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Abstract Introduction to the current issue, including editor's picks. A Protestant historian's ideas about the durability of Mormonism—if it can survive the critical scrutiny of its foundational events—invite discussion of how secularism, cultural Mormonism, atheism, scientism, countercult anti-Mormonism, and other forms of intellectualism seek to disparage the faith of Latter-day Saints.

Editor's Introduction

THE FIRST STEPS

Louis Midgley, associate editor

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And they that have laughed shall see their folly. And calamity shall cover the mocker, and the scorner shall be consumed; and they that have watched for iniquity shall be hewn down and cast into the fire. (D&C 45:49–50)

Recently, as my wife and I traveled on the autoroute from the airport into Paris, I noticed signs pointing to St. Denis (the final resting place for French kings since the sixth century, as well as of Denis, the first bishop of Paris) and then saw the abbey. This famous basilica is several miles north of Paris and therefore also north of the highest hill in Paris, which was once the site of a tiny village, then eventually an artist colony and now a tourist attraction known as Montmartre—site of the famous Sacre Coeur Basilica—that is, the hill either near or where the legendary bishop of Paris was martyred. It seems that in AD 250, Pope Fabian (AD 236–250) sent Denis (aka Denys),¹ with two companions, to restore the Christian community in Lutetia, the Roman colony then located on the Ile de la Cité in the Seine in the center of what is now Paris. Denis seems to have antagonized the Roman governor, Sisinnius Fescenninus, who around AD 258 had him and

1. The first bishop of Paris is, unfortunately, sometimes conflated with Dionysius the Areopagite (see Acts 17:34) and also with Pseudo-Dionysius.

his companions beheaded. Denis may have been lynched on the way to the famous hill. He is supposed to have then carried his own head to what is now 9 Rue Yvonne-le-Tac on Montmartre, where he washed his bloody hands and is reportedly buried where the basilica bearing his name now stands.² When I noticed the famous basilica and Montmartre in the distance, I was reminded of the thoughtful effort by the distinguished Protestant historian Martin E. Marty to clarify what is at stake in the conversation over Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

The First Steps

Marty insists, and I believe correctly, that the faith of the Saints has always been “characterized by its thoroughly historical mode and mold.”³ He therefore holds that the challenges facing the Saints do not primarily involve theological but historical matters.⁴ Why? Post-Enlightenment skepticism about divine things has marginalized all forms of faith that make prophetic truth claims or that rest on divine special revelations; it leaves faith grounded on historical events problematic, unsettled, uncertain.⁵ Marty insisted that “Mormon thought is experiencing a crisis comparable to but more profound than that

2. In another version of this tale, Denis was killed by the Romans and his body was thrown into the Seine. His followers fished it out and buried it at the site of what is now the famous basilica.

3. Martin E. Marty, “Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography,” initially published in the *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 3–19, and then reprinted with a different title and in a slightly different form in Marty’s *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance* (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 303–25, 377–78. All quoted passages from this point are taken from the version of Marty’s remarks included in an anthology edited by George D. Smith, entitled *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 169–88 at 170.

4. Smith, *Faithful History*, 170. The challenge posed by modernity for both Roman Catholics and Protestants now tends to be focused on abstruse philosophical issues—on questions concerning natural, systematic, or dogmatic theology—and somewhat less on the authenticity of various theophanies.

5. Smith, *Faithful History*, 169. In the secular academy, if faith in God is not entirely displaced, the remnants of Enlightenment skepticism about divine things tend to squash it into tiny cultural enclaves. In academic circles the resulting vacuum is filled with a dogmatic scientism—a passionately held secular fundamentalism.

which Roman Catholicism recognized around the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65).⁶ The crisis facing Latter-day Saints, from Marty’s perspective, “has to do with the challenge of modern historical consciousness and criticism.”⁷ It is therefore the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims—the “*generative issues*”⁸—around which genuinely significant controversy swirls.

To explain why this is the case, Marty draws on a version of the tale of Denis who, after being lynched, carried his own head to his final resting place. “Let me clear the air,” Marty writes, “with a stark, almost crude, but still light-hearted and well-intended analogy.”⁹ He then quotes the following: “When Cardinal de Polignac told Madame du Deffand that the martyr Denis, the first Bishop of Paris, had walked a hundred miles carrying his head in his hand, Madame du Deffand correctly observed, ‘In such a promenade it is the first step that is difficult.’”¹⁰ According to Marty, “by analogy, if the beginnings of the promenade of Mormon history, the First Vision and the Book of Mormon, can survive the crisis, then the rest of the promenade follows and nothing that happens in it can really detract from the

6. Smith, *Faithful History*, 169.

7. Smith, *Faithful History*, 169.

8. Smith, *Faithful History*, 177.

9. Smith, *Faithful History*, 176.

10. Paul Elmen, *The Restoration of Meaning to Contemporary Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958), 189. Unfortunately, Marty drew his striking analogy from a somewhat less than carefully written devotional book. The famous retort concerning Denis by Marie Anne de Vichy-Chamrond, Marquise du Deffand (1696–1789), to Jules Auguste Armand Marie Polignac, a contemporary French diplomat and cardinal, seems to have been as follows: *La distance n’y fait rien, il n’y a que le premier pas qui coûte*, which I render as “the distance doesn’t matter; only the first step costs”—that is, is difficult or troublesome. Versions of this and of others of Madame du Deffand’s witty sayings made her a kind of *femme de lettres*. Mention of her quip about Denis appears in her letter dated 7 July 1763 to Jean Le Rond d’Alembert, a famous Enlightenment figure, who with others (including Horace Walpole, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Fontenelle) participated from time to time in Madame du Deffand’s famous Parisian salon. See Benedetta Craveri, *Madame du Deffand and Her World*, trans. Teresa Waugh (Boston: Godine, 1994), 176. Voltaire’s poem “La Pucelle,” a risqué, licentious history of Jeanne d’Arc, was one of his most popular books. He wrote to Madame du Deffand on 27 January 1764 that she deserved “the homage of a *pucelle*. One of your witticisms is quoted in the notes to this theological work.” Craveri, *Madame du Deffand*, 239, and see also 468 n. 147.

miracle of the whole. If the first steps do not survive, there can be only antiquarian, not fateful or faith-full, interest in the rest of the story.”¹¹ Marty clearly links fate to the faith of the Saints with a narrow slice of the Latter-day Saint past—those crucial and decisive generative issues or first steps.

A Digression on Fate

Why refer to a fateful rather than merely faithful concern for these crucial elements of the Mormon past? Here and now, when we confront the word *fate*, we most likely think of something predetermined or unalterable, and hence of death, destruction, and doom. But there is, I believe, an older and different sense of fate that links faith—understood as obedient love and trust in God—to historical events. This link helps us understand both faith and concern for generative issues.

Why link fate and faith? Put another way: why refer to a “fateful interest” in the past rather than the commonplace “faithful history,” especially since from about the fourteenth century the word *fate* has tended to identify an inexorable destiny, a fatal end, and hence doom? There are, I believe, good reasons for fastening on the word *fate*, though I am not claiming that Marty necessarily had them in mind. First, as an adjective *fateful* identifies something significant, important, or decisive, though not necessarily disaster or doom. Marty seems to have been referring to something of genuine concern, thus to something crucial or decisive, and not to doom.

In addition, our word *fate* has roots in the Latin verb *fari* (“to speak”) and also *fatum*, meaning “that which has been spoken [that is, by the gods].”¹² One source has it that a *fa* once identified a speech

11. Marty, “Two Integrities,” 176.

12. The Latin *fatum* seems to have had the following development: it was first a sentence of the Gods (*theosphaton* in Greek), then a lot or portion (*moira* in Greek, which was personified as a goddess in Homer), and then eventually one of the three goddesses referred to by the plural *fata* (fates) who somehow govern the course of human affairs. Each of these had Greek and Latin names seemingly designating their special directing functions. The word “faerie [later fairy]” is also related to the Latin *fatum*. Christianity seems to have subverted the *fata* (the three sisters), replacing them in the popular imagi-

that summoned vassals to arms and consequently also to a legal proclamation.¹³ Thus in a feudal jurisdiction the lord would issue a *fa* calling his vassals to their legal duty—that is, to arms (and possibly to battle) for a given number of days each year. A *fas* is thus also the divine proclamation or word, if we have made a covenant with the Lord, through which we are summoned to his service. The word *nefarious* once meant something like “not in accord with divine permission or law.” And words like *famous* or *infamous* label certain modes of speech about an individual, or an event or object.¹⁴

But there is more. The proclamation or summons issued by the lord yields what is called a *ban*, which once was a proclamation setting out the duty to serve him. If one refused to serve or deserted, one was banished (that is, outlawed); hence the Italian word *bandito* and the English word *bandit*. The word *ban*, since it identified something owed to or alternatively something owned by the lord, also identified public objects like the “banned mill,” which was a mill provided by the lord for the vassals that was made available for the welfare of all. And the word *banal* even now means commonplace and trite—that is, something to which everyone has access. In this sense divine mercy is banal, and the faithful follow a “banner.” They who obey the summons issued by the lord are not cursed or doomed, but, in accord with the stipulations of the covenant, they are blessed and rewarded for their service and for obedience to their duty. There is also the word *abandon*, which once meant giving up one’s duty to the lord, but now means to give something up, to place oneself or something under another’s control and so forth.

nation with *fay* (a race of beings endowed with curious magical powers). (I wish to thank Kevin Barney for much needed assistance and useful suggestions. Of course, I take full credit for any mistakes.)

13. See, for example, the entries under *ban* and *fate* in Joseph T. Shipley, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1995), 39, 149–50.

14. Barney has also pointed out that the Latin *fari* is related to the Greek *phanai* (to say) and *phonē* (sound, voice). Our words *famous* and *infamous* also seem to derive from a Proto-Indo-European root meaning “to speak, say or tell.”

“The Miracle of the Whole”

Dissident and cultural Mormons, as well as secular and sectarian anti-Mormon zealots, seek to exploit incidents in the Mormon past in their polemic against the Saints. But Marty brushes aside such matters as merely “borderline religious issues” that are not of genuine significance for the faith of the Saints. As Davis Bitton has recently pointed out, there is little in the Mormon past, however it is understood, that has much of anything to do with the crucial ground or content of the faith.¹⁵ As Marty puts it, nothing that happens in the Mormon past “can really detract from the miracle of the whole” *if the first steps in the promenade survive*. This should be obvious, but critics like to point out that the Saints have human imperfections or make mistakes, that some fail to obey the commandments or believe silly things, and so forth. These are what Marty describes as merely “political embarrassments” that present public relations problems. They are not of genuine intellectual interest, at least to those who have some sense of how faith has somehow survived the enormity of evil done through the ages by those presumably following Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁶

What is crucial for the faith of the Saints, what must not be abandoned, are what Marty calls “first steps”—the “generative events” or “issues.”¹⁷ It is, of course, these that trouble our critics the most, forming the essential agenda for what they say about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its history. This also explains the constant insistence by both secular and sectarian critics that peace can come only when the Saints abandon the founding proclamation of the faith and turn away from the covenants they have made with God. Then

15. See Davis Bitton’s analysis in “I Don’t Have a Testimony of the History of the Church,” *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 337–54.

16. For a sober account of the long parade of evil done by those struggling for ecclesiastical honors and dominion, or in league with (or acting as) corrupt secular regimes, or contending over what constitutes orthodox “Christianity,” see Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984).

17. Marty, “Two Integrities,” 178, 177.

and only then can we be thought of as Christians in the eyes of conservative Protestant critics.¹⁸

There has been no effort in the *Review* to picture the Saints as faultless heroes or the Brethren as infallible, or to defend or recommend a sanitized history of the Saints. Instead, what have been provided and promoted are more richly detailed, carefully written, fully documented accounts of the crucial texts and events in the Mormon past—those first steps in the promenade. Our efforts have been focused primarily on the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims—that is, on what Marty labels “the beginnings of the promenade of Mormon history,” the crucial “first steps.” We have not striven to prove the Book of Mormon. From the perspective of sound historical method, only more or less plausible accounts and not final proofs are possible. From the perspective of faith, though a deeper appreciation and understanding is both necessary and possible, proof is not necessary. Critics demand proof because they get the cart before the horse. They thereby slam the door on faith understood as trust in God.

The growth of an obviously faithful and sophisticated literature on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, much of it published in this *Review* or elsewhere under the FARMS imprint, has led to considerable dissonance among dissidents, cultural Mormons, and anti-Mormon zealots. Critics respond to this scholarly literature with vilification, animosity, and acrimony, with slurs, name-calling, and unseemly personal attacks. The tone is shrill; the mode is mockery.

Long before I entered the university, some smug, condescending remarks about the faith and the faithful had made their way into Midgley family gatherings. Though my father was anything but naive about the sins of the Saints, this exasperated him. In private I heard him say, “Fools mock, but they shall mourn.”¹⁹ It distressed him that

18. The constant quarrel over whether the faith of the Saints satisfies some creedal or theological *regula* is mere shadowboxing. The real issue always turns out to be the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims. Those most riveted to some narrow *credo* seem the most rankled since the crucial “first steps” seem to have survived critical scrutiny.

19. Much later I discovered that my father was quoting Ether 12:26.

family members had gone missing from the church, but it exasperated him when they displayed and justified their treason with condescending mockery. Now, looking back, these early encounters with dissidents turn out to have been a harbinger of the skirmishes I later discovered were taking place along the Wasatch Front.

My father never attended a university. But he loved literature and was deeply in thrall to poetry and Shakespeare. When I enrolled at the University of Utah in 1948, he was curious about what went on there. We often discussed my experiences in the classrooms and corridors of that institution. Through me he could vicariously experience portions of a university. He was appalled when I reported that there were some at that institution who ridiculed the faith of the Saints; he was also delighted when I reported that there were some thoughtful, faithful Latter-day Saints teaching at that school.²⁰

In the late 1940s and early 50s it was not the Gentiles at the University of Utah who were critical of the faith of the Saints; it was, instead, those eager to signal that they were liberated from what they imagined was a stifling provincialism. More specifically, they sought a liberation from what they pictured as the oppression or superstition of the “dominant religion.” Back then it was no secret that there were those who were busy substituting some trendy ideological fad for their former faith, or who were otherwise eager to imitate some fashion found in the popular culture. (Currently such a one might describe himself or herself as a “DNA Mormon,”²¹ whatever that might be, or

20. For example, G. Homer Durham was then chair of the Political Science Department and later, among other things, president of Arizona State University and eventually the LDS Church Historian and a General Authority.

21. See Lavina Anderson, “DNA Mormon: D. Michael Quinn,” in *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters*, ed. John Sillito and Susan Staker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 329–63. The expression “DNA Mormon” is Quinn’s own characterization of himself. When he was excommunicated, he told reporters that he was “a DNA Mormon. It’s in me, whether they accept or remove me.” Quinn, quoted in “Six Intellectuals Disciplined for Apostasy,” *Sunstone*, November 1993, 65–73 at 68. His remarks were attributed to something that appeared in the *Salt Lake Tribune*. Anderson seems to have chosen not to indicate the casual source of the language in her title. In 1998, Quinn sought to defend himself by returning to his rather odd genetic metaphor. Though excommunicated for “apostasy and conduct unbecoming a member,” he explained that, “nevertheless, as a seventh-generation member of the church I remain a DNA Mormon.”

as a “seventh generation Mormon,”²² as he or she launches into a diatribe.) I eventually came to describe these as cultural Mormons.²³ I was, of course, borrowing the label from *Kulturprotestantismus*, an expression that identified the effort in German-speaking Europe to bring Christian faith into what turned out to be a harmful harmony with the science and philosophy of the day—an effort that had its intellectual and emotional roots squarely in the enlightenment critique of religion. Something like that had permeated the American academy, and it was alive and well in Utah universities.

“They Were Ashamed . . . and They Fell Away” (1 Nephi 8:28)

Until recently, cultural Mormonism was primarily centered along the Wasatch Front. When I first encountered it, those who shared elements of this ideology all more or less knew each other. For example, under the direction of Sterling M. McMurrin (1914–96), and with the assistance of William Mulder (1915–), the leading cultural Mormons along the Wasatch Front met periodically from 1949 to 1955. They officially called themselves the “Mormon Seminar,” but they knew themselves as “Swearing Elders.”²⁴ As a student, I heard gossip about these self-styled “Swearing Elders.” I got to know several of them, including McMurrin, Heber C. Snell (1905–74), Waldemer P. Read (1897–1975), and Obert C. Tanner (1904–93). McMurrin was by far the most

22. Lavina Anderson, for example, claimed that Quinn “inherited his seventh-generation identity as a Mormon” from his mother. “DNA Mormon,” 353. This kind of language, often used by sectarian anti-Mormons like Sandra and Jerald Tanner, clearly has the function of providing the critic with credentials as an inside authority. In Quinn’s case it also seems to suggest that membership in the church, as well as faith and devotion to God, are somehow biologically transmitted and hence are not matters of conscious choice.

23. See my essay entitled “The Secular Relevance of the Gospel,” *Dialogue* 4/4 (1969): 76–78, for the first use of the label *cultural Mormonism* in this sense and for a characterization of the ideology and its adherents.

24. For a sympathetic account of the activities of these fellows, see Thomas A. Blakeley, “The Swearing Elders: The Birth of the Mormon Intelligentsia,” *Sunstone*, January 1986, 8–13; and, for a reminiscence, see Richard D. Poll, “Swearing Elders: Some Reflections,” *Sunstone*, January 1986, 14–17; and, for a recent homily, see Will Bagley, “History Matters: ‘Swearing Elders’ Left Legacy of Lively Debate among Mormon Intellectuals,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 1 December 2002.

influential, interesting, articulate, genteel, and also the least sarcastic of these “liberals,” which was the fuzzy label by which back then they tended to identify themselves. By “liberal” they seem to have meant something like “liberated from the ‘dominant religion.’”

McMurrin was clearly head and shoulders above his disaffected associates, some of whom were quite nasty and also rather poorly informed. He was a talented teacher. I was fond of him, learned much from him, and admired his gifts. But the fact is that even from McMurrin, the best of the lot, there was little genuine scholarship where the Church of Jesus Christ was concerned. Instead, he opined about various isms and how we are confronted with science, enlightenment, and the demands of reason, and he had a vast repertoire of sometimes amusing anecdotes. His now notorious dogmatism was that “you don’t get books from angels and translate them by miracles; it is just that simple.”²⁵ He simply brushed aside the Book of Mormon. He liked to boast that he had “never read the entire Book of Mormon.” He explained that he was not willing “to take the Book of Mormon seriously as an authentic record, considering the claims of its coming from an angel and being translated by a miracle.”²⁶ He placed the Book of Mormon and the account of its recovery in the same category as Santa Claus. Though he had barely glanced at it, he also boasted that he had “read enough of it to know that it has a confused theology and is a mixture of good and bad religion.”²⁷ It should be noted that these are mere bald assertions and not arguments. But his criticisms of the church were elegantly set forth. This included his dogmatic rejection of its foundational historical truth claims, the Book of Mormon, and most of its crucial teachings, though not necessarily all of its moral constraints. He was genuinely urbane and amusing,

25. “An Interview with Sterling McMurrin,” *Dialogue* 17/1 (1984): 25. A version of this interview with this same language was also published as “The History of Mormonism and Church Authorities: An Interview with Sterling M. McMurrin,” *Free Inquiry* 4/1 (1983–84): 32–34.

26. Sterling M. McMurrin and L. Jackson Newell, *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 114.

27. McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 114.

and consequently his opinions were unlike some of the other cultural Mormons I encountered as a student at the University of Utah beginning in 1948. McMurrin occasionally praised what he liked about the Latter-day Saint culture, as he understood it. His gentle mockery was often set out in his repertoire of stories about the foibles of the faithful. He especially relished telling stories of some his encounters with the Brethren, including his version of what may have been the beginnings of an effort to excommunicate him.²⁸

Much to his credit, McMurrin was thoroughly intolerant of sectarian attacks on the faith of the Saints. But, as Martin Marty reminds us, “the secular academy which despises Mormonism also has to despise Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, all of which make theophanic and revelational claims similar to those of Mormonism.”²⁹ Part of the reason for rejecting sectarian anti-Mormonism, given what McMurrin described as his own “essentially agnostic, naturalistic, and humanistic” religious ideology,³⁰ was his thoroughgoing unwillingness to entertain the possibility that there has been anything approaching a divine special revelation or that anyone has ever really encountered divine beings. His opinions on religious issues thus fit rather snugly into the ethos of the secular academy in the immediate aftermath of World War II. And this explains his own fondness for secular humanism.

Modernity and Mockery

How did prophetic truth claims come to be so thoroughly despised in the secular academy? A full account of how and why this happened is obviously beyond the scope of this essay. But a partial account is possible. In his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Theologico-Political Treatise),³¹ which was first published anonymously in 1670, Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) set out what he believed was the origin of superstition (that

28. *Matters of Conscience* is a useful collection of McMurrin’s playful repartee and amusing tales.

29. Marty, “Two Integrities,” 187.

30. McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 368.

31. For a new translation of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, see Spinoza, *Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 383–583.

is, religion). Much like the Roman Epicurean poet Lucretius (99–55 BC) before him, Spinoza argued that religion is both grounded in and generates fear. Thus, fear of the gods—and also of death and divine judgment—is the primary source of misery. He insisted that enlightenment would eventually eliminate superstition (aka religion) and thereby overcome irrational fear. What can be known from the study of nature, according to Spinoza, should have authority. Everything else should be consigned to the rubbish bin. Only children or childlike adults—the unenlightened or unintelligent—have a need to submit to the moral authority of the scriptures. Spinoza thus pictured faith as a superstitious response to “fortune’s fickle favours,” which often make of us “wretched victims of alternating hopes and fears.”³² Those familiar with the much later secularized accounts of faith set out by Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) will, of course, have encountered similar explanations and commensurate negative stereotyping of faith in God. The label *modernity* in part commonly identifies the network of beliefs that ground hostility to faith in the reality of God.

Leo Strauss (1899–1973), a Jewish scholar of some distinction, began his own career working for an influential organization dedicated to the scientific study of Jewish things (Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums) that had been founded in 1917 by Herman Cohen (1842–1918) and Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929). The first major scholarly effort undertaken by Strauss was a close examination of Spinoza’s puissant turn against normative Jewish faith. Spinoza contrasted what can presumably be known through unaided human reason with what he believed were the sentiments set out in the scriptures and subsequently presented by preachers, which were portrayed as merely emotional and irrational responses to the inevitable exigencies of life.

Soon after he had published his famous book on Spinoza,³³ Strauss came to see that Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), especially in his

32. Spinoza, *Complete Works*, 388.

33. Leo Strauss, *Die Religionskritik Spinozas als Grundlage seiner Bibelwissenschaft: Untersuchungen zu Spinozas Theologisch-Politischem Traktat* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1930). For the later authorized English translation of this book, see Strauss, *Spinoza’s Critique of Religion*, trans. E. M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).

enigmatic *Guide of the Perplexed*,³⁴ also could be read as having entertained heresies that he set out cautiously or even esoterically. Unlike Maimonides, Spinoza, who had little or no particular loyalty to the Jewish community, openly mocked what he considered the illusion of the necessity of obedience to God's will as set forth in the scriptures and fostered in both the Jewish and Christian communities. Spinoza had to confront two different and competing communities of believers, both hostile to his pantheism, which his critics regarded as merely a cautious or guarded atheism. He flatly rejected his Jewish faith, but his disdain for Christians went even further. Take the following as an example of this animosity:

I grant that they are never tired of professing their wonder at the profound mysteries of Holy Writ; still I cannot discover that they teach anything but speculations of Platonists and Aristotelians, to which (in order to save their credit for Christianity) they have made Holy Writ conform; not content to rave with the Greeks themselves, they want to make the prophets rave also.³⁵

The impact of Spinoza's assault on faith grounded in the Bible is still felt in Jewish as well as in Christian circles.³⁶ Though they are probably not aware of the deeper sources of their ideology, something like Spinoza's understanding of the Bible can even now be found among some dissidents on the fringes of the Latter-day Saint intellectual community.

Strauss studied the writings of Maimonides, which he then compared with those of Spinoza. He thereby eventually discovered that mockery was an effective tool in attacking faith grounded in the Bible. It was not only a powerful polemical weapon, but it turned out

34. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

35. *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza: A Theologico-Political Treatise and a Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (1883; repr. New York: Dover, 1951), 1:7.

36. See Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), especially 32–48.

to be the chief weapon of assimilated or cultural Jews who followed in Spinoza's footsteps in their battle against Jewish orthodoxy.

Even though Strauss himself seems to have been among those who turned intellectually against their faith, he recognized that non-believers often confront faith in God not with solid arguments but with laughter and mockery. This becomes clear when one uncovers both the structure of the alternatives set out by Spinoza and also the grounds upon which atheist arguments are ultimately made to rest or which they are designed to support. Thus it was

that Spinoza and his like owed such success as they had in their fight against [Jewish] orthodoxy to laughter and mockery. By means of mockery they attempted to laugh orthodoxy out of its position from which it could not be dislodged by any proofs supplied by Scripture or by reason. One is tempted to say that mockery does not succeed in the refutation of the orthodox tenets but is itself the refutation. The genuine refutation of orthodoxy would require the proof that the world and human life are perfectly intelligible without the assumption of a mysterious God; it would require at least the success of the philosophic system: man has to show himself theoretically and practically as the master of the world and the master of his life; the merely given world must be replaced by the world created by man theoretically and practically.³⁷

Strauss made a career out of pointing out that none of this has happened, though much mockery of faith in God persists both in high culture among intellectuals and in the media and popular culture. Be that as it may, fear has not disappeared. Nor has unhappiness or human misery. And ironically, modernity has itself been called into question and is now on the defensive.

37. Strauss, "Preface to the English Translation," *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, 28–29. Strauss described Spinoza as "the greatest man of Jewish origin who had openly denied the truth of Judaism and had ceased to belong to the Jewish people without becoming a Christian" (p. 15). See also Strauss, "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion," in his *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 239.

The English word *mock* comes from Latin, where it initially identified a sign or gesture of contempt, since *muccare* meant something like wiping the nose. To appreciate the metaphor, we should think of the related word *mucus* and of words like *snot* or *snotty*—words that identify, among other things, one who is spitefully unpleasant, one who is scornful or who sneers. One certainly does not have to pour out venom to mock. Still, we often see scornful, sneering, snooty snobs busy sniffing at (or looking down their noses at) what they picture as the superstition and sentimentality of believers. To mock is thus to deride or treat with contempt. And, like children on the playground, we would rather be beaten than laughed at. Critics of faith in God know this and continue to take advantage of it.

Mocking the “Sentimentalist” with Slogans and Stereotypes

In an unpublished essay entitled “The Mormon Intellectual,” written thirty-five years ago, Fawn Brodie (1915–1981) described a confrontation between a group of heroic “Mormon intellectuals” and a mass of those she ridiculed as merely mindless “sentimentalists.” She asserted that “to qualify as an intellectual a Mormon must reject the divinity of the golden plates,” as well as the Book of Mormon, “and the authenticity of the Book of Abraham. If he accepts either as a divinely inspired historical document he is not an intellectual but a sentimentalist.”³⁸ The underlying sentiment behind this stereotype has changed little in subsequent years. Notice that it was not, from her perspective, a specific coherently spelled-out argument or network of arguments with supporting evidence that yields the rejection of the

38. Fawn McKay Brodie, “The Mormon Intellectual,” 1. This unpublished item is a five-page, double-spaced essay written in 1968 at the request of Irma Saffold for the *Western Review: A Journal of the Humanities* (a literary magazine published at Western New Mexico University in Silver City, New Mexico). For reasons that are not clear, the essay was never published. Saffold indicated to Brodie that a forthcoming issue of *Western Review* would contain a symposium “on the Mormon intellectual, his background, his role, his achievements, and his problems.” See the letter from Saffold to Fawn Brodie, 11 January 1968. The original of both the essay and the letter can be found in the Papers of Fawn Brodie, Box 65, Fd 2, in Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Book of Mormon or Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims, but it was, instead, what she called an "important decision" that was crucial. Thus, according to Brodie, when a Latter-day Saint "resolutely faces up to the mundane origin of these holy books . . . , then it matters very little whether he concludes that Joseph Smith was a paranoid, a charlatan, or a profound religious mystic."³⁹ What matters, instead, is the decision to cease trusting God—that is, to cease being a sentimentalist. It is this decision, and not learning, intelligence, analysis, argument, or evidence, that turns one into an "intellectual" and thus liberates one from the emotional bondage of the faith of the Saints.

And, according to Brodie, "this decision comes as a wonderfully simplifying revolution in his intellectual life. The theological complications disappear as if by magic."⁴⁰ The "honest and open" intellectual will "find it impossible to conceal a slight contempt for the unthinking acceptance of Mormon dogma on the part of the faithful" and may therefore "make himself instantly unpopular by trying to convert others to his point of view." Why? Brodie's answer is instructive: "No man likes to be thought simple-minded by a more bookish companion, and his family and friends are quick to show their consternation and resentment."⁴¹ This would seem to explain the contempt that Brodie insisted would be manifested toward the faith and the faithful by those who had made the heroic decision to reject the faith of the Saints. But Brodie was aware that the liberated "Mormon," who has rejected the foundations of the faith, often seeks or is in need of an outlet for his hostilities and also for emotional support.

Dissidents also seem to face the problem of backsliding. A fortunate one who lives "in Salt Lake City" will, Brodie believed, find a "large colony" of like-minded dissidents with whom he can socialize and thus reinforce his hostilities toward the community of Saints. "Here he can find kindred souls who have also abandoned the faith if not the faithful. Theirs is a special kind of brotherhood too. They share a collection of wry Mormon stories, similar feelings of guilt, exaspera-

39. Brodie, "The Mormon Intellectual," 1.

40. Brodie, "The Mormon Intellectual," 1.

41. Brodie, "The Mormon Intellectual," 2.

tion, and liberation. Here they can unburden to each other the problems imposed by a still faithful wife, or husband, or still devout children.” She also believed that the dissident who “has no such friendly group at hand . . . is in trouble” since, “even if he is tough-skinned as well as tough-minded, and blessed with a sense of humor, he will find it difficult to live . . . in the midst of the faithful.”⁴² Dissidents “need each other for emotional as well as intellectual support.” Otherwise the dissident “may slip back unobtrusively into the Church. If so, the intellectual in him invariably atrophies. Once he begins to compromise . . . and to look at history again through the parochial lens of Mormon dogma, he loses his capacity for criticism, for innovation, for uncompromising analysis, and often even for fruitful research.”⁴³

Brodie understood that “dissenters cannot reform [the church] from without,” and, if they are honest, “they cannot reform it from within, for there are too many tests they cannot pass in order to reach the seats of power.” She noted an effort by “a new small group of Mormon intellectuals still relatively close to the Church” who she thought were striving to effect reforms.⁴⁴ From her perspective, “the new journal *Dialogue*” could or at least might provide a “much-needed outlet for legitimate dissent.”⁴⁵ But she also doubted that this magazine would accomplish much. The Brethren are simply not inclined to adopt the perspective of a few noisy dissidents on the fringes of the faith.

But, Brodie also mused, if the church leadership wants to “keep ‘the chosen people’ intact,” it “must eliminate its constant testing for signs of apostasy. It must find a way to embrace the doubters along with the faithful”—that is, it must tolerate or perhaps even celebrate blatant attacks on the foundations of the faith, including the rejection of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims.⁴⁶ However, those who pray and pay may believe that they should have the say and not those who murmur and mock. Put another way, those

42. Brodie, “The Mormon Intellectual,” 3.

43. Brodie, “The Mormon Intellectual,” 4.

44. Brodie, “The Mormon Intellectual,” 4.

45. Brodie, “The Mormon Intellectual,” 4, 5.

46. Brodie, “The Mormon Intellectual,” 5.

who sacrifice and serve may genuinely believe that the community of Saints ought to be led by apostles and not apostates.

The Current Road Conditions

Of course, Brodie's analysis in 1968 preceded Signature Books and Sunstone conferences, as well as the current flush of unseemly blogs and message boards on the Internet. What was once primarily focused on Salt Lake City, if Brodie was correct, has toadstooped into an industry reaching the entire world. I am, however, not eager to identify the self-serving, unsavory, even obscene, and quite unfair so-called "recovery," "lampoon" or "salamander" message boards, blogs, and Web pages. I am inclined to comment on public gatherings that feature what have become known as "alternative voices"—that is, gatherings that allow and even feature dissidents and apostates railing against the Saints and their history, beliefs, and leaders. All of these, of course, thrive on mockery and not much else.

Many of the Saints who slip away, of course, are not angry or resentful. For a host of reasons—perhaps because they yielded to the incessant sybaritic siren call of worldly concerns and self-indulgent luxuries, or were never really fully converted, or for various other understandable though not necessarily laudable reasons—they have gone missing. However, after finding themselves lost and alone in the inevitable storms of life, in the darkness of this world where they may eventually sense being in bondage and captivity, they may begin to yearn for some tiny flicker of light along the shore signaling a safe harbor and a way to return to the light they once enjoyed or perhaps never really fully glimpsed but only saw dimly reflected by others. They cease being concerned about the self and search instead for an anchor for their souls in the troubled seas in which they find themselves. For these folks a genuine recovery is possible.

But others, who have fled the faith for often less than noble reasons, have filled the resulting void with various secular surrogate religions. At times they are driven by resentment and an overwhelming urge for revenge. They are confident of their grasp of reality and may be bloated with pride. They insist on expressing their own intense, raw

emotions by directing aggression at others. Since they no longer seek the Lord to establish his righteousness, they now ardently serve an idol, which is a mere “likeness of this world” (D&C 1:16). Their mode is mockery, their manner laughter and lampoon.

Brodie described rather well an actual community centered along the Utah’s Wasatch Front. We now have a small, worldwide, anti-Mormon cyber-community where former or marginal Saints emit much violent, negative, highly emotional nonsense. They form a kind of surrogate “church.” They are passionately religious in their utter devotion to themselves—thus idolatry thrives among these folks. The Web has provided a means through which these angry, irrational, marginal, and often emotionally disturbed people can express, reinforce, and justify their hostility to the faith of the Saints. Their emotional safety is found within their negative little cyber-community, which provides a venue for reinforcing and invigorating their shared sense of exasperation and liberation. They post lurid “exit stories” that are often larded with self-righteous sentimentality and blatant falsehoods. What they post frequently manifests outright hatred. This faddish new anti-church, composed of people who refuse to move on, provides a means of assuaging lingering misgivings and guilt. They post various outright lies, rumors, and bizarre misinformation. They assist each other in undermining the faith of their extended families and even of their own children or parents. They also target the faith of their spouses, where they always engage in much deception.

Some members of this new surrogate “electronic antichurch” realize that there is a literature that challenges virtually all of their rationalizations for apostasy, and they are therefore constantly engaged in frenzied, deranged, desperate dissonance management. They give little evidence of having understood a thing. They also regularly blast away at the Brethren. They rabble in a rhetorical gutter.

In much the same way that Brodie described those dissident and cultural Mormons with whom she associated, this new batch of dissidents, even when they appear to be only marginally literate, love to picture themselves as powerful intellectuals. They imagine that they are at last thinking for themselves as they try to reassure themselves

of the absurdity of the faith of the Saints. The mere thought of divine commandments or any genuine moral restraints often disgusts them. They tend to demand unnecessary and impossible proofs before they will even consider turning or returning to God. They thereby effectively shield themselves from the recovery they might otherwise have from their disease.

By servicing the surging self-help industry, a few who have turned away from the faith have negotiated notoriety and affluence. Some of the sentimental “alternative spirituality,” New Age stuff they produce is being marketed by entertainment celebrities. When obsessed with the self, the soul disappears. Hence self-satisfaction, self-esteem, self-realization, and self-love are being sold as a substitute for repentance and a merciful redemption from sin. The goal is getting in touch with one’s inner or essential self, whatever that may mean, or gratifying one’s base desires. Some self-credentialed gurus (for handsome fees, of course), offer to serve as “spiritual” guides, or as alternative lifestyle coaches, fully capable of pointing the way to their kind of guilt-free “good life.”

Other than a few “celebrity” figures who turn themselves into quaint caricatures, for the most part (quite unlike those Brodie described) these folks are hoods hiding behind handles. They form an unruly community of rhetorical beehive-burning bigots who in some ways resemble the hooded cross-burning Ku Klux Klansmen of an earlier age. Their rhetoric is unseemly, absurd, violent, relentless; their language crude, profane, obscene—they are simply incorrigible. Their new “church” rests heavily and awkwardly on a series of moral (or actually amoral) negations. Their identities revolve around these raw negations and the emotions they emit.

A few of them, however, seem a bit troubled by the thought that, with their new atheism—and so without even tiny remnants of their former faith—in fifty years nothing they now say or do will mean a thing. Atheism leaves a few of them rather listless. These somewhat more thoughtful ones, as they begin to sense that without God they are merely an accidental, meaningless excrescence on a tiny planet, describe an enervating ennui, lassitude, or apathy.

Latter-day Saints are, of course, struggling to endure in a hostile, gentile world. The unrecovered who have fled their former faith are not, as they imagine, now somehow free to think new thoughts never before thought. Instead, they are heirs of a rebellion against God that started much earlier, whose origins and consequences for the most part they only dimly comprehend. They pride themselves on having figured it all out, but they do not realize that their version of atheism is a rather modern human project and that it has a history—that it entails, whether they know it or not, a kind of morality or amorality. They pride themselves on tolerance, except for God and his people. They fasten themselves to a crude scientism. They devote themselves to some fashionable secular religion. They thus form a kind of anti-church, whose members are deeply into the latest fads in pop culture and, of course, rumors and ridicule. They worship novelty. They seek celebrities who will consecrate art and science for them. They pride themselves on their new, clever, self-centered “sanity,” while indulging in an unloving wholesale madness in which there is no place in their hearts and minds for redemption from sin, or for faith, and exactly no hope whatsoever beyond the grave.

The Saints have in their possession some explicit prophetic warnings about those in the “attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those who had come at and were partaking of the fruit” of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8:27). Still, unfortunately a few of the Saints are dazzled and beguiled by the “great and spacious building”—the glamour of the world and of the worldly with their diverse fashions and fads and their sybaritic, lax, indulgent, self-serving, and soul-destroying “morality.”

Should we not keep in mind the powerful impact on our faith of such scoffing, as we observe the commotions made by various brands and strands of sectarian and secular anti-Mormonism? Are not some of the faithful made to feel ashamed and turn away and become lost? Much of this is, of course, merely the result of an unfortunate yielding to worldliness or what now might be thought of as the temptations of wanton, high-end, attractively packaged consumerism. But some of it comes as the effect of what some preacher maintains is “orthodox,

biblical, trinitarian” Christianity, or of what reason or history has supposedly demonstrated. And heaven help those who dare to challenge apostates, dissidents, and cultural Mormons in the attitude of mocking.

Religious “Decisions” and Practical Matters

Fawn Brodie thought that unbelievers had reached a safe harbor by making a decision not to believe. This decision—and not deep thought or rational inquiry, and certainly not careful weighing of the available evidence—made them “intellectuals.” The decision not to believe was a passport—as if by “magic,” she wrote—out of the dreadful Desert and into a land of contempt for the faith and faithful. This decision, she thought, is not forced on the erstwhile “believer” by powerful arguments, nor does it flow from the command of the relevant evidence.

But the same is also true of the believer. The decision to either trust or turn away from God is necessarily made in the absence of proofs one way or the other and therefore is not based on the actual or possible evidence. The decision to believe or not to believe tells us more about the hopes and fears, the longings and desires of the one making it than it does about his or her intellectual capacities, accomplishments, or command of the evidence. When confronted by claims to divine special revelations, once the decision not to believe has been made, some demand “proofs.” When the faithful strive to provide these “proofs,” they play a game according to rules set by unbelievers who will deign to believe only when faith is no longer necessary—when it has been replaced by a secular certainty.

In the face of laughter and mockery, faith should not be an embarrassment to the believer. Instead, for the faithful, faith should be a badge of honor. “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:6–7 NRSV). It is the interplay between the work of the Holy Spirit and faith that troubles unbelievers and leads to mockery. Those unable to believe, or who are ashamed of their former faith, may see the con-

tent and ground of faith as an irrational or subrational component of religion that may be brushed aside as the mischief of priests and popes or as a deeply held delusion or illusion. They insist that theories defending faith must be expunged from our hearts and minds. Only then will we have escaped the prison of faith.

The theories defending faith are misunderstood if they are taken as the grounds of faith. Whatever else they may be, they are not that. Instead, they are no more the real grounds of faith than the theories attacking faith are the real reasons for unbelief. Why? Both faith or unfaith (and indifference) are practical/moral decisions about how we desire to live. These decisions tell us more about our hearts than about the product of our inquiries. Such decisions are made before we have much in the way of a command of the scriptures, history, science, philosophy, or much of anything else. The persistence with which we project ourselves and strive to relate to others—including the divine—and thereby act on our longing and desire or how we understand ourselves may shift dramatically over time.

A decision to trust God, if it is authentic, will ultimately depend on our own immediate experiences with the divine and not on some prior profound understanding of divine things. Our knowledge of God, as fragmentary and little understood as it is, is more reliable than any explanation of divine things in some abstract manner or account of how we come to know divine things. Faith does not depend on a theology. Our unmediated experience of the work of the Holy Spirit—given to us by God as a guarantee—is more directly manifest to us and thereby more reliable than inferences or explanations, including explanations of how one might come to know divine things. Theology, or what conservative Protestants now insist on calling a worldview, cannot save us. Only God can save us. But our direct awareness of divine things still remains a riddle. Here below we walk by faith. We should not be ashamed of this fact.

Christian theologians, in fashioning what is now known as “classical theism,” borrowed from pagan philosophers various “proofs” for the reality of God. Certain of these proofs rested on the assumption that, among other things, God is an explanation for, and can be seen by

analogy in, the order that appears in nature. Dogmatic atheism, it should be noted, is often directed at such proofs and not directly at our encounters with the divine. We might call this the Alma Principle. A direct encounter with the divine trumps all doubts about divine things. Jesus of Nazareth did not travel the dusty roads of Palestine offering proofs that he was Being-itself, the Ground or Power of Being. So it is theology, understood in part as our always clumsy efforts to fashion proofs and a worldview, against which atheists direct their heavy artillery.

Though doubts about claims to knowledge of divine things have a long history and something resembling atheism can be found in certain schools of philosophy (for example, in the Epicurean poetry set forth by Lucretius), as far as I have been able to discover, a militant, *public*, rather than *private*, atheism was first proclaimed in 1770 by Paul-Henri Thiry d'Holbach in a book entitled *Système de la nature*, which contains a hypothetical account of the apparent order found in nature. When one begins with the assumption that God is somehow a necessary element in a purely hypothetical explanation of order in nature, then Baron d'Holbach's account might seem to yield atheism. When direct unmediated experience of the divine has been replaced by speculation or theories about the divine, then such accounts are threatening for those who insist that God is an inference from the structure of nature.

Why did a militant, *public* atheism arise so recently? Did not the ancients have doubts? Put another way, why is that ideology such a novelty? Philosophers, of course, had doubts. But by and large they were a shy and retiring lot and not bold and adventuresome like modern atheists. They did not doubt that children or childlike adults—that is, most people most of the time—needed belief in divine sanctions to control their desires. Those ancient doubters did not doubt the need in a civilized society for an opiate (a *pharmakon*) to ground and regulate the passions and distempers common to human beings of every sort. It is only very recently that this has all changed and an outright war has been made on faith in God.

The arguments presumably proving God are linked to the contents of classical theism. Since I flatly reject classical theism, I watch from

a distant hillside as two armies battle it out below. I enjoy the battle, but the outcome does not seem relevant to my faith. If I take sides, it is with the skeptics who are busy pounding away at classical theism. I do not believe that the so-called proofs for God are the real reason people decide to trust or not trust God, or to believe or not believe, though they may have a certain apologetic or polemical function. Do any of the arguments for God, or the refutation of those arguments, somehow entail faith or unfaith? I doubt it. Why? There are various reasons. Atheism, at least in its public guises, would seem to rest on an array of experiences demonstrating the failure of every claim to divine special revelation. So it is not in the coherence or soundness of the demonstrations of the reality of God, but, instead, in our own personal stories, in a kind of history, where the real contest between faith and unfaith takes place. Be that as it may, atheists should be able to guide the faithful with perfectly lucid, coherent, and sound arguments from the Desert, which the believers mistake for a paradise, into a lush garden where the divine has been excluded.

But, instead of being kindly guides, unbelievers sometimes behave like cadre in basic training who order us to make a clean break with our faith and its practices. With the equivalent of a pistol whip or a ruthless jab with a bayonet, we must be conditioned or indoctrinated in a secular dogma in an effort to kill any sign of the illusion within us. Faith, understood as trust in God, must be replaced with faith in oneself, or faith in impersonal forces at work in history, with science and the arts, and so forth. Atheists may wage war on faith or they may passively recline on a bed of dogmatic atheism. Such unreasoned unfaith is made to rest, in such cases, on a belief that these issues have all been settled long ago, once and for all. Put another way, dogmatic atheism is itself a kind of faith. The relevant issues are thought to have been settled by science, but probably not the junk science that is used to market food fads, investment schemes, alternative medicine, various bizarre conspiracy theories, “scientifically designed” exercise machines, “life coaching,” hair-loss remedies, and so forth. It is not any particular theory, always necessarily tentative, but scientism—and the authority of science—that counts.

Our new secular cadre reject the God who issues a summons to do our often unwanted duty. They are troubled by the thought of a God who makes moral demands, who blesses those who genuinely seek his mercy, and who curses those who turn their back on their covenants with him. The more passive forms of dogmatic atheism are thus relics of an older, deeply passionate hostility to God. So we are back with Spinoza's insistence that such a deity is a mere human invention, the function of which is to assuage fear but which also becomes an object of fear.

If we move from the theoretical side of militant atheism, which I find interesting, to its practical side, which I find appalling, then we see that with God dead and when we are properly enlightened, freed from base superstition, and liberated from the dead hand of the past, everything we can get away with is permitted, if it brings some measure of pleasure or power. Those who dogmatically reject God, if they understand the implications of their stance, are Epicurean—they imagine themselves free to pleasure themselves with no ultimate justice or other adverse consequences. The current dogmatic atheism reveals just below the surface an Epicurean practical side. It is this moral or practical component, I believe, and not the theoretical side, that beguiles those who make a decision against faith in God. However, those in thrall to an atheism seem to need more and more proof that they made the right decision. They may suffer a kind of “buyer's remorse.” They may worry that they may have made the wrong decision. They seem to need reassurance. Unbelievers seem to be as much troubled by doubts, as are the faithful, about their decisions. Of course, either decision involves risks since we live by faith and not by sight, unless the decision not to believe is an unreasoned unbelief. Both stances are instances of faith (or unfaith) seeking understanding.

Strange Bedfellows—A Fundamental Antipathy and a Common Enemy

Whatever else might be said about Joseph Smith, for various reasons he, and his followers, aroused considerable enmity, calumny, and mob brutality. It seems to have started with some playful mockery. On 25 July 1829, Anne Royall, in her *Paul Pry's Weekly Bulletin*, began

emitting spoofs on the Book of Mormon that carried the title “From the Golden Bible.”⁴⁷ The label “Gold Bible” became the standard way of mocking what was then the still unpublished Book of Mormon.⁴⁸ Both it and Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims were thus greeted with considerable mockery and laughter by those entrenched in Enlightenment skepticism about divine things.⁴⁹ And preachers, who were also being

47. See entries in Royall’s *Paul Pry’s Weekly Bulletin* beginning on 25 July 1829 and continuing on 8 August and 29 August 1829. Dan Vogel thinks that Jeremiah O. Block was the editor of *Paul Pry’s Weekly Bulletin* and hence attributes the three essays attacking Joseph Smith to him. His evidence is that Abner Cole once named Block as editor of the Rochester *Bulletin* and referred to him as “a certain Mr. Block, of ‘Paul Pry’ memory.” Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 3:224 n. 2. Vogel does not seem aware that a “Paul Pry” is a type—the name for any belligerent, sarcastic, antireligious zealot—and not a single person. The exact author of those three essays remains unknown. But the editor of the paper in which they appeared is known, and it was not Block, as Vogel claims. For details, see Louis Midgley, “Prying into Palmer,” *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 366–67.

48. On 26 June 1829, in the first published reference to the Book of Mormon and nine months prior to its publication, an anonymous writer in the *Wayne Sentinel* derisively referred to Joseph Smith’s “Gold Bible.” Later the title “Gold Bible” or “Golden Bible,” according to the author of “Gold Bible,” *Palmyra Reflector*, 13 January 1830, 20, was explained as follows: “We inadvertently neglected in our remarks last week, respecting this wonderful work, to accompany them with the *explanations* requisite to, correct understanding of it. The appellation of ‘Gold Bible,’ is only a *cant cognomen* that has been given it by the *unbelievers*—for be it known that this Book, as well as the sacred volume which is held so valuable by all good Christians, is not without its *revilers* and *unbelievers*—by way of *derision*. The true title of the work, as appears from the copy-right, is ‘the Book of Mormon.’”

49. For those unfamiliar with the bedrock of anti-Mormon rhetoric, the following from *Paul Pry’s Weekly Bulletin*, 8 August 1829, provides an instructive example: “Now the rest of the deeds of Israel . . . how he yet liveth in shame, and of Joseph and Wanton how they still cleave unto Israel, and of Horace the publican ‘*how he couldn’t git no beef*’ on the fourth day of the week, and of Hiram the Jeromite, how he gave unto Israel a writing promising to cleave unto him, and how *he* too done the unclean thing against the body of a large oak near the precincts of the tabernacle, and of Chad the money lender how he squanders the monies of the children of Samuel the miser. Behold, *all* these things, yea many more, are graven on the massy leaves of the Golden Book, and are now in the custody of *Joseph* the prophet.” During Joseph Smith’s lifetime, anti-Mormon literature did not move much beyond this sort of gibberish. Three months after the Book of Mormon was published, the notorious Abner Cole (aka Obediah Dogberry Jr.) published a bizarre caricature under the title “Book of Pukei.” See *Palmyra Reflector*, 22 June and 7 July 1830. Why the name *Pukei*? Dan Vogel provides several possible explanations. For example, he thinks that the word *Pukei* might have been taken from *puke*, meaning a “poor puny, unhealthy-looking person.” *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:231 n. 20. *Pukei* is more likely to have

pounded by Anne Royall's skepticism heavily laced with sarcasm, were also anxious to guard against challenges posed to their version of Christianity by the publication of the Book of Mormon. On some crucial issues, whatever the deeper differences, sectarian preachers shared common ground with secular skeptics. Both were anxious to brush aside Joseph Smith as a mere "juggler."⁵⁰

But there were also some deeper differences. These rest in part on assessments by Protestant clergy of their own factional, sectarian self-interest. The clergy then, as now, tended to be radical cessationists, dogmatically denying the possibility of genuine messages from the heavens in addition to those they found in the Bible, which they insist on reading from the perspective of the ecumenical creeds and with the dogmas of classical theism securely in place. In 1830, "a divine of the Presbyterian faith" who was operating in Colesville, New York, seems to have agreed with the "Paul Pry" style of mockery of the "Gold Bible."⁵¹ The Reverend John Sherer insisted that Joseph Smith was a mere "juggler," and he was certain that "no man in his right mind can think the Book [of Mormon] or the doctrines it contains, worthy of the least notice; yet there are a number who profess to believe it."⁵² He was also alarmed; some of his flock had been "stolen" by Joseph Smith.⁵³

At a deeper level, since secular critics also mock the Bible, sectarian and secular critics of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon are mortal enemies. In the secular academy, believers have been marginalized. If

been drawn by Cole from *puke*, meaning "to burst forth, vomit, spew." See the 1828 Webster's under *puke*. Vogel overlooks this possibility.

50. *Juggler* is a highly pejorative term. The word has roots in the Latin *joculator*, where its cognates include *jester*, one who "jokes" or tricks. Hence a "juggler" is a person who deceives by trickery or manipulation. The 1828 Webster's defines it as "one who practices [*sic*] or exhibits tricks by sleight of hand," or "a cheat; a deceiver; a trickish fellow."

51. See John Sherer's letter dated 18 November 1830 to the Reverend Absalom Peters of the American Home Missionary Society. Sherer's letter is quoted by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and Historical Record* (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 187.

52. Sherer's letter, in Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 187.

53. Sherer's letter, in Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 187. The Reverend Sherer was also outraged when he discovered that the Saints in Colesville viewed him and his associates, while Christian, as "formalists, 'having the form of Godliness, but denying the power.'"

they have not been able to exclude entirely faith in God, whether Jewish, Muslim, or Christian, from the forums in which a dogmatic atheism tends to dominate, such an ideology, often set out in a confident scientism, is still fashionable in academic circles. All those expressing faith have been placed on the defensive. On the surface and in the polemical situation in which they find themselves, sectarian and secular anti-Mormons, whatever their deeper antagonism, from the very beginning have shared a proclivity to mock Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. In the one instance, it is because there is simply no divine, and in the other it is because what can be known of the divine is found only within the categories of classical theism and in the speculation of theologians and not here and now where angels are still coming and going and the heavens are not shut tight. In this regard, not all that much has changed in 175 years—the fundamentalist-formalists fulminate, while the secular fundamentalists still sneer.

Countercult Dynamics

In earlier issues of the *Review*, we examined some of the literature that is currently being produced and marketed by the fundamentalist/evangelical countercult movement and directed at the faith of Latter-day Saints. We have grown weary of exposing the weaknesses of countercult anti-Mormonism, much of which recycles old nonsense and some of which is far too ludicrous and boring to warrant critical attention. However, I admit to being fascinated by the existence and persistence of the countercult industry on the margins of conservative Protestantism. It has become a sizeable, sometimes well-financed, noisy, corrupt industry. It is useful, I believe, for the Saints to be aware of its history and dynamics, beginning in the 1960s when it emerged under the leadership of the late “Dr.” Walter Martin.⁵⁴ It is helpful for the Saints to be aware of who and what we are facing, and why these individuals and agencies persist in bearing false witness against us. Fortunately, in Douglas Cowan’s examination of the fundamentalist/

54. See Louis Midgley, “A ‘Tangled Web’: The Walter Martin Miasma,” *FARMS Review of Books* 12/1 (2000): 371–434; Louis Midgley, “Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 271–340 at 286–93, 330–31.

evangelical countercult,⁵⁵ there is now available a scholarly examination of the entire movement. We have therefore included in this issue of the *Review* an additional and more detailed essay by Richard Holzapfel and David Whitchurch on *Bearing False Witness?*⁵⁶

One feature of the countercult industry that must be stressed is the scope and intensity of the bitter, and rather amusing, internecine battles that take place between competing countercult individuals and agencies. Part of what fuels these curious scuffles is competition for scarce resources (that is, for income from those on the fringes of the fundamentalist/evangelical movement). The contentious personalities of those drawn into the countercult industry and, in some instances, the urge for revenge, the narcissism of small differences, as well as the strong differences of opinion on what constitutes historic, biblical, trinitarian, orthodox Christianity, are always close to the surface, and each aspect seems to play a role in ugly turf fights. Countercultists are thus often at each other's throats over differences in their religious ideologies, as well as over the control of agencies and resources. These facts help explain the indifference of countercultists to what the Saints actually believe, the low level of understanding Mormon things, and the bizarre caricatures of the faith of the Saints, as well as the gross distortions of our history⁵⁷ commonly found in countercult rhetoric and literature.

Some instances of the sectarian urge to mock are shameless as well as scurrilous. A tabloid entitled *The Evangel* provides an example of this proclivity. It is published by Utah Missions, Inc. (formerly UMI Ministries), which is now "a ministry of Watchman Fellowship"—a countercult agency, with several field offices, that controls and finances

55. For prepublication comments on Douglas Cowan's *Bearing False Witness? An Introduction to the Christian Countercult* (Westport, CT: Preager, 2003), see Louis Midgley, "On Caliban Mischief," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): xii–xv; and, for brief comments, see also Midgley, "Cowan on the Countercult," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 395–403.

56. See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and David M. Whitchurch, "Assessing the Countercult," in this number, pages 311–35.

57. For a striking example of a thoroughly reprehensible, fundamentalist falsification of the history of the Church of Jesus Christ, see Richard Abanes, *One Nation under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002, rev. paperback edition 2003).

several anti-Mormon fronts.⁵⁸ Reverend Dennis A. Wright proclaimed in a 2004 issue of *The Evangel* that “the LDS Church is fundamentally dishonest.”⁵⁹ He embellished this remark by claiming that “the church lies constantly to its members and to non-members; sometimes it seems as though Mormonism would lie even when the truth would be more helpful.” He expressed consternation because “it claims that it’s Christian even though it rejects every essential Christian teaching and attacks Christianity.”⁶⁰

When Reverend Wright made these singular allegations, he was director of Utah Missions,⁶¹ having been handed the reigns to that “ministry” in 1997 by the Home Mission Board (now called the North American Missions Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). He had somehow come to replace the pugnacious Mike Reynolds, who in 1991 had been called upon by agents of the SBC to assist the aging Reverend John L. Smith, who had founded the operation in 1954 and had moved it to Marlow, Oklahoma, in 1968. He turned his ministry over to the SBC in 1991.⁶²

58. For example, Watchman Fellowship supports Coleen Ralson’s “Nauvoo Christian Visitor’s Center,” which is within a stone’s throw of the Nauvoo Temple.

59. Dennis A. Wright, “Why I Am Not a Mormon (Part Two),” *The Evangel*, April 2004, 2.

60. Wright, “Why I Am Not a Mormon (Part Two),” 2. But Wright wrote the following in 2002: “Let me be very quick to admit that there are those involved in Christian apologetics who are certified ‘nut cases.’ All of us are aware of their tribe and all we can do is shake our heads at the sadness of their stupidity.” Dennis A. Wright, “A Plethora of Possibilities,” *The Evangel*, September 2002, 2.

61. James K. Walker, who for three years has been both “president of Watchman Fellowship and Utah Missions,” recently admitted that UMI Ministries “has been experiencing a serious shortfall in financial support for a year now,” as an introduction to the announcement that the Reverend Wright had “resigned” and as part of his explanation for why the publication of the tabloid entitled *The Evangel* had been postponed. Walker has taken over as “editor” while an effort is being made to find someone to replace Wright, who had served as “writer, researcher and speaker,” in addition to directing UMI Ministries and editing its tabloid, from 1997 until his recent “resignation.” See James K. Walker, “Dr. Dennis Wright Resigns as Editor of *The Evangel*,” *The Evangel*, May/June 2005, 1. Walker advertises himself as a former “4th generation” Saint, who in his youth was once ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood. See “James Walker, Who Are You?” *The Evangel*, May/June 2005, 2.

62. For some details, see Louis Midgley, “Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture,” *FARMS Review* 10/1 (1998): 271–340 at 332–33. The SBC divested itself of Utah Missions in 1997.

When Dennis Wright took control at UMI, he assured me (and other Latter-day Saints, including Daniel Peterson and William Hamblin) that he would raise the rhetorical standards.⁶³ It became more literate, especially after Dennis Wright was able to squeeze John L. Smith out in January 2000. It also became less amusing.⁶⁴ But the nonsense did not cease—in some ways it got worse.

Quite unlike the always befuddled John L. Smith, Dennis Wright knew what he was doing. For example, after the dedication of the Nauvoo Temple, Wright fed the bigotry of Baptists by charging that the temple is decorated with Satanic symbols.⁶⁵ He knew what he was doing when he allowed Richard Stout, a member of *The Evangel* “research team”—as well as, among other things, an actor in dinner theater and a home schooling activist—to blast away at the faith of the Saints in issue after issue of *The Evangel*. In the same issue in which Wright opined about the “fundamental dishonesty” of the Saints,⁶⁶

63. For some of the details, see “Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture,” 333 n. 171.

64. John L. Smith, in his semiliterate way, had become a favorite of LDS countercult watchers, which admittedly was only a tiny group mildly amused by some low-end entertainment. This is what I have described as the “fun factor” in observing the dreadful countercult industry.

65. Dennis Wright and his associates at Watchman Fellowship seemed especially troubled by the Nauvoo Temple. Throughout 2002, efforts were made to mock and belittle that building and its place in the faith of the Saints. Some of this snide stuff was found in the columns written by Colleen Ralson, who operates the Nauvoo Christian Visitor’s Center. She complained about “all the satanic, occult symbols” on the Nauvoo Temple. Colleen Ralson, “We Survived!” *The Evangel*, Summer 2002, 9. This kind of language, of course, fed the bigotry of those who have been told that Latter-day Saint temples are demonic and filled with occult symbols, supposedly satanic pentagrams, and so forth—that is, the nonsense published by those Wright identified as the certifiable “nut cases” among countercultists. Wright published photographs of exterior decorations on the Nauvoo Temple with the caption reading: “Detail showing the inverted pentagram windows,” *The Evangel*, Summer 2002, 1. Wright also published a long diatribe by Richard Seedorf entitled “Nauvoo Temple: A House of Deceit” in the same issue (pp. 1, 5, 10). And Wright published a photo of a window “still in window maker’s shop in Nauvoo. Is the pentagram,” he asked, “an occult symbol? We report, you decide.” *The Evangel*, Winter 2002, 7. Earlier, after he had toured the Nauvoo Temple, he reported that “the most interesting thing [he] saw was the abundance of pentagrams. How about that?” Wright, “I Visited the Temple,” *The Evangel*, May 2002, 2.

66. Wright, “Why I Am Not a Mormon (Part Two),” 2.

Mr. Stout went on a turgid rampage. In what he offered as a spoof that he attributed to one Jack M. Ormon,⁶⁷ thereby signaling where his diatribe was headed, he aimed ridicule at Hugh W. Niblick (Nibley), William J. Hambone (Hamblin), Daniel C. Peterdout (Peterson), John L. Snorenson (Sorenson), and me—I became “Ms. Louise C. Midgey.” Mr. Stout is, of course, an amusing fellow. With this sneering, he seems to have shown something of his version of dinner-theater comedy. His unseemly spoof was, presumably, included in *The Evangel* with Wright’s approval.⁶⁸ This sort of thing is fortunately not typical of morally scrupulous Protestants nor of evangelical scholars, but it tends to be the stock-in-trade of the countercult industry.

The Dawning of a Brighter Day?

Without going into detail, I can say that early in my academic career I benefited from Protestant and then eventually Roman Catholic scholarship. I will illustrate. Although Sterling McMurrin, who introduced me to contemporary theology, brushed Karl Barth’s writings aside as “sheer irrationalism,” when I actually started a careful reading of the work of Barth (1886–1968), the famous Swiss-German theologian,⁶⁹ rather than merely labeling him as McMurrin had done, I came away very much impressed with both his scholarship and his piety.

67. See Richard Stout, “How Could Joseph Smith Have Known That? Part Twenty-Five,” *The Evangel*, April 2004, 3, 10, which took the following juvenile form: “Solomon Spalding Canonized Minor LDS Prophet, By Jack M. Ormon (*Deseret Daily Dispatch*—Evening Edition, 1 April 2004).” See also Stout’s similar unseemly diatribe entitled “Mormon Professor Claims Football Nephite Sport,” *The Evangel*, April 2002, 4, 6. After a number of complaints, Dennis Wright seems to have found it necessary to publish the following disclaimer: “We here at Utah Missions and Watchman Fellowship do not wish to be thought of as being among the ‘nut cases’ in Christian *apologetics*—nor do we wish for others to so consider Mr. Stout.” Dennis A. Wright, “A Plethora of Possibilities,” *The Evangel*, September 2002, 2, emphasis added.

68. When John L. Smith was expelled from UMI Ministries, he started up his own tabloid, blasting away at Dennis Wright’s hostile takeover. He seems to have drawn away financial support for UMI Ministries, which had to turn to Watchman Fellowship for funding.

69. See Karl Barth’s six-million-word, unfinished, thirteen-volume *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Clark, 1957–).

Much more recently, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) has become one of my Roman Catholic favorites.⁷⁰ His deft response to “liberal” biblical criticism, which he argues has been eating away at the faith of Christians and which abets the current culture of unbelief, matches well the criticisms of revisionist accounts of the Book of Mormon—some of which I have written—that have appeared in this *Review* and under the FARMS imprint. In addition, I have benefited from reading the work of Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–), famous Dutch Roman Catholic historian of theology,⁷¹ and of many other Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish scholars.

From the moment I discovered that there was such a literature, I have learned much and borrowed heavily from it. Along with my colleagues, I also have a high regard for the scholarship of a number of contemporary evangelicals.⁷² With others, I have from time to time engaged in civil and productive conversations with some of these fellows. I am therefore pleased that informal conversations have been taking place between Latter-day Saints and those from various other Christian traditions, including some recent exchanges with evangelicals.

I hope that those evangelicals involved in these conversations do not form the opinion, merely because they have discovered that we are not the way we have been pictured in countercult literature, that we wish to be known as conservative Protestants or that we are about to adopt their notion of what constitutes biblical, historical, orthodox, trinitarian Christianity. We are not seeking an evangelical Stamp of Christian Approval. It would be a mistake on the part of evangelicals

70. See, for example, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today,” in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1989), 1–23. Ratzinger read his Erasmus Lecture on 27 January 1988 at St. Peter’s Church in New York City.

71. See, for example, Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1983); and his *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hurbert Hoskins (New York: Crossroad, 1985).

72. Among a number of other writers, I have in mind Roger Olson, Clark Pinnock, Stanley Grenz, and John Sanders. For some details, see Midgley, “On Caliban Mischief,” xxiv–xxxii.

to assume that the faith of the Saints is somehow in flux and is about to be fundamentally modified by the pressure or influence they exert so that we will come to fit their notions of Christian orthodoxy. We simply are not at all inclined to capitulate to their notions of what constitutes Christianity. Some evangelicals may perceive a desire on our part for respectability, which they couple with a common misunderstanding that, because we do not spend our energies in crafting a tight, closed “theological worldview,” we are prime targets for their evangelistic efforts. If any hold some version of these opinions, they have not been listening with sufficient care. Or they have let their desire to evangelize the entire church, rather than a few individuals, fuel illusions they hold concerning their influence among Latter-day Saint intellectuals and thereby regarding shifts they imagine are taking or will soon take place among the Brethren and within the Church of Jesus Christ. Some may wrongly imagine that, through conversations they are having with a few Latter-day Saint scholars who they believe wield power in the church or have influence with the Brethren, they will somehow manage to evangelize the entire church.⁷³

Interfaith “Dialogue”?

Richard J. Mouw, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary, who has a reputation for civility as well as for an uncanny ability to facilitate productive interchanges between those who in the past have tended to talk past each other, has been instrumental in sponsoring some conversations between evangelical and Latter-day Saint scholars. However, his efforts have not drawn plaudits from countercultists. Why? As I will demonstrate, some insist that “dialogue” must mean “debate” in which they attack and we are on the defensive. Thus, instead of striving to come away from conversations with a better understanding of the other party, countercultists demand an adversarial confrontation with the Saints and their faith.

73. For a recent example of this illusion, see Paul Owen, “Our Witness to the Mormons,” posted on Pastor Greg Johnson’s Web page, www.standingtogether.org (accessed 5 August 2005).

When Pastor Greg Johnson (of Standing Together Ministries) and Robert Millet, an LDS scholar involved in conversations with evangelicals, had Ravi Zacharias deliver one of his stump speeches to an audience of evangelicals and Latter-day Saints in the Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City on 14 November 2004, Professor Mouw provided the introduction. He stole the show by indicating in his introduction that he is

now convinced that we evangelicals have often seriously misrepresented the beliefs and practices of the Mormon community. Indeed, let me state it bluntly to the LDS folks here this evening: we have sinned against you. The God of the Scriptures makes it clear that it is a terrible thing to bear false witness against our neighbors, and we have been guilty of that sort of transgression in things we have said about you.⁷⁴

Mouw's remarks drew the attention of the print media, which are always looking for something seemingly sensational; they also generated a firestorm of protests from the anti-Mormon element among countercultists and their clientele.⁷⁵ The remarks by Ravi Zacharias about Jesus, the substance of which, without the melodrama, is central to the faith of Latter-day Saints, were mostly lost in the subsequent scuffle. In fact, Mouw's remarks should have been expected, since he had already written the following in 2002:

as an evangelical I must confess that I am ashamed of our record in relating to the Mormon community. To be sure, there are deep differences between our worldviews. I strongly disagree with what I understand to be traditional Mormon teachings about God, about human nature, and about what it takes for a sinner to get right with God—matters on which

74. Quoted from Richard Mouw, "Response to Criticism of Richard Mouw (We Have Sinned against You)," at www.standingtogether.org/Responses_mouw.doc, p. 4 (accessed 2 December 2004, but no longer available).

75. Though anti-Mormons might have imagined that what Ravi Zacharias said on that occasion was a much deserved punishment for the pagan Mormons present that evening, the talk he gave was one of his theatrical stump speeches about Jesus, which Latter-day Saints did not find either especially enlightening or at all objectionable.

the Latter-day Saints differ not only from standard Protestant teachings but from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox teachings as well. But none of these disagreements give me or any other evangelical the license to propagate distorted accounts of what Mormons believe. By bearing false witness against our LDS neighbors, we evangelicals have often sinned not just against Mormons but against the God who calls us to be truth-tellers.⁷⁶

Still Another Occasion for Countercult Acrimony

Our relationships with morally earnest evangelicals, including scholars, must always be governed by mutual respect—by the unspoken rules of comity. When this happens, conversations can be both civil and mutually enlightening. Of course, both sides will, each in its own way, be attempting to evangelize the other, but not in an adversarial manner. The Saints know that, while they must defend the faith, they cannot argue anyone into the kingdom.

My own experience leads me to believe that relations with countercultists are almost always adversarial—they inevitably end up in unpleasant confrontations. When a genuine, mutually respectful conversation takes place, there is no real or imagined audience having its residual biases reaffirmed, keeping score, or awarding points. But this is about all that is going on when people are driven by loathing or an urge for vengeance or fear of the challenge the other party presents to their own understanding of divine things. Unfortunately, some of the better informed evangelicals cannot quite decide whether they desire respectful conversations with Latter-day Saints or whether they must function in an adversarial and confrontational mode, attempting to batter us into submission in an effort to overcome what they perceive as a grave challenge to the health and growth of what they understand as authentic Christianity.

76. Richard J. Mouw, foreword to *The New Mormon Challenge*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 11.

Countercultists, some of whom were not present to hear Professor Mouw's apology and who are also not well-informed on the current conversations taking place between evangelical and Latter-day Saint scholars, went berserk when they heard reports of his remarks.⁷⁷ Anti-Mormons protested in whatever venue they could find and in some cases directly to Professor Mouw. They expressed indignation at the suggestion that they might ever have been guilty of the offenses he had described and for which he apologized. Some of them demanded that he identify the alleged culprits who had been guilty of "bearing false witness." Mouw obliged and pointed directly at the countercult industry, identifying as examples the literature produced by the old father of the countercult, Walter Martin, and one of its most strident operatives, Dave Hunt.⁷⁸

For my purposes, it is unnecessary (as well as tedious) to review the entire assortment of responses to Mouw's apology. I will, however, examine one complaint to illustrate the penchant for belligerency towards the Saints and also for evidence of an unwillingness to overcome the urge to "bear false witness" against the faith of the Saints. It comes from Ronald V. Huggins,⁷⁹ who was present in the

77. James White, of Alpha and Omega Ministries, has discovered that the blog is a superb instrument of aggression. He loves confrontations; he revels in setting out his hostility toward those who do not agree with his extreme version of Calvinism. So on 2 May 2005 he started a rant about the publication by Eerdmans Publishing—an evangelical press—of Robert L. Millet's *A Different Jesus* (which had the endorsement of Richard Mouw). For the details, see www.aomin.org/index.php?itemid=411 (accessed 8 August 2005). White has quarreled recently with Richard Mouw, Douglas Cowan, Paul Owen, and a host of others. These amusing items can be accessed by going to the organization's Web page and then searching the archive of White's blog.

78. For details, see Midgley, "Cowan on the Countercult," 403. Pastor Greg Johnson had the item on his Web page in which Mouw identified Walter Martin and Dave Hunt as examples of those who "bear false witness" against the Saints. This has unfortunately now been removed.

79. See, for example, Ronald V. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue." This item is available on a Web page operated by Luke Wilson in Grand Rapids, Michigan, under the curious name Institute for Religious Research. It is not an academic institution, but merely a sectarian propaganda mill parading under an academic title. Wilson offers a general countercult Web page (see www.irr.org, accessed 8 August 2005) and an anti-Mormon adjunct site under the deceptive name "Mormons in Transition" (see www.irr.org/mit, accessed 8 August 2005). The essay by Huggins can

Tabernacle and was deeply troubled by Mouw's remarks. Huggins was clearly aware of the earlier statement by Professor Mouw and also of his propensity for honesty.

Huggins claims that the appearance of Ravi Zacharias in the Salt Lake Tabernacle provided "a remarkable opportunity for interfaith dialogue between Mormons and Christians."⁸⁰ While granting that "some Evangelicals have certainly been unkind to Mormons and have been guilty of inaccurately portraying Mormon beliefs," Huggins asserts that this "does not characterize . . . most evangelical churches and ministries."⁸¹ What he does not seem to realize is that his own diatribes against the faith of Latter-day Saints fit rather nicely under the stricture issued by Mouw.

Huggins opines that the Church of Jesus Christ "does not appear ready for, nor does it seem to really desire, authentic dialogue with Evangelicals." Why? The reason he gives is that the church—presumably orchestrated by the Brethren—has a "project of marginalizing (rather than interacting with) careful and credible critics like Jerald and Sandra Tanner, the Institute for Religious Research (IRR), and others."⁸² So it appears that Huggins thinks that unless the Saints get down in the rhetorical gutter with the likes of Sandra Tanner or Luke Wilson or some other virulent anti-Mormon, we are not interested in an "authentic dialogue with Evangelicals." And in an ironic way he is right. He also imagines that the Saints "desire . . . mainline respectability" but will not pay the price to get it. What is the price? Caving in to Sandra Tanner?

Huggins also complains that the way the church—that is, newspaper reporters—treated that evening in the Salt Lake Tabernacle when evangelicals got to perform was "somewhat self-serving" and manifested "apparent bad faith." The reason is that attention was focused by

be found at the following address: www.irr.org/mit/authentic-dialogue.html (accessed 8 August 2005). Not surprisingly, "An Appeal for an Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue" was also published by the Watchman Fellowship in *The Evangel*, May/June 2005, 1, 3. Huggins is an executive board member of Luke Wilson's Institute for Religious Research, as well as an assistant professor of theological and historical studies at the Salt Lake Theological Seminary.

80. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue."

81. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue."

82. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue."

the media on Mouw's apology and not on the speech given by Zacharias. What Huggins seems to believe is that, because Mouw apologized for the lies that have been told by countercultists about the Church of Jesus Christ, the Saints ought to have manifested "greater ethical integrity."⁸³ He also claims that many of the conservative Protestants present at that meeting thought that those who put that meeting together—Pastor Greg Johnson and his associates—have what he calls an "unhealthy, lopsided relationship with Mormon apologists."⁸⁴ And he is convinced that "Mormon apologists [are] not ready for real dialogue."⁸⁵ The reason is, from his perspective, that they will not slug it out with anti-Mormons in the rhetorical gutter. And he claims that those who deal with these unworthy "Mormon apologists" are engaged in a program of he calls the "Pander/Slander" of countercultist anti-Mormons.⁸⁶

A civil, fruitful conversation between those of different faiths has to be between equals, and it must occur in a respectful fashion in which both sides listen and learn from the other. It cannot be a confrontation in which one side pounds away at the other. Such "debates," a favorite of some of the most strident anti-Mormons, are efforts at appearing to score points; they are pure theater and exhibitions of pride. Huggins bemoans the fact that some evangelicals now "pander to them [the Latter-day Saints] without challenging them." What he appears to mean by an authentic evangelical dialogue with Latter-day Saints is an ugly confrontation in which evangelicals pound away and the Saints just take it on the chin. We are simply not interested in an "interfaith dialogue" in which Huggins and his anti-Mormon associates do the talking and we do the listening or where they attack and we must defend our faith on their terms—and presumably be battered into seeing the error of our ways before surrendering.

"Mormon apologists," according to Huggins, take on a "cloak of victim privilege."⁸⁷ And he claims that evangelicals who are friendly with those he describes as "victim-bull[ies]" are merely "buying credi-

83. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue."

84. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue."

85. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue."

86. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue."

87. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue."

bility with Mormon apologists.”⁸⁸ He also boasts that he has been saying for quite some time that “it was incumbent on nobody to interact with the work of Mormon apologists until they produce something of real scholarly significance that could stand on its own outside Mormon circles.”⁸⁹ We have in this issue of the *Review* an essay by Larry Morris examining in detail the “scholarship” of Ronald Huggins.⁹⁰

Some Secular Anti-Mormon Mockery Exposed

This issue of the *Review* is not focused exclusively on sectarian anti-Mormonism; we also have essays dealing with secular attacks on the faith of the Saints. Nicholas Literski,⁹¹ an expert on Freemasonry, has reviewed a remarkably inept book by Clyde Forsberg.⁹² When we read his criticism of Forsberg’s *Equal Rites*, we were astonished by what appeared to be Forsberg’s ignorance of Freemasonry. We made a genuine effort to determine if these criticisms were sound. What is even more amazing is that the Columbia University Press published a book by an author whose command of both Freemasonry and Mormonism is confused and deeply flawed—primitive at best. When I read Literski’s review, I wondered how well Forsberg understands Mormon things. So I had a close look at his master’s thesis, done at the University of Calgary, and his doctoral dissertation, done at Queens

88. Huggins, “An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue.”

89. Huggins, “An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue.” On 26 July 2003 at the Salt Lake Theological Seminary, there was a day-long conference that featured the presentation of an approach called “Bridges” that was developed by Ken Mulholland and his associates, including Ron Huggins, on “how Christians can relate to their Mormon neighbors with sensitivity and awareness.” Pastor Greg Johnson actually began the presentations at this conference by describing his conversations, both public and private, with Robert Millet. He did not, however, remain to take heat from Ronald Huggins, Kurt Van Gorden, Luke Wilson, Sandra Tanner, Bill McKeever, and others. However, I did stay for the entire conference and found it very divisive.

90. Larry E. Morris, “‘I Should Have an Eye Single to the Glory of God’: Joseph Smith’s Account of the Angel and the Plates,” in this number, pages 11–82.

91. See Nicholas S. Literski, “Mormonism, Masonry, and Mischief: Clyde Forsberg’s *Equal Rites*,” in this number, pages 1–10.

92. Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., *Equal Rites: The Book of Mormon, Masonry, Gender, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

University.⁹³ It turned out that both of these works are simply not well done. It seems that in his frenzy to attack the church (in his recent book), Forsberg garbles both the Latter-day Saint and Masonic sides. But he is always highly opinionated and confident.

Andrew and Dawson Hedges have looked at Dan Vogel's latest effort to pull the church from its foundations,⁹⁴ and Ryan Parr has examined Simon Southerton's attack on the Book of Mormon.⁹⁵ Two essays by Kent Jackson and Gregory Taggart expose the wanton nonsense invented by Martha Beck to justify her life-style choice by fabricating calumny—that is, patently absurd charges maliciously calculated to misrepresent her father—and in a kind of New Age, faddish way, richly rewarded with wealth and celebrity status as a life coach. She has turned against everything her father stood for and is striving to destroy his reputation and to mock the church he sought to defend.⁹⁶

93. See Clyde R. Forsberg Jr., "The Roots of Early Mormonism: An Exegetical Inquiry" (master's thesis, University of Calgary, May 1990), which was in religious studies, and also his "In Search of the Historical Nephi: The *Book of Mormon*, 'Evangelicalism' and Antebellum American Popular Culture c. 1830s" (PhD dissertation, Queen's University, April 1994). Forsberg claims that he got support for this work from Brent Metcalfe, Dan Vogel, Bill Russell, and Newell Bringhurst (p. vi). A portion of his dissertation was published as "Retelling the Greatest Story Ever Told: Popular Literature as Scripture in Antebellum America," *Dialogue* 29/4 (1996): 69–86. The following is an example of the confusion in Forsberg's dissertation, which follows fourteen years of intensive study. He asserts that "the underlying assumption of [Hugh] Nibley's work is that scientific or historical truth are one and the same" (p. 4). What this means is that "at bottom, the assumption is that faith can be proven scientifically" (p. 4). Then he argues that this notion faces "the great stumbling block of the 'scientific history' of the last century, that 'noble dream' which assumed that science was the friend of faith and objectivity and the lamp of the righteous." He has, to the degree that any of this makes sense, gotten it exactly backwards. Latter-day Saint scholars, especially those who have published in this *Review*, have argued consistently against the illusion that history is a science or that objectivity is possible or even desirable. Forsberg has also self-published a novel entitled *All the King's Horses and All the King's Men: Love, Alienation and "Reconciliation" in a Big, BIG Mormon Family* (Xlibris, 2001).

94. See Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, "No, Dan, That's Still Not History," in this number, pages 205–22.

95. See Ryan Parr, "Missing the Boat to Ancient American . . . Just Plain Missing the Boat," in this number, pages 83–106.

96. See Kent P. Jackson, "Leaving the Facts and the Faith," in this number, pages 107–21; and Gregory Taggart, "How Martha Wrote an Anti-Mormon Book (Using Her Father's Handbook as Her Guide?)," pages 123–70. Jackson once published a highly critical review

Since the Saints may encounter the claims of those anxious to brush every manifestation of faith aside in a world unencumbered by the current findings of science, we have included an essay by Allen Buskirk dealing with the popular speculation of Carl Sagan. He is one of the more media-savvy celebrity-science figures who has an urge to explain away the divine.⁹⁷

A Concluding Postscript

The current title of this periodical, *The FARMS Review*, is intentional. It allows for review essays, as well as book notices, book reviews, and bibliographical essays or assessments of the literature on various topics, and for essays not linked directly to a single book. We occasionally include older items that never were printed, or we republish items that in our estimation have not had sufficiently wide circulation, and we may occasionally publish interviews with scholars on important topics. We do not intend to publish rejoinders or letters to the editor. Those who wish to quarrel with something that we publish have available to them various venues, with editors and publishers sympathetic with their ideology, such as the Signature Books Web page, or perhaps *Sunstone* and *Dialogue*. We feel no obligation to fill that niche.

In this issue of the *Review*, Alan Keele has translated an essay by the late Ernst Benz, a prominent German historian. Much of this essay originally appeared in an English translation in a collection of essays edited by Truman Madsen.⁹⁸ It should be noted that, unlike

of Hugh Nibley's scholarship; see Kent P. Jackson, review of *Old Testament and Related Studies*, by Hugh Nibley, *BYU Studies* 28/4 (1988): 114–19. I showed that Jackson was mistaken on every substantive point; see Midgley, "Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), lxxi–lxxiii.

97. See Allen R. Buskirk, "Science, Pseudoscience, and Religious Belief," in this number, pages 273–309.

98. See Truman Madsen, ed., *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1978), 201–19. On 30 March 1976, Professor Benz delivered a forum address at BYU entitled "Mormonism and the Secularization of Religions in the Modern World"; see *BYU Studies* 16/4 (1976): 627–39.

some sectarian critics, Professor Benz found nothing outrageous in the Latter-day Saint emphasis on deification.

We have reprinted an address by Dil Parkinson on the problems associated with learning a foreign language, which, I believe, can teach us much about what can be called participatory understanding and the need to go beyond the current limits of our understanding.⁹⁹ Parkinson draws some insightful parallels between our efforts to master a foreign language and our efforts to learn the gospel. Unfortunately the Saints sometimes use the language of “testimony”—referring to their initial conviction that the gospel has been restored and that the Book of Mormon is true—as an excuse for making that initial, rudimentary experience of a conviction the terminus of their understanding. As such, it tends to function as a rough equivalent of the fundamentalist/evangelical initial born-again experience. What Parkinson so eloquently points out is that the Saints should always be avidly seeking further light and knowledge and never think that they have mastered the “foreign language” of divine things.

Those who wish to find a stumbling block to obeying God’s will, or who cannot stand the mocking of the residents of the Great and Spacious Building and who turn their back on a fateful history, may find justifications in the foibles of the Saints and their leaders, neither of whom have ever thought of themselves as infallible or omniscient. They may also strive to rationalize their refusal to take seriously divine special revelations as a way of justifying their decision to avoid being a part of fateful history. When one’s behavior does not come close to conforming to what one believes, then what is often called dissonance management takes place. Unless there is genuine repentance, one merely changes one’s beliefs and begins to attack God and his covenant people. The deeper the belief, the more likely that apostates will not be able to leave the church alone. They may end up wasting and wearing out their lives waging a war against their former faith. It is easy to find excuses—to rationalize turning against the faith and the Saints. But for me and my associates, keeping the

99. See Dilworth B. Parkinson, “We Have Received, and We Need No More,” in this number, pages 255–71.

covenants we have made with God, obeying his will, and looking for our redemption to Jesus as our Lord and Savior are warranted by our experiences with the Holy Spirit, which is consonant with our deepest longings and desires and also made plausible by the best scholarship currently available—some of which we strive to publish in the pages of this *Review*.

Editor's Picks, by Daniel C. Peterson

In accordance with tradition, we now offer a rating of some of the books considered in the present issue of the *Review*. These evaluations emerge from personal examination of the books, coupled with a reading of the relevant reviews or book notes, and after conversations with those who assist in the production of the *Review*. This is the rating scale we traditionally use:

- **** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely
- *** Enthusiastically recommended
- ** Warmly recommended
- * Recommended

Of the books considered in the present issue of the *FARMS Review*, we feel that we can recommend:

- **** Richard L. Bushman, with Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*
- **** John W. Welch, with Erick B. Carlson, eds., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*
- *** Douglas E. Cowan, *Bearing False Witness? An Introduction to the Christian Countercult*
- *** Terryl L. Givens, *The Latter-day Saint Experience in America*
- *** Robert L. Millet, *A Different Jesus: The Christ of the Latter-day Saints*
- *** Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*
- *** Andrew C. Skinner, *The Garden Tomb*
- ** Margaret Barker, *An Extraordinary Gathering of Angels*

- ** Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*
- ** Avraham Gileadi, *Studies in the Book of Mormon*
- ** Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform*
- ** John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*
- * Gregory A. Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism*
- * Jana Riess and Christopher K. Bigelow, *Mormonism for Dummies*
- * Thomas P. Rausch, ed., *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?*

This current number of the *Review* would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of numerous individuals. To the authors and reviewers, we owe a great debt of gratitude. Kevin L. Barney, Kevin M. Christensen, Stephen D. Ricks, and D. Charles Pyle lent their expertise on various technical matters. Shirley S. Ricks coordinated the work at all stages, and Louis C. Midgley and George L. Mitton worked diligently and thoughtfully to improve the content and presentation of the essays and book notes. Alison V. P. Coutts offered useful comments and suggestions on each of the contributions and served as the main typesetter. Paula Hicken supervised the source checking and proofreading done by Linda Sheffield, Amanda Smith, Sandra Thorne, and Renee Wald. I offer my sincere thanks and appreciation for a job well done.