

Is Mormonism Christian? An Investigation of Definitions, part 1

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.” “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”¹

Theologians do not, generally, ask other theologians if they are heretics. Most people are too well aware of the subjective nature of such designations to rely on a person’s self-description in this manner. Very few men and women, we all realize, would choose to describe themselves as “heretics” or “heterodox,” except perhaps in an ironic vein. On the other hand, we routinely ask—certainly we can at least imagine ourselves asking—whether some living or historical person is a Christian, or a Jew, or a Buddhist, or a Muslim. Hospital admission forms and military induction papers, to choose two illustrations from among many, commonly ask for precisely such information, just as they inquire about weight and home address and full name. Furthermore, we seem to expect that the answer given to this question—“Of what religion are you?”—conveys objective truth, that it depends not on the position and preferences of some other individual or group of individuals empowered to accept or reject it, but on the simple, straightforward facts of the case. If the patient in Room 3458 has identified herself as Catholic, a priest will be called in when necessary. If Private Roth says he is a Jew, that fact will be noted on his dog tags. We do not see these matters as subject to debate or prey to controversy, any more than we would normally consider weight, home address, or full name questions for dispute. That Isaac Newton was a Christian seems as objectively valid a judgment, and as universally acceptable a claim, as that he formulated the laws of gravity or lived in early eighteenth-century England.

There are voices today, however—insistent and often loud voices—who would make of the designation “Christian” a judgment no more objective, no more universally acceptable and agreed upon, than the verdict of “heresy.” Indeed, these accusing voices would apply the terms “heretic” and “non-Christian” according to rules of their own choosing, making them virtual synonyms. This is strikingly evident in the recent fashion, among certain circles, of denying that Mormonism is Christian.² There are probably few Latter-day Saints who have not, at one time or another, been told—usually to their considerable surprise—that they are not Christians. Indeed, a large and well financed campaign has been underway for several years to convince the general public that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, despite its unwavering identification of itself as Christian, does not deserve and cannot lay claim to that title. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of fundamentalist and other conservative Protestants in the United States and abroad are working desperately to alert mankind to the dangerous “Satanic nature of the Christ-denying cult of Mormonism.”³ Of course, these critics would not gladly admit that their denial of Mormon Christianity rests upon subjective grounds; they claim instead to issue their judgment on the basis of cold, hard, objective facts, submitted to rigorous, value-neutral analysis.

The campaign of which we speak is a literal one and not merely our own sensationalistic metaphor. It has its rallies, its enthusiastic volunteers, and its professional organizers and cheerleaders. It uses all the media of print, radio, and television to publicize its point, and has produced a flood of newspapers, pamphlets, newsletters, and books. Some few years ago, for example, a Houston-based organization seeking contributions to fund a “Christian” radio station in Provo, Utah, published a pamphlet entitled “KEYY: A Missionary Opportunity.” Attempting to arouse its audience to the magnitude of the challenge posed by Mormonism, the pamphlet announced that “there are seven . . . counties in Utah with *no known Christians!* (There are more Christians per capita in India than in the state of Utah.) . . . This is an amazing opportunity to penetrate the darkness!”⁴

On 25 July 1986, the vocal anti-Mormon J. Edward Decker and a contingent of his followers even attempted to present a petition to leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, demanding that Mormons cease calling themselves Christians. (Unfortunately for the Deckerites, Church offices were closed for the long Pioneer Day weekend. Richard Baer, one of Decker's lieutenants, was finally able to deliver the petition on 8 August 1986.) Nearly 21,000 people had signed the petition by that date, and the drive was intended to continue.

Ed Decker and his friends do not, of course, seriously expect the Latter-day Saints or their leaders to "concede" that they are not Christians. (Church spokesman Jerry Cahill, asked what would be done with the petition and its accompanying documents, replied rather cryptically: "They will receive the attention they deserve, I suppose.") The effort, therefore, seems to have had one or both of the following goals: (a) to generate publicity for the accusation that Latter-day Saints are not Christians, or (b) simply to embarrass the Mormon Church.⁵ The latter aim would not be out of character. Decker also actively fomented hostility toward Mormons in connection with construction of Brigham Young University's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. He made at least one lengthy visit to Israel for that purpose, and the co-author of his book *The God Makers*, Dave Hunt, was the centerpiece of a Jerusalem press conference where representatives of eight denominations denounced Mormons as non-Christians. Of this latter episode, the long-time Israeli Jewish mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, has tellingly observed that the anti-Mormon "attitude . . . was less than Christian."⁶ And, indeed, the claim that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not Christian is frequently advanced with a passion and a vehemence that can shock unsuspecting Mormons hearing it for the first time. Speaking of what he calls "this sinister subject," William C. Irvine, for example, does not mince words: Mormonism is "a fountain of slime."⁷

While, in the view of these religious enthusiasts, Mormonism is a positive evil, its sinister nature is well concealed. Kenneth Boa, an active crusader against dissenters from mainstream Protestantism, declares Mormonism to be "one of the most effective counterfeits of biblical Christianity ever devised."⁸ In *The Utah Evangel*, Mormonism is described as a "vicious imitation."⁹ It is "devious" and "dishonest,"¹⁰ and Mormons are "dupes."¹¹ "Dr." Walter Martin, the indefatigable "cult"-watcher, wrote of the Latter-day Saints that "they have not in the past hesitated to employ deception in their effort to mimic orthodox Christianity."¹² More recently, "Dr." Martin revealed to his disciples that "Mormonism strives with great effort to masquerade as the Christian church."¹³ Its army of missionaries is a vital concomitant of this vast lie: they merely "pose as Christians."¹⁴ But the deception does not restrict itself to missionaries: Even a former Secretary of Education, Latter-day Saint Terrell H. Bell, in an invited presentation to the student body of Rev. Jerry Falwell's Liberty Baptist College, was only "posing as an exponent of the Christian faith."¹⁵

What is it, according to their adversaries, that Mormons have to hide? Why would they be so careful to dissimulate and mislead? Harold Lindsell is far from alone in reporting that the Latter-day Saints are actually pagans.¹⁶ "When the Mormons opened their new temple . . . in Dallas," reported Kenneth L. Woodward in *Newsweek*, "visitors were hounded by fundamentalists . . . who waved placards proclaiming, 'Welcome to America's Newest Pagan Temple!'"¹⁷

Confronted with such hostility, and with charges that seem to come from out of nowhere, most Latter-day Saints, understandably, are at a loss for a reply. One sometimes suspects, in fact, that certain militant fundamentalist mindsets tend to see paganism everywhere—reflecting, perhaps, a deep-seated psychological alienation from the world and from society that goes beyond what any Christian ought to feel as "a stranger and a pilgrim." Bob McCurry, for example, calls upon Christians to shun the "demonic" institution of Halloween.¹⁸ Other examples

could be provided without difficulty, but two will serve: Early in 1992, many newspapers carried a wire service story that offers a particularly extreme illustration of such attitudes, telling of a man whom an Indianapolis Municipal Court convicted of criminal mischief, a misdemeanor, for toppling and smashing a limestone monument on the statehouse lawn. The monument had been inscribed with the Ten Commandments. But, not, it would seem, with the Ten Commandments in precisely the form to which this gentleman was accustomed. To quote the newspaper account, the man's "defense was civil disobedience. He argued that the monument in question amounted to state endorsement of a pagan religion. He said the version of the commandments inscribed on the monument was a heretical one that lacked the Second Commandment's forbiddance [sic] to make graven images. He has said Indianapolis is loaded with graven images that depict ancient gods and goddesses."¹⁹ And Ellen Goodman, in a nationally syndicated 1986 newspaper column, reported on a lawsuit in Greenville, Tennessee, brought by twelve "Christian" parents against the public schools: "The parents object to the tale of 'Goldilocks'. . . They object to the dance around the burning wolf in 'The Three Little Pigs' because it promotes witchcraft. . . . A seventh-grade reader called on children to use their imagination, 'the powerful and magical eye inside your head.' This, said [one parent], was an 'occult practice.'" "The objections these parents raise," wrote Ms. Goodman, "are easily the stuff of parodies." Unfortunately, however, they represent very much the mentality of many anti-Mormons. "In a chilling piece of testimony, [the mother who is the leader of the parental group] said that her religious belief did not allow for religious tolerance. 'We can not be tolerant of religious views on the basis of accepting other religions as equal to our own.'"²⁰

Most non-fundamentalists, though, including many who profess to be Christians, have somehow managed to miss the occultism of "The Three Little Pigs." Even among fundamentalists, probably only a minority recognize in Halloween a demonic threat to their children, or fear imagination as a form of sorcery. More to the point, the Latter-day Saints have generally seemed to their neighbors to be decent, moral, religious people. Few Christians, even, have seen through the quiet, clean, religious Mormon exterior to the horrendous evil that, their critics declare, lies at Mormonism's heart. Hence the pressing need for the current campaign against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The public must be warned.

How have the Mormons managed to succeed in their fiendish ruse thus far? For many fundamentalist critics, the answer is quite simple. They are deceivers, says Dave Breese.²¹ Mormonism "use[s] the language of the Holy Scripture to hide its true character."²² It projects a deliberately confusing and "filmy coat of pseudo-Christian testimony."²³ Even the Articles of Faith are "deceptive," "hid[ing] heretical Mormon doctrines behind Christian terminology."²⁴

But what is the purpose of such a "cleverly designed counterfeit of the Christian religion"? What is the goal of "the Mormon masquerade?"²⁵ Predictably, "Dr." Walter Martin knows. It is "cult infiltration."²⁶ The Latter-day Saints are attempting to insinuate themselves into Christianity in order to destroy it. For Mormonism is not merely non-Christian, it is "anti-Christian."²⁷ The relationship between Mormonism and Christianity is adversarial.²⁸ "To trust in Mormonism is to reject Christ."²⁹ Thus, there is a "deadly poison behind the honeyed words"³⁰ which Mormons use to conceal their deep "contempt for Christians."³¹ John Henry Yount, in a pamphlet addressed to blacks, sounds this chilling alarm: "After a century-and-a-half of ripping-off white people and sending them to a Christless eternity, Mormonism is coming after *you*."³² In the view of these anti-Mormons, it is likely that the Antichrist will be a Mormon.³³ "If Christianity is the thesis," writes Rick Branch, "then Mormonism must be its antithesis."³⁴

After enduring hundreds of pages of our “experts” in the course of our research for this book, however, we wonder who has contempt for whom. Walter Martin, for example, alludes to the “blatant chicanery” of the Unity School of Christianity and calls it “a monstrous farce.” Those who accept the claims of Mary Baker Eddy are, he says, “her zealous lackeys.” Jehovah’s Witnesses are “arrogant.” Martin is also extremely sarcastic about the story of Mormonism. “The general story of how Smith received his ‘revelation’ is a most amusing piece of fantasy,” he writes, “and would be occasion for genuine laughter were it not for the tragic fact” that so many people believe it. And, he says, in order to believe it Mormons have to be egomaniacs. Likewise, Martin’s treatment of Christian Science displays deep sexism, and his chapter on Father Divine is appallingly racist. He ridicules “cultists” generally, speaking, for instance, of “their manifestly feeble powers of logical thought.” In fact, when he says of Jehovah’s Witnesses that they “vilify and condemn all religious opponents as ‘enemies of God’ and perpetrators of what they term ‘a racket,’” Walter Martin is very accurately describing what was, until his death in 1989, his own operation. He could seldom bring himself to grant the sincerity of those whom he attacked, and he could never grant their intelligence.³⁵

G. H. Fraser adopts much the same tone. He caricatures Mormon beliefs on the afterlife, and then cites his own caricature to show that Mormons “have never been able to visualize a heavenly scene where the blessed are more than heavenly unemployed in a land of eternal sex.” The Latter-day Saints hold their ludicrous, unscriptural beliefs because they don’t understand English grammar. Elsewhere, approvingly citing earlier writers, he remarks that “Mormons, as a people, have never possessed . . . a modicum of common sense.” Fraser is unwilling even to grant the legitimacy of Latter-day Saint religious impulses, declaring that “the Mormons have never displayed any of the graces of religion in their migrations and settlements.” At still another place, he denies that there was any religious persecution of the Mormons, and points to their own obnoxious behavior as justification for what bad treatment they did receive.³⁶ He thus whitewashes one of the great blots on American history, in what must rank as a classic illustration of blaming the victim. (Those who make similar arguments with regard to Hitler’s attempted extermination of the Jews are generally termed anti-Semites. Yet Fraser’s book is highly thought of among anti-Mormons.)

But we must leave such quibbles, and return to the alleged duplicity of the Latter-day Saints. We have remarked that most Christians seem to have been taken in by Mormon attempts to disguise the paganism of their religious beliefs. Fortunately, the “experts” are not fooled by such Mormon craftiness. “Orthodox Christianity,” reports James Spencer, “agree[s] unanimously that the Mormon Church [is] a non-Christian cult.”³⁷ Certain strains of anti-Mormonism (perhaps in an effort to forestall the obvious and important question of what Mormons are if they are not Christian) have pronounced them to be “the Islam of America.”³⁸ J. R. van Pelt, on the other hand, imagines that “the Mormon conception of deity rather resembles that of Buddhists”³⁹—although, given the utter absurdity of the comparison, it does not surprise us that he provides no support for his assertion. More recently, it has become fashionable among anti-Mormons to call the object of their attacks Hindus, or even Satanists.⁴⁰ The wild variety which characterizes these comparisons—is an Islamic Hindu Buddhism even remotely conceivable?—reminds one strongly of the tale of the blind men and the elephant.⁴¹

Tiring of the attempt to place Mormonism in the context of world religions—an attempt for which they have no real competence, and which is, anyway, intended only to stamp Mormonism as non-Christian—a vocal faction of anti-Mormons has come to prefer the “Satanist” identification advanced most loudly in recent times by J. Edward Decker.⁴² This view of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints represents perhaps one of the first real innovations in anti-Mormon writing since Eber D. Howe’s 1834 *Mormonism Unveiled*. Not content to repeat the

standard claims that Mormonism is false, adherents of this school of anti-Mormonism assert that at least some of the leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints know full well that it is false, and that they are conscious worshippers of Lucifer. Rather than denying the reality of supernatural events in the founding of Mormonism, these anti-Mormons admit them—but declare them to have been Satanic. Of the Mormon priesthood, Decker writes: “Its origin is a lie and its power is the power of priestcraft, and its author is Satan.”⁴³

Some Mormons have responded to such accusations by declaring their own deep feelings about Jesus, and by pointing to beliefs and practices that, they feel, demonstrate that they are Christians.⁴⁴ This response has left their detractors generally unmoved.⁴⁵ “The Mormon and the Christian worship at entirely different altars,” asserts Ed Decker, “with doctrines and ‘gospels’ that fully separate the one from the other.”⁴⁶

Perhaps the charge that Latter-day Saints are non-Christians requires a different approach. By struggling to justify themselves to their detractors, Mormons have sometimes come dangerously close to recognizing the claim implicit in much anti-Mormon literature—that the title of “Christian” somehow belongs to fundamentalist Protestants, and that it is theirs to bestow or withhold. Yet, as will be shown in what follows below, this is at best a dubious claim. Latter-day Saints are not the only people who are surprised and puzzled by it. Lloyd J. Averill, for instance, the author of a useful volume entitled *Religious Right, Religious Wrong*, explains that he wrote his book for mainstream Christians who are “especially troubled” by fundamentalism’s “claim of exclusive rights to the Christian name.”⁴⁷ Further, the assertion that they alone are Christians is rendered even more doubtful by the fundamentalists’ refusal to recognize the flimsy—indeed, often paradoxical—grounds upon which that claim is based.

We reject in the strongest possible way the false declaration that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is non-Christian. We declare, in the strongest words that we can find to do so, that Mormons are Christian, and that Mormonism is a Christian faith. The words of the ancient Book of Mormon prophet Nephi express the feelings of today’s Latter-day Saints, both leaders and ordinary members of the Church: “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins.”⁴⁸

In debating the contention of our critics that we are really not Christian at all, we rely upon the social nature of words and of language, according to which meanings and usages are rarely if ever dictated by a single person or even by a single faction. A couple of illustrations should serve to make clear what we mean.

In order to determine the semantic range of a given term, to understand its meaning, compilers of dictionaries do not engage in solitary meditations in their studies. They do not ponder the etymology of the term and then decide what it *ought* to mean. Instead, they survey as exhaustively as possible the way the term is actually used. They realize that it is a linguistic community as a whole which determines the character of a language and the meanings of the words within that language.

Every human baby born into a human community inherits a language which has existed before his or her birth and will presumably exist after his or her death. Much of that baby’s education, from infancy through maturity (or even through graduate school) will consist in learning the language of its culture (and of its subculture). This is not an entirely passive process, for the growing child will be able to produce its own sentences and to produce its own thoughts—perhaps even to frame sentences and think thoughts which the world has never before known. But its liberty is set within limits, constrained by the social character of language. The child may limit itself to purely

conventional use of language—e.g. “Hand me the sugar, please”—or may come to write poetry, like that of Gerard Manley Hopkins, in which the conventional rules of usage and meaning are stretched and refreshed. But individual human beings can never wholly liberate themselves from conventional grammar and meaning except at the cost of becoming unintelligible to those around them. To say “Globe he chair the” is to use ordinary English words in such a bizarre way and, apparently, at such a distance from recognized signification, as to speak mere gibberish. To use “book” for “boat,” or to mean “amoeba” by “symphony,” is to put an end to communication—at least until someone manages to decode the speaker’s private language.

It is our contention that there exists a fairly coherent basic meaning to the term “Christian” and its lexical equivalents in other languages, a meaning which can be traced throughout, and illustrated by, a long and richly documented history. Since this meaning is well established, latecomers have only a very limited ability to alter it, much in the same way that the new-born infant possesses only a constrained freedom in using its received language. To use the word “Christian” in a new and different sense is to limit communication—or even to mislead—until outsiders are able to decode and understand that new and different usage.

We shall survey the way the word “Christian” has historically been used, and shall argue that the historic meaning of the term is clearly broad enough to include The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as well as fundamentalist anti-Mormons. We shall also contend that attempts to redefine the term have thus far failed to create a new definition that, in excluding Mormons, would not also exclude millions of people, past and present, commonly regarded as Christians.

Notably, we shall discover that the Roman Catholic Church—no insignificant part of what ordinary speakers and writers think of when they use the word “Christian”—is subject to many of the same arguments as are the Latter-day Saints, and prey to a very similar intolerance. Mainstream Protestant writer Lloyd Averill, for instance, who has listened to fundamentalist denunciations of Mormons and Roman Catholics, hears in them “frustration, outrage, desperation, and latent violence.”⁴⁹ Let us note here just a few of the rhetorical similarities. Bob Witte has devoted an entire pamphlet, “Mormonism: The \$3.00 Bill of Christianity,” to the metaphor of other-people’s-religion-as-counterfeit. It is not his metaphor alone, however, for anti-Catholics, too, offer deliverance “from the darkness of a counterfeit religious system.”⁵⁰ Gleason Archer’s description of Mormonism as a “dangerous counterfeit of the historic Christian faith” can easily be matched by Keith Green’s similar intimations about Roman Catholicism.⁵¹ Jimmy Swaggart terms the Church of Rome “a shimmering mirage that lures men to their deaths as they die of thirst . . . that delivers eternal torment instead of eternal life.”⁵² To pick up another common theme, G. H. Fraser seems occasionally to deny that Mormonism is really a religion at *all*. Rather, it is a giant business scam, hiding behind religion. “The presidents and prophets of the past several decades have been much more prone to receive their revelations from the spirit of Dow-Jones.” Indeed, Fraser remarks that, “The names of the two priesthoods are the only element that lends a religious flavor to the structure of the priesthood.”⁵³ This, too, can be paralleled in fundamentalist attacks on the Church of Rome: “Our American freedoms,” cries Rev. Loraine Boettner, “are being threatened today by two totalitarian systems, Communism and Roman Catholicism. And of the two in our country, Romanism is growing faster than is Communism and is more dangerous since it covers its real nature with a cloak of religion.”⁵⁴ Boettner’s refusal to grant the religiousness of Roman Catholicism is paralleled by the refusal of certain other anti-Catholics even to refer to the Roman Catholic *Church*. To the Rev. Donald F. Maconaghie, as well as to the writers of Chick Publications, there is only “the Roman ‘Church,’” or “the Roman Catholic Institution.”⁵⁵ The charge of “paganism,” too, is not restricted to Mormons, but is directed against Catholics as well.⁵⁶ The Church of Rome, according to one source, is “based on fetishism and sorcery.”⁵⁷ And

Jimmy Swaggart argues that the Catholic practice of auricular confession, along with many other elements of both doctrine and practice, “has its origins in heathenistic, pagan rituals.”⁵⁸

The question of whether the Church of Rome is even Christian at all is a big one among fundamentalists. “Catholicism,” writes Karl Keating, summarizing the position taken by many of these fundamentalists, “is part Christian, part pagan, and wholly to be rejected.”⁵⁹ And Jimmy Swaggart, at least, is less ambivalent than even Keating’s summary would suggest: Catholicism, he says, “is a false religion. It is not a Christian religion.”⁶⁰ “Rome fulfills the prophetic description of the ‘Whore’ [of Revelation 17] in every way!” scream the advertisements of Chick Publications. “There is nothing ‘Christian’ about her.”⁶¹

In the course of this study, in fact, we shall see that the very people who want to run the Latter-day Saints out of Christendom don’t have a great deal of affection for most of the rest of their fellow Christians, either. Lloyd Averill does not exaggerate when he speaks of the “refusal of fundamentalists to recognize that anything Christlike is happening outside of the fundamentalist movement,” of their extreme and strident rhetoric. We shall see little reason, in the course of the present study, to reject Averill’s description of fundamentalism as “ungenerous and unlovely.”⁶²

Those who deny that Mormonism is Christian usually imagine that they are doing so on the basis of a standard they find in the Bible. “In order to be a Christian,” wrote “Dr.” Walter Martin with all the air of a man asking something both simple and self-evident, “one must conform to the Scriptures.”⁶³ (Martin’s claim raises certain obvious questions from the start: Just how simple and unambiguous are the Scriptures? Must one conform absolutely and in every detail? How much deviance, if any, is allowed before one ceases to be a Christian? Is there only one possible scriptural position? If so, can both Quakers and Presbyterians be Christians? Methodists and Anglicans? Pre-millennialists and post-millennialists?⁶⁴ Charismatics and non-charismatics? Fundamentalists, notes Karl Keating, are “convinced . . . that the Bible is easy to understand, and convinced that all its parts admit but one interpretation and that anyone interpreting differently must be acting in bad faith.”⁶⁵ But we will leave such questions for another place.) What such a rule would mean in practice—“if you do not conform to [my reading of] the scriptures, you are not a Christian”—is evident from the writings of Martin’s fundamentalist ally, Loraine Boettner, who (somewhat incoherently and illogically) informs us that “if the Roman Church were reformed according to Scripture, it would have to be abandoned.”⁶⁶ “The best book written against Romanism,” says Joseph Zacchello, “was not written by a Protestant or by a former priest, but by God. It is the BIBLE.”⁶⁷ We shall first examine whether Scripture provides us with a clear definition of what a Christian is, or what beliefs he or she must adhere to in order to retain the title. If it does not, the anti-Mormon case is unintelligible and should be dismissed as having no biblical authority.

Does the New Testament Define “Christianity”?

Several leading anti-Mormons cite as their mandate for a crusade against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the two verses of Jude 3–4, wherein the New Testament admonishes them to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶⁸

But how does this apply to the Mormons? Do the Latter-day Saints somehow deny the Father and the Son? Not according to the first Article of Faith, which specifically affirms belief in both. Are the Latter-day Saints peculiarly prone to “lasciviousness”? Where is the evidence for a claim like that? It seems quite clear that the admonition of Jude 3–4 for followers of Christ to “earnestly contend for the faith” against “ungodly men” cannot refer specifically to Mormons or Mormonism. And, in fact, since the Mormons don’t really fit Jude’s description particularly well, it seems rather difficult to apply these verses to them at all.

So, having established the negative proposition that Jude 3–4 does not apply to the Latter-day Saints in any obvious way, we must ask ourselves what the occasion for Jude’s exhortation actually was. The answer to that question is significant. A reading of the entire epistle makes it clear that Jude’s concern was at least as much ethical as theological. The people he opposed were encouraging “lasciviousness” [*aselgeia*, or “sexual transgression”]. His target was a group of Christians, antinomians, who rejected authority and understood divine grace as sanctioning flagrant immorality.⁶⁹ This appears to be rather an odd analogy to use on the Mormons, whom our “experts” tend to consider too concerned with “works-righteousness” and too devoted to a priesthood.⁷⁰ After all, haven’t the Latter-day Saints long insisted that sexual sin was second only to murder or to the denial of the Holy Ghost in its seriousness? (See Alma 39:5.)

It is apparent, then, that Jude 3–4 does not legitimize a campaign against the Mormons. Instead, it calls upon believers in Christ to combat immorality and to condemn sin—the very position taken by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If anyone today stands in need of the kind of rebuke suggested by Jude 3–4, it would have to be someone who exaggerates the role of grace. And someone like that is more likely to be found among the critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints than among the Mormons.

Other prominent writers against the Latter-day Saints and others who diverge from conservative Protestant orthodoxy vaguely cite the Bible as a whole as the basis and justification for their efforts. P. B. Smith, a Canadian writer, will serve to illustrate this position.⁷¹ “The Christian Bible,” Smith writes, “is insistent upon the ground rules and the necessity of testing any group of people who call themselves Christians: ‘Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of anti-Christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. . . . Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error’ (1 John 4:1–3, 6). Whatever else this passage says, it indicates that everybody who uses the name of Jesus Christ is not a Christian.”⁷²

But this is precisely what the passage in question does *not* say. The word “Christian” is neither defined in it nor even mentioned. Only one doctrinal standard is laid down: The spirit of truth will not teach gnosticism or docetism—early Christian heresies which denied or downplayed the reality of Jesus’ physical body—but will affirm the actual incarnation of Christ; it will not teach that Christ was only spiritually the Son of God, or that he did not have an actual body of flesh and blood. “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15).

Do the Latter-day Saints deny that Jesus is the Son of God? No, for the first Article of Faith and literally hundreds of passages in their scriptural books teach his divine Sonship in the most explicit terms. Do they deny that he had a real body, a body of literal flesh and blood? Absolutely not. Indeed, fundamentalist critics of Mormonism have usually argued that it views the advent of Christ in *too* carnal terms.⁷³ Given their complaints on that score, anti-

Mormons certainly cannot deny that Mormons regard Jesus as the Son of God. How, then, can they apply 1 John 4 to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? They cannot. It is entirely irrelevant.

“Who is a Christian?” asks Frederick Sontag. “When one considers this question, the most interesting thing to note is that Jesus did not say much about it.”⁷⁴ But, in fact, Professor Sontag understates the case. If one is looking for explicit treatment of the word “Christian,” Jesus said absolutely *nothing* on the question. The striking thing about the New Testament’s use of the word “Christian” is its infrequency. Indeed, the word appears only three times, and never in the mouth of Jesus.⁷⁵ (The term “Christianity” is completely absent.) And close examination of those three occurrences will easily show that they offer no grounds for expelling Mormons from Christendom.

In Acts 11:26 we are told that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”⁷⁶ Here, the use of the passive verb—they “*were called* Christians”—allows us to infer that the term was first used by non-Christians.⁷⁷ That is to say that the Christians did not, at first, call themselves by that name. In fact, as E. H. Trenchard notes of the biblical evidence, “In early times this name was mainly used by outsiders or by enemies.”⁷⁸ It was “originally used as a pagan designation.”⁷⁹ “It is a characteristically Gentile appellation,” declares F. F. Bruce, “and would never have been devised by Jews.”⁸⁰ Instead, the term “Christian” was modeled on such words as “Herodian” and “Caesarian,” already in circulation, probably on the mistaken assumption that the title “Christ,” a Greek translation of the Hebrew “Messiah,” was a proper name like “Herod” and “Caesar.”⁸¹ “Christian” probably meant nothing more complicated, originally, than “Christ’s people” or, perhaps, “partisans of Christ.”⁸² (In the United States, we have frequently called people “Jacksonian democrats,” or “Freudian analysts,” or “Marxists,” or “Darwinians.” The history of Christianity is amply supplied with “Augustinians,” “Pelagians,” “Lutherans,” “Calvinists,” “Mennonites,” and the like. All of these titles occur on the same principle as “Christian.”)

Who were these people who first were called “Christians”? What was the composition of the Church at Antioch, which drew that designation from outsiders? For one thing, it included “prophets” (Acts 13:1).⁸³ (This should give some critics of Mormonism food for thought, for they often claim that Jesus Christ is the final revelation of God, and that there can consequently be no prophets after him. Yet, here, the first congregation of Jesus’ followers to receive the title of “Christian” is characterized, precisely, by Christian prophets.)

Many of the congregants in the Antioch branch were Hellenistic; the group was deeply involved with the Gentile mission and heavily influenced by Pauline teachings.⁸⁴ Outsiders probably began to notice that Christians were not merely another sect of Jews because the church at Antioch did not require circumcision of converts.⁸⁵ But to leave it at that would be to commit a gross oversimplification. The careful presentation of John P. Meier on the subject shows clearly that there were, among the “Christians” of Antioch, believers along the whole spectrum of attitudes toward the Jewish law. Paul’s was not only not the only influence at Antioch, it was not the dominant one.⁸⁶ Why is that fact important? Simply because Mormons are often expelled from Christendom because they do not accept the supposedly Pauline doctrine of salvation by grace alone. But neither, it seems, did members of that Antiochene congregation who were the very first in the Old World to receive the title of “Christian.”

Amid the various theological strands that characterized Antiochene Christianity, loyalty to Jesus Christ was the unifying thread. This is of the utmost significance. Considering his study on *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, James D. G. Dunn points out “*the surprising extent to which the different unifying factors in first-century Christianity focus again and again on Christ, on the unity between Jesus the man and Jesus the exalted one.* And when we

ask in addition what both unifies *and* marks out the distinctiveness of first-century Christianity, the unifying stand narrows again and again to Christ alone. As soon as we move beyond it, as soon as we begin to attempt to fill it out in word or practice, diversity quickly becomes as prominent as unity. And the more we attempt to add to it, the more disagreement and controversy we find ourselves caught up in. In the final analysis then, the unity of first-century Christianity focuses (often exclusively) on Jesus the man now exalted, Christ crucified but risen.”⁸⁷

What makes a person a Christian in the first century, and what makes a person a Christian today, is, simply, a commitment to Jesus Christ. Such commitment is central to the religion of the Latter-day Saints. It is evident in their hymns, their scriptures, their prayers, and their religious rituals. Clearly, there is nothing in Acts 11:26 which will justify a denial that Mormons are Christians.

In Acts 26:28, Agrippa II makes his famous reply to Paul: “A little more, and your arguments would make a Christian of me.”⁸⁸ This statement occurs after a brief speech by Paul at Caesarea, in which the apostle relates to Agrippa and Festus the story of his conversion.⁸⁹ The doctrinal content of Paul’s speech is slight, but that slightness is itself deeply significant: Paul bears witness that Jesus had been foretold by the Jewish prophets, that he suffered and rose from the dead, and that it is through Jesus that forgiveness may be obtained. Paul describes his mission as that of summoning people to “repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20). There is no evidence that the apostle’s speech at Caesarea mentioned original sin, or a metaphysical trinity, or salvation by grace alone, or *ex nihilo* creation, or any of the other doctrines for which, as we shall see, Mormons are expelled from Christendom by zealous critics. Yet Paul does not deny Agrippa’s perception of his minimal theological statement as a summation of “Christianity” (Acts 26:29).

If Paul’s statement to Agrippa and Festus is accepted as a scriptural test for the Christianity of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons pass easily. Do they believe that the Jewish prophets foretold the coming of Jesus Christ? Emphatically yes. Indeed, the three books of scripture revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith offer prophecies of the advent of Christ which are far clearer and more specific than anything found in the present text of the Hebrew Bible. Do Mormons believe that Jesus suffered and rose from the dead? Absolutely! “The fundamental principles of our religion,” Joseph Smith said, “are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”⁹⁰ Do Mormons believe that it is through Jesus Christ that forgiveness may be obtained? The third Article of Faith should leave no doubt of that. Nor should literally scores if not hundreds of passages in the scriptures of the Latter-day Saints. Do Mormons believe it their duty to summon people to “repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance”? Without a doubt they do. (See, for example, D&C 6:9; 11:9; 14:8; 18:14, 41; 19:21, 31; 36:6; 44:3; etc.) Do Mormons call upon their hearers to do good works? Indeed they do, and this is one of the charges which their critics inconsistently bring against them, claiming that it shows them to be non-Christian. In fact, the Latter-day Saints meet Paul’s minimum statement of Christianity remarkably well. If there is anyone who should be doing some soul-searching on this point, it might well be those who condemn The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for teaching that men and women must “do works meet for repentance.” Acts 26:28 cannot plausibly be used to purge Mormons from Christianity.

It will be noted that in neither of the two instances discussed above is the term “Christian” found in the mouth of the Apostle Paul. Instead, it is found in the mouths of unbelieving outsiders. This is significant, since, as we have mentioned, it is often against the standard of allegedly Pauline teachings that Mormonism is weighed in the balance and found “non-Christian.”⁹¹ If Paul himself did use the word “Christian,” there is no New Testament proof

that he did, and no scriptural indication whatsoever as to *how* he might have used it. Thus, there is no Pauline definition of the term and no Pauline reason to deny that Mormons are Christians. Enemies of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who seek biblical justification for banishing it from Christendom will have to look elsewhere for ammunition, and they have only one more chance:

1 Peter 4:16 represents the last relevant New Testament passage.⁹² Yet it is virtually without theological content, merely assuring the believer that he need not worry if he suffer as a “Christian.” Persecution is contrasted with suffering “as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer.” And even here, perhaps, we are to think of “Christian” as an identification made by persecuting outsiders, just as “murderer,” “thief,” and “evildoer” might be judgments rendered by a Roman court.⁹³ It is, says F. F. Bruce, “by implication used by non-Christians.”⁹⁴

We might also note that being “Christian” here probably has a behavioral aspect. After all, suffering “as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer” clearly would flow from something the sufferer *does*. A person is not punished merely for holding the theoretical belief that murder might be acceptable. (In an instance like this, faith without representative works is legally irrelevant.) A thief is not merely a believer in the abstract redistribution of wealth. Both of these are “evildoers,” and it is as evildoers that they suffer or are punished by the law. If Peter really meant that suffering as a “Christian” was analogous to suffering “as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer,” is it not logical to infer that he saw “Christianity” as expressing itself in behavior? So do the Latter-day Saints! It is Mormon insistence upon the necessity of repentance and good works which, as we shall see below, leads many anti-Mormons to deny that the Latter-day Saints are Christian. If, for this offense, they are thrust from the Christian fold, they may well find Peter already outside the wall. This is not bad company to keep.

Manifestly, the charge that Mormonism fails to meet the New Testament definition of “Christianity” is utterly groundless, for the simple reason that no such definition exists. The word “Christianity” does not even occur in the text. On the other hand, of course, the term “Christian” does occur, albeit rarely. It, too, remains undefined, although its context in the three places where it is to be found allows us perhaps to infer some very basic notions about how New Testament writers used it.

How does Mormonism fare, following an exhaustive survey—not hard to manage!—of the rather sparse biblical data on this question? The Latter-day Saints do extremely well. They meet every criterion. By every New Testament standard, Mormons are Christians.

A test case will make this completely clear: Robert McKay, a dedicated anti-Mormon who is based in Oklahoma, tells us that one must be “born again” in order to be a Christian. He bases his assertion upon John 3:7.⁹⁵ “The New Testament definition of a Christian is one who has been born again,” he says.⁹⁶ But there is a problem here, as the alert reader can easily see by now. The problem is that John 3:7 does not mention the word “Christian”—and, thus, can hardly be said to “define” it or to lay down conditions for its use. Indeed, the word “Christian” does not occur in the gospel of John at all, nor, for that matter, in any of the four gospels. Robert McKay’s insistence that the New Testament defines the word “Christian” leads us to wonder if he might have a larger New Testament than we have, one perhaps outfitted with extra books. For we can find no definition of the term in any New Testament passage known to us.

The claim of anti-Mormons that the New Testament itself clearly excludes The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from Christendom is hereby shown to be baseless, to be totally without foundation. In a very real sense, the entire overall question of whether Mormonism is Christian is already decided, and nothing more need be said. But charity is an important biblical virtue, and so we should, perhaps, permit the critics to have their say. Still, it

should never be forgotten amidst all the names and dates and details which will follow that, by the (admittedly rather vague) standard of the New Testament, the Latter-day Saints have been demonstrated to fall within Christianity. No issue discussed below can call that demonstration into question.

Do Denials That Latter-day Saints Are Christians Find Support in the Early Church?

As we have seen, the term “Christian” began its career among outsiders, “more as an insult than as a title of honor.”⁹⁷ The great Roman historian, Tacitus (d. A.D. 120), for example, was able to describe how Nero’s persecuting zeal fell upon “a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians.”⁹⁸ Indeed, it is not until the second century that we can document use of the designation among Christians themselves.⁹⁹ By February of 156, Polycarp of Smyrna could boldly declare to the Roman proconsul, just prior to his martyrdom, “I am a Christian.”¹⁰⁰ (It is ironic that any attempt to define the term “Christian” based on noncanonical texts earlier than the second century must necessarily rely upon its use by pagans.)

Of course, it is not uncommon that nicknames are adopted by their targets. One thinks of “Yankee” or, for that matter, of “Mormon.”¹⁰¹ But what did the early Christians mean by their use of the term? It will be interesting to survey, briefly, some of the earliest writings we have from Christians outside of the New Testament. It is not, of course, that we think these early documents scriptural, or believe that they should be included in the canon. Still, they are extremely early—in a few cases, some scholars have argued, perhaps earlier than certain books in the New Testament itself—and they provide an extremely useful window for observing just how the earliest Christians viewed themselves and how they used words. (Furthermore, it should be recalled that these earliest writers knew the apostles. They *spoke* the language of the New Testament. There is good reason to believe, therefore, that they had at least some notion of what earliest Christian teaching was about. Twentieth-century Christians should dispute their views only with good reason.)

Of these early writers, Ignatius of Antioch is particularly important for our present purposes. He is the early writer who most commonly uses the word “Christian.” How does he use it? In a very interesting way. In his *Epistle to the Romans*, Ignatius addresses his co-believers with regard to his own impending martyrdom: “Only pray for me for strength, both inward and outward, that I may not merely speak, but also have the will, that I may not only be *called* a Christian, but may also be found to *be* one.”¹⁰² He got his wish, and was thrown to the beasts at Rome under Trajan, ca. A.D. 108. Plainly, to Ignatius, who—significantly¹⁰³—was the third bishop of Antioch, being a Christian depended at least partially upon behavioral criteria.¹⁰⁴ He wanted to really *be* one. “A Christian . . . gives his time to God,” he writes to Polycarp. “This is the work of God.”¹⁰⁵ On several occasions, he summons his readers to be “imitators of God.”¹⁰⁶ On another occasion he exhorts the Magnesians, “Let us learn to lead Christian lives.”¹⁰⁷ Ignatius is faithful, in other words, to an important part of the heritage of his church in Antioch, reiterating the ethical emphasis of the gospel of Matthew—which, many scholars think, was very likely written there only a few decades earlier.¹⁰⁸

Outsiders, too, sometimes noticed the great emphasis given by Christians to moral behavior. Writing sometime between A.D. 97 and A.D. 109, Pliny the Younger describes a regular “ceremony” practiced in the early church: Christians, he tells the Emperor Trajan, “bind themselves by oath . . . to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it.”¹⁰⁹ (It is frequently alleged against Mormon temple worship, by the way, that oaths are forbidden by the New Testament. Apparently, either the earliest Christians did not understand this or else the anti-Mormons are wrong.)

In his *Epistle to the Ephesians*, Ignatius appears to presume yet another sense of the term “Christian,” an ecclesiastical one, when he writes of “the Christians of Ephesus, who . . . were ever of one mind with the Apostles.”¹¹⁰ This is consistent with his *Epistle to the Magnesians*, where he declares that “we should be really Christians, not merely have the name.”¹¹¹ And how do we do so? The burden of this epistle is that we must be subject to the authority of the bishop, who presides “in the place of God.”¹¹²

It cannot, of course, be denied that, for Ignatius, being a Christian involves more than simply moral behavior and obedience to priesthood authority. Still it must not be overlooked that he regards these traits (heavily criticized by anti-Mormons when occurring in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) as essential to true Christianity. In addition, however, he also gives us a few theological guidelines to follow. Ignatius is the first writer known to have used the term “Christianity,” which he explicitly contrasts with “Judaism.”¹¹³ Much like Paul before Agrippa—and much like the statement of Joseph Smith, quoted above—he bears witness of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection. Against the Docetics, who teach of Jesus that “his suffering was only a semblance,” Ignatius affirms that the Savior “was truly born, both ate and drank . . . [and] was truly crucified.”¹¹⁴ “I beseech you therefore,” he writes to the Trallians, “live only on Christian fare, and refrain from strange food, which is heresy.”¹¹⁵

Here, at last, we seem to have a doctrinal criterion for what is and what is not Christian. However, Ignatius’s own doctrinal position is not unambiguous. He has, for example, secret teachings which he refuses to reveal in his letters.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, how enlightening is it, really, to discover that “Christianity” is not identical with “Judaism”? And in answer to the implicit question of how one is to distinguish truth from heresy, Ignatius immediately falls back on lines of priesthood authority.¹¹⁷ “This will be possible for you,” he declares, “if you are not puffed up, and are inseparable from God, from Jesus Christ and from the bishop and ordinances of the Apostles. He who is within the sanctuary is pure, but he who is without the sanctuary is not pure, that is to say, whoever does anything apart from the bishop and the presbytery and the deacons is not pure in his conscience.”¹¹⁸ And as for the “strange food” of the heretics, which Ignatius contrasts with “Christian fare,” is it not reasonable to see in that an allusion by the bishop of Antioch to eucharistic service—which is to say, in Mormon terms, to the administration of the sacrament—conducted by invalid authority? “Let no one,” he admonishes the Smyrnaeans, “do any of the things appertaining to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints.”¹¹⁹

“Let no one be deceived,” Ignatius warns the Smyrnaeans. Even the heavenly hosts are subject to judgment. And then the saint applies his ethical standard to the heretics: “Mark those who have strange opinions concerning the grace of Jesus Christ which has come to us, and see how contrary they are to the mind of God. For love they have no care, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the distressed, none for the afflicted, none for the prisoner, or for him released from prison, none for the hungry or thirsty.”¹²⁰ They have, in other words, forgotten what James 1:27 describes as “pure religion and undefiled.” But it is not only James who insisted on ethical standards as a means of identifying the real followers of Christ, for statements by Jesus himself are recorded in the Gospels which are relevant to the question at issue. The most famous is probably that of John 13:35: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples [*mathētai*], if ye have love one to another.” Thus, in their emphasis upon behavior as a key to identity as a disciple of Christ, both James and Ignatius faithfully follow their master. For Ignatius, Walter Grundmann notes, “*Christianismos* simply means discipleship.” It is “being a Christian as expressed in life-style.”¹²¹ This ethical view of Christianity is common to others among the first Christian writers as well. The early-second-century *Shepherd of Hermas*, for instance, one of the so-called “Apostolic Fathers,” views Christianity

as “above all, a series of precepts that must be followed.”¹²² (The Latter-day Saints, of course, can certainly live with this ethical emphasis found among the earliest Christians. But what of their critics?)

As is implied in the assertion that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,” the original word applied to the followers of Jesus was “disciples.”¹²³ It was, states Grundmann, “obviously the term which the original believers used for themselves.”¹²⁴ K. H. Rengstorf argues that the Greek *mathētēs*, “disciple,” is merely a translation of the Hebrew *talmĀ«dh*, and that it derives from the common name which Palestinian Christians used in self-description. It gave way to the term “Christian” only as the Church became more and more Hellenized.¹²⁵

What did the earliest followers of Jesus understand by “discipleship”? Rengstorf sees three—largely behavioral—elements in their view: (1) commitment to the person of Jesus; (2) obedience to Jesus; and (3) obligation to suffer with Jesus.¹²⁶ “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31).¹²⁷ Commenting on this verse, Bruce Vawter remarks, “Merely to be receptive to the word is not enough; one must also take it in and act on it constantly. Then alone can one be a true disciple of the Lord.”¹²⁸ “This is my Father’s glory, that you may bear fruit in plenty and so be my disciples” (John 15:8, New English Bible).¹²⁹

Being a disciple of Jesus was not an easy thing. “Those who responded,” writes Frederick Sontag, “left their family, friends and conventional religious practices to follow an itinerant preaching, healing ministry which was at time subject to danger. To follow Jesus meant to abandon convention and to join a religious cult [!] of the day. . . . Thus, the most obvious definition for ‘Christian’ would be: ‘One called to follow Jesus’ no matter what danger or ostracism is involved.”¹³⁰ Discipleship, thus, demanded behavior, actions—works.

It appears that there are few if any guidelines to be found in the New Testament or in earliest Christianity for ruling on who is, and who is not, Christian. And apart from a condemnation of Docetism, there are no doctrinal criteria given whatsoever. There is, furthermore, sufficient ambiguity in the records left behind by the earliest Christians that the question of just which doctrine and what practice is authentically “primitive” has historically remained very much open. In late antiquity, each Christian sect claimed apostolicity.¹³¹ And if the situation was confused in ancient times, it has only grown worse with the passage of time. Among nineteenth-century American Protestants, Klaus Hansen observes, “each church conceived of itself as conforming more closely to the primitive church than any of its rivals.”¹³² Despite Walter Martin’s complacency about “conform[ing] to the Scriptures,” such conformity seems to be both difficult and controversial.

Why should it be so difficult to get a fix on the pure Christianity of the earliest believers? Modern biblical and patristic scholarship would reply that this is because there never was a golden age of unambiguous and unanimously held Christian truth. The important evangelical scholar James D. G. Dunn denies that “orthodoxy” is a meaningful concept within the New Testament period. There is no single preaching or proclamation of the gospel (Greek *kerygma*), but, rather, multiple and conflicting forms of such preaching and proclamation (*kerygmata*). Dunn recognizes “a marked degree of diversity” and “many different expressions of Christianity within the NT.”¹³³ Even fundamentalists are willing to avail themselves of this idea when it proves useful to them: “The fact is,” says Loraine Boettner, going after the Catholics, “that [the Church fathers] scarcely agree on any doctrine, and even contradict themselves as they change their minds and affirm what they had previously denied.”¹³⁴

Terms like “orthodoxy” and “heresy” seem increasingly—to modern objective scholarship—to be mere self-congratulatory epithets worked up by the victors in the dogmatic skirmishes of Christian history. In earliest Christianity, the two are often impossible to distinguish, at least without the benefit of hindsight. In many areas, the “heretics” were the established church, while the “orthodox” were the damnable minority. And this is not merely the case in later, “apostate” centuries. The New Testament itself contains conflicting perspectives and positions that, many scholars would contend, resist even the most determined harmonizer.

Protestant critics who like to contrast Mormonism with “biblical” Christianity—a uniform Pauline abstraction that never fit the reality of the Christian church, even in its first centuries—argue from a mirage.¹³⁵ “The ancient church produced a vast number of theological attempts to interpret Christianity,” writes Norbert Brox. “These theologies differ very widely from one another, according to period, environment, points of departure, and intention, and they show the breadth of the options which then existed for understanding the Christian faith.”¹³⁶

Clearly, if it is thought to rest upon standards derived from the New Testament or from immediately postapostolic Christianity, the anti-Mormon case for expelling Mormons from Christendom is without substance. Earliest Christians liked to describe their fellowship and their community in ethical terms—terms with which the Latter-day Saints, given their emphasis on good works and “living together in love” (D&C 42:45) can certainly feel comfortable. Their critics, on the other hand, may actually feel less at ease with the early Christians and all their talk of “works” than the Mormons do. Thus, lacking both biblical support and support from the earliest generations of ancient believers, these critics are driven to seek another reason to banish The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from the Christian fold. Is there is another possibility? Is there another weapon?

Can the Councils and Creeds Be Used to Banish Mormonism from Christendom?

The majority of anti-Mormons probably belong to so-called “non-denominational” churches.¹³⁷ These predominantly conservative and fundamentalist institutions are typified by the Interlake Christian Church near Seattle, which claims in its advertising to have “No Creed but Christ, No Book but the Bible, No Name but Christian.” Of course, the Interlake slogan is itself a creedal statement. And no Christian—least of all a precritical fundamentalist—comes to the Bible or to Christ without presuppositions that reflect his society and upbringing. Further, is it likely that even the most backward Protestant is utterly deaf to the great debates in which Christian theology has been shaped through the centuries? Is it probable that, standing at the end of twenty centuries of doctrinal development, he understands his English Bible in precisely the way that a first-century Palestinian Christian heard and understood the sermons of Peter? Did the great movements of Platonism and Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism and Manichaeism and Augustinianism and Averroism and Thomism, which surged for centuries about and within Christendom, really have no effect at all? The implied answer given in most anti-Mormon sources is no, none whatsoever. Karl Keating explains this quite well: “Fundamentalists think the intervening centuries have not made the Bible any more confusing for us than it was for people who lived in New Testament times, and they think that way (although they do not realize it) because they begin, not with the Bible, but with an accepted set of beliefs, which they then substantiate by ‘searching the Scriptures.’”¹³⁸

Mormonism makes no secret of having sources of authority beyond the Bible. Latter-day Saints have never been shy about admitting—nay, proclaiming—that their understanding of the Bible is guided and enriched by revelations through modern prophets. Anti-Mormons, on the other hand, like to think that they represent pure biblical Christianity, arrayed against a Mormonism that is “decadent” and “syncretistic” (precisely because of its extrabiblical sources). Yet this is highly implausible on the face of it. “Fundamentalists use the Bible to protect

beliefs that are, in fact, antecedent to the Bible, which is interpreted so it justifies what they already hold, although most fundamentalists think what they believe comes straight out of the sacred text and that they are merely acknowledging its plain meaning.”¹³⁹ Besides, we have already shown that the Bible offers no real reason to deny that Mormonism is Christian. So anti-Mormons have recourse—overtly in some cases or, as is more common, implicitly—to doctrinal principles that are, at the very best, doubtfully present in primitive Christianity. Quite often, these doctrinal principles derive either directly or indirectly from the classical creeds, which were hammered out in and around the great councils of the ancient post-apostolic Christian church.

The so-called “ecumenical councils” of the Church (from the Greek *oikoumenē*, or “world”) are normally reckoned as being approximately twenty-one in number. Of these, most Protestants accept only the first seven as binding and doctrinally authoritative. The first was the famous Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). This was followed by the first Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381, and by the Council of Ephesus, in A.D. 431. The important Council of Chalcedon, in A.D. 451, was succeeded by the second and third Councils of Constantinople, in A.D. 553 and 680, respectively. Finally, the second Council of Nicaea took place in A.D. 787. These councils were essentially legislative sessions, in which bishops and theologians from across the Roman/Byzantine Empire came together to debate each other about doctrinal issues great and small, to identify and condemn heresies and heretics, and to issue declarations or creeds.

These creeds, convenient doctrinal summaries formulated by theologians to express their own beliefs and to rule out the beliefs and formulations of those with whom they disagreed, are usually divided into several categories. First, there are the “ecumenical creeds.” These are products—or, at least, claim to be products—of the entire Church, of bishops representing all Christians in the world. There are other categories as well, including Eastern Catholic, Western Catholic, and Provincial creeds. (Later Protestant denominational “confessions” are frequently discussed under a separate category altogether.) We will be concerned here with the “ecumenical creeds.” These are the statements which purport to express the universal judgment of Christians. They are generally identified as three—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the so-called Athanasian Creed. The latter, however, gained its stature only in the thirteenth century, and is most definitely not by Athanasius (d. A.D. 373). It may therefore safely be omitted.

What does the historical record of these assemblies and their resolutions imply about the Christianity of the Latter-day Saints? Distinctly little. The great creeds and the ecumenical councils of mainstream Christendom—while they can clearly be used to demonstrate that Mormonism is out of step with the evolution of “historic Christianity,” a proposition no informed Latter-day Saint would care to dispute—furnish very weak grounds upon which to deny that Mormons are Christian. This is so for at least three reasons: (1) the creeds do not include all the groups generally viewed as Christian; (2) they are themselves innovative, and of a nature foreign to the Bible; and (3) the ecumenical councils that generated the creeds have never been viewed as consigning those whom they anathematized to “non-Christianity.”¹⁴⁰

Of course, certain creedlike passages can be located in the Bible itself, although not of the metaphysical type popular in succeeding centuries. Both Protestant and Catholic scholars recognize 1 Corinthians 15:1–11, for example, as a very early Christian creedal statement, not unrelated to Paul’s speech before Festus and Agrippa. The Protestant editors of the popular New International Version of the Bible, commenting upon 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, point out that these verses contain “the heart of the gospel,” which, following Paul’s own language, they summarize as the belief “that Christ died for our sins . . . that he was buried . . . and that he was raised from the dead.”¹⁴¹ The resemblance between this early Christian creed, containing “the heart of the gospel,” and Joseph Smith’s statement, already cited above, is so striking that the latter is worth quoting here again: “The fundamental

principles of our religion,” Joseph Smith wrote, “are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”¹⁴² Mormons accept such propositions fully—and in a much more literal way than do, say, liberal Protestants. In the language of the editors of the New International Version, they thereby accept “the heart of the gospel.” Yet this makes no difference in the eyes of their critics, who persist in calling them non-Christians.

Once again, however, the Bible fails to support this expulsion of the Latter-day Saints from Christendom. Thus, a post-biblical instrument is needed to justify such an un-biblical move. J. O. Sanders, for instance, identifies Christianity with the so-called Apostles’ Creed,¹⁴³ the brief text of which runs as follows: “I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only (begotten) Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell [Hades, spirit world]; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body [flesh]; and life everlasting. Amen.”¹⁴⁴ Admittedly, Mormons do not use this creed. But failure to use the text of the creed in liturgy and worship would seem dangerous grounds for thrusting them from Christianity if they accept its principles. “If we take the recognition and use of the Apostles’ Creed as our test,” writes Einar Molland, “both the Orthodox Church and a number of Protestant Communion will fall outside the limits of Christendom, which would be absurd.”¹⁴⁵ But if it is “absurd” to claim that non-use of the Apostles’ Creed expels the Orthodox and many Protestants from the Christian fold, it can be no less absurd to claim that such non-use banishes the Latter-day Saints. And indeed, as even some outside observers have noted, the Latter-day Saints do accept the creed’s principles.¹⁴⁶ For example, in their first Article of Faith, Latter-day Saints declare a belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Similarly, Latter-day Saints baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Yet consistency sometimes seems too much to ask from anti-Mormons. While declaring acceptance of the Apostles’ Creed to be the essence of Christianity, J. O. Sanders denies that the Latter-day Saints are Christians.¹⁴⁷

If the Bible and the Apostolic Fathers and the simple text of the Apostolic Creed fail to justify denials that Mormons are Christians, perhaps later and more theologically detailed tools can be located to do the job. Since it is manifestly ridiculous to call the Latter-day Saints non-Christian when they accept a New Testament creed that represents “the heart of the gospel” and when they agree fully with a post-biblical creed which one of their own enemies has effectively described as the least common denominator that links and defines Christians, it will obviously be necessary to purge them from Christianity on the basis of non-essentials—however logically dubious such a course may be. And the later creeds are the obvious place to turn. For inessential speculation and post-biblical innovation, they are mines of unfathomable richness.

Among them, the Nicene Creed is almost certainly the most famous and the most important. Yet its very innovativeness makes it a most questionable basis for banishing the Latter-day Saints from Christendom. “It is impossible for any one,” declared Edwin Hatch in his classic 1888 Hibbert Lectures, “whether he be a student of history or no, to fail to notice a difference of both form and content between the Sermon on the Mount and the Nicene Creed. The Sermon on the Mount is the promulgation of a new law of conduct; it assumes beliefs rather than formulates them; the theological conceptions which underlie it belong to the ethical rather than the speculative side of theology; metaphysics are wholly absent. The Nicene Creed is a statement partly of historical facts and partly of dogmatic inferences; the metaphysical terms which it contains would probably have been

unintelligible to the first disciples;¹⁴⁸ ethics have no place in it. The one belongs to a world of Jewish peasants, the other to a world of Greek philosophers. “The contrast,” Hatch continues, “is patent. If any one thinks that it is sufficiently explained by saying that the one is a sermon and the other a creed, it must be pointed out in reply that the question why an ethical sermon stood in the forefront of the teaching of Jesus Christ, and a metaphysical creed in the forefront of the Christianity of the fourth century, is a problem which claims investigation.”¹⁴⁹

Some conservative bishops, even among those who were committed to the doctrinal position taken by the Council of Nicaea, were very much worried by the fact that, in the Nicene Creed, a word utterly foreign to the scriptures—*homousios*—was proclaimed the dogmatic standard for the church.¹⁵⁰ This consideration ought to, but does not, give pause to those who would make of it—or any of its Hellenistic cousins—the *sine qua non*, the indispensable essence, of Christianity: Who gave the ecclesiastical diplomats of Nicaea the right to set up a definition of Christianity utterly unknown to the prophets, apostles, and evangelists of the Bible, and one which would almost certainly have been incomprehensible to them?

But a yet more fundamental question arises here, for there is no evidence that the statesmen and scholars of the Nicene Council ever *claimed* the authority to define “Christianity.” This fact is universally overlooked by those who cite the Nicene Creed as their warrant for determining who is Christian and who is not, but it is of vital importance. While those who framed the Nicene Creed and sought to enforce it were quite willing to expel dissidents from the institutional church, we know of no evidence that they ever claimed they were thereby transforming those excommunicants into “non-Christians.” And modern scholarship is unanimous, so far as we have been able to determine, in its implicit denial that condemnation by a creed or expulsion from a council made one a non-Christian. Nevertheless, “Dr.” Walter Martin, calling Jehovah’s Witnesses “Arians” and attempting thereby to thrust them from the Christian fold, asserts that Arius was excommunicated from the Christian church at the Council of Nicaea, in A.D. 325.¹⁵¹ His assertion is technically true but fundamentally misleading, since, as we have just pointed out, excommunication from the institutional church seems not to have been viewed by anyone concerned as making the excommunicant into a non-Christian. (Also excommunicated at Nicaea were the Quartodecimans, for holding a minority viewpoint on the proper date for Easter. Would “Dr.” Martin seriously have contended that we should call the Quartodecimans non-Christian because of a quibble over the dating of Easter?) Arianism was given a major blow at Nicaea, it is true, and finally lost at the Council of Constantinople (in A.D. 381), but it is nonetheless routinely referred to as “Christian.”¹⁵² And in the half-century intervening between Nicaea and Constantinople, Arianism enjoyed much more support than could plausibly have been commanded by a movement officially declared and widely recognized as non-Christian. It was, for example, backed by Constantine’s son and successor, Constantius, and indeed was preferred by the majority of the Eastern bishops. Athanasius, on the other hand, who was the guiding force in the formulation of the creedal statement accepted at the Council at Nicaea, was, more often than not, in exile from his bishopric or in disfavor.

Since the Nicene Creed does not seem to have turned any of its dissenting contemporaries into non-Christians, it is frankly difficult to see how it could possibly cause such a metamorphosis in a group of people living a millennium and a half afterwards. And clearly it does not, since it is not accepted even by all those modern churches universally recognized as Christian.¹⁵³ Thus, there is no substance to arguments that seek to force The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from Christianity on the basis of the Nicene Creed.

After a survey of the various creeds and councils, discussing in greater detail the kinds of problems to which we have alluded here, Einar Molland concludes that the Lord’s Prayer is “the one creed of all branches of Christendom.”¹⁵⁴ All other creeds exclude one denomination or other that is universally recognized as Christian,

which is clearly unacceptable and absurd. Acceptance of the Lord's Prayer, on the other hand, is implied by Molland to be a good demonstration of one's Christianity. What does this imply for the Christianity of Mormonism? The Latter-day Saints would find nothing troubling in Molland's rule, since, while they do not use the Lord's Prayer liturgically—they have very little liturgy to speak of—they certainly do accept it. Indeed, 3 Nephi 13:9–13 has the resurrected Christ teach the same prayer in the New World. Still—strangely, and with striking inconsistency—Einar Molland denies that Mormons are Christian.¹⁵⁵ Once again, Latter-day Saint acceptance of something that makes everyone else Christian, something that their attackers elsewhere recognize as the very definition of "Christian," fails to gain them admission to the club.

Other councils of the ancient church can likewise be shown to furnish no basis for anti-Mormon assaults on the Christianity of the Latter-day Saints. In A.D. 431, for instance, the Council of Ephesus condemned Nestorius and his followers. Yet the Nestorians are invariably described as Christians.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the verdict of that council is now generally recognized to have been unjust.¹⁵⁷ The Monophysites, to choose another ancient faction, were condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. Yet they—and their numbers include the Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian, and Jacobite churches—are invariably described as Christian.¹⁵⁸ Is there any authority anywhere who would dispute the claim of, say, the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox church, to the title "Christian"? The idea is preposterous. But is this merely a matter of some bloodless modern "tolerance"? Clearly, no. In 531, that great persecutor of the Monophysites, the Emperor Justinian, sent envoys to the Monophysite Negus of Ethiopia, requesting, "by reason of our common faith," assistance in the war against the Sassanians.¹⁵⁹ If excommunication by a council of the church made one a non-Christian, this fact seems to have escaped Justinian.

The Fifth Ecumenical Council, in A.D. 553, posthumously condemned Theodore of Mopsuestia, who had died in A.D. 428.¹⁶⁰ He appears to have been a victim of the same passionate search for heresies and stumbles that seems to dominate some modern fundamentalists. Indeed, Norbert Brox characterizes the period of Theodore's excommunication in terms that could also be used to describe some brands of anti-Mormonism: "A nervous, polemical climate of polarization dominated the era, in which people absolutely waited for their enemies to commit dogmatic or political mistakes."¹⁶¹ Theodore was caught up in this unpleasant situation even though he had been dead for over a century. But his excommunication did not remove him from Christendom, and modern scholars invariably refer to him as a Christian.¹⁶²

A look at other major "heresies" discloses that they also are, in both specialist and common usage, referred to as Christian. The Montanists, for example, were a faction of the second and third centuries A.D. whose chief sin was admitting postbiblical revelation. (In this respect, if no other, they prefigure the Mormons.) Yet they are always called Christians.¹⁶³ Their most famous convert, the great Latin father, Tertullian, is indeed described by one historian as "the first Protestant."¹⁶⁴ Similarly, Donatism, condemned as a heresy in 405 A.D., is considered to be Christian by the scholars who deal with it.¹⁶⁵ Even more striking is the fact that authorities are not at all reluctant, in discussing what is perhaps the most radical complex of heresies ever to appear in Christendom, to speak of it as "Christian gnosticism." "Gnostics," writes Yale's Bentley Layton, "in fact made up one of the earliest and most long-lived branches of the ancient Christian movement."¹⁶⁶ James D. G. Dunn is able to speak of "gnostic tendencies within first-century Christianity," expressly including the New Testament.¹⁶⁷ Marcion and his followers are also routinely called Christians.¹⁶⁸ Never condemned were the "Christian Platonists of Alexandria"—who surely represent a melding of biblical doctrines with pagan influences, and who count among their number some of the

most illustrious thinkers in the history of Christendom.¹⁶⁹ (Even the Docetists, who seem to be the only group that might, on the basis of earliest Christian writings, justifiably be termed non-Christian, are not.)¹⁷⁰

Some critics of the Latter-day Saints would push the issue yet further, and would claim that Mormons cannot be Christian because they reject the ecumenical councils altogether. This, it is alleged, places them definitively beyond the boundaries of Christendom. However, such reasoning can only be described as arbitrary. As we have seen, Protestants accept but seven of the twenty-one ecumenical councils that have occurred in the course of Christian history. Should they be expelled from Christendom for that fact? Certain Eastern Orthodox Christians—Abyssinian or Ethiopian, Armenian, Coptic, and Syrian—reject all but the first three. Should they be termed pagans? Latter-day Saint scholar Stephen E. Robinson asks very important questions in this context: If the Ethiopians and Armenians and Copts and Syrians “can reject everything in traditional Christianity from the fifth century on and still be Christians, then where is the cutoff that marks how much can be rejected? If it can be as early as the fifth century, then why not as early as the second?” Furthermore, Robinson demands, “if the councils and creeds teach doctrines not found in the New Testament, on what authority must they be accepted? And if the councils and creeds merely repeat or summarize the doctrines of the New Testament without adding to them, then why is it necessary to accept them *in addition* to the New Testament itself?” Obviously, the demand that Mormons must accept the creeds and councils or be denounced as heathens rests upon rather shaky grounds. But even “if other churches argue that it is necessary for Latter-day Saints to accept the councils in order to be Christian, then we might well ask, *Which* councils must be accepted? How can these other churches themselves accept only three, or four, or seven, and not all twenty-one?”¹⁷¹

The implications of all this should be plain. We have seen that the Bible cannot be used to define The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints out of Christendom. Nor can the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Nor can the ecumenical councils and the classical creeds of post-apostolic Christianity be used to achieve such a goal. The essential principles of Christianity as documented in the earliest sources are fully accepted by the Latter-day Saints, who easily qualify as Christians according to the earliest definitions.

The question is now settled, as indeed it was after we had examined the three New Testament occurrences of the word “Christian.” Mormons are Christians. Nevertheless, it may be interesting to examine some of the specific standards that anti-Mormons claim to derive from the Bible, and by which they claim to be able to discern “true” Christians from false pretenders. In so doing, we will cite instances from Christian history and biography which illustrate the wide latitude allowed for variation and doctrinal dissent by common usage of the terms “Christian” and “Christianity.” Some of the figures we shall cite (e.g. Augustine) are in the mainstream, while some (e.g. Origen and Thomas Müntzer) are less representative, chosen precisely because they indicate the range of possibilities allowable under the rubric of “Christian.”

Specific Reasons Given for Denying That Latter-day Saints Are Christians

Claim 1. A newspaper advertisement being run by Ed Decker’s Saints Alive in Jesus, playing on the Book of Mormon’s claim to be “another testament of Jesus Christ,” proclaims in bold headlines that “There is a Testament of Another Jesus Christ.” “Mormonism claims to be a Christian church, but it does not have the same Jesus. Mormonism worships a false Christ (2 Cor. 11:4),” writes John L. Smith, of the Oklahoma-based Utah Missions, Inc. “Mormon leaders have admitted that they believe in another Jesus. One official of the Mormon church has declared, ‘It is true that many of the Christian churches worship a different Jesus Christ than is worshipped by the Mormons.’”¹⁷²

Response. This allegation, if true in the sense claimed for it by Rev. Smith, would be very damning. For if the Mormons were partisans of an individual who simply happened to bear the title “Christ,” but was in reality a wholly distinct individual from the Jesus of Nazareth whom mainstream Christians worship the world over, Latter-day Saint claims to be Christian could be dismissed as true but misleading. The situation would be precisely equivalent to a debate between two biologists, both of whom claimed to be Darwinians. Biologist A, an evolutionist and a follower of the nineteenth century Englishman Charles Darwin, would be absolutely baffled by his opponent’s claim to be simultaneously a “scientific creationist,” an opponent of evolution, and a disciple of Darwin. “You certainly follow a different Darwin than I do,” he would say. But Biologist A would only be puzzled until he realized that the Darwin whom Biologist B followed was the Rev. Jimmy Joe Darwin of the Deadprophets Bible Church in Jenningsbryan, Alabama. Thereupon, Biologist A would probably grow angry, and accuse Biologist B of playing with him—indeed of engaging in deliberate misrepresentation. “You know full well,” he would insist, “that ‘Darwinian’ has a very specific and accepted meaning in common usage, and you were trading on it to cause confusion among your hearers.”

It is precisely this accusation, of deliberately misleading outsiders, that is routinely made against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is, however, also a charge that we are strongly tempted to turn against our accusers.

Is the Mormon official’s “admission,” quoted by John L. Smith, really significant? Almost certainly not, and for a very simple reason. The word “different” can be used in varying ways. Consider the following two sentences: “Paris today is a different city from the one I saw on my first visit many years ago.” “Berdyayev was born in Moscow, but died an exile in a different city, Paris.” Clearly, the “difference” in the first sentence is merely one of quality, while that in the second is actual or quantifiable or, if you will, numerical. Suppose that Biologist A, having learned that the “Darwin” followed by Biologist B was an entirely distinct individual from the “Darwin” he had thought under discussion, with different nationality, birthdate, location, and fingerprints, now repeated his statement to his opponent. “You *certainly* follow a different Darwin than I do!” It should be clear that this sentence now has a quite distinct meaning, although its wording has not changed in the least. The variation resides entirely in the shift in the word “different” from a qualitative sense to a numerical or quantitative one.

No knowledgeable Mormon would ever “admit” that his church worships a supernatural individual numerically distinct from the God and Christ of the Bible. Clearly the statement cited by Rev. Smith simply acknowledges the undeniable difference between the attributes ascribed to Jesus by Mormons and those ascribed to him by other Christians. Just as clearly, however, the person of whom those attributes are predicated is identical for both Mormons and non-Mormons. Further, it is vital to keep in mind the fact that the difference in attributes between “the Mormon Jesus” and the Jesus of other Christians is only partial: In terms of practical spirituality and prayer, for example, there is little difference between Mormons and other Christians.¹⁷³ Mormons share with other Christians, too, the historical data of the New Testament, deviating only very rarely in its interpretation. Indeed, perhaps the greatest irony of the current campaign against Mormonism is that it is almost entirely the work of conservative Protestant Christians. Latter-day Saints have long tended to feel most at home with evangelical Bible commentaries, when they use such scholarly tools at all, because of the belief that we share with them in Christ’s literal resurrection, in the historicity of his miracles, in the birth narratives, and in the Savior’s divinity.¹⁷⁴ At least until recently, Mormons have thought of conservative Christians as, in many ways, their allies against the threat of theological liberalism and unbelief, as well as against trends toward immorality and family breakdown in the society at large. Hence the shock felt by many Mormons—the present writers among them—at the sometimes venomous attacks now aimed against their Church. Mormons consider Jesus divine, the Only Begotten Son of God, and the only perfect man who ever lived. Their Articles of Faith affirm that men are saved, if they are saved,

“through the Atonement of Christ.” Most Latter-day Saints can only shake their heads, therefore, at the claim that Mormonism is not Christian.

A comparison of twenty elements of personal identity possessed by “the Mormon Jesus” and “the Jesus of the Bible”—and many, many more elements could be compared if space and the reader’s patience did not constrain us—should make it clear to even the most hardened missing persons detective that the two are the same person.

Category	“The Mormon Jesus”	“The Jesus of the Bible”
1. birthplace	Bethlehem	Bethlehem
2. ethnicity	Jewish	Jewish
3. of David’s line?	yes	yes
4. stepfather’s name	Joseph	Joseph
5. mother’s name	Mary	Mary
6. time period	early first century	early first century
7. occupation	carpenter, preacher	carpenter, preacher
8. taught at temple?	yes	yes
9. sojourn in Egypt?	yes	yes
10. baptized by John the Baptist?	yes	yes
11. walked on water?	yes	yes
12. water to wine?	yes	yes
13. gave parables?	yes	yes
14. public office?	no	no
15. manner of death	crucifixion	crucifixion
16. time of death	under Pontius Pilate	under Pontius Pilate
17. place of death	just outside Jerusalem	just outside Jerusalem
18. sign of death	earthquake	earthquake
19. resurrected?	yes	yes
20. ascent to heaven?	yes	yes

Beyond any question, the Latter-day Saints worship the same Jesus as do other Christians. To make his quotation more damning, therefore, Rev. Smith has chosen to take the word “different” in the quantitative or numerical sense, when it is almost certain that the Mormon leader he cites intended the word in the qualitative sense. In so doing, Smith has, perhaps innocently, perhaps not, committed the logical fallacy of equivocation. This elementary logical error, also known as the Fallacy of the Ambiguous Middle Term, is surprisingly common in anti-Mormon writings, but perhaps its clearest manifestation occurs in connection with this question of Mormonism’s allegedly “different Jesus.” As one elementary logic textbook defines it, “This fallacy is committed whenever we allow the meaning of a term to shift between the premises of our argument and our conclusion.” It is amusingly illustrated in the following short poem:

I love you, Therefore I am a lover; All the world loves a lover. You are all the world to me— Consequently
You love me.¹⁷⁵

The poem’s error occurs, of course, when the phrase-term “all the world” is allowed to shift meanings between the third and fourth lines. This is precisely analogous to the way in which the word “different” shifts in meaning between the supposed admission of a Latter-day Saint general authority and the triumphant accusation of John L. Smith.

Once this is understood, it becomes apparent that we are talking here merely about differing views of one individual, Jesus, and not about distinct and separate individuals. Rev. Smith’s earthshaking discovery thereby becomes trivial. After all, the Catholic Jesus is different from the Pentecostal Jesus, and both differ from the Coptic Jesus. Furthermore, given their different human experiences and upbringing and cultural and psychological conditions, it is not surprising that Jane and Joe and Manuel and Yahya ^cAbd al-MasÄ«h and Kim Ho Pak and Uri Schwyzer have rather different ideas about Jesus. So what? To have different views of an individual does not

magically create different individuals. Citizen C may think Senator Bunkum a paragon of fiscal restraint, as well as a statesman of rare wisdom and moderation, while Citizen D regards him as a heartless skinflint and an indecisive political coward, but we are still, mercifully, left with only one Senator Bunkum. It is with this principle in mind that John Hick and Edmund S. Meltzer can publish a volume about the three Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and can quite justly title it *Three Faiths—One God*.¹⁷⁶

“Christianity begins with Christ,” writes C. L. Manschreck, “but who is Christ? The one depicted in the Gospels? Protestantism generally asserts this and uses the Bible as its authority, but examination discloses different views of Christ among the gospel writers, and the apparently older letters of Paul show little interest in the supposed facts about Jesus. Individual Protestants have assumed varied stances for interpreting Scriptures, with the result that widely divergent portraits of Jesus emerge, with no way to determine which is ‘true.’”¹⁷⁷ As James D. G. Dunn points out, there was certainly “one Jesus” in history, but there have been “many Christs” in Christian belief—even (or especially) in the period of the New Testament.¹⁷⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan’s fine book on *Jesus Through the Centuries* discusses just a few of the various Jesuses that can be documented over the past two millennia. Catholic views of Jesus differ from Protestant views in several respects, and anti-Catholics do not lag behind anti-Mormons in exhorting their Roman Catholic readers to “be converted to the true Christ of the Bible,” “the Christ of the Bible, not a counterfeit Christ.”¹⁷⁹ “Is There Another Christ?” is the title of an anti-Catholic pamphlet published by Chick Publications, of Chino, California.¹⁸⁰ The clear implication is that the Catholics claim to have “another Christ,” and that their claims are blasphemously false.

Since it is undeniably the case that many differing ideas are held about Jesus, the question arises just where on the opinion spectrum the line will be placed that separates “Christian” from “non-Christian.” And this question, in turn, suggests the more fundamental problem of who has the right to draw such a line, and whence that authority comes. These are precisely the questions that will occupy us in the next few pages.¹⁸¹

In the meantime, Rev. Smith offers one seemingly clear distinction between the Mormon view of Jesus and the traditional Christian view: “The Mormon Jesus was the most unforgiving of men. Rather than being a Savior, the Mormon Jesus is a slaughterer.” This latter idea he derives from the account of the New World destruction that accompanied Christ’s Palestinian crucifixion, as recorded in the early chapters of 3 Nephi in the Book of Mormon. This idea is picked up by the Decker advertisement as well: “The Book of Mormon teaches that Jesus Christ destroyed 16 major cities and killed hundreds of thousands of his ‘other sheep’ (3 Nephi 8, 9). The Jesus of the Bible gave *new life*, not death!” But is the contrast so patent? The tender portrayal of Jesus blessing the little children in 3 Nephi 17 is only one of many texts that portray the gentle nature of “the Mormon Jesus.”¹⁸² Yet even in the Bible, Jesus is not depicted as sweetness alone. What of the cleansing of the temple? And what of the cleansing of the earth that will accompany his Second Coming?¹⁸³ Furthermore, given a trinitarian understanding of the Godhead, is Jesus not rather intimately implicated in such events as the Flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? The Jesus of the Book of Mormon is in fact both judge and Savior, precisely as he appears in the Bible. And our examples need not be restricted to “sacred” history. If Jesus is God, and if God is the Sovereign of all nature—as most Christians would testify, and as Mormons would agree—then it is not immediately apparent that Jesus is unconnected with, say, murderous floods in Bangladesh, or disastrous earthquakes in Turkey, or the burial in Colombia of an entire city by volcanic lava. (These are precisely the kinds of natural destruction reported in the Book of Mormon.) Does Rev. Smith intend here to announce that events in the natural order are (a) of no concern to the Trinity, or (b) beyond the Trinity’s ability to control?

Probably the best evidence offered by Rev. Smith for his position is the illustration on the cover of his pamphlet entitled “Mormonism Has Another Jesus.” The sightless, staring eyes, the stark features, the long, coal-black hair, the thickly sensuous mouth, the lips parted in devil-may-care lassitude, the lurid red flames that leap around him, all these fairly shout out that this is indeed a different Jesus. But is he “the Mormon Jesus?” No.

Go to part 2 of “Is Mormonism Christian?”

1. Carroll (1963): 269.

2. A few examples might include Coe and Coe (1985): 188; Gruss (1980): 17–18; *The Utah Evangel* 33 (July/August 1986): 1; van Baalen (1983): 159; Whalen (1963): 173; Molland (1959): 355; Decker and Hunt (1984): 82, 246 (cf. on this Scharffs [1986]: 123–24, 353–55); Geer, “Who Is This Man . . . ?”; Martin (1955): 7, 51; Martin (1976): 3; disappointingly, Brauer (1971): 575; Spittler (1962): 11–18; Decker (1979): 23, 27–28; Decker, “To Moroni with Love”; Lanczkowski (1972): 208–13. This is to be distinguished from the (much more sophisticated) view, held by some scholars, that Mormonism is somehow post-Christian, that—as the view’s foremost contemporary exponent, Jan Shipps, would put it—Mormonism is to Christianity as Christianity is to Judaism. Such a notion is beyond the scope of this study; anyway, its adherents are able simultaneously to hold opinions on the question at issue here, which is whether or not Mormonism is Christian. Significantly, they contradict one another: Shipps (1985) affirms that it is, while Utter (1897): 13–23 (hesitantly), Molland (1959): 348, and Lanczkowski (1972) deny. (It is interesting to note that, in the English edition of Lanczkowski’s work, the section dealing with the Mormons has been altogether deleted. Did he have second thoughts about the appropriateness of including the Mormons between Mongols and Muisca religion, or was it the simple fact of the size and relative power of Latter-day Saints in English-speaking countries that daunted the publishers?).

3. *The Utah Evangel* 33 (May 1986): 3; cf. *The Utah Evangel* 31 (May 1984): 1. Mormonism is “one of the more virulent strains of American cults.” Thus Martin (1985): 173.

4. “KEYY: A Missionary Opportunity,” 5 (italics in the original), 8.

5. Salt Lake *Tribune* (26 July 1986); Salt Lake *Deseret News* (9 August 1986). Alert readers will recall the Nazi technique of the “the Big Lie.”

6. Kollek (1990): 78. See also “Leader of Anti-Mormon Group Admits He Helped Stir Jews’ Furor over Center,” Salt Lake *Tribune* (10 August 1985); “Christian Groups Join in Protest of Mormon Center,” Denver *Intermountain Jewish News* (19 August 1985). This issue resulted in bomb threats against Mormon chapels and death threats against individual members of the Church. We have unpublished documentation on file, covering further anti-Mormon efforts to sow discord in Jerusalem.

7. Irvine (1921): 128, 133.

8. Boa (1984): 64; cf. P. B. Smith (1970): 52; J. O. Sanders (1962): 111–13.

9. *The Utah Evangel* 31 (March 1984): 2.

10. *The Utah Evangel* 31 (January 1984): 12, and 31 (March 1984): 6; cf. Decker and Hunt (1984): 246 (vs. Scharffs [1986]: 353). The Book of Mormon is a “sham,” declares Martin (1955): 50, “cloaked in the finery of saintly language and masqueraded as divine revelation.” The book of Abraham, according to Decker (1979): 46, is “pure

fraud.” Mormon belief in the restoration of the priesthood, says Fraser (1977): 91, rests on “chicanery.” (Boettner [1986]: 266, no amateur in the language of religious disrespect, terms Catholic penances and indulgences “clever frauds.”) *The Utah Evangel* 33 (July/August 1986): 6, relates an anecdote to illustrate the fact that Mormon missionaries are generally liars, and suggests that their church trains them thus.

11. See Decker, “To Moroni with Love,” 46, and virtually any issue of *The Utah Evangel*. The Book of Mormon is a “rank fake” (van Baalen [1983]: 162). Mormonism is “a religion built on patent fraud” (Whalen [1963]: 173). These facts are self-evident to all but the benighted Mormons.

12. Martin (1976): 29; cf. *The Utah Evangel* 31 (December 1984): 1, 3. “Dr.” Martin was something of an authority on misrepresentation; cf. the discussion of him in Brown and Brown (1984), which gives a certain ironic tang to his accusation, in Martin (1955): 17, that the “cults” project “deceptive veneers of pseudo-scholarship.”

13. Martin (1985): 226; cf. Whalen (1963): 157. Theosophy also “masquerades,” says Martin (1955): 41. Rather similar charges are made against the Roman Catholics; cf., for example, Whealon (1986): 16–17.

14. Fraser (1977): 10.

15. *The Utah Evangel* 30 (June 1983): 1.

16. Lindsell (1987): 115.

17. Woodward (1985): 65. This is, on the whole, a disappointing article, written with Mr. Woodward’s usual incomprehension of what Mormonism is about; cf. A. L. Sanders (1986): 68.

18. See McCurry, “The Truth about Halloween.”

19. As given in the Salt Lake City *Deseret News* (29 February 1992), on the basis of a UPI story. The article does not explain, but it seems probable that the monument on the statehouse lawn contained a Catholic version of the Ten Commandments.

20. Salt Lake City *Deseret News* (21 July 1986).

21. See Breese et al. (1985); cf. Decker (1979): 26, 29; *The Utah Evangel* 33 (July/August 1986): 4; van Baalen (1983): 148, 151; Whalen (1963): 168; Martin (1955): 53, Mormons are seen as blasphemers. Mormons are out to “deceive the unwary.” *The Utah Evangel* 33 (May/June 1986): 4. According to Martin (1955): 46 (cf. 74), Mormonism “ensnares” souls. See also Decker and Hunt (1984): 157, 208, 230–31, 236–37, 252 (vs. Scharffs [1986]: 213, 270, 331, 341–42, 361–62). Compare the anti-Christian polemicists of the second and third centuries A.D., who were agreed, in the words of Gonzales (1970): 1:99–100, that “Christians approach only those who are ignorant—that is, women, children, and slaves—for they know that their ‘science’ would not resist solid refutation.” (This is precisely the charge that Decker and Hunt [1984] make against Mormonism; cf. Scharffs’s reply, Scharffs [1986]: 341.)

22. Irvine (1921): 128; cf. Fraser (1977): 8, 32. This is typical of “cultists”; cf. Martin (1955): 5, 74.

23. Martin (1976): 30. Compare J. O. Sanders (1962): 109. Yount, “Black Brother, Black Sister,” identifies one Mormon tool as “their slick publications.” The deception is, of course, deliberate—certainly on the part of Mormon

leaders; cf. Decker, "To Moroni with Love," 46. Cultists are just generally tricky devils. A favorite technique of Jehovah's Witnesses, says Martin (1955): 18, is "bluffing Christians into silence." They deal in "deliberate falsehood" (p. 32).

24. *The Utah Evangel* 33 (May 1986): 6; cf. *The Utah Evangel* 33 (July/August 1986): 6; *The Utah Evangel* 34 (May–June 1987): 6; Whalen (1963): 167. Martin (1955): 52, says that the Articles of Faith are "a clever and, I believe, a deliberate attempt to deceive the naive into believing that Mormonism is a Christian religion." Mormons have, says Rowe (1985): 28, a "heretical hidden agenda."

25. Martin (1976): 30, 20.

26. Martin (1976): 31. Decker and Hunt (1984) see Mormonism as, in the first instance, a subversive, theocratic movement. This is, of course, the view of classical American anti-Catholicism, which is well-represented by the work of Boettner (1986). Boettner's book is, however, much more competently written than is *The God Makers*.

27. Martin (1985): 213; so, too, *The Evangel* 37 (October 1990): 12; J. O. Sanders (1962): 109; van Baalen (1983): 170; Decker and Hunt (1984): 143 (vs. Scharffs [1986]: 203). Martin (1955) is generous with this accusation: Jehovah's Witnesses are "anti-Christian" (p. 18) and Charles T. Russell of Jehovah's Witnesses was "a sworn enemy of historical Christianity" (p. 24), Theosophy is "anti-Christian" (p. 44) and "anti-Biblical" (p. 39), Christian Science is "one of the most dedicated enemies of the evangelical Christian faith" (p. 58).

28. Scott (1979): passim; cf., too, Decker and Hunt (1984): 125 (vs. Scharffs [1986]: 181–82).

29. *The Evangel* 37 (November 1990): 12.

30. J. O. Sanders (1962): 111.

31. *The Utah Evangel* 31 (March 1984): 6. The charge that Mormon temple ritual mocks Christian clergy was long a favorite among anti-Mormons, sparking, for example, considerable controversy in connection with the dedicatory services for the Denver Temple; cf. Decker and Hunt (1984): 246; but see also Scharffs (1986): 353.

32. Yount, "Black Brother, Black Sister" (emphasis ours). Mr. Yount denounces "the white-racist Mormon leadership" and attempts to align himself with the civil rights movement of the 60s. However, the pamphlet's short sentences and gigantic print would seem to imply a rather different attitude toward his intended audience.

33. See *The Utah Evangel* 31 (December 1984) and 33 (April 1986); also Decker and Hunt (1984): 229, 250 (vs. Scharffs [1986]: 15, 329, 358). (Do Mormons even come *close* to fulfilling the criterion of 1 John 2:22 and 2 John 7? Usually, they are accused of viewing the advent of Christ in too-fleshly terms! See below.) Martin Luther's eminent biographer Ronald Bainton notes with great regret the tendency in the Protestant Reformation to identify the Catholic Church and its leaders with Antichrist; cf. Bainton (1950): 330.

34. In *The Utah Evangel* 31 (January 1984): 12. (Rick Branch is the only Hegelian anti-Mormon we have ever encountered.)

35. In order of citation, the references are to Martin (1955): 78, 80, 64, 18, 49–50, 55, 34, 37, 84–102, 16, 24. Loraine Boettner, whose book is described by Spittler (1962): 117, as "a veritable encyclopedia of evangelical criticism of Romanism," shows his characteristic tone when he says, on p. 253: "To Protestants the whole ex

cathedra business appears, on the one hand, as particularly monstrous and vicious, and on the other, as just a big joke—a joke perpetrated on the Roman Catholic people who are so docile and unthinking and so poorly informed as to believe in and submit to such sophistry.” We are proud that there exists no comparable literature in Mormonism.

36. In order of citation, the references are to Fraser (1977): 14, 84, 183, 175–188.

37. Spencer (1984): 138. We have tried to show in our essay “Is Mormonism a Cult?” in this volume, that the term “cult” is so vague, and has been so abused, as to be virtually useless.

38. The Decker petition denying Mormons the name “Christian” asks them to use “New World religion” as a self-designation in its place—whatever *that* may mean! For recent equations of Mormonism with Islam, see *The Utah Evangel* 31 (February 1984): 1; Molland (1959): 348; Whalen (1963): 167. The supposed “Islamic connection” was especially popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and deserves a separate study. In many cases, the accusation that Mormons are not Christian seems to reflect the accuser’s ignorance of non-Christian religions, which leads him to overstate the differences between Mormonism and traditional Christianity while undervaluing the considerable areas of commonality. To cite an example, one of the authors in writing to a leader of the southern California Ex-Mormons for Jesus about their denial of his Christianity, suggested that she talk with a Muslim if she wanted to meet a *real* non-Christian. He was immediately accused of holding a double standard: “How,” came the reply, “can you be offended when we call you non-Christian, and then turn right around and call *Muslims* non-Christian?!?” Of course, the crucial difference, recognized even by Molland (1959): 348, is that Mormons claim to be Christian, whereas Muslims do not. More on this below.

39. J. R. van Pelt, “Mormons,” in Jackson (1977): 8:18; cf. Decker and Hunt (1984): 254 (vs. Scharffs [1986]: 364). It will become apparent that Decker and Hunt (1984) seem willing to say almost anything, however inconsistent, if it will damage Mormonism. In recent years, Decker has come under attack from fellow anti-Mormons like Wally Tope and the Tanners for apparently untrue claims that he was poisoned by agents of the Latter-day Saints during a trip to Great Britain.

40. Decker and Hunt are the foremost proponents of the Hindu theory. They are also among the chief advocates of the Satanist theory—which says something about their view of non-Christian religions! (For them, Hinduism equals Satanism; cf. Decker and Hunt [1984]: 60, 137, 251; contrast Scharffs [1986]: 197; cf. Scharffs [1986]: 256.) Of course, it is always difficult to tell how serious Mr. Decker is. On purported Mormon Hinduism, see Decker and Hunt (1984): 28, 32, 60, 250–51, 254, 258 (vs. Scharffs [1986]: 10, 81–83, 101, 358–59, 364, 371). On alleged Mormon Satanism, see Decker and Hunt (1984): 71–78; 105–09; 127–31; 134–35; 138–39; 160–61; 170; 188–92; 208–10; 216, 248–49; 251 (vs. Scharffs [1986]: 31, 48, 97, 109–18; 122–23; 133; 145; 148; 155–59; 170; 172; 183–84; 187–91; 196–99; 209; 219; 228; 249–51; 271–72; 276; 296; 356; 359); cf. also the tract, “Questions for Your Temple Tour.” Compare Ed Decker’s “The Question of Freemasonry,” 7–8; *The Utah Evangel* 33 (July/August 1986): 4; Fraser (1977): 41, 74. *The Utah Evangel* 33 (May/June 1986): 2, contains a handy list of etymologies linking Mormonism with Satan-worship. A Deckerite tract entitled “Temple Marriage: Eternal Commitment or Eternal Damnation?” alleges that Mormon temple rituals are really Baal worship; cf. W. Thompson, “What We should Know qabout Roman Catholicism.” *The Prayer Bulletin* of Saints Alive in Jesus (December 1984) contains a “Prayer Map” of Utah which presupposes many of Mr. Decker’s views on this subject. (These Prayer Bulletins are an excellent—and often amusing— source for Deckerite ideology.) “It has been wisely observed,” says Martin (1955): 11, “that the field of apologetics has the depth of the oceans and the breadth of the celestial galaxies.” However, one will search in vain in his writings for any evidence of such broad sympathy and

deep erudition. In a discussion of Unity's denial of trinitarianism, for example (Martin [1955]: 75), he characterizes their position as one of "abject pantheism." To use such an adjective to describe one of the most venerable and philosophically significant of theological viewpoints speaks eloquently of Martin's provincialism.

41. Van Baalen (1983): 151, sees in Mormonism a pastiche of "Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedanism, Fetishism, Communism, Manichaeism, Campbellism, and others." Whalen (1963): 157, recognizes "paganism, Judaism, Christianity, Swedenborgianism, Spiritism, and Campbellism." (Alas for the Campbellites!) Whalen (1963): 158: "That the hodgepodge of heresies which is Mormonism can produce such results is a continual source of amazement." Indeed. Yet, as J. L. Smith admits in *The Utah Evangel* 33 (July/August 1986): 8, "this untenable, inconsistent, groundless, illusive hodgepodge of tenets . . . has enslaved millions since its inception more than 150 years ago."

42. Not all anti-Mormons accept Decker's "Satanist" theories. Jerald and Sandra Tanner (1988) sharply attack Decker and his sidekick Bill Schnoebelen on this issue, and the Tanners continue to raise serious questions about Decker's integrity. The "New Age anti-Mormonism" of Ed Decker and his associates is discussed by Peterson (1991): 231–60, in his critique of Loftes Tryk's *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*.

43. Decker, "To Moroni with Love," 47. Decker and Hunt recognize Mormonism as a spiritual movement, albeit one with demonic roots. Of course, one of their major subtheses also has it that the Latter-day Saint Church is a Satan-led political conspiracy. For a close parallel to their view of Mormonism, compare the N.I.C.E. in C. S. Lewis's novel *That Hideous Strength*.

44. The book by Wells (1985), for example, and the article by Weyland (1985), are largely of this character. On the other hand, the approach taken by Forrest, "Are Mormons Christian?" resembles our own, although on a smaller scale. Eugene England's essay, "What It Means to Be a Mormon Christian," found in England (1984): 173–90, is superb and even moving.

45. After all, as *The Utah Evangel* 31 (March 1984): 2, points out, Mormons are "wolves in sheep's clothing."

46. Decker, "To Moroni with Love," 4. Carver (1983) is a fairly effective reply to Mr. Decker's pamphlet.

47. Averill (1989): xiii.

48. 2 Nephi 25:26.

49. Averill (1989): 107. The Salt Lake City *Deseret News* for 7 August 1988 reported the case of a passenger on a Delta Air Lines flight from Atlanta to Greenville, South Carolina, who had to be subdued after he slammed a stewardess to the floor and threatened to "kill everyone who is not a born-again Christian."

50. Dunlap, "Alex Dunlap Answers Roman Catholic Priest," 2.

51. See Archer's "Translator's Preface" to the (historically worthless) Ahmanson (1984): 8; Green (1984b).

52. Swaggart (1985b): 35.

53. In order of citation, see Fraser (1977): 19, 88, 152, 87. In this position, too, Fraser has allies in Decker and Hunt (1984). With remarkable inconsistency, considering their claim that Joseph Smith was a Hindu, they describe

him on p. 159 as “a classical humanist atheist”; contrast Scharffs (1986): 372.

54. Compare Boettner (1986): 3. Rev. Boettner further denies that Catholicism is really a religion at pp. 32, 64, and 460; but see p. 450. This book went into its 25th printing in March 1986. It is an Evangelical Book Club selection, and was specially highlighted in the big California “Christian” bookstore where we bought it. Keating (1988) terms it “the ‘Bible’ of the anti-Catholic movement within fundamentalism” (p. 28), and describes Loraine Boettner as “the intellectual godfather of modern fundamentalist anti-Catholicism” (p. 291). In other words, much as we wish it were otherwise, we are not citing a fringe figure.

55. See the newsletter of The Conversion Center (May/June 1990); Chick Publications February 1990 Retail Catalog, 28.

56. Against Catholics: Zacchello (1984): 14–16, 91; Ironside (1982): 23; W. Thompson, “What We Should Know about Roman Catholicism”; Boettner (1986): 10, 11, 13, 23–24, 53, 55, 90, 256, 272, 274, 286, 292–93, 455, 459–60. Martin (1955): 45, so views Theosophy—but it is not certain that Theosophy ever aspired to be called Christian.

57. Boettner (1986): 288–89.

58. Swaggart (1985a): 41; cf. 38.

59. Keating (1988): 154; cf. 16.

60. Keating (1988): 90; cf. 93.

61. Chick Publications February 1990 Retail Catalog, 31.

62. Averill (1989): 77, xiv. On p. 52, Averill quotes evangelical Edward J. Carnell, former president of Fuller Theological Seminary, as lamenting that fundamentalism “sees the heresy in untruth but not in unloveliness.” On fundamentalist rhetoric, see pp. 46–51.

63. Martin (1955): 41. Such a proposition is itself meta-scriptural. It is nowhere to be found in the canon. The New Testament never says what is required to be a Christian, and, as we shall see, does not define the term.

64. Averill (1989): 140–41, offers examples of the varied interpretations of future prophecy offered by fundamentalists—each interpreter claiming to possess the absolute, indisputable truth.

65. Keating (1988): 102.

66. Boettner (1986): xii.

67. Zacchello (1984): vii. Emphasis his. He is (or, at least, claims to be) a former priest.

68. The passage is used, for example, by J. O. Sanders (1962): 5, and Martin (1955): title page.

69. Compare the interpretations of W. J. Dalton, “Jude,” in Fuller, Johnston, and Kearns (1975): 959a–960e; Alexander and Alexander (1977): 644; D. F. Payne, “Jude,” in Bruce (1986): 1590–92; Blair (1975): 339–42; T. W.

Leahy, "The Epistle of Jude," in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy (1968): 2:378–80.

70. See below. Mormons could plausibly argue that a better analogue for Jude's "filthy dreamers" would be their saved-by-grace-alone, no-need-of-church-or-priesthood fundamentalist Protestant critics. But no Mormons have, to our knowledge, made such an argument.

71. P. B. Smith (1970): 9–10.

72. P. B. Smith quotes all of 1 John 4:1–6. We have edited it for the sake of brevity. A glance at the original will show that the meaning has not been affected.

73. See below. Spittler (1962): 24, describes the speculations of one or two early Mormon leaders on the subject as "a blasphemous stench." (For good measure, he throws in the adjective "deceptive," as well.)

74. Sontag (1986): 113.

75. It occurs four times in the Book of Mormon.

76. The book of Acts is frequently dated to near the end of the first century (so H. Wansbrough, "Acts of the Apostles," in Fuller, Johnston, and Kearns [1975]: 822d). Dillon and Fitzmyer place it A.D. 80–85 ("Acts of the Apostles," in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy [1968]: 2:165). Trenchard, "Acts," in Bruce (1986): 1266, prefers to put its writing "before A.D. 64." J. A. T. Robinson (1977): 72, no hesitant controversialist, opts for "about 62."

77. See Dillon and Fitzmyer, "Acts of the Apostles," in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy (1968): 2:190. They dismiss as "not cogent," however, evidence for the view that "this title was first used by Roman officials, who sought to distinguish Jesus' followers from Jews"; cf. Kittel and Friedrich (1974): 9:537; Trenchard, "Acts," in Bruce (1986): 1288.

78. Trenchard, "Acts," in Bruce (1986): 1288.

79. So F. D. Gealy, "Christian," in Buttrick (1962): 1:572. Gealy reports the theory that the Christians were deliberately named after Nero's *Augustaniani* youth gang, who were active in Antioch. *Christianos*, he notes, is an odd Greek form, and probably a Latinism.

80. Bruce (1972): 232, 267–68.

81. Bauer (1957): 865; W. Grundmann, "Christos," in Kittel and Friedrich (1974): 9:536; Dillon and Fitzmyer, "Acts of the Apostles," in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy (1968): 2:190; Munch (1967): 106; Bruce (1972): 231–32, 267–68; J. P. Meier, "Part One: Antioch," in Brown and Meier (1983): 35 n. 81.

82. These translations are suggested respectively by Bruce (1972): 232, and Polkinghorne, "1 Peter," in Bruce (1986): 1561. Trenchard, "Acts," in Bruce (1986): 1288, has "Christ's men."

83. As did the congregation at Jerusalem (Acts 11:27).

84. Differing views of the mission of Jesus led to a dispute between certain Jerusalemite and Antiochene Christians on the subject of circumcision; cf. Acts 15:1; J. Munch (1967): 107; Bruce (1972): 231, 266, 282–85,

85. So, among others, J. P. Meier, “Part 1: Antioch,” in Brown and Meier (1983): 35 n. 81.

86. See J. P. Meier, “Part 1: Antioch,” in Brown and Meier (1983): 24.

87. Dunn (1977): 371–72 (emphasis in original).

88. Following the Jerusalem Bible, which reproduces well the sense of the Greek. (The NEB here is periphrastic, and too wordy.) On this “slightly humorous retort,” see H. Wansbrough, “Acts of the Apostles,” in Fuller, Johnston, and Kearns (1975): 840i; Bruce (1972): 268.; cf. Dillon and Fitzmyer, “Acts of the Apostles,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy (1968): 2:211. Trenchard, “Acts,” in Bruce (1986): 1311, rejects the King James rendering of Agrippa’s exclamation—“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian”—on “textual and exegetical grounds.” Instead he follows the translation of F. F. Bruce—“In short you are trying to make me act the Christian!”—and characterizes it as a “slightly cynical evasion.” So, too, Alexander and Alexander (1977): 568; Munch (1967): 245.

89. As elsewhere in ancient writings, it is unlikely that the speeches of Acts are verbatim transcripts. Rather, they are likely to be the compositions of “Luke.” But they probably conform quite well to the occasion and to the character of the speaker, and “reproduce an authentic picture of apostolic Christianity.” See H. Wansbrough, “Acts of the Apostles,” in Fuller, Johnston, and Kearns (1975): 822a–822c; cf. J. A. T. Robinson (1977): 100. If the report of Agrippa’s use of the term “Christian” is authentic—which cannot be demonstrated—the word was in circulation by A.D. 57–60. For chronological information on this incident, see J. A. Fitzmyer, “A Life of Paul,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy (1968): 2:221; H. H. Rowdon, “The Historical and Political Background and Chronology of the New Testament,” in Bruce (1986): 1045; “Bible Dictionary” in Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible, s.v. “Chronology”; Alexander and Alexander (1977): 467.

90. *TPJS*, 121.

91. Citing Galatians 1:9, J. O. Sanders (1962): 20 alleges that “there is no identity whatever between Paul’s Gospel and that of the Mormons. It is without doubt another gospel.” Sanders is too sure of himself. Anderson (1983) is a fine Mormon interpretation of the Apostle to the Gentiles.

92. J. A. Fitzmyer, “The First Epistle of Peter,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy (1968): 2:362–63, assigns this letter to ca. A.D. 64. W. J. Dalton, “1 Peter,” in Fuller, Johnston, and Kearns (1975): 950f, and F. J. Polkinghorne, “1 Peter,” in Bruce (1986): 1551, place its composition A.D. 62–64. J. A. T. Robinson (1977): 66–67, argues that we can date 1 Peter “with a fair degree of accuracy in the spring of 65.” Based on this approximate consensus, we have a reasonably clear *terminus ante quem*: The adjective “Christian” was being used by early A.D. 65. And perhaps, if Acts 11:26 is accurate, and if, therefore, Peter’s use of the word is later, it was in use several years before that. Tacitus’s *Annals* were written ca. A.D. 116. *Annals* 15:44 puts the term *Christianos* in the mouth of the Roman mob during Nero’s great fire. However, given ancient historiographical method, it would be reckless to assume—though it is not impossible—that Tacitus precisely reflects the linguistic usage of 19 July, A.D. 64.

93. A similar use may possibly occur in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* III, 2. Lake (1976–77) regards it as a contemporary account of that event, which took place in the mid-second century; cf. Polkinghorne’s brief discussion, “1 Peter,” in Bruce (1986): 1561, of the list of offenses given in 1 Peter 4:15. As B. Reicke observes, the list seems to designate “unlawful and not simply immoral activity”; cf. Reicke (1964): 125. To Fitzmyer, “The First

Epistle of Peter,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy (1968): 2:368, on the other hand, the term “Christian” in 1 Peter 4:16 “implies in this context a compatibility with Christ in suffering.”

94. Bruce (1972): 268.

95. *The Utah Evangel* 34 (May–June 1987): 4.

96. *The Evangel* 38 (October 1991): 4.

97. Küng (1980): 135: “eher ein Schimpfname als ein Ehrenname.”

98. Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44—*quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos appellabat*. English translations in Jackson (1969): 5:283.

99. Bruce (1972): 268. Clearly, by the time of the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan, i.e., between A.D. 97 and A.D. 109, the term “Christian” was both well-known and punishable.

100. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 10:1. English translation in Lake (1970): 2:325; cf. 12:1—2. F. D. Gealy, “Christian,” in Buttrick (1962): 1:562, agrees that it is in the second century that the term “Christian” came into “common use” among the followers of Jesus themselves.

101. Cf. Stewart (1975).

102. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans* 3:2. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:229.

103. J. P. Meier, in Brown and Meier (1983): 35, thinks so; cf. also Gonzales (1970): 1:76 (n. 56); Kittel and Friedrich (1974): 9:576.

104. In a similar situation, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* (3:2) speaks of “the nobility of the God-loving and God-fearing people of the Christians.” English translation in Lake (1970): 2:317. Aristides, a Greek Christian apologist of the early second century A.D., emphasized the Christians’ mutual love and “superior customs.” “Because of this [public-relations-style] manner of presenting Christianity, Aristides says little about the beliefs” of the Church; cf. Gonzales (1970): 1:102. A virtually identical charge is routinely made against the Mormons. The great German theologians and historians of doctrine, Albrecht Ritschl and his student Adolf von Harnack, held that ethics and morals were the essence of Christianity—not dogma.

105. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp* 7:3. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:275–76.

106. As at Ignatius’s *Epistle to the Ephesians* 1:1, *Epistle to the Trallians* 1:1, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 7:2, *Epistle to the Romans* 6:3.

107. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 10:1

108. See J. P. Meier, in Brown and Meier (1983).

109. Pliny, *Letter* 96.

110. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 11:2. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:187.

111. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 4. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:201.

112. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 6:1. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:203; cf. 2:1, 7:1, and esp. 13:2.

113. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 10:3; *Epistle to the Philadelphians* 6:1; cf. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans* 3:3. Also W. Grundmann, "Christos," in Kittel and Friedrich (1974): 9:537, 576, see the term "Christian" as having arisen with the realization that the followers of Jesus now constituted a group distinct from the Jews.

114. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians* 9:1. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:221; cf. *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 2, 5–7; cf., in the New Testament itself, 1 John 4:2–3. Docetism was a real threat in Antioch to the form of Christianity advocated by Ignatius. (See J. P. Meier, "Part One: Antioch," in Brown and Meier [1983]: 75.)

115. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians* 6:1. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:214.

116. See Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians* 5.

117. Ignatius's view of "priesthood" is not altogether unlike that of the Mormons, who do not accept the notion that priest and prophet are naturally opposed. Writes J. P. Meier, in "Part One: Antioch," in Brown and Meier (1983): 76–77: "Ignatius does not view his office as un-charismatic. Rather, in Ignatius we find a peculiar fusion of office and charism, perhaps because Ignatius has come forth from the college of prophets and teachers and still considers himself very much a man of the Spirit. . . . To sum up, then: the presiding teacher-prophet at Antioch became the one bishop, the other teachers and prophets became the college of elders."

118. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Trallians* 7:1–2. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:259.

119. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 8:1. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:219. Docetists proper tended to ignore the eucharist, presumably because they denied the incarnation; cf. *Smyrnaeans* 7:1. The word "strange" in Lake's translation of *Trallians* 6:1 renders the Greek *allogrios*. This can also mean "belonging to another," "alien," "hostile," "enemy," or, as a substantive, "other people's property"; cf. Bauer (1957): 40. There may also be a possible reference to idol offerings, as at Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Cor. 8:4.

120. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 6:1–2. English translation in Lake (1970): 1:259.

121. W. Grundmann, "Christos," in Kittel and Friedrich (1974): 9:576. We have transliterated the Greek of the original.

122. Gonzales (1970): 1:89.

123. This did not forbid the use of other titles; cf. Kittel and Friedrich (1967): 4:457.

124. In W. Grundmann, "Christos," in Kittel and Friedrich (1974): 9:536. P. Parker, "Disciple," in Buttrick (1962): 1:845, surveying the gospels and Acts, calls "disciple" "the most frequent and general term for believers in Christ."

125. K. H. Rengstorf, “Mathē^{ētēs},” in Kittel and Friedrich (1967): 4:458–59. Irenaeus (d. ca. A.D. 202), notes P. Parker, “Disciple,” in Buttrick (1962): 1:845, “used ‘disciple’ as equivalent to ‘Christian.’ ” A notable fact is that the word “disciple” [*mathē^{ētēs}*] occurs about 260 times in the Gospels and in Acts, yet is utterly absent from the rest of the New Testament; cf. P. Parker, “Disciple,” in Buttrick (1962): 1:845; K. H. Rengstorf, “Mathē^{ētēs},” in Kittel and Friedrich (1967): 4:441.

126. K. H. Rengstorf, “Mathē^{ētēs},” in Kittel and Friedrich (1967): 4:458–59.

127. This is a “classic passage” on the subject. Thus K. H. Rengstorf, “Mathē^{ētēs},” in Kittel and Friedrich (1967): 4:458.

128. B. Vawter, “The Gospel according to John,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy (1968): 2:442. Likewise R. Russell, “St. John,” in Fuller, Johnston, and Kearns (1975): 810h.

129. The New English Bible is slightly clearer here than the KJV.

130. Sontag (1986): 113.

131. Brox (1983): 149.

132. Hansen (1981): 56.

133. Dunn (1977): 1–32, 372–74.

134. Boettner (1986): 78; cf. 41.

135. Boettner (1986): 78; cf. 41.

136. Brox (1983): 146. Translation ours; cf., for example, Brox (1983): 121–22, on eucharistic debates in the early church.

137. This is implied in the distribution of signers of the Decker petition: The majority were adherents of non-denominational churches. Second best represented were, not surprisingly, the Baptists, with Lutherans coming in a distant third; cf. “Critics Ask LDS Faithful to Stop Calling Themselves Christians,” Salt Lake City *Tribune* (26 July 1986).

138. Keating (1988): 322–23.

139. Keating (1988): 26.

140. See Brox (1983): 170, 183–84, on the problematic character of conciliar authority.

141. Barker (1985): 1755.

142. *TPJS*, 121.

143. J. O. Sanders (1962): 15; cf. Boa (1984): 67. The *Forma Recepta* of this creed probably dates back to no earlier than the sixth century.

144. The English text, with bracketed explanatory glosses, is cited from Schaff (1983): 2:45. “Catholic,” of course, is used here in the sense of “universal.” The Roman Catholic Church, in the modern denominational sense, did not yet exist.

145. Molland (1959): 355.

146. See Ferm (1945): 432; Broderick (1976): 401. S. E. Robinson (1991): 126, n. 3, agrees. Of course, Mormons would want to watch carefully the phrase *ton sullep'henta ek pneumatos hagiois / qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto*, the translation of which is sometimes questionable. They are concerned to affirm the divine fatherhood of the Father.

147. J. O. Sanders (1962): 109.

148. This is reminiscent of a currently popular joke, in which Jesus is reported to have asked his disciples, “Whom do you say that I am? And Peter said unto him: Thou art very God of very God, the Ultimate Ground of our being.” And Jesus said unto him, “What?”

149. Hatch (1970): 1. Mormons, adherents of an essentially creedless Church, access to whose temples depends upon ethical worthiness far more than upon doctrinal purity, would tend to see the change as merely further evidence of the Great Apostasy.

150. Brox (1983): 179.

151. Martin (1955): 28.

152. Explicitly, in our sampling, by Brandon (1970): 97; Russell (1968): 91; Bruce (1979): 302–4, 321–22, 325; Johnson (1983): 128; implicitly by Kraft (1966): 54–57, and by Cross and Livingstone (1983): 83, where it is opposed not to “Christianity” but to “orthodoxy” and (small “c”) “catholicism.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* makes no denial.

153. Molland (1959): 356–57.

154. Molland (1959): 360.

155. Molland (1959): 360.

156. Cross and Livingstone (1983): 962; Peters (1973): 153; Brandon (1970): 468. Several of the specimen sentences given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* call Nestorianism “Christian.”

157. As by Brox (1983): 161–62. One of the most passionate of Nestorius’ defenders was Friedrich Loofs.

158. Farah (1970): 20, speaks of “Christian Abyssinia,” while on p. 30 he implicitly so labels the Jacobites. Speaking specifically of the Ethiopians and the Arab Ghassanids, Peters (1973) explicitly calls Monophysites “Christians” at least a score of times. Monophysitism is implicitly identified as Christian by Cross and Livingstone (1983): 932; Brandon (1970): 450. Similar references—these have been found largely at random—could be multiplied indefinitely.

159. Peters (1973): 25.

160. Brox (1983): 186.

161. Brox (1983): 186 (translation ours).

162. Implicitly by Kraft (1966): 485; Brauer (1971): 814–15; explicitly by Moyer (1982): 396–97. These examples have been chosen at random.

163. On the Montanists, see Johnson (1983): 71. They are implicitly identified as Christians by Johnson (1983): 85–86; Cross and Livingstone (1983): 934. The label is explicitly given to them by Ferm (1945): 505, and by the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

164. Johnson (1983): 50.

165. Ferm (1945): 233; Johnson (1983): 83–85; Manschreck (1985): 59; implicitly, Treadgold (1979): 71.

166. Layton (1987): xi. Examples of similar phrasing include T. W. Leahy, “The Epistle of Jude,” in Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy (1968): 2:378–79; J. M. Robinson (1978): 4; Jonas (1963): 124; Rudolph (1983): 118; Pagels (1981): xxxvii; Meyer (1986): xvii; Cross and Livingstone (1983): 573–74; P. Perkins, “Gnosticism,” in Ferguson (1990): 373; Pétremont (1990): 4–5. Frend (1981): 73, identifies Cerinthus as a “Judeo-Christian Gnostic.” The astute reader will recognize that this list reads like a partial “Who’s Who” of authorities on gnosticism; cf. Cross and Livingstone (1983): 1423, who clearly imply Valentinian gnosticism to be Christian, and Johnson (1983): 45, who explicitly says that the Valentinians were “quite inside Christianity.” Manschreck (1985): 30, identifies both Valentinus and Basilides as Christians, as does the late and much lamented Couliano (1992): 30, 103, who also adds Isidorus as a “Christian gnostic.” If Brox (1983): 139, really denies the Christianity of the gnostics—his remarks are ambiguous—he is distinctly in the minority.

167. Dunn (1977): 275–305.

168. As by Manschreck (1985): 31. Johnson (1983): 46–48, implicitly so recognizes Marcion, as does H. F. Stander, “Marcion,” in Ferguson (1990): 568–69. Positive statements of Marcion’s Christianity are rather rare because, as in the cases of other “heretics,” the question simply does not arise for the vast majority of historians and scholars. As will be seen below, we ourselves are quite willing to grant the title of “Christian” to the Marcionites, despite our deep disagreement with them.

169. See Brox (1983): 160. A classic book on the subject bears the title, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*.

170. Johnson (1983): 45, 89, implicitly identifies them as Christians. The *Oxford English Dictionary* nowhere denies this.

171. S. E. Robinson (1991): 35, 38.

172. J. L. Smith, “Mormonism Has Another Jesus.” Cf. Fraser (1977): 61; Decker and Hunt (1984): 11 (vs. Scharffs [1986]: 71–72, 277–78). The official cited is the late Elder Bernard P. Brockbank, in a conference address carried by the *Ensign* (May 1977): 26. 2 Corinthians 11:3–4 is a favorite among anti-Mormons; cf. “What the Mormons Think of Christ REALLY . . .,” and Tope, “Can the Mormon Jesus Save You?”

173. One of the authors, for example, considers his participation in an interdenominational choir in Cairo among the highlights of his spiritual life. The choir sang Schubert's "Mass in G," which remains—especially the "Credo"—for him one of the most religiously moving pieces of music he knows. Handel's "Messiah" is beloved among the Latter-day Saints not only for its music, but because they believe every word of it.

174. A survey of the commentators and authorities cited by such Latter-day Saint writers as James E. Talmage and Bruce R. McConkie will easily bear this out.

175. See Brennan (1961): 210, 208, for the definition and the illustration. (Coincidentally, the very same logical fallacy, involving exactly the same phrase, is also committed by the character Helena, in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act II, Scene I.)

176. Vroom (1990): 73–90, argues in much the same direction.

177. Manschreck (1985): 1.

178. Dunn (1977): 203–31.

179. Quotations from "Which Will You Believe," and Ciampa, "Catholic or Christian?" respectively.

180. Chick Publications February 1990 Retail Catalog, 8.

181. Drawing on specific issues raised in Rev. J. L. Smith's pamphlet, "Mormonism Has Another Jesus," as well as other anti-Mormon literature.

182. And the marvelous seventh chapter of Moses, in the Pearl of Great Price, extends the emotions of sorrow and compassion even to the Father—something that "high" Christian theology, e.g., that of the medieval scholastics, is extremely reluctant if not altogether unwilling to do.

183. Averill (1989): 153–55, argues that the apocalyptic depictions so deliciously savored by many fundamentalists, with their details of the horrible sufferings that will afflict the wicked in the last days, "traduce the character of the God whom we come to know in Jesus as the Christ." He might accurately have said that the fundamentalists have "another Jesus."