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A Passion for Faultfinding: The Deconversion of a Former Catholic Priest

Barry R. Bickmore

Review of Inside Mormonism: What Mormons Really Believe (1999), and When Mormons Call: Answering Mormon Missionaries at Your Door (1999), by Isaiah Bennett.
A Passion for Faultfinding:
The Deconversion of
A Former Catholic Priest

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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has always had critics, but when does simple disagreement turn into anti-Mormonism? Isaiah Bennett, a former Catholic priest who resigned his priesthood to join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and then later returned to Roman Catholicism, recently published two anti-Mormon books, *Inside Mormonism* and *When Mormons Call.* Bennett rejects the “anti-Mormon” label, and on its back cover, *Inside Mormonism* is advertised as “a thorough, frank, and charitable investigation of Mormonism.” In the other book, he complains that Latter-day Saints “interpret any criticism of their beliefs as persecution and call anyone who questions their tenets ‘anti-Mormon,’ even if the disapproval is sincere and polite” (WMC, p. 15). This interpretation can,

1. Parenthetically cited as IM and WMC.


Indeed, be found among a few Latter-day Saints, usually those who have little or no experience talking to others about their faith, but the same attitude can also be observed among Catholics and those of other faiths. So as to avoid confusion, let me clarify what I mean by “anti-Mormon.” I personally classify as anti-Mormon those who, in their desire to find fault, resort to dishonest or sloppy methods to make their case against the Latter-day Saints.

This is not to say that Bennett’s work should be classed with the hate literature propagated by some fundamentalist critics. Bennett forgoes some (not all) of the sensationalism but still does not offer a fair presentation. Likewise, only limited evidence suggests dishonesty on Bennett’s part; I do not believe that his books were written in bad faith. However, it is evident that he has uncritically accepted the charges of other anti-Mormon writers. It is also clear that Bennett has an ax to grind with the church. In his zeal to find fault, he paints a distorted picture of Mormonism and its history.

It is especially egregious that such books should be published by Catholic Answers, a prominent Roman Catholic apologetics organization. For years, Catholic Answers has defended Catholicism against the hate-filled anti-Catholic literature often published by fundamentalist critics, some of whom the Latter-day Saints also know very well. However, when the organization turns its attention to the Church of Jesus Christ, its editors publish material that uses the same methods they decry with respect to their own critics. Karl Keating, director and founder of Catholic Answers, writes the following regarding Loraine Boettner’s book, Roman Catholicism, which relies heavily on the testimony of former priests to establish “what Catholics really believe”:

These are the books—written by disaffected ex-Catholics or by people who never have been Catholic but who have made their mark in the world by pushing unadorned bigotry—from which Boettner gets his juiciest information. Relying on them for the straight story on the Catholic Church is like relying on a political candidate to tell you all the good points about his opponent. . . .
Now it may well be that a man leaving one religion for another can write fairly, without bitterness, about the one he left behind . . . . But it stands to reason that most people who suddenly think they have an urge to write about their change of beliefs just want to vent their frustrations or justify their actions. Their books should be read and used with discretion, and they should not be used at all as explanations of the beliefs of their old religion if the books betray the least hint of rancor.  

It is my hope that the reader will apply the same standard when assessing Bennett’s writings.

I will give some general impressions regarding When Mormons Call and Inside Mormonism, and then I will provide evidence that Bennett has consistently used tactics that qualify his work as anti-Mormon. His work, I will show, should not be taken at face value. This treatment will be neither exhaustive nor complete in its particulars. The most pressing issue in my mind is to show that readers can seek better comparative information on the two religions elsewhere.

As Keating writes regarding Boettner’s Roman Catholicism:

There is no room here to discuss each point Boettner brings up—the refutation of a one-sentence charge may take a page, and his tome would require a small library as an adequate reply—but the style of Roman Catholicism can be conveyed, and the reader can see there are serious deficiencies in the book, which forms the basis of the anti-Catholic movement.


3. For example, Steve Clifford and Barry Bickmore, “Who Holds the Keys—Pope or Prophet?” (a debate between me and an ex-Mormon Roman Catholic regarding the apostasy doctrine) at geocities.com/afmjock/rc_dex.html. All Web sites given herein were online as of 14 December 2001. Various issues of the FARMS Review of Books and other publications by Latter-day Saints can also be consulted to counter many of the standard criticisms Bennett brings up.

General Impressions

The purpose of Bennett’s shorter book, *When Mormons Call*, is simple—head the Mormon missionaries off at the pass! “Rather than let them in (especially if they weren’t invited), be polite. Say, ‘Thank you for stopping by (and leaving the tape, book, or whatever). We’re a Catholic family and have no interest in hearing your presentation.’ Then say it again. And again” (*WMC*, p. 14). In case the Catholic reader does invite the missionaries in, the balance of the book is essentially a prep course on how to derail the discussions.

After having studied beforehand a particular topic in this book, stay with it. Don’t let the missionaries give a quick brush-off and change the subject. Remember, they learned in their training course to “build” on each item they present. To deflect them from the pre-arranged flow could unsettle and confuse them. That’s all right. They need to be shaken up and encouraged to think for themselves. (*WMC*, p. 16)

The larger of the two books, *Inside Mormonism*, is composed of five main parts. These include an overview of Latter-day Saint history, with special emphasis on what Bennett perceives as major changes in doctrine and practice; a description of “Mormon life”; and discussions of the great apostasy, LDS theology and anthropology, and LDS revelations and scriptures. This book is riddled with problems, including serious distortions of church history and doctrine. Bennett’s work is heavily dependent on that of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, whom he praises profusely (*IM*, p. 513). The only “caution” Bennett mentions is that “the Tanners are now Fundamentalist Protestants, members of The Christian and Missionary Alliance. Their *sola scriptura* bias occasionally shows up in their analyses.” But much more can and should be said. Bennett does not realize that the Tanners have long been shown to employ faulty historical methods such as out-of-context quoting, questionable use of ellipses, and innuendo. In the analyses that follow, clear instances where Bennett borrowed information from the Tanners (without attribution) and then apparently put little or no effort into checking their interpretations will be examined in detail.
Inside Mormonism does have a few good points, some of which I will mention here. For instance, Bennett shoots holes in some faulty proof texts church members have been known to use. But he also brushes off LDS interpretations that are perfectly sound. Unfortunately, when it is convenient for him, Bennett argues from the assumption that only a literal, historical reading will do, when to take such a stance would disqualify most of the messianic prophecies cited by New Testament writers like Matthew. Prophetic, typological (as opposed to allegorical) interpretation of the scriptures has plenty of precedent in the Roman Catholic (not to mention Jewish) tradition, and it defies the narrow sort of “rules of hermeneutics” fundamentalists like to recommend. In some instances, various Latter-day Saint interpretations of biblical passages could be argued much more strenuously than Bennett allows.

I also enjoyed reading Bennett’s explanations of various Catholic doctrinal stances. I firmly believe that one cannot begin to understand a substantially different religious tradition without looking into the reasons members of that tradition give for their beliefs. Just knowing what they believe is rather useless without understanding the why of it. In fact, Bennett does a fairly good job in some instances of offering reasons for his faith. For instance, I was particularly impressed with some of the arguments he presented for the antiquity of the practice of baptism by affusion (“pouring”) (IM, pp. 212–14). I also liked his lucid explanation of how Catholics view Latter-day Saint ordinances and ordinations (IM, pp. 84–107).

Finally, Bennett does us the service of pointing out instances in which Latter-day Saint authors have used what can be reasonably construed as anti-Catholic propaganda.5 While incidents in Catholic

5. On the other hand, Bennett sometimes seems a bit too ready to take offense. For instance, he quotes President Thomas S. Monson, who asks, “Where and how should we begin [a] search for Jesus?” (IM, p. 216). Elder Monson, then of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, continues, “Some have attempted to answer these questions by turning to idols, others by burning incense or lighting candles. In times past, great thongs journeyed in the crusades of Christianity, feeling that, if only the Holy Land could be secured from the infidel, then Christ would be found in their lives. How mistaken they were. Thousands upon thousands perished. Many others committed heinous crimes in the very
history like the Crusades and the inquisitions can legitimately be used as evidence for apostasy, in my opinion, we should be specific about which aspects make our case, rather than holding the whole up like a talisman to impress the masses. Much misinformation about these events has become a part of popular culture, and it will not do to simply mention them as proof of Catholic apostasy. Likewise, it will not do to uncritically accept the assessment of Protestant or secular critics of Catholicism. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ should recognize better than anyone that this is unwise; indeed, Joseph Smith specifically warned against it. "The old Catholic church traditions are worth more than all you have said. . . . The character of

name of Christianity, [Jesus will not be found by crusades of men" (Thomas S. Monson, Conference Report, October 1965, 142).

Bennett complains that Elder Monson uses a "subtle manipulation of terms" to equate burning incense and lighting candles with idol worship. On the contrary, Elder Monson specifically says that "some" turn to idols, while "others" light candles or burn incense. Is there any question that some people try to substitute religious performances for a true relationship with God? Of course they do, as I'm sure Bennett would admit. And if so, what is so offensive about Elder Monson's statement? Bennett also complains that the Crusades are mischaracterized, but Bennett himself admits that heinous crimes were committed during the Crusades (IM, p. 217). Since Elder Monson did not blame anyone except those who committed the crimes, what is the issue? In fact, Elder Monson's characterization of the attitude of many crusaders is quite accurate. Specifically, the Catholic Church recruited crusaders by granting "crusading indulgences" that amounted not only to a remission of enjoined penance but a full remission of properly confessed sins. For a discussion of crusading indulgences, see Maureen Purcell, Papal Crusading Policy: The Chief Instruments of Papal Crusading Policy and Crusade to the Holy Land from the Final Loss of Jerusalem to the Fall of Acre, 1244–1291 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 36–40. Although the Catholic hierarchy vacillated about whether such a thing could be granted by the church, "ordinary Christians assumed from the first that it meant a remission of all punishment due for sin, an assurance of direct entry into heaven." Jonathan Riley-Smith, What Were the Crusades? (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), 58. In another instance, Bennett claims that the LDS doctrine of the apostasy, as well as other doctrines, "reveal[s] the anti-Catholicism of Smith and the Mormon church" (IM, p. 160). I find it difficult to swallow Bennett's repeated insistence that he is not "anti-Mormon" when he so wantonly throws around the term anti-Catholic.

6. A good example of this is the myth of the Galileo trial (IM, pp. 223–25). In my view, an examination of the evidence surrounding this case reveals that the Catholic Church was remarkably restrained.
the old churches [has] always been slandered by all apostates since
the world began.”

**Anti-Mormon Tactics**

Although Bennett appears to exhibit some restraint in his tone,
he often lets loose with unfair characterizations, unkind remarks,
and unsupported assertions. Combine these with clear instances,
whether intentional or not, in which he has distorted the truth to
make his case against Mormonism, and what we end up with are a
couple of anti-Mormon books. Whatever their good points, these
books should be an embarrassment to Catholic Answers.

**Imputing Sinister Motives**

A favorite tactic among anti-Mormon writers is to impute sinis-
ter motives to everything the Latter-day Saints do. Such writers may
employ this approach because readers tend to be much more recep-
tive to charges against people for whom they have bad feelings, and if
bad feelings can be cultivated against the Saints, the rest of the anti-
Mormon propaganda goes down much more smoothly. For instance,
Bennett writes, “If you’ve ever felt ‘pestered’ by a Mormon acquain-
tance, realize that he is simply working out his ultimate godhood
by trying to lengthen the membership rolls of his church” (WMC,
p. 104). When the missionaries are taught to “build relationships of
trust” with investigators, Bennett supplies his interpretation of this
phrase: “[The missionaries are] told something like: ‘Get to know
your target, get him to like and trust you. Talk about your own family
and feelings. Then gradually introduce the pre-selected and pre-
packaged message you were taught in the missionary training pro-
gram” (WMC, p. 105). According to Bennett, we do not really care
about our targets—er, friends; we are, instead, selfish people grasping
at godhood.

Consider also this comment, which is supposed to prepare readers for attending a Latter-day Saint worship service: “Also, be prepared for ‘love bombing.’ The members will welcome you warmly and urge you to return again and again. They’ll sweet-talk you into attending other meetings later in the day or the week. And they’ll coax you to be baptized” (WMC, p. 100). Describing the hypothetical experience of a fictional Catholic who attended an LDS service, he writes, “Though people had been pleasant to him at all of the events, there did at times seem to be something ‘forced’ about their friendliness” (IM, p. 68).

I have been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ all my life, and I can testify that the “love bombing” has never stopped. When I moved into my present home, about twenty people from our congregation, who had never met us, showed up a few hours before Christmas Eve to help us unload our rental truck. One of the members had picked up the keys from our landlord, and others had left food items, a Christmas tree, and logs for the fireplace. Now, if I were a cynical person, I might interpret these gestures as grasping attempts to “earn godhood.” If so, these attempts are not unique to Mormons. On one occasion I was identified as a visitor to mass by a Catholic couple who took my fellow missionary and me out to dinner on the spot. On another occasion a Catholic priest befriended me and took me out to lunch. These were real Christians, and if they held out some hope that they might influence me to one day accept Catholicism, so be it. I love them for it and appreciate their making such an effort on my behalf.

Bennett apparently had no reservations about the genuineness of Latter-day Saint overtures of friendship until he left the church. Before his reconversion to Catholicism, he was a popular speaker at LDS firesides, and in fact his conversion story was taped and distributed by Deseret Book. Consider his comment to an audience in Utah:

Barbara and I know it’s not because of any celebrity status that might have brushed by us. It’s because that’s the way you are. They are a brother or sister in Christ—of course we’re going to fall all over ourselves for them. Of course we
make sacrifices. Of course we treat them with utmost respect and kindness. No big deal, that’s what we do.  

It seems apparent that Isaiah Bennett became embittered toward the Church of Jesus Christ at some point, and now he sees sinister motives behind every action. Which Isaiah Bennett should we believe?

“Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics”—Mormon Morality

Even when an anti-Mormon writer imputes sinister motives to the Latter-day Saints at every opportunity, this may not be convincing to some readers, especially those who have a number of LDS friends. The reader may think very highly of his Latter-day Saint acquaintances, or he may be influenced by the cultural stereotype of Mormons as strictly moral and decent people. To overcome this obstacle, the anti-Mormon writer must do three things. First, he must admit there are a number of really good Latter-day Saint people out there, simultaneously claiming that he does not wish to cast aspersions on their character. “Though they were gravely theologically misled by the organization Joseph Smith started, they were still good people, and many of them had never known anything except Mormonism” (IM, p. 487). Second, he must brush off the wholesome cultural stereotype of Mormons as the result of slick advertising on


9. Another variation on this theme is that it is really the hierarchy of the Church of Jesus Christ that consists of deceitful people. James Akin, Bennett’s editor, writes the following in an afterword to When Mormons Call: “If you are a Mormon reading this, you must cast off the deceptions that have been passed on to you by the Mormon hierarchy” (p. 142). This tactic may appear more credible to some readers whose friends include Latter-day Saints but who know none of the general church leaders. Incidentally, Akin’s afterword is mostly concerned with “Satan’s lie” in Genesis 3:4–5, that Adam and Eve would “be as gods, knowing good and evil,” and with how the church hierarchy is propagating that same lie. Of course, Akin fails to look further on in the chapter, where God says, “the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil” (Genesis 3:22). Obviously, “Satan’s lie” was that Adam and Eve would “not surely die” (Genesis 3:4); but the anti-Mormon cannot afford to miss a chance to link church teachings with Satan, so this is a common charge.
the part of the Church of Jesus Christ. "The Mormon church," according to Bennett, "is being deceptive when it tries to create a pro-family image that suggests Mormon family life is superior to that of average Americans. Despite the slick Mormon television and radio advertisements, the rule of the day should be caveat emptor—let the buyer beware" (IM, p. 141). Finally, he must convince the reader that morality among church members is really only average, at best. Usually this is done by quoting a number of statistics for the state of Utah (the population of which is about 70% LDS) that appear to cast a negative light on the state and therefore on the Church of Jesus Christ. In the examples that follow, I will show how Bennett has portrayed the members of the Church of Jesus Christ in an unfair light.

Bennett states that Utah's divorce rate (4.7 per thousand) is slightly higher than the national average (4.6 per thousand) (IM, p. 149). This statistic does not take into account the fact that Utah has a higher marriage rate as well or that a good share of the people who live in Utah are either not LDS at all or not active in the Mormon faith. The Barna Research Group recently published a study showing that 24% of LDS marriages end in divorce (slightly lower than the national average of 25%), compared to 21% of Catholic and Lutheran marriages, 21% of atheist marriages, 29% of Baptist marriages, 34% of nondenominational Protestant marriages, and 25% of mainline Protestant marriages. Unfortunately, such statistics are often abused when taken out of context, and Isaiah Bennett displays his tendency to disregard context in a chapter of Inside Mormonism entitled "All Is Well?" (pp. 140–55). Latter-day Saint readers will recognize the title as an allusion to the chorus in one of our favorite hymns, "Come, Come, Ye Saints." Bennett opines, "The refrain 'All is well, all is right' is repeated throughout, like a form of divine affirmation of the rectitude of the Mormon church" (IM, p. 140). On the contrary, "Come, Come, Ye Saints" was written by William Clayton in the middle of winter on the Iowa plains just after the Saints had been expelled by mobs from Nauvoo, Illinois, when the only news in which Clayton could rejoice was word that his absent wife was safely delivered of a healthy child. Far from being some fatuous brand of self-affirmation, the hymn is a powerful call to faith during trying times.

also published a study with somewhat different results.\footnote{12} Although their results are less current, the sample sizes were much larger and the data were analyzed more rigorously. Heaton and Goodman found that the fraction of married persons who had ever been divorced was significantly different among different religious traditions and those with no religious preference, with members of the Church of Jesus Christ weighing in with the lowest divorce rate (male Catholics, 19.8%; female Catholics, 23.1%; male liberal Protestants, 24.4%; female liberal Protestants, 30.8%; male conservative Protestants, 27.7%; female conservative Protestants, 30.9%; male Mormons, 14.3%; female Mormons, 18.8%; males professing no religious preference, 39.2%; and females professing no religious preference, 44.7%). Church activity also made a significant difference in all cases. For instance, only 8.5% of Catholic males, 18.1% of Catholic females, 10.2% of Mormon males, and 15.2% of Mormon females who had ever been married and who attended church at least twice a month had been divorced. The Catholic and Mormon divorce rates were the lowest, both overall and among frequent church attenders. However, the differences among denominations were somewhat reduced when education was included as a control factor; members of the Church of Jesus Christ had the highest level of educational attainment. Finally, Heaton and Goodman also found that only 5.4% of Mormon males and 6.5% of Mormon females who had their marriages solemnized in an LDS temple had been divorced.\footnote{13} Plainly, the beliefs of those who faithfully follow LDS teachings significantly affect their attitudes toward divorce.

Even if we assume that the statistics reported by the Barna Research Group are more correct than those of the Heaton and Goodman study and that the divorce rate for Catholics is indeed somewhat lower than that of the Latter-day Saints, more questions remain. For


instance, why would the divorce rate for atheists be the same as that for Catholics? The answer may be related to attitudes toward premarital sex in these groups (as well as such factors as educational attainment). While I have no data for atheists, the Encyclopedia of Mormonism reports that "a greater percentage of Latter-day Saints disapprove of premarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality than any other religious group. . . . 58 percent of the Latter-day Saints said that premarital sex is always wrong, compared with 34 percent of Protestants and 25 percent of Catholics."14 In addition, members of the Church of Jesus Christ tend to marry quite young (a risk factor for divorce),15 and the percentage of LDS cohabitation was reported at half the national norm in 1991.16 Finally, a larger percentage of LDS people over 30 have entered into marriage than those in any other religious group.17 When all these data are taken together, it can be seen that the LDS emphasis on marriage and premarital chastity motivates more Latter-day Saints than others to marry and to do so at a younger age. Those in social groups where these principles are not stressed as much may postpone marriage to an older age (lowering the risk of divorce). Certainly, those who solemnize their marriages in LDS temples have an extremely low divorce rate, but the sphere of influence of the LDS emphasis on marriage extends to those who are not as active in the faith. Such individuals may place a high value on getting married but lack the commitment to make it work. Obviously, complicated and interacting social forces are at work behind the single statistic Bennett cites, and when more data are taken into account, the LDS record on divorce comes out looking not quite so tarnished.

Bennett also cites statistics to show that "while the consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs is low in Utah, the state ranks third in prescription drug expenditures . . . and sixth in over-the-counter drug

abuse treatment admissions for 1992.” He also writes, “As of April 1, 1993, the United States average for all suicides was 12.1 per one-hundred thousand persons. The Utah average was 14” (IM, p. 152). His point is that he believes the high demands their religion places on Latter-day Saints drive many to depression and suicide. However, once again he has not given the whole story, and more questions must be asked.

First, why does Bennett bring up the statistic for prescription drug expenditures? Does the fact that doctors prescribe more medicine in a certain state imply that people are abusing their penicillin? Bennett’s innuendo here is irresponsible.

Second, why would the use of alcohol and illicit drugs be so low in Utah but the abuse of over-the-counter drugs so high? Having lived in Utah as a teenager, I am aware that some children in Utah abuse over-the-counter drugs because they are often more readily available than more traditional drugs like alcohol. In fact, sociologist Stephen Bahr reports that Latter-day Saint teens have a lower incidence of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use compared to teens of other religious groups but are similar to those in all other religions in their use of cocaine.18 This is a strange statistic, since Bahr and Anastasios Marcos also report that the data show a cumulative progression from alcohol to cigarettes to marijuana and subsequently to other drugs among teens in Utah, as has been reported in similar studies of teens in other states.19 Apparently, teens in Utah who start down the road of drugs and alcohol are more likely to go farther than those in other states. Sociologist Harold T. Christensen writes that in a strongly conservative society like that of the Latter-day Saints, those who deviate from accepted behavior often pay a heavier price. For instance, in the 1950s Mormon college students were reported to have the lowest drinking rate but the highest alcoholism rate among drinkers of any religious group.20

18. Ibid., 1375, table 8.
The statistic for suicide in Utah also raises questions. For instance, what social factors may be stacked against the population of Utah other than the fact that most of them are nominally Latter-day Saints? Generally, males are almost five times more likely than females to commit suicide, and white males are nearly twice as likely to commit suicide as nonwhite males. According to the 1990 census, Utah was 93.8% white, whereas the country as a whole was 80.3% white. Another significant factor may be the “frontier attitude” with respect to gun ownership that is prevalent in the West. Arthur Kellerman and coworkers report in the New England Journal of Medicine that “ready availability of firearms is associated with an increased risk of suicide in the home,” and Utahns against Gun Violence assert, “In Utah at least 13 percent of parents have a loaded gun in an unlocked place.” Another group of researchers recently wrote in Psychiatric Quarterly, “Suicide rates typically decreased following implementation of a variety of firearm control laws. Suicide-prone individuals seldom substitute other means or go outside legal channels for suicide weapons. Firearm restrictions may decrease the ready accessibility of firearms enough to allow the peak period of suicidality to pass.” In this context it is interesting to note that a recent report by the Open Society Institute gives Utah a score of 0 on the toughness of its gun laws (twenty states ranked lower, with scores of -1 to -10

and Family, ed. Brent Corcoran (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 77. These statistics bring up a pressing problem for any religious society: what is the best way to promote strong morals without discouraging those who deviate from coming back to the fold and without giving the impression that deviant behavior is somehow acceptable? A difficult question, indeed.

within a possible range of 100 to -10). The scores for all eight states in the Mountain region (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Wyoming, and Utah) were similarly low, ranging from -6 to +4, which might partially explain why the overall suicide rate in this region is far above that of other regions of the country.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently released a study on regional variations in suicide rates. They adjusted for age, sex, and race/ethnicity distribution and still found distinct regional variations, with ten of thirteen Western states in the top quartile for suicide rates. Even taking into account the increased availability of firearms in the West did not appear to account completely for the variations. Surely, the relatively high suicide rate in Utah is part of a regional phenomenon, the causes of which have baffled even the CDC. On the other hand, Utah has the lowest suicide rate in the Mountain region, so obviously the number of members of the Church of Jesus Christ in these states does not correlate positively with suicide rates.

Bennett connects Utah's suicide rate to depression among Latter-day Saints but cites no data to support this conclusion except that he knows a few Mormon women who feel stress over not living up to their ideals. (Has anyone else heard the expression Catholic guilt?) A number of psychological studies examine the effect of religious attitudes on mental health, and Latter-day Saints have frequently been the subject of such inquiries. What were the findings of these studies? Daniel Judd recently reviewed all the available literature on mental health among Latter-day Saints (some 58 separate studies) and found that

71 percent of the outcomes indicated a positive relationship between religiosity and mental health variables, 4 percent


negative, and 24 percent neutral (1 percent was curvilinear). While much of the anecdotal writing concerning the mental health of the Latter-day Saints has been negative, . . . the majority of the research (95 percent of the outcomes) clearly refutes these negative assertions. The research evidence clearly indicates that Latter-day Saints who live their religion report better mental health than those who are less committed to the faith.29

David Spendlove, Dee West, and William Stanish published a study on the prevalence of depression in Mormon and non-Mormon women in which they found no difference between the two populations.30 Marleen Williams also recently published a study showing that although “perfectionism” correlates positively with depression among women, no difference is evident between the prevalence of depression among LDS and Protestant women.31 Larry Jensen, Janet Jensen, and Terrie Wiederhold report that college students with high religious involvement in any of the denominations studied had more positive scores on a mental health test. However, “LDS women tended to show more emotional maturity than those in the other denominations.”32 With respect to suicide in particular, Jie Zhang and Darwin Thomas report that a sample of students at Brigham Young University had “a lower rate of suicidal ideation than other college students nationally.”33

The reader should carefully consider the fact that Isaiah Bennett connects the suicide rate to depression among Latter-day Saints using nothing but anecdotal evidence, whereas the vast majority of scientific studies dealing with this issue emphatically contradict his conclusions. Do Bennett's Latter-day Saint acquaintances really have an anomalously high rate of mental illness, or is this prima facie evidence of his anti-LDS bias?

But Mormons do not just have a high rate of depression, in Bennett's view. Apparently, he also thinks the religion somehow promotes criminal behavior. Bennett writes that Utah ranked twenty-fourth in 1993 in substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect, and he also cites several statistics suggesting that crime is high in Utah (IM, pp. 152-53). However, such data need to be normalized to factors such as age distribution and urbanization and are dependent on the reporting behavior of the populace. After examining Utah crime statistics in this context, sociologists Richard Johnson and James Whitaker conclude, "There are no reliable numbers that support the idea that Utah has exceptionally high rates of fraud or child abuse." Additionally,

The measurement of crime is elusive, involving ideological disputes over the appropriate meaning of crime, uncertainties about the accuracy of official law enforcement crime reports, and the absence of data for some offenses. If we focus on FBI reports of "street crime," Utah appears to be one of the safer places in the nation. Similarly, a recent national study taking into account sixteen crime and justice-related factors placed Utah thirty-fifth in their "Most Dangerous State" rankings.34

Once again, religious activity is not factored into the crime statistics Bennett reports. Does he really believe that illegal activity is somehow encouraged by the Church of Jesus Christ? If so, how? Is this another case where lapsed members of the Church of Jesus Christ are more likely to deviate farther from the norm than others?

In any case, what percentage of the population can be labeled the “criminal element”? The Utah State Corrections Department has data available on the religious affiliation of its inmates. Although Latter-day Saints comprise approximately 70% of the Utah population, only 34.6% of the male inmates and 24.4% of the female inmates are listed as Latter-day Saints. And although Catholics comprise only about 6% of Utah’s population, 17.6% of the male inmates and 15.1% of the female inmates are listed as Catholic. If I were to follow Isaiah Bennett’s behavior in this review, I might insinuate that Catholicism must promote criminal behavior, but this would be just as absurd as Bennett’s innuendos about the Mormons. Good Mormons and good Catholics are law-abiding citizens, and Bennett’s use of crime statistics does not reflect the evidence.

According to Bennett, all these statistical potshots should not be taken to imply that “Catholics outshine Mormons or others in the ethical areas cited. The point is not to place blame on individual Mormon lay people.” Rather, “Mormon moral theology comes up lacking. When faced with a changing world, the Mormon response is not to continue proclaiming God’s unchanging moral truth, but to revise, reword, and accommodate—to appear righteous while holding to doctrines of iniquity” (IM, pp. 140–41). Bennett’s evidences for this statement are the LDS stances on abortion, birth control, and divorce. But this argument is extremely disingenuous. If Catholics do not outshine Mormons in the arena of morality, what does Bennett’s biased statistical report have to do with our supposedly “lacking” moral theology? Why cite such statistics, if not to show the conse-

35. These statistics on percentages of Utah population by religion appear at www.adherents.com (by location).

36. Utah State Department of Corrections statistics as of 6 December 1999. These statistics can be viewed at corrections.utah.gov/offenders/statistics/snapshot.html (select the following dropdown menus: legal status [inmate], category [religion], date [Dec. 6, 1999]).

37. Brent Top and coworkers report that LDS youth “who most successfully resist peer pressure to engage in delinquent behavior come from homes where parents teach and live religious principles.” Brent L. Top, Bruce A. Chadwick, and Janice Garrett, “Family, Religion, and Delinquency among LDS Youth,” in Religion, Mental Health, and the Latter-day Saints, 129.
quences of LDS moral theology in contrast to the consequences of the Catholic version, which is supposedly not “lacking”?

The official Latter-day Saint stance on abortion is that it is a grave sin and is not tolerated except in rare cases where the life or good health of the woman is in jeopardy, the pregnancy has resulted from incest or rape, or the fetus is known to have severe defects that will not allow it to survive beyond birth. Even in such cases, a woman may have an abortion only after consulting with her husband (if applicable) and her local priesthood leader and receiving divine confirmation of the action through prayer.38 A Catholic friend of mine pointed out that this policy seemed contradictory to him because on the one hand, abortion was defined as a “grave sin,” but on the other hand, it was allowed that God might specifically endorse such grave sins via personal revelation. Catholics declare that an unborn child is always an “innocent,” and therefore it is always a grave sin to kill such a person. In answer to this objection, I will first point out that even the Catholic Church allows for abortion in cases such as ectopic pregnancies. They simply do not define it as an abortion but rather as a surgical procedure with the object of removing a diseased fallopian tube, which procedure happens to have the unintended consequence of aborting a fetus. Presumably, Catholic bombardiers who carpet-bombed entire cities during World War II were similarly absolved from sin because their intent was not to kill innocent people, even though they knew that would be an inevitable result of their actions. Latter-day Saints might appeal to the same principle, for example, by saying that in situations where abortion is allowed, the intended result is to save the mother from trauma or death.

However, in my opinion, all such attempts to make nuanced definitions to create a completely consistent “moral theology” are doomed to fail. Consider the biblical example of the entrance of the Israelites into Palestine. The Lord commanded them to conquer the land and show mercy on those who surrendered. Even when a city had not surrendered, the Israelites were commanded to spare the women,

38. See Gospel Principles (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1992), 251 (cited in IM, p. 144).
children, and cattle (Deuteronomy 20:10–15). However, the Lord commanded one exception. “But of the cities of [the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, and Jebusites], which the Lord thy God doth give thee [for] an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth” (Deuteronomy 20:16–17). The context from the previous verses makes it clear that women and little children were not excepted. How does this example fit with the assertion that one can never be justified in purposefully killing an innocent? Perhaps this example has made the reader a bit uncomfortable, and I have to admit that these verses are somewhat shocking to my sensibilities. But it is my conviction that those who insist on trying to circumscribe the whole of moral action within some narrowly defined “moral theology” are planting their heads firmly in the sand. In contrast, I offer the only attempt I know of by Joseph Smith at any sort of comprehensive moral theology: “That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another. God said, ‘Thou shalt not kill;’ at another time He said, ‘Thou shalt utterly destroy.’ This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire.” 39

Bennett attempts to show that the LDS position has changed on this issue by citing the 1979 and 1988 editions of the Gospel Principles manual, which state, “There is no excuse for abortion unless the life of the mother is seriously threatened” (IM, pp. 143–44). However, Lester Bush has recently shown that the official LDS position on this issue has remained fairly constant over the years, making some adjustments with advances in medical science. For instance, the First Presidency made this official statement on the issue in the Priesthood Bulletin for June 1972:

The church opposes abortion and counsels its members not to submit to or perform an abortion except in the rare

39. Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 256.
cases where, in the opinion of competent medical counsel, the life or good health of the mother is seriously endangered or where the pregnancy was caused by rape and produces serious emotional trauma in the mother. Even then it should be done only after counseling with the local presiding authority and after receiving divine confirmation through prayer.40

Obviously, the wording in Gospel Principles was changed in the 1992 edition to more accurately reflect the true position of the church.

In any case, Bennett is incensed by this position, and in fact it appears to be one of the reasons he left the church (IM, p. 486). He writes, "One can only turn away in disgust from the Mormon church's dithering on the necessity of protecting unborn humans" (IM, p. 147). He also asserts that although Utah has a very low abortion rate, "the rate in Utah might be even lower if not for church teachings that endorse abortion in particular situations" (IM, p. 143, emphasis in original).

Is that so? Let us examine a few relevant facts. First, Utah does not just have a low abortion rate—it has the lowest abortion rate among all the states, and this despite having the highest birth rate. Of course, the fact that Utah has the lowest out-of-wedlock birth rate might be a contributing factor as well.41 On the other hand, Roman Catholicism has the strictest stance against abortion I know of, but a recent study showed that "Catholics are as likely as women in the general population to have an abortion, while Protestants are only 69% as likely and Evangelical or born-again Christians are only 39% as likely."42 In a 1992 Gallup Poll, only 12.9% of Catholics surveyed


41. The Alan Guttmacher Institute, "Contraception Counts: State-by-State Information," 1998. This report can be viewed at www.agi-usa.org/pubs/ib22.html. The fraction of births out of wedlock in Utah was 16%, compared to the national average of 32%. The state with the second-lowest out-of-wedlock birthrate was Idaho (which also has a large percentage of Mormons), at 21%. Rhode Island, where 63% of the population is Catholic, came in at 33%.

responded that abortion is never a morally acceptable choice. Bennett only once attempts to compare Catholic and Mormon statistics by citing the divorce rates in Utah and Rhode Island, where the population is 63% Catholic (IM, p. 149 n. 16). But when it comes to the abortion issue, he neglects to inform us that while Utah had an abortion rate of 8 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 in 1998, Rhode Island's abortion rate was 24 per 1,000, and the national average was 23.

Latter-day Saint leaders have consistently and strongly denounced abortion, but they recognize that rare cases may arise in which one life must be weighed against another, and they do not wish to completely close the door on abortion in such instances. The principle behind this was stated by Brigham Young: “Teach the people true knowledge, and they will govern themselves.” No matter what one thinks of this approach with respect to abortion, it has apparently worked relatively well to convince Latter-day Saints not to have abortions. Can the Catholic leadership say the same of its policy?

The same point can be made about the issue of birth control. While the Catholic Church absolutely forbids artificial birth control, the Church of Jesus Christ discourages the use of such methods for selfish purposes but leaves the issue up to individual couples. And yet, Utah has by far the highest birth rate in the nation. On the other hand, the 1992 Gallup Poll cited above showed that 87% of U.S. Catholics reject their church’s teaching on birth control. Religiosity was a factor, but 82% of Catholics who attended church at least once a week agreed that the church should permit couples to make their own decisions about forms of birth control. Bennett may condemn


44. Discourses of Brigham Young, ed. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 146.

45. The Utah birth rate was 91.4 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44 in 1998, compared to the U.S. average of 65.6. The second-highest birth rate was that of Arizona, at 78.2, and the rate in the largely Catholic state of Rhode Island was 57.5. See www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/nvsr/48/48-pre.htm; select Births: Preliminary Data for 1999, p. 11.
the deficient moral theology of the Church of Jesus Christ on this issue, but outcomes speak louder than words.

Finally, what about divorce? It is true that Jesus equated divorce and remarriage with adultery in most circumstances (see Matthew 5:31–32), but he also equated lustful thoughts with adultery (Matthew 5:28). Nowhere does the Bible say what the ecclesiastical body should do when a member wants a divorce, and neither does it recommend what should be done with those who have lustful thoughts. Both are considered wrong and are strenuously discouraged by Catholics and Mormons, but the questions at hand are how closely a person must adhere to religious ideals to remain in full communion with the church, and which moral choices or failings best remain between the believer and God.

Mormons and Catholics both have their problems, and statistics show that a greater degree of activity in their respective faiths positively affects their moral choices and family life.46 The Church of Jesus Christ is not engaged in false advertising when it portrays itself as a “pro-family” church, and its stances on abortion, birth control, and divorce appear to have had a very positive effect on the actual behavior of its adherents. Clearly, Bennett does demonstrate excessive faultfinding when it comes to members of the Church of Jesus Christ, and his assertions should be taken with more than a few grains of salt.

Creating Contradictions

I think it is a legitimate enterprise, when investigating the truth claims of a particular religion, to inquire whether its doctrine and practice “hang together.” This inquiry requires a bit of charity, however,

46. A couple of examples of how Catholicism and Mormonism positively affect family life are in order. A 1995 study by Douglas Downey, an assistant professor of sociology at Ohio State University, shows that although academic achievement of children generally declines with increasing family size, the same effect is not observed among Mormon families. David L. Wheeler, “Mormons Found to Be Exception to Rule on Education in Big Families,” Chronicle of Higher Education 45/2 (4 September 1998): A35, citing results from Douglas Downey. Father Andrew Greeley notes that Catholics are more likely by substantial margins than white Protestants to visit or phone family members. These differences
since there will always be areas at the fringe of doctrine where all the implications cannot be worked out without more information. Furthermore, human language is rarely used in a strict, technical manner. Words often have multiple meanings, and statements may be true in one sense and false in another. But even though such an exercise requires some subjectivity in judgment, it is a useful one. If a person cannot convince himself that apparent contradictions can be harmonized, perhaps he has reason to doubt. Thus, it does not bother me when anti-Mormons produce lists of supposed contradictions, but it does bother me when the alleged contradictions are clearly fabricated. That is, anti-Mormons will often ignore mitigating statements within the documents they claim are contradictory in order to fabricate a contradiction.47

Bennett employs this tactic with regard to the practice of polygamy by members of the Church of Jesus Christ. His basic thesis is that Joseph Smith invented the doctrine of plural marriage to justify his extramarital affairs. Although the church claims Joseph Smith had a revelation on this subject as early as 1831, Bennett summarily dismisses this belief as an ex post facto fabrication, and as primary evidence for his assertion he produces several verses from the Book of Mormon (Jacob 2:23–24, 26–27) to show that “polygamy is unambiguously condemned in the Book of Mormon” (IM, p. 477; cf. pp. 26, 478, and WMC, pp. 68–70). Naturally, if the practice were “unambiguously condemned” in an earlier revelation, it would seem a bit fishy if Joseph Smith produced a contradictory revelation after engaging in extramarital affairs. And yet, if Bennett had bothered to look three verses ahead in the Book of Mormon, he would have found this mitigating statement: “For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise


47. A parallel example from anti-Catholic literature is mentioned by Karl Keating. He complains that in one anti-Catholic publication, John Henry Newman (a cardinal) is quoted as listing all sorts of perversions engendered by the Catholic Church. Keating points out that Newman wrote this statement before he became a cardinal, and in fact he wrote it as a description of how he felt about the Catholic Church when he was still an Anglican. Keating, Catholicism and Fundamentalism, 71–73.
up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things” (Jacob 2:30). This statement plainly proves that plural marriage is not “unambiguously condemned” and, furthermore, that plural marriage is unambiguously advocated in cases where the Lord specifically commands it. By looking ahead three verses, we find that Bennett’s entire thesis that the later revelations were ex post facto fabrications to justify the Prophet’s supposed infidelity is destroyed. Incidentally, this position accommodates the biblical data (that is, that sometimes God has approved of plural marriage and sometimes he hasn't; see, for example, Exodus 21:7-11; Deuteronomy 21:15-16; 2 Samuel 12:8-11; 1 Timothy 3:2, 12) much more easily than any of the alternatives. Several of the early Christian writers expressed very similar interpretations.

The most disturbing aspect of this particular charge is that Bennett undoubtedly knew it was false before he made it. In his conversion story, taped before he returned to Catholicism, Bennett related that before he converted to Mormonism, he was heavily involved in reading anti-Mormon literature and in fact was working on an anti-Mormon book of his own. After having a spiritual experience that led him to believe that Mormonism might have some truth to it, however, he began to fear that he might have to someday join the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He went on:

But I had a loophole, and the loophole was the Book of Mormon. I had read into the Book of Mormon here and there, as directed by the anti-Mormon literature, and I had underlined passages in Jacob, chapter 2, where it absolutely forbids polygamy, and all of that. And then I read in the anti-Mormon literature where even the LDS Church doesn’t

48. I brought this to Bennett’s attention in an e-mail interview, and he admitted that the Latter-day Saints could use this verse to justify changes in church policy with respect to polygamy. However, he still maintains that this “illustrates the doctrinal and moral flexibility afforded by the concept of continuous revelation.” Isaiah Bennett, e-mail correspondence to the author, 17 and 23 February 2000.

49. For several quotations from writers like Augustine, Tertullian, and Justin Martyr, see Barry R. Bickmore, Restoring the Ancient Church (Ben Lomond, Calif.: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 1999), 336-39.
obey its own supposed scripture, and I soaked it all up. So I
had read bits and pieces of the book—I'd never sat down to
read it.\textsuperscript{50}

From the context of his remarks about Jacob 2, it is clear that at the
time of his fireside talk he was aware that his interpretation of these
passages was based on selective reading. Furthermore, apparently his
fears about the Book of Mormon were allayed, because when he fi-
nally began to read the whole book, he said, "By the time I got through
2 Nephi . . . I was absolutely convinced that this is the word of God."\textsuperscript{51}
This is clear evidence that Bennett's charges regarding polygamy in
the Book of Mormon are not only baseless but disingenuous.

The example cited above brings up the broader issue of how anti-
Mormons like Bennett treat the Book of Mormon. For instance, Ben-
nett creates a contradiction between the statement that the Book of
Mormon contains "the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (D&C
20:9) and the fact that it does not clearly preach a number of distinc-
tive LDS doctrines and practices (\textit{IM}, pp. 450–52; \textit{WMC}, pp. 42–43,
48–49). This is a standard anti-Mormon criticism, but it ignores sev-
eral pertinent facts. While it is true that the Latter-day Saints have
often used the term \textit{gospel} in a broader sense that would preclude the
Book of Mormon containing the "fulness" of it, we also use it in the
narrower sense of "the good news about Jesus" and the basics of en-
tering his kingdom.\textsuperscript{52} This is precisely the definition used in the Book
of Mormon (e.g., at 3 Nephi 27:13–19). Additionally, the only place
the phrase \textit{fulness of the gospel} is defined in the scriptures is in Doc-
trine and Covenants 76:11–14, where it is equated with a prophetic
testimony of the mission and person of Jesus Christ. Finally, and
most important, the Book of Mormon specifically states that there
would be "greater things" revealed.

And these things have I written, which are a lesser part of
the things which he taught the people; and I have written them

\textsuperscript{50} Bennett, \textit{A Passion for Truth}.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} See Bruce R. McConkie, \textit{Mormon Doctrine}, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft,
1966), 331–34, for a discussion of LDS usage of the term \textit{gospel}.
to the intent that they may be brought again unto this people, from the Gentiles, according to the words which Jesus hath spoken. And when they shall have received this, which is expedient that they should have first, to try their faith, and if it shall so be that they shall believe these things then shall the greater things be made manifest unto them. And if it so be that they will not believe these things, then shall the greater things be withheld from them, unto their condemnation. Behold, I was about to write them, all which were engraven upon the plates of Nephi, but the Lord forbade it, saying: I will try the faith of my people. (3 Nephi 26:8–11)

Since Bennett approaches the Book of Mormon looking for full-blown explanations of every LDS doctrine, he instead finds “contradictions.” In contrast, Latter-day Saints approach the book in the manner the text itself demands and find important truths expressed (e.g., the unity of the Godhead) which, when combined with further revelations, add to a more complete understanding.

The difference between the two approaches is simply the presence or absence of faith. An attitude of faith seeks first to harmonize before concluding that contradictions exist, and Catholics believe this principle at least as much as the Latter-day Saints. For example, when asked about alleged contradictions, Catholic apologist Jeff Mirus wrote, “These apparent contradictions must be resolved according to the ‘analogy of faith.’ In other words, since we know that both (or several) teachings are inspired by the same Holy Spirit, it is unacceptable to reject one in favor of another. Rather, the key is to find out how they fit together.”

Following is a concrete example of how this principle is applied. Some Catholics are disturbed by the fact that currently their church teaches that non-Catholics who die unbaptized may be saved. Their concern is based on the fact that some popes appear to have stated

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53. Jeff Mirus, “How Can the Church Be Infallible If One Church Council Contradicts Another?” This tract may be viewed at www.ewtn.com/library/answers/contrad.htm.

54. For example, see the Web site for the organization In Hoc Signo Vinces at ihsv.com.
the opposite, and some of these statements appear to satisfy all the criteria for papal infallibility. For instance, Boniface VIII stated in the bull *Unam Sanctam* (A.D. 1302), “Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” Eugene IV was even more explicit in his bull *Cantate Domino* (A.D. 1441):

The Most Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and preaches that none of those existing outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews, and heretics, and schismatics, can ever be partakers of eternal life, but that they are to go into the eternal fire “which was prepared for the devil, and his angels,” (Mt. 25:41) unless before death they are joined with Her; and that so important is the unity of this Ecclesiastical Body, that only those remaining within this unity can profit from the sacraments of the Church unto salvation, and that they alone can receive an eternal recompense for their fasts, alms deeds, and other works of Christian piety and duties of a Christian soldier. No one, let his almsgiving be as great as it may, no one, even if he pour out his blood for the Name of Christ, can be saved unless they abide within the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.

The Web site of the Catholic “Eternal Word Television Network” provides a “Catholic Q&A” forum where anyone can ask questions of a number of experts in various fields of doctrine and practice, and it happens that questions about such papal statements often come up. It is instructive to see how completely these experts embrace the idea of “faithful harmonization.” For instance, when historian Warren Carroll was asked about the statement in *Unam Sanctam*, he responded:

56. A translation of this bull can be viewed in its entirety at the New Advent Catholic Web site: www.newadvent.org/docs/bo08us.htm.
57. This document can be viewed in its entirety at the Web site of In Hoc Signo Vinces at ihsv.com/cantate.html.
The bull “Unam Sanctam,” which was written in the 13th century, does not refer to persons who have never had the truth of Christianity preached to them or are in a position of “invincible ignorance” regarding the true Faith. In Christian Europe at that time there were no such people. Pope John Paul II has clearly taught that anyone can be saved if he diligently follows the best that he knows. But if he is saved, it is then only through the Church (even though he does not recognize it) and the merits of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary.\(^{58}\)

Aside from the fact that “every human creature” was specified, rather than every person in Christian Europe, Carroll’s answer seems a bit strange. Is it to be maintained that in 1302 no Eastern Orthodox peasants lived who were too illiterate and ignorant to understand the issue of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome? That would have been an odd historical situation, indeed.

Catholic Answers’ Keating happens to be one of the experts in this forum as well. When confronted by a dissenting Catholic with several statements, including the above, he did not even try to harmonize them with current teachings; instead, he simply appealed to the belief that the magisterium has the right to interpret infallible statements, just as it does the scriptures.

The magisterium is the final authority on what the Bible means, and the magisterium is also the final authority on what magisterial teachings mean. The magisterium has made it clear that your interpretation of the documents you quote is not what the Church teaches. Like the Protestant who thinks the meaning of the Bible is crystal clear, you think the meaning of these quotations is crystal clear— but you both err.\(^{59}\)

\(^{58}\) Warren Carroll to David McMahon, 8 February 2000. This communication can be obtained by requesting Catholic Q&A record number 156929 from webmaster@ewtn.com.

\(^{59}\) Karl Keating to Robert Sissons, 19 February 1999. This communication can be obtained by requesting Catholic Q&A record number 134543 from webmaster@ewtn.com. Catholic Answers has also attempted to answer this objection in a 1996 pamphlet entitled *The Salvation of Non-Catholics*. But here they maintain that the current
Now, I have no intention of dwelling on the question of whether the pope really possesses the gift of infallibility, and Catholic apologists have in fact given better answers to the problem mentioned above than either Carroll or Keating. Even if the doctrine of papal infallibility were proven false, it might only mean that the doctrine of infallibility defined in the First Vatican Council was not an infallible teaching. Indeed, this is the position of many a liberal Catholic. I have to admit that I do not fully grasp what this doctrine covers, and I am told that there are some minor disagreements about it even among conservative Catholics. However that may be, it is perfectly clear that Catholic apologists apply the principle of “faithful harmonization” quite liberally to their own texts, while Bennett has attempted no such application in his writings about the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ. This disparity serves to demonstrate Keating’s inconsistency in publishing Bennett’s exposés.

“Kitchen Sink” Argumentation

In the above examples, it seems apparent that Bennett has created contradictions in his own mind instead of resolving the problems simply by looking more carefully at the texts in question. But he goes further. Anti-Mormon writers tend to pile on accusations, throwing in everything, including the kitchen sink, because by doing so they discourage the average reader from checking sources and weighing arguments. Under the weight of such a mass of charges, the reader naturally assumes that at least some of them are correct, and his faith may waver.

For example, when discussing alleged problems with the Book of Mormon, Bennett hits the reader with: “The Book of Mormon uses doctrine was held in the beginning, and so they quote a number of early fathers from the second through the sixth centuries to demonstrate this point. The problem is that they do not quote a single papal or conciliar statement, let alone one that could be considered “infallible.” This pamphlet can be viewed at www.catholic.com/library/salvation_outside_the_church.asp.

60. For example, a Catholic friend, Phil Porvaznik, has written something on this. See Phil Porvaznik, “The Unam Sanctam ‘Problem’ Resolved: Can Non-Catholics Be Saved?” at hometown.aol.com/philvaz/debates/debate9.htm.
several Greek (and even French!) terms. These languages would have been unknown to the Hebrew-American immigrants (see 3 Nephi 9:18; 19:4; 6:19; Jacob 7:27)" (WMC, p. 51; cf. IM, p. 446). Let us start with the French term in Jacob 7:27, where Jacob concludes with the word adieu. The fact is that adieu was and is a perfectly acceptable English word that happens to have been borrowed from French (as have thousands of other English words). Whatever the word used on the plates may have been, this was a perfectly legitimate English translation. Daniel C. Peterson recently noted:

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word had been a common one in English since at least 1374. It is included . . . in Noah Webster's 1828 American Dictionary of the English Language. It was simply a word that Joseph knew; he could just as easily and justifiably have used ciao, auf Wiedersehen, or sayonara if those words had formed part of the functioning vocabulary he shared with his audience.61

In fact, I recently noticed that before their fateful duel in 1804, both Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton wrote letters to close family members to be read in case of their deaths, and both of them concluded their letters with "Adieu." All these "adieus" indicate a final good-bye, such as one might say just before dying to another who

62. Alexander Hamilton, letter to Elizabeth Hamilton, 10 July 1804, and Aaron Burr, letter to Theodosia Burr Alston, 10 July 1804, in Interview in Weehawken: The Burr-Hamilton Duel as Told in the Original Documents, ed. Harold C. Syrett and Jean G. Cooke (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1960), 133–37. When I brought up the subject of this ridiculous charge to Bennett, he initially responded, "The LDS church cannot have it both ways. The Brethren teach that the translation of the book is literal and inspired. Why not, then, bring directly into English all the terms found in the original text? Joseph Smith was not limited, as were the Nephite prophets, to a finite number of plates. Translating the reformed Egyptian equivalent of 'adieu' could have found proper translation into English, even if it needed several words." Isaiah Bennett, e-mail correspondence to the author, 26 February 2000. After some further explanation, however, Bennett noted that he understood my concern and would consider my objections in future writings.
will be met again only at the last judgment—literally, it means “to God,” in the sense of “I commend you [or your soul] to God.” We use the French word because there is no equivalent in Anglo-Saxon English. It is not just an acceptable translation—it is the most accurate translation, then and now.

What about the Greek terms Bennett mentions? Third Nephi 9:18 refers to Jesus Christ as “Alpha and Omega.” However, once again these are not only Greek words but perfectly good English words borrowed from Greek. Anyone in Joseph Smith’s milieu, steeped in the King James Version of the Bible, would have readily recognized and understood this phrase (see Revelation 1:8). In fact, even today modern English translations like the New International Version and the New English Bible can translate “το Α και το Ω” as “the Alpha and Omega.” Again, if an equivalent concept is expressed in Book of Mormon language, this is a completely legitimate translation. Similarly, in Inside Mormonism Bennett questions “the use of ‘Christ’ throughout the pre-Christian centuries” (p. 446). However, “Christ” is not a Greek word, but the English equivalent of the Greek Christos and the equivalent of the Hebrew meshiach. Again, whatever was written on the plates, Joseph Smith produced an acceptable English translation.

The other two instances mention Greek personal names, which seems like a more legitimate issue. However, since Hugh Nibley showed nearly fifty years ago that these were just the sort of Greek names Lehi and company might have been familiar with,63 I will refrain from elaborating further. However, I would also recommend the work of Nibley and others, which shows that a large number of the nonbiblical personal names in the Book of Mormon are genuinely ancient Near Eastern names.64 I have yet to see a critic of the


64. For example, see Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 20–36; Hugh Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 281–94;
Book of Mormon make a serious attempt at explaining this remarkable fact.

**Lexical Imperialism and Ignorance—Monotheism vs. Polytheism**

In order to be successful at creating contradictions, the anti-Mormon must insist on his right to define terms. He creates his own dictionary and then uses it to decide which statements by his opponents must be false. Often this sort of lexical imperialism is based on ignorance of the range of meanings that have been assigned to various words. This is certainly the case with Bennett’s treatment of the LDS doctrine of the divine unity—our idea of how more than one “person” can be called “one God.”

The LDS doctrine of the divine unity can be expressed in three complementary ways. First, the Father is “the only true God” (John 17:3), as Jesus declared, because “there be gods many, and lords many, but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things . . . ; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things” (1 Corinthians 8:5–6). Second, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are so completely unified in mind, will, purpose, love, and covenant that they can properly be referred to as “one God” (2 Nephi 31:21). Third, all those who ever have been or will be exalted as “gods” are “one” with each other in the same way. Jesus expressed the nature of divine unity

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65. Another example is Bennett’s objection to the subtitle recently added to the Book of Mormon, “Another 'testament of Jesus Christ.’ He complains, “This is itself a historical anachronism. In the historical sense, a 'testament' is not a set of books but a covenant” (BM, p. 411 n. 35). Certainly this is true, but the subtitle was added as a short explanation of the purpose and content of the book for a modern English-speaking audience. My dictionary also defines “testament” as a “testimonial” or an “affirmation of beliefs.” See Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, 2nd college ed., s.v. “testament.” This being the case, this objection is yet another example of Bennett’s willingness to create faults out of thin air. In any case, D&C 84:57 calls the Book of Mormon “the new covenant,” so Bennett’s argument is not only ridiculous but based on a false assumption about the intended meaning of the word testament.
in his great Intercessory Prayer. He prayed “that [my disciples] 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” (John 17:21–22, emphasis added). This is the only passage in the Bible in which the nature of divine unity is defined, and Latter-day Saints see no reason not to take it at face value. In contrast, Catholics and others claim that “God” consists of three distinct “persons” who are “one being” and “one God.” The Bible does not contain any statements regarding any sort of oneness of being.

Bennett uses statements by Bruce R. McConkie to illustrate how Latter-day Saints claim to be monotheists and then writes:

This is just word games. McConkie is making up his own definitions for words that already have established meanings. He misleads Mormons in this attempt at redefining the meanings of monotheism and polytheism. Monotheism teaches there is one Supreme Being without equal. There never was and never will be a different or an additional God. (IM, pp. 265–66)

However, this approach betrays ignorance of early Christian theology and of trends in modern biblical studies. Pennsylvania State University’s Baruch Halpern explains: “Scholars have traditionally taken a theological and prescriptive approach to the issue of Israelite monotheism: monotheism is the conviction that only one god exists, and no others. This conviction is, however, difficult to document.”66 He goes on: “Monotheism, Yehezkel Kaufmann observed, postulates multiple deities, subordinated to the one. . . . Two elements distinguish it from polytheism: a conviction that the one controls the pantheon, and the idea of false gods.”67 The Bible speaks in many places of “one God” contrasted with false gods but in some cases mentions

67. Ibid., 525.
real beings who are called "gods." For instance, the Hebrew text of Psalm 8:5 says that God made man "a little lower than the gods." Some scholars, like Peter Hayman and Margaret Barker, have even gone so far as to claim that Judaism and earliest Christianity were not monotheistic at all. On the other hand, Larry Hurtado of the University of Edinburgh argues against such a view as well as against anachronistic projections of modern "orthodox" definitions of monotheism back on ancient Judaism.

That is, on both sides there is a tendency to proceed as if we can know in advance what "monotheism" must mean, which turns out to be a very modern, monistic form of monotheism, and can accordingly evaluate ancient Jewish texts and beliefs as to whether or how closely they meet an a priori standard of "pure" monotheism.

Neither did the earliest forms of Christian theology measure up to a monistic definition of monotheism. For instance, Bennett criticizes LDS theology because it teaches the subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father. That is, while they are "fully God," they are not equal to the Father in rank and glory (IM, pp. 295-300). However, as Anglican scholar Richard Hansen observes, "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." Even at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), the majority of participants were still subordinationists. J. N. D. Kelly refers to these as "the great
conservative ‘middle party’” and goes on to describe its beliefs: “Its positive doctrine is that there are three divine hypostases [i.e., persons], separate in rank and glory but united in harmony of will.”

Bennett also criticizes the Latter-day Saint belief that “Jesus Christ is a second god” (1M, p. 296). In a sense this is true, because we postulate no “oneness of Being.” Therefore, the Father and Son are two separate beings and can be termed two separate Gods. Again, such a notion would not have compromised early Christian monotheism, since they are “united in harmony of will.” For instance, St. Justin Martyr (d. ca. a.d. 165) wrote that Jesus is the “first-begotten” and the “first force after the Father.” He is “a second God, second numerically but not in will.”72 He also maintained that the Son is “in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third.”73 Well into the third century, Origen could speak of Jesus as a “second God,”74 but he added a qualification: “We are not afraid to speak, in one sense of two Gods, in another sense of one God.”75 In what sense are they “one”? “And these, while they are two, considered as persons or subsistences, are one in unity of thought, in harmony and in identity of will.”76

Another point to consider is that Latter-day Saints and Catholics (including the hellenized Catholic fathers quoted above) have vastly different concepts of the nature of God. Whereas the Latter-day Saints believe that the beings we call “God” or “Gods” are embodied and anthropomorphic, Catholics believe God to be “eternal, immense, incomprehensible, . . . who, being a unique spiritual sub-

74. Origen, Against Celsus 5.39 (ANF 4:561).
75. Origen, Dialogue with Heraclides 2.3, quoted in Alan F. Segal, Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 231.
stance by nature, absolutely simple and unchangeable, must be declared distinct from the world in fact and by essence.” For over a century scholars have been pointing out that this description of God appears to derive from the Greek philosophical schools and was only adopted by Christians beginning with the apologists of the mid-second century, when it replaced a more anthropomorphic conception of deity. Even some of the hellenized early Christian writers admitted as much, as can be seen by the following quotations from Origen. “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.” “For it is also to be a subject of investigation how God himself is to be understood,—whether as corporeal, and formed according to some shape, or of a different nature from bodies—a point which is not clearly indicated in our teaching.” This is not the place to fully discuss the problem of early Christian and Jewish anthropomorphism. This has been done elsewhere, and Latter-day Saint writers have effectively answered all the objections Bennett brings to bear (IM, pp. 267–79). Rather, it is enough to note that Christianity very likely started out with an anthropomorphic concept of God, and in this context a “oneness of being” between separate persons makes no sense.

78. The literature treating this subject is vast, but a pioneering example is Hatch, Influence of Greek Ideas, originally published by Williams and Norgate in 1895. A recent example is Christopher Stead, Philosophy in Christian Antiquity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
82. For example, see Bickmore, Restoring the Ancient Church, 75–165.
Bennett insists that Latter-day Saints claim to be monotheists in order “to put a more positive ‘spin’ on Mormon teaching” (IM, p. 253), but when we turn to the scholarly literature we find historians struggling to classify the ancient Jewish and Christian theologies, which deviate from classical monism in the same way that LDS theology does. When we turn to the earliest forms of Christianity, we find that they defined the unity of the Godhead or Trinity in exactly the same terms as the Latter-day Saints do. Thus, despite Bennett’s cries of protest, Latter-day Saints have a perfect right to the title of monotheists. As long as Latter-day Saints are careful to delineate the differences between our brand of monotheism and that of mainstream Christianity, we are not spinning anything. We are simply trying to accurately convey our concept of God.

“The Enemy of My Enemy Is My Friend”—Salvation and Exaltation

For the anti-Mormon writer, any argument against the Latter-day Saints is a good one, regardless of whether said argument has been or can be used against the writer’s own position. This is why one often sees Protestant fundamentalist critics of the church parroting attacks by liberal Mormons or even atheists, even though the same or similar arguments are often used against fundamentalist views of the Bible. Bennett appropriates arguments made by Protestants that can be or have been used against Catholicism as well as against Mormonism.

This is clearly the case in Bennett’s treatment of the alleged LDS view of salvation and exaltation. According to Bennett, the Latter-day Saints emphasize good works, faithful obedience, performance of ordinances, and “pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps”—to use Kimball’s phrase—as the means of achieving eventual deification. Members are continually urged to become perfect and thus merit godhood. Many good members sincerely participate in their church in hopes that they, too, will one day be equal with God. How different this seems from the
self-emptying of Christ, who for our sake became a servant of all, not minding the lowliness. (IM, p. 352)

In essence, this is merely a regurgitation of the old fundamentalist charge that Latter-day Saints believe we must become morally perfect in this life to “merit” exaltation. Perhaps realizing that this charge cannot be sustained, Bennett produces this caveat:

The kinder, gentler tone of current Mormon conference talks seeks to allay some Mormons’ perfectionist tendencies and the depression of inevitable failure. Man is not, members are now advised, expected to become totally perfect in everything in this life. There will be time beyond the grave for continued progress in virtue. (IM, p. 347)

We have already seen that Bennett has grossly exaggerated the instances of clinical depression generated by the “perfectionist tendencies” of Latter-day Saints, and now it will be shown that he has also exaggerated the extent of these “perfectionist tendencies.” If LDS leaders currently do not teach that one needs to reach moral perfection in this life, what evidence does Bennett provide for his charge that they once taught this? His only evidence is a single quotation from Joseph Fielding Smith regarding the Savior’s words in Matthew 5:48. “We, in this life, should try to perform every duty and keep every law and thus endeavor to be perfect in our sphere as the Father is in his.”

“Would the Lord give us a commandment if he knew we could not keep it?” (IM, p. 347). However, President Smith never said that we must become perfect in this life, but rather that we should try to be perfect. Jesus said the greatest commandment is “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37). And in another passage he said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Does Jesus leave any doubt that we should try to keep his commandments with our whole hearts, souls, and minds? And isn’t this the same as trying to be perfect? To

accurately assess President Smith’s viewpoint, I suggest we take into account the following passage:

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.  

The crux of the matter was summarized in a revelation to Joseph Smith: “And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:31). In other words, with the enabling grace of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, one can become truly holy, truly perfect. As Paul put it, “Let the Spirit change your way of thinking and make you into a new person. You were created to be like God, and so you must please him and be truly holy” (Ephesians 4:23–24 Contemporary English Version). Not only should we try to be perfect, but, eventually, the faithful will actually attain perfection.

The irony of Bennett’s charge is that the Latter-day Saint and Catholic views of sanctification are similar and have been attacked by fundamentalist Protestants in essentially the same terms. For instance, Keating writes against fundamentalist anti-Catholics in the following manner.

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84. Joseph Fielding Smith, Answers to Gospel Questions (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 4:72. Consider the following comment made by Joseph Smith in 1842: “Although I do wrong, I do not the wrongs that I am charged with doing; the wrong that I do is through the frailty of human nature, like other men. No man lives without fault.” Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 258.

85. I chose this version because of the clarity with which it states the principle and also because it bears the Catholic imprimatur.
tack Catholicism for emphasizing the necessity of good works and true sanctification:

The Church teaches that only souls that are objectively good and pleasing to God merit heaven, and such souls are ones filled with sanctifying grace.

...For the fundamentalist, sanctifying grace is a figment of Catholics' imaginations. Accepting Christ accomplishes one thing and one thing only. It makes God cover one's sinfulness. It makes him turn a blind eye to it. It is as though he hides the soul under a cloak. Any soul under this cloak is admitted to heaven, no matter how putrescent the reality beneath; no one without the cloak, no matter how pristine, can enter the pearly gates.86

One difference between the Latter-day Saint and Catholic views of sanctification is in our respective beliefs about deification. Bennett writes:

We are to become perfect, by God’s grace, by growing into the moral image of God and his Son. ... We can grow to share in God’s communicable, moral attributes, but nothing here suggests that we can take on God’s incommunicable, ontological attributes and so become gods ourselves. We are to be like God in our moral, behavioral character, not the same as God in our essence. (IM, p. 348, emphasis in original)

In spite of frequent appeals by LDS writers to early Christian writers who taught the deification of Christians, Bennett again sides with the enemy.

There is a bitter irony here. Mormons accuse the Catholic Church of having imported many Greek and other pagan philosophies, incorporating them into a sorry substitute for the true gospel of Christ. Yet several contemporary Christian

authors dismiss the entire notion of deification as itself a hellenizing of the original Christian message. (IM, pp. 350–51, n. 8)

In support of his point, Bennett cites a book by Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, but the cardinal, in turn, is citing the liberal Protestant scholars of Adolf von Harnack’s school (who are not really contemporary) and liberal Catholic theologian Hans Küng. Cardinal Schönborn rejects their arguments: these scholars and theologians were attacking the myriad Catholic saints (and, I might add, the current Catholic catechism) that have taught versions of the deification doctrine. Does Bennett here admit that Catholic theology has been corrupted by hellenistic philosophy? Or does he believe that the hellenization of Christianity was a God-ordained development, as do Cardinals Newman and Daniélou? We shall see that Bennett sides with Cardinal Schönborn in accepting some version of the deification doctrine, so what is his point? It seems unlikely that he is trying to argue that imported pagan doctrines are perfectly acceptable, so apparently he is appealing to arguments against Catholic doctrine in order to argue against a similar Latter-day Saint belief. This is a very odd practice, at best.

On the other hand, Bennett does make a valid point when he charges Latter-day Saint writers (or at least some of them) with equating the early Christian fathers’ deification teachings with our own, when in fact there are some basic differences.

St. Maximus the Confessor, a seventh-century Byzantine theologian, provides us with the definition of this human mirror of deity: “The one deified through grace receives for himself everything that God possesses, apart from the identity of substance.” Man receives all God has; he does not become all God is.

The last qualifier is important, and it runs throughout the early Church Fathers. Whenever deification is spoken of, it is always with the proviso that we do not become gods in the sense the Father is a God. We never take on the incommunicable, ontological attributes of the Godhead. (IM, p. 351)

While I do believe that Latter-day Saints can legitimately appeal to these early Christian teachings in support of our own beliefs, I also believe that we should be more careful than we sometimes have been to show exactly how such passages make our case. To illustrate how this may be done, I will return to the theme of hellenization.

I demonstrated in the previous section that many early Christians did not believe in God as a “divine substance,” as the Greek philosophers did, but rather as an anthropomorphic being. Even Origen, who appealed to the philosophers against the anthropomorphites, recognized that these Christians were merely following standard Jewish modes of interpretation. Thus the idea of God as a divine substance was clearly adopted into Christianity from the philosophical schools. And if the first Christians knew of no divine substance, what are we to think of the distinctions later Christian theologians made about Christians becoming deified in every sense but “identity of substance”? Very few Jewish-Christian documents have survived, and the particulars of their deification theologies are somewhat of a mystery. However, the Jewish-Christian Clementine Homilies teaches that while men are not gods at this point, they are “of the same substance” (i.e., of the same nature) as God. “The bodies of men have immortal souls, which have been clothed with the breath of God; and having come forth from God they are of the same substance, but they are not gods.”

89. Clementine Homilies 16.16 (ANF 8:316). Although the phrase of one substance was used as early as the turn of the third century to describe the unity of the Trinity, it was exclusively used in a generic sense. That is, two different human beings, horses, or whatever could be said to be “of one substance” because they were of the same class. The use of this term gradually changed after the Council of Nicea, for it was realized that if God were a simple, unique, spiritual “substance” or being, then either the Son and Spirit must be beings lower in class than the Father or share the same being as the Father. Of course,
But what if Harnack and the rest were right, and the whole idea of deification was another hellenistic import? Catholics might pass this off as a legitimate doctrinal development, but Latter-day Saints would have a harder time squaring it with our view of Christian history. Similarly, scholars of Harnack’s generation sometimes charged that early Christian esoteric traditions, which Latter-day Saint writers often point to as survivals of ancient temple-based traditions similar to our own, developed because of hellenistic influence (specifically the mystery cults). Recently, however, Guy Stroumsa of Hebrew University has pointed out that these claims were made in relative ignorance of the relevant Jewish sources, which are in fact replete with esotericism.\textsuperscript{90} The same can be said of the doctrine of deification, and it would now be hard to sustain the charge that it was a hellenistic import.

For instance, Jesuit scholar George H. Joyce wrote that the early doctrine of deification was regarded “as a point beyond dispute, as one of those fundamentals which no one who calls himself a Christian dreams of denying.”\textsuperscript{91} Another Jesuit scholar, Henri Rondet, wrote that deification was a doctrine common to both the orthodox and heterodox.\textsuperscript{92} Thus, while the Middle or Neoplatonic doctrine of God adopted by most of the church fathers after the mid-second century was in no sense universal and hence may not have been the original Christian belief, the deification doctrine appears to have been universal, and it seems very unlikely that such a belief would have met with no resistance as an import into the deposit of faith.

the question of how three distinct “persons” can share a “simple” (i.e., indivisible) being without compromising the distinctness of the “persons” is considered a mystery. See Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines, 235–36, 250, 254; Stead, Philosophy in Christian Antiquity, 160–72; Christopher Stead, Divine Substance (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).


Further, deification was taught within Palestinian Judaism, a fact that diminishes the likelihood that the doctrine was a hellenistic import. For instance, in one Dead Sea Scroll fragment, the human speaker says, “For I have taken my seat ... in the heavens ... I shall be reckoned with gods and established in the holy congregation.”

Indeed, perhaps the passage in ancient literature that most strikingly resembles LDS thought on deification comes from rabbinic literature. Rabbi Akiba (d. A.D. 135) is credited with the following:

The Holy One, blessed be He, will in the future call all of the pious by their names, and give them a cup of elixir of life in their hands so that they should live and endure forever. . . . And the Holy One, blessed be He, will in the future reveal to all the pious in the World to Come the Ineffable Name with which new heavens and a new earth can be created, so that all of them should be able to create new worlds. . . . The Holy One, blessed be He, will give every pious three hundred and forty worlds in inheritance in the World to Come.

Therefore, Latter-day Saints can make a strong argument for the proposition that the original Judeo-Christian concept of deification was very similar to ours.

Expanding the Authoritative

Prophets have opinions. We respect those opinions but are not necessarily bound to believe them. It is only in certain special circumstances that doctrines or interpretations are made authoritative and thus binding on the body of the church. Nonauthoritative teachings may indeed be inspired, and church members are taught that they must live so as to obtain the companionship and discernment of the


Holy Spirit in order to distinguish inspired from uninspired statements. These principles are not really that hard to understand, and if anyone really wants to know how Latter-day Saints deal with such questions, I would highly recommend an article by President J. Reuben Clark Jr., “When Are Church Leaders’ Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?”

Apparently, Isaiah Bennett has not read President Clark’s essay since he claims, “In what follows, I have cited only ‘authoritative’ Mormon leaders and theologians” (WMC, p. 19). And yet, throughout both books he continually cites LDS sources that are not considered authoritative. But this is one principle that Catholics ought to understand completely. For instance, one continually finds Keating complaining that anti-Catholics confuse the doctrine of papal infallibility to fabricate grounds for finding fault with Catholicism. “For [fundamentalists] papal infallibility seems a muddle because their idea of what it covers is muddled.” It should not bother Latter-day Saints too much if opponents want to criticize the opinions of our prophets, but we are entitled to object when those opinions are labeled or implied to be authoritative. I would think that our Catholic friends could sympathize.

Virgin Birth

When nonauthoritative statements of LDS leaders do not deliver the desired “punch,” anti-Mormon authors will often expand the authoritative to include their own dubious interpretations of LDS doctrine. This is especially true with regard to the LDS doctrine of the virgin birth. Bennett quotes a number of nonauthoritative statements by LDS leaders saying that Jesus is the “only begotten after the flesh,” that Jesus was begotten “in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers,” that Mary “must have been, for the time

96. Keating, Catholicism and Fundamentalism, 218.
being, the lawful wife of God the Father,” and the like (IM, pp. 292, 293; WMC, p. 93). He takes these statements to mean that members of the Church of Jesus Christ “do not believe that [Mary] was a virgin when [Jesus] was conceived or afterward because they believe conception occurred in the ordinary, natural way” (IM, p. 292) and that “God the Father begot Jesus in the flesh through copulation with the Virgin Mary” (WMC, p. 92). Since the LDS have an anthropomorphic concept of deity, it is certainly possible to interpret these statements in the way Bennett indicates. However, this is not the only interpretation possible, and Bennett leaves out important statements from our prophets and scriptures that lead to much more modest conclusions.

Certainly the prophets have clarified that the virgin birth was a case of sexual reproduction.\(^{97}\) That is, Jesus had both a father and a mother in the flesh, and his flesh obtained its genetic blueprint from both. Similarly, they have made clear that Jesus was not conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary was told, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” (Luke 1:35). To us this indicates that Mary had to be transfigured by the power of the Holy Spirit to withstand the presence of God (see Moses 1:11). On the other hand, it is equally clear that our scriptures and prophets have affirmed that “His mortal mother, Mary, was called a virgin, both before and after she gave birth. (See 1 Nephi 11:20.)”\(^{98}\) That is, whatever the particular mode of conception, Mary came out of the experience still a virgin. Consider the following statement by President Harold B. Lee:

You asked about . . . the birth of the Savior. Never have I talked about sexual intercourse between Deity and the mother of the Savior. If teachers were wise in speaking of this matter about which the Lord has said but very little, they would rest their discussion on this subject with merely the words which are recorded on this subject in Luke 1:34–35: “Then said

\(^{97}\) I thank Russell McGregor for this exceptionally clear explanation.

\(^{98}\) *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 7.
Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

Remember that the being who was brought about by [Mary’s] conception was a divine personage. We need not question His method to accomplish His purposes. Perhaps we would do well to remember the words of Isaiah 55:8–9. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Let the Lord rest His case with this declaration and wait until He sees fit to tell us more. 99

Bennett even resorts to a highly interpretive paraphrase of a statement by Bruce R. McConkie to obscure this point. “McConkie resorted to redefining the term: A virgin is a woman who has not had sexual intercourse with a mortal man. The Heavenly Father is a resurrected, immortal man. Therefore, Mary did not lose her virginity” (IM, p. 294; cf. WMC, p. 93; purportedly citing The Mortal Messiah 1:314). Nothing of the kind is on the page or even in the book Bennett cites. (I will discuss below his tendency to lift quotations from other anti-Mormon authors without attribution and without checking sources.) However, his paraphrase is vaguely similar to the wording in McConkie’s article, “Virgin Birth,” in Mormon Doctrine. McConkie writes, “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 how did the conception take place? He goes on to say that “Mary, his mother, ‘was carried away in the Spirit’ (1 Ne. 11:13–21), was ‘overshadowed’ by the Holy Ghost, and the conception which took place ‘by the power of the Holy Ghost’ resulted in the bringing forth of the literal and personal Son of God the Father.” Finally,

McConkie claims, “Modernistic teachings denying the virgin birth are utterly and completely apostate and false.”\(^{100}\) All this seems quite a bit more vague than Bennett would have us believe.

Regarding McConkie’s supposed statement, Bennett opines, “Of course, this is ridiculous. Sex is sex, whether it is with an immortal man or a mortal man” (WMC, p. 93). Is it really so obvious? We do not know what the mechanics of reproduction are when celestial beings are involved. As James E. Talmage explains, Jesus was begotten “not in violation of natural law but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof.”\(^{101}\) That is, it was a miracle.\(^{102}\) What is the “higher manifestation” of natural law that occurred here? Talmage never says.

Indeed, one of Bennett’s prime witnesses is Orson Pratt, who said that the Father and Mary “must have been associated together in the capacity of Husband and Wife” (IM, p. 294), but if Bennett had read just a few more lines, he would have found that Pratt also said the Father “overshadow[ed] the Virgin Mary in the capacity of a husband.” Surely, Pratt meant that God acted in the capacity of a husband by begetting a child with Mary; but as for the mechanics of conception, Pratt only ventured to apply the scriptural language that God “overshadowed” her.

Consider this analogy. Jesus has a resurrected, celestial body. At one point he transported this undeniably physical body right through a solid wall, and the wall remained intact (see Luke 24:36–40). Christians of all stripes affirm that this event really occurred. It did not happen spiritually or figuratively—a solid body was literally transported.

\(^{100}\) McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 822. I find it significant that Bennett uses quotations rather than paraphrases in every other instance in this section of Inside Mormonism. Did he know that McConkie’s words did not quite go as far as he would have liked?

\(^{101}\) James E. Talmage, Jesus the Christ (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 77.

\(^{102}\) Talmage defined miracles in these words: “Miracles are commonly regarded as occurrences in opposition to the laws of nature. Such a conception is plainly erroneous, for the laws of nature are inviolable. However, as human understanding of these laws is at best but imperfect, events strictly in accordance with natural law may appear contrary thereto. . . . The operation of a higher law in any particular case does not destroy the actuality of an inferior one.” James E. Talmage, The Articles of Faith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 200. See Paul C. Hedengren, “Miracles,” in Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 2:908: Miracles are “a beneficial event brought about through divine power that mortals do not understand and of themselves cannot duplicate.”
through a solid wall and nothing happened to the wall! How did Jesus do it? Here, most Christians will stop short and look puzzled. It was a miracle, after all, and it seems a little silly to ask how Jesus did it. It should not take a rocket scientist to figure out why many Latter-day Saints stop short and look puzzled when anti-Mormons tell us how we must believe the miracle of Jesus’ conception and the virgin birth were accomplished. No matter what they may have personally speculated, the modern prophets have never explicitly, and certainly never authoritatively, stated what Isaiah Bennett says they have.

“Them Ignorant Mormons”—Facts vs. Feelings

If an anti-Mormon writer can successfully create the impression that the Latter-day Saints believe a mass of contradictory doctrines, it becomes necessary to explain how a reasonably well-educated and stolid bunch like the Mormons can swallow such idiocy. Bennett gives us his version of the standard anti-Mormon explanation:

Mormons say they are “Spirit-led.” That is, their personal beliefs are based to a large extent on their subjective “testimonies” or feelings that a teaching or practice is true. Never mind that one Mormon teaching may be inconsistent with another or that a doctrine once taught as God’s revealed law is now denied and demeaned. Never mind what scientific or rational analysis may disclose: If I “feel” a thing to be true, then it’s true. Facts will not convince me to turn from my subjective testimony. If I believe the Holy Ghost has told me, interiorly, what is true, how can I deny him by listening to his enemies, such as history, science, and the whole of lost Christianity? (WMC, pp. 14–15)

In contrast, Bennett explains what he sees as the proper way to approach the truth:

From a Christian perspective, Christ said the “truth” will set us free (John 8:32). He did not tell us to “feel” our way into his Church. To know him—he is the “truth” (John 14:6)—and his will, we are to seek (Matt. 7:7) and study, to search
his word in Scripture and the Church’s teaching authority (Acts 17:10–11) and listen to his chosen leaders, for that is the same as listening to him (Luke 10:16). (WMC, p. 15)

He gives the following instructions to Catholics confronted by a Latter-day Saint bearing a testimony:

Respond to their testimony by bearing your own. You know the truth of your own faith, too, and you can back it up with something beyond mere sentiment. The Catholic Christian faith has serious, objective evidence on its side. Mormonism does not. By pointing to this objective evidence, you counter their purely subjective “testimony.” (WMC, p. 17)

Thus, Bennett reduces faith almost to a logical deduction. That is, if one were to accept as premises the sort of manufactured history, engineered definitions, and naive assertions Bennett produces throughout his books, one would certainly come to the conclusion that Mormonism is wrong and Catholicism is right. But aside from that, how does one know where to start? If one is supposed to obtain “truth” from a study of scripture in conjunction with the “teaching authority” God has provided, how can one know what constitutes scripture and where the proper teaching authority lies?

Against fundamentalist claims that the Holy Spirit tells them that the Bible is God’s word, Keating offers us what he calls a “spiral argument” leading to the conclusion that the Bible is inspired and Catholicism holds the key to its truth. At the base of his spiral, he asserts that from “textual criticism we are able to conclude that we have

103. In one of his less tactful moments, Bennett wrote a section entitled, “‘Abandon All Logic, Ye Who Enter Here?’” (WMC, pp. 64–65), where he also makes light of Latter-day Saint testimonies. This appears to be an allusion to the inscription on the gates of hell in Dante’s Inferno iii.1, “Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here.” However, as altered by Bennett, the sentiment expressed is closer to that of Celsus, a second-century anti-Christian polemicist, making fun of Christian attitudes toward the philosophies current in his day: “Let no educated man enter, no wise man, no prudent man, for such things we deem evil; but whoever is ignorant, whoever is unintelligent, whoever is uneducated, whoever is simple, let him come and be welcome.” Origen, Contra Celsum 3.44, quoted in Hatch, Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages, 124–25.
a text the accuracy of which is more certain than the accuracy of any other ancient work.” That is, we have more manuscripts of more ancient date of the Bible than of any other ancient work, so it seems clear that the text has been copied reasonably accurately. We will not examine the entire argument here, but at the conclusion of his argument Keating notes, “We thus have taken purely historical material and concluded that there exists a Church, which is the Catholic Church, divinely protected against teaching error.” Later he explains: “What has just been discussed is not, obviously, the kind of mental exercise people go through before putting trust in the Bible, but it is the only truly reasonable way to do so. Every other way is inferior—psychologically adequate, perhaps, but actually inferior.”

Many problems remain with Keating’s rather loose brand of logic, but it is only necessary here to show a flaw at the base of his spiral. He wants us to rely on his version of the results of textual criticism to show that the Bible accurately portrays history, but the fact is that a large number of textual critics believe the New Testament was written well after the events described supposedly took place and that it was mythologized by these later Christians. In another book, Keating defends against these opinions by citing two recent scholars who have come to the conclusion that the Gospels were written much earlier than has been supposed. He writes, “Regardless, each denies what is the majority opinion among biblical scholars, that the synoptics were written late in the first century, possibly into the last decade or two.” He goes on, “It may be, a few decades from now, that the ‘assured results of modern biblical scholarship’ will look different from what we have been told to accept as gospel truth.”

Here Keating lets the cat out of the bag. When arguing against fundamentalist subjectivism, he pronounces that reasonable people should—nay, must—come to faith in the inspiration of the Bible by first trusting in the results of textual criticism. And yet we find him arguing out of the other side of his mouth against secular criticism.

104. Keating, Catholicism and Fundamentalism, 123–27.
by appealing to what the majority opinion of such textual critics might be after a few decades, as new information surfaces. In the end, it appears that the Catholic Answers version of the search for truth boils down to making a half-educated guess and then appealing to simple faith when history and science oppose the Catholic viewpoint.

In any case, the average person on the street is hardly qualified to judge disputes about textual criticism or most other scientific and historical disciplines. For that matter, most people do not have the necessary education to be able to master even one of those disciplines, let alone all of them. (And what about those people who lived during the many centuries when such academic disciplines did not exist?) Here the Catholic Answers approach to truth seems to be that the unwashed masses must take on blind faith the results of "history and science" as they are spoon-fed this information by Keating and Bennett. 106

Despite Bennett’s protests, Latter-day Saints are not taught to disconnect their brains. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ are strongly encouraged to pursue secular education and on average have more formal education than Catholics. 107 If we really engaged in the sort of "cultish" anti-intellectualism that Bennett suggests, why would this be the case?

The truth is that Latter-day Saints simply recognize the limits of human scholarship. 108 The apostle Paul put it this way:

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106. In Bennett's case there is reason to believe he does not understand what scientific disciplines are or what they are capable of. For instance, he interprets Mosiah 13:18 to mean that the Nephites followed a seven-day week and then pontificates, "Archaeology has shown that the ancient Native Americans used a number of calendars, but none used a seven-day week" (IM, p. 439). Such a statement is patently absurd unless archaeology has produced the pertinent information about the calendrical systems of every Native American population that ever existed. And even if this were the case, archaeologists would have no way of knowing that no more such information will be unearthed.

107. In a 1990 study it was found that 55% of Mormons and 48% of Catholics in the United States have attended college. See Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 42-44.

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. . . . For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. . . . But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:4-5, 11, 14)

We do not find people in the New Testament following any kind of spiral argument to find the truth. Rather, we see over three thousand Jews converting after Peter’s speech at Pentecost because “they were pricked in their heart” (Acts 2:37). We find Jesus’ disciples on the road to Emmaus being convinced of Jesus’ exposition of scripture because, they said, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32). We find Jesus saying to his apostles that the Holy Spirit “shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). John preaches that “hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1 John 3:24). He also tells the Saints, “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him” (1 John 2:27). He goes on, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:9–10). And Paul is heard to say that Jesus Christ has “given us the earnest [or guarantee] of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 1:22). Although the testimony of the Spirit of God is not the only necessary ingredient in the search for truth, it is indeed necessary, and in fact one cannot be sure of one’s status with God without it.

Neither is the testimony of the Spirit a completely subjective thing, based solely on feelings, although feelings are an important
part of the experience ("the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," Galatians 5:22–23). Rather, Latter-day Saints have been encouraged to develop the spirit of revelation in their lives to the point that they have objective evidence of its testimony. Joseph Smith said:

A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus.\(^\text{109}\)

Consider how Isaiah Bennett describes an experience with the Spirit of God that led him to eventually accept the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (he gave this account while still a member of the Church of Jesus Christ). He was sitting in his church preparing to say mass and reading one of his anti-Mormon books. He recalls:

At the moment it happened it was a simple nugget, well-defined, no fringe around the edges. It started and it stopped. It was clear, it was distinct, and it proved permanent. And all that came to me while I was immersed in anti-Mormon literature, at the very moment, was simply the notion or the idea—I don’t know if it was a thought; I don’t know if it was a feeling—but it was the notion, “Give the Mormons a chance.” It came out of nowhere. I was not prepared for it. I had not been reading pro-Mormon literature. I was turned off as ever to the LDS theology. “Give the Mormons a chance.” Period.\(^\text{110}\)

Does this sound like he had some vague, subjective feeling that impelled him to accept Mormonism? No, this was an experience, and

when one reads Bennett’s books in the context of his earlier experiences, they come off as extended attempts to convince himself that his experiences did not, in fact, occur.

Sign-Seeking—Geography of the Book of Mormon

The constant cry from the anti-Mormon camp is that we have no evidence for our claims. However, when these charges are examined in detail it is found that a great deal of evidence exists. But what the anti-Mormons really demand is proof. This is obviously the case with Bennett’s treatment of the geography of Book of Mormon lands. After noting that members of the Church of Jesus Christ are not united in their interpretations of where the Book of Mormon events took place, he writes:

This contrasts with the biblical text, which refers to real peoples and places that have never needed proving. Though some groups and locations have been and still are disputed, we have always known who the Jews, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Romans and the Greek[s] are. We have always known where Jerusalem, the Sea of Galilee, Rome and other biblical sites are located. The existence of several biblical persons has also been substantiated by sources outside the Bible. (IM, pp. 437–38)

What if we did discover some of the Book of Mormon cities, which could be identified to everyone’s satisfaction? Would this not be very nearly absolute proof of the supernatural origin of the text? In contrast, identification of some of the biblical sites proves nothing, since the dispute beyond the nineteenth century has been whether the Bible is genuine history or a historical novel with any number of mythological elements added in. As Paul noted above, God does not prove spiritual things through human scholarship, and some of these anti-Mormon criticisms certainly amount to seeking signs.

Also, if the Book of Mormon events transpired in Mesoamerica, as most contemporary Mormon scholars believe, should we expect the same kind of archaeological results that have been obtained in the
Middle East? William Hamblin addressed these kinds of faulty assumptions in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*.\(^{111}\) The fundamental difference between the identification of ancient sites in Mesoamerica and the Bible lands is that several biblical sites have kept essentially the same place names (toponyms) through the centuries, whereas the same has not been the case in Mesoamerica. Hamblin quotes non-Mormon scholar Yohanan Aharoni as stating that, of 262 biblical sites "identified with any degree of certainty," 190 still bore their ancient names. Of the 72 that did not, "only about a half" were identified with a "degree of certainty." Hamblin then summarizes Aharoni's findings:

> In other words, without the continuity of place names between biblical and modern times, only about 36 of the [total of] 475 biblical place names could be identified with certainty. But in fact those 36 are identifiable largely because it is possible to triangulate their relationship to known sites [i.e., those still bearing their ancient names], moving from the known to the unknown. It is only because there are numerous biblical sites known with certainty through the continuity of place names that these other 36 sites can be located.\(^{112}\)

Hamblin later summarizes the situation in Mesoamerica:

> A serious problem facing Book of Mormon geography is the severe discontinuity of Mesoamerican toponyms between the Pre-Classic (before c. A.D. 300), the Post-Classic (after A.D. 900), and the Colonial Age (after A.D. 1520). For example, what were the original Pre-Classic Mesoamerican names for sites currently bearing Spanish colonial names such as Monte Alban, San Lorenzo, La Venta, or El Mirador? These and many other Mesoamerican sites bear only Spanish names, dating

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from no earlier than the sixteenth century. On the other hand, we occasionally learn from historical sources of Mesoamerican toponyms that we cannot precisely correlate with modern sites. For example, the original site of the seventeenth-century Itza Maya town of Tayasal is still disputed between Lake Yaxha and Lake Peten, despite the existence of much Spanish colonial ethnohistorical information on this location.\footnote{Hamblin, “Basic Methodological Problems,” 167, citing Arlen F. Chase, “Con manos arriba: Tayasal and Archaeology,” \textit{American Antiquity} 47/1 (1982): 167–71.}

Fortunately, some of the Book of Mormon events took place in the Old World at known locations. Therefore, it has been possible for LDS researchers to identify the trail of Lehi and his family with a high degree of certainty. Warren and Michaela Aston were able to chart and travel the probable course of Lehi’s journey in “nearly a south-southeast direction” (1 Nephi 16:13) along the ancient incense trade route. Lehi’s group was said to travel this route until reaching a “place which was called Nahom” (1 Nephi 16:34), where they buried Ishmael, and then they traveled “nearly eastward” (1 Nephi 17:1) to a place on the eastern coast of Arabia which they named “Bountiful” (1 Nephi 17:5). It turns out that the valley of Jawf, where the incense trail turns east, has an ancient Arabian burial ground in a place still called Nehem, variously spelled Nahm, Nehem, Nihm, and so forth. (In ancient Semitic languages, vowels are superfluous, so Nahom, Nehem, Nahm, and Nihm would derive from the root *NHM.) This location—lying about twenty-five miles northeast of San'a, capital of the Republic of Yemen—and its name have been established at least as far back as 600 B.C. No other place in Arabia has been found to have an equivalent name. Although the incense trail turns southward shortly after veering east, Lehi’s group kept going “nearly eastward” to the coast; and indeed, we find that if one travels less than one degree off due east from Nehem to the coast, one runs into Khor Kharfot, a lush inlet on the coast of Oman that has been used off and on over the centuries as a port. Furthermore, it is one of the only spots along the coast that is accessible from inland. Every detail
Nephi recorded about Bountiful corresponds exactly with the situation at Khor Kharfot.\textsuperscript{114}

A similar identification of an ancient place (but unrelated to the Book of Mormon) was recently made in the area of Nehem by non-Latter-day Saint researchers. Anthropologist Tudor Parfitt recently studied the traditional history of the Lemba, a tribe in southern Africa that claims to be descended from the Jews. DNA evidence now confirms that one clan of the Lemba has a high occurrence of a genetic marker also common among the Cohanim, Jews descended from priestly lines. The Lemba believe that their ancestors migrated from a place called “Sena” in Arabia, and a place by this name (Senaah) is mentioned in Nehemiah 7:38. The location of Sena was uncertain, but Parfitt guessed that it might have been equivalent to the modern capital of Yemen, San‘a, or alternatively a nearby town called Seiyun. He traveled to Seiyun and asked a local scholar if either Seiyun or San‘a could be the site of ancient Sena. The local scholar responded that Sena was three hours east in a Bedouin area. Parfitt traveled there and found that the history of the town matched closely with Lemba traditions and that some local clan names were the same as Lemba clan names.\textsuperscript{115}

These two examples clearly show how the retention of ancient place names can greatly facilitate the identification of ancient sites, and where ancient place names have been preserved, as in the Arabian Peninsula, the geography of the Book of Mormon has received striking confirmation. It is only by focusing on that which has not been found, and which would be exceedingly difficult to find, that Bennett can charge that Book of Mormon geography cannot be substantiated.


\textsuperscript{115} Parfitt’s research has been described on the PBS television show, \textit{Nova}, in an episode called, “Lost Tribes of Israel,” and the transcript of the show can be viewed at www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/transcripts/2706israel.html.
Plagiarism and Tannerism—The Danites and Blood Atonement

In order to make an anti-Mormon book look respectable, the author must make it lengthy and load it with quotations from LDS sources. Since looking up all those sources would take quite a bit of work, the author usually opts to read a few anti-Mormon books and copy both the quotations included therein and the conclusions drawn from them. After joining the Church of Jesus Christ, Isaiah Bennett reported that he had noticed this phenomenon in his rather large collection of anti-Mormon literature.

And I checked the footnotes of these big, fat volumes, and they are plentiful. And this man is quoting this one over here, and this one over here is quoting another one, and the other one is quoting the first one. I didn’t catch on that it was a mutual admiration society where they were all quoting one another.  

Keating complains that anti-Catholic writers typically use the same labor-saving device by lifting passages from Loraine Boettner’s *Roman Catholicism*. “Pick up an anti-Catholic tract, then turn to the same subject in *Roman Catholicism*. As likely as not, the words will be the same, simple plagiarism. In the world of religious bigotry, it seems all roads lead to *Roman Catholicism*. ” In the inbred world of anti-Mormon literature, the sourcebook for works written during the last few decades usually turns out to be the work of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, who operate Utah Lighthouse Ministries.

The use of secondary sources is not necessarily a bad thing, but certain precautions must be taken if they are to be used responsibly. First, if the secondary source is used to track down a primary quotation, the author should preferably look up the primary source to verify the accuracy and context of the quotation. Second, if the primary source is quoted without such checking, the secondary source should be acknowledged in the footnote. The problem for the anti-Mormon

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writer wishing to save himself work is that it is not nearly as impressive to cite a primary source as quoted by a secondary, hostile source. Therefore, he often cites the primary source without checking to see if his anti-Mormon comrades use the primary source responsibly and without giving credit to the secondary source.

Bennett has evidently adopted this practice, for his books appear to be heavily dependent on the Tanners, although he rarely gives credit to them and has obviously not bothered to check the accuracy of their work. Two examples are found in Bennett's discussions of the Danites and of blood atonement. He brings these topics up in order to defend against charges that the Crusades and the Inquisition are evidence for Catholic apostasy (IM, pp. 215–25). Specifically, he asserts that Joseph Smith advocated the use of force against religious enemies by creating the Danites and that Brigham Young advocated capital punishment for apostasy, among other things.

The history of the Danite band, led by Sampson Avard, is well known to Mormons, but Latter-day Saint historians have generally denied that Joseph Smith had any knowledge of their activities until after they were caught. However, Bennett provides possible evidence from one of Joseph Smith's diaries in his attempt to show that Joseph Smith did in fact know about and approve of the Danites. “Fortunately, Mormon scholars, including H. Michael Marquardt [!], Scott H. Faulring, Dean C. Jessee, and David J. Whittaker, have managed to decipher all of the July 27 entry” (IM, pp. 218–19). Bennett quotes Joseph Smith's journal as saying:

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\text{[T]he bretheren or Saints . . . have come up hither Thus far, according to the order <Rev?> of the Danites, we have a company of Danites in these times, to put right physically that which is not right, and to cleanse the Church of verry great evils which hath hitherto existed among us inasmuch as they cannot be put to right by teachings & persuasions, This company or a part of them exhibited on the fourth day}
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118. Avard's band committed a number of crimes in revenge against the Missouri mobs who attacked the Mormons.
of July [illegible word] They come up to consecrate by companies of tens, commanded by their captain over ten.  

Here, I noticed an odd thing about the citation, which Bennett lists as “Jessee and Whittaker, Brigham Young University Studies, Winter 1988, 14.” Why the abbreviated citation? Throughout his books Bennett normally gives full citations, including the titles of journal articles, so why not in this instance? The Tanners are well-known for their odd and inconsistent citation style, so I decided to check through their writings on the subject of the Danites to see if they were Bennett’s true source. It turns out that the Tanners’ newsletter, The Salt Lake City Messenger, gives precisely the same quotation (including the ellipses, which are not in Jessee and Whittaker’s article) with the citation “Brigham Young University Studies, Winter 1988, page 14.” The newsletter also mentions Jessee and Whittaker as the authors of the article and alludes to the involvement of H. Michael Marquardt, Scott H. Faulring, Dean C. Jessee, and David J. Whittaker in deciphering the passage. Since two other quotations Bennett uses to bolster his case (from B. H. Roberts and Brigham Young)  

120. The full citation appears in the previous note.  
122. The Tanners do not mention any details about Michael Marquardt, who is an anti-Mormon author, and Bennett mistakenly includes him with the Latter-day Saint historians mentioned, even though he cites a book coauthored by Wesley Walters (another anti-Mormon author) and Marquardt several times.  
123. To prove that Brigham Young also advocated violence, Bennett quotes President Young in Journal of Discourses, 6:176: “And if the Gentiles wish to see a few tricks; we have ‘Mormons’ that can perform them. We have the meanest devils on earth in our midst, and we intend to keep them, for we have use for them; and if the Devil does not look sharp, we will cheat him out of them at the last, for they will reform and go to heaven with us.” Who were these Mormon thugs? If Bennett had looked up his source, rather than copying it from Jerald and Sandra Tanner, he might have noticed that Young made this comment during the heat of the Utah War (17 January 1858), when Johnston’s army was marching on Utah. Army spies might well have been in the audience, so the comment may have been for their benefit. More important, however, President Young went on to
are also found verbatim in the Tanners' article, it seems abundantly clear that Bennett lifted the quotation of Joseph Smith without attributing it to the secondary source and without so much as looking up the article to find the title.

The most important question, however, is whether Bennett (i.e., the Tanners) has proven Joseph Smith's involvement with Sampson Avard's Danite band. Why not ask what the LDS historians who published the passage have to say about it? When the Tanners cite Jessee and Whittaker's article, they gloss over the conclusions presented in the article with this comment: "Jessee and Whittaker do not seem to catch the serious implications of their transcription." Bennett does even worse, giving no indication that Jessee and Whittaker (not to mention Faulring) may not draw the same conclusions as he does about the passage.

In fact, the main topic of Jessee and Whittaker's paper is the personal writings of Albert Perry Rockwood, which are some of the only contemporary accounts of the Missouri period of LDS history that discuss the Danites. After examining the documents, Jessee and Whittaker marshal evidence to show the following: (1) a church-sanctioned Danite organization existed; (2) that organization involved the entire LDS community and was concerned with defending against mobs, helping the poor, and other such activities; (3) the organization was not at all secret; and (4) the term Danite was a reference to the vision of the kingdom of God described in Daniel 2. Several details about this Danite organization contradict the self-serving testimony of dissenters like Avard, who tried to pin their misdeeds on Joseph Smith. Jessee and Whittaker conclude that there were two Danite organizations—

explain that he was referring to some bloodless scare tactics used by Lot Smith's "Mormon Raiders," who were assigned to harass and detain the army. "We have already showed the invading army a few tricks; and I told Captain Van Vliet that if they persisted in making war upon us, I should share in their supplies. The boys would ride among the enemy's tents; and one of their captains ran into Colonel Alexander's tent one night, saying, 'Why, Colonel, I'll be damned if the Mormons won't be riding into your tent, if you don't look out'" (ibid., 176).


125. Scott Faulring has informed me that he does not, in fact, agree with Bennett's twisted interpretations.
the church-sanctioned one that involved the whole community and Sampson Avard's spin-off. After Avard was caught, the church authorities probably downplayed the existence of the original Danites because the name was now inextricably associated with Avard and his miscreants.

The interested reader can find a more complete discussion of the available evidence in Jessee and Whittaker's paper, but for our purposes it should be evident from the above discussion that Bennett not only plagiarized from the Tanners but made the Tanners' already careless treatment of their sources even worse.

When Bennett turns to the subject of blood atonement, he again lifts his information from the Tanners without attribution. At issue is whether blood atonement was ever actually practiced by the church. That is, were murderers, apostates, and adulterers ever executed under the auspices of the church hierarchy? In order to prove that such did occur, Bennett quotes Gustive O. Larson, once professor of church history at Brigham Young University (IM, p. 223). Larson reports that reliable eyewitnesses testify that during the Mormon Reformation of the 1850s a certain Mr. Johnson of Cedar City was tried by a bishop's court for adultery with his stepdaughter and sentenced to death to atone for his sin. He willingly submitted.

This appears to be fairly damning testimony, but once again Bennett uses that odd citation style, omitting the title. And once again I found that the Tanners' newsletter used the very same quotation, with the same bracketed editorial note, and failed to give the article title in its citation.


127. This doctrine, explained by Brigham Young and others, essentially claims that it is necessary for Saints who commit certain particularly heinous crimes to submit to capital punishment in order to fully repent. In most particulars this is merely a return to certain aspects of the law of Moses.


Still, was Larson’s work fairly reported? Not in the least. If Ben-
nett had bothered to look up his source, he would have found that
Larson wrote the following:

Omitted from quotations used by the anti-Mormons
were restraining clauses such as follow from Brigham Young:
“The time has been in Israel under the law of God . . . that if a
man was found guilty of adultery, he must have his blood shed,
and that is near at hand. But now I say, in the name of the
Lord, that if this people will sin no more, but faithfully live their
religion, their sins will be forgiven them without taking life.
“The wickedness and ignorance of the nations forbid
this principle’s being in full force, but the time will come
when the law of God will be in full force.”130

Larson goes on to say, “The emotional stress had brought forth pro-
nouncements from men in high places which gave enemies a golden
opportunity to accuse the church of gross crimes and link it with
weird doings of fanatical individuals.”131

It is unfortunate that in the case of Johnson, local leaders misap-
plied some of Brigham Young’s statements and dealt out Old Testa-
ment justice (see Deuteronomy 22:20-27), but the blame cannot be
placed on the prophet. Further, as will be shown below, this solitary
action is hardly on a par with the Inquisition, even if we consider
only the information Bennett supplies.

Distorting History—The Mountain Meadows Massacre

Continuing his line of reasoning concerning the use of force
among Latter-day Saints, Bennett cites the famous Mountain Mead-
ows Massacre, in which a group of non-Mormon emigrants were
killed by Mormons and Indians. Bennett offers us this analysis:

This action was taken because Young and other Mor-
mons perceived a threat to their territory. Mormons try to

defend what happened at the Mountain Meadows Massacre, arguing that it was an accident, that the innocent travelers going west should not have been harmed, but the fact remains that this was one instance in a larger conflict in which Smith, Young, and other Mormon leaders were actively in favor of the use of armed, organized force to protect Mormon territory from perceived threats. This, plus the history of Mormon use of force in general, makes it impossible for Mormon apologists to cite the Crusades as examples proving the apostasy of the Christian Church without their own history proving the apostasy of the Mormon church. (IM, pp. 219–20)

Let us examine a few details Bennett forgot to include. First, “Young and other Mormons perceived a threat to their territory” and were preparing to defend themselves because Johnston’s army was marching to Utah for no apparent reason. Second, the Mormon settlers in the area were provoked by certain members of the emigrant company who claimed to have participated in the murder of Joseph Smith and bragged that they would bring back an army from California to attack the Mormons on the western front. Third, the Mormon settlers dispatched a messenger to ask for orders from Brigham Young, but the messenger returned a day late with Young’s orders. The orders read, in part, “In regard to the emigration trains passing through our settlements, we must not interfere with them until they are first notified to keep away. You must not meddle with them. The Indians we expect will do as they please but you should try and preserve good feelings with them.”

It is evident that Bennett severely distorts history while addressing such issues as the Danites, blood atonement, and the Mountain Meadows Massacre. While it is true that LDS leaders have advocated organized force for defensive purposes, not every Mormon misdeed Bennett brings up was officially sanctioned by the church hierarchy.

133. Ibid., 53.
134. Brigham Young to Isaac Haight, 10 September 1857, quoted in ibid., 63.
Part of Bennett’s point is well taken, however—that, among other reasons, the Crusades were originally undertaken as a defensive strategy against Muslim forces that were taking over Christian lands.\(^{135}\) Certainly we cannot criticize that. Bennett also writes: “Did bad things happen in the Crusades? Certainly. Bad things happen in every war, but that does not mean the war itself is unjust” (IM, p. 217). This is undoubtedly true, and one cannot indict the whole of Roman Catholicism for the misdeeds of individual Catholics if those misdeeds were not officially sanctioned by the Catholic Church.

Unlike Bennett’s examples of Mormon misdeeds, however, some of the “bad things” that happened during the Crusades and the Inquisition were specifically advocated by the Roman Catholic Church. For instance, although the Catholic Church never officially sanctioned sword-point conversions of pagans during the Crusades,\(^{136}\) it did sanction such for heretics. Maureen Purcell writes, “Theologians and canonists were all in agreement that heretics and schismatics could be compelled by main force to return to the fold, and the Fourth Lateran Council had explicitly decreed the same indulgence for those combatting heretics, as for those going on crusade to the Holy Land.”\(^{137}\) Even here, a more charitable interpretation may be applied—the church advocated such sword-point conversions because, in their view, heretics represented a serious threat to Christian unity.\(^{138}\) Indeed, given such political implications, some justification

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135. On the other hand, this is the most charitable interpretation possible. The Crusades were initiated when Muslims were invading Byzantine territory in Anatolia. The Byzantine emperor asked for Western mercenaries to defend against these invasions, but the pope diverted the Crusades to Jerusalem instead. Any judgment on whether the Crusades originated as a just cause must hinge on whether one believes the pope’s action was really a tactic to divert Muslim forces away from the Byzantine Empire. I thank William Hamblin for bringing this point to my attention.

136. Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?* 19. However, sword-point conversion of pagans often did occur in practice; for example, even St. Bernard, a saintly and even heroic man, “had advocated that the Slavs against whom he preached a diversion of the second crusade must be either converted, or killed.” Purcell, *Papal Crusading Policy*, 93.


for the execution of heretics can be found in the Bible (see Deuteronomy 13:6–10; 17:2–6). However, what are we to make of the official sanction given to the torture of heretics? I will mention here only a single example, from the writings of Pope Innocent IV:

The podesta or ruler (of the city) is hereby ordered to force all captured heretics to confess and accuse their accomplices by torture which will not imperil life or injure limb, just as thieves and robbers are forced to accuse their accomplices, and to confess their crimes; for these heretics are true thieves, murderers of souls, and robbers of the sacraments of God.139

The use of torture to extract confessions was eventually abandoned as an unreliable method of obtaining the truth; however, during the period of torture, the courts of the Inquisition were considerably more just than the civil courts. Prior to the Inquisition, heretics were saved on several occasions from the civil authorities or from mob action by the clergy.140 However, even when we take these factors into account, we are still left with the fact that the Catholic Church officially sanctioned the extraction of confessions from heretics via torture, and in my mind such behavior cannot be excused in a Christian society. As Latter-day Saints approach the history of the Crusades and the Inquisition, we can undoubtedly be more charitable in our interpretations than we have been. We can judge historical figures by the standards of their times rather than our own. However, it is perfectly fair for us to point out such instances of officially sanctioned evil as evidence for an institutional apostasy.

Smearing the Book of Mormon Witnesses

In the path of every critic of the Book of Mormon stands a large roadblock—the witnesses. If one wants to account satisfactorily for

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the phenomenon of the Book of Mormon, he or she must explain how eleven apparently sane and honorable men could testify to the world that they had seen the gold plates and that eight of them had handled them. And even if one were to concede the existence of the plates but were to maintain that Joseph Smith got them through means other than divine, that person still has to explain how Joseph Smith’s testimony was confirmed by an angel who showed the plates to the Three Witnesses.

The classic treatment of the subject is Richard Lloyd Anderson’s *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*. Anderson painstakingly researched their lives and testimonies, as well as all the major charges against them, and concluded that the testimonies of the witnesses must be taken at face value. He writes this about the tactics used to smear them:

This became a formula: ignore the testimony and attack the witness, the same pattern as the detailed current treatments. That method is sure to caricature its victims: lead off with the worst names anyone ever called them, take all charges as presented without investigating, solidify mistakes as lifelong characteristics, and ignore all positive accomplishments or favorable judgments on their lives. Such bad methods will inevitably produce bad men on paper. The only problem with this treatment is that it cheats the consumer—it appears to investigate personality without really doing so.

This description exactly fits Bennett’s treatment of the witnesses. Indeed, essentially every charge Bennett brings to bear against the witnesses is answered in Anderson’s book, along with a mountain of positive evidence in their favor. Since the charges have been answered for at least twenty years (although Bennett never cites Anderson’s work on the subject), I will forgo an exhaustive rebuttal; rather, I will examine a few examples of Bennett’s charges to illustrate the sort of misuse he makes of historical sources.

142. Ibid., 166.
Consider Bennett’s assessment of the testimony of the Eight Witnesses:

Mormon missionaries tell you these eight men both saw and handled the plates. In fact, according to another Smith brother, William, his father and brothers only “hefted” something covered with a sack. John Whitmer seems to be the only one to give an independent statement that he handled the plates uncovered. Yet he, too, stated that they were shown to him “by a supernatural power.” If the plates were physical objects in Smith’s possession, what need is there for heavenly assistance in seeing them? (IM, p. 417)

In contrast, consider Anderson’s analysis of William Smith’s testimony. Anderson’s text clarifies that William was not one of the Eight Witnesses and that Bennett seems to have conflated the night Joseph received the plates with Joseph Sr.’s later experience with the Eight Witnesses:

Joseph’s father was not allowed to see the plates then, but he became an official witness [later]. This was after the translation was finished, as William explained to an educated minister who reported his conversation in 1841: Joseph Smith “kept the plates a long time in his chamber, and after translating from them, he repeatedly showed them to his parents and to other friends. But my informant said he had never seen them.” But picking them up and feeling their contour was another matter, for at the end of the above speech William was asked how much the plates weighed, and his answer was: “As near as I could tell, about sixty pounds.” William said the same thing in the early story of Mormonism that he authored, recounting how Joseph “escaped to the house and brought the plates with him—wrapped up in a towfrock.” In the same work William sharply distinguished himself from his father and brothers Hyrum and Samuel, “who were witnesses to the truth of the book.” They had this additional privilege later, for William could say of himself
(and the family) on the night that Joseph brought in the plates: "I was permitted to lift them as they lay in a pillow-case, but not to see them, as it was contrary to the commands he had received. They weighed about 60 lbs. according to the best of my judgment." All of William's reports of lifting and feeling seem to refer to this same night, for Joseph did not usually keep the plates wrapped in his work smock, which William called "his everyday frock such as young men used to wear then." Not long before his death, William reiterated his vivid experience with the plates to interviewer J. W. Peterson. "Bro. Briggs then handed me a pencil and asked Bro. Smith if he ever saw the plates his brother had had, from which the Book of Mormon was translated. He replied, 'I did not see them uncovered, but I handled them and hefted them while wrapped in a tow frock and judged them to have weighed about sixty pounds. I could tell they were plates of some kind and that they were fastened together by rings running through the back.'" 143

Bennett would lead the reader to believe that William Smith's testimony casts doubt on that published by the Eight Witnesses (among whom were his father and two of his brothers). Their testimony, published in the front matter of the Book of Mormon, proclaims that "Joseph Smith ... has shown unto us the plates ... which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated, we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship." However, it turns out that William's testimony does not contradict that of the official witnesses and in fact significantly adds to its weight.

Was John Whitmer the only one of the eight to give an "independent statement" that he had handled the plates uncovered? Consider the following testimonies, which Anderson documents, reporting that the witnesses stood by their printed testimony and said they

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143. Ibid., 23–24.
saw the plates. Lyman Wight recalled Peter Whitmer's testimony "that he had seen the plates." 144 Jacob Whitmer's second son told Andrew Jenson, "My father, Jacob Whitmer, was always faithful and true to his testimony to the Book of Mormon, and confirmed it on his death bed." 145 Hiram Page's second son told Andrew Jenson that his father remained true to his testimony to the last and that "whenever he had an opportunity to bear his testimony to this effect, he would always do so, and seemed to rejoice exceedingly in having been privileged to see the plates." 146 Daniel Tyler related that Samuel Smith told him that "he knew his brother Joseph had the plates, for the prophet had shown them to him, and he had handled them and seen the engravings thereon." 147 Hyrum Smith's brother-in-law, Joseph Fielding, reported, "My sister bears testimony that her husband has seen and handled the plates." 148 Angus Cannon recalled a sermon in 1844 where he heard Hyrum Smith testify "to the divinity of the Book of Mormon and the appearance of the plates from which it was translated." 149 Finally, Hyrum published the following in a letter to the Times and Seasons, after having languished in the abominable conditions of Liberty Jail for months: "I thank God that I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had borne testimony to." 150 In all, at least seven of the Eight Witnesses testified, independently as well as together, that they had both seen and handled the plates. (The eighth witness, Christian Whitmer, was still in full church fellowship when he died.) Bennett's failure to report these events betrays, at the very least, inadequate research.

What about John Whitmer's testimony that he saw the plates "by a supernatural power"? 151 This statement is given to us thirdhand,

144. Ibid., 126.
145. Ibid., 129.
146. Ibid., 130.
147. Ibid., 140.
148. Ibid., 146.
149. Ibid.
150. Ibid., 148.
and Whitmer apparently did not elaborate. Perhaps he was simply generalizing about how the circumstances surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon were attended by manifestations of divine power. This would be consistent with his other statements and those of the other witnesses present.

Bennett’s views on both the Three and Eight Witnesses seem to be that all of them were so religiously stirred up that they convinced themselves they were treated to some sort of mystical vision of the plates. However, even if the Eight Witnesses had not physically handled the plates, this scenario would still present a significant problem. Regarding the “miracle of the sun” at Fátima in 1917, Keating reports that seventy thousand people saw the sun “zig-zagging” in the sky and that both the ground and people’s rain-soaked clothing immediately dried. He writes: “Some commentators, then and now, claim the miracle of the sun was an example of mass hallucination, but hallucination is a solitary phenomenon. In medical literature, there are no records of even two people having the same hallucination at the same time.” If I wanted to discount the “miracle of the sun” (which I do not), I might appeal to “unexplained atmospheric phenomena,” or some such catchphrase. Bennett himself admits that Martin Harris was the only one of the witnesses to view the plates alone with Joseph Smith (IM, pp. 413, 417 n. 27). How did Joseph Smith simultaneously bring about visions of the plates for two groups of four men as well as for Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer? Bennett still has some explaining to do.

Bennett Slays the Straw Men

The ultimate expression of Bennett’s excessive faultfinding is his tendency to knock down straw-man doctrines. It is a difficult task to gain an adequate understanding of a substantially different religious tradition, but if one is intent on finding fault, he or she will unfailingly garble many things. It takes much less work to defeat an imaginary,
stupid opponent than a real, intelligent one. This is the primary reason that it is highly inadvisable to seek information about another religion primarily from hostile sources. As Isaiah Bennett put it when he was still a Mormon: "When I joined the Church and entered the waters of baptism I had a great deal of repentance to do, especially intellectual repentance. To actually have gone to the enemy to find out what the Church believes—what a blockhead!"\(^{154}\) In his book, Bennett points out several instances in which Mormons have mischaracterized Catholic doctrine, but his examples are generally off-hand comments and not large books pretending to deliver "what Catholics really believe." In this section I will point out just a few of the many instances in which Bennett misses subtle points of LDS theology and builds large arguments upon the basis of imaginary doctrines. Evidently, a couple of years as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ and a stack of anti-Mormon source books do not make an expert on Mormonism.

In *Inside Mormonism*, Bennett quotes several statements by Elder Bruce R. McConkie to the effect that we are to worship the Father rather than Jesus Christ (pp. 297–300). However, in context it is clear that McConkie was only teaching that we should not pray directly to Jesus, but only to the Father. If Bennett had bothered to look up "worship" in McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine*, he would have found this statement: "The Father and the Son are the objects of all true worship. . . . No one can worship the Father without also worshipping the Son."\(^{155}\) One would think that Catholics, who insist that praying to saints does not equal worship, would not have much trouble understanding the LDS belief that worship does not necessarily equal prayer. Latter-day Saints are taught to pray to the Father in the name of the Son and through the Holy Spirit. The believer addresses the Father in the name of Jesus Christ because Jesus is our advocate; being filled with the Holy Spirit, the believer is prompted to pray for that which is in accord with the will of God.\(^{156}\) One can imagine the

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156. See ibid., 581–87.
Son standing next to the believer, pleading his case as the believer strives to submit his will to the will of God as communicated by the Holy Spirit. If our prayers are always addressed to the Father, that does not mean we do not worship the other members of the Godhead through reverence, devotion, gratitude, and keeping of covenants with him.

Bennett continues this line of reasoning (IM, pp. 299–300) by appealing to a common misconception among members of the Church of Jesus Christ that the name Elohim refers exclusively to the Father and that the name Jehovah refers exclusively to the Son. Bennett asserts, “The tangle of Mormon error is further exposed when one notices that we are specifically instructed to worship Jehovah and not any other God whatsoever, which would preclude worshipping Elohim” (IM, p. 299; see Exodus 34:14). While it is true that Latter-day Saints use these names to refer to specific persons, it is also true that these names are used as titles that may be applied to other members of the Godhead, referring to the fact that the Godhead, is in a sense, “one God.” James E. Talmage quoted this excerpt from Smith’s Comprehensive Dictionary of the Bible: “Name in the scriptures not only = that by which a person is designated, but frequently = all that is known to belong to the person having this designation, and the person himself.”157 Since the Son is one with the Father, and all that belongs to the Father also belongs to the Son, often the Godhead is referred to in a collective sense. For instance, Talmage also wrote:

Note that distinction is not always indicated here between the Eternal Father or Elohim, and the Son who is Jehovah or Jesus Christ. In the Authorized or King James Version of the Old Testament, JEHOVAH is rendered LORD, printed in capitals; while LORD GOD indicates the personalities of Elohim and Jehovah, or both the Father and the Son.158

A perfect illustration of these different usages can be found in the writings of Joseph Smith. In a prayer delivered at the dedication of

157. Talmage, Jesus the Christ, 38.
158. Talmage, Articles of Faith, 44.
the Kirtland Temple, Joseph addressed his pleas to the “Holy Father, in the name of Jesus Christ,” but, in the middle of the prayer, he said, “O Jehovah, have mercy upon this people” (D&C 109:4, 34). A few days later he received a revelation in which Jesus Christ appeared; Joseph Smith identified him as Jehovah (see D&C 110:3). Consider the statement, “Let us plead the justice of our cause; trusting in the arm of Jehovah, the Eloheim, who sits enthroned in the heavens,” as well as this prayer:

O Thou, who seest and knowest the hearts of all men—Thou eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Jehovah—God—Thou Eloheim, that sittest, as saith the Psalmist, “enthroned in heaven,” look down upon Thy servant Joseph at this time; and let faith on the name of Thy Son Jesus Christ, to a greater degree than Thy servant ever yet has enjoyed, be conferred upon him, even the faith of Elijah.

Similarly, Brigham Young said, “It is true that the earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely, Eloheim, Yahovah, and Michael.” But on another occasion, he said, “We obey the Lord, Him who is called Jehovah, the Great I Am, I am a man of war, Eloheim, etc.” Clearly, the Latter-day Saints do worship Jesus Christ and sometimes have referred the title Jehovah to the Father and Elohim to the Son.

Another example of a straw man is Bennett’s charge that “Mormons deny the existence of original sin” (see IM, pp. 336–43). On the surface, this seems to be perfectly true, but he continues by stating that because of the LDS belief in a premortal existence, “it would be blasphemous to think these spirits would come into mortal life with encumbrances other than those of their own pre-mortal making” (IM, p. 341). This is inaccurate in that Latter-day Saints do believe that man inherits a “sinful nature” because of the fall: “As in Adam, or

159. History of the Church, 5:94.
160. Ibid., 127.
162. Ibid., 12:99.
by nature, they fall, even so the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins” (Mosiah 3:16). The LDS belief in premortal existence, however, does dictate that “every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God” (D&C 93:38). The “fallen nature” is linked with the body, rather than the spirit, in LDS thought, whereas other Christians usually teach that both body and spirit were tainted by Adam. As Nephi put it, “And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh?” (2 Nephi 4:27). Brigham Young was even more explicit:

When the spirit overcomes the evil consequences of the fall, which are in the mortal tabernacle, it will reign predominant in the flesh, and is then prepared to be exalted, and will, in the resurrection, be reunited with those particles that formed the mortal body, which will be called together as with the sound of a trumpet and become immortal.\textsuperscript{163}

Even Bennett admits that “the flesh rebelled against the spirit (Rom. 7:23)” (IM, p. 341). If so, how can the spirit be tainted to the same degree as the flesh? In fact, the greatest distinction in LDS teaching on the fall is that men will not be held accountable for Adam’s transgression but only for their own (see Moses 6:54; Article of Faith 2). Bennett denies that Catholics believe men will be punished for Adam’s sin (IM, pp. 342–43), but it is more correct to assert that although it was once taught that unbaptized infants will be excluded from the full reward of heaven, the Catholic Church now teaches that no one knows the fate of unbaptized infants, whose only faults are inherited from Adam.

Bennett complains that it is an “entrenched misunderstanding in the Mormon Church” that Catholicism teaches the damnation of unbaptized infants. He claims, “The Catholic Church has never taught the damnation of any unbaptized infant” (IM, p. 212). However, this isn’t the entire story, as can be seen from the following statement from the 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia, which was printed before recent popes began to soften the teaching on this issue:

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 7:287.
The fate of infants who die without baptism must be briefly considered here. The Catholic teaching is uncompromising on this point, that all who depart this life without baptism, be it of water, or blood, or desire, are perpetually excluded from the vision of God. This teaching is grounded, as we have seen, on Scripture and tradition, and the decrees of the Church. Moreover, that those who die in original sin, without ever having contracted any actual sin, are deprived of the happiness of heaven is stated explicitly in the Confession of Faith of the Eastern Emperor Michael Palaeologus, which had been proposed to him by Pope Clement IV in 1267, and which he accepted in the presence of Gregory X at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274. The same doctrine is found also in the Decree of Union of the Greeks, in the Bull “Laetentur Coeli” of Pope Eugene IV, in the Profession of Faith prescribed for the Greeks by Pope Gregory XIII, and in that authorized for the Orientals by Urban VIII and Benedict XIV. Catholic theologians are unanimous, consequently, in declaring that infants dying without baptism, are excluded from the beatific vision; but as to the exact state of these souls in the next world they are not agreed.164

Certainly, many Latter-day Saints have not had a very clear idea of the Catholic teaching on this point, and perhaps we should be more exact in our language regarding this. On the other hand, it has clearly been officially taught by the Roman Catholic Church that unbaptized infants will be excluded in some way from the full measure of salvation granted to others, including baptized infants. Perhaps this could be more accurately described as an exclusion from reward rather than a “punishment,” but the difference appears to me to be merely semantic. In any case, we should definitely educate ourselves about the current Catholic teaching, which is that they do not know whether unbaptized infants may be saved. “As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the

great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: ‘Let the children come to me, do not hinder them,’ allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church’s call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.”

Other points should be raised about Bennett’s critique of the supposed LDS doctrine of the fall. First, he complains that the Latter-day Saints believe the fall was necessary, while the Bible portrays it as a sin (IM, pp. 338-40). However, if Adam and Eve did not know the difference between good and evil at the time, how can they be held fully accountable for their action by a just God? He also objects to the idea that the fall was a necessary and even fortunate event, “even if God used it to bring about something even better for us” (IM, p. 343).

If something better was brought about by God in consequence of the fall, was it not a fortunate event? Consider this exclamation by Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 200): “O mystic wonder! The Lord was laid low, and man rose up; and he that fell from Paradise receives as the reward of obedience something greater (than Paradise)—namely, heaven itself.” Is it not a good thing that God can say man “is become as one of us, to know good and evil” (Genesis 3:22)? And why would it be inherently a bad thing to be like God?

None of these straw-man topics has been fully discussed here, but enough has been said to demonstrate that Bennett bases much of his argumentation on an incomplete understanding of LDS doctrine. Even if this were the only legitimate criticism of Bennett’s work, it would be clear that his conclusions about LDS beliefs should be treated as suspect.

Conclusions

I can think of no better statement to summarize my findings about Bennett’s work than the following by Keating:

165. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1261. The catechism can be viewed at www.christusrx.org/www/CDHN/baptism.html#WHO.
We all like a good argument. We like the give-and-take, and we enjoy watching one party score a point and the second return the favor. A good argument, particularly on an important theme, stimulates our minds and helps us draw our own conclusions. We do not demand that each participant give both sides—each needs to give only his own, as well as he can—but we do insist on fair play. We do not want one participant to misrepresent what the other thinks or to make points by using cheap shots. Ridicule, misrepresentation, taking quotations out of context, bending the truth, leaving out important facts—these violate the rules of the game.\(^{167}\)

I have had enough experience with anti-Mormon literature to come to expect such behavior, but it is deeply disappointing to me to find this approach used among Catholics. I am disappointed because, in my experience, Catholics have been much less inclined than certain Protestant groups to engage in such religious mudslinging. I have had several reasonable and charitable discussions with Catholic acquaintances in the past, including an ex-Mormon and another who makes his living defending the Catholic faith, and I am very disappointed that such misconceptions are being published and distributed by a respected Catholic institution. It is my hope that Catholic Answers will turn from this behavior and initiate a legitimate discussion of LDS beliefs and practices.

It is also my hope that Latter-day Saints will be more careful and charitable when describing the beliefs of their Roman Catholic neighbors. All parties could benefit from following the guidelines suggested by Joseph Smith:

\begin{quote}
If I esteem mankind to be in error, shall I bear them down? No. I will lift them up, and in their own way too, if I cannot persuade them my way is better; and I will not seek to compel any man to believe as I do, only by the force of reasoning, for truth will cut its own way. Do you believe in Jesus Christ?
\end{quote}

\(^{167}\) Keating, Catholicism and Fundamentalism, 27.
and the Gospel of salvation which he revealed? So do I. Christians should cease wrangling and contending with each other, and cultivate the principles of union and friendship in their midst; and they will do it before the millennium can be ushered in and Christ takes possession of His kingdom.¹⁶⁸