kingdom of God” (p. 240).

Second, Bigler makes little attempt to give a fuller understanding of the fears and motives of the Mormons involved in the Mountain Meadows Massacre, and he fully accepts the designation “Circleville Massacre” for a tragic event where Mormons killed sixteen Indian war captives. Yet Bigler again makes a special effort to downplay the troubling nature of Colonel Connor’s actions at the Bear River Massacre, where as many as three hundred men, women, and children were shot down by Connor’s California Volunteers (see pp. 229–31).

Colonel Connor personally conceived and led this operation. It is remembered by the historians and the Shoshone still today as one of the most brutal army atrocities ever committed against Native Americans. Nevertheless, Bigler portrays this event as an execution of a legitimate military campaign. He euphemistically suggests that it continue to be called the “Battle of Bear River” (p. 228).

The problem with such a portrayal can be illustrated by imagining what would happen if a Mormon historian were to suggest that the Mountain Meadows Massacre be called the “Battle of Mountain Meadows.” Bigler’s description below of the Bear River Massacre could just as easily describe the Mountain Meadows Massacre by substituting “Fancher party” for “Indians.”

The fight Connor led has since been called either a battle or a massacre, perhaps depending on one’s point of view, but in fact it was both, first a pitched struggle with no quarter asked and none given, followed by a one-sided slaughter. Connor was also accused of indiscriminately killing non-combatants and allowing his men to rape native women, but such charges are difficult to verify and even harder to square with his character. (p. 231)

This benefit of the doubt on account of character is extended despite the fact that Connor was known to have refused to protect besieged settlers and circulated unfounded and damaging rumors about Mormons in his newspaper the Union Vedette. The atrocities committed at Mountain Meadows are also difficult to square with the character reputations of those thought to be at the scene, yet no similar benefit of the doubt is extended to them (see pp. 159–80).

The point here is not that history should not hold individual Mormons accountable for Mountain Meadows and Circleville. Rather, the point is that historical memory of accountability and moral questioning should be equitably applied to similar situations regardless of whether the perpetrators belonged to the Nauvoo Legion or the U.S. Army.

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5. See ibid., 37.
Third, Bigler's choice of sources in describing the violence that resulted from the Morrisite affair is also perplexing. In 1862, LDS police authorities, including Robert T. Burton, tried to free hostages held by Morrisite schismatics from the LDS Church. Bigler admits that the many accounts of the shooting that occurred are contradictory and incomplete. Yet after hinting (with no evidence provided) that LDS Church leaders were preparing to massacre the Morrisites as soon as the army left, he zooms in on an account of the event that could hardly be more unfavorable to Mormons. He justifies his choice with only the following: “Middleton’s is probably as good as any of the contradictory versions of this tragedy. After the Morrisites had surrendered, Burton rode into the fort with a number of his men and personally shot Morris to death with a revolver at close range” (p. 213).

Brigham Young and the Mountain Meadows Massacre

Few events in pioneer Mormon history have consumed more ink than the Mountain Meadows Massacre. While there is no denying local-level Mormon involvement in this tragedy, the reasons that it happened are complex. (However, it seems very clear that it never would have happened at all had Utahns not regarded themselves as being in a state of war with the United States—a state of war not initiated by the Mormons.)

Anti-Mormon writers have long sought to demonstrate a causal link between Brigham Young and the Mountain Meadows Massacre, but in over 140 years of trying, nothing has turned up. Since Juanita Brooks's conclusions in *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, most historians, Mormon and gentile, recognize that it seems very certain that he was not involved and was devastated when he learned of it.6

Nevertheless, *Forgotten Kingdom* strongly hints, without providing any new evidence, that Brigham Young was not only involved but was a direct instigator. Bigler points to a meeting of Piede Indian chiefs with Brigham Young a week before the attack; Piedes were later

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known to be among those involved in the massacre. Bigler also refers to Brigham Young’s instruction not to harm the Fancher party as an “alleged” order. This loaded term “alleged” is not applied by Bigler in any discernibly evenhanded way and appears rarely throughout the book and never in conjunction with any questionable action of any gentile. The word’s use here seems designed to prejudice the reader against Brigham Young and to suggest that the memory of this instruction was fabricated after the fact to protect the church president (p. 170).

Law and Violence

One of Forgotten Kingdom’s most provocative features is the general sense it conveys of Mormondom as a violent vigilante society with little sense of normal law. Bigler lays—through speculation more than documentation—at unseen Mormon vigilantes’ feet a litany of unsolved murders and ostensible attempted murders. His selection of crimes to which he gives extended treatment appears to focus only on those that can be interpreted as serving the purposes of Brigham Young’s ostensible imperial designs.

This portrayal goes counter to the accounts of contemporary observers and the understanding of historians who have investigated the matter of crime in nineteenth-century Utah. In fact, if anything distinguished Deseret from elsewhere in the West, it was its reputation for well-established and fair courts (administered by LDS bishops) and a remarkably low level of violence—vigilante, criminal, or otherwise.8

Gentile travelers such as British explorer Richard Burton and U.S. Army surveyor Lt. John Gunnison observed that murder and general lawlessness were rare in Utah compared to elsewhere in the

7. To name just a few, Bigler, Forgotten Kingdom, 131–33 (the murder of apostates Parrish and Potter); 148–50 (the alleged attempted murder of federal agent Garland Hurt); 202 (shots fired at Associate Justice H. R. Crosby); 213 (the killing of schismatic Joseph Morris); 247–53 (the murder of public land preemptor Dr. John King Robinson and harassment and possible attempted murder of four others is given a whole chapter).

West. Burton noted, "During my [three-week] residence at the Mormon City not a single murder was, to the best of my belief, committed: the three days which I spent at Christian Carson City witnessed three." The presence of well-run courts and the low levels of violence were attributable to a large degree to the ideal of a just and covenant society that the Latter-day Saints were trying to build. The places in Deseret where lawlessness and murder occurred at higher rates tended to be those areas such as army camps and mining towns where Mormons' presence and influence were less pervasive.

While Bigler's chronicle of one strange killing after another laid at the "Danites" feet makes for exciting anecdotal reading, it does not square with the overall picture of history. Legal historian D. Michael Stewart underscored this when he remarked, "extralegal violence was rare compared to that found in other frontier communities." The singular awfulness of the Mountain Meadows Massacre has overshadowed the general tenor of Mormon official and individual restraint during this period and left a distorted impression of the era in many people's minds.

Again, the point here is not to claim that no vigilante crimes by angry Mormons protecting their interests ever occurred in territorial Utah. The point is that overattention to such activities obscures the fact that they were very rare compared to elsewhere in the West, where no concerted effort to undermine a popularly supported government was going on as in Utah.

11. While the relative lack of violence in Deseret seems to be very well established and most likely the result of Mormon influence, some historians have argued that what violence did occur was also the result of Latter-day Saint influence—specifically a "Mormon culture of violence." The most forceful and lucid advocate of this interpretation can be found in D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 226–61. Critics of Quinn have suggested that his evidence is anecdotal rather than statistical, that he tends to suggest the most sinister possible interpretations for events for which there is scanty documentation, and that his portrayal does not adequately account for the loyalty and affection Mormons extended to their leaders. See, for example, Richard Ouellette, "Mormon Studies," *Religious Studies Review*
Democratic Process and Deseret Government

Related to Bigler’s accusations of lawlessness is his assertion that the Mormon theocracy corrupted the democratic process by “tampering with elections” (p. 313), depriving its citizens of the “right to cast their ballots in secret” (p. 214), and resisting the development of national political parties. This accusation is presentist in its failure to fully describe the alternate system employed by Mormons and to account for the historical context of American politics at the time. It should be remembered that the first secret ballot elections in the world were held in the colonies of South Australia and Victoria, Australia, in 1856. The implementation of this idea spread gradually, and secret ballots were by no means universal in the United States in the late nineteenth century. Not until the Progressive Era was voting fully transformed from a public display of social affiliation to a matter of private cognitive choice. Even today secret ballots are not universally applied to all democratic processes. The elected officials in representative democracies such as ours still usually vote openly.

The Mormon system was neither as far removed from a representative democracy nor as out of sync with mid-nineteenth-century democratic practices as Bigler depicts. It was in fact a distinct way of running government that could be considered even more just and egalitarian. Mormons used a “cooperation, and consensus” rather than an adversarial model of civic participation. Leaders who (ac-

25/2 (1999): 161–69. Nevertheless, even Quinn tempers his “culture of violence” theory with comments considering the degree to which they had been persecuted, such as “It would be the worst kind of distortion today to criticize Mormons of the past for harboring profound bitterness toward persons who ‘acted’ or ‘sounded’ anti-Mormon” (Quinn, Extensions of Power, 241–42), and “Mormon culture’s missteps are on a far smaller scale than those of other religious cultures” (Quinn, Extensions of Power, ix).

12. For an analysis of the evolving conceptions Americans have had concerning appropriate democratic practices and for an investigation into why the people in colonial and mid-nineteenth-century America thought differently about such issues as secret ballots, an informed electorate, social voting, and voting as an identity group, see Michael Schudson, “Voting Rites: Why We Need a New Concept of Citizenship,” American Prospect 19 (fall 1994): 59–63, 66–68. See also Michael Schudson, The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

cording to scriptural church policy) could be removed by the voice of the people twice a year were usually entrusted with much decision-making responsibility. Ideally, all sides of any local issue got a full hearing, and "voting" was done not as an exercise of individual power but as a public sign of assent to a foregone agreement. Variations of this governmental model are still used in many small communities today, and it is still highly regarded by many political philosophers. Consensus and cooperation are seen as especially appropriate for the kind of small-scale agricultural communities in which Mormons lived. As described in Michael Zuckerman's *Peaceable Kingdoms*, nineteenth-century Mormons strove for a kind of "other-oriented" community ethic similar to that—but minus the religious intolerance—of their eighteenth-century New England forefathers.14

Mormon resistance to the incursion of American political culture is especially understandable given the atmosphere of widespread political corruption that characterized American governmental processes at the time. This was the era of graft, coercion, and kickback-riddled political machines like Tammany Hall. One of the official symbols of the Whig party at the time was the whiskey barrel. The barrel indicated the reward that the party often gave its voters right at the ballot box.15

Dale L. Morgan, a scholar who has never been accused of being a Mormon apologist, said the following of those who criticized Mormon authority in territorial Utah:

Opponents usually failed to take into account the specific trust of the Mormons in their leaders, and the sense of responsibility held by the leaders to ward their people—a conception of inter-responsibility and mutual faith, which was


15. Mormon suspicion of the American political system on the grounds of the factious nature of political parties and corruption in elected officials has been part of Mormon political thought at least since the publication of Joseph Smith's presidential platform; see *General Smith's View of the Powers and the Policy of the Government of the United States* (Nauvoo, Ill.: John Taylor, Printer, 1844).
certainly a more vital ethical relationship than is ordinarily observed between governors and governed.\textsuperscript{16}

In other words, the Mormon hierarchy was less of a form of autocratic despotism than it was a legitimate expression of the people's popular will.

Again the point here is not that there was no dissatisfaction with government among Mormons and gentiles in Utah. The point rather is that there were few places at the time and probably ever in history where government enjoyed such popular support among the majority of the people. It is certainly understandable that white Protestants accustomed to enjoying the privileges U.S. society provided them chafed at their relative political powerlessness in Utah. However, they \textit{did} have the right to vote and as far as political minorities go, few had as powerful a friend as Utah gentiles had in the federal government.

Finally, it is worth noting that if one accepts the legitimacy of Deseret's political authority, one must also accept that Deseret had the right to ensure the security and public safety of its citizens and protect its interests against hostile outside influences just as any other legitimate governmental authority would. Unfortunately, Deseret had to accomplish this task under the watchful eye of anti-Mormon propaganda writers. Any attempt to maintain order, apprehend and punish criminals, or protect legitimate interests would be spun as criminal despotism. That Deseret's authorities were able to maintain order and control crime at all under these conditions, let alone achieve the peace and stability that they did, is an impressive feat.

\textbf{The Legality of the State of Deseret}

Bigler states clearly in his introduction and implies throughout \textit{Forgotten Kingdom} that there was something somewhat seditious and extralegal about Utahns' attempts to organize and maintain a proto-state government parallel to territorial administration while the region sought statehood (see pp. 15–18, 141, 201–6, 363–68). According to Bigler,

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For some fifty years this militant millennial movement engaged in a continuing struggle for sovereignty with an American republic that never quite knew how to take the challenge. In the end, the more irresistible of two incompatible systems proved to be the one founded on ideals of individual freedom and self-rule. (p. 16)

However, except for the strength and focus of their religious motivations and their tradition of well-coordinated social organization, Mormon efforts were not unique. The 1787 Northwest Ordinance spelled out how territories would be organized and admitted into the Union but was purposely vague on the exact relationship between local and federal authority. Thus, according to Western historian Charles S. Peterson, in the path to statehood “conflict, challenge, variety, confusion, and inefficiency often resulted,”17 and “dreams of empire, provisional states, and local initiative” were part of the political climate of American westward expansion.18 In American history, several other locally initiated self-governing movements flourished in places where little functioning state or local authority existed. Five other full-blown “protostates” attempted self-creation, although only California was successful in this endeavor. None of these other states were condemned as disloyal or were invaded by the army for taking this kind of initiative.19

The creation and maintenance of the State of Deseret before and after territorial organization was not an act of surreptitious rebellion; it was a sign of American hopefulness in the spirit of the times. The best case for legal irregularity and obstructionist activity in the story of the State of Deseret is not in its existence, but rather in the failure of the United States to admit it to the Union. The Northwest Ordinance stipulated sixty thousand people as a minimum population for statehood—a requirement Deseret had been able to meet for decades before 1896.20

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18. Ibid., xiv.
While much is made of the theocratic nature and sense of divine calling of Deseret government, Bigler gives little sense of how thoroughly the mainstream nineteenth-century American culture was energized by millenarian hopes and a sense of America's rightful apocalyptic purpose at the center of world history. Of course, the nascent American millennial kingdom confidently regarded itself as more moderate and committed to personal freedom than Mormons were. However, while Protestant Americans were free to practice their religion in the "Mormon Kingdom," Mormons were not free to practice their religion in the Protestant vision for a Christian America. If, as Bigler says, the "American" system was the more "irresistible" choice, it was not so by the power of persuasion and attractiveness to Utah's people. It was irresistible because it was imposed by the raw power of the military, deputy marshals, and a federal government committed to stripping Mormons of their civil rights. It is difficult to see how the following coercive actions, legitimized by what Circuit Court Justice John T. Noonan calls "a mass of intolerant legislation," can be characterized as "founded on ideals of individual freedom and self-rule," as Bigler suggests, or in any way contributing to America's traditions of civil democracy and freedom of conscience.

Under the direction of Chief Justice Charles S. Zane, the federally appointed Utah Commission arrived in Utah to broadly enforce the 1882 antipolygamy Edmunds Act. They posted flyers announcing substantial rewards for information leading to the arrest of polygamists and sent federal marshals fanning out across the territory, breaking up families and throwing 1,035 Mormon men as well as a few women into jail. Rather than risk incarceration for their convictions, many families fled to newly established Mormon colonies in Mexico and Alberta.

In Utah, federal marshals and paid informants participated in the systematic surveillance of polygamous households, the disrup-

tion of worship services, the tailing of Latter-day Saints going about their business, and late-night, no-knock home invasions in which men were pummeled and dragged from their beds and off to prison. In 1886, a deputy marshal shot and killed Edward M. Dalton in Parowan as he tried to escape capture for the misdemeanor offense of unlawful cohabitation.

In 1887, the Edmunds-Tucker Act abolished female suffrage in Utah and authorized the administration of loyalty oaths to prospective voters, jurors, and officeholders. The act stipulated compulsory attendance of witnesses at trials, overturned common law in compelling wives to testify against their husbands, and disbanded the church’s fund for bringing foreign converts to Utah. The act’s most devastating provision legally disincorporated the church and provided for the seizure of all its assets in excess of $50,000.

The Utah Commission gerrymandered territorial districts to ensure election victories in Salt Lake City and Ogden for the minority anti-Mormon Liberal party. In early 1890, the Supreme Court declared constitutional an Idaho law barring all Mormons from voting whether or not they believed in or practiced plural marriage. Congress neared almost certain passage of the Cullom-Strubb Bill, which was designed to disenfranchise the church’s entire U.S. membership—the first and only such attempt at total disenfranchisement of an entire religion in American history. Enacting the provisions of the Edmunds-Tucker Act, federal agents began confiscating church property and blocking access to meetinghouses and temples.

The Utah Commission had made the LDS Church into an outlaw organization and Utah into a nearly totalitarian state under a marshal law that was hostile to the majority of the territory’s inhabitants. This campaign only began to ebb when Wilford Woodruff announced a cessation of plural marriages in 1890. Utah gained statehood in 1896 only under the condition that polygamy be “forever banned” and the Mormon preferred name Deseret be abandoned in favor of the gentile preferred name Utah.23

23. Much of the information in this sketch of federal action against Mormons is well-known to historians, but I relied on Thomas G. Alexander’s Utah, the Right Place: The
The Morality of Deseret’s Suppression: The “Twin Relics”—siblings or Polar Opposites?

Defending Deseret’s autonomy may sound similar to the appeals to popular sovereignty the Southern States used during and after the Civil War to protect slavery and segregation. Indeed, Forgotten Kingdom echoes much nineteenth-century political thought in portraying antislavery and antipolygamy efforts as emerging from the same reformist impulse and enjoying the same moral mandate. However, while antipolygamy and antislavery campaigns may have shared some of the same spirit and rhetoric of Victorian Protestant sensibility, their methods, effects, and moral basis were almost diametrically opposed. There are fundamental differences between the first and second “relic of barbarism” and the regional governments that protected them.

In the South the slaves were in bondage; they were the least enfranchised people in the country. Their African religious expressions were suppressed, and their Christian expressions forcibly channeled and constrained. The slaves were held down by the complex and effective exercise of threats and applications of physical terror—a system that survived in modified form long after it became illegal to own another person.

On the other hand, unlike in the South and contrary to popular literary stereotypes, no systematically organized posses chased after those who decided to leave Utah and plural marriage. Rather than

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Official Centennial History (Salt Lake City: GibbsSmith, 1995), 186–204, to refresh my memory.

24. See, for example, the preface of A. G. Paddock, The Fate of Madam La Tour: A Story of the Great Salt Lake (New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1881), 366, which touted itself as doing “for Mormonism what ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ did for Slavery.” Harriet Beecher Stowe equated the antipolygamy crusade with antislavery in her introductory preface to Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse, “Tell It All”: The Story of a Life’s Experience in Mormonism (Cincinnati: Queen City, 1874), vi.


26. See Leonard J. Arrington and Jon Haupt, "Intolerable Zion: The Image of Mor-
compelling people to stay, Brigham Young on several occasions invited dissatisfied Mormons and gentiles to leave the territory. Many apparently took up this offer and left for the California gold fields or elsewhere.

Rather than being disenfranchised by Deseret, Mormon women, the alleged victims of “polygamic theocracy,” were on the cutting edge of female suffrage in the United States. They were the first American women to vote in municipal elections. In Deseret before “Americanization,” Mormon women were more free to practice their religion and exercise their political rights than anywhere else in the United States. That Mormon women overwhelmingly practiced plural marriage as a religiously motivated personal choice is forcefully stated in their own publications.

A central piece of the effort to establish full federal hegemony in Utah was to strip women of their franchise in order to reduce Mormon political power—an effort condemned by national feminist leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. In addition, not only polygamist men but all Mormon men were to be disenfranchised. Federal action subjected the majority of Utah’s populace to imprisonment and harassment, making them less free to practice their religion and exercise their civil rights. Mormons did not demand a level of religious tolerance that they were not willing

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27. Seraph Young was the first woman to vote after the passage of the Utah State suffrage bill. Alexander, Utah, 180.

to extend to others. Deseret law required, and Brigham Young forcefully advocated, religious freedom for everyone. According to tradition, he even set aside land for Salt Lake City's Catholic cathedral.

It is ironic that this time period is often referred to as the "Americanization of Utah." People are not "Americanized" by taking away their most American of rights—the right to vote, the right to free exercise of religion, and the right to be free from unreasonable seizure and imprisonment. In sum then, Southern Reconstruction sought to expand the civil rights and freedoms of an oppressed minority while the "Americanization of Utah" constricted the civil rights and freedoms of an oppressed minority. They were different endeavors entirely.

This critique of the morality of the suppression of Deseret is not presentist revisionism. The principles by which Deseret might have been allowed to flourish unmolested were well understood and have had powerful defenders throughout American history. Before being tempted by the French offer to sell Louisiana, Thomas Jefferson believed that the westward expansion of Americanism did not require the westward expansion of the United States government. Instead he imagined sovereign and autonomous sister republics filling up the West, each of which would work out American ideals in their own slightly different ways. He imagined Indian nations as sovereign states along these lines when he sent Lewis and Clark to contact them and open up trade routes to the Pacific.29 It is not inconceivable that the deeply Americanist vision of the citizens of Deseret could have fit into Jefferson's vision of North America.

Later, in the 1850s and 1860s, gentile observers as diverse as Mark Twain, influential U.S. Army surveyors Howard Stansbury and John Gunnison, English explorer Richard Burton, and New York reporter Horace Greeley doubted accusations of Mormon rebelliousness. While none of these observers agreed with Mormon doctrines, they all advocated leaving Mormons alone. These gentile observers

claimed that calling for anti-Mormon legislation was the province of
demagogues. They further warned that compelling essentially loyal
Mormons to conform would be a prescription for bloodshed.\textsuperscript{30}

**The Challenge to Contemporary Mormon Studies**

Despite these problems, *Forgotten Kingdom* does make some im-
portant contributions. As Bigler rightly suggests, a chronicle of the
establishment and dismantling of Latter-day Saint theocracy in the
American West is long overdue. Many Mormons’ historical con-
sciousness stops in 1847 as if the arrival of the pioneers in Utah were
the end of history. Bigler invites us not to ignore the fascinating
1847–96 era. For this we should thank him. However, there are some
signs of this era’s reemergence as an important time period in LDS
historical consciousness. At the September 1999 fundraiser for the
Association for Mormon Letters, keynote speaker Richard Bushman
suggested that because of our experience with federal intervention
and domination, Mormons now exist in a state of mind that shows
many features of a postcolonial condition.\textsuperscript{31} Drawing on the work of
Palestinian scholar Edward Said, Bushman described ways in which
colonized peoples begin to accept the image of themselves con-
structed by their colonizers.\textsuperscript{32} Said and Bushman invite us to be cog-
nizant of this colonization of our minds.

\textsuperscript{30} See John W. Gunnison, *The Mormons, or, Latter-day Saints, in the Valley of the
Great Salt Lake: A History of Their Rise and Progress, Peculiar Doctrines, Present Condition,
and Prospects, Derived from Personal Observations during a Residence among Them*
(Philadelphia: Lippincott & Grambo, 1852), 154–57. Howard Stansbury, *An Expedition to
the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah; including description of its geography, natural his-
tory, and minerals, and an analysis of its waters: with an authentic account of the Mormon
settlement* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1852). Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1872;
New York to San Francisco: In the Summer of 1859* (New York: Saxton, Barker, 1860),

\textsuperscript{31} See Richard Bushman, “The Colonization of the Mormon Mind,” in *The Annual
of the Association for Mormon Letters, 2000*, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City:

The fact that many Mormons today fail to celebrate our ancestors' courageous, principled, and amazingly well-disciplined non-lethal defense of local autonomy, noncontentious governmental operation, communitarian living, cooperative economics, personal religious freedom, and family privacy—and instead shamefacedly avoid engaging with our theocratic past—may indicate that we have internalized the ideology of our colonizers. David Bigler's stirring the coals of this secret-shame-that-shouldn't-be is a wake-up call to those who engage in Mormon studies to rise to the challenge of appreciating the historical meaning and current implications of our theocratic past.
"Out of Zion Shall Go Forth the Law"  
(Isaiah 2:3)  
Nathan Oman

Religion and the State

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying . . . Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew unto me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s. (Matthew 22:15–21)

Christ’s answer to the Pharisees and the Herodians frames one of the major questions of political and legal theory: what is the proper relationship between religion and the state? Perhaps because he perceived the hypocrisy and insincerity of his interlocutors, Christ did not offer a complete answer to the question. The state and religion

both have legitimate spheres, but beyond taxes and currency, Christ's answer does not inform us how far the intersection between those two spheres extends or if they intersect at all. The restoration has offered some fascinating and sometimes radical answers to this question.

In 1842, Joseph Smith declared, "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law" (Article of Faith 12). However, alongside this avowal of religious submissiveness to secular authority, the Prophet also laid out a radical program of "the literal gathering of Israel" and a prediction "that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent" (Article of Faith 10). He also affirmed an expansive notion of religious liberty. "We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may" (Article of Faith 11). Thus from the beginning the church has had an ambiguous relationship with the state. It affirms loyalty and obedience but insists on the right of the Saints to pursue the peculiar vision of Zion dictated by revelation. The refusal of Mormons to yield ultimate obedience to the norms of others and the dictates of the state has brought them into frequent conflict with the law. The story of these encounters and the Mormon attempt to create gospel-based alternatives to the secular courts makes for one of the most fascinating chapters in church history. At the same time, the account contains powerful insights into the nature of law and the state, and their relationship to religion. In Zion in the Courts, Firmage and Mangrum tackle this story. Although their work is not without limitations, it lays out for the first time a comprehensive look at the nineteenth-century legal experience of the Latter-day Saints. The result is an impressive piece of scholarship full of possibilities for later students.

1. The original text of the Wentworth Letter, from which the Articles of Faith are taken, reads "That Zion will be built upon this continent." The wording was slightly clarified in the canonized text. See "Appendix 12: The Wentworth Letter," in The Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 4:1754.
Much of the freshness of this volume comes from the fact that neither Firmage nor Mangrum is a historian by training. Both are law professors. Mangrum studied law at the University of Utah, Oxford, and Harvard and currently teaches at Creighton Law School, where he specializes in jurisprudence and church-state issues. Firmage is the Samuel D. Thurmond Professor of Law at the University of Utah, teaching international and constitutional law. He received his education at Brigham Young University and the University of Chicago. Thus both authors are grounded in the law rather than traditional historiography, and the results can be seen in their work.

_Zion in the Courts_ is divided into three main sections. The first section chronicles the years from 1830 to 1844. The second section deals with the massive legal battle the church fought with the federal government over the practice of plural marriage. The final portion focuses on the system of ecclesiastical courts that sought to serve all Mormon judicial needs in the nineteenth century. All of these themes have been treated by other authors. The innovation of Firmage and Mangrum is their close attention to legal detail and (in the case of ecclesiastical courts) the sheer breadth of their study. They explain legal actions in great detail (see pp. 120–24), examine the full impact of judicial decisions (see pp. 185–94), and look into the role of ecclesiastical courts on issues ranging from definitions of adultery under polygamy (see pp. 357–58) to fishing rights on Utah Lake (see p. 285).

Although the wealth of detail can be overwhelming at times, on the whole the authors avoid useless pedantry and pointless cataloging of legal minutiae. Instead, one is left with a sense of precisely how the restoration has interacted with, challenged, and been challenged by

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3. A detailed account of Joseph Smith’s bankruptcy.
4. An analysis of the reduced evidentiary standards used against polygamists.
law and the state. The result is a rare feat in Mormon historical writing: Firmage and Mangrum provide a genuinely new approach to previously treated events without resorting to violent revisionism. In this review, I will summarize the basic content of Firmage and Mangrum’s book, touching on what I see as some of the more interesting issues. Then I will offer a framework in which both the limitations and possibilities of this book can be understood.

**Legal Experiences in the Early Church**

Much of the early legal experience of the church revolved around lawsuits against the Prophet and his associates. Firmage and Mangrum lay out the early money-digging trial of Joseph Smith along with the initial attempts in New York to silence him using the law against disorderly persons (see pp. 48–50). Unfortunately, the paucity of reliable sources for these early suits means that the treatment is necessarily truncated. The legal experience in Ohio included litigation surrounding the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society (see pp. 54–58). In a harbinger of more ominous things to come in Missouri, Joseph Smith also sued leaders of anti-Mormon mobs for assault. Unlike in Missouri, however, “the Saints generally received fair treatment in the Ohio courts” (p. 54).

While “in Ohio, at least, the Saints were willing to present their complaints before the gentile courts” (p. 52), the violence of Missouri’s mobs and the connivance of her public officials dramatically shifted Mormon attitudes. By the time the Saints were driven to Illinois, they had already suffered nearly a decade of illegal, semilegal, and legal persecution. Mobs had destroyed Mormon property and dreams in Missouri, Mormon leaders had been hounded with both legitimate and vexatious lawsuits, and appeals to state and national authorities had fallen largely on deaf ears. Firmage and Mangrum sum up the position of the Saints at the time:

The disheartening Missouri episode created a resolve among Mormons to rely no longer on “gentile” government to protect their civil rights. Instead the Mormons turned in-
ward, forging a society that combined democratic and theocratic elements of government that would provide for substantial autonomy, insularity, and self-sufficiency. In search of those objectives, the Saints developed Nauvoo into a sanctuary arguably untouchable by state law. (p. 83)

An essential element of this autonomous sanctuary was the ability to halt and evaluate outside legal processes. The method used by church and civic leaders was the writ of *habeas corpus*.

*pHabeas corpus* is a Latin phrase literally meaning “produce the body.” It is a particular kind of writ or order issued by a court to a government official who is holding someone prisoner. The writ demands that the official bring his prisoner before the court (i.e., “produce the body”) and show legal cause for his incarceration. It thus provides judicial review of executive action, insuring that a prisoner can challenge the government’s action in court. Traditionally, *habeas corpus* has been known as “the Great Writ” because it formed the basis for a government of law rather than caprice.5

Under the Nauvoo charter, the municipal court, which consisted of prominent church leaders, had the right to issue writs of *habeas corpus*, and “this provision of the charter logically became the foremost weapon in the Mormons’ protectionist arsenal” (p. 93). Firmage and Mangrum point out that most city charters of the time contained identical *habeas corpus* provisions, belying the claims of some that Mormons expressly lobbied for the writ in order to completely exclude outside law from Nauvoo (see p. 93). Nevertheless, they chronicle the imaginative use that Mormon lawyers made of the writ in protecting the Saints—and Joseph Smith in particular—from gentile law.

The central legal problem for the Saints was that Joseph Smith was technically a fugitive from justice (see p. 77). He had been charged and imprisoned in Missouri on grounds of treason, murder, and robbery. Despite his incarceration in Liberty Jail, Joseph had

never been formally tried for any of these offenses. Thus he was subject to extradition and trial in Missouri, a trial that most Mormons believed would lead to his murder. The precariousness of the Prophet’s legal position increased after Missouri officials blamed him for the attempted assassination of Lilburn Boggs (see p. 95). Beginning in September of 1840, state officials from Missouri began a series of attempts to arrest Joseph. At first he simply dodged the arresting officers, but after the governor of Illinois intervened to ensure Joseph’s arrest, his lawyers sought a legal way of defeating the extradition (see p. 94).

Their first success with habeas corpus came before gentile Judge Stephen A. Douglas, who ruled that the writ for Joseph’s arrest was technically invalid (see p. 94). Thereafter, the Nauvoo municipal court used its power to issue writs of habeas corpus each time Joseph was arrested. In addition, the city council took action to increase the scope and breadth of the writ’s reach. First, they insisted that the Nauvoo municipal court had the power to examine all arrests, even those not carried out by municipal officials. Second, the council passed a law dramatically expanding the depth of local inquiry under habeas corpus.

It allowed the municipal court to look into the procedural correctness and legality of any writ of process, foreign or local, and also (if the court concluded that the writ of process was procedurally valid) to “then proceed and fully hear the merits of the case, upon which said arrest was made, upon such evidence as may be produced and sworn before said court.” If upon investigation the municipal court concluded that the writ of process has been issued “through private pique, malicious intent, or religious . . . persecution, falsehood or representation,” then the court could quash the writ. (pp. 97–98)6

This law gave Nauvoo the power not only to see if an arrest was procedurally valid, but also to decide on its underlying worth and

6. Ellipsis points in original.
justice. In effect, the Saints were claiming the right to exclude the operation of what they perceived as unjust laws from their community. Mangrum and Firmage devote some time to a discussion of the law's validity. Although they conclude that it may well have exceeded traditional notions of *habeas corpus*, they do acknowledge the existence of a precedent at the time for expanded use of the writ (see p. 99). However, despite any legal merit inherent in the Mormons' position, the authors argue that their use of *habeas corpus* contributed to the public outcry that led to Joseph's murder at Carthage (see p. 113).

Beyond the Mormon quest for immediate protection from legal harassment by enemies, Firmage and Mangrum also delve into how efforts to live the law of consecration fared before the bar of secular courts. In many ways the lawsuits arising out of Mormon attempts at communal economic activity are philosophically much more significant than the high-stakes, *habeas corpus* maneuvering in Nauvoo. The actions in Nauvoo were ultimately ad hoc attempts to protect Joseph from extradition to Missouri. While they had potentially life-or-death outcomes, the crisis conditions under which they were adopted were less directly tied to theology or fundamental issues of legal theory. That was not so in the law of consecration cases. Classical liberal theorists have traditionally exalted the role of legally enforceable contracts as one of the hallmarks of freedom. The ability of autonomous individuals to forge binding agreements supposedly allows them to create their own voluntary business arrangements. For a brief period around the turn of the century, the Supreme Court even extended constitutional protection to economic agreements, declaring that “the general right [of a citizen] to make a contract in relation to his business is part of the liberty of the individual protected by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Federal Constitution.” Despite this latent respect for contract in American thought and jurisprudence, the church was unable to make the law of consecration legally palatable to “gentile” judges.

During the first fourteen years of the church's existence, the Saints obeyed a series of revelations calling for communal economic

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arrangements. Firmage and Mangrum go into the details of how members formally deeded property to the church and received their stewardships in return. They summarize the legal results of the law of consecration thus:

Basic theological principles lay behind this law: possessions belonged to the Lord; and spiritual commitment required the individual to give priority to the Kingdom of God over materialistic desires. But implementing these ideals in a legally enforceable arrangement proved more problematic; the law would not accommodate Zion. (pp. 61–62)

Legal problems arose in three ways. First, wealthy members who had “cold feet” about consecration would sue the church for the return of their property. The secular law, unwilling to recognize the legitimacy of the church’s claim to consecrated property, would side with the disgruntled members. At the other end of the economic spectrum, there were those members who wished to apostatize from the church and take their stewardships with them. In these cases, secular authorities would again side against the church. Finally, the church wished to retain an interest in any stewardship so that it could adjust the size of individual grants to accommodate new members or special circumstances. However, the secular law was wedded to a more traditional concept of property and once again refused to uphold the church’s position (see pp. 61–63).

Plural Marriage and the Law

The fiercest legal opposition to the church, however, had to wait until the Saints emigrated to Utah and the Mountain West. After the church publicly announced the practice of polygamy in 1852, the church became the target of increasingly harsh legislation from the federal government. Beginning with the Republican platform of 1856—which declared polygamy, along with slavery, to be one of “the twin relics of barbarism”—national opinion began to galvanize against the church (see p. 129). In 1862 the first of a long series of laws was passed to punish Mormon polygamists (see p. 131).
The story of the federal government’s persecution of Mormons between 1862 and 1890 is one of the great legal dramas of United States history. It pitted the combined displeasure of the entire country against a small but tenacious minority. The lengths to which the federal government went in attacking the church illustrate the extent to which legal and constitutional protections can prove inadequate. Ironically, most members of the church today are unaware that at one point in time, the annihilation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was a stated policy goal of the federal government. Unlike the haphazard but violent mobs in Missouri and Illinois, the antipolygamy crusades prior to 1890 represented a deliberate decision of the United States government made by presidents, congresses, and the Supreme Court. The Saints challenged these actions in federal court, forcing the Supreme Court to issue a string of decisions that—for better or for worse—laid the basic structure of religious liberty jurisprudence in America.

The problem began with polygamy. The church accepted it as a divinely inspired institution. The federal government insisted that it was an immoral and degrading practice that had to be eradicated. However, the Civil War and its aftermath engaged the attention of the nation for the first few years after the passage of the first antipolygamy law, and it remained a dead letter. The Saints assumed that the law violated their first amendment right to the free exercise of religion, and the federal government did not press the matter.

However, after the war, federal officials began to step up their efforts to punish polygamists. In 1874, Congress passed the Poland Act, which eliminated some procedural obstacles to convicting polygamists. The law signaled a change in federal policy. The government was discarding the live-and-let-live attitude that had prevailed during the Civil War and Reconstruction years in favor of a vigorous attack on polygamy. The church decided to test the matter. The test case, Reynolds v. United States, was a landmark case because for the first time the Supreme Court directly interpreted the meaning of the free-exercise clause of the first amendment.8 Firmage and Mangrum do

8. The Supreme Court first dealt with the free-exercise clause in Peroml v. Municipality No. 1, 44 U.S. 589 (1845). The case dealt with a municipal ordinance that,
an admirable job in explaining the two written decisions in this case, but their treatment is not without faults. Unfortunately, Mangrum and Firma\-m\-ge rely almost exclusively on the court records to recon-struct these events (see pp. 151–56). The absence of other outside sources—such as diaries and letters by the participants—leaves consider-
able doubt as to the nature of the out-of-court maneuvering. Reynolds was the secretary to the First Presidency and also a polyga-
mist. The church seems to have struck a deal with federal prosecutors in order to test the constitutionality of the antipolygamy laws (see p. 151). Reynolds apparently provided evidence to convict himself with the understanding that prosecutors would not seek a stiff sentence. When the federal officers pushed for a long prison sentence anyway, Reynolds vigorously fought the case (see p. 151).

The Supreme Court’s decision opened the floodgates of federal persecution. The Court held that the Poland Act was constitutional, notwithstanding Reynolds’s objections. Chief Justice Waite stated:

> Congress was deprived [by the free-exercise clause] of all legis-
> lative power over mere opinion, but was left free to reach actions which were in violation of social duties or subversive of good order.\(^9\)

The court thus announced a narrow view of the free exercise of religion by creating a dichotomy between belief and action that protected only belief. In so doing, the justices harked back to the cramped religious theory of Thomas Jefferson (see p. 154).\(^10\) Jefferson saw the right to free exercise as being a very limited concept that protected only belief. He had argued that “the legislative powers of government

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for health reasons, forbade open-casket funerals except in the city mortuary. Since this law effectively outlawed Roman Catholic requiem masses, Permoli challenged it, claiming that it violated his right to free exercise of his religion. However, prior to the passage of the fourteenth amendment after the Civil War, the Bill of Rights applied only to federal actions. Thus, in \textit{Permoli} the Court disposed of the free-exercise claim by pointing out that it couldn’t be applied to a city ordinance. Since the polygamy law challenged in \textit{Reynolds} was a federal law applied to the territories, it avoided the issue of the states’ relationship to the Bill of Rights.

\(^9\) 98 \textit{U.S.} at 164 (1878).

\(^10\) Cf. \textit{ibid.}
reach actions ... and not opinions.” Unfortunately, in Jefferson's view only belief enjoyed constitutional protection. In practical terms, the decision gave the government virtually unlimited power to criminalize any behavior it found objectionable. Mormon polygamists discovered that the first amendment would not protect them, and Reynolds went to prison (see p. 156).

After the Reynolds case settled the major constitutional question, prosecution against polygamists accelerated. There were two basic obstacles to government victory in polygamy cases. The first was the problem of Mormon control of the courts. The Utah Territorial legislature had granted broad jurisdiction to local probate courts that traditionally dealt only with cases involving wills and were staffed almost exclusively with Mormon judges. Since these courts had the ability to issue writs of habeas corpus and try criminal cases, they could effectively frustrate any polygamy prosecution. Congress responded by dismantling the local court system in 1874 (see p. 141). All criminal cases were thrown into the federal courts, which were firmly in the control of non-Mormons. More important, in 1882, Congress excluded all Mormons from jury duty. When a member of the church challenged this law as unconstitutional, the Court upheld Congress's action in Clawson v. United States (see pp. 227–29).12

The second barrier to convicting polygamists was the nature of the offense itself. The crime of "bigamy" consisted of being married to two or more persons simultaneously. The law required proof of a marriage ceremony to convict. Mormon marriages, conducted in temples or endowment houses, were almost impossible to prove. Congress reacted by creating a new offense: "unlawful cohabitation." The proof of this offense did not require evidence of an actual marriage ceremony (see p. 161). But what it did require was very unclear. Mormon attorneys argued that the threshold should be proof of sexual intercourse (see p. 169). However, this would have imposed the same kind of evidentiary problems as bigamy. The

12. See 114 U.S. 477 (1885).
courts refused to accept this interpretation with the result “that proving the offense [of cohabitation] became ridiculously easy for federal prosecutors” (p. 174). Any contact between a man and his wives became evidence of cohabitation. Thus Mormon men who attempted to obey the law after the Reynolds decision by ceasing to live with their plural families would still be prosecuted if they provided financial support to them (see p. 175).

Even more fascinating, the courts created evidentiary rules that in practice destroyed the presumption of innocence in cohabitation proceedings. For evidentiary purposes, a man was presumed to cohabit with his legal (i.e., first) wife (see p. 186). However, in a case where a subsequent wife had children but the first wife did not, a man trying to avoid prosecution would often live with his children. The presumption of cohabitation with his legal wife put the man in the position of having to prove that he was innocent of the charge. Finally, the courts so diluted the amount of evidence necessary to establish cohabitation that a man could be convicted entirely on the basis of reputation without any corroborating evidence at all (see pp. 189–90).

The decisive federal attack came in 1887 with the Edmunds-Tucker Act. No longer content to prosecute polygamists, this act aimed at nothing less than the destruction of the church as an institution (see p. 257). The territorial law that gave the church its legal existence was revoked, and all church property in excess of $50,000 was to be confiscated by the government (see p. 201). Federal marshals and prosecutors moved in. The federal government seized huge amounts of church property, including Temple Square. The church tried to protect its assets by creating dummy corporations or deeding property to loyal church members. These attempts proved partially successful, but the government continued to relentlessly locate and seize church property. In a case whose name seemed to summarize the era, The Late Corporation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints v. United States, the Supreme Court upheld the Edmunds-Tucker Act, giving the government the final go-ahead to completely dismantle the church (see p. 257).

In the face of this relentless pressure and the almost certain annihilation of the church, President Wilford Woodruff received a revelation authorizing the discontinuation of plural marriage. The First Presidency issued the Manifesto in the October conference of 1890. With the retreat from polygamy, the federal government relented and eventually returned most of the church’s property (see p. 259). Firmage and Mangrum summarize the era by saying:

In the battle of wills between the church and the federal government, the government was victorious. It suppressed polygamy and crippled the church’s political, social, and economic power in the territory [of Utah]. Faced with a choice between a principled commitment to polygamy and survival as an organization, the church chose to survive. (p. 259)

Church Courts in the Nineteenth Century

The final section of the book deals with the ecclesiastical court system the church established in Utah. Unlike present-day church disciplinary councils, nineteenth-century church courts served as the primary forum for all civil disputes between the Saints. Thus, in addition to deciding on traditional moral issues such as adultery or apostasy, church courts also resolved contract disputes, property battles, and a host of other legal questions. While this section lacks some of the narrative appeal of the first two-thirds of the book, in many ways it is the most fascinating and potentially most important part of the work.

Firmage and Mangrum’s basic thesis is that the church court system reflected a distinctively gospel-centered alternative to secular courts. While traditional legal forums emphasized atomic individualism, personal rights, and legal formality, the church courts placed far greater value on the concepts of community, charity, and substantive justice embodied in the restoration’s concept of Zion. Motivated by a desire to build up the kingdom of God on earth, the Saints voluntarily submitted to religious authority (see p. 261). The result was that for several decades, Mormonism operated what constituted an autonomous legal structure independent of state institutions and coercion.
Firmage and Mangrum marshal an impressive array of data in defense of their argument. Ordinarily, records of church courts are kept confidential. Firmage and Mangrum gained special access to these materials, but only on the condition that the names of parties to the disputes be kept secret. Thus, with a few exceptions, all of the characters in the last section of the book are referred to only by their initials. One drawback of this system is that Firmage and Mangrum could not deepen their research with other primary sources such as letters or diaries. In order to preserve confidentiality, they confine themselves almost exclusively to the disfellowishment files in the Church Archives. However, because of their willingness to work within this constraint, they provide an impressive wealth of information on the details of how church courts actually functioned.

What they reveal is an independent Mormon legal system. In the harsh environment of the Great Basin, the Saints were only able to survive through cooperative efforts directed by priesthood authority. This required, among other things, notions of water and land rights at serious odds with secular law. The Saints responded by simply creating their own system of water law (see p. 314) and real estate law (see p. 293). Priesthood authorities resolved the inevitable disputes that arose. The church was perfectly willing to tell members that they had to pay damages and take other remedial action when they violated the norms laid down by the church, even in cases where the secular law required a different result (see p. 265).

This legal independence was not confined to water and real estate. Priesthood authorities adjudicated cases involving everything from assault to bankruptcy. The aim was to provide the Saints a way of resolving all of their disputes without “suing . . . before the ungodly” (p. 263). Despite their willingness to impose real monetary judgments, church leaders were far more likely than their secular counterparts to temper their decisions with a concern for mercy and neighborliness. Time and again, Firmage and Mangrum record cases where church courts sought to accommodate both parties to a dispute rather than impose a winner-takes-all solution. Likewise, church courts refused to allow cases to turn on legal technicalities. Instead, they sought to get to the central issues without a slavish devotion to procedural niceties (see pp. 274–75).
Mormon courts also dealt with distinctively Mormon issues that couldn't find a hearing in secular court. The church courts handled divorce proceedings involving plural families and the consequent custody agreements, alimony payments, and child support in cases where the parties had no standing in secular courts (see p. 332). The concept of eternal marriage created some interesting cases. Firmage and Mangrum record cases of wives seeking to divorce deceased husbands so that they might be resealed to someone else. Some of these cases became very complicated:

In an 1878 case HP, who was married civilly to TP, requested that she be sealed to WD because her husband “treated her poorly and was not in good standing with the Church.” WD consented to the sealing, provided that HP would stay with her husband during his life. When TP died, HP requested that WD either furnish her a home or agree to a cancellation of the sealing so that she could be sealed to yet another party, JS, who insisted on the sealing as a condition for providing her with basic necessities. WD responded: “I am not in circumstances financially to comply with her request, but would have felt glad to have done it if it had been in my power, and if she feels desirous to be sealed to Brother [JS] under these circumstances if it can be done to be unsealed I am willing to relinquish my claim” (p. 332).

Church courts insisted on their authority to reconsider and revise civil decisions involving church members. “Suing before the ungodly” was deemed to be un-Christian-like conduct worthy of disfellowshipment (see p. 264). Generally, the procedure was for the defendant in a civil suit to complain of the un-Christian-like conduct of the plaintiff to his bishop. The bishop would then convene a church court to consider the matter. The court would consider the entire dispute and craft a final judgment. Oftentimes, the church court would actually side with the plaintiff in the civil suit, ordering the defendant to pay damages. However, in these cases the plaintiff would generally have to pay the defendant's legal costs to atone for his un-Christian-like conduct (see p. 266). Provided that both parties
chose to abide by the judgment, the case would be closed (unless either side appealed). If either party refused to abide by the decision, however, he would be disfellowshipped from the church (see p. 320).

This brings us to the question of enforcement. For a brief period of time during the desperate days at Winter Quarters, church courts meted out “coercive sanctions” (p. 288). However, apart from this exception, participation in church courts was voluntary. They did not have the ability to seize property or physically coerce participants. Rather, they relied exclusively on their ability to disfellowship members, with its associated spiritual and social consequences (see p. 288). In the few cases where nonmembers submitted their disputes to church courts, the courts required posting a bond that was forfeit if the parties did not abide by the decision (see p. 282). Thus Mormons were able to operate an autonomous legal system bereft of the kind of institutionalized violence demanded by classical liberal theory.

History and Religion

*Zion in the Courts* avoids the temptation to explain Mormon legal experience in purely secular terms. The religious historian Mircea Eliade, writing about the general state of the history of religion, observed that:

We wanted at all costs to present an *objective* history of religions, but we failed to bear in mind that what we were christening *objectivity* followed the fashion of thinking in our times. . . . Desirous to achieve by all means the prestige of a “science”, the history of religions has passed through all the crises of the modern scientific mind, one after another. Historians of religions have been successively—and some of them have not ceased to be—positivists, empiricists, rationalists or historicists. And what is more, none of the fashions which in succession have dominated this study of ours, not one of the global systems put forward in explanation of the religious phenomenon, has been the work of a historian of religions; they have all derived from hypotheses advanced by eminent linguists, anthropologists, sociologists or ethnol-
ogists, and have been accepted in their turn by everyone, including the historians of religions!...

... In short we have neglected this essential fact: that in the title of the "history of religions" the accent ought not to be upon the word *history*, but upon the word *religions*. For although there are numerous ways of practising *history*—from the history of technics to that of human thought—there is only one way of approaching *religion*—namely, to deal with the religious facts.¹⁴

Mormon history presents the same temptation to disregard that which is distinctly Mormon in the search for "objective" explanations. Fortunately, Firmage and Mangrum, to the extent that they offer explanations, are unabashedly theological in their arguments.

The opening chapter of the book, entitled "Zion and the State," makes the doctrinal concept of Zion the main vehicle of explanation. The Saints, they argue, were seeking to establish an independent community based on obedience to God's commands (see p. ix). When that vision of Zion threatened secular authority and norms, the federal government reacted with massive persecution. Ultimately, the church, faced with the real threat of complete destruction, was allowed to relent on certain commitments (i.e., plural marriage and other distinctive practices). The church court system was likewise an outgrowth of this commitment to build an autonomous city of God. In their introduction, Firmage and Mangrum argue "as long as the Mormons held themselves responsible for building Zion, the church courts flourished, despite secular alternatives, much longer than any materialistic historical model would have predicted" (p. xvii). They also note the doctrinal continuity into the present. "For the Mormon today," they point out, "Zion is not dead, even though many of the institutions of nineteenth-century Mormonism are gone or have been modified beyond recognition" (p. 371).

If *Zion in the Courts* has a weakness, it is the weakness that much of all historical writing shares. An old adage defines history as "one damn thing after another." Writing in reaction against what he saw as disciplinary overreaching, the German historian Jacob Burckhardt laid out a very modest goal for historians. "We shall . . . make no attempt at system, nor lay any claim to 'historical principles.' On the contrary, we shall confine ourselves to observation." However, most modern practitioners of history have greater ambitions. They wish to offer explanations as well as descriptions of events. For example, Leonard Arrington, who has been called "the patron of virtually all contemporary scholarship in the field of Mormon history," insisted that his *magnum opus* "*Great Basin Kingdom* represents an attempt to give meaning to an American experience that often has been obscured by sectarian controversy." Thus most historians seek to do more than simply describe the past; they also wish to interpret it, show causes and effects, and attempt to portray "what really happened." This is the genre of literature into which *Zion in the Courts* falls.

There is nothing wrong with this approach in and of itself. Fighamge and Mangrum have done an excellent job of compiling a massive amount of material. The bibliography alone, which fills thirteen pages, is a major resource for anyone interested in law and the restoration. As noted above, their explanations are interesting and avoid predictable pitfalls. However, at the risk of faulting the authors for not writing a book they did not set out to write, I think that *Zion in the Courts* suffers from an unwillingness to stray very far from a recitation of nineteenth-century facts. This may make it good history, but it ignores a host of important questions of legal and political theory.

“Mormon Studies” and “Mormon Perspectives”

In a larger sense, part of my disappointment with Zion in the Courts stems from its basic approach to dealing with Mormonism. Mormon scholarship can flow in two paths that I would label as “Mormon studies” and “Mormon perspectives.” “Mormon studies” views Mormonism as subject matter. The aim is to examine LDS experience, doctrine, or scripture from within the framework of some other discipline so that we can understand what is “really” going on. This type of scholarship can take many forms and can be either faith building or faith destroying.18 Fawn Brodie’s attempt to explain Joseph Smith by supposedly revealing his inner psychological experience is an early and notorious example of this kind of writing.19 However, much as they might resent being placed in the same category as Brodie, the work of many faithful scholars fits into a similar pattern. For example, the recently published FARMS volume Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins contains the work of philosophers, linguists, anthropologists, demographers, statisticians, military historians, and other scholars, all of whom use their intellectual training to examine the Book of Mormon from within the framework of their respective disciplines. Although the authors plainly acknowledge the apologetic value of their work,21 they share with Brodie an approach that places Mormonism under the lens of an outside scholarly perspective. Thoughtful scholars freely acknowledge the limitations of this approach. For example, Noel Reynolds argues in the introduction to Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited that, despite the findings contained in that book, “science and logic can prove negative, but not positive, claims” about the Book of Mormon.22

18. I should also, in all fairness, add that it is often neither. There is much of “Mormon studies” that inflicts no harm beyond boredom and does no good other than “adding to the record.”
22. Ibid., 16.
Beyond its conceptual limitations, however, the "Mormon studies" approach also contains spiritual dangers. This is because it must grant, at least provisionally, intellectual authority to some system of thought beyond the gospel. Thus, a linguist studying the Book of Mormon must privilege the categories of his or her discipline in order to proceed. In most cases, this is innocuous because the categories of this or that discipline do not directly confront the gospel, and in any case the faithful scholar cedes ultimate intellectual fealty to the Lord and his revelations. However, it is naive to assume that any intellectual discipline's pursuit of knowledge is always neutral vis-à-vis the gospel. There can and will be conflicts between the truths of revelation and the assumptions of certain kinds of scholarly inquiry. Furthermore, there is the danger that use of scholarly tools—which requires the privileging of those tools—will breed habits of mind that reflexively privilege secular scholarship over the gospel. I must hasten to add that I am not attacking "Mormon studies" per se. Money may carry with it spiritual dangers (see Matthew 6:24), but that is no reason to not make a living or support one's family. Scholarly tools can do much to elucidate our understanding of things Mormon. The spadework of diligent researchers produces mounds of valuable and insightful material. I simply wish to point out the limitations—and possible dangers—of approaching Mormonism purely as an object of study.

"Mormon perspectives" takes a different approach to the relationship of the gospel and the life of the mind. Rather than using scholarly tools as a way of classifying and understanding Mormonism, this approach seeks to use Mormonism as a lens with which to examine, understand, and perhaps critique existing theories. In a sense, this is a much more daring approach. Given the vast range of seemingly trivial and uninteresting objects that scholars examine, offering up Mormonism as a potentially fruitful topic of study does not require a great deal of chutzpah. Obviously this is not always the case. The recent demand by Mormon scholars that the Book of Mormon be taken seriously as both an ancient record and a genuinely insightful text certainly pushes the envelope of the current intellectual climate. Nevertheless, the "Mormon perspectives" approach ultimately
requires greater daring than the “Mormon studies” approach. One suggests a possibly fruitful subtopic of study. The other suggests that the experience and doctrine of a relatively minor—by the world’s standards—religion can seriously challenge and engage in the great dialogue of our civilization.

Mormonism remains—by the world’s standards—a young religion. Whether the next chapter of the restoration will be a continuation of the current explosive growth or a winnowing of the wheat and the chaff remains to be seen. The church could well become “a new world faith” on the same scale as Islam or traditional Christianity, as some sociologists contend. It could remain a relatively small dose of leaven and salt in a much larger sea of humanity. Regardless, the church is reaching the point where serious LDS students should awaken to the fact that Mormonism can offer more than an interesting topic of study. It can also challenge and reshape the categories by which that study proceeds. In the end, such an approach may prove much more valuable than the patient accumulation of further studies of Mormon topics. The philosopher Thomas Kuhn has pointed out that science has not in fact proceeded and progressed by the gradual accretion of further facts and knowledge. Rather, the most far-reaching scientific inquiries have been those which have challenged and shifted entire paradigms rather than simply adding more experiments within an existing framework.

Clearly, not all Mormon writing and discussion falls neatly into a “Mormon studies” or “Mormon perspectives” category. Most Mormon writers do not think of themselves as providing either a “studies” or a “perspectives” approach. The work of competent scholars and students will contain a mixture of both. Mormonism can be studied as a topic even while it challenges the way that study proceeds. Nevertheless, the categories are useful in that they ask students to evaluate what the ambitions and implications of their work are.

Zion in the Courts could have been a much more ambitious work. Certainly it contains the possibility for more ambitious work. The book follows a “Mormon studies” approach. The legal experience of the Latter-day Saints is subject matter, and the authors do an admirable job of bringing their scholarly expertise to the examination of that subject. Yet Mormon legal experience can be more than grist for the disciplinary mill of legal history. It can also be a challenge to developed and developing theories of the law. Zion in the Courts uses the law to examine Mormonism. Its weakness is that it is timid about using Mormonism to examine the law. The material amassed by Firmage and Mangrum invites one to reexamine basic questions about the relationship of religion and law and of law and the state. How should the state react to religious communities that refuse to give final allegiance to secular authority? How far can or should the free exercise of religion be taken? Can law exist divorced from the state? If it can, what does the concept of law mean in these cases? These are important and basic questions in jurisprudence. If the nineteenth-century legal experience of the Latter-day Saints suggests anything, it is the possibility for the gospel to offer unique and challenging answers to these questions.

It is unlikely that we will ever have an official or even quasi-official Mormon legal theory. Most likely it is not even desirable to have one. Official Mormon doctrine will always remain under the control of the Lord and his prophets, and thus far their messages have focused on weightier topics. Still, it is not too much to hope that we might develop an autonomous Mormon legal and political theory. The goal need not be to use the gospel to find the “right” answers to questions of political philosophy or jurisprudence. Rather, it can be to use the gospel to challenge the questions and answers of the disciplines to find new and unique insights and formulations. Some writers have already begun to lay what could be the foundations of Mormon jurisprudence. Harvard Law School currently has an institute devoted to the

study of Islamic jurisprudence. A century or two hence—provided of course that God does not wrap up history earlier—might not students devote similar energy to understanding Mormon perspectives on the law? If they do, Zion in the Courts will be one of their seminal texts. We can only hope that there will be many others.


COIN OF THE REALM: 
BEWARE OF SPECIOUS SPECIE

Alma Allred

“This is the very coinage of your brain.”
(Gertrude, in William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.5.137).1

Introduction

My first experience with counterfeit money took place in a street market in Italy. I handed a merchant a 500-lira note. He politely explained that he couldn’t accept the money because it was “matto.”

“Matto? What do you mean it’s ‘crazy’?” I asked.

“It’s counterfeit,” he said.

I was amazed. It looked good to me. It had the feel and look of Italian currency, so I asked him how he could be so certain it was fake. He took some other 500-lira bills from his cashbox and put them next to mine. They were all 25 percent larger than the one I had given him. I had been easily fooled because I was just learning about Italian currency, but once I learned more about the subject, I was less likely to be deceived.

Similarly, the authors of a recent book, *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*, have compared their religion to the teachings of the

1. My thanks to Daniel W. Bachman, who shared this with me.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Convinced that Mormonism bears the marks of a counterfeit gospel, they lay out their claims in a series of chapters dealing with a variety of LDS subjects. One author, Norman Geisler, offers a comparison between his view of scripture and his view of LDS scripture. Although he has authored and edited several scholarly works and earned a legitimate Ph.D. from an accredited university, this is not representative of Geisler's best work. His reliance upon Jerald and Sandra Tanner's book, The Changing World of Mormonism, is so transparent that, at best, it qualifies as a rewrite of their material. This review, however, will consider the portions of the book Geisler claims to have written—including the foreword, the chapter on scripture, and the concluding section entitled "A Word to Our Mormon Friends."

**Foreword**

At the outset of the foreword, Geisler accuses Mormons of being deceptive, claiming that confusion related to Mormonism is "due to Mormonism's failure, especially in its proselytizing work, to be less than candid about its doctrines" (p. 6). Geisler's comments begin with the accusation that Mormons are less than honest in how they present Mormonism—therefore the responsibility to educate the world about what Mormons really believe falls to him and his colleagues. Apparently, they feel this responsibility rests on them because Latter-day Saints are part of a conspiracy to lie to the world in order to get converts and that new converts will, in turn, lie to others. Astonishing as it may seem, Geisler apparently believes this conspiracy theory. He is so convinced that he has a better grasp of LDS doctrine than do Latter-day Saints that he does not hesitate to cor-

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2. See Daniel W. Bachman's companion article to this review, "The Other Side of the Coin," pages 175-213.
3. Geisler claims to have been the general editor of the book, and since the foreword and concluding chapter appear without attribution, I have surmised that they were compiled by the editor, Norman Geisler. See the review of this last chapter by D. L. Barksdale, pages 335-53.
4. He accuses us of failing to be less than candid—which means that we have, in fact, been candid.
rect us and with a straight face say, “This is what you really believe.” It reminds me of the late Walter Martin, who claimed to have invited LDS General Authorities and professors from Brigham Young University to a meeting in Salt Lake City where he would answer their questions about Mormonism.5

We have thousands of missionaries, an extensive seminary and institute program, and thousands of gospel doctrine classes devoted to teaching Mormonism, yet this self-appointed expert is certain he and his colleagues are uniquely qualified to explain what Mormons really believe.

In accusing us of dishonesty, Geisler suggests that Mormons misuse 1 Corinthians 3:2 when we teach that people need to be prepared with doctrinal basics before they are able to understand more difficult and complex doctrines. He does not say, however, how we have misused this passage; he merely asserts it as a fact without offering any supporting evidence. I would have been interested to see how this is a misuse of Paul’s teaching, but he offers no such explanation. Instead, he asserts and moves on—the theological equivalent of a drive-by shooting.

Have Latter-day Saints misused this passage? In claiming that there is doctrine for which new converts may be unprepared, we find the support of Anglican scholar Adam Clarke, who comments on this passage:

I have instructed you in the elements of Christianity—in its simplest and easiest truths; because from the low state of your minds in religious knowledge, you were incapable of comprehending the higher truths of the Gospel: and in this state you will still continue.6

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5. Quoting Walter Martin, “I did something a few years ago that hadn’t been done before: I went to Salt Lake City and I invited the professors of Brigham Young University, along with the leaders of the Mormon church, to attend some meetings downtown at First Baptist Church. I offered to answer any and all questions on Mormonism they might want to ask. I was coming not as a Baptist minister, but as a full professor of comparative religions, with all the necessary credentials.” Walter Martin and Jill Martin Rische, Through the Windows of Heaven (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 127.

6. Adam Clarke, A Commentary and Critical Notes: Designed as a Help to a Better
Latter-day Saints understand 1 Corinthians 3:2 precisely as explained above. And so Geisler begins an examination that supplants logic and evidence with assertions and double standards.

Which Side of the Wide Divide?

Geisler suggests that The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism is a partial response to How Wide the Divide?—a 1997 book comparing Mormonism and evangelicalism by LDS professor Stephen Robinson and evangelical professor Craig Blomberg. In that book, Blomberg and Robinson each prepared papers on four topics. To make sure that each other’s positions were accurately portrayed, these scholars exchanged preliminary drafts of their papers and sought input before issuing the final product. Geisler would have been wise to have sought out a similar exchange. Rather than being a response to How Wide the Divide? this book merely demonstrates the difference between dialogue and demagoguery. Robinson and Blomberg wrote about things they understood and succeeded in relaying that information to each other and to an audience of readers—many of whom acquired valuable information and insight from the exchange. The same cannot be said about The Counterfeit Gospel.

Chapter One—Scripture

Geisler begins this chapter by offering opinions on the origin of scripture, the role of a prophet, and certain other issues dealing with the canon. He claims, “the role of the biblical prophets was unique. They were the mouthpieces of God, commissioned to speak His words—nothing more and nothing less.” As evidence of this assertion, he continues: “God told Balaam, ‘Only the word that I speak to you, that you shall speak’” (p. 10).

It is unlikely that this passage is meant to stipulate parameters for all prophetic utterances because Balaam said much more than

what had been dictated to him by the angel.7 The princes of Moab offered to pay him if he would consent to curse the children of Israel. Although the biblical account is sketchy, apparently Balaam was tempted by this offer. The Lord sent an angel to confront him, telling him, “Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak.” Geisler sees this as what must always occur rather than what God wanted to occur in that instance. Subsequent events show that this was a command given specifically to Balaam, which he chose to disregard, rather than a general proclamation on the words of prophets. The Bible clearly teaches that Balaam went far beyond the restriction imposed by God. Revelation 2:14 tells us that Balaam taught Balac to eat things sacrificed unto idols “and to commit fornication” (Revelation 2:14). Surely sacrifice and fornication weren’t part of God’s word to Balaam, and Geisler has therefore misinterpreted the meaning of this text. His misreading also conflicts with the accounts of other prophets in the Bible, whose commission extended beyond speaking God’s words to judging Israel (see Exodus 18:13), anointing kings (see 1 Samuel 16:12), healing the sick (see 2 Kings 5:8-10), freeing Israel from bondage (see Exodus 3:10), and directing the labors of the church (see Acts 13:1).

Infallible, Inerrant, and without Error

In How Wide the Divide? authors Blomberg and Robinson agreed that inerrancy of scripture extended only to the original manuscripts.8 In contrast, Geisler affirms that the “final product” is infallible, inerrant, and “without error whatsoever.” From that beginning, he makes the claim that the Bible is “without error in whatever it affirms, not only on spiritual matters but also on those of science” (p. 11). Without question, that premise is far removed from the LDS paradigm concerning scripture. It also conflicts with the perceptions

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7. Contrary to Geisler’s assertion that this was God speaking, the text notes that it was an angel.
of many evangelicals. Most Latter-day Saints and many evangelicals are willing to concede the fact that hares do not chew their cud even though Deuteronomy 14:7 and Leviticus 11:6 say they do. In embracing the scientific fact that hares are not ruminants, we are not denigrating the Bible nor questioning its inspiration; we are merely making allowances for the human elements and perceptions involved in writing scripture. Brigham Young explained this LDS perspective on scripture, both ancient and modern:

I do not even believe that there is a single revelation, among the many God has given to the Church, that is perfect in its fulness. The revelations of God contain correct doctrine and principle, so far as they go; but it is impossible for the poor, weak, low, grovelling, sinful inhabitants of the earth to receive a revelation from the Almighty in all its perfections.9

This view, however, is not far from that articulated by evangelical scholar Donald Bloesch, who wrote:

Calvin, too, upheld biblical infallibility and inerrancy without falling into the delusion that this means that everything that the Bible says must be taken at face value. He felt remarkably free to exercise critical judgment when dealing with textual problems. He tells us, for example, that Jeremiah's name somehow crept into Matthew 27:9 "by mistake," and no reference is made to the autographs as a way out of this difficulty. . . .

We are not willing to abandon the doctrine of inerrancy, but we must take the Scripture's own understanding of this concept instead of imposing on Scripture a view of inerrancy drawn from modern empirical philosophy and science. Berkouwer perceptively reminds us that inerrancy in the biblical sense means unswerving fidelity to the truth, a trustworthy and enduring witness to the truth of divine revelation. It connotes not impeccability, but indeceivability, which

means being free from lying and fraud. He warns us that we must not identify the precision of journalistic reporting with the trustworthiness of the Gospel records. The man of faith must not be surprised by what Abraham Kuyper has termed “innocent inaccuracies” in Scripture. The Scriptures do not lie in their witness to the heavenly truth which God revealed to the prophets and apostles, not only the truth of salvation but also the truth of creation; yet this does not mean that everything reported in the Scriptures is factually accurate in the modern historical sense. Nor does such a judgment detract in the slightest from the full inspiration of the Scriptures.10

Even though the above sentiment is precisely mirrored in LDS belief, Geisler tries to demonstrate that Mormon scripture does not qualify as scripture—not because it fails to measure up to biblical standards but because it does not coincide with his subjective and inconsistent paradigm of what scripture ought to be. Consider, for example, these assertions made by Geisler: “Further, what the Bible claims about its own origin in general is also claimed for sections and books of the Bible in particular” (p. 11). But the Bible never refers to itself or its own origin as a collection. The most that can be said is that Bible passages refer to other Bible passages as authoritative. The Bible also refers to scripture and the word of God, but Geisler is begging the question when he assumes from the outset that those terms are synonymous with the Bible.

Geisler writes, “Jesus referred to the ‘Law’ and the ‘Prophets’ as God’s indestructible Word, saying, ‘Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill’” (p. 11). When Jesus said he had not come to destroy the law, that does not necessarily make the law indestructible. If that were so, using Geisler’s standard, we might also conclude that men’s lives were indestructible because Jesus said he had not come to destroy them: “For

the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” 
(Luke 9:56). Geisler’s comments here betray a tendency to read more 
into scripture than it actually says—and to ignore obvious exceptions 
to his proposed rules of exegesis. He gives the impression that he 
thinks he is the lone player on the basketball court and that any ap­ 
proach to the basket will be uncontested. However, the rules he stipu­ 
lates are not consistently applied, and he hasn’t given adequate 
thought to the consequences of the evidence he presents. In order to 
be compelling, evidence needs to fall within certain parameters. 
(1) Samples of the applications of his “rules” should be reasonably 
numerous; (2) they should be truly typical; (3) exceptions should 
be explainable and demonstrably not typical; and most important, 
(4) the rules must be consistently applied. On these counts, Geisler 
has simply failed to provide compelling evidence that is consistent 
with reality.

No Occult Means

Geisler claims that “God’s servants were forbidden to use physi­
cal objects to ‘divine’ things.” As evidence, he cites passages forbid­
ding the practices of witches, soothsayers, sorcerers, mediums, spiri­
tists, and interpreters of omens and conjurers, or making children 
pass through fire. None of these restrictions mentions physical ob­
jects—nor do they apply to any of the practices of Mormonism or 
Joseph Smith. This is because God’s servants have, in fact, used physi­
cal objects to obtain the word of God. The clearest example comes 
from Genesis, where Joseph—a man who previously had given in­
spired interpretations of dreams— instructed his servant to tell his 
brothers that he used a silver cup for divination (see Genesis 44:4–5). 
Geisler discounts this in a footnote (see p. 48 n. 3), concluding that 
Joseph lied as part of a ruse to trap his brothers, or, alternatively, that 
if he had used the cup, he too would stand condemned by God. 
But Geisler’s effort results in the unhappy conclusion that Joseph of 
Egypt was either an occultist or a liar. In leveling this accusation, 
Geisler should recall that the scripture tells us, “the Lord was with 
Joseph” (Genesis 39:21). Joseph’s cup, however, is not the only bibli-
cal example of a physical object used in obtaining the words of God. Gideon used a fleece to determine the will of God (see Judges 6), and God’s high priests used the Urim and Thummim—the same objects Joseph Smith claimed to use to receive revelation. Additionally, the apostle Paul used handkerchiefs and aprons to heal the sick (see Acts 19:12).

The Urim and Thummim (Luck Be a Lady Tonight)

Geisler offers several opinions about the Urim and Thummim, based largely on popular tradition rather than scriptural exegesis. He writes that “the Urim and Thummim were used by the high priest alone (Exodus 28:30)” (p. 12). The passage cited by Geisler makes no such restriction; it merely says it shall be used by Aaron. He claims that these items “were not occult objects like seer stones, crystal balls, or the like” (p. 12). However, given the fact that Mormons have consistently used the terms seer stone and Urim and Thummim synonymously, they would reject the conclusion that either the Urim and Thummin or a seer stone could legitimately be classified with crystal balls “or the like.” Geisler intones the most popular theory regarding these objects—equating them with a type of holy dice: “The Urim and Thummim were used only for getting ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ answers from God” (p. 12). That idea is derived from a rendition of the Septuagint where Saul asked the people to cast lots to determine if his son Jonathan should die:

Therefore Saul said, “O Lord God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in thy people Israel, give Thummim.” And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. Then Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.” And Jonathan was taken. (1 Samuel 14:41 RSV)

It is important to note, however, that this translation is based on the assumption that the Urim and Thummim were “lot oracles” rather than instruments of revelation. The Hebrew manuscripts of
this passage make no mention of either the Urim or Thummim. The same is true of Geisler’s citation of Proverbs 16:33. Both passages refer to casting lots and have only been associated with the Urim and Thummim through tradition. There is no necessary connection between “casting lots” and the Urim and Thummim, even if one begins from the assumption that answers from the Urim and Thummim were obtained in a fashion similar to throwing dice.

The exact nature of revelation through the Urim and Thummim has long been debated, and the most recent scholarly treatment of the subject concludes that revelation through this source could not have been limited to “Yes” or “No”:

It is of interest to note that 1 Sam 14:41 (LXX) mentions the UT and equates it with a lot oracle. For many, this text settles the question. 1 Sam 14:41 (LXX) is a problematic passage, however, and needs to be studied very carefully. The passage is not decisive. Indeed, when all relevant evidence is considered, making the UT equivalent to a lot oracle is not a defensible conclusion.¹¹

An Everlasting Priesthood Dissolved?

Geisler claims, “The Aaronic priesthood was dissolved by the work of Christ (Hebrews 7,8). The writer of Hebrews says explicitly that ‘the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law’ (Hebrews 7:12)” (p. 12). Protestants have for years concluded that the word changed in that passage should be interpreted as dissolved—not because that is the meaning of the word but because interpreting it as changed leaves them in the uncomfortable position of having to concede that the Catholics have a biblical position abandoned by Protestants. There are, however, significant problems with interpreting changed as dissolved. The passage simply does not say that the priesthood was dissolved or done away; it says it was

changed. Perfectly good words exist in Greek to convey the meaning "dissolve," "abrogate," or "abolish." The inspired writer did not use any of those words; instead, he used metatithemi—a word that means "to place differently" or "to change." The same word appears in Acts 7:16 when Stephen tells the Jews that the bodies of Jacob and Joseph were transferred from Egypt to Sechem (Shechem). The highly regarded Greek lexicon of Walter Bauer defines the word as "change" or "alter" and provides Hebrews 7:12 as an example, "when the priesthood is changed, i.e. passed on to another." In addition, Bauer cites Josephus as having used metatithemi to describe "the transfer of the office of high priest to another person." LDS doctrine and practice is consistent with all these legitimate interpretations that have been rejected by Geisler.

Geisler's interpretation can also be faulted because God promised in Exodus that the Aaronic priesthood would be everlasting throughout the generations of Aaron: "And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office: for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations" (Exodus 40:15). A priesthood that was dissolved can hardly be considered "everlasting."

Prophecy Never Faileth?

In his discussion on the Urim and Thummim, Geisler offered a conclusion about the product of revelation that conflicts with the teachings of the apostle Paul. In teaching the eternal nature of the love of God (called charity in the KJV), Paul points out that prophecy can fail: "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail" (1 Corinthians 13:8). In contrast to this biblical concept, Geisler maintains that revelation through the Urim and Thummim "never produced false results, since God speaks only

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truth” (p. 12). Obviously God only speaks the truth, but Geisler rejects the idea that these were instances of God speaking—they were only a metaphorical thumbs up or down. However, the larger question of whether or not prophets can prophesy in the name of God and that thing not come to pass is clearly answered in the Bible. Consider, for example, the occasion when King Hezekiah had a terminal illness and the prophet Isaiah told him, “Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). Hezekiah immediately prayed to God for mercy, asking to be spared. As a result of this pleading, the Lord sent Isaiah right back to Hezekiah, where he spoke in the name of the Lord and promised Hezekiah fifteen more years of life. Someone critical of the Bible might claim that Isaiah’s first statement was a false prophecy. An unfriendly interpreter might say that if God knows the future, he would have known beforehand that Hezekiah was going to ask and receive additional time, and consequently Isaiah gave a false prophecy. A believer in the inspiration of the Bible—say, for example, a Latter-day Saint—would not be troubled by this account, for he would grant that the prophet’s statement was conditional upon the as-yet-undetermined actions of the recipient of the prophecy.

No Tampering with the Text

Next, Geisler makes a claim that is nothing short of amazing. It demonstrates how much thought went into his chapter. He relates a version of Jeremiah 36 as though it taught that biblical prophecy is immune from tampering. Geisler writes: “When King Jehoiakim cut out a section from the Word of God, Jeremiah was told: ‘Take yet another scroll, and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll.’ No one was to add to or take away from what God had said” (p. 12, emphasis added). Geisler would have been well served to have read more of the account, particularly the next three verses. Were he aware of what this specific account teaches, it is doubtful he would have used it as an example for an immutable text. Jehoiakim not only cut out a portion of Jeremiah’s prophecy, but he also burned the whole scroll. Whereupon Jeremiah took another scroll and had his
scribe record what had been written on the one destroyed by Jehoiakim. But note this detail left out of Geisler’s account: He “wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words” (Jeremiah 36:32, emphasis added). Surprisingly, this is the account Geisler uses to demonstrate that “prophets were forbidden to tamper with the text” (p. 12). Jeremiah restored all the words destroyed by the king and added to them—demonstrating that at least one prophet could and did revise the text of scripture.

The Bible—Sum Total or Subtotal of Inspiration?

Geisler next takes up the claim that the Protestant English Bible contains “all the inspired books that God intended to be in the Bible” (p. 15). Such a claim is hard to refute, but so is the claim that the Book of Mormon contains everything God intended to be in it—or that everything I had for breakfast was what God intended I should have. Doesn’t the Catholic Bible also contain everything God wanted in the Catholic Bible? But Geisler goes beyond this to conclude that if something is not in the Bible that he prefers, it cannot be inspired. As evidence of his conclusion, he uses some surprising arguments. He points to the fact that Judaism believed in a closed canon as evidence that the Old Testament is complete. He neglects to consider the fact that the Jews did not merely believe in a completed Old Testament—they condemned all new revelation, including the inspiration of the apostles and the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

He next points to early Christians, claiming they shared a concept limiting scripture to a specific list. He agrees that New Testament authors quoted extracanonical sources but assures his readers that these sources were not inspired. The problem with this, of course, is Jude’s citation of the words of Enoch as a prophecy: “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints” (Jude 1:14). Some might see a distinction between prophecy and inspiration but that entails little more than special pleading. It is a fact that Jude
referred to an extracanonical source as prophecy, a source that is rejected by Geisler as “uninspired.”

Geisler claims that the teachings of the Savior also limit scripture to the specific books now in the possession of Protestant Christianity. He writes: “[Jesus] never cited any book other than one of the 24 (39) canonical books of the Jewish Old Testament” (p. 17). But this too is false. On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus told the Jews, “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Here Jesus refers to a passage of scripture unknown to the world outside of this quotation. It is clearly classified as scripture because the Lord calls it “the scripture.” Equally clearly, the original passage is not found in the Protestant Old or New Testaments, in any of the apocryphal works known to exist, or anywhere else.

Geisler also tries to limit the canon by citing the words of Jesus: “from the blood of the righteous Abel . . . to the blood of Zechariah . . .” (Matthew 23:35)” (p. 17). He claims that this verse defined the limits of the entire Old Testament, understood by Jews to end at 2 Chronicles where the murder of one Zacharias is recounted. This, however, simply muddies the waters on the concept of inerrancy because Jesus referred to Zacharias, the son of Barachias. The Zacharias referred to in 2 Chronicles 24:20 was the son of Jehoiada. But remember that Geisler uses this passage to support a closed canon—which would also place the New Testament outside the limits of scripture. It is likely that the Lord’s quotation referred not to the Zacharias of 2 Chronicles, but to another Zacharias who lived much later and had been killed by the Jews in Jesus’ time. The Lord accused the Jews in his audience of being the murderers of Zacharias by saying, “whom ye slew between the temple and the altar” (Matthew 23:35). If those Jews were the murderers, the Lord’s comments cannot apply as Geisler has contended.

Geisler cites the words of the Lord to his disciples that they would be guided into all truth and then concludes from that statement that if the apostles did not teach completed revelation, “then Jesus was wrong” (p. 19). But he has created a false dichotomy. There
is no connection between being led into all truth and having written down all truth. He falls into the common logical fallacy of concluding that there are only two possible solutions to a particular question. The idea that every question has only two sides—an either and an or—is not valid. Questions often have more than two sides. It is entirely reasonable to believe that the apostles were led into all truth by the Holy Spirit and that many of those truths were never recorded in the Bible or anywhere else. Paul illustrates such a condition in referring to “unspeakable words” revealed to a man (2 Corinthians 12:4). If they were unspeakable, it is likely they wouldn’t be written either.

Geisler asserts that since the resurrection occurred in the first century and an apostle had to be an eyewitness of the resurrection, “anyone who lived after that time was a ‘false apostle’” (p. 19). Presumably he means to say that one who claimed to be an apostle after the first century (rather than anyone who lived after that period) would be a false apostle, but that too is unreasonably narrow. There is no record of any individual witnessing the resurrection of Christ. Many were eyewitnesses that he was indeed resurrected, but none were witnesses of Jesus actually rising from the dead. Consequently, eyewitnesses of his resurrection needed to know for a certainty that Jesus was a living, resurrected being. They did not need to be present at the resurrection itself. That is, by the way, how Paul qualified as an apostle. Consequently, if Jesus appeared to other men as he did to Paul and Joseph Smith, they could reasonably qualify as apostles. Geisler points out that Paul claimed to have been the “last” to have “seen” the resurrected Christ (see p. 19). It is true that when he wrote that, he was the last, but you are only the last until someone else follows you, and then that person becomes the last. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery bore witness to having seen the Savior, also using the word last to refer to themselves: “And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives!” (D&C 76:22). Last is often used to mean the most recent in a series rather than the conclusion to a series. Consequently, apostles wrote about these last days (see Hebrews 1:2). Similarly the last game of the NBA finals refers to the
most recent of a repeating series, and I can tell my son that his sister got my last dollar and he can walk away disappointed but not despondent because he believes that we are bankrupt as a family.

Geisler suggests that substantial evidence supports the claim that all the inspired writing of the apostles was preserved and compiled into the Bible. This alleged evidence consists of the premise that since God is great and God is good, we can not only thank him for our food, but "it follows" that he would not inspire books for believers through the centuries without also preserving them (see p. 20). Clearly, this does not follow any more than the idea that God's goodness will send everyone to heaven. The preservation of some scripture through God's providence does not demand the preservation of all scripture.

Although it is apparent that Geisler did not expect his chapter to be dissected by Mormons, he might have planned for such a contingency. In appealing to the idea that "every major branch of Christendom . . . [has] accepted" (p. 22) a closed canon, he has missed the proverbial boat. The LDS premise of an apostasy and restoration takes for granted that the rest of Christianity would be united against our beliefs—it practically demands such a position. Consequently, the fact that every branch of Christianity except Mormonism agrees on this position counts as evidence only for the fact that they all disagree with us. We shouldn't expect any other position. More important, the popularity of a particular view is not evidence that the view is correct or true; it is just more popular.

Geisler dismisses all too briefly the fact that scripture cites books currently not found in the Bible. While he does mention some of the books referred to by the Bible, he offers a sanitized list, and two books that prove problematic to his thesis receive no mention. While it is possible that historical books such as Jasher and the Wars of the Lord (which Geisler mentions) were not inspired by God, references to prophecies and visions recorded elsewhere surely suggest that those communications were inspired. Perhaps that is why the prophecy of Ahijah and the visions of Iddo the seer are not mentioned by Geisler.

Even more interesting is Geisler's attempt to dismiss references to other books or epistles as though they have different names in to-
day's Bible. He offers the plausible position that the historical books of Chronicles and Samuel contain the writings of Nathan and Elijah, but his certainty quickly evaporates with the wonderful weasel words probably and may as he discusses "inspired books mentioned by another name," including:

the contents of... "Gad the Seer," which parallel that of 1 and 2 Samuel; 3) the "vision of Isaiah the prophet,"... probably the same as the book of Isaiah; 4) the other accounts of the life of Christ, which may refer to Matthew and Mark; 5) the "epistle from Laodicea," which is probably Ephesians, for it was written at the same time and had not yet reached there; and 6) the letter to the Corinthians, which may refer to 1 Corinthians itself by a device known as an 'epistolary aorist,' which stressed the urgency of the message, a device Paul used elsewhere in the same letter. There is simply no evidence that any inspired apostolic work is missing from the New Testament." (p. 23, emphasis added)

Geisler accepts "no evidence" for missing scripture because he is unwilling to consider any. Such selective use of sources, however, is best illustrated in his comparison of the Bible with the Book of Mormon. He asserts that the Bible alone has been supernaturally confirmed to be the Word of God. How has that occurred? He says that the "supernatural confirmation" of the Bible comes from Bible stories recounting supernatural events. That is, the claim in Acts that the apostles performed miracles is actually evidence that the apostles performed miracles. But this is not all. According to Geisler, the stories about miracles also constitute "supernatural" evidence validating the entire Bible! However, this is not evidence; it is crooked thinking. In the first place, such self-referential logic is question-begging at its worst. Second, Geisler will not allow his standard for evidence to be applied to anything other than the Bible. If, according to Geisler, the Bible validates itself because it claims to report actual miracles, do the miracles recounted in the Book of Mormon validate that book as scripture? Of course not. He has one standard for the Bible and another for everything else. If he were consistent in his standards, his
reasons for accepting the Bible would not only validate the Book of Mormon and its miracles, but every other account of "supernatural" activity—including Elvis sightings from the *National Enquirer*.

Geisler does not explain how he arrived at the conclusion that miracles validate the entire Bible; he simply asserts it as a given—even though the entire collection known as the Bible is never referred to as a unity in any account of these supernatural occurrences. In contrast, miraculous events subsequent to the production of the Book of Mormon refer specifically to the Book of Mormon, yet these are dismissed by Geisler with a dogmatic wave of the hand: “Of all the world religious leaders, neither Confucius, Buddha, Muhammad, nor Joseph Smith was confirmed by miracles that were verified by contemporary and credible witnesses” (p. 24).

**Geisler Declares the Mormon View of Scriptures**

The author points out that, as one of the drafters of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) Statement on Inerrancy, he can say with authority that "there is a great gulf between what evangelicals affirmed in this statement and what the Mormon Church teaches." An appeal to authority may be helpful in resolving philosophical disputes: when someone quotes Einstein, people pay attention—provided, of course, the discussion deals with physics rather than Sanskrit. If it deals with Sanskrit, a reasonable question is: "What did Einstein know about Sanskrit?" Similarly, Geisler may be very qualified to explain the philosophical underpinnings of the ICBI Statement on Inerrancy, but the fact that he has a copy of *The Changing World of Mormonism* hardly qualifies him to explain what "the Mormon Church teaches." He begins this section by making an outrageous and false claim: “Latter-day Saints [sic] teaching has consistently affirmed that our present translations of the Bible are neither accurate nor complete” (p. 25). As evidence, he cites the writings of Orson Pratt—the man who holds the dubious distinction of being the only apostle ever condemned for false doctrine by proclamation of the First Presidency and Twelve Apostles.¹⁴ He does point out that

¹⁴. See the “Proclamation of the First Presidency and Twelve,” 21 October 1865, in
Brigham Young disagreed with Pratt’s stance, but in doing so, he unwittingly advertises that much of his “research” consists of rewriting selections from Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s book, *The Changing World of Mormonism*. Note below how Geisler revises the Tanners’ material from chapter 12 and changes Orson Pratt’s supposed *attack* on the Bible to a full-fledged *rejection*:

*Changing World*: “Even Brigham Young felt that Apostle Pratt went too far in his attack on the Bible (see *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 3, p. 116).”

Geisler’s *Counterfeit*: “Joseph Smith’s successor, Brigham Young, agreed (JD 3:116) that Apostle Pratt went too far in rejecting the Bible” (see p. 26).

Thus in “smouching” the Tanners’ work, Geisler’s revision manufactures a falsehood. Pratt’s hyperbole against the Bible was too strong for Brigham Young’s comfort, but there is no justification for claiming that Pratt rejected the Bible. “Oh, what a tangled web we weave…”

Geisler alleges that Latter-day Saints believe the Bible is inaccurate, unreliable, and riddled with errors. Although he cites our claim in the eighth Article of Faith indicating that “we believe the Bible to be the word of God,” he immediately dismisses that statement as a ruse, reiterating that what we say is not what we *really* believe. As evidence for his allegation, he poses a question that reveals a great deal about why he does not understand LDS belief. He asks, if the Bible is the word of God, “then why did God command Joseph Smith to make an ‘inspired translation’ of the Bible?” (p. 26).

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*Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 2:235. “Whenever brother Orson Pratt has written upon that which he knows, and has confined himself to doctrines which he understands, his arguments are convincing and unanswerable; but, when he has indulged in hypotheses and theories, he has launched forth on an endless sea of speculation to which there is no horizon” (p. 238).


New Paradigm Time

Geisler looks at scripture and inspiration in a certain way. He sees through lenses with fixed focal points that filter out all shades of gray. For him, truth exists in a system of absolutes, yes or no, inspired or false, perfect or unreliable. But these are false standards. The fallacy of equivocation occurs when words are allowed an illogical shift of meaning in the same argument. In the list of terms above, only yes and no are opposites; the others are inappropriately juxtaposed. An imperfect book is not necessarily unreliable or uninspired. Neither is an inspired book necessarily either perfect or sufficient. But Geisler’s standards rely on this very subtle placement of words against each other. Yet the ability to recognize these distinctions is at the heart of understanding Mormonism. Unfortunately, Geisler does not seem to be able to perceive the danger of such confused terminology. He is standing at the top of the ladder of his evangelical perceptions, unaware that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall. Helping him to move the ladder, however, is an unlikely solution, since it is inhibited by our response to anti-Mormonism and its response to us.

Critics approach Mormonism, as does Geisler, with accusations of error in LDS scripture. We respond, thinking that we are attacking their perception of scripture, by showing them errors in the Bible. This has no effect on their view of scripture, but it convinces them that we do not really believe the Bible because we do not think of it the same way they do. We protest their paradigm, showing them more reasons why they shouldn’t believe that the Bible is perfect, and they interpret that as an assault on the Bible. This basic misunderstanding fuels Geisler’s attack on the LDS view of scripture.

JST vs. KJV

Geisler provides a historical background for the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of the Bible. Unfortunately, he misread The Changing World of Mormonism where it points out that the RLDS Church obtained the manuscript in 1866 and published the work the
following year. Geisler writes that the RLDS obtained the manuscript in 1886 and published it in 1887—claiming that the 1887 edition is currently sold at Deseret Book. The 1867 edition was available in LDS bookstores until it was replaced by the RLDS 1944 edition. An 1887 edition was never published.

Geisler asserts that the “Inspired Version” has “been an embarrassment to the Mormon Church” (p. 28). As evidence of this claim, he points out that it has never been officially published by the church, is sold in the LDS Church-owned Deseret bookstore, and is cited by Mormon scholars. How this might indicate embarrassment is not exactly clear and instead seems the opposite of what Geisler alleges. If we were embarrassed by it, why are we selling it in church-owned bookstores and why do our scholars quote from it? In reality, the church values the information found in the JST and has printed selections from it since 1851. The LDS Church published an LDS Bible in 1979 and included much of the JST in that edition. These actions simply do not indicate any Mormon embarrassment over the JST and demonstrate that this quotation—also borrowed from the Tanners—is false.

Geisler points out several circumstances that he feels are fatal to the Mormon system. They can be distilled as follows: Joseph Smith was commanded by God to go through the Bible and make inspired revisions. He did so and completed the project. However, Mormons “admit” that it still contains errors. Ergo, it cannot be complete because it is not perfect.

He calls this the “Mormon dilemma,” but it is only a “Geisler dilemma.” His perception of scripture and prophets requires Joseph Smith to produce a perfect book, absolutely error free—but that’s his faith, not ours. Earlier, I cited Brigham Young’s statement that he did not believe that any revelation from God came to the church in perfection. On another occasion, he explained that revelation is adapted

17. See Tanner and Tanner, Changing World, 383.
18. See ibid.
to the understanding of those who receive it and that if God would now cause the Bible or the Book of Mormon to be retranslated, they would be different:

Should the Lord Almighty send an angel to re-write the Bible, it would in many places be very different from what it now is. And I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation.19

If Geisler really expects to make inroads into Mormonism, he needs to demonstrate through the use of logic and valid evidence that the acceptance of fallible prophets and scripture violates the teachings of the Bible. Until he does, Latter-day Saints are not likely to be perplexed at the fact that their scriptures do not measure up to impossible standards. Mormons are not dismayed that Joseph Smith felt at liberty to revise the wording of the Book of Mormon or the Bible. They are not troubled that Joseph Smith could notice that the Book of Mormon spoke of Benjamin when it should have been Mosiah and that it was a small thing to cross out the wrong word and correct it. Similarly, if he felt phrases could be clearer, he did not hesitate to revise them. The first edition listed Joseph Smith as the “author” because he could not very well obtain the copyright for either Mormon or Moroni. That and lots of other situations were rectified in subsequent editions, and they give faithful Latter-day Saints no reason to wring their hands, weep, or lose sleep over it. That is an element of our faith, understood almost by instinct among Mormons. But among our critics, it is a precept that appears to be beyond their grasp.

Confirmation of LDS Scriptures

Geisler proposes that only the Bible enjoys the distinction of having had witnesses supported by supernatural events. In this, however, he is mistaken. If he is reluctant to believe the accounts of

miracles found in the pages of LDS history, he might consider the findings of the late Walter R. Martin—prominent anti-Mormon of the seventies and eighties—who concluded that Mormons did indeed experience supernatural events:

Smith claimed to have supernatural powers, and there is evidence that he exercised the power to heal when the Mormons were plagued by disease in Nauvoo. Joseph passed through the people, laying hands on them and praying for them, and a great many of them were restored. The early Mormons also claimed the gifts of the Holy Spirit as recorded in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, and they particularly emphasized the capacity to speak in tongues, prophesy, discern spirits, interpret tongues, and work miracles.

Geisler tries to dismiss the fact that there were indeed supernatural events as part of the restoration of the gospel. He uses the time-worn allegations that the Three Witnesses were probably deceived or only believed that they saw “angel-like beings,” or that they later denied their testimonies. It sounds like the defense attorney backed into a corner who is forced to argue alternatives: “My client couldn’t be guilty; he was somewhere else. And even if he was not, he does not own a gun. Even if that’s his gun, he did not fire it—but if he did, he’s crazy.” Like the desperate attorney, Geisler wants his readers to pick any of several options except the one that makes the most sense: Three credible men—including a school teacher, a farmer, and a businessman—declared in words of soberness that an angel of God descended from heaven and showed them the plates that had been translated by Joseph Smith. They further declared that the voice of God spoke to them and bore witness that the Book of Mormon was true.

Allegations made by others about the witnesses are irrelevant because, to their dying day, each man affirmed a testimony that withstood ridicule from others and alienation from Joseph Smith—who

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essentially defied them to recant what they affirmed, knowing that they could not do so without bringing the judgment of God upon them.

In his attempt to impugn the testimony of the witnesses, Geisler claims that by uniting in prayer to God to provide them this witness, they created “almost classic conditions for a hallucination” (p. 37). It would be interesting to see what empirical evidence Geisler has for such a conclusion. Perhaps he could provide historical examples of hallucinations where all present experienced the same manifestation and steadfastly affirmed throughout their lives that they had been in the presence of an angel of God. These tired old arguments have been fully answered for over twenty years, but since Geisler’s primary source is that old, perhaps we should not expect him to be aware of that fact.21

Geisler points out that the Book of Mormon “anachronistically had people speaking in 1611 English more than 2000 years before the KJV was written” (pp. 37–38). Is it really necessary to point out to him that the Book of Mormon claims to be a translation? His comment illustrates the same mental incisiveness as the one claiming the Nephites spoke French because Joseph Smith included the word “adieu” in his translation of Jacob. Does Geisler also think that the New International Version of the Bible has people in Jerusalem anachronistically speaking twentieth-century English?

The Problem of Plagiarism

Geisler only includes one paragraph on this subject, noting that the Book of Mormon has thousands of words taken from the 1611 version of the KJV Bible. He is wrong. The words are actually taken from the 1769 Oxford edition of the King James Translation. But these passages are quotations of the Bible. Why should Joseph Smith translate anew passages that were already extant and in a prose style far superior to his own? More important, has Geisler leveled the same charge against the authors of the New Testament, who copied

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verbatim from the Greek Bible available to them? Is he at all concerned about the angel of Revelation 2:27, who “plagiarized” the Septuagint version of Psalm 2:9? Perhaps he feels there should be one standard for Joseph Smith and another for himself? The irony of this claim in this section of this particular book is rich indeed.

Alleged False Prophecies

Geisler lists three instances from LDS Church history that he feels are false prophecies on the part of Joseph Smith. The first is an account reported by David Whitmer, in which Whitmer claimed that in 1830 Joseph Smith instructed men to go to Toronto, Canada, where they “should” sell the copyright for the Book of Mormon in Canada. Whitmer claims they took the journey and returned without success. Geisler points out that B. H. Roberts admitted that this was a false revelation, but in this case he is taking liberty with the facts. Roberts asks if the “alleged” account by Whitmer is authentic, is it possible to still accept Joseph Smith as a true prophet? Roberts replies affirmatively to that hypothetical “what if.”

Roberts felt that it was necessary to meet the claim of Whitmer and answer it as if it were a prophecy. I do not share his concern for several reasons: Whitmer divorced himself from the Latter-day Saints fifty years before recording his recollection of this event. Time has a tendency to color our perceptions and our memory; unless an event is recorded soon after the experience, our own minds will replace forgotten elements so that the story retains consistency for us. It is not uncommon to hear people say, “That’s not how I remember it,” because the distance of time and space makes things unsure. While it is probable that Joseph Smith received a revelation about sending people to Canada to try to sell the copyright, Whitmer’s deep conviction to justify his own actions may have allowed his memory of the event to become distorted. Joseph Smith may have received permission to send men to Canada to sell the copyright, which Whitmer interpreted as a prophecy. But Whitmer should have known “first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20). His recollection of this event is certainly a “private interpretation” of something that was not a prophecy.
He Should, He Would, He Might, He Will

Geisler turns his attention to an account found in the *History of the Church* in which Joseph Smith is reported to have said that the coming of the Lord was “nigh—even fifty-six years should wind up the scene.” Recognizing that this accusation shows up in practically every anti-Mormon potboiler published in this century and that it has been adequately and repeatedly addressed by LDS authors, it is disappointing to see that Geisler does not appear to have the slightest idea about any LDS responses. A few minutes on the Internet could have provided him with abundant resources responding to this staple but ignorant criticism.

Geisler also points to the promise that a temple would be built in Missouri “in this generation” and concludes that Joseph Smith spoke falsely. However, twenty-six hundred years ago, the prophet Jeremiah established an important ground rule for prophecy. He pointed out that God’s promises to build up a people or a nation or, conversely, to destroy them depended on the righteousness or wickedness of that people or nation. Jeremiah said that if God promised to establish a people and they became wicked, he would revoke that promise:

> O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. (Jeremiah 18:6–10)

Consequently, Jonah was not a false prophet when he promised that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days (see Jonah 3:4) because the Ninevites repented and the city was not destroyed. Joseph Smith sent several reminders to the Saints in Missouri warning them that their conduct was going to bring the judgments of God upon them. In a letter written in 1833, Joseph Smith warned, “I say to you (and what I say to you I say to all,) hear the warning voice of God, lest Zion fall, and the Lord sware in His wrath the inhabitants of Zion shall not enter into His rest.”24 The Mormons in Missouri did not repent, and the promise to establish them was revoked:

Behold, I say unto you, were it not for the transgressions of my people, speaking concerning the church and not individuals, they might have been redeemed even now. But behold, they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil, and do not impart of their substance, as becometh saints, to the poor and afflicted among them; And are not united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom; And Zion cannot be built up unless it is by the principles of the law of the celestial kingdom; otherwise I cannot receive her unto myself. And my people must needs be chastened until they learn obedience, if it must needs be, by the things which they suffer. (D&C 105:2–6)

Consistent with the parameters established by Jeremiah, and the warnings of Joseph Smith, the Latter-day Saints forfeited the promises for their generation.

Geisler’s next criticism of Joseph Smith’s “prophecy on war” suffers from a sort of theological dyslexia. In this case, he misquotes the prophecy and interprets it based on his misreading. In 1832 Joseph Smith made a prophecy on war that included a reference to the United States Civil War. Following the specific reference that the Northern States would be divided against the Southern States, Joseph

predicted, “And the time will come that war will be poured out upon all nations beginning at this place” (D&C 87:2). Geisler’s quotation of this passage inserts the definite article the, changing the meaning from war in general to the Civil War itself: “And the time will come that the war will be poured out upon all nations.” Geisler offers four reasons why this prophecy cannot be considered a supernatural circumstance, concluding that the most significant reason was because “the war was not poured out on all nations” (p. 40). Obviously, the prophecy never said the war would be poured out; consequently, his criticism is moot.

“First of all,” as he gives his second reason, “it was never published during Joseph Smith’s lifetime. It first appeared in 1851, seven years after his death” (p. 40). Well then, what are we to do with the prophecies of Jesus? Not one of them was published during his lifetime either. What relevance the publication date of a prophecy may have to its validity escapes me. Perhaps Geisler thinks that it was manufactured after Joseph Smith’s death to give him credibility. If that were true, it does not remove the difficulty because the prophecy was still published ten years before the war began.

“Second,” he complains, “over 300 words were deleted in the first two editions of the History of the Church” (p. 40). In reality, both editions of the History of the Church contain the entire revelation—a total of only 293 words. If “over 300 words” have been deleted, what were they deleted from? The answer to this senseless charge turns up in The Changing World of Mormonism. In it, the Tanners claim this prophecy was “suppressed” because it was not included in the first serialized church histories published in newspapers in Nauvoo and England.

Joseph Smith’s revelation concerning the Civil War was never published during his lifetime, and although it is included in the handwritten manuscript of the History of the Church, it was suppressed the first two times that Joseph Smith’s history was printed (see Times and Seasons, vol. 5, p.688; also Millennial Star, vol. 14, pp.296, 305). It is obvious that this
was a deliberate omission on the part of the Mormon historians, for over 300 words were deleted without any indication!25

Apparently, Geisler thought that various histories published in newspapers and the History of the Church are synonymous. In assuming so, he levels a false charge against the church, based on his misreading of the Tanners’ tortuous logic. This prophecy was not deleted from any church publication; it simply was not included in all accounts of the church’s history.

Geisler claims that pretty much anyone could have guessed back in 1832 that the Civil War would begin with the rebellion in South Carolina and so Joseph Smith’s prediction simply mirrored the common view of the times. Wouldn’t that also negate the Lord’s prophecy that his disciples would be hated and driven from city to city, since that was the common view of the time? That future civil war was not common knowledge of the day can be ascertained by the reaction of those who became aware of this prophecy during the Civil War. Under the heading “A Mormon Prophecy,” the Philadelphia Sunday Mercury on 5 May 1861 reported that it had a copy of Joseph Smith’s prophecy published in England in 1851. “In view of our present troubles, this prediction seems to be in progress of fulfilment, whether Joe Smith was a humbug or not.” There follows the entire revelation and this concluding comment: “Have we not had a prophet among us?”

An additional historical note is appropriate at this juncture since Geisler joins most critics of Mormonism in taking the narrow view that this prophecy was limited to the Civil War rather than to war in general. Leaders of the LDS Church after Joseph Smith felt that they possessed holy pearls that were to be guarded from the public at large. Occasionally, they would mention one of these items—possibly unintentionally. Had not Franklin D. Richards published the prophecy on war while in England, it is possible the world might not have learned of it. In 1860, apostle Orson Hyde spoke to the

Saints and mentioned the prophecy on war. He thought it had been published in the Doctrine and Covenants but could not locate it. Brigham Young explained,

Brother Hyde spoke of a revelation which he tried to find in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. That revelation was reserved at the time the compilation for that book was made by Oliver Cowdery and others, in Kirtland. It was not wisdom to publish it to the world, and it remained in the private *escritoire* [emphasis in original]. Brother Joseph had that revelation concerning this nation at a time when the brethren were reflecting and reasoning with regard to African slavery on this continent, and the slavery of the children of men throughout the world. There are other revelations, besides this one, not yet published to the world.26

Brigham Young’s comments show that this prophecy had wider application than allowed by Geisler. Further evidence of this comes from Orson Hyde, who explained more of Joseph Smith’s prophetic insight in comments about the Civil War. In the late 1850s, Hyde prophesied in a public discourse in Salt Lake City that war was about to divide the nation. Mocking reports of his prediction appeared in eastern newspapers. After his comments had been vindicated by the Civil War, Orson Hyde wrote an “I told you so” letter to the editor of the Springfield Missouri Republican. His comments indicate that Joseph Smith’s prophecy extended far beyond the Civil War and included an additional, chilling detail of events yet future:

You have scarcely yet read the preface of your national troubles. Many nations will be drawn into the American maelstrom that now whirls through our land; and after many days, when the demon of war shall have exhausted his strength and madness upon American soil, by the destruction of all that can court or provoke opposition, excite cupidty, inspire revenge, or feed ambition, he will remove his headquarters to the banks of the Rhine.27

Thus the maelstrom was war itself, rather than solely the American Civil War. Hyde pointed out that the strength of this particular war in America would dissipate and cease, to be followed by a new headquarters of war based in Germany.

If, according to Geisler, war between the North and South was a foregone conclusion, one wonders why these newspapers were so out of touch with common views that they would ridicule Orson Hyde for espousing the same view only a year or two before its fulfillment? Where are the others who recognized and published similar claims? If this were such a common understanding, might not Joseph Smith's critics be on firmer ground if they had even one instance of a similar prediction?

Changes in Revelation

Geisler reiterates his erroneous claim that biblical prophets were forbidden to make changes in their revelations, citing the standard passages warning against adding or taking away from the word of God. He points out that “by contrast, Joseph Smith made thousands of changes” (p. 41). The account of Jeremiah, however, establishes the fact that prophets can make changes; consequently, the number of changes is irrelevant, as long as they were made by a prophet rather than an unauthorized meddler. History clearly shows that Joseph Smith did not hesitate to make changes in items that he valued as scripture. This state of affairs is consistent with the worldview of Latter-day Saints and gives them no discomfort. It is not problematic because Mormons believe that the scriptures were dictated by inspired but fallible men rather than directly by God. In an effort to overcome this perception, Geisler quotes a recollection of “Olive[r] B. Huntington,” who claimed he heard Joseph F. Smith stipulate the Protestant view of scripture in relation to the translation of the Book of Mormon (p. 41). However, for Joseph F. Smith to have adopted this paradigm, he had to be ignorant of elementary doctrines of Mormonism and its history. The premise that scripture comes in man's language rather than God's was well-known to Joseph F. Smith, who was one of the LDS Church's leading theologians. He was well aware that the Book of Mormon teaches that the Lord “speaketh
unto men according to their language, unto their understanding” (2 Nephi 31:3). A more likely interpretation of Huntington’s journal entry is that Oliver Huntington misunderstood Joseph F. Smith’s comments.

In September 1878, Joseph F. Smith and Orson Pratt traveled to Richmond, Missouri, where they spoke at length with David Whitmer. Nine years later, Whitmer published An Address to All Believers in Christ. In this pamphlet, Whitmer claimed that the translation of the Book of Mormon was given to Joseph Smith simply to read. “When it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear.” This language is practically identical to that recorded in Huntington’s journal, cited by Geisler. The source of Huntington’s account, therefore, is clearly David Whitmer. It seems unlikely that Joseph F. Smith would have embraced this interpretation, given his view of revelation generally and a willingness to question Whitmer’s recollection in other areas.

It is more likely that Huntington only heard part of the discussion, the part quoting Whitmer—not necessarily Smith’s own perception.

Misunderstood Miscellany

Geisler notes that it is difficult to understand how Joseph Fielding Smith could deny the virgin birth in light of the Book of Mormon claim in Alma 7:10 that the Lord would be born of a virgin. Unfortunately, his confusion is the result of an incorrect assumption. Joseph Fielding Smith did not reject the virgin birth; he rejected the idea that the Holy Ghost rather than the Father begot Jesus. Geisler

28. David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ (Richmond, Mo.: Whitmer, 1887), 12.

29. Joseph F. Smith noted in his journal that Whitmer erroneously thought he had possession of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. “Now herein he is evidently mistaken, as Joseph Smith expressly states in his history that before the Ms. was sent to the printers an exact copy was made and it is my belief that this is that copy and not the original.” Joseph Fielding Smith, Life of Joseph F. Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 246.
has jumped to the conclusion that Mary could only be a virgin if Jesus were the son of the Holy Ghost rather than the son of the Father. In this he fails to perceive that in Mormon theology, the Father has as much power as does the Holy Ghost. If Geisler allows that the third member of the Godhead has the power to beget a son while preserving Mary’s virginity, why does he assume that this is beyond the Father’s power? Latter-day Saint authors have never denied that Mary was a virgin; they have simply concluded that even though the power of the Holy Spirit came upon her, the power of the Highest—the Father—caused Mary to conceive the Savior. President Ezra Taft Benson affirmed that Mary was a virgin after the birth of the Savior by citing the Book of Mormon: “He was the Only Begotten Son of our Heavenly Father in the flesh—the only child whose mortal body was begotten by our Heavenly Father. His mortal mother, Mary, was called a virgin, both before and after she gave birth. (See 1 Ne. 11:20.)”

Under the heading, “The changeableness of God,” Geisler concludes that it follows that if gods are begotten as we are “that they change as we do” (p. 43). That no more “follows” than the premise that if gods eat as we do they must change as we do. We share many of our Father in Heaven’s attributes because we are his children. We do not share many of his attributes because we are mortal and sinful and he is not. However, he has promised to make us partakers of his divine nature, and when that comes to pass, we will be unchangeable in the same way that he is unchangeable. The fact that God is now unchangeable does not at all preclude the idea that he arrived at that status. Aside from that perspective, Geisler seems to have adopted an idea about the unchangeableness of God that is not entirely scriptural. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the same today, yesterday, and forever (see Hebrews 13:8), even though he “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). The Lord experienced other changes that indicate that his unchangeableness consists in his relationship to righteousness and truth, not in

whether he was born or died sometime in the past—for these circumstances indicate a wide variety of change and were all experienced by the Savior.

In a brief mention of plural marriage, Geisler falls prey to the malady that is endemic among critics of the LDS faith. He interprets our scriptures and history as if he really knew what they contain. He claims that the Book of Mormon “never approved anything but monogamy” (p. 44), oblivious to the fact that the chapter he cites contains the word of God that polygamy can be authorized. In Jacob 2:27, the Lord commands the Nephites to abide by two specific commandments: “For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none.” This was the standing law given to Lehi and his posterity and is the standing law of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. However, both the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith taught that God may command exceptions to this rule. This exception is explained in verse 30: “For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.”

After pointing out some of the instances of editing apparent in LDS scripture, Geisler concludes that this constitutes evidence that God could not have had a hand in Mormonism. Although he realizes that manuscripts of the Bible have endured revisions, he does not seem to allow the same latitude for LDS scripture. In his parting shot, Geisler brings up Wesley Walters’s discovery of a bill of costs for an 1826 trial at Bainbridge, New York. He claims that this bill proves that Joseph Smith was a money-digger. But this document does not prove any such thing; it only proves that Joseph Smith was tried before a justice of the peace in 1826—rather old news for Latter-day Saints. Oliver Cowdery commented on Joseph Smith’s trial way back in 1835:

On the private character of our brother I need add nothing further, at present, previous to his obtaining the records of the Nephites, only that while in that country, some very officious person complained of him as a disorderly person, and

Joseph Smith publicly acknowledged that he had been a money-digger in his youth, and that he had to give it up because it paid so very little.\footnote{See Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 120.} Geisler’s use of this material, however, presents a distorted picture that fudges the facts a bit. He mentions Walters’s 1971 discovery of court documents and follows this immediately with what he implies Hugh Nibley was forced to “admit.” In addition to using the time-honored practice of propaganda that has your own side defending and affirming while your opponents merely apologize and admit, Geisler places a quotation of Nibley in such a way as to imply that Nibley was trying to question the court documents found by Walters. Immediately following reference to Walters’s discovery, Geisler quotes Nibley: “If the authenticity of the court record could be established it would be the most devastating blow to Smith ever delivered” (p. 46). It is impossible for this quotation to refer to the Walters discovery because it comes from a book published ten years before the event. Nibley’s statement referred to two alleged accounts of the trial—one very late and another that disappeared before it could be examined by competent witnesses. There is still good reason to question the provenance of the accounts challenged by Nibley.\footnote{See Francis W. Kirkham, A New Witness for Christ in America (Salt Lake City: Utah Printing, 1960), 1:423.}

At the conclusion of his chapter on scripture, Geisler produces a self-serving chart in which he purports to compare and contrast the “evangelical and Mormon views of Scriptures” (p. 47). In reality, the chart merely shows a comparison between his view of the Bible and his interpretation of LDS scripture. It certainly does not reflect LDS perception, and in a couple of instances his chart goes beyond
laughable to truly insulting. He would certainly be hard-pressed to find believing Latter-day Saints who also believe that our scriptures were produced through “occultic” means or that they are “unreliable.” He did get one item right in his chart: his chart shows that he believes in a closed canon and we do not. Perhaps he should be commended for understanding that much about our faith.

**With Friends Like These...**

The final chapter of *The Counterfeit Gospel* is entitled, “A Word to Our Mormon Friends.” Adding irony to this title, the author opines, “Throughout this book we have spoken the truth as we know it based on God’s Word” (p. 233). As the book opened by charging Mormons with dishonesty, it now closes by affirming the probity of its authors.

Geisler begins by pointing out that God requires perfection of the Latter-day Saint. He quotes Matthew 5:48 and then misquotes its companion passage in 3 Nephi 12:48. There follows a discussion that illustrates that “apart from faith” (p. 237), it is impossible to please God. Where on earth did he get the idea that any Latter-day Saint expects anything “apart from faith”? Did he perhaps skip over the fourth Article of Faith that begins, “We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” (emphasis added)? Does he assume, because the Bible teaches that Zacharias and Elisabeth were “both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6), that they too had done this “apart from faith”? Clearly, his view of LDS doctrine is the counterfeit to watch out for. But amidst all this “speaking the truth in love,” I find an appalling misrepresentation of an LDS source. In his discussion about striving for perfection, Geisler quotes the Melchizedek Priesthood Study Guide from 1989. He writes:

> All informed Mormons know what meeting the standards for perfection entails. The following list is taken from the priesthood manual, *To Make Thee a Minister and a Witness* (p. 59). Being perfect includes: 1) personal prayers, 2) regular
family prayer, 3) regular family home evening, 4) home storage, 5) regular Scripture study, 6) strict personal worthiness, 7) support of church leaders, 8) tender concern for one’s wife and family members, 9) keeping the family history, 10) having patience and love, 11) honest work and integrity in one’s occupation, 12) exemplary grooming and dress, 13) regular attendance at church meetings and activities, 14) regular temple attendance, 15) keeping the Word of Wisdom, and 16) having purity of thought. (p. 234)

When I read that quote, I knew it was a distortion. There was no question in my mind but that the author of this chapter had misused the study guide. The quote comes from lesson 15, titled “What It Means to Receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost.” The lesson manual then asks this question, offering the above list as discussion points: “In which of these suggested areas of personal growth do you feel you are making progress in obeying God’s laws?” Why is it that anti-Mormons resort so consistently to falsification in their work against us? Do they know who the father of lies is and whom they serve when using his tools? Perhaps Geisler does not believe that the truth is a strong enough weapon.

This chapter approaches Mormonism from the perspective that efforts to be obedient to God’s commandments will be frustrating, depressing, and endless and that the correct path is to merely accept the free gift of salvation: “All that remains for us to do is to believe.” Certain it is that man cannot bring about his own salvation or exaltation and that he is wholly dependent on the mercy and grace and merits of Jesus Christ. It is equally certain, however, that the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God (see Acts 5:32) and that those who believe in God are not automatically his sons; they are given power to become such: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). In the final analysis, it won’t be mere believers who shall finally be saved; it will be obedient believers, because Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9, emphasis added).
Twenty years ago, there was a serious shortage of coins in Italy. The larger grocery stores offered plastic tokens redeemable at their stores in lieu of the real thing. It did not do any good to protest the fake change because you got it whether you wanted it or not. Everyone knew it was bogus, and it was simply an irritation that everyone had to live with. Similarly, the “love” and “truth” found within the pages of The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism are the plastic tokens of true Christianity. I prefer the real coin of the realm.
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN:
A SOURCE REVIEW OF
NORMAN GEISLER’S CHAPTER

Danel W. Bachman

Character cannot be counterfeited, nor can it be put on and cast off as if it were a garment to meet the whim of the moment.

Madame Chiang Kai-shek¹

Introduction

In 1997 InterVarsity Press of Downers Grove, Illinois, published a book coauthored by moderate Baptist minister Craig L. Blomberg and a Latter-day Saint professor of religion at Brigham Young University, Stephen E. Robinson. It was titled How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation and dealt with the evangelical and Latter-day Saint views on four subjects: scripture, God and deification, Christ and the Trinity, and salvation. The book does not seem to be widely known in Latter-day Saint circles beyond the scholarly tier and those interested in apologetics. In the evangelical world, however, it has created considerably more interest, even debate.² Apparently some evangelicals feel that Blomberg was too agreeable

². See, for example, the following Internet sites: www.pfo.org/stilwide.htm
www.gospelcom.net/apologia/mainpages/WhatsNews/HowWide/
www.gospelcom.net/apologia/textown/WhatsNews/WhatsWide/ArtalkHW.html

and accommodating and that he didn’t take Robinson to the mat. So, to date, evangelicals have written two books in response to *How Wide the Divide*—both from Harvest House Publishers in Eugene, Oregon. The most recent response is a volume of essays with the rather confrontational title *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*. It treats the same subjects as *How Wide the Divide*? and each chapter is written by a different author. The project was the idea of Phil Roberts and Norman Geisler, two of the contributing authors. Although there is no indication in the book, Norman Geisler claims responsibility as the general editor.4

*The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* is a recent addition to the topmost layer of rubble of an ever-increasing anti-Mormon literary tel. This essay is a source review of the first chapter—dealing with the scriptural canon—written by Geisler.5 According to the Web site of Southern Evangelical Seminary6 in Charlotte, North Carolina, he is the dean of that institution, which is also the home of the Veritas Graduate School of Apologetics and Counter-cult Ministries. The Web site rather modestly declares him to be an “internationally

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1. www.gospelcom.net/apologia/mainpages/WhatsNews/WN970527.html
2. www.gospelcom.net/ivpress/author/blombec.html
3. www.watchman.org/watchman.htm
4. www.california.com/~rpcman/HWTD.HTM
5. My thanks to Stan Barker for providing most of this list.
5. The chapter under consideration here is forty pages long. It is nearly equally divided between a presentation of the evangelical and the Latter-day Saint views of scripture. Two of the forty pages are endnotes.
6. See ses.digiweb.com/nguisler.htm (this site is apparently no longer available).
known speaker and debater. Considered one of the greatest living
defenders of the Christian faith,\textsuperscript{7} he is fairly new to the ranks of those
who publish criticisms of Mormonism, although his contribution to
\textit{Counterfeit Gospel} is not his first salvo against the church.\textsuperscript{8} Geisler is
well educated, holding four academic degrees,\textsuperscript{9} and is considered a
noro with a substantial reputation as an evangelical scholar.

Given his reputation, it is with considerable regret that I make
the following report. He has not made a significant nor even an im-
portant contribution to the discussion regarding the Mormon view of the
canon. From whatever perspective one wants to view it, the piece does
not nearly approach the level of \textit{How Wide the Divide}? It is dogmatic
and somewhat speculative in its presentation of the evangelical view\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{7.} He also runs Impact Ministries, a "Christian Apologetic Book & Tape Ministry."
And judging from his speaking engagements, he is a popular lecturer.

\textbf{8.} In 1997 he coauthored, with longtime anti-Mormon Ron Rhodes, an encyclo-
dedia of responses to cults. See Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, \textit{When Cultists Ask}
(Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997). The greatest number of entries in that volume
were directed against the LDS Church. By count of items under the bold subheadings in
the "Religious Groups Index" in the back, the five most frequently referred to religious
movements include twenty-three entries on the Word of Faith Movement, twenty-five on
New Age, thirty-eight on Roman Catholicism, forty-five on Jehovah's Witnesses, and
forty-seven on Mormonism. Since Mr. Rhodes is a longtime anti-Mormon, one wonders
if Geisler was recruited to their ranks by him.

Geisler wrote relative to his chapter in \textit{Counterfeit Gospel} that until its publication he
"had only spoken on the topic (not written)." Geisler to Bachman, 29 January 1999.

\textbf{9.} Geisler has two bachelor's degrees, one each from Wheaton College and William
Tyndale College. He earned an M.A. at Wheaton Graduate School and a Ph.D. from
Loyola University. His publications include at least ten articles and fifty-five books. Most
of these show no special interest in Mormonism. He is also the editor of the new

\textbf{10.} I have in mind here his section on "The Confirmation of Scripture"; there he
argues that, "Unlike other holy books, including the Qur'an or the Book of Mormon, the
Bible alone has been supernaturally confirmed to be the Word of God. For only the
Scriptures were written by prophets who were supernaturally confirmed by signs and
wonders" (p. 23). A similar section in the LDS portion of the chapter reads, "Unlike the
Gospels, the witnesses to the claims of the Book of Mormon were not supported by
supernatural events, as were Jesus and the apostles. That is, neither Joseph Smith nor his
witnesses were confirmed by a multitude of miracles including healing the blind, lame,
and deaf, and even raising the dead" (p. 33).

Well, what does one say about that? One can only point out this is a new criterion by
which to establish the canonicity of a document, one invented by Geisler specifically,
and superficial in analyzing the LDS position. It is cavalier, poorly written, and replete with errors.\textsuperscript{11}

But there is more. It is an interesting twist of irony that Geisler challenges the probity of Joseph Smith by accusing him of plagiarism (p. 38),\textsuperscript{12} because it becomes my unpleasant duty to inform the reader that the majority of Geisler’s material dealing with the LDS view of scripture (approximately twenty pages) is not derived from his original research. The organization and format are his, but most of the quotations and many of the ideas come from a book written by Jerald and Sandra Tanner: \textit{The Changing World of Mormonism}, published in 1981 by Moody Press in Chicago. \textit{Changing World} is, according to the back cover, “a complete revision, update, and condensation of the Tanners’ earlier definitive work,”\textsuperscript{13} Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? It is indeed distasteful to point out that this cleric, academician, and educator has not done his homework or his writing properly.\textsuperscript{14}
In tapping primarily one book, not only for quotations and reference citations, but also for ideas, facts, logic, and even phrasing, Geisler has not served as an archaeologist who leads his evangelical or LDS students to a newly discovered library of ancient documents, an inscribed amulet, or even a fine ostraco. Rather, the portion of his chapter relating to the LDS view of scripture is little more than a fragment of Tannerian conglomerate excavated from the 1981 stratum of anti-Mormon literature. It is, in fact, one of the most blatant examples of unacknowledged appropriation and use of the work of others in modern anti-Mormon writing and constitutes a stain on Geisler’s heretofore highly praised career.

work of his mentors, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, at least in respect to accuracy in reproducing quotations. This review will have occasion to draw attention to only a few of the most egregious errors that riddle this chapter.

15. LDS apologists generally believe that it is a common practice of anti-Mormon writers to borrow frequently from each other without attribution. It is also believed that Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? is the most popular and copied book among them. It would not be inaccurate to describe it as “The Anti-Mormon Documentary History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” However, little actual data has been published to substantiate these perceptions. In a recent exception, Daniel Peterson shows how Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine, in their Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995), copy the arguments and language of Marvin W. Cowan, Mormon Claims Answered (Salt Lake City: Cowan, 1975). See Daniel C. Peterson, “Constancy amid Change,” review of Behind the Mask of Mormonism, by John Ankerberg and John Weldon, FARMS Review of Books 8/2 (1996): 81–84. For another example from the same book, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Editor’s Introduction, Triptych (Inspired by Hieronymus Bosch),” FARMS Review of Books 8/1 (1996): ix–x.

Jerald and Sandra Tanner have written about the ethics of some of their fellow anti-Mormons: “While we are sorry to have to say this, it seems there are some who will accept any wild story or theory if it puts the Mormons in a bad light. They reason that since they already know that Mormonism is false, it is all right to use anything that has an adverse effect on the system. The question of whether an accusation is true or false appears to be only a secondary consideration.” Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Serious Charges against the Tanners: Are the Tanners Demonized Agents of the Mormon Church? (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1991), 47.

16. Interestingly, the Evangelical Ministry to New Religions (EMNR) has a statement on plagiarism to which its members subscribe. According to listings on their Web site neither Norman Geisler nor a number of professional critics of Mormonism are members of EMNR. The statement, pointed out to me by Barry Bickmore, reads:

“PLAGIARISM. EMNR members must always give proper source credit to works published under their name. For our purposes, plagiarism shall be defined as:
I am not unaware of or insensitive to the difficulties of advancing such a position. Recently the evangelical scholar C. E. Hill noticed similar wording between Geoffrey Mark Hahneman’s 1992 study of the Muratorian Fragment and Harry Y. Gamble’s 1985 book on the New Testament canon. “Curiosity compounds,” he writes, “when one sees that at least thirteen full sentences and parts of many others from . . . Gamble’s book also appear verbatim or nearly so in chap. 3 of Hahneman’s book, without attribution.”17 After citing two of Gamble’s sentences that were reproduced nearly word for word in Hahneman, Hill considers some questions relating to the “tricky business” of determining cases of possible unattributed dependency.

Does this show that Hahneman borrowed from Gamble? To conclude so might be rash; after all, “no explicit appeals are made.” And, even though Gamble’s book appeared first and is listed in Hahneman’s bibliography, it is just possible

The act of appropriating the literary composition of another, or parts or passages of his writings, or the ideas or language of the same, and passing them off as the product of one’s own mind. To be liable for plagiarism it is not necessary to exactly duplicate another’s literary work, it being sufficient if unfair use of such work is made by lifting a substantial portion thereof . . . (Black’s Law Dictionary, 5th ed.)

We recognize that plagiarism can be committed unintentionally, such as when the original source for a stream of ideas and concepts has been forgotten and the source text is not physically before the writer as it is worked into the new document. Quoting clichés, catchphrases, or data of common knowledge (which can be found in three or more reference sources) is not cause for action. However, plagiarism of substantial portions of another writer’s material is grounds for disciplinary action within EMNR. Sustained or repeated instances of plagiarism in a member’s career, followed by no acknowledgment of regret or remorse, may result in Expulsion or Temporary Suspension of Membership.” (See Manual of Ethical and Doctrinal Standards, Evangelical Ministry to New Religions at emnr.org/EMNRMEDS.htm)

that it was Gamble who borrowed from Hahneman. Perhaps the material originated in a lecture or seminar given years earlier by Hahneman in which Gamble may have been in attendance. Alternatively, as Hahneman says of Polycarp and the Pastorals, verbal agreements in our modern authors may “suggest no more than that they both stand in the same ecclesiastical and cultural tradition.” Hahneman and Gamble then may be heirs of oral, history-of-the-canon tradition, in this case a tradition which must have come complete with suggestions for footnotes. Or, are they both indebted to a common written source, now lost . . . which circulated through both authors’ respective scholar-communities in the early 1980s? Perhaps less likely, but a viable critical possibility nonetheless, is that Gamble and Hahneman are in reality the same person (cf. the theory that Polycarp wrote the Pastorals). So, here, just as in the case of apparent use of NT writings in the Apostolic Fathers and others, actual dependence must not be hastily claimed until all the probabilities are carefully weighed. 18

Hill’s analysis, however, concludes, “But when they are, actual dependence, in both our ancient and modern instances, is still perhaps the best conclusion.” 19 Because the evidence of Norman Geisler’s borrowing from the Tanner volume is so extensive, I must agree with Hill. When all the probabilities are carefully weighed, actual dependence is “still perhaps the best conclusion” and needs to be detailed. Let me stress that the following remarks are directed primarily to the second half of the essay under review, that portion which deals with the LDS view of the canon.

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19. Ibid., 444.
The Evidence for Geisler’s Dependency on Jerald and Sandra Tanner

Most of the data substantiating the lack of independent research of which I speak can be seen in the extensive supplement to this review: “Comparison of Quotations Related to the LDS Position Cited in Norman Geisler’s Counterfeit Gospel and Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Changing World.”²⁰ It contains all the quotations Geisler uses in the portion of his chapter relating to Mormonism in parallel with the corresponding citations in the Tanners’ Changing World. The most important illustrations of the close affinity of the two works are detailed in the discussion below. The details are massive, consistent, and indicting. They include but are not limited to (1) the total number of references cited, (2) the number and publication dates of LDS-related sources used, (3) similar constellations of quotations in both volumes, (4) similar language used in introducing quotations, (5) similarity of inconsistent Book of Mormon citations, (6) Geisler’s use of Changing World to improve endnote references, (7) similar use of unique reference citations, (8) extent of the quotations used, (9) mistakes made by Geisler, and (10) his adoption of the ideas and logic of the Tanners.

The Total Number of References Cited

In the section of his chapter dealing with the LDS view of scripture, Geisler provides ninety-nine sources. Thirty-three of fifty-one endnotes pertain to this section (endnotes 19–51); the rest of the references appear within the text. Of Geisler’s ninety-nine sources, eighty-six were also found in Changing World. Thirteen do not appear to have similar parallels in that source. Of those thirteen, five are scriptural references,²¹ two cite the volume being rebutted, How Wide

²⁰. To order, request Daniel W. Bachman, “Comparison of Quotations Related to the LDS Position Cited in Norman Geisler’s Counterfeit Gospel and Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Changing World,” from FARMS, P.O. Box 7113, University Station, Provo, UT 84602.

²¹. One assumes, given his background, that Geisler is familiar with the scriptures.
the Divide? and one is a quotation from one of Geisler's own books. So eight of thirteen items not found in Changing World are not necessarily relevant to the question of homogeneity. When these items are subtracted from the total of ninety-nine, the percentage of relevant quotations possibly acquired from the Tanners rises to as high as 94. These statistics are particularly troubling because only eight of thirty-three of the endnotes and none of the in-text references relating to the LDS section of the chapter tell the reader the author is using the Tanners' Changing World as his source. To be fair, it should be noted that endnote 33 covers five quotations in the text. Thus about 14 percent of the eighty-six items used, which are also found in the Tanner volume, are actually attributed to the Tanners by Geisler. Also, five quotations have no references in either the text or an endnote, but all five are in the Tanner volume with references. Demonstrating that Geisler expropriated a great deal from Changing World without giving proper credit demands more than just numbers, as suggestive as they might be. Therefore, we turn to specifics.

The passages are Malachi 3:6; Psalm 90:1; Isaiah 43:10; Jacob 2:26–29; 3:3–11; and Matthew 24:24. After searching for Geisler's sources visually in Changing World, I discovered that the Tanners have put a facsimile copy of it on their Web site. I searched that text electronically and discovered that of the above list only Malachi 3:6 is cited by the Tanners and can be found on page 187.

22. Endnotes 25, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37, 43, and 47. For comparative purposes, we have an equally thick anti-Mormon screed from the same publisher that also relies heavily on Changing World. John Ankerberg and John Weldon published a booklet of about forty pages called The Facts on the Mormon Church: A Handy Guide to Understanding the Claims of Mormonism (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1991). It has 202 endnotes, many of which cite Changing World, something found therein, or other works by the Tanners. Although the booklet is at about the same level as Geisler as far as content and persuasiveness of argument is concerned, it contrasts with his chapter in one important respect—Ankerberg and Weldon have gone to greater pains to give the Tanners appropriate credit for their work. See notes 4, 28–30, 32, 34, 41, 69–70, 81, 84, 103, 105, 111–18, 120, 127, 132, 135, 139, 141–42, 144, 153, 156–57, 169, 171–72, and 175–77. However, the questions raised in note 15 above are consistent with repeated suspicions that surfaced while I read the booklet and checked footnotes: here too there may also be times when Ankerberg and Weldon relied on the Tanners without giving them credit. Verification of this must await further investigation.

23. See items 3, 10, 30, 31, and 60 in the supplement. This is the first of many manifestations of haste and unprofessional work on the part of Geisler and his publishers.
The Number and Publication Dates of LDS-Related References Cited

One important way to examine the nature of Geisler's research is to look at the LDS-related materials cited and the dates of their publication. All but four of the sources used, excluding some scripture references, appear in and could have been extracted from *The Changing World of Mormonism*. In addition to that work, the four LDS-related sources not found in *Changing World* are (1) Robinson and Blomberg's *How Wide the Divide?*; (2) a standard LDS Sunday School manual, *Gospel Principles* (1988); (3) Keith Marston's dated reference work, *Missionary Pal* (1976); and (4) Michael Marquardt's *The Use of the Bible in the Book of Mormon* (1979). Since *How Wide the Divide?* is the subject of the essays in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*, it is not relevant to the discussion of dependency. The rest—*Missionary Pal*, *Gospel Principles*, and *The Use of the Bible in the Book of Mormon*—are cited only four times in the text; only *Gospel Principles* postdates the 1981 publication date of *Changing World of Mormonism*. All the remaining sources relating to Mormonism cited in the text and endnotes predate the publication of *Changing World* and were available to the author in that publication. That means he could have, and the facts strongly suggest he did, produced the LDS section of his chapter by consulting as few as half a dozen sources relating to Mormonism. It is consistent with the remainder of the findings of this study that the vast majority of the quotations used to build the LDS portion of his chapter were quarried from *Changing World*. The use of this book as his primary source also explains why the preponderance of LDS materials used is nearly twenty years old; the most recent is more than a decade old. Furthermore, Geisler is also not keeping up with Tanner productions relating to Mormonism, because even *Changing World* is not the latest version of this work; *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* is now in its fifth edition (published in 1987). And, strange as it may be in an essay deal-

24. This is a reprint of an article originally published in the *Journal of Pastoral Practice* in 1978.

25. I searched *Changing World* electronically for the two pre-1981 sources discussed in the text and no matches for either were found.
ing with the LDS canon, he does not refer to, indeed seems unaware of, the most recent editions of the LDS scriptures.

Similar Constellations of Quotations in Both Volumes

Another avenue by which to assess dependency is to explore significant relationships between the groupings of quotations found in each text. Well over half (fifty-seven of ninety-nine) of the quotations in our author’s treatment of Mormonism fall into groupings that are identifiable in the Tanner volume. For example, fifteen are found on pages 102–16 of Changing World in a section on the Book of Mormon. Four more, dealing with changes in the Book of Mormon, are on pages 128–29; two about the plurality of gods are on page 175; six dealing with deification, a mother in heaven, and the virgin birth are on pages 177–80; and four on page 187 are about the changeable nature of God. Significantly, twenty-six of Geisler’s citations are found in the Tanner chapter titled “Mormon Scriptures and the Bible,” the most relevant to his subject.26 Of these, five are found on pages 366–67, three on page 379, nine on pages 382–86, seven on pages 388–93, and two on page 396.27

Not only are at least half of the quotations used by Geisler found in groupings similar to those in Changing World, but reliance on that volume is also illustrated by the numerous quotations in the chapter that appear in the same order they do in Changing World. For example, five items in my supplement (17–21) match the order on page 386 in Changing World. A minor exception is that the Tanners include a second quotation from Jenson’s Church Chronology between supplement items 18 and 19 that Geisler does not use. Similarly, items 34–38 in the supplement show up in the same order in both books. Of the fifteen citations on pages 35–38, also on pages 102–16 in chapter 5 of Changing World, all but three (items 41, 42, and 44 in the supplement) duplicate the sequence in Changing World. Items 50–56 in the supplement are in chapter 14 of Changing World, titled

27. See the supplement for verification of these statistics.
“False Prophecy.” There the Tanners give four alleged false prophecies of Joseph Smith—the same four Norman Geisler discusses in Counterfeit Gospel and in the same sequence. All seven of Geisler’s quotations on the subject mirror those in Changing World. Items 74–77 of the supplement are all found on page 187 of Changing World and item 77 is the only one out of order. This high correlation, both of dates of the works cited and of the groupings of quotations, demonstrates an unusually strong affinity between the two volumes.

Similar Language Used in Introducing Quotations

That Geisler benefited from Changing World without appropriate acknowledgment may also be seen in the similarity of the introductions to a number of the citations in each book. About 25 percent of the time he adopts language or phrasing similar to that used by the Tanners to introduce their quotations. In several cases the wording is exact, or nearly so. The similarities here are compelling when viewed side by side. Four on the list of twenty-five come from quotations acknowledged in endnotes as being taken from the Tanners. Of those, items 34 and 61 are included in the table below for comparative purposes because we know in these instances they have a direct relationship to Changing World. Though modified, one can clearly see the Tanners’ language reflected in Geisler’s introductions of these two items. When these examples are compared with the rest of the items in the table, the similarity is evident, especially in the use of key words and phrases found in Changing World. Thus the perception of dependency on that volume grows. The table on the following pages contains a sample of the twenty-five introductions with significant similarities. The item number in the supplement is at the left.

28. See supplement items 4, 6, 17, 19, 34–35, 37, 43, 45, 50, 53–55, 58, 61, 65, 68, 70, 72–73, 75–76, 82, and 85–86.
29. See supplement items 6, 50, 68, 75, and 76.
In 1832 the Mormon publication The Evening and the Morning Star said that the changes in the Bible were made "by the Mother of Harlots."

In the History of the Church, under the date of February 2, 1833, we find this statement by Joseph Smith:

And in a letter dated July 2, 1833, signed by Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and F. G. Williams, the following statement is found:

In short, David Whitmer was not a man of strong character or credibility. Rather, he was gullible, being influenced by Hiram Page's "peep-stone" and possibly by a woman with a "black stone in Kirtland, Ohio."

In his History of the Church, Joseph Smith admits that Martin Harris was not with the other two when they saw the angel. Smith had them pray continually in an effort of obtaining a vision for Harris.

In 1835 Joseph Smith prophesied that Christ would return in 56 years. In History of the
Church (HC 2:182) we read that should wind up the scene. In the History of the Church, volume 2, page 182, we read as follows:

61 Oliver B. Huntington recorded in his journal that Joseph F. Smith, who became the sixth President of the Mormon Church, claimed

Oliver B. Huntington recorded in his journal that in 1881 Joseph F. Smith, who later became the sixth president of the Mormon church, taught

68 Milton Hunter, who served in the First Council of the Seventy, affirmed that

Milton R. Hunter, who served in the First Council of the Seventy, affirmed the same teaching;

75 Wilford Woodruff, who became the fourth President of the Mormon Church, said,

Wilford Woodruff, who became the fourth president of the church, said that

82 Even the first (1835) edition of the Doctrine and Covenants emphatically denounced polygamy:

In the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, printed in 1835, there was a section which absolutely denounced the practice of polygamy.

86 Even the signed statement by the eight eyewitnesses has been altered. In the 1830 edition it read,

It is interesting to note that even the signed statement by the eight witnesses to the Book of Mormon has been altered. In the 1830 edition the last page read:
Similarity of Inconsistent Book of Mormon Citations

A unique but highly important parallel illustrating the use of Tanner materials may be seen in the inconsistent form of Book of Mormon references used in both volumes. A variable method of citing scripture is itself unusual inasmuch as scholars and editors generally insist on a standard form of scriptural notation in publications. What is telling here is that in each instance Geisler employs essentially the same format for each Book of Mormon reference that the Tanners use. Twice he quotes 1 Nephi 13:28 (items 5 and 9 in the supplement). The reference in the second one is “BM, 1 Ne 13:28,” which is very close to the Tanners’ notation: “Book of Mormon, 1 Ne 13:23–28.”

The parallels in item 77 of the supplement are more explicit. Here Geisler quotes Moroni 8:18, but his reference is “BM 517:18.” He does not explain that this means page 517 verse 18, nor are we told the edition in which this may be found. Examination of the same quotation used to make the same point in Changing World explains the anomaly: There the reference is “Book of Mormon, page 517, verse 18.”30 Notably, the Tanners also omit the book, chapter, and edition in their notation. It is difficult to explain why Geisler, who has studied and written about the canon, would refer to a text without noting the edition, inasmuch as such information is so vital to textual criticism.31

In a third example, Geisler argues that the 1830 rendition of Mosiah 21:28 was changed in later versions. He illustrates this by quoting a 1964 edition (p. 44). Why he singles out the 1964 Book of Mormon in a 1998 essay to make a point about changes in scripture is puzzling because the most recent major edition was published in 1981. If Geisler knew this and was writing to an LDS audience, why refer to a 1964 edition, which almost no present-day Mormon would

31. Two additional examples where only page numbers are used, in one instance citing two different editions of the Book of Mormon, one of which is not identified, may be found in items 87 and 88 of the supplement.
own, let alone use? The question is answered in Changing World, which makes the same point using the same passage from the same 1964 edition. The Tanners give the reference in their text as “Book of Mormon, 1964 ed., p. 176, v. 28.”

In our final example (see item 84 in the supplement), Geisler writes: “Another change involving king Benjamin once read (in 1830) ‘... for this cause did king Benjamin keep them ...’ (page 546). Today it reads ‘for this cause did king Mosiah keep them ...’ (page 485).” Here we have another departure from the standard method of citing scripture references by substituting page numbers for chapter and verse, just as Jerald and Sandra Tanner do in Changing World. The use of the word today in this paragraph is also curious. Although the passage does read this way in the 1981 edition of Ether 4:1, that verse is now on page 494 of the current LDS edition rather than 485.

Geisler, apparently unaware of the 1981 edition, again follows the Tanners’ use of the 1964 version and makes the erroneous assumption that it is the one being used “today”—the mistake reveals the source of his information. The close resemblance of unique Book of Mormon references in both texts suggests that Geisler did not consult the originals but adopted whatever Book of Mormon citation format the Tanners were using. Outside the certainty of Geisler’s use of Changing World in these examples, it is inexplicable why a reputed expert on the canon, who presumes to discuss Mormon scriptures, fails to use the latest revision of the Book of Mormon to make his arguments, especially when that edition is now nineteen years old!

Geisler’s Use of Changing World to Improve Endnote References

The careful student may point out something that seemingly contradicts the thesis of this essay. On pages 27–28 of Counterfeit Gospel, our author quotes a pamphlet written by Orson Pratt. In endnote 22 the reference is “Orson Pratt, Orson Pratt’s Works (Liverpool, 1851), pp. 46–47” (p. 49). Yet in Changing World one notices that the Tanners do not give the publication data “Liverpool, 1851” in

32. Tanner and Tanner, Changing World, 129.
the text (item 11 in the supplement). So, one might ask, if Geisler didn’t examine the original how might he have known this information? Isn’t it exculpatory evidence? In fact it is not, because the information was available to him in Changing World’s bibliography. On page 569 we find the following entry: “Pratt, Orson. Orson Pratt’s Works. Liverpool, 1851.” So to complete his endnote properly, Geisler needed only to check the bibliography of Changing World. Can we be certain that this is what happened? Not completely perhaps, but there are additional telltale signs. His endnote indicates that the quotation came from pages 46–47 of Pratt’s Works, but the Tanner quotation comes from pages 44–47. Again, one might wonder if this doesn’t further contradict the thesis. However, when his quotation is checked carefully against both the Tanner version and Pratt’s original, the apparent reason for the discrepancy emerges. Actually, Geisler’s portion of the quotation comes from page 47 of the 1851 edition of Pratt’s pamphlet. So, was he simply careless in writing his endnote? Maybe. Many clues elsewhere suggest that the preparation of this chapter was very hasty and slipshod. Nevertheless, I propose a different scenario. If the reader studies item 11 of the supplement, he will discover that the reverend begins his citation well after that in the Tanner version. In other words, he left out a considerable portion at the beginning of what the Tanners reproduce; there are three sets of ellipses in that unquoted portion. The Tanners use three more sets of ellipses in the remainder of the quotation that Geisler cites. It appears then, if he consulted only Changing World, he would be forced to guess on which page the passage actually appeared. Perhaps he suspected the first ellipses eliminated a couple of pages and since the quotation from that point on is more than half of the entire text, he assumed the portion he was drawing from came from the last two pages. He guessed wrong, but who was going to check his sources?

Other characteristic items strengthen the hypothesis that Geisler didn’t examine the original 1851 edition of Pratt’s pamphlet. Both he and the Tanners refer to the article from which the excerpt is extracted as “The Bible Alone An Insufficient Guide.” However, the precise title is considerably different. Actually, it is a chapter designation of a larger work called Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon.
The full title of this chapter is "The Bible and Tradition, Without Further Revelation, An Insufficient Guide." One can understand why the Tanners abbreviate the rather long title, thereby withholding the important caveat "and tradition, without further revelation" from their readers. But it is fair to inquire how Geisler came up with the identical abbreviation, error included (the word alone is not in the original), that the Tanners use. The data presented above suggest that he did not examine the original Pratt pamphlet but seized what he found in Changing World, in the process making two critical errors. Moreover, using Changing World to improve source references is not a onetime occurrence in Geisler's chapter but is part of a pattern. Three more instances are considered below.

One with equally powerful support appears in the reference in endnote 23 (item 13 in the supplement). Here Geisler cites his source as, "John A. Widtsoe, Joseph Smith—Seeker after Truth (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1951), p. 251." Four things indicate that the Tanners were the source of this reference rather than the original. First, both give the same incomplete title; it is actually Joseph Smith: Seeker after Truth, Prophet of God. How did that come about if Geisler used the original source? Second, while the Tanners do not provide the publication data for the reference in the text of Changing World, it is in the bibliography as "Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1951," precisely the same as in Counterfeit Gospel. But, and this is the third point, it is common in citing publishers with the name Deseret in them to include the whole name to distinguish among publishers. This is because the


34. Actually he made two other errors that are germane to the point of the discussion. See details under the heading "Extent of the Quotations Used," 196–99 below.


word *Deseret* was part of several different publishers' names over the years. For whatever reason, the Tanners left the full publisher's name out of the bibliography. Why wouldn't Geisler cite it correctly as *Deseret News Press*? The answer seems to be that he did not consult the original and simply assumed that when the Tanners gave the publisher as "Deseret" it was the complete name. Finally, he capitalizes the word *He* after the first set of ellipses, while the Tanners correctly leave it in lowercase. While this may be dismissed as a typo or poor editing, when seen in context of the pattern here developed, it would suggest that Geisler did not consult the original and may have again simply guessed that the first word after the ellipses should be capitalized.

Another case of sprucing up the endnotes without consulting the original is found in item 96 in the supplement. Here Geisler cites Lucy Smith's 1853 history of her son and adds that the work was reprinted by Preston Nibley in 1954. Again, the latter fact is not in the Tanner text but is in their bibliography. It is puzzling, without knowledge of the thesis of this article, why he would note that the work was reprinted in 1954. Not only is that very old news, but there have been other editions of Lucy Smith's work since then. The reasonable explanation seems to be that he relied overmuch on information provided by the Tanners and is not current in Mormon studies himself.

Finally, the reference in item 45 in the supplement also requires combining the Tanners' in-text reference with additional data in the bibliography to be complete as he presents it. Note that neither source gives the page number of the reference or the date of the publication. Thus on several occasions Geisler apparently consulted both the text and the bibliography of *Changing World* in order to put his endnote references in something simulating proper academic format while at the same time camouflaging the true origin of the information—a secondary source.

37. For yet another example of the same genre, see item 45 in the supplement.
Similar Use of Unique Reference Citations

An intriguing demonstration of Geisler’s requisitions from *Changing World* is found in the use both he and the Tanners make of Bruce R. McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine*. Well-informed Latter-day Saints know that there were two editions of this work, the original published in 1958 and a second revised and enlarged edition released in 1966; the Tanners point this out in their bibliography. Norman Geisler quotes *Mormon Doctrine* four times (items 12, 67, 71, and 99 in the supplement) in his chapter, but only one (item 12) is taken from the 1958 edition; the other three are from 1966. All four are also found in *Changing World*, and Geisler quotes only the portions found in *Changing World*. What is especially interesting here is that the material cited from the 1958 edition is unchanged in 1966, making reference to the former unnecessary. If Geisler were researching the original sources, he would not have needed to hunt for one of the rare first editions to cull from it a nonunique quotation. The Tanners have done such a cut-and-paste job from numerous sources on *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* over the years that it is understandable that they may have missed updating the *Mormon Doctrine* citations as *Shadow* went through successive editions. But how does one explain the identical problem found in Norman Geisler’s chapter eighteen years later? One must believe either that it was a miraculous coincidence or that he has simply copied the Tanners without checking the original sources.

A similar problem is found in endnote 35 where the source is given for a passage from a book review by Marvin Hill in the journal *Dialogue*. The standard method of citing a journal is to give the article title in quotation marks and the journal name in italics. Interestingly,

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39. Ibid., 568.

40. My thanks to Barry Bickmore, who suggested I check further into this matter. The item exposes the amateurish work of both *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* and Norman Geisler’s chapter in *Counterfeit Gospel*—for completely different reasons, however. In checking *Mormon Doctrine*, I also discovered that the Tanners’ ellipsis points separating the two portions of the quotation leap over almost two and one-half columns of text. To verify my assertions here and in the text, compare pages 351–52 in the 1958 edition of *Mormon Doctrine* and 383–84 in the 1966 edition.
both Geisler and the Tanners cite only the journal name and omit the article title. But, you might ask, why didn’t Geisler consult the bibliography to enhance the reference as he did with others? Because the complete reference is not in the Tanners’ bibliography either. Thus he could not have known the title of the Hill article without consulting the original. The conclusion that he merely copied Changing World is supported as Geisler later quotes the same Hill article for a different purpose. Not only is the same reference given (endnote 49), but the excerpts in both books are exactly the same. The likelihood that Norman Geisler independently quoted twice from a rather old and, for non-Mormons, a somewhat obscure journal article, with the quotations identical to those found in Changing World, and then gave precisely the same incomplete reference documentation as well, seems extremely remote.

A final instance of using similar but unique references might also fall under the category “Mistakes Made by Norman Geisler” discussed below. Geisler cites, or rather cites incorrectly, the writings of David and John Whitmer. He quotes David Whitmer’s Address to All Believers in Christ three times and John Whitmer’s History once. All four texts are also in Changing World (see items 33, 45, 52, and 54 in the supplement). Two—items 45 and 54—have introductions that slightly resemble those in Changing World. Most important, however, are the very significant problems with the references for these quotations that raise serious doubt about whether the originals were ever consulted. Geisler’s confusion about the writings of the Whitmer brothers surfaces in his first reference to David Whitmer’s Address to All Believers in Christ; he puts the title in quotations as if it were a speech or a thesis rather than in italics as a book should be. The Tanners cite it correctly (see item 33 in the supplement). Significantly, the confusion continues as he cites the writings of David and John Whitmer, twice attributing quotations from David to a publication written by John (see items 52 and 54 in the supplement).


42. On another occasion he confuses Orson Pratt with Orson Hyde. See item 74 in the supplement.
What possibilities explain these errors? First we might charitably suggest that Geisler was more than careless in keeping track of the sources from which he drew his quotations, thereby mixing up both David and John Whitmer and their writings. Or, consistent with the patterns revealed in this study, he never consulted the originals and knows little or nothing about either the Whitmers or their writings, but hastily and inaccurately copied their statements from his primary source—*The Changing World of Mormonism*. Why is careless use of the Tanners’ book the more reasonable explanation of the two since they both involve shoddy work? The likelihood of confusing the Whitmers and their writings is greater if Geisler relied on a secondary source than if he actually looked up and read the primary source.

**Extent of the Quotations Used**

The most obvious and incriminating indication that *Changing World* was mined almost exclusively as a source for the quotations used in Geisler’s section on the LDS view of the canon may be seen in the extent to which individual quotations are copied from the Tanners. It is an astounding but true fact that where the materials cited are in *Changing World* (and remember this is eighty-six of ninety-nine quotations), Geisler never provides more material from the original source than is available to him in the Tanner volume. In other words, he never begins a quotation before the Tanners do, and when they leave something out of a quotation or end one at a particular point, the reverend follows suit. The use of ellipses is particularly interesting because a glance at the supplement will demonstrate that the Tanners use them extensively. Sometimes our author leaves out more than the Tanners, but he always leaves out what they do and never quotes more text than they do.43 Certainly this knowledge further establishes the point that Geisler lifted his quotations directly from *Changing World* without bothering to check the originals. All of these phenomena may be observed in the example comparison provided below from item 11 in the supplement.

43. The reader simply has to study the supplement thoroughly to verify this statement.
Geisler's Quotation

Since Mormons believe that the Bible as we have it is an unreliable guide, they claim this reveals the need for new revelation, such as the Book of Mormon. In a pamphlet titled "The Bible Alone An Insufficient Guide," Apostle Orson Pratt wrote:

"We all know that but a few of the inspired writings have descended to our times, which few quote the names of some twenty other books which are lost . . ." and

"What have come down to our day have been mutilated, changed, and corrupted in such a shameful manner that no two manuscripts agree."

Tanners' Version

In a pamphlet published in the 1850's, Apostle Pratt further commented:

Many Protestants say they take the Bible as their only rule of faith . . . What evidence have they that the book of Matthew was inspired of God, or any other of the books of the New Testament? The only evidence they have is tradition . . . If it could be demonstrated by tradition, that every part of each book of the Old and New Testament, was, in its original, actually written by inspiration, still it cannot be determined that there is one single true copy of those originals now in existence . . . What shall we say then, concerning the Bible's being a sufficient guide? Can we rely upon it in its present known corrupted state, as being a faithful record of God's word?

We all know that but a few of the inspired writings have descended to our times, which few quote the names of some twenty other books which are lost . . .

What few have come down to our day, have been mutilated, changed, and corrupted, in such a shameful manner that no two manuscripts agree.
For
"verses and even whole chapters have been added by unknown persons; and even we do not know the authors of some whole books; and we are not certain that all those which we do know, were wrote [sic] by inspiration.\textsuperscript{44}

and who, in his right mind, could, for one moment, suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide?"

In fact,
"Who knows that even one verse of the whole Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original?"

In view of this,
"no reflecting man can deny the necessity of such a new revelation [as the Book of Mormon]." (pp. 27–28)

Verses and even whole chapters have been added by unknown persons; and even we do not know the authors of some whole books; and we are not certain that all those which we do know, were wrote by inspiration.

Add all this imperfection to the uncertainty of the translation, and who, in his right mind, could, for one moment, suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide?

Who knows that even one verse of the whole Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original? . . .

There can be no certainty as to the contents of the inspired writings until God shall inspire some one to rewrite all those books over again . . .


\textsuperscript{44} The [sic] in brackets is Geisler's own.
A particularly interesting example, which may possibly be an exception to the generalization above, is found in item 89 of the supplement in which Geisler quotes Doctrine and Covenants 13:8 from the 1835 edition, but this is not quoted in the text of Changing World. However, the Tanners do reproduce a facsimile of the relevant portion of the 1833 Book of Commandments, along with their marginal notes of the changes made in the 1966 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, which also reflects changes made in the 1835 edition. So it was possible for Geisler to reconstruct the verse in his text from the Tanners' marginal notes without consulting the original, but I am not able to demonstrate that he obtained the accurate reference to Doctrine and Covenants 13:8 in the 1835 edition from Changing World (p. 58).45

This anomaly aside, it nevertheless defies belief to suppose our author independently extracted only what the Tanners did from the original sources, especially since this at times involved compressing many lines and sometimes pages of an original by means of ellipses. Furthermore, that he never found a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph in a parallel source to incorporate into his chapter that was not used by the Tanners is beyond credibility. It is incriminating data of the strongest kind.

Mistakes Made by Geisler

More telltale signs that our author did not rely on original sources in his research surface when one examines closely his mistakes in this brief chapter. They are legion, but several of the most critical ones are reviewed below. Take, for example, items 17 and 18 in the supplement. In Changing World the Tanners give two brief quotations from the History of the Church and two from Jenson's 1899 edition of Church Chronology to show that the Joseph Smith

45. Tanner and Tanner, Changing World, 58. A careful comparison of Geisler's reconstruction with Doctrine and Covenants 13:8 (1835 ed.) shows he left out two commas and the first instance of the word which in that verse, thus compounding the problem of determining the source of this quotation. It is Doctrine and Covenants 42:29–31 in the present edition.
Translation (JST) was completed in Joseph's day. Speaking of the last source, they write: "In the Church Chronology, by Andrew Jenson, we find the following under the date of February 2, 1833: 'Joseph Smith, jun., completed the translation of the New Testament.' Under the date of July 2, 1833, this statement appears: 'Joseph the Prophet finished the translation of the Bible.'

Geisler recites a mixture of these same sources and in doing so makes two errors that suggest that Changing World was the source of his argument. After citing the 2 February 1833 entry in the History of the Church, Geisler then says, "And in the Church Chronology by Andrew Jenson [under] the entry of the same day (February 2, 1833) we read: 'Joseph Smith, jun. Completed the translation of the Bible" (p. 30). Counterfeit Gospel's version ends with the words "the Bible" whereas the Tanners correctly have it as "the New Testament." This faux pas is perhaps best explained by the fact that both statements appear on the same page in Changing World, whereas they are on different pages in Church Chronology.

But a more serious conceptual error seems to clinch the matter of his dependency on the Tanners. Geisler makes exactly the same point that they do about the JST when he says, "Furthermore, early Mormons considered it a completed version" (p. 30). And he recruits the same witnesses as do the Tanners (i.e., the History of the Church, Andrew Jenson, and Arch Reynolds) to make the point. But in using Jenson he betrays his ignorance of the original sources he is calling upon. And it is exactly the same mistake made by the Tanners. Both assume that Jenson and the History of the Church are separate witnesses to the completion of the JST. Actually, they represent only one source because Jenson is drawing on the History of the Church for this data in his Chronology.

47. Tanner and Tanner, Changing World, 386.
48. According to the Tanner version, "at one time the early Mormons considered it to have been complete." See Tanner and Tanner, Changing World, 386.
In another representative error, Geisler copies a statement by Joseph Smith (item 56 in the supplement) regarding the time of the second coming and gives “Ibid.” as his in-text reference; however, it is incorrect. The previous reference in the text is to *History of the Church*, 2:182, but the quotation in question actually comes from *History of the Church*, 5:336. Why the problem? If he had actually looked at the *History of the Church*, the chances of making this mistake seem remote. But if he borrowed from *Changing World*, the reason for the error becomes evident. In their treatment of this subject, the Tanners actually used three extracts from the *History of the Church*. The second one was from *History of the Church*, 5:336. Then they begin the paragraph containing the third quotation by saying, “On the same page Joseph Smith said.” In his haste Geisler missed the second quotation with its reference. He assumed that when the Tanners said the third passage was on the same page that they were referring to *History of the Church*, 2:182, the reference for the first quotation. Hence the erroneous “Ibid.” reference. Here again, Geisler’s carelessness exposes his reliance on the Tanners’ work.

In item 62 of the supplement we find perhaps the most telling blunder of all, one which unquestionably divulges our author’s lack of knowledge about Mormonism, especially the Book of Mormon and indeed all the latter-day scriptures, as well as his unfailing dependency on the Tanner volume. Here he tries to make the point, as do the Tanners, that Joseph’s understanding about God changed between the time he wrote the Book of Mormon and when he translated the Book of Abraham. He wrote,

The Book of Mormon teaches that there is only one God. The later *Book of Abraham* affirms that there are many gods. A *comparison of the two books* reveals the *former* saying over and over “I, God” or “I, the Lord God” while the *latter* affirms “the Gods” or “they [the Gods]” (cf. Moses 2:1,10,25; 3:8 with Abraham 4:3,10,25; 5:8). By 1844 Smith came to believe that “God himself, who sits in yonder heavens, is a man like unto one of yourselves.” (pp. 41–42, emphasis added)
As the references indicate, the comparison here is not between the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham as our author believes; rather it is between the books of Moses and Abraham, both in the Pearl of Great Price.

How did Geisler make such a blunder? The answer may be attributed to his inattentive but slavish use of Changing World. The Tanners make the same point in their chapter entitled “The Godhead.” The similarities of the arguments in both texts are uncanny.49

The best way to illustrate Joseph Smith’s change of mind concerning the Godhead is to compare the Book of Moses with the Book of Abraham. Both of these books are printed in the Pearl of Great Price—one of the four standard works of the Mormon Church. . . . While the Book of Moses states that “I, God” created the heavens and the earth, the Book of Abraham states that “they [the Gods]” created them.50

The Tanners then place in parallel columns the very excerpts from the books of Moses and Abraham that Geisler cites above. Unfortunately, he overlooked the fact that the book of Moses is part of the Pearl of Great Price and wrongly assumed quotations from it were from the Book of Mormon. Thus he adapts and summarizes the information he finds in the parallel columns of the Tanner work, but by not consulting the originals he commits an oversight that once more shows that he did not discover these ideas by independent research. If he had, surely he would have realized the book of Moses was not part of the Book of Mormon.

Still another very revealing mistake concerns a reference attending a comment about Doctrine and Covenants 132. Geisler writes,

49. One such similarity concerns the latter part of Geisler’s quotation above. “By the year 1844,” the Tanners write in Changing World, 173, “Joseph Smith had completely disregarded the teachings of the Book of Mormon, for he declared that God was just an exalted man and that men could become Gods.” They then quote from the Times and Seasons, the same passage Geisler mentioned in his last sentence above. Endnote 44 for his citation reads, “Joseph Smith in Times and Seasons (Nauvoo, Ill., 1839–46), 5:613-14.”

“Smith had earlier received his revelation about many wives on July 12, 1843. This change in revelation is printed as part of LDS Scripture in *Doctrine and Covenants* (D&C 132:1–62)” (p. 44). The casual reader may not notice that the reference to “D&C 132:1–62” is incomplete, but Section 132 actually has 66 verses. Assessing how such an elementary mistake could be made is easy. Geisler did not consult an LDS edition of the Doctrine and Covenants; instead he simply lifted his information from *Changing World*, leaving behind an unintentional clue that he had copied the reference without verifying it. In their book the Tanners also reproduce portions of the revelation for which they give the following reference, “*The Doctrine and Covenants*, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1966, 132:1–4, 19, 20, 34, 35, 38, 39, 52, 60–62.” However, when Geisler rustles this statement from *Changing World* he places the quotation marks around the comments of both Jerald and Sandra as well as Nibley—but attributes them only to the latter! The Tanners’ words are italicized in the following passage to highlight the error. “LDS apologist Dr. Hugh Nibley admitted, ‘... if the authenticity of the court record could be established it would be the most devastating blow to Smith ever delivered’” (p. 46).

51. Ibid., 205.

52. Ibid., 72. See supplement item 94. Nibley did not exactly say it the way the Tanners have portrayed it here. See Hugh Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 142.

53. There is a similar phenomenon in material Geisler acknowledges he took from the Tanners. In supplement item 34, summarized in endnote 33, he puts quotation marks around the whole phrase “black stone in Kirtland, Ohio,” whereas the Tanners only have quotation marks around the words “black stone.” The remaining words “in Kirtland, Ohio” are theirs. Again in item 37 in the supplement, which is also summarized in endnote 33, Geisler has put quotations around the wrong portion of the passage. He has shortened the Tanner statement, leaving out the phrase “during the period” but including...
Thus we have several potent examples of how mistakes resulting from hasty preparation of his chapter and carelessness regarding detail provide consistent illustrations of his repeated and unattributed poaching of quotations, information, and ideas from *Changing World of Mormonism* and his failure to check the original sources the Tanners cite. In every instance where Geisler makes a significant error in the examples above, it can be explained by his reliance on *Changing World*.

No other hypothesis can comprehensively and credibly account for these errors.

** Adoption of the Ideas and Logic of the Tanners **

We have already seen the frequency with which quotations used by Geisler to make the same points are found in the same order as they appear in *Changing World*. Elaboration of an example or two is helpful to see that he also incorporated the Tanners’ ideas and logic as well. Let me acknowledge here that I did not concentrate on this aspect of the problem in my research. I spent my time and effort analyzing the sources and quotations, so I have only included here those items that surfaced in the course of those investigations. I believe a more diligent search would turn up more of the same.

We begin with Geisler’s contention that Joseph Smith finished his work on the JST. Above, it was pointed out that supplement items 17-21 regarding this matter all come from page 386 of *Changing World* and appear in the same order as they appear in that work. Subsequent paragraphs of the Tanner argument were also used by Geisler. He cites “Mormon writer Arch S. Reynolds,” who asserted that the JST was finished, and in endnote 25 Geisler acknowledges the whole thing in quotation marks when the Tanners have quoted the correct portion of the article in question.

54. Another example of Geisler’s shoddy work, his dependency on *Changing World*, and his failure to consult original sources may be seen in item 65 of the supplement. Here he gives a reference for a Brigham Young quotation as *JD*, 5:19, when it should be *JD*, 7:333. As with our other examples this can be explained by the fact that both quotations appear on page 175 of *Changing World*. He simply attached the wrong reference to the quotation.
that he got this information from *Changing World*. He continues by quoting Doctrine and Covenants 104:58: “I have commanded you to organize yourselves, even to shinelah [print] my words, the fulness of my scriptures,” but he does not say he also got this information from this portion of the Tanners’ book. He simply puts the reference “D&C 104:58” at the end of the selection. The supplement (item 21) shows that the parenthetical insertion “[print],” which explains the non-English word *shinelah* in the verse, is in both texts. The insertion “print” appeared in a pre-1981 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants used by the Tanners in *Changing World*. However, in the 1981 and subsequent printings of the Doctrine and Covenants the word *shinelah* was removed and the word *print* was substituted without parentheses. If Geisler had consulted the current edition, he would have been unaware of the presence of the non-English word. Thus he was either using a pre-1981 edition or relying on *Changing World*. Since both the Reynolds excerpt and the D&C 104:58 verse were also part of the Tanner argument, the former option seems unlikely.

But this is not the only indication of his utilization of this part of the Tanners’ work. Immediately following Doctrine and Covenants 104:58, the Tanners reproduce two more excerpts from the Doctrine and Covenants and then return to another selection from Arch Reynolds. In his very next point, Geisler adopts some of Reynolds’s logic from the Tanners’ second citation without crediting either Reynolds or the Tanners. Here is what they quote of Reynolds, which Geisler paraphrases:

> Why the Bible was not published is still an enigma; of course the Saints were unsettled: they were persecuted, but many other works were published so why not the Holy Scriptures? . . . The Lord gave Joseph a commandment to publish the Bible to the world, and the Lord prepared the way to accomplish this but it was not fulfilled.55

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Here is Norman Geisler’s version: “Even though the Mormons were unsettled and persecuted, they were able to publish many other works. Why then do they not publish their prophet’s Inspired Version of the Bible?” (p. 30).

As we view Geisler’s entire section devoted to the JST, we become more convinced we have discovered the sources of his ideas regarding that work. This is accomplished by outlining his arguments and comparing them with those in Changing World. He devotes about three and a half pages to the subject, “Joseph Smith’s Inspired Version of The Bible” (pp. 28–32). The Tanner treatment of the JST is in chapter 12 of Changing World, named “Mormon Scripture and the Bible” under the subheading “Inspired Revision.” Below is a detailed outline of Geisler’s analysis. The section name and subheadings are reproduced as they appear in the text, with various points in a bulleted listing. Following each point, I will give the page number where the item is found in both Counterfeit Gospel (CG) and Changing World (CW).

**Joseph Smith’s Inspired Version of the Bible (CG, 28; CW, 383)**

- The Inspired Version is an embarrassment to the Church and was not published in Joseph Smith’s lifetime (CG, 28; CW, 383).

As an illustration of the similarities one can find by this type of comparison, notice the likeness of the language in both books on this point.

Actually, the Inspired Version of the Bible has been the source of much embarrassment for Mormon church leaders. It was never published during Joseph Smith’s lifetime. (CW, 383)

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56. It should be mentioned that even the term Inspired Version is a clue to the dated nature of Geisler’s knowledge of Mormonism inasmuch as it has not been in vogue in the church since the 1979 publication of the LDS edition of the Bible. There, extracts of the JST were included in the footnotes and in an appendix. Since that time it has been customary to refer to Joseph’s work on the Bible as the Joseph Smith Translation. Obviously if Geisler were familiar with LDS-related literature beyond the 1981 edition of Changing World of Mormonism—especially regarding the canon—he would have known this and would likely have used the new terminology. So, as it is, this is also one more bit of evidence of his extensive reliance on dated Tanner materials, in this case terminology.

Actually, this so-called ‘Inspired Version’ of the Bible has been an embarrassment to the Mormon Church. It was never published during Smith’s lifetime. (CG, 28)

- Emma gives the Inspired Version to the RLDS Church in 1886 (CG, 28; CW, 383).
- The 1887 [sic] edition is sold by Deseret Book and cited by LDS scholars (CG, 29; CW, 384).

Under the heading “The Origin of the Inspired Version,” the following points are made:

- The text quotes John A. Widtsoe on how Joseph prepared the Inspired Version (CG, 29; CW, 384; supplement item 13).
- The text quotes Reed C. Durham about eighteen sections of the Doctrine and Covenants concerning the “Revision” (CG, 29; CW, 384; supplement item 14).
- The text quotes Doctrine and Covenants 73:3–4—a commandment to finish the project (CG, 29; CW, 384).
- God expected Joseph to finish the work; failure to do so was disobedience, or God was wrong (CG, 29).

Under the heading “The Mormon Dilemma,” the following points are made (CG, 29; CW, 385):

- Latter-day Saints cannot deny Joseph was commanded to make changes (CG, 29).
- Incorrect parts were not changed (CG, 29).

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58. This is another of Geisler’s many factual errors. The Tanners speak of the 1867 edition, but later point out that a revised 1944 edition is sold in Deseret Book and often referred to by LDS scholars. See Tanner and Tanner, Changing World, 385. One wonders if Geisler thought the Tanners were in error, assuming there would not be an RLDS publication until after the manuscripts came into the possession of the RLDS Church. If so, the logic is understandable but erroneous.

59. The idea of a dilemma is found in both texts, but Geisler departs from the Tanners in describing the nature of the dilemma. To me his description is more abstract than theirs.
• The text quotes *Doctrines of Salvation* (CG, 29; CW, 385; supplement item 15).

• Joseph Fielding Smith's explanation of Joseph's failure to revise further because of persecution is insufficient for several reasons (CG, 29).

• Mormon scholars admit there are errors in the Inspired Version (CG, 29; CW, 385–86).

• An omniscient God would have known where corrections were needed and so inspired Joseph (CG, 29–30).

• An omniscient God would have known of Joseph's busy schedule (CG, 30).

• Mormons considered the Inspired Version completed (CG, 30; CW, 386).

• The text quotes *History of the Church*, 1:324 (CG, 30; CW, 386; supplement item 17).

• The text quotes Jenson's *Church Chronology* (CG, 30; CW, 386; supplement item 18).

• The text quotes *History of the Church*, 1:386 (CG, 30; CW, 386; supplement item 19).

• The text quotes Arch Reynolds (CG, 30; CW, 386; supplement item 20).

• The text quotes Doctrine and Covenants 104:58 (CG, 30; CW, 386; supplement item 21).

• The text paraphrases Arch Reynolds: why doesn't the LDS Church publish the Inspired Version? (CG, 30; CW, 386–87).

Under the heading "An Evaluation of the Inspired Version," the following points are made (CG, 30):

• Many problems remain with the allegedly inspired Bible (CG, 30).

• Joseph overlooks some verses that are contrary to LDS teaching—for example, 1 John 5:7–8 (CG, 30–31; CW, 389).
• Joseph renders authentic verses without justification—for example, John 1:1 (CG, 31; CW, 390–91).

• Joseph could have restored lost books; instead, he removed the Song of Solomon (CG, 31; CW, 393).

• A strange eight-hundred-word interpolation appears in Genesis 50:24 (CG, 31; CW, 391–92). 60

• A bias against blacks comes out in the Inspired Version (CG, 31; CW, 392).

• The claim that Adam was baptized as believers were in Acts 2 is an anachronism (CG, 31; CW, 392–93).

• The nature of the revision process indicates it was human, not inspired (CG, 31; CW, 397).

• The Inspired Version corrects Bible verses that are quoted in the Book of Mormon (CG, 32).

Obviously this is a very high degree of correlation between the two texts. The parallels in the outline constitute twenty-four of thirty-four items, or about 71 percent. A number of these ideas appear in the same sequence in both works. Geisler does not have one quotation in his section on the JST that is not found in the Tanner volume, and he uses only those portions of the quotations which are available therein. Virtually all the facts he cites are in Changing World, as well as most of his logic and arguments.

Geisler’s list of Joseph Smith’s alleged false prophecies, noted above, is another example of plagiarism that indicates Geisler’s dependence on the Tanners’ text. If space permitted, similar detailed outlines would demonstrate very strong correlations between the two texts on the subjects of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon and changes in the Book of Mormon.

60. The Tanners provide the fact thus: “Over 800 words were added into Genesis 50:24.” Tanner and Tanner, Changing World, 391.
Conclusion

By depending on this eighteen-year-old material, yet being unaware of its weaknesses, Geisler left himself extremely vulnerable to criticism. He essentially confined his research to a 1981 production, and his endnotes demonstrate that he has not gone beyond that time in keeping abreast of LDS scholarship on the canon. (Even if he used the originals of the sources he cited he is still woefully behind.) Moreover, Geisler seems unaware that Mormon—Shadow or Reality? has been negatively reviewed and also unwittingly falls into


many of the same errors as his source. Moreover, he compounds their weakness with many serious errors of his own. Given his unfamiliarity with ongoing discussions by Latter-day Saints of canonical issues since the 1981 publication of *Changing World*, he can hardly be deemed an authority on the LDS canon. Indeed these facts explain why he exhibits a conspicuous lack of awareness that a number of the issues that he rehashes have been answered or refuted time and time again. Consequently, Geisler receives a failing grade in original and careful research, in his knowledge about his subject, and in the content of his analysis.

By itself any given section above may not convince the reader that Geisler drew his quotations and ideas from the work of Jerald and Sandra Tanner. However, the probability that he produced all these similarities, many identical, through independent research and writing, is incalculably infinitesimal—approaching zero. In the aggregate they make a much stronger case, say, than the evidence both he and the Tanners present to accuse Joseph Smith of relying on Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* or of plagiarizing the King James Version of the Bible to produce the Book of Mormon. Cumulatively the findings of this study are so convincing that when all the possibilities are carefully considered, actual dependency on *Changing World* is the best conclusion in reference to the sources Norman Geisler used to write the LDS section of his chapter. He may be “considered one of the greatest living defenders of the Christian faith,” but this study raises serious ethical questions about his method insofar as his attack on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* is concerned.

Harvest House Publishers must also bear its share of the blame for publishing this error-filled, poorly edited scoria. The publisher obviously did not demand a rigorous peer review of these essays, nor did the editors proofread the text carefully or check the accuracy of quotations and references. They mismanaged the publication as much as the author himself did, exhibiting a disconcerting lack of professionalism, and must, with him, shoulder the stigma surrounding the first chapter of *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism*, which puts them among third-rate evangelical propaganda machines in the
United States. Both bear responsibility for the fact that half of the first chapter of The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism is itself an imitation.63

One ponders why such a tactic as herein described was employed by the author and permitted by the publisher. Apparently both believe that Mormonism is so superficial, its historical basis so groundless, its theology so transparently false, its leaders so wickedly deceptive, its people so easily duped,64 that all that was required to debunk it was to obtain a large anti-Mormon documentary tome with a good reputation among countercultists, then incorporate some of its most provocative ideas and quotations on the topic in a chapter in an anti-Mormon book. Norman Geisler's failure to seriously confront the

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63. Therefore, it is obvious I do not completely share the view of Marianne Jennings, professor of legal and ethical studies at Arizona State University, who recently said, "Years ago when I was working in the U.S. Attorney's Office, we did not have word processors. One of the secretaries finished making final copies of a 75-page brief for an appellate case. At the last minute, I discovered a typographical error. I went to the senior attorney and said, 'This is not my fault. I corrected the type on the last draft, but the secretary missed it.' He looked at me and said, 'Does it have your name on it?' When I replied that it did, he said matter-of-factly, 'Then it is your mistake.'" Marianne Jennings, "The Evolution—and Devolution of Journalistic Ethics," Imprimis 28:7 (July 1999): 4–5.

What little experience I have had with publishers has shown me that late mistakes can enter in after the author has checked the proofs. Last-minute directions for final changes can be misunderstood by editors and deadlines can prevent a final check of those that have been made. But it should be mentioned that Jennings's remarks were said in context of a journalist's relationship with her editor, which is presumably much closer spatially and professionally than most authors have with publishers.

64. From the beginning such an attitude has pervaded anti-Mormon sentiment, though in those days of less politically correct speech authors were more overt in expressing their opinions. In 1832 Joshua V. Himes explained in a preface to Alexander Campbell's anti-Mormon pamphlet, Delusions, that he thought Mormonism should be exposed but "judicious friends" advised him against it because "the system was so unreasonable and ridiculous, that no person of good common sense would believe it." Inexplicably, however, it was making progress "among some of our respectable citizens . . . worthy members of the religious societies to which they belonged," so he decided it was his duty to use his "exertion against its spreading and contaminating influence." But Campbell beat him to it, so Himes contented himself for a time with promoting the former's pamphlet. His own work, Mormon Delusions and Monstrosities, came out in 1842. See Joshua V. Himes, "Prefatory Remarks," in Alexander Campbell, Delusions. An Analysis of the Book of Mormon: with an Examination of Its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of Its Pretences to Divine Authority (Boston: Greene, 1832), 3.
Mormon canon with substantive scholarship indicates an underlying prejudice\textsuperscript{65} common among many critics of Mormonism. Cloaked in pseudoscholarly garb, his highly dependent piece—counterfeit coin, really—turns out to be little more than a diatribe against Mormonism. If this is the best the students of Veritas Graduate School of Apologetics and Countercult Ministries are receiving from their mentors, if this kind of scholarship is typical of its faculty and students, or if this is the ethical foundation on which the school is built, then both evangelicals and Mormons can continue to expect to be fed warmed-over stew from the greasy kitchen of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, all the while believing they are partaking of original cuisine. It is hoped that this source review will serve notice that their writings and arguments will continue to be meticulously scrutinized, if for no other reason than to inspire an increase in the quality of dialogue between Mormons and evangelicals in the spirit initiated by Stephen Robinson and Craig Blomberg.

La Roy Sunderland, another critic of this period, was equally condescending. It could not be supposed, he thought, “that any number of intelligent people are in much danger of being carried away by a delusion so manifestly monstrous and absurd.” As for believing in the Book of Mormon, he observed “one patient reading of this book, would probably suggest to any one the true reason, why more notice has not been taken of it, and more efforts made to expose and confute its pretended claims to inspiration.” Its errors, contradictions, and “gross blasphemies” were so “abundantly sufficient to lead any person of ordinary intellect, who reads it with attention, to suppose that but few, if any, who believe the Bible . . . could be led away by such barefaced hypocrisy.” Yet he also faced the paradox of people falling for the so-called fraud. He also found it difficult to comprehend why reasonable people would leave their homes and migrate to Missouri as Joseph Smith had encouraged them to do. “This requisition of Mormonism is so perfectly preposterous, and cruel, so evidently a figment of a covetous combination, that it almost tortures the human imagination to conceive how any man, in his senses, can believe it has the sanction of truth or the Bible.” He gives the only explanation that made any sense to him in the face of such bald deception: “that persons are found, professing faith in the Christian Scriptures, and, yet, ignorant enough to be duped by such a monstrous and bare-faced delusion, is an evidence of the inefficiency of human reason, to discern between the claims of truth and the absurdities of error.” La Roy Sunderland, Mormonism Exposed and Refuted (New York: Piercy & Reed, 1838), iii–iv, 34.

COUNTERFEITING THE MORMON CONCEPT OF GOD

Richard R. Hopkins

Francis Beckwith expresses his thesis at the outset of his contribution to *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* as follows: “Most people, including some Mormons, are unaware of how radically the Mormon view of God differs from the picture of God that one finds in the Bible and traditional Christian theology” (p. 51). This is a controversial statement, but it is certainly true in one respect: Mormons are, indeed, unaware of any difference between their view of God and that taught in the Bible. What Beckwith is really trying to prove, however, is a little narrower. He promises to show “why Christians believe that their concept of God better captures the data of Scripture than does the LDS view” (p. 51).

This statement implies a distinction between “Christians” and Latter-day Saints that does not exist, but it is a worthy goal if only Beckwith would have stuck with it. This review will examine his arguments and show that, in fact, he fails not only to sustain his claim, but he diverts from it so substantially as to suggest that even he does not believe it is provable.¹

¹ As to Beckwith’s claim that the Mormon view of God differs radically from “traditional Christian theology,” there will be little argument from Latter-day Saints. In the latter half of the second century A.D., false views of God reflecting the tenets of popular

Two major problems beset and completely undermine Beckwith's thesis. The first is his assumption that "classical theism" is the same thing as "biblical" theology. He incorrectly asserts that what "one finds in the Bible" and "traditional Christian theology" are one and the same. They are not, of course, but there is little point in addressing that issue historically because all Beckwith says in support of the historical issue is that "this view of God has long been the orthodox theistic position of all branches of the Christian church: Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox" (p. 51). That, of course, proves nothing.

The second is Beckwith's interpretation of the LDS view of God. It is understandable, since he seeks to debunk it, that he should portray the LDS view in the worst possible light, but what Beckwith does in this chapter is more an attempt to rewrite Mormonism's tenets than to portray them. His restatements concerning "the Mormon concept of God" are so far from the mark, so often, that one is tempted to accuse him of setting up a straw version of the Mormon concept of God rather than confronting real Mormon doctrine.

The first portion of his chapter attempts to demonstrate his first claim, namely that classical theism most accurately represents the biblical concept of God, so we will start with that issue. His arguments regarding the Bible's support for classical theism are addressed in the order of their presentation.

The Classical Christian Concept of God

Beckwith admits to "variations within this tradition [classical theism]" but claims that his "bare bones" version constitutes the fundamentals of orthodox Christianity (pp. 51–52). In truth, the term orthodox in Christianity was first applied to a set of interpretations of biblical language beginning late in the second century A.D. 

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Greek philosophy found their way into what was left of the church after Roman persecution had all but wiped out its leadership. Since that time the traditional view of God espoused by Christian churches has differed radically from that found in the Bible.

2. This, in itself, is an understatement that borders on deception.
that ultimately became the “dogma” of the Roman Catholic Church. As early as the third century A.D., these dogmas started to become inviolate. Denial of them, even improper wording or examples used in teaching, could be grounds for excommunication. These doctrines constituted the official position on theology arrived at by agreement among the various surviving churches.

Does that make them biblical? Actually, they are often directly contrary to passages in the Bible. They are not even based on oral traditions handed down by the original apostles or any other knowledgeable leaders of the early church. They are nothing more than the majority opinions of early Christian thinkers still alive after A.D. 125.

There is no reason to think that orthodoxy or classical theism represents the teachings of the Bible any more than any other person’s opinion about the words contained in scripture. It is simply a fact that by the end of the fifth century A.D., if not earlier, certain interpretations of the Bible were considered “orthodox” and therefore acceptable, while others were believed to be “heretical” and therefore subject to disciplinary action. In fact, many orthodox dogmas were attacked and even renounced in the Protestant Reformation, and many of the opinions of those early thinkers are now considered heretical.

Any student of second-century Christian history can attest to the problems the church had in arriving at a reliable set of biblical interpretations. For one thing, the canon had not yet been established. Many orthodox thinkers (e.g., the highly respected Irenaeus) believed that the Shepherd of Hermas was scripture and based some of their interpretations (e.g., the doctrine of creation ex nihilo) on passages from that work. Others refused to accept either the writings of Paul, the Old Testament, the book of Revelation, or some other portion of the canon that has since been accepted by Protestant denominations.


To make matters worse, church leaders in the second century were confronted with a cacophony of opinions about church doctrine. It was the age of the heretic, and every church teacher espoused a different theory. Many orthodox doctrines (e.g., the genesis of Christ and the doctrine of consubstantiality) appear to have first been formulated by Tatian, a man who later became openly heretical and was excommunicated.

By the end of the fifth century, the church that survived may have resembled early Christianity, but it was highly influenced by the struggles through which it had come and the prevailing views of the Greek education system that pervaded the known world. The fact that the views promulgated by the church that rose from the ashes of Trajan’s persecution have prevailed in much of the Christian world for the last seventeen hundred years cannot be denied. But that is hardly evidence that they rely on or agree with the Bible. It can’t even be maintained in all cases that they are the same as the views of first-century Christians.

Nevertheless, Beckwith lists the supposed principles of Christianity or orthodox classical theism as follows:

The God of classical Christian theism is at least 1) personal and incorporeal (without physical parts), 2) the Creator and Sustainer of everything else that exists, 3) omnipotent (all-powerful), 4) omniscient (all-knowing), 5) omnipresent (everywhere present), 6) immutable (unchanging) and eternal, 7) necessary and the only God, and 8) triune: one God, three Persons. (p. 52)

This list really identifies twelve separate attributes or characteristics of God, but each characteristic will be reviewed as it is listed by Beckwith for convenience in examining his arguments.

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5. See Tatian, Address to the Greeks 5, in ANF, 2:67.
Personal and Incorporeal

According to classical theism, God is “a personal Being.” Beckwith says this means he “has all the attributes that we may expect from a perfect person: self-consciousness and the ability to reason, know, love, communicate, and so forth” (p. 52). He then provides biblical authority for that position. So far, Mormons agree with classical theists that this is biblical doctrine.

But classical theism departs from biblical theology when it refuses to acknowledge that, since man was created in the image of God (see Genesis 1:26–27), the concept of personality in God must be the same in him as it is in man. That purely biblical deduction places this attribute of God in direct conflict with the doctrine of consubstantiality, which lies at the core of the classical Trinity. If the idea that man was created in the image of God means anything, it means that if three human persons cannot be one human being (and they cannot), the three persons of the Godhead cannot be one singular person or Being.

This is not to say that the oneness of God is unbiblical. Quite the contrary. God’s “oneness” is unquestionably taught throughout the Bible and other Latter-day Saint scripture. But it means that the biblical message about God’s “oneness,” even the very concept of “God” in the sense of “deity,” must be reexamined by classical theologians with an eye toward determining what the authors of the Old and New Testaments meant. The idea of consubstantiality promulgated by second-century Christian thinkers just does not capture the meaning of the scriptural passages.

Expressing one important source of confusion, Beckwith maintains that because John 4:24 refers to God as “spirit,” he cannot also have a body of flesh and bones (see p. 52). This interpretation conflicts with innumerable eyewitness accounts throughout the Old and New Testaments (e.g., Exodus 24:9–11 and Acts 7:55–56). It also conflicts with the New Testament’s unequivocal testimony that Jesus Christ, a resurrected being with flesh and bones (see Luke 24:39), is indeed the express image of the Father (see, e.g., Hebrews 1:3) and is himself divine.
The argument in which Beckwith uses John 4:24 to deny God's corporeality is credited to Carl Mosser, who paraphrases Christ's remarks to the Samaritan woman in John 4 as follows:

Jesus in effect says, God is not located either in Jerusalem or at Gerizim. God is spirit—He is not “located” anywhere. You don’t need to go to the right place, you need to worship with the right attitude—in spirit and in truth. Of course, for Jesus to make the point that God’s essential nature is unlocated, ‘spirit’ precludes a physical body also being a part of that nature, since a body is located. (p. 92 n. 3)

It is true that, in prayer, the location of the supplicant is irrelevant, but it is wrong to assume that this is because God has no location. Although Mosser doesn’t acknowledge that he has made this assumption, the unexpressed foundation of his thesis is the idea that a spirit has no location, while a body does.

Such an idea is taught nowhere in the Bible. On the contrary, Solomon, for example, understood that the God of Israel, then a spirit, had a location. In his prayer of dedication for the temple in Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 8:39, 43), he repeatedly asks, “Hear thou [the prayers of the people] in heaven thy dwelling place.” In so saying, Solomon recognized that the God of Israel, the pre mortal spirit of Christ, had a “dwelling place” “in heaven.” Thus Mosser’s argument must fail. The idea that spirits are “unlocated” is completely without biblical support.

In any event, John 4:24 does not discuss God’s nature at all but relates to the means by which men may communicate with him from any location. They can do so in spirit and in truth. This passage recognizes that there is a spiritual aspect to man’s nature as much as to God’s. To suggest that it precludes God from having a physical nature would necessarily require the same conclusion with respect to men, namely that they also can communicate with God only if they have no physical nature.

Beckwith cites the Old Testament to prove his thesis that “God is not a man” (see, e.g., Numbers 23:19). But the very assumption that lies at the foundation of these verses is in direct conflict with the idea
that God is only a spirit. In Numbers 23:19 God contrasts his perfect condition with man's imperfect condition. The passage confirms that God is not an imperfect man, that fallen men differ grossly from the perfect, glorified Father of heaven and earth. But it does not contradict God's basic human nature (see Genesis 1:26-27). Instead, it reflects a contrast between the perfect nature of the resurrected God and the imperfect nature of mortal men.

This understanding is aided by the use of the comparative form of the word man in Numbers 23:19 (and similar passages). There the Hebrew word 'ish is translated “man” in the English text. That word is commonly used in Hebrew to compare one type of man with another (e.g., an older man with a younger man), in this case a perfect man with an imperfect man. Thus this passage actually teaches that the God of the Old Testament is a man.

Christians worship Christ as God, yet he is clearly a man. Even classical theists admit that Christ has a human nature as well as a divine nature. How can they lay claim to biblical support for their view when they teach that the Father of Christ is not a man, especially in light of such passages as Hebrews 1:3? Did God's eternal and immutable nature change upon the incarnation of Christ? Did he change from not being a man in the Old Testament to being a man in the New? Latter-day Saints answer, “No.” Even Christ's spirit personage had the appearance of a man (see Exodus 24:9-11). He came to earth as a physical man subject to death (see Philippians 2:5-8), and he is now an exalted and glorified man, just like his Father (see Luke 24:36-43; Romans 6:9; Colossians 1:15; and Hebrews 1:3). How could God be anything but a corporeal man? To deny it is tantamount to denying that Christ is God.

Beckwith thinks the fact that God generally keeps himself invisible to mortal men (see Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; and Hebrews 11:27) means he is not corporeal. But the inability of some to see God conveys no such information. More important, some have seen God and borne testimony of his appearance, always in anthropomorphic terms (see, e.g., Acts 7:55-56).

Beckwith claims that "no mere human person has ever seen or can see God (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12)" (p. 52). The phrase mere human person is not in the Bible. It is used by classical theists to get around John 6:46, a passage that directly contradicts the classical position on this issue. It teaches that "he which is of God" has seen the Father. Classical theists claim that this refers to Christ alone, but that explanation undercutsthe vision of Stephen the Martyr in Acts 7:55–56, and the appearance of "the God of Israel" to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel in Exodus 24:9–11, to name but two incidents describing an appearance of God.

Beckwith next uses a rather strange twist of logic. He claims that the fact that heaven and earth cannot "contain" God (see 1 Kings 8:27) proves he doesn't have a body. The logic of this argument is hard to follow, especially in view of the fact that the Hebrew word translated "contain" means "to keep in" (p. 52), a nuance of containment that relates more to God's power than to his corporeality.

Finally, using the metaphysical idea that God is the "sustainer of everything else that exists" and citing his role as creator and his omnipotence, immutability, and omnipresence, Beckwith concludes, "it is difficult to see how such a being could be physical" (p. 52). This statement is not a biblical argument at all and simply reflects a lack of familiarity with basic principles of physics. The Bible teaches that Christ has all these attributes, but classical theists as well as Latter-day Saints understand that he has a human as well as a divine nature. If Christ can have a human nature and still be omnipotent, immutable, omnipresent, and the creator of heaven and earth, certainly God the Father could be likewise. Indeed, that is exactly what the New Testament teaches in Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:13–15; and 2 Corinthians 4:4. Thus classical theism's claim that God is incorporeal lacks biblical support.

9. The similarity between 1 John 4:12, which is unconditional, and John 6:46 (by the same author), which is conditional, suggests that one of the texts may not conform precisely to the original. There are more textual problems with 1 John than with the Gospel of John. Therefore, it is more likely that 1 John 4:12 is missing the conditional phrase than that it was erroneously added to John 6:46.

10. This is usually explained by saying that Stephen "only" saw "the glory of God" and that he did not, therefore, actually see the Father. In the Old Testament, however, it is precisely "the glory of God" that was the most invisible aspect of Deity (see Exodus
The Creator and Sustainer of Everything Else That Exists

"In classical theism," Beckwith admits,

all reality is contingent on God—that is, all reality has come into existence and continues to exist because of Him. Unlike a god who forms the universe out of preexistent matter (ex materia), the God of classical theism created the universe ex nihilo (out of nothing) . . .

. . . The Bible also teaches that everything that is not God or in God's mind (e.g., numbers, ideas) has not always existed. (p. 53, emphasis in original)

While the understanding that God created the heavens and the earth is clearly biblical, the extension of that concept described above is not. It is a theory taught for centuries before Christ by Greek philosophers, especially the Platonists. Plato developed the idea, based on the theories of Parmenides, the father of metaphysics, that the universe is essentially a figment of the imagination of God. His suggestion was that God is pure mind and that he only exists in reality along with the "Forms" (numbers, ideas, and so forth) that exist in his mind. This was "being," "pure being," or the "ground of all being." Everything else—the universe, all matter, indeed, all of time and space as man perceives them—was "not being," formed after the pattern of the Forms out of chaotic and illusory matter that was referred to as "becoming" or phenomenon (Gr. phainomena). 11

Plato did not teach ex nihilo creation, of course. That idea can be traced to a Greek philosopher and Christian Gnostic heretic named Basilides, who lived and wrote early in the second century A.D. 12 Creation out of nothing, however, is consistent with later Platonist and neo-Platonist thinking. 13

33:18–20). Stephen saw enough of God to know that Jesus was standing on his "right hand." If there is more to see of God besides his "glory," it is not evident from Acts 7:55–56, which suggests that God's glory has at least some anthropomorphic measures.


This is a distinctively metaphysical concept, and nothing in the Bible accepts or teaches the metaphysics of classical theism. Metaphysics must be inferred, if it is to be believed at all, from passages in the Bible. Beckwith looks to the following for such inferences: Acts 17:25; Romans 11:36; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 11:3; and Revelation 4:11 (see pp. 53–54). He receives some aid in making these conclusions from the translators of the Jerusalem Bible, from which his New Testament quotations are taken (see p. 51). However, a careful examination of the original texts, or even the more literal KJV translation, reveals some serious problems with Beckwith’s conclusions. For example, Hebrews 11:3, if translated literally and with an understanding of the philosophical idiom in common use among the Hellenized people of the time (such as the Alexandrian Jews to whom the book was likely written), directly contradicts the metaphysical concept of the universe.\footnote{In the KJV, the passage reads: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” The phrase things which do appear is translated from one Greek word, “phantomata,” commonly used by Middle Platonists to identify the supposedly illusionary world that appears to man’s senses. Thus the last half of the passage could be translated,}

In order to understand Beckwith’s inferences, each of his conclusions must be examined individually.

1. “God has always existed” (p. 54). (In support, Geisler cites Genesis 21:33; Exodus 3:15; Deuteronomy 33:27; 1 Chronicles 16:36; Job 36:26; Psalms 90:1–4; 102:12, 24–27; 143:13; Isaiah 40:28; and Romans 1:20.) More will be said about this later, but it is clear that Latter-day Saint theology agrees with this tenet in at least two senses. First, the individual members of the Godhead have always existed, though not necessarily as members of the Godhead. Second, the Godhead itself, the Divine Nature (the words from which “Godhead” is taken), may be viewed as a reference to a singular authority over all the universe. Latter-day Saints teach that this authority has always existed. All the scriptures cited by Beckwith are consistent with this, the LDS position. Hence, they cannot be used to support the classical rather than the Latter-day Saint view.

2. “The universe, including its matter [everything that is not God or in God’s mind], has not always existed” (p. 54). (See Acts 17:25;
2 Corinthians 4:6; Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 11:3; and Revelation 4:11.) With so many passages listed, one naturally expects some biblical support for this view, but Beckwith does nothing to show how his conclusion follows from any of the passages he cites. In fact, the scriptures that describe creation are in direct conflict with his view. The primary Hebrew word translated “create” or “created” is בָּרָא, which means “to carve out,” implying that God created the heavens and the earth out of preexistent material. That material, in fact, is carefully described in Genesis 1:2, the second verse of the Bible. Even responsible classical theists have admitted that nothing in the Bible teaches the idea of ex nihilo creation.15

3. “God is the creator, sustainer, and sole cause of the universe, which means that the universe has no material cause” (p. 54). (See references in item 2 above.) This is a problematic conclusion at best. First, biblical passages that say God created “all things” are subject to a scriptural context.16 The context for all such passages is established in Genesis, which limits itself to a description of this earth and its surrounding “heavens.” Besides, the Genesis account specifies that the “heavens and the earth” were made out of something, namely the desolate, ruined, and barren planet described in Genesis 1:2. Lacking some specific indication to the contrary, which does not appear in the passages Beckwith cites, any statement about creation contained in the scriptures must be taken in the context established in Genesis. To apply these passages to the universe in general or to some prior creative act not mentioned in the Bible is pure speculation.

"so that things which are seen were not made from phainomena." This wording conveys the understanding that the things God created, the things that appear to men's eyes, were not formed out of the illusory chaos from which Plato thought the sensory universe was made (phainomena).


16. In the New Testament, they are translated from one of the various forms of the Greek root word πασ, which is specifically contextual in form. Pas basically means “all that are the subject of this discussion.” Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. pas.
Latter-day Saints, who tend to be strictly biblical, would grant that God is the sole cause *in* the universe, but they have no basis for assuming that he is the sole cause *of* the universe in the sense that classical theists claim. The only account of creation man possesses—namely that contained in the scriptures—specifically identifies pre-existing matter as an essential element in the process.

4. “God created light out of darkness, which implies that out of nothing something was created” (p. 54). (See Genesis 1:3.) Here Beckwith tries to find something that was actually created out of nothing in the biblical account, specifically in Genesis 1:3. His conclusion rests on a tenuous implication at best. First, Genesis 1:3 says nothing about God creating light out of darkness. Especially problematic is the fact that darkness remained after the light was created. Genesis 1:4 says God separated the light from the darkness. The Bible never indicates that the “darkness” is “nothing.”

Notwithstanding the weakness of his arguments, Beckwith finishes his “proof” as follows: “Conclusion: Scripture teaches that God created the universe *ex nihilo*” (p. 54). (No citations.) Clearly, this conclusion is unwarranted. Even such noted classical theologians as Millard Erickson would refrain from making so broad a claim.

Still, Beckwith continues as follows: “Consequently, it is on God alone that everything in the universe depends for its existence” (p. 54).

This conclusion does not follow from the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, even if that concept could be established as biblical. As it is understood in classical theism, this idea is really only consistent with Plato’s metaphysical concept of a God who holds all creation in his mind, literally a figment of his imagination. Nothing in the Bible teaches that concept.

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17. In fact, the reference to darkness in Genesis 1:2, when the text is studied in the original Hebrew, suggests that the condition of the earth was such that sunlight could not penetrate to sea level (“darkness was upon the face of the deep”). In that context, the command in verse three could have been a parting of the atmosphere to allow sunlight through. This would be consistent with verse four and is not contradicted by verse five.

Although the Jerusalem Bible’s translation of Colossians 1:17 (“he holds all things in unity”) might seem to support this concept, that translation is far from literal. The KJV translates the phrase by him all things consist, and the word consist is fairly specific. It means “to place together, to set in the same place, to bring or band together.” No support for the classical idea can be found in this passage. LDS scripture teaches that the “power of God” is that “which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed” (D&C 88:13). That idea is consistent with Acts 17:25 and the other passages Beckwith cites, but it is hardly the same as the classical view.

Omnipotent

God’s omnipotence is declared by classical theism, taught in the Bible, and taught by Latter-day Saints, who would even agree with Beckwith (except for his reference to God being incorporeal) when he says:

This should be understood to mean that God can do anything that is 1) logically possible and 2) consistent with being a personal, incorporeal, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, and wholly perfect creator. (p. 54)

Beckwith deals with such seeming limitations as the fact that God’s omnipotence does not allow him to sin, by quoting Augustine as follows:

Neither do we lessen [God’s] power when we say He cannot die or be deceived. This is the kind of inability which, if removed, would make God less powerful than He is. . . . It is precisely because He is omnipotent that for Him some things are impossible. (pp. 54–55, quoting Augustine, City of God 5.10)

Beckwith's discussion of this attribute takes a turn that leaves Latter-day Saints wondering why classical theists don't listen to their own logic.

When the classical theist claims that God can only do what is logically possible, he or she is claiming that God cannot do or create what is logically impossible. Examples of logically impossible entities include "married bachelors," "square circles," and "a brother who is an only child." But these are not really entities; they are merely contrary terms that are strung together and appear to say something. Hence, the fact that God cannot do the logically impossible does not in any way discount His omnipotence.

... everything is possible for God, but the logically impossible is not truly a thing. (p. 55)

It is a shame such wisdom is not applied to the Trinity. If a "married bachelor" is a logical impossibility and God cannot do the logically impossible, how is it He can consist of three persons who are only one Being? The doctrine of the Trinity has been recognized as a paradox since the second century, when it was much easier to explain in terms of the Greek metaphysical universe. Why isn't this paradox recognized today for the logical impossibility that it is and rejected as "not truly a thing"?

Omniscient

Beckwith explains the classical position on the attribute of omniscience as follows: "God is all-knowing, and His all-knowingness encompasses the past, present, and future" (p. 55). Most Latter-day Saints agree with this proposition. But there is a vast difference between classical theism and Mormonism on the subject of how God knows the future.

Classical theism views God, consistent with its Platonistic belief in metaphysics, as being outside of time and space. From this vantage, he can supposedly see any point in time he chooses. The trouble
with this view is that no passage of the Bible even suggests that it is true. Certainly Beckwith does not offer any scripture that would uphold the idea.

Some Christian philosophers and theologians also differ with classical theists on this issue. Beckwith cites one such theologian who claims that “some prophecies are ‘predictions based on God’s exhaustive knowledge of the past and present’” (p. 56).

In refutation of this idea, Beckwith cites Deuteronomy 18:22, but his is a very narrow reading of this passage. It fails to state the true crux of the prophetic calling. A reading of the passage in context (see Deuteronomy 18:18–22) reveals that a true prophet is one who speaks the words God commands him to speak. Verse 22 is merely a convenient rule of thumb. Jonah, for example, was definitely a true prophet, even though his prophecy about the destruction of Nineveh (see Jonah 3:4) did not come to pass.

Jeremiah clarifies this point in a way that completely undermines Beckwith’s argument based on Deuteronomy 18:22. In Jeremiah 18:5–10, the Lord responds to certain complaints from his people, explaining:

At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it;
if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil,
I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.
(Jeremiah 18:7–8 NASB)

Thus God may know that a calamitous pronouncement will turn a people to righteousness, and he may instruct his prophet to present the announcement unconditionally, as he did with Jonah. If the people repent and the catastrophe is averted, what does that say about God’s omniscience? The fact is that it neither detracts from his perfect knowledge of the future nor supports the classical notion of how he comes to that knowledge.

20. Beckwith cites the passage as follows: “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him” (p. 56).
What does the Bible say about how God knows the future? The answer is suggested in Isaiah 46:10-11, a passage Beckwith himself cites (see p. 55). In those verses, God declares the end from the beginning, saying, “I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed [NASB: planned] it, I will also do it.” This passage suggests that God knows the future because, through his infinite knowledge, he has planned it, and through his infinite power, he will bring it to pass. What he promises for the future will be fulfilled. He has the power to do it, he has planned it, and he will do it.

This is not the kind of prescience classical theists attribute to God, but it is the nature of God’s knowledge of the future reflected in the Bible. It essentially says that God knows the future because he knows all things in the past and present and has all wisdom and all power.

Beckwith suggests that any knowledge of the future thus acquired is “opinion or highly probable guesses” (p. 55), as if man’s feeble attempts to foretell the future could be compared to a prediction made by the Almighty, who established the laws of the universe, knows man’s every thought, and can pinpoint the location of every quark in the universe from the infinite reaches of the past through the latest instant of the present. Given this level of knowledge, God’s “predictions” cannot be regarded as “opinion or highly probable guesses.” They are nothing short of perfect knowledge.

Nothing presented by Beckwith contradicts the impression given by this passage from Isaiah. He cites Psalm 139:17, 18, but the fact that God’s thoughts outnumber the sands doesn’t support the classical view. He also cites Psalm 147:5, saying that God’s understanding has no limits. Lack of limits, however, does not support the metaphysical view of God’s knowledge, especially in light of the fact that the passage specifically refers to God’s “understanding.” When classical theists speak of God’s knowledge, they are not talking about “understanding.” They are talking about knowledge that exists either because whatever God decides in his mind will happen is what happens, or because God is able to look into the future and see what happens.
As to the latter notion of how God knows the future, Beckwith cites a passage that, at first blush, might be interpreted in a supportive way. Job 28:24 (NASB) says: "For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens." Of course, literally speaking, this passage merely states that God sees everything that is happening on earth in the present. This passage is consistent with Isaiah 46:10–11.

The whole idea of metaphysics was unknown to the Hebrews of Job’s time (and to the Greeks back then as well, for that matter). The Hebrews to whom this passage was written held no belief that God could transcend space and time in order to look at the future. To them, that would have been an impossibility. Therefore this passage should not be interpreted in a metaphysical way.²¹

The only other argument Beckwith cites for the classical view on this issue is Isaiah 41:21–24 (“Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come” [Isaiah 41:21–22]), but that scripture actually supports the understanding of how God knows the future as indicated by Isaiah 46:10–11. It contrasts the inability of idols to foretell the future with the ability of God to do so but suggests God’s method for doing so is the one requested, namely “shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them.”

Once again, Beckwith fails to demonstrate that classical theism accurately reflects biblical teaching.

²¹ Passages of scripture whose literal interpretation would constitute an impossibility, as understood by the people to whom the passages were given, should usually be interpreted figuratively. See D. R. Dungan, Hermeneutics: A Text-Book, 3rd ed. (Cincinnati: Standard, n.d.), 195–96.
Omnipresent

Beckwith next considers the issue of God’s omnipresence, saying, “It is the Bible’s explicit teaching that God is omnipresent” (p. 57). The passages he cites, however (Deuteronomy 4:39; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:5, 6; and Acts 17:24–28), immediately belie this claim, for the fact is that the Bible does not use the word omnipresent anywhere within its pages.

The Bible does nothing more than describe God’s knowledge of the present and his power to be at, or communicate with, any part of the universe at his discretion, from which men are intended to derive some understanding of his omnipresence. The term omnipresent is nothing more than a word that describes the effect of these attributes; it is not the attribute itself. Therefore, one cannot learn what this attribute involves from the word omnipresent. It must be understood from the scriptures.

Passages stating the Lord’s position as God in both “the heavens above and on the earth below” (Deuteronomy 4:39), discussing the inability of any building or place to “contain” him (see 1 Kings 8:27 and 2 Chronicles 2:5, 6), or delineating his refusal to occupy man-made shrines, his independence, and his imminence or nearness to man (see Acts 17:24–28) fail to prove that God is omnipresent in the sense taught by classical theists. Nevertheless, Beckwith claims:

Since God is not a physical being who takes up space, it would be wrong to think of Him as a sort of gas that fills up the universe. In that sense, He is not everywhere, since God is not a thing, like water or air, that can take up space. Rather, God is everywhere insofar as He is not limited by a spatio-temporal body, knows everything immediately without benefit of sensory organs, and sustains everything that exists. In other words, God’s omnipresence logically follows from His omniscience, incorporeality, omnipotence, and role as creator and sustainer of the universe. (p. 58)

Actually, God’s omnipresence follows logically from his omniscience and his omnipotence alone. These are the only attributes cited in passages that describe God’s omnipresence (see, e.g., Psalm...
139:7–10). It is entirely unnecessary to argue that God must be incorporeal or claim that he is “not a thing, like water or air, that can take up space.” Nor is it necessary to claim that God is “not limited by a spatiotemporal body” (p. 58). This can readily be demonstrated by noting that the New Testament implies Christ’s omnipresence (see Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8) despite the fact—acknowledged by all classical theists (see, for example, p. 93 n. 11)—that he has a “human nature” and a corporeal, spatiotemporal body (see Luke 24:36–38). In other words, Christ was, and thanks to the resurrection, now is and will forever be, “a thing, like water or air, that can take up space” (p. 58), yet he is also omnipresent.

In an attempt to distinguish the classical concept of God’s omnipresence from pantheism, Beckwith denies that God is “identical to His creation” (p. 58). That was a Stoic notion, but the Stoics were not always pantheists. The essence of the pantheistic view is the absence of a personality that can be located at any specific time or place. Pantheism places God’s “presence,” the center of his consciousness, everywhere in the universe simultaneously. Thus to Stoics God was present in everything and at every location in just the same way Beckwith describes God as “spiritually and personally present at every point of the universe” (p. 58).

The God of the Bible has a distinctly identifiable “presence,” which “comes to” and “departs from” specific spatiotemporal locations. He is also described as imminent, “not far from any of us” (Acts 17:27). The entire concept of God’s imminence, taught by classical theists as well as Latter-day Saints, contradicts the idea that he is actually present at every location in the universe simultaneously. To say that God is close by requires the assumption that he is not actually present.

Some classical theologians have correctly noted that it is antithetical to the notion of personality to claim that God is present everywhere simultaneously. Personality, they note, is necessarily centered at some location. Thus to say that God is present everywhere simultaneously is to rob him of his personality and turn him into a pantheistic deity.

That God is both ubiquitous (accessible anywhere) and imminent (near to man) is consistent with the Bible. However, as part of their claims of omnipresence, classical theists also insist that God is transcendent (not located in the real spatiotemporal universe). Belief in the imminence of God and his transcendence is contradictory. This has led some classical theists to admit that they simply do not understand in what way(s) God is omnipresent.23

Beckwith and other classical theologians frequently cite passages that say God is not limited or contained by anything as proof of God’s transcendent omnipresence. Thus Beckwith states that God is not “limited by it [referring to his creations] (as in Mormon theism)” (p. 58). But the implication that if God exists among his own creations, he must somehow be limited by that creation, is not a teaching of Mormonism. The idea that God would be limited if he existed in time and space, or that the eternal existence of “matter” and “intelligence” represents some kind of limitation on God’s omnipresence or other attributes, is as shortsighted as many other ancient Greek notions about the physical universe that still hamper classical thought today. Latter-day Saints would rather assume that God imposed on time and space the laws and conditions in which he himself chose to live.24

Immutable and Eternal

According to Beckwith, “when a Christian says that God is immutable and eternal, he is saying that God is unchanging and has always existed as God throughout all eternity. There never was a time when God was not God” (p. 58). What this means, he explains, is that “His nature remains the same” even though “God certainly seems to change in response to how His creatures behave—such as in the case of the repenting Ninevites (see the book of Jonah)” (p. 59).

It is not important what some Christians mean when they use biblical language. Beckwith’s thesis relates to what the Bible says, and the Bible is not supportive of his claims on this subject. Malachi

23. See ibid.
24. The latter conclusion is in line with scientific theories about the quantum structure of vacuum.
3:5–6, cited in part by Beckwith, teaches that God’s judgment—that is, his perfect adherence to the best principles of jurisprudence—is unchanging. This is not the same as saying that everything about God is unchanging. Beckwith quotes Alan Gomes’s teaching that God’s counsel, his “intention, resolution, will, or purpose . . . are not subject to change, fluctuation, or failure” (p. 58). (See also Hebrews 6:17 and Isaiah 46:10b, cited by Beckwith.) On these points, classical theists have correctly identified biblical teachings.

But the Bible indicates several major areas of change experienced by God. Some of these are changes pertinent to the classical claim that God has always existed “as God.” Since the Godhead consists of three separate persons, Beckwith’s assertion that “God has always existed as God” is necessarily ambiguous. If it refers to God in the broad sense of the ultimate authority over the universe, it is biblical and unquestionably a tenet of Latter-day Saint doctrine. But classical theists apply the statement to all three persons of the Godhead individually. That notion is demonstrably unbiblical.

For example, Proverbs 8:22 reads that the Messiah, God the Son, obtained “wisdom” before he participated in the creation of the earth. Though translators, influenced by the classical tradition, have routinely translated this passage “The Lord possessed me [wisdom] in the beginning of his way, before his works of old,” the word possessed does not come from the usual Hebrew word for that concept (yārash). The text actually uses qānāh, the Hebrew word that means “to acquire.”25 Thus we learn from this passage that Christ acquired wisdom before he performed the works described in the Old Testament.

It is well established that Christ went through a notable change relative to his position in the Godhead when he condescended to be born in the flesh, to be incarnated. This change is known as the kēnosis in classical theology and is described in Philippians 2:5–8. That is clearly a major change in the nature (as that term is used by classical theists) of God. So is the resurrection, since it involved making his human nature permanent.

A number of passages in the Bible also suggest that Christ has not always held the status of divinity. They imply that he was “exalted” to that status at some point in time, presumably the very distant past. These passages include Psalm 45:6–7, 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, Philippians 2:9, and Hebrews 1:8–9.

Notably, though the Bible teaches that God always existed—as Latter-day Saints also teach (in the broader sense described previously)—nowhere are the words as God added to a passage. Beckwith did above. He even put those words in italics to emphasize their importance in his theology. The Bible simply teaches that God “lives forever” (Isaiah 57:15a, cited by Beckwith) or is “undying” (1 Timothy 1:17, also cited by Beckwith).

References to God’s “everlasting power and deity” (Romans 1:20, cited by Beckwith) are even clearer in this respect. They do not refer to God personally at all, but only to his “power” and “deity.” These passages suggest that the position or office of “God”—that which represents the authority of God, his “power” and “deity,” as opposed to his individual identity—is that which has always existed.

Many Old Testament passages refer to “the everlasting God,” and Psalm 90:2 in particular (cited by Beckwith) declares that “from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.” Unfortunately, classical theism assigns a Greek rather than a Hebrew meaning to this passage and thereby misses the understanding of God’s immutability taught in the Bible. The word everlasting in these passages is translated from the Hebrew word ָּלָּם, which has a different meaning from the English word infinite. It is relative and does not have the absolute mathematical meaning assumed by classical theists. Specifically, ָּלָּם means “hidden time, long; the beginning or end of which is either uncertain or else not defined.”27 Thus these statements are also unsupportive of the classical claim that any particular member of the Godhead has always existed “as God.”

26. In the New Testament, the word God is most often translated from the impersonal Greek θεός, meaning “object of worship.” This implies use of that term in a broader sense, unrelated to specific individuals who might bear this status.

27. Gesenius, Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon, 612, s.v. ָּלָּם.
Necessary and the Only God

Beckwith makes an argument for his idea of "the Only God" as follows:

Since the God of the Bible possesses all power, there cannot be any other God, for this would mean that two beings possess all power. That, of course is a logical absurdity, since if a being possesses all of everything (in this case, power) there is, by definition, nothing left for anyone else. (p. 59)

Although this is a fundamentally flawed argument, it makes some sense when applied to the concept of God in the broader sense of the ultimate "object of worship." Latter-day Saint theists also teach that there is, and can only be, one ultimate authority over the universe. This truth is attested in numerous Bible verses cited by Beckwith (see Isaiah 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5, 18, 21, 22; Jeremiah 10:10; John 17:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; and 1 Timothy 2:5). But that does not mean this authority cannot be shared or exercised by more than one being who is divine. The idea of an agent who is himself divine is one that man, in his imperfection, has found difficult to grasp, despite Christ's clear teachings on the subject (see John 17) and his invitation to all men who "overcome" to join him on the throne of his Father (see Revelation 3:21).

In regard to the more narrow sense of individual divinity, the Bible does not teach that any one of the three who are now known to be divine (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost) is "the Only God." To the extent it identifies any one of the three in such terms, it always refers to God the Father (see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 8:6).

Classical theism also teaches that God is "necessary" in a very unbiblical sense. Beckwith argues for this concept as follows: "Since everything that exists depends on God, and God is unchanging and eternal, it follows that God cannot not exist. In other words, he is a necessary being, whereas everything else is contingent" (p. 60).

Actually, there is nothing logical about the conclusions Beckwith draws here. Except to the extent that it teaches man's utter dependency on God, this concept is not derived logically from anything in
the Bible. It was adopted entirely from the metaphysical views of Greek philosophy. The distinction between “necessary” and “contingent” beings is rooted in the Greek conception of God as the only real Being, with all of space-time a figment of his imagination.28 Not surprisingly, Beckwith offers no biblical support for his claim that “there is no doubt that the Bible teaches that God is a necessary being” (p. 60). He even admits that “Christian philosophers and theologians do not all agree on the precise meaning of God’s necessity” (p. 60).

**Triune: One God, Three Persons**

Through nearly seven pages of this chapter, Beckwith next attempts to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical. Unfortunately, he loses the argument in the very first paragraph when he explains the doctrine as follows:

In the nature of the one God there are three centers of consciousness, which we call Persons, and these three are equal. Each human person is one *who* and one *what*; that is, there is one person per being. God is three *Whos* and one *What*; that is, there are three Persons who are one Being. (p. 60)

Only a philosopher would imagine that a “person” could be as different from a “being” as a “who” is from a “what.” This statement violates a fundamental teaching of the Bible. Man was created in the “image and likeness” of God (Genesis 1:26–27). How then can classical theists teach that something as fundamental about man’s nature, image, and likeness as his personhood is completely unlike the personhood of God and still claim that their idea is biblical?

Actually, they don’t—exactly. Beckwith admits that “‘Trinity’ is merely the term employed by theologians and church historians in order to describe the phenomenon of God they find in the Bible” (p. 60). Thus he admits that the Trinity is not biblical in itself but is

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28. For an in-depth study of this issue, see Hopkins, *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God*, chap. 2.
merely one attempt to understand what is taught in the Bible about God.

Beckwith then proves two basic truths that every Christian knows, namely, that the Bible teaches “there is only one God,” and “there are three distinct Persons called God” (p. 62). What he does not prove is that the Bible applies the term person to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost in any way similar to the way in which classical theists use that term. Thus the problem doesn’t lie with Beckwith’s proof of his premises. Nor does it lie with his conclusion that “the three Persons . . . are the one God” (p. 62). Mormonism fully acknowledges the biblical source of these teachings.

His problem lies with the assumption that the oneness of the three Persons is ontological in nature. Classical theologians from the late second century have insisted that these teachings imply something about God that has to do with his substance or being. But that was only true of the Supreme Being of Greek philosophy. He and his Logos were considered to be the same Being. That may have been true of Plato’s god, but it was never true of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

What, then, is the Bible’s explanation of the oneness of God? One explanation is found in John 17:20–23 where Christ explains:

> Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

This expresses a form of composite unity not foreign to either the understanding or experience of Christ’s audience. It is the only biblical explanation of God’s oneness, and it is the one Mormonism accepts. The ontological unity of the three Persons promulgated by classical theists is nowhere similarly attested in the Bible.
The Mormon Concept of God

Unfortunately, Beckwith is intentionally disingenuous in presenting "The Mormon Concept of God." His section on Mormon theology begins:

Although the Mormon Church claims biblical influence on its theology, the Mormon doctrine of God is derived primarily from three groups of sources. 1) The first group consists of works regarded by the Mormon Church as inspired scripture: The Book of Mormon (BM), the Doctrine and Covenants (DC), and The Pearl of Great Price (PGP). 2) The Mormon concept of God is also derived from Joseph Smith, Jr.'s other statements and doctrinal commentaries, such as the seven-volume History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CHC) . . . 3) Authoritative presentations of the Mormon doctrine of God can also be found in the statements and writings of the church's ecclesiastical leaders, especially its presidents, who are considered divinely inspired prophets. (p. 66, emphasis in the original)

The obvious absence of the Bible from the list of "works regarded by the Mormon Church as inspired scripture" cannot be an oversight. Beckwith spends four pages trying to justify his refusal to accept what Mormons openly teach as Mormonism only to say, "Nevertheless, our chief concern will not be the historical development of Mormon theism, but rather the dominant concept of God currently held by the LDS Church" (p. 69).

29. A footnote to the above remark cites BYU philosophy professor David L. Paulsen's doctoral dissertation, Comparative Coherency of Mormon (Finitistic) and Classical Theism (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1975-76), and claims "this list of sources of Mormon theology is nearly identical to the one presented" by Paulsen. How "nearly identical" the two lists really are can be readily ascertained by comparing Beckwith's list to the one in Paulsen's dissertation (see p. 66), which reads:

I shall rely on (1) doctrinal statements found in the primary LDS datum discourse which includes the Pearl of Great Price, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Holy Bible. These books have been officially sanctioned as scripture and as doctrinal canons for the church; (2) doctrinal
That approach would be fine, if only he did study and present the teachings of the church, which are readily available from any number of mainstream sources. But he does not. Instead, he argues with Latter-day Saint scholars, claiming they don’t know what their own church teaches. He then discards all the sources cited above and uses spurious references and misquotations in order to arrive circuitously at the following gross misstatement of Latter-day Saint doctrine:

Although there is certainly disagreement among Mormon scholars concerning some precise points of doctrine, I believe it is safe to say, based on documents the Church currently considers authoritative, that current LDS doctrine teaches that God is, in effect, 1) a contingent being, who was at one time not God; 2) finite in knowledge (not truly omniscient), power (not omnipotent), and being (not omnipresent or immutable); 3) one of many gods; 4) a corporeal (bodily) being, who physically dwells at a particular spatiotemporal location and is therefore not omnipresent (as is the classical God); 5) a being who is subject to the laws and principles of a beginningless universe with an infinite number of entities in it; and 6) not a trinity, but rather, there exists three separate Gods who are one in purpose but not in being. (pp. 69–70)

Though Beckwith pretends that “disagreement . . . concerning some precise points of doctrine” exists among Latter-day Saint scholars, his numerous efforts to qualify his conclusions reveal at least a suspicion that his list would not be accepted by Latter-day Saints as

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statements of Joseph Smith which, although lacking doctrinal canonization, are almost universally accepted as normative for LDS theology; (3) doctrinal statements of presidents of the church, who as successors to Joseph Smith, are uniquely entitled to speak authoritatively on points of doctrine; (4) propositions entailed by or inferable from the aforesaid doctrinal statements; and (5) principles which are consistent with (as contrasted with entailed by) the datum discourse which seem fruitful in theological construction. (emphasis added)

30. A more complete analysis of this portion of Beckwith’s chapter is included in the appendix to this review, pages 268–74.
an accurate statement of their beliefs. Furthermore, his use of the words “in effect” indicates that he has put his own interpretive spin on those tenets.

Though he should know this is a very distorted list—questionable, at the least; disputable, certainly; and totally inaccurate, possibly—he has no qualms about repeating it in a table at the end of the chapter for easy reference by his readers (see p. 91). Clearly, this list of so-called Mormon doctrines is used to delude Christian readers into thinking that Latter-day Saints actually harbor these beliefs, among which are certain obviously unbiblical statements about God. If this was done intentionally it constitutes the promotion of bigotry. If it was done in order to prove his thesis, it is flawed reasoning. If it was done unintentionally, it is incompetence. Any way it is viewed, this is unworthy of a man who teaches philosophy at the university level.

Having concocted a strange admixture of Mormonism, Greek philosophy, and error, Beckwith sets out to explain his version of the Mormon concept of God. He starts by describing “the overall Mormon worldview and how the Deity fits into it” (p. 70) and explains the concept of eternal progression as follows:

Mormonism teaches that God the Father is a resurrected, “exalted” human being named Elohim, who was at one time not God.\(^n\) He was once a mortal man on another planet who, through obedience to the precepts of his God, eventually attained exaltation, or godhood, himself through “eternal progression.” (p. 70)

One would think that his footnote might cite some proof that Mormon theology does teach the idea that God “was at one time not God,” but it does not. Instead it supports the mundane point that common parlance in the LDS Church frequently uses the name Elohim to designate God the Father. Actually, nothing in any authoritative source of LDS theology can be cited for the point Beckwith has emphasized with italics.

Beckwith does cite Joseph Smith’s King Follett Discourse, Lorenzo Snow’s famous couplet, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Milton R.
Hunter to prove Latter-day Saints teach that God was once a man and that man can become like God. But Christ was God before his incarnation and then became a man like us, so the belief that God the Father was also once a man does imply that he was not always God.

Joseph Smith asserts, “God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did” (cited on p. 70). This may sound strange to the ears of classical theists, but it is hardly an unbiblical idea. Divinity, in the person of Jesus Christ, did, in fact, dwell on this earth as a man (see Philippians 2:5–8), and John 5:19 says Christ “can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do” (emphasis added). Sadly, Beckwith does not address these biblical passages.

Instead he says: “The Mormon God, located in time and space, has a body of flesh and bone and thus is neither spirit nor omnipresent as understood in their traditional meanings” (p. 70). This reasoning simply proves the error of “their traditional meaning.” Christ was clearly located in time and space while on earth as a man, and he is now so “located” as a resurrected being (see, e.g., Luke 24:36–43). Classical theism accepts the idea that he also has a divine nature, which must certainly involve a spirit (see John 4:24 and James 2:26) and omnipresence. Clearly, the fact of being located in time and space does not require the false conclusions Beckwith has drawn about Mormon theology.

Latter-day Saints do not teach that God is not spirit or that he is not omnipresent. Beckwith merely implies such a teaching so he will have some point on which to claim Mormon theism is not biblical. He may win against his straw man, but it is unfortunate that he doesn’t even show up for the debate with real Mormonism.

Beckwith next acknowledges that Mormon theism agrees with the classical view that omniscience is an attribute of God. He even asserts, “some Mormons believe omniscience means that God knows all true propositions about the past, present and future” (p. 71). For this proposition, he cites Neal A. Maxwell, as good an authority as he could possibly find for Latter-day Saint doctrine on this subject (see p. 94 n. 40). Then he spoils it all by saying, “on the other hand,
dominant Mormon tradition” differs from Elder Maxwell’s teachings. The “dominant Mormon” position, according to Beckwith, is that “God does not know the future” (p. 71).

In an effort to show that this idea, rather than the teachings of an LDS apostle, constitutes Mormon doctrine, Beckwith first cites Blake Ostler, an attorney and philosophy aficionado who sometimes teaches at Brigham Young University. Ostler has personally expressed to me some chagrin that his thoughts about how God knows the future have been transformed into a statement that God does not know the future. Anyone who actually reads Ostler’s article, “The Mormon Concept of God,” will have the same reaction.

It would be convenient for Beckwith if Latter-day Saints really did teach that God is not omniscient. He could then point to a Mormon teaching that is unbiblical. Unfortunately for him, that just isn’t the case.

The next subject Beckwith tackles in his effort to show that Mormon theism isn’t biblical is the question of whether God is a “necessary” or a “contingent” being, a “creature” (something that is created) or “uncreate.” The problem with this effort is that these are unbiblical notions from the start. They were drawn from popular Greek philosophy of the second century A.D. Hence, Latter-day Saints can easily disagree with them and remain totally biblical in their teaching. Beckwith doesn’t mind stating clearly the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on this subject because he doesn’t have to compare them with the Bible. In fact, he neither cites nor discusses a single passage from the Bible. To do so would emphasize the nonbiblical source of his own position. Likewise, he doesn’t bother to address the numerous passages Latter-day Saints point to in support of their position on these issues.

Beginning with the Mormon concept of man’s premortal existence, most recently as a spirit and originally as an “intelligence,”

32. The term intelligence has come to be used in Mormon parlance to describe the pre-spirit nature of man, about which the scriptures reveal little.
Beckwith notes that Mormon theism teaches "man's basic essence or primal intelligence is as eternal as God's" (p. 72, emphasis in original). From there, he paraphrases a common speculation in Mormonism:

Since God the Father of Mormonism was himself organized (or spirit-birthed) by his God, who himself was a "creation" of yet another God, and so on ad infinitum, Mormonism therefore [sic] teaches that the God over this world is a contingent being in an infinite lineage of gods. (p. 73)

This conclusion attempts to state Mormon doctrine, but it goes well beyond LDS speculation, using terms like creation in a context familiar only to classical theists. He then expresses conclusions not drawn by Latter-day Saints. Mormonism teaches nothing about God being "a contingent being." Neither does the Bible. Thus Mormonism, once again, takes the biblical position.

This doctrine of classical theism reduces all created things, including any and all "created beings," to illusions entirely "contingent" on God's existence. The concept is not only demeaning to God's creative powers (see Ecclesiastes 3:14), but it is entirely nonbiblical. Beckwith cannot cite Mormonism's refusal to accept these doctrines as evidence that its teachings are unbiblical.

From the concept of eternal progression, Beckwith concludes that Mormonism is a polytheistic religion. In support of that conclusion, he cites Joseph Smith's teachings in the King Follett Discourse about "the plurality of Gods" (cited on p. 73). The problem with his argument is that such teaching is entirely biblical. The New Testament clearly identifies three persons as divine: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. That constitutes a "plurality of Gods" under any mathematical analysis. Without knowing more, such passages suggest that Christians are polytheists, and, indeed, Jews and Muslims have accused Christians of being polytheistic in the same way Beckwith accuses Latter-day Saints.

But the New Testament also states that there is one God, one Theos, or one object of worship. This is just as valid a position in Mormon theism, and whether one is dealing with the three revealed in the New Testament or some other "plurality," the principle is the
same. There remains but one God. That is as much a teaching of Joseph Smith as it is of the New Testament (see D&C 20:27–28). Contrary to Beckwith’s claim, Mormonism is not a polytheistic religion . . . any more than any other Christian faith.

Beckwith continues by citing authorities for the well-known refusal of Mormonism to accept the nonbiblical doctrine of creation out of nothing. He does not try to prove that creation ex nihilo is biblical. That is because it is not, of course. As previously indicated, that doctrine does not come from the Bible and is not supported by it. Instead, Beckwith jumps to the following wholly unsupported and unsupportable conclusion:

For Mormonism, God, like each human being, is merely another creature in the universe. In the Mormon universe, God is not responsible for creating or sustaining matter, energy, natural laws, personhood, moral principles, the process of salvation (or exaltation), or much of anything. Instead of the universe being subject to Him (which is the biblical view), the Mormon God is subject to the universe. (p. 74)

This is not an attempt to restate Mormon theology; it is an insult to it. That God is “like each human being” is an undeniable conclusion based on Genesis 1:26–27 and is thus biblical. But the balance of this assertion is neither Mormonism nor a reasonable conclusion based on any of its teachings. This may be the limit of Beckwith’s ability to understand the God Latter-day Saints worship, but it has nothing to do with what Mormons think about the Most High.

Perhaps Beckwith is trying to be deceptive here, but it is more likely that he simply cannot comprehend the truth. Perhaps he is unacquainted with the real universe, having grown up with classical theism and its unbiblical acceptance of metaphysics. Maybe he is incapable of understanding the parameters of a real God in a real universe. Whatever the reason for his error, it is clear that instead of defining the Mormon concept of God, he has redefined it in terms of the imaginary universe with which he is familiar. That is both unfair and inaccurate.
Continuing in that same vein, nevertheless, Beckwith argues that God, as identified in Mormon theology, could not be "omnipresent in being" (p. 74). Here he is correct, given the way he has expressed his argument. God is not "omnipresent in being," and nothing in the Bible says he is. That description of God is only compatible with the Stoic belief system known as "pantheism."

Beckwith acknowledges LDS belief that "God’s influence, power, and knowledge are all-pervasive" (p. 75), but he ignores the concomitant understanding Mormonism has of God’s power to travel anywhere he wishes with speed incomprehensible to man.

Perhaps Beckwith is unable to grasp the idea of a physical God who is not as ignorant as man. That God can do many things in the physical universe he organized that seem impossible to man should not come as a surprise to Christians. God, a resurrected, physical as well as spirit being, is capable of many things mortal men are not. That understanding is supported by a number of Bible passages. The resurrected Savior had the ability to appear suddenly in a place to which physical access was limited—namely, the locked upper room in which the disciples met the day of his resurrection (see Luke 24:36). He was able to disappear out of the sight of his disciples on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:31). Clearly, the fact that Christ’s body “exists at a particular place in time and space” and that he is a resurrected being with “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39) does not prevent him from being omnipresent in the biblical sense.

That Beckwith cannot comprehend a real God, like the resurrected Christ, is unfortunate. That he cannot properly define LDS theology about God because of his lack of comprehension is inexcusable. Beckwith knows that Latter-day Saints believe God is omnipresent in exactly the sense the Bible teaches. His inability to comprehend the nature of a God who, like Christ, is part of the real space-time universe but still omnipresent is no excuse for his failure to correctly state Mormon teachings to that effect.

Beckwith makes another false allegation about Mormon theism in connection with his discussion of omnipresence. He says, “Because Mormon theology does not teach that the universe is contingent
upon God to either bring it into being or to sustain its existence, there is no need for Mormon theology to hold to the classical Christian view of omnipresence" (p. 75). Aside from the fact that this conclusion is a non sequitur, it again distorts LDS teachings on the position of God with respect to the universe.

Even though Latter-day Saints do not teach the doctrine that the universe is a figment of God's imagination (embodied in the belief that "the universe is contingent upon God"), they do teach that he did, in fact, "bring it into being," that he is the creator of all things in the precise sense taught in the Bible. Further, it cannot be denied that Mormonism teaches the great sustaining role of God in the universe. The nature of that role, though as important as anything classical theists imagine about God, is different from the Greek construct in that it relates directly to a real universe. It is described in Doctrine and Covenants 88:6–13 as follows:

He that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth;

Which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made.

As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made;

As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made;

And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand.

And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings;

Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—

The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.
Either Beckwith is ignorant of these teachings or he is disingenuous in his portrayal of Mormon doctrine on the subject.

Beckwith next claims that “Mormon theology denies the doctrine of the trinity” (p. 75). On this point, he has no difficulty discerning and stating Mormon doctrine. Again, this is because he will not need to compare it to the Bible, since the Bible doesn’t teach the Trinity either. From this point, he jumps to a conclusion as erroneous as that aimed by Rome at the church in the second century. Roman authorities during the reign of Marcus Aurelius accused the church of being atheistic because it taught belief in one God but worshipped three—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. In like fashion, Beckwith accuses Latter-day Saints of being polytheists because they teach the distinctive separateness of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, just as the New Testament does.

Beckwith opines: “Mormon theology affirms tritheism, the belief that there exist three gods with which this world should be concerned (though Mormon theology teaches that there exist many other gods as well): Elohim (the Father), Jehovah (the Son), and the Holy Ghost” (p. 75). This is not a true statement. As previously noted, Mormonism teaches that there is but one God, and that these three (and all others who might be or become deified) constitute one God. Classical theists are wrong to think there is no explanation for biblical teachings about God other than the idea of consubstantiality taught in traditional trinitarianism. It is well past time for men like Beckwith to stop claiming that Mormonism is polytheistic because it teaches the separate reality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, or speculates that others might have taken Christ up on his offer “to sit with [him] on [his] throne” (Revelation 3:21).

That they have not done so demonstrates the inability of classical theists to think outside the confines of Greek philosophy. The extent

34. The convention Mormons use, applying the word Elohim to the Father and the word Jehovah to the Son, is for convenience only and not meant to suggest that these are the titles by which they are consistently designated in the scriptures. In scripture, the names are quite interchangeable. Beckwith doesn’t address this issue, but it is a common point of misunderstanding among critics of the church.
of that disability is reflected in a comment by Beckwith, as follows: "And even the Holy Ghost is not really a spirit, since, according to Smith, there is no such thing as a nonphysical reality" (p. 75).

Nothing in the Bible provides man with any scientific knowledge about the nature of spirits. The word *immaterial* isn’t even employed in the Bible. It is purely a Hellenistic assumption that a spirit is "a nonphysical reality." All the Bible says about the physical aspects of spirits is that they do not have “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). This does not mean they are “immaterial.” There are many other materials in the real universe besides flesh and bones. Science has only recently made real progress in the effort to understand what is material in our universe. Doctrine and Covenants 131:7–8 (quoted by Beckwith) reflects an insight that was not even considered by religionists until the developments in physics that have recently taken place. There is nothing inconsistent about Joseph Smith’s teachings against nonphysical reality and his statement that the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit.

Beckwith’s final comments in this section of his chapter are an attempt to make the words used by David Paulsen in the title of his doctoral thesis (*The Comparative Coherence of Mormon [Finitistic] and Classical Theism*) appear to contradict the comments of Stephen Robinson in *How Wide the Divide?* Beckwith claims that Paulsen’s thesis “presents the LDS view of God as a form of finite theism” (p. 76), but his view of that “form” must be very different from Paulsen’s, for Paulsen and Robinson teach at the same university, yet Robinson claims that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not teach the kind of “limited, finite or changeable God” evangelicals say they do.

Refusing to accept Robinson’s word on this point, Beckwith charges him with ignorance of his own colleague’s teachings, as if Beckwith understood Paulsen’s teachings better than does Robinson. The claim is nothing more than an attempt by Beckwith to set himself up as a higher authority on the teachings of Mormon theism than the BYU professors who teach it on an academic level.

Like so many critics of Mormonism, Beckwith makes no effort to understand what both Paulsen and Robinson are saying and never
cites or quotes a single comment from Paulsen’s thesis. Had he been honest with his readers, he would have revealed that Paulsen’s thesis defines the phrase *God is finite* in the following terms: “There are logically-possible-states-of-affairs which God cannot bring about.” For example, God cannot bring about the state of affairs in which he tells lies. Though lying is a logically possible activity, the scriptures clearly teach that God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). Thus the God of the Bible, whom classical theism claims to worship, is also *finite* as that term is specially defined by Paulsen. This is not a new concept. Indeed, Augustine, quoted earlier by Beckwith, says essentially the same thing: “It is precisely because He is omnipotent that for Him some things are impossible.”

It is apparent, looking back over this section (including the material covered in the attached appendix), that Beckwith has failed in his effort to show that classical theism is more biblical than Mormonism. The nature of that failure is significant because he does not even attempt to confront Mormonism’s teachings head-on. Instead, he restates LDS beliefs and attacks the straw man thus created.

**Philosophical Problems with the Mormon Concept of God**

Beckwith next tries to use logical syllogisms to prove that the Mormon concept of God is not philosophically coherent. Unfortunately, it is plain to even a freshman college student that it is Beckwith whose logic lacks coherence.

**The Problem of an Infinite Number of Past Events**

Beckwith begins by making an obvious comment about Mormon theology, namely that it assumes infinite past duration. Why he chooses to attack this particular tenet is a mystery, especially since

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biblical references to an "eternal" God are too numerous to list (see, e.g., Deuteronomy 33:27). If the past is not eternal, that is, if the universe does not predate this earth by a substantial length of time, Beckwith has a lot more to explain than Latter-day Saints do.

The problem, again, is that Beckwith assumes we live in the metaphysical universe of the Greeks, which postulated a beginning for time. If he were, in fact, living in that kind of a universe, his logic might be sound, though even then it would be both circular and based on unstated and false assumptions.

One of those assumptions is that time is something that can be created. Entirely aside from time as a property of matter, the idea of duration exists independently in everything capable of action. The mere presence of order in the universe implies the existence of time in the form of chronology or duration. The entire notion that God created time in this sense can be dissolved by the simple question, "What did God do before he created time?"

Notwithstanding, Beckwith argues as follows:

Reason 1: "If the Mormon universe is true, then an infinite number of past events has been traversed."
Reason 2: "It is impossible to traverse an infinite number."
Conclusion: "Therefore the Mormon universe is not true."

(p. 77)

It should be apparent to any calculus student that Reason 2 is a glaring and ludicrous fallacy. Any movement whatever involves traversing "an infinite number." The fact that the infinite number traversed involves infinitesimal points is quite irrelevant to the argument since Beckwith has failed to specify his units of measure. He is speaking philosophically and, like his Greek predecessors, fails completely to perceive the complexities of a real universe.

Aside from his units of measure, given an infinite length of time, which is entailed in Beckwith's Reason 1, it is entirely possible to traverse an infinite number, even an infinite number of infinite units, whether of distance or of time. To accomplish this, one merely needs an infinite past. Such a past is fully entailed in the Mormon concept of the universe.
Nevertheless, Beckwith gives an example in which he sets the units of measure at “miles” and reasons that it is impossible to count off an infinite number of miles, because “an ‘infinite’ is, by definition, limitless” (p. 78). Aside from the circularity of that reasoning, what Beckwith has failed to note is that a limitless period of time is entailed in Reason 1. It is most certainly possible to count off a limitless number of miles in a limitless period of time. Thus God, or any eternal being (such as man, in Mormon theology), can travel an infinite number of miles.

Changing the units of measure to days, Beckwith tries to prove that a beginningless universe is impossible. The problem with his proof, and with that of J. P. Moreland, whom he quotes (see pp. 78–79), is that it assumes its own validity in order to establish its own proof. Moreland argues that it would be impossible to remember all the events of past history if the past were, in fact, infinite. Unfortunately, he fails to give the person remembering the infinite past an infinite future in which to accomplish the task. Since Reason 1 entails an infinite future as well as an infinite past, Moreland’s proof fails, and with it this philosophical objection to the Mormon concept of the universe.

The Problem of Eternal Progression with an Infinite Past

In Beckwith’s second “philosophical problem,” he cites the Latter-day Saint belief “that all intelligent beings have always existed in some state or another.” He then notes the LDS concept that they can “progress or move toward their final state” (p. 79). From this, he reasons that “we should have already reached our final state by now” (p. 80). In response to the objection that men have not all had time to reach their final state, he argues, “one cannot ask for more than infinite time to complete a task” (p. 80).

Of course, that is not true. A man who has been sitting around wasting his time for an infinite period of time may well ask for another infinite period of time in which to make some progress in preparing for the judgment. Whether a man has reached his final state by now depends on what he has been doing with the infinite period of time in question.
Contrary to Beckwith’s notions about infinity, the man in the example above could easily get his wish—another infinite period of time in which to progress. To understand how that is possible, it will help to know that there are orders of infinity, three of which have been identified by mathematicians. Each order of infinity is infinitely greater than the order below it.37

The lowest order of infinity is the number of numbers in the universe. Mathematically, this is the order at which Beckwith’s argument lies when he claims that no one could ask for more. In fact, there is infinitely more for which to ask, such as the number of points on a line (or lines in a plane, or planes in a cube). Infinitely greater than that is the number of curves in the universe. Clearly, one can ask for more than an infinite time in which to complete a task. One can ask for an infinite number of infinite times in which to complete it.

Of course, before even reaching this point, Beckwith’s argument breaks down in its fundamental assumptions. He has assumed first that all individuals are progressing toward their goal at a measurable rate and second that they all started measurable progress at approximately the same moment. Neither of these assumptions can be made in any real system involving independent beings. One person could spend an infinity not progressing at all before he even begins to make real progress toward his eternal goal, while another may progress at a much faster rate.

The universe is exactly as Mormon theology envisions it—a vast array of beings, all at different levels of progression. This includes, no doubt, an infinite number who have not begun to progress toward their ultimate goal as well as an infinite number who have reached that goal.

Beckwith’s last argument in this section is such a stretch that it is better described as a prejudice than a logical conclusion. He claims, “If the Mormon universe is false, then the entire theological system . . . collapses” (p. 80). That is certainly true of classical theism, for its

doctrines are derived from Greek concepts about the universe that are assembled like a logical house of cards. But it is not the same for any system of thought based on reality. Such a system sees its weak points strengthened as men learn more about reality. That is the nature of Mormonism: it improves as men gain greater understanding.

This is what Robinson, whom Beckwith quotes, says with the words, "the ontological frame . . . , while a vital part of our theology, is secondary to the truth of the gospel itself" (p. 80). Mormonism is a system based on reality, not one that, like classical theism, teeters precariously on the unsupportable foundation of metaphysics. To Latter-day Saints, every other truth is secondary to the truth of the gospel and whatever the truth is about the universe, it will be found compatible with the truth of the gospel. Mormons are not required to believe anything that is not true. Hence, to designate the universe as "Mormon" is to designate it as true. It is simply not possible for the "Mormon" universe to be false, because what is real and true cannot be false, whether Mormons fully understand it now, or not.

Some points of doctrine taught by Latter-day Saints about the universe and God are divinely revealed truth. Other points are the product of speculation based on what has been divinely revealed. There are important differences between these two. Speculation can be false or incomplete. Thus Mormons do not claim that every thought they have about God and the universe is the absolute truth. But Beckwith never seems to recognize this fact. He mixes the two even in his most accurate statements about Mormon theology. This results in many erroneous notions on his part regarding LDS doctrine and many entirely ineffectual arguments against it.

**Answers to Questions**

Beckwith next undertakes to answer some questions that have apparently been put to him by Latter-day Saints as the result of his various statements about their teachings. Not only is he selective in choosing these questions, but he also refrains from expressing the complete Mormon argument entailed in them. Nevertheless, he attempts to respond to scriptures Latter-day Saints frequently cite to
prove that God has a body and that many "gods" exist, and then he tries to rationalize the claim that orthodox Christianity has been influenced by Greek philosophy.

The Scriptural Proof Question: God Has a Body

Beckwith notes that Deuteronomy 34:10 and Exodus 33:21–23 speak of God anthropomorphically. Then he claims, "There are several problems with this use of the Bible" (p. 81). What follows only demonstrates that the main problem with this use of the Bible is that it does, in fact, prove what Latter-day Saints have said all along, namely, that God is anthropomorphic.

Beckwith claims that Latter-day Saints are wrong to cite these passages because they refer to the preincarnate Christ, "a god before he acquired a physical body" (p. 81). Thus he argues that Moses could not have seen Christ's real physical body because he didn't have one when the events described in Deuteronomy and Exodus occurred.

On this point Beckwith further demonstrates that he does not understand Mormon doctrine. Mormonism teaches that Christ's physical body is patterned after the body of his spirit (see Ether 3:16). Hence, even Christ's spirit body would be described anthropomorphically, just as Moses did.

Beckwith next retreats into philosophical definitions, claiming that no biblical passage claims that God is by nature a physical being, while the passages cited and discussed previously say God is by nature a spirit.

The fact is that the Bible nowhere employs such philosophical terms. It never even uses the words by nature to describe God the way classical theists do. Second Peter 1:4, cited by Beckwith, refers to the divine nature but does not describe it as he does, and Paul in Galatians 4:8 (also cited by Beckwith) actually does damage to the orthodox view by referring to idols as "them which by nature are no gods" (emphasis added). This suggests God's nature is not like that of idols. But the point on which God's nature differs from the nature of idols is not a point classical theists accept. The Bible notes that the
dissimilarity between God and idols is based on the very anthropomorphic attributes classical theists deny. Idols lack these attributes: sight, hearing, and the ability to eat, smell, and walk (see, e.g., Deuteronomy 4:20 and Revelation 9:20), but God does not.

Of course, even if Beckwith were able to prove his point from Bible passages, it would not contradict Mormonism nor prove that God is not anthropomorphic. Mormonism teaches that both man and God have a spiritual nature as well as a physical one (see Ether 3:15–16).

Beckwith also argues that a physical being could not be God. He tries to wriggle out of the overwhelming testimony of scripture to the contrary by claiming that “the passages Mormons cite to prove God’s corporeality should be seen as . . . the use of physical language by the biblical authors to convey a particular meaning of God’s actions in human terms” (p. 82).

What exactly does this mean? What does Beckwith think God is trying to convey? He never says, but it isn’t difficult to determine what God is trying “to convey . . . in human terms” when one looks at such passages as Exodus 33:21–23. God is saying, “This is what I look like.” If men were meant to take some other message from this eyewitness account, Beckwith doesn’t let us know what that message is.

Alternatively, Beckwith suggests that such appearances might be “instances in which God temporarily assumes a physical form (i.e., a theophany)” (p. 82). However, there is no indication of why God would do this in the context of the Exodus passage. Beckwith doesn’t even suggest any possible reasoning behind “theophanies,” and it is important to note that God never says, while appearing in clearly anthropomorphic form, “I am just doing this because you couldn’t comprehend my real form.” Such a disclaimer, if it were true, is something one would expect from an honest God. Its absence suggests that the form in which God has consistently appeared to man is not a temporary convenience.

The balance of Beckwith’s argument on this point is decidedly antibiblical. He claims once again that a being who is physical “by nature” would be limited in time and space, could not be the creator and sustainer of everything that exists, and could not be omnipotent,
immutable, or omnipresent. Latter-day Saints wonder why not. His
physical nature doesn’t limit him according to classical theism. He is
recognized and worshipped as God by them as well as by Mormons.

Of course, these questions are not answered by Beckwith. His en-
tire argument is that of a man whose philosophical and scientific in-
sight is limited to the technological level attained by the ancient
Greeks. In essence, his reasoning amounts to a claim that the Bible
must be wrong when it describes God anthropomorphically. Mor-
monism rejects that view and refuses to see an anthropomorphic
God as limited in anything like the ways iterated by classical theists.

Beckwith’s last argument against an anthropomorphic God is the
clichéd insistence that, if Mormonism requires a literal interpretation
of the eyewitness accounts describing God in anthropomorphic
terms, it must also accept a literal interpretation of various similes
and metaphors used in the scriptures to describe God’s movements
or feelings, references to wings, etc.

This is semantic nonsense, of course, not to be entertained by
anyone capable of the most elementary hermeneutic analysis. Under
well-known rules, references to the Holy Ghost descending “as a
dove” or even “in a bodily shape like a dove” (Luke 3:22, emphasis
added) at the baptism of Christ, or to God wanting to protect Israel
as a hen covers her chicks with her wing, and similar poetic language
referring to God as a consuming fire are not to be interpreted in the
same way as eyewitness descriptions of God’s form. This argument is
nothing but desperate double-talk and should be abandoned by
knowledgeable thinkers like Beckwith.

The Scriptural Proof Question: Many Gods Exist

Beckwith next claims to have shown that “the Bible teaches that
there is no being who is by nature God except for Jehovah (or Yah-
weh)” (p. 82). Yet there is not a single passage in the Bible that makes

38. See, for example, Dungan, Hermeneutics, chaps. 7 and 8; Milton S. Terry, Bib-
liical Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.); and Walter M.
the point Beckwith thinks so important that he has put the words in italics. Having failed on that score, he unsuccessfully argues against such passages as Exodus 7:1, Psalm 82:1, and 1 Corinthians 8:4–6 and then tries to throw the burden of proof (that these passages do not teach the existence of many gods) back on Latter-day Saints, claiming that they have to prove something more than what the passages actually say in order for classical theists to accept them at face value.

His argument against 1 Corinthians 8:4–6, including his quotation of theologian Gordon Fee’s obscure commentary (see p. 84), misses the most obvious point of that passage. After mentioning both “gods” and “lords,” Paul writes in verse 6 that “to us there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ.” That is two divine beings by anyone’s count (except, perhaps, someone trained in second-century Greek philosophy). Mormonism never rejects the concept of “one God,” nor does it seek to find some strained meaning in Paul’s words “unto us.” It merely acknowledges, in light of passages such as John 17:20–23 and Revelation 3:21, that the oneness of God spoken of in the scriptures cannot be physical but must be found in the composite unity of those divine individuals who make up the Godhead.

Of course, Beckwith doesn’t even touch the best arguments for the Mormon view of progression. For example, he doesn’t try to explain Revelation 3:21, in which Christ invites “him that overcometh”39 to join him on the Father’s throne; nor does he say how many “gods” there would be if a million or so of those who “open the door” to Christ (see Revelation 3:20) were to take the Savior up on his offer.

The Greek Philosophy Question

In response to the question of Greek philosophy and its influence on classical theism, Beckwith attempts to defend the indefensible with the following unconvincing arguments.

39. Lest anyone misunderstand this term, it is quite clear from John’s other writings, as well as Revelation, that it refers to the effort of everyday Christians to overcome the evil one. See, for example, 1 John 2:13–14; 4:4.
First, he claims it is not clear what Mormon critics mean when they say Greek philosophy has influenced classical Christianity (see pp. 84–85). Like all classical theologians before him, he sees nothing wrong with the philosophical analysis of theological truths and doubtless feels that man’s understanding of the gospel of Christ has actually benefited from such analysis. The real problem, however, is that he cannot even see how his entire frame of reference has been influenced by the ancient Greek view of the universe. In this, he is more like the second-century apologists and less like the late first-century and early second-century apostolic fathers, who generally eschewed philosophy as commanded by Paul (see Colossians 2:8).40

Second, he notes that alleged similarities between classical theism and Greek philosophical principles is not in itself a valid argument against any particular theological dogma. Truth is truth, he argues, and if Greek philosophy is true in some measure, it is no problem to incorporate it into one’s theology (see pp. 85–86).

This would be true if one were simply observing truth in a pagan system. The problem with classical theism is that it takes its fundamental perspective on the universe from Greek philosophy quite apart from the Bible and attempts to reconcile biblical truths using that perspective rather than the original Hebrew perspective on which the Bible was founded.

Third, Beckwith claims that it is the Bible that reshaped Greek thought (see pp. 86–87) rather than the other way around. That claim can certainly be sustained in many instances. Neoplatonism was, in fact, a Greek response to the influence of Christian ideas on the existing philosophical schools of thought. But the change was by no means unidirectional,41 and that is where the concern arises.

Unfortunately, Beckwith does not address the true situation. In fact he attempts to obfuscate it by asserting that Greek philosophy was part of a pagan system and that monotheism represented the dividing line between the church and that system. This is simply untrue. The Greek philosophers were as much reformers of paganism as

40. See Hopkins, How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God, chaps. 5 and 6.
41. See Hatch, Influence of Greek Ideas, 238.
Christians were of Judaism. Indeed, the philosophers included their share of martyrs to that reformation. By the time of Christ, Greek philosophy was decidedly monotheistic. The problematic influence of Greek philosophy on Christianity did not involve a contrast between pagan polytheism and biblical monotheism. It involved the integration of two very similar systems of thought.

Surprisingly, Beckwith quotes Norman L. Geisler as follows: “The Greeks never identified their ultimate metaphysical principle with God” (p. 87). This displays an ignorance one does not expect from a man of Geisler’s background. Parmenides, the father of metaphysics, attributed the existence of the supposedly unreal sensory world (the real universe men perceive with their senses) to the collective consciousness of man. But Plato and the later philosophers attributed it to God. The relationship of the Greek’s Supreme Being to the pleroma of Plato’s metaphysical universe was adopted by the early apologists and is taught by classical theists today.

Beckwith quotes Cornelius Van Til’s effort to contrast Aristotle’s Unmovable Mover with the Christian concept of God. Unfortunately, he does not address such obvious inroads of Greek thought as Justin Martyr’s second-century adoption of Aristotle’s formula for God as the valid Christian description of the Father. That alone is overwhelming evidence of the second-century adoption of Greek philosophical ideas as though they were biblical principles, even by the most influential of the early church fathers. Other examples of adoption abound.

As a red herring, Beckwith notes that Greek philosophers did not subscribe to the notion of creation out of nothing, but taught, as does Mormonism, that God made the worlds out of existing matter (of a sort). They also believed in the premortal existence of man (see p. 87).

42. See ibid., 171-72.
43. See ibid., 238.
44. See Ronald H. Nash, Christianity and the Hellenistic World (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 32.
45. See Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew 127, in ANF 1:263.
46. See Hopkins, How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God, chap. 6.
But Mormonism has had no historic contact with Greek philosophy. It is completely anomalous to claim that it adopted concepts from Greek philosophy at any time. The similarities between Mormonism and Greek philosophy found in these two doctrines only demonstrate that Beckwith's second argument can, indeed, be true. Many beliefs found in non-Mormon, even non-Christian religious systems are true.

Beckwith next quotes Paul Copan, who claims that the early church fathers who agreed with Mormon views on these subjects got their doctrines from Greek philosophy and paganism (see p. 88). The problem with that argument is that these doctrines are entirely defensible from the Bible, while the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, for example, which negates any notion of a premortal existence, is non-biblical.

Fourth, Beckwith argues that early Christian scholars and Latter-day Saint scholars alike have "used philosophical terminology and concepts to convey certain biblical and theological truths" (p. 88). This is entirely beside the point. The appropriate question to ask is this: What is biblical and what comes from outside anything taught in the Bible? It is not the language of the expression that matters, as Beckwith himself argues at one point. It is the existence of the teaching in the Bible.

Why, if Beckwith understands this, has he spent little or no time addressing the fundamental issues in his chapter on the Mormon concept of God? Why has he not presented accurately the position of Mormon theism and its basis in the Bible and then addressed the question of which biblical interpretation is truer to the original writers? One can only surmise that he fails to do these things because, if he did, he could not defend his position against that taken by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

**Conclusion: The Divide Is Wide**

In his conclusion, Beckwith reiterates his view of the differences between the Mormon concept of God and the classical concept that he identifies as "Christian." Specifically, he cites the following:
1. “Christians believe that God is by nature an immaterial Being, whereas Mormons believe that God is by nature a material being” (p. 89). This is a difference that falls outside the original manifest goal of Beckwith’s treatise—namely to show that the scriptural facts better support the view of classical theism than the view of Mormonism. While it is true that classical theists believe this, the idea of material as opposed to immaterial beings is a Greek, not a Christian or Jewish, concept. Nothing in the Bible ever says God is an immaterial being. The word immaterial is not even used in the Bible.

2. “Christians believe that God is the creator and sustainer of everything else that exists, whereas Mormons believe that God is merely the organizer of the world and is subject to the laws and principles of a beginningless universe” (p. 89). The idea that God is the sustainer of everything else that exists in the manner taught by classical theists is derived from the Platonic view of a Supreme Being who forms the unreal world where man exists using his mind. This notion is not Christian. While Latter-day Saints believe God organized this world, exactly as the Bible says he did, they do not believe that this world is the extent of his works. The passage from Doctrine and Covenants 88 quoted above should suffice to demonstrate that Beckwith is misstating Mormon doctrine on this subject.

3. “Christians maintain that God is omnipotent, while Mormons believe that God’s power is limited by certain forces in the universe which have always existed and thus have been around long before God became God” (p. 89). Classical theists and Latter-day Saints both proclaim that God is omnipotent. Classical theists speak of limitations on God in the same sense as do Latter-day Saints. To paint a difference here is to be disingenuous. The idea that there was ever a time when there was no God, when there was no Creator in existence, is also entirely contrary to Mormon doctrine. Mormons believe God created the laws of the universe, not that he is limited by them.

4. “Christians hold that God is omniscient and thus has knowledge of the past, present, and future, whereas Mormons believe that God knows the past and present but not the future and that God is increasing in knowledge (some Mormons, however, disagree on this point and hold the classical view)” (p. 89). Actually, all Mormons
disagree on this point and hold to the view that God knows the past, present, and future. Some Mormons have offered unique philosophical views as to how God, a real being in a real universe, can know the future, but all agree that he does. It is a solid tenet of Mormon theism, and Beckwith’s effort to make it look otherwise is dishonest.

5. “Christians believe that God is omnipresent, while Mormons believe that God is localized in space” (p. 89). Classical theists believe God is omnipresent in the same way the ancient Stoics did. Mormons believe he is omnipresent the way the Bible teaches. It never uses the term omnipresent, but God can be described as “omnipresent” despite the fact that his “presence” is localized in space. If that were not true Christ himself could not be omnipresent.

6. “Christians maintain that God is unchanging (immutable) and eternal, whereas Mormons hold that God is a changing being who has not always existed as God” (p. 89). Classical theists claim they believe in an unchanging God, while they proclaim such major changes as the doctrine that he no longer reveals himself to man. That point aside, they believe God has gone through the same changes Mormons recognize, including incarnation and resurrection. Mormons hold the same view of God’s immutability as that taught in the Bible. They make no claims as to whether God the Father has “always existed as God.” However, they definitely teach that he has always existed and that he has been God from “everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2). Furthermore, they teach that “God,” Theos, or the “Godhead” referred to by Paul has always existed as the one and only ultimate power over the universe just as the Bible teaches.

7. “Christians claim that God is a necessary Being and the only true and living God in existence, while Mormons believe that God is a contingent being and one of many gods” (p. 89). Christians, at least those who believe in the Bible, do not properly make any claims about God being either a “necessary” or a “contingent” being. That is not in the Bible. Classical theists have adopted this doctrine from the Greek philosophy of the second century A.D. Neither the Bible nor Mormonism draws the same distinction as Greek philosophers and classical theists do on this issue. As to Mormons believing in “many
gods," one must ask, How many is three? If the answer can be one for classical theists, it can be one for Mormon theists . . . and it is!

8. “Christians maintain that God is a trinity (three Persons, one Being), whereas Mormons are tritheists who believe that each member of the Christian trinity is a separate, finite, and personal God” (p. 89). The earliest Christians did not proclaim the Trinity nor can this concept be found in the Bible. It was the second-century apologists who came up with the notion. Latter-day Saints reject the claim that there can be three persons in one being, but they nevertheless maintain that the three persons described as divine in the New Testament are one God. Beckwith and other classical theists are simply wrong if they say otherwise. Latter-day Saints are not tritheists in the sense in which that word is used by classical theists.47 Mormon theism teaches of only one God, though many separate individuals clearly can and do share that designation. These individuals include the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, whom Mormons believe to be separate and personal, but not “finite” in the sense Beckwith and other classical theists claim. They are separate eternal beings who share all the infinite powers and attributes of God in perfect unity one with another, thereby constituting one God or “object of worship.”

Having thus imperfectly defined both Christianity and Mormonism, Beckwith concludes: “Stephen Robinson . . . denies that much of what we have covered is really the Mormon concept of God” (p. 90). Of course Robinson denies it! because Beckwith’s representations about Mormonism are not accurate, a fact Beckwith should have known or determined before he wrote an article on the subject.

Instead of learning about Mormonism from Robinson, however, Beckwith cites Joseph Smith in supposed opposition to Robinson’s statements. In so doing, he proves nothing more than the fact that Latter-day Saints know better how to understand and interpret

47. Some in the Mormon community have used words other than monotheism to describe Mormon theism, but they do not mean thereby to imply that Mormons believe in any more than one God. Instead such terminology is normally used to emphasize LDS beliefs in the total separateness of the three individuals in the Godhead.
Joseph Smith than he does. Beckwith does not see this, however. Instead, he goes so far as to claim that his personal interpretation of Joseph Smith's teachings, coupled with his meager understanding of how the statements of living prophets affect Mormon doctrine, must be accepted as true Mormon doctrine above anything said by mainstream Latter-day Saint authorities.

To compound his error, Beckwith has the effrontery to claim that any effort to clarify his misinterpretations of Mormon doctrine "must go through Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and numerous other church authorities and prophets" (p. 90). One is prompted to ask, What does Beckwith know about how Mormon doctrine is established? Obviously no more than he does about how to interpret the writings of the very men he claims as the dead guardians of Mormon doctrine.

Beckwith's final insult is to set up a dichotomy between Robinson and Joseph Smith or, rather, his own personal misinterpretations of Joseph Smith, and ask, "If President Hinckley says that Smith was wrong about God's nature, would Robinson believe him?" (p. 90) He continues, "If Smith can't be trusted to tell us the truth about God's nature, why should we believe Hinckley's claim to divine authority, since it, after all, is contingent upon the veracity of Joseph Smith?" (p. 91). Would he also claim that Jeremiah's veracity is contingent upon the veracity of a misinterpretation of Isaiah's teachings? It is unlikely, but that is exactly what Beckwith is doing here. The problem is not with what Joseph Smith actually said, but what Beckwith has decided Joseph Smith meant. The entire argument is not only invalid for this reason but egotistical and insulting as well.

Beckwith closes by citing Robinson's statement: "I think I am the world's authority on what I believe, and I consider myself a reasonably devout well-informed Latter-day Saint" (p. 91). He then argues:

However, when we ask another Mormon, Joseph Smith, he tells us something contrary to what Robinson tells us, which forces one to ask Robinson the question: Does Joseph Smith speak for the LDS Church? If Robinson answers yes, then LDS doctrine does affirm a finite, changeable, contin-
gent God. . . . If Robinson answers no, then the only difference between him and evangelicals is that the latter disbelieve in a larger number of things said by Joseph Smith than does Robinson. (pp. 91–92)

This argument supposedly leads to the conclusion that “the more interesting divide is not between Robinson’s version of Mormonism and Christianity, but between Robinson and the founder of Mormonism” (p. 91).

Beckwith may think he is clever with this argument, but all he has done is set up his personal interpretation of Joseph Smith’s writings as the standard against which Robinson and other Mormon theologians are supposed to be judged. Joseph Smith did not say that God was “finite, changeable, [or] contingent.” These are Beckwith’s words, his personal misinterpretation of Joseph Smith’s teachings. To set that misinterpretation up as the standard by which Robinson is to be judged is the ultimate in egotism.

It also reveals the true goal of Beckwith’s chapter. It is neither an effort to warn others about false doctrine nor an attempt to present intelligent rebuttals to Mormonism. It is an effort to set up a counterfeit gospel of Mormonism and use it to heap ridicule on the Latter-day Saints. Such effrontery is hardly worthy of response. This one has been made only because the person issuing the affront is a professor of philosophy who should know better.
Appendix

On the Difficulty of Determining Mormon Doctrine

Critical to Beckwith’s thesis is his effort to ensure that his readers are misinformed as to Mormon doctrine. It would be impossible to make light of Mormonism were the true strength of its position on biblical issues exposed to other Christian believers. Accordingly, a bit of misdirection is undertaken by Beckwith at the beginning of his section on “The Mormon Concept of God” to make his readers believe he is correct in his statements about Mormonism. In this misdirection, Beckwith almost reveals what Latter-day Saints look to as the source of their beliefs, but then he carefully diverts his readers to the sources he really wants to use, nonauthoritative sources better known for their shock value than their reflection of Mormon theism.

In anticipation of using these nonauthoritative sources to derive his “Mormon concept of God,” Beckwith tries to create a nonexistent contradiction between Stephen Robinson of Brigham Young University and other LDS authorities. He quotes Robinson’s statement in How Wide the Divide? as follows:

To the scriptural passages above I would add Lorenzo Snow’s epigram and Joseph Smith’s statement in the funeral address for King Follet that God is an exalted man. Neither statement is scriptural or canonized in the technical sense, and neither has been explained or elucidated to the church in any official manner, but they are so widely accepted by Latter-day Saints that this technical point has become moot. (p. 67)

Before this, Beckwith presented a statement by the late Bruce R. McConkie as follows:

Concerning these latter two groups of sources [referring to statements and commentaries by Joseph Smith Jr. and other LDS Church leaders], the late Mormon Apostle Bruce McConkie writes, “When the living oracles speak in the name of the Lord or as moved upon by the Holy Spirit, how-
ever, their utterances are then binding upon all who hear, and whatever is said will without any exception be found to be in harmony with the standard works.” (p. 67)

Latter-day Saints see these two statements as without contradiction. Indeed, they are barely, if at all, on the same subject. To the extent that they address a similar issue, Robinson’s implication is that the declarations of President Snow and Joseph Smith are inspired as demonstrated by the fact that they are widely accepted by Latter-day Saints.

Nevertheless, Beckwith claims that “Robinson’s qualifications of Smith’s and Snow’s statements (both of which will be cited below) are not consistent with the Church’s official pronouncements” (p. 67). Of course, Robinson does not “qualify” Smith’s and Snow’s statements at all. He points out obvious historical facts, then supports those statements as widely accepted by Latter-day Saints.

Beckwith next cites Henry D. Taylor as follows:

As Latter-day Saints we accept the following scriptures as the standard works of the Church: the Bible (consisting of the Old Testament and the New Testament), the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and official statements made by our leaders. (pp. 67–68)

This is the same point made in the Gospel Principles manual, which Beckwith quotes as follows:

In addition to these four books of scripture, the inspired words of our living prophets become scripture to us. Their words come to us through conferences, Church publications, and instructions to local priesthood leaders. (p. 68)

So where is the inconsistency here? Is it really that hard for a professor of philosophy to interpret these statements? Can it be ignorance that caused Beckwith to miss such qualifiers as “when the living oracles speak in the name of the Lord or as moved upon by the Holy Spirit,” or “the official statements made by our leaders,” or “the inspired words of our living prophets”? Does he not know that not all
the statements of Joseph Smith or the other presidents of the church have been so labeled?

That is precisely what Robinson points out, but still Beckwith pretends that Robinson is contradicting himself when he says, “the LDS ‘church’s guarantee of doctrinal correctness lies primarily in the living prophet and only secondarily in the preservation of the written text’” (p. 68).

The value of current and authoritative oral tradition providing doctrinal clarification of the written word has been recognized since the early Christian era. Noted church historian Henry M. Gwatkin decried the lack of such tradition in the Christian church of the early second century A.D. 48 A living oracle of God who can give authoritative explanations of the written text is obviously more valuable than the text alone, especially after a lapse of nearly two thousand years has obscured some of the meanings and even cast doubt on the accuracy of parts of the text itself. Can Beckwith deny that explanations of the Old Testament given by Christ and his apostles are more valuable than that esteemed scripture alone? Yet he pretends not to understand this principle when it is pointed out by Robinson.

Why has he done that? Clearly it is to justify his decision to use his own authorities for what it pleases him to call “Mormon theism.” He makes this point abundantly clear in the following statement: “Additionally, I will consider the insights of contemporary LDS scholars who have attempted to present Mormonism’s doctrine of God as philosophically coherent” (p. 68).

In his footnote to this sentence, Beckwith identifies these “contemporary LDS scholars” as Gary J. Bergera, Sterling M. McMurrin, Blake Ostler, David L. Paulsen, Kent Robson, and O. Kendall White Jr. None of these individuals is a General Authority of the LDS Church. With the exception of David Paulsen, none is an employee of the Church Education System or an LDS university, or even a mainstream LDS author of doctrinal works.

David L. Paulsen is a BYU professor of philosophy and an excellent source of Mormon doctrine. Unfortunately, Beckwith doesn’t actually cite him as such. Apparently his only purpose was to use the word *finitistic* from the title of Paulsen’s doctoral thesis. He does not quote a single passage from Paulsen’s thesis and fails to inform his readers that Paulsen uses this term very differently than do evangelical critics of Mormonism. So what do these men contribute to Beckwith’s idea of Mormon theism?

Nothing. Beckwith has assembled a group of scholars whom he can either misquote or misuse and still label the result “Mormon doctrine.” That this is disingenuous on his part can hardly be doubted. It is revealed in his next remark:

> Because there are so many doctrinal sources, it may appear (with some justification) that it is difficult to determine precisely what the Mormons believe about God. (p. 68)

This is the crux of Beckwith’s chapter, and it is simply untrue. Beckwith frequently argues with the very Latter-day Saint scholars who could clarify Mormon doctrine for him. It is obvious that he doesn’t want to hear what Mormons really believe. With the sources he has selected and the way he uses them, his goal is to obfuscate rather than to clarify Mormon doctrine.

If there were any doubt about that conclusion, it is removed with his next point. He presents a supposed contradiction between two LDS scriptures as follows:

> For example, the Book of Mormon (first published in 1830) seems to teach a strongly Judaic monotheism with modalistic overtones (see Alma 11:26–31, 38; Moroni 8:18; Mosiah 3:5–8; 7:27; 15:1–5), while the equally authoritative *Pearl of Great Price* (first published in 1851) clearly teaches that more than one God exists (see Abraham 4, 5) and that these gods are finite. (p. 68)

No modalism is taught in the passages Beckwith cites nor anywhere else in the Book of Mormon, and it should be no surprise that this volume of scripture, consistent with all the standard works of the
church, teaches monotheism. That system of theistic belief is not only Judaic but most definitely LDS (see, e.g., 2 Nephi 31:21 and D&C 20:28).

The New Testament speaks of the Father as “God” and Jesus Christ separately as “Lord” in John 17:3; Romans 15:6; 1 Corinthians 8:6; and 1 Timothy 2:5 and 5:21. Yet Christ himself repeated Deuteronomy 6:4 in Mark 12:29, teaching that there is but one God. Is that a contradiction? Abraham, in the Pearl of Great Price passage cited by Beckwith, uses the word Gods in his account of the creation just as Moses did in the book of Genesis, where he used the plural Hebrew word elohim, literally “gods,” in the same context. Yet Moses also taught the oneness of God in Deuteronomy 6:4. Why claim that this is a contradiction if not to foment misunderstanding?

The existence or more than one person who is designated as “God” is the foundation of the two-thousand-year-old problem classical theists have resolved through their belief in the Trinity. If this seeming inconsistency can be tolerated in the Bible, it is disingenuous to pretend that it is a contradiction when it appears in LDS scripture. It would be more appropriate to complain if this “contradiction,” a teaching that has uniquely marked Christianity for centuries, were absent from LDS scriptures.

Finally, no part of the Book of Abraham or any other LDS scripture teaches that “these gods are finite.” It may be Beckwith’s misguided opinion that Latter-day Saints believe in a finite God, but that is no excuse for him to misrepresent what Mormon scripture actually says.

His next statements are the pièce de résistance of his effort to muddy the waters of Mormon doctrine. He cannot resist mentioning the officially debunked “Adam-God” theory, once apparently expressed by Brigham Young and a few other early church leaders. In so doing, Beckwith reveals that he is not navigating through unknown waters. He is aware of what Latter-day Saints say they believe, but he pretends otherwise in the hope that his readers will believe the version of Mormon theism he intends to weave for them.

Despite the fact that the Adam-God theory appears to have been contradicted in other contemporary statements by Brigham Young
himself and stands as one of the most fascinating but irrelevant conundrums in LDS history, Beckwith introduces his extensive recital of this unique, convoluted, and controversial doctrine with this revealing sentence:

This finite view of God culminated in the theology of Joseph Smith’s successor, Brigham Young, in sermons that were considered authoritative at the time but are now disputed by Mormon authorities. (p. 68)

Actually, the sermons Beckwith introduces were not considered authoritative at any time. They were speculative, perhaps inaccurate in whole or in part, and were never accepted by the church in any official action—either through an official statement of the First Presidency or by common consent of the church membership. Beckwith’s footnote to the contrary does nothing to prove otherwise.

What is really significant about his statement is its acknowledgment that current LDS teachings by “Mormon authorities” dispute the inspiration of these declarations. This is an admission that Beckwith knows he is misstating Mormon doctrine when he presents these arguments. Yet he presents them anyway, proving that his motive can be nothing but disingenuous.

In a misguided effort to prove that these statements should somehow be considered authoritative in spite of official pronouncements to the contrary, Beckwith argues in a note:

Brigham Young’s statements on the Adam-God doctrine come primarily from the Journal of Discourses, about which the publisher said in the preface to volume 3, “The ‘Journal of Discourses’ is a vehicle of doctrine, counsel, and instruction to all people, but especially to the saints.”... Brigham Young himself said that he had “never yet preached a sermon

49. It is “irrelevant” because Brigham Young said it was. In a discourse published in the Deseret Weekly News 22/20, June 1873, 308–9, he said, “How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to them... namely that Adam is our father and God—I do not know, do not inquire, I care nothing about it.”
and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture” (JD 18:95). (p. 94 n. 29)

The lapse in Beckwith’s logic on this point is apparent from the footnote itself. It correctly cites that G. D. Watt, not Brigham Young, was the publisher of the sermons found in the Journal of Discourses. Thus Watt, not Young, is the person sending them “out to the children of men.” That takes them completely outside the purview of Young’s statement, which relates to a far more official and carefully considered presentation.

The most important point is that Beckwith refuses to take the word of current LDS authorities about the authoritative value of the Journal of Discourses in general and the Adam-God doctrine specifically. That he is aware of their position is evidenced by his note 30, which cites both Bruce R. McConkie’s and Joseph Fielding Smith’s refutation of that doctrine.

Beckwith is not trying to advocate Adam-God as a personal belief, of course. His motive is clearly more devious. It is because this theory is an easily ridiculed notion. Beckwith wishes Mormons taught this doctrine so he could refute it with greater ease than he can anything Mormons actually do teach. He claims the existence of the theory demonstrates that “the Mormon doctrine of God . . . evolved from a traditional monotheism to a uniquely American polytheism” (p. 69). But there is no truth to that claim either. (Nor is it supported by his quotation from another so-called “Mormon scholar” (p. 69), Boyd Kirkland, whom Beckwith either misquotes or misuses.

Beckwith’s true purposes are revealed in his claim that it is difficult to determine what Mormons really teach about God. His effort is to obscure Mormon doctrine and make it sound unclear or difficult to determine. That way he can present an illegitimate list of characteristics that supposedly constitute the Mormon concept of God and claim some semblance of support from the Latter-day Saint community. It is a sad thing that Beckwith’s intelligence and capabilities were bent to such a demeaning and unworthy chore in this paper.
NOT COMPLETELY WORTHLESS

Barry R. Bickmore

Introduction

When Stephen Robinson and Craig Blomberg wrote How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation, they covered a lot of ground and were obviously limited by space constraints. They didn’t intend their book to be the end of fruitful discussion between evangelicals and Latter-day Saints but rather a beginning. Therefore, I do not have any particular problem with the idea of a group of evangelicals writing what they see as a more complete exposition of their point of view, in opposition to that of the Latter-day Saints. This is ostensibly the purpose of The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism—to respond to How Wide the Divide? by providing evidence for their faith and against the Latter-day Saint faith, in the process showing more clearly that Mormonism is really “another Gospel,” not fit to be called Christian.

If this is the goal of The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism, the chapter “Christ” by Ron Rhodes fails on a number of counts. For

1. According to his Web page, home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/RonRhodes.html, Rhodes is the president of Reasoning from the Scriptures Ministries and an adjunct professor of theology at Biola University, Southern Evangelical Seminary, and Golden Gate

instance, Rhodes does not respond to Robinson’s central argument, that behind mainstream Christianity’s creedal formulations lie extrabiblical assumptions and definitions that appear to have been adopted from the Greek philosophical schools. More important, Rhodes seems to have uncritically accepted some of the worst anti-Mormon caricatures of Latter-day Saint doctrine and spends a good deal of his chapter knocking down these straw men.

This is not to say Rhodes’s argumentation is completely without merit. He does in fact bring up a few legitimate points that Blomberg does not. These deserve a response, no matter what his failings. In this review I intend to rebut Rhodes’s most important arguments against the Latter-day Saint view of Christ and the Trinity and in the process clarify some aspects of the debate that he has not dealt with.

A Framework for Interpretation

It is a fundamental truth that nobody can interpret the Bible, or any other document, without supplying some set of assumptions and definitions external to the text. It just isn’t possible. Consider this example from the New Testament: “Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5 NIV). At Pentecost, were there really Jews visiting from every nation or just the ones in that part of the world? Even in our own language, these same terms can be ambiguous. If I were to say, “Everyone is here,” would I necessarily mean everyone in the universe? One makes sense of such statements within an interpretive framework that lies outside the particular words used.

Craig Blomberg appears to have recognized and readily admitted this in How Wide the Divide? (see p. 142). Stephen Robinson made some limited attempts to show that many of the assumptions and definitions that mainstream Christians use to arrive at their doctrines about Christ and the Trinity were adopted from the pagan Greek philosophical schools and could not have been part of the original Christian message. In turn, Craig Blomberg made an at-

Seminary. He has a Th.D. in systematic theology from Dallas Theological Seminary and has been an associate editor of the Christian Research Journal.
tempt to neutralize this charge. Space considerations did not allow for a complete discussion, but if Rhodes had bothered to look up the footnoted references in How Wide the Divide? he would have been able to gain a more complete understanding of this most important issue. That mainstream Christianity’s doctrines are based on pagan philosophy is not a charge that can be passed by in silence because the Hellenization of Christian doctrine is a topic too well attested in the scholarly literature.2 Consider, for example, the following recent admission by a group of evangelical scholars:

The view of God worked out in the early church, the “biblical-classical synthesis,” has become so commonplace that even today most conservative theologians simply assume that it is the correct scriptural concept of God and thus that any other alleged biblical understanding of God . . . must be rejected. The classical view is so taken for granted that it functions as a preunderstanding that rules out certain interpretations of Scripture that do not “fit” with the conception of what is “appropriate” for God to be like, as derived from Greek metaphysics.3

I am not suggesting that these evangelicals are advocating a concept of God in all respects identical to ours. While they believe that “the early Fathers did not sell out to Hellenism, but they did, on certain key points, use it to both defend and explain the Christian concept of God to their contemporaries,”4 some evangelical scholars are


4. Ibid.
beginning to realize the extent to which Greek metaphysics governs
the boundaries of “acceptable” Christian theology and are attempting
to unshackle themselves from its influence. Furthermore, they point
out that people like Rhodes largely do not even recognize this influ-
ence at all—it is completely taken for granted.

In order to expand the discussion begun by Blomberg and
Robinson, I intend to supply a few concrete examples where Latter-
day Saints believe mainstream Christians have adopted Greek philo-
sophical tenets in place of Hebrew thought forms. These examples
will provide a framework for the discussion of how Latter-day Saints
and evangelicals come to widely different conclusions about the very
same biblical passages.

My first example is perhaps the most important: the kind of be-
ing God is. Is he a person with a body in human form, as the Latter-
day Saints believe, or “a most pure spirit, invisible, without body,
parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternally incomprehen-
sible,” as the Westminster Confession of Faith states? The Vatican
Council further explains that God’s being is “a unique spiritual sub-
stance by nature, absolutely simple and unchangeable, [and] must be
declared distinct from the world in fact and by essence.” These defi-
nitions of God go beyond anything in the Bible, but they happen to
coincide nearly exactly with those taught by the ancient Greek phi-
losophers. For instance, Xenophanes (570–475 B.C.) conceived of
“God as thought, as presence, as all powerful efficacy.” He is one
God—incorporeal, “unborn, eternal, infinite, . . . not moving at all
[and] beyond human imagination.” Empedocles (ca. 444 B.C.)

5. For recent discussions of this phenomenon from an LDS perspective, see Barry R.
Bickmore, Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity (Ben
Lomond, Calif.: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 1999); Richard R.
Hopkins, How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God (Bountiful, Utah:
Horizon, 1998).

6. The Westminster Confession of Faith, in Creeds of the Churches—A Reader in
Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present, ed. John H. Leith (New York: Anchor
Books, 1963), 197.


3:13.
claimed that God “does not possess a head and limbs similar to those of humans... [He is] a spirit, a holy and inexpressible one.” This concept of God was adopted by Christians, starting in the mid-second century, in an attempt to make sense of their faith in light of the assumptions they inherited from their Hellenistic culture. Thus the Christian theologian Tertullian (ca. A.D. 200) could say, “The Father... is invisible and unapproachable, and placid, and (so to speak) the God of the philosophers.”

How did the Jews and Jewish Christians conceive of God before they moved out into the Hellenistic world? Christopher Stead, Ely Professor of Divinity Emeritus at Cambridge, writes that “The Hebrews... pictured the God whom they worshipped as having a body and mind like our own, though transcending humanity in the splendour of his appearance, in his power, his wisdom, and the constancy of his care for his creatures.” In the early third century, the Christian theologian Origen argued against the Jewish and Jewish Christian belief in an anthropomorphic God, not by appealing to unanimous Christian tradition, but to the philosophers: “The Jews indeed, but also some of our people, supposed that God should be understood as a man, that is, adorned with human members and human appearance. But the philosophers despise these stories as fabulous and formed in the likeness of poetic fictions.” Our evangelical friends interpret the anthropomorphic passages in the Bible allegorically, but Latter-day Saints see no compelling reason (apart from the assumptions of Greek philosophy) not to take Ezekiel quite literally when he says he saw “upon the throne, a form in human likeness” (Ezekiel 1:26 NEB). True, some passages describe God’s “wings” or

9. Ibid., 51.
10. For instance, Sanders, “Historical Considerations,” 72, writes, “Despite different attitudes taken by the fathers toward philosophy, the influence of Greek philosophical notions of God is universal, even among those who ‘repudiate’ philosophy.”
12. Stead, Philosophy in Christian Antiquity, 120.
“feathers” (e.g., Psalm 91:4), and the like, but these are always given in a clearly metaphorical context. What, then, was Ezekiel’s metaphor when he simply described what he saw?

Our neighbors might object that the biblical God cannot have a body, for that would contradict John 4:24. This verse can be translated “God is a spirit” but in modern translations is usually rendered “God is Spirit.” This passage is parallel to two others from John’s writings, where it is said that “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Read in context, these passages are not metaphysical statements about God’s “being” but rather descriptions of God’s activity with respect to men. Stead explains how the ancient Hebrews would have interpreted God’s “spiritual” nature. “By saying that God is spiritual, we do not mean that he has no body . . . but rather that he is the source of a mysterious life-giving power and energy that animates the human body, and himself possesses this energy in the fullest measure.”

In fact, some of the ancients, like the Latter-day Saints, considered spirit itself to be material. Origen complained that some of these actually used John 4:24 to prove that God is material! “Fire and spirit, according to them, are to be regarded as nothing else than a body.” In contrast, historian J. W. C. Wand (formerly the Anglican bishop of London) writes that the Hellenized Christians learned what it meant for God to be “a spirit” from the Neoplatonists:

It is easy to see what influence this school of thought [i.e., Neoplatonism] must have had upon Christian leaders. It was from it that they learnt what was involved in a metaphysical sense by calling God a Spirit. They were also helped to free themselves from their primitive eschatology and to get rid of that crude anthropomorphism which made even Tertullian [A.D. 160–220] believe that God had a material body.

Rhodes also objects that since God is said to be “omnipresent,” the divine nature cannot be limited to a body (see pp. 104–5). Apparently Jesus’ body is thought to be attached to the omnipresent divine nature as some sort of appendage. Again, Latter-day Saints do not take such passages as metaphysical statements about God’s “being” but as indications that God’s power and knowledge simultaneously extend to the farthest reaches of the universe (see D&C 88:6–13, 41). Apparently the ancient Jews and Jewish Christians agreed that God’s body was not a limitation.  

The Greeks had a strong tendency to take statements about God in an extreme metaphysical—even mathematical—sense, whereas the Hebrews spoke in more relative terms. Consider Christopher Stead’s statement about how the biblical authors spoke of God’s immutability.

The Old Testament writers sometimes speak of God as unchanging. . . . In Christian writers influenced by Greek philosophy this doctrine is developed in an absolute metaphysical sense. Hebrew writers are more concrete, and their thinking includes two main points: (1) God has the dignity appropriate to old age, but without its disabilities . . . ; and (2) God is faithful to his covenant promises, even though men break theirs.  

What about all those statements about God’s “eternity”? While mainstream Christian theologians, influenced by Greek philosophy, take this in an absolute sense, the biblical writers once again spoke in a more relative sense. For example, God is described as “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 41:13 NEB), but the Hebrew word for “everlasting” is ʼēlām, which literally means “(practically) eternity,” “time out of mind,” or “forever,” expressing the concept of a really, really long time.  

In any number of examples from the Bible, such superlative terms are obviously used in a limited, relative sense. For instance, Exodus 31:16 says, “The Israelites shall keep the sabbath, they shall keep it in every generation as a covenant for ever” (NEB). Perhaps recognizing the ambiguity in the Hebrew terms used, the evangelical translators of the New International Version (NIV) render the passage, “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant” (Exodus 31:16–17). So is it “every generation” or “the generations to come”? Were the Israelites to keep this covenant “for ever,” or was it just a “lasting covenant”? Incidentally, the salient Hebrew word in this verse is the familiar ὅλαμ, the very word the Bible uses to describe God’s eternity.

If it weren’t for such linguistic ambiguities, Leviticus 16:34 might be especially troubling. “This shall become a rule binding on you for all time, to make for the Israelites once a year the expiation required by all their sins” (NEB). Of course, the NIV translates ὅλαμ here so as to make it a “lasting rule” rather than a “rule . . . for all time” or an “everlasting statute” (KJV).

As we can see, the philosophical framework within which Latter-day Saints interpret the scriptural passages describing the attributes of God is widely different from the one used by most mainstream theologians. In addition, a good case can be made to show that the LDS framework is very much like that of the ancient Hebrews and Jewish Christians. And yet, time and time again we will see that Rhodes, like most anti-Mormon writers, seeks to establish some contradiction between the scriptures and LDS doctrine by interpreting scriptural passages within his framework of ideas without taking into account that of the Latter-day Saints or even the biblical writers. In the following responses to his specific criticisms, I will expose this faulty methodology.

“The Only Begotten Son”

Rhodes’s first target is the LDS view of the virgin birth, and here he shows not only a lack of understanding with respect to the LDS interpretive backdrop but also a willingness to twist the words of his
LDS sources to make them sound offensive to evangelical ears. In order to justify his assertion that Latter-day Saints believe Jesus “was begotten through sexual relations between a flesh-and-bone Heavenly Father and Mary” (p. 121), he quotes several unofficial statements of LDS leaders, justifying himself by showing that Latter-day Saints consider the words of the living prophets as scripture—despite the distinctly antifundamentalist view of scripture held by the Latter-day Saints.20 In any case, even while expanding the field of sources for “official” LDS doctrine, Rhodes can’t seem to provide any compelling evidence to make his case. What he does provide is a long series of statements by LDS leaders to the effect that Jesus is the literal,

20. Rhodes quotes Brigham Young (see p. 119), saying that any of his sermons are as good as any scripture in the Bible. However, he fails to recognize that Latter-day Saints have an extremely broad view of “scripture.” For instance, Doctrine and Covenants 68:4 says in relation to any priesthood holder, “And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture.” In fact, in our view even our canonized scriptures are not free from the “mistakes of men” (see the title page of the Book of Mormon). Especially relevant is the following comment by Brigham Young: “I am so far from believing that any government upon this earth has constitutions and laws that are perfect, that I do not even believe that there is a single revelation, among the many God has given to the Church, that is perfect in its fullness. The revelations of God contain correct doctrine and principle, so far as they go; but it is impossible for the poor, weak, low, grovelling, sinful inhabitants of the earth to receive a revelation from the Almighty in all its perfections.” 


In fact, one of the passages Rhodes quotes is the following, excluding the last sentence: “I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture. Let me have the privilege of correcting a sermon, and it is as good Scripture as they deserve.” Journal of Discourses, 13:95. Clearly President Young did not mean that his sermons were “inerrant” in the fundamentalist sense. Therefore, although we believe the inspired words of our prophets are “scripture,” we do not believe that all “scripture” is inerrant or that everything our leaders say is perfectly inspired. This is why we have a process of canonization in place to distinguish official doctrine and practice from what is not. The church as a body recognizes what is spoken by inspiration when we are “moved upon by the Holy Ghost” ourselves, and we canonize the most important and universally applicable of these statements. For an excellent discussion of this principle, see J. Reuben Clark Jr., “When Are Church Leaders’ Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?” in Brent L. Top, Larry E. Dahl, and Walter D. Bowen, Follow the Living Prophets (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993), 225–42. Personally, I see no problem with critics of the church critiquing unofficial statements of LDS leaders. However, they cannot expect to get away with passing them off as something that they are not and that we never claimed them to be.
biological Son of the Father in the flesh. But this is simply a by-product of our understanding of God the Father as an anthropomorphic being with a flesh-and-bone body (the Father was the source of Jesus’ Y chromosome) and says nothing about the mechanics of conception. For instance, Rhodes quotes Bruce R. McConkie and James E. Talmage to this effect, but what did they actually say about the mechanics of Jesus’ conception? Talmage says he was begotten “not in violation of natural law but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof.”

McConkie says:

How and by what means and through whose instrumentality does such a conception come? . . .

. . . When God is involved, he uses his minister, the Holy Ghost, to overshadow the future mother and to carry her away in the Spirit. She shall conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and God himself shall be the sire. . . . A son is begotten by a father: whether on earth or in heaven it is the same.

These descriptions do not go beyond what the scriptures affirm, no matter what seamy innuendos Rhodes wants to pull out of them.

He seems puzzled (see pp. 122–23) by McConkie’s statement that “Our Lord is the only mortal person ever born to a virgin, because he is the only person who ever had an immortal Father.” But then, if a resurrected, exalted man can transport himself through solid walls


23. Rhodes also quotes Orson Pratt and Brigham Young, who say that the Father must have been married to Mary at the time of Jesus’ conception (pp. 121–22). Certainly these are more suggestive (and speculative) than any of the other quotations Rhodes provides, but they still do not necessarily enlighten us about how Pratt and Young thought the conception of Jesus physically occurred. Furthermore, Rhodes cites Brigham Young’s statement from an 1866 edition of the Deseret News and Pratt’s from The Seer. By what stretch of the imagination does he characterize these as “official” teachings?

and leave them intact (see Luke 24:36–40), I see no reason why Jesus’ conception could not have left Mary truly still a “virgin.” Thus, President Ezra Taft Benson could say both that “Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense”25 and that “his mortal mother, Mary, was called a virgin, both before and after she gave birth. (See 1 Nephi 11:20.)”26 I do not pretend to know (as Rhodes does) what anyone’s private speculations about the particular mode of conception might have been. However, Latter-day Saints have generally been content not to publicly speculate about such unimportant topics, and we see attempts like Rhodes’s to “fill in the blanks” for us as rather silly. (Incidentally, we would also see attempts to definitively explain how Jesus transported himself through a solid wall without specific revelation on the subject as silly.)

This discussion of Jesus’ conception brings up the important question of how Jesus is uniquely the “Son of God.” Mormons equate Jesus’ unique Sonship with his incarnation. That is, he is the only son of God with respect to the flesh (see Mosiah 15:3), but one of many children of God with respect to his spirit (see Abraham 3:22–25). In addition, he was uniquely the Son of God even before his incarnation because he “was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20; cf. Ether 3:14; How Wide the Divide? 136) to his calling. Thus, while Latter-day Saints connect Jesus’ unique Sonship with the incarnation, we believe it is proper to refer to him as the “Only Begotten” even in the premortal existence. Mainstream Christians, on the other hand, believe that Jesus has always existed as the Son within the Trinity, “eternally generated” from the Father,27 and they do not specifically connect Jesus’ unique Sonship to the incarnation.

Rhodes uses several scriptures (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:13–14, 17; and John 8:54–58) to conclude that Jesus existed as “the Son of God” before the incarnation (p. 125). As we have seen, he is missing

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26. Ibid.
the point. Likewise, when he trots out passages from the Book of Mormon (such as 2 Nephi 27:23; 29:7, 9; Mosiah 3:5, 8) in support of the eternal nature of Jesus Christ as God, he simply ignores the LDS (and ancient Hebrew) usage of words like *eternity*. He also expends a great deal of effort showing that Greek terms such as *firstborn* and *Only-Begotten* don’t necessarily require the interpretation the Latter-day Saints give them (see pp. 124–27), but he does not acknowledge Stephen Robinson’s demonstration (see *How Wade the Divide?* 138–39) that the LDS view reflects a legitimate interpretation of such words.

One argument Rhodes uses is the following:

Many Mormons, including Stephen Robinson, appeal to Psalm 2:7 in an attempt to prove that Jesus was begotten of the Father. However, Acts 13:33, 34 makes such a view impossible, for this passage teaches that Jesus’ resurrection from the dead by the Father is a fulfillment of the statement in Psalm 2:7, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.” (p. 124)

This is a legitimate point if the object is to establish that *begotten* was sometimes used in a more symbolic sense. However, I fail to grasp why this passage would be any more troubling for Latter-day Saints than for evangelicals, who believe Jesus is “eternally begotten.” The resurrection of Jesus represents the complete fulfillment of his incarnation, so this passage fits very well with the LDS understanding indeed. In fact, the LDS interpretation receives significant historical support. For example, J. N. D. Kelly, commenting on a passage from Ignatius of Antioch (ca. a.d. 110, reputed to have been a disciple of John), says this: “His divine Sonship dates from the incarnation... In tracing His divine Sonship to His conception in Mary’s womb, he was simply reproducing a commonplace of pre-Origenist theology; the idea did not convey, and was not intended to convey, any denial of His pre-existence.”

Jesus as Creator

Rhodes’s strongest argument against the LDS view that Jesus is one of a number of spirit children of God is his use of Colossians 1:16-17: “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.” Rhodes comments, “The words ‘thrones,’ ‘dominions,’ ‘principalities,’ and ‘powers’ were words used by rabbinical Jews in biblical times to describe different orders of angels (see Romans 8:38; Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 2:10, 15)” (p. 127). Thus if Jesus created the angels, he couldn’t possibly be their “spirit brother.”

I can certainly see how one might read the passage in this way, but in fact its meaning is not so cut-and-dried. For instance, Romans 8:38 actually separates “angels” from “principalities and powers,” and thus seems to militate against Rhodes’s argument for the rabbinical interpretation: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come...” Other passages are ambiguous in meaning (see Colossians 2:10, 15; Ephesians 1:21), while some Rhodes fails to mention specifically speak of the “principalities and powers” of this world (see Luke 12:11; Romans 13:1; Ephesians 6:12; and Titus 3:1). Furthermore, the very passage in question seems not to include spirits among Christ’s creations. Paul goes on in Colossians 1:20-21, “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.” Does Paul here include Satan and his angels when he says Christ has reconciled “all things” in heaven and earth to himself? I think not. Again, Paul does not even seem to include the spirits of men among the “all things” Christ created, since he sets them apart by saying, “And you...,” referring of course to believing Christians. He couldn’t have included unbelievers in the “reconciliation”; otherwise, he wouldn’t have qualified the prospects of reconciliation for his audience: “If ye continue in the faith...” (Colossians 1:23).
Let us also consider our interpretation and Rhodes’s argument within the broader context: the nature of creation. According to the earliest Jewish and Christian belief, God doesn’t “create” out of nothing. In his 1990 presidential address to the British Association for Jewish Studies, Peter Hayman asserted the following:

Nearly all recent studies on the origin of the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo have come to the conclusion that this doctrine is not native to Judaism, is nowhere attested in the Hebrew Bible, and probably arose in Christianity in the second century C.E. in the course of its fierce battle with Gnosticism. The one scholar who continues to maintain that the doctrine is native to Judaism, namely Jonathan Goldstein, thinks that it first appears at the end of the first century C.E., but has recently conceded the weakness of his position in the course of debate with David Winston.29

Gerhard May has convincingly shown that where these early texts say God created out of “nothing” or “non-being,” etc., they were using a common ancient idiom to say that “something new, something that was not there before, comes into being; whether this something new comes through a change in something that was already there, or whether it is something absolutely new, is beside the question.”30 For instance, the Greek writer Xenophon wrote that parents “bring forth their children out of non-being.”31 Philo of Alexandria wrote that Moses and Plato were in agreement in accepting a pre-existent material, but also that God brings things “out of nothing into being” or “out of non-being.”32 Therefore, in view of this com-
mon usage and the many explicit statements by ancient authors regarding preexistent matter, we must rule out a belief in *creatio ex nihilo* unless such a belief is explicitly stated. We do not find such explicit statements anywhere until the mid-second century with the Gnostic teacher Basilides and later the Christian apologists Tatian and Theophilus of Antioch.\textsuperscript{33}

Clearly, when Paul said that Christ created "all things," the apostle did so in a sense limited by his underlying interpretive framework. Likewise, the Latter-day Saints often say Christ created "all things" but limit this statement to the material universe.

**The Divine Names**

Four names or titles are commonly used to denote God in the Old Testament: El ("God"), Elohim ("God" or "gods"), Elyon ("Most High"), and Yahweh (equivalent to "Jehovah").\textsuperscript{34} Most mainline Christians see all these designations as referring to one divine being. However, Latter-day Saint usage is much more complicated. On one hand, the divine names can refer to specific persons; for example, El or Elohim usually refers to the Father, and Yahweh usually refers to the Son. On the other hand, they have also been used as titles in reference to more than one divine person. Both the Father and the Son have been called "Jehovah" (D&C 109:34, 42, 68; 110:3). For instance, Joseph Smith said, "Let us plead the justice of our cause; trusting

\textsuperscript{33} See Frances Young, "'Creatio Ex Nihilo': A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991): 141. Even as late as the turn of the third century, Tertullian had to take the more ancient usage into account when arguing for the new doctrine. "And even if they were made out of some (previous) matter, as some will have it, they are even thus out of nothing, because they were not what they are." Tertullian, *Against Marcellus* 2.5, in *ANF*, 3:301.

The only evangelical response to this work I have seen is by a graduate student at Marquette University, Paul Copan. Copan challenges May's assertion that *creatio ex nihilo* is a postbiblical invention, but in fact does not deal with May's primary evidence—the description by ancient authors of creation as "out of nothing" where preexistent matter is clearly presupposed. Paul Copan, "Is *Creatio Ex Nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention? An Examination of Gerhard May's Proposal," *Trinity Journal* 17NS (1996): 77–93.

in the arm of Jehovah, the Eloheim, who sits enthroned in the heavens." The Latter-day Saints believe that the Bible passages that link Yahweh with Elohim or Elyon (see, for example, Isaiah 43:12–13; 45:21–22) refer to a “divine investiture of authority”; there the Son is allowed to speak in the first person as the Father. Thus where Moses says, “The Lord our God is one Lord” (Deuteronomy 6:4), Latter-day Saints see the phrase as an expression of the perfect unity of the Godhead.

Rhodes apparently does not understand the nuances of LDS use of these terms and lists a series of Bible passages in which Jehovah and Elohim are equated. “The Mormon doctrine can easily be debunked by verses in the Bible which demonstrate that Elohim and Jehovah are one and the same God” (p. 129).

But consider the following passage found in both the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint versions of Deuteronomy: “When the Most High parcelled out the nations, when he dispersed all mankind, he laid down the boundaries of every people according to the number of the sons of God; but the Lord’s [Yahweh’s] share was his own people, Jacob was his allotted portion” (Deuteronomy 32:8–9 NEB). Based on this and other passages, some Bible scholars now conclude that the Israelites originally believed El to be the high God and Yahweh to be the chief among the “sons of El”—the second God and chief archangel who had special responsibility for Israel.

35. *History of the Church*, 5:94. Likewise, Brigham Young spoke the following with reference to the Father: “We obey the Lord, Him who is called Jehovah, the Great I AM, I am a man of war, Elohim, etc.” Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 12:99.


37. The NEB follows the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint versions here.

Certainly belief in two Gods is a debated point and beyond the scope of this review, but it is beyond debate that this was a standard early Christian interpretation of the passage. As late as the fourth century, the great historian and bishop Eusebius of Caesarea could write, “In these words [Deuteronomy 32:8] surely he names first the Most High God, the Supreme God of the Universe, and then as Lord His Word, Whom we call Lord in the second degree after the God of the Universe.” A similar interpretation of these verses is found in the Jewish Christian Clementine Recognitions, in which Peter says, “But to the one among the archangels who is greatest, was committed the government of those who, before all others, received the worship and knowledge of the Most High God. . . . Thus the princes of the several nations are called gods. But Christ is God of princes, who is Judge of all.” Indeed, according to Margaret Barker, in a number of Jewish Apocalyptic texts there are actually two Yahwehs. Both the High God and principal angel are so designated.

Clearly the LDS use of the divine names is complicated, so it is perhaps comprehensible that Ron Rhodes would misunderstand. However, it is equally clear that the LDS use has unambiguous precedents in ancient Jewish and Christian writings.

The Oneness of the Godhead

One feature of the New Testament all Christians must come to terms with is that in some passages the Father is represented as “the only true God” (John 17:3), while in others the Son and Holy Spirit are also called “God” (John 1:1; 14:26; Acts 13:2). How can this apparent contradiction be resolved? We can readily see that two disparate definitions of God must lead to different conclusions regarding this question.

In harmony with their definition of God as an indivisible, eternal, unchanging spiritual “essence,” mainstream Christians like

41. See Barker, The Great Angel, 81.
Rhodes say that the members of the Trinity are separate “persons” who share a single “Divine Being.” All three persons have always existed in the same relationship to one another, and no hierarchy exists within the Trinity. That is, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not differ in rank or glory. On the other hand, Latter-day Saints believe the members of the Godhead are separate beings, and so in a sense we believe in more than one God. However, Latter-day Saints also speak of “one God” in two senses. First, the Godhead is “one” in will, purpose, love, and covenant. Second, the Father is the absolute monarch of the known Universe, and all others are subject to him.

Rhodes disputes the LDS view of the divine unity in two ways. First, he disputes the subordinationist interpretation we apply to John 14:28, where Jesus says, “My Father is greater than I.” Rhodes comments,

In response, we must point out that Jesus in John 14:28 is not speaking about His nature or His essential being (Christ had earlier said “I and the Father are one” in this regard—John 10:30), but is rather speaking of His lowly position in the incarnation. Simply put, Christ is “equal” to the Father in regard to His Godhood but “inferior” to the Father in regard to His manhood. . . . During the time of the incarnation, Jesus functioned in the world of humanity, and this of necessity involved Jesus being positionally lower than the Father. (pp. 130–31)

Furthermore, he adds that while the Father is said to be “greater” than Jesus, Jesus is said to be “better” than the angels (Hebrews 1:4), underscoring the idea that Jesus is “positionally” subordinate to the Father, but “by nature” above the angels (p. 131).

Certainly Rhodes reads quite a lot into the terms greater and better; but, more important, he again appears to misunderstand, or at least misapply, the nuances of LDS theology. In our system, to say that Jesus is subordinate to the Father in rank and glory implies absolutely nothing about his “essential nature.” Mormons see gods, angels, and men as having the same “essential nature,” as Rhodes appears to realize (p. 120). Since we do not equate “God” with some indivisible, eternally unchanging spirit essence, it makes perfect sense
to call more than one person "God" and consider them to differ in rank and glory.

And in fact, the pre-Nicene church (excluding the Modalist heretics) universally held this view, even after the Greek concept of God was adopted. Kelly of Oxford University notes that even at the Council of Nicea, the majority party believed "that there are three divine hypostases [or persons], separate in rank and glory but united in harmony of will."42 Richard Hansen writes, "Indeed, until Athanasius began writing, every single theologian, East and West, had postulated some form of Subordinationism. It could, about the year 300, have been described as a fixed part of catholic theology."43 Henry Bettenson writes that "Subordinationism... was pre-Nicene orthodoxy."44

This doctrine took various forms, depending on the particular concept of God involved. Within Jewish Christianity, where God was often conceived of as having a body in human form, Jesus and the Holy Spirit were described both as gods, worthy of worship, and the chief among the archangels.45 (For instance, see the passage from the Clementine Recognitions quoted above.) While Latter-day Saints generally do not refer to the Son and Spirit as "angels," such a designation is consistent with our belief that Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and all angels and men are "sons of God" (Job 38:7), differing in degree and power, but not in essential nature.

An early second-century Jewish Christian document, the Shepherd of Hermas, speaks of "the angel of the prophetic Spirit"46 and of Jesus as the "glorious... angel" or 'most venerable... angel.'47 Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150) wrote that Jesus is "another God [Gk deuteros theos = 'second God'] subject to the Maker of all things... who is..."
distinct from Him who made all things—numerically, I mean, not [distinct] in will."48 He designated the Son as "this power which the prophetic word calls God... and Angel"49 and followed in the same vein: "We reverence and worship Him and the Son who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of other good angels who are about Him and are made quite like Him, and the Prophetic Spirit."50 Justin Martyr also maintained that the Son is "in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third."51

Many other examples could be cited, but it is important to note that this "angel Christology" was not some aberration but was derived from various Bible passages that refer to "the Angel of Yahweh," who is in fact Yahweh himself.52 For example, in Judges 13 the "angel of Yahweh" appears to Manoah and his wife. When he disappears, Manoah says, "We are doomed to die, we have seen God" (Judges 13:22 NEB). Even more interesting is the frequency with which Yahweh and the two angels who appeared to Abraham (see Genesis 18-19) are called "men."53

Rhodes also objects to the LDS understanding of the divine unity on the basis of his idiosyncratic interpretation of the "oneness" passages in John's Gospel (see pp. 132-33). He asserts that John's claim

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49. Ibid., 127, in ANF, 1:264.
50. Justin Martyr, First Apology 6, in William A. Jurgens, The Faith of the Early Fathers (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1970), 1:51. Father Jurgens insists that this is the correct translation of Justin's statement and admits that here Justin "apparently [made] insufficient distinction between Christ and the created angels." Father Jurgens continues, "There are theological difficulties in the above passage, no doubt. But we wonder if those who make a great deal of these difficulties do not demand of Justin a theological sophistication which a man of his time and background could not rightly be expected to have." Jurgens, Faith of the Early Fathers, 1:56 n. 1. "This passage presents us with considerable difficulties. The word 'other,' used in relation to the angels, suggests that Jesus himself is an angel." Robert M. Grant, The Early Christian Doctrine of God (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 81.
52. For a complete discussion of the "Angel of Yahweh," see Barker, The Great Angel.
that Jesus and the Father are “one” (John 10:30–33; 17:21–24) clearly means a oneness of nature: the Jews were prepared to stone Jesus for saying this because he was “claiming to be God” (p. 132). “But the context of John 17:21—where Jesus prayed that the disciples may be one ‘just as you [Father] are in me and I am in you’—is entirely different. In this context, the Greek word for ‘one’ refers to unity among people in the midst of their diversity” (p. 133, emphasis and brackets in original). On the contrary, Jesus’ statement that the oneness of his disciples was ideally to be “just as you [Father] are in me and I am in you” is the only clear comparison of anything in the Bible with the divine unity. The “context” in which we are supposed to understand the ideal unity of Jesus’ disciples is directly supplied by Jesus. It is the divine unity itself!

Rhodes’ discussion of Matthew 28:19 is equally mistaken. Is it really so significant that Jesus is said to baptize in “the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (NEB)? Does the fact that the Godhead is referred to as having a single “name” really mean they are a single being? Equating oneness of name with oneness of being overlooks the common ancient and modern usage where someone’s “name” is equated with his or her “authority.” Someone could say, “I come in the name of the King,” just as Jesus said, “I am come in my Father’s name” (John 5:43). So also, Christ’s ministers baptize by the authority of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is a single authority and power.

If nothing else, it should be clear that the LDS interpretation of the divine unity is quite possible, given the information in the Bible, and in fact this interpretation receives significantly more historical support from the earliest Christian documents than does the alternative Rhodes supports.

The “Two Natures” of Christ

The foregoing discussion of the “nature” of Christ relative to God, angels, and men brings up another of Rhodes’s objections. He complains:
Stephen Robinson in the book How Wide the Divide? [p. 83] makes reference to the “unbiblical doctrine of the two natures in Christ, which was added to historic Christianity by the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.” While the Chalcedon Creed does teach the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, this creed does not constitute the origin of the doctrine. Contrary to Mormons, this doctrine is not something that is foreign to Scripture; it is derived directly from its pages. (p. 134, emphasis in original)

He goes on to argue that “Throughout Scripture we find constant witness to the fact that the incarnate Christ possessed both a human and a divine nature” (p. 134). Here he apparently misunderstands what Robinson was asserting and uses this distorted interpretation to perpetuate the falsehood that Mormons do not think of Christ as truly divine.

Of course, the Council of Chalcedon wasn’t the origin of the doctrine of two natures—the councils did not bring doctrines into existence ex nihilo. The doctrine of two natures was that Jesus’ divine nature is the omnipresent “spirit essence” the Hellenized Christians defined as God, and since this essence is “without body, parts, or passions,” it cannot have been the part of Jesus that underwent suffering, emotion, and death. Thus Jesus must have possessed a human body and soul in addition to his divine nature. The original doctrine, on the other hand, was what Kelly discusses as a spirit Christology. 54 That is, the Word entered a human body, just as other men’s spirits do. As Ignatius of Antioch (ca. A.D. 110) put it, “God the Word did dwell in a human body, being within it as the Word, even as the soul also is in the body.” 55

Clearly the original formulation could not last once the Hellenistic view of God was universally adopted. Evangelical scholar John Sanders explains how the change was accomplished:

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55. Ignatius, Philadelphians 6, in ANF, 1:83.
In the East the Cappadocian fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus) [late fourth century] helped to shape the orthodox belief on the incarnation. They agreed with the Arians that the divine nature was impassible, immutable, illimitable and transcended all characteristics. However, using the newly developed doctrine of the two natures of Christ (human and divine), they were able to rebut the charge that the suffering of Christ implied that the Son was not of the same substance as the Father. The Son, sharing the divine substance, was incapable of change. Since Jesus is both the Son of God and human, and since only the human nature of Christ underwent change, it could be argued that the Son was fully God. This became the orthodox answer to the Arian challenge.56

The Atonement of Jesus Christ

Rhodes's final significant attack on LDS doctrine is a travesty. He actually contends that Latter-day Saints believe Jesus atoned only for the effects of Adam's transgression but not for our personal sins (see pp. 135–36). An exchange of several e-mails with Ron Rhodes57 did not clarify matters, and he still claims, "Having read many Mormon resources, I believe that what is in our book is an accurate representation and summary of Mormon belief on the atonement."

He supports his contention by appealing to a few passages from LDS literature which say that because of Christ's atonement, we are only responsible for our own sins and not Adam's. For instance, Rhodes quotes (see p. 135) LeGrand Richards, who says that Jesus "atoned for Adam's sin, leaving us responsible only for our own sins."58 But doesn't Rhodes believe we are responsible for our personal sins?

56. Sanders, "Historical Considerations," 77–78, emphasis added.
57. See www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/2671/Rhodes.html for the entire conversation.
Otherwise, why do countercultists such as Rhodes spend so much of their time and effort announcing that everyone else is going to hell? In addition, mainstream Christians have traditionally believed that we are all responsible for Adam’s sin as well, so I fail to see how the LDS view denies the efficacy of the atonement. The truth is that both evangelicals and Mormons believe we are responsible for our personal sins but that through the atonement of Christ, we can be cleansed from sin (see 2 Nephi 25:23; Omni 1:26; Mosiah 3:11; 13:28; 16:13; Alma 22:14; 24:13; 33:22; 34:8, 10–12; 36:17; 42:15; Moroni 7:26, 38; 10:26; D&C 3:20; 18:22–23; 20:29; 29:1; and Articles of Faith 3–4). This cleansing is conditioned upon individual faith, although evangelicals and Mormons may have some disagreements over what true faith entails.

How could Rhodes make such a palpably false claim? He writes, “The official Gospel Principles manual tells us that Jesus ‘became our savior and he did his part to help us return to our heavenly home. It is now up to each of us to do our part and to become worthy of exaltation’” (p. 135). And yet, if Rhodes had bothered to flip through chapter 12, “The Atonement,” in the same book, he might have noticed section headings like “Christ Was the Only One Who Could Atone for Our Sins” and “The Atonement Makes It Possible for Those Who Repent to Be Saved from Their Sins.”

Daniel Peterson recently exposed an obvious instance of plagiarism by Ron Rhodes and Marian Bodine, so I decided to spot-check a few of Rhodes’s LDS sources that I happened to have on my bookshelf. While I found no obvious evidence of plagiarism in my check, I did find clear evidence that Rhodes lifted some of his quotations from other secondary anti-LDS writings without bothering to consult the original sources for accuracy or even to cite his secondary sources. For instance, he twice (supposedly) quotes Doctrine and


60. An instance of this sort of thing in Rhodes and Bodine’s book was exposed in
Covenants 93:21–23 in the following manner. "Christ, the Firstborn, was the mightiest of all the spirit children of the Father" (p. 120). A few pages later, he again claims to be quoting those verses: "the mightiest of all the spirit children of the Father" (p. 125). While he has perhaps given an adequate paraphrase of those verses, he has not even come close to a direct quotation. The same phenomenon appears in his supposed quotation of a passage from page 193 of Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* (1966 ed.). "The appointment of Jesus to be the Savior of the world was contested by one of the other sons of God. He was called Lucifer, son of the morning. Haughty, ambitious, and covetous of power and glory, this spirit-brother of Jesus desperately tried to become the Savior of mankind" (p. 120). Now, on page 193 of *Mormon Doctrine* we do indeed find part of an article on "the Devil," and Rhodes's "quotation" is actually a reasonable paraphrase of some of the information there. However, it is not a quotation of anything on that page, nor even in the same article, and in fact comes from a book by Milton R. Hunter.61 Similarly, he quotes (see p. 123) Bruce R. McConkie: "Our Lord is the only mortal person ever born to a virgin, because he is the only person who ever had an immortal Father" and cites page 745 of *Mormon Doctrine* (1966 ed.). While there is an article on "Sons of God" on that page, the quotation actually comes from the "Virgin Birth" article on page 822.

I could add other examples,62 but what makes Rhodes's carelessness even more baffling is that in at least one instance (see p. 122) he

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61. Since the book Daniel Peterson caught Rhodes and Bodine plagiarizing was Marvin W. Cowan’s *Mormon Claims Answered*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Cowan, 1989), I decided to look through the online version of this book at Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s Utah Lighthouse Ministry Web site, www.utlm.org/onlinelooks/mclaimscontents.htm. I found this exact quotation in chapter 2, in the section on Jesus Christ. However, Cowan cites Milton R. Hunter’s *Gospel through the Ages*, 15. Indeed, I found the same quotation scattered through quite a number of anti-Mormon documents, but always attributed to Milton Hunter. We may never know the exact path this quotation took to reach Rhodes, but it seems clear that there has been some judicious "borrowing" of quotations, along with some garbling en route, among the anti-Mormon community.

62. For instance, on page 123 Rhodes quotes Orson Hyde as saying that Jesus was likely married to Mary, Martha, and "the other Mary"; he gives *Journal of Discourses*, 13:259,
cites a secondary, anti-Mormon book for a quotation of an obscure LDS source, a comment by Brigham Young in an 1866 edition of the Deseret News. But the above examples are taken from sources one would find in any LDS bookstore, LDS bookshelf, or even in most public libraries! Are we to believe that Rhodes, a professional critic of the church, does not even have a copy of the Doctrine and Covenants on his bookshelf? If not, he could have looked up a copy on the Internet. And yet, in an e-mail to me Rhodes adamantly claimed, “Of course I read Robinson’s book and the other sources mentioned in our book.”

To clarify, what bothers me so much about Rhodes’s research is not that he lifted quotations from secondary sources without attribution. My problem is that those secondary sources were apparently unreliable and have given Ron Rhodes a distorted view of LDS belief. And although he may have personally consulted reliable sources—for example, the Gospel Principles manual—he evidently did so only in search of quotations to support his distorted views. Otherwise, why would Rhodes have quoted Gospel Principles in his section on “The Atonement of Jesus Christ” to support a point that directly contradicts the chapter called “The Atonement” in the same book?

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion illustrates why anti-Mormon writers like Rhodes have never gained, and will never gain, a significant audience among the Latter-day Saints. He criticizes before trying to understand and in fact makes it abundantly clear that he does not understand what he criticizes. His methods are so careless that it takes only ten minutes of flipping through readily available books to ex-
pose them. He reproduces many of the same arguments that have been answered over and over by the Latter-day Saints and acts as if there can be no counterarguments. In short, he thinks we are so amazingly dense as to believe in a system of theology that can be brought tumbling down by a few biblical proof texts and quotations lifted from other such countercult literary gems.

This also serves to illustrate why Latter-day Saints have received *How Wide the Divide?* so well. It is not that we all agree with everything Stephen Robinson said or that we think he “won” the debate with Craig Blomberg. We have simply been starving for some resource that can serve as a catalyst for meaningful conversations with our evangelical neighbors. We are tired of having to clear up dozens of bizarre misconceptions (like Rhodes’s version of the LDS atonement) at the outset of every single conversation with these people. In addition, I believe the book has done quite a bit to clear up several misconceptions Mormons typically have about evangelicals.

As I stated in my introduction, Rhodes’s chapter does have some redeeming features in that he produces a few cogent arguments for the evangelical position that were not stated by Craig Blomberg. Therefore, although not very useful for the Latter-day Saint, this work is not completely worthless.
"The Horror! The Horror!"

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

A first, quick reading of Roberts's chapter on salvation might suggest that it is a reasonable, basic-level discussion of Latter-day Saint soteriology. The seeming reasonableness of this discussion results, perhaps, because of its use of *Gospel Principles*, a course manual for new members, which does not go into any real depth. A second look, however, reveals numerous problems. Roberts offers an "evangelical" view of salvation doctrine, but his views differ considerably from those of many other evangelicals. More important, the teaching he presents as Latter-day Saint doctrine, although composed mostly of authentic Latter-day Saint elements, is virtually his own creation.

The chapter is structured as a mirror-image of the corresponding chapter in *How Wide the Divide?* That is, in the earlier volume, Robinson presented the Latter-day Saint view first, and Blomberg followed with the evangelical view. Roberts, brave soul that he is, feels adequate to present both views: the "Christian/evangelical answer"

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(see pp. 141–52) followed by what he is pleased to call “The Mormon Doctrine of Salvation” (see pp. 152–77), although he accepts only the former.

Before getting into the details of problems with his chapter, it is worth turning to the back of the book to discover Roberts’s qualifications for this work. The description tells us of his Ph.D., his years as dean of theology at the Institute of Biblical Studies in Romania, and the churches he has pastored in four different countries. This all sounds impressive, but one rather serious blot remains on his copybook; he claims conspicuous credit on his curriculum vitae for the polemical video The Mormon Puzzle. This fact may warm the hearts of Southern Baptists, most of whom are probably not aware of its problems, but it does not inspire confidence among those of us who are.2

In How Wide the Divide? Craig Blomberg discusses the two main strands of evangelical thought—Calvinism and Arminianism. (In simple terms, Calvinism insists upon salvation of a predestined few by an act of unconditional, irresistible divine grace, while Arminianism holds that salvation is offered to all, but that each individual retains the choice of whether or not to accept it.) This is vital information for anyone seeking a true and fair understanding of Protestant beliefs on the subject of salvation. Roberts, however, makes no effort to address this division. Rather, he offers his (Arminian) view of salvation and calls it “The Evangelical View” (p. 141, emphasis added), as if it were the only one. Now, although Roberts is unlikely to return the favor, I certainly accept that he genuinely believes the doctrine he offers; I also do not dispute that it is an authentic evangelical position. However, it is a little presumptuous of him to call it the evangelical view, as if his Calvinist brethren were not evangelical—or their views did not count. Roberts’s view, for example, would most emphatically not be accepted by James White, an old-line, “absolute-sovereignty” Calvinist who is also a Baptist.

Roberts begins by quoting Acts 16:31 and claims that this passage, “in the opinion of evangelicals, says all that needs to be said about the issue of salvation” (p. 142). Having said all that needs to be said, Roberts then expounds and enlarges upon it for ten and a half pages.

Putting aside Roberts’s essay and sticking to “all that needs to be said,” what are we to make of other statements about salvation found in the New Testament, including those in the writings of Paul? While they by no means contradict Roberts’s proof text, neither do they support his use of it. Presumably he believes that these, as well as other relevant passages, can all be harmonized in some way to agree with the surface meaning of his favorite text. If that is the case, he does not share that harmonization process with us; instead, he effectively dismisses those passages as irrelevant.

A point that Roberts emphasizes more than once is his dictum that church membership has no influence on the matter of salvation. “Never,” he avers, “is heavenly reward seen to be tied to a church or denominational identity [in the evangelical view] ... as it so clearly is in Mormonism” (p. 142). However, Roberts severely overstates his case. The New Testament does not address the question of “denominational identity” for the simple reason that the early Saints had no denominational choices. Some have argued that the primitive church was nondenominational, but this argument simply avoids the issue. The reality is that no denominations are mentioned because the church was all one: a single, centrally directed organization operating with the ideal of a living body, whose parts (the actual meaning of “members”) each functioned in perfect harmony with all the others.

Not only has Roberts overstated his argument, but he has failed to see its implications for his polemical enterprise. For if an individual’s salvation does not depend on what his or her “denominational identity” is, neither can it depend on what that identity is not. If one’s heavenly reward doesn’t depend on being in the (or a) “right” church, then it cannot depend on being out of a “wrong” one either.

3. See, for example, Matthew 24:13; Mark 16:16; John 10:19; Acts 2:21, 47; Romans 8:24; 10:9; 1 Corinthians 3:15; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21.
This means that a Latter-day Saint who accepts Roberts’s arguments has no valid reason to leave the Church of Jesus Christ.

As mentioned above, Roberts’s view of salvation is Arminian; that is, he believes that God offers salvation to all but actually gives it to those who freely respond correctly. His exposition of this view is a well-organized one: he first defines “man’s need,” then “Christ’s work,” and “man’s response.” Having dealt with these issues from an evangelical standpoint, he discusses—or rather, performs an exposé of—the Latter-day Saint view of these matters (not, however, before giving a thoroughly hostile presentation on the apostasy and the restoration of the gospel).

Roberts labors to show that the gospel as taught by the Church of Jesus Christ is “A Different Gospel” (p. 153). However, he is not content to show that it differs from the views of contemporary Protestantism; he also attempts to show that it differs from the teachings of the primitive church. However, he does this almost entirely without any serious attempt to come to grips with Latter-day Saint sources; in fact, when he does refer to a Mormon source, he almost always abuses it. For example, when he cites Doctrine and Covenants 1:23 to demonstrate that the church claims to teach the fulness of the gospel and Joseph Smith—History 1:34 to show that we believe the Book of Mormon contains that fulness, he interprets these as a snub against the Bible. The Bible, however, is not mentioned in those passages; Roberts is being unnecessarily defensive. He asks the rhetorical question, “If the Gospel contained in the pages of the New Testament is not complete, why is it that the Apostle Paul would give such a dire and serious warning as he delivered in Galatians 1:8?” (p. 154).

However, his logic begs two questions: first, who says that “the Gospel contained in the pages of the New Testament is not complete”? If any Latter-day Saint has said so, Roberts has not cited such a statement. Roberts arrives at this conclusion by loosely and inaccurately equating his interpretation of the Bible with the Bible itself, and certainly we would say that the Roberts interpretation of the Bible, as presented in his chapter of The Counterfeit Gospel, gives an incomplete and inadequate version of the gospel. To Latter-day Saints,
the primary problem lies not with the Bible but with the trouble men have finding the truth—unaided by revelation—in its pages.

The second question Roberts begs is, what does Galatians 1:8 have to say about the Bible? The answer: nothing at all. The passage refers only to what Paul had preached to the Galatian Saints—that is, what he had delivered to them verbally. On no other basis than the breathless assumptions of unquestioning bibliolatry, Roberts assumes that this passage refers to the New Testament—something that did not exist at the time—when it actually pertains to something else altogether.

Further examples of Roberts's misuse of his sources abound. On the same page as the above example, in one of a number of resentful barbs directed at How Wide the Divide? Roberts says, "Stephen Robinson claims that the Gospel of Mormonism sheds 'additional light' (100-watt bulb) and is superior to the light (40, 60, maybe even 80 watts) of the Bible" (p. 154, emphasis added). But Roberts's statement is a serious misrepresentation. Robinson actually says, "Where most Evangelicals think of themselves as being in the light and all who disagree with them as being in the darkness, Mormons think of themselves—or at least should—as being one-hundred-watt bulbs and other denominations as being, say, forty-, sixty- or eighty-watt bulbs." Robinson is explicitly not talking about the Bible, as Roberts claims, but about other denominations.

The errors described above all tend in one direction, and they have the cumulative effect of poisoning the well, that is, to prejudice his readers in advance against anything the Latter-day Saints might say on their own account. By the time the otherwise uninformed reader reaches page 159, wherein Roberts rips into our beliefs on the subject of salvation, that reader will be sufficiently softened up to accept, without surprise, the dictum that "Like a counterfeit 50-dollar bill which has many similar characteristics to the real thing, the

4. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

Gospel of Mormonism bears similarities to the biblical Gospel.” This argument appears to say that similarities are just as much evidence of our false position as differences are, a remarkably inflammatory—and logically unsound—position to take.

While it would be possible to fill many pages with an analysis of Roberts’s errors—his mistreatment of the apostasy and restoration of the gospel alone could occupy as much space as this entire section of the review—it is time to move on to his treatment of salvation.

Wouldn’t a Divine Plan Succeed?

Man’s condition, as seen by Roberts, is that we are cut off from God as a consequence of the fall of Adam and Eve (see pp. 143–44). He claims no belief in original sin or inherited guilt. In this, his views are remarkably similar to the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ; however, in keeping with the polemical purpose of the book, he finds it necessary to create a “divide” between his beliefs and ours. He widens this divide over two points: the first is the question of what is meant by the biblical statement that humanity has been created in the “image of God.” Roberts argues, on no other authority than the opinion of a “renowned theologian,” 6 that this “image” has nothing to do with what we look like but relates to the human intellect and personality.

The second point concerns the nature of the fall. Roberts’s list of the consequences (pp. 143–44) could easily have been compiled by a Latter-day Saint; however, Roberts is unable to see any redeeming features in that important event at all. It is not enough for him to argue that the fall has serious consequences, a point with which we certainly agree; it must, instead, be an unmitigated disaster. In contrast, the Latter-day Saint view, which fully recognizes the seriousness of the fall, nevertheless finds comfort in the fact that it happened in accordance with the wisdom of God and made salvation not only necessary but possible for the human race. Roberts, however, insists that these positives do not exist.

6. Carl F. H. Henry, an odd source of ultimate authority for one who evidently holds to sola scriptura.
Roberts makes two blinding errors in his treatment of LDS doctrine relating to the fall. The first is that "the Bible claims clearly that Adam’s existence began with . . . [the] creation" (p. 159). In support of this assertion, Roberts cites Genesis 1:26–28, which passage, he boldly claims, "contradicts [Adam’s and Eve’s] existence prior to creation" (p. 159, emphasis added). This claim is plainly wrong; the passage in question simply does not mention the premortal existence. It also does not mention World War I, but Roberts is unlikely to argue that this passage contradicts that event as well.

The second error lies in his claim that Mormons believe that the fall had the effect of embodying Adam and Eve. "As a result of their transgression, according to Mormonism, Adam and Eve left their purely ‘spiritual state’ and became physical beings” (p. 159). Mormonism teaches that? He cites two passages of scripture7 that do not support his claim and do not contain the phrase spiritual state. It is difficult to determine whether these errors arise from external factors preventing a proper proofreading of the chapter or from the pressure of having to create a polemical case ex nihilo.

Perhaps Roberts’s greatest difficulty with the fall, however, is his dogged insistence that it was in all respects contrary to the will of God. He insists that the Latter-day Saint view of this event makes God “morally duplicitous,” an odd complaint for someone who presumably believes that the same God gave the sixth commandment and ordered the destruction of the Amalekites. Although Roberts is less than forthcoming with his beliefs about the human condition without the fall, he apparently subscribes to the view that we would all have been living perfect, endless lives in a paradise on earth. If this was God’s original plan, then the fall defeated it, and Christ’s redemption through the cross, which saves only a subset of the human race after millennia of suffering, is therefore a less-perfect “plan B.” Evidently God, having perfect foresight and all power, nevertheless could not prevent the ruin of his original plan; once it was ruined, he

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7. See 2 Nephi 2:22, which simply says that Adam would have stayed in the garden, unchanged, had he not fallen, and Moses 3:5–7, which talks about the spiritual creation preceding the physical one, but says nothing about the fall.
could not replace it with something equally successful. Since any parent who has ever had a four-year-old could have predicted the outcome of placing that tree in the middle of the garden and then telling the incumbents not to eat from it, it would seem that Roberts credits God with a remarkable lack of common sense.

Any Sinner But . . .

According to Roberts, salvation, in the evangelical view, depends on the grace and mercy of God. The work of Christ, his suffering for our sins on the cross, makes possible the salvation of all who will accept God’s mercy, regardless of what sins they may have committed. In his best Sunday sermon style, Roberts intones:

Yes, even a guilty criminal or a thief on a cross may be forgiven of each and every sin. Such forgiveness is not based on human deserts, but on Christ’s work. A guilty and condemned criminal or a self-righteous but unforgiving and ill-deserving hypocrite may be saved completely and totally. Because Jesus died for each and every sin of the world, no one stands outside the possibility of complete redemption. He may save any person and take him or her straight to heaven into the very presence of God Himself. (pp. 146–47)

This statement apparently ignores the Savior’s teaching on the unpardonable sin (see Matthew 12:31–32; Mark 3:28, 29; and Luke 12:10) but, apart from that oversight, poses few problems for Latter-day Saints. However, in light of this statement it seems odd that Roberts takes us to task for apparently believing the same thing—believing enough, in fact, to act on the possibility that even Hitler could be saved. For later in the chapter, when talking about the LDS view of eternal consequences, Roberts unveils this tabloid-style announcement:

One startling example of Mormonism’s open-ended approach . . . is the baptism, ordination to [the] priesthood, and marriage (to Eva Braun) [who else? they were married in life] of Adolf Hitler at the Jordan [River] Temple, South
Jordan, Utah, on September 28, 1993. If he accepted this temple work, Adolf Hitler was promoted to paradise and is well on his way to the celestial kingdom. (p. 174)

If, as Roberts avers above, there is no “condemned criminal” or “ill-deserving hypocrite” who “stands outside the possibility of complete redemption,” then Hitler, criminal and ill-deserving as he was, can be redeemed too. Roberts evidently thinks that his own noble gospel ideal becomes “startling,” a cause for scandal and derision, when translated into faith-motivated action in a Mormon context. Such inconsistency is hard to explain without reference to the remorseless demands of a polemical agenda.

Furthermore, this paragraph highlights a major problem that recurs throughout the chapter: Roberts continually oversimplifies. The statement “If he accepted this temple work, Adolf Hitler was promoted to paradise and is well on his way to the celestial kingdom” is so oversimplified that it is untrue. Temple work provides no guarantees, only opportunities. The actual forgiveness of sins, and therefore the salvation of individuals, remains at the Lord’s absolute discretion (see D&C 64:10). While everyone is free to speculate, no informed Latter-day Saint would venture to dogmatically declare Hitler’s present or final state, as Roberts has so presumptuously done on our behalf; all we can say is that we have done all we can for him; the rest is between him and his Maker. If Roberts is serious about explaining Latter-day Saint doctrine, he needs to make an effort to get it right.

Roberts’s discussion of Christ’s work (the evangelical view) is light on analysis and, frankly, big on gush. It ends by quoting the first verse of “Amazing Grace.” (The song’s scholarly weight was previously unknown to me.) It is at times hard to work out what Roberts is trying to accomplish; it is almost as if he has taken a nice, cozy, feel-good homily or sermon and expanded it into a polemical piece by larding in copious layers of anti-Mormon venom.

His treatment of the LDS view, by contrast, bristles with barbs. When we speak of Christ and the atonement, something the Book of Mormon recommends (see 2 Nephi 25:26), we are using “jargon and clichés”; furthermore, focusing on Christ is something we are only
doing “now” (p. 162), despite the doctrine’s rather conspicuous presence in the volume regarded as “the keystone of our religion.” Our view of the fall is “shallow and insufficient”; of course, we are “actually speaking of a different Jesus than the biblical Christ.” Roberts labors mightily to minimize the Latter-day Saint dependence on Christ for our salvation, yet for all his zeal, he cannot disguise these two facts of Latter-day Saint doctrine: (1) that the atonement saves all men from physical death, and (2) that that same atonement places a whole range of eternal opportunities before the human race.

Roberts tries to prove by repeated assertion that salvation in the telestial and terrestrial kingdoms is secured by each person suffering for his or her own sins. He offers no reference to support this assertion, which is unsurprising, since, being false, it cannot be supported. He simply quotes Doctrine and Covenants 76:99–103 and points out that there is no mention of those persons having accepted Christ. He seems unaware that LDS eschatology places the final judgment after the time when “every knee shall bow . . . and every tongue confess” (Romans 14:11; see Philippians 2:10; Mosiah 27:31; and D&C 76:110), which of course means that those saved at that judgment will certainly have accepted Christ. That they will have accepted him at a point when they effectively have no other useful option does rather tend to limit their claim on his mercy, but it is not their own suffering that saves them. Rather, it is Christ the Lord who saves them (see Acts 4:12; 2 Nephi 25:20). It is necessary, however, for them to suffer, inasmuch as they are able, before they can claim the salvation the Lord offers them.

Roberts is, of course, perfectly free to discard this teaching, but he is not free to misrepresent it as he has done. In rejecting it, he might find it necessary to explain why Luke 12:46–48 does not support his reasoning.

Roberts might also like to explain why his presentation of Latter-day Saint soteriology seems to exclude what must be the single most explicit description of the role of grace in human salvation. I refer to Doctrine and Covenants 45. These are the words of Christ:
Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life. (D&C 45:3-5)

If this picture stands in vivid contrast to the contrived and hostile caricature drawn by Roberts, then it is probably no accident. Note that this definitive passage of latter-day scripture contains no mention at all of our merits, goodness, or obedience; the blood of Christ is all that we have in our favor. The Savior's only argument in our behalf is his sacrifice and nothing else.

Faith How Alone?

“What does man need to do? Believe and have faith in the Person of Jesus Christ!” Thus Roberts introduces his presentation of the evangelical view of “Man’s Response” (p. 147) to Christ's work. He holds that the appropriate response is simply to have “genuine belief” (p. 148). There is a caveat, however; for him, this “genuine belief” has three parts: faith, repentance, and “confession” (see pp. 148-50)—that is, a confession of belief in Christ, not of a specific transgression.

Thus, according to Roberts, to be saved we must have faith alone. There is, he rather sarcastically remarks, no “God’s 12-step program for heavenly progression” (p. 144),8 as if Mormonism has such a thing. (As we shall presently see, he does in fact claim that we do have such a thing.) However, his “faith alone” is not all that alone, because it also requires repentance and confession to be complete. Very well, so if faith can be “alone” with those elements, why not with others? Why not with baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to

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8. The expression appears in quotation marks, implying that it is a quotation of some kind, but no reference is given, and I am unable to find such an expression in any Latter-day Saint source. My provisional conclusion is that the quotation is bogus.
the end? Roberts seems to have an entirely arbitrary set of inclusions for "genuine belief," and it is not clear what criteria he uses to select some and exclude others. Clearly, whatever is less than Roberts's three requirements—faith, repentance, and confession—is insufficient; whatever is more presumably falls under the curse of "works-righteousness" or some such Protestant anathema. Yet it is hard to deny that if repentance is a genuine "about-face" (p. 149), including "behavioral alteration" (ibid., emphasis dropped), then it is going to involve both the leaving of certain things previously done and the doing of certain things previously not done. On what rational basis can Roberts insist that the truly repentant person should not make and keep sacred covenants, as in temple service, or join in an organized effort to help one another, as in home and visiting teaching? He does not say.

As mentioned above, Roberts thinks that Latter-day Saints teach that man's response consists of a "12-step program for heavenly progression" (p. 144). However, this "program" is an unfamiliar one, and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it is Roberts's own. When he introduces it with the bald statement, "Here are the steps to the highest level of salvation in the celestial kingdom" (p. 167), he again offers no reference to any source, although he does offer references for the individual steps.

Roberts's twelve steps (see pp. 167–70) include:

1. Faith
2. Repentance
3. Baptism
4. The gift of the Holy Ghost
5. Priesthood ordination (for males only, as he correctly notes)
6. Temple endowment
7. Celestial marriage
8. Observing the Word of Wisdom
9. Sustaining the prophet
10. Tithing
11. Attending sacrament meetings
12. Obedience to the church
While everything on this interesting list is an authentic point of Latter-day Saint belief—although he seriously distorts several of these points—the list itself is something of a novelty. While any LDS list of requirements for exaltation would presumably include the first seven items, the last five look remarkably like padding. It appears that Roberts simply wants to make the list look as long as possible. Its organization is also suspect. Why are items 8 to 12 placed where they are? Converts commit to doing these things before they are baptized, and a fairly determined effort at keeping these commitments is required before a person can gain a temple recommend and receive his or her endowments—item 6 in Roberts's scheme. This makes items 8 to 12 logically prior to item 6—not a very sensible arrangement, one would think. And why those five items in particular, anyway? Why not dealing honestly with our fellowmen, obeying the law of chastity, bearing one another’s burdens, sharing the gospel with our neighbors, or working to provide the ordinances of salvation for our kindred dead, all of which are equally important?

The fact is that Roberts is simply wrong on the last five items. None of them is, strictly speaking, essential for salvation or exaltation, and items 9 and 12 really have to do with our citizenship in the kingdom here and now rather than our eternal reward. Of course, if we choose to ignore the counsel of the church and its inspired leaders, we do put ourselves at serious risk of falling into apostasy, but that is an indirect consequence of failure to observe safeguards, not a direct result of missing a “step” that is intrinsically necessary. We go to sacrament meeting (item 11) to partake of the sacrament in remembrance of Jesus, as he enjoined his followers to do. Would Roberts rather have us disobey this injunction?

Roberts even has problems with the items on the list that are acknowledged as essential. The very first item, faith, is tendentiously mishandled. He avoids—perhaps deliberately—calling it “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,” as we do (Article of Faith 4); however, he knows full well that this is what our faith is about, since he tries to vitiate that belief in Christ by falling back on a standard polemical word game: “Mormonism . . . calls for faith in a Jesus who is not the Jesus of the Bible, but who is our spiritual brother from heaven, born like
us as a spirit child of heavenly parents” (p. 167). The only point of strictly christological doctrine in that sentence that differs between Mormon and “orthodox” belief is that Jesus had a spirit birth before his mortal birth. Granted that this is an actual difference of belief and not merely a contrived one, how on earth does believing in Christ’s spirit birth manage to generate an “alternative, unbiblical Christ?” Is Roberts seriously claiming that there actually exist two ontologically separate beings called “Christ,” one of whom has the characteristics of Jesus as recorded in the Bible, fused with those described in the creeds, while the second has the characteristics of Jesus as recorded in the Bible as well as in the Book of Mormon and latter-day revelation? The notion is an amusing one, but it does not in any way add to our understanding either of what Latter-day Saints and evangelicals have in common or of what our differences are. Roberts has effectively squandered an opportunity to add to his own knowledge and that of his readers because he places his polemical agenda ahead of that opportunity.

Roberts argues his twelve steps as if they were something every Latter-day Saint takes for granted and constantly thinks about, but of course this is not the case. Moving on, we find that the errors continue. Roberts correctly finds that only those who have received the witness of the Holy Ghost can actually commit the unpardonable sin, but he then leaps to the erroneous conclusion that committing such sin consists of simply leaving the church. That his reasoning is completely and demonstrably false can be readily adduced from the fact that those who commit the unpardonable sin “shall not have forgiveness of sins in this world nor in the world to come” (D&C 84:41; see 76:34), whereas people who leave the church can repent and come back. If they had their names formally removed from the records of the church, they must apply for rebaptism; if not, they can

9. See, for example, the following from page 170: “eternal life . . . is never a certainty. A Mormon may never be sure that he has fully qualified for exaltation. His hope is that he has adhered to the above 12 steps consistently and regularly enough for him to achieve the celestial kingdom.” An odd claim, since the only Latter-day Saints ever to hear of those “12 steps” are those few who have read The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism as far as Roberts’s chapter before finding more productive things to do.
simply return to activity. Since many of those who have strayed do return, it is manifest that these individuals are not those who have committed the unpardonable sin. Roberts has simply made an egregious and easily demonstrable error in this matter.

In common with other anti-Mormon commentators,10 Roberts seriously mishandles the Latter-day Saint view of divine grace and its importance in our salvation. He commits the common error of claiming that Nephi declares that we are saved by grace only after we have put in our total and sustained effort. He quotes the relevant passage: "Second Nephi 25:23 states: ‘It is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do’" (pp. 170–71, capitalization per Roberts). The capital I beginning his quotation implies that the sentence starts there and that the whole thought is thus being given. However, Nephi’s actual statement is as follows:

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

Nephi mentions salvation to explain why he focuses on Christ: he knows that he depends on Christ and on God for his salvation. Clearly the words after all we can do are there to emphasize the main point: no matter what we do or don’t do, it is still by grace that we are saved. Roberts, like his predecessors, has got the sense of this passage exactly backwards.

Continuing on, Roberts briefly summarizes "a parable describing the Mormon plan of salvation," which he found in Gospel Principles:

A debtor begs his creditor for mercy because his debts are large and long overdue. Just as the cruel creditor is ready to cast the debtor into prison, a friend intervenes. He offers to "pay the debt" for the [debtor]. The debtor is further encouraged by the friend, "You will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible." (p. 171)

10. See, for example, James R. White, Letters to a Mormon Elder (Southbridge, Mass.: Crowne, 1990), 268–69.
This is a well-known parable, first given by Elder Boyd K. Packer at the April 1977 general conference. Roberts does not tell us the title of this parable, which is “The Mediator.” Perhaps he does not do so because the title clearly preempts the interpretation which Roberts offers in the next paragraph:

Is not the friend representative of the LDS Church? Each devout saint under the Mormon system is working desperately to pay off his or her obligation in order to enter the celestial kingdom. The false hope is offered that if he does all he can, at that point grace will take over. (p. 171)

That this hilariously overdrawn picture of terrified Latter-day Saints anxiously toiling away to “pay off” a debt—presumably receiving monthly statements telling them how much is still outstanding—fails to resemble any real church members is apparent to anyone who actually knows any. But notice that the friend in the parable unambiguously does not represent the church. He represents the Savior, Jesus Christ, who mediates for us. His intervention on our behalf pays a debt that we are entirely unable and unqualified to pay. What he asks in return is that we do all we can—not to benefit him, but to benefit ourselves by becoming more like him and to benefit others by blessing their lives with our unselfish service. Whether we live long lives or short ones, whether our talents are many or few, whether our opportunities for service are frequent or rare, however limited our means or our capacity, we do what we can. We do this because he to whom we owe everything and who has already repaid our debt for us has asked us to. And, as Christians, that’s good enough for us.

Eternal Consequences

Roberts gives the conventional evangelical answer to the question of the afterlife: one heaven and one hell (pp. 151–52). While he is emphatic that hell is a place of dreadful suffering, he does not commit himself to whether the “fire and brimstone” is literal or figurative—surely an important question. He is even more vague about heaven, insisting that it is a place of “bliss” that may involve some “responsibilities” (p. 152), but he offers no detail beyond that.
His treatment of the Latter-day Saint view, while superficially accurate, is predictably full of problems. He reiterates his erroneous claim that the sons of perdition are those who leave the church. He thinks that those “who deny the Son after the Father has revealed him” (D&C 76:43, quoted on p. 176 with lowercase son) are simply those who lose their testimonies, although the passages he cites in support do not say this. He assumes that a testimony can come only from “psychosomatic, self-induced, or demonic” (p. 176) sources; this is perhaps the saddest statement in the entire chapter because he implies that personal communication with and from God (personal revelation) is impossible.

Roberts makes an attempt to discredit the Latter-day Saint belief in exaltation with the following rhetorical question:

How can it be that God who possesses all power can share all power without having less-than-complete power Himself? It is incomprehensible. Yet this is the claim of Mormonism.

(p. 173)

Roberts has greatly overstated the problem, if a problem it is. He seems to be claiming that God lacks the power to share his power. Classical theism holds that omnipotence is the ability to do whatever is logically possible. Since the sharing of power is logically possible—mere mortals do it every day—it then follows that it is within God’s power to do so. Further, no logical limits restrict the amount of power that can be shared. The only limits are practical limits—the giver cannot share more power than he or she actually possesses, and the receiver cannot receive more than his or her capacity allows.

Roberts seems to imagine that if God were to share his power, the power he had left would somehow diminish. While diminished power might theoretically be possible, it can only be so if (1) the totality of God’s power is finite and (2) God’s power is somehow analogous to a physical force like electricity, which is drained as it is used. However, most believers—including Latter-day Saints and most Protestants, Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox—would not agree that God’s power is finite. Most would hold that it is really infinite. God could exercise—or bestow—an infinite amount of power
and still have an infinite amount left; any amount of power shared does not actually diminish it. Further, if we view God’s power as analogous to prestige and authority, then sharing does not diminish it anyway. A general’s power is not diminished by any number of colonels under his command, even though those colonels actually operate by the general’s authority. We can consider yet another analogy: it is often said that knowledge is power. Yet a teacher does not lose knowledge as he or she imparts it to students. Many kinds of power exist, and there is no scriptural basis for assuming divine power to be either exhaustible or not shareable.

Because Mormonism contemplates an infinite number of people going through their mortal probation on worlds without number, Roberts concludes that the same proportion (one-third) of the spirits relating to other worlds rebelled, as did those relating to this world. From this non sequitur, Roberts imagines “an infinite number of premortal spirits in an infinite number of hells.” This, he claims, is an arrangement that is “clearly incomprehensible" and infinitely less compassionate” (p. 175, emphasis in the original) than the evangelical view of eternity. However, his is a purely numeric definition of compassion. Roberts himself evidently believes that this world alone, of all the infinite universe, is actually inhabited, and that only the few billions of people who have lived and will live on this earth will inhabit eternity. He thinks his view of eternity is more compassionate because there are numerically fewer people in hell. But it seems unlikely that he would want to take this argument to its logical conclusion, for if the number of damned souls is the single measure of divine compassion, then God’s moral perfection would require him to create nobody at all, so that no one would suffer in hell. This numeric argument is in essence a smoke screen; it attempts to conceal the fact that the Latter-day Saint view of eternity, with a system of graded rewards and equal opportunity for all people to accept or reject the gospel, is not only much more compassionate but also more just than either version of the evangelical view. For, in both the

11. Roberts habitually labels concepts he dislikes as “incomprehensible.” However, as Inigo Montoya would put it, I do not think this word means what he thinks it means.
Arminian and the Calvinist view, those billions of people who have lived and died without ever hearing the gospel in any form—surely the overwhelming majority of God’s children—are utterly damned for all eternity, without ever having had an opportunity to choose anything else.

While considerably more space could be devoted to enumerating the errors Roberts has perpetrated, the foregoing should be more than sufficient. Considering the many problems in this chapter, it is hard to imagine that Roberts made any effort to check his reconstruction of our doctrine against any authoritative Latter-day Saint sources. Most of the problems are easily detectable by any well-informed Latter-day Saint. From the tabloid-style “did you know Mormons believe …” on the back cover to the “Terminology” chapter, everything about this book indicates that it is a purely defensive measure, intended only for an evangelical audience. This book is an attempt to draw support for the “countercult” fringe movement within evangelical Protestantism. In writing this chapter, Roberts had a priceless opportunity to learn more about a vibrant and growing form of Christianity, but he squandered that opportunity in a spending spree of disinformation, polemical clichés, and bad faith.
Terminating Some Terminology Problems between Evangelical Christians and Mormon Christians

Kerry A. Shirts

The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism gives Jerald and Sandra Tanner’s chapter single billing in the preface: “The chapter on Terminology Differences stands on its own. Mormons use Bible words but employ their own dictionary to define them. . . . [This chapter] will unlock the door of ‘Mormonese’ and help the beginner to understand the ‘great divide’ between Mormons and biblically based Christians” (p. 5). The Tanners emphasize this point: the chapter will not simply explain differences but “demonstrate that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is indeed teaching a different god and a counterfeit gospel” (p. 187). These are big promises. The Counterfeit Gospel claims to be something of a rebuttal to How Wide the Divide? (see p. 6), but one of the things the Tanners also seem to want to rebut is caution. Robinson and Blomberg, with doctorates in religion and many years in their respective religious communities, both made very careful disclaimers about their abilities to

2. Ibid., 12.

accurately represent the views of all members of their religions. Neither of them attempted to claim even good understanding of the other’s territory without the help of the other. The Tanners, however, seem to think they can single-handedly represent all evangelicals and all Mormons with equal accuracy. I cannot speak for evangelicals. But (to some degree) I can check the Tanners’ accuracy in speaking for Latter-day Saints.

The Tanners begin their chapter by agreeing with Stephen E. Robinson that differences in terminology do indeed exist between Mormons and evangelicals (see p. 185). They never quote or mention the book again, although, as I have demonstrated above, one of the stated purposes of The Counterfeit Gospel is to rebut How Wide the Divide? I am sure that the Tanners read all of Blomberg and Robinson’s book, and I am sure that in their chapter on terminology they in some way disagree with Robinson and perhaps with Blomberg, but the Tanners’ readers cannot know to what they take exception without reading How Wide the Divide? themselves. So in this respect perhaps we ought to thank the Tanners: by their omission, they give any intelligent reader an opportunity to look at a balanced view of the Mormon-evangelical debate.

Because the Tanners did not respond directly to How Wide the Divide? I do not know how much they intended their chapter to be a response. I will, however, use the book in my review of The Counterfeit Gospel, since they at least imply criticism of it. Further, because they use the Infobases CD-ROM as a resource, I assume that anything on the CD-ROM is fair game even if they have not used it—they had access to the information. In the interest of good scholarship, however, I will quote the original sources, not the CD-ROM. Due to space constraints, I will limit my comments to three of the terms they discuss.

3. Ibid., 14, 27.
4. Ibid., 12, 22.
The Garden of Eden

The Tanners use the Garden of Eden as an example of how Mormons and "Christians" (i.e., evangelicals) do not refer to the same notion. At first glance, the example makes sense: the Tanners point out that "Christians" believe the garden to have been by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (which flow through modern-day Turkey, Syria, and Iraq) and Mormons believe Eden to have been in Missouri. The Tanners even quote John A. Widtsoe on the matter: "Latter-day Saints know, through modern revelation, that the Garden of Eden was on the North American continent" (p. 186). The above statements are straightforward and true. The Tanners' point, however, is to prove the LDS view unbiblical: "[Eden in Missouri] would throw off the entire first part of Genesis" (pp. 185–86).

But, according to modern scholarship, the book of Genesis cannot be "thrown off" because it does not give any explanation of where Eden would be on today's map. Widtsoe explains this problem in the same work from which the Tanners cite him. He first quotes Genesis 2:10–14, which describes the rivers and lands by Eden, and then observes:

Despite the apparently specific descriptions given, this clue has not led to the location of the Garden of Eden. Careful scholars have not been able to identify any of the four rivers with certainty. None of the rivers mentioned fits into the lands now known. Since the historically well-known names of Euphrates, Assyria, and Ethiopia do not fit into the use of them in the Garden of Eden story, it is more than probable that they are ancient names variously applied in later times. Clearly, these rivers and countries belong to early ages of the world's history, and do not apply to present-day terminology.⁵

Hugh Nibley names A. Herrmann as one of those scholars who are looking for Eden. Herrmann believes the geography described in Genesis to be among the oldest parts of the book and that those parts come from an "ur-Genesis" that was originally written by Abraham. Nibley explains Herrmann's position further:

The largest surviving pieces of this lost Book of Abraham are to be found in the Book of Jubilees, according to Herrmann, which, interestingly enough, is of all questioned Apocrypha the one most thoroughly vindicated by the finding of the Scrolls, which show Jubilees to be not a medieval but a genuinely ancient document. According to this source, the entire human race was living in the Land of Eden (not the Garden of Eden, but the land where it had been) when they were overwhelmed by water. This cannot have taken place in Mesopotamia or Egypt, Herrmann observes, since both those lands are described in the sources as being uninhabited in Noah's day, and Kraeling has noted that according to other sources the people in the ark did not have the vaguest idea where they were after the flood, but being in strange surroundings had to learn of their location by revelation. So Herrmann seeks the Land of Eden in Abyssinia, South Arabia, and the headwaters of the Nile—all dubious locales and all far from the conventional Babylonian sites. It is a quest that would have struck the dogmatic scholars of past years with amazement: they knew where the Garden of Eden was.6

By the Tanners' criterion, Herrmann is also unbiblical, as are all other biblical scholars who feel reasonably sure that the Garden of Eden is not by the Tigris and Euphrates.

The Tanners use the Garden of Eden to reason that "a Christian should never take for granted that his LDS friend understands common Christian terms in the biblical way" (p. 186). It is true that Latter-day Saints assign a nontraditional location to the garden.

However, as modern scholarship shows, the traditional location cannot be considered any more or less biblical than Missouri. Before even giving their first definition, the Tanners strangle themselves with the rope they intend to use on the Latter-day Saints. Further, there are surely more important elements of the Eden story than location, and Latter-day Saints share these basics with other Christians. Mormons always associate Adam and Eve, the serpent, the flaming sword, the cherubim, and the fall of Adam with the Garden of Eden.?

God in the Bible

The first term the Tanners attempt to define is Godhead. As with the Garden of Eden, much of what the Tanners say about LDS beliefs on this subject is not offensive. They explain that Latter-day Saints believe the Godhead to be composed of three separate individuals, two of which have bodies, and for support they quote Doctrine and Covenants 130:22. They also point out that “the Mormons teach that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one in purpose, not one in essence” (p. 187).

These statements are true, and in fact the Tanners are right in pointing them out as major points of departure from traditional Christianity. Other Christians believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are immaterial and of one essence. And again, the Tanners are to some degree right that our claims are extrabiblical. We base the separateness and the materiality of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost on Doctrine and Covenants 130:22 and on Joseph Smith’s first vision.

However, the real thrust of the Tanners’ argument is on the question of who God was before he was God. They say, “Preceding these three Gods [Father, Son, and Holy Ghost] there would be a countless number of Gods who rule other worlds. Each of these Gods was at one time a mortal on some other world. As resurrected, exalted beings each God and his wife procreated the spirits for their earth” (p. 187).

The Tanners follow these statements with quotations from Joseph Smith, B. H. Roberts, Brigham Young, and James E. Talmage.

Most other Latter-day Saints (myself included) would not dare to make quite the story of how God came to be God as the Tanners have. Although we do accept the basic principle contained in these quotes—that God was once as we were—anything beyond that idea is pure speculation. In fact, as the Tanners must be aware, Robinson points out in *How Wide the Divide?* that this doctrine is only quasi-official. It has never been formally canonized. The statements the Tanners use are by and large from the nineteenth century, and the modern prophets and apostles have never given official revelation on the topic. Latter-day Saints accept the idea that God was once human as true, but it is much more a mystery than the Tanners’ very explicit description indicates. As Latter-day Saints, we would not presume to know as much about God’s past as they claim to understand of us.

Nevertheless, the Tanners are right in saying that this doctrine is not found in the Bible. It is not explicitly stated, although some scriptures hint at it: in John, the Jews accuse Christ of making himself equal to God. He responds, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). If Christ can only do what he has seen the Father do, then is it not logical that the Father must have had a mortal body at some point, just as Christ did?

Does the Tanners’ claim that “the God of the Bible has eternally been God, has no superiors, was never a human before becoming deity, and is a spirit” (p. 191) hold up any better in the Bible? Or can the scriptures they use for support be read equally well from a Latter-day Saint point of view? Below is a discussion of two of the scriptures the Tanners refer to in support of their concept of God—Numbers 23:19 and John 4:24. Ironically, Blomberg also uses these verses in *How Wide the Divide?*

Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he

8. See *How Wide the Divide?* 85–86.
not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” The Tanners do not explain why they included this scripture, but we can deduce that they quote it in an attempt to refute the LDS notion that God was once a man.

B. H. Roberts replied to that same argument back in the early 1900s. He held a discussion, which appeared in the Improvement Era, with a Jesuit priest, the Reverend Cyril Van der Donckt of Pocatello, Idaho, about the LDS doctrine of God. Van der Donckt used the same scripture the Tanners and Blomberg cite. Roberts explains the LDS interpretation of Numbers 23:19 to “Mr. V.”:

Mr. V. next brings as proof against God’s being an exalted man, what he calls the direct statement of the Bible, that God is not man: “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should be changed” (Numbers 23:19). “I am God and not man” (Psalm). These passages simply present the contrast between man as he is now, and with all his imperfections on his head, and God. . . . The contrast noted in the scriptures by Mr. V. is not between perfected men and God, but between very imperfect men—men who lie, and are changeable—and God; and since the Latter-day Saints do not hold that man while imperfect is God, or like God, or God like him, the argument of the gentleman, based on the passages quoted, is of no force. . . . Clearly, the contrast is one of conditions, more than of natures, and at its very highest value is the contrast between a perfected nature and one not yet perfected.  

As we have noted, Blomberg also used this scripture, and Robinson gave a reply very similar to that of B. H. Roberts, rightly pointing to the context of the scripture cited. In this passage, Balaam has been asked by the Moabite king to curse Israel, which is making plans to invade Canaan. Balaam instead blesses Israel, and when the king,

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Salak, asks a second time for a cursing, Salaam replies with the verse cited. Obviously the verse, in context, has nothing to do with God’s intrinsic being. Such concepts are, in any event, entirely foreign to the Bible, and there is no evidence whatever that they circulated in the ancient Hebrew culture from which the Bible emerged. It only has to do with the moral difference, or the vast difference in constancy, between God as he is now and his imperfect and immature mortal children, a difference Latter-day Saints heartily agree with.

As was true with their argument about the Garden of Eden, one cannot necessarily prove from the Bible that God was once a man; on the other hand, the Tanners cannot prove that he has never been one. Once again, their belief, based on the scripture they have cited, is neither more nor less biblical than that of Latter-day Saints.

This same problem holds true for the scripture they cite in order to “prove” that God the Father is a spirit. Likewise, they do not contextualize Christ’s statement; they simply use it as if it were self-evident: “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). And one cannot blame them for doing so. The scripture looks self-evident, and so seems to support their thesis that “God . . . is a spirit” (p. 191). Many a high school seminary student or missionary has used the scriptures in the same way.

However, a closer examination of the statement reveals some flaws in the Tanners’ use of it, and, oddly enough, it is Blomberg, in his defense of the evangelical view, who provides us with the information that can be used to question both his and the Tanners’ view: “God’s immateriality and invisibility we deduce from numerous texts. John 4:24 declares ‘God is spirit,’ which by itself does not prove that God might not have a ‘spiritual body.’ But in context Jesus is pointing out the irrelevance of the debate that existed between Jews and Samaritans over where to worship God—in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim.”

Blomberg first gives the correct translation of the Greek, omitting the indefinite article. The Tanners’ argument (assuming here that by saying “God is a spirit” the Tanners are referring to his immateriality) is weak because, as Blomberg points out, the scripture does

12. Ibid., 97.
not say he doesn’t have at least a spiritual body. Thus Blomberg calls on the context to prove his point: “Jesus’ point is that God is everywhere, and so it does not matter where we worship him.” But Jesus does not say “God is everywhere.” Christ simply says we must worship God “in spirit and in truth.” Is Blomberg’s interpretation unbiblical? Not necessarily, but it is an interpretation. So would it be unbiblical to interpret the scripture the “Mormon way”?

With Blomberg, Latter-day Saints also insist that John 4:24 ought to be read correctly and in context because Christ is not making a pronouncement about the nature of God. He is explaining to the Samaritan woman that the worship of God has to do with inward processes—spirit (whatever that means) and truth. So does the scripture contradict the Latter-day Saint belief that God has a body? No. Is this an interpretation? Absolutely. Once again, the Tanners have not proven their point. This scripture can be and is interpreted in various ways. To use it to prove that God is immaterial is no more unbiblical than to take the anthropomorphisms in the Old Testament literally to prove that God has a body.

Mother in Heaven

The last term I wish to address is Mother in Heaven. I choose this term because the Tanners really can say, in perfect truth, “There is nothing in the Bible to indicate that God has a wife” (p. 196). All the LDS sources that the Tanners quote come from the twentieth century; in fact, I will add one more that they could have used but did not. President Gordon B. Hinckley addressed this topic in the fall of 1991 at the general women’s conference:

It was Eliza R. Snow who wrote the words: “Truth is rea-
son; truth eternal / Tells me I’ve a mother there.” (Hymns,
1985, no. 292.)

It has been said that the Prophet Joseph Smith made no correction to what Sister Snow had written. Therefore, we have a Mother in Heaven. . . .

13. Ibid.
Logic and reason would certainly suggest that if we have a Father in Heaven, we have a Mother in Heaven. That doctrine rests well with me.\textsuperscript{14}

But just because something isn’t stated in the Bible doesn’t mean that thing isn’t true. The Bible does not tell us that water expands when it is frozen either. The Tanners are arguing from silence—a weak argument at best. Recently, David Van Biema wrote about Moses in \textit{Time}. Archaeological evidence is completely lacking on Moses; the world so far has no confirmation that Moses ever existed other than as a story in an ancient text. Van Biema quotes archaeologist and author James Hoffmeier on this troubling lack of evidence: “There is one important thing to remember. The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”\textsuperscript{15}

Consider also what Adolf Holl, a biblical scholar, has said on this issue:

To draw conclusions from silence is a method that historians rightly reject. . . . We have nothing to go by but silence and conjecture, and we know well enough that in the absence of reliable information a supposition in whatever direction can never harden into truth.\textsuperscript{16}

The only way to know whether or not God has a wife would be for God himself to tell us. It goes beyond the Bible to believe in a Mother in Heaven. But a lack of evidence does not mean that person has not existed, as in the case of Moses, or does not exist, as in the case of a Heavenly Mother. One day the Tanners will no longer be alive. If we were able to destroy all evidence of their existence, including their writings, would that mean they had not lived on this earth and written against the Mormons?

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} David Van Biema, “In Search of Moses,” \textit{Time}, 14 December 1998, 82.
\end{itemize}
The Tanners try to define many more Latter-day Saint terms, but I chose these three because they represent problems that are general to this chapter in *The Counterfeit Gospel* and, indeed, problems that are endemic to anti-Mormon writing in general.

In the first example, the Bible gives a very specific description of the location of the Garden of Eden. The first response, the one that the Tanners and countless others have used, has been to assume a modern setting for the lands described in scripture. Biblical scholars long ago discovered that they had to question their first responses; in fact, they have had to discard many of the traditional assumptions made about the Bible in light of current knowledge. In *The Counterfeit Gospel*, at least, the Tanners' arguments are flawed because, in their haste to prove Mormons wrong, they do not look at the current state of biblical scholarship and they do not question their own assumptions.

In the second example, the Bible could be interpreted either way, as biblical scholar John P. Meier explains: “the evidence available allows for no firm decision one way or the other.” The Tanners either do not accept or do not know that any person who approaches the Bible must interpret it. As we have seen, even what seems to be the most self-evident statement (God is a spirit) can be questioned. When the Bible says that God talked to Moses face to face, Latter-day Saints take that statement literally, while evangelicals take it figuratively. Proving anything in the Bible is almost impossible, and historical Christianity itself is a witness to the many interpretations people can apply to the same text. The Latter-day Saints, recognizing this fact, use the law of witnesses to support their interpretations—they rely on other ancient texts and on modern revelation to help them


understand the truths of the Bible. Although evangelicals do not accept these witnesses, the Tanners could have at least relied on the writings of the early church fathers, as Blomberg has done, or entered a discussion with Mormons about the validity of personal revelation. To debate the acceptability of the fathers as witnesses or the need for revelation would be a more accurate and honest attempt at finding the truth than simply listing a set of scriptures out of context without consideration of the possibility of multiple interpretations.

In the third example, the Bible is silent on the existence of a Mother in Heaven—but silence, as is well recognized throughout any honest scholarly community, cannot prove or disprove anything. The scriptures the Tanners list prove only that, in some sense, God is one God—something with which Mormons do agree.

The methodology the Tanners use to make their case is very simple. They define a religious term as it is used by Latter-day Saints and quote LDS authors to support their case. They then define the term evangelically and give biblical passages to support their ideas. Anyone unfamiliar with scholarly writing will feel this chapter is authoritative both because it has numerous quotations and because it seems easy to follow.

However, anyone who has been taught to write a persuasive paper (and almost everyone who has been to high school has) will notice a major problem with this method: never once do the Tanners bring up those quotations or biblical passages that may in some way bring their definitions into question. To truly make their case, the Tanners would have to look at how the Latter-day Saints use the Bible and what arguments they use to support their interpretation. The Tanners select quotations from certain, perhaps disaffected, Latter-day Saint authors, but they never address the responses that other Latter-day Saints have made to the anti-Mormon material.

I have briefly discussed the problem of arguing from silence. The Tanners take that tactic one step further: they silence the voices that would cast doubt on their case and use that silence as a way to seem authoritative.
A WORD TO OUR ANTI-MORMON FRIENDS

D. L. Barksdale

Mormons seem to have an inordinate number of "friends" who seem to want to "love" us straight into intensive care. We want them to know that we appreciate the time they took to write this message to us. We only wish that they had signed their names, so that we could properly direct our gratitude. We, as Mormons, accept the message in the spirit of "love" in which it was offered and would like to respond to this message in that same spirit. I've been asked to respond on behalf of some of us "Mormons."

"Christian" Love

My Dear Anti-Mormon "Friends,"

You begin your message to us by explaining that you are writing "a loving word from our hearts to our Mormon friends." You then lovingly tell us of the "bad news about our sin," claiming that we, as Mormons, are "drowning" and must be "hurt before [we] can heal." We certainly appreciate the warning. Without such, we could easily have taken your harsh words, misstatements, and misrepresentations of our beliefs to be vicious, petty, and deceptive. Now, however, we have the comfort of realizing that you are simply trying to "love" us.

We must certainly commend you for your thoroughness in this regard. In recent memory, we do not remember being “loved” as unpleasantly as we have been in this book. In the spirit of meekness and mutual understanding, therefore, we offer the words of the Lord regarding this kind of “love”: “But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves” (D&C 121:17).

You advance the notion that “Mormons and Evangelicals” recognize that perfection is necessary to enter the kingdom of God. You then take some liberties with our beliefs—unwittingly, we’re sure—in claiming that Mormons must be perfectly obedient in this life to be worthy of exaltation. As evidence of this, you point to a “chapter loved by Mormons,” citing the verse that reads, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all’ (James 2:10)” (pp. 233–34).

I’m sure that, in your love, you might have overlooked some rather glaring problems with this assertion, so please allow me to take a moment to correct your claim. The truth of the matter is that this verse is referred to only six times in all of the works produced thus far by LDS General Authorities. Period. Only six. And the context in which it appears completely contradicts your assertion.

Since you choose this verse as the foundation of your message to us, these six references should serve to establish the credibility of your arguments throughout the rest of the chapter. Since I know that you want only to present the truth, I’m confident that you will agree.

The first two references appear in Bruce R. McConkie’s The Mortal Messiah and James E. Talmage’s Jesus the Christ.1 I grouped these together because both of them refer to this verse in quoting from a non-LDS source, which employs it as follows:

Some thought the omission of ablutions as bad as homicide; some that the precepts of the Mishna were all “heavy”;

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those of the Law were some "heavy" and some "light." Others considered the third to be the greatest commandment. None of them had realized the great principle, that the wilful violation of one commandment is the transgression of all (James 2:10), because the object of the entire Law is the spirit of obedience to God. On the question proposed by the lawyer the Shammaites and Hillelites were in disaccord and, as usual, both schools were wrong: the Shammaites, in thinking that mere trivial external observances were valuable, apart from the spirit in which they were performed, and the principle which they exemplified; the Hillelites, in thinking that any positive command could in itself be unimportant, and in not seeing that great principles are essential to the due performance of even the slightest duties. 2

Far from being a call to perfection, this passage actually explains the true context of the biblical verse, which you seem to have completely ignored. It does not support your point.

The next three references to this passage are found in Joseph Fielding Smith's Answers to Gospel Questions. President Smith incorporates this passage in the following discussion:

After giving this counsel and teaching the members to be faithful in all things, he said, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." James did not mean that a man who stole was guilty of murder, or that one who lied was guilty of unchastity. He was endeavoring to impress upon the minds of the members that the kingdom of God is one. Its laws are perfect. No unclean person can enter there. Since it is a perfect kingdom, its laws must be obeyed. There can be no disunity, no opposition in that kingdom. . . . Therefore the words of James are true. Unless a man can abide strictly in complete accord, he cannot enter there, and in the words of James, he is guilty of all.

In other words if there is one divine law that he does not keep he is barred from participating in the kingdom, and figuratively guilty of all, since he is denied all.³

At first glance, this statement appears to completely justify your argument. But does it? What else did Joseph Fielding Smith have to say about this very verse? I imagine that in your haste you overlooked the fourth volume of his series, in which President Smith expands upon his comments in the third volume:

The Savior's words in the Sermon on the Mount, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," evidently have been by many misapplied or limited in their application. The Savior knew that mortal man could not reach the great goal of perfection like his Heavenly Father, but here in mortality is the place where that foundation should be laid. Then we should continue on from grace to grace, not only in this life but also in the eternities to come, and it is within the possibility of any faithful soul eventually to attain to that perfection.⁴

Joseph Fielding Smith's own words acknowledge the fact that we cannot attain perfection in this life but, rather, can eventually do so by gradual progression throughout the eternities. As I said, I'm sure you were unaware of that quotation, so I provide it here to assist in your quest for accuracy on Latter-day Saint beliefs. The final reference is found in Church History and Modern Revelation,⁵ which quotes a statement by President Joseph F. Smith in his book Gospel Doctrine:

For if a man keep all the law save [in] one point, and he offend in that, he is a transgressor of the law, and he is not en-

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4. Ibid., 4:72, emphasis added.
5. Joseph Fielding Smith, Church History and Modern Revelation (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1950), 3:122.
titled to the fullness of the blessings of the gospel of Jesus Christ [James 2:10]. But when a man keeps all the laws that are revealed, according to his strength, his substance, and his ability, though what he does may be little, it is just as acceptable in the sight of God as if he were able to do a thousand times more.6

This passage does not seem to support your allegation at all!

As we can see, only one passage comes even remotely close to supporting your assertion, and even that author further clarifies and refines his statement later on to the point of nullifying your assertion completely. I trust that this clarification will be received gladly.

The Mormon Necessity of Good Works

To further bolster your case, you then refer to a priesthood manual, To Make Thee a Minister and a Witness. Certain “standards of perfection” contained in the manual are listed, and you remark:

According to Mormon teaching, without doing these faithfully and continually one cannot enter into the top level of the celestial kingdom and live with his or her Heavenly Father. Failure in a single point means that one has not reached absolute perfection and therefore cannot reach exaltation. (p. 234)

From this presentation, one comes away (that is, if one doesn’t bother to check LDS references to James 2:10) with the notion that Mormons believe that we must be perfect in every way to be “righteous” or “worthy.” We have already seen that the references by LDS General Authorities to James 2:10, few as they are, do not support your conclusions; in fact, it seems that you have somehow managed to ignore a massive amount of LDS teaching on this very subject.

My dear friends, if you wish to use priesthood study guides as a reliable source of LDS doctrine, why did you fail to consult the

priesthood study guide published in 1997? If you had, you would have found a wonderful lesson called "Living the Gospel." In it, President Brigham Young completely refutes your assertion—with quotation after quotation.

We... take all the laws, rules, ordinances and regulations contained in the Scriptures and practice them as far as possible, and then keep learning and improving until we can live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

In conversation not long since with a visitor who was returning to the Eastern States, said he, "You, as a people consider that you are perfect?" "Oh, no;" said I, "not by any means. . . . The doctrine that we have embraced is perfect; but when we come to the people, we have just as many imperfections as you can ask for. We are not perfect; but the Gospel that we preach is calculated to perfect the people so that they can obtain a glorious resurrection and enter into the presence of the Father and the Son.

The people [cannot receive the laws] in their perfect fullness; but they can receive a little here and a little there, a little today and a little tomorrow, a little more next week, and a little more in advance of that next year, if they make a wise improvement upon every little they receive; if they do not, they are left in the shade, and the light which the Lord reveals will appear darkness to them, and the kingdom of heaven will travel on and leave them groping. Hence, if we wish to act upon the fulness of the knowledge that the Lord designs to reveal, little by little, to the inhabitants of the earth, we must improve upon every little as it is revealed.

I... feel to urge upon the Latter-day Saints the necessity of a close application of the principles of the Gospel in our lives, conduct and words and all that we do; and it requires the whole man, the whole life to be devoted to improvement in order to come to knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus
Christ. Herein is the fulness of perfection. It was couched in
the character of our Savior; although but a scanty portion of
it was made manifest to the people, in consequence of their
not being able to receive it. All they were prepared to receive
he gave them. All we are prepared to receive the Lord gives
us; all that the nations of the earth are prepared to receive he
imparts unto them.

It is written of the Savior in the Bible that he descended
below all things that he might ascend above all. Is it not so
with every man? Certainly it is. It is fit, then, that we should
descend below all things and come up gradually, and learn a
little now and again, receive “line upon line, precept upon
precept, here a little, there a little.” [see Isaiah 28:9–10; D&C
98:12] 7

I have to wonder how you missed these statements. Could it pos-
sibly be that they do not advance your agenda as you would like or
that they do not sufficiently display the proper amount of “love” to-
ward us? Please consider the following statements:

Don’t expect perfection from your children or from your-
self all at once. Strive with your children to improve your
lives little by little, step by step, line upon line each day. 8

The discerning realize that it is not realistic to expect
perfection in others when none of us is perfect. 9

It occurs to me that many do not understand what wor-
thiness is. Worthiness is a process, while perfection is an etern-
al trek. We can be worthy to enjoy certain privileges with-
out being perfect. 10

7. *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: The
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 21–22, emphasis added, quoted from
*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 3, 7, 4, 11–12, and 60.
8. *Family Home Evening: Resource Book* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints, 1983), v, emphasis added.
Literally thousands of other references to the same effect from the works of LDS General Authorities contradict your premise. I am sincerely left to wonder why at least some of them were not included, especially when they appear in such abundance.

The Mormon Necessity of Repentance

The next main point in your presentation is the “Mormon Necessity of Repentance.” Your message claims that “LDS teaching demands complete and permanent repentance of sin in order to live with the Heavenly Father” (p. 234).

All the versions of the Bible that I am familiar with make this requirement rather clear. The Savior’s injunction to his disciples was not to “go forth and teach salvation by Faith alone.” His teachings are always prefaced by the command to “repent, and be baptized.” Was the Savior serious in requiring that we actually turn from our sins through repentance? And was that “turning” to be permanent, or was it just a “temporary” repentance? The Savior and the apostles were quite clear on this requirement:

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (Ephesians 5:5)

The Savior also taught that “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). This raises a most interesting question. Why, after having exercised faith in Christ, did those whom the Master was addressing need to repent? Is not professing Christ with one’s mouth enough? And if they truly did have “saving faith,” then wouldn’t their works have naturally followed without consciously and actively having to turn from their sinful ways? Why do we find the apostles of Christ teaching the necessity of personal repentance, obedience, and righteousness after expressing faith in Christ? Why do we find the author of Hebrews going so far as to declare that Christ is the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9, emphasis added)?
In your message, dear concerned friends, you then claim that, from the Latter-day Saint point of view,

Genuine repentance necessary for exaltation means that one will never repeat the offense. If he does, then he loses the forgiveness he got as a result of his repentance. For the Mormon manual, *Gospel Principles* states emphatically that "those who receive forgiveness and then repeat the sin are held accountable for their former sins." (p. 235)

One has to wonder if you truly understand the words of Peter:

> For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world ... they are again entangled therein, ... it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment ... [as the] dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. (2 Peter 2:20–22)

It seems that your purpose in including this section on repentance may be to mock the LDS belief that repentance is necessary to return to our Heavenly Father. And yet, how do you explain the myriad of New Testament teachings that demand this very thing? In claiming a belief in *sola scriptura*, how can you rationalize ignoring some of the clearest, plainest teachings of the Savior and his apostles on the subject of the necessity of repentance? Since your objective was to present the "truth in love" to us, why did you choose to ignore that particular truth?

The Mormon Necessity of Perfection

In your message to us, you observe that "it would seem that reaching the celestial kingdom is next to impossible" (p. 235). You fail to cite a single LDS source reflecting or supporting that belief. You also seem to ignore the fact that becoming perfect is, in the Mormon view, a process of progression in partnership with Christ. I am certain
that omission was innocent. As fellow Christians, I am sure you are as concerned as we are about accuracy and truth. Therefore, we as Mormons would ask that you revisit your thoughts on that issue.

You next claim that the Bible allows for only “two options” in relation to salvation—“eternal life” or “destruction”—adding that “every Mormon should ponder seriously what ‘destruction’ means and who merits it” (p. 235).

You then pose a rather interesting question: Given the “rules of the LDS Church,” will any more “than a miniscule number ever make it” to the celestial kingdom (p. 235)? Surely this is intended as a rhetorical question, given the view of perfection that you have attributed to the Latter-day Saints. In your haste, you must have ignored the observation by President George Q. Cannon:

There have been, no doubt, millions of people on the earth who have had this willingness [to endure to the end]. They will attain, we are told, unto the celestial glory.11

I notice that you fail to cite LDS scriptural sources that specifically note the requirements for entering the celestial kingdom, and I’m frankly puzzled at this deficiency. After all, our mutual quest is to find the truth of our beliefs. In the Doctrine and Covenants, we read of those who inherit the celestial kingdom:

They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given ... And who overcome by faith ... (D&C 76:51, 53)

I notice with intense interest that “perfection” was not one of the requirements given here. I also recall a number of other statements by LDS leaders that contradict the notion that we must be absolutely perfect while here on earth to attain celestial glory. Consider, for instance, this one by George Q. Cannon:

There are some laws that we are prevented from obeying that have been declared to be necessary to exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom of our God. What will be the condition of those who do not obey these laws? God, knowing all our desires, if He should see a spirit of willingness and obedience in our hearts, will judge us accordingly. That which we cannot do we are not expected to do. God does not ask impossible things from His children. But He asks us to be obedient to Him and to carry out His laws in our lives; and if for any reason we cannot do this but are willing to do it, He will accept the offering and the good desires that we entertain in our hearts.\(^{12}\)

**Biblical Teachings on Perfection**

Let us examine the word of God in relation to the principle of perfection. What did the Savior mean when he admonished us to “be . . . perfect, even as [our] Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)? C. S. Lewis said,

> The command *Be ye perfect* is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were “gods” and He is going to make good His words.\(^{13}\)

The Bible teaches that perfection is found in completely surrendering our will to the Lord and in walking in obedience to his commandments.

When the rich man came to Christ, what did Christ indicate was necessary for perfection?

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. (Matthew 19:21, emphasis added)

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12. Ibid., 1:97–98, emphasis added.
For this young man, being "perfect" did not mean walking in absolute perfection to every law and ordinance. It meant being willing to obey the commandments and to sacrifice that which his heart was truly set on, that is, to sell all that he had and give to the poor—something he was not willing to do.

Christ's plea in his great intercessory prayer was that his disciples would "be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:23, emphasis added).

How were the disciples to "be made perfect"? The ancient American prophet Moroni expanded on that concept with amazing clarity in the Book of Mormon:

Yea. come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Morooni 10:32-33)

The Absolute Perfection of Jesus Christ

I must commend you, my friends, for this wonderful section on the perfection of Christ. It was most inspiring. More important, it reflects, more or less, the teachings of the Bible on the subject as well as the understanding and faith of Latter-day Saints on the matter of perfection. No knowledgeable Mormon on earth would claim that our works can ever make us perfect in this life or the next. It is through Christ that we reach perfection. It is through our willingness to obey, however, that Christ's perfection can be applied to our efforts.
You claim in your message that Christ “gives us the perfection we cannot attain as a free gift.” In this we agree, if by that statement you mean that he has provided this gift conditionally, after we have done as much as we are able. If Christ really did offer perfection as a free gift with no effort on our parts, I have to wonder how you interpret the following passages, which teach a very different principle:

Paul teaches the Corinthian Saints in 2 Corinthians 13:11 to “Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” Why, if these Saints were already given perfection as a free gift, would Paul admonish them to “be perfect”?

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul taught the Saints there of the offices and duties in the church, such as apostles and prophets, which should continue “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, emphasis added). What does Paul identify with “a perfect man”? Being “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” This was addressed to those who had already, by your understanding, been given perfection as a free gift. Why would Paul do that? By your standards, he seems to be rather “confused” on this topic.

Paul further muddies the waters, so to speak, in his epistle to the Philippians, wherein he writes,

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12–14, emphasis added)

Paul was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Surely he had “saving faith,” according to your understanding. If that be so, why had Paul not already become “perfect” in Christ? Why did he still feel the need, and teach the necessity of, pressing “toward the mark” to attain perfection?
For that matter, what is one of the primary reasons that God gives us scripture in the first place?

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: *That the man of God may be perfect,* throughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16–17, emphasis added)

Even in this passage, being perfect is not mentioned as a free gift but is associated with our willingness to do good works, to be corrected, to be obedient, to be righteous. This passage does not present a vague perception of “perfection” as something that is bestowed on followers of Christ immediately on simple expression of belief.

You quote the apostle John as saying that “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life” (John 6:47). This is an excellent passage, my friends, and one with which no Mormon would disagree. For how did John define belief? Was it mere lip service, or did he attach more to the word than a bare profession of faith?

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. (1 John 2:3–5)

Allow me to pose several questions. Was John conditional here? Did he allow for obeying some of the commandments only? Are there any commandments that John excused? No. Does this not mean then, that John implied *perfection in obedience* for one who really knows God? And who was John’s audience? Were they all heathens and the “unchurched”? No. They were those who had *already* accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior. How can this be, if we understand your position properly?

You make the point that John’s statement, “hath everlasting life,” amounted to nothing more nor less than a “once-saved, always saved” promise of salvation. I must point out, however, that such is not compatible with John’s teachings. In his magnificent revelation,
John warned the churches to whom he wrote that they were in danger of being “removed out of their place,” or, in other words, of losing their very salvation, because of their sin.

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. (Revelation 2:5)

How could this be so if they had at one time been “saved”? How could they, having once obtained “perfection” as a “free gift,” lose it to the point of being in danger of losing their very salvation?

By the way, your quotation from Paul regarding the law was taken woefully out of context. I’m sure this was an oversight on your part. I’m sure you’re aware that Paul’s statements against the “law of sin and death” referred to the Law of Moses specifically and were directed to the Judaizers who maintained that the requirements of the law remained necessary for salvation, thus negating the effect of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice.

Your next statement about the apostle James was most intriguing. You quote James 2:24, which is very clear: “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” You then correctly profess that “nothing is considered good works in God’s eyes apart from faith,” and we wholeheartedly agree. But I must admit that I found your next statement to be somewhat of a stretch: “James is distinguishing true faith from false faith” (p. 237). I was very perplexed by this declaration. Try as I might, as many times as I read that passage I could not, and cannot, see that message anywhere within the text. I even examined my Greek version very carefully. To me, it is very clear. “By works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (emphasis added). I honestly found no distinction in the text of that verse between true faith and false faith. Perhaps you could point out where the text makes that distinction.

You then observe that James uses the word faith more than he uses works. I must say that I was surprised by this argument. Does the frequency of a word in the scriptures determine the truthfulness of the principle represented by that word? I don’t seem to be able to
find any indications for such a notion. Perhaps if you would steer me to where that is found, I might better understand your point. In the meantime, I would settle for a sound explanation of why Paul’s statement that “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” should not be taken at face value.

The True Gospel

I found this last part of your message to us extremely interesting, particularly your quotation of Hebrews 10:12–14:

But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

I was especially intrigued by verse 14: “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” I thought about that, and the question arose in my mind, “But how are we sanctified, if that is a prerequisite for perfection and not a product of it?” This question was followed closely by another: “If we are saved once when we profess faith in Christ, why is sanctification necessary at all afterwards?” So, I searched the Bible and found some wonderful information that I would like to share with you in our quest for truth.

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 4:3–8)
I found that sanctification, upon which our perfection is based, comes through God's truth (see John 17:17), through Christ (see 1 Corinthians 1:2; Hebrews 10:10; 13:12), by the Spirit of God (see 1 Corinthians 6:11), through the influence of others (see 1 Corinthians 7:14), by obedience to the ordinances of the gospel, notably baptism (see Ephesians 5:25–26), and by the word of God and prayer (see 1 Timothy 4:5). From these passages, I learned that in order to be “perfected,” we must be “sanctified” by a combination of our efforts and the grace of Christ. I learned that this is the true gospel.

I trust that you are genuine seekers of truth and not merely defenders of dogma and that you will carefully consider your own injunction as you closed your message to us: “This is the true gospel. Any other gospel is a false gospel—even if it comes from an angel!” (p. 238).

In Summary

My dear anti-Mormon friends, I hope that you receive this response to your message in the spirit in which it was offered. We know that your hearts are sincere and that you are concerned about us. We know that we have differences that divide us. But one thing is certain. We believe that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. He is our Redeemer. It is only in him and through him that we can be saved. We know to whom we look for salvation, and we know that his righteousness is sufficient to save us. But we thank you all the same for reminding us of this truth.

Stephen E. Robinson summed up what we really believe regarding perfection and salvation in the following words:

First, it is impossible to earn or deserve any of the blessings of God in any sense that leaves the individual indebted to God’s grace. . . . Even in those contexts, such as the law of tithing, where there is a quid pro quo—a covenant agreement that if I will do A, God will grant B—the very fact that such a covenant has been offered to me and that I am able to receive such overwhelming blessings in return for such paltry efforts is in itself a prior act of grace, . . . an expression
of the pure love of God, a gift. Salvation itself is the result of such a covenant of grace—"the new testament [cov enant] in my blood" (Luke 22:20). The very existence of this covenant is a gift, a grace offered by a volunteer Savior. Yet like all covenants, there are terms binding upon both parties. Our best efforts to live the laws of God are required, but not because they earn the promised rewards—our efforts are infinitely disproportionate to the actual costs. Rather, our best efforts are a token of our good faith and of our acceptance of the offered covenant. Thus we participate in our own salvation as we attempt to keep the commandments of God, but we can never earn it ourselves or bring it to pass on our own merits, no matter how well we may think we are doing.

Second, redemption can never come as the result of an individual’s own efforts, but only through the atonement of Jesus Christ. . . . There is no doctrine, ritual, principle, ordinance, law, performance, church, belief, program, angel, or prophet that can save us in the absence of the personal intervention in our lives of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is the teaching of the Book of Mormon as well as the Bible.

Third, the individual must be born again through the atonement of Jesus Christ and become Christ’s spiritual offspring. . . . Even membership in the Church of Christ is insufficient for salvation without the personal experience of the Savior and of his atonement, which begets us spiritually. . . .

Fourth, we are saved by grace and condemned without it, no matter what else we might have or do. Grace is sine qua non, an essential condition, for salvation. . . . Moreover, if a person is willing to come to Christ and endure to the end, the Savior’s grace is sufficient for that person’s salvation, despite his or her mortal weaknesses. . . . In other words, our comparative righteousness is secondary in importance to humbling ourselves, admitting our weaknesses, striving to live the gospel, and having faith in our Savior.14

We are deeply grateful for your message of love and concern for us. We too love the Jesus of the Bible, the Only Begotten Son of Almighty God. We too attempt to follow him and exercise “saving faith,” showing our faith by our attempts to do what he showed us and to obey his commandments and to deny ourselves of “all ungodliness.” Our prayer is that all of us will grow in the “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” that we may be perfected in him through his grace, as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling before his throne. Our hope is that this response has clarified our belief regarding perfection.
Cultures in Conflict is not your standard, ordinary, run-of-the-mill anti-Mormon book, but it is definitely an anti-Mormon book just the same. I am certain that the authors would disagree with me. They are John E. Hallwas, an English professor at Western Illinois University, and Roger D. Launius, chief historian at NASA. One gets the initial impression from the list of their previous publications (see p. 369) that both are members of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. However, although Launius is RLDS, Hallwas’s affiliation remains unknown. From their point of view, this volume is impartial and unbiased, presenting both sides of the story. Why would I, then, call it an anti-Mormon book? Initially, and from my point of view, because any book may be called anti-Mormon that depicts the Prophet Joseph Smith as a liar (see p. 112), a thief (see p. 75), and a despot (see p. 111), while implying that Thomas Sharp was a “much-admired champion of republican virtue” (p. 80) who later became a well-respected judge (see p. 6), that William Law and others of questionable integrity were “some of the most solid and dignified men of the community” (p. 175), and that John C. Bennett

was "made the scapegoat for activities that the Nauvoo Mormons did not want to acknowledge in Smith" (p. 8).

This fine-looking volume begins with a preface that explains the purpose and methodology used by the authors in presenting a collection of some ninety source documents from the Nauvoo period. These documents are arranged chronologically in six parts, with thirteen to seventeen documents contained within each part. Each of these six sections has its own introduction and footnotes, and each document is preceded by its own headnote.

The authors inform us:

We have avoided the inclusion of explanatory notes in the documents themselves—so much of what passes for this type of scholarship is really pedantry—and have confined such material to the headnotes. (p. ix)

True to their word, they have confined all their pedantries to the volume and section introductions and the document headnotes.

I suppose it would be appropriate to begin with a few comments on what I found worthwhile, enlightening, or of interest in the volume. The one document that most captivated my interest was a heretofore unpublished account of the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith written by Samuel Otho Williams, a second lieutenant in the Carthage Greys (pp. 222–26). In about four pages, it provides interesting detail from a non-Mormon perspective on some of the events shortly preceding the martyrdom. From a distance of about 150 yards, Williams saw the Prophet fall from the upper window of Carthage Jail.

In addition, seven other documents are published for the first time in this volume. However, only one of them is of Mormon origin, and non-Mormon documents for this time period can be found in abundance. Most of the documents, from both sides of the fence, are neither new nor particularly noteworthy. For example, fully half of the Mormon documents come from either the Times and Seasons or History of the Church.

The preface concludes with an impressive list of the organizations and individuals who contributed to the volume. The organi-
zations listed are Brigham Young University Library, Chicago Historical Society, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Huntington Library, Illinois State Historical Library, Illinois State Historical Society, Missouri Historical Society, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa, Utah State Historical Society, and Western Illinois University Library.

The preface is followed by an introduction that gives preliminary background for the Nauvoo conflict and explains why a Mormon study of the Nauvoo conflict, even though scholarly, cannot give a true perspective of the actual events:

The modern explanation of the conflict has been developed primarily by Mormon scholars, most of whom view the conflict in western Illinois not only as historians but also as members of the same interpretive community as the Nauvoo Mormons of the 1840s. That is, many of them assume that the early church was led by divine revelation through Joseph Smith and that the Saints were innocent followers of God, persecuted by enemies who failed to recognize their righteousness. (p. 1)

Mormon scholars too often write history that, if not blatantly, at least tacitly defends the faith. Their work might be of a scholarly nature, but it strives to reinforce traditional Mormon conceptions about the church rather than to comprehend the full complexity of the past. (p. 2)

I am always a little annoyed when someone says that I am incapable of properly understanding Mormon history or Mormon theology because as a Mormon my views will inevitably be biased and one-sided. It’s a little like saying that the Gospels written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are hopelessly biased and prejudiced and simply cannot give a true perspective of the actual events of Christ’s life because the writers were Christians themselves. “Oh, that we had a history of Christ written by a pious Pharisee or Sadducee so we could have an unbiased view of what really happened!”
The fact is that a person who has a firm belief in and a proper understanding of truth is always more competent to perceive, understand, and describe events related to that truth than one who does not. A person who believes that $2 + 2 = 4$ is always more capable of perceiving and describing basic mathematics than a person who believes that $2 + 2 = 3$ or one who believes that $2 + 2 = 5$. Being correct is immeasurably more significant than being unbiased. Therefore, what our “unbiased” authors are actually proclaiming is that Mormon beliefs are wrong, that Joseph Smith was not a prophet, and that he did not receive revelation from God, see angels or visions, or translate ancient manuscripts. Since we who are Mormons still believe in these fallacies, we are incapable of properly assessing what actually took place. Moreover, the Saints who lived in Nauvoo in the 1840s were just as naive as we are and held at least many of the same irresponsible beliefs. Their descriptions of what took place are therefore tainted and must be examined for any legitimate facts but cannot be viewed as authoritatively historical when compared with those descriptions written by the upright and more perceptive populace, which we have termed non-Mormons. In order to arrive at an unbiased understanding of the conflict that took place in Nauvoo, we must therefore give preference to those historical accounts produced by non-Mormons and allow them to be interpreted by those today who are non-Mormons, thereby filtering out those biases induced by an excess of emotional religious fervor. Is it any wonder that such an approach here leads to the inevitable conclusion that it was the Mormons in general and Joseph Smith in particular who caused the conflicts in Nauvoo?

As one particularly biased individual who sincerely believes that Joseph Smith was a prophet, that he received revelation, that he saw and conversed with angels, and that he translated ancient manuscripts, I can assure the authors that their views are every bit as biased and tainted as are mine, just from an opposing perspective. I can see and understand their perspective, but I cannot agree with it. They appear to have the same difficulty with my point of view. Nevertheless, the pertinent issue is not bias but correctness. It is understandable that the authors believe that they are right, but this
leads us no closer to the solution of the problem. Still, an examination of opposing viewpoints is not without merit as it helps to broaden our perspective and tends to point out both strengths and weaknesses of our own position.

As I indicated above, properly assessing what actually took place in Nauvoo depends much less on presenting both points of view than it does upon which point of view is correct; however, presenting both points of view appears to be the stated purpose of the present volume. We are assured at the onset by Hallwas and Launius that this volume circumvents the common defect of all Mormon analyses of the Nauvoo conflict through a “sensitive comprehension of both Mormon and non-Mormon ideals, values, and motives” and by recognizing that there are “two sides to any story” (p. 4). It would seem, however, from the remainder of Cultures in Conflict that the authors feel that the Mormon side of the story has too frequently been told and that it is now time to balance out the scales by putting as much weight as possible back onto the anti-Mormon position. Unlike most anti-Mormon books, however, this is accomplished here more through subtle and consistent methodology rather than through the blatant and raucous antagonism to which we have become accustomed. The authors proceed to do this in several different ways.

Selection of Documents

Sixty documents are from non-Mormon sources and only thirty from Mormon sources, with half of the Mormon sources being descriptions of the martyrdom. In addition, some of the documents from Mormon sources appear to have been selected more to emphasize the non-Mormon perspective than to give a Mormon point of view or understanding. Examples of these include a selection of pertinent portions of “The Nauvoo City Charter” (p. 21); Sidney Rigdon’s address at the laying of the Nauvoo temple cornerstones, “Celebrating the Power of Mormon Nauvoo” (p. 55); “The Prophet Denies ‘Spiritual Wifeism’” (p. 138); and “Governor Ford Justifies the Use of Militia” (p. 310). Thus, although claiming to be fair and to give both points of view, the authors do not equally present both
points of view. Instead, they deceptively discriminate in order to support their own thesis.

Manipulation of Words and Phrases

Words and phrases whose meanings may differ somewhat between the 1840s and today are manipulated. For example, the term *persecution* is throughout depicted as having been incorrectly used and unwarranted.

Indeed, because he was a religious leader, Smith commonly characterized any criticism of him, for whatever reason, by non-Mormons or disaffected Mormons, as persecution. (p. 5)

[Arrington and Bitton] . . . omit such pertinent intellectual currents as American millennialism and theories about the origin of the prehistoric mound builders—they still do not investigate seriously the causes of the conflict between early Mormons and their neighbors. Instead they see it as essentially a matter of religious persecution (one of their chapters is even entitled “Early Persecutions”). (p. 3)

Obliquely one wonders why current theories about the origin of the prehistoric mound builders are so pertinent. But more pointedly, one wonders if the authors feel that the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith by a mob in Carthage Jail, while they were under the promise of protection by the highest official of the state, should perhaps be called “Political Disagreements.”

Misconceptions about Joseph Smith

The book regularly encourages common misconceptions about Joseph Smith and the church instead of correcting them. It is possible that these errors are not all intentional, but that the authors, being sympathetic to RLDS views, simply have not availed themselves of the abundance of scholarly material published in the LDS community. Or perhaps they have avoided it intentionally because “it
strives to reinforce traditional Mormon conceptions about the church rather than to comprehend the full complexity of the past” (p. 2).

There is no evidence, contrary to Marsh’s comments, that the whittlers were part of the Danites, a secret Mormon group formed in Missouri that was committed to violent reprisals against enemies of the church. (p. 75)

The authors either do not know, or make no attempt to help the reader understand, that the Danites were neither a part of nor legitimately affiliated with either the church or its leaders. Or that Sampson Avard, who organized the group, was cut off from the church as soon as his actions and motives were discovered. Another example of a misconception follows:

Thus, at Nauvoo Joseph Smith could engage in secret polygamy, lie to his followers about it, and when accusations were made against him, he could go into a public meeting, denounce his accusers, and be regarded by the Mormons as a persecuted innocent. (p. 112)

Again, the authors either do not themselves understand the differences between polygamy, polygyny, plural marriage, and spiritual wife (in the index, the entries for both polygamy and spiritual wife say “see plural marriage”) or else they go to great pains to

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2. Polygyny is defined as the state or practice of having more than one wife or female mate at one time. Polyandry is defined as the state or practice of having more than one husband or male mate at one time. Polygamy is defined as marriage in which a spouse of either sex may have more than one mate at the same time. Spiritual wife was defined by Brigham Young in the following statement: “And I would say, as no man can be perfect without the woman, so no woman can be perfect without a man to lead her, I tell you the truth as it is in the bosom of eternity; and I say to every man upon the face of the earth: if he wishes to be saved he cannot be saved without a woman by his side. This is spiritual wife isn’t that is, the doctrine of spiritual wives.” Times and Seasons 6 (1 July 1845): 955; Millennial Star 6 (1 October 1845): 121.
confuse the words in the various texts in order to ensure that their readers will not understand how Joseph Smith could denounce one while practicing another. Joseph Smith apparently knew and understood these distinctions and used that understanding to help avoid accusations of polygamy while espousing polygyny. 3

Bias within the Explanatory Headnotes

Significantly, the authors bias the reader in the explanatory headnotes of each document. For example, the authors introduce document 3:1, “John C. Bennett’s Expose,” by implying that Joseph Smith made John C. Bennett a scapegoat for difficulties that arose with his own problems with polygamy by making a lot of lies and false accusations about him, but that John C. Bennett, although not immaculate, was actually a reasonably swell fellow.

Bennett, whose reputation was not exactly clean anyway, became the target of a smear campaign in Nauvoo. He was charged with everything from rape to attempted murder, and his character has been sullied ever since. While there is certainly some truth to the charges made by Joseph Smith against John Bennett in 1842, some of them were mere fabrications. He became a scapegoat for secret polygamy—seduction, deception, and hypocrisy. (p. 116)

In the same introduction, they depict Joseph Smith as the bad guy and portray most of John C. Bennett’s accusations against Joseph Smith as credible.

Even though some of them were probably untrue, especially those concerning sexual improprieties, Bennett countered with his own set of charges against Joseph Smith. Many of his descriptions of the evolution of Mormon theocracy, temple endowments, and plural marriage have proved to be pretty much on the mark. (p. 116)

My point here is that throughout this volume Joseph Smith is portrayed as the bad guy, while the anti-Mormons are the good guys. This approach is not unique to any one segment or portion of the volume; in fact, it seems to be the single major underlying theme. Although carefully written so as not to instill obvious bias in the mind of the reader, the volume everywhere speaks disparagingly and belittlingly of Joseph Smith through the basic sophistry of innuendo and inference:

- Joseph Smith “virtually assured the Mormon conflict in Illinois” (p. 35).
- Josiah Quincy “captured some of the darker aspects of Smith’s character” (p. 44).
- Joseph Smith “was depicted as a self-important and dangerously powerful man” (p. 44).
- Joseph Smith’s “involvement [in Mormon theft cannot now] be established with any certainty, despite what some of the memoirs in this section imply” (p. 67).
- Joseph Smith ruled through “theocratic domination of government at Nauvoo” (p. 68).
- Joseph Smith encouraged “bloc voting for candidates he supported” (p. 68).
- Joseph Smith used “the Nauvoo Charter to avoid prosecution” (p. 68).
- Joseph Smith violated “the civil rights of his critics” (p. 68).
- Joseph Smith “avoided paying a debt to a non-Mormon farmer” (p. 75).
- “It is impossible to determine whether the prophet encouraged Mormon raiding of area farms, but he apparently instructed Nauvoo’s ‘whistling and whittling’ brigade to run farmer John W. Marsh out of town” (p. 75).
- “Bartlett was concerned about the potential for despotism in Smith because of his ‘claims of divine inspiration’ and his unusual control of his followers” (p. 78).
• Joseph Smith's speech "reveals his resentment of the Missouri au-
thorities and his determination to oppose them with military
force if necessary" (p. 91).

• Joseph Smith "achieved the kind of mass surrender of the will
upon which his theocratic government was actually based"
(p. 91).

• "As a religious city-state under tight control, Nauvoo was a haven
where the followers of Joseph Smith had their most important
choices—what they should do to serve God—made for them"
(p. 111).

The slander goes on and on. And as if this constant defamation
of Joseph Smith and his character weren't sufficiently poignant, the
authors concurrently weave a shining web of praise for those who
oppose Joseph Smith and the church. I provide a few of the more of-
fensive (to me) statements:

• "Men of integrity who criticized the prophet, such as William
and Wilson Law, could be defamed as enemies of the people"
(p. 112).

• "In establishing the new church, he [William Law] was joined by
his brother Wilson, Dr. Robert D. Foster and his brother Charles
A. Foster, Francis M. Higbee and his brother Chauncey L.
Higbee, James A. Blakeslee, Charles Ivins, Austin Cowles, and
several others. Together they represented well-informed, re-
spectable dissent in Nauvoo" (p. 131).

• "Led by William Law, a successful businessman and a counselor
to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency during the early 1840s,
some of the most solid and dignified men of the community
were involved" (p. 175).

• "Although some non-Mormons regretted [Thomas C.] Sharp's
eventual turn to mobocratic means for ridding the county of
Smith and the Latter Day Saints, in the minds of many he was a
much-admired champion of republican virtue and law" (p. 80).
• “However one-sided his historical account may be, [George T. M.] Davis was not motivated by religious bigotry but by political anxiety” (p. 103).

• “While he [George T. M. Davis] was biased against the Saints, much of his version of events has been substantiated by later writers, both eyewitnesses and scholars” (p. 231).

• “Bennett was, in fact, made the scapegoat for activities that the Nauvoo Mormons did not want to acknowledge in Smith or in the Mormon community generally. However, there is conclusive evidence that Smith originated and engaged in the secret practice of polygamy, which was so upsetting for Hovey and others, and there is corroborative evidence for much of what Bennett asserted in his 1842 expose” (p. 8).

• “While there is certainly some truth to the charges made by Joseph Smith against John Bennett in 1842, some of them were mere fabrications. He became a scapegoat for secret polygamy—seduction, deception, and hypocrisy” (p. 116).

• “Even though some of them were probably untrue, especially those concerning sexual improprieties, Bennett countered with his own set of charges against Joseph Smith. Many of his descriptions of the evolution of Mormon theocracy, temple endowments, and plural marriage have proved to be pretty much on the mark” (p. 116).

Such are the basic methods used by the authors to misrepresent the Prophet Joseph Smith and the LDS Church. One can certainly not accuse them of assuming “that the early church was led by divine revelation through Joseph Smith” (p. 1) or that “the Saints were innocent followers of God” (p. 1), but somehow I fail to see how that enhances their presentation of what occurred in Nauvoo. A verse comes to mind:

4. It is ironic that two historians sympathetic to the Reorganized Church are now proclaiming to a largely LDS audience that there is “conclusive evidence” that Joseph Smith originated plural marriage in the church.
Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them. (D&C 121:16)

After having examined the techniques by which the authors promote their thesis of Mormon aggression in the Nauvoo conflict, we can see that almost no significant problems raised by this volume remain to be answered. That the Nauvoo Mormons were free of fault has never been suggested. That they were the basic aggressors is simply wrong, a concept spawned by the authors' obsessive inability to acknowledge any divine involvement in Joseph Smith's life and their predilection to embrace any other solution.

There is one more item I would like to comment on before closing. The destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor* is perhaps the keystone of the authors' presentation. It is one of the most reiterated and frequently mentioned topics throughout the volume. Time and time again the authors allude to this incident as the prime documented example of an illegal and aggressive action perpetrated by Joseph Smith and other leaders of the church against a few upstanding and honorable men of the community who wanted nothing more than a reform of the church. These claims were answered before they were ever raised, but because the primary legitimate and accepted scholarly assessment of the action taken against the *Nauvoo Expositor* does not agree with their presumptions, the authors discard it with a mere wave of the hand.

Dallin H. Oaks, former justice on the Utah Supreme Court and present apostle in the church, has tried to pound a square

5. The section continues: "But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves. And those who swear falsely against my servants, that they might bring them into bondage and death—Wo unto them; because they have offended my little ones they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house. Their basket shall not be full, their houses and their barns shall perish, and they themselves shall be despised by those that flattered them" (D&C 121:17–20).

The authors’ authority for dismissing forty pages of documentation, detailed legal examination, discussion, and findings by a former member of the Utah Supreme Court is that “virtually everyone except the Latter Day Saints” considered it illegal at the time and that Governor Ford, “as fair an individual as was present in the Mormon conflict,” called the action “irregular and illegal, and not to be endured in a free country” (p. 9 n. 6). They make the additional unsupported assertion that Governor Ford was an authority on constitutional law, but neglect to indicate what bearing that may have on Elder Oaks’s review.

Oaks’s review responds thoroughly and sufficiently to the legality of the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*. Virtually all the additional problems concerning the *Nauvoo Expositor* that were raised in *Cultures in Conflict* are answered in the following Mormon document (written in 1869 by George Q. Cannon, who was present at the time of the incident), which for one reason or another the authors neglected to include in their anthology:

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**Similarity of Past and Present Apostasy**

An examination of all the apostate schemes which have been concocted for the division and overthrow of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reveals the curious fact that they all bear the marks of a common origin. The lapse of years and the change of men make no difference in this respect. If the programme of the apostates from the Church in Kirtland, and that of the apostates in Nauvoo and that of those of latter days be compared, the similarity is most striking. If they were the production of one brain, they could not be more alike. Even the language in some points is almost identical. In Kirtland the doctrine which Joseph had taught, the organization which he had perfected and the ordinances which he had administered were all
divine, so said the apostates; but he had fallen, and was no longer a prophet. He had transgressed, they said, and because of this, his power and authority were taken from him.

The Nauvoo apostates took precisely the same ground. Everything that Joseph had taught and done up to a certain point, even including the acts and policy which their predecessors, the apostates at Kirtland, had objected to, was correct; but they affirmed that he had fallen, because of something which he had just then done. He began to teach false doctrine, they said; the possession of power had spoiled him, he had become so intoxicated by it that he did not yield that respect to others which was justly their due; in fact, instead of being the Prophet of God which he once had been, they declared he had become a tyrant. The prospectus of the paper which they started at Nauvoo stated that its publishers had, as their object in publishing it,

"To restrain and correct the abuses of the UNIT POWER, to ward off the rod which is held over the heads of the citizens of Nauvoo and the surrounding country, to advocate unmitigated DISOBEDIENCE TO POLITICAL REVELATIONS," &c.

"To advocate and exercise the freedom of speech in Nauvoo, independent of the ordinances abridging the same,—to give toleration to every man's religious sentiments, and sustain ALL in worshiping their God according to the monitions of their consciences, as guaranteed by the Constitution of our country, and to oppose with uncompromising hostility any UNION OF CHURCH AND STATE, or any preliminary step tending to the same," &c.

The cunning of these apostates is apparent in every line of this prospectus. Its writers knew the views of the enemies of the Church, and they artfully worded their prospectus to appeal to them, pandering to their prejudices, and thinking, thereby, to evoke their sympathies and to obtain their attention and support. Yet none knew better than they that to establish a "unit" or "one-man power," in the sense which they wished it understood, or to effect a "union of Church and State" was not the aim of Joseph Smith or the people of the Church.
In the *Expositor* itself appeared half-a-dozen columns of "Cards" and "Manifestoes," in the shape of a preamble, resolutions and affidavits of the publishers and their fellow-apostates. But with all these, they wished the public to know that they were still Latter-day Saints; in fact, the only pure Latter-day Saints; for they said:

"As for our acquaintance with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we know no man nor set of men can be more thoroughly acquainted with its rise, its organization, and its history, than we have every reason to believe we are. We all verily believe, and many know of a surety, that the religion of the Latter-day Saints, as originally taught by Joseph Smith, which is contained in the Old and New Testaments, Book of Covenants, and Book of Mormon, is verily true; and that the pure principles set forth in those books are the immutable and eternal principles of Heaven, and speak a language which when spoken in truth and virtue sinks deep into the heart of every honest man."

We never look for consistency in apostates from this Church; for of all people, they are the most illogical and inconsistent. The prospectus of the *Expositor* and the contents of its first and only number are but fair specimens of this inconsistency. In one breath calling Joseph a prophet, the doctrine and religion which he taught the immutable and eternal principles of heaven, and in the next denouncing him as guilty of everything that is low and vile, and clamoring for his blood! Napoleon, we believe, it was who said that there was only one step from the sublime to the ridiculous. We never knew an apostate from this Church to undertake to defend his own course and to assail the presiding authority in the Church who did not take this step. A complete illustration of this is afforded in the case of these apostates at Nauvoo; yet, the language and conduct of men of this class were the same previous to those days, are the same to-day and will be so as long as Satan can entrap dupes and make them his willing tools.

The Publishers of the *Expositor* were seven in number, and around them rallied the corrupt and the disaffected to the num-
umber of nearly as many more. They probably did not number twenty, all told, yet they had the cool assurance to try and persuade the people that they were the Church, and while claiming the doctrines which God had revealed through Joseph as their own, they declared that he and those who followed him were all wrong, and that if they ever did get right, it would have to be through their reforming and reconstructing agency! They were not apostates; Oh, no. It is true, they had been cut off from the Church; but what difference did that make with men who believed the religion of the Latter-day Saints as “originally taught?” How curiously history repeats itself! They only said what other apostates, years previously, had said, and what other apostates, years subsequently, are saying to-day; and doubtless what apostates will iterate and reiterate in years to come; that is, if men continue to yield to corrupt and iniquitous influences.

Among the advertisements in the Expositor was one, which, to the uninitiated was full of gushing philanthropy. The publishers did not say that the Expositor was “no personal speculation;” but two of them did what they thought would be equally effective: William and Wilson Law, who as merchants and millers had fleeced the people and defrauded them by means of false scales in their mill, offered to grind the grist of the needy Saints one day in the week toll-free! But even this philanthropic dodge failed. With all their efforts they never secured enough followers to make it difficult for a child to count their number on his fingers. The whole scheme collapsed, and all their belief and knowledge “of a surety that the religion of the Latter-day Saints is verily true,” suddenly disappeared, to be heard of no more.6

I conclude by reiterating that Cultures in Conflict is not your standard, ordinary, run-of-the-mill anti-Mormon book because it presents both Mormon and non-Mormon accounts of historical events and views of those events. However, it is definitely an anti-Mormon book just the same.

A “Tangled Web”: The Walter Martin Miasma

Louis Midgley

What a strange mind, to cover the real thing with an imitation of something real.

Frances Mayes

The old, staid American Protestant denominations are said to be in decline. Even if this is true, it is incorrect to say all of American Protestantism is in decline, for it turns out that some factions still have resilience. For instance, evangelicals seem to be prospering because they are not enthralled by the fads and fashions of liberal theologies. They simply do not make trendy “liberal” causes the central focus of their world.

1. Frances Mayes, Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy (New York: Broadway Books, 1997), 32.
2. See also Walter Martin, Mormonism, rev. ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, 1976).

It is, however, difficult to set firm parameters to recent American evangelicalism. Why? From one perspective, evangelicals seem aggressive, militant, rock hard in their beliefs. But, from a slightly different perspective, they seem eclectic and quarrelsome—there are signs of conflict or tension among the evangelical faithful. If one tries to figure out what is somehow shared by Baptist churches, Lutherans, some elements on the fringes of Roman Catholicism, the Pentecostal and Holiness movements, various radio and television “ministries,” and the multitude of countercultists, it is difficult to locate a clear family resemblance other than a brand name.

Those who want to be known as evangelicals seem to do so for several reasons. First, they tend to manifest a passion for witnessing to the saving power of Jesus Christ, and hence they strive to evangelize the unsaved, which seems to follow from the original meaning of “evangelical.” Evangelicals also often stress the necessity of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is frequently, though not necessarily, regarded as a primal emotional experience guaranteeing the salvation of the believer. In addition, some evangelicals may stress different notions of personal holiness, while some long for at least a semblance of a sanctified community. Evangelicals also tend to insist that their ideology is entirely biblically centered and derived. Thus, along with slogans about salvation coming “by faith alone” and “through grace alone,” evangelicals often insist on what might be called “the Bible alone,” though they also commonly manifest a fierce loyalty to the great ecumenical creeds, various confessions, and Augustinian elements in Reformation theology.

Despite such beliefs, or even because of them, the quarreling or competing factions of American evangelicals seem to be uniquely American. Evidence of the appropriation of American culture by evangelicals can be seen in the new urban megachurches as evangelical fervor moves from its rural roots to the suburbs of cities. The widespread adoption of modernity can also be seen in the slick public relations and massive publication efforts of evangelicals. In addition, one can see preachers struggling for power, wealth, and prestige. Institutional and personal rivalry, power politics, scandal, and also much competition between factions campaigning for the attention of
the same potential audiences are unfortunately never entirely absent from the evangelical scene. The most entertaining (and instructive) examples of these vices are found in the electronic church, with its host of radio and television “ministries.” An additional sign of evangelical religiosity is the burgeoning countercult industry that currently flourishes on the margins of customary evangelicalism. I will focus on this feature of contemporary American Protestantism.

What can possibly explain the horde of competing evangelical countercult “ministries” busy blasting away at the faith of others or even each other? Part of the answer lies in Protestantism itself, which provides a rich opportunity for private entrepreneurs to venture forth in search of lost souls. With no institutional quality control available, independent merchant-ministers are free to sell a product, plant “churches,” or otherwise gather the elect into generic congregations not even nominally linked to discernible denominations. These preachers also manifest a wide range of motivations. Some preachers garner wealth and prestige, making names for themselves, while others—at times spectacular performers—compete for the attention of the same clientele and for the same dollars.

Elements of modernity can be found at the very core of all the varieties of evangelicalism, even while preachers are busy lamenting some of what the label modernity identifies. This may seem anomalous. But evangelical beliefs and practices have been more deeply influenced by American cultural experiences than by the Protestant Reformation or by an original, presumably apostolic, substance. There seems to be a close and even perhaps symbiotic relationship between American popular culture and evangelical religiosity. By examining the writings of Walter Ralston Martin, who helped form much of the countercult industry, I will describe part of the symbiotic relationship between evangelical religiosity and American popular culture. Furthermore, I will show how Walter Martin and the countercult movement in general (and the anti-Mormon element in particular) are an outgrowth, if not harbinger, of evangelical religiosity.

Part of what makes something like the countercult movement possible and even successful is what Alexis de Tocqueville described
as individualism, which he saw as the American manifestation of egoism—what we might now describe as “taking care of Number One.” Tocqueville also saw the potential impact of the American form of egoism on religion. His hunches have, unfortunately, turned out to be remarkably accurate. Preachers are, as Tocqueville guessed they would be, often in the business of selling something—they are entrepreneurs. And what they merchandise is often a kind of quick-fix version of Christian faith. They make it appear that getting oneself saved, ensuring that one’s seat is secured in heaven, suddenly discovering that one was predestined from the moment of creation for salvation, or enjoying eternal security is a matter of answering an altar call or in some other way experiencing a momentary relationship with God, at which time one is regenerated or “born again.”

And, while countercultists are busy hawking cheap grace—no repentance or keeping the commandments is necessary for election—they also require an enemy toward whom they can direct the aggression of their potential buyers. They target those who emphasize moral discipline (that is, keeping the commandments) as a necessary condition of being genuinely born again. Some evangelicals thus seem to either discover or invent morally blameworthy agents who presumably threaten the faithful and against whom they can mobilize hostility. Generating hatred may constitute the primary political or social function of contemporary countercultism.

Far removed from the older denominations and earlier expressions of Protestantism—though not entirely unlike the emotional expressions of religious zeal found in revivals and camp meetings—are the marketing strategies employed by the recent wave of sometimes media-savvy preachers. Where radio was once the major vehicle with which countercultists strove to reach the potential consumer with crudely duplicated items and primitive tape recordings, the countercult message is now often being merchandised through slick publications and expensively produced videos or films or being advanced on the Internet. What has remained essentially the same is the role of powerful, charismatic individuals striving to arouse audiences as they sell themselves and their wares.

Countercultic activities are not, for the most part, aimed at witnessing to (that is, evangelizing) the “cultists” against whom the
countercult preacher declaims. Rather, the target audience for countercult messages and literature is primarily other evangelicals. Why? Evangelicals are pictured by countercultists as threatened by the allure of the so-called "cults." The countercult movement has convinced some Protestants that the "cults" are hijacking members of their faith. Evangelicals are thus persuaded that so-called "cults" are a significant threat.

When countercultists assemble, for example, to pass out literature at LDS temple dedications, they are not primarily attempting to "witness" to or otherwise "evangelize" the Saints. Instead, countercultists are anxious to warn fellow evangelicals of the grave dangers that follow from taking seriously the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and to do something visible to demonstrate zeal to their supporters. When countercultists actually encounter Latter-day Saints, they commonly engage in debates in which proof texting becomes a way for them to score points and in which clichés dominate the conversation. If countercultists were genuinely interested in witnessing to Latter-day Saints, both the tone and content of their literature would be different. Rather than being lurid, sensational, and abrasive, their materials would be much less tendentious and inaccurate. And personal encounters would not involve bashing Latter-day Saints with proof texts drawn from the Bible or lore borrowed from some anti-Mormon handbook. The typical approach of countercultists—obviously not aimed at Latter-day Saints, but intended for fellow evangelicals—is to warn of (according to Walter Martin) the "Mormon menace" or to protest about the "Mormon masquerade" or the "maze of Mormonism."

"The Father of Christian Cult Apologetics"

Walter Martin died of heart failure on 26 June 1989 at age 60. More than eight years later his best-known publication, The Kingdom of the Cults, was republished by his disciples. He began attacking the faith of the Latter-day Saints in the 1950s. He did this because he

4. *The Kingdom of the Cults* first appeared in 1965 with the subtitle *An Analysis of the Major Cult Systems in the Present Christian Era*, but revised, corrected editions were published in 1977 and 1985 (without a subtitle). For the anti-Mormon portion of this
believed that they belong to what he capriciously called a “cult.” The anti-Mormon portion of The Kingdom of the Cults turns out to be another version of some rather fatuous religious polemics originally published thirty years earlier. Even in 1965, when this book first appeared in print, it was essentially an expanded version of two other earlier essays, the first of which has been around more than forty years.

The reader may wonder why attention should be given to the literature of a man who was not a scholar but merely a partisan sectarian preacher. Why now examine Martin’s notably unoriginal expressions of sectarian anti-Mormonism? The publisher of the most recent edition of The Kingdom of the Cults provides one reason for a close look at Martin’s literary career. He “was fondly and respectfully known as ‘the father of Christian cult apologetics.’” His publisher also insists that “many current professional and academic apologists credit” him “with their introduction to the field.” Although Martin is probably less well known to Latter-day Saints than Ed Decker of “God Makers” infamy or Sandra and Jerald Tanner, each of whom

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5. I have compared Martin’s treatment of Mormon things in the 1965, 1985, and 1997 editions of The Kingdom of the Cults line by line in order to identify every correction, deletion, addition, or refinement in each edition, except the 1977, which I have not seen.


8. See Midgley, “The Newfangled Countercult Culture,” 300–301, 323–25, for some details. J. Edward Decker is responsible for an anti-Mormon agency called Saints Alive, which he operates out of Issaquah, Washington. He also operates an anti-Masonic “ministry.” In both instances he dabbles in bizarre conspiracy theories.

9. Under the name Utah Lighthouse Ministry, the Tanners operate an anti-Mormon bookstore in Salt Lake City. Unlike most of the “ministries” in the evangelical countercult industry—that is, those most heavily influenced by Walter Martin—the Tanners (and a
still doggedly pursues his or her own peculiar version of anti-Mormonism, Martin had, I believe, more overall influence on the style and rhetoric of recent anti-Mormonism than any other individual.

Latter-day Saints may not realize it, but Martin influenced the clichés, slogans, and polemical strategies presently employed by the swarm of countercult “ministries.” Though his primary influence on the countercult industry seems to have come from his frequent public presentations (and their recordings), he also spread his ideology through the literature that carries his name. Martin’s disciples continue to sell his recorded talks and books. Thus, as I have shown elsewhere, his approach to what he quaintly called “cults,” as well as his rhetoric, continues to dominate the countercult culture.

A sign of the veneration Martin still receives from countercultists is the publication of the “revised, updated, and expanded anniversary edition” of The Kingdom of the Cults. As with two earlier revisions,
The Kingdom of the Cults has once again been revised and updated by devoted disciples.\textsuperscript{14}

Martin has followers in sectarian seminaries, as well as disciples in several rather pugnacious publishing houses.\textsuperscript{15} Some may even be the same people. For example, Alan W. Gomes teaches at an evangelical seminary\textsuperscript{16} and is also the editor of two series of countercult propaganda pamphlets published by Zondervan Publishing House, which has been a center of countercultism over the years. Martin founded the Division of Cult Apologetics at Zondervan in 1955\textsuperscript{17} when he first began his countercult career. His early booklets and books were published by Zondervan, which opportunity helped to launch his countercult career.

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\text{\textsuperscript{14} The Spring 1998 Bethany House Publishers catalog described the 1997 edition of The Kingdom of the Cults as "fresh, up-to-date information—over fifty percent new material" (p. 3). I calculate that 8.69 percent of the chapter on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is new. Bethany House claimed that "since the first edition was published in 1965, The Kingdom of the Cults has been the authoritative reference work on major cult systems" (p. 3). This new edition, the publishers claim, is "sure to set the standard for cult reference books for the next decade" (p. 3). It is "the definitive reference on cults" (p. 3). Finally, the publishers assert that "DR. WALTER MARTIN held four earned degrees [one being a high school diploma], having received his doctorate from California Coast University [then called California Western University] in the field of Comparative Religions" (p. 3).}

\text{\textsuperscript{15} I have not been able to discover any indication that responsible academics in real universities have taken Martin's polemics seriously.}

\text{\textsuperscript{16} Professor Gomes is at the Talbot School of Theology at Biola University in La Mirada, California. The name "Biola" seems to have been derived from the "Bible Institute of Los Angeles."}

\text{\textsuperscript{17} See "A Brief Chronology of Walter R. Martin's Ministry," included with "Memorial Service for Dr. Walter Martin," Christian Research Newsletter 2/4 (1990): 7. See also the RIN Web site, waltermartin.org/memorial.html.}
Some of Martin's disciples continue publishing with Zondervan, now under the direction of Gomes. For example, Reverend Kurt Van Gorden, who is, among other things, a thoroughly truculent anti-Mormon, dedicated his own recent booklet attacking the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints "to Dr. Walter R. Martin (1928–1989)." Van Gorden describes Martin as "a personal friend, teacher, and mentor who wrote the first Zondervan series on cults (1950s)."

Walter Martin was primarily responsible for launching the Protestant evangelical countercult industry and hence is also the source of much of the recent anti-Mormonism being marketed by countercultist merchant-ministers. In the 1950s Martin's countercultist activities drew relatively little attention, and his writings did not sell particularly well. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, when elements of the so-called Jesus People (sometimes called the Jesus Freaks or the Jesus Movement) were attracted by Martin's attacks upon what he called "cults," that he became a kind of "cult" figure with this particular group. Martin's writings, including The Kingdom of the Cults, did not start selling well, according to his disciples, until the Jesus People started supporting him. Then the sale of The Kingdom of the Cults escalated. Martin's apologists estimate that it has sold more than 750,000 copies.

19. Ibid.
21. The Jesus People were essentially drawn from the remnants of the counterculture protest movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s who had become jaded by the licentious and undisciplined world of drugs, wanton sexual gratification, and endless protests and who had in their quest for new ideology somehow discovered Jesus, who became their new guru.
22. Mrs. Jill Renee Martin Rische has confirmed this figure in an e-mail to me dated 23 August 1998. Mrs. Rische, together with her husband, Kevin, operates what they call the Religious Information Network (RIN). For the sales figures of The Kingdom of the Cults, see www.serve.com/rini/bio.html or waltermartin.org/bio.html. Mrs. Rische, the eldest daughter of Walter Martin, uses this Web site to promote her father's countercultism.
In the 1960s, after what his admirers describe as a “clarion call” for others to join in his countercult activities, there was a veritable explosion of “ministries” or “outreachs” dedicated to attacking the faith of others, with Latter-day Saints being a major target. Martin thus led a crusade against the “cults.”

Some Denominational Guile

Martin found an amenable audience for his countercultism (and hence also for his anti-Mormon rhetoric) in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). And the radically fundamentalist faction that has recently wrested control of the SBC from a previously somewhat more moderate segment of Baptists, as I will demonstrate, seems to have been enthralled by his claim that the “Mormon church” worships a different Jesus, has a different gospel, and hence is part of a pagan “cult” that merely “masquerades” as Christian. Martin seems to have helped turn the SBC, which is the largest American Protestant denomination, into a fertile field for a new round of anti-Mormon fanaticism.

The 1998 annual meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention took place in the Salt Palace in Salt Lake City. The meetings were preceded and then accompanied by expensive, sophisticated, and officially sanctioned propaganda produced and orchestrated by official spokesmen for the SBC and directed against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These materials, sometimes circulated with the assistance of a crew of veteran anti-Mormons, turned out to be highly biased and also contained quite inaccurate portrayals of the Latter-day Saint faith.

Among the literature sold or distributed at the SBC meetings in Salt Lake City was a book by Phil Roberts, who is the head of the Interfaith Witness Department of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Adorned with a dreadful though inadvertently commonplace title, *Mormonism Unmasked* is a typically tendentious anti-Mormon book, one quite unworthy of a wealthy, powerful, and sophisticated Protestant denomination.

The cover of *Mormonism Unmasked* contains some astonishing advertising hype, which depicts well both its style and contents. "Much of the power of Mormonism springs from its aura of mystery," according to the description of this quickly assembled book, "but R. Philip Roberts brings the Mormons' carefully guarded secrets to light." *Mormonism Unmasked* is described by its publisher as "a powerful new book that gives you the tools you need to defend Christianity against their false authority and doctrine."

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26. When R. Philip Roberts's *Mormonism Unmasked* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1998) was first announced, its authors were said to include Tal Davis, an associate director of the Interfaith Witness Division of the SBC, and Sandra Tanner, who, with her reclusive husband, Jerald, operates Utah Lighthouse Ministry. The title page shows only Roberts as author. But it would appear that Davis is responsible for chapters 1, 5, and 7, while Tanner wrote chapters 3, 4, and 9. It is not clear why their names do not appear on the title page as coauthors.


28. For earlier uses of this same title, see R. Clark, *Mormonism Unmasked: Or the Latter-day Saints in a Fix* (London: Banks, 1849); Reverend Benjamin Willmore, *Mormonism Unmasked; or, Earnest Appeals to the Latter-day Saints* (West Bromwich: Hudson, 1855); Fred E. Bennett, *The Mormon Detective; or, Adventures in the West, Mormonism Unmasked* (New York: Ogilvie, 1887); and R. C. Evans, *Mormonism Unmasked* (Toronto, Canada: n.p., 1919).

29. Phil Roberts, *Mormonism Unmasked*, vii, thanks Tal Davis and Sandra Tanner "for working so quickly under the time constraints under which this book was produced." And he also mentions the "unusually fast way in which this book was produced." Enormous stacks of these books were offered for sale at the June 1998 SBC convention in Salt Lake City for those who felt a need to have "Mormonism Unmasked."
Embedded in *Mormonism Unmasked* is the claim that its author speaks for historic (in a sense that excludes most of those who considered themselves Christians from the first century to the present), Trinitarian (as defined by the ecumenical creeds), and biblical Christianity (as understood by one faction of late twentieth-century American Protestants). It also charges that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are not Christian and that its members worship a different Jesus and have a different gospel, a different God, and so forth—a rather commonplace litany invoked by countercultists following the slogans popularized by Martin. What could convince the leadership of a sophisticated faction of presumably educated churchmen—leaders and spokesmen for the largest Protestant denomination in the United States—to promote such nonsense?

SBC leaders warned their people that they were about to visit a place dominated by people who are essentially pagans—that is, not Christians in any sense. In SBC literature Latter-day Saints are portrayed as members of a pagan cult. The Saints are presumably badly in need of an introduction to the real Jesus of the Bible. The efforts by the SBC to “educate” their Baptist brethren about “Mormons,” though ostensibly designed to equip those folks to witness to Latter-day Saints, were largely directed at (and hence sold to) Baptists, thereby preventing the Baptists who came to Salt Lake City from falling into the snare set by the Saints.

Southern Baptists claim that they do not proselyte—that is, attempt to draw other Christians into their “church.” To do so would be “sheep stealing,” and they assert that they never have and never will do such a thing. Instead, they “witness” only to those who are not Christians. If Baptists were to grant that Latter-day Saints are Christians, then they could not witness to the Saints and would have to treat them in the same way they approach Methodists, Presbyterians, or Anglicans. These other folks tend to be seen merely as low-voltage Christians.

The current leadership of the SBC seems to have found in Martin’s ideology a useful—even necessary—justification for obstinately excluding Latter-day Saints and the restored gospel of Jesus
Christ from their own self-serving definition of what constitutes a Christian. By adopting much of his bizarre rhetoric, they have found a way of warranting their own urge to attack the faith of Latter-day Saints. Martin's claims that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not Christian, Latter-day Saints worship a different Jesus, and so forth were necessary in order to sell himself and his anti-Mormon propaganda to his fellow Baptists. Roberts describes Martin as "dean and encourager of many contemporary cult-watch groups."30 Along with his followers, he seems to have "educated" Baptists about the "Mormon menace." The SBC adopted his ideology in order to justify their hostility toward Latter-day Saints, whose proselyting activity is viewed as a major threat.

Since Martin's audience was primarily Baptist, he gained favor with them by his concocted notion that Mormons were not Christian. This false ideology, along with the support of the Baptists, helped launch his career. The publishers of the most recent edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults* did not exaggerate when they claimed that Martin "mentored many who have since become leaders in the counter-cult ministry field. He was deservedly called 'the father of cult apologetics.'"31 What they neglected to point out is that Martin's brand of countercultism has infiltrated the Southern Baptist Convention. They also failed to mention that his influence has also contributed to still another resurgence of religious bigotry in the United States and elsewhere.

Some Standards

Martin was best known for public appearances on his sectarian hustings, as well as for his performances as the syndicated "Bible

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30. *Mormonism Unmasked* (1998), 156. See also the sidebar to an article by Louis Moore, entitled "Countering the Mormon Wave," in *The Commission: Magazine of the International Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention*, June 1998, 12, which lists Walter Martin's *The Kingdom of the Cults* as a source for "Baptists interested in more information of the Mormon Church, its history, practices and beliefs." It is not uncommon for Baptists to include Martin's work in lists of recommended reading when they are addressing concerns about Latter-day Saints.

"Answer Man" on the radio. His style seems best preserved in tape recordings of his talks—a few of which are still sold by the Christian Research Institute (CRI)\(^\text{32}\) and many more by the Religious Information Network (RIN)—along with his literature that is still in print. Martin’s tapes clearly indicate that he was aggressive, confident, pugnacious, and witty—a spellbinder. Martin, who obviously loved to ridicule and assail those he denigrated as “cultists,” liked to pose as a scholar and expert. He loved being called “Doctor” long before he purchased a Ph.D. from a correspondence school in California. He often expounded on the meaning of Greek or Hebrew words in the Bible, giving the impression that he had mastered the ancient biblical languages. These affectations were his way of staging his performances and manipulating his audiences.

So it may be just a bit unfair to hold Martin to scholarly standards, even though he allowed himself to be advertised as a teacher or scholar\(^\text{33}\) and permitted others to make claims about his academic credentials. What standards should Martin be held to? Should he be held to a standard he set forth? In 1956, early in his career, Martin set out in a book entitled *The Christian and the Cults* what he called

\[\text{32. Hank Hanegraaff currently runs CRI. It seems that Hanegraaff pushed aside a number of others who perhaps hoped to inherit at least portions of Martin’s business empire. CRI has thus been turned into a hotbed of controversy. And it would not be entirely wrong to say that Hanegraaff is himself very controversial.}

\[\text{33. Martin’s friends report that he “taught at Shelton College in New York” in 1953–54; was the “Public Relations and Alumni Director at Stony Brook School” in 1954–56 (this was the high school from which he graduated); “taught at King’s College in New York” from 1960 to 1965; “took over the Bible Class of Donald Grey Barnhouse, held every Monday evening in New York City” in 1966; and continued to teach this class through 1973. In 1974 Martin “began teaching ‘Cults and the Occult’ at Melodyland School of Theology. His class at Melodyland evolved into a regular Sunday School class in Southern California.” Finally in 1980 he “became the Director of the MA program at Simon Greenleaf School of Law.” All this is available from RIN on their Web site at http://waltermartin.org/memorial.html in “A Brief Chronology of Walter R. Martin’s Ministry.” If any are curious about what Martin was doing at, say, King’s College, they can consult the title page of Martin’s *The Maze of Mormonism* (1962), where they will discover that he was “Visiting Lecturer, English Bible, The King’s College, Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.” Unfortunately they will be unable to figure out if this was a secondary or post-secondary school. But never mind, it sounds impressive.}
“do’s” and “don’ts” “that the Christian can profitably observe when attempting to evangelize a cultist.”

We have, I believe, in Martin’s list of what he called “Pitfalls to be Avoided” an appropriate standard by which to judge his performance as an anti-Mormon. Did Martin follow his own advice?

“Do not,” Martin advised at that time, “attack directly the founders of any particular cult, either on moral or intellectual grounds.”

Did Martin ever attack (ridicule, mock, belittle, or deride) Joseph Smith or other leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? If he did, then he obviously neglected to follow his own advice. In addition, “do not,” he insisted, “pretend to understand the doctrines of a cult unless you have first looked them up and studied them from primary sources.” To fail to understand what the “cultist” actually believes is, according to Martin, to invite being “embarrassed beyond words.” Instead, one ought to know “what his [that is, the cultist’s] literature teaches.” Presumably this would not involve trying to tell the “cultist” what he believes, but it would demand that he be allowed to set forth his own understanding of his beliefs.

Therefore Martin felt that countercultists ought to make “every effort to understand the doctrinal, historical and psychological components” of the “cultist.” We may ask, did Martin make a genuine effort to understand the beliefs of Latter-day Saints from their own perspective? Or was his understanding filtered through the contorted and distorting lens of anti-Mormonism?

Martin insisted that no matter “how ‘dense’ a cultist may appear to be,” it is a mistake to “become antagonistic or impatient.” To do so is to become one’s “own worst enemy.” He also insisted that the evangelical should “avoid a hostile or suspicious attitude or one which radiates superiority of either belief or accomplishment.” And “do not,” Martin insisted, “attempt to ‘overpower’ the cultist with Biblical

35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 100.
37. Ibid., 101.
quotations or trite evangelical clichés.”38 Martin seems to rule out proof texting and slogan thinking. Did he violate these rules? Do Martin’s writings have any “trite evangelical clichés”?

“No cast aspersions or doubt upon the sincerity or motives of the cultist.” “Do not humiliate a cultist,” no matter what his “background, education, intellectual ineptness, or knowledge of the Scripture.” “Do not dodge questions for which you do not have an answer.” And the kindly evangelical should also allow “a cultist to ‘save face’ . . . , especially if you both know he has lost the point.” (And remember, to countercultists, winning “points” in debates is what witnessing is all about.) Martin also insisted that evangelicals should radiate “true Christian love” as they “approach every cultist as an ambassador for Christ.” The countercultist should always move with “great tact and a careful choice of words and expressions.”39 We will soon see if Martin practiced what he preached.

Encountering Martin’s Early “Scholarship”

In 1962, I purchased a copy of Martin’s The Maze of Mormonism. It was simply atrocious and also, even at $2.95, overpriced. It was poorly written and did not contain the fruit of serious research. Its author was obviously not well-informed. The book made no original contribution to the study of Mormon things. I was both amused and disgusted by the book.

Now, returning to The Maze of Mormonism after thirty-eight years, I am even less impressed with it. Why? It is just packed with falsehoods and errors. For example, in 1962 Martin claimed that an LDS “ward is composed of districts known as ‘blocks’ presided over by a bishop with two teachers as assistants.”40 Obviously this claim is simply wrong. In 1965 the statement still read: “Each ward is composed of districts known as ‘blocks’ presided over by a bishop with

38. Ibid., 99–100.
39. Ibid., 100–102.
40. The Maze of Mormonism (1962), 19. Martin did not confuse wards and stakes because in the next sentence he tries to describe the organization of stakes.
two teachers as assistants."41 In 1978 it was changed to the following: "Every ward is composed of districts, known as ‘blocks,’ presided over by a bishop with two counselors as assistants."42 Finally in 1985 this passage was again modified: "Each ward is presided over by a bishop and his two counselors."43 It took Martin and his associates twenty-three years to get just this tiny bit of information right.

Subsequent printings and editions of Martin’s essays often underwent massive changes designed to remove or correct such misinformation. Hence the later versions of his anti-Mormon writings are better than the originals, but only marginally. In nearly fifty years neither Martin nor his many assistants and editors have been able to get all the inaccuracies out of his essays. By 1978, Martin seems not to have been involved in making corrections or in modifying his essays. He was far too busy making speeches for admiring audiences. His associates seem to have taken on the task of correcting, editing, and perhaps even writing his essays. His output seems to have benefited from having what amounted to ghostwriters, but the host of corrections and additions made over the years to his essays were made by only somewhat better informed editors or assistants.

Who exactly researched, corrected, or even wrote Martin’s anti-Mormon essays? If Jill Martin Rische, who is the executor for her father’s papers, would make them available for scholarly inquiries, assuming that they have not already been trashed or culled, then it might be possible to nail down these details. Without Martin’s papers I have only clues from his writings to suggest who might have worked on them.

Like myself, other Latter-day Saints have lacked enthusiasm for Martin’s work. Hence I was amused when I discovered that Robert and Rosemary Brown had offered solid evidence that Martin lacked probity in many of the claims he made about himself and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.44 Neither Martin nor his disciples

41. The Kingdom of the Cults (1965), 149.
42. The Maze of Mormonism (1978), 22.
43. The Kingdom of the Cults (1985), 168.
44. For an examination of Martin’s personal proclivities, and also some of the substance
have addressed the substantive issues raised by the Browns. Instead of
dealing directly with their evidence, apologists for Martin have been
content to attack the Browns personally. The best that can be said for
Martin's apologists is that some have attempted to do a bit of damage
control, but their efforts have been feeble.45

After I read what the Browns had discovered about Martin's di-
vorces and then eventually noticed that he once claimed that one
wife is enough, it occurred to me that, rather ironically, it was not the
case for him. But I am not really interested in Martin's divorces, other
than to point out that he seems to have been, ironically, a kind of se-
rial polygamist. And I grant that an unaccredited correspondence
school in California that calls itself a "university" bestowed a doctoral
degree on Martin in 1976. But it appears that he never wrote a disser-
tation nor was involved in any of the usual examinations that go with
earning a genuine Ph.D.46

LDS Neglect of Martin

Until recently, only a few Latter-day Saints thought that Martin's
publications and public statements deserved critical attention. Those
who have taken notice of Martin have been amused by his academic
posturing and his shifting family affairs. To Latter-day Saints, Martin
was merely another preacher with illegitimate qualifications who
made a living spreading bigotry and recycling lies. Martin has not ap-
peared to Latter-day Saint scholars as anything more than another in
a dismal line of incompetent, poorly informed, and not particularly
honest partisans engaged in a propaganda war against the Church of
Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Those Saints who have encountered
Martin's anti-Mormon writings may not have thought it worth their

of his anti-Mormonism, see volume three in the series of exposés of raunchy anti-
Mormon preachers written by Robert L. and Rosemary Brown entitled They Lie in Wait to

45. See the RN Web site at waltermartin.org. See, for example, the bizarre item en-
titled "Walter Martin's Doctorate" at waltermartin.org/degree.html or the effort of his
daughter to explain away his divorces.

46. Brown and Brown, They Lie in Wait to Deceive, 49.
time to respond to his charges. My initial disgust toward The Maze of Mormonism in 1962 was probably a typical LDS response to that dreadful book and his other anti-Mormon writings.

And yet he was a legend in the minds of his disciples. An apologist for Martin has claimed that "any Latter-day Saint dealing with 'anti-Mormon' literature is bound sooner or later to run into the name of Dr. Walter Martin, a man who, perhaps more than any other, is cited as the final word on the subject of orthodox Christianity and the cults."

One might, of course, suspect that those at the CRI exaggerated just a little. When has the "final word" been uttered? But on Martin's influence there is support from others in the countercult industry. Be that as it may, a decade after Martin's death there are still those who claim that he remains the state-of-the-art in anti-Mormon propaganda. Although Latter-day Saints tend to neglect or ignore Martin's work, I still believe that it is a mistake to underestimate his impact on a vocal segment of recent American Protestantism.

Martin's Literary Legacy

It is possible that, early in his career, Martin published one or more anti-Mormon essays in obscure sectarian religious magazines. However, Martin's disciples—including his daughter, Jill Rishe, who has some experience as a librarian and should be able to deal with bibliographical matters—do not possess a full bibliography of his writings. Rische has not assembled her father's bibliography but is

47. "Does Dr. Walter Martin have a Genuine Earned Doctor's Degree?" available from the Web site of the Christian Research Institute, www.equip.org/free/DM100.htm (dated November 1997), emphasis in original. This item was republished from something called The Contender, June 1987, published in Huntington Beach, California.

48. The Religious Information Network offers something called "Walter Martin's Biography," in which it is asserted that "he has contributed frequently to leading Christian magazines and has published articles in Christianity Today, Christian Life, Action, Eternity, and The Christian Reader." The biography also claims that Martin was a contributing editor for a magazine called Eternity for five years. See waltermartin.org/bio.html. I have located one essay by Martin in Christianity Today 5/6 (19 December 1960): 233-35. It does not deal with Mormon things. I have been unable to locate these other magazines.
instead busy doing damage control over her father’s reputation as she sells his books and audiotapes. I have begged her to fashion a complete listing of his writings, but she has been unwilling or unable to do so, just as she has been reluctant to answer questions about her father’s activities, including his questionable academic credentials. Furthermore, the CRI, Martin’s old business enterprise, is also unable to provide a bibliography.

I have consulted Martin’s essays currently available at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University and those at FARMS. I have also traced the subsequent redaction and republication of his early anti-Mormon writings. These essays cast much light on his anti-Mormonism and help resolve the question of his “scholarship.”

Martin reported in 1962 that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints “strives to masquerade as the Christian Church.”49 He loved using the word masquerade, employing it regularly along with cult, maze, and menace to characterize what he called “Mormonism.”50 In 1962 he claimed that this Mormon “masquerade” involved an effort by Latter-day Saints to “deliberately misrepresent” their teachings. He often referred to the “deception” practiced by the Saints and asserted that “scholastic dishonesty and twisted semantics are standard Mormon practices in their ever expanding attempt to masquerade as Christians.” What the Saints believe and teach, according to Martin, is thus “false and devilish”; they knowingly advance “anti-Christian dogmas” as they wage “theological war on Christianity.”51

When I first encountered Martin’s rhetoric, I was not impressed. His arguments and supporting evidence were pathetic. Should a book filled with bombast be taken seriously? Martin’s rhetoric also violated his own rules set out in 1956 on how to witness to a “cultist.” But his language and tone in 1962 were quite consistent with his first

50. The Maze of Mormonism (1962), 124, and also notice the use of the word masquerade at 127, 128, 129, 160 (where, for example, the Church of Jesus Christ is accused of trying to “masquerade as a Christian church”). And see the acknowledgments page of The Maze of Mormonism (1978), where special stress is placed on the expression “the Mormon Masquerade.”
ventures into anti-Mormonism in 1955, 1956, and 1957, and even with his 1997 revised-by-his-associates *The Kingdom of the Cults*.

When I read *The Maze of Mormonism* back in 1962, it was obvious that Martin was ignorant about Mormon matters. Even a less-informed Latter-day Saint would have noticed that he lacked a basic understanding of the history and beliefs of the Saints. But to the uninformed, Martin may have appeared to be an expert.\(^52\) And why not? He advertised that he had spent "five years of research,"\(^53\) and he claimed to have drawn "extensively and exhaustively from primary source materials"\(^54\) (which, however, were essentially other anti-Mormon books).

Martin also boasted of having made an effort at accuracy\(^55\) but anticipated that Latter-day Saints would fault what he had written:

> The results of our five years of research as found in this book will doubtless be criticized by the Mormon Church and its friends, who will claim that much of the quoted material is from allegedly "hostile" sources, and that as a result the Mormons have not had a "fair showing."\(^56\)

Then Martin asserted that "the Mormon Church has not produced contemporary evidence of the same caliber which in any way tends to disprove our basic findings."\(^57\) But how would he know? A glance at the bibliography in *The Maze of Mormonism* shows that Martin was quite unfamiliar with either primary or secondary LDS sources. Be that as it may, he challenged Latter-day Saints to respond to the anti-Mormon literature and the conclusions he drew from it.

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52. And those who encountered *The Maze of Mormonism* at least sometimes appear to have assumed that "Dr. Martin offers us a thoroughly documented, historical, theological, and apologetic survey of the Mormon religion. There is," according to this same writer, "every evidence that the author has endeavored to be accurate." Richardson, *A Great Gulf*, 995. "Dr. Martin" indeed. (He didn't purchase his correspondence-school doctorate until 1976, by the way.)


55. See ibid., 10.

56. Ibid., 9.

57. Ibid.
"If the Mormon Church can produce such evidence, evidence which has been requested time and time again by many investigators, we shall be most willing to consider it and revise our conclusions proportionately."58 However, the fact is that throughout his life Martin was unacquainted with LDS literature and hence knew virtually nothing of the growing body of competent studies dealing with the issues he raised and the complaints he made against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Basking in such ignorance, Martin never once attempted to reconsider his stance or revise his conclusions on the basis of further research or greater familiarity with LDS scholarship. And his followers are only marginally better in this regard.59

In the middle 1950s it appears that Martin looked at some materials assembled by others about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When Martin first targeted a given group, it seems that he began his research by consulting some edition of a book by van Baalen.60 He also consulted Mead's *Handbook of Denominations in the United States;*61 Gerstner's *Theology of the Major Sects,*62 and other similar handbooks. Such books provided Martin with a basic understanding (or misunderstanding) of the church and also a bibliography from which to work.63 In 1978 he published a revised and enlarged edition of *The Maze of Mormonism* in which the references to

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58. Ibid.
59. Martin often thanks others for their textual resources. In the acknowledgments to *The Maze of Mormonism* (1962), he thanks others for providing or collecting materials. The names change somewhat in his acknowledgments for the 1978 edition of this book. One wonders if he ever did any real research.
60. See Jan Karel van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults: A Study of Present-Day "Isms"* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1938). He may also have used, since he cites it, the 1956 edition of this book.
van Baalen, Gerstner, and Mead were removed, thus erasing the faint traces of his original sources. But they turned up again under “General References” in *The Kingdom of the Cults*.  

So they either remained part of his resources or his assistants forgot to remove them from his bibliographies. Although Martin claimed he had drawn from “primary sources,” he did not begin, as he implies, with “primary sources,” and he was not led to such sources by any books he and assistants used. It was only when he turned his “research” and writing over to others that some faint signs of familiarity with LDS sources, either primary or secondary, emerged. Be that as it may, he did not follow the scholarly debates on the issues he addressed in his anti-Mormon essays.

Martin wanted others to believe that his writings were serious scholarship. For example, the dust jacket for the first edition of *The Maze of Mormonism* reported that Martin was “currently completing his doctoral study in the field of Comparative Religions” at New York University. Even if Martin did pursue some legitimate doctoral studies at New York University, he did not complete a doctoral program there. Instead, in 1976 he was given a diploma by an unaccredited correspondence school in California. His apologists defend this oddity by arguing that he had transferred some credits (earned around 1962) from New York University to what was then called California Western University. But how could Martin possibly qualify for a doctorate in comparative religion at this unaccredited correspondence school that still has no library, no faculty, and no program in comparative religion? And yet Martin’s apologists still insist that his Ph.D. was legitimate.

64. See *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1997), 652–53.

65. The second edition of *The Maze of Mormonism* seems to have been the work of Jerry and Marian Bodine, “who spent literally hundreds of hours in research and verification of documentary evidence.”

66. This statement may help explain why Richardson, in his review of *The Maze of Mormonism*, referred twice to “Dr. Martin.”

67. After legal action by the real California Western University, this unaccredited correspondence school changed its name to California Coast University, under which name it currently still operates. It does not, however, even now grant degrees in comparative religion.
The dust jacket for *The Maze of Mormonism* also indicates that in 1962 Martin was "recognized as one of the leading authorities on religions having their origin in the United States." But recognized by whom? By other countercultists or by admiring audiences assembled in Baptist churches? Martin was recognized, no doubt, by sectarian countercult preachers but certainly not by scholars in the field of comparative religion.

Neither Martin nor his defenders have genuinely responded to the criticisms of his anti-Mormon essays. Instead, they have generated some obfuscating propaganda to protect his reputation. This policy calls into question both their competence and probity.

**An Explanation for the Book of Mormon**

After Martin discovered a book by a Dr. James D. Bales, he seems to have adopted an explanation of the Book of Mormon that was not defensible even in 1962. Even in the latest edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults*, though, Martin never moved beyond what he borrowed from Bales. But just how careful was he in using what Bales had written?

In the 1962 edition of *The Maze of Mormonism*, Martin indicated that Bales's *The Book of Mormon* had been published by something called "The Manney Company, Fort Worth 14, Texas." The citation is a bit garbled, but oddly, Martin managed to get the information right in his bibliography. This carelessness in editing is a typical example of Martin's sloppiness. Unfortunately, such carelessness is not always obvious to readers wishing to criticize the church, thereby leaving his credibility intact. This particular mistake, like many others, was carried over into the 1965, 1985, and 1997 editions of *The*
However, the bibliographies continue to give the right citation.73

But there is more to this particular story. Martin began his attack on the Book of Mormon by claiming that it "obviously did not come from God." So for him the only issue was to figure out where it came from. "The answer," according to Martin, "has been propounded in great length by numerous students of Mormonism, particularly E. D. Howe, Pomeroy Tucker, and William A. Linn. All concur that the Book of Mormon is probably an expansion upon the writings of one Solomon Spaulding."74 Here we have an indication of how Martin understood the phrase primary sources and how he reasoned. He believed that zesty anti-Mormon books are "primary sources" and that, if these books agreed on something, their conformity represented the truth about the matter.

Thus Martin assumed that merely mentioning the conclusions of some anti-Mormon writers somehow settled the issue of the origin of the Book of Mormon. He believed that all that was necessary was to show a dependence of these writers on the theory espoused in 1834 in E. D. Howe’s Mormonism Unveiled, the veritable mother of anti-Mormon books. But, of course, Martin did not review the large literature for and against his explanation. Neither did he assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Spalding theory nor even set out a coherent version of it. Martin’s explanation of the Book of Mormon, first set forth in 1962, was repeated word-for-word in The Kingdom of the Cults in 1997.75

Martin should have surveyed the literature on the Spalding theory and, at the end of his career, offered a justification for having selected this interpretation while rejecting competing explanations. Is this not what scholars are supposed to do? An author of a recent history of footnotes points out that one of their inadvertent functions is to "make clear the limitations of their own theses even as they

73. See The Kingdom of the Cults (1997), 656.
74. See The Maze of Mormonism (1962), 57, for both quotations.
75. See The Kingdom of the Cults (1997), 208.
try to back them up.”

Therefore, footnotes tend to “buttress and undermine, at one and the same time,” the very arguments they are intended to support. This is clearly the case with Martin: What one discovers in examining Martin’s citations are signs of extreme editorial sloppiness and ideas spawned from a particular polemical community rather than legitimate scholarly sources. In addition, Martin actually believed that virulently anti-Mormon writings are “primary sources,” and he brushed aside any literature that tended to qualify, question, or contradict his version of Mormon history or teachings.

A striking example of Martin’s brushing aside a literature that challenged his biases can be found in his response to Hugh Nibley’s criticisms of anti-Mormon literature published in The Myth Makers in 1958. This book apparently annoyed Martin. Hence in 1965 he announced that “the Mormons have attempted at times to defend their ‘prophets.’ This has led them,” he claimed, “into more than one precarious historical dilemma.” Rather than elaborating on these dilemmas, Martin advises the reader to “see The Mythmakers [sic] by Hugh Nibley. This is a classic example,” Martin claims, “of Mormon apologetics that requires a strong imagination as well as a strong stomach to digest.” There is nothing in Martin’s footnote indicating any “precarious historical dilemma” that LDS apologists have stumbled into. Instead, Martin’s remarks are a manifestation of his urge to confront arguments with a bit of sarcasm. This sort of thing might work with a live audience, but it is an embarrassment when printed. But beginning in the 1950s, Martin relied on both E. D. Howe and Pomeroy Tucker to build his jaundiced account of Mormon origins. But by 1976 he had become quite defensive about these “au-

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77. Ibid., 32.
78. The Kingdom of the Cults (1965), 149.
79. The sarcasm was eventually removed, and the title of Nibley’s book was corrected. But the assertion about LDS apologists being led “into more than one precarious historical dilemma” was not illustrated or supported. The footnote was made to read: “See Hugh Nibley, The Myth Makers, Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, Inc., 1958.” See The Kingdom of the Cults (1985), 169; (1997), 182.
80. See, for example, Mormonism (1957), 8–9.
"authorities" and therefore defended his use of them with a little bombast. He reported that Tucker, who was writing nearly four decades after the events he was reporting, "is vilified by Mormon writers but his facts have never been refuted by non-Mormon contemporaries." Martin then neglected to point out that Latter-day Saints have challenged much of what Tucker wrote.

Martin was also defensive about E. D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*. He or his apologists eventually claimed that Philastus Hurlbut had virtually nothing to do with the content of Howe's book. In 1997, Reverend Van Gorden and Bill McKeever added a paragraph to *The Kingdom of the Cults* in which they assert the following:

Mormons attempt to dissuade members [presumably Latter-day Saints] from [reading?] Howe's research by pretending that his publication resulted from the revengeful vendetta of one Dr. Philastus Hurlbut (sometimes spelled Harlburt), a Mormon excommunicated in 1833. The fact that Howe published stories that were publicly circulated previously to Hurlbut's excommunication is incontestable, despite Hurlbut's assistance in research.  

What Van Gorden and McKeever neglect to indicate is that the bulk of the materials published by Howe were either collected or fabricated by Hurlbut; this is what is incontestable. They apparently realize that Hurlbut's involvement in writing *Mormonism Unveiled* constitutes a problem for those who wish to draw upon its contents. Moreover, it raises questions about Hurlbut's methods and motives. And even the most ardent critics of Joseph Smith have noticed that many of the affidavits that Hurlbut "collected" (which were published by E. D. Howe) appear to have been written by the same person.

81. *Mormonism* (1976), 6 n. 3.
83. Latter-day Saints have, of course, noticed this, but so have critics of Joseph Smith like Fawn M. Brodie. See her *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Knopf, 1945), 68, 143–44, 419–33.
Martin had earlier argued that "Howe was a contemporary of [Joseph] Smith and did the most thorough job of research on the Mormon prophet and his religion; his work is today considered prima facie evidence of the highest veracity." Are we to believe that Howe did "research"? This explains the efforts of Van Gorden and McKeever to defend Martin's appeal to Howe as a "primary source" on Joseph Smith. Howe's book has been taken seriously by anti-Mormon zealots; his book has provided the foundation for much of what has been written by anti-Mormons of various stripes. So it is understandable that Van Gorden and McKeever seem just a bit coy about Martin's use of Howe. For instance, they retain Martin's claim, even though it is false, that Howe "did one of the most thorough jobs of research on the Mormon prophet and the origins of Mormonism extant." But they removed the following statement made by Martin in earlier editions of The Kingdom of the Cults: "Howe has never been refuted, and because of this he is feared and hated by Mormon historians and not a few contemporary Mormons." Even McKeever and Van Gorden realized that this assertion is absurd. And now we see why Martin was so deeply troubled by The Myth Makers—it challenged his biases. But, other than a bit of unseemly sarcasm, Martin did not confront the arguments and analysis found in Nibley's book.

It is obvious that one important function of footnotes is to "confer authority on a writer." It is equally obvious that writers who want their arguments to be taken seriously must either "stride forward or totter backward on their footnotes." Although Martin wanted to be taken as a serious scholar by at least his evangelical au-

84. Mormonism (1976), 7 n. 4.
85. The Kingdom of the Cults (1997), 197.
86. The Kingdom of the Cults (1985), 181.
87. In 1985 Martin was still struggling to defend his use of highly questionable anti-Mormon sources. He claimed that "it has only been the over-wise Mormon historians, utilizing hindsight over a hundred-year period, who have been able to even seriously challenge the evidence" he had used. See The Kingdom of the Cults (1985), 175. What this confused sentence seems to say is that Latter-day Saints over a hundred-year period have been able to "seriously challenge" the stuff that Martin relied upon. But they are "over-wise," whatever that means.
89. Ibid., 4.
di encc, hi s foot n otes rcvea l him t o be to t te r ing b a c k war d s. I n o r der fo r wri t e r s t o be take n se ri o u s ly as sc h o l a rs, th ey m u s t de m o n s trat e tha t t hey h ave exam in ed "a ll t h e s our ces r e lev ant to t h e so lu tio n o f a pr ob le m an d co n s tru ct a n e w n a r ra ti ve o r arg um en t fro m th e m . Th e foot n ote proves t h a t b o th t as k s h ave b ee n ca rri ed ou t. It identifies both the primary evidence that guarantees the story’s novelty in sub­
stance and the secondary works that do not undermine its novelty in form and thesis."90

Perhaps the most amazing feature of The Maze of Mormonism was Walter Martin’s continued support for the Spalding explanation of the Book of Mormon. He began his “argument” by asking where the Book of Mormon came from, “since it obviously did not come from God.”91 So if Martin’s conclusion is that obvious, why did he bother with an explanation of the book’s origin? He sensed that he needed to provide some seemingly plausible explanation for the Book of Mormon that removed God’s involvement. But his reason­ing is circular; he is begging the question.

Martin triumphantly announced that “all concur that the Book of Mormon is probably an expansion upon the writings of one Solomon Spaulding.”92 He argues by authority although he does not know who the authorities are. So what does he mean by “all”? Are they those he just happens to know who support his opinion? Instead of using ma­
terial from the sources he mentions in his writings, Martin quotes extensively from an obscure writer—an “authority”—to support his conclusion that some version of the Spalding theory explains the Book of Mormon. He quotes from what he describes as an “excellent volume” in which Bales asks: “What if the Latter-day Saints are right and there is no relationship between the Book of Mormon and Spaulding’s writings? It simply means,” according to Bales, “that those who so contend are wrong, but it proves nothing with reference to the question as to whether or not the Book of Mormon is of divine origin.”93

90. Ibid., 4–5.
91. The Maze of Mormonism (1962), 57.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid., quoting Bales, The Book of Mormon?
Apparently Bales does not care whether the explanation being offered of the Book of Mormon is sound. Why not? Perhaps because critics begin with the dogmatic assumptions that it simply could not possibly be true. But, if the Spalding theory is unsound, are its advocates not then obliged to come up with a better, alternative explanation? Apparently not. Even though Bales finally jettisons the Spalding explanation, he continues as if nothing had happened, since, as he claims, "we know that men wrote" the Book of Mormon "and that these men, whoever they were, did not have God's guidance."94

Bales, whom Martin quotes with approval, further remarks that "one can easily prove that the Book of Mormon is of human origin."95 How? Presumably by showing once and for all who wrote the Book of Mormon and how. Martin never seriously addressed the arguments of those who had demonstrated that the Spalding theory was poorly grounded. Why then should anyone take what he wrote about Latter-day Saint beliefs seriously, since explaining the Book of Mormon has to be the central issue? Martin did not address or acknowledge the arguments that the somewhat better informed sectarian anti-Mormons96 and the more sophisticated secular anti-Mormons97 have made against the soundness of the Spalding theory. However, one might assume that he was aware of these arguments, since he cites in his bibliography Fawn Brodie's _No Man Knows My History_, which was published seventeen years before Walter Martin expressed his opinions on the matter.98 But he or his editors seem not to have realized or perhaps cared that Brodie had gone a long way toward demolishing the Spalding explanation of the Book of Mormon for gentile scholars, including even some of the most prominent anti-Mormons. Martin further neglects to tell his readers that some of the most zealous anti-Mormons had abandoned the Spalding theory and considered it both absurd and an embarrassment to the cause of anti-Mormonism.

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94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. See Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Did Spalding Write the Book of Mormon?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1977).
97. See, for example, Brodie, _No Man Knows My History_.
98. See _The Maze of Mormonism_ (1962), 183.
Once committed to the Spalding explanation of the Book of Mormon, Martin refused to give it up no matter how weak it turned out to be. A glance at the bibliography appended to *The Maze of Mormonism* reveals that he drew from a small sampling of anti-Mormon literature. Where the bibliography actually lists some scholarly source (after others took over the task of editing, correcting, and expanding his writings), Martin seems not to have understood or even drawn upon these sources. It appears unlikely that he even mastered the literature to which he appealed.

By 1978 Martin boldly proclaimed that part of Spalding’s novel, in Spalding’s own handwriting, has evidently resurfaced! Twelve pages of manuscript writing has been examined by careful hand-writing analysis and attested to be in the handwriting of Solomon Spalding himself, and is a word-for-word portion of The Book of Mormon! The bitter irony to the Mormon Church is that these pages have been preserved all these years by the Mormon Church itself as a portion of the original Book of Mormon.

This tale turned out to be pure fiction. Neither Martin nor those on whom he relied could explain how twelve pages of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon could have been in the handwriting of Solomon Spalding. Two of the three handwriting “experts” hired for their “testimony” by Martin’s associates backed down as soon as they realized the mess they had gotten themselves into. The third had only offered a kind of preliminary assessment. It was Sandra and Jerald Tanner, well-known anti-Mormons, who sorted out these matters and exposed the fraudulent ideas being advanced by Martin and his associates.

Rather than apologizing for or explaining this “discovery,” Martin instead boasted that the matter had been settled with the

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99. See ibid., 57–60.
100. See ibid., 182–85.
101. Hence one can see refinements in the 1978 edition of *The Maze of Mormonism*. Those who assisted him knew the Mormon sources better than he did.
103. See Tanner and Tanner, *Did Spalding Write the Book of Mormon?*
supposed detection of Spalding's handwriting on twelve pages of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon. But this fraudulent episode was not included in the 1985 or 1997 editions of The Kingdom of the Cults; in fact, Martin made no mention of the twelve pages after the Tanners began to take the whole thing apart. There were no explanations, no apologies, nothing. He simply dropped the matter and went on as if nothing had happened.

Saving a Mentor

Rob Bowman, a former associate of Walter Martin, claims that "Mormons frequently argue that Joseph Smith could not have written the Book of Mormon himself." (Their actual belief is that no one in 1830 could have written the Book of Mormon.) Bowman further notes that "some writers have argued that Joseph Smith plagiarized most of the Book of Mormon from a novel by Solomon Spalding, along with passages of the Bible." This was, of course, more or less the position Walter Martin advanced in his anti-Mormon essays.

Bowman further points out that this position "has been argued most vigorously by Wayne Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Donald R. Scales," whose work (sponsored by Martin) turned out to be both flawed and fraudulent, though Bowman neglects to mention this fact. Bowman senses the problems presented by Martin's continued reliance on the Spalding theory. However, at the time Bowman wrote these remarks he was employed by the CRI. Whatever his own views, Bowman simply could not brush aside the Spalding theory without causing embarrassment to Martin and harming the business interests of his employer. But to his credit, Bowman maintained a measure of independence from his employer when he wrote: "While in this writer's opinion there are serious problems with this [Spalding]

104. See The Maze of Mormonism (1978), 60-64.
106. Ibid.
theory as a complete explanation of the book's origin, it is plausible that Joseph Smith did get ideas or even material directly or indirectly from one or another manuscript by Spalding.” Plausible? How so? Bowman neglected to explain how such a thing could happen, given the weaknesses in the Spalding theory.

Is it possible that Bowman and Martin did not see how the Spalding theory could not be even part of the explanation of the Book of Mormon, once its weaknesses are taken seriously? Though Martin cited Fawn Brodie with approval, he never seriously confronted her effort to show that the Spalding theory was incoherent. The CRI and the Religious Information Network (RIN) are both stuck with the Spalding theory—they cannot brush it aside. To jettison it now would demonstrate a very serious flaw in the ideology of the deceased cultmaster they continue to serve.

Many anti-Mormons, led by Sandra and Jerald Tanner, flatly reject the Spalding theory, which has become an embarrassment for anti-Mormonism. By insisting on the theory, Martin demonstrated that he was badly informed or perhaps incompetent. One wonders if either Bill McKeever or Kurt Van Gorden, who edited the 1997 edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults*, would care to defend Martin’s views on the Spalding theory. If not, then why did they retain this explanation in the chapter attacking Latter-day Saints in the most recent edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults*?

When Mistakes Are Made

Martin once commented on having been informed that he had made a mistake. In a talk entitled “The Maze of Mormonism,” he began by boasting that he had made it his “business so much as is humanly possible to know what they [the cultists] know as well as they know it. Otherwise I don’t think it’s fair to represent them without having knowledge of what they teach.”108 And then he added a hypothetical remark, indicating that if he ever made “a mistake” of some

108. “The Maze of Mormonism,” a transcript of an undated talk found in Special Collections at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University (MSS SC 957). The passage quoted is found on p. 36 of this transcript.
sort, "nothing is lost by saying" that he had made "the mistake as long as you're honest enough to correct it. And if I have made mistakes, I am willing to correct them." 109

Would Martin actually acknowledge that he had made a mistake? "Mormons have written and said you [meaning Martin] made a mistake in your pamphlet on such and such a page. We checked it out and found out the printer had put down the wrong book, we changed it. With apologies." With apologies to whom? And whom did he blame for the mistakes that he was forced to correct? The printer. "But that's not our fault," he protested. "That happens to be the fault of the people who set the type and it wasn't caught in proofreading. But you can't help things like this when you go into print. I've made mistakes before, I'll make them again. But never on factual data in reference to what they really believe." 110

Are we really to believe that a typesetter just put things into Martin's essays that were not in his manuscripts? Typesetters are in the business of following copy, not creating new material. And Martin was the editor of the series in which his booklets and books appeared. It was his responsibility as both author and editor to see to it that his essays did not have these mistakes. Whose fault was it when Martin promoted his "proof" that Solomon Spalding's handwriting had turned up on twelve pages of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon? Where was the apology from Martin (or one of his editors or anyone at CRI) for having promoted what amounts to fraud? When did Martin ever once specifically acknowledge or apologize for any of the host of mistakes he made in his various attacks on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? 111

109. Ibid., 36.
110. Ibid., 37.
111. Readers may wonder if I have ever made a mistake in something I have published. I have. I take full responsibility for even typographical mistakes. One recent instance involved confusing Robert Morey and Steve Van Nattan, both anti-Mormon publicists. See Midgley, "Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture," 316 n. 123. The offending sentence should actually begin "Van Nattan boasts" rather than "Morey boasts." The contents of this note should refer to Van Nattan rather than Morey. Later in this essay I again replaced Van Nattan's name with Morey's. Ibid., 331. It was Van Nattan who claimed that Mormonism is "a damnable heresy from the toilet of hell" and so forth, and
Assaulting the "Mormon Menace"

The oldest item in Martin's arsenal of anti-Mormon essays is a brief chapter entitled "The Growth of the Mormon Menace," which he included in 1955 in *The Rise of the Cults*. In 1957 Martin turned this brief essay into a thirty-two-page booklet entitled *Mormonism*. "The Growth of the Mormon Menace," which is marred with the same kind of errors I noticed when I first encountered *The Maze of Mormonism*, was republished four more times between 1957 and 1983. Only the last version of this essay contains significant additions. But the editorial changes and additions to "The Growth of the Mormon Menace" turn out to be important. They illustrate Martin's effort to explain—or his inability to explain—the authorship of the Book of Mormon.

In Martin's apparent first venture into anti-Mormonism, he insisted that "Mormonism denies the authority of the Bible and ... flatly contradicts the very Saviour they [sic] profess to believe in. The Bible clearly teaches that it ... is the sole authority for faith and morals, but Mormons equate the Book of Mormon with the Bible despite the fact that it has been proved a gigantic fraud and plagiarism on the part of Smith and Harris." Proved? By whom? How?

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not Morey. I apologize to Van Nattan for not giving him full credit for his opinions (and to Morey for pinning Van Nattan's on him).


113. This booklet was reprinted eighteen times between 1957 and 1975, with occasional slight corrections.


And Harris—Martin Harris? Walter Martin began his anti-Mormon career by offering only a bald, unexplained, unsupported assertion—his typical means of presentation. Instead of fashioning an argument with evidence to support it, Martin garbled something he had borrowed from earlier accounts of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In 1957, Martin changed the earlier quoted sentence to read as follows: “fraud and plagiarism on the part of Smith and his cohort, Sidney Rigdon.”\textsuperscript{116} So it was not Martin Harris but Sidney Rigdon who was involved in “gigantic fraud and plagiarism.”\textsuperscript{117} Once again Martin did not offer support for his claim, and elsewhere in his essay he continued to describe Martin Harris as “Smith’s cohort.” Then in 1981, Martin (or perhaps an associate) removed the name of Sidney Rigdon and replaced it with the more ambiguous “Smith and his cohort.”\textsuperscript{118} But the only cohort that Martin mentioned by name in this essay was Martin Harris. Why the change?

The Spalding Theory Reappears

In 1983 Martin introduced into the last redaction of “The Growth of the Mormon Menace”—which now had oddly been given the same name as a book he published in 1962 (and again in 1978)\textsuperscript{119}—a version of the old Spalding theory. In one place in his essay he describes the Book of Mormon as “a purloined novel in disguise.”\textsuperscript{120} In another place in this version of the essay, he asserted that “in actuality, Joseph Smith, Jr., most probably developed Mor-


\textsuperscript{117} Martin was fond of asserting that one would do well to avoid accepting “the jumbled hodgepodge of polyglot plagiarisms that is the Book of Mormon.” See Mormonism (1957), 16. In 1976 he merely referred to “the pseudo-revelation that is the Book of Mormon.”

\textsuperscript{118} “The Mormon Maze” (1981), 71.

\textsuperscript{119} That is, The Maze of Mormonism (1962 and 1978).

\textsuperscript{120} “The Maze of Mormonism” (1983), 57.
monism from using a stolen and plagiarized novel written by Solomon Spalding and stolen from him by Sidney Rigdon.” Martin then added that he believed that “it is Spalding’s unpublished novel Manuscript Found which is almost certainly the basis for the Book of Mormon.” By 1981, the Spalding explanation of the Book of Mormon had finally overtly surfaced in this redaction of this essay but without any attempt to set it forth in any detail or to defend it.

Martin’s expressions like “almost certainly” and “most probably” imply hesitation rather than certainty. Instead of providing evidence, Martin sent his readers to The Maze of Mormonism and Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? to support his argument. The various versions of “The Growth of the Mormon Menace” lacked a coherent argument and evidence to support Martin’s bald assertions; one finds, instead, much confident opining. Martin’s attack on the church in “The Growth of the Mormon Menace” was marginally improved by 1983, but it seems odd that Martin insisted on republishing over a span of twenty-eight years an essay laced with mistakes and lacking reasoned arguments and analysis.

But gross mistakes are not the most irritating feature of “The Growth of the Mormon Menace.” Despite Martin’s admission that what Latter-day Saints believe appears “like a declaration of orthodox theology,” he maintained that such statements constitute “a deliberate attempt to deceive the naive into believing that Mormonism is a Christian religion, which it is not in any sense of the term.” This claim, like many others, was repeated over and over again in The Maze of Mormonism in 1962.

When Latter-day Saints affirm that Jesus of Nazareth is for them the Messiah or Christ and insist that he is their Lord and Savior, are they not Christians in evangelical terms? Martin always insisted that they are not.

121. Ibid., 64 n. 1.
122. See Davis et al., Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?
123. “The Maze of Mormonism” (1983), 52. This language is found in every version of this essay.
Confusion over the Trinity

In each version of "The Growth of the Mormon Menace," Martin insisted that "Mormons deny the Scriptural doctrine of the Trinity and the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ." In making these charges, he clearly begs the crucial questions by merely assuming that his understanding of what he calls the Trinity is taught in the Bible. But it turns out that his notion of the Godhead was dependent on the language of the ecumenical creeds and not the Bible.

How did Martin understand the Trinity? In a 1962 essay, he admitted that "no man can fully explain the Trinity, though in every age scholars have propounded theories and advanced hypotheses to explore this mysterious biblical teaching. But despite the worthy efforts of these scholars, the Trinity is still largely incomprehensible to the mind of man." He accuses the Latter-day Saints of not subscribing to what he admits is speculative and mysterious to the point of being largely incomprehensible. But if the teaching about the Trinity is crucial for authentic faith (and denied by Latter-day Saints), can Martin himself clearly articulate this teaching? He cannot. And why? "Perhaps the chief reason for this [the inability of theologians to set forth a coherent understanding of the Trinity, according to Martin] is that the Trinity is a-logical or beyond logic. It, therefore, cannot be made subject to human reason or logic." If this is true, how can it be determined if someone is affirming or denying it? It must have some rational structure and meaning for that judgment to occur.

Yet Martin also claims that within the Bible "we find the remarkable evidence for the Trinity in the Christian faith." What he draws upon as evidence in the Bible for the Trinity is language that shows the plurality of divine beings, each known by the singular title God. Here he is certainly on the right track. The word trinity does not mean "one" but "three." The early Saints referred to the divinity of

124. Ibid., 60.
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid.
the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But they faced Jews, those coming from a philosophical culture, and eventually Islamic critics, who insisted on the existence of only one God and not three distinct beings, each of whom can be called God. These folks mocked Christians for what they considered polytheism. Christian thinkers were thus faced with the problem of explaining how Jesus of Nazareth could be the Son of God (and also thereby in the full sense God) and still be distinct from his Father, while holding that there is one God. How exactly was Jesus one with his Father and yet distinct from him in crucial ways?

Early in his career, Martin tried to respond to this question. He declared that “within the unity of the one Deity are three separate Persons co-equal in power, nature and eternity.”128 But the Bible does not refer to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as “persons.” This language was employed by theologians who were working with Greek philosophical categories, which eventually got placed in the ecumenical creeds. Furthermore, the Bible also does not deal with “nature” as a category with which to describe or understand divine things. Martin’s point is that language in the Bible suggests—or demands—plurality in the Godhead. On this, of course, he is right. He fails, however, to notice when he uses categories foreign to the Bible.

Martin then quotes passages from the Bible to demonstrate the existence of three distinct beings in the Godhead. For example, he quotes from Genesis: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26).129 He denies that this conversation took place with angels or that God was talking to himself. At this point, Latter-day Saints may feel that Martin’s position resembles theirs. He then tries to accomplish what others have been unable to achieve—to explain how three distinct, separate beings can be understood as one. He does this by pointing out that

if the United States should be attacked by a foreign power, everyone would “rise as one” to the defense of the country.

128. Ibid., 15.
129. Ibid.
Yet no one would say that every one had instantaneously be-come "one person." Rather, we would be one in a composite unity, one in purpose or will to work toward a common goal.130

I rather like this analogy. Martin seems to have stumbled onto the right answer to his question. But he was not satisfied with the idea that three separate beings can be one in the way Jesus is one with his Father and in the same way that his followers are urged to be one with him—that is, in power, authority, purpose, and moral disposition (see John 17:20-23). Instead, he was stuck with defending the language of the creeds and the speculation of theologians.

Martin then moves beyond his original analogy and claims that the Bible also contains language affirming that "the doctrine of the Trinity of God was far above the idea of mere agreement of will or goal; it is a unity of the basic scriptural nature of substance, and Deity is that substance."131 But this, of course, is nonsense—no passages in the Bible employ such concepts or categories. Martin instead uses and defends categories drawn from the literature of pagan philosophy.132 Martin provides a clumsy summary of what various unnamed theologians thought the creedal language might possibly mean. These unnamed "scholars have propounded theories and advanced hypotheses," according to Martin, in an attempt to explain what it means for three distinct beings to share one essence, nature, or substance.

Why must we consult third- and fourth-century theologians concerning the mysteries of God rather than go directly to the Bible? According to Martin, the reason is that Christians quarreled about these matters. He claims that "no other doctrine was the subject of such controversy in the early church as the doctrine of the Trinity." The idea that God is three separate persons in one substance is

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130. Ibid., 16.
131. Ibid., 16-17.
132. See ibid., 17. Martin indulged in a bit of proof texting presumably to support his claim. He cited John 4:24, but there is no mention of substance or essence in this passage, merely that God is spirit.
clearly not taught in the Bible. Martin admitted that only later "did a systematic doctrine of the Trinity emerge," thus recognizing that the sophisticated theological formulations of the Trinity were a product of fierce controversy. The early Christians could not have foreseen what the third- and fourth-century theologians would place in the creeds. It was only later that apostate Christianity came to teach one or more versions of what Martin called "a systematic doctrine of the Trinity." "But the Christian doctrine of the Trinity," according to Martin, "did not 'begin' at the Council of Nicaea nor was it derived from 'pagan influences.'" This was his typical way of arguing: He simply presented his own opinion and moved on as if his assertion settled the matter.

However, Martin tried to offer a rational explanation of the Trinity as taught in the creeds, at least as he understood them. "God is one in Nature yet three in Person and manifestation." This might be a version of what is called modalism or Sabellianism—an early heresy claiming that there is really only one God and that it presents or manifests itself in several modes (that is, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Could this be what Martin was referring to? He actually provided an analogy to explain his understanding of the Trinity that suggests a version of modalism. "Even as water which may be converted into ice or steam is one in Nature though three in form, so also God is capable of being and doing what the mind of man cannot fathom." Is Martin saying that God can manifest itself in three modes as Father, Son, or Holy Spirit? Martin mentioned that "in the world of chemistry it is perfectly possible for a substance to simultaneously exist in three separate and distinct forms yet remain basically one in structure or nature." His analogy hinted at the Sabellian heresy by seeming to deny the separate, distinct reality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but his imprecise language makes it difficult to tell

133. Ibid., 13.
134. Ibid., 14–15.
135. Ibid., 19.
136. Ibid.
137. Ibid.
exactly what he was trying to say. This, however, is a common problem when preachers attempt to explain the language of the creeds or the speculation of theologians.

The word *trinity* was adopted long after the apostles had passed on as a way of identifying the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as separate, divine beings or "persons." Latter-day Saints, however, are not impressed by the confused and confusing language of the creeds or interested in the speculations of theologians on the Trinity. The Saints do not deny that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in power, authority, purpose, and moral disposition but not in substance, essence, being, or nature. The latter terms, despite Martin's denials, were clearly borrowed from pagan philosophy.

Martin moreover insists that "Mormonism denies the authority of the Bible."138 He seems to have had two rather distinct issues in mind when he made such assertions.139 First, he claims that Latter-day Saints do not accept the teachings found in the Bible. What he should have said is that the Saints do not understand the Bible in the same way he did. Second, he also implies that the Saints do not limit the word of God to the Bible or to the interpretations popular among a late twentieth-century faction of Protestants. What he should have said is that Latter-day Saints do not accept his interpretation of the Bible or believe that it contains all of God's word. But rejecting all or part of his interpretation hardly amounts to rejecting the Bible itself, unless he believed that his interpretations were inerrant or infallible.

In addition, Martin inaccurately concludes that "the Bible clearly teaches that it . . . is the sole authority for faith and morals."140 This unwarranted claim was necessary in order for Martin to slam the door shut on any additional divine special revelation that might add to our knowledge of divine things beyond his brand of Christianity. However, he can provide nothing more than a few clumsy proof texts to support such a stance. Why? No biblical author had anything to

139. For similar language, see his *Mormonism* (1957), 27, 19.
140. Ibid. "The Book of Mormon, then, stands as a challenge to the Bible because it adds to the Word of God and to his one revelation." *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1965), 171.
say about such a collection as itself—the Bible simply did not exist at the time they wrote. Martin believes an open canon is forbidden by the Bible, but obviously the canon remained open while the individual texts were being written. Martin continues to insist, rather, that God cannot possibly reveal anything outside the confines of his interpretation of the Bible, and he wants to attribute this dogma to the Bible itself.

Confusion over Redemption

In 1962 Martin wrote an essay in which he addressed the question “Why did Christ die?” An obvious answer might be that he died because he was beaten, dragged through the streets of Jerusalem, stabbed, and then nailed on a tree and left to bleed to death. But this is not what Martin was asking. Put another way, Martin asks, “What does the atonement really mean?” He briefly traces the Old Testament background of the New Testament teaching that Jesus was the Lamb of God whose sacrifice would take away the sins of mankind. But Martin does not explain why such a sacrifice was necessary. An orthodox Jew or a Muslim might insist that God is sufficiently powerful to save whomever he feels inclined to save. Why was a sacrificial death of the Son of God somehow necessary? Martin simply skirts this question and proceeds to other issues.

Martin also wonders whether the atonement was limited or universal. Considerable controversy about this matter exists among warring factions of evangelicals. “One leading school of thought,” according to Martin, “has always maintained that Christ died and shed His blood only for those whom God chose to be redeemed. This view, commonly known as Calvin’s ‘limited atonement,’ has many supporters.” According to this notion of a “limited atonement,” the death of Jesus is effectual only for those already predestined at the moment of creation for salvation. Martin seems opposed to this view, but it is

141. See Martin, “Christ Died for Us,” in Essential Christianity, 43.
142. Ibid.
143. Ibid., 44.
hard to determine exactly where he stood on predestination and limited atonement since he said nothing about a universal atonement and did not clarify whether his views were Arminian or Calvinist.

Without identifying exactly for whom Jesus died—that is, whether he died only for those already saved by God or for those who might eventually come to trust in him as Lord and Savior—Martin held that his death was vicarious (or substitutionary), to use the common Protestant vernacular. Beyond this, Martin was unclear about the atonement. "Although the heart of the atonement is its vicarious (substitutionary) nature, other aspects of it may enlarge upon its relationship to the entire plan of God." This assertion is very confusing. Be that as it may, by "substitutionary" Martin seems to have meant that Jesus somehow took our place and did something we could not do for ourselves. However, he is not clear about why this was necessary. Hence, instead of offering an answer to this question on the atonement, Martin merely reports that "through church history, theologians have tried to explain the ramifications of our Lord's sacrifice," presumably meaning that they have tried and more or less failed.

Martin briefly summarizes theological speculation about the atonement, prefacing his survey with the assertion that "it is not wrong to theorize" as long as such "speculation and theorizing" does not directly contradict what is expressly set forth in the Bible. After his review, Martin concludes that "while none of the theories of the atonement then are complete in themselves, each contains some truth." He mentions that "the various theories of the atonement (ransom to Satan, recapitulation, satisfaction, moral influence, example, governmental, penal, mystical, etc.) make definite contribution to the idea of atonement but by themselves do not deal with the basic issue of man's alienation from God and the necessity of vicarious reconciliation."
One might assume that Martin would have rejected the idea that the death of Jesus Christ merely functioned as a way of revealing "the love of God for the fallen race" in order to influence sinners to rise above their own failures by following Christ's example.\textsuperscript{149} He notes that this theory of the atonement "assume[d] that the human will is capable of response to the moral influence of God despite the curse of sin."\textsuperscript{150} At this point, Martin argues that "the energizing of the Holy Spirit through grace alone makes possible the volitional act of an individual whereby he comes into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ."\textsuperscript{151}

So it appears that every explanation of the atonement contained something insightful, even if none of them provided a satisfactory answer to Martin's question, "Exactly why did Jesus die?" The only thing Martin insisted on was the code language "grace alone."\textsuperscript{152} However, he was unable to explain how that slogan related to any of the theories of the atonement that he reviewed. Martin further demonstrated an unwillingness to address the question of whether the atonement is strictly limited because of predestination (the Calvinist stance) or universal and hence accessible in principle to anyone who comes to have faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior (the Arminian position). Martin also judiciously says nothing about the role of faith in drawing on the saving power of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, an issue that deeply divides evangelicals into warring camps.

When Martin addressed the beliefs of Latter-day Saints, he insisted that "the Mormon Church denies emphatically the great and true Biblical doctrine of justification before God on the basis of faith alone."\textsuperscript{153} But the expression faith alone (or grace alone or Bible alone) is little more than an evangelical cliché. Martin's assertion thus amounted to his opinion that "the Mormon doctrine of the atonement...

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid. "To assume that fallen man is capable of being successfully influenced apart from the grace of God is patently anti-biblical." Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 43, 49.
\textsuperscript{153} "The Growth of the Mormon Menace," 54.
of Christ [which he neglects to set forth] is a far different one from that revealed in the Bible."  

He was anything but clear about New Testament teaching on the atonement, other than asserting that it was vicarious (or substitutionary). Was he any better at setting forth what is taught in the Book of Mormon?

In order to support his attack on the Latter-day Saint understanding of the atonement, Martin would have had to describe in a comprehensive way exactly what is taught in the Book of Mormon on the reconciliation of human beings to God through the life, death, and resurrection of the Holy One of Israel. Then he would have had to compare this with what he believed was taught in the New Testament. He never did this. Instead, he argued by what amounts to bald assertion. Then he changed the subject, leaving the impression that his opinion settled some issue. Or he made unseemly remarks like the following: "Mormon mythology . . . teaches that all the atonement purchased for man was a 'resurrection,' an earthly paradise with the prospect of everlasting fertility and connubial bliss in the tradition of King Solomon's harem."  

The fact is that the Book of Mormon, like the New Testament, clearly teaches that the atonement makes possible the resurrection of all mankind. The atonement involves more than the sacrificial death of Jesus; it also involves his resurrection, which ensures the resurrection of all mankind. But the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ further makes possible, on certain conditions, a liberation from sin through divine mercy. These conditions include the necessity of having faith, repenting of sin, being baptized (showing publicly that one has taken upon oneself the name of Christ), keeping the commandments, and enduring to the end. Of course, the very moment one has faith, one is forgiven by God. But it is easy to fall from grace, thereby necessitating further repentance.

Martin was mistaken in his notion that Latter-day Saints believe that the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus only secures resurrection. Even a glance at the Book of Mormon reveals the stress its prophetic

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154. Ibid.  
155. Ibid.
teachings place on the absolute necessity of divine mercy and forgiveness of sin by the Holy One of Israel. Martin merely excerpted some language to make it appear that the Saints deny the necessity of divine mercy, forgiveness, or grace. However, Latter-day Saints believe that the atonement makes possible the resurrection of the dead and also the forgiveness of sin. I believe that most evangelicals hold a somewhat similar view on these issues, even when they cannot explain why Jesus had to die in order for a sinner to be reconciled to God.

Misconstruing the Book of Mormon

Martin's garbled version of Latter-day Saint beliefs concerning the atonement raises the question of just how well he understood the Book of Mormon. It is obvious that he started out with a passion to show it was not an authentic divine special revelation. But had he read it carefully or even cursorily?

The first printing (1957) of his booklet entitled Mormonism contained a brief, fanciful description of the contents of the Book of Mormon. Martin claimed that, "according to Mormon teaching, The Book of Mormon is an historical outline of the activities of a race of people called Jaredites." He further added that

the Jaredites allegedly set foot in America somewhere in the neighborhood of 600 B.C. and not too long thereafter divided into two tribes, the Nephites and Lamanites, who promptly went to war with each other and kept up a sort of running battle until the year A.D. 385, when according to The Book of Mormon, somewhere in the vicinity of Cumorah in Palmyra, New York, the Lamanites almost completely destroyed the Nephites.

I wonder how Martin could make so many mistakes while claiming he had read the Book of Mormon.

156. Mormonism (1957), 14.
Instead of focusing on the prophetic teachings found in the Book of Mormon, Martin was anxious to discredit it as history. But even in that attempt he made the same mistakes as he did in attempting to explain the contents of the book. For example, he claimed that “Mormon was a direct descendant of Levi [sic] the founder of the Nephites and Mormon’s son, Moroni.” He also liked to point out what he considered plagiarisms in the Book of Mormon. “One of these plagiarisms, which is most embarrassing to the Mormon concept of divine revelation where The Book of Mormon is concerned, is found in 3d Levi [sic], chapter 11, verses 27 and 36.” In so doing, he managed to confuse Nephi with “Levi.” This kind of mistake takes a certain skill.

Martin made these errors both in items he published (ironically, at a press where he served as editor) and especially in his public addresses. In his performances, his considerable, though unwarranted, confidence and inventiveness were allowed free rein. That tapes of his talks are still being sold is an indication of the lack of probity and intellectual acumen of portions of the countercult industry.

Claiming Support from a Book That Did Not Exist

In addition to being confused when he described the contents of the Book of Mormon, Martin frequently deceived his audiences by referring them to a book he had supposedly written in collaboration with someone else and which was about to be published (or had already been published), but that book did not appear in print until 1962. Herein is a story worthy of some attention.

As far back as 1955 and then again in 1957, Martin claimed that he and Reverend Norman H. Klann, with whom he had previously

158. Ibid., 15.
159. Ibid. At least by 1976, either Martin (or one of his assistants) had corrected this blunder by inserting Lehi and also Nephi where “Levi” had originally appeared in both contexts.
160. Described by Martin in his The Rise of the Cults (1955), 5, as a “colleague,” with an additional comment on a comprehensive work they were jointly undertaking on Mormonism. Reverend Klann ran the Second Baptist Church in Union City, New Jersey,
published a booklet on the Jehovah’s Witnesses, would soon publish an important book entitled *The Maze of Mormonism*. He then cited this book as having been published, with Klann as his collaborator. But it was another five years before this book actually appeared in print—without Klann’s name as coauthor. This is puzzling. Why the delay? Why was Klann’s name removed as coauthor? Exactly what role did Klann play in the production of this book? Was Martin, perhaps, working with materials provided or fashioned by someone else?

In “The Growth of the Mormon Menace” (1955), Martin insisted that “it would be possible [for him] to enumerate many, many more differences between orthodox Christianity and the theology of Mormonism, but,” he then claimed, “these are all discussed in a book to be released early in 1956.” Martin did not say that these supposed differences “will be” discussed, but that they “are all” discussed. The footnote to this statement reads as follows: “Walter R. Martin, and Norman H. Klann, *The Maze of Mormonism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956.)” In actuality, *The Maze of Mormonism* was not yet published in 1956; it first appeared in 1962, without a coauthor.


163. Ibid., 55 n. 12.
164. In the 1983 version of this essay, now called “The Mormon Maze,” the footnote had been removed and replaced with a reference to how these things were treated by Martin in his “books *The Maze of Mormonism* and *The Kingdom of the Cults*,” with no mention of which edition the reader should consult.
It would seem that Reverend Klann, who had earlier coauthored two booklets with Martin—*Jehovah of the Watchtower* and *The Christian Science Myth*—was in some way involved in the production of *The Maze of Mormonism*. It is not clear either what he contributed to this book or why his name did not appear as one of its authors when *The Maze of Mormonism* finally appeared in 1962. Without access to Martin’s papers, if they still exist, it is impossible to determine exactly how much of *The Maze of Mormonism* was the work of the shadowy Klann.

This is not to say that there are no obvious evidences of dual authorship in *The Maze of Mormonism*. For example, the preface reads: “The results of our five years of research as found in this book,”166 which is followed by “we would have been only too happy,” and “we shall be most willing to consider,”167 though on the same page there is a reference to “the author.” But immediately following these passages we find “we also feel,” “we offer only,” “our abiding hope,” and “our sincere hope,”168 again possibly implying coauthorship.

These traces of multiple authorship in the 1962 edition of *The Maze of Mormonism* dramatically decrease in the 1978 edition.169 “We” and “our” have mostly, though not entirely, been replaced by “I” and “my,” as follows: I would have been, “I relied upon,” “I shall be most willing,” “I also feel,” “I have made every effort,” “my abiding hope and prayer,”170 “I therefore offer,” and finally “it is my sincere hope.”171 However, remnants of duality occur with “our brief previous expose” and “our examination of.”172 The common editorial “we” also occurs in one passage where a single author might refer to himself.173

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167. Ibid.
168. Ibid., 10.
171. Ibid., 13.
172. Ibid., 72.
173. See ibid., 24.
Determining how Martin worked, who helped him, who fashioned the initial drafts or provided the initial materials upon which he relied, and then who revised his essays would help explain matters that are otherwise puzzling about what appeared under his name.

On Not Knowing the Name of the Church

The 1962 version of The Maze of Mormonism provides, often word for word, the foundation for the chapter in the first edition of The Kingdom of the Cults (1965) entitled “Mormonism—The Latter Day [sic] Saints.” How might this mistake in the name of the church have gotten into what its editors now describe as “the leading reference work on the major contemporary cult systems”? The fact is that Martin was unsure of the name of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when he published The Maze of Mormonism in 1962, and he repeated his error in 1965. He included a host of amusing mistakes, some of which were eventually corrected in subsequent editions.

In the preface to The Maze of Mormonism (1962), Martin contrasted “the Christian Church,” “the historic Christian position,” or “historic Christianity,” with “the Mormon cult,” or the “Mormon Church” or “Mormon church.” The opening words of his first chapter of The Maze of Mormonism, entitled “Mormonism and the Verdict of History,” are “The Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints.” In the second paragraph, Martin claimed that “the Mormons, as they are most commonly referred to, are divided into two

174. The Kingdom of the Cults (1965), 147. In the 1985 edition of The Kingdom of the Cults, someone changed the title of chapter 6 to read “Mormonism—The Latter-day Saints.” Observant readers will have noted the initial confusion in 1965 over the name of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which someone eventually corrected.
175. See the dust jacket for The Kingdom of the Cults (1997).
177. Ibid., 8.
178. Ibid.
179. Ibid., 10.
180. Ibid., 7, 9.
181. Ibid., 15.
major groups, The Church of Jesus Christ [of] Latter Day Saints, Utah, and The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints, with headquarters in Independence, Missouri.”¹⁸² Later in this same chapter Martin refers to the official founding, on 6 April 1830, of “a ‘New Religious Society’ entitled The Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints.”¹⁸³ But this is a double error, since the name initially used was the Church of Christ. His mistake has been corrected in later editions of *The Kingdom of the Cults*.

Jill Rische is either unable or unwilling to explain any of this, even though *The Maze of Mormonism* was her father’s primary early contribution to anti-Mormonism. Since the 1962 version of *The Maze of Mormonism* is filled with distortions, garbling, confusion, and falsehoods, in addition to being poorly written, it would seem that those who wish to honor the memory of Martin might see it as advantageous to attribute the numerous problems found therein to Reverend Klann.

However, although some of the problems found in the first edition of *The Maze of Mormonism* might be blamed on Klann, the fact is that, whatever his contributions to this book, it eventually appeared under Martin’s name. In addition, Martin had already published “The Growing Menace of Mormonism” and the little booklet entitled *Mormonism*. Nothing indicates that the problems in those two publications can be traced to Klann. And even if Klann was a kind of ghostwriter for *The Maze of Mormonism*, that would not entirely absolve Martin of responsibility for its contents.

**Generating Countercult Slogans**

When I first encountered *The Maze of Mormonism*, I noticed that it was packed with strange slogans and clichés. For example, Martin actually accused Latter-day Saints of having a “counterfeit Jesus,”¹⁸⁴ of worshiping a “Christ” different from “the Christ of the Bible.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸². Ibid.
¹⁸³. Ibid., 28.
¹⁸⁴. Ibid., 112.
¹⁸⁵. Ibid., 111.
He charged that "the Saviour of Mormonism . . . is an entirely different person, as their official publications clearly reveal," and so forth. Three decades later this rhetoric has become the main ideological weapon employed by anti-Mormons in their war against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In the 1950s Martin was busy manipulating the word cult, pouring pejorative content into what was originally a perfectly harmless word. A "cult," in Martin's eyes, was a form of pseudo-Christianity "masquerading" under a thin veneer of Christian language. In the case of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he saw something "false and devilish." Latter-day Saints were for him a people with "another gospel" and a "different Jesus."

Martin claimed to represent what he called "historic Christianity," "the historic Christian faith," "the historic Christian position," "the historic gospel," "the historic Christian doctrine," "the true church of Jesus Christ," as well as the "Christian Church" or "Christian church," which he contrasted to "the Mormon cult."

Though Martin had a powerful influence on anti-Mormonism, not all recent attacks can be traced back to him. Exceptions include such agencies as the Utah Lighthouse Ministry, operated out of Salt Lake City by Sandra and Jerald Tanner. The relationship of the Tanners with Walter Martin is complex. Martin initially seems to have found their work useful. The Tanners, however, soon discovered that Martin was guilty of, among other things, sloppy work. In addition, they were appalled to discover that Martin advanced explanations that were from their perspective either seriously flawed or just plain wrong. The Tanners reject the Spalding-Rigdon explanation for the authorship of the Book of Mormon, while Martin loved this explanation and persisted in advancing it, come what may. When I checked the little bookstore operated by the Tanners, nothing written

186. Ibid., 110.
187. Ibid., 8, 110, 140, 143, 149, 158; 7; 8; 139; 127, 143; 141; cf. 7, 8, 9, 62, 124, 145 with 21, 137, and 140; 10; cf. 130.
188. As late as 1981, Martin seems to have thought highly of the Tanners. See his essay entitled "Mormonism," in Walter Martin's Cult Reference Bible (Santa Ana, Calif.: Vision House, 1981), 44.
by Martin was available for sale. And their Web page, as of May 2000, likewise offers none of his publications. Moreover, the CRI (Martin's old "ministry") does not offer anything by the Tanners for sale. Old quarrels still seem to grind away within the countercult industry.

An additional source of hostility between Martin and the Tanners stems from his willingness to support Ed Decker, who got himself into trouble by claiming that he had been poisoned by LDS or Masonic "agents" when he was touring the United Kingdom.\(^{189}\) Both the Tanners and Wally Tope wrote books showing that Decker was lying about this matter. One indication that Walter Martin supported Decker is found in Decker's comments regarding Martin's death. Decker described Martin as his "good friend," and added that Martin

was one of those rare men who was greater than life. His domain stretched from the opening of God's Word, "In the beginning" right through to that day of Christ's soon return. He strode up and down the great corridor of time defending the faith of our fathers from every attack.\(^{190}\)

Decker also noted that

When attacks came against this ministry, it was Walter [Martin] who stood with us and for us. When I was ill, it was Walter who would call regularly to pray for me. When it came time for commitment, it was Walter who sent his private gift to this ministry every month. It was easy for me to submit this ministry and my own personal walk to a man like him.\(^{191}\)

\(^{189}\) See Wally Tope, "Poisoned at Pizzaland: The Revealing Case of Ed Decker's Arsenic Poisoning" (La Canada Flintridge, Calif.: Frontline Ministries, 1991), and Jerald and Sandra Tanner, "Serious Charges against the Tanners: Are the Tanners Demonized Agents of the Mormon Church?" (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1991), 32-38.

\(^{190}\) These comments appear in the June/July 1989 issue of Ed Decker's Saints Alive Newsletter, p. 1, emphasis in the original.

\(^{191}\) Ibid.
Decker also claimed that Martin’s enemies cursed and reviled him. They dug up every blemish in his life and invented ones they couldn’t find. Yet, Walter never stumbled a half step to even take the time to fight them off. He remained calm in the face of some of the most violent behavior you could imagine.  

Choosing Targets

The contents for *The Kingdom of the Cults* (1997) provide an idea of the range of “cult apologetics” from the perspective of Martin and his many followers and imitators. In addition to a chapter on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *The Kingdom of the Cults* contains chapters devoted to Islam, Buddhism, Scientology, Bahai’ism, various “Eastern Religions,” the Unification Church, several so-called “apocalyptic” movements, the Worldwide Church of God, Seventh-day Adventism, the Theosophical Society, the various so-called “New Age” movements, and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses).

However, Martin only rarely addressed liberal Protestant ideology. Unlike many other countercultists, Martin excluded Roman Catholicism from his list of so-called “cults.” It is not entirely clear why Martin did not go after Roman Catholicism. His reasoning on this issue was not exactly clear (neither were his reasons for including a number of religious traditions under his pejorative label of “cult”). Since he came from a Roman Catholic background, he may have harbored some latent sympathies for Roman Catholicism. Perhaps his decision to avoid a confrontation with Roman Catholics may have been tactical and political, since attacking Catholics on the ground

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192. Ibid., emphasis in the original.
193. Various so-called liberal ideologies have found a home here and there in the mainline Protestant denominations, with the exception of the Southern Baptist Convention, which is currently the largest and most wealthy Protestant faction.
194. For details, see Midgley, “Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture,” 317, 319.
that they are not Christian would have appeared foolish even to some of the more aggressive fundamentalists he courted.

If this was the case, then his political cunning would also explain Martin’s reticence to confront Protestant liberals in the mainline denominations. To claim that many Anglicans, Methodists, and Presbyterians are pagans would obviously not sell even among the crowd that the countercultists both cater to and recruit.

Martin did not start out with Latter-day Saints as his target but began by focusing on the Watchtower Society and the Seventh-day Adventist movement. It was in those controversies that he honed his polemical skills and set out his jargon. When he turned his attention to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he was merely following an established pattern.

Manipulating a Pejorative Label

Martin defined a “cult” as “a group of people gathered about a specific person or person’s misinterpretation of the Bible.” Later he claimed that “cults contain many major deviations from historical Christianity.” He believed that any “major” deviations from his interpretation of the Bible made one a cultist. Of course, Martin had in mind understandings of the Bible currently popular within recent American Protestantism.

Martin further neglected to address the question of how one determines the “historic teachings of the Bible.” He seems to have believed that the Bible simply interprets itself for those involved in his version of Protestantism. He also failed to indicate what constitutes a “major” (versus an acceptable) deviation from the teachings found in the Bible. Instead, he focused on what he described as a “desire to save one’s self apart from biblical revelation,” which desire he attributed to “cultists.” This seems to have been a corollary to his basic

196. Ibid., 18.
197. Martin imagined that his understanding of “historical Christianity” was the norm, and he assumed that there has only been one such interpretation.
definition of the word *cult*. It is these “erroneous doctrines”\(^{199}\) that turn a group into what he called a “cult.”

This helps to explain why Martin wrongly insisted that Latter-day Saints believe in salvation by works wholly apart from divine grace or that they somehow believe that they can save themselves rather than relying on the merits and mercy of Jesus Christ. If he had not falsely accused Latter-day Saints with denying the efficacy of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Martin would have had no justification for attacking the church on this issue.\(^{200}\)

In 1997 a new paragraph was inserted in the first chapter of *The Kingdom of the Cults* where Martin (or his redactors) defined the word *cult*. Some criticisms of “liberal churches” appear in this insertion. This label presumably identifies much of what goes on within the mainline denominations, with the exception of the Southern Baptist Convention. Are Protestant liberals Christian? If not, why did Martin fail to mount an offensive against Protestant liberals as a neopagan cult, since their ideology deviated radically from his narrow understanding of the Bible? Are their deviations not “major”?

In this new paragraph Gretchen Passantino, a longtime associate and editor for Martin, claimed that “pantheism, polytheism, goddess worship, new ageism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and agnosticism”\(^{201}\) are mighty manifestations of dangerous and attractive cultic movements threatening what she called “the American Christian church.”\(^{202}\) These would seem to fit within the category of “erroneous doctrines”\(^{203}\) about which Martin was anxious to complain. Please note, however, that none of these qualify as deviations from Christianity—Hinduism, Buddhism, and agnosticism seem not to be Christian in any sense. And why does Martin leave out Judaism? Would not the different manifestations of Judaism be examples of cultism from Martin’s perspective?

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199. Ibid., 22.
201. Ibid., 22.
202. Ibid.
203. Ibid.
Many of the movements presented in *The Kingdom of the Cults* never claimed to be Christian or dependent on the Bible for their understandings of divine things. Earlier editions of *The Kingdom of the Cults* had a chapter on the Rosicrucian Fellowship, which also does not fit Martin's definition of a "cult" as a deviation from "historic Christianity."

Checking some of Martin's earliest writings, I noticed that he defined the word *cult* as follows: "By *cultism* we mean the adherence to doctrines which are pointedly contradictory to orthodox Christianity and which yet claim the distinction of tracing their origin to orthodox sources." Then he added that cultism is "any major deviation from historical orthodox Christianity." This is essentially repeated in the most recent edition of *The Kingdom of the Cults*.

It appears that Martin always defined a "cult" (or "cultism") as a major deviation from historic Christianity by people who trace their origin to Christian sources. If this is true, why then did he attack Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and the Rosicrucian movement, since they have never claimed to be Christian nor have they traced "their origin to orthodox sources"?

Neither consistency nor coherence were among Martin's strong points. He was not a scholar or academic; he did no serious research, and he published no scholarly papers. He focused instead on rabble-rousing, on demagogic attacks on the faith of others. And this he did before admiring crowds of people who already hated those he was attacking and who had come in anticipation of hearing him blast away at those already identified as enemies. Therefore, his books, tracts, and tapes were simply a way to profit and feed from that enmity.

Right from the beginning, Martin played fast and loose with his self-serving definition of the word *cult*. For him it was merely part of the rhetorical arsenal with which he could condemn another's faith. What he did not seem to realize is that the word *cult* in its various forms originally identified merely the manner of worship of any

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205. Ibid., 12.
believers. Hence Jews had a cult and the early Christians had their cult, just as Martin had his. How did he justify manipulating the meaning of the word cult into something so novel and obviously un-biblical? The fact is that he never did attempt to justify his definition of the word nor to account for his constant deviations from his own definition.207

Maturity and Moderation?

When Martin began his anti-Mormon career, he loved to aim sarcastic remarks at LDS leaders. For example, he referred to “David O. McKay, present grand Mogul of Mormondom.”208 This might be expected from a spellbinding preacher intent on presenting “startling facts” and warning Christians of the “alarming spread and popularity” of the Mormon “menace.”209

Is it possible, however, that Martin’s behavior and views mellowed and moderated as he grew older, gained some experience, and consulted some additional literature? Is there evidence that he or his assistants tried to consult the most recent “scholarship” on Mormon things in order to correct the most glaring and obvious mistakes in his anti-Mormon essays? Although some updating took place, at least some of what was added to Martin’s initial anti-Mormon essay, presumably in an effort to bolster his attacks, was false, embarrassing, and later jettisoned. For example, the following passage appeared in a revised edition of one of his essays: “The Book of Abraham has now been branded ‘an insult to the intelligence of the scientific community’ by top Mormon Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson.”210 “Dr.” Nelson, it turned out, was a phony. And Martin’s supporters are now very

207. Perhaps Martin meant by “cult” something like heresy. If that is the case, why then did he employ an unbiblical notion of heresy? A heresy originally identified a party or faction such as those who tended to follow the apostle Paul rather than one of the other disciples of Jesus. And it did not necessarily identify a false teaching.


anxious to distinguish "Dr." Martin's academic credentials from those of "Dr." Nelson, who they admit purchased his degree from a diploma mill.\footnote{211} But there was a time when "Dr." Martin cited with approval the opinions of "Dr." Nelson.

Martin's anti-Mormon essays all seem to have grown out of one original item. Even when expanded, modified, corrected, and updated, his writings essentially stay the same (or become worse). But there is one essay that seems to have been written without an obvious dependence upon some earlier version of Martin's anti-Mormon essays. It is a brief essay entitled "Mormonism" that was appended in 1981 to something called \textit{Walter Martin's Cult Reference Bible}.

Martin began by claiming that Mormonism is "an elaborate system of doctrine which is fundamentally opposed to historic Christianity."\footnote{212} This is merely a different way of stating the premise with which Martin always started. Then he claimed that "the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon) has emerged as the major cult superpower of the Twentieth Century."\footnote{213} This is a new bit of sensationalism and does not indicate a toning down of Martin's rhetoric. When referring to the LDS "missionary force," he added the adjective "well-regimented," presumably to milk the military metaphor, and remarked that "it is backed by the church's huge financial empire."\footnote{214} His choice of words does not indicate that the doctoral degree he purchased had modified his diction or turned him into a scholar.

What is conspicuous by its absence is any mention of the Spalding theory. What takes its place is the notion that the Book of Mormon does not contain all of what Latter-day Saints believe (but who ever said that it did?). Martin even seems willing to grant that the church was "originally only a modest modification of Christianity." The entire sentence deserves to be quoted:

\begin{quote}
\footnote{211}{See the CRI Web site www.equip.org/free/DM100.htm or the RIN Web site, waltermartin.org/degree.html.}
\footnote{212}{"Mormonism," 43.}
\footnote{213}{Ibid.}
\footnote{214}{Ibid.}
\end{quote}
The church which sprang from Joseph Smith’s originally modest modification of Christianity has come to revere him above Christ and regards all other churches as apostate and their pastors as hirelings of Satan, despite the Mormons’ outward friendliness.\textsuperscript{215}

There is no hint of maturity or moderation in these remarks. To assert that Latter-day Saints “revere” Joseph Smith above Jesus Christ, a charge not appearing previously in Martin’s essays, is offensive and false. In an additional embellishment, Martin seemed willing to grant that what Joseph Smith initially taught was essentially orthodox Christianity—only a “modest modification of Christianity.” Now, “nearly all of Mormon doctrine, it seems, deviates significantly from orthodox Christianity, but it was not always so.”\textsuperscript{216} But this remark set the stage for his criticisms about “the declarations of its ‘living prophets.’”\textsuperscript{217}

In 1981 Martin was still anxious to brush aside the Book of Mormon, but this time on the grounds that its “main usefulness today is in gaining converts to the LDS religion.”\textsuperscript{218} He also claimed that Latter-day Saints come to know that the Book of Mormon is true on the basis of what he called “a mystical feeling that it might be.”\textsuperscript{219} This prompted the declaration that “it is tragic that so many people are led eternally astray because of a feeling about a book!”\textsuperscript{220} In a similar vein, could it not be said that it is tragic that so many people are led astray by some primitive emotional “feeling” that their seats are locked up in heaven? The other fellow’s convictions are easily reduced to mere empty emotions or vague “feelings” in the sarcasm of his enemies.

Martin was still disparaging the Latter-day Saints in 1981 because he was sure they were caught in a heresy in which “consistent
efforts and good works" are required (a notion presumably not shared by Martin). Are we to assume that Martin believed that one only needs to hold the right theology and have a primitive experience or a "feeling" in order to be saved? Martin objects in a slightly more sophisticated, if not sophisticated, way by insisting that "the Mormon Jesus’ death on the cross did not pay for our personal sins; rather his suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane atoned for Adam’s sin and provided for the resurrection of all, even the worst of mankind." 221

Martin had actually made a slight shift—in 1981 he was willing for the first time to grant that "Mormonism teaches that one receives a remission of sins at baptism" in contrast to his earlier claim that the Saints believe that the atonement merely secures a universal resurrection. He further claimed in 1981 that after baptism "one is on one’s own from that time forward and that one’s faithfulness in keeping not only all biblical commandments, but Mormon as well, determines one’s eternal destiny." 222 Martin’s fundamental accusation is thus that Latter-day Saints place a "pervasive emphasis on works" and that this "makes the biblical concept of grace of no effect." 223 This seems to imply that Martin placed no emphasis on repentance and keeping the commandments.

I doubt that Martin would have openly taught that keeping God’s commandments is not necessary. I suspect that he believed that deeds or works—repentance and keeping the commandments—are not sufficient for salvation. If this was his position, then he believed something very much like what Latter-day Saints believe. He would probably have said that good deeds (or works) are a necessary consequence of genuine faith and are also the fruit of the Holy Spirit. But then again he might not have placed all that much stress on keeping the commandments, repenting, and enduring to the end. His understanding of the Bible might have led him into some extreme antinomian stance—that is, he may not have believed that God’s commandments should govern the lives of believers. But I doubt it.

221. Ibid., 48.
222. Ibid.
223. Ibid., 49.
The reason Martin constantly distorted what Latter-day Saints believe is that he was merely following a pat little formula that demanded that he assume that what Latter-day Saints believe is a different gospel and that they have a different Jesus, follow false prophets, serve a false Christ, and hence deny the necessity of divine mercy and believe that they can save themselves. Ultimately, he claimed that "Mormonism's works-righteousness plan of salvation makes sanctification a matter of individual effort and magnifies the pride of man." Finally, Martin's mode of argument did not improve materially over the years. As late as 1983 he was still involved in clumsy proof texting. For example, he asserted that "the Holy Bible, [is] God's original and perfect revelation to mankind (Heb. 1:1)." The scriptural reference at the end of this passage appears to support his assertion, but nothing in this verse addresses the claim that he made. First, whoever wrote Hebrews did not know of the Bible as we now have it. The New Testament did not come into existence until much later. In addition, the author of Hebrews was not referring even to the Old Testament as such. The passage reads as follows: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets" (Hebrews 1:1 NRSV). Even if we add the next verse to complete the thought, we find no support for Martin's assertion. Hence the following: "but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds" (Hebrews 1:2 NRSV). Such clumsy, pointless proof texting by Martin is common in his anti-Mormon essays.

Martin never seems to have moderated his rhetoric and never matured; he certainly never became a serious scholar. After having read everything Martin wrote about my faith, I must admit to finding it all very annoying and dreadfully boring. It is particularly

224. See ibid., 50, for Martin's pat little formula.
225. Ibid.
227. The constant upgrading by Martin's associates of his anti-Mormon essays, as I have shown, has not materially improved them.
irritating to have him constantly telling me what I believe, since he obviously did not know what he was talking about when he pontificated on the Mormon past and the Book of Mormon. Walter Martin does not seem to have been genuinely interested in the truth.
The thesis and purpose of *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith Jr. and the Dissociated Mind*, by William D. Morain, M.D., is fairly summarized in its title. Those well-versed in the issues and terminology of clinical psychology and related therapeutic fields, given the title, could deduce the substance of the book. It is an attempt to read the life of Joseph Smith and his work as the result of severe psychopathology produced by childhood trauma and Joseph’s subsequent unsatisfactory psychosexual development. Taken on its own terms, this work is a fairly typical example of psychohistory from a very traditional psychoanalytic (Freudian) perspective. While it fits in well with similar works of psychohistory on notable historical figures (for example, Adorno’s famous study of the “authoritarian personality”1 as an account of Fascism), the book seems to me a bit less sophisticated, not anchored by careful historical research, and more expressive of the personal motives and perspectives of the author (Morain) than one might wish in such ventures into postmortem psychoanalysis.

The fundamental thesis of the book is that the trauma produced by the intense physical pain Joseph Smith experienced during three surgeries (performed without the benefit of anesthesia) on the bone of his lower leg, coupled with the unhappy coincidence that the trauma occurred during the time he would normally be in the throes of intense Oedipal conflict (lusting after his mother and fearing castration from his father), produced in Joseph a powerful and recurring dissociative disorder (a splitting, of sorts, of the psyche from reality). Further, Joseph continued to live out an acute unresolved Oedipal situation, leading to a series of problems in his life centered around sexuality, neurotic guilt, father figures, and an inflated sense of his own importance and mission. Morain also contends that Joseph suffered throughout his life from unconscious fears relating to blood, dismemberment, and sharp instruments—thus the title of the book.

The author relies on three main qualifications in defense of his thesis concerning Joseph Smith and the origins of Mormonism. First, Dr. Morain is a retired plastic surgeon with over two decades of experience, including surgery with young children. Second, during his medical training, Dr. Morain received some training in psychiatry at Harvard University. Finally, Morain draws upon what he describes as his own “mystical childhood world” (p. xix), as he was reared within the tradition of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. By his own account, he has had little contact with the church for over twenty-five years; however, the experiences of Morain’s youth played a role in his attention to the life of Joseph Smith and the production of this book: “A connection between my mystical childhood world and my current profession was intriguing” (p. xix).

The author’s assessment that his own religious upbringing was in some quintessential way “mystical” betrays a bias rendered abundantly clear throughout the text—that the religious is fundamentally mystical and that all mysticism belongs together as a class of phenomena contrasting to the more secular and scientific, and therefore more accurate, view of reality. That one could take this hardheaded analytical position and, at the same time, invoke psychoanalysis as an analytical framework is the source of some considerable irony, since
psychoanalysis, of all scholarly and secular explanations for human behavior, must surely rank among the most "mystical" and least supported by empirical data or sharp analytical reasoning and research. Any reader of The Sword of Laban would be wise to keep this fact in mind. What is and is not hardheaded analytical thinking is still a matter of debate in scholarly social scientific circles, particularly in regard to questions of the secular versus the religious. Thus I will first turn to an evaluation of the psychology underlying Morain's analysis.

I mentioned to a colleague that I was reviewing Morain's book, and as I told him a bit about its thesis, he asked, "Isn't it hard enough to psychoanalyze a living person, let alone a dead one?" The question, although meant to be humorous, is nonetheless important. A principal problem with the sort of psychohistory we are considering here is that the object of analysis is mute, unable to provide details or even to defend him- or herself. This fact has the capacity to unfetter creative minds from the constraints of fact and to eliminate an important source of validation for the story being woven. Thus psychological analysis and creative writing come uncomfortably close. It is worth noting that in the same way Joseph Smith was not able to give responses that would satisfy his critics who would slander him during his lifetime, he is unable to answer those who would analyze him after his death. The intellectual merits of such a posthumous psychoanalysis are not unlike those exemplified in another instance reported to me by a friend who had just come back from a national conference on Shakespeare studies in which a room full of educated colleagues had seriously debated whether Hamlet had a brother.

Morain himself summarizes the intent as well as the supposition guiding his study of Joseph Smith: "Religious themes may be dialectically reduced to projections of early parental relationships, childhood sexuality, and the confrontation with death" (p. xxv). Although the author maintains that such a rendering of religion "cannot take away the impact that these themes have through their universal appeal" (p. xxv) to the religious person, particularly to one with a strong personal testimony, the rendering of the sacred in terms of the secular results in the destruction of the sacred and of faith itself. As Maurice
Merleau-Ponty once argued against the extreme subjectivity of the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre over the question of human freedom, it matters whether the slave really is free. It matters whether Joseph Smith talked with God, whether he had golden plates, whether Peter, James, and John really conveyed authority to him. At its very best, the analysis presented in Morain’s book secularizes and thus privatizes religion, making it a matter of universal symbols of unknown or mystical origin. At its worst, the analysis has the potential to sow the seeds of faithlessness.

The psychology employed by Morain in analyzing the life of Joseph Smith is a fairly traditional brand of heavily Freudian psychoanalysis, augmented by the more recent work of a number of psychoanalytically oriented scholars on the effects of trauma on children. This traditionalist version of psychoanalysis, giving Freud himself a fairly literalist reading, is by no means at the cutting edge of psychological theorizing. Even psychoanalytical theorists have, for at least the past four or five decades, deemphasized the literalist reading of Freud and adopted a metaphorical one, a reading in which the development of meaning, language, and identity supplant sexuality as the prime mover and the master motive of human action.

Views of the unconscious have undergone evolution. Morain’s analysis of Joseph Smith and the origins of Mormonism requires accepting the existence of an extremely creative, powerful, and tortured unconscious mind. Such a view of the unconscious is problematic because it serves as a “guardian angel” of psychoanalytic explanations. If something needs to be explained (such as a claim to revelation) in the face of no confirming evidence in a person’s outward conversations (no objective history of unusual behaviors by Joseph), it can be explained as originating in the unconscious (dissociative disorders). Since the unconscious is unavailable to outside observers (especially the unconscious of dead persons), and even to the person him- or herself, no amount of hard evidence can be mustered in refutation of the psychoanalyst’s explanation. For this reason, treatments such as Morain’s are difficult to rebut. They must simply be classified as what they are—creative accounts in which secular psychology subsumes persons, their experiences, and the possibility of the reality of the divine.
More specifically, Morain's analysis of Joseph Smith's life and work is unsatisfactory from a scholarly perspective. In the first place, Morain's entire thesis rests on the assumption that there is the sort of unconscious mind Freud described and others have written about. However, in contemporary philosophical psychology circles, this assumption is very much in question. At one level, the unconscious is a most mundane phenomenon. We seldom bother to be consciously aware of everything we do and why. To do so would be very disorienting (e.g., consciously moving the tongue to make every phoneme as we speak). This is hardly the kind of unconscious mind offered as the grounding of Joseph Smith's life and the founding of Mormonism. That there is a more sophisticated unconscious mind capable of the very sophisticated things Morain suggests is, at this point, a matter of faith, not fact. Nonetheless, in the best psychoanalytic style, Morain not only assumes such an unconscious mind but follows the common (and often criticized) psychoanalytic move of using the absence of a behavior as hard evidence for the unconscious origins of that very behavior. For example, on page 33, Morain suggests that the fact that Joseph never went into detail about the horror and trauma of his leg surgery is positive evidence that the trauma and horror were real and that he had put them into the unconscious mind in an act of dissociation. The logic of the committed psychoanalytic thinker is such that his analysis is irrefutable by any standard of analysis except his own, since what one does and what one does not do take the analyst to precisely the same conclusion.

An irony is inherent in scholarly treatments of the life of Joseph Smith and the founding of Mormonism. Morain's scholarly treatment is different from some in that he extends his analysis to include an explanation for Joseph's actions and the unique doctrines of the church. However, it should be noted that the fundamental logic employed in such critical scholarly treatments as Morain's is precisely the same as the logic employed in historical treatments that are offered in defense of Joseph's character and work. Scholars not enamored of the church and the message of the restoration will reject such "faithful" histories as being without logical grounds. They ask what evidence might exist that any of the supernatural events Joseph reports ever occurred, or that he was indeed a prophet. The defender of the
faith might respond by referring to Joseph's life and works and their fruits. To the skeptic this is circular reasoning: How do we know he was a prophet? Look at what he did. And how was he able to do that? Because he was a prophet. Morain's argument is no different in its essence. The defender of the church might ask: How do you know Joseph had a dissociative disorder and his work was simply a manifestation of pathology? Look at what he did. And why did he do those things and act that way? Because he had a dissociative disorder. One should not be too impressed with arguments and histories that merely seem to seize the higher logical ground. Morain's book is one of those.

Finally, as a psychologist, I have always had difficulty making conceptual sense of explanations based on lost or repressed memories of severe traumas and privations. Even granting that such things happen occasionally, that they can explain the life of Joseph Smith and the roots of Mormonism itself seems distinctly implausible. Morain claims that the most prominent factors in Joseph's life that brought about the dissociative disorder that produced Mormonism are physical trauma, a universal Oedipal conflict, poverty, and the death of a beloved sibling. If these factors are seen as the causal foundations of Mormonism, we might expect prophets (almost one from each family), books of scripture, and churches with the staying power of Mormonism to have sprung up everywhere, since the Oedipal conflict is ubiquitous, and poverty, physical traumas of various sorts, and loss of siblings were nearly universal facts of early nineteenth-century American life. The holocaust in the twentieth century should have produced thousands of similarly spiritually rich and successful movements. Of course the defense would be that Joseph was unique and that the account of the rise of Mormonism in psychoanalytical terms is exclusive to Joseph. However, universal phenomena make very poor explanations of unique events. Morain offers no explanation for Joseph's uniqueness, merely claiming, albeit implicitly, that he was one of a kind. This failure to explain then leaves the reader to wonder whether Joseph's singularity lies in the world of facts or merely in the creative tale that Morain weaves.
Morain spends a good deal of time uncovering symbols in the Book of Mormon. Finding symbols of father-son rivalry and warfare and dismemberment, and even looking for phallic symbols, is a pastime that has occupied dedicated scholars for many years. Precisely because psychoanalysis takes itself to be a universal explanation, the list of possible symbols that can represent the meanings of life as understood psychoanalytically must be very long indeed. Any story that really did take place during the time frame of the Book of Mormon, or that was written as if it did, is very likely to have many swords, towers, and much violence in it. Those were violent times. It would be difficult to write an account of our own times without similar symbols. In my judgment, Morain's use of symbols again is a testimony to the creativity of psychoanalytically trained writers, rather like the well-known "hammer principle." When you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Any reader of The Sword of Laban should be mindful of another of its claims. Morain seems to suggest (see p. xxiii) that his book is a history. If so, it is not a good one. And it is in this regard that the author's motives are most obviously in question. He reports that histories of Joseph Smith are polarized—from the faithful to the critical. He makes no attempt, however, to review or include much at all of the faithful history. Indeed, Morain both criticizes (when, in Morain's judgment, it is too faithful) and praises (when it seems to supports his analysis) one of his major faithful sources, Lucy Mack Smith's history. For the bulk of his "history" Morain relies on the standard exposes from Fawn Brodie, D. Michael Quinn, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, and the venerable E. D. Howe. He includes affidavits and recollections from a number of early apostates and critics.

5. E. D. Howe, Mormonism Unveiled (Painesville, Ohio: by the author, 1834).
For LDS readers familiar with the anti-Mormon genre, this book presents nothing new. For those unfamiliar with anti-Mormon arguments and claims, this book presents some of the most common and most unfortunate in an uncritical fashion. It might be well for the reader to review Hugh Nibley’s analysis of the commonalities among this genre of work critical of the church, or some other faithful account, as one undertakes a reading of Morain’s book. Suffice it to say that there is no evidence that Morain attempted to verify or evaluate the “historical” information he cites. But presenting an accurate historical overview was, of course, not the purpose of his book. He seems merely to have found these critical accounts useful to his analysis and purposes. In my mind, Morain’s use of the traditional anti-Mormon literature was overkill. In fact, it compromises Morain’s avowed scholarly motives and purposes. Add to this Morain’s public exposure of part of the temple ceremony and our beliefs about the temple garment, and most LDS readers will feel uncomfortable, suspecting that beyond any scholarly motive, Morain seems intent on working out his own misgivings and feelings about his “mystical” RLDS upbringing.

In summary, The Sword of Laban is not a compelling scholarly work. It is not an important contribution to the social sciences based on the level of its psychological or psychiatric merits. It will have interest in this arena to a small cadre of already converted psychoanalytically oriented psychohistorians. Nor is the book a contribution to Mormon studies. It breaks no new ground, choosing, rather, to resurrect and present uncritically all the old anti-Mormon material. It is quite simply an attempt to subsume the spiritual by means of an intellectually self-conscious naturalism that seems reassuring to Morain alone. In regard to the Book of Mormon in particular, Morain’s conclusion at once falls flat and reveals the underlying naturalistic perspective that seems to have motivated the work from the beginning: The Book of Mormon is “probably no more nor less fic-

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tional than such Old Testament books as Genesis or Ruth. . . . It is 'valid,' however, as one person's metaphorical expression of the themes of guilt, punishment, redemption, grief, and the ambivalent relationship of man to 'father' and 'brother'” (p. 126). In response to Morain’s assessment, I am drawn to Hugh Nibley’s observation that the simplest and least convoluted explanation of the Book of Mormon is that it is what it claims to be.7 On grounds of logic as well as faith, Nibley’s explanation rises above Morain’s.

FOR GREATER LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING: THREE GUIDES FOR THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

Keith H. Lane

Since the ministries of President Spencer W. Kimball and President Ezra Taft Benson, Latter-day Saints have been admonished to give more serious attention to scriptures and scripture study than has been given before. The church in general has been responsive to that counsel. One can see greater emphasis given to the scriptures in our meetings, in LDS publications, and in the numbers of those who are studying the scriptures individually and in families. The three books under review here are designed to encourage this important activity and to help improve the quality of scripture study. Though all are successful in these efforts, each book has a particular emphasis that will make it most useful in specific situations. I will not attempt to show all the suggested techniques and principles taught in these books but to give the reader a general sense of the strengths, spirit,


and direction of each book, along with my own suggestions of who might profit most by which book.

Elder Gene R. Cook's *Searching the Scriptures: Bringing Power to Your Personal and Family Study* reveals his deep love for the scriptures and his intense desire that we study them more diligently. The spirit of this book is perhaps best captured at the end of a short section in which Cook speaks about what the scriptures are not (they aren't merely history, a reference volume, something used primarily in crises): "They are not to be read simply in response to feelings of guilt or just because you know you ought to. They are to be read because you love the Lord, because you love his words of truth and counsel, and because you love to grow closer to him" (p. 27). The essence of this book is its fervent testimony that we can and must use the scriptures "as a tool to help us hear the voice of the Lord"—a blessing that comes only through sincere effort (p. xi).

Cook's book is divided into three sections, with several chapters in each section. The first part, "The Purpose of the Scriptures: The Power and Blessing of the Lord's Word," seeks to show why the scriptures are important and to motivate readers to give more serious, heartfelt attention to them. It contains stories, both personal stories from Cook himself and accounts of others and their involvement with and love of the scriptures.

The second part, "Personal Study: A Key to Revelation and Peace," gives suggestions for getting more out of scripture reading. Among other things, Cook gives advice for hearing the voice of the Lord in the scriptures, pondering and asking questions, and finding patterns and personal applications in what one reads. He also provides suggestions for making one's reading a richer experience. For instance, under the category of patterns, he shows the pattern of reversal of meaning—that is to say, we see some of the meaning in the scriptures by noting what is not there, or we see the truth by noting its opposite. "When we note the absence of a word or concept in the scriptures, and then try to discover the meaning of its absence (or reverse meaning), we can learn as much as we can about things that are there" (pp. 77-78). Cook gives a number of examples, such as the term free agency, the word leadership, and so on (terms that seem im-
important to many but which are not in the scriptures). The crucial thing to note, then, is which terms do occur in the scriptures and what the absence of the other terms might mean (i.e., free agency doesn’t occur, but agency and moral agency do). Asking these questions and searching for such answers can open up the meaning of the scriptures more fully.

The third part, “Blessing Your Family with the Word of the Lord,” gives testimonials, examples, encouragement, and advice for implementing scripture study in families. For those needing motivation to read in families, this section gives counsel and witness as to why family study is needed. This section also gives ideas for starting scripture study in families, making family study a good experience for all, and avoiding some of the natural difficulties involved in getting a family together to read and enjoy the scriptures. Cook deals head-on with such issues as time, motivation, differences in age and interests, and logistical challenges. He is rightly firm in insisting that we do all we can to have family scripture study and is practical in how a family might succeed in this effort. He asks parents to give children some responsibility in making the scripture study successful, but also adds that “we need to make sure it’s good enough that they will want to be there” (p. 180).

What is distinct about Cook’s book are the numerous stories from church history and the testimonials of everyday, rank-and-file members, as well as Cook’s personal experiences. While the other two books have some narrative events and testimony, Cook’s book is replete with them and in this area is distinct from the other two. This means that this book would be the best one for those who desire motivation to study the scriptures. Cook’s book also deals at greater length with family scripture study than the other two books and consequently may be of more help in this regard.

Elder Jay E. Jensen’s Treasure Up the Word is written by one who has spent many years studying the scriptures and teaching them in church settings (including the Church Educational System). The wisdom and insights of these years show. The book has thirteen chapters that focus on helpful techniques and principles such as definitions, lists, and homilies (inspirational catchphrases), and on uniting truths
between passages of scripture, discovering story parallels, and marking scriptures. As Jensen is careful to point out, "the scripture study and marking techniques in this book are not an end in themselves; rather, they are the means to a far greater end," contributing to "the Father's work and glory, and support[ing] the mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (p. xi).

Jensen's suggestions are genuinely helpful in that they give good advice as well as necessary cautions about pitfalls. For instance, in the chapter about marking scriptures, he advises that we mark in order to facilitate recall, teaching, and learning (pp. 34–35), also noting that our method of scripture study largely determines our method of marking. These sound ideas are coupled with this equally sound observation: "Indiscriminate marking or shading entire columns and chapters may be no better than leaving them unmarked" (p. 33). Without being overly prescriptive, Jensen suggests simple but helpful ways to go about marking scriptures.

Another strength of Jensen's book is that his techniques help to bring out more clearly what is actually in the scriptures (rather than what we think is or ought to be there). This can be seen, for example, in his chapter on lists. Asserting that finding lists moves one from merely reading to studying the scriptures (and again reminding us that "lists are not an end but rather a means to an end" [p. 59]), Jensen shows how one finds and numbers such lists in the scriptures. In Doctrine and Covenants 19:18, Jensen finds the following list (and sublist) regarding the Savior's suffering during the atonement: "Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, (1) to tremble because of pain, and (2) to bleed at every pore, and (3) to suffer both (a) body and (b) spirit" (p. 58). Such lists help us study more closely and see more clearly what the verses at hand contain. And what is significant is that a person making these lists focuses on what is in the passage itself rather than being influenced by a preconceived list into which everything is then packaged. Such a technique is very helpful in bringing out what is found in a passage and can be used as an excellent aid in teaching in a way that keeps all in-
volved focused on the scriptures, scriptural language, and scriptural concepts.

Readers will also be helped greatly by the chapter “Story Parallels,” which provides a clear way of taking stories from the scriptures and, in Nephi’s phrase, likening them unto ourselves (see 1 Nephi 19:23). Jensen does a commendable job of taking a story bit by bit and showing ways that the story parallels events in our own life—even when context and culture may be millennia away.

The chapter on visualizing the scriptures gives advice about drawing or diagramming concepts, principles, or stories found in the scriptures. While I did not find the chapter helpful to me personally, simply because I am not much of a visual learner, I can see that such suggestions would be helpful to many and especially helpful to those who teach and who want to reach all sorts of students. And it is in this area (teaching) where I think Jensen’s book is most helpful. Anyone could benefit by reading and following the suggestions in this book, but to me its greatest strength is that these techniques can also be extremely helpful in teaching the scriptures in class or group scripture study.

Latter-day Saints are fairly faithful at reading scriptures, claims James E. Faulconer, but may need help studying them. Indeed, the spirit of Professor Faulconer’s Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions is captured in the description of his recommended method of scripture study: close reading. Faulconer recommends a rigorous method of scripture study that asks (1) that we remember that “the words and sentences of the scriptures are the source of divine truth” and that “the scriptures are not just about the truths of God. They are not simply descriptions of those truths or directions for using them. With continuing revelation, they are the very source of those truths, and they are the standard by which we judge personal revelation” (pp. 10–11). Another related aspect of this method is (2) that we should assume “that the scriptures mean exactly what they say and, more important, assume that we do not already know what they say” (p. 11). This helps prevent the error of supplanting what the scriptures
actually say with our own ideas. Similarly, the method asks (3) that we generally concentrate on questions about the text in front of us rather than focusing on particular doctrines. There are clearly times when doctrinal questions are valuable, but “when we start our study with doctrinal questions, we often have difficulty getting beyond what we think we already know—difficulty learning from the scriptures” (p. 11).

The first chapter explains differing ways of studying scripture, argues for “close reading,” and sets the framework for the rest of the book. The following chapters concentrate on the specific suggestions and tools for close reading. Chapter 2, “Outlining,” recommends a few ways of outlining what one reads in order to gain an overview. Chapter 3 contains important suggestions about asking detailed questions of a scriptural passage. Chapters 4 through 7 deal with using the LDS edition of the scriptures, cross-referencing (particularly learning from the differences in the use of similar words or phrases), using English historical dictionaries to understand the history and various meanings a word or phrase might have had, and doing research with Hebrew and Greek lexicons (and other similar aids) for those who do not know these languages. Chapter 8 guides one on parsing sentences of scripture for greater understanding, and chapters 9 and 10 give recommendations for understanding the rhetorical aspects and context of the passage being read. In addition, chapter 11 includes sample study notes (from Moroni 4) and chapter 12 gives welcome advice about one way to write a talk centered on a passage of scripture. At the end of the book are two appendixes: “Scripture and History” and “Hebrew versus Greek Thinking” (both short but stimulating essays).

Rather than say more about the specific suggestions given in each chapter, I will show what Faulconer intends with his suggestion to “read closely” by referring to the sample questions given in chapter 3, “Asking Questions.” Faulconer first recommends asking the following kinds of questions for any passage one reads: “What does this word mean? Why did the writer say this rather than that? Why did he put things in this particular order?” (p. 25). These questions will help us pay attention to the details of a text, but they “are useful only insofar
as they help us hear the questions that the Lord puts to each of us through the scriptures and his prophets” (p. 27). The chapter then takes Genesis 22 (the story of the binding of Isaac) and asks careful questions about the details of each verse, its relation to the other verses in the chapter, and their relation to the book of Genesis and to other books of scripture. Of verse 2 alone, Faulconer asks these questions:

Why is Isaac said to be Abraham’s only son? What about Ishmael? Similarly, why is the Savior said to be the Father’s only Son (see D&C 20:21)? Are we not also children of our Father in Heaven? Does considering this question as it applies to Abraham help us understand the question as it applies to Heavenly Father? Why does the Lord refer to what Abraham must do as a burnt offering? Is it significant that the word sacrifice is not used in this chapter? Why does the Lord not tell Abraham which mountain he is to go to? Why wait to tell him? (p. 28)

These are questions drawn from concentrating on the verse, and they flow from attention to detail. When combined with many such questions from the other verses, one has a genuine, extended, and meaningful interaction with the passage of scripture. Such detailed questions help us focus on and find meaning from the text itself, not from some broad philosophical scheme. Some might be surprised that Faulconer (a philosopher) recommends against “moving immediately to the broad ‘philosophical’ questions.” He explains at least one reason for this recommendation: “I may not yet really understand the scriptures, [and] my response to those broad questions will be what I already know or what others say in response to those questions most of the time” (p. 27). When we turn too readily to such questions, Faulconer warns, we risk mixing what is generally assumed to be true (the philosophies of men) with scripture, rather than letting the scriptures teach us.

The tools and suggestions are straightforwardly presented and easy to understand. The essays in the appendix, however, take a more philosophical bent, and the reader must exert more careful attention.
Nevertheless, readers should not be deterred, for in these essays Faulconer gives a rationale (mostly indirectly) for reading scripture in the way he recommends in his chapters on tools and suggestions. More important, understanding what is said here will help one better understand the mindset of those who wrote scripture. Faulconer sets forth what history would have meant to them and explains how a narrow, modern view of history may diminish our study and understanding of the scriptures. These essays do a commendable job of taking rather complex ideas and presenting the heart of the matter in understandable prose that does not lose the rigor of careful thought.

*Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* will be well received by anyone serious about studying scripture more effectively, but it is designed in many ways for a slightly more academic audience than invoked in either of the other two books. One who is already reasonably adept at scripture study will benefit most by this book, particularly because it often deals with pitfalls of more consistent readers, not novice readers.

I am glad to have read all three books. No one will be hurt by reading any of them, and good can be found in all, although, as I have indicated in this review, each book has particular strengths that make it most effective for particular persons and particular settings. The main thing is that we get on with the job of reading, studying, and teaching the word of the Lord more consistently and more effectively.
The entries in this section are listed by author, title, reviewer (in parentheses), volume number, and beginning page number.


Deseret Book, GospelLink (William Raventos), 11/1:299.


Infobases, Collector's Library '98 (William Raventos), 11/1:299.

Krajewski, Walter, "Voice from the Dust: A Literary Analysis of the Book of Mormon" (Richard Dilworth Rust), 11/1:1.


By Title

The entries in this section are listed by title, author, reviewer (in parentheses), volume number, and beginning page number.


*Collector's Library '98*, by Infobases (William Raventos), 11/1:299.

*GospelLink*, by Deseret Book (William Raventos), 11/1:299.


*King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,”* edited by John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Keith H. Lane), 11/1:18.


By Reviewer

The entries in this section are listed by reviewer, author, title, volume number, and beginning page number.


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