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Editor's Introduction, Debating Evangelicals

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Abstract Midgley shares a missionary experience in New Zealand in which he was confronted about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He then discusses the evolution of the evangelical movement and the problematic nature of engaging in heated debates about religion. While he encourages Latter-day Saints to defend their faith, he insists that they can do so with civility toward and respect for other beliefs.

Debating Evangelicals

Louis Midgley

My first skirmish with one who might now be described as a "debating evangelical" took place in 1951 while I was a missionary in New Zealand. The pastor of a small Baptist church in Point Chevalier, a suburb some six kilometers west of the center of Auckland, had been surveying my missionary companion and me as we went about our activities, including our travel on the tram then connecting Point Chevalier, where we lived, with Queen Street in the center of Auckland. Eventually he introduced himself and invited us to his home so that he could, he explained, learn more about our faith. I was, of course, delighted. But his invitation was a subterfuge. I anticipated a civil conversation. I was mistaken. As soon as I began describing the recovery of the Book of Mormon, this fellow launched into a blistering attack on me and my faith. I faced someone barely civil and fully confrontational. I was discombobulated, stunned, and on the ropes, and this preacher knew it. He showed no mercy; he pounded away, even boasting that, unlike him, I had not been properly trained for the ministry. He was not interested in learning a thing about the faith of Latter-day Saints. He was, instead, eager to bash our beliefs, which he was confident he already understood. Savoring his triumph, he invited us back for a second bout. Since I suspected that he had been bluffing and wrong on some of what he had claimed, I accepted his invitation.

Though I had earlier, as a student at the University of Utah, encountered secular critics of the faith of the Saints, this was my initial introduction to sectarian anti-Mormonism. In an effort to prepare for the second round in this debate, I visited a large Christian bookstore then located on Queen Street, where I purchased some leaflets and a pamphlet attacking the Church of Jesus Christ. This was my first encounter with sectarian anti-Mormon literature. Since I was already in the habit of looking for information in books, I also visited the little library in Point Chevalier, which is still there, as well as the much larger Auckland Public Library. I discovered that our host had made assertions that were flatly wrong. At our second match, I was ready to respond to this preacher, who seemed to have relied on muddled anti-Mormon literature. The debate ended in a draw, and the preacher knew it.

With what I had discovered in those libraries, I was able to expose some bluffing and mistakes on several key issues. I testified to the truth of Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims and to the gospel of Jesus Christ. I came away from that exchange with no information about the grounds or content of that preacher's faith. There was something odd about his mode of "witnessing." I have never lost interest in the literature sectarian critics produce, distribute, or rely upon. I have discovered that some Protestant preachers, especially those involved in or influenced by the countercult movement, have a proclivity for denigrating the faith of the Saints; they operate in a confrontational, attack mode.

Shifting Ideological Sands

Much has changed in the Protestant world since my first encounter with a "debating evangelical." In the 1950s that Baptist pastor in Point Chevalier would not have thought of himself as an evangelical. The reason is that the label *evangelical* did not then distinguish conservative from liberal Protestants. He might, however, have thought of himself as a *fundamentalist*. Why? The first step in the emergence of what we now know as the evangelical movement came in 1941, when those who initially called themselves neo-evangelicals formed the

National Association of Evangelicals.[1] When viewed as the primary contemporary conservative Protestant movement, instead of merely the traditional name for the Lutheran rather than the Calvinist side of the Protestant Reformation, what is now commonly known as evangelicalism gained prominence only following World War II. In addition, those involved in this embryonic neo-evangelical movement sought to distinguish themselves from fundamentalists and also from other much earlier brands of conservative Protestantism reaching back to the Great Awakening and to even earlier sectarian movements in Europe.

The great leap forward for the evangelical movement came in 1956, when Billy Graham (1918–) founded the magazine *Christianity Today*. With the help of some wealthy friends, he soon had in place what quickly became the flagship evangelical publication.[2] From that point on, the word *evangelical* has identified an alliance of a host of somewhat different and even competing ideologies. The original so-called neo-evangelicals set in place a kind of umbrella under which thrived some increasingly sophisticated alternatives to the then dominant cultural or liberal Protestantism.

As previously mentioned, in 1951 I did not debate a preacher who thought of himself as an evangical. He was merely some sort of Baptist who had been influenced by the fundamentalist movement. In addition, the sectarian anti-Mormon literature he seemed to have consulted can best be described as a product of Protestant fundamentalism. The newer and much less thorny evangelical movement is clearly more diverse and also more intellectually sophisticated than the older fundamentalism, which Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003) and

1. The National Association of Evangelicals drew some unwanted attention when its recent president, the Reverend Ted Haggard, the founder of the huge evangelical megachurch in Colorado Springs, Colorado, was exposed and deposed as a moral hypocrite.

2. For an easily accessible treatment of this most recent manifestation of a much older and very diverse evangelical movement, and its close and competitive relationship to the earlier fundamentalism, see Douglas A. Sweeney's "Standing on the Promises through Howling Storms of Doubt: Fundamentalism and Neoevangelicalism," which is chapter 7 of his *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 155–80, 195–99. See also the comments on Sweeney's remarkable book in the *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008): 254–58.

subsequent editors of *Christianity Today* have striven to marginalize, repress, and replace with something a bit more winsome.

Remnants of the older fundamentalist ideology are, however, still alive, if not exactly well, on the margins of the now larger, more sophisticated evangelical movement. The bizarre countercult religious industry is closely allied with Protestant fundamentalism. The countercult, with its anti-Mormon component, was launched by the notorious "Dr." Walter Martin (1928–1989) in the 1960s.[3] It took Martin decades to describe himself as an evangelical. Much of sectarian anti-Mormonism seems to have fundamentalist roots. In addition, sectarian anti-Mormonism is now primarily, though not entirely, the work of the countercult movement, which consists of an enormous variety of often competing "ministries" or "outreaches," as well as a host of Web sites, publishers, and parachurch agencies, and even the top echelons of the wealthy and powerful Southern Baptist Convention.[4]

My first encounter with sectarian anti-Mormonism was an indication of the proclivity I would later encounter from some Protestant preachers, and also, unfortunately, a harbinger of many later wearisome conversations with sectarian critics of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is clear that debating with our sectarian critics, though amusing or perhaps exhilarating, may turn out to be a mistake. Debating evangelicals may not be a useful way of witnessing either in word or deed to our own faith in the Holy One of Israel and the redemption from both sin and death that he has made possible. And yet I am confident that we must defend the faith.

Providing an Apology for the Faith of the Saints

The Greek word *apologia* (often translated into English, depending on the context, as either "vindication" or "defense") appears either as a

3. See Louis Midgley, "A 'Tangled Web': The Walter Martin Miasma," *FARMS Review of Books* 12/1 (2000): 371–434; for additional details and context, see Midgley, "Anti-Mormonism and the Newfangled Countercult Culture," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 271–339 at 286–93, 329–31.

4. For details, see Louis Midgley, "Orders of Submission," *FARMS Review* 18/2 (2006): 189–228 at 189–97, 203–7.

noun or as a verb (*apologeomai*) in eight passages in the New Testament (see Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Corinthians 9:3; 2 Corinthians 7:11; Philippians 1:7; 16; 2; 2 Timothy 4:16; 1 Peter 3:15). In what is perhaps the most famous of these passages, most of which have a judicial context, Peter urged the Saints to "always be ready to make your *defense* to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15 New Standard Revised Version, emphasis added). But it should be noted that those early Saints were also admonished to respond to such demands and hence defend their faith "with gentleness and reverence," so that when "maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame" (1 Peter 3:16 NSRV).

We should also remember that to defend (L. *defendere*, meaning "to beat off") involves, among other things, building a protective fence around something we genuinely value and wish to preserve. This is required by our scriptures. Latter-day Saints are told, for example, that

> it is an imperative duty that we owe to all the rising generation, and to all the pure in heart—for there are many . . . among all sects, parties, and denominations, who are blinded by the subtle craftiness of men, whereby they lie in wait to deceive, and who are only kept from the truth because they know not where to find it—therefore, that we should waste and wear out our lives in bringing to light all the hidden things of darkness, wherein we know them; and they are truly manifest from heaven—these should then be attended to with great earnestness. Let no man count them as small things; for there is much which lieth in futurity, pertaining to the saints, which depends upon these things. (Doctrine and Covenants 123:11–15)

I read this language as a call to assemble, identify, and respond to the calumny crafted and circulated by our critics. How should this be done?

By Debating Evangelicals?

It is clearly neither wise nor necessary to negotiate with our sectarian or secular critics. In addition, our scriptures do not necessarily

require us to appear in public debates, either acrimonious or civil, with our enemies to thrash out our differences. A fruitful conversation is perhaps possible with sectarian critics of the Church of Jesus Christ, if they are not in an attack mode and also when they are genuinely willing to listen and learn.[5] However, evangelical critics of the Church of Jesus Christ are often eager to debate, and sometimes they even insist that we must debate them.

Engaging in debates with evangelicals may tempt us to make at least two mistakes. First, our own opinions, whatever they might be, are often among our most prized properties. They define, as much or more than anything, who and what we are. Hence we tend to hold passionately to our opinions come what may. And when our opinions are challenged, we fight back and may even desire revenge or succumb to the urge to counterattack. We can easily be induced into seeing the Other as a Diabolical Monster and ourselves as a Holy Knight fighting the good fight against evil and error. We also may find it useful to rationalize our words and deeds. Likewise, when we confront those with different opinions, we may end up in verbal or written strife, competition, or combat over our opinions. We may also make the mistake of not really desiring to understand the opinions of the Other. One reason for this is that debates take place before real or imagined audiences and hence in a kind of theater in which points are scored or awarded. The "winner" in a debate often succeeds by the crafty use of rhetoric. The goal easily becomes winning or appearing to win a contest. Clever, quick, confident responses are at a premium in such exchanges. And often biased, poorly informed audiences serve as the judge and presumably determine a winner. Why is this so?

We are, I am confident, familiar with debates among those seeking public office or with the polemics of those seeking to advance an ideology. Debates often dwindle into a kind of theater where the mob takes over. To debate, either formally or informally, is not necessarily to inform or to discover truth but to convince an audience functioning as either judge or jury, or perhaps even ourselves, in a strife for

5. I have dealt with this issue previously. See, for example, Midgley, "Orders of Submission," 189–228.

superiority between adversaries. The word *debate* (L. *de*, down, + *battuere*, beat) has always carried the pejorative meaning of beating down an opponent in what amounts to a war of words.

Even our English word *discuss* once identified something violent—a shaking apart (L. *dis*, apart, + *quatere*, to shake), a shattering as something is dashed to pieces. We can see this intensity in words related to *discussion* such as *repercussion*, *percussion*, and *concussion*. Even the word *argue* has a kind of negative ambience since it can identify attempts to baffle, foil the plans of, or hoodwink someone, rather than inform and clarify, though it also may identify that endeavor as well. Arguments pull apart or separate; they also tend to arouse or generate violent passions. Even or especially when arguments are set out, debates can be contentious. An argumentative person is not necessarily seen as the most civil or trustworthy. The master debater may preen and pose while slashing and battering down an adversary or manipulating an audience with buttery smoothness. And debates are seemingly won or lost on the basis of sets of skills and personality features that have little to do with truth or even academic competence.

No doubt with good intentions, a few Latter-day Saints have engaged in public debates with our critics. In the inevitable commotion of quarreling with the Other, we may fail to inform or instruct, and we may target or appeal to audiences not disposed to hear or genuinely understand our message. While such debates are perhaps unavoidable, they may be the wrong way for a Latter-day Saint to display or sustain faith in the restored gospel. I can imagine my by now petulant reader remembering that earlier I had insisted that the Saints must defend their faith. How should this be done, since our scriptures call for an apology—that is, vindication or defense—of our faith? Is it possible to have debates with evangelicals where there is at least a somewhat level playing field? Put another way: do not the so-called interreligious debates that some evangelicals have sponsored manage to avoid the excesses common to debates?

A "Lesson of Moderation"

Both Plato (427–347 BC) and Aristotle (384–322 BC), each in his own way, extolled the properly educated habits that they believed make one virtuous—that is, an excellent, fine, or genuinely cultured human being. They argued in various ways that this happens if and only if we have somehow managed to win a victory over the base desires warring within our own souls. They both employed the Greek word *sophrosyne*, whose subtle primary meaning is something like "prudence" or "temperance," to identify this control over mere bodily pleasures (and hence self-restraint in words and deeds) but also, by extension, mastery over all other violent passions. Cicero (106–43 BC) then seems to have used the word *temperantia* to translate *sophrosyne* into Latin. He was not, however, aiming necessarily at sobriety, a meaning that the word *temperance* takes on only later. The English word *moderation* now most often identifies what Plato and Aristotle had in mind when they used the word *sophrosyne*. Along with justice, courage, and wisdom, moderation is one of the so-called cardinal virtues. To moderate is to give a proper measure to things, as one ought to strive to do in music. We should all attempt to reduce, abate, control, and thereby render our desires or appetites less excessive or violent. When we moderate, we limit or repress. We also learn to conform to the rules that restrain desires or appetites and thereby make possible a civilized society. Hence even a virtue like courage is self-defeating if it is not tamed by moderation.

James Madison (1751–1826), following David Hume (1711–1776), once strove to teach a "lesson of moderation."[6] It can even be said that

6. For the expression "lesson of moderation," as well as supporting homilies on this virtue, see James Madison and Alexander Hamilton (1757–1804) writing under the pseudonym *Publius* in *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 4–5 (Federalist No. 1, on the wisdom and necessity of learning a "lesson of moderation"), 17 (Federalist No. 3, praising "moderation and candour"), 231 (Federalist No. 37, on the "spirit of moderation"), 298 (Federalist No. 43, extolling "moderation . . . and prudence"), and 595 (Federalist No. 85, after quoting David Hume, noting that "these judicious reflections contain a lesson of moderation" that should be learned if we seek a civil society). Publius borrowed the expression "lesson of moderation" and the architecture of much of his argument contrasting it with zeal and factional or party spirit from David Hume, who once wrote that he would "always be more fond of promoting

one ought to have a zeal for moderation. How can this be? Zeal is genuinely praiseworthy if and only if it is an enlightened zeal.[7] The apostle Paul indicated that there is trouble when zeal is unenlightened—that is, when it is without proper understanding or knowledge. Zeal without this necessary enlightenment, and hence lacking moderation, can easily result in various asperities—that is, among other things, a rough or severe manner of address, harshness, and even churlishness. This is the zeal often manifested in debates where points are being scored against the Other. Or it can be found in the tricks and excesses of sophistry and in the action of partisans, factions, gangs, or mobs.[8] To avoid such excesses, we all need to learn to invoke what are sometimes called the calm rather than the immediate and violent passions; otherwise we may end up, in our zeal, indulging in a torrent of angry and malicious words, as well as mendacious, malevolent deeds.

When we surrender to the desire to debate, we may risk losing a battle within our own souls with appetites and desires over which, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we should seek to gain a victory. The desire to thrash an opponent in a debate, especially while drawing on an arsenal of rhetorical or other tricks, could be an indication of the absence of an appropriate and necessary moral discipline. Put another way, until or unless we manifest an appropriate moderation, we do not represent well the faith we seek to proclaim. It is a mistake to fall into anything like the pattern commonly found among

moderation than zeal; though perhaps the surest way of producing moderation in every party [faction] is to increase our zeal for the public. Let us therefore try, if it be possible, from the foregoing doctrine, to draw a lesson of moderation with regard to parties, into which our country is at present divided; at the same time, that we allow not this moderation to abate the industry and passion, with which every individual is bound to pursue the good of his country." David Hume, "That Politics May be Reduced to a Science," in his *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Classics, 1985), 27; compare his comments on moderation on pp. 15, 45, 149, 168, 201, 273, and elsewhere.

7. In *The Federalist* and Hume's *Essays*, both cited above, there is much said about zeal, its destructive force, and the possibility of disciplining or restraining it through calm passions and hence enlightenment.

8. It should not be necessary to trace the arguments on the evils of faction that are found in James Madison's contribution to *The Federalist*, other than to again point out that one of his prime examples of the evils of faction was drawn from the annals of religious controversy. For some of the details, see Midgley, "Orders of Submission," 223–26.

our critics who often insist on an essentially abrasive, confrontational mode of discourse. Currently the absence of moderation can be seen on blogs, lists, and boards. In some of these venues, diseases of the soul are nourished and spread, rather than assistance being provided to aid in the recovery of sometimes severely spoiled souls.

The Saints seem to me to be facing a growing wave of mindless though also calculated hostility and misrepresentation. Given the abundance of provocations, we must respond, but before launching rebuttals, we should seek to learn the lesson of moderation as we opine—especially on the Internet. While we certainly must defend our faith, this does not entail descending into the rhetorical gutter with our critics. When confronted by countercult calumny, it is painful to see signs of malevolent passions or unenlightened zeal at work among the Saints or within my own soul.

Much, but not all, of the hostility towards the faith of the Saints is peddled by countercult anti-Mormons. Some loathing of the Saints is also found, unfortunately, among academics and others who, one might suppose, are not fond of such excesses. In facing the current avalanche of anti-Mormon prejudice and propaganda, we should strive to rise above the violent passions and hence those commonly exacerbated in or heightened by debating and disputing.

Responding While Avoiding the Rhetorical Gutter

Latter-day Saints do not have a history of bashing or demeaning the faith of others. We have not persecuted, but have proselyted. We have not been in an attack mode. When we have been assailed and assaulted, our responses have been defensive and rather mild, especially given the sometimes extreme provocations. We have no ministries, outreaches, or other agencies dedicated to attacking evangelicals or the faith of others. Unlike the Southern Baptist Convention, which has an elaborate and expensive agency that targets the faith of the Saints, the Church of Jesus Christ has no office or employees busy hounding and harassing those who are not Latter-day Saints. We publish no literature attacking the faith of anyone. Nor have we sought confrontations with evangelicals. We have, instead, sought to defend ourselves

from the onslaught of uninformed, distorted, and intemperate attacks on our faith.

We may not, of course, entirely avoid all the evils associated with confrontation, contention, and disputation. Why? We must have the courage, skill, and knowledge essential to defending the kingdom of God. We need not be bullied by bigots. But, in setting forth the reasons for the faith that is in us, we must strive to do so with moderation—with as much gentleness as we can muster, given the onslaught we face from a growing number of critics. Elder Dallin Oaks recently observed that

> we live in a time when some misrepresent the beliefs of those they call Mormons and even revile us because of them. When we encounter such misrepresentations, we have *a duty to speak out* to clarify our doctrine and what we believe. We should be the ones to state our beliefs rather than allowing others the final word in misrepresenting them. This calls for testimony, which can be expressed privately to an acquaintance or publicly in a small or large meeting. As we testify of the truth we know, we should faithfully follow the caution to speak "in mildness and in meekness" (D&C 38:41). We should never be overbearing, shrill, or reviling. As the Apostle Paul taught, we should speak the truth in love (see Ephesians 4:15).[9]

Our primary and immediate audience is not those who rant outside general conference, or who turn up at candlelight protests, or who harass our missionaries, or who post up a storm on lists, boards, and blogs. Nor is it the authors of criticism of our faith, whether academic or otherwise; nor is it those who write tracts, pamphlets, or books or give seminars in Protestant churches. We seek to inform both those within and without the community of Saints who are or might become "blinded by the subtle craftiness of men," and hence those caught in a snare fashioned by those who "lie in wait to deceive." Our primary audience includes those honest in heart who are "kept from the truth because they know not where to find it" (D&C 123:12), or those among

9. Dallin H. Oaks, "Testimony," *Ensign*, May 2008, 26–29 at 28, emphasis added.

us who may not realize that there are competent answers to genuine concerns and answers to what may seem like difficult questions.

Public confrontations with debating evangelicals, especially when they set the agenda, provide or constitute the audience, or exercise some measure of partisan control, and especially when they insist that our faith must be measured against or assessed by some standards they set, are not likely to be productive; they may not even be appropriate.

But the Saints should respond to critics and criticisms. This has been at least part of what has been done in the *FARMS Review* since 1989, when it was begun. Daniel Peterson has invited and encouraged efforts to defend the faith and the Saints against both secular or sectarian attacks. This has, however, troubled two different groups: first, both secular and sectarian critics who insist that no defense is possible, and, secondly, some of the Saints who wrongly assume that no defense is either necessary or proper.[10] A premise upon which the *Review* is grounded is that a defense of the faith is both necessary and possible. Since 1989, the *Review* has included timely responses to both tired old and trendy new attacks on the faith of the Saints. In addition to critical examinations of both secular and sectarian anti-Mormon publications, accounts have been included in the *Review* of the ongoing and sometimes heated quarrels between competing factions and ideologies within the evangelical movement, as well as some of the more amusing and instructive instances of the internecine warfare that rages within this movement. Some of these go beyond correcting the confusion displayed by critics or exposing the misrepresentation common in sectarian attacks on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. The pages of the *Review* have not, of course, been opened to debating evangelicals; they have their own resources and venues, including those provided by the wealthy Southern Baptist Convention. We have, however, hosted productive exchanges with evangelical scholars on important issues and have allowed them to have the last word.[11]

10. Some may assume that only the Brethren should defend the faith, but every endowed Latter-day Saint is under covenant with God to build and defend the kingdom.

11. See, for example, the exchange between Michael S. Heiser and David F. Bokovoy on *theosis* in the *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 221–323. And an entire number of the *FARMS Review of Books* (11/2, 1999) consisted of commentary on Craig L. Blomberg

It is possible for Latter-day Saints to have productive conversations with those not of our faith. If this were not so, few would have become Latter-day Saints. Once one moves beyond a naïve faith within an isolated community, one must make choices between alternatives. It is also not uncommon for Latter-day Saint and other scholars to discuss questions of faith, including the similarities and differences between faiths or alternative or competing understandings of faith. I have had many such exchanges. Such conversations are fruitful when those involved assume that others are honest about their own beliefs—that is, they present their faith as it actually is for them—and also when there is a genuine desire to learn from the Other. What can flow from such conversations is, among other things, mutual and deeper understanding of both oneself and the Other. This is not unlike learning by reading the best literature of another faith, or the way we come to have an understanding of most anything of interest to us.

Not by Theological Formulae or Creeds Alone

Certain misunderstandings, sometimes enhanced by various suspicions and fears, tend to haunt evangelical conversations with Latter-day Saints. Even when evangelicals are not heavily impacted by countercult propaganda, they may begin with the assumption that they are the gatekeepers of Christian orthodoxy, however this is understood. And they know before a conversation begins that the Saints are not Christians. In addition, they insist that their orthodoxy involves what they understand as theology—that is, what has been worked out or deduced and reduced into creeds and confessions and hence also what certain churchmen have written that now counts as biblical, Trinitarian, historical Christian orthodoxy. This or something very much like it grounds some of the mistrust evangelicals have of Mormonism.

In a recent essay, Martin E. Marty, distinguished American church historian and occasional student of Mormon things, pointed out that Christians are obsessed with doing theology, while Latter-day Saints

and Stephen E. Robinson's *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

live in and by stories. He thereby contrasts Christian *theology* with Latter-day Saint *thought*. But, we must ask, what kind of thought? And Marty has an answer. "If *logos* means word or statement and *theos* refers to God, Mormon thought overflows with theology, of a sort rooted in narrative."[12] Thus the Saints can be said to have a "theology," if what one has in mind is a veritable beehive of stories and also the kind of narration of events associated with accounts of the past—that is, with history. "From the beginning," Marty has argued, Latter-day Saint faith has always been "characterized by its thoroughly historical mode and mold"[13] and not by what might be called a classical view of creeds, dogmas, and formal theologies. When Protestants do theology, Marty argues, they "combine the language of the Hebrew Scriptures with mainly Greek philosophical concepts as filtered through academic experiences in Western Europe, most notably Germany," and if one were to include Roman Catholics, then one would have to also include France and Italy.[14]

Marty identifies an enthusiasm for doing theology typically found among sectarian Christians. This proclivity contrasts with the faith of Latter-day Saints and helps to explain their antipathy toward classical theism, which is found in one way or another in both Roman Catholic and Protestant circles. The dependence of the faith of the Saints on divine special revelations fuels a distrust of theological systems worked out by churchmen or others, especially those grounded in the catego-

12. Martin E. Marty, foreword to *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, ed. Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen (Macon: GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), vii–xiv at vi. This volume is a collection of exchanges between Latter-day Saints and those who are either Protestant liberals or speaking for those who would now be lumped under that label. There are two exceptions: one is Clark Pinnock, a prominent evangelical, and the other is David Tracy, a distinguished Roman Catholic theologian. For details, see the Book Note in the *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008): 252–54. Marty helped put together the bulk of the exchanges included in *Mormonism in Dialogue*.

13. Martin E. Marty, "Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 3–19 at 4. With slight revisions and under different titles, this essay has been reprinted four times. For details, see Louis Midgley, "The First Steps," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): xi–lv at xii n. 3. See also Martin E. Marty, *We Might Know What to Do and How to Do It: On the Usefulness of the Religious Past* (Salt Lake City: Westminster College of Salt Lake City, 1989).

14. Marty, foreword, vi.

ries of pagan philosophy. Marty correctly insists that the Saints live by and in a continuing story of redemption and hence not by creeds or theological formulae. Both the grounds and the primary content of the faith of the Saints consist essentially of stories about the recent and remote past, but also about the present—that is, the Saints tend to live in a charmed world much like that described in the scriptures where the divine is even now present in different ways in the lives of the faithful. The heavens are not closed, and the amazing story of redemption continues. The faith of the Saints is thus profoundly historical. Marty even suggests that it may be that this "will remind more Christians that their theology is also born of story and stories."[15] He also thereby clearly identifies the radical difference between what he calls "Christian . . . *theology* and Mormon or Latter-day Saint *thought*."[16]

Marty's remarks introduce a "dialogue," presumably between "contemporary Christian theologies"—including those advanced by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), Paul Tillich (1886–1965), and Karl Barth (1886–1968), who must now be "regarded as historic by today's believers and scholars"[17]—and what he calls "Mormonism." I agree with Marty that this is a flaw in this publishing project since this format necessarily keeps "the Latter-day Saint scholars in a kind of responsive-defensive mode. There is no way of getting around this inevitable distortion."[18] But the Saints are experienced at being on the defensive.

Marty also points out that "LDS scholars are far more at home with . . . Christian thought than vice versa."[19] One rather ironic reason is that Latter-day Saint scholars tend to "earn their doctorates at Harvard or other graduate schools permeated with the concepts of Christian theology, even if and though they often return 'home' to

15. Marty, foreword, vii. I have pointed out that for all the investment in both dogmatic and also systematic theology grounded in a philosophic culture, all varieties or brands of Christian faith are ultimately rooted in historical events and stand or fall on the veracity of those stories. See Louis Midgley, "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): xi–lxxii at xiv–xx.

16. Marty, foreword, vi, emphasis added.

17. Marty, foreword, ix.

18. Marty, foreword, ix.

19. Marty, foreword, ix.

Brigham Young & Company."[20] The result is that "with few exceptions" the sectarian scholars who were invited to lecture at Brigham Young University on various brands of essentially liberal Protestant theology, and whose essays were included in *Mormonism in Dialogue*, showed "little evidence that they boned up on LDS thought."[21] One possible reason for this is that non–Latter-day Saint scholars, with very few exceptions, are either not interested in the faith of the Saints or are interested only when they feel the need to demolish it or to try to talk the Saints into what would amount to a surrender to an alien theology.[22] There may not be a way of avoiding being cast in the response mode and hence being on the defensive in these kinds of conversations, especially with evangelicals or fundamentalists.

A Stalemate in Negotiations?

It seems that having the correct theology is what really counts with evangelicals, but not for the Saints, for whom stories about a then and there and also a here and now are crucial and decisive. But there is a sense in which evangelicals realize that the faith of the Saints consists of and rests upon stories. This explains why evangelicals insist that Joseph Smith must be seen, in Richard Mouw's recent acerbic formulation, as either a "deceiver or deluded."[23] Accordingly, "the only question in many evangelical minds is whether Joseph was—to put it crudely—a liar or a lunatic."[24] This explains why, when Latter-day Saints debate evangelicals, they inevitably face those who see themselves as the gatekeepers of Christian orthodoxy and who therefore insist that others are not genuine Christians until or unless they adopt what they label a biblical, historical, Trinitarian, orthodox, creedal

20. Marty, foreword, vi.

21. Marty, foreword, ix.

22. See Midgley, "Orders of Submission," 189–228.

23. Richard J. Mouw, "The Possibility of Joseph Smith: Some Evangelical Probings," in *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 189–207 at 197.

24. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 189; compare pp. 190 and 191 where Mouw repeats his "liar or lunatic" line, as well as p. 196, where he also adds "deception or lunacy" to his terse language.

version of Christian theology. In addition, it also provides an explanation for why evangelicals insist that the Saints must abandon their distinctive history, including especially the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims.

To move away from picturing Joseph Smith as either a liar or lunatic, again according to Mouw, "would require that we [evangelicals] concede far more to Mormonism than we are inclined to do."[25] And yet, since Mouw is a gentle person, he still wants to see something significant in the Joseph Smith legacy, even though he continues "to reject [Joseph's] claims to have received a new revelation from the heavens."[26] But he also finds "it difficult . . . as an evangelical [to] simply endorse some of the efforts by other non-Mormon scholars to find an alternative to the liar-or-lunatic choice." Whatever else one can say about Joseph Smith, he remains for Mouw either a liar or a lunatic. Hence, Mouw wants "to resist the relativizing tendencies that often seem to lurk just beneath the surface of non-Mormon efforts to offer a less-than-hostile account of Joseph's status as a religious leader," while he also flatly rejects Joseph's prophetic truth claims. His taking the faith of the Latter-day Saints seriously requires him to see Joseph Smith as either a liar or lunatic. He does not find a genuine conceptual space "between 'pious deceiver' and 'sincere fraud,'" though he believes the efforts of Rodney Stark, Dan Vogel, and others have been "helpful" or "quite illuminating,"[27] without specifying how and why.

For Mouw the "claims on behalf of Mormonism" are, "at best, seriously misleading, much in need of correction and revision in the light of the teachings of the Bible as developed and clarified by historic Christianity."[28] In this remark, we can see signs of the agenda at work in Mouw's hopes to correct and revise the faith of the Saints on the basis of his understanding of what he considers "historic Christianity." The goal is not to make a few evangelical converts from among Latter-day Saints. Instead, this is an effort to convert the entire Church of

25. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 189.

26. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 199.

27. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 190, including quotations preceding this sentence.

28. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 191.

Jesus Christ into an evangelical sect by gradually correcting and revising the faith of the Saints. I have previously described this as an effort to negotiate a surrender. These efforts are modeled on some apparent shifts that took place many years ago when Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895–1960) and "Dr." Walter Martin negotiated with Seventh-day Adventist leaders, as well as during the more recent turmoil and eventual breakup of the Worldwide Church of God following the death of Herbert W. Armstrong (1892–1986), with a portion of that denomination eventually being accepted as fully evangelical.[29]

Mouw is confident that without a "smoking gun discovery—for example, finding a source from which the Book of Mormon was obviously plagiarized—the hope of demonstrating beyond reasonable doubt the falsity of Mormon historical claims is a vain one." But he is still "not willing to see us [evangelicals] declare a moratorium on all historical investigation of 'smoking gun' possibilities." Others have, of course, not given up looking for some final, decisive proof that what Joseph Smith offered was fraudulent. But Mouw is not himself interested in doing what he calls "serious catch-up work in historical apologetics,"[30] which is what he thinks Carl Mosser and Paul Owen once had in mind.[31] The reason for not going down that road is that "such a strategy will accomplish little beyond the maintenance of a stalemate."[32] Instead, Mouw seeks to correct what he considers the maladies of Mormonism, as he understands them. He gently pushes the Church of Jesus Christ to accept the radical otherness of God, since in his theology God is *ganz anders* (Wholly Other); he wants the Saints to embrace what he also calls "a vast metaphysical gap between Creator and creature," and hence to stress what he also calls the "metaphysical distance" between God and human creatures.[33]

29. See Midgley, "Orders of Submission," 211–17, for some crucial details about the role played in the imagination of evangelicals by the curious shifts in the Worldwide Church of God.

30. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 194.

31. See Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, eds., *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

32. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 194.

33. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 195.

One reason Mouw offers for not accepting Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims is that to do so would radically challenge his own theological system, as well as "other systems of religious thought that don't accept such teachings [which] are now to be seen as, if not blatantly false, at least in need of serious correction and revision."[34] A somewhat less oblique way of making this point would be to say that the Book of Mormon presents a radical challenge to those already churched, including certain theologians committed to what Mouw calls "the Calvinist Deity." For such a one, can there really be a genuine correcting of historic Christianity? The limited, thin, authentic appeal Mouw suggests might be found in what Joseph Smith offered as a corrective to the "unhealthy *spiritual* distance of creatures from the Calvinist Deity and his human subjects."[35] Since Mouw's soft version of Five-Point Calvinism must include the radical distinction between Creator and mere creature, one wonders how something spiritually unhealthy can possibly flow from a foundational dogma. If these kinds of issues had been pressed, those conversations would have soon reached a stalemate even on theology. But the crucial questions are not theological but historical.

Mouw seems to hope that something like his mild version of Five-Point Calvinism (aka TULIP)[36] will become attractive to Latter-day Saints or that something like it will replace our distinctive history. Until or unless he can come up with a "smoking gun," it is not likely that the Saints will be enamored with any version of classical theism or creedal Christianity and therefore willing to jettison Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon and join the National Association of Evangelicals and thereby receive an evangelical seal of Christian approval.

34. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 190.

35. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 195.

36. See Richard J. Mouw, *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport: Making Connections in Today's World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004); see the Book Note in the *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 366–68. *TULIP* is an acronym for Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the Saints, which are the Calvinist tenets set forth at the Dutch Reformed Synod of Dort in 1618–19. Some version of all but perhaps limited atonement can be found in the writings of Augustine (AD 354–430). It is not clear that John Calvin (1509–64) believed that the atonement was only for those saved at the moment when the God of classical theism presumably created everything out of nothing.

Ironically, Mouw's "historic Christianity" is, to borrow Martin Marty's formulation cited earlier, an amalgam of the Bible "with mainly Greek philosophical concepts as filtered through academic experiences in Western Europe." What can be expected from closed conversations with those whose world is theological rather than essentially historical? Is there a good reason to debate theology with those who are not open to the possibility that the Book of Mormon is true? Mouw is, however, correct in stating "that some evangelicals have a tendency—especially when . . . asked to assess the differences between certain worldviews—to see things in terms of stark alternatives."[37] The debates Mouw has sponsored have been essentially theological rather than historical. From my perspective, those debating with Mouw, despite the friendly relations, have often dealt with the wrong issues. Both sides in those debates have either not faced the fact or have forgotten that the Saints live by and in stories and not by a theology that is not primarily narrative.

Learning the Rules, Playing an Old Game

Conversations between Latter-day Saints and other Christians are not new. A number of these have taken place informally over the years. The first formal talks were put together many years ago by Truman Madsen with his academic friends.[38] After that groundbreaking event, including the book that resulted from it, not much was done for several years. The next such formal exchange took place in 1984, when Paul Kurtz, until recently the impresario of secular humanism,[39] in league with George D. Smith, owner of Signature Books, held what was called "A Mormon/Humanist Dialogue."[40] Kurtz insisted that

37. Mouw, "Some Evangelical Probings," 197.

38. Truman G. Madsen, ed., *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978).

39. The agencies fashioned by Paul Kurtz include the magazine *Free Inquiry*, the Council of Secular Humanism, Prometheus Books, and several other fronts used to advance an essentially atheist religion. Kurtz has recently been eclipsed by Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Daniel C. Dennett, and Richard Dawkins—the so-called Four Horsemen of the New Atheism.

40. See George D. Smith, ed., *Religion, Feminism, and Freedom of Conscience: A Mormon/Humanist Dialogue* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books and Signature Books, 1994).

"in a pluralistic society such as America, it is important that people from diverse religious and nonreligious traditions engage in debate to define differences and more meaningfully to discover common ground."[41] He neglected to provide reasons to justify this opinion.[42] And he would, of course, not want his atheist ideology described either as a "religion" or as a "faith," though it has many if not all of the usual characteristics associated with both words.

The publication of *How Wide the Divide?*—an exchange between Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson—ushered in the next stage in these interreligious debates, this time between evangelical and Latter-day Saint scholars.[43] The Blomberg-Robinson book garnered some immediate attention and soon led to biannual private meetings between Richard Mouw, Robert Millet, and their respective friends. Millet has turned his friendship with Mouw and other evangelicals into a series of books, including a debate with Gerald R. McDermott that carries the title *Claiming Christ*.[44] Millet has also been heavily involved in a series of public exchanges he holds with the Reverend Gregory C. Vettel Johnson.

McDermott[45] describes the contents of *Claiming Christ* as an "interreligious dialogue" (p. 65). The exchange, at least for McDermott, at times does not seem to be one taking place within a faith tradition but between completing religions. In addition, *Claiming Christ* carries the subtitle "A Mormon-Evangelical Debate." The exchange is clearly cast as a contest over the soundness of Mormonism from

41. Paul Kurtz, "Overview: Humanism and the Idea of Freedom," in Smith, *Religion, Feminism, and Freedom of Conscience*, xvii. For details, see Louis Midgley, "Atheists and Cultural Mormons Promote a Naturalistic Humanism," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 229–97.

42. Kurtz was probably correct, however, when he opined that "this dialogue is historic, for as far as we are aware it is the first formal exchange of ideas by Mormons and humanists." Kurtz, "Overview," xvii.

43. See Craig Blomberg and Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

44. See Robert L. Millet and Gerald R. McDermott, *Claiming Christ: A Mormon-Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2007). For convenience, subsequent references to this book are indicated by parenthetical page citations in the discussion rather than cited in footnotes.

45. McDermott is currently a Lutheran who teaches religion at Roanoke College.

the perspective of traditional, creedal Christianity, at least as this is understood by McDermott, who speaks as a Lutheran within the evangelical movement.

We have a debate between one representing a theological "movement" and one speaking for a church—the community of Saints—with its own unique history and founding narrative. This places Millet utterly on the defensive. He has to try to show that what the Saints believe is as close as possible to the norm that McDermott sets out. Hence the question at issue in this debate is whether the faith of the Saints measures up to traditional, orthodox, biblical standards as these are understood by one faction within the evangelical movement and thus to what is currently believed in some but not all Protestant circles. McDermott strives to identify the difference between the theological "movement" he represents and the faith of Latter-day Saints and hence the Church of Jesus Christ. He is a bit more specific: he claims to be speaking from the perspective of what he calls "evangelical faith traditions" or "groups" or "movements," with all their variations and differences (pp. 11–12), except fundamentalism, which he distinguishes from evangelicalism (p. 60) and apparently dislikes.

McDermott asserts that "evangelicals discount the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and other Mormon scriptures," and hence "they regard Mormon use of these sources as clear violations of the *sola scriptura* principle" (p. 16)—that is, of what stands behind the slogan "Bible alone." Despite whatever similarities there might be between his brand of evangelicalism and what is found in the Latter-day Saint scriptures on the role and saving power of Jesus Christ, in his opinion the Saints are not genuine Christians. The principal problem for McDermott is that "Mormons teach that Jesus visited North America after his incarnation and resurrection in Palestine in the first century. The Saints also believe that Jesus and his Father appeared to Joseph Smith in 1820 to give him new revelation. Mainstream Christians (including evangelicals) reject these assertions about Jesus and his revelations to Joseph Smith"(p. 16). The primary reason for this rejection is that Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims, including the Book of Mormon, violate the *sola scriptura* principle. In addition, the

very existence of divine special revelations in addition to the Bible challenges the authority of the great ecumenical creeds. According to McDermott, evangelicals "tacitly accept the authority of the early creeds" (p. 17). This seems to mean that McDermott defends creedal Christianity, which he assumes is normative, and hence he begs all the crucial questions, which are historical and not theological.

But there is an additional problem with McDermott's argument. Despite appealing to the Bible alone, evangelicals also depend very heavily, he insists, on what he calls "interpretive traditions" (p. 17), and hence not merely on the Bible. Quite unlike Craig Blomberg in his earlier exchange with Stephen Robinson, McDermott is "not overly concerned with the 'inerrancy' debate" (p. 9)—the recent Protestant claim that the Bible is sufficient, infallible, and inerrant. Evangelicals, it seems, come in various sizes and shapes. At least it seems that McDermott differs somewhat from some other evangelicals by insisting on the crucial role of "interpretive traditions" in how we read texts, including the Bible. His argument runs as follows: "All of our reading is done through a filter of our own cultural traditions. There is no naked text that we can access without seeing it through the screen of traditions that we have absorbed" (p. 19). Hence he grants that he cannot ground his own interpretative traditions in the Bible alone. What he ends up asserting is that his interpretive traditions do not leave room for divine special revelations outside the Bible. But his historically bound and diffuse interpretive traditions cannot be normative for those with different traditions. It is not, therefore, the fact that he reads the biblical texts from interpretative traditions that is the issue, since this cannot be avoided. And yet he insists that the crucial question is "whether Mormon traditions and scriptures are authentic" (p. 19). He ends up arguing that the Latter-day scriptures and the network of supporting interpretive traditions are flawed because they differ from the interpretive traditions he feels ought to be normative.

The real issue involves a decision about which texts, both biblical and otherwise, will be considered authentic (that is, have authority). According to McDermott, this issue must be settled not by appeals to the Bible alone, since that is impossible, but by an appeal to interpretive

traditions—that is, from the perspective of his understanding. In rejecting the authenticity and hence authority of the Book of Mormon (and all that goes with it), he is speaking from the perspective of the "orthodox," "traditional," and also "Protestant" versions of Christianity. He describes his own "orthodoxy" on this issue as a subset of "traditional" Christians who "hold to its classical, 2000-year-old teachings of faith" (p. 11). With these woolly labels in place, he excludes the Church of Jesus Christ from his notion of groups or movements or theologies that fit within his definition of Christian orthodoxy.

How should we, McDermott asks, "go about deciding what we can believe about Jesus? (p. 16). Or, put another way, where must "we go to gain assurance that our portrait of Jesus is the right one" (p. 16)?[46] Since he is confident that God only "reveals himself through the scriptures" (p. 16), it seems that, for McDermott, the answer is not to God, who has already had his say in the Bible (and perhaps also through the creeds and to theologians who have, more or less, worked things out), and not, of course, through the unique Latter-day Saint scriptures, since they are, from McDermott's perspective, not authentic. And yet he also insists that the Bible alone reveals Jesus Christ. This conclusion rests on his appeal to what he calls the *sola scriptura* principle. But the problem, which he recognizes, is that the Bible does not interpret itself. Instead, he claims that "we need the wisdom of the whole church in order to understand the scriptures better" (p. 20). What he seems to mean by "the whole church" includes the disparate "Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant" factions, which he describes as "orthodox" and which serve a subset of "traditional" Christianity.

So "the real question," for McDermott, "is not whether we will be influenced by tradition in our reading of and interpreting [of the Bible], but which tradition. The one that is based on the classical Christian Bible or the one that calls both those books [the Old Testament and the New Testament?] and the Mormon scriptures divine revelation?" (pp. 20–21). Since McDermott is claiming to speak for what he calls "orthodox" Christianity, the crucial question is settled for him by what amounts to question-begging made to flow from loose labeling.

46. Compare p. 21.

Even though the Bible alone cannot possibly close the canon of scripture, he will not allow the question of an open canon to be opened to genuine consideration. Unfortunately, the desire of some Latter-day Saints to do theology, rather than to confront the decisive historical issues, may keep us from pressing and addressing the question—is the Book of Mormon an authentic divine special revelation? So, for McDermott, the Latter-day Saint portrait of Jesus is wrong, the Saints worship a different Jesus, and so forth. This is true for McDermott precisely because the Latter-day Saint canon of scripture includes the Book of Mormon and is therefore open.

McDermott complains that Latter-day Saints imagine that Jesus came to be fully God. McDermott thinks this is a fatal weakness in Latter-day Saint theology since it collides with creedal Christianity. For him the "creeds and tradition are justifiably authoritative for a religious community," and, he adds, "it is impossible for them not to be," but of course "scripture is the touchstone for all creeds and traditions" (p. 9).

But, given our devotion to Jesus as the Messiah, and hence Lord and Savior and so forth, what difference does it make that we imagine a time in the remote past when Jesus might not have been fully God? McDermott cannot explain why this is a problem other than that it violates the language of the ecumenical creeds and the teachings of churchmen and theologians. His complaint ends up being that we hold a different view of Jesus. This is true, but so what? Does McDermott imagine that one is saved if and only if one has the most adequate theology, which is defined as "biblical" but which McDermott admits depends on a stream of traditional readings of the Bible and cannot be drawn merely from the Bible alone? So Latter-day Saints are not what he considers creedal Christians. Well, so what? What is gained from debating theology in this manner, since those intent on doing this insist on brushing our faith aside, whatever similar beliefs we more or less share with them? This is especially critical when evangelicals do not even agree with each other on a host of theological issues.

McDermott raises a vital question when he makes reference to different strands of Christian faith, which are often in tension and

sometimes even in violent disagreement. They all are presumably part of a grand tradition of Christian orthodoxy, which can then be turned into a stick with which to thrash the faith of the Saints. If the Bible does not interpret itself, which seems obvious, what exactly constitutes the orthodoxy McDermott values? Is there, except for polemical purposes, such a thing?

If the Bible does not interpret itself and we must rely on interpretive traditions, how can we be sure that we have absorbed or picked the right ones? For instance, if we look closely at justification by faith—a core element in much contemporary evangelical theology—it turns out that there are profound disagreements over whether the teaching commonly attributed to the apostle Paul has been properly understood. According to McDermott, "most evangelicals in the twentieth century favored a model of justification that stressed the primacy of the forensic or legal dimension of the atonement, a model that some scholars are now claiming to be based more on sixteenth-century debates than the Bible itself" (p. 17). McDermott cites N. T. Wright's *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*,[47] which challenges the opinion found among evangelicals who insist on an essentially Augustinian and Reformation understanding of justification. This traditional understanding—reaching back to Martin Luther (1483–1546) and, with a long Roman Catholic interlude, to Augustine (354–430)—insists on contrasting what they label "works righteousness" with "faith alone." Wright has challenged the understanding of what Paul meant by works of the law. What Paul had in mind by "works," if Wright is right, were merely ceremonial matters such as circumcision, dietary restrictions, and Sabbath observances required under the Torah. Wright insists that, for the followers of Jesus, the Mosaic law was fulfilled in Jesus and hence the old badges of the covenant were now dead works, having been replaced by faith as the badge of the new covenant or testament with Jesus Christ. For the followers of Jesus, faith and faithfulness in keeping the commandments of God had replaced circumcision, which was a dead work.

47. N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). For references to N. T. Wright, see *Claiming Christ*, 8, 17, 36, 67, 113, 117.

Wright, quite unlike Protestants generally, thus emphasizes the importance of the new covenant in Paul's understanding. The new covenant requires repentance and faith in the Messiah, or Christ. Wright also argues that justification does not take place, other than by anticipation, at the moment one becomes a Christian, but at the final judgment and hence only after one has been sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit. If Wright is right about this, Protestants have been wrong about this crucial matter. Faith must be manifested in faithfulness—that is, by obedience to the commandments of God. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, this will eventually lead to sanctification ending in justification, which takes place not when one answers an altar call or confesses Jesus. What this means is that evangelicals, since they build on Augustine and then Luther, have been wrong on this crucial understanding of Paul's teachings.[48] All of this is, of course, highly controversial. But this is exactly what goes on in interpreting the Bible.

McDermott's rather casual mention of what is now being called the "new perspective on Paul" (NPP) seems to expose the problems inherent in the myth of seamless interpretative traditions that somehow began with the church fathers, found their way into the great ecumenical creeds, and then were constantly fleshed out and reiterated, refined, and reformed by a steady procession of theologians who presumably, of course, all had as their touchstone the Bible. Elements of the NPP come remarkably close to what is taught in the Book of Mormon. McDermott was, of course, wise to shift way from the notion of

48. N. T. Wright's more elaborate argument is offered in the book not cited by McDermott. See N. T. Wright's *What Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997). Wright has caused a huge stir among evangelicals with his treatment of Paul. This has led to several responses. See John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007); Guy P. Waters, *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004); and a collection of essays entitled *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006). Wright has described responses to his approach to justification as an effort to demonize his views and carpet bomb them or "nuke them from a great height." See N. T. Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 243–64 at 247.

sola scriptura, but by grasping for some other peg upon which to close the canon of scripture and thereby limit forever what God can say or do, he has opened the door to a jungle of competing understandings of virtually every passage in the Bible. This jungle is often red in tooth and claw, though the controversies are sometimes even polite and proper rather than demonic and deadly.

McDermott never speaks as a fundamentalist, though he does speak as a Lutheran and as an evangelical, and sometimes for a much larger, much more amorphous, and even less well-defined community that he calls "the whole church." From this peremptory higher ground, in a rebuttal to Elder Bruce D. Porter's recent essay in *First Things*,[49] he reports that, though the reasons they give "are sometimes awkward," "most Christians say Mormonism is not Christian."[50] He then attempts to offer other and better reasons for this judgment than those commonly held by "most Christians," often with the help of the countercult movement operating on the fringes of the evangelical movement. He is magnanimous; he corrects some common falsehoods advanced by critics of the Church of Jesus Christ. He is to be commended for this. But, much like fundamentalists and those countercult bottom-feeders he abhors, he has but two categories: the beliefs of orthodox Christianity versus the (incorrect) beliefs of the Mormons. His penultimate conclusion is that perhaps some "individual Mormons" might not "be barred from sitting with Abraham and the saints at the marriage supper of the Lamb."[51] His reason is that "we are saved by a merciful Trinity, not by our theology,"[52] though putting the matter that way suggests otherwise. From his imperial higher ground, he insists that Latter-day Saints are simply not "orthodox." McDermott is certain that the Church of Jesus Christ is an aberration and not Christian.

While Mouw suspects that a frontal attack on the Book of Mormon will lead merely to a stalemate and perhaps block any attempt

49. See Bruce D. Porter, "Is Mormonism Christian?" *First Things* 186 (October 2008): 35–38.

50. Gerald R. McDermott, "Is Mormonism Christian?" *First Things* 186 (October 2008): 38–41 at 38.

51. McDermott, "Is Mormonism Christian?" 41.

52. McDermott, "Is Mormonism Christian?" 41.

to talk the Saints into adopting some version of evangelical ideology, McDermott, in his response to Elder Porter's fine essay setting out reasons why the faith of the Saints is Christian to the core, makes the Book of Mormon the key to his argument that we have a different and hence false picture of Jesus and therefore are not genuinely Christian. He does not directly attack the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Instead, he argues that its theology is all wrong and therefore not authentic. What this demonstrates is that those debates with Mouw, McDermott, and others have skirted the real issues by focusing on theology. Those debates seem to have avoided historical matters, which are the key to the faith of the Saints if Martin Marty is even close to being right.

Has debating with some evangelicals, even when it has been fully friendly, reduced the overall intensity of sectarian anti-Mormonism? Or has it exacerbated rather than helped heal the often bitter warfare between factions of evangelicals intent in one way or another on excluding the Saints from their Christian world?

Internecine Warfare between Evangelical Factions

An essay that Ron Huggins has posted on a stridently anti-Mormon Web site provides an instructive sample of the internecine warfare that takes place on the margins of the evangelical movement. It seems that Huggins is not pleased with the recent modest efforts to tone down anti-Mormon rhetoric.[53] He begins with the standard line; he grants that "some Evangelicals have certainly been unkind to Mormons and have been guilty of inaccurately portraying Mormon beliefs." He neglects, however, to identify any of these offenders, nor does he indicate why they were impelled to do such a thing, given their faith claims. Instead, he insists that this is "not characteristic of most evangelical

53. See Ronald V. Huggins, "An Appeal for Authentic Evangelical-Mormon Dialogue." This essay can be found on the Web page of an agency that calls itself an Institute for Religious Research. To access this essay, go to http://irr.org, then to the button on the left labeled "Mormonism," which leads to a batch of strong attacks on the faith of Latter-day Saints. One of these is "An Appeal" (accessed 11 December 2008), the source of Huggins's quotations below.

churches and ministries." Of course, not all Protestant congregations sponsor or disseminate anti-Mormon propaganda. But the vast bulk of individuals who constitute the countercult movement, including the so-called Institute for Religious Research, are involved in spreading rubbish about the Church of Jesus Christ.[54]

When on 14 November 2004, at an evangelical rally in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle on Temple Square, Richard Mouw issued an apology for the long and abundant misrepresentations by conservative Protestants of the faith of the Saints,[55] Huggins and other countercultists were outraged. Later, under pressure from pastors, Mouw explained that he had, among others, the notorious "Dr." Walter Martin in mind when he issued his apology. He could, however, have included the entire countercult industry. His explanation, of course, did not assuage the anger of countercultists. Huggins claimed that he had warned those responsible for the rally that Mouw was unreliable. He was troubled because it seemed to him that prominent evangelicals were now "willing to publicly disparage their own brethren." Doing this, he asserted, allows the Saints to escape the kind of pummeling they deserve.

Along with other countercultists, Huggins views the debates sponsored by Mouw as at least misguided. He complains that Mouw's debates end up lending a hand to those Latter-day Saints who refuse to interact with and "seek to marginalize" those he considers "careful and credible critics like Jerald and Sandra Tanner, the Institute for Religious Research (IRR), and others." For Huggins the Latter-day Saint disinterest in getting into the rhetorical gutter with Sandra Tanner or those at the IRR indicates that "the Mormon Church appears to be interested in 'dialoguing' only with Evangelicals who lack an in-

54. The Institute for Religious Research was once also known as Gospel Truths Ministry before indulging in a PR labeling ploy. Huggins appears to be an executive board member of the Institute for Religious Research.

55. For the details, see Louis Midgley, "Cowan on the Countercult," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 395–403 at 401–3. Mouw had also included a very similar apology in his foreword to *The New Mormon Challenge*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 11. But since that version of his long-overdue apology appeared in print, it drew essentially no hostile commentary from agitated countercultists, nor was it mentioned by journalists.

depth knowledge of Mormon history and doctrine and who are thus more likely to take at face value the representations of its PR types." He declares that "the LDS Church does not appear ready for, nor does it seem to really desire, authentic dialogue with Evangelicals." Instead, what Latter-day Saints "desire is mainline respectability."[56] But the Saints have no interest in being thought of as part of the evangelical movement, if that is what Huggins considers the "mainline." He does not explain how Richard Mouw, David Neff, and their associates could grant "mainline respectability" to the Church of Jesus Christ. What Latter-day Saints would like to see is an end of evangelical misrepresentations of their faith.

Huggins is not happy with the conversations staged by Robert Millet with the Reverend Gregory C. V. Johnson.[57] Huggins accuses the Reverend Johnson of having "unhealthy, lopsided relationships with the Mormon apologists." In addition, Huggins accuses Reverend Johnson of pandering to Latter-day Saint apologists while slandering countercultists. He calls this a despicable "'Pander/Slander' method" of dealing with the Saints.[58]

Shifting to Polemics

For many years Sandra and Jerald Tanner operated in Salt Lake City a mom-and-pop countercult agency called Utah Lighthouse Ministry, which is dedicated to attacking the Church of Jesus Christ. Part of their endeavor included publishing a tabloid entitled the *Salt Lake City Messenger*. With Jerald's illness and then eventual passing, the tabloid came to a virtual halt. When it reappeared, it consisted essentially of recycled materials. However, with the announcement on 28 October 2008 of the closing of the financially troubled Salt Lake

56. See Huggins, "An Appeal," for this quotation and previous ones.

57. For a published version of these conversations, see Robert L. Millet and Gregory C. V. Johnson, *Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation between a Mormon and an Evangelical*, foreword by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Book Publishing, 2007). For an assessment of this book, see the *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008): 249–52.

58. Huggins, "An Appeal."

Theological Seminary (SLTS),[59] Ron Huggins, who formerly taught there, seems to have assumed part of the role once played by Jerald Tanner by providing a series of items for the Tanner tabloid. One of these was a blistering attack on Hugh Nibley.[60] Huggins seems to have imagined that, if he could only find some feature of Nibley's writings about which he could complain, the chief foundation of the Latter-day Saint effort to defend their faith would crumble and the entire edifice would begin to collapse. But Huggins met an obstacle: *Dialogue* declined to publish this essay. He turned to the Tanner tabloid. His attack on Nibley might be an indication of what he considers "a real dialogue" with Latter-day Saints. Shirley Ricks, in a delightful essay, has demolished the Huggins effort.[61]

Included in the most recent Tanner tabloid is a continuation of an intense effort to lionize Jerald Tanner. "As an historian," Huggins announces, he has "long been cognizant of the fact that being careful about getting at the truth of history is not a necessary prerequisite for success in publishing, in fact a certain cavalierness [*sic*] in fiddling the truth is often just the right recipe for achieving big sales."[62] "Mormon scholars," Huggins opines, "have begun to flourish to the point that even in a book published by the distinguished old firm Oxford University Press, Richard Bushman can get away with asserting that Mormon apologists have 'produced vast amounts of evidence for the Book of Mormon's historical authenticity.'"[63] Without engaging the sizeable literature supporting Bushman's opinion, Huggins asserts that those he denigrates as "Mormon apologists have *not* produced *any* substantive evidence for the Book of Mormon's historical authenticity." He as-

59. See the press releases, dated 28 October 2008 and currently posted on the Salt Lake Theological Seminary Web page, entitled "Salt Lake Theological Seminary to Close," http://www.slts.edu/Press/Press_Releases.htm (accessed 14 December 2008).

60. See Ronald V. Huggins, "The Nibley Footnotes," *Salt Lake City Messenger* 110 (May 2008): 9–21.

61. See Shirley S. Ricks, "A Sure Foundation," in this issue, 253–92.

62. Huggins, "Jerald Tanner's Quest for Truth—Part 3," *Salt Lake City Messenger* 111 (November 2008): 3.

63. Huggins is citing Richard Bushman's *Very Brief Introduction to Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 32. Huggins garbles the title of Bushman's book.

serts that Bushman "would have been more honest and accurate if he had said the opposite, i.e., that there is [*sic*] 'vast amounts of evidence *against* the Book of Mormon's historical authenticity.'"[64] Huggins claims, but without providing any supporting argument or evidence, that Latter-day Saint scholars have been "very disrespectful toward truth and the weight of evidence" and that this has actually opened the door for Latter-day Saint apologists to get Oxford University Press to publish "substandard scholarship."[65] It is exactly this kind of bald, unsupported assertion that this *Review* has been engaged in carefully dismantling for the past twenty years.

Huggins manifests some anguish over the efforts of Ronald Walker, Richard Turley, and Glen Leonard to examine the tragedy at Mountain Meadows. Their book, according to Huggins, is "bristling with detail of only peripheral importance to the story,"[66] but they failed to tell the real story because they wrote as mere functionaries "of an authoritarian organization with a long history of suppression of the truth."[67] And they do not agree with Will Bagley and Sally Denton,[68] who "pointed to Brigham Young as the one guilty for the massacre."[69]

Latter-day Saint historians, according to Huggins, have suppressed evidence of Brigham Young's responsibility for the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Huggins claims that Leonard Arrington once prepared a paper for the First Presidency "on John D. Lee and the Mountain Meadows Massacre." This account was eventually gifted to the library at Utah State University. Huggins imagines, it seems, that this paper contained Arrington's opinion that Brigham Young was responsible for the lamentable events at Mountain Meadows. Turley and a church attorney, he alleges, located this document in the Arrington Papers at

64. Huggins, "Jerald Tanner's Quest," 3.

65. Huggins, "Jerald Tanner's Quest," 3.

66. Ronald V. Huggins, "Review: Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy," *Salt Lake City Messenger* 111 (November 2008): 17.

67. Huggins, "Review," 17.

68. See Robert H. Briggs and Robert D. Crockett, who both reviewed Sally Denton's book, *American Massacre: The Tragedy at Mountain Meadows*, in *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 111–47.

69. Huggins, "Review," 17.

Utah State by breaching the diary that Arrington had wanted sealed for a number of years.[70] He seems to assume that Turley needed access to the diary to find where it was in Arrington's papers, but he has not explained why they needed access to Arrington's diary since an exhaustive register of his papers is available. Turley is then accused by Huggins of removing from the Arrington Papers at Utah State University this bit of secondary material in an effort to protect Brigham Young's reputation. Huggins has not seen the paper allegedly prepared by Arrington. Instead, he rests his speculation on those entirely garbled newspaper accounts of an incident involving the Arrington Papers that he simply does not understand. This whole scenario is wild, unfounded speculation.

Huggins has published a few essays in academic journals. However, he seems to have turned to quarreling with fellow evangelicals, as well as mounting an anti-Mormon polemic and thereby to have moved away from serious scholarship. He now seems bent on replacing the late Jerald Tanner as the chief contributor to an anti-Mormon propaganda outlet.

Some Tentative Conclusions

For several reasons the Church of Jesus Christ is currently under attack from enemies both sectarian and secular. I believe that I have demonstrated that the Saints must defend their faith. How should this be done? I have argued that we must learn and relearn a lesson of moderation before we venture out with fortitude in defense of the faith. Some have sought to engage some evangelical theologians in debates. They have formed friendships with some of them, but unfortunately the pleasures resulting from these exchanges do not seem to have changed the situation in which we find ourselves. The anti-Mormon element within the bizarre countercult movement opposes these debates, which have not resulted in a reduced but even a heightened hostility towards the Church of Jesus Christ. The anarchy of contemporary Protestantism is such that debates with our more polished

70. Huggins, "Review," 17.

and respectable evangelical "friends" have not reduced the calumny directed at the Saints and their faith. Evangelicals eager to debate theology with us have neither the will nor the ability to tame the countercult beast that operates with little or no supervision or discipline on the margins of the larger evangelical movement.

Comments on the Essays That Follow

We are pleased to include in this number of the *Review* the initial Neal A. Maxwell Lectures. The first of these was delivered in 2007 by Elder Cecil O. Samuelson, and the second was delivered a year later by Elder Bruce C. Hafen.[71] Future Maxwell Lectures will also appear in the *Review*.

Some additional comments on this number of the *Review* seem warranted. I trust that those authors whose essays I do not mention will not feel slighted.

- We doubt that historians, rather than mere journalistic ideologues and partisan demagogues, will lash out at *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*. Those who brush aside this book because of dark suspicions about motivations or out of intense anti-Mormon fervor are not likely to understand what is involved in writing sound intellectual history. We offer some commentary on a serious effort to address that appalling event and its background. The first item is a sober, restrained review of *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, by Robert Briggs,[72] while the other is an address by William P. MacKinnon, a widely published, distinguished non–Latter-day Saint student of the so-called Utah War and hence an authority on the setting for the terrible events that once took place at Mountain Meadows.[73]
- Perhaps because the Brethren have not tried to fix a Book of Mormon geography, this topic has attracted some wild speculation. In

71. See Cecil O. Samuelson, "On Becoming a Disciple-Scholar," in this issue of the *Review*, 1–14; and Bruce C. Hafen, "Reason, Faith, and the Things of Eternity," in this issue of the *Review,* 15–36.

72. See Robert H. Briggs, "A Scholarly Look at the Disastrous Mountain Meadows Massacre," in this issue of the *Review*, 215–36.

73. See William P. MacKinnon, "The Utah War and Its Mountain Meadows Massacre," in this issue of the *Review*, 237–52.

addition, entrepreneurs have sought to sell lectures, videos, and tours flowing from essentially bizarre, neophyte speculation. Some of these endeavors have become very controversial. In this number of the *Review*, Brant Gardner updates his earlier reply to an effort to present what are likely forged artifacts as possible "proof" that the events recorded in the Book of Mormon took place in the Great Lakes area of the United States.[74] A version of this geography is currently being marketed by both Wayne May and Rodney Meldrum.[75] Among other things, Gardner demonstrates that Ed Goble now flatly rejects the geography for the Book of Mormon that he had originally fashioned for Wayne May.

• Gregory Smith has undertaken an examination of portions of George D. Smith's *Nauvoo Polygamy*, and we also have some impish observations in a review by Robert White on George Smith's long-awaited exposé of polygamy.[76] Attentive readers of the *Review* will be aware that the owner of Signature Books has been involved in several ways with the major atheist publishing venture in America. George Smith is the financial sponsor of what is called the Smith-Pettit Foundation, as well as the so-called Smith Research Associates. He uses both of these to fund his own work, as well as that of others with similar inclinations.[77] It seems

74. See Brant A. Gardner, "This Idea: The 'This Land' Series and the U.S.-Centric Reading of the Book of Mormon," in this issue of the *Review*, 141–62.

75. Meldrum, who began with apparently unfounded speculation about a DNA proof for the Book of Mormon, has also added to his scenario the dubious artifacts being promoted by May.

76. See Gregory L. Smith, "George D. Smith's *Nauvoo Polygamy*," in this number of the *Review*, 37–123; and also Robert B. White's review of *Nauvoo Polygamy*, in this issue of the *Review*, 125–30. Both of these essays focus on the embarrassing mistake found in the opening lines in *Nauvoo Polygamy* where the unwary reader is introduced to the sensual language written by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1792 to Josephine in which he describes their first night together. This is then compared to a letter written by Joseph Smith in 1842, presumably to Sarah Ann Whitney. In 1994, George Smith was fully aware that this letter had been "addressed to her parents, Newel and Elizabeth Whitney, inviting them to bring their daughter to visit him." George D. Smith, "Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841–46: A Preliminary Demographic Report," *Dialogue* 27/1 (1994): 1–72 at 27. It was not addressed to their daughter, though he seems to have forgotten this fact when the introduction to *Nauvoo Polygamy* was fashioned. This fact should complicate matters for the spin doctors at Signature Books, who tend to use their Web page to rationalize problems that turn up in their publications.

77. For the relevant details, see Louis Midgley, "The Signature Books Saga," *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 361–406.

a bit odd that he neglects to inform the readers of *Nauvoo Polygamy* that his long fixation on polygamy has resulted in his having published in *Free Inquiry*, the major American atheist magazine,[78] a series of essays on that topic.[79] Instead, he lists four other essays, two of which were blatant attacks on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.[80]

The close ideological partnership between Paul Kurtz and George Smith, which first became apparent in 1983, and which drew some attention in 1994, has now yielded a copious endorsement of *Nauvoo Polygamy* in the pages of *Free Inquiry*,[81] where Smith has been opining for over two decades about the evils of polygamy. Kurtz believes that *Nauvoo Polygamy* is "a meticulously researched and well-documented book."[82] He also claims that "we should thank George D. Smith for *Nauvoo Polygamy* and Signature Books . . . for publishing this and many other groundbreaking books in a courageous effort to redress the imbalance of the 'official version' of [Latter-day Saint] church history."[83] Signature Books has, of course, posted the Kurtz review on its Web page.[84] Readers should compare and contrast Greg Smith's

78. *Free Inquiry* is published by the same set of people and agencies (or fronts) that advance secular humanism, also known as atheist propaganda. See Midgley, "Signature Books Saga," 370–74.

79. See George D. Smith, "Polygamy and the Mormon Church," *Free Inquiry* 7/1 (1986–87): 55–57; Smith, "Mormon Plural Marriage," *Free Inquiry* 13/3 (1992): 32–37, 60; Smith, "Strange Bedfellows: Mormon Polygamy and Baptist History," *Free Inquiry* 16/2 (1996): 41–45; reprinted in *Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue*, ed Paul D. Simmons (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 207–16. In this essay, it is suggested that Joseph Smith might have gotten the idea of polygamy from John Milton (see note 69 at 377–78). In addition, George Smith published as a separate essay a much less polished version of his "Introduction" to *Nauvoo Polygamy* under the title "Nauvoo Polygamy: We Called It Celestial Marriage," *Free Inquiry* 28/3 (2008): 44–46. For access to a Web version of this essay, see http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=smith_28_3 (accessed 27 December 2008).

80. For the details, see *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 682. Why would George Smith call attention to his "Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon," *Free Inquiry* 4/1 (1983–84): 21–31, which is a strident attack on both Joseph and the Book of Mormon, while he neglected to mention four additional essays he published in this same atheist magazine in which he speculated on polygamy?

81. Paul Kurtz, "Polygamy in the Name of God," *Free Inquiry* 29/2 (2009): 58–60.

82. Kurtz, "Polygamy," 58.

83. Kurtz, "Polygamy," 60.

84. See http://signaturebooks.com/reviews/polygamy.html.

close examination of *Nauvoo Polygamy* with the reviews used by Signature Books to peddle that book.

Editor's Picks

As is customary, we offer our selection of books of special interest, according to the following ratings:

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

The recommendations:

***	Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy*
***	Hugh Nibley, *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*

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