



The Quarterly JOURNAL

The Newsletter Publication of Personal Freedom Outreach

VOL. 17, NO. 4

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1997

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Still Wide the Divide

A Critical Analysis of a Mormon and an Evangelical in Dialogue

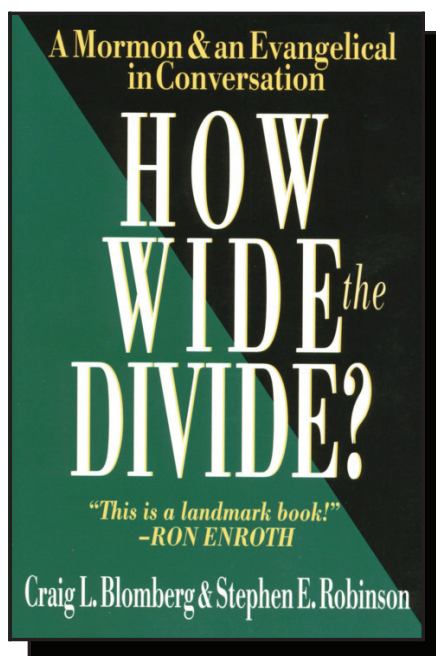
by Stephen F. Cannon

During the past two decades The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has gained great success in its portrayal as just another "Christian church down the street." The emphasis on terms such as "Mormons" and "Latter-day Saints" is being lessened, while the "Jesus Christ" within the sect's name is stressed. Modern television campaigns are even including the opportunity to call a toll-free number to receive a free Bible (rather than a *Book of Mormon*) from the church. The barriers that once separated this group from Orthodoxy have steadily eroded.

Can We Talk?

I think most of us would agree that when two groups of people have discord over virtually any subject, meaningful dialogue will go far to bring resolution to the disagreement.

"Let's sit down and talk about it and maybe we will find out that we're not as far apart on the issues as we thought. ... Let's dialogue ...



talk it through ... define our terms ... come to a meeting of the minds."

These are but a few of the many current popular phrases that are invoked.

And surprisingly it very often works. When we take time to communicate clearly, disputes seem to be resolved with greater dispatch. And even when differences still remain, civilized dialogue make us feel better about ourselves and those with whom we disagree.

"We've cleared up some misunderstandings ... gotten beyond the rhetoric ... clarified some silly semantics ... and even though we still disagree on some issues, we're not as far apart as we thought."

Because of this, when Evangelical publishing house InterVarsity Press produces a book of conversation between an Evangelical (Dr. Craig L. Blomberg, Professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary) and a Mormon (Dr. Stephen E. Robinson, Professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University), hopes are raised that meaningful dialogue is contained therein.

While there certainly is meaningful and sometimes surprisingly candid dialogue between the conversationalists in this book, there are some over-arching questions that must be answered before

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we can rub our hands with relish and say with conviction "Now, we're getting somewhere!"

Who Has Authority to Speak for Whom?

This question is of most importance because from the Latter-day Saint (LDS) perspective you have a church that is organized along strict hierarchical lines with clear levels of authority from the top down. As we will see, there are fixed channels of communication within the LDS church and these can be used to render all voices that dissent from standard church doctrine null and void.

I include here a slight modification of a section, from a previous PFO *Journal* article¹ that I wrote in 1994:

The LDS church is an hierarchical, top-down authoritarian organization. At the apex of this structure is the Prophet, Seer and Revelator (PSR) of the church. Together with his two counselors, the First Presidency is formed. Then, in descending order, comes the Council of the Twelve, the Patriarch to the Church, Assistants to the Twelve, First Council of the Seventy and the Presiding Bishopric. These offices make up the General Authorities of the LDS church.²

Any of these General Authorities wields great power, but it is to the Prophet, the President of the church in whom all earthly power and the keys of the heavens are given. The late Mormon Apostle Bruce McConkie wrote:

"The President of the Church is the mouthpiece of God on earth. Thus saith the Lord: *'Thou shalt give heed unto all his words and commandments which he shall give unto you as he receiveth them, walking in all holiness before me; For his word ye shall receive, as if from mine own mouth, in all patience and faith.'* (D.&C. 21:4-5.)"³

This is not Mormon tradition. This is Mormon doctrine. It has been true from the beginning of the church. The quote from *Doctrine and Covenants* 21 above is supposedly a revelation given to Joseph Smith by God. The investiture of authority is absolute.

In an address given in Salt Lake City on Nov. 8, 1857, then Counselor to the First President, Heber C. Kimball stated:

"In regard to our situation and circumstances in these valleys, brethren, Wake Up! WAKE UP, YE ELDERS OF ISRAEL, and live to God and none else; *and learn to do as you are told*, both old and young; learn to do as you are told for the future. ... Brother Brigham (Young) is my leader: he is my Prophet, my Seer, my Revelator; *and whatever he says, that is for me to do; and it is not for me to question him one word*, nor to question God a minute."⁴

As time progressed, and the Mormon church evolved, the absolute authorities became more important. Many of the embarrassing and more bizarre doctrines were discarded in favor of ones that would stand up to public scrutiny. For example, the doctrine of plural marriage (polygamy), the doctrine of personal blood atonement, and certain Masonic-cult temple rituals, while not totally repudiated, have at least been publicly minimized.

Problematic to church leaders was how to take doctrines that were held in the past to be essential to salvation, and remove them to the status of relative unimportance. This problem was exacerbated by a vivid paper trail of supposed revelations by past Prophets and Scriptures unique to the Mormon church. Critics of the church (both internal and external) became more vocal and began actively publishing evidence found along this paper trail. The church decided that something must be done.

As shown above, the Prophet, Seer and Revelator has absolute authority in the LDS church. But what about when a present Prophet contradicts a former one? The stock Mormon answer used to be that this wouldn't happen. However, when the paper trail showed irrefutable contradictory revelations, the stock answer went away. There had to be a way to deal with this thorny problem. Enter Ezra T. Benson.

On Feb. 26, 1980, then Apostle Benson gave an address in the Brigham Young University Devotional Assembly. In this assembly he gave the students "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following

the Prophets." In this revealing address Elder Benson broadened the parameters for dissension behind the "Deseret Veil."

Space does not permit examining all 14 points, but we must look at some of the more important ones. I cite the points and summary as reported by a local Mormon newspaper, *The Phoenix Voice*, dated May 12, 1980.

"1. The Prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything. The *Doctrine and Covenants* states, 'We are to give heed unto all his words as if from the Lord's own mouth.'"

"2. The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works.⁵ In a meeting in Kirtland [Ohio], Joseph Smith said the standard works are the word of God. Then he had Brother Brigham to give his views on the living oracles and the written word. He [Brigham Young] said, 'When compared with the living oracles, those books are nothing to me; I would rather have the living oracles than all the writings in those books.' Joseph Smith told the congregation that 'Brother Brigham has told you the word of the Lord and the truth.'"

The implications of the last point are obvious. If the prophet and the Scriptures disagree, then the prophet, the living prophet, takes precedence. There will be no conflict.

"3. The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet. The living prophet has the power of TNT [*Today's News Today*]. The most important reading we can do is words of the prophet contained each week in the *Church News* or the *Church magazines*."

"5. The prophet is not required to have any particular earthly training or credentials to *speak on any subject or act on any matter at any time*. Sometimes there are those who feel their earthly knowledge on a certain subject is superior to the heavenly knowledge which God gives on a subject. ... We encourage earthly knowledge in many areas, but remember — if there is ever a conflict between earthly knowledge and the words of

the prophet, you stand with the prophet and you'll be blessed, and time will vindicate you" (emphasis added).

When you link the fifth fundamental with the ninth, you will see that the prophet has been invested with absolute power, not on just religious matters, but on any matter!

The eighth fundamental just sets the stage:

"The prophet is not limited by men's reasoning. There will be times when you will have to choose between the revelations of God and the reasoning of men — between the *politician* or *professor*" (emphasis added).

"9. The prophet can receive revelation on any matter — temporal or spiritual. In a meeting in Kirtland, Joseph Smith asked the elders to draw a line of demarcation between the spiritual and temporal so he could understand it. No one could do it. Then he said '...temporal and spiritual things are inseparably connected and ever will be' (emphasis added).

And then comes the clincher:

"10. The prophet may be involved in civic matters. When people are righteous, they want the best to lead them in government. Great leaders in the Book of Mormon and in church history have been involved deeply in political matters. Those who would remove prophets from politics would take God out of government."

Then the rope that ties it all together:

"14. The prophet and the president — the living prophet and the first presidency — follow them and be blessed; reject them and suffer."

Now we have an absolute leader endowed from the Creator to be the only man on Earth to speak for Him on any matter, who cannot be disagreed with on any basis. He cannot be approached on the basis of reason because he is above the reason of man. He cannot be approached on the basis of scripture or pronouncements of past prophets, because he is "more dear" than any of those. This prophet has the

power to regulate not only the doctrine of his church, but can control any facet of the life of any individual in the church no matter how detailed, upon pain of excommunication.

Read these chilling words from the LDS magazine, *The Improvement Era*, under the section entitled "Ward Teachers' Message for June, 1945":

"It should be remembered that Lucifer has a very cunning way of convincing unsuspecting souls that the General Authorities of the Church are as likely to be wrong as they are to be right. This sort of game is Satan's favorite pastime, and he has practiced it on believing souls since Adam. He wins a great victory when he can get members of the Church to speak against their leaders and to 'do their own thinking.'"

"He specializes in suggesting that our leaders are in error while he plays the blinding rays of apostasy in the eyes of those whom he thus beguiles. What cunning! And to think that some of our members are deceived by this trickery."

"When our leaders speak, *the thinking has been done*. When they propose a plan, it is God's plan. When they point the way, there is no other which is safe. When they give direction, *it should mark the end of controversy*. God works in no other way. To think otherwise, without immediate repentance, may cost one his faith, may destroy his testimony, and leave him a stranger to the kingdom of God" (emphasis added).

This type of magisterium puts a severe crimp in meaningful dialogue on a broad level. Now we are forced back to the original question as it relates to our analysis. By whose authority does Robinson speak? Does he have the blessing of the LDS magisterium (LDS/MGS)? Is he speaking for and in agreement with the Prophet, Seer and Revelator?

Robinson answers this question himself:

"Indeed, *my part of this book represents only the views of one Latter-day Saint*, though I hope a

credible one. *I do not speak in this volume for the LDS Church, only for myself*, but I think I qualify as the world's authority on what I believe, and I consider myself a reasonably devout and well-informed Latter-day Saint."⁶

Blomberg corroborates these sentiments:

"We each speak officially for no one other than ourselves, but unofficially we reflect a fair cross section of the religious traditions we represent."⁷

While it is true that Robinson is the best authority on what he personally believes, the question of whether what he personally believes is in line with what the LDS magisterium pronounces is not answered in this volume. This is the most important question. For as the Prophet, Seer and Revelator goes, so goes the church. The problem is that we don't know what the General Authorities in general, and the Prophet, Seer and Revelator in particular think about the views of Robinson and other progressive Mormons.⁸

The problem is compounded by the way Robinson's dialogue shifts from the specific, "I do not speak in this volume for the LDS Church, only for myself,"⁹ to the general, "Latter-day Saints do not, in fact, seek to be accepted as historically 'orthodox' Christians or as Evangelicals."¹⁰

Then consider these statements: "Mormons would agree with Evangelicals that new Scriptures must and do agree with older Scripture"¹¹ and "Mormons think of themselves — or at least should — as being one hundred-watt bulbs and other denominations as being, say, forty-, sixty-, eighty-watt bulbs."¹² If Robinson, as he claims, is speaking only for himself, shouldn't he be using personal pronouns "I" and "me"?

Admittedly, Blomberg sometimes falls into this erroneous generalization. He too makes the point that he is speaking for himself and ends up speaking for Evangelicals, but outside of a few instances he mostly uses qualifiers like "most Evangelicals,"¹³ "some Evangelicals,"¹⁴ and "few Evangelicals."¹⁵ However, to be precise, he too should have avoided the generalizations that make it

appear he is speaking for a larger group than he is. One would think that trained academics would be more precise in their language.

Bottom line, what you have in this volume of dialogue is a private conversation (made public) between an Evangelical, and a progressive Mormon, expressing what *they* personally believe and offering opinions of what they think others in their respective religious traditions believe. While they are most certainly correct in stating what *they* personally believe (who else can?), their opinions of what others believe are not necessarily correct. This especially holds true of their overgeneralized vilification of counter-cult researchers.

Those Narrow-Minded Fundamentalist Bigots!

Both professors set out, in the preface, to neutralize those who would probably be the most vocal critics of their work: Christian apologists and ex-members. Unfortunately, they do so with unwarranted and unjustified *ad hominem* attacks. They commit the same error of overgeneralization that they accuse critics of having. While this is to be expected from Robinson, it is somewhat surprising coming from a fellow Evangelical. Robinson states:

“Though unfortunate, it would be fair to say that the average Latter-day Saint honestly believes the average Evangelical to be mean-spirited and dishonest — mean-spirited because, as Prof. Blomberg has pointed out, we tend to identify *all* Evangelicals with the fundamentalist anti-Mormons who incessantly attack us, and dishonest because these so-called anticultists *always* insist the LDS believe things we do *not* in fact believe. Since the Evangelicals of *our* experience — Professor Blomberg calls them fundamentalists — usually attack us and usually tell whoppers about us when they do (i.e., are mean-spirited and dishonest), we naturally assume that all Evangelicals think and behave the same way.”¹⁶

Robinson continues:

“In fact, most Evangelicals *do* at least passively accept and even actively disseminate the picture of Latter-day Saints created by rabid

anti-Mormons, and so they share some responsibility for the continuation of these impressions. It was always a mystery to me as a Latter-day Saint how the Evangelicals who so consistently misrepresent my beliefs could be so right and so admirable in many other ways. Perhaps if mainstream Evangelicals could distance themselves a little from the repugnant literature of ‘extreme fundamentalists,’ as Prof. Blomberg calls them, Mormons could in turn do a better job of distinguishing between *mainstream* Evangelicals and fundamentalists.”¹⁷

Just like Robinson, I am a little sensitive about people telling me what I do and do not believe, even when they know me — which he most assuredly does not. This is true of the apologists that I have come to know in almost 25 years in the field, of which there are not a few. I am the one who is the most competent to state my beliefs, and the only one capable of rendering a judgment on my motives. While I cannot prove the motives and beliefs of my colleagues, I can and do test their accuracy and honesty.

Regrettably, there are some Evangelical researchers who criticize the LDS church (and others) inaccurately. They have a tendency to overgeneralize and sensationalize. It has always been my policy to publicly expose and disagree when this happens. I have found this to be generally the case with all reputable research groups. To paint all critical LDS research groups — be they non- or ex-Mormon — with the broad brush of “mean-spirited, dishonest, rabid, anti-Mormon fundamentalists” is to do exactly the same thing that Robinson accuses us of doing.

I think there is a larger agenda here. By isolating and dismissing non- and ex-Mormon researchers as dishonest, mean-spirited and extremist, and by calling those whom he disagrees with within his own church as “ill-informed”;¹⁸ Robinson hopes to eliminate from the debate those best positioned to expose Mormonism’s more embarrassing beliefs which he wishes to discount. It is obvious that he wishes to set the boundaries for dialogue.

Even the term “anti-Mormon” is a misnomer. A Mormon is a person that embraces the theology of the LDS church. Mormonism is the designation for that theology. I and those whom I work with are in no way anti- (against) Mormons (individuals). I do embrace the term anti- (against) Mormonism (LDS theology). I have several friends and associates who are LDS. They are aware of my stance on “Mormonism,” but also know that I have nothing but the highest respect and love for them as persons. It is because of my respect for the Mormon people and my fascination with their history that I have devoted hundreds (maybe even thousands) of hours of primary research into Mormonism. My motive is simple and can be summed up in one word: evangelization. It has been my experience that these are the motives of most of the counter-cult ministries.

A few words, if I may, about honestly expressing beliefs. Robinson accuses the anti-Mormon fundamentalists of telling “whoppers” about them. He accuses Evangelicals of having a distorted stereotype of LDS and that, “It has become *their* orthodoxy that Mormons believe X, Y, and Z, even though the Latter-day Saints emphatically deny it.”¹⁹

Part of the activity that leads to the above charge is the propensity of LDS leaders to deny past doctrines of the church which have been changed, or present doctrines that they wish to keep out of the public eye for some reason. A recent interview with the living Prophet, Seer and Revelator, Gordon B. Hinckley, will demonstrate my allegation.

In an interview with President Hinckley published on April 13, 1997, *San Francisco Chronicle* religion writer Don Lattin asked, “Don’t Mormons believe that God was once a man?”

President Hinckley responded:

“I wouldn’t say that. There was a little couplet coined. ‘As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.’ Now that’s more of a couplet than anything else. That gets into some pretty deep theology that we don’t know very much about.”

Just a few months later, Hinckley used the same subterfuge with *Time*

magazine. *Time* writer David Van Biema reported:

“On whether his church still holds that God the Father was once a man, he sounded uncertain, ‘I don’t know that we teach it. I don’t know that we emphasize it ... I understand the philosophical background behind it, but I don’t know a lot about it, and I don’t think others know a lot about it.’”²⁰

If this was coming from some average LDS member, one could appreciate that he might be theologically challenged, and so not aware of the deeper theological truth. But Mr. Hinckley is supposed to be quite literally the mouthpiece of God on Earth! That is the mission of a Prophet. He is the one who is qualified to speak doctrine directly by inspiration of God!

“We are not dependent only upon the revelations given in the past as contained in our standard works—as wonderful as they are. ... We have a mouthpiece to whom God does and is revealing his mind and will. God will never permit him to lead us astray. As has been said, God would remove us out of our place if we should attempt to do it. You have no concern. Let the management and government of God, then, be with the Lord. Do not try to find fault with the management and affairs that pertain to him alone and by revelation through his prophet — his living prophet, his seer, and his revelator.”²¹

Hinckley’s reply is remarkable. When asked a point blank question about a doctrine of God, he gave an evasive, but still negative answer, and then tried to relegate the subject to “pretty deep theology that we don’t know very much about.” However, the Prophet, Seer and Revelator that God supposedly chose to restore the true church to the Earth, Joseph Smith Jr., proclaimed:

“God himself was once as we are now, and *is an exalted man*, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see. These are incom-

prehensible ideas to some, *but they are simple. It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God*, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, *and that he was once a man like us.*”²²

Who am I to believe? Hinckley contends that he wouldn’t say that God was once a man, Joseph Smith said that He was. Hinckley says that it is pretty deep theology. Smith said it was a simple idea. Hinckley says that Mormons don’t know very much about the doctrine. Smith said that the doctrine is the first principle of the Gospel.

If Hinckley personally does not know much about this doctrine, why wouldn’t he go to God for clarification? Don’t you think that God would want his children to know the “first principle of the Gospel”? As God’s mouthpiece on Earth, wouldn’t doctrinal clarification come from Hinckley?

The problem of General Authorities honestly discussing church doctrine is not new. It can be traced back to the first Prophet, Seer and Revelator Joseph Smith. Conflicts between what the LDS church has taught previously and privately have often been at odds with what is taught presently and openly.

For example, there is evidence that as early as 1831 Joseph Smith privately taught the doctrine of the plurality of wives:

“Joseph Smith learned of the principle of plural marriage as early as July 1831, near Independence, on the border of Missouri and what later became Kansas.”²³

It is a historical fact that Joseph took plural wives long before the revelation was ever written in 1843:

“Moreover, available evidence attests that the Prophet began to take additional wives by 1836, in Kirtland, Ohio. Although plural marriage did not become a law of the Church until its public announcement in 1852, Joseph Smith, and later Brigham Young, did instruct a select number of faithful Mormon brethren to take additional wives before that date.”²⁴

So, privately he was practicing the doctrine, while publicly he was repudi-

ating it:

“What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one. I am the same man, and as innocent as I was 14 years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers.”²⁵

When critics of the church (both internally and externally) accused Joseph of preaching one thing but practicing another, he responded with the accusation that they were telling whoppers about what the church believed.

Yet, not long after the above statement was issued, the LDS/MGS went public with the doctrine and suddenly it was the will of God.

Quite confusingly, while the concept of the doctrine of plural marriage is still the will of God (Section 132 is *still* in the *Doctrine and Covenants*), the *practice* has been suspended. Although a Mormon caught practicing polygamy will be excommunicated from the church, it is still technically a doctrine of that church. Yet, if an Evangelical writer were to pen the words “Mormons believe in polygamy,” (although imprecise, still a true statement) LDS apologists would decry the statement, say they don’t practice it anymore, and vilify the Evangelical for telling “whoppers” on the church!

These examples speak directly to the issue of LDS critics supposedly telling Robinson and other LDS what they believe and earning the charge of “telling whoppers” about LDS doctrine. The good professor admits that Mormon theology is a moving target: “Pure LDS orthodoxy can be a moving target, depending on which Mormon one talks to.”²⁶

The reason for this is, because of progressive revelation, the theology of the LDS church is constantly changing. What was once a law of God, and determined how one earned eternal progression, can change diametrically with the next living prophet. When researchers follow the paper trail I mentioned above and point out the old doctrines that the Professor and other progressive Mormons find embarrassing and don’t want to deal with, then we are accused of telling lies about what

Mormons believe. It is the old debating tool of attacking the messenger and belittling the source.

It makes no difference that Robinson does not want to discuss the issue, the clear fact is that the most compelling question facing Evangelicals and Mormons is that of the authority of the LDS/MGS. Any faction or belief within the LDS church exists at the suffrage of the current Prophet, Seer and Revelator. As the prophet goes, so goes the church!

Individual Evangelicals and Mormons (be they average lay-people, or college professors) can dialogue until they are blue in the face, but nothing is really settled until the Prophet speaks "ex cathedra" on the issue! Unfortunately, even then the issue is not fully resolved, for the next Prophet, Seer and Revelator can (and has) changed what the previous one has pronounced. While this deals a serious blow to the line of prophetic succession, in their zeal to follow the present living Prophet, Robinson and others wish also to sweep this embarrassing issue aside.

An example is necessary: On page 68 the professor tells us how previous Prophet, Seer and Revelator Ezra T. Benson would like to have the modern church defined:

"The only change precipitated by President Benson is that Mormonism now seeks to define itself in terms of its own canonized Scriptures rather than the sometimes polemical or speculative sermons of the nineteenth century or the popular theology of the twentieth century."

While our conversationalist would certainly like for this to be true. It puts him in the classic position of "doublethink."²⁷ For purposes of clarity I will use the designation Dr. A and Dr. B to refer to the two sides of Dr. Robinson.

On the one hand Dr. A wants to have only the standard works of the church define LDS doctrine. He strongly states:

"Nevertheless, the parameters of LDS doctrine are clear — Scripture is normative; sermons are not. Almost anything outside the Standard Works is also outside those parameters."²⁸

He then, in an endnote, equivocates this statement and introduces Dr. B by saying:

"The exceptions being official statements of the First Presidency and/or the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles."²⁹

Which is it? You can't have it both ways. But, that is exactly what Dr. Robinson wants. He wants to retain Brigham Young as a prophet, (so he can keep the LDS apostolic succession) yet dismiss Brigham's prophetic utterances given in his sermons. Dr. A muses:

"Thus, much of the sermons and other homiletic material from the late nineteenth century recorded in the *Journal of Discourses* (which is not part of the LDS canon) has a distinctly different historical context and therefore a distinctly different flavor than the LDS Scriptures themselves or similar homiletic material from the late twentieth century."³⁰

Yet Dr. B tells us:

"For Latter-day Saints, the church's guarantee of doctrinal correctness lies primarily in the living prophet, and only secondarily in the preservation of the written text [i.e., standard works]."³¹

Moreover, Dr. B adds:

"Just as the apostle or prophet is necessary to receive what becomes the written word of God in the first place, he is necessary to authoritatively interpret it in the second. ... God is constant — we are not. As long as 'holy men of God' (apostles and prophets) remain in the church to interpret and apply the written revelations that they and their predecessors have received to changing times and cultures, there is a presumption of doctrinal continuity and correctness."³²

Yet Dr. A counters with:

"Never mind the *Journal of Discourses*; return to the Scriptures; stick to the Standard Works."³³

And maintains:

"Finally, it irritates the LDS that some Evangelicals keep trying to add the *Journal of Discourses* or other examples of LDS homiletics to the canon of LDS Scripture. The

Journal of Discourses is not part of the LDS canon; it is a collection of nineteenth-century talks and sermons. It is often a valuable resource, but it does not have normative force in declaring LDS doctrine. Most of the anti-Mormon rhetoric coming from Evangelical circles focuses on the *Journal of Discourses* rather [than] on our Scriptures — on what one or another nineteenth-century Mormon may have believed instead of what all twentieth-century Mormons must believe."³⁴

The *Journal of Discourses* is a 26-volume set of books that records discourses of Prophet, Seer and Revelators and Apostles from the nineteenth century. Most of the discourses contained therein are in sermon form. These sermons contain prophetic utterances from Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and others. In them are recorded doctrines of God supposedly given by revelation to His mouthpieces on Earth. While some of the sermons are opinions and advice given in a 19th-century context, much of what is written has the weight of "thus saith the Lord" to purported living prophets. Brigham stated:

"I have never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture. Let me have the privilege of correcting a sermon, and it as good Scripture as they deserve. The people have the oracles of God continually."³⁵

At the time that Brigham uttered these words he was the living prophet. The statements he made are either true or false. If true, they carry the weight of Scripture; if false, then Brigham was not a true prophet. No amount of semantic subterfuge on the part of the present Prophet, Seer and Revelator or Robinson can make Young both true and false at the same time. This brings us back question of who has the authority?

I cannot stress this question strongly enough. With one stroke of the Prophet, Seer and Revelator's pen, Robinson, and all those who believe like him, can be excommunicated from the LDS church! There is ample historical proof of ecclesiastical purges within the LDS church.³⁶ The good professor is sadly mistaken if he thinks that his

priesthood and livelihood does not exist at the pleasure of the LDS/MGS. One conversation with his recently terminated Brigham Young University colleague, Steven Epperson, would show him how it works.³⁷

An Evangelical Responds

As distasteful as Robinson's comments are, even more distressing are Blomberg's:

"Most Evangelicals gain their information about the Mormon Church, more properly known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), from three sources: (1) anticult literature, written by fellow Evangelicals in an often polemical spirit, (2) doorstep conversations, as members of the two groups share their faith house to house using a standardized and extremely simplified presentation of their beliefs, and (3) information from ex-Mormons who have left the Church because they are bitter about how it treated them."³⁸

Blomberg continues his analysis:

"None of these sources provides thorough, balanced knowledge of the LDS. Yet every religion should be allowed to speak for itself. Evangelical writers, however well-intentioned, are not likely to know nearly as much about Mormonism as LDS writers, unless they have lived and ministered for years in predominately Mormon parts of the country."³⁹

Wow! Blomberg is the first theologian I have run across that has had the time and opportunity to peruse every piece of "anticult literature," examine all "ex-Mormon information," and take part in every "doorstep conversation" to the extent that he knows "none" of them "provides thorough, balanced knowledge of the LDS."

One wonders if Blomberg has never met a former member of the LDS church (and they are legion) that have left because they came to the realization that the gospel of Mormonism is, in fact, not the true Gospel, or that the anthropomorphic god of Mormonism is, in fact, not the true God of the Bible. I know many, and much of their research is quite outstanding.

One also wonders if Blomberg includes his colleague Dr. Gordon R. Lewis' chapter on Mormonism in his 1966 book, *Confronting the Cults* in the ranks of the unbalanced and not thorough?⁴⁰

It seems that the Denver professor has bought into the progressive Mormon way of thinking that those who research and write about the less attractive side of LDS church are to be relegated to the scrap heap of fundamentalist bigotry.

Of course "every religion should be allowed to speak for itself." Yes, this includes the LDS religion. And when it speaks, it behooves all of us to evaluate the content of that speech. But, how can we make meaningful evaluation if those who commit themselves to long hours of research to give us the tools of evaluation are excoriated as extremists and dismissed as dishonest.

If the LDS/MGS hadn't, through the years, engaged in publicly denying what has been privately believed and then trying to rewrite history to cover it all up, there wouldn't be the need to evaluate closely every word that proceeds from LDS church headquarters.

Blomberg further asserts:

"But for our conversations to be fruitful and honoring to God, we must stop misrepresenting or caricaturing each other, always speaking the truth to each other in love."⁴¹

The operative phrase in this quote is "speak the truth in love." This does not mean that we sweep aside embarrassing or hard parts of the truth so we can appear loving. True love deals with the truth — the good, the bad, and the embarrassing.

It is indeed unfortunate that in his desire to find a middle ground in his conversation with Robinson, Blomberg has agreed to "silence by innuendo," the ex- and non-Mormons who speak the truth, lovingly but honestly, about Mormonism. It is also sad that apparently, for the same reason, he has followed Robinson's lead in dismissing statements made by past Prophet, Seer and Revelators that cannot practically be dismissed.

On page 109, Blomberg writes, "Robinson insists that the Adam-God theory,

as proposed by the various interpreters of Brigham Young, makes no sense and was never officially endorsed." He apparently accepts this as truth. Yet Young, speaking of the Adam-God doctrine said, "Now, let all who may hear these doctrines, pause before they make light of them, or treat them with indifference, for they will prove their salvation or damnation."⁴² Not official? You be the judge.

As long as the authority issue (as it pertains to present and past prophets) remains, then the doctrinal discussion engaged in by our two professors loses much of its significance. Any conclusion drawn about Mormonism can be negated or even reversed by President Hinckley or his successors, and Robinson would have to follow or face excommunication. Then the joint doctrinal conclusions of the two conversationalists would have to be redone.

What About the Divide?

In two words: *still wide*.

Make no mistake. There is still a need for meaningful dialogue. But the discussion must begin at the proper place and proceed in a logical fashion, with the ultimate goal to be the truth, no matter who is embarrassed or uncomfortable.

The initial discussion *must* be "what constitutes a Mormon?" Who has the authority to define what LDS beliefs are? Is the person in dialogue officially representing the LDS/MGS or are the conclusions drawn from the dialogue just one man's opinions of how he hopes things are?

This writer does not personally know either of the professors and is giving them the benefit of the doubt as to their honesty and integrity until proven otherwise. However, neither one of them was the right choice for this type of book. Robinson seems too eager to conceal, and Blomberg seems too quick to agree.

Apologist Don Veinot, director of Midwest Christian Outreach, in his review of the book, astutely points out:

"Intervarsity Press has produced one of the best evangelistic tools the Mormon church has had in a while. When an Evangelical tells a Mormon missionary at his door that Mormonism is not true Christianity,

but is a different faith altogether, the missionary will be able to pull from his bag of materials a book by an Evangelical publisher which says on page 195, '...we jointly and sincerely affirm the following foundational propositions of the Christian gospel as we both understand it.' IntVarsity Press and Dr. Craig Blomberg need to realize their grave error and either retract the book or correct it to show that, in fact, Evangelicals and Mormons do not agree on these areas."⁴³

And to that this writer adds a hearty AMEN!

Endnotes:

1. Stephen F. Cannon, *The Quarterly Journal*, "Behind the Deseret Veil," Vol. 14, No. 4, pg. 6.
2. Cited from Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, pg 309.
3. *Mormon Doctrine*, op. cit., pg. 592, italic in original.
4. *Journal of Discourses* (JOD), Vol 6, pp. 32-33. Reprint of the Original Edition, Salt Lake City: Fifth Reprint, 1967, upper case in original, italic emphasis added.
5. The four standard works of the LDS church in order of importance to doctrine and practice are: *Doctrine and Covenants*, *Pearl of Great Price*, *The Book of Mormon* and the Bible.
6. Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?*. Downers

Grove, Ill.: IntVarsity Press, 1997, pg. 14, emphasis added.

7. *Ibid.*, pg. 25, emphasis added.

8. I use the term "progressive Mormons" to identify a group of people within the LDS church that seem to be trying to downplay the more embarrassing and bizarre elements of the historic LDS church and more closely identify with mainstream Christianity. It is my opinion that the LDS/MGS is using this group to help in the church's ongoing public relations campaign to make the LDS seem more mainstream, but that their eventual agenda is to absorb and ultimately supplant Evangelical Christianity. Any hint of tolerance toward Evangelical Christianity can be eradicated in a heartbeat with the absolute power possessed by the LDS/MGS.

9. *How Wide the Divide?*, op. cit., pg. 14.

10. *Ibid.*, pg. 20.

11. *Ibid.*, pg. 70.

12. *Ibid.*, pg. 165.

13. *Ibid.*, pg. 38.

14. *Ibid.*, pg. 41.

15. *Ibid.*, pg. 118.

16. *Ibid.*, pg. 11, italics in original.

17. *Ibid.*, italics in original.

18. *Ibid.*, pg. 16.

19. *Ibid.*, pg. 12, italics in originals. Also I find it interesting that Robinson decries "stereotyping," yet all counter-cult researchers are "extremist," "mean-spirited" and "dishonest" fundamentalists.

20. David Van Biema, *Time* magazine, August 4, 1997, "Kingdom Come," pg. 56.

21. Harold B. Lee to seminary and institute of religion personnel, July 1964, pg. 16, DCSM:45.

22. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: De-

seret Book Company, 1976, pg. 354, emphasis added.

23. Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982, pg. 293.

24. *Ibid.*

25. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978, Vol. 6, pg. 411.

26. *How Wide the Divide?*, op. cit., pg. 14.

27. The ability to hold two mutually exclusive beliefs at the same time.

28. *How Wide the Divide?*, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

29. *Ibid.*, pg. 208.

30. *Ibid.*, pg. 68.

31. *Ibid.*, pg. 57.

32. *Ibid.*, pg. 58.

33. *Ibid.*, pg. 68.

34. *Ibid.*, pg. 73, italics in original.

35. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 13, pg. 95.

36. See further my article, "Behind the Deseret Veil" as cited above.

37. See further, Scott Abbot, *Sunstone* magazine, "On Ecclesiastical Endorsement at Brigham Young University," April 1997, Vol. 20:1, Issue 105, pp. 9-14.


38. *How Wide the Divide?*, op. cit., pg. 22.

39. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

40. Dr. Gordon R. Lewis is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at Denver Theological Seminary.

41. *How Wide the Divide?*, op. cit., pg. 27.

42. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 1, pg. 51.

43. L.L. (Don) Veinot, *Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. Journal*, "Why The Divide?", Vol. 3, No. 3, July/August, 1997, pg. 9. 

EDITORIALS

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false prophecy. The Brownsville Assembly stopped making available the videotape of the April 6 service. However the Brownsville staff stood by Kilpatrick's words. PFO learned that internal pressures were being turned up on Kilpatrick at Brownsville as the weeks rolled on.

And then, with only 18 days left, Kilpatrick issued a "public statement," faxed to Hanegraaff and posted on the Internet. The pastor, evidently knowing the imminent failure of his "word from the Lord," admitted that "in April [he] got in the flesh and lashed out" at Hanegraaff. Acknowledging his "unChristlike behavior," he claimed "I was not speaking that as a prophet but as a shepherd putting something in the ears of God." He further contended, "This is by no means to be interpreted as an attempt to wiggle out of a prophecy."

Yet, PFO maintains that Kilpatrick's statement is intended to do just that, for the following reasons:

- In his April 6 declaration, Kilpatrick said emphatically,

"I'm speaking this not just to you, friends, to impress you, but I'm saying this as a man of God from behind this holy desk in this holy environment of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. ... I'm going to prophesy to you."

- For nearly 2½ months following Kilpatrick's declaration, the warning stood as a prophecy. Even Kilpatrick's Brownsville colleague, theologian Michael Brown, did not disavow it was a "prophecy" and said they would address it if Hanegraaff "is fully in business after July 5th."

- Kilpatrick is not being honest in disclaiming his pronouncement. He now claims he "felt indignation and anger." Yet in his original prophetic diatribe, he asserted: "I speak that as a man of God. I don't speak that out of vengeance, I don't speak that out of selfishness, and I don't speak it out of a hurt feeling, because my feelings are not hurt. I feel as normal today as I've ever felt. I don't have a chip on my shoulder, I don't have an ax to grind." All the while Kilpatrick knew he was lying.

- God's Word says the false prophets will be humiliated by their spurious predictions. Zechariah 13:4-5 declares: "On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his