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Abstract Review of *One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (2002), by Richard Abanes.

A Dancer/Journalist's Anti-Mormon Diatribe

Rockwell D. Porter[1]

Anti-Mormon literature, some of which is focused on the Mormon past, continues to pour from the presses.[2] Some of it comes highly recommended. Can it be trusted?

The Mormon Past through the Lens of a Few Anti-Mormon Sources

Richard Abanes came to the task of revealing "the true and complete history of Mormonism," which he sets forth in *One Nation under Gods,* with truly remarkable credentials. These need to be known. In the 1980s he was involved with a controversial religious movement started in Ohio by Victor Paul Wierville called the Way International. Much like other joiners or cult-shifters, he was soon dissatisfied with his first "cult" experience and became a countercultist. He was

1. Rockwell D. Porter is a composite effort of several scholars from different academic disciplines who collaborated in writing this review.

2. Some of these publishers (that is, printers) have rather strange-sounding names, even when they are not exactly in faraway places. Four Walls Eight Windows is not exactly a household name. This is not, however, to say that a book by Richard Abanes will not be aggressively marketed by the sectarian countercult movement.

Review of Richard Abanes. *One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church.* New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002. xxv + 651 pp., with bibliography and index. $32.00.

employed by the Christian Research Institute (CRI), a wealthy countercult started by the late Walter Martin, which later came under the control of Hank Hanegraaff. Along with Bill McKeever, Kurt Van Gorden, and others, in 1997 Abanes was heavily involved in the production of the revised, updated, and expanded edition of Martin's notorious countercult classic entitled *The Kingdom of the Cults*.[3]

Subsequently, an ugly, acrimonious falling-out took place between Hanegraaff and Martin's former disciples (and also Martin's family) over, among other things, the control and direction of CRI. Hanegraaff terminated Abanes and his wife, Evangeline (aka Bri), along with over a hundred other employees. Tempers flared, angry letters were written, and lawsuits followed. The feud between these competing countercult factions has not gone away. Hence, one of the unexplained anomalies of this episode of internecine fighting in the fundamentalist/evangelical countercult movement is the glowing endorsement given to *One Nation under Gods* by Hanegraaff (dust cover). Abanes and Hanegraaff now seem to be on good terms.

But who is Richard Abanes? He is a confident, handsome fellow in his early forties. In addition to having started out as a "cultist" and then a countercultist when he was somehow liberated from his initial cultic bondage, he is a former Broadway singer/dancer, having performed in "Dreamgirls" and "A Chorus Line," as well as appearing in TV commercials and movies. He also advertises himself as an investigative reporter who is, of course, a recognized authority on cults and new religious movements. He has published books warning against cults and new religions.[4] And he currently operates both his own countercult called Religious Information Center (RIC) and some-

3. See Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults,* ed. Hank Hanegraaff (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 1997).

4. See, for example, Richard Abanes, *Defending the Faith: A Beginner's Guide to Cults and New Religions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997); *End-Time Visions: The Doomsday Obsession,* 2nd ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1998); and *Fantasy and Your Family: A Closer Look at the Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, and Modern Magick* (Camp Hill, Pa.: Horizon Books, 2002). His sensationalistic harangue against the Harry Potter books has made him very controversial and an object of much ridicule.

thing called Eternity Music, which markets religious music that he claims is sensitive, comforting, and worshipful.

One Nation under Gods falls squarely into the category of agenda-driven exposé. For Abanes the history of Mormonism is "rife with nefarious deeds, corruption, vice, and intolerance" (p. 436). Sandra Tanner, in her foreword to *One Nation under Gods* (pp. xiii–xiv), tells a version of how she was raised in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and of her apostasy. When questions occurred to her that presumably were not answered to her satisfaction, she doubted the truth of her childhood faith; she concluded that Brigham Young, who was one of her distant ancestors, was "not the holy prophet of God I thought he was" (p. xiii). Sandra, in league with her somewhat eremitic husband, sought and of course soon found "a dark side" (p. xiii) to the Church of Jesus Christ, which they have been working to expose and publicize ever since. "Career apostates," as Lawrence Foster calls them,[5] the Tanners have provided grist for the anti-Mormon mill for several decades.[6] In endorsing *One Nation under Gods,* Sandra Tanner also conveniently summarizes it. It details, she says, "the LDS church's quest for religious supremacy" and its "desire for economic and political dominance in order to pave the way for the Kingdom of God on Earth" (p. xiv). She continues, "Joseph Smith's occult practices, the creation of the *Book of Mormon,* the mysterious Danite assassins, Joseph Smith's murder, the Mormon move to Utah, blood atonement killings, polygamy, Mormon cover-ups and conspiracies—all are discussed in this volume" (p. xiv). It turns out that *One Nation under Gods* is essentially a rehash of

5. Lawrence Foster, "Career Apostates: Reflections on the Works of Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Dialogue* 17/2 (1984): 35–60; reprinted in a modified version under the title "Apostate Believers: Jerald and Sandra Tanner's Encounter with Mormon History," in *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History,* ed. Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 343–65.

6. In a revealing tale of the source and emotional power behind the lifelong hostility of the Tanners to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Sandra Tanner presented a talk, "Reflections on 42 Years of Apostasy," to the Eighth Annual Ex-Mormon Conference, 5 October 2002, in Salt Lake City.

previous indictments and assessments assembled by the Tanners and spread by them through their so-called "ministry." Abanes does, of course, supplement what the Tanners have assembled, unfortunately often with "research" gathered from anti-Mormon Web sites, some of which are simply despicable.[7]

To round out the catalog of horrors that make up *One Nation under Gods,* one might add the following: polygamy as an oppressive marriage system, the deceptive plural marriages that occurred after the Manifesto, the refusal of church leaders to allow examination of the source materials that would supposedly prove the corruption and evil of Mormonism, the racism of the church, and the failure of the 1978 revelation granting the priesthood to blacks to measure up to the high moral demands of critics of the church like Sandra Tanner. We even get the so-called Olympic scandal (the charges against Utahns on the local committee for using bribery to influence the decision of the International Olympic Committee to hold the winter games of 2002 in Salt Lake City). You get the idea. Launching sweeping condemnations of the work of Latter-day Saint historians, Abanes helpfully tells us how he will provide "a more objective sketch" by using as his source materials "non-LDS witnesses, secular media articles, and private journals" (p. xvi). His starting point, in other words, is an assertion that the existing histories are cover-ups or otherwise flawed because they do not give the negative information (or spin) that, if available, would pull the Church of Jesus Christ from its foundations and expose the damning dark side of Latter-day Saint beliefs

7. The endnotes for *One Nation under Gods* (pp. 475–618) are revealing. Abanes often sends his readers to Web sites for information. He cannot provide page numbers or guarantee that the item cited will even be available to the reader. He also frequently indicates that he is quoting from a secondhand source, indicating that he has not read the original and hence is not aware of the context. And one wonders if he has read or understood the literature he cites. A fine example is provided by a note in "About Mormon History" (pp. xvi, 477 n. 6); he cites a dozen essays without an indication of what issues are being discussed in the literature he cites. Those unfamiliar with historical scholarship may assume that a mass of citations ensures sound scholarship. This is not true. Instead, bloated endnotes often demonstrate, when the citations are checked or when one knows the literature being cited, the fragility of a literature.

and practices. His effort resembles an attempt to write the history of Judaism from anti-Semitic sources.

But how accurate is his bald, sweeping dismissal of all previous published histories? Do any of the traditional histories admit that the Saints were sometimes abrasive and made themselves nuisances in Missouri? Try B. H. Roberts. Try Joseph Fielding Smith or any general history. Do these histories tell about and condemn the Mountain Meadows Massacre? As for the murders in frontier Utah in the 1850s, Roberts reviews those that were of high profile and were charged to the Saints, though he does not simply accept the unproven allegations of Mormon-haters. And what of the impressive accumulation of scholarship over the past three decades, not to mention significant earlier works?[8] Is any of this to be trusted? Has Abanes allowed his readers even to know of its existence? Is he, one wonders, aware of this literature? The fact is that, in all periods and different areas of church history, valuable works exist—theses, dissertations, articles, books. But with his key in hand, Abanes picks what he wishes—whatever will serve his partisan purposes—and then cavalierly suppresses or sweeps all the rest into the dustbin.

For instance, in discussing the so-called wealth of the church, an evenhanded, dispassionate analysis would give the figures, where they are available and reliable, and explain where these resources come from and what they are used for. What we get here instead is the *National Enquirer* approach: screaming headlines and charges—implied if not stated—of a nefarious conspiracy.

One effect of the rapid-fire, accusatory form of this book is that anyone who wishes to respond fully in a review of it is faced with an

8. How well Abanes has mastered the relevant literature on the historical topics he addresses can be determined by glancing at his endnotes (pp. 475–618) and by noting what is not included in his "Select[ed] Bibliography" (pp. 619–27). To see what Abanes has in mind by "select," one might compare his list of sources with what can be found in *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography,* ed. James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker, and David J. Whittaker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). Even a beginning student of the Mormon past, such as Abanes, should begin by consulting the relevant literature.

essentially impossible task. A topic-by-topic discussion, looking at the evidence and evaluating it, would require a book as long as the book being reviewed; in fact, it would require more space, because weighing evidence, considering pros and cons, simply cannot be accomplished without a more ample treatment of each issue.

For a sample of the Abanes method, consider his description of Brigham Young, his arch demon (pp. 220–21). Both Young himself and Heber C. Kimball spoke of his being a "dictator" on a couple of occasions, meaning that he had dictated to the people what they should do. Voilà. For Abanes, Brigham was in fact a ruthless dictator in the twentieth-century sense of that word. Think Hitler. Think Stalin. Is there reason to doubt that this is the intended impression? Then take this evidence: Brigham Young once said that "the man whom God calls to dictate affairs in the building up of his Zion has the right to dictate about everything connected with the building up of Zion, yes even to the ribbons the women wear; and any person who denies it is ignorant."[9] Overstated just a bit? Probably. But the key point, of course, is whether that "right" was translated into action.

Doubtless Abanes would not like to hear anyone else invite or tell *him* what to do. It is hard to imagine his accepting a mission call or a call to settle. But did Brigham Young really presume to tell all the people all the time everything that they should do? Did the Saints have to get his permission before going to the bathroom? Did he tell each Saint what crops he should plant? If someone made some choices on his own, was that Saint sent to hell across lots? That is the impression given by Abanes. "Those who dared object to these stringent directives were immediately disciplined" (p. 221). They could not even own personal property, says Abanes, showing scant awareness of the nature or chronology of the law of consecration, its limited application, or its abandonment.

This scenario raises a slight problem: If the Saints were quaking in their boots, afraid to do or say anything unless it was approved,

9. *Journal of Discourses,* 11:298.

what was the source of the "murmuring" that makes up much of Latter-day Saint history? If the Saints were so locked into a totalitarian system that they were forced to obey every whim of their evil leaders, why is it that the sermons are filled with calls for the Saints to be more obedient, to observe the Sabbath day, to stop backbiting, to be true to their covenants? Apparently, some of them did pretty much what they wanted to.

"Controversial"—what does this word mean? Does it not mean something like "debatable"—that the evidence is not clear-cut or that opinions differ, that something can be said on both sides? In this sense, presumably, the Church of Jesus Christ is and always has been controversial. So has Joseph Smith, who heard from Moroni that his name "should be had for good and evil" (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). As one reads through this book, chapter after chapter, topic after topic, is labeled controversial. But do not count on Abanes to let you know what, if anything, can be said in defense of the church. Do not count on him to show any reservations about accepting wholesale the testimony of hostile witnesses. This is a book for those who want to go over everything negative that has ever been said about the church, its leaders, and its members. Would it be possible for a fundamentalist preacher to do a similar job on Jews or Roman Catholics or other groups? And how adequate or fair would we consider such an approach? Would a "Select Bibliography" and bloated endnotes somehow turn such an adventure into genuine history?

A key to the mind-set of Abanes is his list of "Recommended Resources"—which turn out to be Web sites since he seems to assume that this is where one should look for sound information. One after another, the anti-Mormon references are listed and described as "valuable," "important," or "excellent," while "websites by devout Mormons tend to be overtly biased and permeated with LDS propaganda" (p. 469). Apparently in an effort to appear fair, he lists eight references to "Mormons/Fundamentalists/RLDS" and gives each a brief evaluation. The *Deseret News,* he says, is "biased, and unabashedly pro-LDS" (p. 472). The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) is dismissed as "highly biased, very unreliable," and, get this,

"often misleading due to its use of historical, archeological, and linguistic arguments unverifiable by persons not possessing higher education" (p. 473). Abanes says nothing about *BYU Studies,* the *Journal of Mormon History,* or *Utah Historical Quarterly*. He shows no disposition to summarize or even acknowledge scholarly work that fails to show the Saints as evil, corrupt, and the like. There is no engagement here, no conversation, no honest debate, no careful assessment, no "controversy." But, of course, UMI Ministries (what Abanes calls Utah Missions, Inc., using a name popular before a hostile takeover orchestrated by the Reverend Dennis Wright removed the Reverend John L. Smith from control of his "Ministry") is described as "a solidly evangelical Christian organization" (p. 472), with no mention that the literature it has distributed over the years has tended to be sensationalistic and inaccurate.

Like others who have provided introductory books on Mormonism, Abanes sees the need for a "Glossary of Mormon Terms" (pp. 437–44). Most of the definitions, though short and inevitably inadequate, carry no barb. But the "great and abominable church" is defined as "all religious assemblies, congregations, churches, or associations of people that are not Mormon" (p. 440). Give us a break. The Gideon Bible Society or Mother Teresa's service missions have not been described by this term and are, along with countless other such organizations, not so considered among Latter-day Saints. Abanes is not subtle or reflective.

Perhaps realizing that his readers will be overwhelmed by unfamiliar names, Abanes also includes a biographical listing of "Notable Mormons" (pp. 445–49). These are usually one-sentence entries with no effort to list, even in summary form, the main features of the person's life. Whenever applicable, he concludes the entry with capitalized "APOSTATIZED" or "EXCOMMUNICATED." It is interesting to discover what Abanes considers the main defining feature of each person's connection with the church. George Q. Cannon is "First Counselor in the First Presidency, went to prison for polygamy" (p. 445). Martin Harris is identified as one of the Three Witnesses who "APOSTATIZED" (p. 446), with no acknowledgment of his re-

turn to membership in the church. Boyd K. Packer is a "powerful LDS apostle, acting president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, nicknamed 'Darth Packer' for his authoritarian ways and strict adherence to LDS beliefs, thought to be behind the string of excommunications of intellectuals in the early 1990s" (p. 447). B. H. Roberts, according to this quick summary, "eventually lost his faith in the *Book of Mormon* by investigating its historicity" (p. 448). No contrary evidence is allowed.[10] Brigham Young, whose tempest-filled, challenging life stretched over seventy-six years and who, by any rational reckoning, has major achievements to his credit, is summed up as follows: "second Mormon president, ruthless and calculating, governed Utah and the LDS church for thirty years, a period during which the horrific doctrine of blood atonement was practiced" (p. 449). And so it goes.

In the universe of those who think like Abanes are two large classes of people who write about Mormonism: (1) the benighted and deceived or, worse, the deliberately dishonest who hide the truth and explain away events and statements that fail to project a Pollyanna, hearts-and-flowers version of the past; and (2) the intelligent, honest, "objective" persons, like himself, who lay it all out. The trouble, unfortunately, is that he does not lay it all out. His effort ends up telling us more about the countercult mind-set than about the Latter-day Saints and their faith.

One Nation under Gods presents itself as "A History of the Mormon Church." That is false advertising. Instead, it is a "History of the Dark Side of the 'Mormon Church,'" or, to be more conversational, a consecutive lineup of everything damning that anyone has ever said about the Church of Jesus Christ or its members. This the author admits. And if Abanes was really writing an "objective," "unbiased" history of the Church of Jesus Christ, why does he include a tendentious chapter entitled "Is Mormonism Christian?" (pp. 375–400)?[11]

10. See Daniel C. Peterson, review of "The Disappointment of B. H. Roberts: Five Questions That Forced a Mormon General Authority to Abandon the Book of Mormon," by James R. Spencer, *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 69–86.

11. Abanes treats his readers to two of those self-serving, question-begging charts in which "Mormon Beliefs . . ." are listed—often inaccurately—on the left side of a page and

Did the leadership of the church ever do anything good? One must turn to others to find out about relief programs and aid to Native Americans. Certainly, there is nothing here about the generous humanitarian aid sent to disaster areas in all parts of the world. There is no mention of cooperation between Latter-day Saints and Roman Catholics in efforts to reduce human suffering. That would not confirm the horrifying stereotype Abanes wishes to project. At the very least, one supposes, the Saints should be allowed to speak for themselves. One does not have to go far to find people who see the Church of Jesus Christ as a great blessing in their lives, but they do not appear in this book.

This is a book to be used with great caution. On each of the specific incidents or charges, moving through the book chapter by chapter, the reader should say something like this: "Well, that is what the *enemies* said. How well does it hold up? Even if true in some sense, how *representative* is it?" One must not, in other words, accept the Abanes version as the whole, unvarnished, and unbiased truth. This book will not help readers to better understand their Latter-day Saint neighbors. It does run the risk of promoting the kind of aversion and rejection that led in earlier times to pogroms against Jews, lynchings of blacks by the Ku Klux Klan, and, come to think of it, the massacre of the Saints at Haun's Mill. This is what comes from a one-sided presentation, focusing on the "dark side," seeing no qualifications, never allowing a group to speak for itself, never trying to listen and learn from the other one.

The author leaves out nothing that he thinks might put his subject in a bad light. And in each instance, he puts the worst possible interpretation on the incident or event. If there is anything to be

"Christian Beliefs . . ." are presented on the right side (pp. 378, 382). The supposed purpose of these charts is to help the reader decide if those "Mormons" are Christians. What we miss is a neon light flashing the word "No!" But the punch line of the chapter, following in the footsteps of Walter Martin, is that the Church of Jesus Christ is a cult. Even some of the more bellicose sectarian anti-Mormons have begun to abandon that charge, but not Abanes.

said on the positive side, he ignores it or mentions it only to sweep it aside. If the Mormon-haters of the past made allegations, that is good enough for Abanes.

Abanes does not pretend to be a historian; he boasts rather of being an "investigative reporter"—that is, a journalist, and his work is merely a "popular" account and not scholarship. What he does is to take advantage of the work of others. But, as suggested earlier, it is a select group he lines up in his support: These include career apostates, excommunicants (often for moral failings), homosexuals, self-proclaimed experts, dissidents, and those who wish to warn the world against the sinister, secret, malignant "cult" they consider Mormonism to be. It is instructive to see how a dozen or so negative writers—when we boil it down, that is what it comes to—can be used to such effect when their views are brought together in a relentless onslaught on the Saints. In their mind, and apparently in the mind of Abanes, they are pure-minded, objective, unbiased, honest truth seekers with nothing more in mind than the good of humanity. If you are just a little suspicious of such pretense, you should be.

Journalists like snappy headlines and attention-grabbing declarations. Not reluctant to offer a conclusion at the end of his book, Abanes writes: "The history of Mormonism is rife with nefarious deeds, corruption, vice, and intolerance. So far the fruits of Mormonism have included lust, greed, theft, fraud, violence, murder, religious fanaticism, bribery, and racism" (p. 436). Apparently, the author does not like the Church of Jesus Christ. As he he sees it, Latter-day Saints are bad—really bad. (We notice, though, that he forgot to mention one of the seven deadly sins—gluttony.) If any ordinary member of the church raises her hand and wants to say that, for her, the "fruits" are quite different and far more positive, she will be ruled out of order.

Sandra Tanner endorses this vituperative attack by Abanes as "ideal for anyone wanting a concise, accurate, and easy-to-understand history of Mormonism from its inception to the present" (dust cover). Not convinced? Then listen to Hank Hanegraaff: The book "reveals . . . the true and complete history of Mormonism from its nineteenth

century origins to the 2002 Olympics" (dust cover). Hanegraaff is president of the Christian Research Institute. For Michael Shermer, publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, Abanes has produced "a triumph of research and wisdom" (dust cover). Wisdom, no less. If you wonder whether any of these endorsers have axes to grind, do not dare to ask—and they will not tell.

An "Educator's" View of the Church of Jesus Christ

There is a curious link between Richard Abanes's book and one written by Charles L. Wood LLC.[12] It turns out to be none other than Sandra Tanner, who does public relations for the Mom and Pop anti-Mormon "ministry" that she and her husband, Jerald, have operated for years in Salt Lake City. She highly recommends both *One Nation under Gods* and *The Mormon Conspiracy.*[13] One might fault her for doing this, but that would be unfair, for she does not seem properly equipped to provide an informed judgment—she seems, instead, to have never matured past her initial hostility for the Latter-day Saints, and, in addition, she is quite unfamiliar with the scholarly literature on the Church of Jesus Christ. If a book is anti-Mormon or can be used as a weapon against the Saints, she and her husband appear ready to market it.

In *The Mormon Conspiracy,* Wood indicates that he "first became interested in researching the Mormon Church when he was given

12. Charles L. Wood LLC, *The Mormon Conspiracy* (San Diego: Black Forest, 2001). The LLC that is included as part of Wood's name would seem to identify him as a Limited Liability Corporation. The following appears on the reverse side of the title page of his book: "Black Forest Press disclaims any association with or responsibility for the ideas, opinions or facts expressed by the author of his book. No dialogue is totally accurate or precise." It seems that both Wood and those who printed his book are anxious about reactions to the content of *The Mormon Conspiracy*. It is, however, sectarian anti-Mormon preachers who tend to want to settle religious questions, to intimidate others, or to enrich themselves by turning to the courts.

13. Sandra Tanner's summary of *One Nation under Gods* also describes the contents of *The Mormon Conspiracy*. This should not be surprising, since sectarian anti-Mormon books are often hackneyed paint-by-the-numbers affairs and are usually heavily larded with recycled materials.

a copy of the *Book of Mormon*."[14] Then he is proud to claim that "several books have been researched, and quotes from them have been used to reinforce and document the conclusions reached in this book."[15] Wood consulted only literature in one way or another hostile to the Church of Jesus Christ, including, he boasts, "Janice Hutchinson's *The Mormon Missionaries,* Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History,* Sonia Johnson's *From Housewife to Heretic,* Deborah Laake's *Secret Ceremonies,* Latayne Colvett Scott's *The Mormon Mirage* and D. Michael Quinn's *The Mormon Hierarchy, Extensions of Power*."[16] One assumes he considers these works to be disinterested, scholarly treatises.

And what did Wood, who has "held positions as teacher and administrator in elementary, secondary and higher education" and who once was the "editor of the national journal, *American Secondary Education,*"[17] learn from this "research" in such secondary literature? He reports that he was

> dismayed at what he was learning about the church and felt an obligation to put down in writing these concerns, especially since they contrasted sharply with his understanding of freedom of thought, individualism, democracy and independence. Intensive reading and research brought about the discovery by the author that the history of the church was fraught with deception, authoritarian rule and leadership and was conspiratorial in its development.[18]

He thus "feels obligated to present the documentation that he feels reveals the fraud and dishonesty that the church's vast propaganda

14. Wood, *The Mormon Conspiracy,* i.

15. Ibid., iii.

16. Ibid. Hence sixty-three of his endnotes cite Quinn, thirty-three cite Brodie, thirty-five cite Scott, twenty-two cite Laake, eighteen cite Hutchinson, and so forth. Fourteen anti-Mormon writers provide nearly three hundred of his 373 endnotes. He seems rather innocently unaware of Latter-day Saint sources or scholarship.

17. According to the back cover of *The Mormon Conspiracy,* Wood has a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa and "was a professor at the University of Akron."

18. Wood, *The Mormon Conspiracy,* iv.

machine dispenses, as well as its real threat to democracy and freedom in America and throughout the world."[19]

As it turns out, Wood is also not fond of America's guarantees of religious freedom, the protection accorded American citizens abroad, or tax exemptions for religions. He insists, for example, that the State Department of the United States is helping Latter-day Saint missionaries to subvert the freedoms found abroad by helping to bring to power what he describes as a "monarchial style of administration" in which "the 'President' of the church is not elected by church members, but assumes power strictly by seniority."[20] Apparently, young missionaries, who carefully avoid any political activity, seek to transform the systems of government of countries throughout the world. Yet, if it is the governance of the church itself he is describing, the pope, who is not popularly elected by Catholics worldwide, is presumably equally dangerous. Moreover, in his view, "the liberal taxing policies of the United States provide the church with excessive tax exemptions which is [*sic*] being used by the church to attain its goal of Mormonizing America and the world."[21] These two complaints are not merely stray, unsupported opinions—they are the conclusions to his book and appear to be his original contributions to anti-Mormonism.

What Abanes and Wood have produced is neither serious historiography nor sober commentary. Quite the contrary. Each is a shameful work of sensationalistic, inflammatory propaganda. Both books reflect discredit upon their authors, their publishers, and those who promote them.

19. Ibid., v.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 253.